Work Appropriation and Social Inequality

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Foreword

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Not too long ago I got involved in a clash with the late David Graeber and his supporters about some of the arguments in his book *Bullshit Jobs* (2019). He asserted that the majority of employees hated and found no meaning in their work, a view repeated by other advocates of a post-work politics, who want to abandon the terrain of improving access to and the quality of work in favour of a universal basic income. I pointed out that this wasn't true, or in more scientific terms, that it was inconsistent with the social scientific evidence (Thompson and Pitts 2018). Some found it slightly odd that a well-known labour process theorist would dissent from their claim. After all, isn't work under capitalism inherently alienating and/or increasingly subject to control, surveillance, intensification and rationalisation?

The great thing about this volume is that by focusing firmly on work expectations and orientations amongst impressively diverse groups of workers in different sectors and occupations, it helps us to resolve the apparent paradox that while work is objectively becoming more pressurised and precarious, it is still a source of meaning and attachment for many employees. We have to consider what we want from work as well as what work wants from us. The contributors focus in particular on expectations of and identifications with the content of work, its uses, purposes and impacts.

Most of the chapters in this volume are from German colleagues, and thus partly reflect the orientation of the debates on the sociology of work in that country, which obviously includes the Weberian legacy. All this is given expert and comparative context in Kupfer's introductory chapter. There is also reference to prominent past debates on worker consciousness, particularly those that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. While these are mainly German debates, there is also mention of the importance of Goldthorpe and his colleagues' research findings on instrumental attitudes to work made in the late 1960s in Britain. This gives a distinctive flavour to the accounts of events and debates.

In the UK, we have tended to proceed from an analysis of what work wants from us, then to consider the subjective and agential responses in terms of identification, consent, resistance, accommodation and so on. I am old enough to remember those debates about worker consciousness, and those memories are generally not fond ones. For me and many of my colleagues, they seemed endless and largely unproductive. The mainstream versions, such as those

associated with Goldthorpe and others, failed to capture the crises of work and the militancy of the 'mass worker' in that period. The Marxist versions were often teleological, working backwards from imputed class interests and revolutionary potential towards attempted explanations of the gap between objective class position and (often absent) class consciousness. This provides some of the context in which Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974) received such a favourable reception.

Ultimately, it probably doesn't really matter, as both objective and subjective features connected substantively to the same set of issues. The challenge, as set out in the following chapters, is to connect those changing objective conditions in the workplace and broader society to changing experiences and meanings. We may end up at the same place, but how we get there can matter. Though academics operate in an increasingly globally connected world and publish in at least some of the same journals, diversity of debate concerning the same phenomena is still important. Diversity is a good thing, but clarity of connections is not always obvious at first glance. This can be illustrated through a brief consideration of a couple of the key concepts used in this volume. The concept of work appropriation figures centrally—it is in the title and a number of the chapters. As set out in the introduction, this is held to encompass the social status of the occupation, the work activity and the use value of the work. This is important, as it seeks to capture the practical, active agency of labour with respect to the work, and is a persistent theme across the various chapters.

It is, furthermore, not just workers who are doing the appropriating. As we know, the workplace is a contested terrain and subject to conflicts, not just about meanings but also about material resources. Appropriation is not a concept central to debates in the UK, but by coincidence it is central to my own work, at least around organisational misbehaviour, which I have undertaken with my colleague Stephen Ackroyd (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999). At the centre of our analysis, we set out four terrains of contested appropriation: effort, time, product and identity. Our analysis is weaker on motives and meanings, and over-reliant on the struggles for autonomy and self-organisation. But it does perhaps capture more of the complex patterns of contested appropriation.

Alienation is another long-standing concept utilised in the sociology of work and one, in my view, that has not pushed the boundaries of explanation very far in proportion to the amount of ink spilled on its exposition. It is a central feature of some of the chapters in this volume, especially that by Hardering et al., and appears episodically in others. One of the limitations of alienation as an operational concept is that in the Marxist tradition, it is an objective characteristic of work under capitalism and therefore difficult to connect systematically to variations in work attachments. Outside the Marxist tradition,

alienation exists alongside a range of other subjective measures, without adding significant explanatory value. To be fair, I am unfamiliar with some of the German sources referred to in a number of the chapters and perhaps these problems have been addressed and resolved. Certainly, Hardering et al. are very effective at showing the connections between the more alienating conditions of contemporary digital work and the 'experience of alienation' in terms of feelings of powerlessness and detachment.

A concept that I found more interesting and innovative is that of subjective work interests—"the interests that relate to the meaning a person attaches to their work"—utilised primarily in the chapter by Nies. I'm not entirely clear whether the term 'interests' is meant as an equivalent to what we would normally consider to be objective interests around issues such as job security, effort and rewards (which the author calls 'reproductive interests'), or whether the term sits alongside others such as attachment or expectations. As indicated above, this relates to workers' perceptions and experiences of the content of their work, its purposes, uses and impacts on others. This is an important insight into how and why employees develop work attachments despite the negative experience of what I have described as "bullshit *in* the job" (Thompson and Pitts 2018). However, I would argue that reproductive interests are equally significant as a source of tension between what employees want from work and want they are currently getting under financialised capitalism. Though financialisation is not the only constraint on the realisation of workers' interests, it does highlight the point that it is not enough to refer to a clash between use and exchange values, given that this dynamic is inherent to capitalism in general. We need to show how and why conditions are changing, and what are the consequences — and of course, many chapters do exactly this.

Insights about subjective work interests raise other issues of relevance for readers, especially this one. The German debate about the 'subjectivation' of work is little known in the UK and elsewhere, so it was useful to have a clear exposition in Nies' and other chapters. It has parallels with the arguments of poststructuralists and Foucauldians in the 1990s concerning the supposed colonisation of worker identity by corporate cultures, electronic panopticons and other mechanisms. Having spent a considerable amount of time critiquing these assertions (Thompson and Ackroyd 1995; Ackroyd and Thompson 1999), I was encouraged by the argument that Nies puts forward, using a case study of engineers and customer service representatives, which challenges claims that subjective interests are individualistic and serve an affirmative function for managerial norms. Nies emphasises work orientations as a source of dissent and distancing. This is certainly consistent with evidence from the UK concerning similar groups (Cushen and Thompson 2012; Hebson et al. 2015). Captured or recuperated subjective perspectives consistently overstate the

scope and effectiveness of normative controls. Indeed, the gap between corporate and human resource management discourses and everyday organisational realities is itself a major source of employee disengagement, as many company and consultant surveys show. This can contribute to the kind of legitimation crises referred to in the chapter by Menz. Such tensions may not lead to overt resistance, but disengagement is itself a type of resistance, or more accurately misbehaviour.

Other chapters attempt to make connections between workplace dynamics and the broader reproduction of social inequalities. This is a necessary but often difficult task, as attitudes to and at work do not always easily translate into the wider social and political arena. So, for example in the chapter of Menz, the author argues that workers relativise their own unequal circumstances by comparison to those even worse off, thus limiting their expectations and willingness to engage in political protest. Whilst we may regard broader social mobilisation as desirable, it is important not to overburden resistance at work with our own expectations based on a rigid template. The question of wider social inequalities also brings up the issue of class, which is the focal point of Umney and Coderre-LaPalme's chapter. The authors usefully highlight 'meaning of work conflicts', but the difficulty of making such connections is indicated by the use of very different class frameworks: the first pertaining to differential opportunities to pursue meaningful work, the second to a more proximate analysis of capital-labour 'flashpoints' at work that might offer opportunities for mobilisation.

Though meaning of work conflicts are not the same nor are they experienced similarly across different skill and occupational groups, there is evidence that shared aspirations around work, its meaning and some of its rewards, can develop across categories that are often demarcated in terms of insiders and outsiders (Findlay and Thomson 2017). Current circumstances and widespread calls to 'build back better' after the Covid-19 pandemic offer opportunities for academics and activists to make connections between the experiences of work and inequalities. This would include greater public awareness about what is essential work and who are key workers, as well as the link between precarious work and susceptibility to Covid-19 infection. Though written before the onset of the pandemic, by providing insightful accounts of what employees seek from work and how current corporate policies and managerial regimes create obstacles to their achievement, the chapters in this book can inform and illuminate these debates.

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Introduction

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Covid-19 pandemic, which emerged as a worldwide phenomenon in early 2020 and is likely to have a significant impact for the foreseeable future, has brought about major disruptions to daily life, with work being among the most salient areas of disruption. Due to lockdown regulations, millions of employees have had to work at home. In addition, as schools closed, many also had to take care of their children and assume the role of involuntary co-teachers. Millions of others became unemployed, while so-called 'system-relevant' workers in health care and food retail received applause and saw an increase in their workload, though with little or no increase in salary. The Covid-19 pandemic has thus affected people extremely unequally, and has brought about changes in societal discourses on the meanings of work. While this volume was written and prepared before the outbreak of the pandemic, and thus does not deal directly with changes in work related to Covid-19, it does shed light on the relation between subjective work appropriation and social structures, a topic that is highly relevant in the dramatic and shifting pandemic landscape. In doing so, this volume links research findings on subjective perspectives and perceptions of work to issues of social inequality. The aim is to shed light on how subjective and objective social positionings take place and how they are related to one another.

Within the sociology of work there is a strand of research that deals with subjective perspectives of work. This has been explored simultaneously in the Anglo-American and German contexts, producing distinct traditions and perspectives. The following concise overview of the key literature provides a chronological outline of the debates in both contexts. The approach of examining subjective perspectives of work began in the 1950s with studies on worker consciousness, which asked, among other questions, for workers' perceptions of society and class in relation to their paid work. This approach was later picked up by studies of workers in industrial companies, first only in West Germany and after reunification also in East Germany (Popitz et al. 1957; Goldthorpe et al. 1968; Kern and Schumann 1970, 1984; Kalleberg 1977; Doerre et al. 2013). Popitz et al. (1957) observed a dichotomous picture of society among the smelting workers they interviewed in West Germany, who conceptualised it as being divided into two parts: those on top and the

downtrodden. The interviewed workers, as part of the workforce, located themselves among the latter group.

In contrast, Goldthorpe et al. (1968) observed less identification among workers in the UK in relation to tasks and instead noted a widespread instrumentalist attitude brought about by a focus on salaries. Knapp (1981) criticised the methods that Goldthorpe et al. applied and thus questioned their finding of a general instrumentalist attitude among British workers. Kern and Schumann (1970) described a dissolving collective consciousness among male industrial workers in West Germany, although this, they argued, was mainly caused by various and differing work experiences. For the US, Kalleberg (1977) conducted a quantitative analysis of the 1972-73 Quality of Employment Survey, a representative sample of paid employees' views collected through interviews. In examining relations between job satisfaction and work values and job rewards, Kalleberg asserted that work values have significant and independent effects on job satisfaction.

Later, Kern and Schumann (1984) continued their research in West Germany and attributed the abovementioned development towards dissolving collective consciousness to strategies of rationalisation that created losers among workers. Doerre et al. (2013) also stated that there is by no means a single, uniform collective consciousness of workers, since the workers they interviewed in industrial metal and electrical companies in East and West Germany offered various views on how they see work and their relation to it, ranging from calls for performance-oriented adjustment, to demands for reforms, to the articulation of fundamental critiques of the capitalist system. However, the authors observed that many of the workers they spoke to praised and identified with their companies and criticised societal issues, without drawing connections between the two. All of the above-cited studies (with the exception of Kalleberg 1977) focused on industrial workers, mainly men. As the service sector has grown, however, studies have shifted towards the analysis of employees.

In the 1980s in the UK and the US (and other countries) and in the 1990s in Germany, a time of forced neoliberalisation of paid work, a new debate emerged around the so-called subjectivation of work, which is conceptualised as a double-sided phenomenon: on the one hand, employees have increasing expectations at work and articulate an orientation towards subjective interests (e.g. Baethge 1991); on the other hand, corporations increasingly use their employees' subjectivity—e.g. their ideas, creativity, social contacts and leisure time—for their own labour processes and profits (e.g. Voss and Pongratz 1998). Relating to Labour Process Theory, which builds on Marx's outline of labour as key for use value, and which was developed in a research tradition starting from Braverman (1974) and then substantially developed by Thompson (1990) in the UK, the Australian sociologist Ezzy (1997) emphasised the subjective experiences of

workers by focusing primarily on the symbolic level. He suggested that narratives of hope are more important than material working conditions in terms of producing a feeling of dignity at work.

In 2002, the German Industrial Union of Metal (*Industriegewerkschaft Metall*) initiated a discussion on the quality of work, placing an emphasis on working conditions. As a result, sociological studies began to focus more on subjective utility and meaningful work, taking employees' views and evaluations of work content into greater account. These views and evaluations were often found to be in conflict with companies' interests in valorisation. In the US, Vidal (2007) questioned the employment theory of job satisfaction with the help of 39 interviews with workers in nine manufacturing plants in Wisconsin, in which many workers expressed a resistance to high-involvement systems by lean production and rather evaluated traditional jobs as challenging enough. Only a small number were inclined to participate in substantive decision-making. Later, management strategies switched from lean production to financialisation and a major debate on the role of financialisation and its consequences for labour took place in the UK. While some argued that the increasing importance of monetary negotiations weakens the role of labour in favour of the creation of profits, others argued that, on the contrary, financialisation re-enforces the relevance of labour processes by squeezing labour costs, intensifying labour, strengthening punitive performance regimes and reinforcing market discipline and market attitudes (Cushen and Thompson 2016, building on Thompson 2003).

Meanwhile, in the US and the UK, the debate on meaningful work has taken place more prominently in business studies, with research including investigations into the conditions within organisations that could enable employees to work in meaningful ways (Bailey et al. 2019). Many other disciplines, such as philosophy, psychology and economy, have also contributed to the topic of meaningful work, which makes the debate highly diverse (Yeoman et al. 2019). In a comparative institutional perspective on meaningful work, Thompson (2019, p. 462) summarises that union power is found to make a large difference in terms of offering higher degrees of autonomy and thus supporting meaningful work, and concludes "that social democratic countries are more likely to develop the institutional arrangements that create more opportunities for meaningful work." He calls for actions to address power imbalances between employers and workers in order to increase the chances for more meaningful work.

In this volume, the collected contributions offer different subjective-oriented approaches to the study of work. Such approaches interpret workers' and employees' assertions and narrations regarding work through reference to their biographies, social contexts, working conditions and relevant social structures. A comprehensive concept that constitutes a red thread running through the

different subjective-oriented approaches to work is work appropriation, which comprises three dimensions: the social status of the occupation, the work activity, and the use value of the work. I use this term to grasp both subjective and structural elements of labour, which I sketch below. Work appropriation is a broader concept compared to that of meaningful work, as it includes an analysis of ways of looking at work that go beyond mere narrations of attitudes towards and evaluations of work. Work appropriation begins with the premise that people appropriate work, independently of whether they feel satisfied with their work or not. Work appropriation is, furthermore, not conceptualised as the opposite of, or being in contrast to, alienation (as it is commonly referred to by authors such as Jaeggi 2014) from a Marxist or Marx-related perspective, since it also takes place in relation to hated work or in exploitative working conditions.

Before starting to work, persons will have an image of the social status of the occupation, which informs their expectations and the ways in which they will relate to their work. Appropriation takes place within the process of working (Frey 2009). It is a practical, active process, an activity (Becker-Schmidt 1983). The outcomes of work—products and services—that carry a use value form the content of working tasks (Nies 2015); they are highly relevant, and workers and employees relate to them. All three of the abovementioned dimensions of work appropriation—social status, work activity and use value—together form subjectivity, which takes place in social contexts and is formed by social structures (Huertgen 2017, 2018). The status of an occupation is created by social evaluations and is institutionalised by regulations related to education and payment. It is the object of social conflicts and struggles. The way in which people work is influenced by concrete working conditions, as well as their wider living circumstances and biographies. Thus for the analysis of work from a subjective-oriented perspective, life courses and biographies are relevant (Becker-Schmidt et al. 1982; Becker-Schmidt, 1983; Huertgen and Voswinkel 2014, 2017; Roth 2015). They are socially structured by institutions such as education systems, as well as by changing social conditions, among which labour markets and welfare regimes play an important role. Furthermore, use values are subject to social change, as they are created purposefully. The fact that use values have been losing relevance in comparison to increasing exchange values and marketisation in the last decades shows this development clearly; it affects workers' and employees' work appropriations, and the ways in which they relate to their work.

Social structures are shaped by social inequalities. Societies are created following unequal distributions of power, leading to the unequal distribution of resources and life chances. With regard to work appropriation, this means that each of the three dimensions is exposed to and takes place under

conditions of social inequality. Where an occupation is placed within the hierarchy of work—i.e. in the productive, service or reproductive sector—has a great impact on its social status; this is expressed, above all, in the fact that work in the former two sectors is paid while in the latter it is (predominantly) unpaid. Another fundamental hierarchy that is socially created is the one between physical and cognitive work, with the former being devalued in relation to the latter. This hierarchy finds its expression in institutionalised inequalities, such as hierarchies among institutions of secondary education and the division between vocational and academic education. Occupations are also assigned differing prestige following aspects such as the degree of autonomy of the occupation, whether employees have responsibility for other personnel, the extent to which tasks are seen as complex, and last but not least the degree of remuneration for the work. Subjective work expectations are formed in relation to these aspects of social inequality, thus the ways in which people relate to their occupations are impacted by conditions of social inequality.

The same is true for the dimension of activity related to work appropriation; namely the way in which people actually work. Here, working conditions are of high importance, and include factors such as whether their work is precarious or secure; i.e. whether workers and employees hold limited or unlimited contracts, or only contracts for special work. The amount of contracted work time is also a resource that is unequally distributed. Working time is important for work appropriation, and is closely connected to the unequal distribution of additional, unpaid care work.

Subjective work expectations relate, thirdly, to the content of work, i.e. to products and services. Here, use value is crucial. Use value expresses the meaning that a product or service has for others. This meaning is highly important for workers and employees, as it is an important source of motivation to work and forms to a large degree workers' subjectivity. In capitalist societies, use value has come under greater pressure in recent decades and is increasingly being diminished at the expense of exchange value. This unequal relation affects workers and employees, both of whom benefit less when use values go down.

This volume collects eight contributions that deal with work appropriation and social inequality from different perspectives, focusing on various work areas. It enables a non-German, English-speaking audience to get to know the major works of German sociologists and social scientists who are part of the current scientific debate. The volume aims to bring together strands from different scientific and national communities in order to advance the discussion on subjective-oriented approaches to work, a discussion that is crucial for the understanding of social inequality. In addition, in times of Brexit,

Covid-19 and other major disruptions, this volume invites readers to share thoughts and research findings that relate to our present moment.

The volume consists of three parts. In the first part, basic approaches to work appropriation and social inequality are outlined. The second part analyses current threats to work appropriation. Finally, the third part offers a philosophical outlook. The first of the three preliminary chapters, written by Stephan Voswinkel, sets the stage for one of the two main foci of this volume: social inequality. By questioning the dominant assumption of desired social ascent in modern societies, he highlights some of the key structures of social inequality present in such societies. Based on his own empirical data, Voswinkel observes that workers and employees of different social classes do not always have a work orientation aimed at social ascent. Indeed, many reject this orientation for various reasons, one of which is that the estimated costs in terms of stress do not outweigh the foreseen benefits. Voswinkel argues that this rejection of the orientation towards social ascent should not be interpreted as evidence of the internalisation of a position of lower social status, but rather as an emancipatory way in which to escape competition.

The second chapter, written by Sarah Nies, builds ground for the second focus of this volume: work appropriation. Nies clarifies the object of workers' and employees' expectations regarding work, namely the use values of their work. In contrast to authors who presume that work expectations are connected to professional positions and mainly oriented towards personal fulfilment, Nies uses empirical data on engineers and customer service advisors in banks to explain that work expectations among these two groups are focused on the functionality of the product and on the quality of the service provided for customers respectively. Nies asserts that all workers and employees, not only those who are more highly qualified or paid, have work expectations. Conflicts arise, however, when use values lose importance and companies impose working conditions oriented towards achieving more exchange value. Indeed, this is increasingly the case, as it is inherent to capitalist development (see Haug 1999). Thus in order to enable workers and employees to fulfil their work expectations, a societal decision to preference use values would be required. According to Nies, depending on their position within companies, workers and employees have differing degrees of power to achieve their work expectations. Thus, one can argue that there are no social inequalities among workers and employees in terms of having work expectations, but rather in terms of the conditions necessary to fulfil their work expectations.

The third preliminary chapter, which offers a life-course perspective, is contributed by Silke Roth. By analysing veterans' motivations to join and leave the British Armed Forces, Roth demonstrates that an analysis of work appropriation requires a biographical perspective, as it changes over time. There are, she argues, no class differences in terms of experiencing work in the

army as meaningful. Men from the lower and middle classes alike state that it was the opportunity for self-realisation and personal growth, mainly through discipline and camaraderie, that had initially attracted them to the military. Among the most-mentioned motivations were making a difference and the diversity of tasks. Working in the armed forces was contrasted to higher education and office work—areas that held little interest for the interviewees. Over time, however, the subjective meaning of military service changed. Key reasons for this were changes in life circumstances, such as founding a family, which made moving around less appealing and more problematic. Others were confronted with routine administrative tasks and being subject to commands, aspects that they did not enjoy. These changes in subjective work appropriation reveal the important impact of life conditions and circumstances on the nature of workers' and employees' expectations, indicating that life context is crucial for understanding work appropriation.

The second part of the volume contains four chapters dealing with current threats to work appropriation. In the fourth chapter by Friedericke Hardering, Mirela Ivanova, Felix Nickel and Helene Thaa, the authors resonate with Nies' observation that use values are increasingly being devalued. According to Hardering et al., the main threat is marketisation. This hits all workers and employees, but those working in highly-skilled areas face particular limitations to their professional practice. Middle-skilled employees mainly face tendencies toward standardisation and the erosion of securities, while low-skilled employees tend to face fragmentation and new forms of control through digital Taylorism. A general observation by Hardering et al. is that the boundaries in terms of experiencing alienation have begun to blur, as highly-skilled workers are also increasingly experiencing the routinisation of work, while low-skilled workers suffer from not being able to realise certain standards of good work. It would be interesting to discuss whether these dissolving boundaries could be interpreted as precipitating a move towards more egalitarianism, or whether, as all skill levels are downgraded, the different groups will nevertheless maintain their former distance.

In the fifth chapter, Charles Umney and Genevieve Coderre-LaPalme also assert that there is a current deterioration of working conditions through rising job precarity. The consequences for workers and employees of different classes in terms of pursuing and achieving their work expectations are, however, quite different. While upper-class musicians in the creative industry are able to maintain themselves financially with the help of private capital in times of unemployment or no income, members of the lower class are not. In the areas in which the latter predominantly work, namely social work and health care, neoliberal ideology and practices reduce their opportunities to pursue meaning in work. The political consequences also differ: while the pursuit of

meaningful work among the upper classes often lies in individual projects, lower-class workers are able to trigger collective protest in cases where the wider public benefits, such as with health care. Coalitions of interests over the meaning of work can therefore arise.

Society's interest in useful work is the topic of the sixth chapter by Stefanie Huertgen. She ties in with Nies' focus on use values and links this to Umney and Coderre-LaPalme's thoughts around broad social coalitions politically defending their interests in useful work. Huertgen asserts that historically, workers constituted themselves as citizens through the institutionalised recognition of the general function of work. In times when deteriorating working conditions impeded societally useful work, a worker's status as a citizen was therefore also threatened. In some cases, workers have reacted with political claims concerning their work, in others with privately-oriented desires. Workers who have insisted on the societal meaning of their work have defended their status as social subjects and rejected being reduced to private citizens. In defending the societal meaning of work, workers have thus shifted values from exploitative work towards caring and creative work, and in this way have made strides towards a more egalitarian society.

The seventh chapter by Wolfgang Menz describes another current threat to work appropriation, as he outlines processes that legitimise inequality. The most prevalent legitimisation of inequality that Menz focuses on relates to work performance—higher or better performance means greater remuneration, which leads to inequality. While this principle is strongly shared among workers and employees, both groups nevertheless observe a general decline in overall wealth and welfare within society. This decline impacts workers' and employees' expectations, also in relation to work satisfaction; by comparing themselves with workers and employees who are worse off than they are, they relativise their own position, see themselves as less severely affected, and consequently lower their expectations. Thus, a general deterioration of living conditions seems to lead to a lowering of expectations rather than to an increase in political protests.

The third part of the volume contains a single chapter by Ruth Yeoman, dedicated to the idea of dissolving social inequalities. Yeoman argues that work appropriation has to be directed towards addressing ecology. This requires work that can create a Self that is consistent with the sustainability imperative, with inter-subjective equality, justice and care, and with collective responsibility for life-value creation. Work in the Anthropocene needs to be meaningful, which means that it needs to be structured by the values of autonomy, freedom and dignity, and should imply more egalitarian relations among people. Yeoman's work ethic in the Anthropocene is directed towards a close interrelation of humans with their environment, defined by relations of care and sustainability.

The required transformation goes beyond the standard 'future of work' debate, and rather aims to produce life-values. The achievement of Yeoman's ethic will require a comprehensive shift away from profit generation towards life-preserving activities.

It is my sincere wish that interested readers will have sufficient time to enjoy the following chapters. For those who lack adequate time resources, I wish them all the best in materializing or improving legislation regarding working hours and conditions.

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