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Will Radical Markets Mean more Equality? : New Patterns of Conflict in Gender Relations

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Table of Contents

KATRIN KRAUS, PHILIPP GONON,
JÜRGEN OELKERS and STEFANIE STOLZ
Work, Education and Employability 7

Recent Changes in Work and Education

PAUL HAGER
Education at Work – Serious Possibility
or Policy Naivety? 21

KATRIN KRAUS
Does *Employability* Put the German 'Vocational Order'
at Risk? An Analysis from the Perspective
of Earning Oriented Pedagogy 55

HILDEGARD MARIA NICKEL
Will Radical Markets Mean more Equality?
New Patterns of Conflict in Gender Relations 83

Vocationalism and Apprenticeship

W. NORTON GRUBB
The Education Gospel: American Perspectives
and International Patterns 105

TERRY HYLAND
Reductionist Trends in Education and Training for Work:
Skills, Competences and Work-Based Learning 129

HILARY STEEDMAN
Adapting to Globalised Product and Labour Markets:
New Models for Apprenticeship in Europe 147

Recent Developments in Japan and their Impact on Education and Work

MIKIKO ESWEIN
New Employment Patterns and their Impact on Occupational Training in Japan 171

TOSHIKO ITO
Simplifying the Transition from School to Employment: Career Education in Japan 183

Historical Perspectives

JÜRGEN OELKERS
Work and Learning: A Look Back and an Outlook on a Classical Theme of Education 207

PHILIPP GONON
Education for Industry – Employability *avant la lettre* 241

KLAUS HARNEY & MATTHIAS VOM HAU
Between Market and Organization: Historical and Empirical Dimensions of Vocational Education in Germany (Or: Do Firms train 'Arbeitskraftunternehmer'?) 259

CHRISTINE MAYER
How the Past Shapes the Present: A Case Study on the Development of Vocational Training and Employment Possibilities of Male and Female Youths in Hamburg from the late 18th to the early 20th Century 297

List of Contributors 321

HILDEGARD MARIA NICKEL

Will Radical Markets Mean more Equality? New Patterns of Conflict in Gender Relations

Social integration zones: The paradox of participation

In Germany the "sunset of industrialism" (Baethge 2001) is a fairly slow and faltering process, although the universal trend towards a service economy is occurring here, too. The path to a service society does not lead straight to a "tertiary civilisation" (Fourastie), but initially into a phase where labour is transformed and restructured. It is not mere rhetoric to ask whether, at the end of this phase – also known as the crisis of Fordism – we will witness a new stage of civilisation where society is able to exert a certain control over capital, or whether we will lapse into barbarity, with a dramatic increase in social inequality, the social exclusion of ever broader sections of society and the polarisation of different social milieus.

The trend towards a service economy has been accompanied by a process of 'market radicalisation', a new stage in the logic of capital expansion which subjects every sphere of society to greater economisation. In the world of corporate restructuring this is known as 'marketisation'. This new form of company rationalisation is encroaching further and further into areas of service provision and social activity which in the past have been 'decommodified', i.e. shielded from the direct intervention of market forces. Many of these services and activities are unpaid and offered, primarily by women, on the basis of needs and use value. Inevitably, this has had an impact on gender relations. These are sucked into the 'marketisation' process as women are caught up directly and at an accelerating pace in the structural changes that are now transforming the character of (gainful) employment.

Europe, including Germany, has seen many examples of public goods and services subordinated to the 'valorisation of capital', from

public transport to district hospitals.[1] The service sector is widely regarded as an area that promises dynamic growth in capital accumulation, because it still only accounts for about 25 per cent of international trade, despite generating at least two-thirds of macroeconomic net output in advanced industrial societies. When we talk about opening public goods and services to the valorisation of capital, we mean the transfer of public property to private capital-based corporations and the conversion of services of general interest into products for capital gain. In other words, value creation and policies affecting human resources and labour are geared increasingly to a profit-making perspective.

The debate in industrial sociology has focused on a hypothesis that a new market-centred, or rather "market-oriented" (Frey, Hüning & Nickel 2004), control mechanism is (intentionally) being imposed. "Insecurities and uncertainties inherent in market competition are thereby shifted onto workers. As a result, orders from above seem less relevant than allegedly objective requirements" (Lehndorff & Voss-Dahm 2006, p. 129).

Exploring the "crisis of Fordism", Robert Castel (2000) comes up with a diagnosis of the current period which he formulates as a metamorphosis of the social question. This entails an interesting heuristic analysis of changes in the way women are integrated into society, something that gender sociology has not yet explored in depth. Castel describes a new position for the worker that has emerged with the crisis of Fordism. First, he addresses the myth of the highly productive individual, the 'performer', and the current obsession with adaptability (flexibility). Secondly, he carefully examines the divide between new, highly productive employees and peripheral labour (migrants, women, young people without qualifications, older workers, etc.). Castel does not rest at observing this growing dichotomy

1 I am drawing here on lines of argument developed in our research project on marketisation and the subjectivisation of labour: "Vermarktlichung und Subjektivierung von Arbeit? Neue Arbeitspolitik und betriebliche Geschlechterverhältnisse", Project Report (draft), September 2006, Project leaders: Hildegard Maria Nickel (HU Berlin) and Hasko Hüning (FU Berlin), team: Susanne Braun (student), Michael Frey (research fellow), Cordula Kiank (student), Almut Kirschbaum (research fellow).

between two social extremes, but goes on to elaborate four zones of social cohesion to demonstrate that there is a process at play here, that social inclusion and exclusion confer a fragile and fluid status, that people may be upwardly or downwardly mobile or, indeed, become isolated from the general flow. As a consequence, he concludes, our social balance is vulnerable. Even during the crisis of Fordism, Castel maintains, the zone of integration is predicated on paid labour. Social integration assumes stable contractual employment enabling workers to ensure their livelihood. As markets become more radical, a second zone evolves out of this centre of social integration moulded by Fordism. This second zone is characterised by an increasingly precarious status (temporary employment, hired labour, mini-jobs, etc.). By generating social insecurities, it affects not only people in precarious jobs, but also workers in relatively stable employment. Thirdly, Castel discerns a zone of 'superfluous' workers. Apart from the unemployed, these are people – predominantly women – who seek access to the employment system but cannot find a place within it and are dependent on alimony or state benefits. Finally, there is a fourth zone, characterised by isolation from economic processes, social exclusion and the loss of the social identity that is primarily acquired by participating in the world of employment. The market-driven desecuritisation of paid labour, and the centrifugal forces in society that result from it, provoke a return to mass vulnerability, similar to the early days of industrialisation. Castel argues that the 'social question' is being posed in new terms. However, one consequence of these social dynamics triggered by the crisis of Fordism has not yet been fully grasped: What subtle influences will they exert on the 'woman question' and shifts in gender relations?

Labour market research in Germany (Oschmiansky & Oschmiansky 2003) has demonstrated how different employment formats propel people towards integration, risk status or exclusion. Here, too, people in jobs which fall below the social insurance threshold, part-time work, temping or self-employment are facing huge potential social risks. These precarious forms of employment rarely culminate in standard full-time contracts or regular work. They are far more likely to create predatory competition in the labour market, to result in the fragmentation of regular jobs and to induce greater sham

self-employment. On the one hand, women are affected more by social insecurity and the proliferation of precarious employment. On the other hand, once they have been 'de-familied' and 'individualised for the labour market', they are increasingly found among the 'new performers'. Social differentiations and, indeed, polarisations between women depend increasingly on how far they can 'dispose of' their role as carers.

There is, in fact, a paradox about women. Their growing presence in the world of paid labour is an indication of greater participation in society and, in Castel's sense, social integration. At the same time, however, this same broader participation in the world of employment, which is itself structurally precarious, exposes them to major hazards and social risks and hence to social vulnerability. The segmentation between different employment formats – and hence between integration, precarity and exclusion – seems more and more dramatic, especially among women. We can identify some of the implications for gender inequality, but we are still a long way from a clear and unambiguous analysis.

The service economy and women's employment

The transition to a service economy is also associated with a trend that has been described as the return of the subject to the economy, or 'subjectivisation'. This offers new, 'risky' opportunities for women (Lohr & Nickel 2005). After united Germany's short-lived dream of eternal prosperity (Lutz 1984), with its broad spectrum of individual differentiation, an unfolding of lifestyles and a diversity of cultural orientations relatively unfettered by economic parameters, the nation is now being compelled to recall the economic foundations on which individual lives are constructed, with paid labour as the key to social participation. Everywhere there is pressure for self-management in an environment of growing existential pressures and unequal, gendered, baseline conditions. Market pressure and rationalisation are being transformed or are perhaps mutating from an external affair that is managed by industry, companies or workplaces into a

behavioural logic that has been internalised by individuals. This affects both women and men and has an impact on gender relations. I wish to explore this thesis on two levels: the sectoral level as a reflection of labour market structure, and the microeconomic level. Between these two levels I shall address challenges in gender theory that relate to that return of the subject to the economy and the interaction between work and life.

At the level of labour market structure, the service sector is pivotal to women's employment. According to the public statistics agency in Germany, about 57% of gainfully employed women in March 2004 were to be located in the sector "Other Services" (which include education, health, veterinary and social affairs and public administration). These employed almost 2.6 million more women than men. In the "Retail, Hospitality and Transport" sector, women accounted for half the workforce. Several authors have pointed to the statistical correlation between the development of socially oriented services and the female employment rate: this sector offers women considerable opportunities for employment, and the availability of these services enables women with children to take a paid job. There is, however, one problematical side effect in that women are automatically associated with certain activities in the service sector (social services, caring occupations, interactive tasks), thereby reinforcing sectoral segregation (Bothfeld 2006, p. 162). For example, of the 1.6 million people employed in information and communication technologies – i.e. in occupations relating to telecommunications, IT and the media – only 26% were women. In IT, the field that has the most jobs to offer, the women's share came out lowest at 14%. Becoming a knowledge-based service economy may entail the risk of greater segmentation between groups employed in the centres of highly skilled and relatively well remunerated activity and those who are engaged in unskilled occupations or else highly skilled occupations with a low value rating (Nickel 1999). Although the gender grammar underlying this segmentation is changing, it certainly has not lost its impact. In the public sector – a major employer of women – low-paid jobs are, moreover, being used to "cover undeniable needs in social services. The dwindling budget is being distributed among more but on average lower paid" workers (Knapp 2004).

> Basically the social services are the growth zone of the future [...] but rather than laying the foundations for a humane expansion of the social services, the existing and potential jobs in this sphere are being elbowed out and devalued by low-wage competition (ibid. 2004).

Individual livelihoods – and hence material independence and a self-determined life – depend on the ability to earn an income from gainful employment. This calls for a political strategy that integrates women (like men) into paid employment. However, an increasingly rigid labour market strategy based on the premise that "any job is better than no job" (Heinze & Streeck 2000, p. 258) forces women in particular into 'bad' jobs: the low-wage sector, precarious employment, (part-time) work that does not secure a living wage.[2] To dwell a while longer on the labour market, women are still *structurally* hindered from obtaining the kind of employment which would grant them equal treatment and equal value. Helga Krüger has been demonstrating for many years that this process takes effect not only when a woman has private care commitments or becomes a mother, but at the latest upon her transition from school to the world of work (Krüger 2003). At least European equal opportunities policy – insofar as it concerns the employment framework – addresses this structural disadvantage affecting women and calls upon member states to implement proposals that both *reappraise the value* of labour and also *facilitate a gender-fair work/life balance*. The EU's most recent annual report on gender equality (Commission of the European Communities 2004), for example, focuses – alongside legislative improvements to gender equality – on the need for better labour policies which are extremely pertinent to the issues discussed here. EU employment policy is geared towards an 'adult worker model' that Jane Lewis (2004) correctly examines in terms of its consequences for women and that has been criticised because the framework for organising the mode of production and reproduction has remained largely unaltered. However, those who call for greater equality of opportunity in the distribution and re-evaluation of care-based and knowledge-based work in a national context might be well advised to make

2 The call for a minimum wage is therefore especially important to securing women's livelihoods.

more vociferous use of European equality rhetoric and to demand that the German government implement the national commitments it has pledged at European level. To utilise 'human investments', for example, the EU member states are duty bound to narrow the gender gap in wages[3] significantly by the year 2010 (Commission 2004). This is to be achieved as part of a multidimensional approach that not only takes account of how gender segregation impacts on inequality, but seeks to counter the trend for wages to fall as soon as more women enter once male-dominated occupations and sectors. These commitments for the period up to 2010 (which are binding to different degrees) contain a number of premises that could be turned into strong arguments for placing women's policies back on the offensive. The persistent gap between pay and conditions in male and female domains and the lower incomes received by women in spite of equal or comparable qualifications and job position are serious indicators for the paradoxical relationship between greater participation and social vulnerability in which gainful employment results.[4] While we can anticipate that the present trend for more variable wage structures (performance- and success-related remuneration) will exert an additional impact on the income gap between men and women and also within the genders, the empirical research is still meagre.

The growing income polarisation between women is relevant here and relatively unresearched. It allows women on higher incomes to avoid spending time on reproductive/domestic tasks by paying for services in these areas, usually provided by women. In other words, they can cast off their own 'cares' by passing them on to other women in return for poor wages.

3 In all EU member states women earn on average less than men. Cyprus displays the biggest pay gap (22% or more) followed by Estonia, Germany, Slovakia and the UK (Ziegler 2006).

4 Regular earnings for women in 2003 were on average about 1000 euros lower than for men. The pay gap in the eastern states of Germany is about 23%, much smaller than in the western states where payslips differ by 30%. In 2001 the EU Commission already described Germany as one of the member states with the biggest gender pay gaps in the EU. Evidently the voluntary commitments made by the private sector are not enough to overcome this unsatisfactory state of affairs, which dates back many years.

The return of the subject: Theoretical challenges

The gender studies community has repeatedly called for a long overdue public debate about the organisation, distribution and recognition of 'work in its totality'. Quite possibly a thorough debate will only be triggered by the transformation of labour we are currently witnessing. Personal and social reproduction cannot be achieved by means of paid employment alone. That has become blatantly obvious now that the 'simple' supply of unpaid women waiting quietly in the wings to perform domestic (and generative) reproduction has been increasingly undermined. The structures of inequality that characterise gender relations have long been accepted as legitimate, but as marketisation places the subject back on the economic stage, this legitimacy could find the carpet swept from under its feet. Subjectivisation – which means the transition from external supervision to self-supervision, self-organisation and self-economisation – could be regarded as a basis for (self-)authorisation. This empowerment of the subject, increasingly at odds with an environment of traditionally constructed Fordist assumptions, is becoming a driving force in the democratisation of the economy and all other social relations. Recognising the inherent options or structural potentiality of the transition to a service economy could lend new weight to the centrality of individual reproductive interests, a proposition which – as gender studies have begun to neglect it – is beginning to make its mark on the sociology of industry and labour (e.g. Jürgens 2006).

In the sociology of industry and labour, this proposition is derived from the basic hypothesis (Sauer 2005) that marketisation and individualisation, or subjectivisation, are two sides of the same coin. They generate an inherent logic that collides with traditional, adaptation-oriented labour and employment policies, which focussed on how workers could respond to corporate requirements without suffering too much harm, rather than on how subjects with expectations of their own might actually influence their work arrangements. A labour policy that is 'resistant' rather than forcing people to fit in (Sauer 2005; Peters & Sauer 2005) and that does justice to subjects with their own inherent logic and purpose should respect and defend not only the individual interests of workers, but also those ex-

pectations of 'good work' that are fuelled by the milieus in which they live. This may sound cynical in the light of Germany's unemployed and the poor bargaining power of those in precarious employment, but it is essential to the future viability of modern societies (see also Memorandum 2005).

Brigitte Aulenbacher (2005) has identified some of the key gaps in research on subjectivisation in the field of labour and industrial sociology, which we shall be looking at more closely here.

It is perhaps not so surprising that labour and industrial sociology often 'forget' the gender dimension, so that it tends (if at all) to be considered in retrospect, usually as an empirical phenomenon or an 'add-on'. What is more surprising, however, is the lack of a basic theoretical understanding of the categorical relationship between gender and subject/subjectivisation. Aulenbacher draws attention here to Beer's Marxist-inspired structural theory (1990). This proposes a theory of subject that extends beyond that of labour and industrial sociology by thinking in terms of a 'mode of industry and population'. *Gender relations* are embedded within the structure of production relations, but *gendered individuals* are embedded within the structure of productive forces. The interface with subject theory offered by this approach is discerned by Aulenbacher (2005) in the following passage from Beer & Chalupsky (1993, pp. 209–210):

> In the determining of relations, individuals function as vehicles [...]. Individuals are the vehicles of social relations first of all as objects of these relations. They are subordinate to a social relationship in the systematic sense that opportunities in life are granted or denied them. But they are also vehicles as defined above in the inverse sense that they are subjects who mould this change, bestowing upon it social content and significance [...]. As individuals are not merely the vehicles of social relations, but above all 'productive forces', including in the Marxian sense, on both sides of this personification of social relations the vehicle role combines with the role of individuals as 'productive forces'. As individuals they lead an autonomous existence and cannot be reduced to their attribute as vehicles of social relations (Beer & Chalupsky cited in Aulenbacher 2005).

Because individuals shape their working and living context, "humans express their 'subject potential' (Knapp 1987) as 'the productive force subjectivity' (Knapp 1987; Beer 1990) in productive and

reproductive relations whose development they thereby help to influence" (Aulenbacher 2005, p. 54). When the analytical perspective extends systematically beyond the *market economy* to the *'reproduction and provision economy'*, the link between work and life is not merely factored in, as Aulenbacher (2005) points out; it is actually founded in our theory of society. Admittedly, this still has to be translated into appropriate research. In the sociology of labour and industry the link between the subjectivisation of labour and the gender dimension needs to be established by primarily empirical means. We can observe that the market- and service-oriented restructuring of companies has not left traditional corporate labour markets untouched: decentralisation and divisionalisation prune back hierarchies and grant local operational units greater status. This has often led to positions changing hands and new people being appointed. Restructuring not only induced greater mobility in internal labour markets. It also sent ripples through traditional corporate gender relations: career opportunities, sometimes quite new ones, opened up for skilled women with management or specialist experience. The personal prerequisites – alongside qualifications and experience – were, first, a high degree of professional *commitment*, and second, a certain *independence* from extra-mural activities such as caring for children or elderly relatives. Apart from professional skills and experience, these new career opportunities are often dependent on *mobility* in space and *availability* in time. Those best placed to meet the demands were women without children and women of middle age after a child-rearing period. These women were able, due to their current private and family situations, to recognise the self-organisation and private initiative required by these middle management or technical positions as a positive career challenge. By contrast, less qualified women who had care commitments to manage outside work found themselves confronting new risks. These women were not always in a position to meet the frequent demand for mobility and flexible time-keeping. This left them facing a not insubstantial risk of exclusion (such as when returning from a period of looking after small children) (Frey 2004).

Pongratz & Voß (2003) reached similar conclusions in their study on the concept of the 'worker entrepreneur'. They showed that it was

above all skilled female white-collar workers who displayed components of an attitude to employment that fitted the 'worker entrepreneur' profile. This prompted the authors to ask whether the 'worker entrepreneur' was a woman. At the time Pongratz & Voß (2003) did not provide much of an answer to this question, but in more recent research Voß & Weiss (2005) have offered a more definite response: the 'worker entrepreneur' is, it seems, by no means infrequently female, but on no account a mother! With this poignant observation Voß & Weiss (2005) express the central issue – from an angle of gender sociology – pinpointed by recent changes in employed labour: those persistently different modes of socialisation that men and women experience, in which the private work of reproduction is unequally attributed and devalued by society in a context of capitalist production relations. Dismantling the consequent gender asymmetries calls for labour and gender policy strategies based on an integrated view of production and reproduction, work and life.

There is every indication, however, that women with a background of family life and experience of looking after others can be highly motivated about their careers and might actually prove an asset to companies, notably in management positions, precisely because of the specific skills they have acquired in this field. A study of mothers in management posts, for example, concludes that it would be worthwhile for companies to employ mothers in leadership posts because family skills and management skills overlap and are mutually reinforcing (Lukoschat & Walther 2006). Besides, having a family does not necessarily mean a "kink to the career" of women in management, but can be utilised as a beneficial resource. Apparently, children are sometimes experienced as a "kick to the career" (ibid.).[5]

5 Similar assessments and findings were obtained by the project on family skills as a potential source of innovative HR development ("Familienkompetenzen als Potenzial einer innovativen Personalentwicklung", Erler & Nußhardt (2001); Erler et al. (2002); Gerzer-Saas (2003)). Cf. also analogous findings from the study on corporate impacts of family-friendly policies ("Betriebswirtschaftliche Effekte familienfreundlicher Maßnahmen") (Prognos 2003) and the similar diagnosis of practice in the Guidelines drawn up by the Federal Family Ministry on how companies can support the work/life balance: "Führungskräfte und Familie. Wie Unternehmen Work-Life-Balance fördern können" (BMFSFJ 2004).

In a study just completed on the German rail operator Deutsche Bahn AG[6] we observed a high degree of male segregation in the management environment, but also a relatively strong female presence in personnel management, for – as one man we interviewed phrased it – "HR [work] [...] is a bit like nursing". This is an appropriate interpretation of the finding. But from an 'option perspective' there is another possible interpretation: during the transition to a service economy, marketisation and subjectivisation, assuming responsibility for the workforce is an important field of management which makes a vital contribution to value creation.

Deutsche Bahn does not pursue an explicit gender policy, but rather an implicit one with a human resource focus that builds less on notions of fairness and the institutionalisation of experts in women's affairs, equal opportunities and gender than on resources management by managers and the human resources department. This echoes trends in business administration logic and can be witnessed in other large service companies as well. At the same time, the fact that relatively more women occupy responsible posts in secondary functions, such as HR departments, could lend greater weight to a labour policy perspective that is not blind to the reproductive sphere and does not isolate the reproductive interests of its subjects from the process of value creation. Firstly, women in management – as we have seen – are often themselves living examples of an integrated strategy for balancing various commitments, including ones that affect personal life outside the company. To some degree they undermine the traditional, male-generated social construction of time, productivity and reliability in management positions. Secondly, they know that "reconciling the two, work and family [...] [requires] problem-solving skills, communication skills [...] skills one needs in both spheres of one's life" (Interview 701/ 279–279). These are core skills in 'entrepreneurial' personnel management geared to the generation of value.

6 Vermarktlichung und Subjektivierung von Arbeit? Neue Arbeitspolitik und betriebliche Geschlechterverhältnisse, Project report (draft), September 2006, Project led by: Hildegard Maria Nickel (HU Berlin) and Hasko Hüning (FU Berlin), Project assistants: Susanne Braun (student), Michael Frey (research fellow), Cordula Kiank (student), Almut Kirschbaum (research fellow).

(Market) individualisation and corporate gender policy

In an environment of marketisation and subjectivisation, corporate options for formulating a gender equality policy are primarily determined by market logic. Companies are increasingly geared to a logic of performance and value and discard the normative logic which pursues ideas such as fairness. "Organisations do not conduct discourse around gender rights, but select skills in order to organise value-generating cooperation" (Priddat 2005, p. 91). With increasing importance attached to optimised performance and individual responsibility, corporate organisations foster the consolidation of, firstly, a strategy in which *gender is removed from the glossary* and, secondly, *gender equality is individualised.* In other words, the burden of implementing any aspirations to equality is shifted to the individual.

Corporate gender relations are crucially co-determined by conditions in the *sphere of reproduction* and vice versa. Because of the rigid gender typology that defines the allocation of care-related tasks in the private sphere, female employees (managers and workers alike) depend more than their male colleagues on a corporate culture that permits *"commitment balances"* (Hansen & Müller 2003). The company we researched, Deutsche Bahn, was like others in that at least *two barriers* had to be overcome before even beginning to tackle fundamental changes in working conditions to respect reproductive interests and gender culture. The *first barrier* is created when *family-friendly policy is not seen as an entitlement* but as a favour (ibid.). The *second barrier* is created when (male) managers and (female) employees appraise things differently. Male managers apparently think that a shorter working week means the worker is less motivated. Women, on the other hand, equate a shorter working week with stronger motivation and higher productivity. Equating long working hours with productivity, reliability and loyalty towards the company is a (male) construction (ibid., p. 38).

Where there is a staff shortage or recruitment problem, our interviews illustrate how the company is prepared to accept the commitment balances which women are more likely to be confronted with and respond with appropriate offers. Moreover, departments

with a larger proportion of women are better able to devise work arrangements that can integrate these commitment balances. For example, one reason for the relatively large number of women managers in the personnel sector is "that in Human Resources it is a tad easier to operate more flexibly with work time models like that – I mean flexitime – that Human Resources is much more tolerant about that than, say, the production units" (Interview 712/ 251–262). Female managers, even those who cannot play this dual role themselves, are more likely than male managers to understand that it depends decisively on the woman employee herself, and her personal bargaining position and skill, whether she is able to assert her wishes. In the light of personal experience the female managers we interviewed knew that female employees in their environment confronted a similar dilemma:

> [...] they are in a long-term relationship or married, and really would like to have a family and children but [...] don't quite dare to take the plunge [...] for the reason I said [...] at some point their career takes a knock and they won't recover the ground. I mean the response isn't all that great (Interview 707/ 225–229).

There are individual cases where 'performers' manage to assert their interests in a proactive and determined manner, but the female managers also know that not many women workers have that kind of bargaining power.

The male managers interviewed do mention feeling a degree of unpleasant personal pressure as a result of the *unilateral de-containment* of labour, in other words the company's unbridled claims on their availability. However, without exception – and unlike both the female managers and the men in the rest of the workforce – they obey what they see as necessity in their position:

> [...] for myself [I] would like much more choice about working hours in the sense that I don't have to be here at quarter past seven in the morning and still find myself here at quarter past seven in the evening [...] but be able to vary on that every now and then as required really by my personal affairs, so that I can be at home sometimes if there's a special occasion or something (Interview 702/ 179–179).

However, "at the moment there are so many different things to do [...] and that just has to take priority as it comes up" (Interview 702/ 181–181). All the male managers interviewed sensed the conflict potential this entailed for their private lives: "My working hours are from early on Monday until Friday evening and on the private side I simply can't deal with all that too [...]. No way" (Interview 711/ 43–47). The female managers are usually aware that time, productivity and reliability, as male constructs in management, have a great deal to do with inherited stereotypes of masculinity and male image projection:

> The men who are managers and who make decisions about whether a woman like me for example should return and what should happen to her, they are looking in the mirror of their own family situation. And most men [...] in these positions naturally have at the back of their minds: I couldn't have pursued my career if my wife hadn't stayed at home [...] And that is engraved on their minds, that latent fear, how are they [women] going to manage? (Interview 701/ 339–339).

Unlike their male colleagues, the female managers we interviewed rarely argued in terms of this unilateral necessity to be there for the company and to perform their duties, but they did stress the need to achieve a balance in their personal lives and to ensure that the social dimension was able to function.

Conclusions

Subjects respond in different ways to the structural challenges of the service economy, reflecting their own specific interests. To realise these interests they draw on their own individual resources and predispositions. These resources are in part associated with their concrete work situation and result from the leeway that corporate agents have to structure their own work (corporate resources). In part they are rooted in subjective qualifications, abilities and skills that workers can acquire to different degrees in the process of corporate and occupational socialisation (individual resources). A third decisive part is played by the resources and leeway that an indi-

vidual derives from his or her concrete life circumstances beyond the factory gate.

Labour policies today expect employees to respond directly to tasks, resources and status attributes (Hornung 2000) and to negotiate them for themselves at the workplace, along with the distribution of care commitments. This could well be interpreted as an opportunity for greater equality, if it means that the classical mechanisms underlying status attribution and the gender-specific division of labour are thereby dismantled. The open and contested question here is to what extent the traditional system of institutionalised labour relations can adapt to these new challenges or whether Fordist patterns of regulation will be drastically undermined. We find this line of argument in, for example, Dörre:

> Direct participation, market mechanisms, flexible working, anonymous control functions, a new subjectivity on the part of working people and corporate competition agreements may not be complete proof, but are at least strong indications that a post-Fordist configuration of management principles and labour relations is taking shape (Dörre 2002, p. 406).

He concludes from this that a new "policy of participatory rights" is required. This policy would have to build on "the individualist core of post-Fordist subjectivity" and promote "social preconditions for the self-activation and participation of individuals" (ibid., p. 408). For (typically female) domains of employment, where the subjects themselves do not and cannot draw on established institutions for consulting and negotiating with employees and where the trade unions have no access at all, transforming new, more direct forms of participation into "universal, institutionally guaranteed justiciable rights" (ibid., p. 409) remains a vision for the future. At the same time, highly individualised formats for defending employees' interests could stem the tide of erosion that has been debated for so long with regard to committees at workplace and more central levels (Bispinck & Schulten 2003, pp. 88 et seqq.), or indeed speed the process up further, in which case there would seem to be little hope for a labour and gender policy founded on solidarity. However, strengthening the workplace tier of negotiation offers an undeniable opportunity for subjects to influence corporate work structures (by,

for example, mechanisms for project-based work, target agreements, etc.), despite and because of the otherwise possibly very heterogeneous interests at play (Schumann 2003).

To sum up, we can conclude that the subjectivisation of labour reinforced by the service economy contains the seeds of individual (self-)empowerment, and this should not be underestimated. This could encourage women as 'performers' or 'worker entrepreneurs' to demand a labour policy at the workplace which takes greater note of their reproductive interests. Even if pressures on the cost of human resources and persistent job losses in many companies offer no grounds for optimism, an option is emerging here in the structural transformation of labour that confronts trade unions and works councils, but above all gender policy debate, with new challenges.

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