

A Great Transformation?

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A neoliberal regime of self-protection: activation and affective subjectivation

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Research object, question and aim

New forms of neoliberal governance

→ state transformation (of public employment agencies) and subjectivation (of state front-line workers and citizens)

Question: How affective technologies constitute neoliberal power relations and governance

In Polanyi's terms:

Affective strategies of neoliberal labor market conservation?

Affective forms of neoliberal self-protection?

The Great Transformation

Double movement of social dynamics:

- Principle of economic liberalism → self-regulating market (laissez-faire, free trade)
- Principle of social protection → conservation of human being, nature and productive force (protective legislation, associations)

Economy evolves into an autonomous field (market economy) of various interconnected markets, according to the logic of profit maximization

Labor as commodity

In a market economy also labor must be organized in markets (“A market economy can only exist in a *market society*”; Polanyi, TGT, 74), but labor (and land, money) are *not* commodities → *fictitious* commodities → commodity fiction turns into an organizing principle of the whole society, where people (the industrial man) have to be protected against the dramatic effects of the fiction (by factory legislation or social laws).

Social history in the 19th century (double movement): extension of market organization reg. genuine commodities and restrictions with regard to fictitious ones (predominantly through legislation).

Extending the theoretical framework

Further transformations (post-Polanyi)

Types of market economies:

Industrial capitalism

→ cognitive, embodied capitalism

“Whereas industrial capitalism could be characterised as the production of commodities by means of commodities, cognitive capitalism produces knowledge by means of knowledge and produces the living by means of the living ... It is bio-production.” (Y. Moulner-Boutang, Cognitive Capitalism, Cambridge 2011, 57 and 55)

“Productivity in embodied capitalism is not the outcome of the ‘cooperation between brains’ but of the cooperation of human bodies, machines, and things.” (V. Tsianos/D. Papadopoulos, Precarity: A Savage Journey to the Heart of Embodied Capitalism, eicpc.net 2006, 10)

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Types of labor (as fictitious commodity): Material labor (factory)

→ immaterial-affective labor (services)

“(T)he novelty we are witnessing is the centrality of a living labour that is not consumed and not reduced to dead labour in machinism.”

(Y. Moulner-Boutang, *ibid.*, 53)

“Production has become communicative, affective, de-instrumentalized, and ‘elevated’ to the level of human relations ... What affective labor produces are social networks, forms of community, biopower.” (M. Hardt, *Affective Labor*, *boundary* 26(2)/1999, 96)

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Types of power relations:

Coercion → government, technologies of power constituting technologies of the self, “conduct of conducts”

(Management by Objectives, New Public Management)

“To govern ... is to structure the possible field of action of others.” “Government of men by other men ... includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects.” (M. Foucault, The Subject and Power, in: Power, N.Y. 2000, 341f.)

Types of protection:

Restrictions → activation (transformation of the state towards competition state, of welfare towards workfare, neoliberal self-protection)

Neoliberal „conduct of conducts“

Common features of economic and state governance:

- Individualization and self-reliance of immaterial workers and citizens
- Entrepreneurialism of immaterial workers and (public) service providers
- Competition and contractualization as core principles of social practices
- Customer orientation of the state apparatus and corporations
- Governance of the “whole person” (living labor), of people’s bodies and minds, feelings and imagineries
- dramatic transformation of subjectivation and collective subjectivities, of the “nature of the human” (Hardt) towards self-entrepreneurship
- Privatization, economization and marketization of social protection => neoliberal self-protection
- Double movement of social dynamics collapses – into a one dimensional hegemonic movement driven by economic “self-interest” (Polanyi)
Extension of market organization reg. fictitious commodities (living labor): “Existence becomes work.” (Cristina Morini)

Empirical findings on neoliberal subjectivation: Public employment services, citizen- customers and affectivity

Context

Bureaucratic state (legislative protection, social rights)

→ affective state (activation of managerial self-protection)

“Governing strategies (of the affective state) address the ‘affective subject’; that is, a subject whose conduct arises from desires, fears, anxieties, insecurities, affection, care, dis/trust, un/ease and so on.”

(A.-M. Fortier, Proximity by design? Affective citizenship and the management of unease, *Citizenship Studies* 14(1)/2010, 19)

Technologies of Power of Public Employment Agencies (PEA)

Strategic aim of power relation:

Fast reintegration of jobseekers into the labor market → activation of employment agents to activate jobseekers (double activation)

Biopolitical power (affective rules of PEAs acc. to document analysis):

- Importance of affective guidance
- Mutual trust is important for activation and successful job counseling →
 - create trustworthy atmosphere
 - treat jobseeker as customer/guest
 - be empathic
 - verbalize feelings and affects “to sense the reality of customers”
 - balance between affection and dis-affection

Disciplinary power (acc. to document analysis and interviews):

- Integration contracts: responsabilization
- Monetary sanctions

Affective Technologies of the Self of Employment Agents

- Employment agents enact the state in an affective mode (motivation and support, emphasis on partnership, interplay of affects and rational arguments)
- Professional self-image (acc. to interviews and videography):
 - make the 'customer' feel comfortable
 - reduce anxieties and allay fears
 - establish an atmosphere of mutual trust and cooperation
 - relate to jobseekers
 - create a fair and partner-like dialogue
 - boost jobseekers' confidence and self-efficacy
 - establish 'partnership'
- make jobseeker to co-producer of the service

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Well, I think it is important that one gives the customer the feeling that you take him seriously and do not treat him like a number. Because that's what makes people stubborn and perplexes them, and that wouldn't help.

Female employment agent, PES Vienna

The interviews should take place at eye level, also some small talk is important. I just try to give my costumers the feeling that I take them seriously. And by relying on my own life experience and on my expertise I try to create a climate of mutual trust.

Male employment agent, PES Munich

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Creation of affective distance (‘un-doing’ affects, dis-affection) to bridge contradictions and tensions of counseling process

- ➔ Technologies of dis-affection:
 - not showing empathy or anger, hide feelings, refer to official rules and laws
 - use of objects like computers and staplers to create physical distance to jobseekers and to fill the empathic vacuum with ‘bureaucratic noise’ (like stapling or stamping)

Creating affective citizen-customers

Distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ customers:

- pro-active, well-educated jobseekers are seen as ‘partners’
 - un-cooperative customers (not in accordance with the activation paradigm) are regarded as “affect aliens” (Sara Ahmed)
- sanctions, monetary punishment

Conclusions

Neoliberal principle of social protection (in the case of unemployment):

Affective governmentality → Affective subjectivation of employment agents and jobseekers to activate entrepreneurial technologies of the self (→ conservation of labor market)

Self-protection based on legislative restrictions (against exploitation) → Bio-production of affective self-entrepreneurialism and neoliberal self-protection

Thanks for your attention!

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