

### Locked into the present or transforming the future: flexible organisations and Identities?

Holtgrewe, Ursula

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Arbeitspapier / working paper

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

SSG Sozialwissenschaften, USB Köln

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Holtgrewe, U. (2003). *Locked into the present or transforming the future: flexible organisations and Identities?*  
Lancaster. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-216822>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.



# Locked Into The Present Or Transforming The Future: Flexible Organisations And Identities?

*Stream 1: Identity: Constructed, Consumed and Politicised*

**Ursula Holtgrewe**

*University Duisburg/Essen*

Institute of Sociology  
University Duisburg/Essen  
D-47048 Duisburg  
phone ++49-203-379-2739  
Fax ++49-203-379-4350  
e-mail [holtgrewe@uni-duisburg.de](mailto:holtgrewe@uni-duisburg.de).

The paper explores current theoretical debates and seeks to examine empirically how subjects position themselves in relation to organisational change. To do this, it suggests some theoretical additions to critical management theory from the tradition of pragmatism and social differentiation theory.

In current debates in critical management theory and in the sociology of work and organisation as well, identity and subjectivity are being (re)discovered both as sources of value and objects of far-reaching changes through the flexibilisation of organisations and the expansion of markets. Theories of subjectivity addressing organisational change may be roughly grouped into theories of subsumption/subjection, of 'empowerment' and of differentiation. I argue that both the theories of 'subjection'/subsumption and of 'empowerment' frequently fail to address the complexity of the relations between the demands of markets and organisations and the subjective processing of these demands. Consequently, subjectivity tends to be misunderstood as the mere fulfilment of such demands. Contradictions, ambiguities and differentiations thus are underrated.

(Re-)Introducing pragmatist concepts of subjectivity and agency here may help to address the multiplicity of ways in which subjects react to and act upon organisational demands. Subjects then enact and process organisational demands like other social expectations and relations of domination, and these shape subjectivity and identities in a variety of ways best addressed empirically.

Empirical studies of subjects in organisations, their biographies, careers and interpretations reveal that even and especially under conditions of flexibilisation and marketisation workers do not unilaterally develop the entrepreneurial and/or fragmented identities the theories would expect. Drawing on contrasting studies in both "old" and "new" organisations in the field of new information and communication technologies,<sup>1</sup> the paper presents an empirically grounded typology of subjective involvements in and detachments from processes of organisational change. It allows to modify the questions of subjection or empowerment along the lines of the distribution of chances and options, the social possibilities of emancipation and their prerequisites.

## 1. Theories of Subjection/Subsumption

Theories of subsumption/subjection argue that subjects are increasingly drawn into capitalist relations of domination or, indeed, constituted by structures of discipline and governmentality. We may further distinguish between theories of *subsumption*, *constitution* and *corrosion* of subjectivity in processes of capitalist flexibilisation.

The classic, Marxist theory of subsumption argues that companies exploit workers' subjective capacities and competencies in both intensified and extensified ways. Subjectivity is conceived as a functional reserve, or indeed, source of flexibility, productivity and skill. Subsumption theory has been revived with sociologists taking a closer look at service work. Here, not just skill and flexibility, but also emotions, bodies and human interaction, i. e. the creative, expressive and aesthetic side of such work is being subsumed under capitalist regimes with new forms of alienation (Hochschild 1990; (Macdonald/Sirianni 1996; (Nickson et al. 2001; (Höpfl 2002).

The predominant view in the critical management debate, however, is a constitution theory. Theorists such as (Knights/Morgan 1994; (Willmott 1994; (Alvesson/Deetz 1996; (Clegg 1998; (Mckinlay/Starkey 1998; (O'doherty/Willmott 2001; (Alferoff/Knights 2002) argue that

---

<sup>1</sup> I draw on an empirical study of the effects the privatisation of Deutsche Telekom had on careers and biographies of their employees (Blutner/Brose/Holtgrewe 2002) and on the project "Call centres in between neo-taylorism and customer orientation" (Holtgrewe 2001; (Arzbächer/Holtgrewe/Kerst 2002; (Holtgrewe/Kerst 2002). The Telekom study involved both expert and biographical interviews (40 each) in two regional offices and a survey of all employees in these regional offices. The call centre study consisted of seven case studies in call centres from different industries, involving expert interviews, interviews with call centre agents and a survey. The analysis of subjectivity is pursued extensively in (Holtgrewe 2002).

the discourses of both management and the market constitute subjectivity itself. This view is inspired by Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, but recently, Foucault's later concepts of biopolitics, *gouvernementality* and technologies of the self have been used as well. They follow arguments by Deleuze (Deleuze 1993) that a society of control has superseded the society of discipline, controlling and shaping subjects less through discipline than through motivation, fun and self-expression – bringing Foucauldian arguments again closer to the critical theory of the (older) Frankfurt School.

Subjectivity and submission, an actor's competency and the fear of its dissolution in this view are tied inextricably together. Institutions and organisations endow individuals with material and symbolic resources giving them a sense of autonomy. They produce self-responsibility and accountability together with the subject. Subjects thus are both constituted as autonomous and overcharged, and hence they invest their sense of autonomy in the dominating institutions and power relations.

While the approaches of *subsumtion* focus on the intended consequences of managerial strategies, the *constitution* perspectives deal with outcomes of power relations and discourses which look very similar to the results of such strategies (although critical authors would of course deny that there is a master strategist anywhere in the picture). Theories of *corrosion*, in turn, emphasise unintended consequences. In the humanist line of argument, represented f. i. by Sennett's "Corrosion of Character" (1998), flexibilisation corrodes identities and fragments biographical narratives. Workers in flexibilised organisations are being held and hold themselves accountable for what happens to them while being cut off from the *gestalt* of occupational identities and from a sense of belonging to a collective. In Sennett's line of argument they become "prisoners of the present" without the means to protect and distance themselves from extended demands of accountability. They are struggling within the structural impossibilities of maintaining their ties to the past, of living in the present and developing a sense of continuity and agency towards the future. Not just character, but the capacity to act meaningfully is thus corroded.

While the grounding of Sennett's approach in a humanist and in a way conservative belief in subjects' identity, continuity and rootedness is a long way from the decided anti-essentialism of critical and postmodernist approaches, neither approach allows a lot of space for subjects' own agency: Their sensemaking, manoeuvring, resistance or ambiguity towards the discourses and practices positioning them is always-already tied up in their subjection and there is hardly any way out. In relation to critical management theory this has been pointed out especially from the perspective of materialist labour process theory: With a view to collective shopfloor struggles, authors such as Thompson, Ackroyd or Smith (Thompson/Ackroyd 1995; (Thompson/Smith 2000) have argued that critical management theory's focus on subjects' involvement in the reproduction of domination allows no theoretical space for resistance. Thus the effectiveness of management discourses in relation to other discourses and practices cannot be estimated within theories of constitution.

However, theories of constitution have their strengths in the empirical analysis of processes of subject formation: f. i. in the fields of professional socialisation (Grey 1994) or of the implementation of management techniques and organisational structures addressing responsibility and autonomy (Deetz 1998), provided they do not prematurely presume such techniques and discourses to be effective.

## **2. Theories of Empowerment**

While the perspective of subjection has been able fundamentally and convincingly to criticise theories and discourses of empowerment in the managerialist sense, recently perspectives on empowered subjectivities appear to gain ground in radical thought again. Authors such as f. i. Lazzarato or Adler (Lazzarato 1998; (Adler 2001) suggest that an increasingly knowledgeable, creative and sophisticated class of knowledge and service workers, "characterised by

progressively higher education levels, broader world-views, more powerful cognitive capabilities and more advanced ethical values” (Adler 2001, p. 393) may increasingly be able to bring about a liberating social transformation. These authors explicitly turn back to earlier Marxist concepts of the unfolding of the forces of production contradicting and, possibly, transforming the relations of production (Adler). To do this, they draw on a specifically cultural perspective (Lazzarato 2002): debates on the technologies and media of artistic production and on the practices of artistic avant-gardes have been rather more sanguine towards new technologies than the perspectives on rationalisation and automation in the labour process tradition. Consequently, if work is becoming more immaterial, more communicative, expressive and creative, such cultural arguments may be applied to work and labour relations and politics as well.

Lazzarato argues that, while communication work is commodified,

“in this process [...], commodification does not concern one specificity of aesthetic production, [...] that is, the creative relationship between an ‘author’ and his or her ‘audience’” (1998, p. 60. translation U. H.).

Following Lazzarato, in this relationship, there is a space for intersubjectivity and creativity before and beyond all commodification.<sup>2</sup> This space is enhanced technologically, but also culturally, and may evolve to become an arena of interest expression and collective action beyond their traditional forms. Theoretically, then, approaches from cultural studies can be into labour process and critical management theory, and politically the logics and practices of new social movements may be applied to labour policies as well (Klein 2001).

While Lazzarato clearly has the work of media or design workers in mind, which is obviously creative in an authorial sense and close to the tradition of cultural avant-gardes, the argument may be extended to the work of service workers who are performers rather than authors. Although in this field of work, traditionally subsumption- and constitution-oriented approaches have been dominant, in the debates on emotional labour, Sturdy and Fineman have pointed out that there are observable ambiguities (Sturdy 1998; (Sturdy/Fineman 2001): Subjects required and trained to perform expressively and emotionally do not (and arguably cannot) simply fulfil organisational demands. They make their own sense of these demands, translate, resist and transform them.

In telephone call centres, workers insist on following a customer’s problem through in spite of organisational attempts to keep calls short (Korczynski et al. 1999). If they are instructed to act naturally and in a personal style, they resist attempts to prescribe their style of interaction (Taylor 1998). In these instances, they redefine the norms of customer orientation in a sense of increased professionalism, which lets them mobilise more discretion and individuality than the organisation and technical layout of the work would suggest (Holtgrewe 2001). The agency and accountability demanded from subjects in service occupations thus takes on a dynamic of its own and leads workers to claim recognition and development of that autonomy.

While the empowerment perspective may sensitise us to the social possibilities of transformation and has the additional charm of “looking on the bright side” for a change, it raises the questions of both historical and, possibly, technological determinism. Are workforces indeed growing brighter, more reflexive and capable of collective action or are they just more entangled in managerialist or market-oriented discourses, or is both even happening simultaneously – especially while higher education itself is being infused with market logics and values? Do increased technological possibilities of global communication indeed enhance the capabilities of social movements for action – or do they diffuse them in technical virtuosity for its own sake?

---

Cf. Also Himanens ‚Hacker Ethic’ which in a more Weberian than Marxian sense contrasts the protest ethic with a self-determined and expressive connection of work and fun

### **3. Pragmatism and Social Differentiation**

So far then, it appears that constitution- and empowerment-oriented perspectives are indeed mutually corrective: The effects of discourses and policies around accountability and especially around the market need to be addressed in order to correct too-blithe assumptions of subjects' agency and autonomy, while the insistence on the social possibilities of resistance counters a 'critical' overrating of these powers which all too easily may end in a socially inconsequential nihilism. However, the purely theoretical debates exchanging criticisms of essentialism versus anti-humanism, materialism versus discursive cloudiness, or of being "more critical than thou" are becoming tiresome and little productive.

Before we turn to some empirical evidence of subjects making sense of organisational change, it will be instructive to look at theoretical approaches which allow for such dynamics, see the interplay of subjectivity and organisation as a dynamic and recursive process in which such contradictions are played out. The traditions of pragmatism and social differentiation, if read in a non-functionalistic way, offer some insights here.

F. i. Mead's interplay between "I" and "me" allows to think about the constitution and reproduction of subjectivity as a process of structuration in its own right. The processes of identity development in this view are creative, open-ended, and they follow an emergent, recursive logic of their own (Hancock/Tyler 2001). They are situated (and again, situate the self) in intersubjective and temporal relations which comprise past experiences and routines, present options and choices (and invisible/excluded options), and future perspectives and projections (Emirbayer/Mische 1998). Subjectivity then is indeed constituted by others' and society's demands, but not in a deterministic way. It emerges as a level of structuration in its own right and is able to process these demands in creative ways. Subjectivity then is neither conceived of as an authentic essence, nor a source of functionality, nor the passive site of discursive struggles. Subjects may even transform the social relations, following their own claims to recognition and creative self-expression (Honneth 1997).

Theories of differentiation strengthen this point. They suggest that individuality and subjectivity develop and unfold through the differentiation of social spheres, with their own logics of functioning, their relevancies and value systems, and their own demands and claims on subjectivity. This of course is a fairly traditional sociological argument found for instance in the work of Georg Simmel with the "crossing of social circles". Their tensions and contradictions both position and challenge individuals, forcing them to balance contradictory demands and establish their own (and collective) priorities and relevancies in the process. The multiplicity and differentiation of social experiences in organisations and in modern society then both permits and necessitates individual agency, deliberation and negotiation (Whittington 1994).

Diversity of actor's social identities, experiences and orientations thus may contravene the pressures of managerial discourses and practices. Flecker and Hofbauer (1998) have pointed to the dialectic of the increased utilisation of subjectivity in organisations which does no longer address management exclusively. While employees' diverse experiences offer a functional reservoir of flexibility, demands in other social spheres increase as well, and employees themselves develop diverse orientations or indeed subjectivities. This suggests that organisational demands and subjective orientations, assignments of agency and actual power can and do not always coincide.

### **4. Empirical Evidence: Self-Flexibilisation and Activism**

In order then to move beyond the question of subsumption/subjection or empowerment in the following paragraphs the question of subjection versus empowerment (or appropriation) will be addressed empirically. This of course is not easily done, since questions of theoretical paradigms hardly lend themselves to simple operationalisation. Yet, for empowerment indeed to be more than a theoretical notion, it must be empirically found as a practical actualisation

of social possibilities – “Die Wirklichkeit muß selbst zum Gedanken drängen” (Marx 1976). In turn, for subjection theories to be more than academically clever, subjects must be observable shaping themselves according to discourses of management, accountability etc., and such shaping can safely be expected to be contradictory and ambiguous.

In the following, I shall present two biographical case studies of Telekom workers faced with German Telekom’s privatisation and massive organisational change through the deregulation of telecommunications markets. In Germany, Deutsche Telekom AG used to be the telecommunications branch of the Post Office until 1989: A public authority which provided standardised infrastructures and services to customers at homogenous prices and high technological quality. It employed civil servants to do so and had strong employee representation and co-operative industrial relations. It has transformed itself into a customer and market-oriented stock corporation, which operates on a global market. In Germany it has been reducing personnel by a quarter (from 230.000 in 1995 to 170.000 in 2000 with further downsizing to come) in a “socially sustainable”, consensus-oriented way, i. e. through hiring freezes, early retirement, and severance pay offers. In return for the exclusion of layoffs workers had to accept considerable mobility. The organisational structure is under continuous transformation. It has been divisionalised and is oscillating between decentralising and re-centralising moves of work reorganisation. Telekom has strengthened its strategic sales departments, especially business sales, while in the service and maintenance departments the focus has been on cost-cutting and rationalisation.

#### 4.1 Ms Kunz: Pre-emptive Self-flexibilisation

Ms Kunz is 26 years old and working for the marketing department of a local Telekom branch.<sup>3</sup> Her job consists mainly in organizing presentations of Telekom products and services at trade fairs. Her life so far appears as a succession of very normal sequences of school and the training period as a Telekom civil servant. Her choice of career was influenced by her mother who worked for the post office some 30 years ago and found the work very easy and pleasant at that time. Ms Kunz experiences the continuous organisational change through a biographical pattern of minimising expectations and limiting temporal perspectives:

“You can only think until tomorrow, [...] tell yourself you did everything – your best and can’t blame yourself, and then take the next step.”

Apart from work, she pursues an artistic project in her spare time: she is writing a film script for a love story, but is unable to relate the plot. She wants to market her script, but has not really made plans. Chiefly she enjoys the actual writing, the process rather than its possible results. This focus on process rather than product also structures the way she positions herself in the organisation: During the interview we asked her what kind of advice she would give a colleague on how to pursue a career with Telekom.

“I should give her the same advice I’ve been given at the beginning of my trainee period. One head of department said: At Telekom we all are freelance artists. Basically, that’s quite clear. After all, you need to organize all that yourself a bit. Well, it’s hard to explain, I think it speaks for itself.

...

Q: Do you sometimes get the feeling that - having just built something as a freelance artist, you need to start all over again?

---

<sup>3</sup> For more exhaustive analysis with a different focus cf. (Wagner 2000).

No, it's not that. I think, that implies it. That's a contradiction. A freelance artist implies that you - as I said - accept that life is a continuous flow. And that you adapt to that again and again.”

Here she is trying to explain what being a artist in a continuously changing organization means - and having some difficulty with it. Being an artist has two sides: The notion of creation of a work of art on the one hand, and the notion of flow, of process-orientation and absorption in what you are doing on the other. First it appears that she does talk about the creative side of building your environment. But when the interviewer takes her up on it and introduces the conditions of continuous reorganization, she turns the statement around. She takes a glimpse at the contradiction, we might say, but then she puts the stress firmly on the side of 'flow' which she explains as something you can only adapt to.

Her biographical pattern of avoiding commitments thus fits in with the demands of continuous reorganisation which both requires and devalues subjects' agency. On the one hand the statement can be read to point to a post-modern, de-centred 'post-subject', who is continuously redesigning herself. This is only possible for her by avoiding definite commitments to the past, by willingly leaving behind her own past work upon organizational demand. This attitude has an enabling side. She is not tied to the past either and she avoids experiences of loss or disappointment. A post-modernist might indeed interpret her as being well on the way to post-subjective wisdom (e. g. Willmott 1994). Also, in a way, she is passively resisting the demands of the market. Markets value results, i. e. performance in measurable terms, and in the organisation performance appraisals and performance-related pay have been introduced.

However, in this case the avoidance of loss or disappointment and also of conflict rather erodes the sources of Ms Kunz's artistic and organizational creativity. Disappointment is avoided at the cost of wanting nothing very much, and the price of adaptability is passivity. In short, she is restricting her own ability to act and thus not just reproducing but subjectively enhancing constraints the reorganization puts upon employees.

This pattern of self-flexibilisation has been found not just in the cases of younger managers (cf. Deetz 1998), but also in cases of call centre agents moving between jobs (Kleemann/Matuschek 2002). Employees moving through boundaryless careers or expecting to do so (Honegger/Bühler/Schallberger 2002), changing projects and temporary assignments do multiply their experiences, and such experiences may present opportunities for learning and resources for making sense of new situations. But the case of Ms Kunz shows how even the anticipation of such flexibilised careers may lead to a mode of preemptive self-flexibilisation.

#### 4.2 Ms Baer: Prospective activism

A contrasting case is Ms Baer, a Telekom works councillor. She is 44 years old, a civil servant with two daughters working 30 hours per week. Her biography has a pattern of a commitment to personal-political development with which she keeps challenging herself and consciously seeks to avoid “drowning in normality”. She used to be the administrator of the inhouse telecommunications network – a sort of invisible maintenance work she was “quite happy with”. Yet when during reorganisation performance appraisals became critical for careers, she was no longer comfortable with that arrangement:

“So if they say afterwards, right, this is why others get a higher-valued job – that – well, not for the sake of that but for the sake of recognition - I wasn't going to take that.”

When her daughters were reaching school age, she enrolled in a further education degree, a feminist course connecting qualification, biographical and political reflection. This fits in with her pattern of “alternative” development and self-actualisation to which she energetically commits herself. After finishing her degree (with limited labour market possibilities) she took



the opportunity to be elected as a works councillor – an alternative and activist career in a changing organisation, in which her qualification offers social movement-related cognitive and normative resources to evaluate the process of organisational change. She thus reflects on the organisations' performance criteria in relation to her own claims for recognition quite in line with Honneth's concept of a "struggle for recognition" (1997): She feels misrecognised individually, but as a works councillor and a feminist analyses the structural unfairness of the organisation's focus on market success – through which the traditional fields of back-office and women's work are devalued and pursues the collective interest of women workers.

In comparing both cases, the biographical prerequisites necessary to reflect upon organisational demands come into view. Both women draw on experiences and fields of practice outside work in order to make sense of their situation in the organisation. Ms Kunz's creative practice, however, does not offer her a way of distancing from organisational demands: By letting herself be absorbed in processes of creation without committing herself to projects or products she is jeopardising her own capacity to act and create. On the contrary, Ms Baer counters the demands of flexibilisation by committing, and indeed tying herself to an activist position in the organisation which is based on the experience and practices of political work and social movements.

#### 4.3 Collective action

An example in which the transformation of subjects' own conditions for action is pursued further, beyond the original organisation, has been found in my study of telephone call centres. It consists of the events around the most intense call centre labour conflict in Germany so far, which happened around the closure and centralisation of Citibank's call centre operations in Duisburg in late 1998 and early 1999 (cf. Holtgrewe 2001).<sup>4</sup>

Citibank, Citigroup's private banking operations, specialise in providing a standardised banking service worldwide, in self-service banking and also in tying banking to other services such as hire-purchase arrangements and loans arranged through retailers. Citibank pioneered telephone banking in Germany, opening the Bochum call centre in 1989 and another one in Duisburg. The Ruhr area was specifically chosen for its high density of universities, and students were recruited as a highly educated, yet cheap and by definition temporary workforce. Inadvertently, the particular students who were recruited had experience in student activism and left-wing politics. Though the call centre was established outside the collective agreements in the banking sector, soon a works council was demanded and established.<sup>5</sup>

In 1998 the closure of the Bochum call centre was announced for 1999. Citibank planned to centralise all its call centre operations in a new subsidiary where previous site-specific agreements would be cancelled and standards lowered. Both in Bochum and Duisburg (where previously the call centre service to retailers was based) a campaign was launched which culminated in a strike.

While the strike predictably resulted in agreements on severance pay for the terminated workers, the participants took the appropriation of service professionalism and customer orientation one step further: They drew on their experience both of work at Citibank and of the protest and on the distinctive and avantgardist reputation they had gained within their trade union to invest their severance pay in the start-up of an enterprise of their own.<sup>6</sup> This start-up business, Tekomedia (<http://www.tekomedia.de>) specialises in information, communication, campaigning and publicity services to non-profit and public sector

<sup>4</sup> This case study is based on interviews by the author and Lars Gundtoft with participants in the struggle, on observations of solidarity meetings and on an analysis of the press and the extensive internet documentation of the events. This is to be found under <http://www.labournet.de/call-op/home.html>, though the material is chiefly in German.

<sup>5</sup> In Germany, the system of industrial relations works on two levels (cf. Weiss 1992; Visser/van Ruysseveldt 1996): On the plant/company level (above five employees), both unionised and non-unionised workers are represented by an elected works council with extensive information, consultation and co-determination rights. Collective agreements over wage rates and working conditions for industries and regions are negotiated by the union(s) and respective employers' association. They may and increasingly do contain frameworks for company-specific regulations.

<sup>6</sup> The financing of the company was carried by some 100 ex-Citibank workers investing at least DM 1.500 each.

organisations and employs 24 people (as of December 2002). The company presents itself as a "Center for Intelligent Services" which offers consultancy to other workers' initiatives against plant closures, promotes the internationalisation of unions and workers' initiatives, offers high-quality service training and presents a model for a learning, non-hierarchical self-organisation. While its ambitious self-presentation should be taken with a grain of salt, it certainly aims to transform the organisational and institutional field: Tekomedia converts political and organisational reputation into entrepreneurship, their supporters into potential customers and/or collaborators, symbolic into material appropriation and transformation of the labour process.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the empirical analysis we can build a typology of patterns of subjective positioning in processes of organisational change. It distinguishes between the types of

- self-flexibilisation
- and prospective activism.

With Telekom, the typology is completed by the type of "retrospective communities", who insist somewhat nostalgically (Strangleman 2002) on the superiority of past practices and orientations (Holtgrewe 2002). For reasons of space this cannot be presented here.

Self-flexibilised subjects come the closest to Sennett's fragmented identities. They keep options open and restrict their actions and claims to the present – locking themselves in the present moment and giving up further-reaching claims to action and strategy. Activism mobilises claims to action and recognition which reach beyond the actual working situation and are oriented towards the future and its transformation. It is to be found among call centre agents as well as Telekom workers who become involved in interest representation and industrial action – bringing the logic of social movements to the workplace.

Self-flexibilisation turns out to fit functionally with the demands of skilled communication and marketing work. Yet notably, self-flexibilising subjects are decidedly not entrepreneurial. They are carefully economical in managing their subjective involvements and avoiding disappointment and thus, risk. Activism is based on both involvement and reflection. Activist subjects do not simply react to infringements of their interests but to misrecognitions of their normative claims to "good work" and respect. The reflexive articulation of both involvement and critical distanciation from organisational demands lead them to a creative transformation of their own conditions of action.

Flexibilised organisations then continue to exert domination over workers as subjects presenting them with problems, challenges and displacements they need to subjectively address and process. Yet, chances of empowerment do exist. However, they do not automatically unfold with workers' increased education and competencies but require a mobilisation of normative claims to recognition (Holtgrewe/Voswinkel/Wagner 2000). The sources of such normative claims are twofold: a plurality of social experiences and ways of being in society *and* the subjective relevance of the use-value aspect of work, its orientations towards usefulness, problem-solving, quality and even service. Prospective activism then is self-enhancing. It requires claims to recognition at work, and then may take activist subjects beyond the sphere of work into other fields of activity and organisation.

The empirical study of subjective manoeuvring in changing and transforming organisations thus has brought some insights in *how* identities are constituted and constitute themselves. The biographical and narrative perspectives pursued here do not simply mirror subjects' accounts either. An interpretative methodology is able to reconstruct the patterns and processes of such accounting. However, in order to work empirically, we cannot help buying

into the social ascriptions of agency and autonomy, and the generic demands of narratives – for a time. We need to take subjects seriously as we meet them (Wray-Bliss 2001), and maybe more seriously than poststructuralists would be entirely comfortable with. In between the dangers of humanist essentialism, historical determinism or discursive pessimism this does not seem to be the worst option to me.

## References:

- Adler, Paul (2001): Towards Collaborative Interdependence: A Century of Change in the Organization of Work. Version of December 28th, 2001.
- Alferoff, Catrina/Knights, David (2002): Quality time and the 'beautiful call'. In: Holtgrewe, Ursula/Kerst, Christian/Shire, Karen A. (Hrsg.): 183 - 203.
- Alvesson, Mats/Deetz, Stanley (1996): Critical theory and postmodernism. Approaches to organization studies. In: Clegg, Stewart R./Hardy, Cynthia/Nord, Walter R. (Hrsg.). Handbook of organization studies. London u. a., Sage: 191 - 217.
- Arzbächer, Sandra/Holtgrewe, Ursula/Kerst, Christian (2002): Call centres: Constructing flexibility. In: Holtgrewe, Ursula/Kerst, Christian/Shire, Karen A. (Hrsg.). Re-Organizing Service Work. Call Centres in Germany and Britain. Aldershot u. a., Ashgate: 19 - 41.
- Blutner, Doris/Brose, Hanns-Georg/Holtgrewe, Ursula (2002): Telekom - wie machen die das? Die Transformation der Beschäftigungsverhältnisse bei der Deutschen Telekom AG. Konstanz, UVK.
- Clegg, Stewart R. (1998): Foucault, power and organizations. In: Mckinlay, Alan/Starkey, Ken (Hrsg.). Foucault, management and organization theory: From panopticon to technologies of self. London, Sage: 29 - 48.
- Deetz, Stanley (1998): Discursive formation, strategized subordination and self-surveillance. In: Mckinlay, Alan/Starkey, Ken (Hrsg.). Foucault, management and organization theory: From panopticon to technologies of self. London, Sage: 151 - 172.
- Deleuze, Gilles (1993): Postskriptum über die Kontrollgesellschaften. In: Deleuze, Gilles: Unterhaltungen. 1972-1990 (Hrsg.). Frankfurt/Main, suhrkamp. <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/archiv/netzkritik/postskriptum.html> besucht 12.6.01.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa/Mische, Ann (1998): What is agency? American Journal of Sociology 103: 962 - 1023.
- Grey, Christopher (1994): Career as a project of the self and labour process discipline. Sociology 28: 479 - 497.
- Hancock, Philip/Tyler, Melissa (2001): Managing subjectivity and the dialectic of self-consciousness: Hegel and organization theory. organization 8: 565 - 585.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell (1990): Das gekaufte Herz. Zur Kommerzialisierung der Gefühle. Frankfurt/Main, New York, Campus.
- Holtgrewe, Ursula (2001): Recognition, intersubjectivity and service work: Labour conflicts in call centres. Industrielle Beziehungen 8: 37 - 54.
- Holtgrewe, Ursula (2002): Flexible Menschen in flexiblen Organisationen? Bedingungen und Möglichkeiten kreativen und innovativen Handelns. Habilitationsschrift, Fakultät für Gesellschaftswissenschaften der Gerhard-Mercator-Universität Duisburg. Chemnitz/Duisburg.
- Holtgrewe, Ursula/Kerst, Christian (2002): Zwischen Kundenorientierung und organisatorischer Effizienz - Callcenter als Grenzstellen. Soziale Welt 53: 141 - 160.
- Honegger, Claudia/Bühler, Caroline/Schallberger, Peter (2002): Die Zukunft im Alltagsdenken. Szenarien aus der Schweiz. Konstanz, UVK.
- Honneth, Axel (1997): Recognition and moral obligation. Social Research 64: 16 - 35.
- Höpfl, Heather (2002): Playing the part: Reflections on aspects of mere performance in the customer-client relationship. Journal of Management Studies 39(2): 255-267.
- Kleemann, Frank/Matuschek, Ingo (2002): Between Job and Satisfaction: Motivations and Career Orientations of German "High Quality" Call Center Employees. Electronic Journal of Sociology 6(2). [http://www.sociology.org/content/vol006.002/kleemann\\_matuschek.html](http://www.sociology.org/content/vol006.002/kleemann_matuschek.html).

Klein, Naomi (2001): NO LOGO. London, Flamingo.

Knights, David/Morgan, Glenn (1994): Organization theory, consumption and the service sector. In: Hassard, John/Parker, Martin (Hrsg.). Towards a new theory of organizations. London, New York, Routledge: 131 - 152.

Korzynski, Marek, et al. (1999): Customers in control? Front line work and the role of the customer in management control. Loughborough: unv. Ms.

Lazzarato, Maurizio (1998): Immaterielle Arbeit. Gesellschaftliche Tätigkeit unter den Bedingungen des Postfordismus. In: Negri, Toni/Lazzarato, Maurizio/Virno, Paolo (Hrsg.). Umherschweifende Produzenten. Immaterielle Arbeit und Subversion. Berlin, id-Verlag: 39 - 52.

Lazzarato, Maurizio (2002): videophilosophie. zeitwahrnehmung im postfordismus. Berlin, b\_books.

Macdonald, C. L./Sirianni, C., Hrsg. (1996): Working in the service society. Philadelphia, Temple UP.

Marx, Karl (1976): Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung [1844]. In: Marx, Karl/Engels, Friedrich (Hrsg.). MEW Bd. 1. Berlin, Dietz: 378-391. [http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me01/me01\\_378.htm](http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me01/me01_378.htm).

Mckinlay, Alan/Starkey, Ken (1998): Managing Foucault: Foucault, management, and organization theory. In: Mckinlay, Alan/Starkey, Ken (Hrsg.). Foucault, management and organization theory: From panopticon to technologies of self. London, Sage: 1 - 13.

Nickson, Dennis, et al. (2001): The importance of being aesthetic: Work, employment and service organisation. In: Sturdy, Andrew/Grugulis, Irena/Willmott, Hugh (Hrsg.). Customer service. Empowerment and entrapment. Houndmills, London, Macmillan: 170 - 190.

O'Doherty, Damian/Willmott, Hugh (2001): Debating Labour Process Theory: The issue of subjectivity and the relevance of poststructuralism. Sociology 35(2): 457-476.

Strangleman, Tim (2002): Speeding up Cultural Change and the Nostalgia for Permanence at Work. Paper contributed to the KWI conference "Speeding up Cultural Change" June 26 - 29, 2002 Mülheim. Nottingham.

Sturdy, Andrew (1998): Customer care in a consumer society: Smiling and sometimes meaning it? In: Organization. 5: 27 - 53.

Sturdy, Andrew/Fineman, Stephen (2001): Struggles for the control of affect - resistance as politics and emotion. In: Sturdy, Andrew/Grugulis, Irena/Willmott, Hugh (Hrsg.). Customer service. Empowerment and entrapment. Houndmills, London, Macmillan: 135 - 156.

Taylor, Steve (1998): Emotional labour and the new workplace. In: Thompson, Paul/Warhurst, Chris (Hrsg.). Workplaces of the Future. Basingstoke, London, Macmillan: 84 - 103.

Thompson, Paul/Ackroyd, Stephen (1995): All quiet on the workplace front? A critique of recent trends in British industrial sociology. Sociology 29: 615 - 633.

Thompson, Paul/Smith, Chris (2000): Follow the redbrick road. Reflections on pathways in and out of the Labour Process Debate. International Studies of Management and Organization 30(4): 40-67.

Wagner, Gabriele (2000): Berufsbiographische Aktualisierung von Anerkennungsverhältnissen. Identität zwischen Perspektivität und Patchwork. In: Holtgrewe, Ursula/Voswinkel, Stephan/Wagner, Gabriele (Hrsg.): 141 - 166.

Whittington, Richard (1994): Sociological pluralism, institutions and managerial agency. In: Hassard, John/Parker, Martin (Hrsg.). Towards a new theory of organizations. London, New York, Routledge: 53 - 74.

Willmott, Hugh (1994): Bringing agency (back) into organizational analysis: responding to the crisis of (post)modernity. In: Hassard, John/Parker, Martin (Hrsg.). Towards a new theory of organizations. London, New York, Routledge: 87 - 130.

Wray-Bliss, Edgar (2001): Representing customer service: Telephones and texts. In: Sturdy, Andrew/Grugulis, Irena/Willmott, Hugh (Hrsg.). Customer service. Empowerment and entrapment. Houndmills, London, Macmillan: 8-59.