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Alienation och Arbete

Unga behovsanställdas villkor i den flexibla kapitalismen

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate how flexible capitalism, drawing from the case of on-call employees, influences the ability to control life and work and affects relationships with other people, both inside and outside work; and to investigate how this can be understood in terms of alienation. A subsidiary aim that emerges from this investigation is to develop existing alienation theories in a way that enables them to be used to understand human existence under flexible capitalism.

Alienation is understood as a process in which something that should be connected has lost its connection: it is a relation of relationlessness. This raises three questions: How can we decide what a relation "ought" to be? What relations are being alienated and what is causing these relations to become relationless?

In the thesis I use an immanent perspective to identify the "ought" in the studied context: the capitalist mode of production. For value to exist it is required that man is, as Marx puts it in *Capital*, "the free proprietor of his own labour-capacity, hence of his own person". Thus, there is a premise of self-determination in capitalism. A premise which, because of man's need to create value and the fact that her activity must be subordinated to the value logic, cannot be realized. This applies to everyone in our society, capitalists and labourers alike, and alienates man from her activity, herself, others and her product. This is understood as *abstract alienation*. On a concrete and specific level the control of how to reach this value-goal and to what extent this affects the individual's life may differ depending on how value production takes place and the individual's position in production. I call this *concrete alienation* and it can be understood as the concrete expression of the abstract alienation. In this way, alienation is neither a purely structural nor a purely subjective phenomenon. It can be both.

Following changes in the accumulation regime the concrete alienation has transformed during the last decades, which is expressed in the on-call employees' situation. Based on an analysis of 17 in-depth interviews I conclude that their subjective motifs of being in the employment differ and their employment is objectively shaped differently. The objective and subjective dimensions are the basis for understanding on-call employees' alienation at a concrete level. Drawing from Jaeggi's qualified subjectivism I argue that since a premise of capitalism is self-determination, the individual must have a say in their situation and experience. If an individual feels that she can't control her life she is thus alienated from the premise of self-determination. If she feels that she can control her life but this feeling is not realised, meaning that there is no objective possibility to control or steer her life, there is no self-determination and thus alienation persists even though it is not perceived. The result tells us that on-call employment can be used both as a way to increase the freedom and self-determination over one's life and hinder it, it can instrumentalise life and work in a specific way, and it can hinder the control over social relations, both in and outside of work. As a result, even though they all experience abstract alienation, their level of concrete alienation differs.