

Bodies and Affects in Market Societies

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What Makes People Work

Producing Emotional Attachments to the Workplace in Post-World War II West-German Vocational Schools¹

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In remembrance of Nino Kühnis (1978–2013), colleague and comrade

For a long time, a major strand of labor historiography was based on the assumption that work constitutes one of the fundamental conditions of mankind. According to proponents of this theory, human beings are primarily willing to work, and any unwillingness is a result of the specific relations of production. In the age of capitalism, as their argument goes, it was primarily alienation and expropriation of work which prevented people from doing their jobs voluntarily and joyfully. Undoubtedly, such standpoints are outdated today. They are instead analyzed as specific discourses within the history of labor: as historiography has shown in great detail, there has been a steady and performative thematization of labor and work in general and particularly of an alleged “will to work” from the beginning of industrialization until today. Numerous studies of bourgeois notions of work and productivity, as well as of the concepts promoted by labor movements, work experts, and governmental institutions, indicate how the production of a “work society” – that is, a society in which work is a fundamental value – in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries was based not least on the construction and implementation of a strong notion of work.² Over recent years, this perspective has also been applied to the historiography of the second

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² Cf., for example, Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Work in a Modern Society: The German Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective* (New York/Oxford/UK: Berghahn, 2010).

half of the twentieth century. Studies on various topics have shown how the production of work societies continued in this period.³

The present chapter contributes to this debate from the point of view of the historiographies of the body and of things.⁴ My argument is inspired by Judith Butler's concept of "passionate attachment." In her attempt to "reject theoretically the source of resistance in a psychic domain that is said to precede or exceed the social"⁵, she is able to conceptualize strong commitments to specific objects that seem to be indispensable for processes of subjectivation. Emotional relations to things, humans, and nonhuman beings, she argues, play a crucial role within these processes as they "take place centrally through the body."⁶ With respect to the history of labor, such considerations give rise to the question of whether and to what extent the production of passionate – or, to use a less "romantic" term, emotional – attachments plays a role in processes of subjectivation of workers in different time periods. Against this background, I ask in the present chapter how contemporaries of the 1950s were made and made themselves "work" through specific modes of emotional guidance.

For this purpose, I took a close look at the ways in which the pedagogy of the mid-1950s directed ordinary factory and domestic workers and store or office employees in West Germany to reflect on their own work. I analyzed about 300 writing compositions from the Roeßler archive that were written by young students (aged from about fifteen to eighteen) attending various types of vocational schools in the cities of Aachen, Bremen, and Trier. I argue that, within this specific framework, the workers and employees were not motivated to be productive simply by propagating abstract concepts of work. Rather, the Roeßler school compositions encouraged them to write about their emotional attachments to various aspects of their jobs and workplaces: to their tasks, their social relations, and to the material conditions of the workplace. In so doing, they did not only give them an opportunity to report on the conditions in their factories and offices.

³ For reviews of the current debates, see Peter-Paul Bänziger, "Von der Arbeits- zur Konsumgesellschaft? Kritik eines Leitmotivs der deutschsprachigen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung," *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 12, no. 1 (2015): 11–38; Kim Christian Priemel, "Heaps of Work: The Ways of Labour History," *H-Soz-Kult*, accessed 10th May 2015, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/2014-01-001>; Jörg Neuheiser, "Arbeit zwischen Entgrenzung und Konsum: Die Geschichte der Arbeit im 20. Jahrhundert als Gegenstand aktueller zeithistorischer und sozialwissenschaftlicher Studien," *Neue Politische Literatur* 58, no. 3 (2013): 421–48.

⁴ Cf. Pascal Eitler and Monique Scheer, "Emotionengeschichte als Körpergeschichte: Eine heuristische Perspektive auf religiöse Konversionen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35 (2009): 282–313; Frank Trentmann, "Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 2 (2009): 283–307.

⁵ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 102.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

First and foremost, they were told that, in fact, work was something to be emotionally attached to. As such, these school compositions were an aspect of the complex history of the emotional guidance of workers and employees since the early twentieth century. Instead of being regarded as opponents to the company's interests, they were increasingly considered as the "human factor" in production.⁷

Professional Work As a Topic in Youth Studies

Like other institutionalized forms of communication, school compositions are not an everyday medium of self-reflection. Therefore, we cannot know what exactly the school children and students did outside of school and, more generally, what role work played in the construction of their identities. However, the public school (as a generic institutional framework) has been attended by the vast majority of children in German-speaking regions since the late nineteenth century. That is why its influence on the formation of ordinary people's relationships to themselves should not be underestimated. Alongside other public institutions, such as vocational guidance and employment services,⁸ (vocational) schools can particularly account for the popularization of specific notions of labor as "creative" and "productive" professional work.⁹ In her 1956 school composition, Erika T., a fifteen-year-old factory worker from Aachen, mirrors this understanding of labor by citing a well-known proverb: "In work lies the happiness of life, you vainly look for it in wealth. A truthful saying indeed."¹⁰

In the present case, the general context of public (vocational) schools was overdetermined by the fact that the compositions were written on behalf of a research project that the education researchers Wilhelm and Elfriede Roeßler conducted in

⁷ Cf. Karsten Uhl, *Humane Rationalisierung? Die Raumordnung der Fabrik im fordistischen Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014), 331.

⁸ Cf. Sigrid Wadauer, Thomas Buchner, and Alexander Mejsstrik, eds., *History of Labour Intermediation: Institutions and Finding Employment in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Berghahn, 2015); Daniela Saxer, "Persönlichkeiten auf dem Prüfstand: Die Produktion von Arbeitssubjekten in der frühen Berufsberatung," *Historische Anthropologie* 19, no. 3 (2011): 354–71, esp. 368; David Meskill, *Optimizing the German Workforce: Labor Administration from Bismarck to the Economic Miracle* (New York: Berghahn, 2010); Sylvia Rahn, *Die Karrierisierung des weiblichen Lebenslaufs* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2001), chap. 4 passim.

⁹ Cf. Philipp Gonon, *Arbeit, Beruf und Bildung* (Bern: hep Verlag, 2002); Otto Ludwig, *Der Schulaufsatz: Seine Geschichte in Deutschland* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 321–30; John Gillingham, "The 'Deproletarianization' of German Society: Vocational Training in the Third Reich," *Journal of Social History* 19, no. 3 (1986): 423–32.

¹⁰ MB Aachen U, no. 182, January 1956, Roeßler archive (RA), FernUniversität in Hagen. My numbering; all names are anonymized; BS: "Berufsschule" (vocational school), KB: "Kaufmännische Bildungsanstalt" (commercial school), MB: "Mädchenberufsschule" (girls' vocational school), U: "Unterstufe" (lower grade), M: "Mittelstufe" (intermediate grade), O: "Oberstufe" (upper grade).

the mid-1950s. Supported by both state ministries of education and local school authorities throughout the Federal Republic of Germany, they collected compositions written by tens of thousands of schoolchildren and young pupils at vocational schools. Their effort was based on the credo that post-World War II West-German society and its youth differed fundamentally from those of the inter-war and war periods.¹¹ At the same time, their project reflects pedagogy and youth studies' interest in (vocational) school compositions, an interest that goes back to the 1920s. Since then, (professional) work has been one of the main topics of the thousands of compositions that have been collected and – in many cases – partly published. The style of writing the researchers encouraged was inspired by the contemporary debates on “free writing” (*freie Niederschrift*) as opposed to the “bound composition” (*gebundener Aufsatz*) that had dominated hitherto. In order to stimulate free writing, the teachers were often asked not to look at the compositions that were penned in their classes.¹²

With reference to these discussions and those within the pedagogy of the 1950s, the Roeßlers implemented a differentiated methodological approach in order to avoid being too normative. Nevertheless, their basic ideas about how children were supposed to grow up becomes clearly visible in their writings. Again, the “creative” and “productive” aspects of life were emphasized, for instance, when they described personal development as being based on “the peculiar fact that man is always born into a ‘world’ that [...] literally means ‘environment,’ out of which it is his duty to create ‘world.’”¹³ These general aspects of adult life were strongly connected to wage labor and, more specifically, to professional work. Thus, it comes as no surprise that one of the topics in the vocational school composition classes was “my future profession.”

This discursive framework becomes even more palpable when we look further at the issues that pupils were invited to write about. Amongst other topics, such as “after work” and “my home,” the vocational school students were invited to write

¹¹ Cf. Heinz Abels, Heinz-Hermann Krüger, and Hartmut Rohrmann, “Jugend im Erziehungsfeld: Schüleraufsätze aus den fünfziger Jahren im Roeßler-Archiv,” BIOS 1 (1989), 139–50. For a general overview of post-World War II German youth research, see Philip Jost Janssen, “Jugendforschung in der frühen Bundesrepublik: Diskurse und Umfragen,” *Historische Sozialforschung Supplement* 22 (2010); Irmgard Weyrather, *Die Frau am Fließband: Das Bild der Fabrikarbeiterin in der Sozialforschung 1870–1985* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 2003), 259–91.

¹² Cf. Rahn, *Karrierisierung*, 214–20, esp. 221–22; Christina Benninghaus, *Die anderen Jugendlichen: Arbeitermädchen in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt a.M./New York: Campus Verlag, 1999), 19–36; Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Jugend zwischen Krieg und Krise: Lebenswelten von Arbeiterjungen in der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1987), 11–28. An overview of the history of German debates on school compositions can be found in Ludwig, *Schulaufsatz*.

¹³ Wilhelm Roeßler, *Jugend im Erziehungsfeld: Haltung und Verhalten der deutschen Jugend in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der westdeutschen Jugend der Gegenwart* (Düsseldorf: Pädagogischer Verlag Schwann, 1957), 17.

about both “the lighter and the darker sides” of their “workplaces.” The expression of criticism was explicitly welcome; yet, at the same time, the presentation was supposed to be well balanced. Thus, it is not surprising that a female laundry worker tellingly commented: “I don’t have any dark sides.”¹⁴ Another respondent, a needle factory worker and student at the girls’ vocational school of the city of Aachen, began her composition by emphatically stating how much she liked her workplace, notwithstanding the fact that she was earning too little, her job was monotonous, and her coworkers, foremen, and forewomen were “not too good” and even “deceitful” to her. She closed by adding that if she “had to do it again, I’d never go to a needle factory again.”¹⁵ Similarly, a male student, who clearly pointed out the bad conditions of his workplace, made some positive remarks in closing. He hoped that the situation “would alter *soon*.”¹⁶

In the context of the “democratic” culture of post-World War II Western Europe, people were supposed to operate without reliance on authority.¹⁷ No longer would they be disciplined only by direct force, to act according to certain normative concepts. Increasingly, they were guided in more indirect ways such as the “well-balanced criticism” encouraged by the Roeßler compositions. Their “soft” power consists, first, of the fact that – like in the context of the 1920s youth studies – the teachers were asked to hand the texts directly on to the researchers and not to look at or even correct or grade them. If they nevertheless did so – which, in fact, quite often was the case – they infringed upon an ethical norm, the performative quality of which should not be underestimated. Second, the soft power lies in a tendency to individualize the perception of living conditions: the students were invited to write about their “individual” workplaces instead of the conditions at work in general.

Together with the increasingly hegemonic discourse on the caring woman¹⁸ who is supposed to be “friendly and cooperative”¹⁹ at home and at work, this may, for example, have prevented the majority of female students from actively criticizing their workplaces. As we know from many accounts, and not only those of their (predominantly male) fellow students, the conditions in contemporary factories and offices were often not very enjoyable. One of the few references to

¹⁴ MB Aachen U, no. 185, 23rd January 1956, RA.

¹⁵ MB Aachen U, no. 145, 23rd January 1956, RA.

¹⁶ BS Trier O, no. 106, 23rd January 1956, RA, 2 (original emphasis).

¹⁷ Cf. Hera Cook, “From Controlling Emotion to Expressing Feelings in Mid-Twentieth-Century England,” *Journal of Social History* 47, no. 3 (2014): 627–46; Nina Verheyen, *Diskussionslust: Eine Kulturgeschichte des “besseren Arguments” in Westdeutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

¹⁸ See still Gisela Bock and Barbara Duden, “Arbeit aus Liebe – Liebe als Arbeit: Zur Entstehung der Hausarbeit im Kapitalismus,” in *Frauen und Wissenschaft: Beiträge zur Berliner Sommeruniversität für Frauen, Juli 1976*, ed. Gruppe Berliner Dozentinnen (Berlin: Courage, 1977), 118–99.

¹⁹ MB Aachen U, no. 224, 23rd January 1956, RA.

social inequality by a woman is a remark on the misbehavior of the boss's daughter that was brought forward in a composition by a domestic worker, Rosa B. Not surprisingly however, her criticism is aimed at personal actions and their moral inadequacy rather than at challenging structural inequality: "Cause before God everyone is equal, no matter if it is a factory owner's daughter or a domestic worker."²⁰

Moreover, if work was fundamentally good, as the majority of the people living in contemporary Germany seemingly thought²¹, at least some aspects of it had to be liked in order to maintain self-esteem as a worker. Attributing positive qualities to labor made it possible for workers to address themselves in a socially acknowledged manner. This may have been another reason that many of them wrote that they enjoyed working in their factory, store, or office despite of some significant annoyances. Accordingly, one of the students started his composition by listing the negative aspects of his workplace: the dustiness, dirtiness, and the long working hours. "I would prefer not to have started to work at all," he recounts. "What a good life for those who don't have to work and still have enough money." In the second part of his account, however, he almost completely flips this perspective. He continues by stating that there have to be laboring people as well; since he was "accustomed" to work, he ranked himself among them. "A young man should work," he concludes, "because idleness is the beginning of all vice as the proverb goes."²²

We do not know whether these students *really* enjoyed their jobs. Yet, the need to attach oneself emotionally to certain aspects of one's everyday life is something to be taken seriously. Of these aspects, labor undoubtedly has been one of the most important since the late nineteenth century.²³ By offering them an opportunity and the necessary guidelines to express both their negative and positive feelings relating to labor and the workplace, the Roesßler school compositions were far more than an ephemeral phenomenon. In a similar way, the unions participated in the production of a society centered around work, describing the gap between the ideal of work and the bitter reality of the shop floors. The emergence of concepts such as exploitation, alienation, and expropriation accounts for these efforts.²⁴ On the one hand, they may have provided some of the vocational school students in the 1950s with the means to see their workplace from an oppositional perspective. This becomes particularly clear in a composition by a seventeen-year-old worker

²⁰ MB Aachen U, no. 143, 23rd January 1956, RA, 1.

²¹ Cf. Axel Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten: Freizeit, Massenmedien und "Zeitgeist" in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre* (Hamburg: Hans Christian Verlag, 1995), chap. 4.1 passim.

²² BS Trier O, no. 110, 16th June 1956, RA, 1.

²³ Cf. Bänziger, "Arbeits- zur Konsumgesellschaft"; Sebastian Conrad, Elisio Macamo, and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Die Kodifizierung der Arbeit: Individuum, Gesellschaft, Nation," in *Geschichte und Zukunft der Arbeit*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Claus Offe (Frankfurt a.M./New York: Campus Verlag, 2000), 449–75.

²⁴ Cf. Jürgen Kocka, "Work As a Problem in European History," in Kocka, *Work in a Modern Society*, 1–15, esp. 7–10.

at a Trier heating engineering company: “Furthermore, you are simply a nothing or rather a workhorse that is exploited. [...] If you say anything or complain, [...] you’re fired. Thus [you] keep quiet and muddle along.” On the other hand, however, he ends his account by adding that this was mainly a problem affecting smaller firms “employing up to 25 workers.”²⁵ Precisely by criticizing his specific workplace, he affirmed the significance that work had in general.

Accordingly, only a few of his fellow students wrote that they went to work for lack of anything better to do. “I enjoy working very much. I am never malcontent because everywhere one has to work, whether it is in a factory or in a store”²⁶, said one student; this was not a common statement. However, they did not describe themselves as happy just because they were proud of their “productive” and “culturally important” work either. Likewise – and maybe even primarily – they did so due to the fact that they were able to acquire certain virtues on the job, which were at least partly connected to the general emphasis on work: diligence, reliability, orderliness, cleanliness, and timeliness were amongst the most important, regardless of the gender and the actual work they did.²⁷ “It is not important in which field I’m working but that I am reliable concerning my job,” Erika T. tellingly wrote.

At the same time, the specific conditions at their workplaces were important to them too. There was a variety of more concrete and “material” objects of emotional attachment complementing and even partly substituting the general discourse on work and work-related virtues. As I will now explain in detail, this is not only a result of the topics of the compositions as they were specified by the Roeslers. It also refers to the specific modes of guidance of labor (by modes of emotionalization) that emerged in the early twentieth century.

Emotional Attachments to the Workplace

If we further examine Erika T.’s composition, we can see that work was for her a pursuit of happiness, not least because her workplace was outside the “noisy” and “dirty” factory hall and her job allowed her to “serve” at the plant office every now and then. Moreover, she wrote that she “like[d] going to work because we are putting something together [*schaffen*] together peacefully.” Such statements are not only a consequence of the specific discursive context of the Roesler school compositions. First and foremost, they can be described against the background of a multilayered process of emotionalization of work operations and workplaces

²⁵ BS Trier O, no. 104, (n.d.), RA.

²⁶ MB Aachen U, no. 110, 20th January 1956, RA.

²⁷ For the gender history of cleanliness, see Nancy R. Reagin, *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and National Identity in Germany, 1870–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

that can be traced back to the early twentieth century. Since then, programs intended to increase “joy in work” were increasingly discussed and implemented as it became more and more clear that both abstract notions of work, on the one side, and discipline and repression, on the other, were not powerful enough to make people work and prevent them from attaching themselves to radical strands of the labor movement.²⁸ The newly established vocational counseling institutions, for instance, began to present the job market as a matter of “choice and emotional satisfaction,” rather than as an annoyance that has to be accepted out of mere economic necessity.²⁹

Sabine Donauer distinguishes three phases in her genealogy of the emotionalization of work: at the beginning of the twentieth century, “embellishing” workplaces and instigating worker participation was supposed to absorb or compensate for the frustrations that industrial workplaces inevitably caused. In the second phase, which Donauer mainly dates to the 1950s, workers’ attitudes toward jobs and companies became more important. In particular, the “human relations” approach no longer considered emotions as being a threat for efficiency. In addition to “bodily” and “intellectual” abilities, they formed an essential condition of productivity. From the 1960s and 1970s onward, this “satisfied” worker was progressively replaced by the jobholder whose demand for “self-fulfillment” and “personal growth” was more or less impossible to satisfy. In this third phase, jobs had to be “enriched” in order to make sure that there was enough incentive for increased performance. Buzzwords like “management by objectives” and never-ending sermons about “responsibility” accompanied this transformation.³⁰

Not surprisingly, the vocational school compositions collected by the Roeßlers by and large align with the first and the second phases. By directing the students to their workplaces and future professions, the task definitions themselves underline the importance of the former and place work within the contemporary discourse on professionalism. Likewise, in the statements made by the workers and employees themselves, learning a profession was one of the central goals, though they did not necessarily refer to the narrow meaning of *Beruf* as defined by governmental and related institutions.³¹ Some of those – both women and men – who did not conform to this scheme felt urged to account for this: “At home they are angry

²⁸ A current overview is given by Uhl, *Humane Rationalisierung?*

²⁹ Saxer, “Persönlichkeiten auf dem Prüfstand,” 368.

³⁰ Sabine Donauer, “Job Satisfaction statt Arbeitszufriedenheit: Gefühlswissen im arbeitswissenschaftlichen Diskurs der siebziger Jahre,” in *Eine Zeitgeschichte des Selbst*, ed. Pascal Eitler and Jens Elberfeld (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015); cf. also Sabine Donauer, “Emotions at Work – Working on Emotions: On the Production of Economic Selves in Twentieth-Century Germany.” (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2013); Ute Frevert, “Gefühle und Kapitalismus,” in *Kapitalismus: Historische Annäherungen*, ed. Gunilla Budde (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 50–72.

³¹ Cf. Alexander Mejstrik, Sigrid Wadauer, and Thomas Buchner, “Editorial: Die Erzeugung des Berufs,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 24, no. 1 (2013): 5–12.

with me because I didn't want a different profession"³², a female laundry worker wrote. At the same time, and as I am going to show now, a variety of aspects of the workplace itself were amongst the main objects of emotional attachment: the operations performed on the job, the material conditions of the workplace environment, and the social relations within the company.

"First I was working in a needle factory because there was no post in a cloth mill," a female worker from Aachen wrote. Yet, when she eventually received employment in the textile industry, it was not exactly what she was looking for: "I would have preferred to start as a catcher apprentice. But everything was manned and I thought if you start off employed in a cloth mill, you might eventually find a post in the shearing division."³³ Her plan worked out and by the time she composed her account she was actually working as a catcher assistant. With respect to their own jobs, many of her fellow students would have agreed: it was important to have more than just any employment. The very job and the specific operations related to it played a crucial role in their examinations of and reflections on themselves as workers.

In most cases, it is impossible to reconstruct why exactly they preferred a certain job over another, since the statements remain too unspecific: "I am ironing shirts, which is a lot of fun"³⁴, a young laundry worker wrote enthusiastically. But she did not explain why this job was producing favorable emotions. Nonetheless, there are some issues that crop up again and again in the compositions. First of all, the ability to enjoy work seems to have depended on contemporary concepts of hygiene and health. "My workplace," a seventeen-year-old metal industry apprentice wrote, "isn't beautiful at all. It's too dusty and there's no good air. In winter the wind blows from every nook and corner. [...] It doesn't matter whether you drop dead today or tomorrow. After being there for some years you even get a black lung."³⁵ Likewise, in many other compositions, the workplace, climate, and hygiene rank among the issues most often drawing criticism. The workers also often complained about noisiness. Workplaces that did not meet certain standards of cleanliness, noise level, and ventilation – that, in contemporary terms, were not "modern" – were not accepted.

Besides general norms of hygiene and class distinction practices based on bodily difference, this reflects the contemporary debates on how job satisfaction can be increased by improving the workplace environment.³⁶ They not only established minimal standards of hygiene, climate, and accident prevention but also defined what additional facilities the factories and offices had to offer. In the eyes of the young vocational school students, these aspects of workplaces – nicely furnished

³² MB Aachen U, no. 105, 23rd January 1956, RA.

³³ MB Aachen U, no. 140, 23rd January 1956, RA.

³⁴ MB Aachen U, no. 108, 23rd January 1956, RA.

³⁵ BS Trier O, no. 112, 16th June 1956, RA.

³⁶ Cf. Uhl, *Humane Rationalisierung?*, chap. 3 passim.

lunch and recreation rooms, for instance – were crucial for their well-being. “We have a large common room, which is offering great possibilities”³⁷, a happy laundry worker explained. We can see here how the efforts to attach oneself emotionally to work and demands for a minimum work (environment) standard tend to go hand in hand. Work was good, yet it was also supposed to be good work.

Second, to enjoy work implied that the individual tasks were not boring. “To take this job was hard for me,” domestic worker Rosa B. confessed because she “would have preferred going to an office” instead of working in a household. Nevertheless, she wrote that she “didn’t regret it till this day [...] For domestic work is very varied.”³⁸ In many other student accounts, operating a machine served the same purpose. A fifteen-year-old Aachen textile worker, for example, argued that she especially enjoyed her job when she was allowed to run a “big machine.”³⁹ Another “ordinary worker” further explained that she was given a big responsibility by running a machine. Her job included, first, “becoming well acquainted with the machine in order to know how to deal with it. Second, I mustn’t be pre-occupied with anything else and I have to know exactly when my adjuster has to repair something. Third, I have to be reliable and clean since even a dirty machine needs its cleanliness.”⁴⁰

These statements undoubtedly refer to contemporary tendencies of increasing operator responsibility within the production process and establishing internal job markets. At the same time, we can discern here an intensive relation to the means of production themselves, instead of emphatic references to the outcome of one’s work or the social relevance of productivity in general. In capitalist industrial societies, products of work increasingly become mass objects and they are mainly treated as commodities. They gain “value” – that is, not only their function in economic communication and exchange but also their significance as a means of ensuring the self-esteem of those owning or trading them – to a lesser extent because of their specific material qualities. Therefore, it is difficult to establish the “demanding, ambitious understanding of their work as qualified, productive, [...] and culturally important” that is discerned by Jürgen Kocka at the “the grassroots level” of the emerging labor movement.⁴¹

Not surprisingly, there is hardly any reference to the objects produced by the authors of the compositions themselves. The products were, if anything, worth mentioning due to their sheer number. In contrast, as the above-quoted compositions indicate, most notably the machines seem to have almost “called” the workers to become attached to them – be they male or female. This raises the question of whether emotional relations to machines are mere effects of discourses connecting

³⁷ MB Aachen U, no. 192, 23rd January 1956, RA.

³⁸ MB Aachen U, no. 143, 23rd January 1956, RA.

³⁹ MB Aachen U, no. 121, 20th January 1956, RA.

⁴⁰ MB Aachen U, no. 134, 20th January 1956, RA, 1.

⁴¹ Jürgen Kocka, “Work As a Problem,” 9.

them to masculinity, modernity, and/or productivity.⁴² If we want to answer the question of how emotional attachments contribute to making people work, does it suffice to analyze the role (certain) things play in “symbolic communication”?⁴³ Or do we have to consider their specific materiality alongside the discourses on them?

Still today, boys are trained to develop an affective relation to (big) machines much more than girls are encouraged to develop the same. Even where women are encouraged to take the tools into their own hands, this difference is reproduced. A current prospectus by Bosch, for instance, offers light do-it-yourself (DIY) tools especially made for women. This image program implies that a woman is supposed to be able to hang a picture on the wall by herself. In its advertisements of the heavy machines for professionals, however, Bosch exclusively shows hardworking, brawny men.⁴⁴ Thus, women seem to be addressed by the current iconography of machine work just as little as they were in the 1950s and earlier.⁴⁵ Since the 1920s, popular publications have depicted the *machine-like* woman rather than the woman *at the machine*. For instance, the well-known Stuttgart psychologist Fritz Giese wrote on the revue dancers of the Weimar era that “our days offer as an example this bit of the fringe area of life – and it may be more important and illuminating than the examination of the official world of the machines.”⁴⁶ These women are part of a world formed by machines. Yet, in contrast to their male coworkers, they are not entitled to be subjects operating these machines. Most likely, this dichotomy had not changed by the 1950s: as Irmgard Weyrather argues, female workers were depicted in contemporary youth studies as alien (*wesensfremd*) to factory work and deformed by their “machine existence” (*Maschinendasein*).⁴⁷

Against the background of the compositions by women running a machine competently, one can see how the presence of specific objects – machines in

⁴² Cf. Tanja Paulitz, *Mann und Maschine: Eine genealogische Wissenssoziologie des Ingenieurs und der modernen Technikwissenschaften, 1850–1930* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012).

⁴³ Trentmann, “Materiality in the Future of History,” 288.

⁴⁴ Robert Bosch GmbH, *Bosch Elektrowerkzeuge für Heimwerker: Gesamtkatalog 2011/2012*, Leinfelden-Echterdingen 2011; idem, *Echt Bosch! Professionelle blaue Elektrowerkzeuge: Programm 2013/2014*, Leinfelden-Echterdingen 2013.

⁴⁵ Cf. Manuel Charpy and François Jarrige, “Introduction: Penser le quotidien des techniques; Pratiques sociales, ordres et désordres techniques au XIXe siècle,” *Revue d’Histoire du XIXe siècle* 45, no. 2 (2012): 7–32, esp. 31–32; Nina Lerman, Arwen Mohun, and Ruth Oldenziel, “Versatile Tools: Gender Analysis and the History of Technology,” *Technology and Culture* 38, no. 1 (1997): 1–8.

⁴⁶ Fritz Giese, *Girlkultur: Vergleiche zwischen amerikanischem und europäischem Rhythmus und Lebensgefühl* (Munich: Delphin Verlag, 1925), 18; see also Astrid Kusser, “Arbeitsfreude und Tanzwut im Post-Fordismus,” *Body Politics* 1, no. 1 (2013): 41–69, esp. 56–59, accessed 27th August 2015, http://bodypolitics.de/de/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Heft_1_03_kusser_arbeitsfreude_end.pdf.

⁴⁷ Cf. Weyrather, *Die Frau am Fließband*, 270–91.

particular – may undermine such gender-specific attributions. These female workers were not just “attachments of the machine.”⁴⁸ They were attaching themselves emotionally to the machines – at least as far as they recount it in the texts examined here. This in turn allowed them to take a subject-position that the gendered discourse on work in industrial societies hardly even offered them. Even the times when women were working in the “masculine” professions of the arms industry, Alf Lüdtke writes, did not complement the images of experienced male machine operators with those of routinized female turners.⁴⁹ In their everyday life, however, “below” the level of the general iconography of work, machines enabled them to establish what Lüdtke calls *Eigensinn*: next to being “means of domination and exploitation”⁵⁰, they gave them opportunities to act as subjects regardless of – or even subverting – the predominant gendered discourses on industrial work.

In her book *Languages of Labor and Gender*, Kathleen Canning criticizes German labor historiography of the 1980s and 1990s for its gendered view on female and male work that by and large resembles the 1950s youth studies. Many historians assumed, she writes, “that women’s work identities, unlike men’s, were *not* shaped primarily by their experience in and relation to production. Marriage and motherhood, not the ten to twelve hours a day spent on the shop floor, are viewed as constitutive of women’s work identities and political behavior.”⁵¹ Later in her book, she refers to some examples of how women “love[d] their machines” and underlines the significance of such emotional attachments to the production of women’s work ethics.⁵² In this vein, her examples show that emotional attachments to certain things at the workplace were not an issue only within the specific context of the Roeßler compositions.

Canning wrote her book in 1996, yet still today such perspectives seem to be underexplored to a large extent. Alongside the gender-troubling capacities of machines and other work-related things, however, we should not forget that relations to things are first and foremost effects of social processes of emotionalization, that is, of historically differing ways of guiding subjects/bodies by the use of emotions. A historiography of things can complement such an account by asking why specific things may be especially well suited for such processes. Because they were “nearby” objects in the truest sense of the word, we could then argue that machines may have both forced the workers to act according to the speed or size of

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie; Erster Band* (Berlin: Dietz, 1973), 674 [my translation].

⁴⁹ Alf Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1993), 17.

⁵⁰ Marx, *Kapital*, 674 [my translation].

⁵¹ Kathleen Canning, *Languages of Labor and Gender: Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 221 [original emphasis].

⁵² *Ibid.*, 258–59.

the machine and given them the possibility of acting responsibly: “I have to stand all day long. I can’t leave the machines, otherwise they will all be idle. [...] They are highly prone to get damaged, for instance, when I place a needle in a skewed way or don’t press again [...]. So my work is good.”⁵³

Social Relations to Coworkers and Superiors

It comes as no surprise that the authors of the compositions allude to their emotional relations to two different social groups: the coworkers, on the one hand, and the foremen, forewomen, and bosses, on the other. While the descriptions of the second group are fairly ambiguous, coworkers are generally put in a rather positive light. Their solidarity may have helped the new workers to overcome the “very very strong inhibitions”⁵⁴ that many of them had experienced within the first few days at work. “During the shift we’re singing and laughing a lot. When I started on the first day I was feeling very strange, but soon I forgot it due to all the laughter and singing”⁵⁵, a laundry worker wrote and many of her fellow students would probably have agreed: singing, fooling around, and making jokes are activities mentioned in many different accounts, though mainly by female authors.

Indeed, the gender difference is striking in this context: not only were the women, as I mentioned above, complaining much less about their jobs and workplaces; they also discussed social situations amongst the workers to a significantly larger extent. Again, this most likely reflects the above-mentioned contemporary gendered discourses on female and male emotions and social relations: men were supposed to be reluctant to talk about emotional attachments to other people. In the course of their working lives, they were supposed to embody a kind of “tacit” worker manhood that is not verbalized. Nevertheless, it is surprising that the male students did not even write about friendships at their workplaces, let alone the diverse forms of collaboration that undoubtedly characterized their jobs. This leads to the question of whether we have to take into account other factors that prevented these men from giving social relations the same priority.

In his 1979 classic *Manufacturing Consent*, Michael Burawoy argues that workers were engaging in “making out,” a sort of competitive game providing them with the possibility to pursue personal goals within – and thus not to challenge – the general rules set by management.⁵⁶ Against this background, we may ask whether or not these male workers communicated mainly by way of competition and productivism as opposed to cooperation and solidarity. But, if it is just

⁵³ MB Aachen U, no. 209, 17th January 1956, RA.

⁵⁴ KB Bremen M, no. 104, 30th January 1956, RA.

⁵⁵ MB Aachen U, no. 105, 23rd January 1956, RA.

⁵⁶ Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

about structural conditions of work organization, why did the women act differently? Did they merely pretend to do so or did they actually have different jobs? In fact, just like workplaces, jobs apparently did not fundamentally differ much, even though women were more likely to get “unskilled” jobs.⁵⁷ Like their male counterparts, some of the female students described how they were operating several machines at a time or had to accomplish similarly difficult tasks; nevertheless, they were processing a variety of social relations at their workplaces. The “ordinary worker,” for instance, who I quoted in the previous section, explained that she used to sing with her coworkers “so that time passes more quickly.”⁵⁸ By mentioning the machine adjuster, she not only commented on social relations in general but also on the (probably male) person she was working with most directly. Thus, performing manhood by means of reticence can hardly be a consequence of a fundamental difference of the workplaces.

It would be interesting to further analyze the gender performances, such as women putting on a cheery face in the morning, in terms of gender relations. Yet, my sample of sources hardly provides any additional evidence. The only composition explicitly discussing gender relations reads: “I think that boys are more kind than girls. I am the only girl who is together with 6 boys. They tease/nurture me [*aufziehen*] as if I’m their own mother and even wife.”⁵⁹ This example shows that, at least toward their female coworkers, some men seem to have been in no way uncommunicative. Furthermore, addressing and valuing social relations and attachments increasingly became important skills in the second half of the twentieth century.⁶⁰ The very fact that men, too, had to write about their (work) lives in the Roessler compositions can then be seen as a part of a historical process that increasingly encouraged people to acquire skills of emotional communication, especially by way of verbalization.⁶¹

At the same time, both female and male workers alluded to their social relations with their bosses and other superiors. While women emphasized the positive aspects, men tended to be more critical, as I have shown. Yet, if seen from a more

⁵⁷ Cf. Karin Hausen, “Frauenerwerbstätigkeit und erwerbstätige Frauen: Anmerkungen zur historischen Forschung,” in *Frauen arbeiten: Weibliche Erwerbstätigkeit in Ost- und Westdeutschland nach 1945*, ed. Gunilla-Friederike Budde (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 19–45.

⁵⁸ MB Aachen U, no. 134, 20th January 1956, RA, 1.

⁵⁹ MB Aachen U, no. 105, 23rd January 1956, RA.

⁶⁰ Cf. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, “Die Rolle der Kritik in der Dynamik des Kapitalismus und des normativen Wandels,” *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 11, no. 4 (2001): 459–77; and, despite its cultural pessimism, Eva Illouz, *Gefühle in Zeiten des Kapitalismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2007), esp. 97–98.

⁶¹ Cf. Monica Greco, “Homo Vacuus: Alexithymie und das neoliberale Gebot des Selbstseins,” in *Gouvernementalität der Gegenwart: Studien zur Ökonomisierung des Sozialen*, ed. Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), 265–85.

distant view, all of them apparently desired to be treated with general empathy. They expected their superiors to appreciate good work and to reward it by conceding small privileges: “At times one can chat a bit without staring at the door to see whether the boss appears in the doorframe”⁶², a worker wrote who praised her good relations to the boss and his assistants. In contrast, only a few of them were “left cold”⁶³ when their bosses were not kind. Many workers and employees seem to have shared a common idea that the company [*Betrieb*] was like a family. This can be traced back to contemporary discourses that have established the company as an intermediary between “family” and “society.”⁶⁴

Company social services and leisure facilities were combined with the specific modes of emotionalization of work itself, as analyzed by Donauer. The following quote shows how these rather paternalistic social relations were internalized:

Yet one of my most beautiful jobs comes now, which I approach with very much delight and love. [...] Then quickly the shorthand pad ready to hand [...]. Afterwards I transfer it to the machine, which works in a steady flow. [...] At times I say to myself, have you done your job well, is the boss content with me?⁶⁵

Instead of “self-fulfillment” and “personal growth,” the main goal of this worker was to correspond to the boss’s imagined demands. But, at the same time, at least in their writings, most of them expected the companies and their representatives to meet certain standards as well. Weekly working hours were to be limited and the working day was to be structured clearly. Again, this reflects contemporary discussions on how to produce a work society by organizing work well.⁶⁶

Conclusion

In her 1985 book, *Verbürgerlichung: Die Legende vom Ende des Proletariats*, Birgit Mahnkopf argues that “it has become certain meanwhile that even female workers with highly repetitive jobs can draw self-confidence and self-esteem from their concrete action, the everyday company with colleagues, and the mastery of machines.”⁶⁷ By and large, my analysis of vocational school compositions of the 1950s is aligned with these findings. I have argued, first, that the practices themselves played an important role: the more “interesting” a job was, the more apt it

⁶² MB Aachen U, no. 188, 23rd January 1956, RA, 1–2.

⁶³ MB Aachen U, no. 196, 23rd January 1956, RA.

⁶⁴ Cf. Timo Luks, *Der Betrieb als Ort der Moderne: Zur Geschichte von Industriearbeit, Ordnungsdenken und Social Engineering im 20. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010).

⁶⁵ KB Bremen M, no. 101, (n.d.), RA, 1–2.

⁶⁶ Cf. Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten*, chap. 2.2.

⁶⁷ Birgit Mahnkopf, *Verbürgerlichung: Die Legende vom Ende des Proletariats* (Frankfurt a.M./New York: Campus Verlag, 1985), 187.

was for establishing an affirmative relation to oneself. Second, the workplace was an object of emotional attachment. Its cleanliness, climate, or working time regulations allowed the workers to regard it against the background of contemporary discourses on “modernity.” At the same time, the function of various things at the workplace – of machines particularly – has to be taken into account. Just as important, at least for the female workers, was a third issue: many of them stressed the significance of having good relations to both social groups, the coworkers and the supervisors and bosses. Having fun and singing together with coworkers and getting appreciation and benefits from superiors helped maintain an emotional regime within the company and made people work productively.

Without a doubt, the abstract concepts of productive work were important too. It is even likely that their significance increased in the second half of the twentieth century.⁶⁸ Yet, in the context of the vocational school compositions collected by the Roeßlers, they were seemingly far from being the only aspects of work with which people were expected and guided to form attachments. If we want to understand how and when the “work society” was established, we have to analyze more precisely the specific and changing contexts within which production was embedded. In so doing, we can also see that the monetary aspects of (industrial) jobs played a significant role for the students. On the one hand, necessity had been a major factor in causing people to work throughout the first half of the century.⁶⁹ As some of the texts show, this had not changed completely by the 1950s – despite the economic boom leading to ever-increasing salaries.⁷⁰ On the other hand, however, the benefits of consumerism apparently were an issue: some workers and employees went (window) shopping after work, others attended the movies. If we want to analyze the emotional attachments that made contemporary people work, we also have to take these additional – or rather, complementary – aspects of the contemporary “consumer and work societies” into account.

What do these findings imply for the history of emotions in market societies addressed in this volume? On a basic level, the modes of emotional attachment that I have described may occur in all industrial societies, not only in capitalist ones. The production of consumer and work societies and their specific objects of attachment has been a way of guiding subjects since the nineteenth century.⁷¹ Thus, if we want to analyze the role that emotions play in market societies, we have to look more closely at specific aspects of these societies, such as the market-based allocation of workers and goods. With this, capitalism has established a very powerful mode of guidance by depersonalizing social relations. In the sources ana-

⁶⁸ Cf. Bänziger, “Arbeits- zur Konsumgesellschaft,” 18–22.

⁶⁹ Cf. Jürgen Kocka, “Mehr Last als Lust: Arbeit und Arbeitsgesellschaft in der europäischen Geschichte,” *Zeitgeschichte-online*, January 2010, accessed 5th November 2015, <http://www.zeitgeschichte-online.de/thema/mehr-last-als-lust>; Canning, *Languages of Labor and Gender*, 258.

⁷⁰ Cf. Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten*, 100–108.

⁷¹ For this argument, see Bänziger, “Arbeits- zur Konsumgesellschaft.”

lyzed here, however, references to (labor) markets allude to jobholder and internal job markets, rather than to employer markets. Thinking of the increasing labor shortage in Germany since the mid-1950s, this may come as no surprise. Due to this, emotional guidance of the workforce may have become evermore important within this period.

Most of the vocational school students neither looked at themselves in terms of “human capital”⁷² or aspired to build a “career.” Due to the legally regulated and limited working time in industry, they may have preferred working at factories instead of at stores or domestic workplaces. Or they chose – and often had to choose – to start making their living immediately instead of completing an apprenticeship in order to earn more money in the long run. Nevertheless, searching for professional advancement by way of educating oneself at or after work was not an unknown idea for many of them. In so doing, some clearly pursued personal goals. To be able to pass the final exam was the main reason that this worker had fun at work: “My workplace is in a huge division, the so-called Ford-division. I am in the control department and it is my job to check the things the workers are making. This is a lot of fun, particularly when I find something that isn’t good, since I can at least prove that I can check everything correctly.”⁷³

However, such accounts do not necessarily point to market-oriented self-identifications. They rather show how people were made to work by way of increased responsibility: “He isn’t supposed to decide why the machine he was placed to is running,” Rudolf M. Lüscher writes, but “he has to decide how to get it started again when it stops running.”⁷⁴ This argument can be applied to market-based and other industrial modes of production and to workplaces within and outside the factory. Guidance by emotional attachments thus turns out to be a mode of subjectivation that is, first and foremost, modern.⁷⁵

⁷² Cf. Brigitta Bernet and David Gugerli, “Sputniks Resonanzen: Der Aufstieg der Humankapitaltheorie im Kalten Krieg – eine Argumentationsskizze,” *Historische Anthropologie* 19, no. 3 (2011): 433–46.

⁷³ MB Aachen U, no. 117, 20th January 1956, RA.

⁷⁴ Rudolf M. Lüscher, *Henry und die Krümelmonster: Versuch über den fordistischen Sozialcharakter* (Tübingen: C. Gehrke, 1988), 75.

⁷⁵ Cf. Ute Frevert et al., *Gefühlswissen: Eine lexikalische Spurensuche in der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus Verlag, 2011); and, with reference to work, Frevert, “Gefühle und Kapitalismus.”

