

Abstracts

- 751 **Judith Hamera**, *The Labors of Michael Jackson: Virtuosity, Deindustrialization, and Dancing Work*
 Michael Jackson, arguably the most notable popular-culture virtuoso of the late twentieth century, cannot be understood outside the economic moment that produced him. This essay examines relations between his virtuosity as a dancer and the trajectory of American deindustrialization in the period 1983–88. Through the trope of the human motor, Jackson's virtuosity produces nostalgia for a vanishing industrial past, while barely containing the contradictions and exclusions endemic to the industrial modernist project, especially those involving race. This trope is activated by the intersection of his movement vocabulary and his recurring invocations of hard work. Jackson's dancing in this period reveals a neglected aspect of virtuosity in dance more generally. As an allegorical presentation of idealized relations between the body and work abandoned by the relentless motility of capital, Jackson's virtuosity allows audiences to view these disappearing modes with a romantic backward glance. (JH)
- 766 **Donal Harris**, *Finding Work: James Agee in the Office*
 James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) might be the best-known literary product of Agee's uneven career and of Time Inc.'s golden days at the top of periodical culture. This convergence of author, institution, and text presents a case study for two undertheorized aspects of mid-century American literary history: how the rise of American media corporations, of which Time Inc. is the most successful, provides economic patronage and massive readerships for a generation of writers raised on the tenets of literary modernism and how the "corporate voice" and collective editorial model at these institutions alter conceptions of authorial production. This essay tracks how competing definitions of writing as work—either "for oneself" or "on the clock"—emerge from the context of institutional affiliation. It then shows how the epistemological question of writing as work can be read into the "mental discipline" of Time Inc. magazines' corporate style (referred to as *Time* style) and into the recursive elision of authorial control in *Famous Men*. (DH)
- 782 **Anne-Maria Makhulu**, *The Conditions for after Work: Financialization and Informalization in Posttransition South Africa*
 This essay situates the problem of twenty-first-century work in the global South—specifically, in South Africa—to challenge northern theories of the crisis of work. Addressing the break between Fordism and post-Fordism peculiar to the postcolonial context, it argues that new regimes of work should be understood in relation both to longer histories of colonial resistance to proletarianization (to the racisms of the shop floor) and to colonial Fordisms, as well as to the way these two factors inform the current expansion of informal employment. What practices and forms of life emerge from the precarity of informal

economies and informal settlements? How are precarious modes of life connected to and informed by the steady dematerialization of the economy through financialization? (A-MM)

- 820 **Rebecca E. Biron**, *It's a Living: Hit Men in the Mexican Narco War*
 Because hit men in the twenty-first-century Mexican drug war engage in paid labor at the extreme end of dehumanizing economic relations, they expose the shifting notions of work, life, and ethics that support contemporary global capitalism. Hannah Arendt's distinctions between labor, work, and action structure this comparative analysis of two 2010 narratives featuring Mexican hit men: a testimonial text titled *El Sicario: The Autobiography of a Mexican Assassin* and a feature film titled *El infierno*. These texts explore the subject-producing as well as the destructive effects of murder for hire. Alain Badiou's *Ethics* illuminates how when professional killing becomes a way of life, it provocatively complicates concepts of the good and the human. (REB)
- 845 **Anca Parvulescu**, *Import/Export: Housework in an International Frame*
 A close reading of Ulrich Seidl's *Import Export* (2007), a film on labor migration between eastern and western Europe, provides an international frame for revisiting the second-wave feminist debate on housework. In the last two decades, "women's work" has been outsourced transnationally on a large scale, leading to the emergence of an international private sphere inhabited by a new housewife figure. The feminist housework debate of the 1970s supplies the groundwork for a critique of autonomist neo-Marxism that foregrounds the role of language, translation, and visual gesture in the contemporary import/export of labor. (AP)
- 863 **Margaret Ronda**, "Work and Wait Unwearying": Dunbar's Georgics
 This essay argues that the georgic poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar offer his most incisive representations of the hardships faced by African Americans after Reconstruction. Written in the context of Jim Crow laws, vagrancy statutes, and other coercive means of restricting the mobility of southern blacks and extracting compulsory labor from them, these poems present the hard agrarian work characteristic of the rural Black Belt. They confront the pervasive rhetoric of racial uplift through labor, popularized by Booker T. Washington, that dominates American social discourse on race in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by revealing the negative freedom of black agrarian labor. At the same time, these poems assert the humanity and blamelessness of African Americans in the face of institutional racism. The essay aims to recast Dunbar's legacy by turning attention from his dialect poetry toward his georgic analyses of the uneven modernization of racialized labor. (MR)

890 **David Babcock**, Professional Subjectivity and the Attenuation of Character in J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*

Contemporary accounts of professionalism often gloss over a crucial ambiguity. On one hand, *professional* has long denoted a privileged class position, distinguishing the trained specialist from the interchangeable wage laborer. On the other hand, it has come to convey an existential pursuit of fulfillment through one's work, which extends in principle to all workers regardless of class. This essay shows how J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) puts pressure on this contradictory logic by situating it in the crisis of a biopolitical state, late-apartheid South Africa. In this state, with its dual mandate of welfare and security, character is impoverished, caught between the search for professional fulfillment and the barbaric violence that conditions every economic relation in the state structure. This tension generates alternative possibilities for the portrayal of character, however, as we see in the enigmatic persona of Michael K. (DB)