

Christina Purcell, Paul Brook, Rosemary Lucas\*

## **Between Keeping Your Head Down and Trying to Get Noticed: Agency Workers in French Car Assembly Plants\*\***

Numerical flexibility is commonly promoted as a driver of employment growth. However, contingent work is frequently associated with “bad jobs”, particularly for those in low skilled occupations. Agency work is a common and growing form of contingent work and is often promoted as a tool for facilitating the labour market integration of young workers. In France, young agency workers make up a significant part of the labour force within car assembly plants. Studies have shown that these workers have harsher working conditions than permanent co-workers and are subject to a “despotic” factory regime. However, the triangular relationship, which frames the agency contract, may give rise to a more complex outcome in which the aspiration for stable employment mediates the coercion of labour market vulnerability.

Key words: **agency work, factory regimes, auto sector, agency autoworkers, hegemonic despotism, unions, labour process, Burawoy**  
(JEL: J47, J50, J63, J71, J81)

---

\* Christina Purcell, Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, Aytoun Building, Aytoun Street, Manchester M1 3GH, UK. E-mail: c.purcell@mmu.ac.uk.

Paul Brook, School of Management, University of Leicester, Ken Edwards Building, University Road, Leicester LE1 7RH, UK. E-mail: viebrook@googlemail.com.

Rosemary Lucas, Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, Aytoun Building, Aytoun Street, Manchester M1 3GH, UK. E-mail: r.lucas@mmu.ac.uk.

\*\* Article received: October 1, 2010

Revised version accepted after double blind review: April 22, 2011.