

## Rise and Fall of "Jobs" as a Personal Possession and the Vicissitudes of Possessive Individualism

### Introduction

Wilmar Schaufeli (1999) claims that burnout is caused by a lack of reciprocity. "The balance between give and take – – is a fundamental psychological principle that is firmly rooted in human evolution".<sup>1</sup> Psychological defences linked with burnout, such as cynicism and depersonalization, are obviously attempts to restore the lost balance.

Teachers and nurses studied by Schaufeli et al. are all trying to minimize what they emotionally provide in order to avoid the feeling of being structurally abused and permanently exposed to an intolerable comparison between their professional self-ideal and the everyday reality of their jobs.<sup>2</sup> Psychodynamically, narcissistic grandiosity arises as a denial of a loss and shame that seems to prove one's worthlessness. Grandiosity prevents emotional dependence and exposure to others' arbitrary rejection after one has first trustfully reached out to them.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, I will observe the circular causality between economic bargaining power, political autonomy, and psychological boundary-maintenance during the history of labour.

In Väinö Linna's *Täällä Pohjantähden alla* (Under the North Star), the national saga of rural Finland, the main protagonists, the family Koskela are tenant farmers dreaming of possessing their plot of land in order to "to finally breathe." Breathing is for them impossible as long as the surplus of their work is appropriated as rent. The moral economy in peasant society operated according to the concept of fair exchange and reciprocal obligation which were not always equal to market pricing.<sup>4</sup> The Finnish Civil War in 1918 was motivated by the frustrated longing of landless people to immediately achieve equality with their masters.<sup>5</sup>

Labor researchers have never compared peasant mentality and paid labor and neither have they come to ask whether it had ever been possible for common people to buy themselves free from other-directed drudgery through inner-directed drudgery, as the peasant family Koskela in Linna's novel once seemed to have hoped.

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<sup>1</sup> Buunk & Schaufeli (1999).

<sup>2</sup> Schaufeli & Janczur (1994); Schaufeli & LeBlanc (1997); van Horn et al. (1999); Elovainio et al. (2002).

<sup>3</sup> Lewis (1971); Scheff (1987); Ikonen & Rechartd (1993); Kapfhammer (2001), pp. 492-497. See also Tomkins (1987); Nathanson (1994).

<sup>4</sup> Thompson (1993); Kujala (2001), pp. 16-18.

<sup>5</sup> Peltonen (1992).

The political bargaining power of the subjects rested, however, first on achieving smallholdership. English parliamentarism emerged through the circumstance that the crown did not own its subjects' work – quite unlike the case was in Russia. In France, the Great Revolution put an end to feudal bondage.<sup>6</sup> Its repercussions in Sweden obliged the king to confirm that peasants would no longer lose their possessions for three years' tax failures but get a "dominium directum" for their land instead of the mere "dominium utile" which had prevailed until then in common law.<sup>7</sup> After the village's fields and forests had been divided into individual parcels, it was in principle possible to produce only as much as one needed or invest the eventual surplus to improve one's own life.

The liberal theory, developed in a smallholder society, considered it immoral to sell oneself or one's children into serfdom. According to John Locke, nobody should be obliged to sell his work by threats to starve him.<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx saw in 1867 that an 8-hour day as an universal standard was the only means to prevent serfdom. In England, possessive individualism was extended to workers between 1875 and 1925: their freedom to make contracts should no longer include the freedom to alienate their freedom.<sup>9</sup>

Employees who possessed no other means of production than their labor established their bargaining basis by threatening a general strike, social unrest, or revolution. In England and elsewhere, labor was partially decommodified as soon as the franchise was enlarged. The goal of the socialist labor movement, an 8-hour day, was formally achieved along with the common franchise after WW I, rewarding the total wartime mobilization; in practice, however, this did not occur until after WW II, as people grew impatient to wait rewards from above.<sup>10</sup>

Experiments with the market economy as a self-regulating system ended in stagnation, protectionist closure, and world wars. During the great depression of the 1930s, foreign trade was reduced by two-thirds, economic growth ceased entirely, and mass unemployment drove the desperate unemployed towards Communism and Fascism. This legitimization crisis put an end to free market liberalism for over 50 years and after WW II obliged capitalism to reform itself.<sup>11</sup>

The postwar welfare states prioritized full employment and high demand. This national political economy counterbalanced international economic pressures to concentrate production into more cost-effective units of scale or maximize returns for capital investments by reengineering.<sup>12</sup> The Bretton Woods regime of money exchange (1944-1973) also curbed external pressures: national central banks regulated the rate of interest and international capital movement, which was confined to direct trade or long-term investments. Because firms had to supply their

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<sup>6</sup> Pipes (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Jutikkala (1958), pp. 289-312.

<sup>8</sup> Lasch (1991), p. 203.

<sup>9</sup> Steinfeld (2001).

<sup>10</sup> Marshall (1992); Esping-Andersen (1990), 20; Fiehler (2000), pp. 204-209; Boxberger & Klimenta (1998), p. 226.

<sup>11</sup> Eichengreen (1992); Simmons (1994); Hobsbawm (1994).

<sup>12</sup> Offe (1984); Lipietz (1987); Esping-Andersen (1990); Helleiner (1994).

capital from their trusted house banks and insurance companies, there arose no benchmarking pressure to increase shareholder value; the internal long-term capital was content with an average rate of interest of 3%.<sup>13</sup>

The principle of reciprocal dependency and trust appeared in the Japanese keiretsu, in the Rheinian model of empowering trade unions by partnership to discipline them and in the Scandinavian model of macropolitics linking together collective contracts, fiscal politics, and social policy. But in addition, large big US corporations were reliable and generous employers during the "golden age."<sup>14</sup>

As the employees got a lion's share of the increased productivity, there was for 25 to 30 years full demand and a high economic growth of 4 to 5%.<sup>15</sup> According to Keynesian economic doctrine, a higher functional share of GNP for capital would have caused only reduction in investments and consumers' demand and speculative bubbles around the same stock assets just as during the 1920s. National macropolitics had to coordinate fiscal policy, rate of exchange, collective labor contracts, and social policy to make profits and wages to fuel a benign circle of mutual reinforcement.<sup>16</sup>

### **"My job is my castle"**

The "ineffective" capital embodied in over-staffed organizations for ten years was as a matter of fact productive from the point of view of the employees: it enabled dependent employees to master their lives as self-regulating adults and exert an influence on their fate as was the case with a smallholder earlier.

For employees, the Fordist welfare system guaranteed a predictable course of life towards a rising standard of living.<sup>17</sup> Security for every imaginable emergency was provided by public services and benefits – like a huge mother's arms embracing her children.<sup>18</sup> A job contained much more than a limited capitalist work contract: it was equated with "social citizenship" or a "social possession," including job security and social insurance.<sup>19</sup>

Due to the inflexible structures laid down by collective trade negotiations and legislation, a job was the employee's guaranteed territory, a territory consisting of tasks to be handled at one's own rhythm and be transparent only to the employee him/herself.<sup>20</sup> As a novice learned to do his/her work more effectively, his rate of exchange improved. And this increased productivity was not immediately expropriated by recurrent reengineerings, because such measures were beyond imagining. Changing production arrangements one-sidedly by employers could

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<sup>13</sup> Pohjola (1996); Cohn (2000), pp. 141-142.

<sup>14</sup> Fukuyama (1995); Fraser (2002), pp. 97-113.

<sup>15</sup> van der Wee (1987).

<sup>16</sup> Hall (1989); Schui (2000).

<sup>17</sup> cf. Karisto (1998).

<sup>18</sup> Zaretsky (1999).

<sup>19</sup> Marshall (1992), pp. 66; Offe (2000), pp. 495-496; Dettling (2000), pp. 202-203.

<sup>20</sup> Kortteinen (1992).

easily have shattered hard-won truces in labor-market negotiations; the prevention of a "hot" class confrontation was considered the highest aim of consensus politics, even at the cost of short-term profitability.<sup>21</sup>

Western citizens have individuated on the basis of their secure jobs, predictable careers and an optimistic horizon of expectations. Cultural individuation was based on the universal bargaining power and the universal entitlements provided by the welfare system.<sup>22</sup>

For the first time in history, employees could afford to think of existential issues of selfhood or alienation or the quality of life. It was not an accident that Abram Maslow's hierarchy of needs became the standard view of the new sciences of social intervention and counseling.<sup>23</sup> Quality of life superseded the standard of living as a hot issue in the 1960s and 1970s, as the years of scarcity seemed to be irrevocably over, and a growth of 5% had been stabilized as normative. (England, Japan, Finland, and Italy did not attain common welfare until in the 1960s.)<sup>24</sup> The personal became political, and the pre-given course of life turned into a quest for self-actualization for employees, too.<sup>25</sup>

### **Autoplastic adaptation replaces alloplastic mastery**

As employees came to consider themselves unique personalities, they unknowingly relinquished their collective political or social citizenship to the services of expert lobbyists.<sup>26</sup> These – in their turn – adapted to the alleged technical necessities of "economism."<sup>27</sup>

The simultaneous crises of the Bretton Woods system, of Fordism, and of the Welfare state were caused both by capital movements breaking regulatory bonds and the long wave of stagnation of the world economy beginning in the 1970s, due to the saturation of the mass consumption market. Everyone already had a car or refrigerator. Wage demands were, however, measured according to the level of productivity of the 1960s and precipitated price inflation.<sup>28</sup>

Orthodox economists recommended as a remedy for stagnation deregulation of capital movement, flexibility of labor markets and adjustment in real wages to increased competition. In their opinion, the Keynesian approach had been only a provisional war economy, a prolonged deviation from the natural rule of economic self-regulation. Neoliberal authors dreamed of a disembedded economy which is free from all human and institutional constraints. Democracy was according to them best

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<sup>21</sup> Dörre (2001), pp. 44-48; Ehlscheid (2001), p. 116.

<sup>22</sup> cf. Coontz (1992).

<sup>23</sup> Maslow (1954); Allardt (1974).

<sup>24</sup> Hobsbawm (1994), pp. 320-322.

<sup>25</sup> Bellah et al. (1985); Coté (2000).

<sup>26</sup> Lasch (1991).

<sup>27</sup> about the concept, see Teivainen (2002).

<sup>28</sup> van der Wee (1987); Hobsbawm (1994); Jessop (1994), pp. 251-279; Maddison (1995), p. 79; Brenner (1998); Hay (1998).

realized in market choices made by rational agents, socially disembodied Robinsons on desert islands, whereas collective lobbying and party politics only corrupted the natural laws of the market: democratic bargaining increased the share of those who did not deserve it in the market (= and should, quite consequently, perish).<sup>29</sup> Social Darwinism accompanied market radicalism as a "scientific" form of legitimation and emotional detachment.

The ideologues of neoliberalism claim that international investors exert neutral arbitrage when they shift their portfolio assets between companies. As markets approach perfection and freedom from external intervention, they become more efficient as allocative mechanisms. Then, wealth will trickle down.

"Structural adjustments" have been undertaken in order to increase the competitive edge of national economies or companies, but recent development – even in the paradigmatic neoliberal economy, the USA – has shown scant evidence of a new upturn or full employment. Sacrifices of employees made to appease the Gods of economy seem to have been in vain. The devouring Gods demand more and more without promising anything in return: the public agenda is filled with punishing superego voices and the containment provided by the protecting ego ideals of collectives vanishes. No one deserves to live only because s/he is a citizen of a state or has achieved a degree, a job or a membership. The superego loses its moral groundings and becomes more and more archaic – representing the insatiable greed of investors – the more that the institutional constraints of labor legislation and collective bargaining are being shattered.<sup>30</sup>

Companies should disclose their financial condition to enable analysts to predict eventual capital return. But just this kind of transparency corrupts the economy, when shortening the horizon to three months and rewarding book-cooking. Financial engineering (Enron, WorldCom, Vivendi) thus replaces productive innovation and long-term competitive advantage with the know-how of a committed staff.<sup>31</sup>

During the "roaring 90s," the ceaseless movement of speculative funding rearranged production units toward provisional networks of independent contractors, because capital, seeking the best comparative return, is unwilling to commit itself for longer periods. Companies have been selling off their real estate, shrinking their inventories, leasing their equipment, and outsourcing their activities. In "the age of access," permanent jobs have more and more been replaced with temporary projects.<sup>32</sup>

### **"To run to stay in place"**

Direct stock market funding of the companies has driven them to cut staff to the minimum and externalize tasks to semi-independent subcontractors or change formerly permanent employees into temps, both of whom have to shoulder the risk

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<sup>29</sup> Tilman (2001).

<sup>30</sup> Jüngst (2004).

<sup>31</sup> Stiglitz (2003).

<sup>32</sup> Handy (1995), 42; Knoke (1996), pp. 156-182; Rifkin (2001).

of an entrepreneur without ever having a chance to benefit as an entrepreneur. Their resilience buffers the company against market fluctuations.<sup>33</sup> They are under-employed but nonetheless stuck in the work, when waiting for a call. Thus, paid work, the scarcer it becomes, colonizes people the more – instead of providing them with pleasures of more autonomous time<sup>34</sup>.

In the public sector, a chronic tax crisis brings about the same effect as stock funding in the private sector: a shrinking staff has to manage an ever-increasing flow of patients, students, and social cases under tightening limits to time and resources. In the BRD, for instance, only 12% of taxes were collected from wages and salaries, 35% from capital incomes in 1960. In the end of 1990s, these proportions had reversed. Those with middle incomes had the highest tax increases, whereas those who had profited from the increased productivity during the 1990s were best able to evade taxes. And because new jobs are most often part-time jobs for women in the service sector, they cannot compensate for the lost full-time men's jobs in industry as a tax source; income taxes cannot compensate the erosion of payroll- and capital taxes.<sup>35</sup>

For the employees, this "Raw Deal" has meant that they now have to do more with less. Even though employees run to stay in place, the place may not stay in its proper place. Corporations have, on their part, declared themselves free of any loyalty and cut out all "organisational fat"; they, however, require total commitment from their employees, which inspires a permanent sense of injustice.

The tendency toward deterioration of work and its rewards has been most obvious in the USA, where capital movement has been deregulated since 1974. In 1960, an average man aged 30 to 40 had to spend 15 to 18% of all his earnings for a home mortgage, toward the end of millennium this became a half. Only those who have enough capital income that they need not work for a living can now be considered winners; even the proportional rise in the highest quintel or decile of income covers huge discrepancies among owners and employees. In the USA, the second quintel stagnated during the 1980s and regressed during the 1990s, and the three lower quintiles have been losing their proportional share of the GNP since the 1960s. America is *sui generis* a trendsetter in the recent modernization of economies under the banner of financial competitiveness.<sup>36</sup>

The educated middle class found itself among the eventual losers also in France in 1995: up until then, it has kept its distance from the threatened blue-collar workers and ridiculed their protests as red-neck racism. Now, the meritocrats had to ally with the workers to defend their pensions.<sup>37</sup>

National economies are benchmarked by international investment funds and analysts, as if they were microeconomies like corporations with some numerical bottom line,<sup>38</sup> – as if their "return" were not secure, healthy, educated citizens but

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<sup>33</sup> Parjanne (1997); Hyrkkäinen (1999); Viinamäki (1999); Tuominen (2000); Sutela et al. (2001).

<sup>34</sup> e. g. Gorz (2000).

<sup>35</sup> Huster (2000), pp. 20-21; Welztk (2000), pp. 27-28; Daly (2001), pp. 88-89, 99.

<sup>36</sup> Hocker (1997); Keister (2000); Fraser (2002).

<sup>37</sup> Todd (1999).

<sup>38</sup> Väyrynen (1997); *Helsingin Sanomat* (= *HS*) 26. 3. 1999: "Mikä on oikea tuotto?" Antti Blåfield.

some degree of universal, transparent capital efficiency. According to the critics of globalization, economic rationality rules out such values as democracy, equality, nature conservation or quality of life as obstacles to commerce.<sup>39</sup>

Monitoring, auditing, and benchmarking are colonizing every sphere of life with economic standards, thus building an iron cage of rational short-term adaptations to irrational long-term goals.<sup>40</sup> For instance, the "return" of a day-care center is now considered to be the more satisfactory for taxpayers, the fewer adults hired to care for the children (= and the more the development of the stored children is then affected by lack of mental state sharing)<sup>41</sup>.

The limits of result-oriented rationality come to the fore most strikingly in the uneven distribution of work load: one-fourth of the active work force (leading white-collar and young specialist males in the private sector, educated women in their fifties in the public sector) work extra hours on a regular basis – most of them without extra pay.<sup>42</sup> One-fourth (men over 50 with only a basic education) drop out of the active workforce entirely, whereas those in between (with a lower or higher occupational education) struggle with insecurity in regard to their jobs or income levels.<sup>43</sup>

### Underresourcing as internalized conflict

Four in five of the Finnish employees now suffer from time pressure, one in four from burn-out symptoms<sup>44</sup> Among information workers, almost three in four now complain that they have more work to do than they can cope with, two in three state that the result of their work does not satisfy them (calling it "quick and dirty"). Four information workers in five are interrupted by messages, phone calls, meetings, and counseling during their personal piecework which should be completed "just-in-time." Work piled up due to unexpected ruptures in the production chain, key persons having had to take responsibility for the failure of others, and after work, getting the project out of one's mind are all difficult.<sup>45</sup>

Loss of job control explains a great deal about work exhaustion. People can stand up to an increased work burden until they notice that they no longer have time to use their occupational skills as they should or that they lack the skills needed. Systematic studies of Finnish communal workplaces show that the increasing work load seems to affect employees only if all job control is lost: the lack of job control has produced 60 to 80% more sick leaves than for those who reported that their job

<sup>39</sup> Martin & Schumann (1996); Greider (1997); Gray (1998); Labarde & Maris (1998).

<sup>40</sup> Eräsaari (2002); Kurbjuweit (2003).

<sup>41</sup> e.g. Greenspan (1997); Zeanah (1999); Siegel (1999).

<sup>42</sup> Lehto & Sutela (1999), p. 38; Julkunen & Nätti (1999), pp. 158-159; Blom et al. (2001), p. 110.

<sup>43</sup> Vähätalo (1998), p. 24; Suikkanen et al. (2001), p. 162.

<sup>44</sup> Kalimo & Toppinen (1997); *HS* 22. 3. 2002: "Koko ajan on kiire joka paikkaan" Päivi Repo; 3. 12. 2004: "Vain muutoksiin sopeutujat selviävät ilman työuupumusta" Perttu Kauppinen.

<sup>45</sup> Blom et al. (2001), pp. 134-135; Julkunen & Nätti (1999), p. 163.

control was satisfactory, consequently, increasing job control has reduced sick leaves by 25 to 42%.<sup>46</sup>

According to Karasek's stress model (1979), anxiety is aroused when employees fear that they cannot accomplish their tasks well enough or that a deadline is exceeded. Anxiety can be alleviated by decision-making rights or more opportunities to use various skills.<sup>47</sup> The experience of control and of one's effectiveness determines whether a difficult work increases one's blood pressure or not. Education and an ensuing self-worth alleviate cynicism,<sup>48</sup> but they do not replace a lack of control of life. Only some control over their work load changes individuals from victims into subjects – but increased responsibility does not reduce blood pressure, if the work load cannot be accomplished.<sup>49</sup> In higher occupational positions, high demands predict by 50% sick-leave risk, even if job control in general has been improved.<sup>50</sup>

People seem to evade any intolerable comparison between their self ideal and their actual selves. They do not want to assume responsibility for effects that they cannot control. In 1990, 60% of Finnish employees said that they could influence their work rhythm, in 1995, only 40%. This undeniable loss of hope, especially on the public sector<sup>51</sup> can be interpreted as a loss of agency: overworking is paid for with more overwork; any meaningful relation between one's effort and reward becomes arbitrary in a schizogenic manner<sup>52</sup>.

When the balance between effort and reward is shaken, the sense of self is also threatened. The fundamental question is: Do I have an impact on my environment? This sense of causal efficacy is established in early childhood, as the baby succeeds in making his/her caregiver understand what s/he needs. When the intention of the child is properly mirrored, the child experiences him/herself as a subject and no longer as a victim of capricious circumstances. Recognizing one's own emotions helps one to read the minds of others. With this "space" for handling emotions, a child dares to explore the world and take the initiative, not being overwhelmed by what then happens.<sup>53</sup>

The predictable outcome of one's deeds promises for a child control over his / her life. For the same reason, job control is so crucial for the subject experience of employees. When even the best efforts do not protect one from downsizing and overtime, an adult employee repeats the fate of a child who is mirrored as a reflection of the caregiver's needs and not recognized for his/her own justified needs.

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<sup>46</sup> Vahtera et al. (1997), pp. 1124-1128; Kivimäki et al. (2000), pp. 971-975; Vahtera et al. (2000), pp. 484-493; Vahtera et al. (2002), pp. 31-33, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Karasek & Theorell (1990); Fox et al. (1993); Cooper et al. (2001), pp. 134-135; Vahtera et al. (2002), p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Jaari (2004).

<sup>49</sup> Kristensen (1996); Jones & Fletcher (1996); Schaubroek & Merritt (1997), pp. 738, 750; Zellars et al. (1999), p. 2264; Spector (1998); van Dierendonck et al. (2001), pp. 41-52.

<sup>50</sup> Vahtera et al. (2002), 33.

<sup>51</sup> In the work atmosphere barometers published by the Ministry of Labour: Ylöstalo et al. (1996); Rahikainen & Ylöstalo (1997); Ylöstalo & Rahikainen (1998); Julkunen & Nätti (1999), pp. 116, 136.

<sup>52</sup> cf. Lehto (2001), pp. 18-21.

<sup>53</sup> Fonagy et al. (2002), pp. 127, 160, 171-180, 190-191, 201-251, 296-299, 430-431, 478-480.



One does not dare take any initiative, when the best intentions can cause unpredictable and counterproductive effects, even the collapse of one's whole world. Mere thinking and experiencing may prove to be dangerous, if the others' reactions do not correspond to one's experienced intentions.<sup>54</sup>

Robert Jay Lifton, a crisis psychologist, sees that even those called "Protean," who have been able to constitute their identities anew after dramatic changes, need a modicum of coherence and continuity in order to cope with the challenge.<sup>55</sup> Maintaining one's sense of agency and experiencing one's impact on events, recognized by one's peers is the unofficial content of every job.<sup>56</sup> Adults regulate their sense of self through both their objective mastery at work and the feedback they receive from their peer group.

### **Psychological boundaries against intrusion are at stake**

When one gets his work accomplished and feels that s/he has done his fair share, s/he hopes to be able to demand that others fulfill his/her justified needs instead of being on call to fulfill their needs. Doing one's fair share enables one to demand at least decent treatment, exceeding one's share by excellence, one can even ask for privileges, freedom, and security.<sup>57</sup> If this implicit contract fails, learned helplessness follows<sup>58</sup> and depression as an exit from the social impasse. The organism goes on strike, when control is lost<sup>59</sup> – when stress cannot be channeled by work into meaningful fight or flight.

One's market position is reflected in hope or hopelessness. One informant of mine, a veteran of IBM, remembers:

"I was born in a smallholder family in Kainuu, where circumstances after the war were harsh and working days in fields and forests long. The prevailing memory from that time is, however, joy and optimism! The situation improved all the time, and we felt that we could influence it. If we only carted enough manure in the fields or cleared enough new fields, the future would shine brighter for us and especially for our children."

Her inherent optimism lasted at IT work for over 20 years, as she imagined herself helping other employees by her mastery of new technology. The disappointment came during the depression and restructuring of the 1990s: "How much can a woman influence on her future now? To some extent, yes, but all kinds of contingent

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<sup>54</sup> cf. Fonagy et al. (2002), pp. 43, 157, 193-198, 283, 300-301, 373-384, 402-403.

<sup>55</sup> Lifton (1993).

<sup>56</sup> Fukuyama (1995); Gini (2000).

<sup>57</sup> Sarmaja (2004), pp. 121-130; Price et al. (2002), pp. 202-231.

<sup>58</sup> Seligman (1975).

<sup>59</sup> Nesse (2000).

factors intervene more and more, and one can no longer plan one's future in the long run." And the existential sense of her work disappeared along with its instrumental utility: "Even if I had done my work even better, the situation of the employees in the client firm would not have improved. Quite the reverse! The better I did my job, the more probable became downsizing of the client's staff. I experienced this situation as too humiliating, and I see here the basic reason for the fact that I did not hold on to the end."<sup>60</sup>

When the efforts are rewarded, people can endure pressure and be energized to act. But if the challenges are insurmountable, even the existing coping capacities are lost, and people become lamed.<sup>61</sup>

Reaching for and achieving self-satisfaction by fulfilling one's implicit contract seems to be the key that separates proactive workplaces from the merely reactive, and subjects from victims.

When 24-hour market competition is introduced into organizations, people are seldom allowed to be content with the work done: they have to earn their positions anew and anew like unqualified apprentices.

Other psychic costs of work increase along with ambiguous work expectations. Psychic boundaries between individual employees, between professions and divisions / units are relaxed when people feel themselves secure and are tightened up when they feel themselves threatened.<sup>62</sup> In defensive organizations, professional or divisional boundaries are not easily crossed, because of the impending threat of having to give more than it is possible to gain in return.

Every rupture in organization – be it an acquisition or downsizing – shatters the discrete feedback and boundary maintenance system of individuals, so that acquisitions seldom fulfill the expectations of profitability: Employees concentrate for years on defining their positions in relation to each other and get involved in a circle of splitting off their disowned insufficiency and rage and projecting them into others.<sup>63</sup>

Employees begin to produce surplus value only after having defined their fair share of work and their due rewards,<sup>64</sup> but this stabilization may never occur again, due to the new emphasis on teams and networks.

### **"We are a family"**

Frederik Winslow Taylor, the father of rationalization, attempted once to capture all the tacit knowledge of the old masters in a scientifically organized "one best method" and thus also to make individual workers expendable and to deprive them

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<sup>60</sup> *Letters*, September 4 and 9, 2004.

<sup>61</sup> cf. Antila & Ylöstalo (2002); West (2001, 2002); Haatainen (2004), pp. 23-26.

<sup>62</sup> Ashbach & Schermer (1987); Obholtzer & Roberts (2000).

<sup>63</sup> Luthans & Sommer (1999), p. 50; Morris et al. (1999), pp. 78-87.

<sup>64</sup> cf. Gilkey (1991), pp. 331-360.

of their bargaining power.<sup>65</sup> But the division of work never did entirely succeed. Because alienated workers cannot be compelled to relinquish their tacit knowledge but have somehow to be motivated, and the only means to get skilled workers motivated has been to widen their space of self-regulation and mastery over their rate of exchange, a labile compromise between self-regulation and formal surveillance has most often prevailed. Employers have been obliged to tolerate uncontrollable, opaque, inefficient behavior in order to get their staff commit to themselves at all.<sup>66</sup>

Nowadays, employers have succeeded in combining self-organizing production lines or accounting units evaluated by results – those once developed by the humanistic management school, with the all-encompassing control of Taylorism: the employees themselves rationalize their work when confronted with direct "market pressures." The officially acknowledged conflict between capital and labor, once collectively negotiated as a matter of politics and human rights, has metamorphosed into interpersonal tensions between workers, when the self-regulating teams and production lines are faced with deadlines and have to handle the projects without involving the management at all.<sup>67</sup> The role of the management as supervisor is blurred and neutralized into coaching.<sup>68</sup> Employees thus adapt their personal time and way of thinking to the market conditions of their employer.

Fordist / Taylorist production defined the work load in hours or items; now, the objective set for the employees or "entployees" is to promote their company's market success. Such an undefined function effaces the boundaries between work and home.<sup>69</sup> The old working life, consisting of standardized tasks and formal means of payment, was surely quite unadaptive as a system but in any case it enabled people who did not exactly love each other to cooperate without too much friction and psychological expenditure.

Whereas the trade unions during the "golden age" represented anthropological standards of occupational health medicine, they now must defend "their site," and they quite easily internalize the point of view of their employer. Labour has been deprived of the political boundaries once erected against total commodification.<sup>70</sup> This is the standard case in IT firms: A work-life balance may be preached, but the public secret is that only 60- to 80-hour week are accepted as a serious commitment.<sup>71</sup>

When workers accuse each other of working too few hours or with too little effort, solidarity is eroding. The structural, institutionalized labor-market conflict of

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<sup>65</sup> Perelman (1998).

<sup>66</sup> Schettgen (2000).

<sup>67</sup> Menz & Siegel (2001), pp. 142-149; Stokes (2000), pp. 127-128.

<sup>68</sup> Sennett (1998).

<sup>69</sup> Siegel (1995); Holch (2000), pp. 241-247; Moldaschl & Sauer (2000), p. 215; Fergen & Scherbaum (2001), pp. 59-64, 74-76; Altwater & Mahnkopf (2002), pp. 57-60.

<sup>70</sup> Dörre (2001), pp. 48-49; Hyman (2001).

<sup>71</sup> Hochschild (1997); Stein (2001); Fraser (2002).

the postwar welfare states has been turned into sibling rivalry<sup>72</sup> and treated as a problem of individual adaptation.

There exists little to mould part-timers, temps, and permanent staff into one self-conscious class of waged workers. In new sweatshops of the service sector, pressures at work individualize and differentiate the work force instead of uniting them for class struggle.

If employees really could gain something in return for their efforts and achieve a sense of mastery, teamwork could empower them and help them to endure the increased requirements.<sup>73</sup> But if teamwork means merely increased expropriation without any chance to become a subject rather than a victim, it only consumes extra energy without accelerating productivity or contributing to a sense of empowerment. Only those who can trust in getting sufficient credit and decent pay are ready to join in the flow of exchange, because they must no longer be preoccupied with the disruptive changes taking place around them.<sup>74</sup>

Because most people now have lost their self-regulated territory at work, they search for it in the life after work. Only one in ten Finns retires at the legal age of 65, the majority seek refuge in early pensions.<sup>75</sup> Most of them explain that they fear that their jobs are becoming too demanding. Those who have escaped the "rat race" into premature retirement are congratulated in the corridors like survivors from a catastrophe (personal information).

### **How to measure the "bottom line" of labour?**

A major portion of Western employees attained during the "golden age" (between 1945-1974 in the USA, 1960-1990 in Finland) economic security and even relative autonomy at work, due to Fordist hierarchies, fixed work-roles, collective contracts, and limited working hours. A job for life corresponded to land tenure, thus turning job-holders into a semi-independent middle-class.

The shift from politically regulated national economies into an accumulation regime of deregulated capital movements recommodified labor: a job as a bundle of guaranteed social rights was again dissolved into separate tasks, bought and sold at market prices. Even if the majority of employees have maintained full-term jobs, these have also been exposed to direct market pressures and particularly white-collar workers have had to do more with less. During the "golden age," even "the common man" was able to dream of "self-actualization"; nowadays, the ideal of a balanced life seems to be unreachable even by the highest segment of the labor market, e.g., the "creative class."<sup>76</sup>

If we consider the rate of exchange of labor as consisting not only of money but also of the "quality time" available for the employees' own pursuits, we can

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<sup>72</sup> Stokes (2000), pp. 127-128.

<sup>73</sup> West (2001).

<sup>74</sup> cf. Csikszentmihalyi (1996); Pfeffer (1998).

<sup>75</sup> HS 4.9.2001: Työvoimapolusta tulossa talouskasvun este.

<sup>76</sup> Julkunen et al. (2004).

without populist exaggeration state a deficit in the "bottom line" of those who have to work to earn their living. Mere physical survival demands now so much time that the progress made since the 18th century in the human and political rights of citizens, increasing life expectancy, decreasing work load, and the emergence of postmaterialist values seems to regress.

During the last third of the 20th century, big corporations began to improve their falling profit rate by expropriation instead of product development. One-sided emphasis on the short-term shareholder value and the "cleptocracy" of CEOs have turned the companies into feudal landlords and their managers into bailiffs of "white-collar sweatshops," exploiting practically all the surplus produced by the employees just as was the case during the military anarchy preceding the Westfalen Treaty in 1648 and also during the ensuing feudal restoration ("Gutsherrschaft" in Middle and Eastern Europe).

In substance, my thesis is that most people who have to work to earn their living are no longer able to bail themselves out of direct feudal dependency by their own efforts, by their education, or by their collective power as a pressure group. Loss of professional autonomy, standardization of work, and tightening controls indicate a reproletarianization, even though middle-class salaries still can make a difference compared with the new precariat.

My methodological thesis is that the subjective agency of employees can also be measured in terms of bargaining power, based on small-holdership or collectively guaranteed "social rights." Psychological boundaries correspond to the limits of others' justified expectations. Economic security, political influence, and mental autonomy reinforced each other in a benign circle during the second third of the 20th century but deteriorated into a malignant circle of mutually reinforcing factors during the last third. It is difficult to conceptualise the gains and losses of work, if the subject of work as the main product of work is ignored.

We have to relinquish the ingrained discourse of postmodern social sciences to recognize the tension between historical possibilities and actual reality. Not only does economism colonize other spheres of life by dividing the world into accounting units – the rational choice theory and a firm belief in the blessings of a struggle for survival infiltrates other sciences as a self-evident background assumption.<sup>77</sup> A new ontology has emerged in psychology, social sciences, and cultural studies: Society is only a discourse maintained by negotiated definitions between equal, atomized partners.<sup>78</sup> The "postmodern" mind is fabricated, when cultural differences are emphasized and universal conditions of the employees ignored.<sup>79</sup> Even social history is most often used to relativize "sweeping generalizations" concerning deprivation and thus to elevate the status quo.

Denial of "essentialist" developmental psychology reflects and justifies not only the collapse of anthropological standards of occupational health medicine but also the massive abandonment of children, if not to the streets, then to over-crowded day-care centers and over-sized classes to grow on their own as well as they can.

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<sup>77</sup> see Siltala (1999).

<sup>78</sup> see Gergen (1991); Anderson (1997).

<sup>79</sup> Ashley (1997); Coté (2000).

Just as adults are declared "elastic-minded," ready to adjust themselves to the flexibilized labour market, changeable teams, and unpredictable conditions, children are – once again in history – considered by many researchers as small-sized adults, and their age-specific needs only as a romantic construction based on the nostalgia of adults.

Opposing this relativization, I claim that labor relations research needs the application of psychological, even biological knowledge to evaluate the impact of structural changes between 1974 and 2004. This does not mean psychologization or individualization of economic and structural injustices; quite the reverse.

We could state that the capacity to cope with new challenges is impaired through the permanent upsurge of the stress hormones, glucocorticosteroids, easily triggered in traumatized persons. The upsurge of cortisol can damage the hippocampus and frontal lobes, thus preventing one from learning from experience or evaluating threats with some sense of proportion or imagining alternative ways of acting. The hippocampus should mediate between the experience-based patterns of relating stored in the long-term memory of the neocortex and the flow of novel stimuli and data coming through the thalamus. When the hippocampus and the REM sleep are disturbed in the ensuing exhaustion, one can no longer discern important information well, among scraps of data, and organize knowledge bits into a meaningful whole.

An overload of emotionally cathected information means traumatization. And a traumatized person is captured in a closed circuit of self-confirming prophesies: the past does not pass, and the person cannot see any other options than to restage his/her victimization in order to control at least its eternal recurrence. Due to damage to the hippocampus and frontal cortex – the center of reality-testing judgement – and to over-arousal in the cerebral fear center, the amygdala, the tiniest fears can grow out of proportion, and fuel the vicious circle of stress hormones and disability.<sup>80</sup> People lose self-control and begin to react automatically, by-passing cortical mediation. (Conditional property rights seem to produce conditioned reflexes...)

Thus, the loss of the subject position of employees, often claimed by representatives of "critical theory" and other Marxists, could be operationalized, and the adherents of Neoliberalism could no longer nullify such value-laden theories as lacking an empirical base beyond very conceptualisation. When the critical theory can incorporate neuroscience, it ceases to be a self-referential system.

### **Regaining subject position**

According to Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson (1996)<sup>81</sup>, globalization is a disabling myth rendering all governance impossible. As a matter of fact, economy has always been embedded in social reciprocities. The market needs society as much as

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<sup>80</sup> cf. Goleman (1995); LeDoux (1996); Siegel (1999); Paanksepp (2001); Solms & Turnbull (2002).

<sup>81</sup> Hirst & Thompson (1996).

society needs it. A private army is not a cost-effective alternative to the state to guarantee contracts.

Since the last currency crises in 1997-1998, there has emerged an inchoate consensus as to curbing the volatility of short-term loans and about favoring long-term investments.<sup>82</sup> This would help companies to concentrate on product development with a committed work force instead of engineering their finances by lay-offs.

The ongoing long stagnation may also predict the end of production of scale: when China overwhelm others by its export-oriented growth, the Western world may return to a more home-market economy consisting of small service companies and artisans. And this new economy will not necessarily any longer be dominated by oligopolies and shareholder value but by autonomous smallholders, who may suffer from work load but no longer from alienation.<sup>83</sup>

On the organizational level, both employers and employees would benefit if permanent change would no longer be precipitated. Even though the relationship between labor and capital will remain controversial at best, alleviating fight and flight stress can be defined as their common advantage.

"Self-organization" and "coevolution" have conquered the biosciences and cognitive sciences as an ontological background assumption. Why, then, do organizations lead hierarchically from the top down, trying to make transparent the opaque spheres of self-regulation and expropriating the tacit knowledge of the staff, instead of allowing less controlled spaces and times to enable staffers to react relly flexibly? If the employees would have some spare moments from their daily routine, they could view their work from a distance, plan it better, and probably build the multi-professional networks needed to meet new challenges.<sup>84</sup>

If employees could cease to tear each other apart to alleviate their own anxieties about personal insufficiency, workplaces would no longer chase nine in ten employees into early retirement. When employees meet, they could avoid criticizing those who happen to be absent, perhaps to care for sick children. Social capital would then accumulate and mutual paranoia be curbed; more energy would be available for the work itself and fuel professional self-esteem.

Trade unions are perhaps unable to regulate individual wages in their entirety but they should confirm that individuals have something on which to base their bargaining: If employees are educated during their working hours, then the employer has invested in them, and they could threaten to leave like capital. The possession of skills, education, and immaterial rights may replace the possession of land or a politically guaranteed job as the battle-field of labor relations. This hot issue has already been taken onto the agenda as regards copyrights: The ownership of multi-national media- and entertainment corporations is defended as sacrosanct against piracy, whereas the mental work of creative artists and researchers is more and more interpreted as "corporate knowledge capital" not transferable elsewhere.

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<sup>82</sup> Stiglitz (2003).

<sup>83</sup> Lehnert & Schmidt-Bleek (1999).

<sup>84</sup> cf. Scott (1998).

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