

Let there be light
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'Lifting one's thought to the level of anger, lifting one's anger to the level of a work. Weaving this work that consists of questioning technology, history, and the law. To enable us to open our eyes to the violence of the world inscribed in the images.'

– Georges Didi-Huberman, *How to Open your Eyes*

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It is said that the first real motion picture ever produced was the film *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon* in 1835 by the brothers Lumière, but, as Harun Farocki has observed, it would be more accurate to say that it was the first camera in the history of cinema pointed at a factory. In any case, ever since that moment, the history of images has been entangled with the history of labour.

An image is not only a trace of the real but also an aesthetic and epistemological production of visibility, a representation that establishes places and roles, functions and forms of participation. The representation of labour produced by cinema, television, photography, sculpture and literature during the 20th century was important for the construction of a social force that operated until very recently. We cannot forget that labour was at the core of most political struggles, nor that the agency for the political subject was the worker. The dismantling of labour as a social force, at least in the form that took in the factory, mine, union or field, has had radical consequences in the political construction of the present.

Simon Gush's recent production insists on creating an image of work today. His work is based in the juxtaposition of long-standing representations of labour and the questioning of his own practice. Post-Marxist theory thought that art was the last human production in which work could be understood as creation and origin, but in times like this in which art has changed both in its production and in its object, what could the ontological status of the work of

art be? And more importantly, given the condition of the artist as labourer, what kind of image can he or she create?

In order to respond to his time and to lift his anger to the level of work, as Didi-Huberman suggests, Gush searches for an image of what has been obliterated, of what has become invisible although it is engraved in our cities, in our monuments, in our memories, in our fantasies and in our bodies.

Assuming the responsibility of location, Gush has produced a palimpsest of images and representations to confront labour in 21st-century Johannesburg. Always taking the city as the site of emplacement, Gush goes from the places of work to the absence of the worker in a city that was built as a product of capitalism. Johannesburg, also known as Egoli (City of Gold), is a place where labour is entangled with colonialism and race but also with struggle and political action.

If the worker was for the brothers Lumière the form to generate the illusion of movement, in the worker's absence, light is the form that shapes time in Gush's moving images. Always filmed in black and white, his images play with the tradition of documentary film but only to betray any purpose of instruction. The moving image is taken from cinema and brought to visual art in order to create forms of intervention, whence to respond to a politics of representation that has failed to create an image of labour able to generate affects and effects. Closer to poetry than a cinema of denunciation, Gush's works emerge from the clash of a personal reflection, always as an interruption of the image as text, and a city that forces the perusing of a critical image.

In the work of Simon Gush there is no way to separate the history of labour and personal experience, and with this operation what is cancelled is any subsumption of the particular. It is in the tension between history and experience that the representation of labour collapses. It is perhaps in this fissure that we can overcome all the melancholy of failure and dispossession and gain some force for what is to come.