

KEYCONCEPTS

W O R K

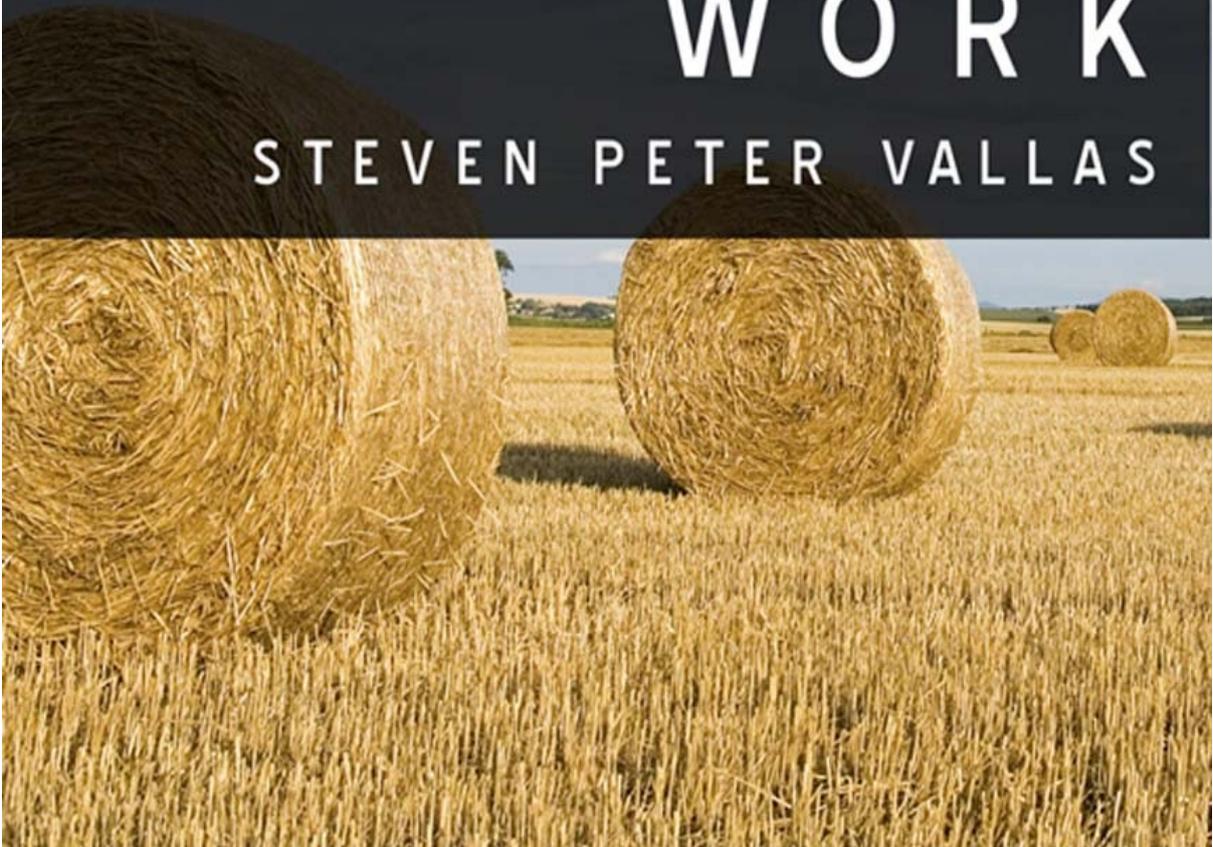
STEVEN PETER VALLAS



KEYCONCEPTS

WORK

STEVEN PETER VALLAS



Work

KEY CONCEPTS

Published

Barbara Adam, *Time*
Alan Aldridge, *Consumption*
Alan Aldridge, *The Market*
Jakob Arnoldi, *Risk*
Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer, *Disability*
Darin Barney, *The Network Society*
Mildred Blaxter, *Health 2nd edition*
Harriet Bradley, *Gender*
Harry Brighouse, *Justice*
Mónica Brito Vieira and David Runciman, *Representation*
Steve Bruce, *Fundamentalism 2nd edition*
Joan Busfield, *Mental Illness*
Margaret Canovan, *The People*
Alejandro Colás, *Empire*
Mary Daly, *Welfare*
Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self 2nd edition*
Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity 2nd edition*
Katrin Flikschuh, *Freedom*
Michael Freeman, *Human Rights 2nd edition*
Russell Hardin, *Trust*
Geoffrey Ingham, *Capitalism*
Fred Inglis, *Culture*
Robert H. Jackson, *Sovereignty*
Jennifer Jackson Preece, *Minority Rights*
Gill Jones, *Youth*
Paul Kelly, *Liberalism*
Anne Mette Kjær, *Governance*
Ruth Lister, *Poverty*
Jon Mandle, *Global Justice*
Anthony Payne and Nicola Phillips, *Development*
Judith Phillips, *Care*
Michael Saward, *Democracy*
John Scott, *Power*
Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism 2nd edition*
Steven Peter Vallas, *Work*
Stuart White, *Equality*

Work

A Critique

Steven Peter Vallas

polity

Copyright © Steven Peter Vallas 2012

The right of Steven Peter Vallas to be identified as Author of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 2012 by Polity Press

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press 350
Main Street
Malden, MA 02148, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-8070-5

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

The publisher has used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: www.politybooks.com

Contents

List of Figures and Tables

1 Introduction

Approaching Work
Three Rules of Thumb
Schools of Thought in the Sociology of Work
Conclusion

2 Capitalism, Taylorism, and the Problem of Labor Control

Taylorism and the De-skilling Debate
Workplace Culture and Managerial Control
Workers as Subjects: Governing the Worker's Soul
Conclusion

3 From Fordism to Flexibility?

The End of Fordism
Flexible Specialization
Scrutinizing Workplace Flexibility

4 Ascriptive Inequalities at Work, I: Gender

Studying Gender Inequality at Work
The Gendering of Work in the United States
Human Capital Theory and Supply Side Approaches
Structural Approaches: The Demand Side of the Equation
Social Networks: The Web of Affiliations
The Devaluation of Women's Work
Conclusions

5 Ascriptive Inequalities, II: Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity at Work

The Continuing Significance of Race at Work
Social Closure Processes
Social Networks and Hiring Practices
Race-Typing and the Devaluation of Black Labor
The Concept of Diversity: Reinforcing Inequality?
Conclusion

6 The Globalization of Work

Neo-liberalism: The Cult of the Marketplace
Globalization: The Debate
Regulating Global Capitalism: Solidarity Movements and Codes of Conduct

Conclusion

7 Conclusion

Notes

References

Index

Figures and Tables

Figures

3.1 “San Precario,” the fictitious patron saint of the precariously employed

Tables

3.1 Saxenian’s theory of industrial systems and regional economic development

Introduction

Social scientists of widely varying persuasions – from Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Max Weber to the Chicago School of sociology – have long acknowledged the centrality of work in all social and cultural life. They confronted the industrialization process, and were keenly aware of the ways in which industrial capitalism gripped the working lives of peasants, artisans, landowners, and merchants. As it did so, it remade the social landscape, refashioned the temporal rhythms of human experience, and redefined the way that authority, community, gender, and domestic life were all defined. Indeed, it might be said that classical social theory was one sustained debate over the division of labor modernity had wrought, and how it was likely to shape the character of human life.

What of our own era? How are the withering away of manufacturing industries, the spread of digital media, the rise of financial models of work and organizations, and the global mobility of production processes combining to transform our everyday working lives and identities? Has the wish for full-time employment in a stable career now become an exercise in nostalgia? Has a new, “post-Fordist,” regime of work emerged, with instability and uncertainty constituting permanent features of the economic landscape? And which (if any) of these developments can be submitted to democratic choice rather than to the blind forces of the marketplace? To pose these questions is to acknowledge that long-established assumptions about the nature of work have been disrupted, and that the very concept of “work” now warrants close and careful deliberation.

Of course, there is no shortage of discussions about work. Yet in the USA, especially, managerial assumptions have proven so powerful as to sideline unsponsored inquiry into the forms that work is beginning to assume. Indeed, at their most extreme, managerial statements about work have become minor industries in their own right, as in the case of Peters and Waterman’s *In Search of Excellence* (which has spun off multiple small businesses), Spencer Johnson’s *Who Moved My Cheese?* (now available in a special edition for pre-teens), or Daniel Pink’s *Free Agent Nation* (which invites its readers to regard themselves as their own CEOs). For their part, policy analysts often do address workplace issues, but commonly adhere to a formulaic montage of well-worn solutions. Should unemployment insurance benefits be extended? How will increases in the minimum wage affect the labor market? Dare we consider public works programs, or paid family leave? Unasked are questions about the forces that govern the structure of work organizations, why some jobs are valued so much more highly than others, how stereotypes of the most “appropriate” workers for a given occupation influence the distribution of opportunities at work, or whether work might begin to reflect the wishes of those who perform it. All too often,

questions of agency and choice in the economic realm have been relegated to the personal advice columns in the business section, which unfailingly school their readers in how to compromise with one's boss. Images of muffled dissent and cynicism find expression in such outlets as *Dilbert* and *The Office*.

If discourse on work in the United States is a function of the political and ideological characteristics of US society, it should not surprise us that the market for workplace analysis displays a family resemblance to that which governs tabloid TV talk shows, rewarding writers who can make the most spectacular claims about the trends gripping our working lives. Hence we find Jeremy Rifkin (2004) declaring the "end of work," Stanley Aronowitz and William DiFazio (1995) alluding to the "jobless future," and Ulrich Beck (2000) holding forth on the collapse of the "work society." Such sensationalism is of course counterbalanced by careful and deliberate social scientific analyses of work. But these are usually sequestered within academic journals far removed from the public eye. Worse, perhaps, they are subject to a division of labor that carves work up into a welter of competing trades that enjoy little coordination. Thus sociology of work coexists uneasily alongside parallel literatures devoted to the study of organizations, occupations, labor markets, professions, and economic networks. Since each trade favors its own conceptual tools and jargon, little fruitful discussion ensues across the boundaries that demarcate each field.

In this book, I try to put at least some of the pieces back together. Three goals seem especially crucial here. One involves the labor of integration – that is, an effort to pull together, in a succinct and thoughtful manner, the disparate strands of thought that scholars have generated with respect to "work" in recent decades. A second objective involves the labor of critique – that is, to interrogate the main lines of scholarly work that have developed, in an effort to open up analytic paths that seem especially likely to advance the frontiers of the field. A third is to sketch out a view toward work that might spill over academic fields, engaging issues that ought to be on the agenda for public debate.

Approaching Work

Work is a primordial part of the human condition; like the biblical poor, it will always be with us. Yet the specific *form* that work assumes has varied enormously across historical periods and national boundaries. This is certainly the case today, as many of our conceptions of "work" have grown contested and ambiguous. We ought therefore to reflect on what the term "work" means, how that meaning has shifted in recent years, and why.

At the most abstract level, we can define work as *any expenditure of human effort aimed at producing a socially valued good or service*. This is a deceptively simple definition, however, and one that requires several provisos. First, few workers get to choose the institutional system in which their labor will be expended. Rather, we must typically conform to the dominant institutional structures that define how work must be performed. A related point is that the institutional structure that is most familiar to us – work as paid employment, performed in exchange for a wage or salary – is only one of several types that have developed over time. Indeed, the dominance of wage-

labor in relation to the labor market is a recent construct, and one whose triumph often required the exercise of cultural and political power, and even military force.

Moreover, although we have come to view paid employment as the only “real” form of work, in fact work has been defined entirely outside of the labor market for the great bulk of human history. This is certainly the case with *unfree* or “forced” labor – slavery, serfdom, prison labor, child labor, and other forms of servitude – which persists in many societies (including our own) to this day.¹ An equally important form of non-market labor is that of domestic or household work, performed in order to reproduce one’s daily life. Farming communities that provided their own food, clothing, and other material goods had little need for any labor market; family members were expected to shoulder the daily tasks required to eke out a living from the land, producing goods for sale only at the margins of their daily lives. More familiar to us are the many forms of work required in our own families, in the form of cooking, washing, cleaning, and caring for young children – certainly, work by any definition.

So dominant has the labor market become in our own society that we have come to view paid employment, or wage labor, as the only “real” form of work. This would have struck our predecessors as a most unusual point of view. As the American historian Jacqueline Dowd Hall (2000) reports, when cotton mills first began to appear in the American South, farming families often referred to factory work as “public work.” They viewed work outside the bounds of one’s farm as a strange phenomenon – one that engulfed unfortunates who had lost their land to the banks, and had few alternatives but to enter the labor market. Moreover, for much of the nineteenth century, protest against wage labor – operating with the notion of the independent artisan who owned “his own competence” – construed it in terms of “wage slavery.” How much has changed.

And change continues to happen, for paid employment is not a static thing. The boundary between work in this sense and “non-work” has become an increasingly difficult line to draw in recent years. This is obviously the case for professional or sales employees tethered to their jobs by their trusty smartphones and portable PCs: here the boundary between the job and private life begins to break down (Fraser 2002; Orlikowski 2007). It is also the case in a growing number of ambiguous situations, such as those that are familiar to graduate students, participants in workfare programs, and, increasingly, to unpaid interns as well. Indeed, graduate students have begun to assume so many teaching obligations that they have sometimes sought to form unions as a matter of self-defense, only to have courts deny them legal status as workers (they have ruled that graduate students are not workers, but students in professional training programs). For their part, workfare participants often seem to be half workers and half public wards. Like workers, they must be paid in accordance with minimum wage laws, and are protected under sexual harassment laws. But, like public wards, they cannot choose their own place of employment, and cannot form unions to defend themselves (see Krinsky 2007). And many employers, it seems, are happy to arrange internships in lieu of paid employment – a point the US Department of Labor has begun to explore (Perlin 2011). In cases such as these, the very definition of work is contested, involving litigation and judicial rulings to decide whether incumbents of these roles are protected under US labor law.

A final point follows from the above. Whether an activity warrants the term “work” even by our narrow, market, standards is not simply a function of the activities it entails. For the very same functions may or may not be “work,” depending on the social and organizational context in which the activity occurs. The very same activity – say, listening to someone’s emotional problems, driving a car, or having sex – means very different things, and involves very different experiences, depending on whether the activity is performed by a worker engaged for pay or someone in a social (or non-market) relationship. Indeed, one of the defining features of contemporary capitalist societies is that it is very difficult to imagine any activity that *cannot* be performed in a market context, for pay.

This book will largely be concerned with work in the form of paid employment. It is written from the standpoint of what may be one of the more peculiar occupations one can imagine, yet one that its practitioners find inspiring: that of the sociologist of work. For our job is that of explaining why work itself is defined in certain ways; why jobs are allocated to the members of some groups and not to others; how the structure of work and employment is evolving in an era of global capitalism, and how these shifts are likely to affect both our social structure and our own personal lives. You might view this book as something of a user’s guide or manual for this most peculiar trade.

Three Rules of Thumb

Any trade will of course need some basic principles, or axioms, that can guide practitioners as they set about doing their work. Of course, as with any area in the social sciences, the sociology of work is often riddled with sharp divisions and debates (these are discussed later in this chapter). In spite of these divisions – or, perhaps, as the outcome of them – sociologists interested in work as a social construct have hammered out three rough principles that do provide coherence for the field. The first is the simple yet profound argument that work is *consequential* for human life, both individually and collectively. Second, and equally important, is the axiom that work cannot be viewed as a mere economic transaction, or as the outcome of technological imperatives; rather, work is almost always embedded in social and institutional settings that lend it a different character than a purely economic approach can reveal. A third point is that what actually happens at work often departs, in subtle yet vital ways, from the formal rules and official policies inscribed within employee handbooks. There is a hidden underside of workplace life, often invisible to authority figures, where informal norms and practices are established that often stand at odds with formal expectations.

The primacy of production

Although the most celebrated theorist who embraced the “primacy of production” thesis is surely Karl Marx, in truth the modern origins of the idea can be traced to John Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers who developed the philosophical notion of *homo faber*, or a conception of human nature that distinguishes the human species on

the basis of our capacity to create, or to use tools and concepts with which to transform the natural world. Indeed, in this view, humans are doubly creative: we not only transform the external world through our labor; in so doing, we also transform ourselves. It is in this sense that work constitutes an especially formative influence at both the individual and the collective levels of analysis.

This view has been widely embraced in the sociological literature on work. Literature on the relation between work and the self abounds. E. C. Hughes, a major figure within the Chicago School of sociology, argued that “a man’s work [sic] is one of the more important parts of his social identity, of his self; indeed of his fate in the one life he has to live.” Work, from this point of view, is “one of the things by which he is judged, and certainly one of the more significant things by which he judges himself” (1994 [1951: 57]). Much evidence attests to the validity of Hughes’s point. Examining existing studies of the mentalities that accompany particular occupational domains, Bensman and Lilienfeld (1991: xv) found occupationally specific “attitudes towards everyday life,” and viewed these as the outcome of “habits of thought that emerge and are developed in the practice of an occupation, profession, or craft.” In a series of studies conducted over the span of several decades, Melvyn Kohn and his colleagues (1969, 2006; Kohn and Schooler 1983) repeatedly found that the occupational conditions under which people are employed (for example, whether the design of their jobs gives them a bit of autonomy or freedom from close supervision) have enduring effects on their psychological functioning, shaping people’s levels of intellectual flexibility, self-esteem, and even parental values. Myriad studies have found strong connections between aspects of the work situation and such mental health outcomes as psychological distress, depression, or hostility (see Kornhauser 1965; Karasek 1979, 1981). Physical health too is affected by the nature of one’s work. A recent French study (Cambois 2004) found that after controlling for relevant variables, white-collar men who were promoted tended to live significantly longer lives than did their counterparts who were left behind. The general implication of this literature is simple: the job shapes the person to a substantial extent.

But the structure of work does more than this. How work is arranged also has massive institutional and cultural effects that are evident at the collective level of analysis. As E. P. Thompson’s landmark studies showed (1964), the coming of industrial capitalism brought about unprecedented conceptions of time and work discipline, reshaping the very sinews of everyday life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The stability or instability established by work institutions can have widespread effects on social control over whole populations. The absence of work for large segments of the population – whether during the Great Depression, or within poor or ghetto communities today – can have massive consequences, sometimes engendering large-scale movements to demand social change (Piven and Cloward 1977), and at other times straining the community’s ability to exercise control over their own neighborhoods (Wilson 1996). Indeed, the economic historian Sebastian de Grazia (1994) was so struck by the weight industrial capitalism placed upon productive employment that he characterized the modern West as constituting a “work society.” Ulrich Beck (2000: 63) believes that as Western societies have grown more secular, people have “lost their faith in God,” and come to believe instead “in the godlike powers of work to provide everything sacred to them: prosperity, social

position, personality [and] meaning in life.”

To be sure, there are reasons to question such sweeping claims. The growing consumption of cultural goods, the proliferation of mass and digital media, and shifts in assumptions about the stability and longevity of attachments to any given firm have emboldened some theorists to challenge arguments concerning the salience of work and to question the presumed link between work and identity. In this latter view, identity is no longer so firmly anchored in the realm of production as in the past; rather, people increasingly define themselves by embracing one or another style of life, as reflected in their cultural tastes, style of dress, bodily comportment, speech, and personal style. In some accounts, the world of production has been overwhelmed or even invaded by cultural influences that stem from television, magazines, movies, and consumer goods. The relation between work and self thus becomes more complex or weakened, as regimes of person-hood emerge that are more firmly rooted in the nation-state, consumer markets, and ideologies of citizenship than in the realm of production as such (Rose 1990).

Evaluating these claims, Leidner (2004) finds them to be narrowly one-sided and overdrawn, citing several considerations. Although one can certainly point to trends that have increased the importance of “non-work” influences in the production and presentation of self, there have also been countervailing trends that operate in the opposite direction. For one thing, the urge to consume often reinforces the need to work; and, indeed, the evidence suggests that American workers now labor substantially longer than was the case two or three decades ago. Although this trend has developed unevenly across different classes and groups (Hochschild 2001; Jacobs and Gerson 2004), the spread of 24/7 work schedules has increasingly impinged on the rhythms of family relations and cultural life more generally. A related development has been the dramatic increase in the proportion of adult women – especially those who are married and have young children – who have entered into the paid labor force, for this structural shift exposes a much larger swath of adults to the demands of work organizations than was true of previous generations. The expansion of professional and managerial occupations, which often fill jobs through national searches, has dispersed employees geographically, weakening extended family relations, and in turn actually reinforcing the growth of care work provided through the marketplace. Moreover, the rise of “knowledge work,” especially among high-pressure professionals in technology-intensive industries, exposes workers to jobs that make increasingly demanding claims on their time and their souls; the concept of the “greedy institution” seems if anything more applicable than ever before (Kunda 1992; Ross 2008; Kunda and Ailon-Souday 2005; Sennett 1999). And analysts studying new “high-performance” work organization or systems using Total Quality Management have often alleged that these structures seek to incorporate workers’ identities to a much greater extent than under work informed by older, more traditionally bureaucratic patterns.

Nor are the expansive demands of work on identity limited to professional and managerial work. As revealed in the literature on interactive service work, which by its very nature requires social interaction between the customer and the worker, employers increasingly seek to define, direct, and control the feelings and emotions that workers display while engaging in their jobs. These practices – immortalized by

Hochschild (1983) in her study of the “emotional labor” performed by airline attendants at Delta Airlines – have the effect of enabling firms to lay claim to a broader proportion of workers’ selves than was previously the case. Our emotional expressions and displays of internal feelings, which have long been a private, spontaneous part of social interaction, thus no longer belong to us, but become part of the very “product” that companies seek to put up for sale. Leidner (1993) finds reason to suggest that corporate efforts to standardize and control the worker’s presentation of self can have potentially corrosive effects on our identities, fostering a cynicism and distanced relation toward others and toward one’s self. In the line of these counter-tendencies, it seems safe to conclude that work continues to leave its mark on social life, though the nature of this link has changed in ways that warrant close and careful research.

Work as a social construct

Beginning in the 1970s, when the USA began to de-regulate industry after industry, economic institutions have increasingly been governed by what has come to be called “neo-liberalism” – the doctrine that not only economic institutions but whole societies operate most effectively when their resources are allocated in accordance with a purely market-driven logic, without resort to public or government intervention of any sort (see Harvey 2005, and [chapter 6](#) below). This doctrine, which was actively encouraged by the Thatcher and Reagan governments, has been embraced by such powerful international lending agencies as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, vaulting neo-liberal thinking into the status of an unquestioned economic orthodoxy. This view often yields a starkly Darwinian assumption about economic institutions: Companies that adopt the most efficient organizational practices will thrive; those that do not will stagnate and die. From this point of view, the key forces driving the structure of work are the imperatives of the marketplace and the efficiency with which technology and other resources are used. Influences that stand at odds with efficiency considerations (including such biases as racism and sexism) are viewed as factors that impede the efficiency of work organizations. As such, they are projected to wilt and wither away as market competition selects them for extinction.

In the sociological view, arguments such as this – which are premised on the efficacy and “natural” character of the market – rest almost entirely on myth. This point can best be developed in relation to the views of Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* serves as the Bible of economic orthodoxy. Smith was one of a generation of thinkers who sought to pursue the development of institutional mechanisms that could hold in check the religious and ethnic wars that had plagued Western Europe during so much of the early modern period. Smith believed that the pursuit of economic advantage, through commerce and trade, had the advantage of binding nations together in the pursuit of rational lines of action, rather than the unbridled and often violent passions that religion had unleashed. Smith’s analysis rested on two fundamental precepts. First, he argued that the general interest was, ironically, best served through the pursuit of individual gain. Because unbridled competition, if left to its own devices, allocated resources in accordance with the “invisible hand” of the marketplace, the results would be more rational and effective than any government

body could possibly achieve. And, second, Smith argued that the rise of market economies was inevitable, for it reflected the “consequence of a certain propensity in human nature . . . to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.”

Smith’s argument has if anything gained increasing relevance in the two and a half centuries since it was developed. It continues to find contemporary application, even in popular culture (think of such figures as Gordon Gekko in the famous film *Wall Street*). Perhaps the single most powerful response to Smith’s perspective, and to the myth of the marketplace generally, was developed by the eminent economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi (1944), whose work warrants close consideration.

In *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi made two interrelated points. First, he argued that, in fact, the great majority of human cultures – including Western culture until a little over a century ago – have organized work on the basis of custom and tradition rather than any impulse to pursue individual gain. Indeed, the production and exchange of goods have been so deeply embedded within social and cultural institutions that pre-industrial societies did not actually *have* “economies” that were structurally distinct from kinship or village institutions. To project currently dominant market norms backward onto human history – as Smith does when he roots the “propensity to truck and barter” within human nature – thus does violence to the actual history of economic institutions.

Second, Polanyi contended that the very notion of a “self-regulating market” is itself highly deceptive. For one thing, the triumph of markets itself rested on political force (often, the stripping away of rights and resources enjoyed by a large sector of the laboring population). Moreover, markets cannot long endure without political and legal regulation, for by their very nature market forces engender instability, uncertainty, and even chaos. (If the point needs emphasis, the economic crises that began in 2008 make the point reasonably well.) Indeed, government supports, inducements, and subsidies of all sorts are typically needed to sustain the ongoing success of the market – success that is (ironically enough) then celebrated by the advocates of the “self-regulating market.” The point here is that purely economic approaches toward work offer only partial, misleading, or reductionist perspectives, for they tend to distort a complex social and political reality. Work and economic institutions, in other words, are social constructs that cannot be reduced to market forces and efficiency considerations alone.

This same point has repeatedly emerged from the very beginning of sociologically informed analysis of work. Until the 1930s, management thinking generally operated on the basis of *homo economicus* – “economic man” (to use the gendered dialect). In this view, workers are rationally acting individuals who respond to material rewards. This approach provided the point of departure for one of the most famous research projects in this field – the Hawthorne studies, conducted at AT&T’s manufacturing plant at Hawthorne, Illinois. The team of researchers was led by Elton Mayo, a Harvard psychologist who designed a series of studies at the company’s Western Electric facility (see Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939). These studies have generated too much discussion and debate to be reiterated here. Two points must suffice in this context. The first concerns the basic findings that emerged from Mayo’s research: even when workers were presented with significant material incentives for increasing their pace of work, they typically refused, preferring to forgo significant sums of bonus pay.

The reason is that workers did not behave simply as individuals seeking monetary rewards. Rather, they acted in accordance with the norms and codes of behavior established in their work groups, which overrode – and sometimes punished – self-seeking behavior.

A second point stems from the Hawthorne researchers' interpretation, which held that sharply distinct logics seemed to govern the behavior of the people in the Hawthorne plant. The actions of managers and executives were informed by the "logic of efficiency," which resembled the notion of economic man. This was a normative orientation that motivated managers on the basis of incentives, bonuses, and individual gain. Yet, alongside this logic, there existed a second, more collectively oriented normative system, which the authors called a "logic of sentiments." This orientation invited workers to adhere to the norms of their work group, and to derive a sense of belonging and recognition that such solidarity could provide. Essentially, the Hawthorne researchers criticized management for naively projecting their own market ethos onto workers – a narcissistic posture that tended to foster enmity and antagonism within the firm, rather than the motivation that companies seek.

The Hawthorne studies had broad implications for the study of work. First, the authors opened up a more reflexive, self-aware approach toward the study of industrial work. Second, these studies led to careful analysis of the research of work groups as a determinant of industrial attitudes and behavior. And, third, they opened up what would become the human relations school of thought – an influential approach that stresses the informal codes of behavior and communication that companies adopt. Perhaps the most important consequence – since reiterated in dozens of studies – has been the recognition that the social organization of work is often governed by social, cultural, and political influences that have little or nothing to do with the pursuit of efficiency.

Two important strands of thought have followed from this last point. One focuses on the internal dynamics that shape workplace behavior. Here, ethnographic case studies have explored the social forces that influence how work is defined, how technologies are selected, and how production processes take shape. One of the most revealing studies in this vein is Robert Thomas's *What Machines Can't Do* (1994). A sociologist at MIT, Thomas conducted a series of case studies in four different manufacturing settings, posing the following types of questions. What seems to drive the organizational and technological innovations that unfold in these industries? Who proposes and designs new technologies for production, and how are these innovations introduced? Thomas's studies had the advantage of moving the analysis backward in time – that is, reconstructing the processes through which innovations were first proposed, well before they were actually introduced. They also moved the analysis downward in the firm, encompassing rank-and-file workers who confronted new production processes on the shop floor itself.

In most of the contexts Thomas studied, engineers played a critical role. Yet there was a key difference that rankled many engineers: the division between *product* engineers (who were often employed at headquarters, in tandem with top executives), and *industrial* or process engineers (who were often employed at manufacturing facilities out in the field). The former group enjoyed great prestige, autonomy, and resources, while members of the latter group were defined as little more than industrial

grunts. Product engineers often generated new designs with little regard for the manufacturing process, while industrial engineers were defined as the “over the wall guys” – that is, they were simply expected to conform to the product specifications they received from the product engineers. This arrangement often produced a sharp sense of deprivation among industrial engineers. Consequently, they and their managers often looked for ways to enhance their occupation’s status and autonomy within the firm. Such interests often found expression in the form of proposals for new production processes – new technologies that employed robotics, or computer-integrated manufacturing systems, or automated systems for the storage and retrieval of parts.

In proposing these kinds of innovations, engineers and their managers typically emphasized the gains the company would enjoy with respect to its return on investment (ROI). Yet, in fact, such gains often proved illusory. In most of the cases Thomas examined, the promised improvements in ROI never materialized. Indeed, top executives seldom bothered to scrutinize the actual outcomes of projects or to evaluate their success in meeting the projected gains. One of the few constants Thomas found was that leadership of a major project did indeed enhance the career of the manager or lead engineer who proposed it – though it produced little structural change in the position of the industrial engineers within the firm. Efficiency served as a rationale, then, masking efforts by occupational groups seeking to advance their own power and prestige. As Thomas puts it, “the rules of the corporate game required that all participants present themselves as rational, calculating utility maximizers, but beneath the official rules an entirely different game was being played.”

The hidden underside of work

Many of the richest and most revealing studies in the sociology of work have been conducted in manufacturing settings, where analysts have consistently unearthed patterns of covert defiance, subterfuge, and restriction of output despite the most determined efforts by management to exercise full control over the efforts of employees. One of the lessons that emerges from this literature is that even the most subordinate-level workers, exposed to the most stringent forms of control, can find ways of neutralizing, disrupting, or renegotiating managerial regimes to their own advantage.

This was certainly the case in the early studies by Duke sociologist Donald Roy (1952, 1954, 1960). Roy was a doctoral student at the University of Chicago who had substantial industrial experience. Conducting participant observation as a machine-tool operative at a South Side Chicago metal-working plant, Roy found that workers invested a substantial proportion of their creative energies in the ongoing effort to outwit management and sidestep its policies. Although their employer established strict rules and an onerous system of piece-rate payment, Roy’s co-workers used alliances with support personnel, go-slow production techniques, and creative uses of the time clock as elements of a general strategy that enabled them to garner levels of pay and autonomy that management fervently wished to deny them. As Roy puts it, “operators and their allies joined forces in certain situations in a manner not only unmistakably at variance with the carefully prepared designs of staff experts but even

in flagrant violation of strongly held managerial “moral principles of shop floor behavior” (1954: 256). David Halle (1984), studying a New Jersey petrochemical refinery, likewise found that blue-collar workers often performed their jobs in a manner that bore little resemblance to the recipes and practices the company printed. Because these workers engaged in close contact with systems and equipment over long stretches of time, they were able to accumulate knowledge about the quirks of the production process that were found in no formal documents and that could not be deduced from formal scientific expertise. Such practical knowledge gave these workers substantial power over the method and pace of their work, and gave them an important measure of independence from their managers. It also gave them a vital stake in keeping the depth and even the very existence of their hidden knowledge largely to themselves. In a similar vein, my own research on pulp and paper manufacturing plants in the US South revealed that when manual workers encountered machine superintendents who showed insufficient respect for the workers’ knowledge and dignity, what transpired were “authority contests” in which workers sought to teach their supervisors important lessons about reciprocity and respect. Machines would run “in the ditch” for whole shifts as workers sought to modify their supervisors’ behavior, or, if necessary, to inflict mortal injuries on their supervisors’ careers (Vallas 2003a, 2006).

Yet the hidden underside of workplace life is hardly restricted to manufacturing settings; virtually all workplaces have “backstage” regions where outsiders are not allowed. Technical support personnel answering phone calls from troubled users, for example, often cope with their jobs by finding novel uses of the chat-room technologies at their disposal. Instead of using them merely to query other workers about specific problems customers report, they often use them to share derisive jokes and stories about the ignorant customers they have on the line. Restaurant cooks and food servers often develop tricks, ways of cutting corners, and imaginative ways of handling food that must by their very nature not migrate beyond the kitchen door (Fine 1996). And ill-behaved customers may at times risk having hot soup “inadvertently” dumped in their laps (Paules 1991). Put simply, the informal culture that develops among routine workers often stands at odds with formal rules and expectations, with effects on the firm’s operations that can take any of several forms.

For example, cultural anthropologist Julian Orr (1996) studied photocopy-repair technicians employed by Xerox. Although, on the surface, this seems to be a relatively isolating and unrewarding job, Orr’s research unearthed a rich occupational community. Workers commonly socialized in their off hours, sharing not only meals and drinks but also an unending supply of “war stories” – tales of their encounters with especially difficult models of machines. This was not idle talk; participation in these communal activities was in fact vital to the worker’s ability to do the job. Workers resisted company efforts to codify their knowledge, preferring to keep it in the form of their own “community of practice.” Here, the informal culture of work actually seemed to aid the company in its operations (though managers often failed to recognize this fact).

Jeffrey Sallaz uncovered a layered set of games – some obvious and authorized, others hidden and unauthorized – in his study of Las Vegas gambling casinos (2002, 2009). Sallaz, a sociologist at the University of Arizona, gained certification as a