

# SOCIOLOGIE DU TRAVAIL

REVUE TRIMESTRIELLE

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## **Animals at work**

**Special issue coordinated by**

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This special issue will focus on the role of animals within productive and remunerated human activities. To what extent can it be said that they work and what is known about this “work“?

For some sociologists of work, it is a concept that refers to a voluntary and deliberate action. In this sense, slaves such as animals or machines cannot properly be called “workers“ because they are not free to sell their labour, and even less to escape from their master’s control. Georges Friedmann and Pierre Naville (1962), the two founders of the French school of sociology of work, assert that it is important not to use the term “work“ to “designate dehumanized operations“ (p. 17): even alienated work entails subjectivity and some sort of free will found only in human groups. On the basis of this definition, which excludes the possibility of non-human work, these two sociologists were nevertheless keen to anchor the performance of work in a natural milieu that is not simply a passive environment. Following on from Marx, who defines work as an act of transformation and mastery of nature, they define work as a set of actions in interaction with “matter”, which in turn reacts upon and alters human beings (p. 12). This mutual interaction does not imply symmetry: so-called “natural“ elements have always already been reshaped by work, or at least by the human eye. And this anthropic state, far from remaining static, was accentuated: with the decline of peasant societies and growing industrialization (including agriculture). Work takes place in an increasingly technical and artificial environment. Thus beasts of burden are replaced by tractors, cars or tanks, sheepdogs by fences. And the exploitation of animal production has intensified to the point of transforming these creatures into intubated and standardized quasi-machines. Animal species with which humanity has cooperated for subsistence seem to have quit the scene of labour to such an extent that there are no studies focusing on the use of the strength and intelligence of living beings endowed with the capacity for autonomous movement and reproduction.

To what extent can the association with animals be used to explore the notion of work? Is work a defining human activity? Is it an exclusively human social relation? If work is defined as a social relation extrinsic to the worker (e.g. Rolle, 1971 pp. 75-76), the concept can be used to describe any productive activity that takes place in a structure of work. It then becomes possible to detach the worker from the concept of personhood, to say that “machines also work“, and to conceive of “production without human intervention“, as in the case of cyborgs (Haraway, 2009), in which humans and non-humans can be seen as a hybrid working collective. Such a conception sets aside the ideal of emancipation contained in the performance of work, retaining only the social relation entailed in the production of use and exchange values – regardless of the combined identity of the workers – in return for payment in cash or in kind (which may consist solely in sustaining the strength to work).

Far from being abstract, these theoretical discussions about the boundaries between free and alienated, human or nonhuman labour, relate to ordinary categorisations. For professionals who work with animals, whether for transporting people or goods, rescuing missing persons, supporting people in vulnerable situations, operating in defence or public safety structures, performing in circuses, films, zoos or sports, it is clear that animals have acquired skills, are qualified and know their jobs, in other words, they “work“. Some even go so far as to blur the boundaries between species: they see these creatures as full partners, endowed with expertise, consenting will and subjectivity, deserving to have their needs, emotions and desires listened to and met. Here, work reclaims its original meaning of non-servile activity, undertaken at times socially distinct from periods of nonwork. In contrast, for some animal rights advocates, the use of animals (as a tool or a resource) constitutes an exploitative relationship, and the word “labour“ approaches its etymological meaning of ”toil“ or “trouble“, both for the beasts and for the workers directly responsible for making them productive.

This special issue will seek to explore the role of working animals from historical, anthropological, economic, legal and sociological perspectives, with a particular emphasis on the distinctiveness of these participants in work: animals are neither machines nor humans. In what capacity and by what means are they involved in human labour?

- 1) A first set of proposals might address *controversies concerning the status of animals and the concept of work*, by exploring the boundaries between an anthropocentric understanding of work and the recognition of mutual vulnerability and dignity. Socio-historical articles might trace developments in the law on the treatment of working animals, discuss the ethical, economic, scientific and environmental debates relating to them, analyse certain iconic cases, or provide some insight into the actors involved in a context of rising political interest in animal rights and changes in legislation on the legal status of animals. What are the different ways in which the status of animals is defined in regulatory terms? Do they vary between professional sectors and animal species? Are they changing, particularly in response to controversies? To what extent

do they incorporate factors specific to human labour, or reflect the perception of animals as objects or subjects? Since one of the main criteria used to define work in a capitalist wage-earning society is the market value of the labour force and the product of this work, another topic for exploration might be the modes of remunerated animal labour and the instruments used to measure the economic performance of animals. Is lack of remuneration what sets it apart from human work?

- 2) A second set of proposals might address *working “with” animals* as collaborators (endowed with strength and wisdom), beginning with the process of selection, training, qualification and certification, and their integration into a human-nonhuman division of labour, further taking into account internal rules regarding assigned and actual work, the leeway available to animals, not to mention their “career” potential. While research has demonstrated socialization and mutual cooperation between humans and animals, questions regarding the emergence of rivalry, of conflicts and hierarchies of interest might be explored. In each professional sphere, what are the drivers for improving the working conditions of nonhumans? Under what circumstances do attachment and detachment occur? These approaches should be linked to a certain conception of animal status and labour.
- 3) A third series will highlight *the special working relationship involved in the partial or total exploitation of animal production* (milk, eggs, fur, wool, honey ...), in some cases entailing the extinction of the resource itself (such as the conversion of the animal into meat or lab specimen). In what terms do professionals speak of this exploitative relationship? How do they justify the economic performance of animals, their “good“ or “bad“ treatment? When animal work is involved in the system of production, the issue of performance evaluation arises. What arguments and technical processes are employed to rationalize a form of production which, however standardized and automated, cannot avoid the reality that it deals with living beings.

For articles based on field surveys, it will be important to give an accurate description of the type of professional collaboration established, the level of cooperation, exploitation and/or autonomy, the type of remuneration and forms of recognition proposed, the procedures of domination and of symmetrization between humans and non-humans. Professional worlds should not be considered as homogeneous, but should be distinguished in terms of the sector of activity and type of work. The articles might also explore the methodological implications of an empirical survey on working groups that include non-human living beings: who speaks for whom? How can animal behaviour be approached ethnographically?

Proposals for articles should begin by presenting their subject and their positioning in the literature, the intended empirical investigation, materials and anticipated outcomes (see below for submission procedures).

## References

Friedmann, G., 1950. *Où va le travail humain ?* Gallimard, Paris.

Friedmann, G., Naville, P. (Eds), 1962. *Traité de sociologie du travail*, t. 1. Armand Colin, Paris.

Haraway, D., 2009. *Des singes, des cyborgs et des femmes. La réinvention de la nature.* Jacqueline Chambon, Paris.

Rolle, P., 1971. *Introduction à la sociologie du travail.* Larousse, Paris.

### Submission procedures and timetable

Contributors are invited to submit **an initial proposal of 1000 to 1500 words** (three to four pages), explaining clearly the approach, the research question addressed, the materials used and the methods used to collect those materials.

These proposals are to be sent by email, in the form of a “.doc“ file, **exclusively to the editors of the journal** ([socio.dutravail@sciencespo.fr](mailto:socio.dutravail@sciencespo.fr)) by September 5, 2016 at the latest. Authors will be notified in October 2016 whether their proposals have been accepted. The proposals will be assessed anonymously and *should therefore not contain any information that might reveal their author's identity*. The authors' contact information must be provided separately in the submission form available for download from the journal's website:

<http://www.sociologiedutravail.org/spip.php?article126>

The authors of selected projects should then send their complete article (maximum 12,000 words) by **February 20, 2017** at the latest.

The articles will be peer-reviewed by three referees in accordance with the usual procedure at *Sociologie du travail*. After revision, the articles finally selected will be published in a special issue at the end of 2017 or in the first half of 2018.