

Quiet Quitting

By Professor Jan Willem de Graaf

Professor of Brain and Technology, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Deventer, Netherlands

A really eye-opening article in an opinion magazine states that in order to be able to do paid work, it is a condition that people also do reproductive work. Raising children, taking care of the house, running errands, taking care of the community (family, neighbours), etc. all this is also necessary work. No paid work without this so-called reproductive work!

Do we live at home to be able to do paid work at the workplace? Work to live! No! Since the industrial revolution, there has been a distinction between reproductive, traditionally female and paid (male) work. Despite emancipation, in the Netherlands 70% of women and 20% of men perform part-time paid work (80% or less). Women, on the other hand, do much more unpaid (reproductive) work, if you do not count sleeping, drinking and watching TV. Industry is now largely automated. Paid work mainly takes place in what I consider "office work" (including ICT/digitization, consultancy, research and clean tech). In addition to the hands on the bed, the healthcare sector now also has an extensive office "water head" (ICT staff, controllers, quality employees, etc.).

Recently I had a broken window at home, 30 by 40 cm single glass. I have to enter my details (including insurance) via the digital online system. An appointment follows immediately via my email, a week later. A week later, the glazier arrives and gets to work. I offer him a cup of coffee. Two minutes later he is done measuring. While enjoying coffee, he enters the data into the digital system and says that a new appointment for when he can place the glass will automatically follow by email. Somewhat disappointed, I ask if that is not possible now. It is for sure, he would be ready in 5 minutes, but since double glazing is usually used, which has to be factory made, measuring and placing are strictly separated. He hates the system, but is absolutely not allowed to make an exception. A week later, the man is indeed ready after 5 minutes, but he likes a cup of coffee, it's almost an hour's drive! Luckily I work from home that day... My reproductive work - keeping our house in order so that we can do our paid work carefree - takes place during my paid work. With my understanding and care for the glazier, a ridiculously malfunctioning digital system - a digital monster - is maintained with humanity!

Degrowth

There is a lot to be said about quiet quitting, about people doing their 9 to 5 (office) job as minimally as possible, because it is so far from their "purpose". Since Corona, people are often allowed to work from home. Contrary to expectations, it appears that people can often do their work in solitude with (considerably) fewer hours at home than before in the office. But reproductive work is always ready at home. As two-income couples, we have outsourced a lot of reproductive work, such as childcare and even walking the dog, to grandparents, SMEs or the self-employed, among others.

Because paid work is therefore only possible if unpaid work is also in order, the call for more paid work - full-time - is very untenable, especially against the background of a planet where paid work makes our footprint dangerously large. Quietly dropping out, doing less paid work (Degrowth) may have more impact than contributing to even more production, material and energy consumption in an economy of infinite growth from finite resources. By increasing our 'reproductive' work - well-being - we may be able to shape degrowth. Tilting towards a sustainable planet must be done bottom up, from our own Inner Development Goals! Something that seems terrifying, quiet quitting, may be a starting signal of something very beautiful!

From now on I decide to repair a broken window myself. Saves driving hours and pointless air pollution from a glazier. Whether I'm drinking coffee with a frustrated glazier or doing my own repairs, it takes paid work time in both cases!