

THE WORK-LIFE (DIS-)BALANCE OF A CREATIVE FAMILY IN THE POSTMODERN AGE

by Martin Kaltwasser and Wikipedia

Laws of nature

How is it possible that when cultural workers do not have a family, they focus on their work, work hard, live alternatively (in a modern way, without a car, with a lot of friends) and share the gender role. But when kids arrive, the traditional life pattern comes back and the gender division of labor is again established: the man works, the woman cares for the children, the family buys a car, buys a house, etc. For the next decades their work-life balance follows the old good rhythm of:

--commuting-work--commuting-family--consumption--commuting-work--
commuting-family--consumption--commuting-work--commuting-family--
consumption--commuting-work--commuting-family--consumption--
commuting-work--commuting-family--consumption--weekend--two days
of consumption--commuting-work--commuting-family--consumption--
commuting-work--commuting-family--consumption--friends--commuting-
work--commuting-family--consumption--grandparents--commuting-work--
commuting-family--consumption--

And then: HOLIDAYS.

The holidays: flight LH 245 Düsseldorf-La Palma-hotel-beach-restaurant-
hotel-beach-restaurant-hotel-beach-restaurant- flight back LH 384 La
Palma-Düsseldorf, followed by:

--commuting-work--commuting-family--consumption--commuting-work--
commuting-family--consumption--commuting-work--commuting-family--
consumption--commuting-work--commuting-family--consumption--
commuting-work--commuting-family--consumption--weekend--two days
of consumption--commuting-work--commuting-family--consumption--
commuting-work--commuting-family--consumption--friends--commuting-
work--commuting-family--consumption--grandparents--commuting-work--
commuting-family--consumption--

A short history of work

Work is a specific, purposeful activity that human beings need to survive in their environment. Work is socially supported by traditions. The worth and meaning of work changed during the whole history. In the pre-industrial societies, until the 18th century, only the lowest classes were working. For the nobles and clergy, work was a taboo. With the growing of the bourgeoisie and industrialization, labor determined vaster parts of the whole society. There was a significant growth of the working class, as dependent workers, but also various patterns of intellectual, commercial and cultural labor were established. In the late 18th century the social division of labor started to be even more differentiated. In the 19th century the aristocracy and industrialized bourgeoisie partially merged. The descendants of rich upper classes spent their lives apart from daily work, cultivating activities related to their status, such as hunting, sports, tourism, or cultural consumption. World War the First resulted in the collapse of ancient regimes, which overlapped with the beginning of communism, the rise of socialists, reformists governments and popularization of worker's rights. These political changes made it possible for workers to adapt new lifestyles, previously not accessible, based on growing working and living standards. The idea of leisure time was born. The division between work and recreation produced new architectural and urban shapes. The new mode of work organization, called fordism, was invented. It took its name from Henry Ford, an American industrialist, whose motto was: "Pay your workers as much as they need to buy goods that you produce." Leisure time became an important factor in the capitalistic society. Mass consumption followed mass production. The recreation time produced new materialistic needs and demands. The industrialized society was based on an extreme demand for consumer goods. And to afford it - you had to work. Work, linked with consumption, became a sacred idol in all the societies worldwide. The Nazi-ideology was based much on the sacred, irrationalized cult around work. The growth of the scientific-industrialized military complex, which accelerated during World War the Second, catapulted the meaning of work into almost religious spheres. All acts of state repression, wars and exploitation are justified with the argument of providing work for the masses. Of course, it always meant alienated labor. Work which was closed in the

vicious cycle of exploitation and accumulation of capital. The alienation of the masses produced extreme wealth for the few. The family became one of the pillars of this holy order. The individual, petty bourgeois family was believed to be the only place suitable for children, and their biological parents to be fully responsible for their education and well-being. This form of family means repression of children and puts much pressure on parents - by the demand of reproduction, the terror of consumption and the exploitation through work and the traditional gender roles.

The critic on work^[1]

The central position of work is almost the same in the collective values systems of industrial societies. Quite surprisingly, it did not really differ in various constitutional forms and governmental models. Both liberal democracies, communists systems, or social welfares - all praised the labor as the central value. There were some exceptions though. One of them is Paul Lafargue (1842-1911), author of the pamphlet „Le droit à la paresse“ [The right to be lazy] (1883). In his times he was a maverick in the workers' movement. He understood himself as a revolutionary socialist, from this position launching a devastating attack on the capitalistic ethic of work. Lafargue aims at production itself. The real enemy of all humankind, argued Lafargue, is its own senseless compulsion to produce, the self-destructive instinct of work. Revolutionaries should first abandon the idea of labor and forget about fighting for the right to work. One should struggle for the right to be lazy!

"A strange delusion possesses the working classes of the nations where capitalist civilization holds sway. This delusion is the love of work. The proletariat, the great class embracing all the producers of civilized nations, has let itself be perverted by the dogma of work. Rude and terrible has been its punishment! All its individual and social woes are born of its passion for work."

For Lafargue, work is, at best, a mere prelude to leisure and to creativity, inventiveness, and satisfaction that only leisure can yield.

"The capitalistic moral, a despicable copy of the Christian moral, overlays the worker's flesh with an anathema: Their ideal consists of the extreme minimalization of the manufacturer's needs, to choke their indulgences and passions and to condemn them to being a machine that can be exploited ad libitum without any stop, without thank."

In his manifesto, Lafargue quotes Gotthold Ephraim Lessing:

"Let's be lazy in all things,
But not lazy in love and wine
But not lazy in laziness."

The radical critics of labor are against any enforcement to work, nevertheless, if we think about the rich or the poor. For this reason, they differ from the socialists, who bristle at the faineance of the rich and take the view that everybody has to work. They call for the abolishment of work, as a real salvation of the tormented mankind. They believe that the technological and social progress should be aimed at the final abolishment of alienated labor. Already in the 19th century Lafargue thought that 3 hours of daily work must be enough for satisfying social needs. Abolishment of work/labor does not only mean the reduction of working time through automatization, but also the reduction of goods produced solely for reasons of accumulating capital.

The abolishment of work is aimed especially at elimination of humiliating wage labor. Under capitalistic conditions everybody is submitted to the system of wage work: the unemployed, the employed, employees and adolescents who are educated to be employed in their future life. In this system, free time is hardly imaginable. Somebody who has so-called free time is not able to use it freely, because he or she cannot share the free time with others who have to work. Another reason is that the whole environment is formed by the commercial pressure, so nobody can truly liberate him- or herself from the regime of compulsory consumption. Either you work, or consume.

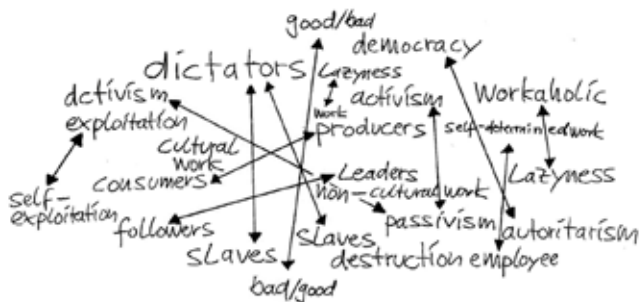
On the other hand, the industrial ideology of labor neglects other types of activities, especially those related to the household, to which traditionally women were enforced, like care for children or the elderly, cooking, cleaning, etc. The abolishment of work also means the disruption of this gender model. These activities, when enacted in other, non-hierarchical environment, surely gain another value.

And after all, isn't it the creative class that already exercises this other type of non-forced labor in different, non-hierarchical context? Could therefore artists become the role models of the upcoming working culture? Free

and egalitarian, based on fun, leisure and inspiration? The sweet idleness praised by Lafargue or Lessing does not mean that people would do nothing, when freed from the chains of enforced wage labor. Even under the hostile capitalistic conditions people prove that they are able to be active and enthusiastic, to share and to engage, or to work voluntarily. The German sociologist Rudi Dutschke said in 1967 that in the future the technical development could reduce the gainful employment: "We will be able to reduce the work day to 5 hours because of modern production facilities and the reduction of dispensable bureaucracy. The company will become the centre of employee's political participation. And there will slowly grow collectives without anonymity." The technical progress, which was achieved after World War the Second, resulted in the common opinion that this could bring much more leisure time. But the history turned in a totally different direction. Especially in Japan the technical progress was conceived as a way of achieving the big economical progress. Therefore, until now there is a harsh competition in productivity, beating new levels of so-called work efficiency. In this race, if you want to use the technological progress for the sake of freedom and leisure, you are on the side of the losers. In 1956, Solow created the model of economical growth, connecting the technological progress with work efficiency. In his opinion, technological innovation only exists as a multiplier of the coefficient "work." With that model, he created a milestone in the economical history of dogmas, which excluded from the public imagination any possible alternative solutions. Technology, instead of being the engine of liberation, is only a tool to forge new, stronger chains of alienated labor. New technologies, like mobiles or the Internet, make people work at a higher pace than ever, slowly conquering all the spheres of private life. Where technology liberated people already before the industrial age, they did not become free. They became unemployed outlaws.

The actual division of the world

Western societies are divided into three hemispheres: producers, consumers and outlaws. Referring to the entrance-mandala, we will now have a look at the short-biography of a former cultural workers couple: He and she goes to school, successfully passes school exams, attends the art college. They are creative, productive and active all the time, but also self-exploiting. It is Okay when they are young. Visiting cool parties, debating whole nights and producing art need energy but bring fun. Then, the artist couple recognizes that becoming a family could make even more fun. After having started the family project, they suddenly discover that the family fun is based on a lot of work, responsibility and harsh expectations from the society. This kind of fun is expensive. So they have to earn money, good money. Automatically the man begins to work, he earns money while the woman cares for the baby. Then, the man becomes good in his job; the living standard rises. The living standard requires a lot. The successful couple needs a lot; they have to have: an up-to-date-apartment, a car, designers clothes and furniture, holidays in the sun, all the consumer electronics and new things for their little prince/princess. They need the funds for a private kindergarten and later the Waldorf School in suburbia... The former creative couple turns into the traditional family model, which is based on the predominant division inside the family. The man is the producer. His woman and their child are the consumers. But all the family members are more and more becoming consumers, and they share this lifelong experience with most of the members of our society.



But what is about the others - the producers, the activists, the creative people, those who go on with their former habits and ideals? What's about the cultural workers? Are there ways to combine these two extremes? Are there any possibilities to go on with your creative activities, but still sustain a family? The "normal way" that most former cultural activists go is based on a lot of fears. A creative, active life seems to be impossible to be combined

with having children. Having children means consuming. There are many more fears lurking in the consumer society's shadows.

Less Consume = Less fun?
more creativity = Less money?
Less family?
Less leisure time?
Less money = depression?

But there are some exceptions. There are artist couples with children, the families of the creative class. Could the artist life become a model for the ideal life-work balance or for even bigger exploitation?

Role Models

Let's have a look at the development of two conceptual artists and activists for the public space and informal structures without a gallery but with a vivid family life:

I never saw a strict border between my "work" and "leisure time." From my childhood on, playing was more than playing. I built, I made paintings, I played role-games with my brother and friends, I wrote. Playing, writing, role-games and building happened at home and at school. I made experiences everywhere and built things out of it. So, in my microcosm, I have always been an "artist." This non-acceptance of strict borders is something very important for all my life. I noticed that we can be creative or not creative. No matter if it's work or not work. Having money should guarantee one's survival, nothing else. Consumption is annoying. I studied architecture, enthusiastically. I squatted in a house in Berlin with other people, and I had my studio there for 7 years. I worked in architectural offices. I noticed that the more boring and unsatisfying the work was, the more money we earned. And vice versa. I made my architectural diploma and decided immediately to stop working in architecture and to put all effort into making art. I met Folke Köbberling and we became an artist and private couple; we got two children, we became a family. We started our artist-family-life with almost no money. But we never stopped being artists, never stopped being creative. We put all our energy into our life as artists - with kids who we included completely into our artistic life. From the very beginning, we took active part in independent artists' networks. In our studio, in the independent, interdisciplinary Berlin art scene. As artists, we are always "working": getting the input, relaxing, leisure time, time to clean the brain, transformation of the input, getting ideas, making artworks. But we don't feel that everything is work. Everything is non-linear. Even in art production it can happen that we don't think that it is work. The life is artwork. In order to live as a family only from making art we have to focus. Especially that our art is not produced for the art market and commercial galleries. We know that we can only survive if we put 100% of our effort, power and concentration into the making of art. But this includes leisure time, family time and social time as well.

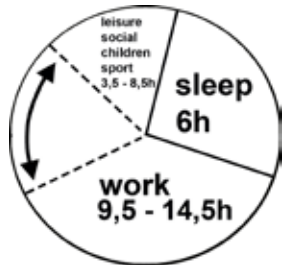
Less is more

We have pragmatically minimized our expenses: no car, no bought furniture, almost no holidays, no TV, no consumer electronics, no pets, no bought interior design, no dining in restaurants, no fashion, no expensive art material, extreme controlling of all budgets. We practice do-it-yourself on all levels. All our furniture is self-built - no design; but it fulfils all the functional needs. We buy the best tools and the best food for home-cooking. We have a rich, vivid social life.



An average employee day:
8h work
10h recreation
6h sleep

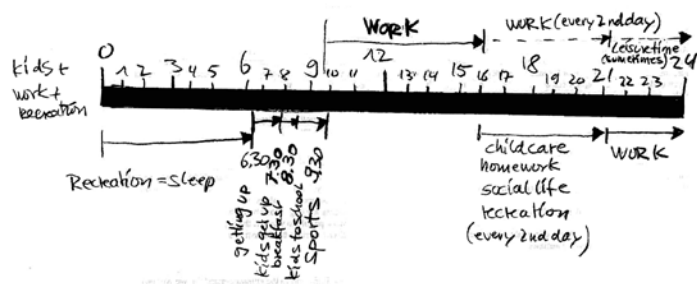
6.30 getting up
6.30-7.30 kids, breakfast, preparing for school
7.30-8.30 bringing kids to school
8.30-9.30 sports
9.30-16.00 work (art, communication, writing, buying, administrative work, production, household)
16.00-21.00 kids (homework, bringing/getting from/to sports, additional lessons, doctor, friends), household and social life: eating, meeting friends and neighbors
21.00-0.00 work (art, communication, writing, online, production on computer)
0.00-6.30 sleep



Our day:

40% organization of work & art (communication, writing texts, timelines, finances, meeting other artists, curators, theoreticians, etc.)
30% art production and teaching
20% children/eating/sleeping
10% recreation: meeting friends, leisure, sports, reading

Martin Kaltwasser's and Folke K bberling's rhythm of the day.



The important basis of working in a self-determined, enriching and creative way is collectivism. We introduce and exercise the common use of things: we have a big studio that we share with friends, including an excellent big wood workshop. So, we share the rent. When it is necessary, it provides some extra space for bigger realizations.

We share our excellent transportation bicycle. We use the public, common space for a lot of activities: birthday parties, meeting friends, children playground, sport activity, public art, reading, relaxing, sport activity, working (repairing the bicycle), drinking coffee, beer, wine, etc. The biggest expenses are for excellent tools. Now we have numerous excellent power-tools. Currently, sometimes we lend them to our friends, as years ago we borrowed tools from friends. We borrow cars and bigger machines from friends and rental companies. The networks and the common use of tools are the backbone in our self-determined life.

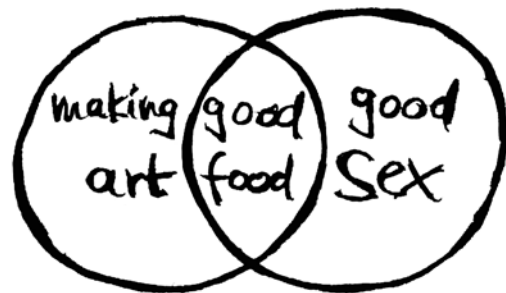
Our habit of working is extremely efficient. Permanently we try to improve all details of our work-life (tools, skills, production lines, the use of the given time), and, at the same time, to avoid all kinds of routine. That makes us being totally motivated all the time. In terms of efficiency, we try to reduce our daily mobility, avoiding unnecessary trips. We recycle most things, so we don't waste time, energy and money on buying new ones. We repair, we re-use. We reduce the time for administration, design, fashion, outfit and transportation. The time that we save we spend with our children, with friends, with other colleagues, with leisure time.

I do what I like and I like what I do

When I am making art, I am not hungry. I don't need to eat much. When an occupation is fully satisfying then I don't need any other satisfaction, no substitute. This happens within the creative process that Joseph Beuys described: "I do what I like and I like what I do." When this happens, it doesn't matter if it is work or not. It is a human expression. The same situation exists



when you are having good sex – in these times there is no need for eating much food. The best combination is making art and having good sex. Then I do not miss much food. I grow more hungry for food when I am not making art, when I am sitting the whole day at computer, or making unsatisfying work. Eating is a substitute for better things to do. And buying, consuming – too!



In some of our social contexts, like that of our children's school, our self-determined lifestyle gives us an exotic image of hippies, outlaws, crazy artists. Our neighborhood consists of architects, designers and computer specialists. They live more the life of car driving, seasonal holidays, commuting-work-commuting, fashion, consumption, possession. Without the car and holidays, but with open doors for everybody and our kitchen as a half-common space, we are the living embodiment of the anti-thesis to their way of life. Still, we are good friends. In our other social context, the art scene of independent, critical, political artists, we are also treated as exotic species because most artists are without family. From their point of view, the creative, hard-working life and the demands of the art scene would be unthinkable in combination with family life. But slowly this way of thinking is fading away.

Contact

The most important element in our life is contact, communication, social life. Contact with ourselves, our body, or our ideas. That leads directly into art production. In daily life we avoid using the iPod (that kills our own thinking), we reduce the use of the mobile phone, we prefer the travel by train, or by bike and generally public transport, instead of going by plane or by car. That makes more contact with the environment and the social world around us. Real contact means real talking without any interruption (by the mobile phone); the near is more important than the far; silence is golden; slow motion is better than speed.

Conclusion

Our life is determined by work, but self-determined work in the context of a capitalistic world. That means, we, as artists, have to combine our ideals in making art with the reality of survival in a hostile environment. We combine the family life with a high-productive artist life. We agree with Lafargue that the right to be lazy should be the highest right. But he writes about laziness as the opposite of proletarian, dependent work. This is the basic division in which he is entangled: the difference between destructive, exploiting work and its opposite – laziness, the lack of activity. We are trying to live the third

way - the self-determined, creative life, where work is not a punishment but an occupation, an enriching and productive one; a funny thing, resembling laziness and sex, or playing music. We organize our time in such a way so that we could be close to our children all the time. We meet friends and have leisure time whenever we want and need it. So, we are at a point where work and leisure are slowly coming together. In the globalized world, work is still the means of exploitation, and labor is alienated. But cultural workers are figuring out how a self-determined, self-controlled, rich work-life balance can look like, so that, in the end, the dream of Joseph Beuys could become a reality. Then "everybody will be an artist."

Literature:

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