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## **Biographical meanings of work: the case of a Polish freelancer**

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**Abstract** The sociological analyses of contemporary society mostly emphasize its liquid and flexible character, which provides new opportunities, but also threats, on both the macro and individual level. The incoherence of the present times could, however, also be perceived as the interference of various social orders that have been described by scholars as “premodernity,” “modernity” and “postmodernity.” In Poland, these tensions are particularly acute because of the collision of the regimes of modernity, postmodernity and elements of traditional culture that are still more visible than in the West. The aim of this paper is to present the relationships between two of the above-mentioned orders: modernity and postmodernity in the sphere of work, with reference to the biographical structure of an individual’s experience. An empirical example of these tensions is demonstrated in the autobiographical story of Piotr, a freelance business psychologist. The article’s first part focuses on the theoretical framework and methodology that were applied while investigating the biographical manifestations of the clashes between these orders. The second part includes a detailed analysis of the narrator’s life story, linking the psychological and sociological perspectives. Furthermore, two meanings of work and their implications for the given case are presented. Finally, the analyzed interview is discussed in a broader perspective, in comparison to other cases.

**Keywords** social order, late capitalism, neoliberalism, modernity, postmodernity, biography, work, freelancing, Poland

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The sociological studies of contemporary society emphasize its liquid, flexible, and open (unfinished) character (Lyotard 1984; Rorty 1989; Bauman 2000), which provides new opportunities, but also new threats on both the macro and the biographical levels (Beck 1992). We assume that the liquidity of the present times can be more accurately seen not necessarily as a specificity of the new emerging postmodern order, but as a manifestation of the interference of various social orders that have already been described in the categories of "premodernity," "modernity" and "postmodernity" (cf. Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk 2004; Pakulski 2009). In order to understand the present times, it is essential to reconstruct the tensions that arise from the coexistence of these three orders. In Poland, these tensions are particularly acute because of the interference of the re-

gimes of the first modernity, the second one, as well as elements of traditional culture that are still more visible than in Western societies. The traditional order lasted longer in Poland than in Western Europe because of the colonial (Poland regained independence in 1918 after over a century of non-existence as the Polish state) and semi-peripheral position in the global system (within Wallerstein's meaning [1974]). The communist Polish People's Republic modernized the "traditional" country, but at the same time it maintained many traditional elements which proved functional for a rapid top-down modernization. The so-called transformation after the fall of communism in 1989 constituted the second modernization (cf. "neomodernity" in Kollmorgen 2004) in Poland, which has been similarly incoherent as was the first one. At the same time, global and

European transformations in the spheres of politics, economics and culture have brought about social processes often associated in sociological literature with the term “postmodern” (e.g. transformation of the state and economic regime, multiplication, differentiation, and “individualization” of the forms of occupational paths, social relations (among others, family), as well as changes in the sphere of an individual’s identity).

The aim of this paper is not to specifically describe these orders and changes, but only to demonstrate the relationships and tensions between two of the above-mentioned orders: modernity and postmodernity in the area of work, having reference to the biographical structure of an individual’s experience<sup>1</sup>. It is not our intention to present the distribution and intensity of these phenomena in the population or their typology, but to make their mechanisms more “visible.” Thus we present the analytical results of one narrative interview with a freelance business psychologist, one that particularly clearly reflects the above-mentioned problems. When it comes to the work-life relation, Piotr’s case constitutes rather “extreme” than “average” type of freelancer in Polish late capitalism (cf. Miller 2016). Yet, it makes the sociological interpretation of the typical mechanisms, which are specific for the present time, more accurate. Our intention here is to uncover the qual-

ity of mechanisms (what mechanisms occur?), rather than their quantitative features (how intense or widespread they are?). Within the context of Piotr’s overall biographical story, the atypical character of typical mechanisms makes them more visible. Furthermore, the peculiar relationship between those mechanisms makes it possible to avoid some elements of stereotypical interpretation, as it will be described at the end of the text. In the first part of the article we briefly focus on the theoretical context and methodology applied in our study. In the next section, we summarize the narrator’s life story and analyze his narrative in detail, linking psychological and sociological perspectives. We then distinguish two meanings of work and describe their implications, referring both to the given interview and to the broader perspective. Finally, we place the analyzed case in a wider spectrum containing variations of the two meanings of work.

### Theoretical context of our investigation

Polish researchers have been mostly interested in macrostructural features of Poland’s transformation after 1989 (cf. Rychard 1993; Wnuk-Lipiński and Ziólkowski 2001; Domański 2002; 2004; Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2004; Kochanowicz, Mandes, and Marody 2007; Krzemiński 2011; Jasiocki 2013). Recently however, there has been an increase in qualitative research concerning individual (biographical) perspectives of that phenomenon. Generally speaking, scholars have focused on individuals’ experience with respect to the more or less intense conflicts, tensions, and dilemmas that were recounted, depending on the given generations (in Mannheim’s terms [1927]), and resulting from the

<sup>1</sup> This attempt to reconstruct the biographical consequences of the interrelationship between “premodernity,” “modernity” and “postmodernity” has been undertaken within the research project *Poles in the world of late capitalism: changes of biographical processes in terms of professional careers, social relations and identity at the time of system transformation in Poland*, conducted at the Institute of Sociology, University of Lodz. The project is financed by the Polish National Science Center, grant no: UMO-2013/11/B/HS6/01473.

shift from the traditional (socialist) type of employment, based on long-term contracts, to the capitalist (neoliberal) labor regimes characterized by flexible, fixed-term project-based and task-based employment arrangements (Mrozowicki 2016: 95; cf. Mrozowicki 2011; Domecka and Mrozowicki 2013)<sup>2</sup>. The process of dismantling the institution of state-guaranteed employment and the flexibilization of the labor market were fuelled and justified by neoliberal, individualistic ideas of self-development, based on a constant need to show one's initiative, creativity, entrepreneurial attitude, and on individually coping with risk and uncertainty (cf. Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). These assumptions superseded the expectations (culturally rooted in the socialist system) of a long-lasting affirmation of an individual's educational and professional status, and the resultant claims with respect to the scope and durability of employment related to this status (cf. Sennett 1998). Some researchers criticize professional career changes in the broader context of late capitalism. On one hand, they point to the neoliberal order with-

<sup>2</sup> This is manifested in the continuous liberalization of the Polish job market, which was supposed to be a remedy for the high level of unemployment and to stimulate employability and competitiveness. Despite the fact these goals were achieved, the rapid increase in temporary employment contracts, as well as other features not regulated by the Labor Code (in terms of working time, minimum wage, annual leave, etc.) and in forms of employment (including civil law contracts or so called "junk contracts" and self-employment) were observed during the last decade (Mrozowicki 2016). Interestingly, the share of people working on different types of "junk contracts" decreased from about 1.3 million in 2014 to about 480 thousand in 2016 (about 3.7 per cent of all employed persons), while at the same time the number of the self-employed persons grew from 1.1 million to almost 2.3 million during that period (GUS 2017). On one hand, this may be considered a result of the Polish authorities' efforts to promote and force employers to hire people on more "stable" terms, but on the other hand such a significant increase in the number of the self-employed means that most probably many people who previously had civil law contracts were forced to become self-employed.

in managerial biographies, in particular to the contemporary corporate standards of increasing competitiveness, creativity, availability, and work effectiveness measured by the employee's usefulness for the particular work project (Biały 2015; Domecka 2016; Waniek 2016). On the other hand, researchers refer to the phenomenon of precariousness (Sowa 2010; Mrozowicki 2016; cf. Standing 2011), and of non-linear, fragmented career patterns (Domecka and Mrozowicki 2013; Róg-Ilnicka 2015; cf. Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Sennett 1998; Fenton and Dermott 2006), and the "disenchantment" with flexibility (Strzelecki 2012; Giermanowska 2013; cf. Zalewski 2012), features which are being differently experienced, depending on the type of employment (low- or high-skilled workers, businessmen) (Domecka and Mrozowicki 2013; Mrozowicki 2016), generation (Poławski 2012) or position in the class structure (Strzelecki 2012; Gdula 2014). Particular attention has lately been given to the issue of the "normalization" of precarious, uncertain, low-paid and highly flexible employment, which is perceived by a growing number of young people entering the job market as an obvious and "natural," albeit temporary, feature of their careers (Poławski 2012; Strzelecki 2012; Gdula 2014; Mrozowicki 2016).

One specific type of career development in the situation of rising flexibility of the labor market is that of freelancer, which, except for few exceptions (Infakt 2010; Piejko 2012; Miller 2016) has not been deeply analyzed so far by Polish researchers. Interestingly, as was noted by Piotr Miller (2016), the author of the most comprehensive Polish study on freelancers, in most cases researchers had not differentiated freelance work as a separate phenomenon, but had been

focused instead on self-employment, short-term contract employment, or “junk contract” employment. Most of the Polish, and especially the West European and American studies on the growing number of people carrying on flexible employment refer to already well-grounded concepts of *protean career* (Hall 1976), *portfolio career* (Handy 1994), *boundaryless career* (Arthur 1994; Defillippi and Arthur 1994; Arthur and Rousseau 1996; Sullivan 1999; Sullivan and Arthur 2006) and *post-corporate career* (Peiperl and Baruch 1997). These concepts were also a reference point for our studies.

Since there are a significant number of analyses on employment changes in post-socialist Poland in the Polish sociology, including some papers on the biographical experiences of workers, the conducted project does not focus solely on the professional sphere, but attempts to broadly reconstruct the stories of contemporary Poles who find themselves in the situation framed by collision of the three above-mentioned regimes.

## Research methodology

The research team employs Fritz Schütze's (2008) autobiographical narrative method of data collection and analysis, as it provides access to the analytical tools of comprehensive reconstruction of processes associated with the formation of personal orientations in their social context. Developed beginning in the early 1970s, this method derives from interpretative-oriented sociology, which assumes that reality is constructed by people themselves in daily interactions (Apitzsch and Inowlocki 2000). However, in this project the autobiographical narrative

interview is expanded in connection with our specific approach, the aim of which is to reconstruct biographical processes by identifying more or less habitual structures of the organization of experience(s). Thus, the accent is on phenomenological and psychological analysis (the Gestalt therapy approach) (cf. Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman 1951), which is combined (and confronted) with sociological analysis of the social orders deeply embedded in socio-historical conditions.

In a typical autobiographical narrative interview, the informant is asked at the beginning to present either his or her entire life, or a given topic of interest, in which he or she participated, in an *ex tempore* narrative. After this stage, the interviewer asks questions referring to those parts of the narrative which were not detailed enough. Finally, in the third stage the interviewee plays the role of experts and theoreticians of themselves (Flick 2009), and are asked questions that aim at “theoretical accounts of what happened and at balancing the story, reducing the ‘meaning’ of the whole to its common denominator” (Hermanns 1995: 184). In this project, a researcher meets with an interviewee twice (the first interview lasts from three to six hours). Later the first life-story narration, particularly its narrative schemes, is interpreted again at the second meeting. With respect to data analysis, this process is carried out in a way inspired by Schütze's (2008) approach: generalizations are made by constant examining and comparing substantive features of various narratives. In this sense, the biographical approach makes it possible to deconstruct social phenomena from the individual perspective, irrespective of the number of cases being reviewed. Analysis requires

high-quality transcription of the verbal material so that a researcher can differentiate communicative schemes of narratives (narration, description, argumentation), as well as pauses, hesitations or paralinguistic phenomena (laughter, crying, self-corrections, etc.), which are regarded as significant markers of the dynamics of the interviewee's self-perception. All biographical details which could lead to identification of the narrator's real identity are also thoroughly anonymized.

The presented project's empirical data base covers 50 autobiographical narrative interviews (out of 82 planned in total), conducted with employees between 2014 and 2016 in major Polish cities. The interviewees are recruited via a snowballing technique, which deliberately aims at a sample that is broad and diversified in socio-demographic terms. The structural features of work organization, as well as the corporate standards of project-based working style, are not specific only to international corporations (as narrowly understood), but they also penetrate the whole institutional field (law, finances, medicine, IT, media and communication, education, consulting, etc.), and therefore we conducted interviews with various professional groups, including managers of large and small companies, the category of professionals, as well as freelancers.

### Piotr's biographical story

The story of Piotr presents an interesting case, which illustrates work-related dilemmas and tensions on the contemporary Polish labor market. He represents the category of freelancers, a group which, as was mentioned, is growing in impor-

tance on the Polish labor market<sup>3</sup>. The interview was carried out in two stages, in the summer and winter of 2015, and lasted over six hours. Piotr is a business psychologist in his early forties, living in a middle-sized Polish city. Both the narrator's and his family stories were strongly affected by Poland's systemic transformation from communism to a neoliberal economy. Piotr's parents divorced in the 1980s, when he and his younger brother were young kids, which in the context of both the past and present conservative Polish society led the narrator to describe his family as "dysfunctional." In the communist period, his father was a coal miner, and in the new economic reality after 1989 he could not find a job. Thus, as was the case with many other Poles at that time, the only solution for him was to seek seasonal work abroad for the next several years, which enabled him to financially support his second newly established family, as well as Piotr and his brother, while at the same time this seriously strained his relations with the narrator (Piotr). After returning to Poland, Piotr's father undertook various jobs, but did not succeed in maintaining any of them for a long period of time. His attempts to run his own company also failed. Currently, he does various casual jobs. As regards Piotr's mother, during communist times she had an office job in a state-owned enterprise. With the change of the economic regime in Poland,

<sup>3</sup> Miller (2016) notes that the "model type" of freelancer is a person who: 1) was "born" or has "matured" to work in this way; 2) takes decisions in this respect individually and autonomously; 3) meets five common definitional criteria (self-employed; works in specialized, or at least creative, white-collar work; works in the service sector for several entities; works without a fixed place and time; and whose work requires a set of specific personal features); and 4) pursues this career model on a full-time basis, is self-employed, and freelance work is his or her primary source of income.

she lost her job and, similarly as with her ex-husband, could not find stable employment for the next 20 years. According to Piotr this has significantly influenced her psychological condition and led her to depression, which, in turn, resulted in deepening her professional problems. Growing up in these difficult conditions (framed by the family's poor economic situation, his mother's deepening depression, and the loosening of relations with his father) Piotr was forced to take the initiative in his life from the very beginning.

Although Piotr consistently underlines in his narrative that his educational and professional choices were of a random character, our analysis shows that in fact his decisions resulted from a *biographical action scheme*. According to Schütze (2008), such a scheme could be understood as a process of intentionally undertaking and realizing one's own goals and expectations. In other words, a person attempts to actively shape the course of his or her life<sup>4</sup>. Thus, in the absence of strong social and cultural capital in his family which could have facilitated his future career, Piotr knew that only hard work could help him get out of the difficult situation he and his parents were in. He was a good pupil, which, together with his persistence in achieving good marks, allowed him to finish secondary school without much effort. His further educational choices resulted from

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<sup>4</sup> Beside *biographical action scheme*, Schütze distinguished three other biographical process structures that are understood as ordering principles of one's life history: *trajectory of suffering* (an individual is not capable of actively shaping his/her own life anymore, since he/she can only react to overwhelming outer events); *institutional expectation pattern* (an individual follows institutionally-shaped and normatively-defined courses of life), *biographical metamorphosis* (an individual faces unexpected events or new opportunities which launch inner development) (2008).

a precise calculation of his own resources (skills and interests in the humanities) and external conditions (a growing demand for consulting services before Poland's accession to the EU and, in consequence, an expected inflow of European funds for "soft skills" development among the Polish workforce). Aware of the promising career prospects on the consulting market, Piotr entered the local university and decided to study business psychology. From the beginning of his studies he was actively broadening his knowledge and competences in that field. His involvement in students' associations and other voluntary activities enabled him to establish a network of professional contacts, which quickly allowed him to find a job as a business psychologist even before graduation. For the next few years Piotr worked in various corporations, where he further developed his competencies in the field.

Eight years ago, he decided to quit these jobs and choose a more, as he claims in neoliberal terms, "flexible and independent" form of work, which was self-employment. Being a freelance consultant, he has taken on a path of career development voluntarily that, as he notices, could in fact be perceived as one leading to precarity (cf. Standing 2011). His resignation from a long-term job contract and stable employment in a corporation is, however, not only a meaningful form of Piotr's individualization. It is also an example of a noticeable phenomenon among Polish professionals who, after acquiring substantial work experience in large, often transnational companies, escape from their current employment contexts in order to finally achieve the status of "the architect of one's own fortune." Miller (2016), in his study on Polish free-

lancers, distinguished two basic paths of “becoming a freelancer”: 1) reaching a voluntary and autonomous decision based on one’s belief in this career model, its specificity, and the relatively higher possibilities of achieving professional success; or 2) making a decision as a result of the occurrence of certain external factors, such as an unfavorable labor market situation, or recognition of one’s own current career phase as unsatisfactory (e.g. due to a physically and psychologically exhaustive full-time job; routine and stressful working conditions, low wages, etc.). On the other hand, other scholars note that the observed global change in work patterns is largely linked to a large-scale blockade of more traditional career paths in work organizations, and is a necessity rather than a fully free choice of an individual (cf. Sennett 1998). Piotr’s story shows that the process of becoming and maintaining freelance status can be more complex.

### Looking for autonomy in order to reach stability

With Piotr’s mother becoming depressed after losing her job, his deteriorating living conditions, and his loosening ties between both his parents – all of these factors had a significant impact on him in his adolescence. He was ashamed in front of his peers about his family’s poverty, and so began to earn a living early on, contributing to the financial support of his mother and brother:

I felt responsible for my brother in a way, well indirectly, and there were some suggestions made by my mother looking back at it now, I mean that we were short of money, that something should be done.

And so Piotr quickly gained a sense of independence. As a result, after passing his final secondary school exams he decided to leave home and support himself. What was important in terms of his future developments, however, was the fact that the impetus for his actions was external-protective motivation (i.e. *escaping from*) rather than an internal impulse or passion, a drive to do something in particular (i.e. *escaping to*) (Każmierska, Piotrowski, and Waniek 2011). From the very beginning this became a reason for harsh and constant arguments, mainly between him and his brother, and later on also between him and his parents. In consequence, both at the time and today he experiences and gets caught up in both feelings of guilt (because he did it), but also resentments (because he was forced to do it), which confirms the above mentioned “escapist” motivation<sup>5</sup>:

I treated it so in my own conscience as if I was paying, as if I was paying ((6 s))//as if it was kind of a toll payment for not being obliged to stay there... I pay so I can stay on my own...and later on my brother started to reproach me, started nagging that he was forced to stay there, that he should have been... and we started to become slightly conflicted and it became even worse as we started to have conversations like “OK, I have moved out, but I pay the rent, nobody gives me anything, so if you don’t like the situation you are in, feel free to follow my footsteps, okay? Try living on your own.” ((irritated, citing his own words he used at that point)). “And although he was in his teens and

<sup>5</sup> The number in double parentheses indicates the length of the pause in seconds; the text in double parentheses constitutes the commentary; the underlined text – emphasis during the speech; “//” – interruption or inclusion in the course of talking.

I was in my teens, I was able to combine it all somehow... //and a digression why, because I have an opinion that we were raised differently.”

A process similar to that observed in the narrator’s family of origin can be discerned when we look at his professional career. The autonomy he has achieved in this area after many years of efforts is very closely guarded, that is, the narrator supports it with an extensive set of arguments, despite all the visible symptoms of suffering; in this case, due to being chronically overworked. In the family sphere he has also sought autonomy at all costs, fearing his mother’s depression and the general dejected atmosphere of his home; the need for autonomy results in getting trapped for many years in emotional conflicts with those close to him.

While still a student of business psychology, Piotr became involved in university-based group activities: he organised meetings with well-known entrepreneurs and business people, and advised his peers on running their companies. It all started somehow automatically, and rapidly expanded, although he had not shown an interest in this matter before. This intensive activity was, again, prompted by the tough conditions in his family home:

It was at the point of my studies where this financial situation of my mother still wasn’t good. So in the year 2000, I kind of experienced how nice it was to earn your own money and, on the other hand, I had the need to finance myself as such was the reality and... I began to go to Ireland during my studies and spent four summer seasons there ((smiling))... and so it was very similar because of this student activity being very vivid

I knew all the authorities, all the deans and the like, all those professors, doctors... and so they would support us greatly and our initiatives, so I, when it came to year-end exams and, having them all passed quickly, I was done with them by end of May, and so until mid-October I could stay in Ireland... earning money to support myself during the next season\...

In a similarly unthinking manner the narrator embarked on his current professional career as a business psychologist:

And so I started conducting business training sessions, because one of the consultants became ill and there arose a need to conduct that training and they decided to give it a go and rely on me in that matter, and because of my experience in the projects carried out during my studies, and with various consulting corporations, I was able to shoulder that as these were rather soft skills, not specialist, some counseling, a quite easy thing psychologically-wise... And so it clicked, it clicked\...\ And so on, one after another and another... And so from the beginning of 2002, since that time I have been working in this business, so it’s over 13 years now that I’ve been doing this... during which time I have gone through three companies, where I first worked as a full-time employee and later on other terms of cooperation... -Errrm- these have always been bigger players, with the last one being an international company... which gave me access to various specific projects, skills and qualification developments, but it always made me want to do it my way... And so as it happened that with each of those concepts I was involved in, I had this feeling of doing things differently, I was cornered by all those formal constraints just because I was an employee...

and so in 2007 I came to the conclusion that I should be working on my own because I had, after five years of... experience, contacts, so I got the idea so I should start my own business and do it my way and so far... it's been working for me for eight years, hasn't it?... since 2007, eight years... ((5s.))

As seen above, Piotr has been working as a freelancer for eight years now. He explains that his decision to choose this career path was determined by a growing need to free himself from tight, highly routine structures of the organizations he was employed in, and to concentrate on "doing things differently." Throughout the whole interview he (typically for freelancers) strongly emphasized the key role of autonomy in making his own work-related decisions, and self-determination in creating his own professional career. He could thus be described, referring again to Miller's (2016) typology of freelance employment, as an *escaping freelancer*, who in search of autonomy and/or due to unsatisfactory conditions in his current workplace gives up the "stable" employment and takes advantage of his own acknowledged professional competences, experiences, and the contacts collected in previous jobs in order to find his own path of professional development<sup>6</sup>. Charles Handy, in his studies on *port-*

*folio working*, underlines the role of these resources in one's decision to resign from a "stable" job, and subsequently in maintaining a sense of continuity of one's professional career. Even when there are no new "projects" for some time, having an awareness that one's own competences are appreciated by clients enables people working on flexible terms to treat that situation as a transitional period (1994; cf. Miller 2016).

Interestingly, on one hand Piotr enlarges on all the advantages of having his own portfolio of competences that secure his self-employed status, while on the other he also remains highly critical of, as he describes it, the illusion of security offered by full-time employment compared to the vision of stability through autonomy which he promotes. He then opposes the general attitude of young Polish workers, who normatively accept insecurity and the high flexibility required by the contemporary labor market only if it frames just an initial stage of their occupational careers and constitutes a "bridge" to traditional, more stable forms of employment (Giermanowska 2013; Mrozowicki 2016). Piotr is aware that the neoliberal regime has dismantled the welfare state guarantees of permanent employment, and thus he rather follows the individualistic ideas

<sup>6</sup> Miller (2016) provides a comprehensive typology of freelance career patterns: 1) *born freelancers*, who from the beginning of their professional careers could not imagine any other model of employment and relates freelancing to their own features of character and the values they follow (e.g. opposing inflexible working conditions in corporate-like organizations); 2) *escaping freelancers* who quit "stable" work and, thanks to acknowledged qualifications, experience and contacts collected in previous jobs, are able to succeed on the job market; their reasons for "becoming a freelancer" result from previous unfavorable job experiences, that is, the need for a greater independence/autonomy and/or unsatisfactory conditions in previous work (interpersonal conflicts, too many obligations, problems with achieving a work-life balance, too

low wages, escape from routine and stress and from the limitations on further professional development in an inflexible organization); 3) *non-ideological freelancers* who are driven by "pragmatic" reasons rather than own features (unlike born freelancers) or previous work experience (unlike escaping freelancers); they see freelance as somehow profitable (mostly in financial terms) or typical for particular professions (e.g. IT specialists); and 4) *forced freelancers*, who are self-employed due to economic reasons or an unfavorable job market situation (they either lost a "stable" occupation or could not find one); they see freelancing as only a temporary and "transitory" career stage until they find a "normal" job; this type is in some fashion a denial of the idea of freelancing, as autonomy is not a value for such people.

of coping with market-driven forces, which are framed by investments in self-development, showing one's initiative, individual coping with uncertainty and risk, and flexibility (cf. Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Sennett 1998). However, at the same time he fails to find internal peace in that sphere; in fact, similarly to the family sphere, he experiences some sort of suffering:

So far I have done 70% of things on my own terms. I do things that stimulate me intellectually. But, they just cost me lots of energy because my work is about erm: going away, talking to people and being with people all day every day. Erm, and this is all physically –erm- energetically –erm- tiring, right? In a way, you know, if you own a shop, two shops, three shops, two restaurants...

Piotr's story reveals that the systemic transformation has created a specific basis for the development of a freelance attitude. In many narratives we studied, the economic situation of one's family during the first years after the systemic transformation turned out to be very unfavorable, leading young people to carry out intensified activities in order to avoid repeating their parents' plight and to achieve their own autonomy. Moreover, the features of self-employment in our times, in particular its acute precarity (with its project-based working style and short-term planning) (cf. Standing 2011) force them to accelerate their actions even more. Scholars indicate that this de-standardization of work, as well as the emergence of new technologies and new management policies, leads to high levels of uncertainty and precariousness of employment, despite the ability of the system to learn in the context of the contin-

ually self-reproducing networks that generate new possibilities (cf. Beck 1992; Castells 1996; Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). Last but not least, the cultural imperative of self-creation and self-realization in the professional sphere, which provides ever new modes of rationalizations for one's work engagement and heavy workload, perfectly complements the above tendencies.

### The trajectory of too many engagements

As noted by Boltanski and Chiapello in their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), capitalism in the Western world is dominated by the project-oriented *cit * (regime of justification of the private market economy). Its central category is "activity." An individual needs to remain constantly "active," to "engage" in "projects" and share "new ideas." Life is defined then as a series of "projects" that require "activity" or readiness to conduct them (one should never remain outside of some project). Although this "engagement" is always short-term and focused on rapid achievement of some given goals, it always brings excitement and satisfaction. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, one of the results of this "active" attitude are "network" relationships based on loose ties, which allow individuals to initiate and conduct new "projects." Thanks to them, such divisions like stable employment and lack of certainty, or work and leisure, are being eliminated (Stacho-wiak 2014; cf. Chiapello and Fairclough 2002).

Piotr's work story seems to match Boltanski and Chiapello's diagnosis of the present times. His freelance activity is grounded on a constant proactive attitude and openness to conduct several, mostly short-term,

projects simultaneously. They can be launched only thanks to an impressively extensive (albeit weak) network of contacts that are, as it was noted, collected and “looked after” from the times of his studies. Moreover, since being a business psychologist is about arousing and maintaining clients’ proactive behavior, Piotr also teaches them the attitude that he has internalized as a freelancer. The analysis of Piotr’s narrative shows, however, that this dominance of work creates tensions with respect to his private life. Typically for contemporary times, work as central category in the interviewee’s life is not a matter of his choice, but a structural requirement in a highly competitive job market. The problems of *work-life balance* and colonialization of private life by work are often seen as a consequence of the tendency towards the flexibilization of employment (Sennett 1998; Gdula 2014). In the case of Piotr, the analogy between his family situation and work comes down again to well-thought out “technologies of self.” He has introduced some regimes to structure his working day and to separate his professional and private spheres. These regimes, however, are subject to a great deal of control and are so strictly observed that one gets the impression of a lack of autonomy, or at least a dependence on these regimes in order to preserve autonomy. In other words, the search for autonomy is not undertaken with an aim to find new values, but turns into an autotelic goal instead. Moreover, paradoxically it leads to other dependencies, both in the sphere of personal relations, as well as in that of work: the means (autonomy) becomes autonomous in relation to the end (stability). Freeing himself from one form of work (in a corporation) turns into dependence on another form (freelancer’s workaholism):

So I wake up at 5 o’clock in the morning, if I’ve got a counselling session, it’s usually in Warsaw, so to be there at 8.30 I have to wake up at 5 and leave at 6 to arrive thirty minutes before the group comes in, to get the conference room ready, be on time, extinguish a fire, as it often happens that the conference room is meant for 5 people only and not 15, and so on... so when I’ve got a training day, I need this buffer... or if I get this kind of mixed day, I wake up early, I mean one hour, one and a half hours before breakfast. Marysia [Piotr’s wife] is still asleep, I work from home, but I think I manage my work well and I like this type of home-office, I’m not the type that would lie on the sofa until 12 o’clock and watch TV and start working only afterwards, people are not the same, not everyone can work from home... during the first hour I take out my diary and check what’s on for today and what’s on this week, I check my incoming mail, prioritize e-mails, and that’s what I do, I teach Marysia not to answer mails straightaway and I don’t send my mails earlier than 8.30 a.m. or later than 6 p.m.... ((4s)) I work with Google Calendar and I create worklists covering things to do today, I’ve got those tabs and I check them when an item is done or not, I avoid the accumulation of things anyway\... ((3s)) and that’s how it looks... So these are undefined working hours, in the sense that of course I can work between 6 a.m. and 9-10 p.m., but what I can do as well is to go walking in the woods for an hour and a half with my audiobook and headphones on, or I can watch House of Cards, season 3 working out on a cross-trainer, as I’ve done today...so on the one hand it is a job from the morning until late hours, but -errm- the system of work is different, due to the frequent changes of activity if you compare office work for 8 hours sitting in front of the computer, right?

In the same way, in trying to free himself from being absorbed by his family, the narrator cuts all the family ties, which in itself is a form of dependence (being trapped in a relationship which has not been worked through, or closed). Even today past emotions keep coming back, both in his life and in his narrative. Piotr refers to his family situation as a failure, he resents his brother and parents, and dwells on past events. Trying to understand it all, he resorts to interpreting his family situation at the macro-social level: the mother as a victim of massive layoffs in the 1990s, and the father as a ruined entrepreneur unable to adapt to the neoliberal conditions. Thus, he manages to convince himself again he is not in any sense to blame for what happened. At the same time, he can see this, but it does not bring him a sense of internal peace. Finally, seeing that each and every effort he makes to meet with his family fails, and the casual psychological counselling turns out to be of little help, he decides to use another psychological method (transgenerational analysis, called “the genogram,” which is used in family therapy) to further justify how his family situation has affected him. As a result of all these actions, he has been able to mentally organize the past, to categorize all these events as irreversible. He has also gained a broader (multi-generational) perspective on his family situation: “what I think is that there is this certain trauma, that the generation of my parents experienced – erm – something difficult and that something just didn’t work out for them.” Despite having worked through these biographical events on many levels, he doesn’t feel less unhappy. As in the past, he feels incredibly lonely, and at the same time even more determined to persuade himself that his autonomy and independence constitute the highest values.

Piotr’s account of the repeated and long-standing efforts to initiate contacts with his family, and their ultimate failure, strikes a similar tone as with his overall resentment, which goes beyond the private sphere and encompasses the whole world. He criticizes his young clients for becoming more and more demanding, which then leads him to distance himself from the whole society. He deplores the general decline of authorities and, from that point onwards, his narrative slides into melancholy, resentments, and decadence. According to Piotr, the world (subject to iron rules) is heading in the wrong direction and there is little opportunity to do anything about it. And yet, he acts both in his professional and family contexts, in disaccordance with it, trying in vain to control everything and everyone:

I am really trying to simply re-formulate this resource, but on different terms//well, I don’t know, we chat with Marysia sometimes that if something occurs to me, I’m like “What can we do about it, what does it bring about?”, rather than “Why has this happened to me, for what the fuck sake?” There is this saying that “life is out of your comfort zone,” if you are in your comfort zone and live a comfortable life, then you are lazy, you get a little bit, although others claim the opposite, but I find it to be characteristic of myself that a certain discomfort makes you take action, doesn’t it?

Afterwards the narrator adds:

I am afraid of becoming ill. I’m afraid of losing my autonomy. Am I afraid of social changes in a sense that/, I don’t know if I am especially afraid of anything because I’ve got this feeling that, erm in a certain way erm I can anticipate that. And so it is not about prepa-

ration, because I can't do anything special about it, if it is to collapse, then it will collapse, right?

Using Fritz Schütze's (2008) language of biographical processes (ordering principles of one's life history), we could say that modernity holds a constant trajectory potential (for a definition of *trajectory* – see annotation 4): a biographical trajectory is the effect of not only the external, uncontrollable forces, but also of too many (even if superficial) entanglements. Piotr is aware of becoming trapped in the world of work, but he remains caught, since he sees the solution in the *right mindset* (see the section below). The real solution would be to gradually reduce the trajectory potential inherent in the style and character of his work, but to do so he would have to acknowledge this potential, as well as come to terms with his own underlying fears. It is this very fear of losing autonomy that means he is forced to overwork – in order to always secure himself and stay ahead of the market. In other words, while in modernity the trajectory appears to be related to the institutional pattern, in postmodernity it may stem from a biographical pattern of activity, which becomes a compulsion - a cultural imperative, as well as a structural requirement of the labor market.

### A *right mindset* attitude

As the extracts quoted above show, the narrator escapes from his mother's depression, his brother's excessive demands, and his father's professional incompetence by pursuing his own goals. Piotr presents a completely opposite attitude, as he engages in a number of activities, and motivates and advises others and himself. Consequently, he wards off any

possible surprises, he "takes over" the world around him and makes it his own, regulating the quantity of spontaneity and relational closeness. His main concern therefore, as was discussed, is about multiplying professional and relational modes of knowing and being able to compartmentalize everything and everyone around him, as well as about keeping the *right mindset*, and thus maintaining his self-image as an autonomous person. Yet, since he prevents any novelty by constant self-motivating, rationalizing and self-control executed in his life and work, he becomes more and more bored, despondent, and lonely:

So to be in good health, Erm: that's what I dream of. Errrm... I don't have any dreams that are defined, in the sense ((smacking)) of measurability, or I can't think of any item, erm: you know, any quantifiable things, right? And after I become dependent/ I mean the disease/, that takes sanity/ ((with a deep sigh)) ((coughing)) I can record that, write it down, blimey, if I were to be/ I will shoot myself in the head, whatever, I don't want to suffer. And I don't want to be a burden to anybody. I've got all the things sorted out as far as my death is concerned/ erm:/ leaving this earth. Honestly, I've got my will drawn up, so that there is no such feeling that I'm leaving things unsorted, right?

In light of the above, it comes as no surprise that Piotr's relationship with his wife is very partnership-like. It is "contract-based," and their personal boundaries are clear and each spouse has a lot of autonomy. He is also unwilling to have children:

Each of us has their own business, an idea of life they would like to live, wants to grow and that's what we

give vent to, what we invest in... but what I also think is that we have loads of time for each other, we're growing strong... and hopefully we shall continue in this vein...

In a transforming society, which experiences a crisis of bonds, the described strategy seems to be one of the potential individualistic adaptations: it aims to seek to isolate oneself as the only reality, with the use of various "technologies of self," rationalizations, modes of knowledge, et cetera. Consequently, the *I* becomes the only support available, sometimes to the point when, as in this case, one's problems are absorbing oneself beyond everything else. As will be discussed below in detail, the *I* takes a given shape for specific reasons related to the interrelatedness between the social orders. From what has been related so far, though, it should be clear that Piotr's biography represents a too fixed organization of experience. He takes on anything to free himself either from his past family situation (by becoming a business psychologist), or from his present working conditions (by dwelling on the uncertain and abstract, with no value-oriented life and work prospects). Yet, the sole purpose of all that is to avoid the uncontrollable and surprising.

### **Identity, occupation, life: the two meanings of work**

Several times during the interview Piotr makes a clear distinction between the sphere of work and his private life, both in terms of tasks (see the quotation on p. 144-145 on the organization of his work), and relationships:

I am a supporter of separating this private sphere from the professional one and having, erm: this base outside of work, not to only live your work for it not to be joined together.

Although other parts of his narrative might lead one to doubt whether Piotr is able to preserve the boundary between the sphere of life and sphere of work quite as consistently as he claims to be doing (see the quotation on p. 144-145), the narrative also shows other indicators of the modern understanding of work. As he points out in the quotation above (and also discusses at length in other places in the interview) not only does he treat them as separate entities, but he also clearly delineates their mutual relations: it is life (i.e. providing an answer to the question how I want to live and who I want to live with) that is primary and constitutes the point of reference. Work is a fact, "a natural thing" to be accepted; its role is to provide one with the means to live the way one wants to live:

And therefore to work later on was something natural for me, I mean that you have to work, right?...and anyway, you know, there comes a moment you've got your own money and it's nice... and when you don't have it, you want to have it again, and when you have already worked, it's all so natural, right?...

As indicated in various sections of the interview, the narrator holds (and so does the modern vision of functionally-interconnected spheres of reality) that the main goal of working is to earn money. It is better - even if it is not necessary - to do what you are good at and what you like doing, since it makes easier to do your work well. Work is something to

be done at the primary level, not necessarily to be pleased or to feel self-fulfilled with it; self-realization at work – although connected with the above – remains of secondary importance. As a result, his choice of studies stemmed from a rational calculation (see the discussion on p. 141-142), rather than searching for an answer to the question “Who am I?”, or “Who could I be?”. Similarly, his largely random choice of profession (see also the quotation on p. 143) could be indicative of a professional identity that is rather adopted than sought after. In addition, Piotr declares he would find it easy to change his job. It can be concluded that his attitude toward work is well summarized in the following formula: although work constitutes an (inherent) part of life, one works to live rather than lives to work.

The aim of reconstructing biographical meanings is not only to give an account of an individual’s understanding of his or her life, but also to establish the meanings that stem from the relationships between the different elements of one’s biography, even if both could be inconsistent. Reasoning in the terms of ideal types is especially effective for this goal, since it makes it possible to create notions which are rooted in the empirical material, but which do not have to be derived only from it. Reconstruction with ideal types allows one to distinguish possible separate dimensions (or discourses) interrelated in a narrator’s expressions, and to describe the relations between them and broader social processes.

One useful set of contrasting terms from a range of the possible meanings of the category of ‘professional work’ - within the biographical structure of meanings and experience - is provided by the following

ideal types, which we formulated using abductive reasoning with reference to the biographical narratives collected within the framework of our research project, as well as from the sociological literature:

Work as a necessary (inevitable) element of life is connected with other areas (elements) in life.

Work as a part of my life – similarly to other areas – is connected with my ( i t s ) features, my lifestyle, and with me.

The core meaning of these terms, with clear connotations, but unclear denotations, comes down to the type of relationship between the individual and his or her work, as well as the image of society and work. In the first image, the individual faces a social reality divided into different spheres, towards which the subject may display a more or less favorable attitude, but which remain facts, irrespective of individual perspectives. The individual can experience and reflect upon work in different ways, but the basis of his or her experience is the necessity to acknowledge the fact of work – by virtue of its very existence (according to Emil Durkheim’s (1965) classic definition of a social fact)<sup>7</sup> or the force of needs, which, while realized in other spheres (in the sphere of life distinct from the sphere of work), remain functionally interconnected with the sphere of work, a fact understood and accepted by a rational

<sup>7</sup> Durkheim in his influential definition claimed that social fact is “every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint [...] which is general throughout a given society while at the same time existing in its own right, independent of its individual manifestations” (1965: 13). Similarly gainful work in this image is experienced as external, a priori for an individual obvious and natural part of the world and one’s life.

actor. Depending on which approach is chosen, we can refer to two opposing paradigms: the over-socialized Durkheimian model of individuals (1965); or the over-rationalized model of the rational choice theory (cf. Powell and DiMaggio 1991). In each, work becomes a social role for individuals, hence (not being fully precise here) – an adopted identity.

However, there is also a different possibility. In the case of the second type expressed above, reality does not appear to have such distinct contours. Instead, the narrative develops as a story about features (dilemmas or pursuits) of individuals and his or her life. As the manifestations of these features combine to form a story of professional life. or another biographical sphere, we can get the impression of choice and/or consequences of the individual's actions, or even of a non-necessary application of a category external to the narrative to the stream of individual experience (presented in narration).

To put it metaphorically, while in the first case the boundary will run between work and life as such (*work-life balance*), in the second case there may be no such division, the division may be flexible, it may be time- and context-dependent, or – in a situation closest to the first case - it will run between professional life and personal life, treated as two contexts or manners of externalizing/expressing the individual *I*.

However, the core of the difference between the two images above is not the degree of directness in the relationship between the individual and work, but rather its mechanism. In the first case, it is work that is primary, while the individual – as he or she sees

him – or herself at the moment of telling the story – remains secondary and reconstructs himself or herself through the acceptance of (or taking a position in relation to) a social identity connected with social roles. In the second case, it is the individual identity which is of primary importance: the individual finds (i.e. reconstructs in the course of telling the story) this identity in his or her actions, dilemmas, experiences (i.e. types or styles of experiences) in various spheres of social reality. Consequently, the above distinction between the two meanings of work could be expressed as a contrast between: identity adopted and identity found, as well as between the conceptualizations of the modern society (a society of facts and social roles, or of functionally interconnected institutions, as well as rational individuals) and the postmodern society (which is fluid in both its social dimension – as devoid of clear boundaries between social spheres - and in its individual dimension – as constantly reconstructed by individuals; see also: Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Bauman 2000). Therefore, we will refer to the first meaning of work as “modern,” and to the second one – as “postmodern”<sup>8</sup>.

As the above shows, it would be a mistake to conclude that the postmodern interpretation of work “expresses” the individual to a larger extent than the modern one does. In fact the contrary is true: it is modernity that offers a better chance for an individual to “adjust” to his or her work based on the

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<sup>8</sup> We do not find it necessary to discuss different conceptualizations of contemporary transformation as late modernity (Giddens 1991), second modernity (Beck 1992), fluid modernity (Bauman 2000) or postmodernity. We adopt the notion of postmodernity for our model since our goal is to analyze the difference between an “old” and “new” meaning of work rather than elements of continuity.

mechanisms described above. Moreover, similarly to social roles in modernity, the relation between the individual and his or her work may be mediated by the images of *I*, thus becoming motives independent from the individual *I*.

As we pointed out above, the central motive behind Piotr's actions is the search for autonomy. The narrator claims that he started working as early as in secondary school in order to financially support his mother and to move out from home. He also mentions the feeling of shame and sense of responsibility for his family at that time. His contradictory emotions led him to cut off from his (in his view) depressive mother and excessively demanding brother, yet they both keep re-emerging in his story. His mother's unemployment and depressive tendencies became the narrator's trauma, setting a direction for all his future life. A thorough analysis of the narrative shows that his taking up professional work, as well as maintaining intensified levels of activity in this area since he was a student (with symptoms of workaholism), constitutes the narrator's struggle for the *right mindset*, which is to protect him from sliding into the apathy he experienced as an adolescent.

The category of the *right mindset* manifests itself not only in the story of Piotr's work: almost all issues the narrator brings up during the 6-hour interview combine to form an analysis of reality based on this very criterion. For example, just after the end of the narrative phase, the interview contains an extensive (20-minute-long) section uninterrupted by questions, wherein the narrator reconstructs the history of his distant family pondering on the attitudes displayed by the different family members and their

ability to get on in life. From a variety of different possible perspectives a narrator is choosing the *right mindset* as the criterion to also describe his more distant family ground.

Piotr was able to transform his family problems into the *right mindset* for himself, and he regards this very ability (the ability to transform difficulties into resources) as his most important feature, his most valuable resource:

Marysia says, says about me that, that she has never known anybody who had this ability to adapt to certain circumstances as I do, right// what I mean is... I have this feeling on the other hand that if it hadn't been for our family story I wouldn't be the person I am now, if I hadn't been challenged in a certain way to grow up so early, I probably wouldn't have dared to have taken particular decisions about my life, right?, right... so I'm not treating it as a... I mean I am really trying to simply re- formulate this resource.

Piotr's professional activity of business psychologist could itself be seen as the kind of work which is linked with his intention to develop and maintain the *right mindset*. It would be hard to answer the question whether the narrator finds fulfilment in this job, given both his critical appraisal of the contemporary world (and his learners), where the lack of the *right mindset* appears to be as acute as in his family home, as well as the enormous amount of effort he puts into his work (see also the quotation on p. 147). The narrator's structure of meaning attributed to "work" should not be described in terms of self-realization, but rather as follows:

Table 1. Two meanings of work in Piotr’s biography

<p>A feature of Piotr’s life is an endeavour to achieve the <i>right mindset</i> (and this is also the main feature of his work as a business psychologist)</p>	<p><i>Postmodern meaning of work:</i> Work as a development/fulfilment of a feature of the narrator’s life</p>
<p>This feature remains a pre-condition to maintaining the ability to act and to live a life where work remains separated from other life spheres, and helps to preserve them and to preserve stability in life.</p>	<p><i>Modern meaning of work:</i> Work as an element of life whose necessary character and functional connection with other life spheres needs to be preserved</p>

Source: own elaboration.

In Piotr’s narrative, it is the postmodern meaning of the category of work that is of primary importance and constitutes the basis for applying the categories of modern meaning, while the fulcrum and the driving force behind his biography is the struggle to preserve autonomy. At work, the narrator realizes not so much the features of himself (although he considers his autonomy and the *right mindset* to be his most important features), as the features of his life. The satisfaction in his life is not a consequence of a positive configuration of non-work spheres of life; despite his declaration of the secondary importance of work, his narration indicates rather a subordination of other life domains to the sphere of work. His satisfaction results not from the work fulfilment, but from the conviction that he is able to preserve his autonomy and the *right mindset*. However, the predominance of work over other spheres of life is also perceived by the narrator as a threat to his autonomy, as some parts of the narrative indicate,

that is, where the lack of *work-life balance* is sharply criticized. To sum up, the maintenance of his ability to realize the modern meaning of work is in fact, in Piotr’s narrative, the realization of its postmodern meaning. It puts the category of work at the center of his biographical structure of experience and leads to the tension with his understanding of work in modern terms.

## Discussion

The motive of autonomy usually plays an important role in the narrations of freelancers and employees of transnational corporations (cf. Miller 2016). However Piotr’s narration, being an extreme, rather than an average case, shows more clearly how important autonomy can become and how contradictory it remains in the context of the interrelation between postmodern and modern meanings (cf. Biały 2015 on the preliminary conceptualization of the auton-

omy and stability motives in the light of social orders' incoherencies). Piotr's narration indicates the complex relationship between the motive of autonomy and the motive of stability (a stable relation between the different spheres of one's life), as well as the difficulties in maintaining a *work-life balance* in the late capitalism.

Piotr's biography is an example of postmodern work patterns as structured by an individual. It is indicative of the postmodern contradiction which arises from the pursuit of autonomy stemming from the fear of becoming excessively involved in the corporate world, accompanied by the necessity to perform excessive amounts of work typical for a freelancer, carry out constant self-advertising, as well as maintain strenuous regimes of work and extensive social networks in the fluid, flexible realities of today's labor market. The story presented above shows that what really constitutes the core of a contemporary individual's condition is a structural crisis leading to a constant sense of tension: the requirement to ceaselessly climb up the career ladder (here: by means of the *right mindset*), while remaining constantly at risk of an unexpected crisis.

In addition, Piotr's case proves that work can be postmodern in its character without bringing self-fulfilment. At the same time, the modern and postmodern meanings of work can co-occur, which in the case of this narrative triggers initially hidden potential of trajectory and autonomization of the motive of work, making the individual unhappy. In this structure, work cannot become a value in itself and it cannot lead to the emergence of the self-realization motive. Nor can it be reduced

to the simple means of satisfying the needs of the individual. Work as such becomes autonomous in Piotr's biography, which leads to the emergence of elements of workaholism and professional burn-out.

Piotr's narrative contains many indicators of the co-occurrence of phenomena that the sociological literature associates with modernity and postmodernity. Therefore, we could consider his case as a transitory one between these social orders. The tensions in the area of work which we can find in his biography could be seen as a result of the discontinuities and tensions that arise between these two social orders.

Interestingly, the coexistence of modern and postmodern meanings of work is a common feature in many of the narrations of Polish professionals and corporate workers within our research project's collection of interviews. However, the relationship between them can be different. Postmodern meaning often can be identified with self-realization of an individual within the sphere of work. It is often linked with a self-image as a creative person, with some special skills or competences which are discovered and developed during one's life. Sometimes it is connected with moments of retrospective reformulation of biographical development. For example, a narrator who decided to change her type of profession from animation culture to the IT industry, summed up her education in culture and art history, as well as her earlier experiences as the development of analytical thinking and some special attitudes. She concluded that this type of thinking is her distinctive feature and led her to the IT industry.

More often it is the modern meaning of work which constitutes the basis for the postmodern one, rather than vice-versa. Two motives are dominant in these interrelations: 1) The cultural imperative of self-realization inclines one to reinterpret his or her profession or work as a matter of choice, personal or biographical development, or even fun (cf. Jacyno 2007: 2). The pressure of excessive tasks or rivalry in the workplace leads an individual to search for (psychological) tools which would rationalize his or her dedication and would make him or her more effective. The narration on work closer to this modern understanding is more characteristic for narrators who are disappointed with their occupational life and are engaged in other activities (e.g. social ac-

tivism, art). These activities are treated as a sphere of self-fulfilment, and often are more important for a narrator than profitable employment. However, in the latter case the tension is still usually present, not necessarily within the sphere of professional work, but rather between the necessary profitable work and "private" work after hours. The narration of Piotr reveals tensions which were commonly expressed within our collection of interviews. Nonetheless, his case is of special meaning as it proves that postmodern work does not have to be linked with self-realization, and that not only can postmodern discourse be utilized for modern goals, but also modern notions can be used for the sake of postmodern values.

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## Biograficzne znaczenia pracy: przypadek polskiego freelancera

**Abstrakt:** Socjologiczne analizy współczesnego społeczeństwa podkreślają przede wszystkim jego płynny i zmienny charakter, co – i na poziomie makrostrukturalnym, i na poziomie jednostkowymi – niesie za sobą zarówno nowe możliwości, jak i zagrożenia. Niekoherecja współczesnych czasów może być jednak też postrzegana jako współwystępowanie i oddziaływanie na siebie różnych łańców społecznych, które w literaturze przedmiotu opisane zostały jako „przednowoczesność”, „nowoczesność” i „ponowoczesność”. W Polsce te napięcia są szczególnie obecne z powodu zderzenia reżimów nowoczesności, ponowoczesności, jak i elementów kultury tradycyjnej, które są tu ciągle bardziej dostrzegalne niż w społeczeństwach Zachodu.

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie związków występujących pomiędzy dwoma z wymienionych łańców (nowoczesności i ponowoczesności) w obszarze pracy w odniesieniu do biograficznego wymiaru doświadczenia jednostkowego. Empirycznym przykładem tych napięć jest autobiograficzna opowieść Piotra – freelancera zajmującego się doradztwem psychologicznym dla biznesu. Pierwsza część artykułu skupia się na teoretycznych i metodologicznych ramach badań odnoszących się do biograficznego wymiaru napięć, które występują pomiędzy wymienionymi łańcami społecznymi. Druga część zawiera łączącą perspektywę socjologiczną i psychologiczną analizę opowieści narratora. Następnie przedstawiane są dwa sposoby rozmiennia pracy i ich zastosowanie w opisywanym przypadku. W końcowej części analizowany wywiad ujmowany jest w szerszym, porównawczym kontekście.

**Słowa kluczowe:** łańca społeczny, późny kapitalizm, neoliberalizm, nowoczesność, ponowoczesność, biografia, praca, freelancing, Polska