

One-day conference

Knowledge workers and changes in employment and capitalism. New representations, new classes?

EHESS, October 22, 2012.
96 bd Raspail, 75006 Paris
Lombards room.

Social sciences often put forward two main tendencies of contemporary capitalism: first, the transformation of employment relationships towards more flexibility, intermittency, and uncertainty; secondly, the rise of a cognitive or immaterial production and of a more “creative” kind of labour. The objective of this one-day conference is to question theoretical or empirical analyses which show that these two trends are the basis for a restructuring of social classes, particularly through the emergence of new social geometries centered on the figure of the precarious intellectual worker.

The life of an increasing fraction of the population seems, depending on whether it is watched from an optimistic or pessimistic standpoint, more and more autonomous and mobile, or affected by various forms of insecurity. Although the majority of the workforce remains in fixed-term contracts and full-time employment, changes in working relations are such that more and more workers, especially the younger ones, are familiar with forms of employment now too widespread to be called “special” or “atypical”. Social sciences have highlighted the ambivalence of this transformation of employment relations by emphasizing that it can lead to autonomy and even emancipation from work on the one hand, but also by stressing that it may weaken the link between workers and employers on which social protections have been historically based on the other hand.

Moreover, contemporary capitalism seems to be characterized by a shift towards cognitive, immaterial or creative foundations. That old theory, which can be encountered in the 1960s American sociological and management literature, is experiencing a resurgence in the 2000s under different forms, around the notions of “creative labour” or “creative industries”, “knowledge society”, “immaterial labour” and “cognitive capitalism”.

How do these profound changes in employment and capitalism affect the social structure? Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have described, in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, how “the representation of society as a class system” had been strongly challenged by a “a process of de-representation of social classes” from the 1980s onwards, in favour of representations of society describing it as an all-inclusive middle class, or as a myriad of individuals now too singular to be aggregated into classes. In opposition to the theories dealing with the end of the class system, one can question the renewal of classes or the emergence of new social classes. For example, some authors have introduced the idea that a “creative class” – that is a group of “precarious intellectuals” or a “cognitariat” – were emerging.

The aim of the conference is to provide an overview of the theories asserting the emergence of these new social classes, and to question how empirical research might contribute to the debate.

Program

10: 00: Welcome and introduction: **Mathieu Grégoire** and **Cyprien Tasset**

Morning (10: 30 – 12: 30)

Introduction and organization of the roundtable: **Dominique Meda**, University Paris Dauphine

Speakers (20 mn each):

- **Mathieu Grégoire**, University of Picardy: *The intellectual professions and wage labour: elements of historical sociology.*
- **Rosalind Gill**, King's College, London: *Are new social classes emerging out of “creative industries”?*
- **Guy Standing**, University of Bath: *The Precariat.*

General discussion

- Lunch pause (12:30 – 14: 00) -

Afternoon (14: 00 – 17: 00)

Introduction and organization of the roundtable: **Mathieu Grégoire**

Speakers (20mn each):

- **Elsa Vivant**, University of Marne-la-Vallee: *Behind the Creative City, the city of the precarious?*
- **Antonella Corsani**, University Paris 1: *Experimenting at the margins of the “salaried”.*
- **Patrick Cingolani**, University Paris Ouest Nanterre: *Intellectual Precariat: a new style of asceticism in the world?*
- **Thomas Amossé**, Center for Studies of Employment, and **Cyprien Tasset**, EHESS: *Contributions of an empirical research on job insecurity in the intellectual professions in France.*

General discussion

16: 30: Conclusion, **Luc Boltanski**, EHESS. *Increasing inequalities, shading social classes?*

Organizing institutions:



Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi



GSPM, IMM, EHESS



CURAPP - ESS

Important! As the capacity of the room is limited, we kindly ask those willing to attend the conference to register by sending an email to :

Thomas Amossé: thomas.amosse@cee-recherche.fr

Mathieu Grégoire: mathieu.gregoire@u-picardie.fr

Cyprien Tasset: cyprien.tasset@gmail.com