Department of Anthropology and Sociology (ANSO)
Academic year 2019-2020

Work, Labour, Practice
ANSO045- Autumn - 6 ECTS
Schedule & Room

Course Description
In a world of growing precariousness and indebtedness, the problem of work has become paramount in contemporary societies. This seminar explores the changing dynamics of labour in the 21st century, in-between working less and the prospect of a jobless future, the advent of the sharing economy and increased automation. Rather than framed in the opposition between waged and unwaged, formal and informal, the seminar will examine the multiplicity of contemporary labour regimes by problematizing the cross-cultural meaning of work as practice and productive action. With the challenge posed by the combination of jobless economic growth rates, rising human productivity, and potentially automatable human labor, attention will be devoted to the future of work and the effects of automation, digitalization, and artificial-intelligence in the Global South. Readings attend to a renewed anthropological and multidisciplinary engagement with work, and the effects of precariousness, inequality or affect in modern, Fordist, and post-industrial economies.

Syllabus
Readings attend to a renewed anthropological and multidisciplinary engagement with work, and the effects of precariousness, inequality or affect in modern, Fordist, and post-industrial economies. This year’s edition of “Work, Labour, Practice” will pay particular attention to the Futures of Work. Following debates on the crowd-based sharing Economy, emergent information technologies, and the increasing prevalence of automation, what is the future of jobs? In-between the threat of joblessness and post-work imaginaries, students will be encouraged to think through the challenges and opportunities that labor in the 21st century can afford.

Class discussions will revolve around the following questions: How can work be mobilized as a window into relational and productive action? What can labor tell us about personal realization, self-worth, or
the making of collective identities? What forms of productive action are mobilized or devalued as labor? The first section of the course (weeks 1-3) introduces the main theoretical concepts relevant for the course: value, practice, labor and work. Weeks 4 to 7 are geared to defining research strategies, with a focus on the identity, narrative, and class: how to write about work or narrate the lives and identities of workers as historical actors, subjects, and objects of labor? Section III (Weeks 8-10) explores research topics on work and labor, including the precarity and flexibility, paid and unpaid work, migrant and forced labor: how can labor illuminate contemporary conundrums of citizenship, migration, indebtedness, intimacy and freedom? The final section of the course (Weeks 10-13) concludes with the challenges of the future of work, including post-wage imaginaries, labor platforms, and automated work: is there a paradigm beyond jobs, and why do we work?

Course Requirements and Grading

Completing the assigned readings and critically engaging the texts during class discussions is a prerequisite to successfully attend this seminar. Evaluation will be based on participation, two short assignments and a final research paper. Additional guidelines for completion of these assignments will be provided in class. The Graduate Institute is a bilingual institution. Lectures will be held in English but participation in class can be take place in French, and written assignments may be submitted in French.

a) Participation: 20%
b) Historical assignment: 25%
c) Ethnographic essay: 25%
d) Final essay: 30%

a) Participation. This seminar is structured around a close readings of the texts. Presence is mandatory and students should come ready to discuss the texts. Absences should be communicated in advance by email. More than two unexcused absences will be reflected in the final grade. Each student will be responsible for presenting one text over the course of the semester. In addition, your engagement and informed contributions to class discussions will count toward participation. Students are also encouraged to submit questions on the readings via Moodle (no later than by midnight on the eve of each session, i.e. Wednesday night).

b) Archival essay (3 pages single-spaced, 1500-2000 words). This assignment requires some preparation. You will have to schedule a visit to the archives of the International Labor Organization in Geneva and search for a document you find significant (preferably primary source, although you may resort to published materials). Analysis should critically reflect on the evidence (event, protagonists and context) provided by the historical document. Due: Week 8

c) Biographical essay (3 pages single-spaced, 1500-2000 words). This exercise entails documenting a specific labor practice in daily life, and may include a) in-site observation; b) semi-structured interview; c) personal narrative or life history. Due: Week 10

d) Final research paper (10-12 double-spaced pages). You may present an expanded version of the historical or ethnographic essay or you may write an extended literature review on a topic of your choice. The additional reading resources provided below should offer thematic orientations for this paper and additional instructions will be provided in class. Students are encouraged to think critically about the future of jobs (e.g. labor platforms such Uber or Lyft, creative industries, cryptocurrency trading, Basic income initiatives, etc). The paper should reference at least three readings (required, suggested, or recommended) covered in class. Due: December 23 (by midnight)
Provisional schedule of readings (all texts will be available on Moodle)

I. Theoretical Foundations

Week 1, September 19 – Introduction: the uses and abuses of ‘work’

[In-class reading]

Week 2, September 26: Value and productive action

- Collins, Jane. 2017. The Politics of Value. Three Movements to Change how we think about the economy. [Value and the social division of labor, pp. 17-33]
- Graeber, D. Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value (pp. 54-89)

Suggested:

Week 3, October 3: Work and Labor


II. Making working lives: Labor and identity

Week 4, October 10: Narrative and Voices of Work

- Terkel, Studs. 1997. Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About it. [each student will select a profile from the book]

Week 5, October 17: Class and Identity

- Irani, Lilly. 2019. Chasing Innovation. Making Entrepreneurial Citizens in Modern India. [Introduction: Innovators and their others; Can the Subaltern Innovate]

Suggested:
Week 6, October 24: Discipline and gendered control


Suggested:

Week 7, October 31: Subjects and objects of work

- Hankins, J. 2014. Working Skin, Making Leather, Making a Multicultural Japan

Suggested:

III. Topics in Work and Labor: Liminal Experiences

Week 8, November 7: Flexible, Temporary, Precarious Work


Suggested:
- Allison, Anne. 2013. Precarious Japan. (chapter 3)

Week 9, November 14: Un/Paid and domestic work


Suggested:

Week 10, November 21 – Migrant, Outsourced, Forced Labor: Surplus workers?


Suggested:

IV. The Futures of Work: Automated, Crowd-based, Wageless?

Week 11, November 28: The End of Jobs and Post-Industrial Challenges


Suggested:

Week 12, December 5: Automation and Work by Algorithm

Guest lecture: Prof. Richard Baldwin


Suggested:
- Besteman, Catherine and Hugh Gusterson. 2019. Life by Algorithms. How Roboprocesses are Remaking our World [Introduction: Robohumans]

Week 13, December 12: Sharing Economy and Post-Wage Imaginaries: Why Work?
Sundararajan, Arun. 2016. The Sharing Economy. The End of Employment and the Rise of Crowd-Based Capitalism

Suggested:
- Scholz, Trebor and Nathan Schneider (ed.) Ours to Hack and to Own. The Rise of Platform Cooperativism, a new Vision for the future of Work, and a Fairer Internet.

Week 14, December 19:
- Overview of course topics and discussion of final papers.

Additional Reading Resources:

1) Value, Work, and Labour
- Thompson, E.P. The Making of the English Working Class.
- Turner, Terence. “Value Theory, Social Production and Exploitation in Pre-capitalist Societies” (unpublished manuscript)

2) Affective Labour, Domestic and Sex Work
- Brennan, Denise. 2004. What’s Love Got to Do with It?: Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic.
3) Flexible, Insecure, Precarious Labour

- Gusterson, H. Catherine Besteman. 2010. The Insecure American: How We Got Here and What We Should Do About It.
- Patel, Reena. 2010. Working the Night Shift: Women in India’s Call Center Industry.
- Sharma, Alakh N. 2006. Flexibility, Employment, and Labour Market Reforms in India. Economic and Political Weekly

4) Migrant Labour, Forced Work

- Gomberg-Muñoz, Ruth. Labor and Legality. An Ethnography of a Mexican Immigrant Network
- Sanchez, Teresa Figueroa. 2013. “Californian Strawberries: Mexican Immigrant Women Sharecroppers, Labor, and Discipline,” Anthropology of Work Review, 34:1

5) Changing Paradigms of Post-Industrial Work

- Holmes, Douglas. Cultural Disenchantments: Worker Peasantries in Northeast Italy.

6) Free and Unfree Labour


7) Futures of Work & Basic Income

- Schwab, Klaus. 2016. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (World Economic Forum)