The Centrality of Work

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Abstract: This article briefly presents some of the main features of the notion of "centrality of work" within the framework of the "psycho-dynamic" approach to work developed by Christophe Dejours. The paper argues that we should distinguish between at least four separate but related ways in which work can be said to be central: psychologically, in terms of gender relations, social-politically and epistemically.

Keywords: work, subjectivity, psychodynamics, politics, gender

This paper defends the now unfashionable thesis of the centrality of work.[1] The paper does this from the perspective of the psychodynamics of work, an approach to work issues that has been developed at the *Centre National des Arts et Métiers* in the last four decades. This paper will sketch the main concepts and arguments at the heart of the current psychodynamic model of work, which have been presented at length in two recent books.[2]

The psychodynamics of work is a clinical approach based on a theory of work that focuses particularly on the relationship between subjectivity, work and action. This theory of work was born from the interdisciplinary encounter of psychoanalysis and ergonomics in the 1970s, following the

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1. The paper is based on a presentation by Christophe Dejours at the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Frankfurt am Main) on 12 February 2009.
2. Christophe Dejours, *Travail Vivant* (2 volumes: *Sexualité et Travail* and *Travail et Emancipation*; Paris: Payot, 2009). See the extended review of these two volumes, as well as other recent books by Christophe Dejours in this issue.

ground-breaking work of Louis le Guillant (for the psychological part)[3] and Alain Wisner (for ergonomics).[4]

Ergonomics, a relatively new discipline at that time, was concerned with the analysis of work spaces and working procedures, with a view to improve working conditions. In the French movement, where Alain Wisner at the CNAM played a major part, the main concern was to improve workers' health. The key lesson the psychodynamics of work have learnt from ergonomics is the fact that in all types of work there is an inescapable and irreducible gap between assigned work – *the task* – and actual work – *the activity*. This discrepancy between the prescribed aspects of work and its actual implementation results from the fact that in real work situations there are always a number of incidents, abnormalities, breakdowns that obstruct and undermine the organization of work as foreseen by the engineers and the managers. This irreducible, contingent element in all situations of real work has since been referred to as the "real" of work: that which makes itself known to the worker by its resistance to scientific and technical control.

The theoretical resource offered by psychoanalysis in its dialogue with ergonomics, was a (classically Freudian) theory of the subject in which the latter is seen as having to constantly struggle against the risk of mental illness or even, against the risk of alienation, in the psychiatric sense of the term, in order to continue to maintain its psychic balance. This made of "normality", the sufficiently good functioning of an individual in the work context, an enigma to be explained. It led to the view of "normality" as the compromise solution in a conflict between suffering and defence, and thus led to inquiries into the forms of individual and collective defence against the specific suffering caused by the resistance of the real in situations of prescribed work.

This confrontation between ergonomics and psychoanalysis leads to significant theoretical shifts in both disciplines. For ergonomics, it leads to abandon the standard model of the subject, designated as an "operator". It forces the discipline to taken into account the impact that defence strategies against suffering (against fear for instance) have on human conduct (the classical "human factor"), in the face of risks (for instance in the building or the nuclear industries); and the influence of these defence strategies on the prevention of accidents and the safety of installations.[5] For psychoanalysis, the confrontation with ergonomics suggested two original avenues of

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3. Louis le Guillant, *Quelle psychiatrie pour notre temps?* (Toulouse: Editions ERES, 1985).
4. Alain Wisner, *Psychopathologie du travail* (Paris: Entreprise Moderne d'Edition, 1985), 102-104; and A. Wisner, "Diagnosis in Ergonomics or the Choice of Operating Models in Fields Research", *Ergonomics* 15(6) (1972): 601-20.
5. Alain Wisner, François Daniellou and Christophe Dejours, "Uncertainty and Anxiety in Continuous Process Industries", Communication for the "5th UOEH International Symposium

inquiry: first, to focus on the impact of work constraints, and not just the inner conflicts inherited from childhood, on psychic functioning and mental health; and second, to study the forms of intelligence and sensitivity that individuals have to develop in order to acquire the skills necessary for mastering the work process.[6]

The Theory of Work Centrality

Whilst the idea of the centrality of work has been discussed in many areas of the social sciences from a diversity of theoretical perspectives, in the intellectual context from which the psychodynamics of work have emerged, this notion became particularly acute in the late 1980s following the significant arguments put forward by Danièle Kergoat and Helena Hirata in their sociological inquiries into the social and sexual division of labour.[7] The introduction of the theme of the centrality of work into the psychodynamic approach to work led to a distinction between four fundamental, overlapping yet separate, ways in which work can be said to be central to the formation of subjectivity. These are: the centrality of work in relation to the subject's health; the centrality of work in the structure of relationships between men and women; the centrality of work in relation to the community; and finally, the centrality of work in relation to the theory of knowledge. We thus speak of the psychological, gender-related, social-political and epistemic centrality of work.

The centrality of work in relation to subjective health

Originally the psychodynamics of work was mainly concerned with mental illness caused by the agents' confrontation with the organizational constraints of work. This part of the work clinic can be called "psycho*pathology*

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on Automation and Robotics", in K. Noro (ed.), *Occupational Health and Safety in Automation and Robotics* (London/New York: Taylor & Francis, 1987), 39-51.

6. Christophe Dejours, "Subjectivity, Work and Action", *Critical Horizons* 7 (2006): 45-62.

7. Danièle Kergoat and Yvonne Guichard-Claudic, *Inversion du genre: corps au travail et travail des corps* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007); "Travail et affects. Les ressorts de la servitude domestique", *Travailler* 8 (2002): 13-26; "Division sexuelle du travail et rapports sociaux de sexe", in Helena Hirata, Françoise Laborie, Hélène le Doare and Danièle Senotier (eds), *Dictionnaire critique du féminisme* (Paris: PUF, 2004), 35-44; H. Hirata and D. Kergoat, "Les paradigmes sociologiques à l'épreuve des catégories de sexe: quel renouvellement de l'épistémologie du travail?", in J.P. Durand and D. Linhart (eds), *Les ressorts de la mobilisation au travail* (Toulouse: Octarès Editions, 2005), 288–98; D. Kergoat, "Penser la différence des sexes: rapports sociaux et division du travail entre les sexes", in M. Maruani (ed.), *Femmes, genre et sociétés* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), 94–101.

of work". There is good evidence of course, from the clinical data, that work can be detrimental to mental health. Indeed in the past decade or so clinicians observing transformations of work have noted an increase in the prevalence and severity of psychopathologies caused by work, culminating in a phenomenon never witnessed to that extent in previous decades, namely the appearance of suicides in the workplace.[8]

But work does not only generate suffering and pathology. It can also bring out the best, provide pleasure and become part of the psychic economy as an irreplaceable mediator in the construction of one's sense of health and self-fulfillment.

The most crucial clinical and theoretical problem therefore consists in uncovering the specific conditions that turn the relationship to work into one of sadness or joy, fortune or misfortune. The structuring influence of work upon an individual's mental health is characterized by two main processes, one that plays out on a strictly individual, solipsistic level; and the other that plays out on a social level.

a. *Individual level*

To work is, first, to experience the real, that is to say, experience the breakdown of technical know-how, even when the technology has been mastered and is being used in a correct way, or when the proper rules and procedures have been followed. A specific form of practical intelligence has to be developed in order to overcome the resistance opposed by the real of work. This practical intelligence involves finding a solution as yet unknown to the working agent. Despite widespread representations about many areas of contemporary work, actual work nearly always demands, to a lesser or greater extent, a form of practical intelligence that is inherently inventive and creative.

The solutions that the subject must invent rely on an intimate experience of failure. In order to find the proper solution to the conundrum posed by the realization of the task, the experience of failure must first be embraced and appropriated. Failure must be faced squarely and experienced intimately. The subject must accept to be at one with a failure that is his or her own. This subjective appropriation of the experience of failure, we call "subjectivation of the real of work".[9] When this "subjectivation of the real of work"

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8. Christophe Dejours and Florence Bègue, *Suicide et travail: que faire?* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009).
9. See the classical study by two psychologists of work at the *Institute of Social Research* (Munich), Fritz Böhle and Brigitte Milkau, *Vom Handrad zum Bildschirm: eine Untersuchung zur sinnlichen Erfahrung im Arbeitsprozess* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 1998).

occurs, however, what is also produced is an intimate familiarization with the reality of work, via an obstinate, bodily confrontation with the obstructing materiality defining the reality of the task at hand: with the tools, the technical objects and rules, but also the inter-personal conditions framing the task (with the clients, the other colleagues, the hierarchy). As a result, the determination to find a way, to fail and yet start all over again, which is the necessary condition for a realization of the task, is also a way of touching the world, in a direct physical sense as well as in the metaphorical sense of getting to know it better, and thus of appropriating it.

This confrontation with the obstructing reality of the world lasts until the ideas enabling the agent to conquer the resistance of the real are born. What the ergonomic perspective also unveils, however, is that inventing this path often implies bending or infringing the rules. Intelligence in the workplace requires cheating, wheeling and dealing, tricks. All that trickery (the "*metis*" of the Greeks[10]), is part and parcel of any live work and no work organization could do without it. If the rules and procedures were followed to the letter, production would grind to a halt. Indeed, the zealous following of all the rules and regulations is one of the most effective forms of strike action.

But experiencing the resistance of the world, I also sense a new range of feelings develop in me, which did not exist before work. Work reveals new powers to the body. Through the experience of the world's resistance and the practical efforts to surmount it, the body's capacities are expanded so that the body, as it were, feels its own life more intensely and more fully. We can say that the embodied confrontation with the real of work allows the subject to appropriate not just the world, but also its own body and thus itself. Michel Henry's phenomenology of "*corps-propriation*" (body-propriation, self-appropriation through the body), that is, of the self-appropriation of the subject via the increased sense of life afforded to it through bodily participation in the world, is the best philosophical account of what the psychodynamic approach discovers through the observation of working activity.

It is via this route, which leads to increased subjectivity, that work can generate pleasure. However, analysing the positive influence of work on the subjective construct from this perspective leads to a great theoretical conundrum. On the one hand, it seems that Freud's metapsychology remains an indispensable instrument to establish a systematic description of the different steps and functions involved in the constitution of a psychic economy, and of the impacts of the different work constraints on such an economy. On the other hand though, there is, in actual fact, no metapsychology of the body

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10. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* Janet Lloyd (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

in Freud. The impulses from the body are always treated by him via their "representations" in the psychic apparatus, but not for themselves.[11] One solution out of this theoretical conundrum is to be found in the resources offered by the phenomenology of the body, in particular in the writings of Merleau-Ponty[12] and Michel Henry,[13] which, by linking strongly the constitution of subjectivity to the life of the body, help us to account for the negative and positive influences of work on subjective constructs.

b. *Social level*

Work can also bring out the best in subjects through the specific relations of recognition at play in the work context. As *Travail, usure mentale* has argued,[14] next to the recognition of the social status linked to the profession, work can also afford a form of recognition based on the doing, not the being, of the worker, that is, a recognition based on the quality of the relationship that the worker has maintained with the "real". This recognition undergoes judgement tests on the quality and usefulness of the work accomplished. It is the recognition of the worker's active, intelligent contribution, a "technical" form of recognition, as it were, which only the peers can give since it requires an acquaintance with the real of that work. This form of recognition, as it provides a symbolic reward to the encounter with the real, constitutes an essential link for the sublimation of the work's challenges into a form of pleasure and subjective enhancement. As such, it also plays an essential part in the development of identity.

These two combined processes bring about (potentially) an enhancement of subjectivity, so that in the end, work upon the world also affords a creative work of the subject upon himself/herself. In other words, working involves not only producing, it also involves one's own transformation. To work is to work upon oneself. The scourge of unemployment is precisely that it deprives the subject of the right to contribute (to the life of a work collective, to a company, to society) and therefore of the chance to benefit from the precious reward that recognition constitutes.

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11. Sigmund Freud, "Triebe und Triebschicksale" (1915), in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10 (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag). See Dejours, *Sexualité et travail*, pp. 75-98.
12. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, C. White (trans.) (London: Routledge, 2001), in particular chapter 5, "The Body as a Sexual Being".
13. Michel Henry, *Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997).
14. See C. Dejours, "From Psychopathology to Psychodynamics of Work", forthcoming in N. Smith and J.-P. Deranty (eds), *New Philosophies of Labour* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2010).

The Centrality of Work in Gender Relations

The sociologists studying the sexual division of work have emphasized the strong interrelations between gender domination in and through work and gender domination in general. The domination of men over women in the workplace is linked directly to the division of work in the private sphere. But these sociologists have also argued that gender domination in general cannot be properly understood without taking into consideration the central role of work, as one of the key stakes in these relations of domination.

Much depends on the nature of domestic work and the way it is distributed in the family. As Danièle Kergoat, a leading sociologist in this area, writes in "Le rapport social de sexe":[15]

> work is what is at stake in gender relations. By work, we do not just mean waged labour or work as a profession, but rather work as 'production of life' (*production du vivre*)… This concept of work includes not just professional work (whether paid or unpaid, market or non-market, formal or informal), but also domestic work. The latter far extends domestic tasks and includes bodily and affective care to children, looking after their schooling, and even the physical production of children. This type of work is not characterised by an addition of tasks, but can be defined either as 'mode of domestic production' (Delphy) or as 'relation of service'… The permanent availability of women's time for the service of the family and more broadly parenthood defines a type of relationship that is characteristic of the process of domestic work (Fougeyrollas-Schwebel).[16]

In the social world of work, gender domination results in men being able to reserve for themselves the most skilled tasks and those that hold the highest status in the hierarchy of power. Work in this example is clearly both the stake of domination and the means by which domination is entrenched and justified. This pattern is compounded by domination in the home environment and the division of labour in home economics. Any activity concerning care tends to be allocated to women, thus imposing a double job on them, a situation which, in the competition for tasks and places in the social

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15. D. Kergoat, "Le rapport social de sexe. De la reproduction des rapports sociaux à leur subversion", *Actuel Marx* 30 (2001): 85–100.
16. See, C. Delphy, "Travail ménager ou travail domestique?" in *L'ennemi principal*, vol. 1 (Paris: Editions Syllepse, 1998), 57–74; Dominique Fougeyrollas Schwebel, "Travail domestique", in Hirata *et al.*, *Dictionnaire du féminisme*, 2 n. 1.

world of work, disadvantages them substantially.[17] Moreover, the complex tasks involved in care are generally dismissed with the tendency to "naturalize" female competences. As a result the recognition of the activities involved in the realization of care is withdrawn as the latter is attributed solely to female instincts and virtues.[18]

This tendency to render female work invisible is confirmed in the division of professional tasks as the activities handed over to women are often characterized by their invisibility. Many of the professional qualities required in the exercise of professional activities classically handed over to women, like: tact, availability, consideration, compassion, are characterized by the fact that they are only efficient when they are used with discretion, when they make themselves invisible.[19] One only notices the cleaning when it hasn't been done. All these elements conspire to create a real "genderisation" or "sexuation" of recognition, which becomes much more difficult to acquire for women than for men.

It can also be shown that when a man is successful in his professional life, it reflects on his status and in his sense of masculine identity. This is often not the case for women where professional success and better qualifications, on the contrary, can challenge gender identity and destabilize the balance of power within the couple.[20] The psychoanalytical perspective makes it plain to see that the attitudes to work have major consequences not only on relations in the workplace and the home environment, but also on the more private aspects of subjective life, such as sexuality and the erotic side of gender relations. From that perspective, one can also argue that the activities that constitute "care" are not only at the centre of power struggles between the gendered partners, but that they are also at the heart of the seduction games, in such a way that they are a stake in the relationship of domination/servitude, or even control (*Bemächtigung*) /submission, within the economy of love.[21] However, as with the body, to refer to work as a central factor in the account of the sexual and erotic dimensions of gender relations would also lead to the re-examination and

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17. C. Delphy, "Travail ménager ou travail domestique?".
18. H. Hirata and D. Kergoat, "Rapports sociaux de sexe et psychopathologie du travail", in Christophe Dejours (ed.), *Plaisir et souffrance dans le travail*, vol. 2 (Paris: Editions CNAM), 131–76.
19. Pascale Molinier, "Care as Work: Interdependent Vulnerabilities and Discreet Knowledge", forthcoming in Smith and Deranty, *New Philosophies of Labour*.
20. Christophe Dejours, "'Centralité du travail' et théorie de la sexualité", *Adolescence* 14 (1996): 9–29.
21. H. Hirata, "Travail et affect. Les ressorts de la servitude domestique. Note de recherche", *Travailler* 8 (2002): 11–26.

expansion of the theory of love, since the latter is not fully developed in Freudian metapsychology.[22]

The Political Centrality of Work

Work involves not just the practical intelligence of an individual, but mostly also the intelligence of a collective. The analysis of intelligence involved in work is almost always in the plural form. No work without cooperation, we might say. This points to the importance of a deontic form of activity as a condition of work. By deontic activity, is meant the activity of making rules for work, in order to make work work. The same gap between task and activity, which ergonomics revealed in the case of individual work, exists also in the case of coordination, that is to say, in relation to the orders and instructions organizing collective work. The external coordination of work cannot be fully respected by the workers if the tasks are to be actually fulfilled. If workers did nothing other than obey, it would create a "slowdown" of production and the system would break down. Cooperation designates precisely the redevelopment of coordination through deontic activity, that is, through the collaborative elaboration of concrete rules by and between the workers, to perform the tasks for which the coordination of work was set up in the first place. These rules that make the actual collaboration possible also create a collective competence that builds up into a struggle to subvert the orders and instructions of coordination, in order to make them compatible with the actual reality of the work situation. The rules of the working collective are thus technical rules, but have an irreducible social dimension, especially as they challenge the prescribed coordination.

Furthermore, from the perspective internal to the working collective, this social dimension of the deontic activity has yet another aspect. In order to produce effective work rules and job rules, cooperation requires a minimum of consideration of others and of conviviality. Cooperation is based on a minimal form of communal life. To put it in a motto: "work is not only production; it is also learning to live together".

This ethical condition of actual work represents the real but as yet unnoticed political significance of working collectives. When working deliberations function well, work can give individuals the chance to learn the essential civic virtues that are conditions of democratic practice: coop-

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22. See the classical reference: S. Freud, "Über die allgemeinste Erniedrigung des Liebenslebens", as well as Jean Laplanche, *Le fourvoiement biologisant de la sexualité chez Freud* (Paris: Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1993), 70–71.

eration, collective life, solidarity. On the other hand, when the communal underpinning of cooperation has been destroyed, work can lead to the worst: the instrumental manipulation of others, to the point of slavery, or even torture. We might say that the best as well as the worst forms of politics all involve mobilizations of individual energies, which are galvanized most efficiently in work collectives. Well functioning work places educate individuals into forming a consensual opinion by taking into account the different views, capacities and needs of all. Dysfunctional work places can be the birth place for a radical disregard of the views and vulnerability of others.

From this analysis of the central importance of cooperation in actual work, two sets of conclusions emerge:

1. First, any work activity involves two levels of subversion which are the prerequisite conditions of quality work:[23]
    – "cheating", to cope with the gap between task and activity;
    – "deontic" activity to surmount the gap between coordination and cooperation.

The emphasis on the importance of the deontic activity in the actual realization of tasks is a strong argument against functionalist or systemic analyses of work organization.

On the negative side, however, the phenomenon also highlights the potential for the influencing of individuals by the work collective and thus provides a new perspective to discuss well-known problems about the mobilization of will, consent and voluntary servitude in negative forms of politics.[24]

2. There is no sharp boundary between the sphere of work and the wider social sphere. The transmission of social values is not just from society to workplace. It also goes in the other direction. A form of collective education acquired through work-related social relationships has a major impact on the evolution of society itself. Under the influence of new forms of work organization, in particular the individualized evaluation of performances (which has a powerful effect on the breakdown of the collectives of work, communal living and solidarity), each worker is practically forced to fall

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23. Bertrand Ogilvie, "Travail et ontologie de la résistance", *Théoriques* 1 (2008): 25–46.
24. See Dejours, *Travail et émancipation* (Paris: Payot, 2009). On the link between "good people" and the "dirty work" they implicitly ask others to do, notably in relation to political contexts, see the classical reflections by E. Hughes, "Good People and Dirty Work", *Social Problems* 10(1) (1962): 3–11.

back on a frenzied defensive individualism. If workers learn to be wary of everyone at work, including their own colleagues, they are hardly likely to show generosity or consideration towards others in the private sphere or in the wider society.

The critical diagnosis developed in *Souffrance en France* has tried to show that politeness, civility and manners breakdown in contemporary society to a large extent because the company, which in neoliberal society has become the paradigm of collectivity, trains men and women to think "every man for himself" and teaches them to show contempt for anything that does not relate to realism, efficiency and the sole criterion of instrumental rationality.

But there is no fatality in the recent evolution of the social relationships at work and their effects on the city. By abandoning the organization of work as a whole to the authority of all-powerful employers and managers, we let the whole society waste and destroy the solidarity capital built up in the workplace since the Second World War. Labour law and the prevention of occupational hazards are insufficient with regard to the problems raised by the political centrality of work. If one accepts the theory of the centrality of work in relation to the evolution of society, it forces one to acknowledge that the organization of work is in itself a political problem. A "politics of work" in the strong sense, which would not be reduced to employment policies, would have to be conceptualized and developed as a decisive political objective to counter the deleterious effects of the neoliberal regime. Such new politics of work would have to be based on the need to ensure the possibility of recognition and the protection of deontic activities.[25] We would thus retrieve what Axel Honneth once called a "critical conception of work",[26] and we could develop, from work, a new idea of emancipation.[27]

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25. See Dejours, *Travail et émancipation*.
26. Axel Honneth, "Work and Instrumental Action. On the Normative Basis of Critical Theory", in A. Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social* (Albany, NJ: State University of New York Press, 1991), 46–49. See also Nicholas Smith, "Work and the Struggle for Recognition", *European Journal of Political Theory* 8(1) (2009): 46–60.
27. Emmanuel Renault, "Reconnaissance et travail", *Travailler* 18 (2007): 119–35; and Renault, "Psychanalyse et conception critique du travail: trois approches francfortoises (Marcuse, Habermas et Honneth)", *Travailler* 20 (2008): 61–75. See also Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Work and the Precarisation of Existence", *European Journal of Social Theory* 11(4) (2008): 443–63; and Deranty, "What is Work? Key Insights from the Psychodynamics of Work", *Thesis Eleven* 98 (2009): 69–87.

The Epistemic Centrality of Work

Finally, the emphasis on the centrality of work for subjective and social life has surprising and significant implications for epistemology. Three especially significant implications should be mentioned in particular.

First, the centrality of work encourages us to question the generally accepted models of separation and prioritization between fundamental sciences and applied sciences. The precedence of field sciences over fundamental sciences is due to the fact that it is always through a form of work that one has access to the real.

Second, as Dewey already argued a long time ago, the real makes itself known most eminently through its resistance to mastery and technical know-how. The "truth", therefore, lies more in the failure of knowledge than in declarative knowledge. It is only when reality has already been revealed through the failure of work, that it becomes possible, and that only *a posteriori*, to retrieve the characteristics of the situation so as to subject them to a regulated protocol of experimental analysis.

Third, the strong affective and emotional dimensions of the experience that the subject makes when she meets with the resistance of the world to her will, means that it is also necessary to put right the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. Subjective knowledge is not a lesser form of knowledge; it is the precondition and the basis without which no new objective knowledge could be developed.

This, in brief, is how the theory on the centrality of work presents itself to a psychodynamic approach to work. Compared to contemporary critical theory,[28] this thesis puts the emphasis on the role that work plays in the formation of human relationships, and beyond this, in the construction of subjectivity and in the evolution of society.

Basically, this theory overthrows two basic, classical assumptions:

1. that it is the knowledge of the workings of the psyche that would allow us to understand the nature of work (Freud's classical assumption in his social-theoretical writings);
2. and that it is the knowledge of society that would allow us to understand the processes structuring social relationships at work.

The psychodynamics of work, by contrast, is founded on two exactly opposite assumptions. It is premised on the idea that we should, in fact, revise psychoanalytic theory on the basis of an analysis of work as "living

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28. See Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Repressed Materiality: Retrieving the Materialism in Axel Honneth's Theory of Recogition", in J. P. Deranty *et al.*, *Recognition, Work, Politics: New Directions in French Critical Theory* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007), 137–64.

work", that is, as the preeminent experience through which subjective life can develop and be enhanced. And it proposes to reconstruct social and political theory on the basis of the social relations built up in work. The clinical data demonstrates that work helps generate understanding, and can even be seen as a critical concept, vital in the understanding of the evolution of individual subjectivity, the evolution of relationships in the city, and finally as a link between individual subjectivity and the social field.

Christophe Dejours is a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, chair professor (Psychoanalysis, Health, Work) at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, Paris, founder of the psychodynamics of work. He is the author of numerous books on psychoanalysis, psychosomatics, pathologies of modern work and the social impact of work pathologies. In 2009 he published *Travail vivant* (Living Work, Paris: Payot), a two-volume monograph synthesizing the main aspects of the psychodynamics of work.

Jean-Philippe Deranty has published extensively in contemporary French and German philosophy. His latest publications include: *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). His current research is dedicated to work and its place in individual and social life.

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