

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*Rethinking Work: Time, Space and Discourse*, edited by Mark Hearn and Grant Michelson, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 353 pp., ISBN 0-521-61759-6.

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Volume 63, Number 3, 2008

La relation d'emploi : état actuel de la question

The Employment Relationship: Current Research Avenues

La relación de empleo: estado actual de la cuestión

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/019103ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/019103ar>

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Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Duxbury, L. (2008). Review of [*Rethinking Work: Time, Space and Discourse*, edited by Mark Hearn and Grant Michelson, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 353 pp., ISBN 0-521-61759-6.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 63(3), 569–571. <https://doi.org/10.7202/019103ar>

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l'exemple d'une sociologie qui, pour comprendre le travail, se réapproprie le modèle de l'économie classique. Dans le sillage de Polanyi, Pillon et Vatin rappellent que cette démarche porte en elle l'important risque de faire des conditions abstraites de ce modèle des objets sociaux que seul un regard normatif sur la société rend possible (p. 56). À nouveau, les auteurs visent juste. Les positions qu'ils prennent, au détour de longs développements descriptifs, rafraîchissent tant par la rigueur du raisonnement que par le sérieux du questionnement épistémologique qui les a fait naître.

À une sociologie du travail « trop » microsociologique, c'est-à-dire incapable de formuler des liens avec une pensée générale sur l'homme et son monde à force d'être trop repliée sur ses données empiriques, les auteurs préfèrent une sociologie qui a pour priorité, comme ils le disent, de reprendre « les choses à

la base en soumettant le riche matériau d'enquête existant aujourd'hui sur le travail et ses multiples formes, à une interrogation philosophique, historique, anthropologique ». Non seulement revendiquent-ils son importance et sa grandeur, mais la lecture de leur *Traité de sociologie du travail* nous convainc que le travail qui a présidé à cet ouvrage constitue un exemple de ce type de sociologie au regard large et riche de sens. En somme, pour cette raison et pour toutes les autres évoquées plus haut, nous pouvons affirmer qu'avec cet ouvrage, Pillon et Vatin sont parvenus à rester fidèles au projet initié avant eux par Naville et Friedmann, les fondateurs de la sociologie du travail française : « penser, autour de la question du travail, la civilisation contemporaine » (p. 2).

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***Rethinking Work: Time, Space and Discourse,***

edited by Mark Hearn and Grant Michelson, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 353 pp., ISBN 0-521-61759-6.

*Rethinking Work* is an edited collection of 15 peer reviewed chapters designed to thrust work researchers out of their disciplinary comfort zone and facilitate their exploration of new theoretical perspectives and methodologies necessary to explain the rapidly evolving and multi-dimensional realm of 21<sup>st</sup> century work. The volume takes as its main premise that those who study work must themselves be capable of adapting to the profound changes reshaping “this most powerful expression of human relationships and experience.” They also perceive that progress in the study of work has been hindered by the academic silos that have been created over time. The solution, argues the editors of this volume, is for industrial relations researchers to put aside the disciplinary boundaries that

have governed their work in the past and engage with other cognate social science researchers to explore the links and relationships between temporal, spatial and discursive dimensions of work.

To this end the editors have produced a book that synthesizes the concepts of time (section one), space (section two) and discourse (section three), and offers an innovative perspective on the study of work and employment relations.

The first section of the book deals with time. Time is frequently considered as a resource in the context of work and organizations as illustrated by our focus on efficiency, time management, “just in time,” manufacturing, etc. Researchers have explored many issues that can be classified within this area including time of work (long hours), timing of work

(work arrangement), work life balance, and time as a political construct (i.e. who controls work time?). The six wide ranging articles in this part of the book contend that our current focus on the rapidity of social change is preventing researchers from using lessons from the past to understand the present and anticipate the future.

The second section of the volume contains four articles focusing on space. Work takes place in space: factories, offices, and now, with the advent of portable office technologies, where ever one has Wi-Fi access (what the editors call the “third space”). This book does not, however, treat space as synonymous with the “static” place in which work occurs. Rather, it views space as something that people organize, structure and reproduce in order to communicate important symbolic and power elements in social contexts. Discussions in the book on globalization are used to make clear that the remaking of and rethinking about work is a spatial process.

The third section in this volume includes five articles focusing on discourse. The editors note that discourse “refers to the practices of talking and writing, the visual representations and the cultural artifacts that bring a range of social phenomena into being through a variety of texts” including written documents, verbal reports, symbols, signs and terminology. They also note that in work and industrial settings, different discourses and how they are articulated represent the interests of different groups such as governments, unions, employers, lawyers, etc.

Researchers will appreciate the following aspects of this edited collection. First, the authors make an effort to ground their discussion in empirical research and many apply the lessons learned to issues of public policy. Second, the editors include chapters of commentary at the beginning and end

of the book which integrates the main themes and puts the various articles into context. Finally, the fact that the authors of the book chapters come from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives (including geography, history, industrial relations, law, economics, management, political science, strategic management, organizational theory, labour and business history and sociology) broadens our understanding of the work construct.

For me, the chapters on discourse analysis were particularly useful. In fact, section three of this book offers a great methodological primer for those who are thinking of incorporating techniques such as “critical discourse analysis” into their own work. In addition, I feel that the editors have achieved their goal of providing a unique identity to the *Sydney School* as a national and international leader of the debate around the organization of work (20 out of 21 of the authors of the articles in this book teach in the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Sydney).

Readers of the book do need to be aware of several shortcomings of this volume. First, the book is “Australia-centric” as most of the major changes in the book as well as much of the empirical data that is presented pertain to circumstances in Australia in the past decade and a half. While the editors argue the Australian experience will inform and speak to the experiences of other countries, in my opinion the book (with the exception of the section on discourse) would have benefited from more international examples. Additionally some chapters will have little relevance to those outside of Australia.

Second, the editors note in their introduction that they wish to avoid giving the impression that the discussion of time, space and discourse is too theoretically abstract or “rarefied” to have practical applications. Unfortunately, that is just the impression I was left with

after reading this book. Many authors' "discourses" were very academic and "siloed" in their terminology and phrasing. This will limit the applicability of this book to academics who either use similar terminology to these authors, or researchers who are willing to put the effort into understanding the concepts being presented.

Finally the editors argue that time, space and discourse are interdependent categories and state that one goal of their volume is to suggest connections between these ideas. Unfortunately, with the exception of the two commentary

chapters, few connections are made in the individual chapters. In fact, the authors seem to prove the editors' point: people do work in silos with their own language and methodologies. That being said, ideas do abound in this book and the techniques of discourse analysis as described in section three can be applied to the study of work however you define this construct. As such, the book offers much to those willing to make the effort to read it.

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***Travail et reconnaissance des compétences,***

sous la direction de William Cavestro, Christine Durieux et Sylvie Monchatre; postface de Hugues Bertrand, Paris : Économica, 2007, 224 p., ISBN 978-2-717853-94-0.

En France, l'analyse des démarches « compétences » s'est taillée une place centrale au sein de la sociologie du travail quand, à la fin des années 90, le patronat français, soutenu en cela par Zarifian, argumentait ouvertement en faveur de telles démarches face aux transformations de l'économie et de la technologie. Par la suite, plusieurs travaux parmi lesquels il faut citer l'ouvrage *Réfléchir la compétence* sous la direction de Dupray, Guitton et Monchatre (Octarès, 2003) ont tenté d'approfondir la réflexion théorique en replaçant notamment cette approche au sein d'un processus d'individualisation de la relation d'emploi. Le présent ouvrage se situe, avec certains des mêmes collaborateurs du groupe « Compétences » du Centre d'études et de recherche sur les qualifications (CÉREQ), dans la poursuite de cette réflexion.

Constatant que l'expérimentation des outils relatifs à la gestion des compétences s'était jusqu'à récemment surtout limitée au périmètre de l'entreprise, les auteurs avancent que le développement récent des politiques publiques visant la transférabilité des compétences, la mobilité des individus

et leur employabilité sur le marché du travail, déplace aujourd'hui la question sur le terrain de l'emploi. La question est alors de tenter de comprendre comment se construit la compétence et par quels moyens elle est reconnue à travers l'évaluation, la rémunération, la classification et la mobilité. Vaste chantier, d'autant plus motivant que l'action publique québécoise s'intéresse de près à cette question de la reconnaissance des compétences, et auquel l'ouvrage s'attaque par trois portes d'entrée : celle de la construction de la compétence individuelle et collective, celle du recours de plus en plus fréquent par l'entreprise à la notion de métier et celle enfin des négociations entre partenaires sociaux pour la reconnaissance des compétences. Élaborés en général sous forme d'essais faisant état des écrits les plus récents sur chaque question, les différents textes qui composent cet ouvrage collectif fournissent donc une base solide pour qui voudrait rapidement faire le tour de ce domaine d'expertise et de recherche.

La première partie de l'ouvrage s'intéresse à une question plutôt négligée dans la dernière décennie, celle de la