

# Homer-making: a tactical art at work

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Publishing an article that focuses on homer-making on a website devoted to practices of hacking might seem somewhat extravagant since this practice has long been described as being “in decline”,<sup>1</sup> a decline supposedly concomitant with the emergence of numerical control in the production process. Though, until then, homer-making could still slip into the interstices of industrial production, it has allegedly been relegated to a bygone era by this “technological and digital revolution”. However, as Michel de Certeau wrote in the introduction to his chapter about homer-making: “The operational models of popular culture cannot be confined to the past, the countryside, or primitive peoples. They exist in the heart of the strongholds of the contemporary economy. Take, for example, what in France is called *la perruque*, “the wig.” [...] *la perruque* reintroduces “popular” techniques of other times and other places into the industrial space (that is, into the Present order).”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in light of the survival of these “tactical arts” throughout ages, it is possible to demonstrate that homer-making (*la perruque* in French) is still connected to modern-day hacking, and that the hacker and homer-maker personas are connected in many ways.

Incidentally, hackers working in the computer field, whose mission is to manipulate the code and computer hardware, will often have the opportunity to become homer-makers and indulge in parallel productions during work hours (creating or maintaining websites, designing and producing programs, games or other software, etc.). And, for their part, homer-makers working in other industries will increasingly feel the need to turn into hackers. Indeed computerization, artificial intelligence, robotization and the automation of production means have considerably changed the conditions of homer-making in contemporary production workshops, so much so that programming skills are now the essential correlates of this practice. Employees who want to divert preprogrammed machines (or numerically controlled machine tools) from their primary function – which is to perform production tasks defined by management – must then be able to *reprogram* them.<sup>3</sup> Thus, alongside old forms of factory do-it-yourself that workers still use when possible, new tactical tendencies take place in workshops where new technologies prevail. In such companies, the machine operator who holds the numerical control is now – just like a computer hacker – the most qualified person and the one who is in the best position in the production line to make homers. Also, if we can make a poacher into a “prehistoric hacker” persona,<sup>4</sup> it could be the case for the homer-maker persona too, at least since the creation of wage labor, because just like poachers who “*use what’s not theirs*”<sup>5</sup> or hackers who “break codes and divert machines to adapt them to their use”,<sup>6</sup> homer-makers make a misappropriated and reappropriated use of the means of production to which they have access in the workspace and during work hours. However, although the homer-maker might foreshadow a certain type of hacker and that it would therefore be tempting to consider homer-making as a form of “hacking at work”, it should be remembered that each practice is peculiar. Thus, although poaching and homer-making have a lot in common with hacking – especially understood as the activity that consists in modifying, diverting, fiddling or tinkering with... elements (such as computer hardware and/or software) so that they may work differently than they were designed to – these different practices shouldn’t be mixed up with each other. For this reason, this article will focus exclusively on the practice of homer-making, starting by trying to find a definition that could delimit the relevant field more precisely.

## Homer-making: what’s it all about?: games and stakes of a definition.

When we question the definition of homer-making – a name whose very origin is unknown<sup>7</sup> – we can see quite quickly that there are as many definitions of this practice as there are different playgrounds and practitioners. However, one could try to define *homer-making* this way: it consists, for a worker in wage labor (in the workspace and during work hours), in the (individual and sometimes collective) reappropriation of the available production means (materials and production tools) to manufacture or transform artifacts outside of the company’s official production.

Obviously this definition can only be understood as a game here (the very rules of which are debatable) because, like all given definitions, it would never be enough to cover all the implications of homer-making or to qualify it through differentiation, in relation to what it is not. Thus, if the merit of our definition – derived from that of Robert Kosmann<sup>8</sup> – is to avoid turning homer-making into a work done exclusively “for oneself” – a homer can be ordered by or for others (colleagues, friends, family members...) or it can even clandestinely contribute to a political scheme that goes beyond the sole satisfaction of the operator who indulges in it –, it nevertheless omits to specify that it is always non-commercial work for example. In this sense, homer-making is defined in distinction to other “parallel practices” such as the clandestine enterprise (here the product of the activity made at work is sold) or undeclared work (the paid activity is carried out outside of the company) and also differs from other marginal practices such as worker idleness, online gaming or shopping, etc. The aim is not to hierarchize these practices – according to their supposedly more or less moral nature –, but since homer-making is often confused with other types of

diversion at work, it seems useful to specify its outline. Made in the workspace and during work hours, *homers are non-commercial*. They are not sold because the makers do not see them as merchandise: homers are free, that is one of their main characteristics. When they are not made “for oneself”, they are mostly offered and, in a “gift/counter-gift” logic, they can be exchanged.

In the same way, if this “clandestinely produced” work implies theft – the last step of this practice is to bring the artifact out of the company<sup>2</sup> – it is not reducible to a simple theft, since it is above all *the expression of a technical know-how* often acquired during professional training attended by the “worker/homer-maker”. An employee who wants to make a *casquette*<sup>10</sup> is therefore dependent on his position in the company, the time he may have – or take, to be more accurate – and his practical know-how.<sup>11</sup> It is necessary to have access to the means of production, that is to know how tools work (milling machine, lathe, torches...) and how to work with raw materials (wood, metals, glass...). This is why homer-making is firstly done by skilled workers and, under these circumstances – those of the division of labor – it is not always possible to “return the favor”, for example among colleagues. Any workstation is not conducive to the production of *bricoles* and therefore does not offer the same reciprocity opportunities. However, if it is not possible to return the favor, it is the custom to trade a homer for a drink, a pack of cigarettes, a bottle of wine or Ricard, a restaurant invitation, etc. The “counter-gift” varies according to the time spent and the difficulty of the work done by the homer-maker.

As we can see, if there is an ongoing discussion and controversy about the definition of this term, it is probably because we could add a number of other rules which are all essential to the refined understanding of the game of homer-making. Thereby, rather than adding an umpteenth definition of homer-making, we would have probably been well advised to present some rules of the game directly [which is the case in the box entitled: *Short summary of the main rules and constraints of the game of homer-making*].

### From homer-making as deviance to deviance as a resistance art.

Practiced on the terrain imposed by the other and with the means available *in situ*, homer-making is therefore an *art of tactics* according to the definition given by Michel de Certeau.<sup>12</sup> This activity can be fun because it turns the context of work into a place devoted to play and tactical diversion of routine constraints.

There are few studies about this practice that is quite common in the worlds of wage labor, although it is most often associated with industrial production methods. Although we do not know exactly when the term *peruque* appeared, we can say that this practice of diversion of the means of production is probably as old as wage labor.<sup>13</sup> Its practice is more or less clandestine because the tolerance and repression policies vary according to companies. But although it is not always repressed by employers, it would be inaccurate to see this practice as a simple vector favoring work regulation. In opposition to sociologist Michel Anteby, according to whom homer-making may well belong to these “gray zones tolerated by the company’s management” and could be seen as “a discretionary remuneration” even endowed with a “regulatory function” of the “factory’s productive order”,<sup>14</sup> it would be tempting to inventory these different practices and automatically place them in the generic category of the resisting ones. But the issue we may encounter with such a practice, whose nature is to be underground, sporadic, most often solitary and without claim, is that by systematically naming it a “resistance”, we decide to make it say something whereas practitioners themselves speak very little of it – and even more rarely to describe it in terms of resistance. Practiced anonymously and (semi-)clandestinely – unlike a collective protest that uses a platform of demands for support for instance – it is difficult to decide to interpret this practice as a resisting one without over-interpreting it.

The question could then be: what creates resistance? Not so much from the point of view of those who indulge in this practice as from that of those that it penalizes: business owners and their delegates. What creates resistance according to management? We think this question can tell us what creates – or not – resistance. This is somewhat the same logic that Howard Becker uses to define the notion of deviance: “...deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others [those he also refers to as “moral entrepreneurs”] of rules and sanctions to an “offender”.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the question is not to substantialize the act of transgression committed by an employee in the company (there is no “good” or “bad” deviance) but, in order to spot deviance (what deviates from official production) and as Howard Becker encourages us to do, we can look at the rule that is being broken, at those who made it, and observe the applied sanctions.

And although deviance is set by the rule, it should be remembered that homer-making is most often considered illegal – including in the companies rules and regulations. And Michel Anteby is right to make the analysis of these regulations the way to find “a “negative” evidence of the existence of a practice. If a practice is systematically prohibited or sanctioned, then it must exist.”<sup>16</sup> And Robert Kosmann adopted the same reasoning to find the clues necessary to assert the existence of homer-making as far back as the seventeenth century. The author of *Sorti d’usines* thus drew on the royal decrees adopted under the reign of Louis XIV and managed by Colbert, then Secretary of State of the Navy – decrees which particularly specified that workers were forbidden to manufacture (for them or their officers) “furniture and other works”, and detailed the penalties incurred by workers who would be caught in the act (sanctions ranging from “a fine amounting to one crown for those who would bring out pieces of wood and shavings” to corporal punishments for “those who would be found with nails or other things belonging to His Majesty”) and the conditions of searches upon exiting the Brest Arsenal<sup>17</sup> – to attest that homer-making is indeed a practice as old as wage labor. That way, the examination of these regulations prohibiting homer-making

not only confirms its “existence”, but allows us to simultaneously identify where, when and for whom... this is a resistance practice – to the extent that bosses seek to prevent it through the explicit use of threats of sanctions. And although it is no longer punished by corporal punishment, as it was the case in the seventeenth century, it still exposes those who indulge in it to managerial sanctions that can lead to dismissal. Marie de Banville and Bruno Dumont's movie *Perruque, bricole et compagnie*... gives us access to the testimony of Mr D, who was fired for making a barbecue during work hours<sup>18</sup>. Of course, in some limited cases, employers or supervisors can embrace what they cannot avoid and then accept to “turn a blind eye” to the *bousille*, under an implicit contract that aims to give the homer-maker their blessing in return for a job well done on behalf of the company. But such tolerance remains precarious and revocable: “*It is absolutely not an acquired right with recognized permanence.*”<sup>19</sup>

The case of our unfortunate barbecue lover speaks well for it. While management was changing, he kept manufacturing his barbecue in plain sight, unsuspecting that the rules and regulations would henceforth be effectively implemented and that he would pay for it.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the boss of bosses Xavier Boniteau (who was president of the employers' organization *Union Patronale des Industriels de la Loire* at the end of the 90s) helps us clarifying – from the point of view of the owner – the expression “authorized homer”, which sounds like an oxymoron. To the question asked by Marie de Banville in the movie *Perruque, bricole et compagnie*...: “*What is the tolerance policy regarding homers?*” the boss answers that there is no tolerance margin: “*...as soon as an employee diverts either raw material or time – which is paid for by the company [sic] – for their own benefit to manufacture any object whatsoever, that is theft. As soon as there is a tacit agreement, there's no homer anymore. If there is a tacit agreement, then there is no theft. Whether it is explicitly said or simply tacit, this is no longer homer-making.*”<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, this boss/perruquier (the one who endures homer-making)<sup>22</sup> – a “moral entrepreneur,” as Howard Becker would say – offers an entirely acceptable definition of what homer-making is – or is not – and of its normative boundaries.

### **Homer-making as an art of resistance recycled in the service of class struggle.**

Homer-making is therefore prohibited by employers in most companies because it is a practice of *direct reappropriation of the means of production during work hours*. In this sense, homer-making questions the legitimacy of the employers' power to dispose of the private ownership of the means of production alone but also to enjoy the surplus value offered by work hours that in reality – and unlike what the big cheese tells us – *they do not pay*. “Left-hand work” is one form, among others, of direct reappropriation of what Karl Marx calls “unpaid surplus labor”.<sup>23</sup> Through homer-making, we seek to get a little bit of what was stolen from us back, even if such gleaning only represents a tiny reappropriation in relation to the wealth produced and the surplus value achieved by the company. And it is undoubtedly to assert this unleashed time and these reappropriated means that some homer-makers proudly indicate how long they have worked on objects they present: “*It took me one week to make this saber [which is a homer]!*”<sup>24</sup>

Also, the object as a summary of the production activity is the trace resulting from a moment taken, or rather snatched, from the regulated and divided control of work. The obtained object is the trophy of what one could call a “resistance making do”, it is the victory of a “Let's do it ourselves!” over the employers' order and the hierarchy that always single-handedly decide, direct, supervise and control work execution.

Therefore, from a political point of view, this practice is a close cousin of other practices that can be described as *libertarian communist or anarcho-syndicalist*. Indeed, in the embryonic stage, homer-making allows for the daily exercise of self-organization (“*this is a work we plan on our own and execute as we see fit*”),<sup>25</sup> direct action (it means a reappropriation and a direct turnaround of the means of production), and it implies a profound questioning of the technical and social division of work understood as a source of alienation because those who engage in it are determined to fight a monotonous, fragmented and alienating work.

But all homer-makers definitely do not relate to this type of political legitimization and only see this as one more theoretical construction: *we do that just because, to keep ourselves busy and also because we know how to do it, that's all*.

However, homer-making is often associated with the ideal of a socialized production, or what Miklós Haraszti calls the Great Homer: “*If production experts were not at the same time dispensers of our means of existence and masters of discipline and performance, this would be the age of the Great Homer. Instead of the alienated meaning, imposed from the outside by wages (and their negation: the nonsense of forbidden comfort), the ecstasy of genuine need would come. Precisely what is senseless about homers from the point of view of the factory announces the tranquil insistent affirmative of work motivated by a single incentive stronger than all others: the conviction that our labor, our life and our consciousness can be governed by our own goals. The Great Homer would be made on machines but these would be subordinated by our experts to the double requirement of real needs and of our freedom from them. It would be the twilight of timer technology. We would only produce what associated homer-makers would need and what would keep us united as homer-makers. And we would produce it a thousand times more efficiently than anything produced today.*”<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the different ways of action used by homer-makers are not radically different than those used by revolutionary and anti-fascist Spain's workers in 1936 as, for instance, they recycled Hispano-Suza factories into an armoring workshop for luxury cars. There are only differences of degrees between them. They proceed from a similar practical state of mind, since it is always about finding a certain freedom to manufacture or transform artifacts outside of the company's official production; the whole

difference – and a major one according to our barbecue maker – stems from the fact that the homer is produced by a worker in a traditional capitalist company and the other – the Great Homer – is mass produced by workers who put the Hispano-Suza luxury car business under worker supervision via factory committees and assemblies.<sup>27</sup>

Far from being an obstacle to the expression of a collective protest, homer-making can be considered a daily exercise, gymnastics that will allow one to put these skills and *recycled* means of production at the service of class struggle, when the time comes.

More simply, this practice is, incidentally, often associated with an “art of recycling”, which trains imagination and ingenuity in making hybrid objects from “anything and everything”. The homer is indeed a composite object made from selected pieces (precious or semi-precious metals, silver soldering wire, copper, piece of lace or leather...) and/or waste (wood or metal scraps, defective piece...). In light of this “art of recycling”, the *bricole* could then not only be considered a worker resistance to the industrial order but also, according to F.X. Trivière, “*a form of resistance to industrial disorder*” because some workers justify it by “*a preemptive right in the name of good industrial waste management*.”<sup>28</sup> This argument, which aims to consider workers who grant themselves a right of priority use on waste (in the name of its “good management”) as legitimate, is reminiscent of the argument of workers struggling to make the claim that a company belongs primarily to its workers effective and get it recognized. A claim that would thus prioritize, against private property, a preemptive right for workers on the means of production (tools and raw material) and their shared uses, self-managed by makers but also, why not, in cooperation with user-consumer groups. This is the case when workers, finding meaning in self-assigned work, relaunch the production of goods and/or services in order to socialize the profits or to popularize, finance or protect a struggle. The occupation of companies by striking workers can then provide a context conducive to the manufacture of “self-defense homers” for instance, which are used to keep the police at a distance. This was the case in May 2009 in Gijón (Asturias), when shipyard workers resisted the closure of their site. To defend themselves against the repeated assaults of the riot police, workers and boilermakers built on the premises several small protective sheet metal sentry boxes on wheels. These small mobile sentry boxes (about 2 meters high, thick sheet metal, spot-welded with a blowtorch, closed on three sides, with protective roofs and frontal and lateral loopholes) thus allowed them to go to the right distance to shoot projectiles and repel tear gas on repressive forces. They also used “*50 mm diameter and 1.5 meter long tubes to shoot small-caliber “garden” fireworks (20 to 25) at Spanish civil guards. Videos show that there’s an opening, a “light” tinkered to allow firing.*”<sup>29</sup> To keep the police at bay, workers also fought back with slingshots, fire hoses, Molotov cocktails, bolts... and also used cranes to maneuver burning containers.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond the fact that it can assume an explicitly political function – in the extraordinary context of an open conflict –, the “hidden work”, as small as it may be, offers several levels of resistance. As we have seen, it calls into question the legitimacy of the employers’ power to be the sole beneficiary of the production means’ private property but also to dispose of the surplus value generated by unpaid work hours. But such work also resists by reversing the constraints imposed by the conditions of production and thus becomes a form of resistance to the organized division of labor. In the case of the “individual” production of a homer,<sup>31</sup> the operator does his best to use the materials available *in situ* and is thrilled to be able to produce an object from A to Z by foiling the constraints of his particular workstation. Therefore, homer-makers resist by producing a complete object from a specialized and parcellized workstation. They resist through the production of a “free” and “creative” work that is organized in constant back and forth between design (what to do?) and manufacturing (how to make it with what one has to hand?). They – temporarily at least – regain control of their work power: during the object’s production time, all operations are their responsibility.

In a way, it is a critique of the division of labor in manufacturing using its own means and constraints. In this sense, the cultural practice of homer-making can fall under a culture of resistance to the division of labor in the industrialized capitalist world – a resistance that the Luddites led from the outside.<sup>32</sup> We can take the risk of a historical transposition and say that homer-makers, just like the Luddites, are faced with the orchestrated division of labor, but also that their attitudes differ: whereas the Luddites destroyed the production tool, homer-makers use it from the inside to produce something else, and differently.

## The homer-object

Yet, if a homer is made through the manufacture or transformation of an object, it is primarily a utilitarian production, which serves to improve the daily life of the homer-maker or that of their friends of family: tools (rulers, triangles, protractors, compasses, hammers...), domestic equipment (cutlery, knives, mincers, shovels, bowls, saucepans, barbecues, lamps, ashtrays, magnetic soap dishes, coat racks...). But the *pinaille* can also be “useless”, “an art of doing just for the sake of doing”, or more exactly of symbolic utility, and can thus consist in objects in three dimensions: figures of protesters made of screws and bolts, miniature wheelbarrow, miniaturized machine tools...<sup>33</sup> We had to wait until the 1970s, a period that saw the emergence of mass distribution and consumption (particularly through the emergence of large-scale retailers), for homer-making to appear more as a reaction to the uniformity of production, and for it to offer more “creative” or “decorative” objects: paperweight, chess set, brain-teasers, solitaire, candlesticks, key rings, pencil cases, pendants, dice, dildos, electronic music box, TV antennas, pirated Canal+ decoders, hi-fi amplifiers,... There is also a certain attachment to the production of weapons: slingshots with steel balls, brass knuckles, pistols, crossbows, swords, halberds...

Thus, the term homer, which covers both the production activity of this object and the object itself, can be considered a

process object. But its exhibition becomes problematic as such. By dissociating the object from its particular context of production, from the everyday and ordinary environment in which it is supposed to take place, we participate in the reification of the homer. The exhibited homer-object, taken away from its process, its history, its maker and the rules of the game that motivated its production, but also taken away from its (whether domestic or political) function or its decor, is given a change of scenery and decontextualized. Although the object is not considered as a commodity by its maker, it can be reified, merchandized as a work of art.

## Homer-making and Art

However, for the last twenty years, it seems that spaces dedicated to art have become ideal places to observe these “small works” produced in the shadows and then brought to light. This sudden interest of the art worlds for the *bousille* seems to be the sign of this object’s change of social status. Homer-makers and those who study homers (sociologists, ethnographers, philosophers, historians, etc.) also seem to find correspondences with artistic practices in this practice, despite their mistrust of the “art” category. Yet the “becoming art” of this practice does not go without saying and the ambiguous relations between *art* and *homer-making* need to be questioned, just like the misunderstanding that lingers between the different actors of these two worlds.

On the one hand, although homer-makers accept to define their objects in terms of “technical pleasure”, “aesthetic emotion”, as “beautiful” or “ugly”, they do not claim, at least in principle, any artistic legitimacy and refuse the “art” category. Just like the workers who, from the factory to the house, transform their interior or their garage into a museum (self-patrimonializing their own productions) and indulge in the creation of diverse “useless” objects – statues, paintings, models in wood, cement, iron, etc. – and that Véronique Moulinié calls “ordinary workers of art”, also to avoid using the term “artist” that would almost be perceived as an insult by many of them: “*Do you think I have the mug of an artist? I’m just a worker. I do that just because. To keep myself busy. Also because I know how to do it. That’s all.*”<sup>34</sup> Étienne de Banville drew on Véronique Moulinié’s study to note – this time about homer-makers/workers of art – that “*refusing to accept the “art” category seems to be based on the rejection of the social, if not sociological, category of “artists”; not only their “mug”, but especially the lifestyle and social category attributed to them: according to many – though not all – homer-makers, being a (recognized) artist could be seen as a betrayal, an unacceptable rupture with their worker career, with the relationships they maintain with their buddies, in short with their own image. Art is for others! in a way, while homer-making is “beautiful work.”*” (Étienne de Banville, *Ibid.*, p. 71-72.) And on the other hand, if we consider these productions in the light of processual art, it is not surprising that they make the libido of the small art world run at full speed. But any attempt to redefine the practice of homer-making (understood in the sense of the *worker of art* who seeks to achieve a *beautiful work*) as artistic could not ignore this cumbersome *professional know-how* that rehabilitates a modernist conception of art with the image of artists as subjectivities that are free to leave their mark on each of their “works” – or “pieces”, to use the same Newspeak as some current art worlds which, under cover of using a term intended to replace that of “work”, continue nonetheless to distinguish their own productions by emphasizing their preciousness –, to achieve a “beautiful work”, a “work well done”, which becomes something “unique”. Such a vision does not quite fit with the art movements that, since Marcel Duchamp’s paradigmatic – if ever there were one – work *Fountain*, have constantly sought to get rid of an aesthetic overvaluation, the surplus value attributed to the supposed “unique” *know-how* of the artist,<sup>35</sup> and to avoid the reification of traces – embarrassing or even compromising residues – left behind. In this sense, the museographic recontextualization of such objects in the performative framework of art represents, step by step, an artistic revaluation that is suspect from both the makers’ point of view and an artistic point of view.

## The exhibition of homers

The ambiguous relations between art and homer-making are therefore much questioned by this museification in the making because, as we have seen, a homer is not obviously produced to be exhibited. The exhibition of homers made at the request of Étienne de Banville in September 1996 at the Château des Bruneaux ecomuseum (in the city of Firminy near Saint-Etienne) was first threatened with a ban due to the presence of the city’s police chief and a court bailiff – who aimed (as a result of a complaint lodged by local employers: l’Union Patronale des Industriels de la Loire) to draw up a detailed inventory of the objects on display on the opening day, to describe them, and to specify the authors and the origin of the enterprise.<sup>36</sup> Ten years later (on November 24, 2006 at Saint-Etienne’s Trade Union Center), the mayor and the city’s VIPs inaugurated the very same exhibition. This institutional recognition – which can be attributed to “*some members of the intelligentsia worrying about the disappearance of some labor know-how in France*”<sup>37</sup> – could be perceived by homer-makers as a funeral announcement regarding a certain type of labor homer-making.<sup>38</sup> It seems that homer-making makes much more sense in its processual phase than in its instituted phase. Once recontextualized in museum institutions – artwork cemeteries (?) –, it loses its grandeur.

The methods used to exhibit or represent these homer-objects largely determine the position and commitment of the curator<sup>39</sup> – or the artist-turned-curator’s one when their work is made of objects created by others – regarding their models, homer-makers. The practices of representation thus reveal often antagonistic positions and interests, and place the subjects in positions that can be asymmetrical. Depending on which side of the mediation they are on, representatives and represented people do not always find the same interests. In his chapter devoted to homer-making (*une pratique de détournement : la*

*perruque – a diversionary practice: “la perruque”*), Michel de Certeau questions the place from which we study this practice. He observes “a gap that separates the time of solidarity (marked by docility and gratitude toward one’s hosts) from the time of writing; the latter reveals the institutional affiliations (scientific, social) and the profit (intellectual, professional, financial, etc.) for which this hospitality is objectively the means. The Bororos of Brazil sink slowly into their collective death, and Lévi-Strauss takes his seat in the French Academy.”<sup>40</sup> Paraphrasing Michel de Certeau, we could probably see something similar in the artistic representation of industrial workers in France. The workers of a certain industry and their associated cultures sink slowly into their collective death,<sup>41</sup> and Jean-Luc Moulène enters Beaubourg with their represented *strike objects*.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, although the collection and archive work regarding strike objects – or “strike homers”<sup>43</sup> – done by Jean-Luc Moulène and his donation to the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail must be recognized,<sup>44</sup> we find the artistic representation of such objects problematic, to say the least. And the artist, – self-proclaimed (?) – actor of this redefinition of “strike objects” into “art objects”, is not mistaken when he says: “There is an ambiguity. In my mind, this work is a place of conflict, not a peaceful place. Beaubourg buying the photographs represents the assumption of a manifest object in art. Thus, in a way, the subversive content of the strike object is appeased.”<sup>45</sup> The artist’s mind is not the only place where this work is a place of conflict, as it can only distend a little more the bonds of hospitality and solidarity that could exist between the “artist-archivist” and the striking workers who are the collective producers of the “strike homers” that have been transfigured into “art objects” and also somehow into objects of speculation. And in this case the tumble is quite severe. In October 2011, the photograph of a strike object – including that of the Gauloise packet with a CGT stamp that was offered in 1982 with a five franc support voucher and which clearly stipulated TASTING-SALE PROHIBITED – was sold 7500 euros including VAT by the Galerie Chantal Crousel<sup>46</sup> (which represents the artist), which gives the twenty-four photographs of “strike objects” a commercial value of 180,000 euros including VAT and gives an important surplus-value to the photograph of the Gauloise packet produced by the striking workers of Seita. The reclassification from “strike homers” to “art objects” creates this kind of schizophrenia. For whom do artists work and what reputation – a priori or a posteriori – do they leave behind? Does this mean that artists – just like curators, anthropologists or sociologists... – are always at risk of betraying their hosts’ hospitality and increasing even more the divisions of labor between representatives on one side and represented people on the other? Of course one has to work on the homer and “transform the material or personally contribute to its added value”<sup>47</sup> and the homer “can also represent an artistic creation: sometimes it can be unique, playful and creative.”<sup>48</sup> But the surplus value brought by know-how, which is the pride of any self-respecting homer-maker, can become a speculative criterion for collectors of “unique” objects. The possible reification – or commodification – of this practice is exactly where all its richness is. The many particularities of the homer-object (hybridity, uniqueness due to its unusual production, creativity, ingenuity, diversionary tactics, etc.) can give it an uncertain attention. Its possible commodification makes it face likely “decontextualizing” attentions. These objects can then be turned into “exotic” art objects – just like African masks in their time – because they were made with the production means and know-how of a bygone era. This would be the end of what Haraszti calls the *Great Homer*, as “connoisseurs of folklore may look on homers as a native, decorative art. As yet, they aren’t able to see further than that. But they will, and the day will come when homers are no longer forbidden but are commercialized and administered.”<sup>49</sup> Besides its possible reification, homer-making can find its own spaces that would promote other kinds of trade, not only merchant ones. Emancipation in the pragmatic sense would imply – beyond trying not to dissociate them from their environment – constituting institutions adapted to such practice. Institutions that would give workers (and users) the means to gather around “parallel labor exchanges” to share experiences of diversion, and socialize the fruits of our know-how and a direct reappropriation of the production means. But these institutions would be all the more effective if they escaped such identification.

Homer-makers from all over the world: let’s unite!

#### A short summary of the main rules and constraints of the homer-making game:

1. To be in wage labor: homer-making is practiced in the workspace and during work hours.
2. Homer-making implies that the worker – or workers – has access to the production means and reappropriates the available tools and materials.
3. The aim is to manufacture or transform an object, which implies the expression of a “technical and professional know-how”. In this sense, homer-making is not always possible.
4. Produced outside of the company’s official production, homers can be ordered (the work is not exclusively “for oneself”, it can be ordered by or for others: colleagues, friends, family members, etc.), but it is non-commercial. Homers can’t be bought!
5. Finally, the “clandestinely produced” artifact is to be brought out of the company, which involves pilfering.





A bent tank to be fastened at the waist, under the jacket, to pilfer fluids such as expensive gearbox oil, manufactured at the Renault Billancourt factories, undated (between 1960 and 1970). Robert Kosmann's photo collection.









Armchair, chairs and large conference table: homers – *Foreign* – made in Derby city's rail factories – between 1870 and 1910 – on behalf of the trade union of English railwaymen RMT (the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers). Jan Middelbos's photo collection.



Training saber for a child practicing Vo Vietnam (martial art), Blade: aluminum, brass, wood and steel. Handle: Castorama bed leg. Salvaged eye bolt. Entirely done and finished using shears and lime. Made in an airline maintenance workshop, 2006. (about 5 days of work). Serge Meillat's collection and photo.





Slingshot, leather, salvaged rubber (factory warehouse), and aluminum (18 cm x 8 cm, 2 cm thick), marked with punch letters and a hammer: "RNUR ST-OUEN". Used in a demonstration to support the "takeover" of Saint-Ouen's Citroën factory during clashes with the CFT-CSL, 1982. Homer made in the workshops of the Régie Nationale des Usines Renault – Saint-Ouen. Robert Kosmann's photo collection.



Cylinder manufactured in 1986 at St-Ouen's Renault plant, made of steel (turning + milling + fitting), about 5 hours of machining in total, serial production (4 copies) 2 for the homer-maker himself and 2 for those who helped him (welder, fitter). The cylinder is a copy of a single shot 22 long rifle that could be purchased freely at the time to turn it into a 6 shot 22 magnum. This was for private use, to shoot in the forest (weapons collector). Robert Kosmann's photo collection.





Knuckledusters made at St-Ouen's Renault plant between 1977 and 1983. The aluminum model is engraved ("Long live the dictatorship of the proletariat"), the other two are made of copper, with one marked "Hasta la victoria siempre venceremos" it's a personalized gift, a caliper was used to measure the size of the person's fingers and adapt the holes to them. Sawing, drilling and fitting. The standard model in aluminum was serially manufactured, with about ten copies for the workshop. About 2 hours of work for each. Robert Kosmann's photo collection.



Chair-stool made from a bike saddle and pedals (steel, wood, plastic, airplane spring...), in an airline maintenance workshop, 2008. Serge Meillat's collection.



"a protester and his son" made at Dept 37 at St Ouen's Renault plant, bolts salvaged and assembled by welding. Arm bent with a blowtorch. 30 mm nut for the head. About 2 hours of work, Robert Kosmann's photo collection.





Clamps used to hold pieces, manufactured in the mid 80's at the wood dept 57 of the Renault Billancourt factories, steel, salvaged bolts and nuts assembled with two pieces of machined steel (about 3 hours of work), production: Marc Forestier, Robert Kosmann's photo collection.



Circlip pliers, tool made at the Renault dept 70 in Billancourt, late 1970s, 22 cm, salvaged steel, shaping made by a fitter (about 5 hours of work), Patrick Schweizer's collection and photo.





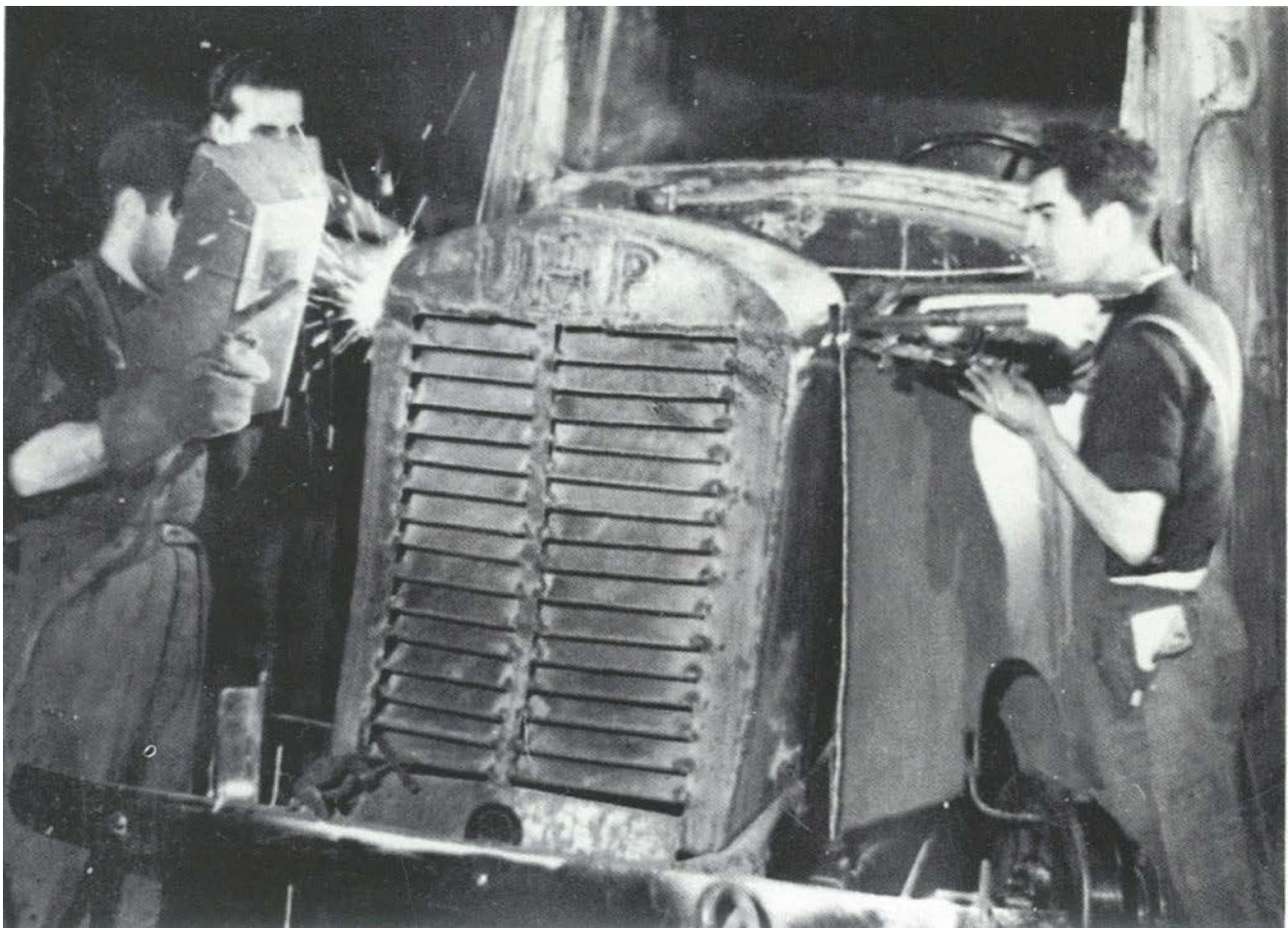
Beaten collar, tool used to flare copper pipes in plumbing, steel, dept 37 Renault in St Ouen, 1988, turned, drilled and milled. 3 hours of work.

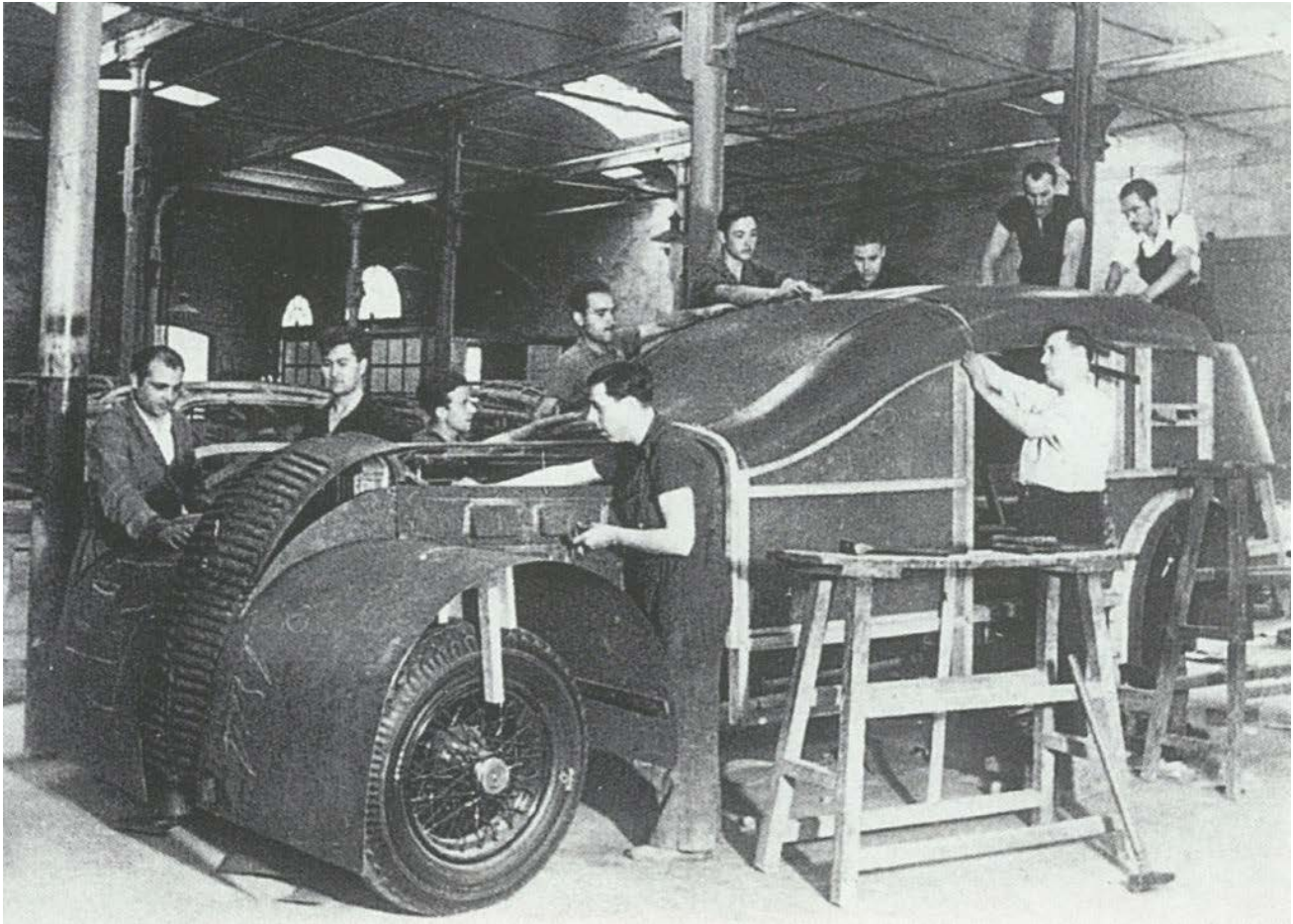






50 mm diameter and 1.5 meter long tube to shoot small-caliber “garden” fireworks (20 to 25). The images show an opening, a “light” crafted to allow firing, Gijón shipyard (in Asturias), May 2009, screenshots from the bella ciao website and from the website: <https://berthoalain.com>

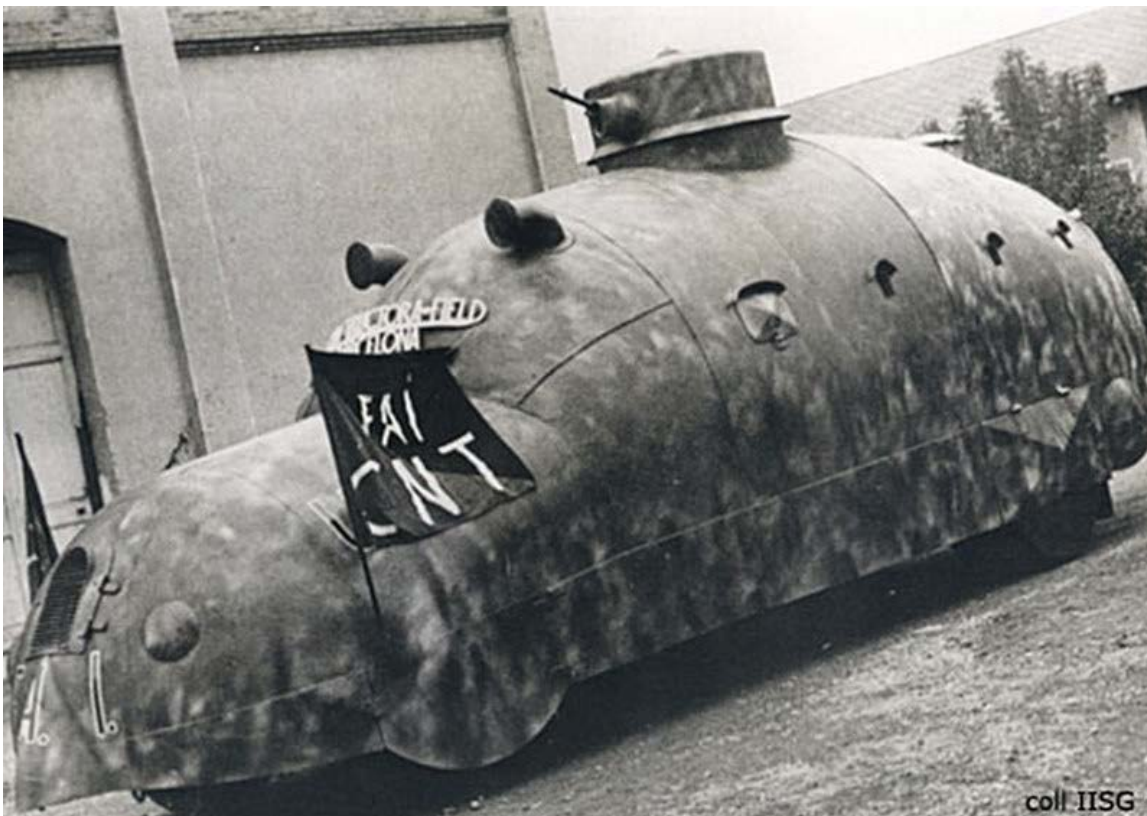




Armoring of cars in Hispano-Suiza factories, Barcelona, 1936, copies of photographs from Abel Paz's book, *The Spanish Civil War*, Hazan, Paris, 1997, p. 154 and 155.







Armored vehicles made in revolutionary and anti-fascist Spain in 1936.





Photomontage of an armored vehicle made in revolutionary and anti-fascist Spain in 1936 with an armored vehicle made by the Kurdish Resistance in Rojava (undated, around 2014).









Vehicles armored by the YPG Kurdish Resistance in Rojava (undated, around 2014).



Barbecues made in the boilermaking workshop of the Alstom Saint-Ouen factory, sheet steel, rubber, (undated, 1980s). Collections and photos of the anonymous boilermaker called "the Spanish".

1. "Homer-making is in decline... This practice followed the evolution of industrial work. The establishment of production lines gave less leeway to workers in their workshops. But the final blow especially came from the introduction of robotics memorizing all production operations as well as the operators' identity. Anonymity is not possible anymore. This phenomenon is reinforced by a "hunt for time" and the ever-increasing restriction of autonomy at work. Nowadays, traditional homer-making can only be found in small or artisanal companies." Étienne de Banville interviewed by Luc Peillon for *Libération*, "Perruquer l'antistress ouvrier", *Libération*, April 24, 2006 and quoted by Robert Kosmann, *Sorti d'usines, La "perruque" un travail détourné*, Paris, Syllepse, 2018, p. 148.
2. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984, p. 25-26. Emphasis added.
3. In an interview with René F (near Lyon) in 1996, Étienne de Banville demonstrated that a night shift (it's easier to make homers and bring artifacts out of the workplace at night) could entirely reconfigure a production line manufacturing metal packaging (intended for the food industry) in order to make cans of air. The line was completely diverted from its programming, diverted from its primary function in order to make floats that were to be used for the creation of rafts to go down the Rhone, on behalf of a youth center association. Étienne de Banville, *L'usine en douce, le travail en "perruque"*, Paris, L'harmattan, 2001, p. 51. Emphasis added.
4. Stephen Wright, "Poaching Practices: On Hacking's Rural Prehistory, and Modern-day Poaching," *Hacking Practices Study Day# 1*, EESAB – Quimper, October 1, 2015.
5. Ibid
6. Karine Lebrun, Presentation of *Hacking Practices Study Day # 2*, EESAB – Quimper, February 22, 2018.
7. In French, the word *perruque* (literally: wig) is the most commonly used term. Although its etymology is uncertain, this slang expression is likely to be



- related to the idea of a postiche, a forgery, a trompe l'oeil. It could also be related to the wigs made by hairdressers between two appointments in the past, from clients' hair that they recycled.
8. Robert Kosmann defines homer-making as: "the use of materials and tools by a worker in the workspace, during work hours, to manufacture or transform artifacts outside of the company's official production." Robert Kosmann, "La perruque ou le travail masqué," in Renault History n° 11, Société d'Histoire du Groupe Renault, Billancourt, June 1999, p. 20.
  9. Although large homers exist (Étienne de Banville reports the homer-making of an eighteen meter long boat with two masts and cabins, while Robert Kosmann reports the manufacture of a small single-engine aircraft made over ten years at Air France's equipment maintenance workshops. The plane, unambiguously registered as *P-RUQ*, took off in 2000), they are exceptional because they require complicity with guards, drivers, colleagues, etc. Homers are usually small, so that they can be brought out more easily. Étienne de Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 59 and; Robert Kosmann, *Sorti d'usines, La "perruque" un travail détourné*, *op. cit.* p. 41.
  10. Terms vary depending on the company, region or country: *bousille* among glassmakers, *pinaille* in Belfort, *bricole* in Le Creusot and in Brittany, *casquette* in Tulle, foreign in the railway factories of Derby city in Great Britain, etc.
  11. For instance, maintenance workshops are places conducive to homer-making.
  12. The tactic is what remains heterogeneous to the systems protecting the norm, what infiltrates them by ruse. It is a way to circulate over "an imposed terrain", to slip in "an established order". It then becomes a circumstantial resistance organized from a "making do", and develops tactical know-how in relation to a given context. It thus responds to a context through a "way of doing", as opposed to the strategy that is indebted to manipulation and long-term calculation. Tactics can resist the domination exerted in a specific and particular way. Michel de Certeau, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
  13. The *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé* (*Digitized Treasury of the French Language*) dictionary, based on Gaston Esnault's *Dictionnaire historique des argots français* (*Historical Dictionary of French Slang*) (Paris, Larousse, 1965 and 1966.), reports a definition of homer-making dating from 1856 as follows: 1856 *arg. Homermaking* "working for oneself during work hours, often with diverted materials". *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé*, or *TLFi*, ATILF – CNRS & University of Lorraine, seen on January 31, 2019 on the website: [http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?11;s=217304625;r=1;nat=;sol=0](http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?11;s=217304625;r=1;nat=;sol=0;);
  14. Michel Anteby, *Moral Gray Zones*, Princeton University, 2008, and "Factory "Homers": Understanding a Highly Elusive, Marginal and Illegal Practice", *Sociologie du travail*, N°45, 2003, p. 466.
  15. Also, to define the types of deviance (including at work), we can say with Howard Becker that "...social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender"!" Howard, Becker, *Outsiders, studies in the sociology of deviance*, Paris, Métailié edition, 1985, p. 9.
  16. Michel Anteby studied a random sampling (10% or 35 regulations) of 354 workshop codes of conduct dating from 1798 to 1936 (see Anne Biroleau, "Les règlements d'ateliers : 1798-1936", Printed catalog, National Library, Paris, 1984.). He was able to demonstrate that 84% of those "refer to material, tools or objects channeled out of the workshop and 20% discuss specifically work done for one's own benefits. Bringing out objects, materials, or tools is always forbidden (except with an "exit slip"). [...] These regulations also allow for extensive employee searches. [...] But, in general, however, codes remind workers that it is forbidden to manufacture something for their own use inside the shop, even during lunch hours", to "engage in a work other than usual work without express supervisory consent" or "to bring work from home in the shop". Michel Anteby, "Factory "Homers": Understanding a Highly Elusive, Marginal and Illegal Practice", *op. cit.*, p. 460-461.
  17. Drawing on Serge Borvon's Ethnology thesis, Robert Kosmann highlights several articles pertaining to the two royal ordinances passed between 1674 and 1689: Article XV.- "Workers who work on the ships and in the shops of the Arsenal are forbidden to exit by water after work, and have to go through the ordinary doors guarded by the Swiss soldiers." Article XVI. "A fine amounting to one crown for those who will make waste out of places intended for this purpose." Article XVII. "Same sanctions for those who would bring out pieces of wood and shavings. Those found with nails or other things belonging to His Majesty will also suffer corporal punishments." Article XVIII. "Sailors, soldiers, guards, and other day laborers are forbidden from buying ropes, scrap iron, wood, and other vessels utensils..." Article XXXVI. "All officers are forbidden from taking goods or other things in the shops and arsenals for their own benefits, and all workers in the arsenals are forbidden from making furniture and other works for them." Articles XXI and XXII. "Only the number of boats ordered by His Majesty will be maintained in the port, as well as the guardians of these boats sent to Arsenal works when not on duty." Serge Borvon, "La perruque, la bricole et la resquille", 1st year of Master's Degree ethnology thesis: *Être ouvrier à l'arsenal de Brest*, University of Western Brittany, 2007. And Robert Kosmann, *Sorti d'usines, La "perruque" un travail détourné*, *op. cit.*, p. 17-18.
  18. Marie de Banville and Bruno Dumont, *Perruque, bricole et compagnie...*, audiovisual VHS document, Solimane Production, 1998.
  19. Étienne de Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
  20. Mr. D was fired without notice for "gross negligence" and, in labor court, was "dismissed from his claims for the cancellation of dismissal or compensation [and Étienne de Banville goes on to testify]: it was as if he believed in good faith that he had simply exercised a right that the labor court members could not recognize in any way." *Ibid.*, P. 81.
  21. Marie de Banville and Bruno Dumont, *op. cit.*. Emphasis added.
  22. In 1807, "Être le perruquier dans l'affaire (to be the one who endures homer-making in business)" meant: "to be the one who gets fooled". Definition proposed by Gaston Esnault, *Le Dictionnaire historique des argots français* (*Historical Dictionary of French Slang*), Paris, Larousse, 1965, and quoted by Robert Kosmann, *Sorti d'usines, La "perruque" un travail détourné*, *op. cit.*, p. 13-14.
  23. Regarding the relation between surplus value and surplus labor, Karl Marx states that: "[The] usufruct is spread over two periods. During one the labourer produces a value that is only equal to the value of his labour-power; he produces its equivalent. During the other period, the period of surplus-labour, the usufruct of the labour-power creates a value for the capitalist, that costs him no equivalent. In this sense it is that surplus-labour can be called unpaid labour. [...] All surplus-value, whatever particular form (profit, interest, or rent), it may subsequently crystallize into, is in substance the materialisation of unpaid labour. The secret of the self-expansion of capital resolves itself into having the disposal of a definite quantity of other people's unpaid labour." Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*, Paris, Garnier-Flammarion, 1969, p. 383.
  24. Homer-maker and professional in an airline maintenance workshop, interview for the *Bourse de Travail Parallèle*, October 24, 2006.
  25. Miklós Haraszti, *Salaire aux pièces : Ouvrier dans les pays de l'Est*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1976, p. 139.
  26. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
  27. In this respect, it is always surprising to see the resurgence of certain forms in history. The vehicles armored by the Kurdish resistance in Rojava – by militants of the People's Protection Units (in Kurdish: *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, abbreviated YPG), the military wing of

- the Democratic Union Party (in Kurdish: *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*, in abbreviated as PYD), who fight against Daesh in Syria and now against Erdogan's Turkish army offensive for instance – look exactly like those made in 1936 in revolutionary and anti-fascist Spain.
28. François-Xavier Trivière, "Objets de bricole, De l'usine à l'univers domestique", in *Carrières d'objets*, Mission du patrimoine ethnologique de la France (Ethnological Heritage Mission), 1999, p. 92.
  29. Robert Kosmann, *Sorti d'usines, La « perruque » un travail détourné*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
  30. See in particular, "Chantiers navals de Gijon (Asturies-Espagne): violents affrontements" published on May 20, 2009 and visited on January 30, 2019, available on the Bella Ciao website: <https://bellaciao.org/fr/spip.php?article86124>, and Alain Bertho, "Affrontements aux chantiers navals de Gijon mai 2009", published on May 21, 2009 and visited on January 24, 2019, available on the website: <https://berthoalain.com/2009/05/21/affrontements-aux-chantiers-navals-de-gijon-mai-2009>
  31. Numerous interdependence relations (notably related to the division of labor) take place during the production of a homer. So much so that even in the context of the "individual" production of a homer, it often happens that the operator activates networks of complicities to solicit the imagination of colleagues, their know-how, or the position they occupy in the company. And many homer-makers we interviewed are aware of the fact that a homer is never really an individual production but rather a collective one. Also, in many cases, several homers were eventually produced so that everyone could have one as the production of the homer required the cooperation of several trades. As Miklós Haraszti said, "most friendships begin with a homer made together." Miklós Haraszti, *Salaire aux pièces: Ouvrier dans les pays de l'Est (A Worker in a Worker's State: Piece-Rates in Hungary)*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1976, p.142.
  32. Indeed, as the latter understood that they were losing control of the social regulation of the production process, they fought against the machinery that they saw as tools at the service of the division of labor. The industrial revolution then imposed, through its new emerging technologies – the steam engine – "...[an] ever-increasing production, necessary to pay back high investment and operating costs, and important centralization and specialization because factors of efficiency and economy supersede those of, say, craftsmanship or aesthetic expression". The industrial revolution led to "large-scale units of production governed by regimentation and control, increasing refinement and complexity of machinery, a division of labor and hence of training and hence of social status, expanding markets, expanding resources, expanding wastes". Kirkpatrick Sale, *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War*, Paris, L'Échappée, 2006, p.51.
  33. These miniaturized machine-tools are often manufactured as part of what is known as "retirement homers" or "behavior homers". They are offered to colleagues during retirement ceremonies.
  34. Quoted words, Véronique Moulinié, "On "ordinary workers of art", When workers make something beautiful...", *Terrain*, n° 32, March 1999, p. 40; and quoted by Étienne de Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 70-71.
  35. "The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of division of labour. Even if in certain social conditions, everyone were an excellent painter, that would by no means exclude the possibility of each of them being also an original painter, so that here too the difference between "human" and "unique" labour amounts to sheer nonsense. In any case, with a communist organisation of society, there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, which arises entirely from division of labour, and also the subordination of the individual to some definite art, making him exclusively a painter, sculptor, etc.; the very name amply expresses the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on division of labour. In a communist society there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1976, p. 397.
  36. Étienne de Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
  37. Robert Kosmann, « Perruque et bricolage ouvrier », *op. cit.*, p. 166.
  38. And the logic has been reversed to the point that it was the artist – Bob le Bricoleur – who took up the role of "homer counselor" for the account – and the public – of the 2008 *Rennes Biennale* whose main patron, let's remember, was Bruno Caron, boss of the agribusiness group Norac. (See the article by Cédric Schönwald, "Les Ateliers de Rennes, La fabrique de l'entente", in *art 21*, n° 18, summer 2008, p.39).
  39. This term refers to the museum curator or the curator of exhibitions and, just like in French (curateur), it also refers to a "Person appointed by the judge supervising a guardianship to assist an emancipated minor, an incapacitated person in the administration of their property. *Curator of the property of an absentee. Curator of vacant successions. Curator ad hoc*, appointed to take care of personal interests. Lat. jur. Curator, from curare, "take care of", 1287." *Dictionnaire, Langue, Encyclopédie, Noms propres (Dictionary, Language, Encyclopedia, Proper Nouns)*, Paris, Hachette, 1989.
  40. Michel de Certeau, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
  41. Yet this notion needs to be put into perspective as on average, 22.6% of men and women – having a job in France – are still laborers. And 29.3% of positions are held by employees. INSEE, "Employed population according to sex and socio-professional category", INSEE, *Employment surveys from the 1st to the 4th quarter of 2008*, seen on the website: <http://www.insee.fr>, April 2, 2010.
  42. As part of its acquisition policy, the Centre Pompidou bought the photographs of the "strike objects" presented by Jean-Luc Moulène.
  43. Strike objects are produced outside of the company's official production, just like homers but with the – once again quite significant – difference that they were produced in a strike context, that is to say during a time – that of the occupation – where workers chose the company's production themselves. These objects are primarily used to popularize and finance the strike.
  44. Forty strike objects are kept at the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail located in Roubaix. They were first deposited by Jean-Luc Moulène before this deposit was converted into a donation in 2006.
  45. Quote taken from Jean-Charles Leyris's article, "Objets de grève, un patrimoine militant", *In Situ, revue des patrimoines* [online], 2007, n°8 [visited on 08/14/2011].
  46. La Pantinoise. Red pack of cigarettes. France, tobacco factory in Pantin (Seine-Saint-Denis), Seita, 1982-1983. Courtesy Chantal Crousel gallery, Paris © Jean-Luc Moulène – ADAGP, 1999.
  47. Étienne de Banville, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
  48. Robert Kosmann, « Perruque et bricolage ouvrier », *op. cit.*, p. 165.
  49. Miklós Haraszti, *op. cit.*, p. 144-145.