

From employee to ‘entreployee’

Towards a ‘self-entrepreneurial’ work force?*

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This paper presents the argument that we are witnessing a fundamental transformation in society’s disposition of labor capacity, seen in changes in the labor strategy of large employers. This may be leading to a new type of labor power that could be called ‘self-entrepreneurial’. In the paper’s first part the concept of the ‘entreployee’ (*Arbeitskraftunternehmer*) is presented briefly, after which, the second part examines several important theoretical objections to the concept, raised in the course of current German debate.

Keywords: employee autonomy, labor power, labor process, labor relations, New Capitalism, new forms of work, work force

Introduction

An intense debate on new kinds of entrepreneurial working conditions for employees has been emerging in Germany over the last ten years. A great amount of public interest was stimulated by an argument, put forth in the neo-liberal program of the German “Commission for Future Problems of Bavaria and Saxony” (Kommission 1998), and later in the recommendations for German labor reform presented by the “Hartz Commission” (Kommission ... 2002) with its highly controversial slogan “*Ich-AG*” (‘Me Inc.’). Independently of these recommendations, and with different scientific and political intentions, the present authors elaborated the idea of an increasing ‘entrepreneurial’ handling of one’s own work capacities, into the thesis that we are facing a fundamental transformation of the character of labor. The typical ‘employee’, prevalent until now in most sectors, is being replaced by a new, active type of labor power (Marx)¹, the *Arbeitskraftunternehmer* (called here ‘entreployee’) (see Voß and Pongratz 1998; Pongratz and Voß 2000; Voß 2001; Pongratz and

Voß 2003). This formulation initiated a broad debate in industrial sociology in Germany, and eventually internationally. In the first part of the paper this thesis is explained and the ‘ideal type’ of the *Arbeitskraftunternehmer* characterized. In the second part, the scope and consequences of related developments are assessed, considering some of the significant objections made in the subsequent sociological discussion.

The socio-diagnostic basis of the thesis of an emerging ‘self-entrepreneurial’ type of labor power is the assumption that we are not experiencing the “end of working society”, as some sociologists postulated in the 1980s, but instead, a transition to a *hyper-working society* and highly flexible *New Capitalism* (cf. Sennett 1998). This is characterized by more gainful employment in all spheres, but an employment that is assuming new forms, some of the foreseeable effects of which seem highly problematic (see Appelbaum 2002). One of these effects may be an intensified (but altered) capitalist interest in the use of labor power (the *subjectification* of labor), resulting in a *new logic of corporate labor control*, and therefore in a fundamental change in the nature of employment.

From employee to ‘self-entrepreneurial’ labor power

Structural changes in the organization of the labor process

In recent years, processes of corporate reorganization of a hitherto unknown kind have been taking place in almost all sectors of modern economies. They are comparable to the fundamental economic and social changes of 19th and early-20th century industrialization. Mainly because of the aggravation of competitive conditions, corporate management is forced to make massive cost reductions and, more importantly, to increase their companies’ capability for flexible and innovative reaction to turbulent business environments. The strategy of subjecting employees to an extremely rigid, detailed surveillance of work activities (often based on Taylorist principles), that has prevailed in most firms hitherto, is now increasingly considered a severe obstacle. Today the attempt is being made — not everywhere, but in several areas — to free up the usual boundaries of the traditional employee in the workplace in nearly all dimensions: time, space, content, qualification, cooperation etc., and to enhance the employees’ own responsibility through strategies of increased flexibility and ‘self-organization’ in the workplace (for the German discussion of this see Kratzer 2003; Minssen 2000; Voß 1998).

These 'new forms of labor', with their greater need for the 'self-organization' of employees in this sense, are manifold (see Overview 1), but it is difficult to assess their exact quantitative scale. In Germany the amount of work done in teams or groups was estimated at up to 12% in 1998 with a definite upward trend (see Nordhause-Janz and Pekruhl 2000); project-based work has meanwhile become a fairly normal form of labor control in many corporate sectors. We believe this change is significant in quantity and quality because the structural relation between company and labor is essentially different: the former detailed, hierarchical structure of work supervision is being replaced by market-like relations (see Moldaschl 1998). This means that employees *must* organize their work more independently than ever before. This far-reaching 'autonomization' of work does not always entail any real new freedom for the people involved. More often than not the independence is limited in scope, is always in accordance with company goals, and is often accompanied by considerable pressure. Nevertheless the 'new forms' of work represent a substantial increase of opportunity for many, and therefore should be an important topic for future work-related research, as well as for unions and labor policy makers (cf. Peters 2001).

Overview 1 — Forms of work characterized by enhanced 'self-organization'

- in *conventional employment*:
 - group and team work
 - management by objectives
 - Cost Center, Profit Center
 - highly flexible working hours (time accounts, trust time)
 - new forms of computer-based telework, mobile work, etc.
- in *relations between businesses*:
 - outsourcing to pseudo-independent occupations
 - cooperation with freelancers, self-employed, subcontractors, etc.
 - virtual companies, etc.

As a theoretical aside, industrial sociologists realized early on, drawing on Marx's important though long undervalued idea, that by employing personnel, companies only acquire the right to their capacity for work for a definite period of time (see Braverman 1974 and the "labor process debate": Knights and Willmott 1990). Although this right is assured in labor contracts, it does not guarantee that the expected performance will actually follow. Thus companies are faced with the fundamental problem of 'transforming' the purchased 'latent'

working potential into real or ‘manifest’ performance by means of specific measures, e.g. directives and monitoring, in short: by ‘labor control’ (Braverman). For a long time, rigid forms of technological and organizational labor control in this sense have been considered the ideal ‘transformation’ strategy for most firms. While exceptions exist, especially for some types of expert and managerial jobs where strategies of ‘responsible autonomy’ are applied instead of ‘direct control’ (see Friedman 1977), rigid surveillance following Taylorist principles has been the leading approach in theory, as well as in practice, for nearly all other categories of labor (especially mass labor in production and administration). Yet this strategy has always encountered limits in many work situations: monitoring costs are considerable, and employee innovation and flexibility are discouraged.

At present we can see in many business sectors a reversal of what was up to now considered standard practice: a *focused reduction of direct labor control practices and the active promotion of employee responsibility*. This does not mean anything like an abdication of central governance in corporations, but a systematic extension of indirect forms through the strategic targeting of performance parameters and goals such as costs, turnover, quality, customer satisfaction etc. This development means turning over increasingly to employees themselves the complicated task of transforming their labor potential into concrete performance, i.e. the previous management functions of work control. In other words, management seeks to *externalize*, on a new structural level, the notorious transformation problem. ‘Outsourcing’ is also an externalizing strategy, well known for more than two decades, but this is outsourcing of a special kind: it affects a key business function, employee management, of the capitalist enterprise. Paradoxically, it hands the problem over to those who cause it, and have to resolve it while simultaneously coping with the consequences.

The entreplovee: a new ‘entrepreneurial’ type of labor power

If the tactic of shifting the transformation problem to those working in new forms of employment were extended systematically (and there are many indicators supporting this supposition), it would not only have consequences for individual groups of employees, but (our central thesis) also for the general disposition of labor capacity in society.

Heretofore a type of work force has predominated that was trained to put standard capacities at a company's disposal for a flat rate of remuneration; expected advancement according to standard professional patterns; has been subject to heteronomously fixed requirements; enjoyed very limited scope for independent decisions and creativity; and had to make do with fixed resources. Now we are witnessing the reversal of this situation, towards active, self-actuating behavior for the 'general good' of the enterprise, job requirements that sometimes must first be defined, and for which resources must often be found by those directly involved. In this reorientation process, the hitherto passive 'employees' are becoming much more active workers, not only continuously redefining their own capacities and potentials within the company by organizing the work process in a self-determining, 'entrepreneurial' manner, but also on the larger labor market. This new type of labor power, which we call the 'entreployee' (*Arbeitskraftunternehmer*), being a product of quasi-entrepreneurial efforts, requires the same entrepreneurial development and commercialization (of personal and professional capacities) as does any product of a business enterprise. Entreployees exhibit three important characteristics.

Overview 2 — Characteristics of the entreployee

- *self-control*
 - Intensified independent planning, control and monitoring of work by the person responsible;
- *self-commercialization*
 - Intensified active and practical 'production' and 'commercialization' of one's own capacities and potential on the labor market as well as within companies
- *self-rationalization*
 - Self-determined organization of one's daily life and long-term plans, and the tendency to accept willingly the importance of the company (employer) as an integral part of life

Entreployees now control the process of the transformation of their own potential into concrete performance, enriching the commodity 'labor power' by one decisive element: the control of work, which until now has rested in the hands of the company, becomes a new and substantial qualitative part of the acquired labor. Thus the commodity 'labor power' becomes a substantially higher-value factor of production: a higher-level work capacity organized to a large extent by the *self-control* of the employee. All characteristics of work are

ultimately and profoundly affected: the organization of the actual work performance, flexibilization of working hours, relaxation of spatial ties, weakening of traditionally assumed social ties, job-motivation. Therefore the attitude of companies towards entrepoyees could be characterized by the new slogan: *It doesn't matter how you manage your job and what you do in detail, the main thing is you achieve at least the goals set!*

Entrepoyees must change their viewpoint, not only with regard to their work as such; they must come to regard their own capacities as a commodity. The hitherto largely passive 'owner' of labor power, present only occasionally on the labor market, is increasingly becoming a high-level, strategic actor, developing and actively exploiting their only available 'capital' to secure a living, the capacity to work, in a focused, continuous effort towards potentially gainful economic usage on the larger labor market, as well as within the company. The attitude of business towards the entrepoyee in this respect might well be expressed thus: *You'll stay only as long as you prove that you're needed, by making profits!* The above means a new higher level of *self-commercialization* of labor power in two ways: On one hand, in autonomous forms of work, employees must actively and consistently generate capacities and performance, thus creating a deliberate 'production economy' of their work capacities. On the other hand, they must also 'market' their capacities on the company level to ensure that their capacities are needed, acquired, and effectively used and paid for. The formerly passive employee is becoming, in the strict economic sense, the 'entrepreneur' of his or her own potential, in the 'individual' market-economy (as well, of course, as industry-wide).

If entrepoyees are to practice active 'production' and 'commodification' of their capabilities and potentials, this will entail profound changes in the lives of the persons concerned. The entire context of life will be 'commercialized' out of the need to systematically reorganize all individual resources. The drastic increase in privately accessed organization and communication tools (not only for managers) is evidence for this development (for similar arguments see Sennet 1998; Hochschild 1997). No wonder that the traditional advice to employees 'Keep your job and life strictly separate!' no longer applies, and becomes: *We need you totally, exclusively, anytime and anywhere, so you'll have to manage your life perfectly! We want people who are completely under control!* What the 'producers' and 'salesmen' of their own work capacity do to *rationalize their lives* may be compared to the activities of those offering other commodities: they transform the production and sale of products from a rather unorganized form into a well-coordinated one and, in doing so, generate a kind

of 'business'. Of course, the entreplooyee's 'business' is not a company in the usual sense; it is production and commercialization of a special product under specific conditions: their individual work capacities and expertise, but within the context of their daily life.

Proletarians–employees–entreplooyees: the historic types of labor power

The entreplooyee or 'self-entrepreneurial' employee is a potentially new social model of labor power for the increasingly market-driven businesses of the late-Taylorist era of work organization. Previous stages of industrial society were based on other types. In a rough characterization we can distinguish three types of labor power.

Overview 3–Historic types of labor power in capitalism

- *proletarian worker (early industrialization)*
 - raw working capacity
 - rigid, direct control of work
 - harsh exploitation, no social protection
- vocational employee (fordism)
 - standardized qualifications, basic work virtues
 - structural control of work on the basis of scientific knowledge
 - milder exploitation, greater protection by the state
- *entreplooyee (postfordism)*
 - individualized qualifications
 - systematic self-control of work
 - self-exploitation, precarious social security

In the early stage of modern industrial capitalism, a very restrictive form of labor control dominated, as labor was a new commodity, only just becoming established systematically in an emerging labor market. Former peasants and craftsmen, poorly qualified to be industrial workers, were recruited primarily from nearly feudal living conditions for factory employment. The working capacity of the *proletarian worker* was in a sense only 'raw'; above all, the ability to perform disciplined work within large organized structures was limited. Thus companies sought to enforce continuous work performance by regimens of repressive control. The everyday life of those workers was extremely insecure, its main feature being harsh exploitation of their working capacity, with only very marginal opportunities for physical recovery.

With the establishment of welfare state institutions — social security, vocational training and industrial relations — a new type of labor power developed: the considerably higher, more comprehensive, standardized and specialized work qualification commonly known as ‘occupation’ or ‘vocation’ (Ger. *Beruf*), obtained by means of systematic education including more fundamental and general virtues that are valued in employment, such as diligence, discipline and accuracy. Within companies, repressive control was replaced by structural, technical and organizational control. The new, disciplined type of *vocational employee* increasingly won the trust of management, supported by psycho-social management methods. The basis of this form of labor application, exemplified in the so-called Fordist production (and societal ‘regulation’) regime, is a well-functioning social security system with increasing wages, decreasing working hours, and a gender-based separation of work within the family: women mainly support their employed husbands by caring for household and family. Thus, a way of life developed, characterized by the bourgeois small family enjoying consumption-oriented leisure time in the modern sense (see Jurczyk 1992, 1998).

This vocational form of labor power, predominant in western industrial societies until now, could be in the process of becoming gradually replaced by the new model of entrepreneurial labor, and direct control of the labor process, by individual self-control, in combination with emerging forms of indirect labor control. Individual discipline and integrative ability, elements already recognizable in the employee model, are now becoming central qualifications. Professional, specialist qualifications are still essential, but new forms of competence, such as the active production and commercialization of one’s own labor capacity, and the willingness to adjust and organize one’s own requirements and private life to the requirements of a company, described by the term *entreployee*, are becoming preconditions to a successful work career. With that the standardized vocation or profession, until now a relatively rigid form of qualification, will be transformed into what we call the *individual vocation* (Ger. *Individualberuf*; see Voß 2001): a personalized model of specific competence and experience, integrated in a rationalized, though individual, way of life.

Scope and consequences of developments thus outlined

Our thesis of the *entreployee* has given rise to widespread discussion in German and international industrial sociology (see e.g. Deutschmann 2001; Kuda and Strauß 2002; Schumann 1999). Some critics maintain that, while there may be

a few forms of labor consistent with the new type of labor power postulated, these are not prevailing trends and thus have to be considered marginal social phenomena. This criticism is understandable from the perspective of the present, but it does not do justice to our thesis as a characterizing prognosis, as we explain later. There are many indicators that employees with a high level of autonomy are confronted with increasing demands to act in an entrepreneurial manner (Pongratz and Voß 2003). They are to be found in economic sectors with great importance for the future of modern capitalism (e.g. service economy, IT sector, cultural professions). Above all, it is important to realize that the entreployee in our description above is a scientific construct, a theoretical model which helps clarify an ongoing empirical, and with that, historical development.

The entreployee as ideal type

The three historical types of labor power are refined, 'ideal types' (in the strict Weberian sense), i.e. they represent a high density of characteristics that prevail in various and changing combinations in the empirical world. Thus the new type of entrepreneurial labor power is intended as a first step towards an analytically trenchant model, more or less close to reality depending on the individual case, not a description of reality. The ideal type of entreployee combines the various elements of the new forms of labor exploitation already apparent in different contexts of the present transformation of the capitalist economic order, with the theoretical reconstruction of that development's logic.

However, even if the empirical observation of particular sectors of labor displays only a few elements of this type, this does not refute the analytic power of the categorization, as long as elements occur in *typical combinations*. In an empirical survey (Pongratz and Voß 2003), we showed how far employees' attitudes towards team and project work were consistent with the entreployee type: the greatest correlation was found in the dimension of self-control (see above), while identification with self-rationalization was weaker, and weakest of all with self-commercialization.

The scope of empirical indicators

As an ideal type, the concept of the entreployee can be useful as an analytical instrument only if it can be related to a broad spectrum of real cases. Although up to now there have been empirical indications of an actual expansion of the self-entrepreneurial employee type in just a few sectors, these examples were

found in various sectors of labor, so that we can conclude that this is a general development. Distinctive forms of the entreplovee can be discovered in some sectors of employment, primarily in the intensely project-oriented IT sector (see Baukrowitz and Boes 2002; Eichmann et al. 2002), as well as in media and cultural professions combining dependent and freelance work, such as journalism and television production (see Geesterkamp 2000; Gottschall and Schnell 2000). Similar trends are visible in areas such as adult training and education, consulting, academics and research.

The entreplovee is obviously most suited to *key future-oriented work sectors*. These jobs are often in prestigious, high-qualification areas especially interesting to young university graduates. Even if in many fields of work the typical vocational employee still prevails, a tendency towards change is becoming apparent in the sectors of 'normal' labor in industry and services. The fact of reverse tendencies in a few sectors, as 're-Taylorization' (Springer 1999), does not refute our prognosis, but simply shows that the process will not be homogeneous. The extent and speed of the development remain open parameters.

The entreplovee as normative model

Our thesis formulates the *prognosis that the entreplovee* could act in the long term as a *normative model*, gaining importance as its implementation is closely linked with organizational changes in companies. Thus, elements of the entreplovee type are being already generally proposed as the future model in many management concepts (Deutschmann 2001). The most incisive example (but also especially problematic) are the present schemes in human resource development in Germany, propagated under the slogan "Selbst GmbH" ("Myself Co. Ltd.") by personnel managers of respected German companies, or the term "Ich AG" ("Me, Inc.") proposed by a government commission for reform of the labor market in Germany, the Hartz Commission (see Kommission 2002).

In stark contrast to our viewpoint, such management or governmental concepts do not focus enough on possible problems and risks of changes to labor structures; and furthermore they offer highly ideological models, but no well-considered descriptions or analyses. Their concepts fit, at best, into the general trend of ideologizing individual success and personal performance that can be associated with the reorganizational measures of the 1990s. The possibility of becoming a freelancer and working independently is propagated as a model of success, open to all those willing and able, with the slogan: 'Be the architect of your own fortune.' And, vice versa, all professional failures and setbacks, although

often inevitable for structural reasons, are to be interpreted as individual failure, and thus perhaps even a legitimation of social inequality. Our thesis of the entreployee, on the other hand, points to the broad range of problematic effects and contradictions that the development is obviously going to cause.

Ambivalence, paradoxes, risks and contradictions

A preliminary assessment of the possible effects of implementing the entreployee model is highly *ambivalent*: Employees with the necessary individual, social and economic resources may become successful 'entrepreneurs' of their own labor power, but under unfavourable initial conditions the model's disadvantages — reduced regulation and job security — could accumulate, likely producing not so small a group of less successful '*self-entrepreneurial*' *day-laborers*, selling their labor capacity piecemeal, a new class of the 'working poor' (see Ehrenreich 2001). The new forms of work may contribute, in any case, to a general *individualization* of the employment situation, because of the unfavourable and isolated market position of the individual working person vis-à-vis companies.

Often even those apparently successful entreployees may experience relatively new and unpleasant side-effects of their increasing self-control and self-marketing: workaholism, estrangement and stress can result and many, even the most ambitious, will not be able to cope in the long term. To the *opportunities and risks* of the new type of labor power, already closely linked to well-known predisposing factors such as education, existing wealth, social contacts, national or social origin and gender, an important new dimension of inequality might be added: the unequal distribution of capacities to cope with the specific dilemmas of self-organized work (see Plath 2000).

Another characteristic of the entreployee is the *frequent change of job situation* in the course of a person's working life. Whereas the traditional course of an employee's career is based on continuous professional advancement in position, power, income and job security, persons working in flexible work situations must reckon with at least occasional setbacks as well as advances. The given situation on the 'entrepreneurial labor market' continuously creates the necessity to prove oneself, for example in project teams or in the acquisition of orders, situations where success or failure must be frequently redefined. Individuals experience and manage this necessity differently, each according to their capabilities, yet all face considerable personal existential risks, especially in later career periods.

The entremployee as entrepreneur?

The term 'entrepreneur' used in the concept 'entremployee', should make clear that a *new stage in the commercialization of individual labor power* has been reached, closely linked with specific risks, well-known to freelancers, of self-exploitation and failure. The term 'entrepreneur' denotes more than just the popular models of the successful big businessman or trendy 'start-up founder' of capitalist industrial society; it also embraces freelancers in agriculture, independent professions, trades and small businesses, amounting (in Germany) to 11% of all persons in gainful employment. These groups demonstrate that entrepreneurship does not always mean as much 'power and success' as frequent long hours, little profit, financial strain and fear for economic survival over long periods.

The idea of 'self-entrepreneurial' labor power should not be interpreted merely in the metaphorical sense, but as the expression of a *partial equivalent* to other categories of entrepreneurship: the calculation of profitability, especially important in the commodification of products and services, is becoming increasingly relevant to individuals commodifying their own capacities and abilities. Important differences between categories of entrepreneurs should not be overlooked in the analogy: freelancers frequently base their activities on financial resources, professional rights (e.g. physicians and pharmacists), but only to a limited degree on the ability to acquire labor from outside; capitalist entrepreneurs establish corporate hierarchies to organize the exploitation of labor for profit. The traditional contradiction between the interests of capital and labor is not eliminated with the shift to 'self-entrepreneurial' labor power, but is transformed into a structural contradiction between entrepreneurs of different kinds.

Manifold causes

To limit the risks and problems of 'self-entrepreneurial' labor power is difficult, because its development has manifold causes, even if the dynamic stems primarily, as we have postulated, from certain reorganization strategies of companies. On the part of working persons, the tendency towards a general *change of values* (cf. Inglehart 2003) as well as an *individualization* of lifestyle and life-course (cf. Beck 1992), especially in the mid-1970s, must be mentioned as decisively influential factors. In socio-political terms, this means a weakening of so-called 'normal working conditions', with the advent of *globalization* and *neo-liberalism*, which gave stability to the 'vocational' employee's existence. Yet,

all in all, these developments were not homogenous, for counter-tendencies, such as intensified direct control, may not only be found in several production sectors (Springer 1999), but also in newly-established service sectors (such as 'call-centers'), leading to working conditions of an early capitalist style. As a result, in the medium-term there is a broad spectrum of work and employment forms among employees and entreployees, with extremes that may endure for the time being, thus encouraging *a new variety of different working conditions and employment models*. General statements about entreployees here and employees there can thus only serve as a rough orientation. Individual cases will need exact consideration of the given intermediary forms and constellations of variables which require differentiated treatment.

Challenges for social theory

The trends we have described show that the innovative capacity of capitalist economic logic is not exhausted with the Fordist production regime. On the contrary, instead of an erosion of corporate hierarchies and work relationships in society, a new stage in the development of the relation between capital and labor is emerging that can no longer be adequately interpreted using previously dominant analytical methods and assessment criteria. Therefore a social critique of capitalism cannot do without developing innovative concepts of its own (cf. Baumann 1999; Sennett 1998).

To do this, one prerequisite above all is the *consistent further development of theoretical approaches* to the analysis of social developments. Here the work of Marx is still a significant point of reference, although it cannot offer a comprehensive analytical system, or any monopoly on interpretation. From our perspective there is no doubt that the new emerging type of labour power indicates a significant increase in the 'productive powers', combined with a fundamental change in practical production regimen, and thus in the Marxian 'societal means of production'. Marx developed the most important social theory of the 19th century, revealing the decisive aspects of the developmental phases of capitalist society. In the 21st century we are faced with further developments that will be understood only by creating largely new theoretical instruments based, to a greater or lesser extent, on classical theoretical elements and thought.

The thesis of the entreployee is not, and never will be, a replacement for such a social theory, but it can help formulate relevant ideas and questions. One of these is an intensified consideration of the subjectivity of the workers in

order to understand the present development of working society. New scientific approaches to the ‘*subjectification*’ of work (see Moldaschl and Voß 2002; for similar ideas see Boltanski and Chiapello 1999; Hardt and Negri 2001) are significant, as is the reappraisal of practical experiences of workers, as in the campaign “Work Without End?” (Ger. *Arbeiten ohne Ende*) propagated by the German metalworkers’ trade union IG-Metall (see Gleißmann and Peters 2001).

The discussion of the subjectification of work centers on the resulting new ambivalence and contradictions experienced increasingly by those involved in market-based labor structures. In that process they are neither helpless victims nor revolutionary actors, but co-participants in a fundamental and for them unusual development. Socio-theoretical efforts may contribute to a better understanding of this and related problems, creating a basis not only for new and instructive forms of knowledge, but also dialogue and adequate socio-political strategies for coping with them.

Notes

* Translated and revised edition of “Erwerbstätige als Arbeitskraftunternehmer”. *SOWI — Sozialwissenschaftliche Informationen*, 2001: 42–52. We thank Monika Baumunk and Stefanie Springer of Stuttgart Academy of Technology Assessment for a basic translation and Franz Zurbrugg for his intensive final corrections.

1. ‘Labor power’ is the usual term in English for the abstract Marxian category *Arbeitskraft*, i.e. the ‘power’ of labor in a general sense (similar to work capacity), but meaning neither the individual working person, nor collectively, ‘personnel’ or ‘work force’ in society or an enterprise (Ger. *Arbeitskräfte*), nor even the actual execution of the work (Marx’s ‘expenditure’ or ‘application’ of ‘labor power’).

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