

Transformations of Work in Contemporary Australia

PROGRAM

Research Hub – C5C 498	
9:30-9:40	Jean-Philippe Deranty - <i>Introduction</i>
9:40-10:25	Norbert Ebert (Sociology) - <i>Contemporary Work Society and the Liberation from Individual Autonomy.</i>
10:25-11:10	Craig MacMillan (Economics) - <i>Internal Labour Markets in Australia: Evidence from the Survey of Education and Training Experience.</i>
11:10-11:30	COFFEE
11:30-12.15	Jean-Philippe Deranty (Philosophy) - <i>Work and Politics in Contemporary Australia</i>
12:15-1:00	Shaun Wilson (Sociology) - <i>Disaffection at Work, Disaffection in Politics? Thoughts about the Connections Between Work and Political Life</i>
1:00-2:00	LUNCH
2:00-2:45	Sharni Chan (Sociology) - <i>"So now I'm single" - New Forms of Precarious Work and Life in Australia</i>
2:45-3:30	Dale Tweedie (Philosophy) - <i>What's Wrong with Casual Work?</i>
3:30-3:45	COFFEE
3:45-4:30	Gillian Vogl (Centre for Research on Social Inclusion) - <i>Work, Too Much Work and Not Enough Work - Implications for Workers and the Workplace</i>
4:30-5:00	General Discussion

Norbert Ebert: *Contemporary Work Society and the Liberation from Individual Autonomy.*

The goal of this paper is to develop the foundations for a theoretical framework on the basis of which transformations characterising contemporary work societies can be analysed. Three processes lie at the heart of this analysis, that is, differentiation, integration and individualisation. My argument is that contemporary work societies are hyper-differentiated and thus integration becomes a challenge. Moreover, it seems that questions of differentiation and integration on the basis of work and

employment result in a "liberation" from autonomy for the individual. This paradox comes mainly to the fore in processes of individualisation.

Craig MacMillan: *Internal Labour Markets in Australia: Evidence from the Survey of Education and Training Experience.*

In recent years there has been important debate on the changing nature of the employment relationship, with some scholars claiming a significant weakening of the bond between employers and employees. An associated implication is that internal labour markets (ILMs) are becoming less prevalent in the economy. This paper uses data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Survey of Education and Training Experience 1993-2005 to explore whether the bonds between employers and employees are weakening, and hence whether ILMs are being dismantled.

Jean-Philippe Deranty: *Work and Politics in Contemporary Australia*

It can be argued that work issues, notably those related to the battle around Workchoices and the insulation debacle, have been decisive issues in the last two federal elections in Australia. In this paper, I seek to highlight the continuing importance of work questions in contemporary Australian politics. I also begin to explore the methodological steps that would have to be taken in order to characterise the historical, cultural and political specificities of Australian responses to the challenges of current neoliberal capitalism.

Shaun Wilson: *Disaffection at Work, Disaffection in Politics? Thoughts about the Connections between Work and Political Life*

My interest is to see whether reduced 'voice' at work is at least compensated by clear expression of political voice; that is, in a clear expression of voting and issue preferences consistent with the rights of marginalised workers. My paper will explore survey data to identify links between low job satisfaction (and other indicators of diminished voice at work) and voting behaviour. I'm particularly interested to see whether disaffected workers also become disaffected voters and to identify causal relationships that underlie any voter tendencies towards 'double disaffection' in work and politics.

Sharni Chan: *"So now I'm single" - New Forms of Precarious Work & Life in Australia*

In this paper I will look at the precaritisation of work in Australia as a structural shift in the world of work. While precarious work has been an historical norm for large sections of the population, this paper draws on interviews with professional workers on casual contracts to explore where contemporary manifestations of precarious work may point to new life ways as well as emerging forms of inequality.

Dale Tweedie: *What's Wrong with Casual Work?*

A puzzling feature of casual work in Australia is that quantitative data has found low levels of dissatisfaction amongst casual workers despite their comparatively poor contractual conditions. One response to this puzzle is to follow Ian Watson in contending that casual work is objectively undesirable irrespective of what casual workers happen to feel about it. This paper develops a second response, which is to identify structural features of casual work which tend to damage workers' well-being, but which are inadequately captured by relevant quantitative research.

Gillian Vogl: *Work, Too Much Work and Not Enough Work - Implications for Workers and the Workplace*

Over the last three decades there have been significant changes in the structuring of work and workplaces. These changes have included more individualistic workplace practices in industrial relations and human resources policies together with more collective forms of work organisation such as 'team work'. Through evidence from extensive qualitative interviews I will discuss how contemporary management approaches, increasing work pressures and insecure work are influencing how individuals relate to one another, both within and beyond the workplace. I argue that while workplace practices may have become increasingly individualised, people have reacted to these changes in ways that demonstrate both individualism and a solidarity/collegiality towards their co-workers. Through rich in-depth qualitative research from extensive interviews with people working in both private and public sector workplaces, I will highlight the complex and contradictory ways in which people react to changes over which they have little control.