

THE ILLUSORY EDUCABILITY OF THE WORKER-ENTERPRISE

Fabrizio d'ANIELLO¹

Abstract: *This article is the transcription of a paper given at an international conference held in Constanţa on 10-12th June 2016 entitled “Man – an eternal challenge” and for this reason its subject is man seen from the perspective of the pedagogy of work in the era of cognitive capitalism. The article’s focus is the neo-liberal anthropology of the worker, the worker-enterprise’s shift from alienation to self-alienation, the bio-politics of work and its subjection mechanisms and lastly a number of educational, anthropological and cultural tasks which pedagogy must take on board if it is to check the excessive economic rationality which is invading work and life.*

Key words: *pedagogy of work, neo-liberal anthropology of work, bio-politics of work.*

1. Introduction: the Need for a new Worker

Right from the beginning pedagogical thought about work has attempted to combat the instrumentalisation of the working man, his reduction to mere means of production, and attempted to promote an educational culture of working activity as an indispensable tool for the achievement of anthropological integrity, as a segment which establishes an end to and perfects theoretical and ideational (the intellect) and practical-decision making (the ethical action) activities (Verducci, 2003), as a factor capable of making explicit and enriching subjective and inter-subjective potential. In this sense the history of pedagogy – from J.A. Komensky to S. Hessen via J.-J. Rousseau, J. Pestalozzi, F. Fröebel, G. Kerschensteiner, the *éducation nouvelle* movement, C. Freinet, J. Dewey, M. Montessori, E. Spranger, T. Litt and so on (d’Aniello, 2009) – is teeming with exhortations to recover the exquisitely educational value of work (as the school linchpin and for social regeneration) and with criticisms of a conception of work which is incapable of respecting personal dignity and health and of responding to demands for meaning and self-realisation.

With the exception of J.A. Komensky, all the other great thinkers of the past took on an industrialism which, over time, has not simply “invented” and then secularised a society (Gorz, 2004; Žižek, 2001) but has also generated a worker which is dependent on the

¹ University of Macerata, Italy, fabrizio.daniello@unimc.it

machine's discipline, subordinate to procedural norms imposed from above and transfigured into an alien automaton. What pedagogical thought is doing battle with today, on the other hand, is a completely different state of affairs.

We are now beyond the third phase of the industrial revolution and capitalism has changed its skin, melding with neo-liberal demands; the market has mutated in both nature and scenario; work itself has profoundly changed. We can no longer speak of dependence on machines and a rigidly vertical hierarchy commanded by an inscrutable rationality prompting trained, passive and interlinked obedient behaviours. Quite the contrary, learning, knowledge, communication, interaction, partnership and taking part are the new mantras of the post-Fordist age. Technological, and consequent organisational, innovations demand a new type of work and, first and foremost, a new type of working man urging a radical anthropological conversion nurtured precisely by the neo-liberal approach. A conversion is under way which is re-writing the rules of the game between capital and labour and requires – or rather suggests – individuals not to limit themselves to intellectual and manual involvement but to alert and activate all their vital energies (material and immaterial). Underlying such “suggestion”, however, there would appear to be no increased educational or self-educational purpose but rather a bio-political abyss of subjection and self-alienation which denies the satisfaction of a valid interest alongside the equally valid interest in profit: human development by means of work. Therefore the objective of the following pages is to analyse the substance of this conversion, to pursue a bio-political debate which has been merely touched on in two articles published in this review (d’Aniello 2014; d’Aniello, 2015b) and renewing a long term pedagogical commitment to a critical understanding of work.

2. The Anthropological Conversion of the Working Man

Who is the working man? Answering this question necessarily requires referring to Foucault's considerations on neo-liberalism, an exercise which is truly crucial to a transcription of a paper given to a conference entitled “Man – an eternal challenge”. However, as the subject has been explored in a number of very recent studies which are currently coming out in print, the argument on Foucault's thought will limit to the essential to avoid needless repetition. From the philosopher's observations on the focus of American, German and part of French neo-liberalism, a preliminary response is linked to the neo-liberal development of the classic *homo oeconomicus* concept; no longer «partner to an exchange» but «entrepreneur of himself», namely a subject playing a part in an economy and society made up of «enterprise-units» (Foucault, 2005, p. 186). A subsequent answer then is supplied by the neo-liberal conversion of the working man into an economically active entity. Workers thus become «self-entrepreneurs» who as such make available and exploit their resources (work attitude and competences) for the purposes of earning return (salary). From this point of view the worker-enterprise is capital, generating income and not being transformed into a machine – by means of the linked dynamics of alienation and corresponding implications – but is rather a machine which uses its own skills to capitalise itself. Ultimately workers cease to be simply the object of supply and demand and become subjects with all the responsibilities and risk taking which entrepreneurship typically involves (Foucault, 2005, p. 184-186).

Given that this anthropological conversion is an authorisation to direct economic interest in worker's activity and its adequacy in order to achieve satisfactory performance results – turning it into a peculiar theory of government of workers – it is also a great advantage from the point of view of capitalism. Indeed, identifying workers as enterprise/capital resolves the capital-labour dialectic blocking demonstrations of alienation (as mentioned above) and favouring the urge to self-alienation. The earlier use of the expression “exploiting one's resources” was deliberate. An individual who is led to see himself as an enterprise and, in the era of cognitive capitalism, (Rullani, 1998; Moulner Boutang, 2002; Fumagalli, 2007), to view his own immaterial as well as material faculties, his whole life, as capital will be unable to avoid putting the abstraction of work to one side, forgetting alienation and devote himself to translating it into self-investment or, more realistically, into self-exploitation.

3. Loving Subjection Mechanisms

The question which arises at this point is understanding how to help this anthropological conversion to come to fruition and implement a worker bio-politics (Demichelis, Leghissa, 2008), in other words how to prompt the latter to squeeze every last drop out of himself, passing from economic theory to practice. In this respect it is worth dusting off a phrase of M. Thatcher which Dardot and Laval (2013) cite repeatedly in their work *La nouvelle raison du monde*: «we have to change people's souls and hearts». “Entering souls and hearts” puts across the meaning of “suggestion” very clearly. It is not a question of direct behavioural coercion which pricks the conscience and triggers resistance but something which creeps into our most intimate beings and moulds our consciousness in view of the «primordial adaptation» (Napoli, 2013, p. III) to the subjectification described by Foucault.

Lordon (2015, p. 27-33) translates this something and its outcome into a «servitude of the passions». From the starting point of the concept of the heteronomy of desires – guided by today's economic dominance of every sphere of existence (Totaro, 2008) – and the establishment of the salaried relationship as the relationship which regulates access to money as a hierarchically superior interest, he makes reference to a servitude which generates desire and orientates both negatively (the desire to avoid an evil) and positively (the desire for a good). If in the working context a desire targeting a good is traditionally linked to potential consumption (as in Fordism) in actual fact, whilst not forgetting about consumption, it achieves a level of evolution which is directly connected with the instrumental vision of self-entrepreneurship. As Laval has written, neo-liberal new man is not simply an enterprise, with all which that involves in terms of behaviour and exploiting oneself for a profit, but is further conceived of as an enterprise in competition with others (the colleagues). Subjectification is thus supplemented by a hyper-subjectification dictated by rivalry (Laval, 2014) and legitimised in workers' hearts by their desire to be “loved” by their employers (Lordon, 2015, p. 95-99). This desire in turn, which opens the flood gates to maximum effort, to an enterprise which is self-activated to the point of obsession, is pushed by specific management techniques which involve the achievement of a further good: (apparent) self-realisation. But let's start from the beginning.

For Dardot and Laval (2013, p. 425-443) management aims to induce workers to work on themselves first and foremost supported by the prior involvement of the company's mission and vision, prompting them to accept their «accountability» (conceived of as responsibility and countability) and consequently their assessment and comparison. Immediately afterwards, and on this basis the so-called «management of souls» comes into play (experts in neuro-linguistic programming, transactional analysis and coaching, etc.) which revolves around rhetorically underlining the indispensable potential of human beings as self-operating machines, on the optimisation of this very potential and the correspondence between worker performance and company performance. “Feeling oneself an enterprise” and the desire to emerge and be recognised, essentially to be loved, derives from all this and moreover leads to workers consenting to be monitored within and even outside the work environment (on the web, social media, etc.) in order for employers to assess in what ways and to what extent their “lives” (material and immaterial resources) and lifestyles are coherent with self-entrepreneurial dedication (Lazzarato, 2013, p. 49). The management of souls and, in particular, copious use of coaching are the basis for the additional illusory promise of self-realisation at work (Lordon, 2015, p. 71-75, 125-128) – an educational promise marked by the greater autonomy and freedom granted by post-Fordist organisational and manufacturing methods – providing an outlet for the perfecting of a plurality of qualities: cognitive, emotional, relational and so on. It is thus that a worker bio-politics is implemented.

4. Fear-inducing Subjection Mechanisms

Thus far we have looked at one side of the bio-political coin. The desire curve is an opportunity to deal with the other, that linked to the avoidance of an evil. Both enter souls and hearts at the same time.

As mentioned above, adapting to the need to make oneself into an enterprise means no less than adapting to the regulatory principles of the neo-liberal market and capitalism: that competition which, going against the Smith principle of exchange, «sharpens individual appetites, instincts and intelligence» prompting their intense and generalised mobilisation (Lazzarato, 2013, p. 18).

Competition is therefore at the heart of an individual's willingness to present himself and act as an enterprise functional to a changeable market structure but must be nurtured if people with very different habits are to get used to the new rules of the game. Such behaviours can be nurtured lovingly, certainly. At the same time they can also be triggered by fear and the «inequality paradigm» introduced by neo-liberalism has played a fundamentally important role in this. The motives underlying the advent of this paradigm relate to the pressing demand for an answer to the three great ills which emerged after the so-called “golden age” (1945-1975), namely high inflation, economic and manufacturing stagnation and a state taxation crisis. The potential to bring it to fruition falls on fertile ground in the growing internationalisation of the markets, embryonic globalisation and progressively inflated financial capital which makes work a contractual state subordinate to the conditions of accumulation and reproduction of capital itself. Its concrete development takes the form of the

breakdown of the Fordist social compromises, of deregulation (especially of the labour law) and the dissemination of an employment insecurity which facilitates market elasticity (Revelli, 2014, p. 4-7).

Essentially, the insecurity generated by neo-liberalism is a potent catalyser of that competitive spirit which an easily agitated and constantly innovation oriented market revolved around, one which acts as the basis for the governmental objective of the anthropological metamorphosis of the worker. From this latter perspective Dardot and Laval (2013, p. 424), again, state that: «neo-liberal rationality drives the self to mutate to reinforce itself and survive in the face of competition». And mutating is simply to fall into line non-conflictually with and continually maximise one's self-exploitation efforts ultimately becoming a competitive enterprise. Specifically, that micro-power which Lordon (2015, p. 67) has defined as «the master liquidity phantom» – part of the wider bio-power inherent in the financialisation (Lucarelli, 2009; Marazzi, 2010; Gallino, 2011) –, acting behind the scenes of a threat of unemployment facilitated by the weakening of dismissal norms, requires workers to instantly conform with their whole beings to the «demands of the desire-master» and to the tension making for undefined productivity increases subjecting workers to unheard of stress aggravated by the previously mentioned duty to self-capitalise. On the same issue it can be concluded that occupational insecurity is an influential bio-political mobilisation mechanism. On the other hand, as Gorz hypothesised (2003, p. 19), the “insecure-enterprise” supplying individual services, bio-politically constituted, will play an increasingly centre-stage role in the emerging post-salarial society.

5. Pedagogical Tasks

In sum, then, the “self-entrepreneur”, theoretically author of his own destiny, is in practice in a state of self-alienated slavery, victim to an anthropocentric hoax whose survival depends on certain specific subjection mechanisms which shake up the subject from within and induce him to engage wholly, qualitatively and quantitatively in it. The increased humanity which could potentially be triggered by work which requires individuals to free various aspects of their personalities which were previously held back is denied by the sophistication of an approach which places Fordism and post-Fordism on an evolutionary continuum. There is no discontinuity in the conception of man as a productive tool; what is discontinuous is the theoretical framework and the means and strategies it employs. Today's reverence for human capital is to be taken literally. A long way from being enlightened by a neo-humanist spotlight, subjectivity is simply an intrinsically productive fact. Subjectivity must self-generate, be self-motivating and self-managing. The argument of this paper may seem extreme – and a generalisation applicable to all work situations is nevertheless not admissible – but it is supported not only by the literature but also by a reality which each one of us is capable of perceiving. Life put to work, the lack of distinction between life and work times, work stress, psycho-physical suffering linked to intensifying work rhythms, psychological presence pressure, emotional control exerted by the organisations, the managerial use of a specific language and strategic communication, the tendency to contractual individualisation, psychological

contracts, performance related blackmail induced by the fear of unemployment and de-localisation, the accentuation of corporate worker loyalty practice, etc. are a status quo which is very real and already confirmed and documented in other works both cited here and otherwise (d'Aniello, 2015a) showing the race towards self-entrepreneurship. This status quo naturally prevents to detect authentic conditions of educability. Human qualities are reduced to the useful and the educability which precludes the promise of self-realisation is equally a bio-political illusion. At the same time this strictly work related status quo is the product of an economic macro-engineering which has overrun and pulled into its orbit all social and existential spheres influencing personal and interpersonal action (without even touching on the political action and its complicity). Capitalism is an organisational system and, more profoundly, a dominant culture which has infiltrated human consciousness and modified people's behaviour making use of the neo-liberal development of the anthropological myth of *homo oeconomicus* – favoured by the exaltation of certain human characteristics and first and foremost competitiveness – and ideologies which shore it up to legitimate an approach to the world (Mancini, 2011). On the other hand, it is principally by means of work that the more widely bio-economic conception of the behaviours uptake has taken shape tending to their “increase in value” to the benefit of the market in all its complexity, including consumption.

As far as this state of affairs is concerned pedagogy can make its own contribution to change and it can do so by acting primarily on the cultural oppositional plane. As the space available in this paper does not allow for in-depth study of all the many facets of this issue – which would also encompass the role of economic education, of the need for pedagogical incursions into corporate training (such as coaching), the training of external trainers and Vet system trainers, the emotional training inside organisations – the concluding points will look at the importance of the educational building of a *homo* capable of countering *oeconomicus* and the importance of educational resistance at school.

The education of a different *homo*, called *col-laborans* (d'Aniello, 2015a, p. 147-149) to highlight the two-fold implications of collaboration and *labor*, involves the educational recovery of a real, not simulated, co-operative work at every level of schooling in relation to the age of students following in the footsteps of the pedagogical past and taking on board a lesson which has as yet not struck a chord either in Italy or elsewhere. By this educational recovery I mean the use of work for goals which are not directly beneficial to professional status but are directly useful to the demonstration and consciousness raising of personal and relationship powers, the gradual discovery and strengthening of intrinsically human abilities, the personalisation and socialisation processes and ontological affirmation in dialogue with otherness. In short educational recovery means returning to the idea of work as a means for education, to *ex-ducere* the human, and moving it away from instrumental laboristic attentions. Equally it means proposing establishing a deep rooted pedagogical culture of work in antithesis to a purely utilitarian culture. Beyond this not unimportant purpose, working together in a meeting/debate of minds, hearts and bodies would strengthen collaborating methods bringing out an awareness of the value of a healthy interdependence, of an agreement between various points of view, welcoming diversity, mediation and true responsibility for oneself and

others. In the sphere of work these values are all subordinated to the efficiency principle in working together whose objective is to work to the benefit of new productive forms while in our daily lives they are tarnished by the pressing economic demand for self-sufficiency, self-referentiality and the pursuit of individual interest. Acquiring the habit of working with others with no profit objective and doing so at length is, on the other hand, the best cultural counter weight to the economic imbalance towards the mobilising competition just as it is the highway to the anthropological enrichment and dissemination of the gift culture, of the culture of “we”, of relationship good (Bruni, 2006), of educational relations, of human development (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2010).

Once again on the subject of cultural regeneration, if the tide of economic rationality both inside and outside of work is to be turned back, pedagogy must be called upon to make a significant impact on the aspects of modern society concerning the specific subject of this paper. Research, academic articles, books, conferences and so on are relevant but not sufficient. What is needed is a focus on training and refresher courses for teachers which combat certain tendencies and promote different thought processes from the bottom up. In general terms what is being referred to here is the possibility of cultivating a conscious and critical spirit in schools making for individuals capable of questioning economic dynamics and their impact on public policies, on life experience and present and future working lives. In particular what is being referred to here is the potential for substituting a tendency in schools to adapt to the economic action with a critical resistance orientation. (In this latter sense, the task of pedagogy is also to take an active part in the public debate on subjects which are its study preserve). Specifically European education policies should be observed from an alternative perspective thus giving future and current teachers the chance to carry out their mission conscientiously and competently, from the starting point of the centrality of that key competence which is called “sense of initiative and entrepreneurship” (European Parliament and Council, 2006) and the consequent “entrepreneurship education at school” (European Commission, 2016) to the predominantly functionalist approach of lifelong learning policies. In the former case, while the entrepreneurship mindset and proactive attitude proposed are not exclusively economic in purpose, the connection with the worker-enterprise configuration is very clear. In the second case, the end of learning and knowledge is more and more marked (adaptation to a changing market, development of competences and meta-competences for work, occupational mobility, etc.) and their strictly educational end, intrinsic to the concept of lifelong education, is progressively less marked (Angori, 2015; Barros, 2013).

Many of the scholars cited in this paper maintain that the enterprise and self-entrepreneurship culture is born at school and then spills over into work and society. It is therefore true that pedagogy can offer a circumscribed contribution which cannot alone resolve complex problems but is an essential contribution especially if the recovery of work and training and refresher courses for teachers focus on the courage to educate and denying educational citizenship’s right to passive perpetuation of a certain order. In conclusion what is needed is a cultural revolution involving a range of actors and pedagogy can play its part in returning the economic sphere to the service of people.

Other information may be obtained from the address: fabrizio.daniello@unimc.it

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