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 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. 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:**

Two short essays (5-7pp) and one longer final paper (10 p). As a seminar, it is imperative that students come to class prepared and ready to discuss the readings. More than two absences will affect your final grade.

**Grading:**

Midterm Essays: 40%

Final Essay: 40%

Participation and Attendance: 20%

**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 24:

*Introduction*
January 26:

January 31:

February 2:
* Studs Terkel. *Working*. (We will divide into groups and read and report on different sections/jobs.)

February 7:
*Marx. “Communist Manifesto”

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

February 14:

February 16:
*Max Weber. *The Protestant Work Ethic*. Parts Two and Three (pp. 52-102)

February 21:

**First Essay Due**

February 23:

February 28:

March 2:
*Kathi Weeks. *The Problem with Work*. Chapter Three (pp. 113-151)

March 7:
**Kathi Weeks. *The Problem with Work*. Chapter Four (pp. 151-175).

March 9:
*Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Chapters I and II (pp. 1-70)

March 14: Spring Recess
March 16: Spring Recess

March 21:
*Martin Luther King, Jr. Where Do We Go From Here Chapters III and IV (pp. 71-142)
**Second Essay Due**

March 23:
*Martin Luther King, Jr. Where Do We Go From Here? Chapters V and VI (pp. 143-203)

March 26:
https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ows/seminars/tcentury/FeminineMystique.pdf
*Barbara Ehrenreich. Nickel and Dimed. (First Half)

March 30:
*Barbara Ehrenreich. Nickel and Dimed (Second Half)

April 4:
*Kathi Weeks. The Problem with Work. Chapter 5 and Epilogue

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

April 11:
*Aronowitz and Cutler (eds.) Postwork. Chapters 3, 4, 7 (pp. 81-128, 141-166, 203-225)

April 13:
*Richard Sennett. The Craftsman (pp. 1-80)

April 18:
*Richard Sennett. The Craftsman (pp. 81-213)

April 25:
*Richard Sennett. The Craftsman. (pp. 214-297)

April 27:
May 2: Wendy Brown. Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution. First half (pp. 1-114)

May 4: Brown. Undoing the Demos. Second half (115-222)
**Final Essay Due**