The Politics of Work

Work, especially wage labor, has come to be assumed as a necessary and unavoidable orientation of modern adult life. Even more, we assume that work is intrinsic to our sense of identity and self-worth. Attached to modern understandings of work are implicit values and morals, specifically the work ethic that frames work as individualistic, merit-based, and belonging to the private sphere. However, recent political critiques have begun to (re) question the ways in which labor and spaces of work constitute (or exclude) us as social and political subjects. In this seminar we will consider work as not only connected and buttressed by the political sphere but as itself political. Our aim will be to examine the unquestioned values that inhere in our understanding of work as well the ways in which the organization of modern forms of work constitute us and organize us as political subjects. In doing so we will consider how labor relations produce and reproduce us as embodied and affective subjects that sustain or exclude different classes, genders, races and ages. We will begin by first examining classical understandings and critiques of the organization of work in the writings of John Locke, Adam Smith, Marx, and Max Weber. We will then turn to contemporary critiques of work including those that point to postwork imaginaries. What would it look and feel like to live in a postwork society? How would we reorganize our time? What creative projects might ensue? What conditions (a basic universal income?) would make such a society possible?

Course Objectives/Learning Goals:

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- think about work politically
- understand work and its changing nature historically
- analyze and discuss work in relation to not only class but also gender and race
- critically assess postwork imaginaries
Required Texts:


Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* Beacon Press: 1988


Required Assignments:

Students are required to write a two-page response paper to each week’s readings. These essays are due at the beginning of each Monday class session. The aim of the papers is to allow students to develop their thoughts and reactions to the reading assignments in preparation for class discussion. The intention is also to give students the opportunity to improve their critical writing skills. As students will be continuously writing throughout the term, no final seminar paper will be due. As a seminar based largely on class discussion, active participation and attendance are imperative. More than two unexcused absences will adversely affect the final grade.

Grading:

Weekly Papers: 70% (the lowest two grades will be dropped)

Participation and Attendance: 30 %

Academic Integrity:

“As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)”
Electronic Devices:

Laptops and Tablets are allowed for note taking only. Cell phones should be turned off.

Seminar Schedule:

January 26:
*Introduction

January 28:

February 2:

February 4:
*First Essay Due

February 9:
*Kathi Weeks. *The Problem with Work*. Chapter Two (pp. 79-113)
*Second Essay Due

February 11:

February 16: President’s Day

February 18:
Max Weber. *The Protestant Work Ethic*. Parts Two and Three (pp. 52-102)

February 23:
*Third Essay Due

February 25:

March 2:
*Fourth Essay Due
March 4:

March 9:
*Kathi Weeks. *The Problem with Work*. Chapter Four (pp. 151-175).
* Fifth Essay Due

March 11:
*Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Chapters I and II (pp. 1-70)

March 16: Spring Recess

March 18: Spring Recess

March 23:
*Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here* Chapters III and IV (pp. 71-142)
*Six Essay Due

March 25:
*Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here?* Chapters V and VI (pp. 143-203)

March 30:
*Barbara Ehrenreich. *Nickel and Dimed.* (First Half)
*Seventh Essay Due

April 1:
*Barbara Ehrenreich. *Nickel and Dimed* (Second Half)

April 3:
*Kathi Weeks. *The Problem with Work*. Chapter 5 and Epilogue

April 6:
*Aronowitz and Cutler (eds.) *Postwork*. Intro and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-80)
*Eighth Essay Due

April 8:
*Aronowitz and Cutler (eds.) *Postwork*. Chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 81-140)

April 13:
*Aronowitz and Cutler (eds.) *Postwork*. Chapters 6 and 7 (pp. 185-224)
*Ninth Essay Due
April 15:
*Aronowitz and Cutler (eds.) Postwork. Chapters 7 and 8 (pp. 225-275)

April 20:
*Baudrillard. The Mirror of Production. Preface, Introduction, Part I (pp. 1-52)
*Tenth Essay Due

April 22:
*Baudrillard. The Mirror of Production. Parts II, III, IV (pp. 53-110)

April 27:
*Baudrillard. The Mirror of Production. Part V (pp. 111-167)
*Eleventh Essay Due

April 29:
* Jodi Dean. The Communist Horizon. Introduction, Chapters One and Two (pp. 1-68)

May 4:
*Jodi Dean. The Communist Horizon. Chapter Three (pp. 69-118)
*Twelfth Essay Due

May 6:
*Jodi Dean. The Communist Horizon. Chapters Four and Five (pp. 119-206)

May 11:
*Jodi Dean. The Communist Horizon. Chapter Six (pp. 207-256)
*Thirteenth Essay Due