

First edition of *The Happily Unemployed*
Busy Doing Nothing, July 2000
English translation by Jocelyn Clark
Interview with Guillaume Paoli
translated by Isaac Cronin

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The Manifesto of the Happily Unemployed

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Introduction to
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As in 1996 the three authors of the text “Looking for Obscure Resources” (later known as the Manifesto of the Happily Unemployed) read it to a small audience at a confidential event, they had no idea of the chain reaction that would ensue in the years to come. Back then it was just a way to spend a pleasant evening and to toss out a new idea. The listeners fell in love with it at once, which wasn’t surprising given that they were all a bunch of professional dilettantes. The text circulated by hand, it was then reprinted in a few underground magazines, that was it. Time and again, we would consider “doing something” with this idea but then laziness quickly took over and nothing happened. One action at the most, if you may call it like that: One day, as a “European march against unemployment” walked through Berlin, our little gang set up deckchairs on the brink of the demonstration, relaxing and drinking sparkling wine under a banner that read: “We remain seated.”

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then. This was still the epoch of the fat Kohl government. Sleepy like a snake after having digested East Germany, the German capital had not recovered its feisty dynamism yet. As for Berlin with its 300,000 unemployed, the majority of whom having made their condition a social rationale, it was a city where both the many wastelands and empty buildings combined with the welfare mattresses designed to cushion the fall into the competitive market offered occasions for sharing, experimenting or just doing nothing. Thus, many people could easily identify themselves with the things we were describing.

Things began to change in the winter of 1997-1998. As the government announced that it would tighten the controls on welfare, the unemployed took to the streets, although manipulated by organizers who had something completely different in mind, namely the impending federal elections. Inspired by the French unemployed people's movement that was unfolding at the same time, the small core group which had met around the Manifesto

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decided to break with the lock-step, sheepish behavior of the demonstrators. We organized “rides,” little groups that walked through the city, occupying an unemployment office here, dining and dashing in a posh restaurant there, then seizing the proceeds from a concert, all done in high spirits and a playful mood. Unlike the main movement, we didn’t demand jobs, but simply an end to the harassment of the (happy as well as unhappy) unemployed and the unconditional payment of their benefits. This tiny difference did not go unnoticed. It was at this point the movement got more attention from the public and networks started to form.

From the outset, the leftist groups held their noses. They were suspicious because the initiative came from outside their “scene,” they were frustrated because they didn’t find in our writings the ritual call for the destruction of capitalism. So, they quickly and angrily concluded that the Happily Unemployed were merely advocating some kind of communitarian reformism seeking to accommo-

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date itself to the crumbs thrown out by the system. Or that we indulged in a hedonistic and elitist critique of work. But because it was precisely our intention to distance ourselves from this closed and sterile milieu, their disdain was more reassuring than upsetting. On the other hand, people who were generally indifferent to the habitual radical critique were seduced by the style of intervention and the open discussions of the Happily Unemployed who used to say: “We don’t have a solution and this is not a problem.” In fact, we were just reviving an old local tradition. As soon as 1918 the “central revolutionary Dadaist council of Berlin” had demanded ‘the gradual introduction of unemployment through the complete automation of all activities’, arguing that only such a measure would enable the humans to “get used to life at last”. In 1973 Peter-Paul Zahl, one of the anarchist bank robbers of the “June 2nd Movement”, published in West Berlin a pamphlet called “The Happy Unemployed” in which he demanded “occupational bans for everyone.” So, we were

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not the first. Besides, none of the ideas stated in the manifesto are new. What was new then was the context in which they were expressed. After twenty-five years of promises of full employment, of training courses, occupational therapies and other work simulations, of calls for sacrifice and dude shells, a fairly big part of the public had stopped believing in all this. And in such a situation, a simple public statement can have a liberating effect.

However, on the occasion of our drives and in the following weeks the mainstream media, always eager to find out what the next trend is going to be, mentioned our existence more and more until finally the very pompous *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* announced: “The movement of the Happily Unemployed is far more widespread than previously assumed” and they named the incredibly exaggerated figure of 150,000 members! This fake news had the effect of dropping a bomb on the political journalism crowd. All at once they suspected that a major change in mentalities was taking place behind their

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backs. From this moment on, the rush started. Everybody wanted to get in touch with this invisible and mysterious “movement”. Our scarce statements and commentaries were reproduced as so many scoops (for example our announcement, following the “alliance for employment” which had just been concluded by the government and the unions, we were launching an “alliance for simulation” based on the deal: “You pretend to create jobs, we pretend to work.”) And the specialists for the prevention of uncontrollable ideas started to grumble. The modernist sociologist Ulrich Beck announced that the emergence of this phenomenon “confronted modern society with the measuring stick of the future of non-work.” (A little later we had the pleasure of legally blocking the distribution of a book written by Beck in which the manifesto was reprinted without our permission, arguing that this publication seriously damaged our reputation). Peter Glotz, the ex-secretary of the SPD and figurehead leader of this party, promoted the members of the Happily Un-

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employed to the level of “the League of Communists of the new underclass of the excluded and objectors,” adding: “On reading them one can guess what kinds of conflicts await us. And their ideology is spreading like a pool of oil.”

We had a lot of fun contemplating all this bustle. Whenever TV-channels invited us to participate to some talk show, we sent back a standard reply: “Dear confusers and confused, please don’t take this negative response personally. As a matter of principle, we refuse to appear on television. Any self-respecting individual hates having make up put on him like an old whore. We are sure you will find other willing candidates for your daily dose of ineptitude. Cordially, The Happily Unemployed. Don’t respond to this message. It was automatically generated.”

As was to be expected, this tactic made them pay even more attention to us. From then on, we became the ones “who refused to go on television.” In fact, we based our attitude on this idea: In the worldview conveyed by the media, the unemployed are the Big

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Unseen. Mind you: we're talking about flesh and blood unemployed people, not about the scary monster of "Unemployment" which is being shown constantly. Still, it would be vain to try and obtain some bits of visibility for them. Better make their very absence visible, let their invisible presence be felt as mysterious and vaguely troubling. And have the joke-ers on your side all the while. Thus, we did not refuse to make public appearances, but we only appeared sporadically in places where we were not expected. It could be an art exhibition, a welfare office, a theater, a psychiatrists' congress, a radio broadcast, a squatted underground tunnel, a feminist summer university, a symposium of sociologists, a mine with disaffected workers, a religious academy, an agricultural coop, an empty lot, a young entrepreneurs' club, or of course a happy hour.

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actually started to exist. Soon we were inundated with hundreds of letters from all over Germany, from the largest cities to the smallest villages. The general tone was, “Finally someone who says what I am thinking but don’t have the courage to say.” What was striking about these letters was that these people did not indulge in big political theories or reform programs. What they talked about were their lived experiences, their fears, their disgust, their agitation, their boredom, but also time taken back, the discovery of unexpected gifts, the fleeting pleasure of existence liberated from the constraints of work. This same kind of personal testimony was offered during the public events we organized and it often had a cathartic effect. It often happened that people were deeply moved, not particularly by what we had said, but by the shared experiencing of certain feelings, that are most of the times hidden under the patina of economic justifications. All of these accounts, full of humor and tenderness, formed a mosaic that was much richer and more colorful than the standard

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sociological pattern. In this way the Happily Unemployed, who was born in the Manifesto as some kind of literary figure, developed a more concrete presence. Obviously, it wasn't possible to witness all these heartfelt testimonials without a response. With the goal of creating lines of communication between people who were isolated and scattered around the country, we published a newsletter called *müßiggänger* (a wordplay on *Müßiggänger*, "idle") that everyone was invited to contribute to. Funded by generous donations, it was distributed freely to anyone who asked for it, provided he gave his reason. There again, the newsletter's impact far exceeded its actual circulation. Only four issues were published. We also visited the towns where there were significant pockets of Happily Unemployed in order to meet them and to give them the chance to meet each other. Generally, our meetups happened in a public place in a fluid setting where those passing by could join in. For example in Hamburg, we trans-

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formed a horrible pedestrian walkway into a green space by covering it with turf we brought in rolls. The previously mentioned deckchairs, a bbq and cold beer contributed to presenting the problem of unemployment appropriately. It was very unusual for people who came upon us randomly to react aggressively against us. Beyond the first moment of surprise, they were generally sympathetic to our cause. All of these brief encounters and lengthy conversations led us to believe that the famous Prussian work ethic was not what it used to be.

Anyway, we were not going to continue this public presence for more than a few months (and even then at a fairly slow pace). Clearly it wasn't our intention to create a permanent group. An anti-work lobby would have been an absurdity. To those who asked us "how can I join your initiative?" we answered, "You are the initiative, everyone has a Happily Unemployed sleeping inside them." It was always a pleasant surprise to learn by chance that in a town where we knew nobody there were

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people speaking out as the Happily Unemployed. And clearly, they too would just make this claim once in a while. We had written in the manifesto that the luxury of unemployment consisted in disposable time. Precisely, it wasn't our ambition to spend our own time blabbering about work and non-work, to become some kind of unemployment specialists. Moreover, we quickly realized that our street tactics could not be indefinitely repeated without becoming an end in itself, a kind of "jobless pride" drowning out all content in the general partying. So, we opted for more discretion. Because no group had been created, it wasn't necessary to dissolve it, and since opportunity creates the thief, we would sometimes rise again from our ashes. This happened for instance as the job center began to demand from its "clients" that they provide frequent evidence of "active job seeking" (that's how they talk these days). This ritual is even a source of annoyance for the companies themselves. Some had to hire an extra employee full time only to turn down the requests of

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those applying for a non-existent job. In order to simplify the process, the Happily Unemployed introduced an algorithm called “Negative Response Generator”. With one click the “client” could download a coordinated series of rejections from actual firms and produce the turned down queries in order to get his benefit paid. We made this innovation public, of course. It was one more occasion to reveal the fiction at the heart of the system by taking it at its word. From the point of view of efficiency, speeding up of procedures and cost reduction, our “negative response generator” is a genuine contribution to the rationalization of the labor market (remember the psychoanalytical definition of rationalization: it is the justification of an action whose actual ends are unspeakable.)

If the Happily Unemployed are no longer out there demonstrating, it is also because we have given everything we had to give. What we had to say on this matter can be summed up in a few words. Rehashing soon gets boring.

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Moreover, these ideas have made the rounds to a great extent. (clearly a lot remains to be considered, elaborated, debated, but in another form. We only wanted to ask intentionally naïve questions.) In this sense, the mission that we had not set our sights on initially was accomplished beyond our wildest dreams. One day I got an email from a high school girl from a small town telling me that her class had just had a three hour discussion to try to determine if the Happily Unemployed were just slackers or if we were trying to achieve a goal, revolution for example. Once, a friend overheard two workers in a bar who were considering joining the Happily Unemployed instead of carrying on working under their shitty conditions. We learned through the occasional use of a search engine that the Happily Unemployed had been mentioned in a speech by the mayor of Essen as well as in a sermon of a Bavarian priest, each time with the remark: "There is some truth in that." As a result of encounters and translations the virus even went global, occurrences of it have been

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located almost everywhere in Europe as well as in South America. What more could one expect from such a modest enterprise?

Clearly the social situation has also changed a great deal since the publication of our manifesto. One of the last public statements of The Happily Unemployed was in August, 2002 on the introduction of the Hartz Reforms, which promised, once again, to cut the unemployment rate in half, to save costs, and to encourage self-employment. Predictably the number of unemployed increased, the marvelous reforms cost billions, and those who were lured into starting small businesses found themselves broke. The only promise that was kept (and this was also predictable) is that the daily existence of the jobless got worse, whether it be their poor income, intrusions in their private life, their housing conditions, bureaucratic harassment or the imposition of forced pseudo-work.

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the straitjacket again, this time without any other promise than a reduction of the state's budget deficit. As I am writing these lines in 2006, I hear the social-democratic minister of Labor on the radio quoting the biblical phrase: "He who doesn't work doesn't have the right to eat." It has come to that.

The jobless people, mainly East Germans, who, beginning in August 2004, spontaneously relaunched the "Monday demonstrations" (which had contributed to the downfall of the German Democratic Republic in 1989) did not have the heart to turn in derision on the fairy tale of employment policies. Even laughing is a luxury they cannot afford. They really were the leftovers, the unemployable ones, the kind of people you only come across in the halls of employment agencies, who do not receive any form of compensation, even symbolic, for their misery. People whom neither the Happily Unemployed nor anybody else can reach. And they marched in a heavy silence, filled with seething anger and impotent rage. Their only slogan, "We are

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the people!” (also a reference to 1989) meant to say “We exist!” (The far left had made a pretext out of this slogan that it called “right wing populism” to refuse their support). It would have been indecent to play the role of spokesperson. We honored their silence until they gave up the fight, slandered by all media talking heads and politicians.

Obviously, the “movement of precarious workers” which started in 2005–2006 received a friendlier reception from the journalists, who, to a large extent, are precarious workers themselves. Even though it was in this milieu (young, urban, college graduates, having multiple activities) that the Happily Unemployed had had more support (but not only there, far from it), it is now difficult to identify with people who basically demand nothing else than the recognition of their level of education, their creative potential, their underemployed and underrated competences. The problem with this movement is precisely that it deliberately parts itself from the Monday demonstrators who had no such assets to put forth.

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So, are the Happily Unemployed definitively dead and gone? Some people say so and brag: "I always knew that this was just idle talk." But this is, I believe, the result of a misunderstanding. It is clear that the lifestyle that we laid out is much more difficult to assume today. Even if as the years went by many people learned to play with systems of control and to juggle opportunities, disposable time is getting as scarce as non-commodified places. That said, we never meant to promote something which would already be there and that you just had to join. The moments being stolen away from the necessity of work are only fleeting hints of a life beyond the market. The Happily Unemployed is merely the depiction of an ideal, allowing to question the obstacles that prevent its realization. It never was a matter of opposing the "happiness" of those in the know to the affliction of the masses, but of seeking to discover the reasons for this affliction. I believe that what characterizes the manifesto as well as our other writings and actions is that rath-

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er than denouncing an injustice, we focused on unmasking an absurdity, the fundamental absurdity that rules the labor market and all other markets. In this sense we do not address the unemployed in particular, but also people who are inside the corporate beast, who experience its unreality from within, and therefore can easily understand what we mean. The least one can say is that the current “reforms” of the world of work haven’t reduced its absurdity.

As a result, demotivation continues.

Guillaume Paoli
Berlin
May 2006

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The Manifesto of the Happily Unemployed

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... and what do you do for a living?

Until now the Happy Unemployed have always been reluctant to begin with theory. They have always far preferred to gain publicity through action, malefaction, and above all inaction. In this respect what is about to follow breaks with previous principles. Furthermore, we cannot present any conclusive research results for the field of happy unemployment as none exist as yet. A few explanations are needed nonetheless because the rumors that have already helped the Happy Unemployed to achieve a clandestine fame are not free from misunderstandings. In fact, misunderstandings surround even rather fundamental issues, namely happiness and unemployment too. Firstly, as soon as anyone mentions the word happiness, suspicion is immediately aroused. Happiness is middle class. Happiness is irresponsible. Happiness is un-German. And anyway—the refrain goes—how can anyone be happy faced with poverty, violence and the bread rolls that cost 67 Pfennigs these days even though there's nothing but air inside. In his book *The Situation is Serious*

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but not *Hopeless: The Pursuit of Unhappiness* Paul Watzlawick provides a most convincing description of this kind of attitude:

What if we were not involved in the original incident? What if we can't be blamed of any complicity? There's no doubt about it that would make us out and out victims. And just let anyone try to call our victim status into question or even dare to expect that we do something about it. Whatever God, the world, fate, nature, chromosomes and hormones, society, our parents, our relatives, the police, our teachers, our doctors, our bosses or—most of all—our friends have done to us is so heinous that the mere suggestion that it might be possible to do something about it is an insult in itself. Besides, this is not a scientific argument.

In order to address this whole issue we would have to advance into the morass of psychology and of course we want to avoid this at all costs. People also have other arguments against happiness ready at hand. For example, it is said that totalitarianism is about wanting to make people happy against their will. But unhappy workers and job-seekers don't need to

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lose any additional sleep about this. The Happy Unemployed do not have the slightest intention of forcing anyone to be happy against their will. The word *happiness* is of course a cue for all kinds of quacks who want to extol the virtues of their miracle cures. But the Happy Unemployed have no miracle cures to offer. The Happy Unemployed's programme is similar to Lautrémont's. In 1868 he formulated his objective in the following manner:

Up to now unhappiness has been described to arouse fear and compassion. Now I am going to describe happiness to arouse the opposite.

And now to come to the point.

We all know that unemployment cannot be abolished. If a company is doing badly, there are job cuts, if it is doing well, money is invested in automation—and this also means job cuts. In the past a workforce was called for because there was work. Now work is desperately called for because there is a workforce and no one knows what to do with these workers because machines are faster, better, and cheaper. Mankind has always dreamed of automation. Two thousand three

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hundred years ago Aristotle, clearly one of the Happy Unemployed, said:

If every tool could perform its own work when ordered [...]if thus shuttles wove and quills played harps of themselves, master craftsmen would have no need of assistants and masters no need of slaves.

Now this dream has been fulfilled, yet everyone experiences it as a nightmare because social change hasn't kept pace with technological change. This process is irreversible. Workers aren't going to take over again from robots and machines. And any work that still requires the involvement of human beings has already been farmed out to the inhumane sweat shops of the Third World or is being carried out here by underpaid immigrants. Only the reintroduction of slavery could bring this downward spiral to an end.

Everyone knows that it's true, but no one dares to say it. Officially it's a "campaign against unemployment," but really it's a campaign against the unemployed. For this purpose, statistics are being manipulated, pseudo jobs are being created, and people are being harassed. On top of that—

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and because such measures alone can't do away with the problem—there is all sorts of moralizing. It is said the unemployed have only got themselves to blame for the situation in which they find themselves. The jobless are simply turned into “jobseekers” just to force reality to fit with the propaganda. The Happy Unemployed say out loud what everyone else already knows.

“Unemployment” is a poor word, a term with negative connotations, the other side of the coin to employment. An unemployed person is nothing more than a worker without work. But that doesn't tell us anything about the person as a poet, a traveller, a seeker, or a breathing human being. In public people are only allowed to mention the shortage of jobs. Only in private, away from the journalists, sociologists, and other snoopers, do they dare to be honest: “I've just lost my job. It's brilliant! I've finally got the time to go to parties every night, I don't need to eat food out of the microwave any more and I can shag as much and as long as I like.” Isn't it about time that the gulf between private truths and public lies was bridged? We are told that now would not

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be an opportune moment to criticize employment, that it would be just the kind of provocation that the stiffly respectable middle classes have been waiting for. Twenty years ago workers were in a position to call into question their own work and the whole concept of work. Today they have to feign satisfaction just because they have a job and the unemployed have to feign dissatisfaction just because they don't. The critique of work has, as a result, simply petered out. The Happy Unemployed just laugh at such an infantile form of blackmail.

In a world where the work ethic has disappeared, the fear of unemployment is the best way of encouraging more boot-licking. One Schimilinsky, management consultant for the abolition of absenteeism, made this quite plain:

Stable owners also consider which horse they are going to put out to grass and which they're going to send to the knacker's yard. Businesses that want to survive in today's world businesses have to be similarly ruthless from time to time. Too much kindness can spell the end for a firm. My advice to my customers is to tackle the problem

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with an iron hand in a kid glove. We live in an age in which workers see jobs being cut all around them. No one wants to make a bad impression. Firms are increasingly exploiting this insecurity to significantly cut the number of working hours lost because of absenteeism.

(Der Spiegel 32/1996)

The creation of a biotope suitable for the Happy Unemployed would improve the workers' situation, too. People would be less afraid of becoming unemployed and they would find it easier to pluck up the courage to voice their opposition. Maybe one day the balance of power might even tip in favor of the workers again. "What did you say? You're checking to see whether I'm really ill or not? Stuff that! I'd rather be one of the happy unemployed."

Work is a matter of life and death. This is a point of view that we hold too. Bob Black, writing from North America, had this to say on the matter:

In fact, work is mass murder or genocide. Directly or indirectly, work will kill everyone who reads these words. Between 14,000 and 25,000

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people are killed annually in this country on the job. Over two million are disabled. Twenty to twenty-five million are injured every year. And these figures don't count the half million cases of occupational disease every year. Even this barely scratches the surface. What these figures don't show is that tens of millions of people have their life spans shortened by work—which is all that homicide means after all. Consider all the doctors who work themselves to death in their 50s. Consider all the other workaholics! Even if you don't get killed or crippled while actually working, you very well might be while going to work, coming from work, looking for work, or trying to forget about work. To this augmented body-count must be added the victims of auto-industrial pollution and work-induced alcoholism and drug addiction. We kill people in the six-figure range (at least) in order to sell Big Macs and Cadillacs to the survivors!

The cobbler and the carpenter revered their craft. Shipyard workers could still watch with pride the launch of the magnificent ship built with their own hands. This feeling of doing

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something useful no longer exists in ninetyfive per cent of jobs. The Service Sector only employs servants and computer appendages that have no cause to be proud. Even a doctor only really acts as a sales representative for the pharmaceutical companies. Who can still say that they do something useful for a living? What it comes down to these days is how much money you can earn in a job, and not what the point of it is. The sole aim of every job is to boost a company's profits, just as every worker's sole relationship to his work is his pay. Unemployment exists for the very reason that making money rather than benefiting society is the ultimate objective. Full employment spells economic crisis, unemployment means a healthy market. Just consider what happens when a company announces that it is destroying x number of jobs? Stock exchange speculators praise the scheme to restore the firm to profitability, the company's stocks rise in value, and sooner or later the company's balance sheets have the profits to show for it. In this way the unemployed create more profit than their former colleagues. In fact, it would be only logical to

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thank the unemployed for promoting growth in a way unmatched by any other. Instead they don't get a whiff of the profit that they have created. The Happy Unemployed believe that they should be rewarded for not working.

Here we can cite the work of Kazimir Malevich, the painter of Black Square on White. In his book *Laziness—the Real Human Truth*, which was written in 1921 and only published in Russia two years ago, he stated:

Money is nothing but a small piece of laziness. The more one has, the better one will be able to become acquainted with the bliss of laziness. In capitalism work is organized in such a way that it does not permit everyone equal access to laziness. The only ones who can enjoy this laziness are those who are protected by capital. The capitalist class has liberated itself from the work from which the whole of mankind has to liberate itself.

If the unemployed are unhappy, it's not because they don't have any work but because they don't have any money. So to make things clearer we shouldn't talk about being jobless but being moneyless. As we are going to see, the

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Happy Unemployed are offering to compensate for this shortfall by going on the hunt for unidentified resources.

If you were to count up how much money is officially spent on unemployment by taxpayers and companies, and then divide it by the number of unemployed, then you would quickly realize that there are clearly more zeros on the end of this figure than on the sums that we find in our bank accounts. Most of the money is spent not on the welfare of the unemployed, but on keeping them in check by means of all sorts of chicanery: such as making them attend pointless appointments and so-called training, retraining, and continuing education programs--which spring up from nowhere and lead nowhere--and by making them pursue sham occupations for sham wages—just in order to artificially bring down the statistics i.e. just to sustain an economic illusion.

Our first concrete proposal could be put into practice immediately. We are calling for an end to all measures implemented to keep checks on the unemployed, the closure of all statisti-

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cal data collection and propaganda offices (that would be our contribution to the government savings package), and the automatic, indefinite payment of unemployment benefit plus the savings made. The latest conservative outpourings of bile accuse the unemployed of being dependent upon the state, of living off it, and of being incapable of standing on their own two feet, and so on and so forth. Now to our knowledge, the state is still in existence and is still collecting taxes. Therefore, we don't see why we should forego state support. But we don't have a state fixation. As far as we're concerned the income of the Happy Unemployed may just as well come from the private sector whether it be through sponsoring, adoption, an extra capital gains tax, or blackmail. We are not choosy.

If being unemployed makes people unhappy, it's also because the only social value that they know is work. They no longer have anything to do, they're bored, they've lost all their social contacts because work is often the only opportunity to meet people. The same goes for pensioners too, by the way. The reason for this

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existential misery is of course employment and not unemployment. Even when they're not doing anything else, the Happy Unemployed create new social values and develop contacts with a lot of nice people. They would even be prepared to hold reintegration courses for employees who have been given their notice.

Nevertheless, all unemployed people have a very valuable thing at their disposal: time. That could prove to be a stroke of historical fortune—a chance to lead a decent, meaningful, and happy life. You could describe our goal as reconquering time. In other words, the Happy Unemployed are active people. For that very reason they don't have any time to work.

Jacques Mesrine, once France's "Public Enemy No. 1" decided:

If I wanted a shag at 6 o'clock in the morning, I wanted to be able to take my time and not have to keep one eye on the clock. I wanted to be able to live without clocks. The invention of time-keeping introduced the first constraint into human lives. The sentences of everyday life resounded in my head: "I've no time," "It came at the right

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time,” “I gained time,” “It lost me time.” I just wanted the time to live and the only way of achieving that is by not being a slave to time. I knew how irrational my theory was and that you couldn’t construct any society around it. But what kind of society was this with its nice principles and laws!”

Some people tell us that the Happy Unemployed are only out of work in the current sense of wage labor. Here we have to make it quite clear that the Happy Unemployed are not looking for wage labor, but are also not interested in slave labor. And as far as we know there are only two types of work: slave labor and wage labor. Of course there are students, artists and others puffed up with their own sense of self-importance who can’t even cross the street without maintaining that they are carrying out important work. Even the so-called autonomous groups can’t organize an anti-capitalist “seminar” without holding “productive debates” in “work groups.” Feeble words for feeble thoughts.

The German word for work, *Arbeit* is not only infelicitous in its present sense. It has always

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In the Romance languages the matter is even clearer. *Travail*, *trabajo*, etc. are derived from the Latin word *tripalium*, a three-pronged torture instrument used on slaves. It was Luther who identified work as man’s vocation and ethical duty in the world. He said that: “Man is born to work, just as birds are born to fly.” You could ask, what’s in a word? But were you to confuse the word “drink” with “Coca Cola,” the word “culture” with “Bob Monkhouse,” or the word “activity” with “work,” it would also have certain repercussions.

As soon as we start using the word “work” or the phrase “out of work,” we are dealing with moral categories. This is increasingly the case. You only have to open a newspaper to realize that.

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has been a shift in the power balance between two different philosophies, and now the dominant school of thought regards poverty as something resulting from moral impropriety, rather than from economic causes.

Just as was the case in the age when priests saw their monopoly on souls coming under threat, morality only serves to paper over the growing cracks between ideology and reality. However tells the unemployed that they have sinned expects them to accept the validity of the category “sin” and to respond with either a “yes” or a “no.” Whining attempts to arouse pity in this world at best arouse pity. Only sublime laughter can actually annul this morality.

Paul Lafargue, author of *The Right to be Lazy*, is quite clearly a historical model for the happy unemployed. He wrote:

The economists never tire of urging the workers to work to increase the national wealth! And yet it was one of their number, Destutt de Tracy, who said: “It is in the poor nations that people enjoy a sense of well-being. In the rich nations people are usually poor.”

has been a shift in the power balance between two different philosophies, and now the dominant school of thought regards poverty as something resulting from moral impropriety, rather than from economic causes.

Just as was the case in the age when priests saw their monopoly on souls coming under threat, morality only serves to paper over the growing cracks between ideology and reality. Whoever tells the unemployed that they have sinned expects them to accept the validity of the category “sin” and to respond with either a “yes” or a “no.” Whining attempts to arouse pity in this world at best arouse pity. Only sublime laughter can actually annul this morality.

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*Yet their ears deafened and their minds numbed
by the sound of their own gabble, the economists
reply: "Work proletariat, work, work so that
you increase the national wealth and your own
personal misery. Work so that you, having become
ever poorer, have even more reason to work and to
be miserable."*

However, we are not demanding the right to be lazy. Laziness is merely the flipside of diligence. If work is not recognized as a concept, then laziness also loses its meaning. There is no vice without virtue. In the post-Lafargue age it has become clear that the leisure time that workers are granted is often even more boring than the work they do. For that reason the solution to the whole problem is not simply a matter of reducing working hours and increasing the amount of leisure time. A short time ago in Spain there was a plan to ban the siesta under the pretext that it was putting the European market in jeopardy. We are one hundred percent behind those Spanish workers who replied that it would be better if the EU introduced the Euro-Siesta instead.

The Happy Unemployed, as should be

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obvious by now, do not back the advocates of short-time working who think that everything would be hunky dory if everyone could keep their job but only had to work five, three, or two hours a day. What kind of bodge job is that? Do I clockwatch when I am preparing a meal for my friends? Do I check to see how much time it is taking me to write this bloody thing? Who counts the seconds, the minutes, or the hours when they're in love?

That doesn't mean to say, however, that Happy Unemployment represents a new kind of utopia. *Utopia* means "a non-existent place." The utopian writer draws up precise plans for an allegedly ideal society and then expects the world to pour itself into this pre-formed mold. In contrast, the happy unemployed could be said to have a *topian* approach: they seek to shape and modify places and things that are already there. They don't construct systems but instead investigate all of the possibilities for improving their environment.

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acceptance and consequently unconditional financial support, or do they want to revolutionize the system by means of illegal activities, for example by fiddling electricity meters? The combination of both strategies would hardly seem to be logical: I can hardly demand social acceptance and at the same time reward criminals.

Well, the Happy Unemployed are no fans of illegality. In their striving to do good they are even prepared to resort to legal means. Moreover, what is nowadays a right, was once a crime. The right to strike, for instance. And it could always be turned back into a criminal offence. Primarily, we are concerned with social acceptance. We are not appealing to the state or the authorities but to Joe Public.

We can already hear the theorists of class struggle chanting: “The whole thing is just a system for letting off steam. It is a means of confining the unemployed proletarian strata to an illusory niche where they are urged to transform those remaining life functions and thus just help to mitigate the contradictions within capitalism. The Happy Unemployed amuse themselves while

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the bourgeoisie carries on increasing their profits in peace. Sell-out! Sell-out!”

Every single practical step, even every single breath taken, can be accused of being an attempt to conform. And it is precisely this space to breathe that is all about. The most sophisticated radical theories are not of much use, if their outcome in practical terms amounts to the message: Wait and see.

We are aware that our experiment could fail in various ways. It could, for example, end up becoming merely a joke, a fruitless prank. Or the original idea could be crushed under a ton of deadly earnestness. Another possibility is that a small group of unemployed could become so successful that they turn into happy managers and lose all contact with their original social roots. But these are all just potential risks. They are not predestined to happen. We just bring the ball into play. Whether it ultimately ends up in the goal or not, is not only down to us.

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But the question also needs to be asked: what should we actually fight for? Definitely not for the welfare state and the full employment of yesteryear—its reintroduction is even more improbable than the reintroduction of the steam train. But the alternative could be even more dreadful. It is conceivable that the unemployed could be granted leave to grow their vegetables on the wasteland and rubbish dumps of post-modernity and to devise their own social relations as they go along. They would live under long-distance, high-tech police surveillance and be subject to callous exploitation at the hands of some mafia or other, while the well-off minority could continue to function without care or worry. The happy unemployed are looking for a way out of this dreadful alternative. It is a matter of principles.

The prevailing propaganda frequently asserts that the unemployed have been excluded from society, and numerous good people plead for their reintegration. What that in actual fact means was explained by a Unesco humanist at the Copenhagen Social Summit: “The first step

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to social integration is to be exploited.”Thanks but no thanks!

Three hundred years ago farmers eyed the prince’s castle with envy. Justifiably, they felt excluded from his wealth, his life of leisure, his court entertainers and courtesans. But who wants to live like a stressed-out manager? Who wants to stuff their head with his meaningless figures? Who wants to fuck his bottle-blonde secretaries, drink his dodgy Bordeaux wine, and end up dying of his heart attack? We are quite happy to exclude ourselves from the dominant abstraction. We desire another kind of integration.

In poor countries there are millions of people who are forced to live outside the cycle of the market economy. Every day the newspapers report on the terrible troubles endured by the so-called Third World, a depressing chain of famine, dictatorship, war, and disease. But we shouldn’t forget that existing alongside this (mostly imported) misery there is another social reality: an intensive communal life based upon pre-capitalist traditions. Western society appears almost dead in comparison. In the non-Western world the work

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of the white man is despised because it knows no end—quite unlike, for instance, that of those Somalia craftsmen who blow their profits on an annual celebration. The lower the gross national product, the greater is the capacity of people for celebration. The ethnologist Serge Latouche said in *In the Wake of the Affluent Society: An Exploration of Post-Development--*

The poor are much richer than other people, and they themselves, think they are. Many visitors have been struck by the unbelievable joie de vivre that flourishes on the edges of African towns. It is a less deceptive indicator than those depressing objective calculations made by statistical data collection agencies that only take into account the Westernized indicators of wealth and poverty.

Of course there is always the risk of Europeans eroticizing. But as far as social life is concerned, people living there confirm the superiority of the poor South. The Egyptian Albert Cossery, for instance, writes in *Proud Beggars*:

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faith in his dignity. For El Kordi believed that dignity could only result from unhappiness and despair. It was the reading of Western books that had damaged his spirit in this way.

The Happy Unemployed have much to learn (and to unlearn) from Africa and other non-Western cultures: Of course there's no point in mimicking ancient social customs, but we can find inspiration there. Picasso and the Dadaists also found a refreshing source of creativity in African art.

Just to cite one example: A few years ago sociologists made a study of the life of the inhabitants of a slum area of Dakar, in Senegal. They discovered that the income of an average family of twelve was actually seven times higher than their official income. It's not that these people can perform miracles and have discovered a way of turning a single bank note into seven. Instead they make the most of their meager means by making it circulate more intensively. It is impossible to live in Africa without belonging to a group, a clan, or a circle of friends. Within these networks money permanently circulates accord-

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ing to a precisely laid down system that regulates the giving of gifts, donations, investments, loans, and repayments. Because the possibilities of getting more substantial sums of money are accumulated in the family, it has at its disposal a sum of money that far exceeds its scarce resources. Moreover this circulation of money is only one element of that reciprocal economy. In addition, repair jobs, maintenance and installation jobs, home made shoes and clothes, collectively prepared food, metalwork and carpentry jobs, child raising and sick-care duties are bartered. And of course the celebrations that bind the group together mustn't be forgotten. Money doesn't play a role in any of these activities. That's why it is impossible to measure any standard of living using Western criteria.

Just imagine that the same system was in place here. People on income support would then have 3,500 marks a month at their disposal. This wouldn't solve all of their problems, but it would certainly help a bit. And on top of this they would profit from things that money cannot buy. The question: how much money do

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This leaves the happy unemployed with plenty of space to experiment and we call this project the *search for unidentified resources*. As you may have grasped by now, our life of leisure is very ambitious, it is theoretical and practical, serious and playful, local and international (in Europe alone there are already twenty million virtual happy unemployed). One day you will be able to say with pride: I was around when the whole things was just getting off the ground.

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Interview

Guillaume Paoli is the third member of the Happily Unemployed, the German trio who wrote the manifesto of the same name in 1996. A Frenchman who has lived in Berlin for over twenty years, the philosophical essayist who authored works with evocative titles such as More of the Carrot Less of the Stick and best known for his Demotivational Training published in 2008. (Little Black Cart 2015). A sharp analyst of the pathology called work, he does not lack a sense of humor. The proof is the following laid-back interview.

When and under what conditions have you decided not to work?

I was in my mother's womb, as far as I remember... In fact, I never applied for a job, nor did I look for a career in anything, thinking it better to do what I like without concern for "the constraints of the market." I had the chance to spend my adolescence in an epoch, the 70s, when such an existential stance was much easier to sustain and also more widespread than today. Having said that, I don't refuse work as a matter of principle. When

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someone offers to pay me to do something appealing, I gratefully accept. This is the case now at the Central Theater in Leipzig. But let me insist on this: The idea is not just to take care of oneself, but to take care of others as well. I have no respect for people only seeking their own narcissistic self-satisfaction, no matter if they are bankers or slackers. We are social beings and we flourish as social beings. This is precisely the reason why work as it exists has to be criticized: It forces you into anti-social behavior, makes you live at other people's expenses, whether it be screwing your clients with a smile, treading down your subordinates or climbing over your colleagues to get to the top.

The Manifesto of The Happily Unemployed *was written more than fifteen years ago. Do you think it is more relevant than ever?*

Maybe not that much from a practical point of view. At least in Berlin where I live, it certainly was easier to avoid work back then, without sinking into sheer poverty and bureaucratic hassles. Basically, the Manifesto described the way we actually lived at that time. Now it has become some kind of ideal that is difficult to attain. Nevertheless, as far as our ideas are concerned, I don't think that anything has occurred since then has proved

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What has happened to the other members of the group?

As a group involved in public interventions, the Happily Unemployed ceased to exist around 2002, simply because we had the feeling that we were through with these topics and each of us had the desire to start something else. That doesn't mean that there aren't any sleeper agents left in the belly of the beast! What happened to the members? One converted to Islam and moved to Dubai. Another lives in China. A third is practicing critical architecture. One became a photographer, another grows her vegetable in the countryside, etc.

What do you think of Krisis?

Somehow, radical theory groups like Krisis resemble those spiritual brotherhoods united around a common dogma, which is not without a certain charm, actually. They endeavor to save theory from the damages of the outside world. Indeed, it might soon be necessary to build new monas-

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Rather well. That is to say I got quite a lot of feedback. Readers talked with me about their own experiences, told me that this little book had helped them reflect on their own aspirations, their lives. Which was my goal after all: Not to create a sensation in the marketplace of ideas with a new ultra-radical theory, but to share some questions with others. Attentive readers got right the ironic dis-

How was Demotivational Training received?

Never would I accept being in a debate with such a non-entity who has a monopoly of media attention based on some pseudo intellectual jive. That would give him too much credit. I ran into Finkielkraut on the street one day but didn't recognize him quickly enough or I would have spit in his face. I regret that lost opportunity.

If you were debating Bernard Henry Gluckskraut what would you say?

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tance of the text. Others, stuck in the matrix of readymade judgements, buried their heads in predictable commentaries. Those who dislike questions remained silent. However, a book is nothing but a bottle tossed into the sea. You shouldn't overrate its importance nor expect being able to estimate its actual effect.

Bob Black in his book The Abolition of Work advocates "a permanent festival, the playful revolution". What do you think of that?

Raoul Vaneigem wrote this long before Black. Those were the slogans of May 68. There was a time when I embraced them without thinking much about what they meant. Later I read a ferocious critique of such conceptions written by Philippe Muray (*L'Empire Du Bien*). Above all I witnessed how these slogans were actually being used: carnivalized revolt, Halloween-turned-anger, a never ending depoliticized party, a festival of mass infantilization. Mind you, refusing work doesn't mean refusing to make efforts, and those who dream of revolution shouldn't forget that not necessarily playful, sometimes strenuous efforts are required for self-organization, for the methodical building of networks, for experience. On top of that: a permanent festival would be the

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The picture collapses on itself as soon as you consider the actual conditions on the job today: all that workplace bullying, occupational burn-out, computer-aided authoritarianism, job insecurity. Add to this the feeling that your skills are being underemployed, that your desires are dulled, that the meaning of it all has got lost, and finally that you are contributing to generalized self-destruction. Do you really have to be a dandy to reject

Certain people see anti-work as a dandy's pose, one opposed to people who slave away at a job. How do we change this picture?

Every human being bears in himself a contradictory tension between activity and rest, ease and unease, action and contemplation. When one lives outside of the constraints of salaried work this tension is palpable at any time. If you lose focus, you can either fall into total lethargy or into empty activism. Letting both tendencies coexist, discovering the middle path, this is a lifetime's learning process.

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In Notre Paresse: Vice et Vertu Camille Saint-Jacques wrote: "Whatever you think of the work ethic in our production obsessed society, in the vast majority of cases the inability to work reveals a great degree of suffering accompanied by drug and alcohol dependence as well as other emotional and physical pathologies. Other as anti-social parasitic dandyism, laziness in daily life means depression and helplessness." Your reaction?

I wrote in *Demotivational Training* that the lack of work generates suffering much in the same way as the lack of a drug for the addict. From school onwards, people were hooked on performance and productivity. Subsequently, being suddenly thrown out of the job amounts to quitting cold turkey. Unemployed workaholics suffer withdrawal symptoms, they are depressed, sick, and resort to compensatory drugs. There's no question of denying these terrible facts. But they have to be considered as the very consequence of work addiction and the physical and mental violence endured in the company. In other words, what this woman labels an incapacity for work is actually an incapacity for laziness.

Do you still advocate the subversion of the system by
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In Notre Paresse: Vice et Vertu Camille Saint-Jacques wrote: "Whatever you think of the work ethic in our production obsessed society, in the vast majority of cases the inability to work reveals a great degree of suffering accompanied by drug and alcohol dependence as well as other emotional and physical pathologies. Other as anti-social parasitic dandyism, laziness in daily life means depression and helplessness." Your reaction?

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means of illegal actions? How does that work?

It has never been a matter of glorifying illegalism as an end in itself. We know how harmful mafia-like practices can be while being at the same time perfectly integrated to the system. But let's restate the obvious: we do not live under the rule of law, but under a balance of power which is substantially unfavorable to atomized individuals. For example, unemployed people are not allowed to claim their rights collectively. If they do so and invade the office of a bureaucrat at the job center, they already indulge in illegal action. Same thing if you sell homemade hotdogs on the corner for a few bucks — it's against the law. And I am not even talking about bootlegging electricity from the main power line, stopping to pay back your debts or resisting a foreclosure. All these practices are only possible collectively. And every collective generates its own practical reality which is not necessarily illegal, but at least outside the law to the extent that it bears its own legitimacy in itself.

What do you say to the unemployed who feel excluded and useless?

The same thing I say to workers who feel excluded and useless. The first question is: excluded from

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what exactly? From a life rich in experiences, encounters, passions? Or from a repetitive job where you are exploited and left without real gratification? Do you miss the recognition of your folks or the autistic market competition? Before you start feeling useless, ask yourself what is useful: Selling hamburgers, sick-making medicines, and stupid ads? Or hanging out with your friends, cooking a good meal, making love, or reading a book? Besides, remember that, since we are human beings, even the superfluous is necessary and even the useless is useful. You cannot quantify the gain of a long springtime walk.

Can the mindsets conditioned for so long by the world of work actually change?

Mindsets change constantly, and the world of work even faster. All the reasons why people in the past might have valued their work have today become just as many “archaic” obstacles due to be removed. For example: taking the time necessary to make a quality product or to win the customer’s confidence. Relying on some material security. Knowing you have health insurance when you’re sick and a decent retirement when you’re old. None of these things have a place in the new labor market. Therefore, an increasing number of people under-

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Getting rid of the minority living on capital interests. The whole system of work as it exists today has only one purpose: growing the wealth of the global oligarchs. The right to vote changes nothing. Feudalism is all we have. As long as this system exists, no freedom is possible. As to the question of how to get rid of the capital owners, obviously I don't have an answer. If there were one already, everybody would have it.

What is the first step toward a world without work?

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Biography

Guillaume Paoli was too young to make the May '68 revolution but he is old enough to have been made by the May '68 revolution. In his young years, he decided to take retirement first and work later. Living in various towns in France he took part in diverse attempts to passionate everyday life and was involved in several social conflicts throughout Europe as well. Later he joined the underground post-situationist group Os Cangaceiros that achieved some fame by means of sabotage and reappropriation. Of this experience, he says today that it “probably was the best way to survive the dreadful eighties.” As the Berlin Wall went down he moved to this city where he still lives today. Inspired by the festive and innovative climate there, he co-founded a group called The Happily Unemployed, which spread pamphlets and initiatives throughout Germany at the turn of the millennium. A major social-democratic politician branded them “the utopian socialists of the new underclass.” Urged by the bureaucracy to become self-employed, Paoli then registered as a “demotivational trainer”. The theoretical results of his field research were published in his book *Demotivational Training*.

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