A pie

in the sky

when you die
THE WORK
Project report
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MA Storytelling
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(it’s a lie)
"We must dare to prepare ourselves for the Exodus from the “work-based society”; it no longer exists and will not return. We must want this society, which is in its death-throes, to die, so that another may arise from it’s ruins. We must learn to make out the contours of that other society beneath the resistances, dysfunctions and impasses, which make up the present. “Work” must lose its centrality in the minds, thoughts and imagination of everyone. We must learn to see it differently: no longer as something we have—or do not have—but as what we do. We must be bold enough to regain control of the work we do.”

In my first year as a master student I was invited to be a student opponent to one of the bachelor final projects. The graduating student had made a beautiful hand bound book, with crafted details that reflected the pre-Raphaelite references in the literary content. The art and craft inspired work could not be mass-produced, a deliberate part of the realization of the project. I found the work conceptually strong and well executed. But the external critic, representing a big publishing company, dismissed the work and said, “this would never work in reality,” adding that she rarely worked with students from Konstfack because they were too independent. This made me think, what is this “reality” really? Are we not supposed to be educated in… fantasy?

During my years at Konstfack I had noticed a concern about the employability of graduating students. At the same time education in the arts and humanities was the target, or was threatened by, cuts or rising fees. In Sweden, all political parties from the left to the right, was pushing a full employment policy, “creating work” at any cost, regardless if the work was meaningful to society or the individual. This work obsessed reality was at odds with the reality I saw: that people, despite a huge rise in productivity and automation, was working more than ever. With the result of massive stress on both humans and environment. This attitude was also contemporary with never seen before expansion of digital visual culture. In my eyes, education in visual communication and imagination was more important than ever.

The master degree is called "Storytelling" but I missed an in-depth discussion about the various ways that concept could be understood. I decided I wanted to explore concepts of reality and imagination in relationship to design education. How could education resist to comply with the limitations of a harsh "reality", and instead contribute to the envisioning of other realities and futures? Could critical thinking around the work-based society provide insight in artistic training? I decided to trace the roots of this workfare-ideology in search for alternative voices that challenged the idea that designers had to be bake oven ready for the creative industry and instead argued for the importance of an imaginative curriculum.

The conflict between artistic freedom and commercialization is certainly not a new phenomenon. I wanted to connect my work to students before me who had been protesting limiting educational goals by creating alternative educational material. I also wanted to study progressive schooling, study-circles, and different ways of organizing free and autonomous universities.

I decided to turn my final project into a school in the tradition of self-education, but placing it within contemporary challenges of graphic design education, alternative ways of thinking about employability and "the reality" of work. My initial idea was to make a course with seminars and lectures that would run through the spring, invite researchers outside the field of design and art like philosophy, sociology and political theory. But I soon realized I had to limit myself to educational material and a proposal for a course that could be held at Konstfack after the examination.

The major work would be theoretical and editorial, selecting texts for the syllabus. I would collect the text in a text book/compendium that would work as the manifestation of my work. The text compendium, being a photocopied mix of already typeset pages from various sources, was also interesting to look at from a graphic design perspective addressing questions about how knowledge production is visualized and communicated.


My point of departure was the book *The Workfare Society — How Work Survived Technology* (Arbetssamhället — hur arbetet överlevde teknologin) by the author and sociologist Roland Paulsen. The book goes through changing attitudes towards work throughout human history, describes the development of the welfare society we live in today and introduces alternative ways of thinking about work.6

My external tutor the artist Michele Massucci, introduced me to new ways of thinking about art and labor. Michele’s artistic practice is process oriented, working with different groups for action in the public space or using the exhibition rooms for knowledge production, such as seminars and talks.7 He had been one of the curators arranging the Workworkwork seminars at Iaspis in 2010, addressing questions about the production conditions in art. Michele also introduced the theory and practice of the Italian autonomous movement Operaismo (“workerism”).

I traveled to Malmö to talk to the researcher Mikael Ottoson who had, together with Calle Rosengren, published many articles on the connection between work and morality. They had brought forward how the concept of work and morality is connected to other factors such as gender, class and ethnicity and how the polar concept pair “nourishing-consuming” coincides with ideas of “healthy-unhealthy”.8

In Malmö I visited the working-class movements archive in Malmö and talked to their archive-worker and researcher Fredrik Egefur. Fredrik introduced me to Margareta Ståhl who had written the dissertation on the iconography of the socialist flag.9 I talked to Margareta about the art of the working class movement represented in different Community houses (Folkets hus) throughout Sweden. The interview revolves around Folkets hus on Norra Bantorget, which is now the Stockholm City Conference Center, and still houses one of the largest collections of working class movement art.

I soon came to realize the subject matter of work was infinite. I had challenges limiting my research and at the same time edit, write and design. Finally the material was divided into four themes, resulting in four text-compendiums, around 25 texts in total, theoretical material mixed together with other material I had found while researching such as images and poems.

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The Engelbrekt uprising (Engelbrechtsupproret), a symbol of revolt, by Bror Hjorth on the wall of one of the conference rooms in Stockholm City Conference Center former Folket hus i Stockholm.
"During the long time that humanity was doomed to daily toil, the aversion to work knew no bounds. For the past four hundred years, this abomination has been turned into an idolatry without borders. It is difficult to find other institutions that are so drastically re-evaluated as work".10

Compendium 1:
A Pie in the sky when you die (its a lie)

The title of the first compendium is taken from the song “The Preacher and the Slave”, by the Swedish-American protest singer Joe Hill in which he ironies over the protestant idea of believing that hard work would be rewarded in heaven.11 Joe Hill was a "Wobbler" a member of the IWW: Industrial workers of the world. The international union-organization was founded in 1905 by socialist, anarchists and radicals to abolish wage-based society and welcomed all workers including women, immigrants, Afro-Americans to join the movement.

The first course compendium is themed around the history of work. Roland Paulsen is explaining the transition of values and changing attitudes toward work in his chapter From Curse to Duty. Paulsen also describes how this new attitude towards work is internalized by, among other things, the clock: "An important element in this disciplinary process, the essence of which still consists in the humiliation of swallowing the very humiliation, was power making itself invisible. With the explosive spread of the clock during the 19th century, the authority assumes a more abstract form of power. Instead of obeying the masters orders, time increasingly works as the medium of power and time consciousness is born".12

Long-haired preachers come out every night, Try to
tell you what’s wrong and what’s right; But when
asked how ‘bout something to eat They will answer
with voices so sweet:

Chorus: You will eat, bye and bye, in that glorious
land above the sky; Work and pray, live on hay, You’ll
get pie in the sky when you die.

The starvation army they play, They sing and they
clap and they pray ‘Till they get all your coin on the
drum Then they’ll tell you when you’re on the bum:

Holy Rollers and jumpers come out, They holler,
they jump and they shout. Give your money to Jesus
they say, He will cure all diseases today. If you fight
hard for children and wife Try to get something
good in this life You’re a sinner and bad man, they
tell, When you die you will sure go to hell.
Workingmen of all countries, unite, Side by side we
for freedom will fight; When the world and its wealth
we have gained To the grafters we’ll sing this refrain:

You will eat, bye and bye, When you’ve learned how
to cook and to fry. Chop some wood, ‘twill do you
good, And you’ll eat in the sweet bye and bye.

Image from compendium one with the lyrics to The Preacher and the Slave by Joe Hill, 1910. Company boards would send in Salvation Army to disturb IWW speakers, and as a counter-act Joe Hill wrote parodies of Christian hymns so that union members could sing along with the Salvation Army, but with their own lyrics. This song has the melody of In the sweet by and by.
Compendium 2: 
The workers ask —who are we

The existential dimension of work, becoming more indistinguishable with the self, is brought up to discussion in the second text compendium about contemporary work. The headline of this title is taken from the manifesto of the Workers Opposition, a group within the USSR’s Communist Party. It was written by the Russian communist Alexandra Kollontai in opposition to the power structures and the bureaucracy of communist leaders.13

The authors in these chapters describe immaterial labour, the production of values instead of goods and an economy in which employers are getting away with less responsibility and less costs, having access to an unlimited pool of workers negotiated on project-basis. The compendium introduces the concept of the precariat, an analogy of the proletariat describing a new exploited class of self-employed, freelancers, temporary, part-time, and low wageworkers who’s working conditions are characterised by instability and forced flexibility. One of the most prominent work critics Andre Gorz describes it as a controlling mechanism: “Everyone should continue ‘urgently’ to desire what companies will grant only to a few, so that the competition of each against all on the labour market will lower expectations and intensify the eager self-submission of the rare ‘privileged individuals’ whom companies will allow to serve them.”14

This text compendium includes the interview with Margareta Ståhl about working class art represented in Community houses. Margareta had understood a lot of the art was thrown out when the houses where sold. Because the art of the working class movement had little institutional representation in museums, this part of art history was in danger to be unwritten but Margareta managed to make an inventory of the art before it disappeared. In this interview she also talks about how the transition of attitudes towards work, from pioneering socialist fighting to abolish work to later socialism praising work, is reflected in the art.


Constantin Meunier, The Dock-Worker, 1893.

I konsthistorikern med det att man menar att man ska ta bort konst som provokerar. Men du hör ju på mitt sätt att berätta att jag har tagt ställning. Flytt- man kan göra som när man upptäckte att huvudboken för många konstvetsenskapliga kurser, History of Art av H. W. Janson, inte hade några kön-

Dock Worker

jokar för att inte ta bort konst som provokerar. Och du hör ju på mitt sätt att berätta att jag har tagt ställning. Flyt-

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Dock Worker

jokar för att inte ta bort konst som provokerar. Och du hör ju på mitt sätt att berätta att jag har tagt ställning.
"A strange delusion possesses the working class of the nations where capitalist civilizations holds it’s sway. This delusion drags in it’s train the individual and social work, the furious passion for work, pushed even to the exhaustion of the vital force of the individual and his progeny."\(^\text{15}\)

Compendium 3: 
In Praise of Idleness

This text compendium introduces texts that defend laziness and discusses refusal of work. *In praise of Idleness* is taken from the title of a text by the philosopher Bertrand Russel in which he states that the belief of virtuous work is a “morality of slaves” fooling us to believe that we work in the interest of ourselves when in fact we work in the interest of our masters.\(^\text{16}\)

This delusion is also brought up in the text *The Right to be Lazy* by well-known labor critic and socialist Paul Lafargue. In the essay he argues that the labor movement has adopted a distorted view of wage labor as an end in itself. The counteract, refusal of labour, is brought up by Mario Tronti in his text *The Strategy of Refusal* in which he writes about the Italian workers movement — students, intellectuals and workers who used refusal of labor as strategy.\(^\text{17}\)


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"Var nöjd med din besläktade del,
tyck inte du behandlas fel!
Det punn du fått är ringa.
Men om du det förvärvar väl
Så kommer tyckan till din själ.
Och sorger har du inga.
Sträva
Gräva
Med din spad,
Hej, du glade,
Som är fattig!
Sitt och le där Herren ser dig!
Du kanske vill ha mer betalt.
Det vore rent katastrofalt.
För ditt förnöjda psyke
Att leva som vi rika gör.
Du skulle ställas utanför
Du hajar inte kryke'
Bli som
Vi som
Pengar ösa
Kärleksslösa
Släss och kivas!
Tror du att du skulle trivas?
Nu kanske du vill fråga oss
Varför vi rika plåga oss
Med stora penningmängder
Till dig vi kunde rubbet ge
Och sedan gå omkring och le
På fattigdomens ängder
Jo'ru
Tro'ru
Inte vi vet!
Livet livet,
avgrundspuren,
skulle gora dig förstupen.
Compendium 4: Jevla Jevelen

The title is taken from a quote from a text-based artwork by artist Elis Eriksson. Part of Elis artistic practice is using a childlike and misspelled language, making it almost impossible to translate the text work. The title Jevla Jevelen can (badly) be translated to "damn devil" and in this work Elis is ironising over the divine punishment of condemning men to painful and never ending toil to make up for the sin of eating from the fruit of paradise.

The last compendium wants to discuss possible exits from this condemnation of endless hard work. Kate Soper is arguing against the gloom/doom and apocalyptic rhetoric of the left. Instead she is promoting an alternative hedonism and aesthetic revisoning, an new imagination for "alternative hedonism to develop its own contemporary cultural presence, both ethically and aesthetically, through representation, both discursively and visually, of this new political imaginary".

The theme also includes text about education and protest, Tom Holert is discussing the "dedemocratization, economization and the transformation of universities into edu-factories" in his text Something other than administrated "quality." Art Education and Protest 2009:1979 from, Kate Soper & Lynn Thomas: Alternative Hedonism and 'Aesthetic Revisioning' from: 'Alternative Hedonism' and the Critique of 'Consumerism', Working paper series, 2006, Mark Fisher: Capitalism and the Real + Reflexive impotence, Immobilization and Liberal communism from: Capitalist realism—is there no alternative, O books, 2009 and a letter to Eva Hesse from Sol le Witt, 1965.


21. Erissson Ernst, Elis (EEE): satan och jahves bild from text till grejen, ca 1977 s. 326
Dear Eva,

It will be almost a month since you wrote to me and you have possibly forgotten your state of mind (I doubt it though). You seem the same as always, and being you, hate every minute of it. Don’t! Learn to say “Fuck You” to the world once in a while. You have every right to. Just stop thinking, worrying, looking over your shoulder wondering, doubting, fearing, hurting, hoping for some easy way out, struggling, grasping, confusing, itchin, scratching, mumbling, bumbling, grumbling, hulming, stumbling, mumbling, rumbling, gambling, tumbling, scumbling, scrambled, hitching, hitching, bitching, moaning, groaning, honing, boning, horse-shitting, hair-splitting, nit-picking, piss-trickling, nose sticking, ass-gouging, eyeball-poking, finger-pointing, alleyway-sneaking, long waiting, small stepping, evil-eyeing, back-scratching, searching, perching, besmirching, grinding, grinding, grinding away at yourself. Stop it and just DO! From your description, and from what I know of your previous work and you [sic] ability; the work you are doing sounds very good “Drawing-clean-clear but crazy like machines, larger and bolder... real nonsense.” That sounds fine, wonderful – real nonsense. Do more. More nonsensical, more crazy, more machines, more breasts, penises, cunts, whatever – make them abound with nonsense. Try and tickle something inside you, your “weird humor.” You belong in the most secret part of you. Don’t worry about cool, make your own uncool. Make your own, your own world. If you fear, make it work for you – draw & paint your fear and anxiety. And stop worrying about big, deep things such as “to decide on a purpose and way of life, a consistant [sic] approach to even some impossible end or even an imagined end” You must practice being stupid, dumb, unthinking, empty. Then you will be able to DO!

I have much confidence in you and even though you are tormenting yourself, the work you do is very good. Try to do some BAD work – the worst you can think of and see what happens but mainly relax and let everything go to hell – you are not responsible for the world – you are only responsible for your work – so DO IT. And don’t think that your work has to conform to any preconceived form, idea or flavor. It can be anything you want it to be. But if life would be easier for you if you stopped working – then stop. Don’t punish yourself. However, I think that it is so deeply engrained in you that it would be easier to DO!
“Six million women wage workers; six million women, who have equal rights with men to be exploited, to be robbed, to go on strike; aye, to starve even. Anything more, my lord? Yes, six million wage workers in every walk of life, from the highest brain work to the mines and railroad tracks; yes, even detectives and policemen. Surely the emancipation is complete.”

Feminist perspectives on work

Work critical feminist perspectives runs through all four text compendium, challenging the feminist claim of the “right to work” and the absurdity to demand an equal share of the oppression. Kjersti Ericson argues in her text *Mary Wollstonecraft’s dilemma — conditions and strategy for the women’s struggle* that there is no real liberation in women pursuing a career at the expense of other women. The class perspective is also brought up by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in the text *Women workers and the Politics of Solidarity* in which she is describing the exploitation of third world women and their agency as workers.

Reproductive work in capitalism society is discussed by Maria-Rosa Della Costa and Selma James in the text *The power of women and the subversion of the community* from 1972, a key text in the Italian feminist movement. They argue that the reproductive work carried out by women outside employed work can be seen as a social fabric, unpaid but indispensable for the creation and maintenance of workers and the reproduction of the system. This is also brought up by Nina Power in her text *Socialism must not exclude human sensual pleasures from its program* from the book *One dimensional woman*: “The family in this sense is always precisely a question of the relationship between sex and politics, how it is that someone first arrives at the gates of the labour market in the first place and subsequently remains fit and functioning enough to sell eight hours of their labour a day.” Power is criticising contemporary feminism by pointing out that we have to rethink work within capitalist society “What looks like emancipation is nothing but a tightening of the shackles.”

I also added a non-published interview I had made with Ruthel Eksell, the wife of the late graphic designer Olle Eksell. She gave up her work as an illustrator and instead became his manager, organisation and planning both life and work, enabling his enormous production. The interview has the title *Plan, sort, organize, calculate, design* which was Olles Eksells work motto. But it would be a simplification to come to the conclusion that she was a victim of a destiny faced by many creative women, because it is also a story about love and companionship.

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https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/goldman/works/1914/ marriage-love.htm

http://www.nat.nu/artikelarkiv/2007_1


Interview with Ruthel Eksell about her work and life together with Olle Eksell.
I started to look for creative possibilities within the rather dull characteristics of the compendium like A4-format, Wire-O-binding and photocopied texts. For example the Wire-O made it possible to play with different formats and papers. I wanted to approach it as a crafted object but not become an overworked artist-book.

The production should be able to be done in school with a normal inkjet/laser-printer/Xerox-machine, because I wanted to work with the same limitations as a teacher but also illustrate the possible ways of producing your own school within the school.

One of the reasons for why I wanted to make a theory course was that we had had few during my five years Konstfack, and my impression was that most of the students found the classes dull and boring. With reason, academic texts are often heavy and laborious to get through. My ambition with the design I was to present theory in a communicative and convincing way, making it relevant to the practice of the students.

Typography

I use the typeface Franklin Gothic for headlines. It was drawn by Morris Fuller Benton in honor of the American politician, scientist, author, philosopher and printer Benjamin Franklin, who was a proponent of hard work and frugality, the originator of the quote “time is money” and the face of the 100 dollar bill. For body copy I used Century Schoolbook, designed especially for text-books, also by Morris Fuller Benton.

Each text compendium has a headline set in hand-lettered text from the silent movie Modern Times by Charlie Chaplin. I started to work on a digitalised version of the font that I called Modern Times, but I had not time to finish it and used it only for the head titles of each compendium.

Franklin Gothic and Century Schoolbook are used the same way in this report.
Images
I found a lot of interesting imagery while researching. One funny find was the 70s childrens book *2010 — Living in the future* by Geoffrey Hoyle in which he envisioned the future we live in today. Many of Hoyles predictions have come true, like being able to teach your children to order food and groceries from your “vision desk”. Not realised though is the forecast that automation would have released mankind from work in 2010.28

For the interview with Margareta Ståhl I included images of art from Stockholm Folkets hus/Stockholm City Conference Center as well as the promotional images from their website. The interview with Ruthel Eksell was illustrated with her own watercolour drawings and images from the home of Ruthel and Olle Eksell. I also included two pictures on the topic of work from the artist Erik Östensson. They where also shown in the spring exhibition.

Colors
In my bachelor degree work *Färglära* (On Color) I had written about the dichotomy between the pale color palette and the bold and intense palette, the first being associated with elegance, intelligence and credibility and the latter read as kitschy, arty, mystical and less reliable. I explored how that dichotomy also reflected gender, race and class hierarchies, the colourful, and less “trustworthy”, palette associated with feminine, non-European, ”ethnic”, childish and folklore. Further I discussed how this was reflected in the graphic design of academic writing and science. I wanted to challenge this perception in this project, working with ice-cream pastel colors, usually thought of as childish and playful.29

While you are at school in one room, your parents may be at work in another. People who do office work do it at home. To keep in close touch with other people in their office they use the vision phone. The vision desk is connected to their firm's computer, which stores all the office files. With this close contact between everybody in the office, it is easy to work from home.

Wherever people work—in a factory or at home, or whatever else their job might be—they will work for only three days a week. The rest of the week they can do what they like. They can play football, learn a language, or train for a new job.
Examination

My work was presented the 26 of April. I gave the examination in the form of a lecture, using it as an opportunity to tie the "work as school" together by giving an introduction to the history of work and the critical thinking I had discovered. I focused mainly on the idea of creating own educational material, the suggestion for an expansion of the curriculum and less on the design. My appointed opponent was the curator and art critic Jonathan Habib Engqvist. He was positive to the work and could draw parallels to practices within the art world, but had the objection that it was hard to criticise an idea, that was not yet realised.

I experienced ambiguity from my professors on how to confront my project, and got the critique that I should have focused more on design and execution. I interpret this ambivalence in part due to the fact that most final projects from the graphic design and illustration faculty are more practical and visually comprehensive (like for example a childrens book or a typeface). But I also agree that I should have had a better balance between editorial work and design work.

Exhibition

The work was exhibited, together with the final projects of Stefan Engbom and Aron Kullander, in a self built exhibition space outside the main entrance of Konstfack. The house was part of Aron Kullanders project *News from Nowhere*, departing from the utopian socialist book by William Morris in which he argues that work should be creative and pleasurable. Our three projects where mainly theoretical and exhibiting together in a separate space was a great way to communicate our projects.
The collective exhibition space that provided a room for the "school" during the exhibition time.
I had not been introduced to this field of critical thought prior to reading *The Workfare Society* (Arbetssamhället) by Roland Paulsen and was struck by how contemporary some of the almost one hundred year old texts felt: "Modern methods of production have given us the possibility of ease and security for all, we have chosen, instead to have overwork for some and starvation for others. Hitertho we have continued to be as energetic as we were before there were machines, in this we have been foolish, but there is no reason to be foolish forever." Throughout the research process I was strengthened in my idea of creating educational material based on a counter-narrative that challenged work as something inherently good, and open up to a new field of thinking within graphic design practice and education.

I was happy to find so much writing but I had not anticipated the amount of texts, which made the editorial part very time-consuming. In hindsight I should have asked for help with the editorial part earlier so I would have had more time to work on the design and elaborate on how educational material is visualised and distributed. Still, the important part was treating the text compendium as an illustration to the expansion on what is thought of as graphic design "work". I think Stuart Bailey from Dexter Sinister puts it well when he discusses the work of the graphic designer, pointing out that graphic design only exist in relation to other subjects: "I don’t really see graphic design as deserving of being treated as an independent, navel-gazing discipline. It exists entirely in relation to other subjects. There’s nothing mysterious about this, it just took me a while to realise it. To look at it from another angle, though, I suspect what I’m really against is what that term “graphic design” has come to represent, i.e. synonymous with business cards, logos, identities and advertising, and, again simply put, those are things I’m just not interested in. To me that idea of “graphic design” is as far removed from my interests as being a milkman or a lawyer. In fact, I’d rather be a milkman”.32

During my research I discovered that many of the questions around work and self-organisation and education as artistic practice/protest, were themes long investigated in the art-world. But I can also see an emerging graphic design practice, that just like Baileys, evolves into publishing, editing, teaching, or work on the borders of art, and I think that it is relevant to introduce a discussion around work from the perspective of visual culture and graphic design practice.

I chose to conclude the last text compendium with the chapter *Capitalism and the Real* from the book *Capitalist realism—is there no alternative* by Mark Fisher. In this book he quotes Fredrik Jameson who says: “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” and argues that one of the biggest threat to society is not environmental collapse but the lack of imagination.

With this final project and educational material I wish to contribute to a demoralising, creative and imaginative re-thinking of the role of art, design and craft education and the possibilities to challenge the "reality" with other visions and new images.

33. Fisher, Mark: *Capitalist realism—is there no alternative*, O books, 2009