

# **CULTURES OF LABOUR INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES**

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, CEU  
Mandatory course for MA in Sociology and Social Anthropology  
Winter Semester AY 2024-2025  
4 Credits/8 ECTS  
Fridays, ...

**Lecturer:** Alina-Sandra Cucu, [CucuAS@ceu.edu](mailto:CucuAS@ceu.edu)

**Office hours:** ..., room ..., by appointment

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The course introduces students to some of the most important transformations in the world of labour. At the end of the course, students will have a deeper understanding of the relationship between the ways in which work has been organized in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century and cultural factors, broadly understood. In the first half of the course, we will address fundamental aspects of the encounter between work and culture: the commodification of labour; the organization of the workplace; the relationship between work and livelihood; managerial ideologies and practices; struggles in, for, and beyond the workplace; the relationship between labour, class, race, and gender; and the imperial roots of current labour relations. The second part of the course will be dedicated to the latest debates concerning immaterial and affective labour; ethical and political implications of the non-human work; work and new technologies; and finally, the possibility of a utopian/dystopian end of work. Drawing on explorations of concrete cases (many of them ethnographic), the aim of this class is to help students develop the capacity for critical thinking about cultures of labour as they encounter them in the real-world, including in their own everyday lives.

## **The PEDAGOGICAL GOALS of this course are to:**

- Build a strong knowledge foundation for students' current and future inquiries in labour studies;
- Familiarize students with the basic concepts and concerns of sociology and anthropology of labour;
- Understand some of the ongoing tensions and contradictions within the world of labour;
- Develop students' oral and written argumentation skills;
- Deepen students' critical analysis and interpretation skills.

## **GRADING**

- (1) **CLASS PARTICIPATION (20%):** All students are encouraged to participate in class discussions and ask questions based on the assigned readings.
- (2) **READING NOTES (15%):** Students will write and submit **reading notes for all classes between week 2 and week 10**. The reading notes will be submitted two hours before the class starts at the latest. The notes will be half-page to one page long (Times New Roman 12, single spaced). They will have to (a) summarize the argument of **one** of the mandatory readings assigned (1-2 sentences); (b) select and define the main concepts used by the author; (c) note if there were things the student could not understand. The lecturer will make sure to clarify the difficult points in class.  
\*The notes do not have to be polished. They are meant to help students better understand what they read and to monitor their comprehension progress during the semester. Try your best and don't worry too much about the form.
- (3) **CONCEPT DICTIONARY (15%):** Students will be required to submit a personal dictionary with the definitions of the main concepts they select from the text (the ones they should also add in the reading notes, plus the ones they encounter in the other texts, and the ones we discuss in class). Please use complete references, with pages, so you can use the definitions as a direct quote when needed.  
\***Due date: to be announced**
- (4) **CLASS DEBATES (50%):** Students will get organized in teams and will work together to organize two debates. You can use the suggested bibliography and find your own materials to support your for or against arguments in the debate. The exact format of the debate will be discussed in the beginning of the Winter semester.  
\***Due date: week 10, week 12.**

### **Email policy**

Please treat email as a form of professional communication and always use your CEU email address. Substantive issues concerning course materials should be raised during office hours with the course instructor. Email should not be used as an alternative to meeting with the instructor.

### **Policy for the late assignments**

Late assignments will be accepted with a late penalty of 5% per day (including weekends). If you have a legitimate excuse for a late assignment, please send justificatory documents when asking for an extension.

### **Academic integrity**

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from Central European University is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. Potential offences in papers and assignments include, but are not limited to:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.

- Making up sources or facts.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.
- Using Chat GPT or similar types of aid for entirely or partly writing your assignments.

\*\*\*Please read CEU's plagiarism policy: <https://documents.ceu.edu/documents/p-1405-1>

### **Accessibility**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Please feel free to approach me to arrange the necessary accommodations.

### **WEEK 1: Labour as commodity**

- Karl Marx. 2020 [1849]. *Wage labour and capital*. Paris: Foreign Languages Press.

- Polanyi. 2001 [1944]. "The self-regulating market and the fictitious commodities: Labor, land, and money". In *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*, p. 71-80. Boston: Beacon Press.

**Further readings:**

- Karl Marx. 2020 [1865]. *Value, price, and profit*. Paris: Foreign Languages Press.
- Massimiliano Mollona. 2014. "Informal labour, factory labour or the end of labour? Anthropological reflections on labour value". In *Workers and labour in a globalised capitalism: Contemporary themes and theoretical issues*, edited by Maurizio Atzeni, p. 181-209. London: Palgrave.

**WEEK 2: Structural transformations: From Fordism to flexible production**

- David Harvey. 1990. Part II. "Introduction", "Fordism", and "From Fordism to flexible accumulation". In *The condition of postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*, p. 121-172. London: Blackwell.

**Further readings:**

- David Harvey. 1990. "Theorizing the transition" and "Flexible accumulation – solid transformation or temporary fix? In *The condition of postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*, p. 173-200. London: Blackwell.
- Ash Amin. 2001. "Post-Fordism: Models, fantasies and phantoms of transition". In *Post-Fordism: A reader*, edited by Ash Amin, p. 1-40. London: Blackwell.
- Ricardo Antunes. 2013. "Dimensions of the structural crisis of capital", "The responses of capital to its structural crisis", and "Toyotism and the new forms of capital accumulation". In *The meanings of work: Essay on the affirmation and negation of work*, p. 15-43. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Judit Whitehead. "Flexible labor/flexible housing: The rescaling of Mumbai into a global financial center and the fate of its working class". In *Blood and fire: Toward a global anthropology of labor*, edited by Sharryn Kashmir and August Carbonella, p. 123-166. New York: Berghahn Books.

**WEEK 3: Labour, time, discipline**

- E. P. Thompson. 1967. "Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism". *Past & Present* 38, p. 56-97.
- Laura Bear. 2014. "For labour: Ajeet's accident and the ethics of technological fixes in time". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20: 71-88.

**Further readings:**

- Alina-Sandra Cucu. 2019. "Planned heroism and nonsynchronicity on the shop floor". In *Planning labour: Time and the foundations of industrial socialism in Romania*, p. 204-227. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

**WEEK 4: Politics of production and labour regimes**

- Michael Burawoy. 1985. "Introduction". In *The politics of production: Factory regimes under capitalism and socialism*, p. 5-20. London: Verso.
- Maurizio Atzeni. 2014. "The workers' control alternative". In *Workers and labour in a globalised capitalism: Contemporary themes and theoretical issues*, edited by Maurizio Atzeni, p. 161-180. London: Palgrave.

#### **Further readings:**

- Mollona, Massimiliano. 2015. "Working-class politics in a Brazilian steel town". In *Anthropologies of class: Power, practice, and inequality*, edited by James G. Carrier and Don Kalb. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- David Arnold and Stephen Campbell. 2017. "Labour regime transformation in Myanmar: Constitutive processes of contestation". *Development and Change* 48 (4), 801-824.
- Elena Baglioni, Liam Campling, Neil M. Coe and Adrian Smith. 2022. "Introduction: labour regimes and global production". In *Labour regimes and global production*, edited by Elena Baglioni, Liam Campling, Neil M. Coe and Adrian Smith, p. 1-28. Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing.
- Jamie Peck. 2022. "Modalities of labour: Restructuring, regulation, regime". In *Labour regimes and global production*, edited by Elena Baglioni, Liam Campling, Neil M. Coe and Adrian Smith, p. 63-80. Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing.

### **WEEK 5: Ambiguities of wage labour: Peasant-workers, kinship, modern slavery**

- Intan Suwandi. 2019. "The hidden abode of global production" (Chapter 1), p. 13-41; and "Labor-value commodity chains: Power and class" (Chapter 2), p. 42-67. In *Value chains: The new economic imperialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Chris Krupa. 2012. "Ghostly figures outside the domain of political economy: Class analysis and the invisibilized livelihoods of an Andean export-zone". In *Confronting capital: Critique and engagement in anthropology*, edited by Pauline Gardiner Barber, Belinda Leach, and Winnie Lem, p. 187-207. New York and London: Routledge.

#### **Further readings:**

- Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. 2021. *The atlas of enslavement: Facts and figures about forced labour and exploitation*. Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Press.
- Beverly Silver. 2014. "Theorising the working class in twenty-first-century global capitalism". In *Workers and labour in a globalised capitalism: Contemporary themes and theoretical issues*, edited by Maurizio Atzeni, p. 46-69. London: Palgrave.
- Marcel van der Linden. 2014. "Who is the working class? Wage earners and other labourers". In *Workers and labour in a globalised capitalism: Contemporary themes and theoretical issues*, edited by Maurizio Atzeni, p. 70 – 85. London: Palgrave.
- Ricardo Antunes. 2013. "The class-that-lives-from-labour: The working class today". In *The meanings of work: Essay on the affirmation and negation of work*, p. 80-95. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Alina-Sandra Cucu. 2019. Chapter 3. *Planning labour: Time and the foundations of industrial socialism in Romania*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

- Laura Bear. 2018. "The vitality of labour and its ghosts". *Terrain*. 10.4000/terrain.16728.

## WEEK 6: Precariousness and surplus populations

- Guy Standing. 2013. "Tertiary time: The precariat's dilemma." *Public Culture* 25(1): 5-23.
- Tania Murray Li. 2009. "To make live or let die? Rural dispossession and the protection of surplus populations". *Antipode* 41(S1):66-93.
- Prem Kumar Rajaram. 2018. "Refugees as surplus population: Race, migration and capitalist value regimes. *New Political Economy* 23(5): 627-639.
- John Smith. 2016. "The global commodity". In *Imperialism in the twenty-first century: Globalization, super-exploitation, and capitalism's final crisis*, , p. 9-38. New York: Monthly Review Press.

### Further readings:

- Dimitra Kofti. 2016. "Moral economy of flexible production: Fabricating precarity between the conveyor belt and the household". *Anthropological Theory* 16(4) 433-453.
- Stephen Campbell. 2013. "Solidarity formations under flexibilisation: Workplace struggles of precarious migrants in Thailand". *Global Labour Journal* 4 (2): 134-151.
- Ching Kwan Lee. 2016. "Precarization or empowerment? Reflections on recent labor unrest in China". *Journal of Asian Studies* 75(2): 317-333.
- Ching Kwan Lee and Yelizavetta Kofman. 2012. "The politics of precarity: Views beyond the United States" *Work and Occupations* 39(4): 388-408.
- Pradella, C. & Cilo, R. (2020). "Bordering the surplus population across the Mediterranean: Imperialism and unfree labour in Libya and the Italian countryside". *Geoforum*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.06.019>

## WEEK 7: Social reproduction and the gender of the workplace

- Aiwha Ong. 2010. *Spirits of resistance and capitalist discipline: Factory women in Malaysia*, Chapter 8-9, p. 179-214. New York: SUNY Press.
- Ching Kwan Lee. 1995. "Engendering the worlds of labor: Women workers, labor markets and production politics in the South China economic miracle." *American Sociological Review* 60(3): 378-397.
- Jennifer Bair. "Gendered labour regimes in global production". In *Labour regimes and global production*, edited by Elena Baglioni, Liam Campling, Neil M. Coe and Adrian Smith, p. 29-44. Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing.

### Further reading:

- Carolyn Steedman. 2007. *Master and servant: Love and labour in the English industrial age*, p. 1-28. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Silvia Federici. 2014. "The reproduction of labour power in the global economy and the unfinished feminist revolution". In *Workers and labour in a globalised capitalism: Contemporary themes and theoretical issues*, edited by Maurizio Atzeni, p. 85-110. London: Palgrave.

- Kathi Weeks. 2011. "The problem with work", p. 1-36. In *The problem with work: Feminism, Marxism, antiwork politics, and postwork imaginaries*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Helen Hester and Nick Srnicek. 2023. *After work: A history of the home and the fight for free time*. London: Verso.
- Karen Ho. 2021. "The housewife and the home: Stone Age economics and insights for US (and Global North) economies". *Annals of the Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* LV: 127-148.
- Laura Bear, Karen Ho, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, and Sylvia Yanagisako. 2015. "Gens: A feminist manifesto for the study of capitalism". *Theorizing the Contemporary*, Fieldsights, March 30. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/gens-a-feminist-manifesto-for-the-study-of-capitalism>.
- Laura Antona. 2024. "Geographies of bodily (dis)possession: Domestic work, unfreedom, and spirit possessions in Singapore". *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, DOI: 10.1080/24694452.2024.2310106.
- Carolyn Kay Steedman. 1987. *Landscape for a good woman: A story of two lives*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

## WEEK 8: Labour and actually existing socialism

- Martha Lampland. 2019. "From each according to Their ability, to each according to their need": Calorie money and technical norms in mid-twentieth-century Hungary". In *Economic Knowledge in Socialism, 1945–89*, edited by Till Düppe and Ivan Boldyrev. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Goran Musić. 2021. Chapter 1 - "Two roads to self-managing socialism". In *Making and breaking the Yugoslav working class: The story of two self-managed factories*, p. 17-50. Budapest: Central European University Press.

### Further reading:

- Martha Lampland. 1995. "Introduction". *The object of labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## INVITED GUEST: Goran Musić, University of Vienna

## WEEK 9: The "salaried masses: Then and now; immaterial and affective labour

- Siegfried Kracauer. 1998 [1930]. *The salaried masses: Duty and distraction in Weimar Republic*, p. 28-52. London: Verso.
- Hadas Weiss. "Workers to capitalists: Repositioning Berlin's middle class". Paper presented at the Symposium *Labour changes: Work's futures and political imaginaries*, ICI Berlin, May 30, 2024.
- Henrique Amorim. "Theories of immaterial labour: A critical reflection based on Marx". *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation* 8(1): 88-103.
- Andrea Muehleback. 2011. "On affective labor in post-fo rdist Italy". *Cultural Anthropology* 26:59-82.

### Further reading

- David Graeber. 2018. *Bullshit jobs: A theory*, Preface, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Paul Thompson and Frederick Harry Pitts. 2018. "Bullshit about jobs". RSA Journal blog.
- "Is passionate work a neoliberal delusion?" <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/is-passionate-work-neoliberal-delusion/>
- Eva Illouz. 2008. Chapter 3: "From *Homo economicus* to *Homo communicans*", p. 58-104. *Saving the modern soul: Therapy, emotions, and the culture of self-help*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Analiese Richard and Daromir Rudnyckyj. 2009. "Economies of affect". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15:57-77.
- Ben Trott. 2007. "Immaterial labour and world order: An evaluation of a thesis" *ephemera: theory & politics in organization* 7(1): 203-232.

## WEEK 10: Does "nature" work?

**CLASS DEBATE: Do animals work? What are the ethical and organizational implications for each possible answer to this question?**

### Suggested bibliography:

- Sarah Besky and Alex Blanchette (eds.). *How nature works: Rethinking labor on a troubled planet*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press; Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Elisabeth Povinelli. 1995. "Do rocks listen? The cultural politics of apprehending Australian Aboriginal labor". *American Anthropologist* 97 (3): 505-518.
- Jocelyn Porcher. 2015. "Animal work." In *The Oxford handbook of animal studies*, edited by Linda Kalof, p. 302–318. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maan Barua. 2017. "Nonhuman labour, encounter value, spectacular accumulation: The geographies of a lively commodity". *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42 (2): 274-288.
- Michael Sommer and Christian Stache "Marx's non-speciesist concept of labour". *Capital and Class* 47 (3)
- Bram Büscher. 2022. "The nonhuman turn: Critical reflections on alienation, entanglement and nature under capitalism". *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 12(1): 54-73.
- Elena Greco. 2022. "Engaging with the non-human turn: A response to Büscher". *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 12(1): 90-94.
- Singh, N. M. 2022. "The nonhuman turn or a re-turn to animism? Valuing life along and beyond capital". *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 12(1): 84-89.
- "What is animal labour and should non-humans receive employment rights?" <https://www.surgeactivism.org/articles/what-is-animal-labour-and-should-non-humans-receive-employment-rights>.
- Dakhina Mitra with Delphine Valette. *Environment, human labour and animal welfare*. Geneva: ILO Press.
- Charlotte E. Blattner, Kendra Coulter, Will Kymlicka. (eds.). 2020. *Animal labour: A new frontier of interspecies justice?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/series/the-naturalization-of-work>.



- Murray M. 2011. "The underdog in history: Serfdom, slavery and species in the creation and development of capitalism". In *Theorizing animals: Re-thinking humanimal relations*, edited by Taylor N., Signal T., p. 87–106. Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill.
- <https://www.ppesydney.net/on-the-labour-of-animals/>
- Barron, E.S. and Hess, J. 2020. "Non-human 'labor': the work of earth others." In: *The Handbook of Diverse Economies*. Gibson-Graham, J.K. and K. Dombroski, eds. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing. Pp. 163-169.

## WEEK 11: Labour and technological change

- Phil Jones. 2021. Chapter 1 – "The surplus of Silicon Valley". In *Work without the worker*. London and New York: Verso.
- Moritz Altenried. 2022. "Workers Leaving the Factory: Introduction", p. 1-20. In *Digital factory: The human labor of automation*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Matteo Pasquinelli. 2023. "Introduction", p. 1-22. *The eye of the master: A social history of artificial intelligence*. London: Verso.

### Further reading:

- Nick Srnicek. 2017. Chapter 2 – "Platform capitalism". In *Platform capitalism*. London: Polity Press.
- Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjoson, and James Steinhoff. 2019. Introduction: AI-Capital, p. 1-29. *Inhuman power: Artificial intelligence and the future*. London: Pluto Press.
- Aaron Benanav. 2020. Chapter 1 – "The automation discourse". In *Automation and the future of work*. London and New York: Verso.
- George Caffentzis. 1997. "Why machines cannot create value: Or, Marx's theory of machines". In *Cutting edge: Technology, information, capitalism, and social revolution*. edited by Jim Davis, Thomas Hirschl, and Michael Stack. London: Verso.
- Alina-Sandra Cucu and Edward Jones-Imhotep. (forthcoming): "Technology and post-work fantasies". In *Cambridge new handbook for the history of technology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- European Central Bank. 2023. "Reports of AI ending human labour may be greatly exaggerated." <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/research-publications/resbull/2023/html/ecb.rb231128~0a16e73d87.en.html>

## INVITED GUEST: *Slobodan*

## WEEK 12: Post-work dreams and nightmares

**CLASS DEBATE:** *Is the future of work utopian or dystopian? In what ways and why?*

### Suggested bibliography:

- Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Towards a new manifesto*. ...
- Frederick Harry Pitts; ...

- Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams. Chapter 5 – “The future isn’t working”, and Chapter 6 – “Post-work imaginaries”. In *Inventing the future: Postcapitalism and a world without work*. London: Verso.
- Paul Thompson. “Capitalism, technology, and work: Interrogating the tipping point thesis”. *The Political Quarterly*
- Frederick Harry Pitts, Kates Bales, and Hew Thomas. 2018. “To be a productive worker is not luck but misfortune”. *Futures of work* podcast. University of Bristol.
- Shaun Wilson (with the assistance of Peter McCarthy). 2004. *The struggle over work: The ‘end of work’ and employment alternatives for post-industrial societies*, Part I, p. 11-60. London and New York: Routledge.
- Aaron Bastani 2019. Chapter 3 – “What is fully automated luxury communism? In *Fully automated luxury communism*. London: Verso.