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TOWARDS NEW
FORMS OF SOCIAL
VULNERABILITY?
THOUGHTS ON
RELATIONS BETWEEN
FLEXIBILITY AND
UNCERTAINTY

As he explores the redistribution of power and the new organizational arrangements elaborated by the “flexibility” concept, R. Sennett goes back to the Anglo-Saxon etymology of this term from the end of the 15th century. The “natural” language of that time describes it as “possibility of bending without breaking”. “The flexibility is the ability of a tree to bend and to recover, to put to the proof its form and to restore it. Ideally, a human flexible behavior should have the same elasticity: to adapt to changes of circumstances without letting to be broken by them.” (Sennett 1998, p. 60, underlined). A similar definition in the Petit Littré (1990): “which allows bending to a certain point without breaking”. Beneath the elasticity need of human behavior equalizes the risk of breaking and tearing of more or less irreversible social tissue.

We owe a great deal to R. Castel for having described the genesis of that social tear and its change. This author opposes the dynamic approach to conditions and dimensions of social vulnerability with a traditional dualism vision. Between stable employment and poverty, the vulnerability lets an “intermediary and unstable zone, which conjugates the uncertainty of work and fragility of proximity supports” to the surface of the social structure (Castel 1995, p. 13). This zone gathers all whose social and economic life insertion conditions have become extremely seized or menaced without belonging to classic categories initiated by the Welfare State in the industrial phase. Individuals “floating in the social structure” who “occupy its cracks without finding an assigned place” and consider themselves menaced with “social inutility” (*ibid.*). In that matter, Castel is very clear: the vulnerability is not a state but rather a process. It has a root in the center of modern organizations operations and not in the outskirts. “The process by which a society expulses some of its members makes us wonder about who, in the center, triggers this effect. It is this *hidden relation from the center to the outskirts*

that we should try to disengage. (...) The heart of the exclusion matter is not where the excluded ones reside” (*ibid*, p. 108, underlined).

The weakening of a whole part of social structure refers to efficiency norms also called hereafter “the flexible and patrimonial capitalism” by some authors. In other words, it refers to specific restraints that organizations impose to employees with their price creating strategy, particularly in finances (Sennett 1998; Orléan 1999). The processes that generate this progressive invalidation of some active population parts still need to be better understood. The hypothesis this article is based on is that we would assist to a *dispersion of vulnerability forms, here meant as both the extension and diversification of its contents*. Appealing to an uncertain employment or by casting out segments of the production machinery, the external flexibility leads to a drastic reduction of income, social welfare and social integration possibility. Yet, it is not necessarily followed by a homogenous degradation of working conditions. The internal flexibility is interpreted as a reorganization of professional time and an evolution of internal coordination customs. This movement also comes along with a destabilization of existing collectives and intensifying work. Furthermore, it concerns both the uncertain ones as well as the stable ones.

An important aspect emerges from this moving scenery. The effects of the flexibility are not necessarily homogenous or cumulative. While it is affecting only one part of the wage-earning relationship, the flexibility puts the social subjects in situations we could qualify as ambivalent. Their working conditions could become reduced in stable situations - and *vice versa*. Faced with that, the subjects are not helpless. They often adjust and settle. But these “adjustments” are solitary and restrained. They do not have the power of “compromise” in the sense of lasting and collective agreements seeking a “superior public good” inside a critical frame of discussion (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). The emergency of the first takes place on the grounds of the fragility of the second. Without being unilateral, the flexibility of the wage-earning relationships submits the employees to the free market forces by depriving them simultaneously the possibility to enroll in an alternative social relation. There are three ideas supporting this hypothesis: Such evolution takes place on the grounds of an increasing dissociation between work and employment (*first part*). It appears in recent European research (*second part*). It conjugates the weakening of traditional regulations and the multiplication of individual arrangements (*third part*).

WORK, EMPLOYMENT: THE END OF A COHERENCE

There is probably no unique or neutralized definition of flexibility. First, this idea is inseparable from normative projections, which historically marked its emergence. The flexibility has in fact appeared during the eighties in the heart of a “re-encharmed enterprise”, promoting organizational flexibility and legal deregulation at a level of unemployment crisis solutions. It made the enterprise a place where class relations and opposition of interest are set aside (Pollert 1991). This employers’ rhetoric was strongly disclaimed by ruptures that determined the nineties and by a reappearance of many antagonisms. Still, it remained as a constitutive dimension. Second, because the concept has progressively changed and because it recovers many realities today. In one of the first comparative studies on that matter, R. Boyer noted the multiplicity of factors and the definitions of flexibility, particularly on a macro-economic level.¹ That led Boyer to propose a flexibility approach based on a negative rather than a positive definition, referring to *what the production system is no more*. Within its own diversity, the flexibility expresses a series of changes, more or less declared, with principal points composed of Fordism: mass production, organizational *one best way*, stable and homogenous rules of employment. While not emerging from any alternative model, it is described no more as a “series of errors and groping” (Boyer and Durant 1998, p. 146). We can observe after reading L. Boltanski and E. Chiapello that, in a broader way, the incessant call to inventive, mobile and flexible behavior participates with a recomposition of capitalism and “re-internalisation” of what they call “the artistic criticism” which opposes creativity, individual talent and artistic subversion to dehumanization originated by the twin domination of mass production and consumption (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999, p. 501 and following). These different elements make it extremely difficult or rather impossible to restore the project with a stable definition, but they simultaneously indicate the mutations, which strain the emergence of such a notion. Three striking remarks particularly catch our attention: the emergence of a “new asymmetry”; the rise of reversibility and differentiation in new strategic principles; the separation between the “relation to work” and the “relation to employment”.

A new asymmetry

If we follow R. Boyer and J.-P. Durant, we could come to a conclusion that the creation of wealth of firms stands

upon “the flexible mass production” (Boyer and Durant 1998, p. 139). In other words, it stands upon a production of goods and services aiming at both a continuous satisfaction of clients and an assessment of new standards. This brings along a series of socio-productive strategies aiming to assure the continuous and immediate adaptation of labor and organization characteristics to fluctuations imposed by the different markets: financial market, market of goods and services, and labor market. These fluctuations are so much alive that they henceforth obey the system of globalized, open and uncertain competition. But this generalization of permanent adjustment engages a mutation of the whole wage-earning relationship system: the increasing dependence of the enterprise in relation to the market leads, in most cases, to a degradation of conditions of work and employment for the most exposed employees. An author of a European report on that matter, A. Supiot, notes about the subject: “the external flexibility is the nightmare of constantly revisited workforce reduction schemes, working with a revolver pressed to the forehead. The internal flexibility is most commonly the adaptation of man’s time to the work schedule (instead of it being the other way around) and the decomposition of free time in the private life” (Supiot 1999, p. 10). This multiform succession of flexibility introduces a fault in one of the main principles of the old industrial balance: that of responsibility or reciprocity of firms towards their members which constitutes both a condition and a compensation of the constitutive inequality of wage-earning relations.

Even though it is strongly asymmetric, this principle puts the organizations implicitly back to the control level concerning their environment. In the industrial logic, the firms enact the consumption laws whose principle is based upon “the satisfaction of needs” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991, p. 150 and following). What is specific about Fordism is how it has emerged as a general form of “management” of industrial societies. In the after war decades, these represented a whole that was both irregular and stable as well as stratified and integrated at the same time. The most characteristic secessions of Taylorism – notably the separation between the notion and execution and the formation of a technocratic elite – were partially compensated by development of mass consumption aiming to respond to the economic outfit needs. The rise of purchasing power responds to the absence of power in enterprises. In other words, it is a general extension of a monetary logic on which the State based its compensation mecha-

nisms. But this general organization has at the same time propagated a strongly integrated usage – the permanent full time norm: the latter allowed the sustaining of long-term wage-earning relationship based on the integration through work, which involved a number of guarantees given to employees against the principle of *continuous subordination*. An inseparable evolution of things to come and a consolidation of what R. Castel called “the wage-earning society”.²

With the primacy of market and the generalization of a fluid world – a world where “there is no scene or mirror but a display and a network, there is no transcendence or depth but an immanent surface of unrolling operations” (Beaudrillard 1987, p. 12) – the criteria of justification changes very radically. Suitably to wishes of liberal economists, the market reaches a central and hegemonic position, imposing as a quasi-exclusive guarantor of general interest. According to some authors (Gollac and Volkoff 1996; Boltanski and Chiapello 1999), we assist to a transformation of industrial logic – where restraints essentially joining the production occur (“pushed flow”) – into a market logic – where restraints coming from a continuous adjustment to the market replace or complement traditional restraints (“pulled flow”).³ But this transformation of links between the enterprise and its environment implies to get rid of one of the central features of the Fordist balance, which is a whole set of stable, homogenous and coercing rules, assuring tension between social inequalities and economic development. Within this new context, the principle of permanent subordination becomes void. Even though it is unequal, the stability of social relations is no more a relevant economic object because it still has a bond at the exact spot where the flexible capitalism seeks primarily mobility, fluidity of different capitals and absence of mutual engagement. In the actual wage-earning relationship situation, the flexibility might be apprehended throughout the attitude that *firms report or set a whole lot of restraints in connection with the uncertainty of market to employees themselves* (Beffa *et al.* 1999; Supiot 1999; Brewster *et al.* 1998). With this shift, they get away from permanent forms of unequal reciprocity and confer to the individual the unique responsibility of the social situation. The inequality changes its form. It furthermore does not oppose only the top and bottom of the hierarchy but also the “mobile and the immobile”, those who could profit from this permanent requirement of mobility and those who suffer consequences, those who form a new power from “the reversibility of rules” and those who do not have ac-

cess to this power (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999; Périlleux 2001). As R. Sennett wrote, the “new capitalism radiates indifference” (Sennett 1998, p. 208).

Flexibility and social differentiation

It is not easy to describe this new form of asymmetry. The analysis of the flexibility was for quite some time made around the opposition between “defensive” strategies focused on immediate adaptation and labor cost reduction on one side, and the “offensive” strategies of innovation and quality research and development of competence on the other side. But this analytical dualism seems less and less relevant today. On a global market, wrote T. Coutrot (1999, p. 53), the strategies based on direct and indirect cost complement each other: the enterprises are submitted at the same time to strong pressure on cost (short term) and to demand of quality and innovation (mid/long term). In fact, most labor underlines the increasing interaction between various types of flexibility – external or internal, but also quantitative or qualitative.⁴ These are rarely implemented in an exclusive way. They can evolve according to professional groups and organization segments, appearing as complex and changing “combinations” of limited duration. But this paradoxical structure of flexibility has many consequences.

The first is that it leads to a need of auditing the relations between flexibility and strategy. At first glance, “putting into perspective these two terms makes almost an antinomy” (Everaere 1997, p. 13). The flexibility expresses a radicalization of uncertainty applying pressure onto enterprises: it seems to forbid the foreseeing and erode the fundamentals of the strategic reflection, by reducing its application field considerably. Opposite to the strategy, it has a tendency to close the temporal horizon of firms, generating a tight, uneasy, immediate timing, ratifying an “ideology of urgency” in a globalised world (Laïdi 1994). Nevertheless, all authors do not have this same vision. First, as we just saw, because the flexibility simultaneously integrates several modalities and also several temporalities. Furthermore, the idea of the strategy itself is to be redefined. If the emergence of flexibility opposes even diversely to inherited control and stability values of the previous industrial period, it cannot thus escape to all strategic consideration in the quest of new production efficiency. But, this last notion is transforming: some researchers (Procter *et al.* 1994) show that the weakness of the planning induces also a displacement of the strategic

action field which meant a thought and implementation frame to be more than a set of explicit choices, a reference model in the flow of variables and reversible decisions. Without being reduced to logic of pure adjustment, the idea of a “flexible strategy” is more oriented to a latent and implicit control of the reversibility of actions (Everaere 1997). However, this insinuation is not entirely insignificant. By going for the reversibility of choices, the employers’ action becomes prepared to continuously refund the legitimacy of their orientations, including situations when they stay at an experimental level. At the strategy level, the defeat does not produce any more a crash of the system but just a stage in the functioning of the model. The groping acts like a new value – undermining at the same time the basis of an alternative and critical discussion (de Nanteuil-Miribel 2001).

That is where the second consequence comes from: the differentiation of strategic orientations and professional situations both become a new sociological marker, an indication of the rediscovered coherence of the managerial decision. The choices of management henceforth seem to privilege the heterogeneous more than the homogeneous and diversification more than unification. And that concerns the organization of work as well as labor characteristics. For the first, the recognition of the Taylor model limits has not resulted in an emergence of another model but rather a multiplicity of work organization forms – of which some are qualified as “newtaylorist” (Linhart 1991). For the second, we assist to a multiplication of employment statuses and work duration, a retreat of the “full time permanent contract” which is not leading to the emergence of a unique opposite alternative but rather of highly heterogeneous “particular forms of employment”. D. Ségrestin and F. Michon reveal on that matter a “defined impulse of particular employment forms too much heterogeneous to reach through to the opposite category” (Michon and Ségrestin 1996, p. 12). A verified point in the most recent European statistics: in the last five years, the relation between permanent and uncertain employment stays practically unchanged (83% – 17%), but the percentage of unstable employees who consider themselves neither as having a fixed-term contract nor a temporary agency contract grows progressively (reaching more than 3.5% in 2000, which is in fact a fifth of the unstable employees) (Merlié and Paoli 2000).

From differentiation to disjunction

This differentiating dynamic constitutes probably one of the major characteristics of the contemporary situation. It explains the difficulties of the analyses aiming to generalize the meaning of work and employment evolutions. Even limited, the outcome of Fordism makes the postulates of a referential universe drop, without substituting a new objective state to him, a stable or homogenous alternative. Then again, the flexibility of wage-earning relations appears in its “duplicity” (Gollac and Volkoff 1996). Its progression escapes partially to traditional analytic categories that swept, structured and cleaved the social field during the previous period of time. This does not invalidate the possibility to introduce transversal diagnostics, but under condition to seize the displacements that operate for such a generalized stake. A proceeding to which S. Paugam seems to proceed in his last work, *The Wage-Earner and the Uncertainty*, and on which we would like to hold support here.

Our intention is evidently not to summarize all the aspects of this work but to go back to the distinction that he suggests between “relation to work” and “relation to employment”. This distinction constitutes “the organizing principle” in the first part of his research (Paugam 2000, p. 25-26). The first one is according to him supposed to be the “dimensions of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of employees” while exercising their activity, resulting from “the production logic of the industrial society”. The second measures the “stability degree of their professional situation”, referring to the “protective logic of the Welfare-State” (*ibid*, p. 17, 25). And further:

“It strikes me to conclude that these two dimensions are very often confused. We almost always associate, at least implicitly, the employment with an uncertain status to the impossibility of advance in the work as we interpreted the norm of stable employment as a condition of social status. Could we then confirm that all the persons having an uncertain status are unsatisfied at work? Likewise, we can often hear that those who have a stable employment are privileged without taking into consideration to add that the stability of employment does not itself assure professional integration. Are there not cases of persons with a stable employment who resigned simply because they were feeling misunderstood in the enterprise and that they could not stand their work any more?” (*ibid*, p. 26)

This quote underlines the landslides which are brought about in the analysis of concrete forms of social vulnerability. By dividing this question into two and breaking the previous coherence between work and em-

ployment, Paugam considerably changes the question, intensifying the stakes. His analysis does not aim to attenuate the seriousness of this new vulnerability because it clarifies in an extremely precise way the continuity of processes, which connect the “deviations in the integration process” and produce a social disqualification. But it performs at the same time an essential analytical displacement, making of “relation to work” and “relation to employment” two distinctive and disjointed types of relationship.⁵

To simplify, we could say that Fordism was characterized by a homology between work and employment. Precise and repertory work contents correspond to precise qualification statuses and levels. The theory of “deskilling” had in other respects formalized this homology: the impoverishment of work was interpreted by regressions in the structure of qualifications – and *vice versa*. The development of employment instability and insecurity, characteristic in the nineties could have made us believe to a simple amplification phenomenon, but Paugam shows that the situation is much more complicated. In reality, it becomes necessary to distinguish the “work uncertainty” and the “employment uncertainty”. In a way, the latter refers to common sense. It interprets the reduction or even disappearance of social rights associated to employment. This concept is important but insufficient: it describes only a part of the problems which employees encounter and can take place independently of the work activity. It is then necessary to supplement it with the uncertainty of work: this one covers all the situations which, this time independently of the employment status, produce dissatisfaction and suffering at work. These two experiences could accumulate: this conjugation appears since then as the most desperate form of social uncertainty, the one which drives to a breakdown of moral and social identity of the subject. This is a particularly significant phenomenon, which aggregates experiences from separate domains and therefore creates irreversibility. But such a process appears as only a possibility. In many cases, the author demonstrates that the vulnerability relates only to one part of the wage-earning relationship – the “relation to work” or “relation to employment” – without being immediately general and to generate the kind of “objective visibility” that is usually attributed to uncertainty. In other words, we could not understand the deep nature of this event without realizing that it also changes its form while increasing – two conditions of the above mentioned *dispersion*⁶ which is a result of recent European research on that matter.

FLEXIBILITY AND UNCERTAINTY: RESULTS FROM A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Recently achieved, this research had as an objective to improve the understanding of flexibility impacts on general working conditions by letting the most exposed persons speak about it.⁷ It was all about the completion of statistic approaches on that matter and the correlations they make appear in this domain. Like the works of S. Paugam just mentioned, these correlations underline the aggravating character of the employment status towards working conditions. Besides a “structural effect”, they put some light on the existence of a “status effect” according to which the “employees, already unsure at the level of their employment conditions, are exposed to difficult work conditions more than others” (Letourneux 1998). Concerning the available figures, this effect might be extremely variable and depends on the considered criteria (situation, autonomy, rhythm, health, etc.) (Merlié and Paoli 2000).

Verified on the statistic plan, this correlation clarifies the existence of labor force allocation strategies, which assign the employees in unstable situations to particularly difficult jobs or tasks. Nevertheless, it does not cover the whole lot of flexibility models and keeps a principally quantitative dimension. Therefore it does not permit to realize more qualitative dimensions, linked mainly to internal flexibility development, and in a way so the employees could perceive the changes, especially when this perception is itself ambiguous. Supported by more than a dozen of enterprise monographs achieved in seven European Union States (Germany, Spain, Finland, France, Italy, Netherlands, United Kingdom), this research aimed then to confront the existing often statistic results to concerned employees’ points of view. Without taking into consideration detailed results, we would like to take support in those to empirically illustrate the theoretic elements above indicated. This will lead us to emphasize two important aspects. First, we remind the way the principle of a distinction between “relation to work” and “relation to employment” was little by little elaborated in the midst of the research dynamics, even though this distinction relies on aspects slightly different than those evoked by Paugam. Then we see to which reformulation of links between flexibility and uncertainty this distinction has led. Besides an “extensive” or cumulative uncertainty, the research made visible a more “intense” process of uncertainty marked by contrasted evolution of work and employment variables. The “intensive” uncertainty interprets a partial but intense

degradation of the initial wage-earning situation and produces an ambivalent perception.

History of a research

In spite of a relatively fine consciousness of the working condition question, the researchers were led to reposition this concept in several different ways. First, it was not possible to proceed to an ergonomic observation on such an irregular model as the one that could have been collected in several different countries. The study has privileged the collecting of information from employees' point of view in relation to their professional situation. This subjective perception was a differentiated perception by the same: it became necessary to examine not the question of working conditions as an isolated object, but to surround the differentiation that could exist in this domain next to the employees who benefit from a full time stable activity. Soon it appeared – and that is the second point – that this approach merits elements of complementary precision: as they were achieved, several case studies did not enter in a thus defined frame. The latter generated an implicit dualism between situations characterized by degradation of working conditions and others in which they seem unchanged. But this division does not take into consideration the fact that many situations are characterized by a deteriorated “relation to employment” under pretenses of sensibly homogenous working environment. All the same, the working condition evolution of employees in stable situations was often hit by chain reaction consequences of the flexibility recourse (external or internal). The problem was in fact the border between conditions of work and conditions of employment. Reducing the specter of flexibility evaluation in the domain of working conditions *stricto sensu* deprived the analysis of an intermediary material. The latter in fact appeared to be the richest on the heuristic plan, composed of professional situations in which the professional discriminations affect just a specific and limited dimension of the wage-earning relationship, at the same time being the generator of dissatisfaction and suffering to the concerned persons. The interpretation line that was progressively drawn was then that of a possible non-coherence between work and employment variables.⁸ Beyond the persistence of the uncertainty core, the research has evidenced the existence of very diverse situations, that escape to the traditional dualism but that remain necessary to integrate when looking at the global reality of uncertainty. To illustrate this event, we would like

to explain now what separates these two processes that we want to distinguish.⁹

The extensive uncertainty

We propose an approach to the first form of vulnerability in relation to the issue of *employment insecurity*. To ease the understanding, we have chosen to restrain this notion to the use of uncertain contracts (fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work, subsidized employment, etc.).¹⁰ If this notion has a decisive role, it is because of the nature of processes that we examine here: this one affects all variables of the wage-earning relationship and should not be applied, at least in this form, to employees who have a stable employment. That does not mean that those permanently employed could not know other forms of vulnerability, nor that the situations of insecurity necessarily lead to a degradation of relations to work. But what we wish to describe here is a congruence between “work uncertainty” and “employment uncertainty”, while trying to surround the organizational functioning happening underneath. In other words, how the organizations produce or reactivate the uncertainty of the wage-earning connection in its different forms. In that field, the research material permits to clarify two interacting dimensions: the articulation between employment insecurity and working environment and the strengthening of selectivity considering the uncertain labor.

Insecurity and work conditions

As long as we adopt the point of view of internal organizational mechanisms, and not just exclusively the one driven by the Welfare-State logic, the question of employment status impacts becomes slightly displaced. It is not only a provider of rights and legal protections it also produces a group of *ordinary protections* in the work environment. In some professional contexts, the stability of employment makes a grant to strategic resources of employees allowing them to reduce their exposition to risks, and more than that, to secure one from experiencing effects of the work environment. In other terms, the stability of employment constitutes the decisive element in elaboration of what D. Cru calls the “prudence know-how” (1995).

The research evoked here gives us several examples. In a Dutch transport enterprise, the conditions of work exposed of many risks: they associate at the same time painful positions (during driving), difficult tasks to manage (curves, maneuvers) and psychological tensions (intensity

of traffic or aggressiveness of clients). The access to quality material constitutes a decisive element to drivers, since vehicle changing is very frequent. The uncertain employees “have only access to second hand material” wrote A. Goudswaard *et al.* (1999, p. 36). Furthermore, their ignorance of passage or of obstacle anticipation techniques, as well as their lack of apprenticeship towards clients, makes the psychological tension to which they are submitted to even worse. In spite of their real novelty, the engaged training efforts concerning the uncertain employees do not allow a compensation of this intrinsic degradation of work relations – as long as they are not followed by any concrete professional perspectives.

We could quote a similar example of a French cultural goods enterprise having a massive resource in part time work. This form of employment, interpreted as a weakness of wage-earning income and concerning primarily women, produces particular work restraints. The insecurity affects “the quality of proposed services”, is what were interview participants saying (Gerritsen and Martin 2000, p. 27). It is particularly interpreted with an impossibility to have a “good perception of the department”. But this is decisive, especially in the affluence phase. It lets employees rapidly respond to clients and also to reduce the psychological tensions to which they are submitted. Tensions that sometimes come along with a general fatigue already described (standing positions, numerous coming and goings, etc.). Concerning the case of the large alimentary distribution enterprise, A.-M. Artilles and R. Alos-Moner reflect on those observations by writing: “the employees with stable situations control the security rules better than others (general instructions, operating methods, evacuation procedures, etc.). The employment security improves the prevention of risks and accidents at work” (Artilles and Alos-Moner 1999, p. 31). A degradation of the employment status generates a process of specific uncertainty: it is interpreted with a need of negotiation percentage allowing the employees to avoid the existing painfulness. It exposes them to particularly difficult work conditions and provides support for a cumulative and “disqualifying” uncertainty, using the term of Paugam.

A regular selectivity

We can add that the support to uncertain employment is often followed by an *even harder division of labor*. The uncertain employees are recruited for less qualified employment or even unqualified employment, and appear as be-

ing *de facto* deprived from vocational training. Their professional perspectives still exist but the filters they should go through multiply. The frailty of the employment status supplies a supplementary selective tool, adding a fundamental uncertainty on the future to ordinary working constraints. Let's consider in this matter the example of a British recovering bank. Let's say that it engaged in the establishment of "call-centers" in pursuit of strategic repositioning. The uncertain employees to whom the enterprise has resource (fixed-term contract and temporary agency work) are over-represented on the employment scale: 94% of them hold unqualified or less qualified positions in the context where the production pressures - primarily quantitative - do not cease to be developed. These employees have a very limited consciousness of their professional environment. They cannot elaborate strategies that could allow them to participate and reduce the productive pressures and have no influence on their work schedules and timings. Add to that a recent introduction of surveillance experience: several employees witnessed managers taking control of calls in some centers so that they could anonymously eavesdrop on their own personnel.

This degradation of working environment simultaneously enrolls in a very reconfigured division of labor. The call-centers have in fact produced a different approach to skills: the enterprise henceforth prefers the so-called "generic" skills rather than skills called "specialized" (Grimshaw and Ward 1999, p. 30-31). This was emphasized by the fact that the management chose not to offer supplementary training to "banking activities" but only as to "client services". This evolution brought diffusion of multiskilling among telephone operators. However, the experience of employees suggests that this evolution has not managed to diversify work. The analysis of judging between "specialized" skills and "generic" skills show that the first ones are in fact reserved to qualified personnel - which benefit from the push of specialized vocational training organisms. The other ones are left to a "mass training" and are attributed to uncertain employees. From the point of view of many interviewees, "the accent is on the communication with a client but it is simultaneously deprived from its technical contents". The feeling of repetition and monotony is important. "It is mass production" said some interviewees (*ibid*, p. 29). There again, the insecurity reaches employees while in construction of their relations to work: by assigning them unworthy positions, placing them in testing professional environments, depriving them from formal support which would allow them to

evolve in the enterprise or at the labor market level. There is an organizational disqualification added to the status disqualification – characteristic to the “extensive” uncertainty.

The production of social vulnerability is therefore interpreted as an *intricacy of two forms of uncertainty* against which neither work nor employment are up to provide alternative support. We cannot talk about ambivalence here. The concerned employees express a feeling of disqualification and loss of social dignity. The analysis of several situations at a level of European research allows the uncertainty persistence to become visible, marked by the increase of degradation factors. This visibility should not be possible though without analyzing organizational mechanisms. It holds in fact onto specific modalities of a flexible enterprise. In situations that we have observed, the employment insecurity is used by the different enterprise’s actors in a dynamic way. It involves a chain reaction degradation of work conditions (physical or psychological work conditions) and the employment conditions (status, education, professional progress, and income).

The intensive uncertainty

But the nature of such a core uncertainty supposes that we understand the processes which do not directly make a part of it, but which are not connected to stable or even “protected” situations. The other part of the model is characterized in fact by limited but intense forms of vulnerability. These situations are sometimes more dissimilar and more outstretched.¹¹ They cover various professional contexts that witness a simultaneous implementation of several types of flexibility – external or internal, quantitative or qualitative. Thus, the employment insecurity does not establish itself as a unique or central variable. There are more elements capable of affecting the anterior wage-earning relationship: uncertain status, part time, atypical schedule or timetable, inadequate treatment, overtime, etc. This does not indicate that social vulnerability does not take place: it does enroll into the wage-earning relationship but within a form that does not belong to the above-described process. To understand this mutation, it seems possible again to reconsider all the organizational mechanisms that produce this new type of vulnerability – limited but intense, disparate but extensive. Considering the elements that we dispose of, it seems that three cases of specific figures could be cleared: the relation between health and subcontracting, the satisfaction at work within

employment insecurity, the intensification of the rhythm of stable employees.

Subcontracting and health

The question of the links between subcontracting and health made an object of important but still limited reflections (Thébaud-Mony 1997, 2000). We do not propose to directly engage in this debate but to rather see how this question takes part of an extension and transformation of uncertainty forms. The support for this thought is provided by a Spanish chemistry enterprise providing support to subcontracting for its strategic activities. The subcontractors are responsible for the achievement of most specialized tasks but also for the most dangerous ones (transports of toxic or flammable products, contamination risks, etc.). A dualism form of work conditions takes also place behind the probability of a technical division of labor. The researchers note “progress in the prevention of risks and improvement of working conditions” but these evolutions “are deeply dualist because they are followed by a transfer of exposition to risks onto the subcontractors” (Artiles and Alos-Moner 1999, p. 32). It is a transfer in which the management, but also the employees, of the using enterprise play an active role.

The specificity of this observed event holds ever since to the fact that subcontractors benefit from higher qualifications and stable positions – at least in the short run. It is then for them unlikely to assimilate to uncertain employees even though “such an idea is sometimes widely spread in the enterprise” (*ibid*, p. 24). However, their conditions of work are testing and dangerous. They indicate the existence of a rather deteriorated type of “relation to work” compared to the one experienced by the employees of the enterprise in use. This deterioration is particularly intensive because it explicitly endangers the life of persons involved, and it is also fortified in the work activity. Then it generates a differentiated vulnerability relating to the previously considered case. Besides, the limited but intense character is not such an antinomy, as it seemed. It is much more likely to consider that the intensity becomes much stronger as the degradation of the wage-earning relationship becomes limited. In other words, it becomes quasi-invisible insofar as it keeps employment rules apparently stable and that no solution is assigned to a problem that is denied by the same. The subcontracting constitutes from this point of view a typical example: difficult conditions of work are often exchanged against favorable condi-

tions of employment depriving employees from an alternative or critical basis at the same time.

In the case of subcontracting, we can add that the distinction between intensive and extensive uncertainty remains only partial. A. Thébaud-Mony has shown how the harm to health of the subcontracting personnel often led the employing enterprise to get rid of them because of the encountered risks. These figure the “disposable” employees: the insecurity of employment intends to relieve the deterioration of conditions of work and the same hides the question of harm to health. Thus, there are many cases of subcontracting which are not related to qualified personnel and take place in a context of weakened conditions of employment (industrial cleaning, gardening, restoration, etc.). Finally, we should note that the economic conditions of subcontracting enterprises frequently produce a feeling of insecurity to employees even when they obtain an indefinite duration contract. It in fact has no significance in an unfavorable economic environment. The question of subcontracting rises a question of *increasing porosity of uncertainty forms* at the same time.

*The satisfaction at work in conditions of employment
insecurity*

The second case of figure is supplied by the employees whose employment conditions have deteriorated (fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work, forced part-time, etc.) but whose work conditions stayed sensitively similar to those of stable employees. Differently from the previous case, the employment status is not a basis for implementation of what we described as ordinary protection strategies: either because the environment presents a relatively lower level of risk, or because the policy of risk prevention has developed. The weakening of employment bonds does not lead to an extensive uncertainty movement but rather to *a recomposition of work relations within the frame of deteriorating employment norms*. The research provides here several examples with one particularly significant. It is about a large alimentary distribution German enterprise. Primarily female, the part-time labor has close to three-quarters of total labor at the points of sales (supermarkets and hypermarkets). It is associated with lousy incomes but also hides large dissimilarities in the effective continuance. Inside this enterprise, the conditions of work are principally characterized by strengthening of production pressure, diffusion of atypical work schedules, and lack of prediction of numerous time schedule changes. But those results

seemed relatively transversal. The researcher notes that “the part time employees are not victims of particular discriminations in comparison to the full time employees. Concerning the conditions of work, the differences separate the types of profession more than the employment status” (Deiss 1999, p. 24). For example, some activities are characterized by very hard handling tasks (like in a bonded warehouse for instance) for which the part time employees are not compensated.

Just like the full time employees, these are considered as being a part of central labor – and not of the surroundings. The measures in work security and health matters, notably the prevention of certain risks and the concept of work positions, correspond to a high level of requirements considering the enforcing regulation and action of the Works Council. But these measures are of equal concern to all employees. Likewise, the enterprise commits to maintain and keep the skills of its own personnel, including situations when this personnel is part time employed. The trade union implantation partially explains this situation: even though it is inferior to the national score, it is still significant (around 15% of labor), and assures an essential regulation operation in the fields of working environment and consistency of working timetables. The interests of part time employees are therefore taken into consideration in an explicit way even though the rotation of those that work only a few hours weekly leads to a lack of attention. This situation does not mean that the employees have the possibility to access full time positions – such perspectives are still rare. But the enterprise has a tendency to keep them in a specific professional state by situating them within a same distance from a generalized deterioration and an assured integration.

Some qualify this strategy as a means to “buy the confidence of personnel whose employment conditions are weakening” and could be described as a typical strategy of securing cheap labor. This strategy is however connected with the industrial relation system – the trade unions play a significant role in this stability – and allow the personnel to benefit from social policies improving their working environment – a particularly appreciated point in this sector. Thus, it provides a support in construction of their work relations to the employees who wish so. From a certain point of view, we could say that it reinstalls favorable work norms in a context marked by deterioration of employment norms.¹²

Employment stability and intensification of work

Matthieu de Nanteuil-Miribel
**Towards New Forms of Social
Vulnerability? Thoughts on
Relations Between Flexibility
and Uncertainty**

One of the fundamentals of the dualism theory and of models it led to – specially the one of a “flexible firm” (Atkinson 1984) – is based on the idea that some protected employees could radically avoid development of an external flexibility and its disastrous effects. The core, as an opposition to the periphery, forms some sort of virtual circle in which the qualified and valued employees would enjoy favorable working conditions. But the critics specially emphasize the fact that the working conditions of these employees do not make an exception: they often submit counterblows of repetitive organization changes and diverse flexibility strategies. After some structural transformations, it is then possible to look forward to study the dimensions which characterize such evolutions. Following some authors, we promote the idea by which the intensification of work participates in a general way to this evolution (Gollac and Volkoff 1996). To make it short, this term interprets not only the tightening of production restraints (timing and schedules) but also the progressive disappearances of “resting periods” allowing the employees to adjust and recover. Meaning, this definition is clearly distinguished from the one of productivity. But the proper sense of intensification is that, contrary to traditional risks, it is not placed in a certain type of activity and is therefore not enrolled in usual demarcations between social groups. When it participates to a degradation of working environment of uncertain employees, it enrolls in the frame of the above-described extensive movement. But when it affects the situation of stable employees, it gets within the intensive uncertainty that we try to describe here. Its reach is limited but the frail that it produces could be very acute. That is what happened in the case of an Italian automobile enterprise.

The change of organization in a form of elementary work units (UET) is where the “integrated factory” project, which characterized the observed enterprise, was at the beginning. We could add to that the important efforts of training for the whole personnel within the factory’s startup and putting to work phase, the training being designed “intrinsically connected” to the new organization (Fortunato *et al.* 1999, p. 22 and following). But these choices come along with traditional risks remaining and an appearance of new risks connected with the intensifying production rhythms. As the Italian researchers wrote, “if the automation improved the ergonomics of operation units on the assembly line, the different hierarchy levels

confirm the remaining of traditional hazards resulting in muscular problems for both superior and inferior members. According to them, work accidents are in many cases connected to the nature of the new production model. The restraints of time, as well as the stress, often make the employees accomplish different tasks without giving much attention to security norms. This concerns both the workers (qualified or unqualified equally) as well as maintenance technicians (which have to intervene in case of a technical problem)” (*ibid*, p. 44). The complexity of this example is related to the fact that these risks emerge or develop even when the enterprise has chosen to stabilize most of the uncertain contracts (98%) issued in the recruitment phase. This paradox gets us back to the multi-form characteristics of flexibility. The degradation of conditions of work comes from a development of multi-skilling and unstoppable organization changes, which add to classic pains numerous stress factors. The improvement of conditions of employment is more the reflection of a policy which, after having largely used numerous flexibilities, intends to secure its personnel by developing qualifications.

Like in the example of the German large distribution enterprise, we can see there how a relation of dependence and subordination of labor is settled for employees whose employment conditions are improved within a context of intensifying production rhythms. The acceptance of hard working conditions passes with the stabilizing of uncertainties, or employment stability is exchanged against the weak level of working condition measures, which has the same result. What we have here is not an extensive vulnerability, but a *deterioration of the “relation to work” in the context of employment stability*. The organization takes advantage of the vulnerability forms: on one side it offers real professional perspectives to newcomers, meaning a strict selection and uncertain duration; on the other hand, it puts them to testing work conditions, increasing the requirements which dwell on their activity.

THE AMBIVALENCES OF THE SOCIAL SUBJECT: ADJUSTMENTS WITHOUT COMPROMISES

We can see how these examples modify the analysis of social vulnerability forms. Beyond the hard core of the uncertainty described above, a whole series of organizations are hereafter described by more or less hybrid uncertainty forms, whose meaning is beyond common reading. The production of vulnerability seems to respond less and less

to a dualistic or mechanical logic, which would directly oppose those whose work and employment conditions degrade in an unilateral manner and those who see themselves as invulnerable and protected, as through a phenomenon of “communicating vases”. As D. Linhart and M. Maruani already noted at the beginning of the eighties, the uncertainty affects all kinds of employees and puts out of balance positions that were considered stable before (Linhart and Maruani 1982). However, such a generalization can be understood only under the condition that it is admitted that vulnerability changes its form at the same time. The weakened employees do not necessarily contain all the uncertainty forms, some get by or adjust better than others and the vulnerability forms differ more and more each day. Beyond the most difficult uncertainty situations, the set of weakenings extends and diversifies, rendering the individual strategies more isolated and more difficult to describe. What to say about some subcontractors whose employment conditions are favorable but whose activity exposes to major risks? And what about part time employees who consider their conditions of work acceptable while suffering from conditions of employment particularly detrimental? Or the temporary agency workers, who enter the labor market, find an interest in their activity, but go mad because they cannot stay in the enterprise or are forced to stay in the outskirts? Or the full time employees who see that their working conditions intensify or become harder and harder every day? How to interpret these uncompleted, heterogeneous and hybrid figures of the social vulnerability? Could we aggregate them and risk closing them in a reducing reading? But how can we not see at the same time that they all represent, although in different forms, a significant deterioration of the professional situation of these employees?

The rise of ambivalence

This diagnosis about the transformation of vulnerability modes, in fact, poses a question of their acceptance or, contrarily, of their refusal. This is a particularly delicate and complex question. Our consideration here has neither the means nor the ambition to give a definite reply. It seems to us however that it could significantly contribute to what the others mean under the name of “voluntary servitude” (Abel 2000) or the “soft domination” (Courpasson 2000). The different examples presented here underline in fact the emergence of a more and more ambivalent relationship to the world: the increasing separation between “relation to work” and “relation to employment” multi-

plies the weak areas by differentiating them strongly. Sure, in the case of extensive uncertainty, the restraint seems omnipresent. The concerned employees experience a sentiment of identity and dignity loss. But the intensive uncertainty situations tend to moderate the understanding of this phenomenon. We could not speak of an acceptance in the full sense of the term. In the examples that we have indicated, the employees express their discontent and sometimes even their revolt to be put in situations where they see themselves as under obligation to make concessions and accept “tests” (Périlleux 2001) which permanently affect their identity. They are not fooled with difficulties they are familiar with, or stakes that represent them overstepping the limits.¹³ We cannot however diagnose a refusal in a strict sense: the more or less sharp expression of discontent doubles after partial acceptance of the social game in which they happen to be. In the case where the vulnerability is at the same time intense and limited, the employees evoke the idea that their refusal is not complete or that an acceptance form is in progress. In fact, we can conclude that *they benefit from a certain level of support while experiencing vulnerability at work*: the encountered situations are not entirely disastrous and can be in some cases provided with important supports. The question of the absence of refusal, whether it takes the form of retreat or of litigation, merits to be examined again in one of those observations.

To adjust oneself

The first explanatory frame was provided by works of C. Dejours - singularly by his work *Souffrance en France* (Suffering in France 1998) - relating to social suffering issues in contemporary organizations: the acceptance of observed degradations in the field of work or employment would be principally motivated by *fear*. Fear of losing employment, fear to perceive more deteriorated working situations, fear to oppose superior decisions, in the context where uncertainty increases the inequality of wage-earning relationships. This approach presents a particular interest, in a proportion where it brings out psychological tensions, sometimes unbearable, to which are exposed employees while doing their work activity, as well as defense systems these tensions involve. But it seems to have been completed by an analysis of social transformations with which the subjects are also confronted while experiencing uncertainty. S. Paugam notes on that matter that the uncertain employees have “no application point in their discontent”, in the sense of a political horizon capable to pro-

vide a common destiny to their possible fight (Paugam 2000, p. 382). We could also add that, while experiencing new forms of vulnerability, they lack the “stable grounds” on which they could base their refusal without any ambiguity.

Except the extensive uncertainty situations which make a series of extremely strong uncertainties appear, the other cases of appearance show in fact composite and hybrid situations with which employees manage and settle, without disposing of collective grounds allowing them to be a real opposition. This is not quite harmless: it reflects the exact nature of flexibility policies, at least a large part of it. These are brought to speculate on the forms of vulnerability, to profit from certain testings against individual and limited improvements. The diagnose to which our initial hypothesis leads us is the following: the dispersion of vulnerability forms forces the employees to adjust themselves - in an isolated and forced way - yet these adjustments do not lead to collective compromises - that would allow these adjustments to be part of a critical discussion frame seeking alternative solutions of collective nature. On the contrary, such adjustments do not root in the type of social backgrounds that characterize the always fragile search for lasting and collective compromises, a quest for a “superior public good” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991) allowing them to get out of the enclosure into individual ambivalence.

To understand this evolution, it would not be futile to briefly get back to the distinction proposed by L. Boltanski and L. Thévenot between “compromise” and “adjustment”. The existence of compromise figures interprets the way individuals or groups settle their disputes “without resorting to violence” and succeed to “construct, manifest and ratify more or less lasting agreements” (*ibid.*, p. 39). The possibility of compromise is founded on the overstepping of individual interests and the pluralism of the justification criteria: “the presumption of a superior public good is necessary to accomplish this compromise. But, for the compromise to hold, it is not necessary to seek going further into explanations because there is no superior rank instance in which the incompatibles worlds, associated with the compromise, could converge” (*ibid.*, p. 408). The authors oppose different forms of relativity to this agreement logic, particularly the one of adjustment. This notion is individualistic: it is not supported by any universal justification and is not submitted to justice criteria that are characterizing to compromise. “The adjustment is an agreement convenient to both parties (“you do

that, that suits me; I do this, it suits you”) related to their mutual convenience and not in pursuit of a common good. The link gathering people is not generalized to all. (...) It is an adjustment, a friendly agreement, between them. It is not the object of any explicit convention; it cannot be justified publicly and then may be broken at any time.” (*ibid.* p. 408-409). Different from a compromise, the adjustment ignores the public good: “to remain within one’s own frame of relationship, that means to suspend the aim of reaching a form of a public good and to establish connections which are not supported by justice requirements and are not universal” (*ibid.*, p. 409-410).

To these authors, the notion of adjustment interprets a modality of exchanging. But the results that we dispose of suggest completing this intersubjective vision in promoting the idea by which, in a new work and employment context, the employees are also restraint to *adjust to themselves*. Except in the toughest cases, the employees are rarely in uniform situations. Their work conditions could degrade in stable situations – and *vice versa*. In such configurations, the social experience field is displaced. It is forced to combine certain disastrous aspects of professional life with other more attractive ones. Between alienation and assured integration, the weakening of wage-earning relationships opposes multiple and heterogeneous situations. The vulnerability experience becomes a blurred experience deprived of distinguishing marks and common sense. The social subjects participate in this game because they do not have a choice, sometimes because of fear, but also because the perceptions of the inconveniences to play have been modified. Even if certain aspects of their situation are not favorable, the social game is not homogenous. All the “blows” do not have the same nature: some of them can be causes of pain and suffering, others can provide support in vulnerable situations. This reading suggests, by a dispersion of vulnerability forms, the existence of a stronger ambivalence in the social experience of subjects. A solitary ambivalence. These “blows” are also experienced in the inner self, isolated, in a confrontation of self with the self. The flexibility puts the employees in ambiguous situations, which could make them adjust and settle most often for want of better. But these adjustments are elaborated in an isolated and restraint way, without allowing collective oppositions or contradictions to express. Thus, and without being unilateral, the flexibility of wage-earning relationships exposes the employees to market forces depriving them simultaneously of means to enroll into an alternative social position. In imitation of what D. Courpasson said about

the action in liberal organizations (Courpasson 2000), we could be here talking about a “restraint acceptance”: the acceptance is partially present, but is elaborated in the restraint itself, in other words in a weakness, if not a deprivation, of collective resistance means allowing emancipating from a sometimes painful ambivalence.

Towards new compromises?

The question of the appearance of new collective distinguishing marks, or in other words said critical discussion instances in the midst of which structuring compromises are likely to be established, seems to us to be at the heart of the link between flexibility and uncertainty. The diagnosis on the condition of the wage-earning relationships and the consequences of the above-evoked asymmetry are from this point of view very divided. Sure, after a deregulation wave which indicated the arrival of flexibility, some authors see an appearance of “new social conditioning” (Michon and Ségrestin 1996). The existence of “professional socialization itineraries suitable for uncertain employees, in spite of the brutal reality of the uncertainty” or an appearance of “irregular partnerships” concerning subcontracting situations, are as an example evoked as signs of a “re-codification of employment relations” (*ibid*, p. 21 and 23). All the same, some European collective negotiation experts evoke the hypothesis of a “flexible regulation of the employment market”: the establishment of general rules between social partners aim to both “organize the employment market” and assist to agreements authorizing “an increasing flexibility of the working conditions of employees, particularly in the matter of working schedules” (Barre *et al.* 2000, p. 54 to 55). But these observations do not seem to us contradictory to the idea by which this attempt of recodification is followed by *the weakening of the idea of compromise itself*, as a capacity of participants to establish lasting and collective agreements giving the social subjects a basis for social supports and horizon for plausible alternatives.

We have mentioned at the beginning of this article that the flexible decision became incarnated principally in the reversibility of choice and that it produced a strong social differentiation, the one observed in the field of employment statuses constituting the most visible part. These two dimensions represent a major defiance for collective negotiations and even more for the democratic project of a “collective control” of the market domain (Barbier and Nadel 2000). In a European perspective, C. Brewster *et al.*

add that, whatever the benefits that employees could get from some flexibility formulas, these stay by far mostly incited by the employer and only rarely suit the demands of employees (Brewster *et al.* 1998). Likewise, J.-L. Beffa and co-workers remind that, when it is agreed upon, the stability is less and less enrolled in the frame of employment rules and regulations that were negotiated: “it is henceforth *up to the initiative of firms* and their redefinition of business that the stability is accorded to the employees performing best... and not any more as a response to trade union claims which have an intention to generalize the status (Beffa *et al.* 1999, p. 1045, underlined). Finally by having accomplished the above mentioned monographs, these researchers show that the trade unions are put in a difficult position by decisions of flexibility, because these are often accepted in a unilateral way during the recruitment phase. They are adding that many particular cases escape the regulating action of personnel representation urgency from consequences of their breakdown, even when these try to stay close to the site (Fortunato *et al.* 1999; Deiss 1999; Gerritsen and Martin 2000).

The question of compromise construction, allowing the making of a stronghold when faced to weakening of wage-earning relationships, seems a stake of the primary plan. Because this weakening is so much more spread as it interferes into the frame of an individual subjectivity confronted with the increasing experience of ambivalence and a rise of solitary adjustments. Then again, this stake is supposed to be moderated by persisting differences between countries when it comes to their capacity to establish lasting compromises. D. Anxo and J. O’Reilly suggest in that matter to distinguish countries by flexibility regulation models and arbitration existing between legislative intervention and conventional initiative.¹⁴ Likewise, the research that we have evoked proposes to differentiate compromises after their institutional basis. Such a consideration is supposed to be examined thoroughly at a European level. But the question of the transformation of adjustments into compromises is more than ever an actuality. Evoking the “virtue of compromise” and the fundamental ethical difference between “compromise” and “compromising oneself”, M. Nachi wrote:

“The dictate of the market in fact leaves no more room for making new 'social compromises', that would be comparable to the compromises which prevailed in France during the 'Thirty Glorious Years'. (...) The uncompromising position of the market order will lead to deadlocks if it would be perpetuated. Some conflicts it produces would risk resulting in violence. That is why 'new forms of compromises' are not

only necessary but also urgently needed. The introduction of a 'compromise civilization' evoked by Ricoeur should unavoidably go through research of new reference systems which would make a formation of 'good' compromises possible, or if we could say compromises which do not camouflage conflicts even if they stay fragile" (Nachi 2001, p. 18-19).

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹ R. Boyer specially evokes "the adaptability of the production organisation, the natural disposition of workers to change jobs, the weakness of legal restraints administering the work contract, the sensibility of employees to the economic situation and the possibility of enterprises to avoid parts of the social and fiscal deductions" (R. Boyer 1986, p. 236-239).
- ² Concerning the work conditions in the 30s, the author speaks of "a relative integration in the subordination" (R. Castel 1995, p. 341).
- ³ This transformation of industrial logic to market logic has to be graded. The works of L. Boltanski and L. Thévenot only aim at underlining the plurality of co-ordination forms in organisations, across what they call the plurality of societies and justice criteria (inspiration, domestic, civic, of opinion, industrial, merchant). But the characteristic of the merchant logic is precisely that it has a "tendency to become hegemonous" and make impossible the engagement of this plurality.
- ⁴ For a detailed description of flexibility types see A. Goudswaard and M. de Nanteuil (2000).
- ⁵ This evolution is what makes the specifics of an employment sociology which are different from that of the traditional work sociology (Maruani and Reynaud 1999).
- ⁶ The work of S. Paugam proposes a typology of four forms of professional integration which, in France, proceed from this dissociation between work and employment: the *assured* integration, which combines satisfaction at work and employment stability, represents 42% of the wage-earning population; the *uncertain* integration which articulates satisfaction at work and the employment instability, 18%; *hard-working* integration which combines dissatisfaction at work and employment stability, 20%; and finally the *disqualifying* integration which accumulates dissatisfaction at work and employment instability, also 20%.
- ⁷ This research was part of a publication with the title Flexibility & Working Conditions - A comparative and qualitative study in 7 E.U. Member States (Goudswaard and de Nanteuil, 2000). The researchers associated with its achievement were the following: M. Deiss (ISF, Munich), R. Alos-Moner, M. Antonio Martin Artilles (QUIT, Barcelona), P. Huuhtanen, I. Kandolin (FIOH, Helsinki), D. Gerritsen, D. Martin (LSCI, Paris), S. Negrelli, E. Rapisardi, V. Fortunato (Pietro Sevezo, Milano), A. Goudswaard, J. Klein Hesselink, E. Miedema (TNO, Amsterdam), D. Grimshaw, K. Ward (UMIST, Manchester).
- ⁸ The work variables represent here the conditions of work in a usual sense: surroundings, positions, work contents, autonomy, health; the

employment variables are related to attributes of the conditions of employment: qualification, education, professional perspectives, salary, status.

⁹ On the methodology plan, the results that we have do not allow us to proceed to a detailed European analysis. Such a perspective would suppose a much more important material than the one that was gathered here (2 to 3 monographs by country) in the aim to articulate qualitative analysis quantitative investigation. In the case of links between flexibility and uncertainty, the national differences remain significant: they even go all the way back to basic definitions, national industrial relations systems, Welfare-State regimes and socio-economic history of every country. At the present time there are several research with an intent to construct a model of these differences: they distinguish the types of flexibility (Boyer 1986), forms of work time regulation (Anxo and O'Reilly 2000), forms of employment regulation (Barre *et al.* 2000) or specific relations between the professional and domestic domain concerning the role of women on the work market (Fagan and Rubery 1996). We could also add the analogous differences between activity sectors, particularly in the part time case (Maruani and Nicole-Drancourt 1989). The results that we give in return here do not ignore the differences but they seek a way to place themselves in such modelling processes. It is about analysing the way the social subjects are affected and shattered by the development of forms of diverse flexibility placing this consideration into a European context. The question of support of such an approach on a more quantitative base, while allowing us test different comparative models, stays completely open and offers a particularly heuristic perspective.

¹⁰ But this situation equally includes the sub-contract uncertainty (supported part time, weakness of wage-earning income) as well as the feeling to be menaced during employment (licensing, restructurations). The notion of employment insecurity supposes also to be rephrased in a European perspective. In countries in which social rights associated to the employment status are important (Germany, France, Scandinavian countries), the employment insecurity is principally of statutory nature. On the other hand, in the countries where these laws are weak and the intervention of State is minimal (United Kingdom, Ireland), the insecurity is more interpreted as an extension of supported part time and a weakness of salaried income. For a detailed analysis distinguishing the "libéral", "continental" and "social-democratic" models, see Esping-Andersen (1999).

¹¹ These regroup the *uncertain and hard-working* integration forms described by S. Paugam (2000).

¹² Some other examples could be presented on that matter, specially when the support to temporary agency work is practiced in a quasi-structural way and makes no specific differentiation in the field of conditions of work. In the case of a French electronic enterprise (Gerritsen and Martin 2000), the temporary agency workers considered to be forced to accept a position that they estimated themselves favorable to their insertion on the labor market. But they simultaneously expressed - with violence - the "rage" of not being able to integrate into the user enterprise and thus benefit from any professional perspectives. For further readings on the world of temporary agency work see C. Faure-Guichard (2000).

¹³ On that matter, S. Paugam reminds that "the uncertain employees are not left unprovided of a critical sense and a rational plan of

stakes in the fight. (...) They are not fooled when faced with the real action of difficulties they encounter in their professional life. In other words said, we would be wrong to interpret the current weakness of protestations faced with the uncertainty by an incompetence of concerned employees to bring out a clear judgement on the objectives of this revolt” (Paugam 2000, p. 381).

- ¹⁴ The authors distinguish concerning this matter the “State-supported” flexibility (ex. France, Spain), the “individualised” flexibility (ex. United Kingdom, Ireland) and the “negotiated flexibility” (ex. Netherlands, Denmark) (Anxo and O’Reilly 2000). The recent example of the Netherlands (Klein-Hesselink and van Vuuren 1999) having negotiated and then legislated the requalification of uncertain employments to permanent employments makes us wonder about possible future perspectives – even if this example also shows certain limits.

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