Re-articulating our conception of resistance at work: Towards a poststructural perspective

Hegemonic theories in International Relations, namely neo-realism and neoliberalism have, in their emphasis upon the role of states and markets within the international system, failed to recognise the significance of the social relations of production in the shaping of the global economy. In their seminal works, both Robert Cox (1987) and Jeffrey Harrod (1987) emphasised the need for studies in International Political Economy (IPE) to move away from state centred analyses, and instead create a counter-discourse which placed labour and production as being central to our understanding of political and structural change. To re-define our understanding of political economy and envisage future world orders, Cox suggests we need to focus our enquiry on the contradictions which arise from within the social relations of production, as it is out of these struggles that 'a change in the structure of social power' (Cox, 1987, 12) can emerge.

It is from this trajectory that I would like to begin my own analysis of resistance at work and its importance to our understanding of International Political Economy. By looking at the changing nature of work within advanced industrial societies and the modes of resistance common to the corporate mode of production, I will be able to show how resistance can shape the organisational practises of workers and firms alike. Furthermore, it is my contention that although the neo-Gramscian school has made an important contribution to IPE by placing work at the centre of its analysis, it doesn't offer an intricate enough explanation of how the everyday experience of work can formulate the world views of people and potentially incite political and

structural change . Therefore I would like to both critique and develop their approach by urging the discipline to engage more thoroughly with postructural notions of power and subjectivity, as a way of augmenting their critical IPE and explaining more clearly the creation of social forces at work. I will begin by outlining the neo-realist and neoliberal positions and contrasting them with the neo-Gramscian critique of them. This will enable me to indicate directly how labour and production should be at the centre of our enquiries in IPE. Following this, I will then use examples to highlight the changing nature of work within the corporate mode of production, and the common resistance tendencies that have developed out of it. I will then articulate my argument that in order to understand resistance at work within corporate enterprises more clearly, we need more engagement with postructural notions of organisation and power.

Neo-realism and neoliberalism have dominated academic International Relations since the 1970's and have subsequently influenced the policies of states and actors in world politics. As Lamy (2001) indicates, the two theories are 'intellectual siblings' that favour a bias towards 'the state, the capitalist market and the status quo' (Lamy in Baylis and Smith, 2001, 182). Neo-realism, largely associated with the work of Waltz (1979), seeks to explain the continuing dominance of states as the primary actors in word politics, and defends the notion of a hegemonic power in the world to maintain equilibrium to a perceived anarchic international system made up of competitive states and their individual priorities. Neoliberalism is the economic theory that has developed from the writings of radical liberals such as von Hayek (1976) and which favours free trade, open markets and the privatisation of national industries. It remains synonymous with neo-realism in its adherence to the 'new constitutionalism' which

purports that it is states that are 'the authors of the very legal regime that is realigning the bounds of permissible sate action' (Schneiderman, 2000, 758) and not the immaterial forces of globalisation. Both theories have a commitment to the problem solving capacities of institutions and states. Contemporary defenders of the two hegemonic theories in International Relations argue that, although the initial attacks on the legitimacy of the realist position during the immediate post cold war years were fruitful, it was a mistake to completely ignore the role of states and simply accept in particular, the perceived logic of the decline of US hegemony (Cox, 2001). An example of this would be their belief that American hegemony still exists in a large part through its control over the World Bank (Wade (2002). To maintain its leadership and move forward, the US should increase its multilateral ties with other states through the Bank causing it 'to affirm a wider range of institutional ecologies' (Wade, 2002, 235). This illustrates the problem solving tendencies, and institutional bias associated with neo-realist and neoliberal approaches to IPE. It is against this academic and policy driven tide that the Neo-Gramscian's seek to insert their critical, bottom up analysis of structure and power in international relations and create a counter-discourse to the hegemonic positions of neo-realism and neoliberalism.

Neo-Gramscian IPE aims to continue the legacy of Antonio Gramsci (1971) and his inversion of history as being a perpetual cycle of historical hegemonic blocs. They do so by placing his thought within the context of the 'reciprocal relationship' between the complexes of state and society and the 'historical forms taken by these complexes' (Cox, 1981, 96). Articulated predominantly through the work of Robert Cox, Jeffrey Harrod and Stephen Gill, the Neo-Gramscian argument is that social forces which rise out of the social relations of production are central to our understanding of how

historical blocs materialise. I will now discuss three key ideas within the discipline and show how they seek to undermine the neo-realist and neoliberal agendas.

Firstly, Harrod (2001) introduces the concept of 'global realism' to show how the development of realist thought in its state centred form 'hindered its more useful application to global society' (Harrod, 2001, 111). Though a revision of the work of key realist thinkers, Harrod indicates that contrary to the notion that state power should be observed and measured within the international system, realism should focus on 'individuals and social groups' (112) and their relationship to the power structures which govern them. Without this fundamental element, social science has remained distinctly 'power-empty' (115) and conducive to maintaining the dominant patterns of state and institutional order. Closely related to this is Gill's (2003) discussion of the process of institutionalisation, seen through the emergence of what he terms 'disciplinary neoliberalism'. The state centred logic of realism has resulted in the creation of a global system, defined by its commitment to financial institutions and their capacity to create the agendas for the interaction of states and transnational actors. As Gill argues, neoliberal ideas are not necessarily universal, but instead have a disciplinary function which operates within bureaucratised institutions at the local and global levels of governance. The result is that organisations, for example, such as the WTO and the IMF maintain a distinct level of independence from political actors and agendas, successfully subsuming the policies of states into what Gill terms the 'supremacist transnational historical bloc' (Gill, 2003, 131). Subsequently, individuals and social groups are increasingly alienated from the decisions which fundamentally govern their lives. Gill and Harrod clearly show the neo-Gramscian criticism of the top down theoretical implications of realism and neoliberalism within

IPE. It is now important to consider the benefits of the bottom up approach, which focuses on the experiences of labour and production practises.

Robert Cox argues that the concept of power in IPE is misguided. Instead of being conditioned by states and institutions, power should be understood as stemming from the social forces that exist within different modes of production. Work is fundamentally a universal activity, and the particular social forces that exist from struggles at work 'overflow state boundaries' (Cox, 1981, 105). The focus within International Relations and IPE on the actions of states and institutions has resulted in a neglect of the concept of work and significantly undermined our understanding of what it means to work; as well the related issues of rights, wages and the ability to form wider social relationships. Cox (1987) argues that 'work is a fundamental activity that affects a range of other important human relationships and the organisation of society as a whole' (Cox, 1987, ix). By re-focusing our studies into the patterns and modes of production, we can begin to articulate an alternative view of how relationships of power are formed, which can potentially lead to the creation of transformative theories of political action. Similarly Harrod (1997) argues that the emergence of sociological studies into work related practises in the 1970's failed to incite change, as they didn't incorporate into their analysis a thorough regard for worker consciousness. The result was that by the 1980's and the emergence of organisational practices such as human resource management, social forces at work became distinctly invisible from both academic and policy driven studies; hence a 'triumph of the practitioner over the analyst' (Harrod, 1997, 114). The role of IPE should be to bridge the gap between the political and the institutional if there is going to be any 'potential for change' (116). To do so Cox and Harrod propose that we look

at the various types of production practices and consider the inter-subjective experiences that exist within each of them. For this study, I would like to focus on what Cox (1987) terms as 'enterprise corporatism'; one of twelve significant modes of production. It is within this mode that I would like to show how both the restructuring of the global economy through an overtly neoliberal agenda has created new environments of work within corporate structures that have undermined the organisational capacity of the workers within these production relations. Furthermore, I would then like to elaborate, using examples, on some of the common modes of resistance within corporate enterprises and the potential they have to challenge the prevailing power structures. It is from here that I will then contend that postructuralism helps us to understand these modes of resistance more clearly.

Classic studies of work related practices within factories, such as those conducted by Burawoy (1979, 1985), took a step towards showing the increasing corporatisation of production; whereby firms began to distance themselves from their traditional collective competitive functions and move towards a separation of divisional enterprises, each with a distinct 'profit making' (Burawoy, 1979, 44) capacity. Not only did this increase the autonomous capabilities of the firm on an international basis, but it significantly changed the nature of work by placing individuals and divisions within the firm into competition with each other. The period of de-industrialisation, within advanced industrial societies, has seen the role of manufacturing increasingly outsourced and replaced by an increase in operational practices such as human resources, production design and the honing of innovation and creativity through information management. Therefore Burawoy's analyses need updating to incorporate the changing nature of work within contemporary global

firms. Central to this should be a consideration of globalisation discourse since the 1990's; the familiar mantra of which alludes to the prospects of innovation, advancement and autonomy at work and in production, which are perceived to be inevitable factors in a changing global environment. This has been a predominant agenda, particularly within the restructuring of the economies of advanced industrial societies, and one which has affected the social relations of production within the corporate enterprise.

Amoore (2002) contends that the knowledge behind this new fashioning of enterprise organisation has been perceived as 'essential and inexorable' (Amoore, 2002, 23), resulting in firms moving to flexibilise their workforce to maintain security and prosperity in an ever changing and uncertain economic climate. The flexibility of hours, roles and positions of hierarchy within high tech business, were intended to allow 'workers to work with considerable freedom', whilst encouraging them to 'engage in formal interaction in the performance of their tasks' (Castells, 2000, 261). Furthermore, flexibility was supposed to allow workers, for example, to take part in skills improvement training as a way of helping them to improve their 'employability as a form of human capital' (Budgen, 2000, 153). Work and life, it can be assumed, are intricately linked; in that active involvement within the corporate enterprise can help workers to improve themselves and their interpersonal relationships inside and outside of the firm. Contrary to this, Amoore (2004) argues that flexibility simply means that workers now have to contend with 'uncertain hours and pay', a 'blurring of work and non work and the 'intensification of work and surveillance practices (Amoore, 2004, 182). This has reduced their capacity to determine patterns of work, free time and the ability to bargain with their employers. The restructuring of the

global economy has been embedded with top down corporate management practices, which have undermined and ignored the real difficulties faced by the workers forced to adapt to them. As Sennett (2006) argues, rather than uniting workers under a new paradigm of workplace autonomy, the 'fragmenting of big institutions has left many people's lives in a fragmented state' (Sennett, 2006, 2). Furthermore, the democratisation of ownership though shareholding and the transcendental belief in the power of technology (Henwood 2003), has added to the pressures of workers to conform to the new workplace standards, whereby it is assumed that their efforts are needed to drive structural changes to make them work for everyone. The disintegration of collectivity and community at work means that it is 'the value of individual effort' that is 'taken as a more reliable indicator of achievement' (Mcrobbie in Du Gay and Pryke, 2002, 101) and this is causing friction and creating new forms of contestation within the corporate relations of production. It is from this perspective that we can begin to re-articulate what it means to resist the organisational changes within the corporate enterprise.

By taking the neo-Gramscian position within IPE, and focusing my theoretical analysis within a particular mode of production, it has been possible so far to indicate how studies of work and production could incite alternative discourses to the dominant theories of International Relations and IPE - neo-realism and neoliberalism. Furthermore, by discussing the changing nature of the working environment within corporate enterprises, due to the structural changes imposed on them by a global system governed at an institutional level by the policy implications of these theories, I have indicated how the new perceived freedom and autonomy given to workers in firms has in fact reduced their ability to participate in the systems which

fundamentally control their everyday working lives. This has led to new forms of resistance at work within corporate enterprises. I would now like to consider some of the resistance tendencies which have emerged from within firms adapting to the organisational practises concurrent with global trends in industry. I will look briefly at research that has been done in creative, audiovisual and small corporate enterprises. In doing so, I will be able to emphasise the neo-Gramscian argument that the struggles which rise out of the social relations of production provide us with both an alternative understanding of the organisation and proliferation of power in IPE. From here, I will then outline the postructural perspectives on organisation and power, and show how they provide us with a clearer conception of the nature and transformative potential of social forces at work.

Studies in resistance at work have always considered the ability of workers to organise through union representation (Burawoy, 1979), through the power of striking (Franzosi, 1994) or other formal methods of collective bargaining in the workplace. More recently, with the growing need in IPE to focus on 'the politics emerging from the experiences in work and production' (Davies and Ryner in Davies and Ryner, 2006, 4), theorists have been keen to examine the more covert, 'tacit' (Amoore, 2002, 145) and subtle forms that resistance can take. I would like to consider how one approach can inform the other. In industries where union representation is increasingly scarce, Roscigno and Hudson (2004) have found that 'individual resistance' (Roscigno and Hudson, 2004, 14) has often successfully incited collective action in the form of more traditional methods of mobilisation. This is what Scott (1990) termed the 'infrapolitics of subordinate groups' which he argues inevitably provide the building blocks for more 'elaborate institutionalised political action' that

could not exist otherwise (Scott, 1990, 201). In videogame production for example, the unpredictability of work has lead to new forms of informal worker resistance. Videogame production is central to what autonomist Marxists have termed 'immaterial labour', or work which requires 'creativity, communication, emotion, cooperation and values' (Lazzarato in Virno and Hardt, 1996, 146) as central features in the everyday process of production. The blurring, in this respect, between personality, intellect and work, and its routinisation within the organisational matrix of flexible hours, contracts and hierarchies has further incited workers into individual forms of contestation. De Peuter and Dyer Witheford (2005) give the example of an anonymous blog circulated by an EA Games worker amongst his colleagues and media outlets in 2004, which resulted in a frenzy of discords being articulated throughout the industry, leading to game labourers re-assessing their strategic roles within game enterprises and bargaining for greater protection at work. Furthermore, within the UK's audiovisual industries, the lack of organised representation together with a natural tendency for workers to 'exploit contracts to further their own careers' (Saundry, Antcliff and Stuart, 2006, 378), tensions have grown with regards to the stability and definition of work within this field. The result has been a move by audiovisual workers to seek solutions to these issues through interpersonal networks, which have assumed a central role within the employment relationship. The increase in informal networking has therefore given workers the opportunity for 'sharing of information, the articulation of ideas and the development of effective campaigns over specific issues' (389) leading to a re-emergence of the traditional reciprocal relationship between workers and recognised trade unions, who have helped to articulate the grievances arising from the networks of audiovisual workers.

In the lower end of corporate enterprise, where worker antagonisms have seen even less recognition during the global restructuring of industry, steps have also been taken to frame the experiences of workers within SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) into more organised and articulated political structures. Moore and Read (2006) highlight how agency within SMEs has predominantly been managed by a commitment to 'individual bargaining power' (Moore and Read, 2006, 358), whereby individuals can contest the terms of employment they oppose, yet are given no formal mechanisms to pursue them at an institutional level. The actions from a minority of activists within SMEs in recent years have led to a legal challenge with firms to recognise some involvement of union activity. SMEs have been obliging to some extent, yet to create a domino effect within the lower end of the corporate enterprise, Moore and Read suggest more efforts are needed to train workers in wider social and political concerns to develop activist skills and 'mobilise collective interests in the workplace' (373). These examples show how a bottom up analysis of the struggles within the corporate mode of production can help to re-articulate our understanding of the importance of worker's struggles and the effects they can have on structural power in IPE, concurrent with the neo-Gramscian argument. I will now discuss postructural perspectives on these resistance tendencies to show how they can help to explain the potential of social forces at work.

Recent trends in IPE have indicated that there is a growing need for the discipline to engage with alternative theoretical perspectives that challenge the dominant or orthodox theories in international relations (Jessop and Sum 2001). The role of contemporary IPE should therefore be to engage in interdisciplinary research that seeks to broaden the critique of the international system by 'constructing a

transformative and emancipatory knowledge' (Gills, 2001, 235) out of the new struggles that have emerged within global politics. Neo-Gramscian theorists in particular have been keen to encourage this, claiming that the historical knowledge gained from historical perspectives of IPE has opened up 'opportunities for the formation of ideologies that could bridge the gaps between these fragmented sources of discontent' (Cox, 1987, 382). One alternative perspective, which has traditionally been criticised by international relations scholars, is poststructuralism. Poststructuralism emphasises the failures of the universal tendencies of grand theories of International Relations. Edkins (1999) argues that poststructuralism gives us the tools to 'bring the politics back in' to our understanding of International Relations which has been displaced 'by the rule of bureaucracy' (Edkins, 1999, xii). I would now like to move towards a conclusion by considering how poststructural notions of organisation and power can re-politicise our conception of resistance at work within corporate enterprises.

As we have seen, individual resistance within corporate enterprises has often resulted in the emergence of collective organisation in the form of networks. Poststructuralism has been keen to interpret this tendency within popular dissidence, and provides insights as to why networked logic has emerged. Deleuze (1990) argues that the decline in traditional avenues of organisation, as associated with the disciplinary societies of the 18th and 19th centuries, have been replaced by what he calls a 'serpent' logic that innately belongs to today's 'societies of control'. Societies of control function through an immanent sense of uncertainty and instability; largely articulated through the fluctuation of the market and our reliance upon it. As a form of protection against this climate of insecurity, individuals tend to 'come and go according to what

holds a passing affinity for them' (Lovink and Rossiter, 2005, 14) instead of committing to a particular collective, thus a temporary network of association. In corporate enterprises, flexibility at work together with the reduction in official avenues of worker representation has made it increasingly difficult for workers to articulate their grievances at a formal level. Within a culture of uncertainty and insecurity, they have been forced to create networked alliances to bargain for greater protection. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe this type of association as 'rhizomatic', as it tends to branch out and 'resist structures of domination' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 8) to further its own end. The postructural emphasis on the potential to overcome, in this sense, gives us a significant re-politicisation of the dynamics of organisation within corporate enterprises, which provides an interpretive function to the Neo-Gramscian position of how workers can inform and challenge the prevailing structures within certain modes of production.

More significant however, are the relationships of power within corporate enterprises and how they influence the organisational capacities of workers. Neo-Gramscian IPE has argued that power stems from the social relations of production, and can be understood through engaging with the intersubjective experiences of workers and their everyday struggles. Notions of power therefore, can be critical to comprehending how we analyse the social relations of production within the corporate enterprise. As we have seen, the restructuring of firms has resulted in the fragmenting of work; creating cultures of individualism and competition amongst workers, leading to resistance practises which have stemmed from intuitive and spontaneous attacks on the structures of power within firms. Foucault's (1976) concept of power, as being 'exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile

relations' (Foucault, 1976, 93) provides a useful basis to how we can view individual struggles against an ever changing environment of control and perceived autonomy. Again the poststructural emphasis on difference and subjectivity allows us to avoid making general assumptions about the activities of workers, and instead focus on 'forms of resistance against different forms of power' (Foucault in Rainbow and Rose, 2003, 128) that may exist within the corporate enterprise as well as the relationships which develop 'outside the institution' (140). To do so would maintain that concepts of resistance at work remain open to interpretation, adding to the resourcefulness of the discipline of IPE. Furthermore, Lazzarato (2004) speaks of the corporate firm 'without factories' which seeks to benefit from the multiplicity of abilities that individuals can bring to it. Instead of looking at modes of production in that sense, he sees the restructuring of firms, which has resulted in new environments of work, as creating a 'production of modes' (Lazzarato, 2004, 202) of resistance that are emerging from within and outside of the corporate enterprise. This lends to the poststructural idea that power can be 'silent, unthought or untruthed' and needs to be 'deconstructed' so that its 'presence can come into being' (Derrida in Hall, 1997, 41).

Fundamentally, poststructuralism allows us to focus our attention on the subject over the institution in aspects of resistance and organisation. 'Subjectivity' in Zizek's (1991) view, is intricately linked to the political, because it is through moments of subjectivity that ideas are born and movements emerge. This paper has highlighted that, in order to emphasise both how and why the social relations of production are fundamental to our understanding of political and structural change in IPE, we need to first move away from traditional institutional analyses associated with neo-realism and neo-liberalism. Then, by engaging in studies into contemporary experiences of

work, we can seek to resolve the increasingly fragile social relations of production within the corporate enterprise mode of production and using the interpretative function of poststructuralism highlight the emergence of new forms of subjectivity. What is perhaps missing is a movement of resistance that crosses over and between corporate enterprises. However, as Cox (1987) states, 'people learn to behave within the framework of social and political structures before they can learn to criticise or oppose or try to change them' (Cox, 1987, 395). The de-industrialisation of the economies of advanced industrial societies has seen an increase in new forms of work within corporate structures and the burgeoning similarities of the struggles within them. These could yet prove to be integral to the formation of a counter-hegemonic historical bloc.

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