

# Where is the study of WORK in critical IPE?

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## Abstract

The British school of International Political Economy (IPE) has been highly innovative in encouraging inter-disciplinary work, revealing – while allowing for – an eclecticism of research and investigation that stands in clear contrast to its American counterpart. Critical theorists in the British school of IPE in particular have been highly prolific in recent years and have introduced research on a wide range of contemporary issues in the global political economy. However, this school tends to overlook two very important areas of analysis: work and employment. More thus needs to be done. This article argues that researchers from seemingly autonomous fields can teach critical IPE a lesson: inter-disciplinarity is not a fantasy. The analysis suggested here is of how governmental policy idealises a particular subjectivity wherein workers are not employed, but are *employable*. Not only would a focus on this problem enhance existing research in critical IPE: it is also essential if we are to address the needs of humanity in the increasingly unstable and flexibilised world of work. The British school of critical IPE is the forum within which this conversation could and should be continued.

## Article

Within International Political Economy (IPE), researchers have been devoted to discussions of the internationalisation of finance, foreign direct investment (FDI), and currency fluctuations; and methodologies are often focussed on econometrics, supply and demand-chain statistics, and related quantitative methods. In mainstream IPE, interest in the fluctuations of global capital rises during periods of crisis, such as the 1997 Asian economic crisis and the contemporary 2008 global crisis.

But alongside mainstream research, critical transnationalised IPE should become committed to understanding how, in the context of crisis, the collapse of neoliberal banking and corporate systems and restructuring of labour markets affects people. New struggles for the hegemony of ideas and subjectivities are impacting the way we live and work. In response to the onslaught of mainstream theory, areas of research conducted, and orthodox methodologies in IPE, this article intends to contribute to the emerging area of critical IPE through revealing what is at stake for people in the neo-capitalist, neoliberal markets and the economic recession that plagues our current world.

The emergence of IPE as a genuine rival to the dominant position that International Relations (IR) has taken with its orthodox views on realism and general emphasis on the study of security, is seen with the rise of the British school of IPE. What differentiates the British school from the American school is the emphasis on qualitative versus quantitative research, respectively (Cohen,

2008: 16–65). In general, the British school is more sympathetic to research that is not dedicated to orthodox views or uncritical readings of finance and banking.<sup>i</sup>

Critical theorists in the British school of IPE have been highly prolific in recent years and adept in introducing research on a wide range of contemporary issues in the global political economy. Examples of these interventions include Ian Bruff on historical materialism and IPE, varieties of capitalism, Nicolas Poulantzas, and open Marxism (2009, 2010a with Bieler and Morton, 2010b, forthcoming, and present issue); Chris Clarke's work on the moral individual in market relations that encourages a more sociological approach within IPE (2010); Charles Dannreuther who uses regulation theory and the theories of varieties of capitalism to understand the SME (and Petit 2006, 2006, 2007, and Petit 2007); Matt Davies' investigations on everyday life in the global political economy, and work (2009a, and Ryner 2006, 2006, and 2005); Paul Lewis on the politics of financial crisis and triadisation in global markets (2010 and 2006); Johnna Montgomerie's critical look at indebtedness and American financialisation (2009a, and Williams 2009b, 2008, 2006a, and 2006b); Or Raviv on post-Socialist Europe with regard to integration and finance (2008); Stuart Shields on transnational forces, neoliberalisation and Eastern Europe (2008, 2007a, 2007b, and forthcoming); Robbie Shilliam on uneven and combined development and the political theorising of Trotsky, James and Althusser (2009 and 2008); Adam Morton on passive revolution and Mexico (2010a and 2010b); Owen Worth on critical theory and IPE as well as anti-globalisation movements (2006, and Farrands 2005, and Kuhling 2004, and Abbott 2002, and forthcoming) and Brigitte Young's work on GATS, gender, and East Asian governance (2007, 2002, and 2001). While not a comprehensive list by any means, all of these recent contributions demonstrate the rise of the critical voice within the British school of IPE.

While the theoretical assumptions across these sometimes quite divergent pieces of work may not always complement one another, the point emphasised here is that the emerging school of critical IPE is happening within the heartlands of the British tradition. Theorists may or may not be ethnically British, but that is not the point: these authors have emerged from an epistemological premise that nurtures inclusion and requires diversity, and this is its principal strength.

Nonetheless, despite my claim that the British school is the most innovative in inter-disciplinary work, and allows eclecticism within research and investigation; the critical school of IPE within the British school continues to overlook a very important area of analysis: work and employment.<sup>ii</sup> As Matt Davies points out, the two core UK IPE journals *New Political Economy* and the *Review of International Political Economy* have only published 36 articles about work, labour or production out of an aggregate of 446 articles (Davies, 2009b: 2). Clearly, critical IPE, an area that is fundamental to the British school, is missing something. This is surprising not least

because political economy was originally a study of labour and work. While Adam Smith was interested in promoting productivity through efficient production methods, and David Ricardo sought methods to reduce labour in geographical locations by identifying countries' comparative advantages, these theorists could not fathom the role of the state beyond a limited intervention that could encourage these ideals, and saw these modes as having the perhaps unintended, but very convenient liberal outcome of social harmony envisaged in a way that perhaps only a middle-class white male in this time period could have perceived. Karl Marx was very critical of these classical arguments and based his arguments on the point that the value of labour is exploited by those who own the means of production, and looked at work as a commodified entity in the circulation of capital, and this argument is fundamental to the beginnings of political economy as a discipline.

So, subsequent political economy research that identifies itself with Marx's critique, including labour process theory; heterodox economics and industrial relations; varieties and models of capitalism; and a range of sociological and comparative politics methodologies; are areas to which IPE owes tribute. In order to develop the blossoming field of critical IPE that was started with the work of the neo-Gramscians, these literatures should be explored. As Jeffrey Harrod (1997) stresses in an under-acknowledged piece 'Social Forces and International Political Economy: Joining the Two IRs', the incessant devotion to specialisation in our disciplines across the social science is grounded in methodological and epistemological *choices*, and is thus not some accident, and may even look like a 'crutch for intellectual cripples' (*ibid.*: 107).

*Industrial Relations* as an academic discipline, has taken a serious blow in recent years. The threatened job cuts and restructuring at Keele University in 2008 inspired 'vigorous campaigning in opposition, the biggest in our nearly 60-year history' (Darlington, 2009: 1). The campaign involved a march across the University campus in protest of threatened cuts of 38 of the 67 academic posts in the Economic and Management Studies School, and to contest the reintroduction of the degree programmes offered in the previously separate Industrial Relations department within the new Business School. Ralph Darlington highlights the need to rescue Industrial Relations in *What's the Point of Industrial Relations? In Defence of Critical Social Science* (2009), and notes that the campaign he led with the British Universities Industrial Relations Association (BUIRA) was successful in preventing compulsory redundancies and in improving severance packages. The fight has *not* been won, as is now seen in several instances of industrial disputes across the UK and across the world, and public services are threatened with non-discretionary job cuts. Many aspects of positive radical thinking in social life are being threatened and subsumed by seemingly emancipatory rhetoric, seen in policy to do with education and skills revolutions discussed in this article. Industrial Relations is increasingly becoming classified in

educational environments as a study of human resources management and business and economics studies, which has all but eliminated any form of critical political economy within the academy (Spencer, 2008: xvii).

The research of Darlington, Spencer, and Harrod demonstrates that Industrial Relations, a school that originates in heterodox economics, has become increasingly underrepresented, and this reflects a battle between mainstream agenda and the left in academic circles. The developments within Industrial Relations must be protected, and my suggestion is that it should, in light of 'globalisation', taken up by critical IPE for a 'full understanding of the construction of world orders' (Harrod, 1997: 106). To fully incorporate the study of social forces, there should be a marriage of the 'two IR's': *International Relations* dealing with world orders and *Industrial Relations* [my italics] dealing with social forces created from the sociological, psychological, and political effects of the power relations surrounding the universal occupation of work and production and the universal preoccupation with its distribution and allocation' (*ibid*: 105). Harrod suggests the introduction of an International Political Economy of Labour (2002), but this discipline should not exclude *work*, and should include research into the discourse of employability as a technique for the micromanagement of the productive self, in the form of the transnationalised concept of a, paradoxically, forced subjectivity.

In this article, Neo-Gramscian conceptual navigations to do with passive revolution and *trasformismo* are advanced via references to a range of policies that point to an emerging discourse seeming to create a comprehensive transnational mural of the types of subjectivities that are necessary for survival in the global information era. I look at a range of literatures but at the core of my theoretical approach I rely on Gramscian concepts. In this way, I have not restricted myself to the typical avenues taken by neo-Gramscian authors who tend to construct theoretical fences rather than promote theoretical mergers. I am interested in the way in which a global 'revolutionary' project that remains in a checkmate, or passive revolution, by national instances of *trasformismo*.

A struggle for the hegemony of ideas is identified in the global expansion of 'employability'-related education and employment policy, which seeks to construct a particular subjectivity. This is a global passive revolution, since it cannot be identified as being hegemonic in the Gramscian sense.<sup>iii</sup> The manner in which hegemony is disputed can be located with the analysis of workspaces found in both virtual and physical arenas, and this is a nearly completely uncharted territory within critical IPE.

This article first explores a variety of literatures that deal with the question of the meaning of 'work' and workplaces, and labour, to set up the analysis for how this new world is being both created and filtered by governments that influence particular political strategies intending to create employable, objectified subjects. I compare traditional views to more contemporary, modern, and even postmodern conceptualisations, to identify how common sense, discourses, and the hegemonies of ideas in a Gramscian understanding take shape in conjunction with social change and assumptions of human capabilities in the new and 'flexible' world of work. Neoliberalism, the offspring of liberalism, stalks and controls an increasing arena of social experience, and this can be seen in the way policy is aimed at day-to-day lives. In this light, this piece does not extensively theorise how the emerging discourse on employability can be interpreted as a hegemonic struggle,<sup>iv</sup> or even perhaps a global passive revolution. The rhetoric of lifelong learning informs that contemporary employment policy is seen as a strategy of *trasformismo* (see Moore 2006, 2007, 2010) and the way that the dominant capitalist class continues to prevent revolution.

The second section of the article thus looks at the terms 'employability', lifelong learning, skills and competencies, which are found in labour market policy reports and various binding statements across skills policies in many areas across the world. These concepts are very much *subjectively* derived states of being and mind, and diverge dramatically from what perhaps could be

expected in a world where *employment* is prioritised. This policy strategy has begun to affect people's experiences of the world and most importantly, invades subjectivities. Through this analysis, I begin a discussion that is needed within the area of critical IPE, and conclude that empirical research will uncover a much needed analysis of the global passive revolution of skills reform. Likewise, an exploration of literatures that theorise the day-to-day urgency of, and the undulating definitions of labour and of work, suggests a critical avenue for research within IPE.

## **Work and Labour**

Social scientists have followed the evolution and significance of the perception of *work* as it has emerged in various epochs of specific production models and management strategies as well as production relations. *Labour* has become *work*, and this has been seen to challenge autonomy. Work has taken a different significance for people with regard to identity formation in the climate of consumerism and supposed unlimited freedoms in the new globalised world of work. This world has less to do with personal prosperity, and less to do with personal relationships and collaboration, and more to do with individualism and accumulation. Several contradictions have emerged, and in light of the expansion of neoliberal capitalism, this shift can either be viewed as potentially extremely liberating for workers, or on the other hand can become a grounds for appropriation and re-invention of subordination.

The demands for new forms of work and creative 'play-bour' (in place of 'labour')<sup>v</sup>, most often seen in the culture industries and in something referred to as immaterial labour (Hardt and Negri 2001, 2004) is heralded as emancipatory and generally liberating for workers. However, there no truly emancipating angle to this new world of work, which stems from the Quality of Working Life (QWL) model in the 1970s and overlaps into the current global information-based economy. Reasons for the lack of fulfilment of the 'promise' for workers have to do with what is done with the product of play-bour. While workers cannot expect a guaranteed wage within this new world of work (Gorz, 1999; Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979; etc.), people are still expected to produce. Production or 'product', whether it is a form of commodified cognitive output or traditional physical items, is viewed and measured in light of others' production and presumably can be used to alter the employee relationship depending on its measure, but increasingly, at the macro-level people's productiveness with relation to people's employability and competency, is also viewed in light of company productivity and international competitiveness. Simultaneous to government-led 'skills revolutions' that place responsibility for workers' employability directly into the hands of those workers through their personal self-management and lifelong learning abilities, workers are ironically being held accountable for nations' economies and economic

health. Therefore the position of the worker is not only unstable according to supposedly immutable conditions of capital but, increasingly, is unstable unless personality and drive are freely available to all from some unknown resource found within subjectivity.

‘The notion of work [*travail*] is an invention of modernity or, more exactly, of industrial capitalism’ (Gorz 1994: 53). So the idea of ‘work’ only becomes ‘work’ as we know it today in the context of commodity production. People no longer toil, drudge, construct, prepare (*ibid*), or attend to subsistence production in villages where there was no measure for production that could be used for all outputs and for all types of workers, as management began to think during the Fordist era. Hannah Arendt distinguished labour from work, stating that work only becomes a separate category of activity when production is no longer for the self, but begins to fulfil a wider function for society, and is necessarily seen as having value *outside* of the labour in and of itself. Work is done in the public eye, and from a highly liberal viewpoint, it is done for the good of society. This distinction is reflected in Gorz’s insights. These authors mention out that Marx and Marxists paid/pay very little attention to the difference between manual and intellectual work. Rose points out that ‘in nineteenth century capitalism – in mine, mill, and manufactory – work seems easy to picture in these terms. But over the course of the present century, types of work and conditions of working have radically changed’ (Rose, 1999: 56). In the context of work flexibilisation and precarious forms of labour on the rise, work for the social good becomes a different concept, as it is no longer paired with security of the self except as a trajectory chosen by individuals themselves, who are perceived to have a wide range of opportunities available to them for work, at all times, and in all fields. Lifelong learning requires a ‘classroom’, metaphorically speaking, and if paid jobs simply don’t exist due to crisis and government spending choices or the inevitable collapse of private sector fantasies, the learning process recommended appears quite farcical.

Characteristics of value and social worth are the defining points of *work*, but one more element has been added with the rise of industrial capitalism:

Work must have a recognized social validity or value, and this will be attested by the possibility of exchanging it for a determinate quantity of any other kind of work whatever – or, in other words, by the possibility of *selling* [*italics added*] it, of presenting it as a commodity. It is by its commodity form that it becomes social work ‘in general’, abstract work, participation in the overall social process of production. (Rose 1999: 54)

In the nineteenth century, the introduction of specific skills amongst industrial workers changed the way 'work' was viewed. Work became seen as the road to prosperity and wealth, and a means to dominate nature. It is with this rise of a 'poietic' framework that work was considered to be a creative and productive act for the greater social good, an act that would ultimately provide mastery over nature. Work at that point was deemed to have worth only in the public sphere, and traditional private sphere production was not valued.

Soon, management structures increasingly placed emphasis on teamworking and introduced the concept of flexisecurity as the private sphere became increasingly overlapping with public spaces. In that context, it is increasingly difficult to know how to separate *work* from free time, leisure time, and freedom to be a creative subject. Gorz talks about work in our contemporary workplace as a 'false work'. This new inheritance of the model of *work-as-poiesis* is being applied to new forms of work such as are seen within the service industry. Gorz contrasts this with the types of work that was historically conducted by 'toolmakers, boilermakers, metal-turners, masons and rolling-mill workers' (1994: 56).

Rose writes about the transformation of work with relation to 'techniques of the self' (1999: 60). Rose outlines the way in which transformations to the 'conception, organisation, and regulation of work and the worker over this century involve relations between many aspects of thought and practice ... human technologies, and the techniques of the self have been brought into being by [these] new ways of thinking and acting on the economy, the workplace and the worker' (*Ibid*). Particular networks of power were evident within Taylorist design and later post-Fordist management structures. Similar to the Yahoda experiment (1932/2002) Rose notes that, historically, work gave people a sense of personal satisfaction and identity as associated with a connection to other workers. The shift from an alleged Protestant work ethic emerged perhaps, in the 1980s simultaneous to the upsurge in neoliberalism. Now, along with the identity of consumer with inalienable rights of shopping and choice, people also might be seen as having the full range of choice for work and professions and identities as associated. The range of personal image choices as associated with work and productivity is intended to be as exciting as a row of sparkling party attire in a dress shop window. Mark Banks writes about the cultural worker in particular as being subjected to alienation and subjugation through various 'mechanisms of rule' (2006) whereby regulatory discourses in policy relating to the 'art of government' (Dean 1999) appeals to the glamorous side of self-regulation alongside social improvements, or a the 'utopian belief that social reality is innately "programmable"' (Banks 2006, 47).

Thus, work does not offer social satisfaction and a type of community inclusion, despite work is perceived now to be something conducted for a greater good. Instead, it offers the chance for

individual identities and self-perceptions, rather than paycheques alone. So, workers no longer simply search for financial survival but indeed are defined by the work they do and all this entails. There is, therefore, emancipation as obtained within work, and the idea of emancipation *from* work as would be touted within workerist philosophy, is gone. In the 1970s, a management campaign called Quality of Work Life, emerged, emphasising ‘excellence’ and ‘humanising work’ (Rose, 1989: 102), and really took force in the 1980s. This movement calls for democratising the workforce. However, its antecedents appear to promote a psycho-technology of work, one that requires a specific psychology and subjectivity, as well as a management psychology. Peters and Waterman outline chosen management styles in the book *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best-Run Companies* (1982). The authors suggest behaviours that seem almost like adages to the contemporary management guru, having to do with the fostering of innovation, teamwork, and so on. This influential text relies on a supposedly typical human psyche or human nature, and has a sub-text for how these behaviours would increase productivity of the humans it was intending to represent. This type of subjectivity must be held by the individual who craves security but is also in love with change, one who is competitive but also longs to work in groups, longs for success and achievement, and so on. This was to be a new kind of citizen who longs for self-fulfilment through work, but in a way that is not complementary to the society of the industrial age. What is now generally taken out of the equation was the wage, and union involvement at the level of human resources, and the commitment from governments to provide anything but a resolve to inculcate higher education and training by way of a particular process that could produce such subjectivities.

Theorists in critical IPE can learn much from these authors. Beynon (*et al*) write about the ‘new realities of work’ (2002); Rifkin identifies the ‘end of work’ (1992); Burawoy critiques working conditions and monopoly capitalism (1979; 1985); Spencer gives a sophisticated historical as well as contemporary view on the *Political Economy of Work* (2008); Fine and Milonakis muse on ‘the social’ in economic theory (2008); and Fine (2001) writes about social capital versus social theory. Moreover, theorists who are interested in the world of work in the digital ‘playground’ are searching for new ways to measure work and labour in our new information economy, such as Cubitt (1998), and have begun to make investigations into how society is constructed objectively, subjectively, and highlights the importance of inter-subjectivities (building on the work of Berger and Luckmann, 1967).

IPE theorists have not yet investigated ‘necessary’ subjectivities of the worker. Typically, sociologists or work psychologists have taken the lead in analyses of the subjective elements of work, such as Clark and Oswald (1996), and Clark (2005) (cited in Spencer, 2008: xvii) who aim to find ways to identify life satisfaction as associated with subjective participation. The

‘economics of happiness’ (Layard, 2005) thesis claims that happiness can be found through work, a philosophy that informed New Labour’s unemployment and welfare-to-work policy in the UK, but Spencer (2008) is critical of this homogenising platform. The emotional labour literature looks at emotion work and emotion labour as forms of alienation that occur particularly in the context of service labour, that is, hotel and shop work that forces people into ‘suppression of the real self’ (Brook, 2009: 533). Hochschild distinguishes between emotional labour, which is the ‘management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display (1983: 7) and emotion work, which is the ‘process of managing and presenting emotions in the private sphere of our lives such as among family and friends’ (Brook, 2009: 533). This is also related to the research on affective labour (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Research into the meaning of Marx’s category of abstract labour includes, recently Bonefeld (2010) and Kicillof and Starosta (2007). The school of autonomism has written about immaterial labour and affective labour (Lazzarato, 1996; Terranova 2000; Hardt and Negri, 2004, 2001; Berardi, 2009). A handful of mainstream work psychologists, including Holman (Holman *et al*, 2009, 2008) advocates well-being through specific work design models and goal-setting strategies. But these authors completely ignore the implications for why resistance is happening in the workplace and are interested only in reforming according to pre-determined ‘rules’.

The ‘labour process’ literature, is based around a category identified by Marx that referred to ‘the simple elements of the labour process [which] are 1) purposeful activity, that is work itself, 2) the object on which that work is performed, and 3) the instruments of that work’ (1976: 284). Littler states that the labour process is a category that lies in ‘contradistinction to the valorisation process’ (1990: 77). Valorisation (translated from the word *Kapitalverwertung*) is vital for the labour process. While this translation of the term is not exact, ‘valorisation’ is understood as the process of value creation and of the surplus value of work. So the labour process is not exactly a theory but it is a process of production that Marx critiqued in his *Critique of Political Economy* (1976). The activity that makes this process affiliated with capitalism is accumulation, including profit for the capitalist from workers’ output and indeed surplus value. Paying a worker less for her work than the value that is added to the labour process as a result of that work, is at the heart of the capitalist employment relationship (Knights, 1990: 4).

The ‘labour process’ literature begins with the work of Harry Braverman, who published *Labour and Monopoly Capital* in 1974. Braverman’s work was the first to analyse the employee/employer relationship and the management structures of control of the relationship through intentional deskilling and by forcing the perceived separation of manual from mental labour in management approaches. Braverman emphasised the way in which scientific management separates conception from execution. Davies has also recently critiqued this apparent divide between mental and

manual labour (2010).

The debates emerging in light of these claims have had to do with:

1. questions about deskilling and the attempt to construct a satisfactory model of skills changes;
2. questions about labour markets and the attempt to construct a satisfactory model of capitalist labour markets; and
3. questions about managerial strategy and control. (Littler, 1990: 46)

Braverman has been called a structuralist, and is critiqued for ignoring the affective subjectivities of workers. Michael Burawoy identified these missing dimensions in Braverman's work, saying that he is overly concerned with "objective" aspects of the labour process' (Burawoy, 1985: 25) and neglects 'day-to-day impact of particular forms of "control", and specifically Taylorism, so the same one sided perspective leads him to compound Taylorism as ideology and as practice ... He makes all sorts of assumptions about the interests of capitalists and managers, about their consciousness, and about their capacity to impose their interests on subordinate classes' (*ibid.*). Burawoy carried out fieldwork within the factory, with the specific intention to not only disclose regimes of control but to also identify how workers deal with pressures in the workplace. Burawoy builds on Braverman's influential analysis through his application of Gramsci's thesis on hegemony to the workplace, and the absorption of workers' needs and interests through what he calls *concrete* coordination (*ibid.* 10). Political and ideological research is crucial for the understanding of what actually occurs in the workplace, of how management structures of control are operationalised and how they are sustained, and why workers have not overthrown these structures of control. Braverman did not seek out 'subjective dimension' of class, and is restricted by an economistic view of externally defined class and one that predominantly looks at people's contribution to capital-accumulation processes despite his claims that classes are 'not fixed entities but rather *ongoing processes*' (1974: 409). So, considering the absence of adequate analyses of subjectivity, how could this father of the labour process literature theorise resistance or dissent?

Nikolas Rose explores the connections between material, social and economic changes, and workers' subjectivities:

The changes in the conception, organisation, and regulation of work and the worker over this century involve relations between many aspects of thought and practice: the history of the large corporation, the changing relations of manufacturing and non-manufacturing industry;

the elaboration of an expertise of management; innovations in the rationale and techniques of accounting to incorporate the human resources of the enterprise; transformations in macro-economic policy and much more ... the relations between governmental rationalities, social strategies, human technologies and techniques of self [that] have been brought into being by these new ways of thinking and acting on the economy, the workplace, and the worker ... new networks of power have been established, a web of calculations and technologies connecting macro-economic policy, the management of the enterprise, and the design of the labour process with human subjectivity itself. (1999: 60)

So what scholars have not yet done is to look specifically at how people are affected by related policies and workplace changes that are linked with 'human subjectivity itself' (*ibid*). Education has been targeted as a site for reskilling, has become the site for attempted *trasformismo*. Private sector industry is repeatedly welcomed to take part in curricula development, and the impact this will have on social lives is becoming evident.

### **Employability as discourse and as subjectivity**

Employability in the post-Fordist world of work at first glance appears unproblematic, as it ideally provides a self-woven safety net (Moore 2006) for people's survival in an increasingly unstable labour market. But what does the rise in an 'employability' rhetoric seen across social policy and education programmes mean for workers, as well as jobseekers?

The study of employability as a newly relevant form of subjectivity is an under-researched area. The changing meaning of work has implications for what it is now to be 'employable', in the context new expectations. To be generally 'employable', but not necessarily 'employed', means that people are required to take a new form of subjectivity and self-awareness as well as responsibility for learning and self-education in the form of lifelong learning. The significance of 'employability' is often used in such a way that it appears authors would like this idea to be taken for granted. However, as people find themselves increasingly out of work for reasons that are attributed to a global crisis, our self awareness and identities are becoming increasingly removed from the workplace. If we were identified previously by the work they did, now we are being forced to understand ourselves as wageless people, but with a growing responsibility for our own identity creation as employable subjects who will be successful in immanent job searches.

'Employability' is a form of subjectivity that is seen to be complementary to the contemporary, post-Fordist interpretations of work. Work is intended to become increasingly self-managed, creative and 'immaterial', but that has not yet eliminated the structures of governments and management which tend, seemingly very successfully, to undermine and control workers. In fact,

the ‘employability’ revolution of subjectivities is one that the government has tried to incorporate and manipulate as part of its own supposedly commonly accepted discourse, by way of a series of elite-driven skills ‘revolutions’. An interdisciplinary approach is necessary to understand the ideas I have outlined, with the intention of looking at how skills revolutions are in fact passive revolutions in the Gramscian sense, in our current world of less-measurable labour time. In this sense, this seeming global ‘skills revolution’ is elite-led.

Starting in the 1960s and accelerating in the 1980s, leaders decided that change would be inevitable as a response to pressure to ‘outsmart’ rivals in the global political knowledge economy. Policy began to focus on ways to prepare labour markets and to promote workers’ employability for economic prosperity. Despite the industry/education link has never been proven to promote economic growth, nor has it been proven to increase employment opportunities, policymakers promote ‘employability’ in various guises since the 1980s.

In a series of ‘waves’ (Garsten and Jacobsson 2004: 7–9), the accepted definition employability has responded to different forces. In the 1900s, someone was either available for employment and was thus employable or, they were simply, not. During the Great Depression, *dichotomic employability* was a statistical measure to explain people’s physical ability work. Modern versions emerged during a ‘second wave’ occurring in the 1950s and 1960s, and were more inclusive of ideas beyond the predominantly Anglo-Saxon model. The first wave genre for this concept is apparently ‘socio-medical employability’, which emphasises a range of qualities observed by potentially employable individuals with an emphasis on physical and mental health. The second version is more general and is called ‘manpower policy employability’. This type identifies social ‘health’, that is, it identifies whether someone has a criminal record or has a driving licence, and recommends rehabilitation centres on these apparent detriments towards employability. By definition, this type ‘measures the distance between the individual’s characteristics and the production and acceptability requirements on the labour market’ (7). Both these versions assume authority of markets to depict someone’s suitability, and do not question employer discrimination or prejudice, or engineered changes or restructuring. The third variation emerges in the 1960s in French circles and takes a more collective dimension. However this type concentrates on *unemployability* through a look at the amount of time it takes for unemployed groups to find work.

But over time, employability becomes defined as the ability to *adapt* to patterns of employment. This is increasingly conflated with the idea of lifelong learning (Hillage and Pollard, 1999; Tamkin and Hillage, 1999; Worth, 2003). The incentive to work in a socially sustainable and meaningful way is therefore reduced. The firm was seen as an unreliable arena for comprehensive training in

economies that have begun to commodify knowledge. Government programmes began to focus on training people to achieve 'greater individual self-sufficiency over job stability and career advancement' (Worth, 2003: 608; Walker and Kellard, 2001). Experts began to measure employability as a unit of analysis and found that the general perception of employability tends to be higher during times of prosperity but that dual labour market and human capital factors also affect the level of perceived employability of workers regardless of structural factors (Berntson *et al*, 2006). What this means is that training is no longer associated specifically with job-related tasks, but consists of a more seemingly holistic preparation forum, with education/learning at the forefront and with individuals' self-improvement and a certain kind of self-management as a crucial value.

Attempts were made to build a high-skilled, value-added production capacity intending to accommodate technology-heavy industries through building links between education and industry and encouraging people to take on specific forms of subjectivity relating to employability. Policies demonstrate a people-centred or supply-side agenda and have made 'employability' a top priority rather than using the demand-led approach that uses a different set of criteria to interpret how industries are kept in 'business'. So, contemporary skills revolutions have followed the human capital approach. The British government from 1997 to 2010, Labour, has also been claimed to increasingly follow the American model at many levels as well, or the welfare to work, 'workfare' model (Daguerre, 2004: 20–4). Further examples can be seen in the way that East and Southeast Asian countries have openly made the effort to publicly shift responsibility for decision making to external factors from international organisations to individuals, and to the intangible 'authority' of the market. The globalising networks and regimes of responsibility include Korea's involvement with UNESCO Vocational Education and Training Council (UNEVOC); Singapore's ongoing relationship with foreign capital, both of these entities with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); and the UK's ongoing membership of the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education as well as the pressures of EU membership to adapt to the Lisbon Agenda. These supranational governance intentions involve specific frameworks of 'rules, institutions and practise at a level above the nation-state whose authority extends beyond just one state' (Kennett, 2001: 31–3).

Marxist analyses unravel inequalities and power relations as based on labour regulation within an industrial model. New models of production and labour processes now differ from those of the industrial age. As indicated, labour process theory fails to address the importance of the subjectivity of the worker and the way in which exploitation of the surplus value of labour is not always explicit, but is a lived process that becomes internalised to the point that a version of 'consent' can replace the assumption of worker compliance (Burawoy, 1979). Braverman had noted even earlier that 'as

human labour becomes a social rather than an individual phenomenon, it is possible – unlike in the instance of animals where the motive force is inseparable from action – to divorce conception from execution’ (Braverman, 1974: 113). While ‘conception’ relies on management’s exclusive power to define and manage work, responsibility was transferred to workers themselves in unprecedented production environments, or what are now understood as work cultures. The cultural turn throws light on the management of business and organisations (Lash and Urry, 1994: 108), and has inspired a shift from bureaucratic, mechanistic, rationalist systems. The term cultural economy is associated with the grand claims towards the network society, economies of signs, and the knowledge . This represents the turn to culturalised organisational and economic life (DuGay and Pryke, 2002: 6).

Employability therefore has been described in the discourse as if it were a skill in its own right, which is a frightening development when this idea is viewed as supposedly the most important/viable way to gain and to enclose full employment. People are subjected to labour processes now in the same way that we saw before Fordism supposedly overturned this static waged relationship. Work becomes a commodity when sold to the capitalist, but in the case of the employability discourse, it is more than concrete labour playing a role in this relationship. The worker who can demonstrate ‘employability’ has begun a relationship of subordination to capital before even necessarily being employed, meaning that capitalism is successfully becoming integrated into increasing levels of people’s everyday lives.

But what is even more interesting is that this phenomenon looks increasingly similar in a widening territorial context, as capitalism continues its ascent to hegemonic status. ‘Employability’, in the sense that it is a highly subjective term, requires a productive woman/man to become a citizen/worker, or a learner worker (Williams, 2005) and an ‘incurable learner’ (Harding, 2000). Rather than specific skills and abilities alone, workers can demonstrate ‘labour attitudes’ (Worth, 2003: 608). The employable individual appears to demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Flexible personality
- Incurable learner
- Learner worker
- Enriched communicator
- Entrepreneur
- Employable
- Self-managed/directed
- Innovator
- Independent thinker
- Individual

Adaptable

Job sharer (*Ibid*)

Threads running through the literature on employability include (1) a human capital approach and (2) an approach that stresses labour market attachment or work-first (Daguerre, 2004). Overall, employability has shifted from the simple notion of those who are 'able' to work, to a reliance on workers' capabilities to adjust to rapidly changing labour markets. The way that workers are trained into this form of subjectivity becomes an issue discussed at increasing levels of government and governance alike. Employability therefore appears now to stretch beyond solely personal factors, but must include the awareness that individuals encounter a range of barriers to prevent access to the labour market due to 'globalisation'.

Braverman argues (1974) that the deskilling of workers has always been a management imperative designed to maintain hierarchies and subordinate workers. Several authors have aimed to resurrect Braverman's ideas, and look at the transposition of Taylorist employment relations into the present day. Dedicated orthodox management theorists see no need for normative explanations and the extraction of value through workers' productive capability is simply used for the good of organisational aims (Reilly, 2001). In response to this stance, labour process literature should fully engage with the way in which the subjectivity of workers is challenged and manipulated by seemingly inevitable organisational aims (O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001; Knights, 1990; Willmott, 1990; Sakolsky, 1992). Within Marxist literature, structures of management control and objective conditions are usually prioritised beyond 'workers' subjective feelings and identities' (Glenn and Feldberg, 1979: 52). But to restrict research to structural conditions is to offer an incomplete view of the labour process and of important relations of production. Employment relationships in the contemporary context rely on a policy discourse of gospel truths of a set of imperatives within a neoliberal, globalised world. Lazzarato points out that in our new world of work, 'the worker's personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible to organization and command' (1996: 133). Burawoy begins to attempt to build an understanding of exactly what happens on the shop floor and production and to show how these happenstances are formed around political and ideological factors (Smith, 1990: 233). 'Skill' is now more than specific knowledge about the execution of a job and is required for competitive advantage within supposed knowledge economies. Contemporary governments have tended to forget their own rules for neoliberal laissez faire-ism and have begun to intervene through investment into education. Pascaill notes that higher education is no longer devoted to knowledge and wisdom. Instead, it becomes a training ground to create a workforce that will directly become involved in the development of prosperous economies (2006). We are increasingly subjected to arbitrary policy decisions that are hoped will engineer *trasformismo* and allow the

hegemony of global neoliberal capitalism to continue. In the year 2011, the hegemony of employability as a required subjectivity is unlikely in the context of rising unemployment and declining working conditions and rising employee dissatisfaction. A global labour revolution is imminent.

### **Toward a Conclusion: Is this a Passive Revolution?**

Passive revolution occurs in a space of ambiguity between leadership and resistance in the context of consolidation of ideologies from contrasting perspectives, through what Gramsci called *trasformismo*. *Trasformismo* controls ‘common sense’. Common sense is what allows hegemony to remain in place, is one that that leading ideas and assumptions held by leaders and leading class cadres within societies, but leadership is not sustainable unless the hegemonic ideas saturate society to the extent that it ‘constitutes the limits of common sense for most people under its sway’ (Williams, 1980). In the current trend of neoliberal capitalist societies, common sense is increasingly hard to separate from good sense, and it is the project of critical IPE theorist to disentangle these, and to get to the heart of emancipatory projects that are as restricting and isolating as the processes of Taylorism and piecework production of the industrial age.

*Trasformismo* as a policy project is led by managers, politicians, civil servants, and educators who can be seen as members of the transnational capitalist class (van der Pijl, 1984, 1997; Sklair, 1997, 2001a, 2001b). *Trasformismo* is seen in policy discourse and application that appears to give power to workers, in a way that might be linked to the autonomist movement, except that in practice, this discourse looks nothing like the *operaismo* movement as envisaged by Paolo Virno (2001, 2001), Antonio Negri (2003), Mario Tronti (1966), and others.

The appeal to workers’ subjectivities, included in the ‘promise’ for employability, is framed in such a way as to appear to provide tools for workers’ survival in an increasingly uncertain world. Training programmes appear to offer worker empowerment or authority, such as limited self-management of worker associations, but are ultimately managed by pre-existing power structures or formal discussion platforms. These provisions have been designed to tackle the needs of workers to remain or to become newly employable through the cultivation of workers’ subjectivities, but do not meet fundamental needs, which include basic humane working conditions and involve the need for secure income, in every corner of the world that is touched by capitalism. The employability policy ‘revolution’ is indeed a passive revolution because it attempts to subsume potential socialist movements into the mainstream through the use of seemingly hegemonic discourse. Employability is linked with self-empowerment, and is expected to become part of people’s practice as well as their very subjectivity or self-understanding. These projects are not, I would argue, self-valorising and do not allow for autonomy and self-

management as perceived and advocated by the autonomous movement.

Internationally-minded policymakers have become interested in the relationship between the labour market, employability, lifelong learning, and individual workers, and often conclude that self-directed and workplace learning are the key for workers' survival in an increasingly unstable world wherein they are held responsible not only for their own ability to become gainfully employed through self-training and preparation, but also for the success of employers' businesses and even university programmes. Experts have attempted to measure 'employability' as a unit of analysis, and found that the general perception tends to be more optimistic during times of prosperity, but that dual labour market and human capital factors also affect the level of perceived employability of workers regardless of structural factors (Bernston *et al*, 2006). Organic intellectuals' undivided belief in empowerment through self-managed, self-directed learning relies on unlimited and sustainable lifelong learning. These beliefs also require a biopolitical management of the self, that in many ways replaces what could be expected in the era of a welfare state. Again, *employability* replaces expectations for *employment*.

Individuals are increasingly being held responsible for the success of the organisations that hire them, and work is all pervasive and accountable. Responsibility is increasingly transferred to workers themselves, as the relationship between employers, workers, and the government is reorganised by the international capitalist class. Critics of the hegemonic management discourse note that 'companies have emphasised employability in an attempt to shift the responsibility for jobs, training and careers onto the individual' (Brown, Hesketh, and Williams, 2003: 114). The preparation of the self (Rose, 1999) and expectations for workers' subjectivities to match flexible job markets and firms, as companies restructure to accommodate technology and innovation, is a contemporary innovation celebrated by a range of management gurus and specialists (Peters and Waterman, 1982). An aggregation of related policy across nations can be understood as a global passive revolution, whilst various projects of *trasformismo* attempt to manipulate common sense.

The focus is upon a new management or, to be precise, a required *self*-management surrounding workers' perceived employability, because the rapid transformation of what this means for workers, particularly after episodes or periods of crisis, throws people's lives into tumult and disarray. The symptoms mentioned here, and the debate about globalisation, passive revolution, and industrial relations require a genuine commitment to inter-disciplinarity that can be started by theorists within the critical school of IPE if we are to remain both responsive and reflexive to our contemporary world.

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<sup>i</sup> While the founding of the British school of IPE is usually attributed to Susan Strange and Robert W. Cox, its intellectual history is grounded in Benedetto Croce, Fernand Braudel, Giambattista Vico, Karl Polanyi, R. G. Collingwood, and E. H. Carr. Cox (2009) notes in the recent special issue for *New Political Economy* on the British school the discrepancies of national affiliation with the stated schools. Cox notes for example, that David Harvey, James Mittelman, V. Spike Peterson, William Robinson, Mark Rupert, and J. Ann Tickner present critical views to American imperialism, dominant masculinities, and critique the idea of an inherent straightjacket associated with globalisation. Phil Cerny's work is another body of work that cannot be placed in either school, but has been a crucial contributor to the development of critical IPE (1999a, 1999b, 2005, etc.)

<sup>ii</sup> Paul C. Lewis (2009), Louise Amoore (2002), Robert O'Brien (2000a, 200b), Matt Davies and Magnus Ryner (2007), Phil Cerny (1999), Andreas Bieler (2008), Nicola Phillips (2009) and Jeffrey Harrod (1987) have carried out research that is committed to critical analyses within IPE, looking at flexible labour markets, work, unions, migration, production, and poverty.

<sup>iii</sup> Gramsci succeeded in developing an idea (in the dark cells of prison during Mussolini's fascist Italy) that managed to overcome some of the weaknesses of Marx's thesis on the labour process. Marx's observations of the exploitation of surplus value inherent to capitalism accurately represented industrial production. Gramsci reshaped the originally Greek idea of hegemony to devise a hypothesis for the reasons resistance appears futile, by viewing it as an elite project that requires not just coercion of the masses, but in fact gains a level of consent. Hegemony is absent within the context of passive revolution, which must be a *globally* perceived construct in the contemporary age.

<sup>iv</sup> Hegemonic struggle within the contemporary neoliberal bloc of history involves consent as well as some amount of coercion at the international level. Since ideological leadership and consolidation is the cohesion that maintains hegemonies, ideological impotency must be a condition for passive revolution at a global hiatus. A class becomes hegemonic when it effectively transcends its corporate phase of solely representing its own interests but succeeds in representing universally, at least in rhetoric, the main social forces that form a nation. Organic intellectuals or the missionaries of dominant ideas work very hard to keep these ideas at the forefront of people's lives, meaning that ideas become a kind of tool for leadership and the control of potentially dissenting populations. Gramsci notes that ideas are 'real historical facts which must be combated and their nature as instruments of domination exposed ... precisely for reasons of political struggle' (Gramsci, 1995: 395).

<sup>v</sup> The idea of 'play-bour' originates in the gaming industry, wherein, for example, the modification of games, or 'modding' is seen as something IT developers do as a leisurely pastime. However, developers often are not able to translate their activity into something personally useful, and the output of modding is frequently used by the industry or by salaried developers to advance the quality of games, while modders remain in precarious forms of work. 'the relationship between work and play is changing, leading, as it were, to a hybrid form of "playbour"' (Kücklich, 2005).