

ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY





NEW

SZÉCHENYI PLAN

ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

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ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

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Week 8

Labour, employees and employers
in post-industrial settings

Tamás Dombos, Viola Zentai

Emergence of industrial work

- Industrialised, mechanised work necessitates a specific work culture
- Thompson (1967)
- Pre-industrial work:
 - “work” and “leisure” not so strictly separated:
 - in space: work in dwelling or land around it
 - in person: working together with other members of the family
 - task oriented
 - organised according to natural time:
 - sunrise and sunset
 - alternation of long periods of intensive work (spring-summer) and relaxation (winter)

Emergence of industrial work

- Industrial work:
 - separation of work and leisure
 - factory ↔ home, public ↔ private, production ↔ leisure
 - mechanical clock
 - measuring labour power (and salaries) in hours and minutes
 - Taylorism
 - efficient organisation of work
 - breaking down work into phases, scientific planning of work phases
 - ≈ Fordism: assembly line
 - supervision, “the gaze”
 - easy to monitor factory halls
 - minimizing movement of workers

Marx's critique

- Wage labour: exploitation
 - labour theory of value
 - wage = cost of reproduction of the worker, not the value of products (no free choice, must subsist)
 - surplus value = profit
- Wage labour: alienation
 - does not work voluntarily, but out of must
 - does not have an overview of the productive process
 - does not see products as his own creation
 - no sense of community with other workers

Control and resistance

- Consent to work hard to maintain
 - shirking, defiance and sabotage
 - trade unions: organised resistance
- De-skilling (Braverman 1974)
 - workers easier to replace
 - mechanisation
- Making out (Burawoy 1979)
 - piece-rate pay system
 - labour as game: culture of competition
- The welfare turn
 - Fordism: higher wage: can pay for products
 - housing, care, leisure activities: loyal workers

Fordism and postfordism

mass production

standardised products

assembly-line production

heavy industry

semi-skilled worker

industrial centres

national economy

mass consumption

flexible production

customised products

computer-controlled
production

clean technology

polarisation of skills

new industrial
districts

international economy

niche marketing

A Boston bakery

- Sennett & Cobb (1972), Sennett (1998)
- 1970s:
 - Italian bakery (owner: “mafia”)
 - hard physical labour, harsh working environment
 - trade union: organises the whole life of workers
 - American individualism: taboo over class categories
 - ⇒ everyone belongs to middle class
 - solidarity among workers:
Greek ethnic identity
 - work ethic:
good baker = good Greek



A Boston bakery

- 1990s:
 - owned by a food concern
 - flexible production: computerised: “pushing buttons”
 - clean, silent, airconditioned,
 - part time labour: people come and go
 - both men and women, mixed ethnic background
 - technology dependence:
 - no overview of production processes, waste calculated part of the system
 - alienation



Does work still matter?

- Offe (1985)
- Work lost its central relevance as an analytic category
- Objective:
 - work no longer structures social and economic life
 - no longer the basis of collective action
 - passing free time less linked to work
- Subjective:
 - people defines themselves by categories outside of work
 - importance of consumer roles
- Critiques:
 - Western experience (\Leftrightarrow global outsourcing of production to South)
 - emergence of new forms of control and surveillance

Possessed Malay female workers

- Ong (1987)
- Female Malay workers in a multinational factory
- Incidents of being possessed by spirits (violent, unconscious outbreaks)
- Kampung (village):
 - peasant work free of surveillance, strong parental control, organised marriages
- ⇔ Factory:
 - economic independence, sexual autonomy, constant surveillance (foreign males)
- Resistance to constant surveillance (by foreign, capitalist, males)

Culture as work

- McRobbie (2002)
- Analysis of the British „creative” sector: journalists, cultural consultants, managers, strategists
- Freelance, contracted work
- Distinctions between work and leisure, personal and professional self, work ethic and consumer style blurred
- Discourse of creativity:
 - promise of work as self-realisation
 - flexibility, self-exploitation