PART THREE

WORK AND SUBJECTIVITY: TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
CHAPTER EIGHT

FROM THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY TO THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF WORK

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Introduction

This essay was originally published to explain the theoretical bases of the psychodynamic analysis of work. The use of this specific designation aimed at obtaining the scientific community’s recognition of the legitimacy and originality of a new discipline within the work sciences. Stemming from research on the mental pathologies related to work, the “psychodynamics of work” constitutes a wider field of investigation and research than the “psychopathology of work” which emerged in France in the 1950s. The broadening of the question has undoubtedly resulted from interdisciplinary comparisons within clinical approaches to suffering, as well as in the social sciences. This comparative effort, organised with support from the French CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research), took the form of a seminar entitled “Plaisir et souffrance dans le travail” (Séminaire interdisciplinaire de pathologie de travail) (Pleasure and suffering in work [Interdisciplinary seminar on the pathology of work]), which took place in Paris between 1986 and 1988. The papers from this seminar have had a lasting impact, as demonstrated by the number of times they have been reprinted over the past twenty years.

The text which follows was published for the first time in 1993 as an addendum to the second edition of an essay on the psychopathology of work (Travail: usure mentale [Work: Mental wear and tear], first edition 1980). As such, it explains the reasons behind the change in designation proposed for this theoretical school and sketches out a new conceptualisation of the work collective and cooperation around the central idea of “activité déontologique” (deontic activity). But it also suggests that there is no possibility of cooperation without the mobilisation of the workers’ desire and determination, both of which are closely linked with a psychodynamics of recognition. It should be