

Performances for Upward Mobility

How Dutch workfare programmes function as
temporal spaces of imagination

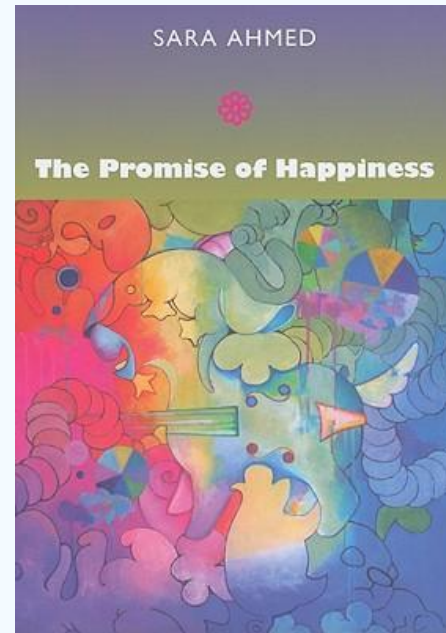
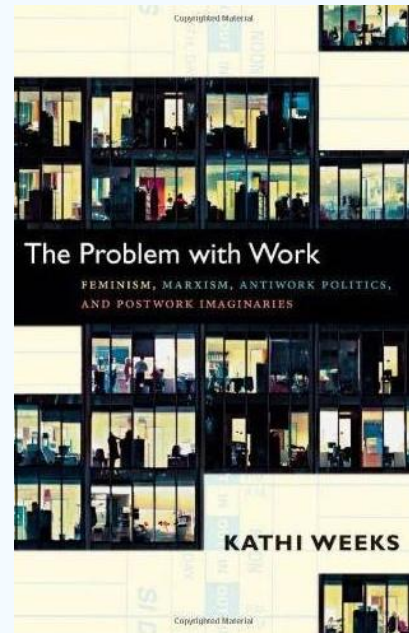
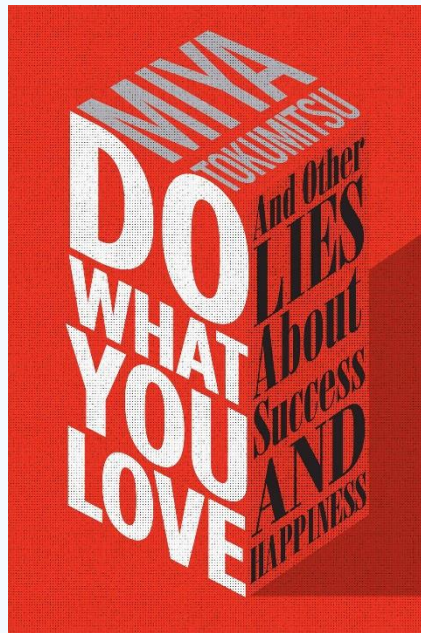


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For the love of work



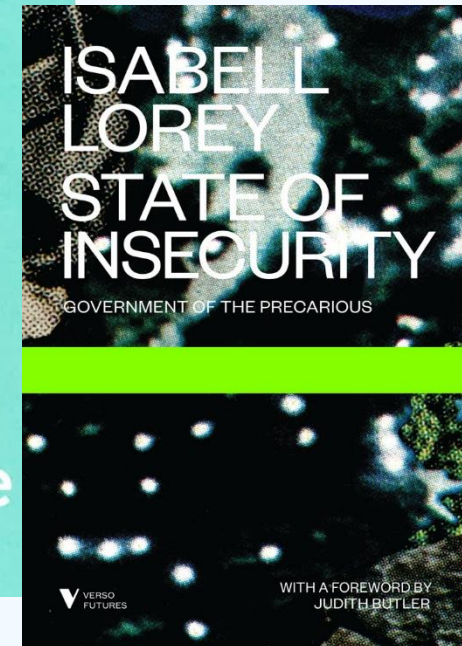
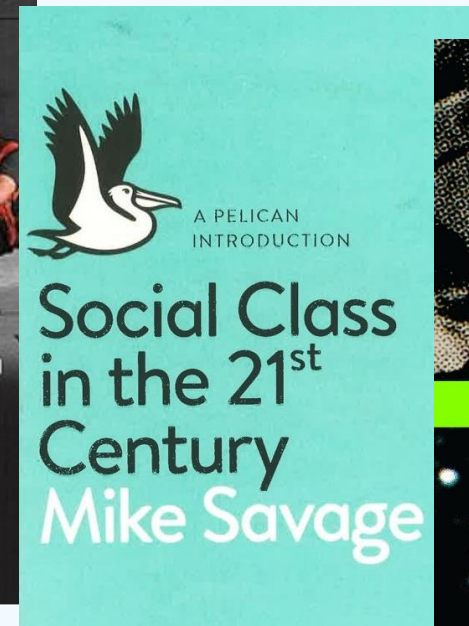
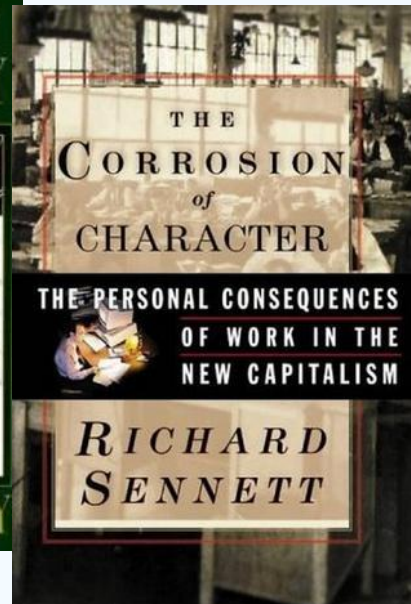
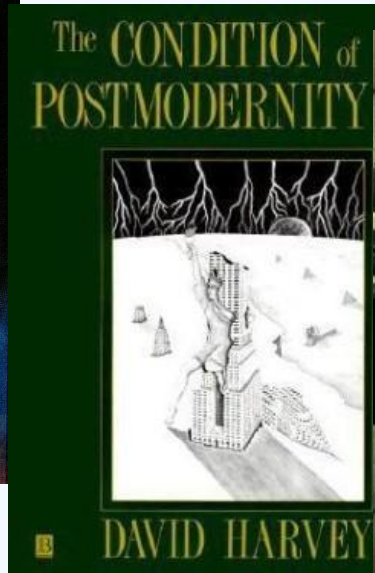
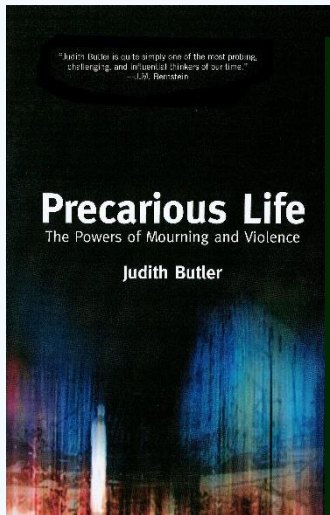
Hard-working
Dutch citizens



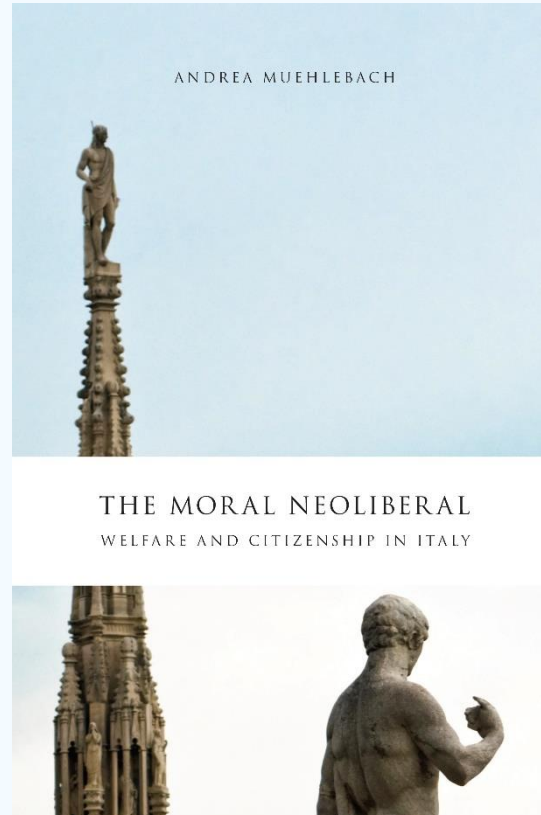
WERK
LOONT

‘work pays off’

Precarity, precariat, precarization



Post-Fordist affect



Workfare as temporal spaces of imagination

Fordist ideals of economic security, social belonging and **upward mobility**

Post-Fordist realities of:

- competitive, precarious labour markets
- welfare policy aimed at rapid labour market (re-)integration

To solve this conflict -> **techniques aimed at 'improving' welfare clients (' situation):**

- introspection
- identification with employers
- imitation of labour market situations

Result: **performances of an imaginary potential**, yet not actual, post-Fordist worker of 'middle class' status

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Fordist ideals, Post-Fordist realities

During the first meeting with the group of welfare clients, the case manager starts by saying: *'You have applied for welfare benefits. You have not succeeded (in finding paid employment), that is why you are here. We are here to assist you in finding paid employment.'*

You have to keep trying. It is your life, your existence and you are responsible for what your life is like. If you are on welfare, you are in fact dependent. It is barely enough to pay your bills and doesn't leave much room for other things. That's why it is important to find a job again. It gives you a reason to get up from the couch, the feeling to belong again, the feeling to live again.'

Fordist ideals, Post-Fordist realities

The welfare client tells the case manager what kind of a job he is looking for: working in manufacturing or (industrial) cleaning. But that requires a certain (safety and health) certificate. He asks if it is possible to acquire that with (financial) support from the welfare office.

Case manager: *'You can get a cleaning job where such a certificate is not required, right?'*

Welfare client: ***'But I would like to go a step up.'***

Case manager: *'It is not about what you want. Fun, better, nice, those are very lovely words, but **that is for later. First, you have to get out of welfare.***

The welfare client says he indeed wants to find a job as quickly as possible, he adds: ***'If I get a job, I will be free.'***

Fordist ideals, Post-Fordist realities

‘The workshops are aimed at helping people to have a clear picture of their bread job, that is to say, a job they can obtain in the short-term. This has to be a realistic job and realistic means that there are vacancies available for it.

The bread job is opposed to the dream job: a job that people work towards. Not from being on welfare, but from a bread job.’

Fordist ideals, Post-Fordist realities

Case manager: *'It is our goal here to get you to your dream job, but not directly. As an intermediate step, we help you to get a bread job.'*

Welfare client: *'But I am afraid I will get stuck in a job like that and never move forward.'*

Case manager: *'A bread job is in any case better than being on welfare.'*

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Introspection, identification, imitation

Case-manager: *'I will give you a form with questions you can answer. It helps you to determine your strong qualities. It includes questions like: what kind of father, mother or partner are you?'*

Welfare client: *'Isn't that private?'*

Case-manager: *'Well, if you beat your wife, you shouldn't say it, that's private. But **it is about who you are as a person.** Like "I am someone who always tells the truth", but it is also about: what kind of people annoy you? (With the personal profile) you **indicate what you are good at, what your qualities are, but also who you are.** You can get that from the test. What matters in the end is, do I grant you the job or not. **The employer has to choose between people with similar work experiences and educational backgrounds.** And then he asks himself: 'do I want you here, do you have to offer me something?' That has everything to do with presentation and personality.'*

Introspection, identification, imitation

The case manager suggests to have everyone state their pitfalls. One of the welfare clients says he doesn't know what his pitfalls are.

The case manager asks the other participants. The next (male) welfare client says he doesn't know his pitfalls either and another male welfare client says his memory is not that good, so he can't recall his pitfalls. The female welfare clients, however, do not seem to have a problem with the exercise. The first woman says her pitfall is that she is too compliant and has to learn to say no. The second female welfare client says she can be a control freak. Both women give examples of situations in which their pitfalls have played a part.

The case manager compliments both women by saying they have described their pitfalls very well. She explains to the group why an employer would ask about their pitfalls: ***'It says something about your self-insight, it shows that you know who you are. And the trick is to be able to turn your pitfall around into a quality.'*** She gives the group of welfare clients an assignment for next week: *'come up with two pitfalls and ways to turn them around into something positive.'*

Introspection, **identification**, imitation

The case manager explains: *'You are stranded in the desert with an empty tank. The Big Five are there as well and you have two children in the back seat of your car. You are in luck, because there is a petrol station close by, called "The last drop". It closes in two minutes. You rush over there to get petrol.'*

The case manager further explains that his colleague will play the part of the petrol station attendant and invites the welfare clients to take turns playing the part of the person who is coming to get petrol: *'Who wants to try first?'*

Introspection, **identification**, imitation

After a few welfare clients have played their part, some with success, others without, the case manager explains the lesson to take away from the exercise: *'Are you going to bring something, or are you only there to get something out of it? When you are looking for a job, you are irrevocably in the mode of getting something, but you can also bring something. **You have to be interested in the other person's needs.** The petrol attendant might be very unkind and unwilling to help, but to say that doesn't get you anywhere. You have to switch over. (...) **What do you have to offer him? Because it is not inviting if you force yourself onto someone. You have to put yourself in the other person's position.'***

Introspection, identification, **imitation**

*‘(The elevator pitch) is a short encounter. Imagine that you run into your boss in the elevator. You are on your way to the first floor and your boss is going to the hundredth floor. **You want to go higher up as well, so you have to sell yourself in thirty seconds.** We are going to practice that.*

Introspection, identification, imitation

Case manager: *'Shall we start?'*

Welfare client: *'Can I read my pitch out loud?'*

Case manager: *'It is about your personal presentation, conveying your personal character, making **contact**. You can keep your notes with you, in case you don't know what to say, but **try to speak from yourself**.'*

The welfare client reads her pitch from the piece of paper in her hand. When she is finished, the case manager gives her feedback: *'It is not really spoken language, but more like written language. The content is good, but if you tell it instead of reading it, you might use other words. I do see you have implemented the suggestions I gave you last week. That is good to see. Do you want to try it again, this time from yourself?'*

The welfare client says: *'Not right now, I will try again next week.'*

Case manager: *'Very well, just keep practicing.'*

Introspection, identification, **imitation**

Case manager: *‘Today, we are accompanied by an account manager from the Employers Service Center. She has a large network of employers. That is why we have given you the assignment to prepare your elevator pitch.’* Before the welfare clients start with their pitches, he asks the account manager whether she wants to say something.

Account manager: *‘I am in contact with employers on a daily basis and I want to try to start you in the right direction. I will not look at you as a trainer or coach, but as a future employer. Do you fit me, or the vacancy? And what do you have to offer as a colleague? What makes you stand out from the rest? This is the way you would view a product you want to buy, right? That tube of toothpaste or a bicycle.’*

Introspection, identification, **imitation**



<http://greenbusinessclub.nl/kennisbank/projecten/netwerkgalerie/>

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