

Stop Working and Start Living: or How to Squander Property and not Our Lives

Katja Čičigoj

Abstract:

"Anti-work, Atheism, Adventure" are Federico Campagna's antidotes to 'normative abstractions', that is ideological beliefs held dear both at the right and left side of the political spectrum. His passionate attack, aiming particularly at "the God of Work", faces us with a radical proposition: to stop living our lives as if there was some sort of heaven waiting for us (personal success, progress or a better world) and start living them as if it was our last night.

How to cite:

Čičigoj, Katja: „Stop Working and Start Living: or How to Squander Property and not Our Lives [Review on: Campagna, Federico: The Last Night. Anti-Work, Atheism, Adventure. Winchester: Zero Books, 2013.]“. In: KULT_online 40 (2014).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2014.867>

© by the authors and by KULT_online

Stop Working and Start Living: or How to Squander Property and not Our Lives

Katja Čičigoj

Campagna, Federico: *The Last Night. Anti-Work, Atheism, Adventure*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2013. 95 pages, paperback, 9.99€. ISBN: 978 1 78279 195 9đ

"Beware leftist and anarchists, it is our assumptions that the book dismisses most ruthlessly" – Max Fisher's acute assessment of *The Last Night* might come off as surprising to those familiar with the work of its author: the Italian born writer and political activist Federico Campagna, collaborator of the Italian autonomist thinker Franco Berardi and editor of anthologies such as *What are we fighting for – A Radical Collective Manifesto* (Pluto Press, 2012). Yet Fisher's assessment turns out to be rather accurate: the "normative abstractions" Campagna's impassioned iconoclasm is aimed at, are not only the old gods worshipped by the conservative sides of the political spectrum (the Family, the Nation, the Individual, the Market, God), but also those we might find lingering at the left side of politics: Identity (singular or collective, majoritarian or minoritarian), the State, the Revolution and particularly – the god of "Work".

Especially the latter is what Campagna takes as his perhaps most striking and most often struck target, somehow in the wake of the Italian autonomist tradition of the refusal of labour, from the 70s, but also the age-old socialist and communist programme of the likes of Paul Lafargue, Kazimir Malević and even Karl Marx himself. The productivist religion worshipping the God of Work – a working ethic which moralizes those who labour and produce and demonizes the others – is what Campagna diagnoses as being the common mental illness of politics on all ends of the spectrum. The right historically opposed the protestant work ethic of capitalist entrepreneurs to a rhetoric against those who are seen as 'parasites' (receivers of social welfare, migrants, disabled, the old, students, etc.). On the other hand, the left historically based its political programme on a deeply rooted and moralized proletarian identity, being against which was portrayed as a symptom of the individualist opportunism of bourgeois dandys. And precisely what has been historically denigrated by both left and right is what Campagna's manifestative writing wishes to reclaim, asking the provocative question implied in the title of his book: How would we live our lives if we really had 'no future'? What kind of relationship to self and others would we wish to entertain, if there was no afterlife (either religious, or as the belief in economic self-realization or the progress of revolution)?

"Anti-work, Atheism, Adventure" – Campagna summarizes his answer in the title of his book. If perhaps implying a philosophical tradition of 'radical scepticism' and 'anarchist egoism', Campagna's proposition of anti-work is aimed at blowing up the idol which underlies both

right and left ideologues. He calls for a "radical atheism" and aims at tearing up any leftist beliefs in the teleology of a revolutionary programme; furthermore his invitation to a common "adventure" brings in something which 'transcends' (for lack of a better word) his ravishingly deconstructive iconoclasm. Adventure, with its elements of parasiting and squandering, is not only an 'adaptation' to a society which enslaves us by imposing a religion of work. As understood by Campagna, adventure's joyful playfulness is never fully solitary, since "the self", "identity" and "the individual" are all equally part of "the kingdom of normative abstractions", of fictions we are so used to believe in that they work as if they were actual (as Nietzsche would have it). In the wake of this, adventure figures as a hedonistic politics of enjoyment, self-flourishing and investigating life's chances and the world's offerings and as such can only be a communal and relational practice: an endeavour for friends, lovers and comrades.

This might sound like a radical anarchist programme, but politics itself are not among Campagna's main aims. As he understands it, politics is either one of the "normative abstractions", when driven by any kind of ideology, or, at its best, "an evolution of economic science – which simply deals with the relationship between people and resources – through the introduction of the finality of happiness" (82). When politics gets extended to realms which are not political (i.e. war or comradeship), the result is either the perpetuation of secular religious (ideological) illusions, or "the economisation of the human". Campagna's book "written for and dedicated to teenagers", with its specific rethorical mixing of autobiographical anecdotes, aphoristic statements, allegoric stories, and metaphors, with propositions that willfully remain vague, poetic, and always personal or singular, is thus perhaps best read as a manifesto of personal ethics (in Nietzsche's sense, where ethics is opposed to morals, or in its Foucauldian reading of an "ethics of the self"). Particularly in times that preach self-denial, discipline, and enslavement in the name of "normative abstractions" of the Market, the State, and Work. However, even if starting from personal experience, Campagna's ethical proposition takes the form of a biting question, transversing the most intimate experience of our own subjectivities and the communal relations that are an integral part of it; a question that could make us rethink "what are we fighting for" and why; how are we living our lives, and why. How would you live your life, if it was all – your 'last night'?