

Arbeit and Transformations in Workplace Structures: Three Post-Reunification German Novels

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Abstract. *Arbeit*, as one of the themes of culture is considered relevant and representative in the study of foreign literatures. Three German novels that were written in the second decade after reunification (2000–2010) and that have *Arbeit* as their main theme were selected as the material object of this research: *Das Jahr der Wunder* by Reiner Merkel (2001), *Wir schlafen nicht* by Kathrin Röggla (2004), and *Mobbing* by Annette Pehnt (2007). This research's main goal is to obtain a greater understanding of *Arbeit* as presented in these three novels, and to see how authors have responded to dynamic developments within the workplace in Germany, particularly since reunification. This study utilized a perspective of sociology of literature by summarizing various theories that mainly related to the conception *Arbeit* to become a major foothold in elucidating various aspects based on the objectives of this study. This research shows that, Normal workplace relations have slowly shifted to anomalous workplace relations, and as a result workers have lost an ever increasing number of rights. Workers have been consciously exploited within the workplace, and the social inequalities within the workforce have challenged not only workers' dignity, but also their very existence. As such, the three writers discussed here have promoted a more humanized *Arbeit*—one which recognizes human dignity as central to its conceptual framework—for modern society.

Keywords: *Arbeit*, German Novels, Post-Reunification.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Politiklexikon* (Schubert & Klein, 2011), the word *Arbeit* ('work') is defined as a specific physical or intellectual activity undertaken by humans to obtain important resources necessary for maintaining their existence. The word *Arbeit* itself has found widespread currency and transformed into an important theme in various sectors of human life, a fact attributable to the relatively rapid transformations in the workplace structure (*Strukturwandel der Arbeitswelt*). In modern history, *Arbeit* as a theme began to emerge with the industrial revolution, which began in Britain (1750–1850 CE) but soon spread throughout western Europe and then around the globe (Bell, 1969). As a theme of culture, *Arbeit* has a long history in the German literary tradition. Even in the middle ages, the theme could frequently be found in works of German literature (Gentry, 1978). Over time, during the classical Weimar, realism, and naturalism periods, *Arbeit* had its own thematic forms and tendencies (Fetscher, 2008; Berghahn & Müller, 1979). In the 20th century, *Arbeit* became more prominent in various literary genres. According to Eggerstorfer (1988), in his book *Schönheit und Adel der Arbeit: Arbeitsliteratur im Dritten Reich*, the release of Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter, Herrschaft und Gestalt* in 1932 marked the first use of the *Arbeit* theme in the National Socialist (Nazi) era, where it was depicted as a fundamental force for freedom.

Following the Second World War (1939–1945), Germany was divided into two states: the German Democratic Republic, better known as East Germany, and the Federal Republic of Germany, better known as West Germany. In this divided Germany, the theme of *Arbeit* gained different nuances. In East Germany, *Arbeit* frequently colored domestic literary works until German reunification (*Wiedervereinigung*) in 1990. The situation differed in West Germany, where *Arbeit* ceased being a central theme in the 1970s, as stated by Nowak (1977) in his *Arbeiter und Arbeit in der westdeutschen Literatur 1945–1961*. However, in the 1990s, following German reunification, *Arbeit* returned as a central theme in social and literary life. Since the mid-1990s, many works of German literature have discussed the theme of *Arbeit*, not only as a sub-theme but a central topic. In eastern Germany, various writers began to critically examine *Arbeit* in their works, including Angela Krauß (*Sommer auf dem Eis*, 1998), Christoph Hein (*Willenbrock*, 2000), and Volker Braun (*Machwerk oder Das Schichtbuch des Flick von Lauchhammer*, 2008). Hein and Braun wrote multiple dramatic works centered on the theme of *Arbeit*. Furthermore, the theme has been subject to discussion from several writers who left East Germany in the 1980s, including Katja Lauge-Müller (*Die Letzten*, 2000) and Monika Maron (*Endmoränen*, 2002).

In the context of the New Economy and the situation in the workplace two decades after German Reunification, three novels are discussed in this article—*Das Jahr der Wunder* (Merkel, 2001), *Wir schlafen nicht* (Röggla, 2004), and *Mobbing* (Pehnt, 2007). These are not, however, the sole works dealing with *Arbeit*. Others include Ernst-Wilhelm Händler's *Wenn wir sterben* (2002); Rolf Dobelli's *Und was machen Sie beruflich?* (2004); and Jakob Hein's *Herr Jansen Steigt Aus* (2006). The latter of these depict protagonists who attempts to give meaning to life outside work. From the above discussion, it is readily apparent that the theme of *Arbeit* is

not a new one in German literature. However, literary interest in economics and finance has only increased over the past decade, as evidenced by the frequency of novels centered on economic themes (read: *Arbeit*). This is not surprising, given that understandings of *Arbeit* change with dynamic developments in society. In other words, *Arbeit* is a highly contextual theme open to academic exploration.

RESEARCH METHOD

The corpus in this research consisted of three German novels that were born in the second decade after reunification, namely: *Das Jahr der Wunder* (Merkel, 2001); *wir schlafen nicht* (Röggla, 2004); and *Mobbing* (Pehnt, 2008). Determination of the three novels is done by considering: First, the year of issuance of the novels; Second, the 'thickness' *Arbeit*-theme as a formal object in the novels. That is, *Arbeit* really became the main theme (Hauptthema) and not merely as a side theme (Nebenthema); Third, the realist elements contained in the work, both in the setting, plot, and characterization.

The data sources in this research consist of two categories namely, primary data (read: three German novels) and secondary data sources in the form of texts from the study of various fields of science, especially studies of sociology, economics, politics, and history. These fields are needed in order to see the *Arbeit* context outside the work. This becomes important, because the nature of the study of sociological literature always moves from the study of structure in the text to the study of structures outside the text (read: the structure of society). The data collection is the "text analysis" method, that is, first, analysing to linguistic units - whether in the form of words, phrases, sentences or discourse - which are significant in the three German novels as primary data. The next step is to analyze the important elements in building a novel, both from the aspect of plot, setting, characterization, point of view until finally it comes to a deeper analysis of the theme. The critical reading process is also treated for secondary data by paying attention to the character of each text.

The data that has been collected is then analyzed descriptively analytically. This analysis technique begins by describing all the facts found in the corpus of research as a source of primary data and secondary data found outside the text. These data are then analyzed in such a way as to find answers to all research questions both concerning understanding of the *Arbeit* conception, criticism and ideology carried by each author in addressing changes in the structure of the world of work that occurred in Germany after reunification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transformations in Workplace Structures

Work and employment, as sources of income and necessary resources, are likened by Dettling (2000:201) to an anchor, as they offer social security and specific standards of living and reinforce certain economic and social investments. Through work and employment, social structures are created that imbue human life with rhythm. The success of industrial societies such as Germany, according to Dettling, can be attributed to harmony between the economic, cultural, and social sectors.

Industrial societies have transformed into socially integrated ones, reaching the peak of their success in the 1960s and 1970s. In this era, industrial communities did not recognize long-term unemployment that required social safety nets.

In the 1980s, owing to the rapid developments in technology and science, the workplace structures created through early industrialization efforts began experiencing extensive transformations, while available jobs decreased dramatically in number. The digital revolution led to decreased need for human labor, and Germany began transitioning from an industrial society to an information society. Communication networks, particularly the internet, began playing an increasingly important role in social life. During this period, unemployment levels increased drastically, particularly in West Germany. In response, polemics regarding the end of labor society became common. This discourse, however, has been rejected by Dettling (2000: 204), who emphasizes that, although the quality and volume of labor has changed, various types of labor have yet to find their place in society, and there is thus the potential for economic and workplace growth. Dettling's argument is echoed by Kocka (2001: 11), who states that many types of work can be found in society, though these may not necessarily rely on market mechanisms.

According to Kocka (2001), the industrial nations of Europe, including Germany, have experienced a revolutionary change in three sectors: market/corporation, family/household, and State/politics. Kocka notes, for example, that the standard of men (particularly fathers) earning an income while women (mothers) focus on housework was never firmly enforced. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, women who worked in the family and domestic sector were not categorized as *Erwerbsarbeit*. However, since the 1970s, there has been extensive regulation, and thus the aforementioned types of labor are classified as *Erwerbsarbeit* and protected by the State. Furthermore, decreasing birth rates have reduced need for domestic labor, leading to more women becoming involved in the workplace. Such transformations, according to Kocka (2001), will continue to have broader impact, rather than lead to the end of labor society.

Another shift experienced by present-day German society is workplace fragmentation, both temporal and spatial. Kocka (2001) recognizes modern workplaces and workplace relations as being increasingly flexible. Work places and times are no longer sharply defined. On the one hand, this has created new constellations and formations within the workplace. The rise of mass communications, for instance, has allowed the development of a new form of labor known as outwork (*Heimarbeit*), a model that allows the unison of (office) work and household or family labor. However, on the other hand, according to Kocka (2001) workers face greater career risks, an uncertainty in employment and workplace relations or "*Prekarisierung der Arbeitsverhältnisse*". According to Vogel (2008), the term *prekarität* (precariat) best describes the social disparities in modern-day workplaces. Vogel identifies this precariat as a new manifestation of the proletariat, differentiated only by political nuance.

Discussion of the precariat, according to Vogel (2008), is particularly important as its presence is no longer sporadic or periodic, but permanent. Furthermore, the precariat are no longer limited to low-paying simple laborers; the

term increasingly encompasses qualified and high-ranking workplace positions. The precariat has become ensconced within modern industrial societies such as Germany.

From these structural changes in the workplace, a shift in the concept of *Arbeit* or work—from human relations to outsourcing—is readily apparent (Füllsack, 2009). Füllsack explains that a humanistic view of work, imbued with a Calvinistic ethos, had been central to the industrial European society. Questions of corporate identity and corporate solidarity prominently shaped corporations' and industries' working relations. In this system, corporations functioned primarily to create a familial workplace for their employees and motivate them to increase their productivity. In other words, corporations were socially responsible for the welfare of their employees. As such, social facilities—houses, schools, hospitals, etc.—were built around factories.

Geographically, corporations were the center of their employees' lives, or *das Dasein der Arbeiter* (Haas, 2011:26). However, over time, it became apparent that corporate dedication to workers' welfare had a significant financial impact on corporations and represented an expensive investment. To overcome this, the principle of corporate identity—with workers expected to make sacrifices for their employer for the possibility of increased wages—was developed, with smaller groups collaborating to support the corporation. These working groups developed into autonomous specialist ones, no longer integral to their corporations but independently contracted for short-term projects. This form of labor is termed outsourcing, and allows corporations to shed their administrative and organizational accountability for as well as their social responsibility to workers. Such outsourcing, realized in workplace relations identified with *prekär*, has spread around the globe.

The Precariat as the New Proletariat: Transformations of Practica

The precariat, as a social group in digital-era Germany, are clearly presented in the three novels discussed here. Practica, as a real manifestation of precariat creation emerging from developments in science and technology, are broadly criticized by these novels' authors. The presence of *praktikant* (practica participants) in *Das Jahr der Wunder* (Merkel, 2001), *Wir Schlafen Nicht* (Röggla, 2004), and *Mobbing* (Pehnt, 2007) strongly signals the interest of these novels' authors in practica and their practice. Merkel, in *Das Jahr der Wunder* (2001), presents the *Praktikantin*, who is predicted to undergo his practicum for thirteen years. This is an extraordinarily long time for practica work, as such positions are generally only held during university or at most for several years afterwards. The extensive duration of this practicum indicates not only the increasingly heated competition, particularly between academics, in the digital era, but also reinforces the impression that practica have transformed into "permanent" positions. This has allowed capital holders to readily recruit professional academic staff with relatively low wages. This is reinforced by Stolz (2005), whose survey of 3,320 job offers on the website 'Jobpilot' found 1,560 offers for full-time positions, with the remainder for practica positions; in other words, corporations offer more practica positions

than full-time ones. Furthermore, during an exhibition in Berlin, twenty-four corporations offered practica positions, but only four promised wages.

For Rögglä, the situation with practica is concerning. Through the character of Nicole Damaschke, Rögglä shows the sad life of a *praktikant* who is unable to pay for her health insurance—a basic necessity in Germany—because she receives no funding from the corporation with whom she works (Rögglä, 2004: 89). Through this character, Rögglä criticizes the suffering of the *praktikant* who are incapable of affording basic insurance, let alone her other necessities. For Nicole Damaschke, earning a wage for her work appears to be nothing but a dream: *sie könne nur träumen von einem volontariat, träumen von einen bezahlten praktikum, träumen von fixgehältern und bestehenden arbeitsvertrag*. (She could only dream of work, of paid practica, dream earning a fixed income through contract work. [Rögglä, 2004: 88]).

The economic adversity experienced by *praktikant* is not limited to their wages. It also includes the limited opportunity for obtaining permanent work. Stolz (2005) shows that corporations tend to offer more practica vacancies than opportunities for permanent employment. As such, not all workers accepted for practica positions can receive permanent gainful employment. Rögglä criticizes this situation through the character of Nicole Damaschke, who experiences similar limited opportunities (Rögglä, 2001: 12). As Nicole narrates, potential employees are expected not only to have soft skills, but also specialized skills and workplace experience in their field—experience that is extremely difficult to obtain, given the limited opportunities for practica work. Under these conditions, workers increasingly suspect that capital holders deliberately create and preserve the status quo to ensure they can continue hiring workers who will accept low wages. Stolz (2005) shows that practica—initially understood as a means for gaining experience before truly entering the workforce—have become understood as sources of cheap labor: *Früher sollten Praktikanten bloß Efrahrungen für ihr künftiges Berufsleben sammeln. Heute werden sie als billige Arbeitskräfte eingesetzt*. (Before, the *praktikant* only gained experience for their own future careers. Today they are viewed as nothing but cheap labor).

The functional transformation of practica into a means of acquiring cheap labor cannot easily be mitigated, and the social gap within German society cannot readily be reduced. This fact is reinforced by the concept of *Arbeit* itself, which is viewed as an absolute requirement for one's inclusion in or exclusion from society. Owing to this understanding, those who have yet to find permanent employment feel compelled to continue their practica, thus avoiding unemployment (*arbeitslos*).

Furthermore, the problem of practica have yet to receive serious political attention from the German government. This is apparent from the minimal statistics available on the *praktikan*, including their number, duration of service, and output. This is not surprising, as such data is considered of little importance by the government, given that such persons are not categorized as unemployed and thus not legally the government's responsibility. The *praktikant* are considered to have never been employed (i.e. with a contract or *Arbeitsvertrag*), and thus cannot be categorized as unemployed. As such, they cannot receive unemployment benefits (*Arbeitslosengeld*) or start-up loans (*Startgeld auf eine Ich-AG*) from the government.

For Merkel, thirteen years as a *praktikant*, is evidence that the government has not seriously attempted to overcome the problems faced by the *praktikan*. As such, Rögglä has attempted to highlight their suffering and draw attention to their needs. Social identity and political policy combine to reinforce the sad and dilemmatic existence of the *praktikant* while simultaneously offering capital holders the opportunity to maximize profits by extensively utilizing *practica*. *Praktikan*, who have been reimagined as "cheap" labor, are an example of social disparity and inequality in the modern workforce.

The Marginalization of Private Life

Historically, structural separation between *Arbeit* and private life has long been expected in modern society, and even in the current digital era such structural separation is still considered an important principle (see Jürgens & Voß, 2007: 9). The structural separation of work and leisure developed together with government stability during the twentieth century, particularly following the world wars. The marked distinction between *Arbeit* and *Leben* (leisure, private life) is manifested in various binary terms, including *Öffentlich* and *Privat*, *Arbeitszeit* and *Freizeit*, as well as *Familie* and *Beruf*. However, in principle, *Arbeit* refers to the production of goods and provision of services to earn the resources necessary for continued existence (*Erwerbsarbeit*). *Arbeit*, thus, is considered a productive activity. Meanwhile, private life, or leisure, is understood as all non-productive (i.e. reproductive) activities. These activities tend to be more personal and informal, and may involve childrearing, family activities, and other activities intended to escape the routine of *Erwerbsarbeit*. In other words, private life is a means for biological and/or social reproduction, through which the continuation of humanity is ensured. The marginalization of private life, thus, threatens the continued existence of humanity.

Concern for the increased marginalization of private life, and its threat to humanity's continued existence, is frequently expressed by authors through their works. Rögglä (2004), for example, criticizes the increasingly marginalized position of private life through the character of Silke Mertens, a 37-year-old key account manager who is frankly described as having no private life: "*sie habe kein Privatleben*" (she had no private life [Rögglä, 2004: 72]). Silke views everything as work, as if there is nothing to life except *Arbeit*. A similar experience is had by Andrea Bülow, a 42-year-old Online Editor (*Online-Redakteurin*) who lacks even the semblance of a private life. In his everyday communications, Andrea no longer used the pronoun "du" (non-formal you), but "Sie" (formal you) to maintain formal relations. The workplace atmosphere has permeated every aspect of his language. Owing to his constant sense of exhaustion, he no longer has the opportunity to visit bars or other venues for entertainment. Rögglä's criticism of the increased marginalization of private life is also manifested through Nicole Damaschke, a 24-year-old *praktikantin*. From the beginning, Nicole Damaschke dedicated herself to her work. She promised that, once she had found employment: "*was sollte man schon sagen –letztendlich würde sie gerne weniger Privatleben haben und mehr ein ordentliches Berufsleben,*" (what could people say if she preferred having less of a personal life and focusing her struggles on work [Rögglä, 2004: 72]). Similar concerns are realized through the character of Oliver Hannes Bender, a 32-year-old

senior associate who, owing to his extraordinary workplace pressures, doubts that he can ever have a personal life (Röggla, 2004: 70).

The increased dominance of *Arbeit* and its threat to humanity is readily apparent in the characters presented by Röggla. Social reproductions are increasingly limited, as are humans' mobility. They are active solely within the workplace, and therefore lack the time to establish broader social networks. Their biological reproductive activities are similarly hampered, and thus family life, as part of private life, becomes a rarity. The "normal" activity of starting a family is no longer an easy one; in fact, it may be entirely impossible. This situation is recognized by the character of Oliver Hannes Bender (Röggla, 2004: 70). Despite his high mobility within the workplace, he doubts his ability to eventually start a family.

der senior associate: er schwöre ja auf fernbeziehung. das wäre noch lebbar neben der beruflichen belastung. aber so ein normales familienleben ginge nicht. das könne er sich nicht vorstellen. gut, da sei er auch noch ein wenig zu jung dazu, aber wenn er einmal eine familie gründen werde, würde er die ab und zu schon mal sehen wollen. und wie solle das machbar sein, wenn man andauern unterwegs sei. das sage sich ja so einfach: »friday in, monday out.« dabei stimme es ja gar nicht, und wenn es doch mal klappe, müsse am wochenende nachgearbeitet werden. also wenn er jetzt ehrlich sein solle, er bekomme seine wohnung kaum noch zu gesicht, also ihn würde es nicht wundern, wenn er sie eienes tages nicht mehr fände. also mit dem familienleben ginge bei ihm nicht. (Röggla, 2004: 70-71).

senior associate. He strongly believed in long-distance relationships. That was still possible, even with the pressures of work. But a normal family life was impossible. He couldn't imagine that... and he was still quite young for that. But if one day he did start a family, he would have to think about how to work it, if all the time he was working outside the house. As they said, "friday in, monday out". Of course, that was not wholly true, but it was still possible for people to work through the weekend. So he wanted to be honest now. He hadn't thought about a home, so it wouldn't be a surprise if he couldn't be found one day. So it appeared family life was still impossible for him.

Family life, as a means of biological reproduction to ensure the continued survival of humanity, is frequently presented by Röggla to indicate that, although private life exists, it faces extraordinary pressure. Persons who desire a family life must seek compromises within the current *Arbeit* culture. Mr. Geringer, who has a wife and two children, is one example of the continued existence of private life. However, Mr. Geringer's family is far from the "normal" one expected in previous eras, which emphasized firm distinctions between work and leisure. Röggla refers to Mr. Geringer's family as *Wochenendbeziehung*, as "weekend relations". His family is only able to endure owing to intense telephone communications throughout the week, through which he supervises his family and his children's development. Mr. Geringer's "weekend relations" give the impression that the marginalization of private life is occurring not only spatially, but also temporally. Leisure, which could once be experienced every day after work, must be suspended until the weekend.

The marginalization of private life in present-day society, and its potential consequences for the continued survival of humanity, is no mere threat; its effects are apparent in present-day Germany. This can be seen through six characters presented by Rögglä. Although all are of productive ages, only one character—Mr. Gehringer—has a family. This is a real threat faced by German society, where the productive-age population has tended to decrease over time, a fact attributable to the difficulty of starting a family while dealing with workplace pressures. Many Germans put off marriage and having children, or decide not to have children (see Jürgen & Voß, 2007: 6).

The dominance of *Arbeit* over private life, as depicted by Rögglä, is fundamentally an inequity in the workplace. For Rögglä, success in the productive sector cannot truly be realized without success in the private sector (i.e. in one's private life). Rögglä's emphasis on striking a balance between *Arbeit* and leisure is apparent through the character of Mr. Gehringer, who as a stockholder holds a strategic position at the corporation but also heads a successful household. This ability to balance his work life and private life is ultimately a consequence of Mr. Gehringer's ability to plan his own life. From this, it is apparent that Rögglä considers dynamic developments in the workplace to force workers to realize and manifest their own private lives. Governments and corporations are no longer capable of ensuring workers have leisure time, unlike in previous generations. Workers are thus responsible for their own private lives, and managing their time is part of their personal performance (*Leistung der Person*). The ability to manifest a private life, as realized by Herr Gehringer, is increasingly needed within the workplace. From a sociological perspective, as expressed by Jürgen and Voß (2007: 9), advancement in the workplace requires networking, i.e. broad social networks. Such networks can only be established through sufficient leisure time. Having such leisure time, thus, is an invaluable personal resource.

Reinforcing Humanism through *Arbeit*

Authors' desire to restore the humanistic goals of *Arbeit* are based in their concern for the fall of human dignity in the face of extensive rationalization in the workplace. The rise of *practica* and other forms of *prekär* labor are likewise viewed with concern, particularly since workplaces have increasingly replaced human labor with mechanical labor. As this process continues, factories will be increasingly devoid of humans and human labor. Seeing this tendency, Ulrich Beck wrote: "*Wer verspricht, ein Rezept gegen die Arbeitslosigkeit zu haben, sagt die Unwahrheit.*" (Whoever offer a recipe for overcoming unemployment is offering nothing but lies. [Beck, 2000: 7]). Beck's view is reinforced by the current workplace situation, which is inseparable from the problem of unemployment. When a company or corporation is facing bankruptcy and insolvency, according to Beck (2000) the most logical step is to dismiss workers. Conversely, when a company or corporation is experiencing growth, it will invest in mechanization and automation—thus ultimately leading to the dismissal of employees.

The question, then, is where human workers should be positioned. This is a difficult question to answer today, and various thinkers have yet to agree on a solution. However, this phenomenon also illustrates the dynamics of labor,

particularly in Germany. In the past, human workers were greatly required and widely available. However, presently the opposite holds true: more jobs are necessary to employ more people. Overcoming this situation poses a unique challenge, as machines are capable of working more quickly, more accurately, and more cheaply than humans.

Such conditions imply Karl Marx's concept of *verstorbene Arbeit* ("dead labor", in Negt, 2011: 5), which was developed after Marx began investigating various elements of capitalism. Marx argued that "dead labor" degrades workers and smother any hopes to create a humanistic society. Marx's concern is reflected in the three novels discussed here, although the question of dead labor is not foregrounded within them. The authors discussed here focus primarily on the effects of increased competition within the workforce, which emerges from increasingly limited employment opportunities and affronts to human dignity. Similar in the concerns of Marx and the authors discussed here is the fact that no solutions to questions of dignity or employment are available within the framework of capitalism. Although technology should serve the interests of humankind, it is humans who are being exploited by technology. Likewise, rather than increase human dignity, *Arbeit* is used for exploitation. This condition has drawn the concern of the authors discussed here, who seem to depict, through their novels, an unremarkable workplace while simultaneously highlighting the conceptual shifts undergone by *Arbeit*. The relationship between dignity and employment, which should be linear, has instead worked to distance workers from humanistic values.

As depicted in the three novels discussed here, *Arbeit* reinforces existing inequalities within society. As argued by Merkel (in Ebbinghaus, 2001), *Arbeit* is viewed as a *Fetisch*, a talisman inseparable from humanity. On the one hand, persons who have lost their *Arbeit* will feel marginalized or superfluous. On the other hand, persons who have employment will feel themselves imprisoned by their jobs. Such a dilemma is faced by the characters in all three of the novels analyzed here. Working, on the one hand, allows workers to become accepted in social in-groups. On the other hand, once that employment is lost (i.e. once someone enters unemployment) workers feel as though a great burden has been lifted. This is evident in Jo's statement upon being dismissed.

Wenn das Schlimmste passiert, muss man sich endlich nicht mehr davor fürchten, sagte Jo.

Sehr weise, sagte ich. Haben sie dich rausgeschmissen oder was.

Genau, sagte Jo triumphierend." (Pehnt, 2007: 5)

Even if the most difficult things happen, people no longer need to be afraid, said Jo. That's wise, I said. So they let you go?

Yes, said Jo victoriously.

Jo's loss of employment is greeted with triumph (*triumphierend*) rather than loss or regret. This signals that, for Jo, work is a heavy burden, even as it offers in-group access. The way Germans accept this condition (read: dismissal from their place of employment) is frequently similar. Persons who have lost their jobs will frequently comment, "*Ich wurde entlassen, geil! Endlich habe ich Zeit, jeden Tag auf Parties zu gehen, braucht nicht mehr aus der Mikrowelle zu essen und kann ausgiebig*

vögeln." (I've been fired, excellent! Finally I have plenty of time to party, without eating microwaved food, and pass the days away. [Beck, 2000, 110]). This dilemmatic condition is exacerbated by the low job security (read: minimal availability of *Vollzeitbeschäftigung* or full-time employment, as experienced by the characters, whose employment system relies on renewable contracts), which leads some to fear they may lose their jobs with little notice.

The dilemma of *Arbeit* is particularly evident from transformations in the mindsets of various characters. Pride in one's work has been replaced under the influences of capital (i.e. money), which has become the end-goal of all labor. In the digital era, which is dominated by the service sector (*Dienstleistungs-Sektor*)—as depicted in the three novels analyzed here—workers are not able to exclaim with pride that their work is important and highly necessary. Essentially, all of their work serves as a complement to and component of mechanical processes. As stated by Beck (2000:32–33), in the modern era there is no reason for someone to take pride in their work; even doctors serve but as (medicine) sales agents for pharmaceutical consortiums. In the current atmosphere, the question is no longer a job's importance, but the amount of money it earns. *Arbeit* is no longer viewed as beneficial to society and humanity, but solely as a means of obtaining necessary capital (*Geld ist das Ziel der Arbeit* [money is the desired goal of work]). This mindset is thought to contribute to increased unemployment rates, as by positioning money as the end-goal of all work, any types of work that are "unable to earn money" are marginalized or even negated.

The functional value of *Arbeit* has shifted, becoming increasingly material and money-centered. As such, skepticism has emerged regarding different types of employment, despite these types of employment having fundamental functions for promoting humanity and humanism. In *Mobbing*, for example, Jo's wife (Pehnt, 2007) handles household duties (*Hausarbeit*). She washes clothes, cleans the house, and cooks for her family, but receives little recognition. Likewise, she takes care of her two children at home, reads them fairy tales and accompanies them to *kindergarten* (*Erziehungsarbeit*). None of this is classified as *Arbeit* under the current system, despite such work being more tiring and time-consuming than paid labor. Such work remains common, but entirely lacks social prestige.

Owing to the concept of *Geld ist das Ziel der Arbeit*, the characters in the three novels discussed here live lives of pretense within a massive collective illusion. Although they do not desire to dedicate themselves to *Arbeit*, facing the pressures of *Arbeit* and the need for *geld* they focus their time and efforts on earning as much money as possible. Ultimately, the time allocated to working in honesty (read: outside of pretense) is limited. The act of lying to oneself for one's *Arbeit* is depicted by Rögglä through the character of Oliver Hannes Bender, a senior associate:

der senior associate: also für ihn wäre das nichts. er habe ja pause gemacht, er habe ja durchaus schon mal eine auszeit genommen, er habe sich gedacht: warum nicht? eine weile mal nichts tun, könne er sich vorstellen. mal ein kind aufzuziehen, mal ein buch zu schreiben oder etwas anderes für sich zu tun? warum auch nicht, habe er sich gedacht, und was habe er gemacht? gar nichts habe er gemacht, d.h. er habe probleme

bekommen - »ist doch logisch.« menschen, die gewohnt seien, über 14 stunden am tag auf druck zu arbeiten, die könnten das nicht einfach abstellen, die setzten das fort. die würden sich immer situationen suchen, in denen sich dieser streß von alleine wieder einstelle." (Röggla, 2004: 169).

The senior associate: for him (leisure) didn't happen. He'd rested, he'd taken leave, he'd thought: why not? For a while he'd do nothing. Occassionally he'd take care of children, work on a book, or spoil himself. Why not, he thought... and what did he do? None of it. It meant there was a problem. And this was logical. People who were used to working fourteen hours a day, under pressure, couldn't easily stop. They had to keep working. They had to try and find a way to overcome workplace stress.

Oliver Hannes Bender's desire appears clear and logical; if possible, he would do all kinds of work that have long been excluded from the category of *Arbeit* in the *Geld* system, such as child-rearing activities (*Erziehungsarbeit*) and leisure (*Regenerationsarbeit*). However, pressured to continue *Arbeit* (read: earn money), this is impossible for him. Bender feels himself trapped by *Arbeit*. Expected to work fourteen hours every day, Bender has no opportunity for any other activities. The idea of non-work related activities is nothing, for him, but a pipe dream; even when he has the opportunity for leisure activities, he hesitates. The idea of leaving work and dedicating himself to leisure had left his mind entirely. If possible, Bender would rather work sixteen hours a day than leave his work: „*da arbeite er lieber seine 16 stunden durch. also kurz gesagt: nein, so einfach abschalten, das ginge eben nicht.*" (He wanted to work for sixteen hours a day. In short, just taking a holiday, no... he couldn't do that. [Röggla, 2004: 171]).

A similar situation is experienced by Silke Mertens, a key account manager who is depicted as trapped by her work:

„key account managerin: ja, das sage sich so leicht, eine auszeit nehmen, einfach mal abschalten. als käme man dann automatisch auf urlaubsgedanken, aber auf so urlaubsgedanken kommen man nicht, und wenn sie mal urlaub habe, würde sie auch nicht an diesen urlaub denken, im gegenteil, sie werde dann nervös. bzw. letzten sei sie andauernd nervös gewesen. sie habe einfach nicht abschalten können und habe immer im büro angerufen, ob dies und das schon erledigt wäre. ob man an dies oder das gedacht hätte. und die seien natürlich umgekehrt auch ständig mit ihren problemen angekommen. also im endeffekt sei sie dann doch dauernd im büro gewesen, obwohl es ihre auszeit gewesen sei." (Röggla, 2004: 171).

Key account manager: Yes, it's very easy for me to talk about it, take leave, free from the workplace routine. As if ideas about holidays will come on their own. But for her, the idea of a holiday never came. When she went on vacation, the opposite happened. She felt anxious throughout her holiday. She could not simply keep away from her office affairs. She would regularly call her office and ask whether this or that had been done, whether the people there had thought about one thing or another. This was the opposite of what should happen, but it continued to be her a problem. As a result, it was as if she remained at the office, despite being on vacation.

Silke Mertens appears uncomfortable, even when she is on holiday. She is unable to enjoy her holiday or escape the workplace routine. Even when her

physical form is outside the office, her mind and soul remain. *Auszeit*, or leave, has taken a different meaning for Silke Mertens. If told to take a short holiday, she would not understand this as an invitation to rest or relax; she would infer this as a statement that her presence at the office was no longer required: „*freiwillig würde sie sich auch keine auszeit nehmen, sie wüßte nicht warum. wenn jemand zu ihr sage: »sie sollten mal eine auszeit nehmen«, heiße das doch nur: »du wirst hier nicht mehr gebracht.«*“ (She wouldn't willingly take a holiday. She didn't know why. If someone told her, "You would best take a holiday", she would only hear "you're no longer needed here." [Röggla, 2004: 173]).

Arbeit being a location where freedom is stifled is also shown by Annette Peht in her novel. Jo, upon receiving a letter of severance, considers it a form of release:

„*Dabei hätte er doch jetzt Zeit. Jetzt könnte er all die Dinge tun, die er sich schon lange vorgenommen hat. Er könnte laufen, Halbmarathon, Marathon, er könnte sich mit chinesischer Geschichte und Philosophie beschäftigen, er könnte schreiben, irgendetwas schreiben, etwas Kürzeres, etwas Längeres, ein Kinderbuch, einen Essay, ich habe ihm ein Klavierbuch geschenkt, mit dem er sich selbst Klavier beibringen könnte.*“ (Pehnt, 2007: 6-7).

Now he had time. Now he had done everything he had been planning. He could run a marathon, or half of one. He could learn Chinese history and philosophy. He could write, write anything. Something short, long, a children's book or essay. I'd given him a piano book. He could study on his own, with that book."

Through their characters, Röggla and Peht strongly show the involvement of *Arbeit* in shaping and controlling actors. *Arbeit* controls every aspect of workers, without leaving any space for non-work related activities. Bender, Mertens, and Jo, none of whom appear to enjoy rights—even over themselves—provide ample evidence of the loss of humanity and dignity in the workplace. The freedom to act in one's own interests and to seek happiness, without intervention from others, is a fundamental characteristic of independent being. Bender and Mertens, however, exist within a totalitarian system that rejects their desires, and are compelled by the dogma of *Arbeit* to dedicate themselves entirely to their work.

The above-discussed depictions of the workplace's detrimental effect on human dignity signals to readers the need to transform or at least mitigate the current situation. The three authors discussed here do not blame the current unsatisfactory situation on capitalism, which is prominent through all three novels, nor do they explicitly condemn the capitalist system that has so greatly influenced the characters. They simply try to show that, although present-day society has experienced extraordinary progress, it has not been enjoyed by those within the system; rather, workers and other actors have been subjugated. All three authors attempt to construct an ideal *gute Arbeit*, in which workers' rights and obligations are wholly protected. Through aesthetic mechanisms, the three German authors discussed here have attempted to manifest greater humanism in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

The three novels discussed within this article are considered reflections of the social conditions being experienced by German society in the second decade after reunification (2000–2010), in which the New Economy system has brought Germany into a new chapter of its history. In this era, the manufacturing sector that had once dominated the German workforce was replaced by service sector (*Dienstleistungsbereiche*), while technological developments and innovations became increasingly important for economic success. These developments have had extensive and transformative implications for workplace structures (*Strukturwandel der Arbeitswelt*) in Germany.

Although the authors discussed here used different perspectives and storytelling techniques, all three (Merkel, Röggl, and Pehnt) share an understanding of the injustice and exploitation present in the workforce, which contribute to the extensive socio-economic disparities within social life. The effects of transformations in workplace conditions are not simply felt directly by workers; they have a broad negative impact on human dignity and the human condition. The construction of *Arbeit* presented through these three novels indicates the emergence of new workplace relations, anomalous ones recognized as "*atypische Arbeitsverhältnisse*". Consequently, workers' identities are slowly eroded, as are clear career paths. Concerns for a dark future, thus, becomes not solely the purview of the unemployed, but also those who have found employment within the new system.

The construction of *Arbeit* reflected in the three novels analyzed here indicates that *Arbeit* has been conceptually reinforced. For German society (read: in the novels), *Arbeit* is everything. *Arbeit* is life. *Arbeit* is the main filter through which individual and community existence are understood. Without *Arbeit*, members of society face marginalization and ostracization. *Arbeit* determines in-group and out-group membership within society. As such, the prestige of *Arbeit* has only increased, forcing all involved to utilize their potential entirely to maintain their in-group status. As a result, increased competitiveness has emerged within the workplace.

Higher education is an answer to this demand. However, those who have obtained such educations rarely obtain gainful employment within the workforce, and must therefore undergo years of *practica* to avoid becoming trapped within social outgroups. *Practica* have thus become places of "temporary" shelter from the threat of unemployment. Over time, capital holders have developed *practica* further into sources of greater profit. Through *practica*, capital holders gain access to highly qualified workers without having to provide them with the same wages as full-time employees. The utopia of modern life, motored by a capitalistic model that preaches the creation of a "society of masters" where all live lives of pleasure, has instead trapped workers in "modern slavery".

Through their novels, these three writers attempt to challenge their readers, to create awareness of the social inequality and subjugation of human dignity being created through *Arbeit*. Developments in science and technology must be used to promote human needs and freedom, rather than subjugate and exploit humanity or

control every aspect of human life. In other words, the three authors discussed above desire the humanization of *Arbeit* within German society, which will in turn promote human dignity within the workplace.

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