# A 'Use-Value Thesis' on the Labour/Learning Process: Re-assessments and Expansion of Conceptual Resources

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**Abstract:** *This article reviews a cross-section of theoretical resources dealing with skills, knowledge and work for their potential to further the analysis of previous findings of a Work and Lifelong Learning Research Network (WALL, Centre for the Study of Education and Work, University of Toronto) research project entitled* Working IT: Learning new technology in the public sector[1]. *This project, undertaken in partnership with the Canadian Union for Public Employees (CUPE), focused on changes that have affected social benefits delivery processes in Ontario (2002-2006). The article covers mainstream sociology of work literature and the development of Harry Braverman's labour process theory (LPT). Criticizing what is termed the 'up-skilling/de-skilling impasse', the review is followed by a discussion of several alternative conceptual resources that may help overcome this impasse and stimulate further development of LPT. In the end, a 'Use-Value Thesis' of the labour/ learning process is outlined. This depends, first, on a rigorous and expansive understanding of the phenomena of skill, knowledge and human development, i.e. learning, in its own right; and second, on an expansive understanding of* labour *as not simply activity enmeshed within processes of capital accumulation but rather co-constitutive of the direct satisfaction of individual/collective human needs (i.e. use-value) as well. It is argued that recognizing 'use-value' is central for addressing the contradictory interests and practices (e.g. up-skilling and de-skilling) that can occur simultaneously in workplaces, and for conceptualizing the inter-active role of a variety of social spheres.*

## Introduction

This article builds from preliminary analysis of labour process and work design in public sector front line social service workers' learning in response to management-led introductions of new information technology (IT) and workplace reorganization in Ontario, Canada (2002-2006) (Hennessy and Sawchuk, 2003; Sawchuk, 2003a). The focus of this article is current theoretical models of skill, knowledge and work. My central goal is to critically and expansively review sociology of work literature as it relates to 'labour process theory' (LPT) in order to, in future, more fully analyze the findings from the *Working IT* project.[1]

The significance of this study reaches beyond Ontario and Canada. The basic patterns of work, learning and IT change have been and will continue to be mirrored around the world wherever neo-liberal governments flourish. In Ontario specifically, the changes are rooted in the Conservative government's introduction in 1995 of the 'goal of creating efficient programs that would save taxpayers money and provide excellent customer service, information on demand, and modern technology' (Ontario Government, 2002a). Beyond the immediate cuts to social assistance payments across the board, this goal included the reform of the social assistance delivery system through the implementation of a Business Transformation Project (BTP). The BTP was comprised of a public-private partnership between Accenture (formerly Andersen Consulting), municipalities (which administer welfare assistance), and the provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services (which administers disability assistance). Notably, the unions representing the workers who were to work under the system were not consulted (see Hennessy and Sawchuk 2004). In December 2000, the BTP resulted in an automated eligibility review process for welfare and disability clients, an automated telephone system to provide information to clients about their cases (limiting client opportunities to deal with benefits workers directly), and a province wide database designed to help detect welfare fraud and allow recipients to transfer their entitlement if they move around the province. In 2002, a new IT system called Service Delivery Model Technology (SDMT) was implemented in more than 200 community sites across Ontario to create a province wide system that is centrally controlled – a first in Canada. The Ministry and Accenture claim the system was meant to free its over 7,000 front-line staff to "spend more time serving recipients" (Ontario Government, 2002b), while reducing welfare fraud. Previously reported findings as well as the provincial auditor have seriously challenged the veracity of this claim, and most of the publicly stated goals of reorganization process generally.

Front line service workers in the Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) programs facilitate the delivery of social benefits to unemployed or disabled citizens in a variety of ways. They create a file for applicants, monitor changes to personal circumstance, and assist clients in job search or in accessing specialty support and training programs. The workers often, though not exclusively, have a university degree or college diploma related to social work. Significantly, the changes have placed the new web-based SDMT computer system, at the centre of the labour process, while the once broad, semi-professional occupation of welfare and disability benefits work has been sub-divided into a modular production system. A single client's file now goes through several workers' hands in a day. New learning has focused mainly around use of SDMT. Training on SDMT was provided by organized courses (approximately 3 days) and self-directed, computer-based learning (approximately 33 hours). Significantly, our earlier findings indicated that workers consistently criticize the relevance of these organized forms of learning on its own, indicating that informal learning amongst peers (though not formally supported) as a foundation in the learning process is most important. Moreover, our study explored activities across a range of workplaces and institutional domains including: (large, medium and small) municipal service delivery sites and IT support services work centralized in the provincial capital of Toronto. In total, we studied five OW and ODSP workplaces where we asked workers to tell us about their experiences learning (and

sometimes 'learning their way around') SDMT and associated labour process changes. Our semi-structured interviews (n = 80) are currently being further verified by a province wide survey of case management workers (n=1500). We saw that interviewees commonly reported feelings of frustration and loss over the implementation of the new system. Virtually every interviewee notes that they work and learn under a labour process that has been transformed from a humanized, holistic and semi-professional one to one that is depersonalized, polarized in terms of labour/management relations, fragmented and, in many important ways, de-skilled. The changes are enmeshed within a complex web of institutional relations through which informal learning amongst co-workers at the local level emerges as both the 'last line of defense' for coping with SDMT-related technical glitches and increased workload as well as the foundation for a creative response by workers to re-skill and re-humanize their work. Plans for up to 15% reduction in the service worker employment are already being implemented as the system finishes its third year of full operation. Workers submit their work load is greater than ever.

It is in this context that a new, creative and critical review of theoretical models of skill, knowledge and work has its role. Is a simple recovery of the 'de-skilling' thesis (Braverman 1974), as suggested in earlier analyses, adequate to describe the processes we're seeing amongst social benefits delivery workers? Likewise, should various competing models of work change such as Bell's post-industrial thesis, post-Fordism, flexible specialization, lean production, up-skilling or re-skilling theses be substituted, appended or referenced? In light of the emergent findings of the *Working IT* research, a number of models are re-assessed for their ability to illuminate the contradictory nature of labour/learning processes with special emphasis on broader, societal models of human development. My assumption is that paid work, like any other institution, is definitively historical and definitively social; that is, the most powerful conceptual resources will recognize that at the heart of the labour process is both a process of change and a process of individual and collective human development, or learning. In this sense, the separation of analyses of work and analyses of learning that characterizes the field of inquiry is deemed a barrier to be overcome.

In the review of literature below, I begin with studies since World War 2. I assess iterations of what are known as the *industrialism* and *post-industrialism* theses, a ground-breaking response to which in the 1970's was Harry Braverman's Marxist Labour Process Theory (LPT). I explore the many forks in the road that characterize LPT's development since. I then present several additional theoretical resources, each with the potential to contribute toward further development of LPT and a more adequate means of understanding the findings of the *Working IT* project to date. As I note in my concluding comments, the current struggles of social benefit delivery workers along with client/citizens who are among the most vulnerable in our society, to my mind, infuse this 'theoretical exercise' with considerable practical and political value.

## *Research on Skill, Knowledge and Work: A Review*

The two decades immediately following World War 2 were in many ways definitive for current debates surrounding theories on the work process today. What became known in several distinct but nevertheless closely related guises as the 'industrialism thesis' (e.g.

Dahrendorf, 1959; Friedmann, 1961; Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison and Myers, 1962; Blauner, 1964; Touraine, 1971) posited the emergence a type of society in which social progress was realized through diminishing conflict, heightened cooperation and, in particular, expansive economic growth in the realm of new, technologically advanced ('labour-saving') paid work. In a key work, Daniel Bell's The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society (1973) solidified what seems to remain today the basic contemporary formulation of the thesis. It is indeed ironic that it is most often Marxists who are singled out as 'singing the same old tune' given the enormous continuity between the post-war period mainstream management, work and learning literature from the 'human capital thesis' (i.e. Becker, 1964), decades of prescriptions by Drucker through to Senge's "learning organization" and Reich's The Work of Nations (1991) analysis, the latter being perhaps the most obvious replica of Bell's work. Across the industrial and post-industrial theses, and all the specific variations and contributors above, it is argued that routinized (and in the earlier work particularly physically exhausting and/or repetitive work) is year by year being replaced by new technology and work systems that require use of information, knowledge, greater discretion, smarter workers and symbolic analysts, all accompanying advanced education and training: like the dinosaurs, it was argued, the 'bad jobs' are simply becoming extinct.[2]

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that this backdrop presented a monolithic view of where the western world was and where it was headed. Certainly proponents would be quick to note what they see as important distinctions. Nevertheless, in response to the industrialism/post-industrialism thesis, in the early 1970's would come the work of Harry Braverman. Taking up what he saw as the modern expression and outcomes of Scientific Management (or, Taylorism) as embodied in the turn of the century writings and public campaigning of Frederick W. Taylor, in Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century (1974) Braverman sought to recover a Marxist analysis of work to develop what became known as 'Labour Process Theory'. Braverman LPT did not deny as relevant but, all the same, set aside subjective dimensions of work and workers to focus on the process and outcomes of Taylorist divisions of labour on skilled work. He re-analyzed the effects of the separation of conception and execution and argued these to be an expression of management's war with (largely craft and office) workers for control and through it heightened exploitation and profitability. Specifically, he demonstrated that, on an aggregate level, the Taylorized technical division of labour-- breaking jobs down into minute actions and re-arranging activity based on management prerogative--was aimed at breaking down knowledge forms, and through this the power exercised by skilled workers within the production process.

What ensued has been a three decade long debate over whether work was being 'up-skilled', 're-skilled' or 'de-skilled'. As Wardell, Steiger and Meiksins (1999) noted, "[t]o a casual observer it might have appeared as if, for every researcher who attempted to follow in Braverman's footsteps, another researcher attempted to challenge, if not discredit, Braverman's work…" (p.1-2). Advancing a form of (post-) industrialism and up-skilling thesis were the likes of Wood (1982), Hirschhorn (1984), Attewell (1987), Spenner (1988) and Zuboff (1988). This cluster tended to critique Braverman's pre-occupation with social

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[2] Compare with these industrialism/post-industrialism projections, recent analyses by Livingstone (1999), Kotz and Wolfson (2004), Scholtz and Livingstone (2005).

class, his emphasis on (indeed many said his romanticization of) craft skill, excessive emphasis on Scientific Management, and the lack of attention paid to other sectors where new skills were on the rise. Seeking to advance, often through constructive critique, Braverman LPT with attention to the de-skilling thesis were writers such as Zimbalist (1979), Friedman (1977), Edwards (1979), Burawoy (1979; 1985) and Littler (1982); with important extensions of thinking found in Hales (1980), Pollert (1981), Westwood (1984) and Cockburn (1985). This cluster sought to expand Braverman's thesis through greater attention to the subjective dimensions of the labour process (such as worker consciousness, resistance and consent) while others of this cluster sought to address Braverman's exclusion of other social divisions such as gender, and still others pointed toward the need to deal with more than simply manufacturing sites, to develop a more detailed understanding of command/control structures as well as external economic factors. A third cluster which has come to be referred to as 'contingency theory' (e.g. Kelly 1990) has sought to balance both up-skilling and de-skilling theses, in its earlier iterations with specific attention to changes brought on by technology. Its core principle, sensibly, is that changes in skill are contingent; mediated by decisions and social struggle at multiple levels of organizations and the economy (i.e. techno-economic forces, internal labour markets, labour relations frameworks and organizational context).

  Although Smith and Thompson (1999) have argued, in some ways it may be misleading to allow the industrialism and Braverman LPT debate to degenerate simply into an up-skilling versus de-skilling impasse, in many ways it has done just that. Beyond the sources of confusion that Braverman himself identified (1974: Chapter 20[3]), contributing to the quagmire was, first, the matter of the many new paradigms of work that seemed to blossom like weeds in the context of accelerating economic changes, premised on further technological change and increased, globalized competitive pressures that came with the neo-conservative resurgence of the 1980's. Practically speaking, it took time for researchers to separate the fact from fiction regarding the new work and technological systems. A contributing factor to the challenges of analysis undoubtedly were the new 'magic bullets' of managerial and organizational rhetoric--from synergies, to quality production, just-in-time, lean, agile and reengineered organizations, not to mention the 'learning organization'; dense, new discourses, implicitly framed by industrialism/post-industrialism ideas, seeped into popular consciousness of working life making matters even more difficult to assess. These issues aside, the 1980's also saw distinctive contributions that, at least on the surface, seemed to end-run the up-skilling/de-skilling debates.[4] Kern and Schumann (1984), Piore and Sabel's (1984), Womack, Roos and Jones (1990) and others seemed to suggest a type of re-emergence of new forms of craft labour,

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[3] Braverman noted that, on the one hand, many so-called unskilled jobs were in fact skilled jobs (in particular he mentions farm work, the decline of which was assumed to signal an aggregate skills upgrading); and on the other the hand, many contemporary jobs were mis-labeled as semi-skilled or skilled simply because they used newer technology.

[4] Depending on the sub-field in which one is reading, on occasion these sets of theories have been categorized differently; sometimes referred to as examples of "contingency theory" (e.g. Kelley 1990), sometimes "regulation theory" (e.g. Frenkel, Korczynski, Shire and Tam 1999), sometimes as "institutional theories" (Tilly and Tilly 1998). Compare categorizations with Thompson (1989) (occasionally referred to as a contingency theorist himself).

multi-skilled occupation or re-professionalization that apparently went hand-in-hand with the autonomy required by expensive new technologies. The tenor of the argument has been, for example, that under conditions of flexible specialization capital is forced to transform production in ways supportive of labour in light of their need for workers' intelligence, skill and participatory capacities. Much if not all of this work rests comfortably amidst assumptions of the industrialism/post-industrialism theses. Collectively, many such theories can be taken as what Thompson (2003) referred to as 'virtuous circle' theories, or what Braverman called "nostalgia for age that has not yet come into being" drawing on Marx (1974, p.7).

Finally, in completing this summary of the conventional debates that have surrounded the industrialism, post-industrialism and the up-skilling/de-skilling impasse, it's important to recognize the energetic sub-stream that sought to radically transform the question of subjective dimensions of LPT by convening a search for the 'missing subject'. Post-structuralism emerged in the 1990's, largely in Britain, as fuel for the critique of Braverman LPT. The most prominent and persistent figure of the post-structuralist stream to date has been David Knights (e.g. 1995; see also Parker 1999) where the work of both Foucault and Derrida figured prominently and concepts such as the episteme of representation, logo- and phallo-centric reason and the general benefits of archaeological and genealogical analysis are championed. What is lost, at least according to some (e.g. O'Doherty and Willmott 2001; Tinker 2002), is a coherent model of material and historical elements that define the period itself as capitalist. O'Doherty and Willmott provide a direct review of the Foucauldian-inspired post-structuralist "anti-realist" stream in relation to "realist" orthodoxy of Braverman LPT with an eye toward a constructive synthesis. In their terms there are,

> …two distinctive responses to discussions of 'the missing subject'. First, a 'realist' response that commends a return to the structuralist orthodoxy of Braverman and the labour theory of value; and second, an 'anti-realist' position, which marks a dramatic departure from the established concerns of labour process theory. Outside of these comparatively well-defined positions, that either embrace the orthodoxy or reject it, a wide range of responses identify problems with orthodox labour process theory but disagree about how best to address and overcome them. In this third disparate group, there are those who, when push comes to shove, tend to retreat to the familiar, secure ground of structuralist orthodoxy, while others, including ourselves, lean more towards synthesis and dialogue by exploring and applying insights garnered from other traditions, including feminist research and poststructuralism. (2001, pp.457-8)

Their goal is ultimately to open up for examination 'the complex-media of capital–labour relations, that difficult space where work organisation gets produced and reproduced in the everyday accomplishments of agency and social interaction" (pp.458-9). They draw persuasively on the work of Storey (1985) who in the mid-80's challenged functionalist presumptions of several LPT variants which, he argued, did not assess the multiple levels, circuits and forms of control that may not directly relate to the logic of capitalism alone; that even the control located in the workplace itself is subject to struggles both between

and within worker and managerial groups; a view with which the alternative framework I propose in this article has a good deal of sympathy.

To this point, the ground that's been covered has been the stuff of conventional reviews of sociology of work and LPT. While it is important to map the debate, I argue the substance is in several key ways limiting--serving well the occasional degeneration of discussions into partisan game-playing. In other words, there is something missing; something that is perhaps as foundational to theoretical development as it is to the development of our particular analysis in the *Working IT* project. This something is a model of human development situated within the specific historical, political economic conditions of capitalism and, ultimately, something that sociologists Dorothy Smith referred to with her expansive concept of 'relations of ruling'.

This goal of introducing a human development perspective into the labour/learning process analysis begins (but does not end) with the point of contact between, on the one hand, the structure of capitalism, and on the other a perspective on human development that is critical and expansive enough to accommodate change in localized individual/collective terms that is also historically situated thus part of a broader theory of social struggle and change.

The entry point in terms of the structure of capitalism has been developed in a number of key works of the LPT tradition which stand out. Each has taken seriously the most basic structural element of capitalism itself, the dialectic constitution of the commodity form from which the contradictory elements of the entire production-distribution-circulation-consumption circuit are made. The constructive critiques of Braverman, from Burawoy (1979), Friedman (e.g. 1977) and Littler (e.g.1982), were among the first to outline a dialectic of conflict/consent, control/resistance, bureaucracy/creativity. Likewise, Cressy and MacInnes (1980) were among the first (besides Braverman) to explicitly relate LPT to the dialectic relations of labour/capital itself; these contradictory elements were, under capitalism mutually constituting and the primary means through which the historical system underwent change.

## *New Resources for LPT*

My argument here is that despite the development of vital new concepts and an expansive set of empirical data to our collective understanding of changes in work, skill and knowledge under capitalism; that, the LPT tradition has, as of late, advanced only modestly. There can be many ways of thinking about this, and to be fair my preoccupations lie foremost with an explanation of problematics emerging primarily from the *Working IT* project. Nevertheless, in this section I review several key works that, in my view, make a fundamental contribution to the breaking of the up-skilling/de-skilling impasse; most, but not all, of which do so by returning to a close application of original Marxist principles of analysis.

We can begin with a look at the work of Paul Adler. Adler (2005) summarizes a good deal of his substantial past work on LPT highlighting the confusion that surrounds the up-skilling/re-skilling debates. In particular he takes the LPT corpus to task for either failing to account for aggregate upgrading trends in work-based skill requirements, or, for those who have drifted toward a contingency approach, abandoning the critical Marxist

analysis of the tradition altogether. In terms of the first set, citing Spenner (1988) and others, Adler highlights evidence of persistent, if gradual, up-skilling trends drawing on the Dictionary of Occupational titles tracking as well as the massive growth in educational participation over the last 50 years. In each of these arguments, there are some significant clarifications to be made.[5] Nevertheless, drawing on detailed analysis of software design work, Adler's goal is more fundamental. He offers a positive, re-articulated, 'paleo-Marxist' (his term) solution to the up-skilling/de-skilling impasse--able to reconcile *both* a broad pattern of upgrading *and* a multitude of counter-examples of deskilling--with a focus on the socialization of the forces of production in a contradictory relationship with the profit-motive of capital. In other words, an aggregate socialization of work processes (i.e. the expansion of the complexity of the social division of labour) on the one hand, and the expansion of the privatized relations of production (i.e. private ownership and its requirements for capital accumulation) on the other, continually act on one another to produce the types of changes Marx originally identified with the transformation of capitalism. In doing this, Adler adds a vital missing (or forsaken?) component of LPT by reclaiming the argument that, according to Marx, the forces and relations under capitalism create conditions for historical change because they are contradictory. A reading of the either the up-skilling or de-skilling research demonstrates an all too infrequent recognition of this dialectical element; and hence tend to fail as overall analysis of a social, political system in motion. At the same time however, Adler (2005) shares with so much of the debate to date no real conceptual framework for skill and knowledgeability itself, let alone skill/knowledge *in situ*, and let alone practice as located across overlapping spheres of activity which include but aren't limited to the workplace (cf. Sawchuk 2003b).

   In response to these concerns we can look toward the work of Nancy Jackson (1994) which today can be seen as an invaluable alternative perspective. She presents a concise critique of the presumptions that pervade dominant understandings of vocational skill which can serve as an orienting backdrop to the types of gaps I've identified both in the context of the up-skilling/de-skilling impasse and the otherwise useful critique offered by Adler. She comments that these dominant understandings of work and learning:

> [treat] knowledge and skill as naturally occurring phenomena, locatable empirically by examination of work processes in the world around us. In this mode, vocational knowledge and skills are constructed as stable objects which stand outside the learner, and can be discovered in the form of "tasks" to be mastered. Such tasks and their mastery are seen to be unambiguously definable and accessible to evaluation in a systematic and unambiguous manner… This method of approach the educational process involves the objectification of vocational learning. "Performance" becomes a form of action from which the "knowing subject" has been removed for all practical purposes. It is a moment of abstraction, a

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[5] These clarifications include that fact that the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (the latest version is 1991) is far from a definitive assessment of actual skill and knowledgeability of workers in practice, but rather the result of fairly cursory occupational analysis (indeed, the classification systems in the 4th, 5th and 6th digits of the codes are laughable if one were to compare them to even the most basic qualitative accounts of workers and work); and, as Livingstone (1999; and Berg 1970 before him) has demonstrated, increased educational participation may in fact be better termed 'credential inflation' in that there clearly exists a series of 'gaps' between skill/knowledge acquisition and application in the labour process.

separation of subject and object, a rupture in the internal continuity of knowledge and action. It is precisely this separation that provides for the possibility of external definition and control--it creates a position for authority outside the moments of teaching and learning from which these activities may be defined, measured, and evaluated fro someone else's purposes… But I will argue here that is [also] has the effect of disorganizing vocational activity for the purposes of the individuals whose "need" is to master it as a form of practical action. (p.344)

The key issues raised by Jackson, for my purposes, are i) the dearth of conceptual substance, relying on a presumed nature of the phenomena of work-based skill and knowledge, ii) the persistent epistemological denial of the acting and knowing subject, and iii) the socially reproductive effects that these dominant presumptions actually have in "disorganizing" the potential of workers to individually/collectively work, learn and develop. The overall affect is to recover people as subjects of their labour, rather than merely objects of managerial control. Jackson herself suggests a variety of socio-cultural schools of thought among them 'situated learning' and 'activity theory' as likely foundations for more adequate analysis of skill and knowledge development, but presents only a brief example.

While hardly a comprehensive response to the issues raised by both Adler and Jackson, one hopeful contribution toward a substantive model of skill itself is found in work of A. Aneesh (2001):

> There is a need to reconceptualize [Braverman's] thesis about skills and develop new criteria for the understanding of skills. I seek to lift the debate out of the de-skilling vs. re-skilling confusion, developing an alternate set of analytical tools to make sense of skills, especially in view of the transformations associated with information technologies. I attempt to focus on deeper structures of skills independent of the question of whether de-skilling plagues all industries… The concept of skill saturation seeks to evaluate skills solely on the basis of their grammar and structures… It does not allude to the consciousness  - obscure or obvious – of the manager or the worker, nor does it refer skills to the will of the work designers… (pp.365-6)

His analysis of *saturated* versus *unsaturated* skill is worth noting. Skill saturation is defined by Aneesh as the degree of closure of space of play leading to predictability of procedure and outcome "resulting from the exhaustive ordering of various components of skill and the elimination of all irregular spaces of work" (pp.363-364).

> Unsaturated skills, on the other hand, tend to contain multiple bonds with the job and certain unanalyzed dimensions to allow enough room for action to take place, an action based on long and intuitive understanding. It implies engagement that is implicit, inherent, and defies clear visibility. Michael Polanyi's concept of 'tacit dimension' may allow us to understand how the unqualified process of the formalization of skills leads to complete predictability, and eliminates the elements of creative freedom and discovery. Polanyi explained tacit dimension as something remains unanalyzable in action…. Many creative skills are performed and learned by 'indwelling' and 'interiorization,' rather than by explicit, formalized knowledge. (Aneesh 2001, p.373-4)

Importantly, Aneesh's model allows some explanation of the contradictory claims that permeate the up-skilling/de-skilling impasse. His model helps us see, for example, that the type of skilled, semi-skilled and un-skilled categorizations of a coding system like the Dictionary of Occupational Titles may in fact miss a crucial point. Many jobs, conventionally defined may exhibit unexpected levels closure/openness as defined by the saturated? unsaturated continuum, particularly when actual work activity is looked at closely. This breaking up of conventional hierarchies of skill/knowledge is helped further when we take off the arbitrary straight-jacket that define *legitimate* goals, interests and activity from organizational standpoints.[6] This is in part a point Jackson makes in her discussion of accounting for the specific subject standpoints in her article (1994, pp.342-343). Further more, it should be apparent that there is an instructive contrast between Aneesh's and Jackson's assessments: Aneesh's claim of saturation, a more substantive means of identifying de-skilling, and its effect of regularizing work on the one hand, and Jackson's assessment that managerial control actually disorganizes activity on the other. How are we to reconcile these seemingly contradictory accounts?

From the field of educational studies comes an additional, helpful, unifying conceptualization that begins to help us address this and other questions. Glenn Rikowski (e.g. 2000, 2002a, 2002b) begins from Marxist theory and expands the issue of education, training and learning to encompass, at a broad level of abstraction, both learning and work activity as examples of a singular phenomenon: the development and application of *labour-power*.

> …labour-power is a complex phenomenon with inherent contradictions and tensions that become incorporated within personhood – given labour-power's fusion with the person of the labourer… However, as well as these diverse aspects of the unified social force that is labour-power, there is a deeper rift that de-stabilises labour-power and the person within which its force flows. Labour-power, which takes the form of human capital, is at odds with the person (de facto with itself) as not-labour-power; the person with interests, desires, motives (with dreams even) that run counter to the subsumption of the self as labour-power. The antagonistic labour-capital relation is a relation within personhood too in capitalist society. Our existence as labour against capital (as opposed to labour within and as capital) places a limit on the capitalisation of our souls, the capitalisation of humanity through the phenomenon of labour-power. (Rikowski 2002a, pp.15-16)

Rikowski (2002b) goes on to list a relatively exhaustive series of what he calls qualities, attributes and aspects of labour-power, and recovers Marx's original claims of its singularly unique ability (against all other 'commodities') to create value, and in the process helps us identify, again, the contested dual-quality of labour-power: "The labour-power of the labourer is under the sway of a potentially hostile will, a will that also exists against capital as well as within it. The labourers also have the capacity to use their precious commodity in non-capitalist productive forms as labour beyond capital, which is capitalist dredd *(sic)*"

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[6] Such 'organizational standpoints' would include a bloc of dominant interests, minimally based on gender and race as well as class positions.

(2002a, p.8). Having stated this, Rikowski's comments are not absolutely clear regarding the nature of labour-power, a point I return to in a moment.

## *A 'Use-Value Thesis'*

Rikowski's recovery of core principles of Marxist analysis, to my mind, contributes to the types of 'paleo-Marxist' goals identified by Adler in his critique of LPT. Specifically, it contributes recognition of the dual, or rather dialectic, nature of skill/knowledge under capitalism that might help break the impasse of the up-skilling/de-skilling debates without the abandonment of a critical Marxist perspective as per contingency theory. A 'Use Value Thesis' begins with this dialectic, rooted in analysis of the basic building block of capitalist society: the commodity form. We start, first, from the idea that a key way for understanding the functioning of (past, present or future) society is that people are both subjects and objects of history; that societies are actively built. Through this building (or labour) process they satisfy their individual and collective (cultural, psychological and material) needs. In a capitalist society specifically these needs are met in two basic ways: either *directly* (the production of use-values) or *indirectly* (the production of exchange-values). Use-values are produced all around us, across all spheres of our daily lives, virtually all the time, even though only a select portion of this production has 'economic' value (i.e. exchange-value). Use-value is also inherent in the outputs or commodities that result from paid work in that consumers tend to buy things that they can (in some broad sense) use; this is the case whether or not the worker finds her own needs directly satisfied (i.e. as separate from the pay-packet) within the labour process. My point here is that according to this conceptual framework, historically, as now, use-value production is the foundational activity. Moreover, it is a unique feature of the development of capitalism, according to Marx, that over time, as the system develops and expands, more and more of our daily life is thought of and organized by the principle of exchange-value production; that is, life and our activities are increasingly commodified.[7] Recovering the 'use-value' foundation of all activity is thus in my view a vital missing component of analyses of work; one means of thinking critically and historically about the ensemble of social spheres that co-constitute one another. Together this forms the basic rationale for a use-value focus of this 'thesis' is on the labour/learning process.

　　　To return to my review of the authors just above, I suggest a careful re-reading of their work in an effort to trace the dialectic of use-value/exchange value. For this, we can pay particular attention to their discussion of contradictions (roughly summarized for each author as follows):

- Socialization of Forces of Production *versus* Capitalist Profitability (Adler)
- Practical Action/Knowing Subjects *versus* Objectifying Managerial Control (Jackson)

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[7] The key examples here are, of course, the idea of 'human capital' as well as the notion of 'soft skills'. These concepts function to convert activities, skills and knowledge broadly conceived into things that have value in exchange (e.g. for a wage). The critical, cultural analyses by, for example, the French scholars Pierre Bourdieu and Henri Lefebvre are helpful in this area where they shows the increasing economic (i.e. exchange-values) dimensions of an enormous array of human activity including cultural and aesthetic appreciation and styles of everyday life.

- Unsaturated Skill/Play *versus* Saturated Skill/Rationalized Procedure (Aneesh)
- Labour-Against-Capital *versus* Labour-As-Capital (Rikowski)

Making the linkage between work and learning in keeping with a 'Use Value Thesis' is inherent in, as Rikowski puts it, "labour-power's fusion with the person". *Learning*, as I comment elsewhere, is the *labour* we do on ourselves and labouring teaches us all the time whether those lessons are deemed legitimate or not. Moreover, given that labour is constituted by both use-value and exchange-value production we can speak in the same terms of learning. It is the unity of work and human development within the concept of labour-power that is the key to understanding how and why the labour process can be up-skilled, re-skilled and de-skilled--all at the same time!

Of course, as valuable as it may be to raise the questions and issues above, there is still a good deal missing regarding tools for a coherent empirical program. In this sense, both Jackson's (1994) and Adler's (2005) suggestions for the turn toward socio-cultural approaches to learning and situated action are highly relevant. And indeed, work moving in this direction has continued to emerge with special attention to Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) specifically (see Sawchuk, 2003b; Livingstone and Sawchuk, 2004; Sawchuk, Duarte and Elhammoumi, 2005; Sawchuk, in press).

Nevertheless, the overwhelming lack of attention to actual processes of human development and activity, the recognition of the "knowing and acting subject" (Jackson) within analyses of the labour process appears chronic; a condition which in my assessment virtually assures the maintenance of the up-skilling/de-skilling impasse on the one hand, and the tendency to 'de-Marxify' LPT, as per contingency theories, on the other. How does, given this emphasis, the 'Use-value Thesis' open up new ground for LPT and the types of findings available in the *Working IT* project? It does so by, first, inherently linking labour process and labour-power concepts to a theoretical tradition that has the capacity to offer detailed, expansive, empirical analyses of the actual human developmental process. Second, it provides the capacity to identify and track what I've termed 'trajectories of activity' (i.e. learning and human development; Sawchuk 2003b) that always co-exist but which express very different qualities and outcomes. Drawing on Aneesh's (2001) formulation, for example, while a set of occupational skills may be assessed as leaning toward the saturated end of his saturated? unsaturated continuum model (leaving little room for discretion and play) this may simply be accurate for those activities defined as *organizationally legitimate*, that is involving processes that convert labour-power into exchange-value and ultimately surplus value and profitability. If we're to pay attention to Marx, as Adler and Rikowski so carefully do, we might recognize the dialectic of exchange-value and use-value production. Since the direct satisfaction of human needs (use-value) may run continuously with the interests of capital, tangential to these interests, and occasionally in opposition to the interests of capital, we discover a conceptual framework for including together with conventional work activity, the often elusive dimensions of play, creativity, agency and resistance which constitute something akin to Aneesh's unsaturated skill. That is, saturated and unsaturated skills may, indeed frequently do, co-exist. What Adler (2005) refers to as the socialization of the relations of production and what Jackson (1994) suggests in her characterization of vocational know-how and mastery which tends to 'disorganize' the

rationalized work processes that management crave, are part and parcel of these other hidden dimensions of activity as well.

With a turn toward 'human development' and learning--in the socio-cultural sense of being a situated, social and systemic, as well as an individual activity--we necessarily turn also toward questions of paid work as but one sphere in an ensemble of spheres that define people's lives and societies. In this context, if one is at the same time interested to expose and transform the relations of power and inequity, the sticky questions that closely follows concerns the relationships between classist, sexist, racist, agist, ablest systems that cross-hatch and shape each and all of these spheres simultaneously. LPT research has an established tradition of addressing class and gender, though within little conceptualization of real human development and learning. Educational research on work in the socio-cultural tradition has *rarely* dealt adequately with either the complexities of the labour process or with issues of power and inequity. Neither of these clusters of research have attempted to address the inter-sectionality of these systems of inequity.

## *Conclusions*

For the purposes of the *Working IT* project, the practical-political value of this proposed marriage of ideas lies is in a more nuanced analysis of current findings where social benefits delivery workers have been experiencing what in conventional Braverman LPT is de-professionalization and de-skilling in their formal duties. All the while, what has become increasingly clear is that at another level new skills--skills necessary for working *around* restrictive work systems and technologies to both personally cope and continue to produce the use-value of their efforts (that is, assuring poor and unemployed have dignity, food and shelter), skills necessary for everyday resistance, skills necessary for formal resistance and response through the invigoration of union structures, and so on--were all part of the intense learning that was taking place. Here again is the need for a new theoretical approach. In the context of my critical appraisal of the up-skilling/de-skilling impasse, how contradictory this situation is: de-skilling and up-skilling, all at once, despite the fact that a great deal of learning is *not* necessarily what either management or up-skilling advocates had in mind.

What makes this theoretical exploration doubly significant in the context of the Working IT project, however, is the fact that as predicted early in our project analysis the types of work system and technological design changes implemented have, indeed, set the stage for a cleaving off of key work functions for privatization. 'JobsNow' (www.ontariojobsnow.com) is part of a private sector company which has bid for and won the opportunity to establish six pilot sites in Ontario that will ultimately develop the capacity for off-shoring elements of the social benefits delivery process. In terms of exchange-value production, the current provincial government sees further massive savings in addition to those currently being realized by down-sizing and the original cuts to the benefit levels themselves. In terms of use-value production, client/citizens, by definition some of the most vulnerable members of our society, see a further de-humanization and rigidity to the system they, in many cases, literally depend upon to survive.

Far from an abstract theoretical exercise, social benefits delivery workers along with researchers of their parent union and those of the *Working IT* project are faced with the very real need to not simply critique and 'hold-the-line' on the current system, but rather throw forth viable alternatives to work and technological design. The value of a new theoretical direction leading to a stronger understanding of the existing system and critical points of change necessary to reverse the current direction is enormous.

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