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King's College London
 Faculty of Arts & Humanities
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 (Undergraduate & Taught Postgraduate)*

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This assignment is entirely my own work. Quotations from secondary literature are indicated by the use of inverted commas around ALL such quotations AND by reference in the text or notes to the author concerned. ALL primary and secondary literature used in this piece of work is indicated in the bibliography placed at the end, and dependence upon ANY source used is indicated at the appropriate point in the text. I confirm that no sources have been used other than those stated.

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Candidate no.	Y	0	7	6	0	9
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Module Title:	Literature and Media
Module Code: (e.g. 5AABC123)	6AAEC081
Assignment: (may be abbreviated)	How do media cultures shape the relationship between labour and leisure?
Assignment tutor/group:	Ella Parry-Davies
Deadline:	09/01/18
Date Submitted:	09/01/18
Word Count:	3, 047

Your assignment may be used as an example of good practice for other students to refer to in future. If selected, your assignment will be presented anonymously and may include feedback comments or the specific grade awarded. Participation is optional and will not affect your grade.

Do you consent to your assignment being used in this way? Please tick the appropriate box below.

YES NO

Poem one: 《最后的墓地》 The Last Graveyard, 21 December 2011,

<https://libcom.org/blog/xulizhi-foxconn-suicide-poetry> [accessed 01 December 2017]

"The Last Graveyard"

机台的鸣叫也打着瞌睡

Even the machine is nodding off

密封的车间贮藏疾病的铁

Sealed workshops store diseased iron

薪资隐藏在窗帘后面

Wages concealed behind curtains

仿似年轻打工者深埋于心底的爱情

Like the love that young workers bury at the bottom of their hearts

没有时间开口，情感徒留灰尘

With no time for expression, emotion crumbles into dust

他们有着铁打的胃

They have stomachs forged of iron

盛满浓稠的硫酸，硝酸

Full of thick acid, sulfuric and nitric

工业向他们收缴来不及流出的泪

Industry captures their tears before they have the chance to fall

时辰走过，他们清醒全无

Time flows by, their heads lost in fog

产量压低了年龄，疼痛在日夜加班

Output weighs down their age, pain works overtime day and night

还未老去的头晕潜伏生命

In their lives, dizziness before their time is latent

皮肤被治具强迫褪去

The jig forces the skin to peel

顺手镀上一层铝合金

And while it's at it, plates on a layer of aluminum alloy

有人还在坚持着，有人含病离去

Some still endure, while others are taken by illness

我在他们中间打盹，留守青春的

I am dozing between them, guarding

最后一块墓地

The last graveyard of our youth.

Poem Two: 《我咽下一枚铁做的月亮》 I swallowed a Moon Made of Iron, 19 December 2013, , <https://libcom.org/blog/xulizhi-foxconn-suicide-poetry> [accessed 01 December 2017]

"I Swallowed a Moon Made of Iron"

我咽下一枚铁做的月亮

I swallowed a moon made of iron

他们把它叫做螺丝

They refer to it as a nail

我咽下这工业的废水，失业的订单

I swallowed this industrial sewage, these unemployment documents

那些低于机台的青春早早夭亡

Youth stooped at machines die before their time

我咽下奔波，咽下流离失所

I swallowed the hustle and the destitution

咽下人行天桥，咽下长满水锈的生活

Swallowed pedestrian bridges, life covered in rust

我再咽不下了

I can't swallow any more

所有我曾经咽下的现在都从喉咙汹涌而出

All that I've swallowed is now gushing out of my throat

在祖国的领土上铺成一首

Unfurling on the land of my ancestors

耻辱的诗

Into a disgraceful poem.

How do Media Cultures shape the relationship between leisure and labour?

In approaching this question, I feel it most relevant and topical to understand the term 'media culture' through the lens of what stands as the practical engine behind what makes media a culture within itself. The given culture is created through the means of mass communication and connectivity, meaning that my lens will focus on the production and consumption of electronic devices within information society, and how from this basis, particular relationships through the mediation of the labour-leisure mechanism are shaped. Through looking specifically at the connection between the creator and commodity within media cultures, I want to evaluate this dichotomy as it intertwines in determining both counter-parts working existences'' through the formation of a product. In using modalities such as 'labour' and 'leisure', the pairing evidently assumes the presence of a working being as a middling piece in being bound up in human relations. In defining the leisure-labour model from my own subject position, I will reside in referring to the statements; 'leisure has become almost irretrievably fused with the concept of freedom' as well as being the 'reward for work, it is the key component in what we now call the work-life balance'.¹ It seems appropriate to study this perspective within and through typically Western technology companies, yet for the means of this discussion, the basis of this study will concentrate on the material outsourcing of production work, on workers who put together the world's most valuable brand. Within the Foxconn assembly-line, the formations which media cultures have created between capital and labour within this precinct will be examined, as well as where the balance of 'freedom' from voluntary factory work comes into rewarded play across China's new working class. In establishing this context, this essay will analyse the given model by evaluating and testing the intrusion of literature within this. As this discussion develops, the

¹ Chris Rojek, *The Labour of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time* (London: SAGE Publications LTD, 2010), p. 1.

argument will concurrently unfold by understanding the treatment of the labour-leisure mechanism through writing and the call for a creative zest, proves indeed to uncover and at times interrogate such relationships through association. Yet it is ultimately insufficient in aiding the separation of the worker from the demands of their labour, in being seen as a visible and autonomous subject within the face of the very much alive, feeding motion of capitalism, which extends as an integrated network dependent on life itself.

To begin this, I intervene on Lisa Nakamura's textual conversation with Donna Haraway to introduce my chosen literature. As Nakamura claims, 'A Cyborg Manifesto' insists upon a Marxian view concerning 'materiality', in drawing our attention to the irony that some must 'labour invisibly for others of us to feel free or empowered' through the purchasing and usage of technology. Bodies become part of digital platforms by providing the human labour needed to make them, which is indefinitely true within my context.² However, in challenging Nakamura's reading of the text as a 'celebration of a newly extended and enhanced cyborg body, one made powerful by technology' in having the power to transcend boundaries through technology use that appears to the digitally identified, the following will directly embody the cyborg-body image by unveiling its force as a mere inadequacy towards effective oppositional strategies for the means of this essay.³ This juncture of thought will converse with the poems, 'The last graveyard' and, 'I swallowed a moon made of iron' by Li Lizhu, a Foxconn worker who migrated to the city of Shenzhen to relish his passion for books, yet evidently found himself unable to leave, by consistently returning to the assembly line in order to support himself. It is imperative for the factory-space to maintain efficiency and speed to sustain the buyer-driven asymmetry with companies such as Apple, thus allowing an intense concentration of capital to reconfigure class and labour politics within.

² Lisa Nakamura, 'Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture', *American Quarterly*, 66.4 (2014), 919-941 (p. 919).

³ Nakamura, p. 920.

The definition of the cyborg being a ‘hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction’, allows for a pairing association with the workers’ complex position in poem one, with specific reference to the lines, ‘the jig forces the skin to peel’... ‘And while it’s at it, plates a layer of aluminium alloy’.⁴ The Foxconn worker is indeed a ‘hybrid’ creature which plays to create a seamless forging of the physical symbiosis of man and metal in poetic fiction, yet through its duality, he is also social commentator to a bodily reality. Through the almost onomatopaic ‘jig’ of the labour-machine which calls for the body’s attention, the evasion of skin boundary stands as ironic considering the number of fingers that are lost in Foxconn factories whilst manufacturing the devices that are built to be used by fingertips. The image is both an abstraction of bodily infrastructure and attributed tactility to the apparatus which represents his labour, reducing a human existence that borders on the ‘obscene’, ‘out of place’ or ‘reducible to sex’ (p. 166). as an almost erotic, sensual image is reproduced as the skin peels to the commanding action of a machine. This existence is tempered by an experience of the body being prioritised within pieces or through certain parts like the hands or genitals, alongside a shifting consciousness that is made concrete only in moments of contradictory experience, a physical forced closeness yet disengagement or vulnerability to the labour apparatus. If labour ‘is the humanising activity that makes men’ (158), then it is both an ontological category which constructs perspective, and the anatomical model which can operate and indirectly choose the mobility of muscles to be used, then this image represents the extreme intensification of capital and labour-demand to be all-encompassing within this space. He thus represents himself as the ultimate Marxian victim of the wage relationship, which creates ‘a consequence of systematic alienation, as the

⁴ Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,’ in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 149. All further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

worker is dissociated from his (sic) product' (p. 158), or the physical doing of work as 'wages are concealed behind curtains'. The poem is almost vampiric through the layering of image, as the stomach is drained of goodness and filled with an excess of 'thick acid, sulfuric and nitric', like a petrol-fuelled car. This open-holed, ingesting body can find form in Ann Anagost's essay, which plays on this idea of the Marxian worker's consistent contradictory experience. She contextualises the migrant's body to be of 'low value, despite the fact that the exploitation of migrant labour is the hidden engine powering China's economic take-off'.⁵ In interrogating this 'low-value' then, Li Lizhu could be imagined in this way, as the openly mutilated or wounded body which takes position on the working front line of production. This sheds light on China's new 'conceptualisation of value, in which the value coding of bodies produces very real material effects'; an economic model which fixes the subject within a system, as if one were to leave, it would threaten the neoliberal's status to be responsible for his/her profits and losses, or threaten the pursuing of a migrant's city dream, it is a complete totality which prevents the autonomous being from being uplifted.⁶

Furthermore, through utilising this cyborg alignment, the speaker also appears to be fundamentally aware of time's unforgiving nature towards the human call for creativity or 'expression' which is blanketed by this labour. He evidently desires to 'express' through its inclusion, yet before one can pursue this, 'industry' captures the 'tears'. The need for surplus labour is evident in its equating with a constant pain spanning over night and day, through to the poem abruptly enclosing the enjambment with 'The last graveyard of our youth.' The speaker's composition of opposing life stages here of which he 'guards' creates a tone of imminence, demonstrating a need to capture the last strands of youth within the proletariat,

⁵ Ann Anagosis, 'Strange Circulations', in *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death*, ed. by Patricia Ticineto Clough and Craig Willse (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 213-238 (p. 213).

⁶ Anagosis, p. 213.

yet inevitably aging body. Such techniques leave consequently, no time or room to picture the still youthful body outside the realms of labour. The act of writing a poem, considered as epitome to artistically expressive valour, is quite literally utilised within this mechanism, positioning the subject again in what seems to be an unbalanced work-life structuring of time. Perhaps, if looking at this literally, one could find resonance within cultural context of Foxconn's 24-hour production scheme. The created dormitories, or micro-Cities, mean that 'labour reproduction activities take place in a self-contained, all-encompassing geographical locality', a socio-spatial administration which helps impose surplus labour as absolute and most potently, the complete blurring of distinctions between home and work, night and day.⁷ The reader may wonder towards the locality therefore of where and when the poet assembled this piece together.

At this point, the alignment with the cyborg definition has performed well in uncovering this model of an all-encompassing labour, to which the subject is rendered fully enclosed. Yet in line with my argument, I urge to test these limits. If Haraway states that the cyborg is the 'illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism' (p.151), then surely, within my context, I ask, what does it mean to be a cyborg-writer out of context? Through the speaker's strange equating of the 'wage's concealed behind curtains' with the responding simile of, 'Like the love that young workers bury at the bottom of their hearts', a shift in focus is introduced as the speaker reveals the chance of an un-requited love. The alienated poet standing alone and misunderstood amongst the masses, creates a somewhat *elsewhere* for himself, in acknowledging the possibility of a romantic trope which settles on the calls of the beating human heart and lustfulness within the factory space. Perhaps cyborg writing as an opposing force to the 'worship' of the 'monotheistic or

⁷ Pun Ngai and Jenny Chan, 'Global Capital, The State, and Chinese Workers: The Foxconn Experience', *Modern China*, 38.4 (2012), 383-410 (p. 403).

singular work' which resides in 'Western myth' (p. 175), takes this form of blending genre over reality and fiction, or through the call of the machine and human, allowing for worker's mind to be replenished in transcending the applied manual of what labour insists. In seizing the tools which marks China's most treasured and esteemed art form, and to reconstitute a space which is habitable to contemplate his own survival, marks a radical blending between high and low culture. Through the reproduction of text, which is born out of the process of biological abstraction, an absence creates an agency by having the ability to creatively mould and hallucinate between the lines and letters when disengaged from the practical work. Perhaps, a cyborg who plays with writing as form, creates a space to be autonomous within mental capacity, through the form of a freedom abstracted from the labour itself.

Although deconstructing literature is crucial in aligning with the cyborg image, I question Haraway's pairing of this with the form of 'liminal transformation' (p. 177), which comes as a somewhat causal answer towards what should account as a progressive movement between radical literature and its ability. The Cyborg takes the form of a manifesto, which thus resides in the future as declaration to its form, and can therefore count on creating a cyborg myth which is entirely ubiquitous and theoretical. It can simply come to pass, or not pass at all within its mythic waiting to challenge the information of domination within science and technology. From this acknowledgement I ask, what means are we left with when she demands that we 'act potently', yet we are faced with death? How does the cyborg manifesto account for a dead body when it can only be associative with a poetic haze, and not perhaps towards reconstructing a material, yet unbalanced labour-leisure model?

With this in mind, introducing the poem 'I swallowed a moon made of iron' in response to these queries, I would like to highlight the consistent use of the past tense 'I swallowed'. The placing of 'I swallowed' and 'Iron Moon' plays on the aesthetic of this moon image, which proves to be a supreme trope within Chinese poetry in representing solitude, romance or

companionship. However, this metaphorical swallowing takes form only alongside wasted opportunity and features of urbanity such as ‘industrial sewage’, suggesting that the speaker is encompassed by a position with a lack of geographical and professional stability. These features prove to be over-bearing, rough and in representation of a land which has already decayed in rust, removing the chance of urban adventure or representation that signifies the city as a manufacturing and money-making hub. The disgrace he feels comes with the unadorned expression which closes the poem, with the addition of a certain felt disgust as the speaker transforms his treasured form through a release of sickness.

The poem stands as the receiving answer to a stomach which become full of contained waste. Perhaps this inability to swallow not only stands as a form of suicide note in the form of ‘I can’t swallow anymore’, yet also, through the very production of the poem form within this context, it can stand as further representation of writing’s inability to account for the ‘expression of individuals’, or ‘the traces of bodies’ in representation of the dead, as well as the ghostly remnants of memories or dreams which were once associated with the magical alignment of books and words which could linger only in imagination.⁸ As the dead can now become technically reproducible and as our poet’s existence as well as death is bound up through electronic production, the limits of literary form prove ever more incompatible in testifying this modern suicide. Perhaps what only came from his peril proves only to be the hanging of safety nets through the factory floors.

I argue that from such analysis, Haraway’s manifesto is therefore somewhat inefficient in releasing the autonomous being from its labour-leisure model, as it is always placed *beyond* the body through a timeless, yet future-imposed action. The poet is forever unable to act upon autonomy through the text, as his associations can only be merely associative. Throughout

⁸ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 16.

this form, the Manifesto can only articulate on the level of aesthetics, creating a cyber-space of its very own, a terrain of fantasy and appropriation of image as it travels through time within reading. Not only this, but we find there is also a discrepancy between the human and the machine in placing this piece within the context of my own. Although Harraway states that the ‘new machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment’ to which ‘we can be responsible for machines’... ‘they do dominate or threaten us’ (p. 180). It is evident that the poems stand as typed testament to the opposition of this statement, as the machine will always theoretically outlive the worker or human, which is built to serve as produce of the demands of media culture. Harraway’s cyborg thus leaves the speaker in a state of flux both close in image yet far-off in effect, reinstating the subject as a middling counterpart between the uninhabitable City and Countryside, and as a worker which represents both the foot soldiers of the ancient Qin dynasty in an almost fascist regime, and the automata of the future, as well as lastly a writer who invests within the organic nature of the poem form to regain and remember the predominant human flavour and thought value.

What can therefore be enclosed from exploiting the cyborg image, is that to be free, in reinstating my initial use of Rojek, and in gaining a ‘leisure’ balance in this sense through an all-encompassing labour model, means to die. The only way to recognise life for the Foxconn worker, is evidently through death. The cyborg cannot account for material reality, only ontology, wandering between images of both ‘imagination’ and ‘material reality’ (p. 150). It is ironic as it attempts to subvert the powers of Capital, yet through analysing literature within its limelight, it helps to suggest that capitalism is a beast requiring an entire arsenal to render it as a life-saving, when in reality it swallows suicidal bodies alive. Capital’s existing produce, technological and electronic devices, can themselves decide what can/cannot occur, or what can/cannot live. I question as a conclusive point then, in establishing this all-

encompassing labour model relationship within my given context, in asking, what are we left with from this?

The artist Li Liao who specifies in conceptual and journalistic art took a job at Foxconn for 45 days to then go on and buy the product of his labour- the iPad. In a gallery space, Li places his white- collared uniform, security badges and the product on display as singular art pieces. It is visible that the remnants of a person's touch, or a once worker's skill, stand in the form of a product upon an isolated pedestal. In mirroring the potential of Li Lizhu's creations utilised in the hands of a current consumer, the art stands as a cynical commentary on production and consumption, in visualising a spatial demonstration concerning the disconnection between the worker and their product, which stands in this case, as the object of his art. Through the artist using his own pay to own his product of labour, it displays that the commodity here is not the product, yet the very labour which goes into making it the commodity a proxy for someone else, as part of an integrated circuit. When we live in a society connected to the breakdowns of distinctions between work, home and leisure within 'free' media cultures, it must be remembered that information, embodied in this case within an innate object/product, is always material to which the worker is approximate yet existentially alienated, exemplified through the harrowing images and eyes of literature, artistic creativity, and most importantly, death.



Fig 1: Anon, ca. 2013. No title. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/evan-osnos/what-is-an-ipad-doing-on-a-pedestal-at-a-chinese-art-museum> [accessed 23 December 2017]

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