



Graduate Conference 2011

12-13 November 2011 at Erlangen University, Germany



(Re-)Presentations of Working Life

Drawing on the academic debate well established in the fields of sociology, political sciences or theology the 10th Interdisciplinary and International Graduate Conference will focus on the analysis of ‘(Re-)Presentations of Working Life’ and seeks to promote this debate within the humanities, particularly within the field of cultural studies. The conference is taking place at Erlangen University from 12-13 November 2011 and is aimed at graduates and postgraduates from the fields of linguistics, literary and cultural studies, political sciences, sociology, history, philosophy, pedagogy, theology, art history, or theater and media studies whose work is related to the conference theme.

In the face of extensive global changes of employment markets, severe transformations of welfare states and intensified individual uncertainties, the world of labor is increasingly (re)presented in literature, on stage, in fine arts and films. The tight bonds of living and working conditions and the widening meshes of social safety nets are reflected in contemporary theater and movie productions, for instance. These productions may serve as vivid examples of the urgency of the issue and of the search for alternative perspectives on labor society: the work of the performance collective ‘Rimini Protokoll’ or the growing popularity of movies about the negative consequences of globalization exemplify this tendency. The postmodern lightness that affected the depiction of the working world in the past is vanishing and making way for a new discourse that reevaluates the relation between labor and life. Contemporary (re)presentations of the working world are thus part of a rapidly changing and dynamic field, yet to be explored from the perspective of cultural studies.

The labour-market situations in the U.S., Canada and Europe show a similar tendency: standard employment relationships are declining, temporary work and temporary agency employment are increasing. Feelings of uncertainty and experiences of social insecurity cause the fear of slipping through the meshes of the social safety net – often either interpreted as a result of ‘destiny’ or individual failure. While some consider ‘deregulation’ as a chance, others warn against growing precarity and its consequences. In many countries labor market reforms go in fact hand in hand with retrenchment in social security – from welfare to workfare.

The 10th Graduate Conference in Erlangen ‘(Re-)Presentations of Working Life’ invites graduate and postgraduate students and researchers to present their own projects surrounding, but not limited to, the following questions:



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In how far do representations in different media and aesthetic forms question established discourses on labor and/or challenge individual self-assurance? In what ways do they analyze lifestyles within labor society and different cultural codes of labor? What are the characteristics of the diverse worlds of employment and how are they (re)presented within different discourses on labor? What kinds of shortages are the unemployed and 'working poor' faced with, and how are these justified or criticized within different (re)presentations? What kinds of strategies can help to establish and/or maintain the capacity to act within the economic and social conditions of labor society? Is the current labor society shaped by any central concepts of 'the good life', desires, mentalities and values? Why has labor society become so widely established? What do alternative concepts and utopian visions look like?

Proposal topics may include, but are not limited to, the following fields of interest:

- Staging labor in art, literature, film, photography and theater
- Documentary photography and film
- Ethics and philosophy of work / work as value
- Discourses on labor and work in mass media, science etc.
- Religious perspectives on labor
- Social inequality / poverty
- Social state / administration of unemployment and poverty / 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor
- Globalization and labor migration
- Types of work: creative work / subsistence work / emotional labor / reproductive work
- Prostitution / child labor / shadow economy
- Subjectification of work
- Employability and biography
- Family life, love and relationships
- Age and work
- Suffering from and without work
- Health and employment
- Race / class / gender
- Prejudices and resentments



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Conference languages will be English and German. Proposals by international participants are particularly welcome. Selected contributions will be published in an essay collection.

Abstracts (250 words max.) should be submitted online (www.gradnet.de) by September 15th. Individual presentations should not exceed 12 minutes. All submitted proposals will receive email confirmation on receipt. Accepted abstracts will be published on our website before the conference in order to facilitate discussion and scholarly exchange.

The conference fee (25 Euros to be paid upon arrival) includes: two lunches, coffee and tea during breaks and a conference dinner with social/cultural programme as well as a guided tour of the exhibition: Industrialization in Erlangen (please note: in German only).

If you need child care during the conference please email to: info2011@gradnet.de

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us!

Conference organizers: Johannes Barthel M.A., Dr. Susanna Brogi, Carolin Freier M.A, Katja Hartosch M.A, Ulf Otten M.A