

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

Sociology and the Future of Work

Contemporary Discourses and Debates

Paul Ransome



SOCIOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF WORK

For John Edward Ransome, 1927-1997
Although a very quiet man,
the silence he leaves behind is quite deafening

Sociology and the Future of Work

Contemporary discourses and debates

PAUL RANSOME

School of Social Sciences and International Development

University of Wales Swansea

UK



Routledge

Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1999 by Ashgate Publishing

Reissued 2018 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © Paul Ransome 1999

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and welcomes correspondence from those they have been unable to contact.

A Library of Congress record exists under LC control number: 99073694

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-34562-1 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-34565-2 (pbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-429-43777-9 (ebk)

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>x</i>
 Introduction	 1
 1 The Narrative of Industrialism	 15
A Typical Narrative of Work	15
Karl Marx	25
Max Weber	33
Emile Durkheim	43
Industrialism and the Future of Work	48
 2 The Narrative of Post-Industrialism, Post-Fordism and Flexibility	 52
Post-Industrial Society	52
Post-Fordism and Flexibility	64
The Work Paradigm	78
 3 The New Technological Paradigm	 88
The Technological Paradigm of Microelectronics	88
The Question of Skill and Quality of Working Life	95
Management, Organization and Control	109
 4 Feminist Perspectives and the Future of Work	 128
Patriarchy	129
Social Reproduction	133
Gender Ideologies of Work	139
Segregation and the Occupational Sex-typing of Jobs	153
Women and the Future of Work	159

5	Work, Identity and the Production/Consumption Debate	167
	Identity Crisis	168
	The Work/Non-work Divide	186
	The Production/Consumption Divide	191
	The New Individualism	194
6	Economic Globalization and the Future of Work	201
	The Antinomies of the Concept Globalization	202
	The Future Narrative of World Capitalism	207
	Globalization and the Future of Late-Industrialism	213
	The Global Future of Work in the 'Network Society'	227
7	Work Futures	237
	<i>Chapter Notes</i>	249
	<i>Bibliography</i>	261

List of Figures

Figure 3.1	Key features of the five Kondratiev waves	89
Figure 3.2	Future impact of technology on levels of skill and degree of satisfaction along the three dimensions and across the three categories of skill	97
Figure 3.3	Future impact of technology on patterns of employers' demands for people with particular skills	107
Figure 3.4	The three levels of control at work	110
Figure 3.5	The exercise of control in the future of work	125

List of Tables

Table 4.1	Attitudes towards male/female responsibilities by class and gender	147
Table 4.2	Average minutes spent per day by women and men on domestic tasks	148
Table 4.3	Employees in employment, GB 1959-1995	150
Table 4.4	Hourly earnings by sex and whether full- or part-time	155
Table 5.1	Attitudes towards work and income	171
Table 5.2	Attitudes towards benefits of working	172
Table 6.1	World league table in manufacturing: exports, 1978/1989	217
Table 6.2	World league table in commercial services trade: exports, 1970/1989	218
Table 6.3	Share by region of the world's manufacturing production: 1988/2000	219
Table 6.4	Foreign direct investment in the world economy: the changing relative importance of leading source nations, 1960-1985	221
Table 6.5	Intra-Triad foreign direct investment in 1990	222

Preface

The world of work is not what it used to be. One doesn't have to be Brain of Britain to recognize that once familiar assumptions about having a job for life, of developing a life-long career structure, or that work is a predominantly masculine activity are largely things of the past. The typical picture today is of a much more fragmentary and insecure pattern of employment. The message from Government spokespeople, careers advisers and employers is to develop a portfolio of flexible skills which will, if we are lucky, allow us to find a series of niches of employment. It is up to us to meet the challenge of the new world of work, to redouble our efforts to find new opportunities for rewarding and creative employment. We no longer simply have to be prepared to work whilst at work, but to work at anticipating where the next job, the next contract, the next challenge will come from.

The aim of this book is to lay bare a number of the key dimensions of change which are taking place in the present, and to use this as a basis for analysing what the key features of work in the future are likely to be. In developing this analysis, the book is organized around a critical examination of some of the leading discourses which are currently being deployed in debates about the future of work. Although this book will describe a number of the most likely underlying features of the future of work, it is also, and perhaps primarily concerned, with understanding which are the most useful ways of approaching the study of the future of work. It is as much a book about how to study the future of work from a sociological point of view, as it is an account of what that future will be like.

Acknowledgements

Inevitably, any book builds upon the ideas and research of its predecessors, and I would therefore like to acknowledge the work of all those authors referred to in the text. I would also like to acknowledge the support of colleagues teaching sociology and social theory in the School of Social Sciences and International Development at the University of Wales Swansea. My debt to Nickie Charles and Chris Harris is already large and continues to grow. The errors and omissions in the following are of course entirely my own responsibility.

Introduction

A friend of mine commented that it should not take very long to write a book about the future of work. She wondered if perhaps it ought to be called '*is there* a future of work?' Despite the sarcasm of this comment there is a serious point here, since the answer depends a great deal on *whose* future of work one is talking about. As is often the case in looking at the social world we tend to assess things from our own vantage point. Thus, in asking questions about the future of work, our first response is likely to be framed in terms of our *personal* expectations of work. As sociologists however, we need to adopt a much more objective perspective, and to recognize that the future of work is actually made up of diversity of a views depending on which parts of the working population we are looking at.

Imagine for example, that we are standing in the High Street asking different kinds of people what they think the future of work will be. Our first respondents are an elderly retired couple. Ostensibly, our question might seem non-sensical to them as they themselves are no longer working. What they are concerned about is their pensions and the value of their savings. As long as the economic well-being of society remains constant, they can be reasonably confident about their future prospects. The prices they pay for basic utilities, food and clothing will not increase too rapidly, and the state will be able to continue to provide them with the medical and social services they need. Their perspective on the future of work is framed in terms of the overall economic position of the country. They are less concerned about precisely who is doing what kind of job, or with whether the practical content of this or that job has changed, than with a general hope that relative economic stability can be maintained.

The next person we speak to is a man in his mid forties. After spending much of his adult life working in a bank, he has recently lost his job as a consequence of restructuring. Where once he held a position of some responsibility, he now finds that the personal and organizational skills he had built up over the years are no longer needed by his employer. In looking around for another job, he finds that although valuable these qualifications and experience are no longer sufficient to guarantee him a job. He is a skilled professional man, but he is no longer employable on these grounds alone. His prospects of finding the kind of work he is used to doing are slim because restructuring has taken place across the whole of the industry in which he

used to work. It is not that he himself has become a bad employee, but that the circumstances in which he is looking for work have changed. Besides, he knows that because he is by no means the only person in this position, he faces stiff competition from other former managers, and especially from those who are a few years younger than himself. For him, the future of work seems bleak. At a minimum he faces the prospect either of having to take a quite different kind of job, perhaps one which bears little relation to what he did before, or of having to spend some time outside employment while he tries to acquire new skills. In either case, he knows he will have to revise his expectations of what the future holds and to look again at the standard of living and lifestyle which he and his family can afford. He feels demoralised and disillusioned by the fact that the expectations he had of work, expectations which he used to take for granted, can no longer be met.

Next we meet a woman in her late thirties who has just taken her children to school. Ironically, she has just started working part-time in the bank where our previous respondent used to work. The job she does is not terribly exciting, but she was able to pick up the necessary word-processing skills quite easily, and enjoys the company of her colleagues. Although she does not receive a large wage, this is off-set by the fact that her hours of work are flexible and convenient - she can work while the children are at school - and because being at work provides her with a break from the sometimes lonely routine of household life. She is pleased to have this opportunity for returning to work after a period away from it, and is quite confident that there is a continuing and perhaps growing demand amongst employers for women like herself. She knows that her employability is largely based on her availability, and on the employer's perception of her as a reliable mature and responsible person. She does not feel that her future employment prospects are unduly threatened by younger people with more current qualifications. She also feels economically secure because her partner is working. If she should not be able to work for a while, they will still be able to pay the mortgage and household bills. They also have modest savings to tide them over in an emergency.

Also having just taken her children to school is a younger woman. She is in a hurry to get to work at the nearby fast-food restaurant because she has already been warned about being late. One of her children has been ill and her employer is less than sympathetic. She also works part-time, but resents the fact that because she is a single parent, and is heavily dependent on her earned income, she cannot be too choosy about the job she does. For her, opportunities for part-time working are more ambiguous, because she has to work despite the relatively poor conditions and low wages. She feels that her employer is taking advantage of her and the other young people she works

with, since the firm can always find somebody else. This is partly because the work itself is tedious and very intensive so that some people can't stick it for very long, and partly because the relatively low levels of skill mean that the employer isn't investing much training in any particular employee. Staff turnover is not a problem. Although she knows that she could have found a better job if she had made more of an effort at school, and that she could go to the local college to gain some qualifications now, having to look after the children on her own makes this very difficult. Besides, most of her friends also left school as soon as they could, and either took unskilled jobs or expected to start a family. In her current circumstances she is more concerned about having some kind of income than she is about where exactly that income comes from. Her perception of the future of work is constructed almost entirely in terms of these immediate pragmatic necessities.

Two people who did decide to persevere with formal education are two young men in their early twenties. They are studying at university, and have a largely optimistic perspective on the future of work. Although neither of them has concrete plans about the kind of job they will find, they are confident that the general skills they are acquiring - working with computers, being responsible for organizing their work, being able to communicate effectively - will make them attractive to a prospective employer. They accept that they will have to be prepared to keep on top of new skills once at work, and that they are likely to move from one employer to another rather than staying with the same firm for the whole of their working lives. Whilst they are realistic about the fact that they may not be able to find continuous employment, they hope to be able to avoid serious financial problems by not taking on commitments which they cannot meet. Essentially they are flexible and positive in their attitude towards work and the kind of lifestyle they will be able to have once they leave university.

A quite different attitude is expressed by two other young men just crossing the road. They have gained some vocational qualifications at college, but have been unable to find work. To start with, they were not too concerned about this thinking that it was just a matter of time before a job came along. They hoped that the time they spent at college would pay them back, and that they would be able to avoid the long-term employment which both their fathers had experienced when the local engineering firm has closed down five years before. After two years on benefit though, they are becoming increasingly worried about their prospects. They feel that they are very much on the margins of employment. Either they have to take what ever kind of job they can, or have to take a chance on further training. The latter option has started to feel like a waste of time, since the qualifications they already have,

have not been very useful. They spoke about older friends who had spent several years passing from one training course to another only to find either that there just weren't any jobs, or that their skills always seem out of date. Like other members of their families, they are becoming quite fatalistic about the future of work. It seems that whatever they do, it is the general lack of semi-skilled jobs in the area which is the problem. Looking around, they know that with so many people chasing so few jobs, they actually have very little control over their future employment prospects.

Even from these few imagined examples, we can see that there is actually no single future of work, but a variety of different futures depending on who and how old you are, where you live, the kind of work you are looking for, and what your family obligations and circumstances are. Since we cannot specify what the future of work will be like for every single person, the most appropriate strategy to adopt is to identify and understand *the underlying patterns and trends* which are likely to be part of the structure and experience of work in the future. Sociologically, and without denying the individual and personal forms through which these features will be manifested, we are not so much interested in particular individuals as in the prevailing structures and patterns which will confront them as the future of work unfolds.

On the basis of what we already know about the nature and experience of work, we can anticipate the *key dimensions* along which these underlying patterns and trends will develop. In each case however, choices about *which* dimensions deserve our closest attention, and about *where* the balance of importance lies between one factor and another, are radically affected by the theoretical and discursive perspective, the particular kinds of argument and specific areas of debate with which the observer chooses to engage. In the same way that there is no single future of work, there is no single *analytical perspective* from which to develop an account of the future of work. Although some of these key dimensions will be common to a number of accounts - everyone would agree for example that in the advanced economies at least, fewer people will work in manufacturing, and that an increasing proportion of the workforce will be made up by women - the process of selecting those key dimensions, of deciding where to place the emphasis in the analysis, depends on the choices that various researchers have made between the different theoretical perspectives and their associated discourses which are available. In building up a comprehensive picture of the future of work, we need both to describe the leading trends and details, and to look critically at the different perspectives which are involved.

It will be useful to begin by making a number of general observations about why different perspectives on work have been developed. As is the case in all

kinds of scientific investigation, knowledge is a process rather than a thing. What may seem to be 'received wisdom' at one point in time is likely to be regarded as 'old hat' at a later point in time; knowledge is thus provisional rather than absolute. Where we were once comfortable with, and indeed comforted by, a sense of surety in what we know about the nature and experience of work, important changes in the world of work are forcing us to reassess previous knowledge and to investigate new avenues of enquiry. As we shall see shortly, three of the clearest examples of this process of reassessment have emerged from feminist discourses on work, from those working within the tradition of cultural studies, and from those who are concerned with how work will be affected by the process of 'globalization'. As the former have pointed out, almost all accounts of the nature and experience of work carried out by industrial sociologists until the late 1970s, were done by male researchers about male employees. Given that women have always played an important part in both public and private economic life, we are bound to ask whether the knowledge developed in these earlier accounts is actually very 'knowledgeable' at all. Similar pressures for revision have come from cultural theorists, who propose that the practice and experience of work are deeply embedded in a much more complex and diverse range of cultural practices and experiences, many of which are to do with questions of identity. From a culturalist perspective, a lot more needs to be said about life outside the immediacies of work, and about the kinds of processes and connections which bind or splice working life into social and cultural life more generally.

This process of revision is given a further push in the back because of the particular characteristics of *social-scientific* knowledge and its subject matter. As Giddens has described it, our understanding of the social world in the late-modern period is 'reflexive' in the sense that we are constantly revising what we know (or more precisely what we think we know) in the light of new information about the social world. This knowledge doesn't stand outside its subject matter as something separate from it, but is more or less rapidly absorbed by social actors thus altering their future actions:

Sociological knowledge spirals in and out of the universe of social life, reconstructing both itself and that universe as an integral part of that process.... Sociology (and the other social sciences which deal with extant human beings) does not develop cumulative knowledge in the same way as the natural sciences might be said to do. Per contra, the "feed-in" of sociological notions or knowledge claims into the social world is not a process that can be readily channelled, either by those who propose them or even by powerful groups or governmental agencies. Yet the practical impact of social science and sociological theories is enormous, and sociological concepts and findings

are constitutively involved in what modernity is. (Giddens 1990, pp.15-16, original emphasis)

Since the realm of work can be very responsive to the development of new ideas and perspectives, reflexively acquired and reflexively applied knowledge will almost inevitably result in the development of new discourses about work. Moreover, since the vast majority of the population are involved in work of one kind or another, these arguments and debates are not confined within the sometimes obscure world of the academy, but are very a much part of people's day-to-day lives. If for example, a company decides to introduce a different kind of management structure, or more dramatically, to re-locate its operations, these decisions and the knowledge on which they are based will have a very profound and immediate impact on the employees involved. New ideas about work and how it can be organized have practical rather than just academic consequences.

It is also important to consider why questions about the future of work have come to figure so prominently in the public imagination at the present time. A simple answer would be that people always have been concerned about the way they work and that the present concern is not new at all. A second answer might be that as we approach the beginning of a new century, people tend to become particularly conscious of the future and what it holds for them. The future of work is therefore simply part of our heightened future gaze. A more pragmatic answer however, is that people's present experiences of job insecurity and the more or less universal disappearance of the 'job for life', have seriously undermined our sense of economic well-being. If our only means of gaining the financial resources we need in order to live is through paid employment, then it is inevitable that instability within those means of livelihood will focus the mind quite sharply on what might happen next.

Although periods of instability, such as the great depression of the 1930s or the oil crises of the 1970s have happened before, these were largely followed by a resumption of work very much in the manner of what had gone before. What is different about the present crisis of employment, is that many of its key characteristics have changed radically and rapidly and at the same time. The widespread restructuring and reorganization of industry, the development of powerful new technologies, the displacement of established patterns of work by new occupations and new ways of working, important changes in the composition and distribution of the workforce, and new pressures from the increasingly global character of economic planning and practice, are generating a fundamental transformation of work. Important aspects of the future of work will be quite unlike the past of work.

In addition to these practical changes in the nature and organization of work, we are also concerned with changes in people's *perceptions* of what work will be like in the future. The future of work may involve significant changes in people's ideas about what work is, and how it fits into their lives as a whole. How for example, will these likely changes hinder or help the eradication of gender and other forms of segregation and discrimination? What impact will they have upon social, personal and familial relationships outside the immediate work environment? How readily will we accept that the earlier perception of work as a predominantly male, skilled and full-time activity has being displaced by a gender-neutral conception which acknowledges the growing dominance of part-time service occupations? If leisure and consumption are displacing work as the primary basis of self- and social identity, does this mean that the future of work will be one where work itself is of diminishing importance?

In recognizing the importance of work and the employment structure in the character and development of modern industrial societies, the question of the future of work occupies a prominent position in academic and theoretical debates. Whilst earlier debates over the nature of the capitalist labour process have been revived, these have been supplemented by new, and in some cases more complex theoretical perspectives, which seek to plot the likely future trajectory of recent changes.

From a Marxist perspective, important questions arise as to whether these changes signify the 'final' crisis of capitalism as the dominant system of economic production and exchange, or whether they are simply the latest stage in its historical development. If capitalism is moving from a Fordist to a post-Fordist phase, then it is necessary to understand the characteristics of this transition in order to make an informed appraisal of how further inequality and exploitation can be challenged and reversed.

From a liberal-pluralist perspective, it is largely accepted that capitalism is here to stay, and that recent changes can be accommodated within the present system as long as a number of the challenges they present are met in the correct way. The rightist conservative view holds that further relaxation of restraints on market forces is the best way forward, whilst the leftist social-democratic view argues that a new balance needs to be struck between the free market and the supportive structures of the welfare and social systems. From a economic-managerial perspective, the primary concern remains one of how best to use the new methods of work organization in maintaining and increasing profits. If economic efficiency demands greater flexibility, then the further segmentation of the workforce between a specialized 'core' and a

number of less specialized 'peripheries' is simply part-and-parcel of the development of more fluid patterns of employment and 'employability'.

From a broader social-theoretical perspective, the future of work debate cuts across a number of currents in theories of modernity. In tracing the underlying dynamics of 'late' or 'high' modernity for example, Giddens (1990) has stressed the importance of the twin processes of *capitalism* defined as 'a system of commodity production, centred upon the relation between private ownership of capital and propertyless wage labour', and *industrialism* defined as 'the use of inanimate sources of material power in the production of goods, coupled to the central role of machinery in the production process' (Giddens 1990, pp.55-6). To the extent that late-modernity is characterized by a particularly energetic combination of these institutional structures and practices, transition in the economic structure inevitably has an important bearing on the direction of modernity itself. In addition, the somewhat disruptive way in which current changes in the world of work are unfolding and the sense of uncertainty and fragmentation which this generates, are very much part of what modernity is. Giddens conjures up the image of a juggernaut to capture these feelings of opportunity and uncertainty:

The juggernaut crushes those who resist it, and while it sometimes seems to have a steady path, there are times when it veers away erratically in directions we cannot foresee. The ride is by no means wholly unpleasant or unrewarding; it can often be exhilarating and charged with hopeful anticipation. But, so long as the institutions of modernity endure, we shall never be able to control completely either the path or the pace of the journey. In turn, we shall never be able to feel entirely secure, because the terrain across which it runs is fraught with risks of high consequence. Feelings of ontological security and existential anxiety will coexist in ambivalence. (Giddens 1990, p.139)

Experiences of loss of direction and control, a sense of being carried along by events in a discontinuous rather than evolutionary way, and the feeling of having to cope with unfamiliar pressures, are affecting all aspects of our lives. Against such a background it would certainly be surprising if we were *not* concerned about the future of work.

In developing our account of the future of work we need to keep a firm grip on reality. It is all too tempting to drift into a romanticized preview of the more glamorous and eye-catching features of the high-tech future of work. In such an account we would find a simple description of the kinds of work and employment which are typically available in the 1990s. We would read about the fact that many more people now find employment in service-type work, that brain has largely superseded brawn in the balance of activities at work. Within the diminishing realm of employment in manufacturing, we would read

about how sophisticated automated and computer-controlled machines have displaced the need for manual labour. The grime and noise associated with heavy industry and manufacturing have been replaced by a much more convivial working environment closely regulated by the technology's need for cleanliness.

Amongst white-collar employees, we would read about office workers 'interacting' within a world saturated by data. Information technology in the form of telephones, fax machines, and computer modems provide the means of living within this information-intensive environment. In terms of the organization of work, we would read about how hierarchical vertical systems have been replaced by democratic horizontal systems where people are networked into groups. Team-working, target-setting and opportunity maximization are the new canons of the culture of the enterprise. Employees are no longer represented as functionaries and operatives, but as dynamic human resources who must be nurtured and stimulated.

This kind of account might provide the background for a speculative description of the more exotic possibilities for work in the future. In what we can call the *Star Trek* scenario, the tedium and stress of work are overshadowed by fantastical images of virtual reality, the internet, working from home, the electronic cottage, automated factories populated by intelligent machines working night and day. At last we will have achieved the kind of Utopia described by H.G. Wells at the end of the nineteenth century:

But now that the new conditions physical science is bringing about, not only dispense with man as a source of energy but supply the hope that all routine work may be made automatic, it is becoming conceivable that presently there may be no need for any one to toil habitually at all; that a labouring class - that is to say, a class of workers without personal initiative - will become unnecessary to the world of men.... [Were] our political and social and moral devices only as well contrived to their ends as a linotype machine, an antiseptic operating plant, or an electric tramcar, there need now at the present moment be no appreciable toil in the world, and only the smallest fraction of the pain, the fear, and the anxiety that now makes human life so doubtful in its value. There is more than enough for every one alive. (H.G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia*, 1905, p.56)

Despite the attractiveness of these images, we have to accept that they are still just fragments of a much more complex and less glamorous whole which will continue to include very many low-tech mundane activities which our grandparents, let alone our parents, would find familiar. Whilst it is certainly true that many features of work are changing, that microelectronic technologies are by their nature extremely flexible and adaptable, and that

whatever else it is, modernity is profoundly dynamic and full of momentum for change, it is also true that many aspects of people's working lives and expectations of work are likely to remain constant. Most importantly, we have to accept that people *need* work, are *motivated* to work, and have *basic expectations* of work, which are unlikely to be discarded simply because of the introduction of e-mail or a more sophisticated photo-copying machine.

Although new technologies can change many aspects of work, they don't have the magical capacity to change everything. In a hospital or school for example, many working activities are by their nature physical and manual and are likely to remain so. Whilst looking for evidence of change therefore, and whilst trying to predict what these changes tell us about the future, we also need to discuss those features which are changing much less quickly.

Understanding the future of work therefore requires an assessment of where the balance lies between the established and the new, between high-tech and low-tech, between the familiar and the unfamiliar. It means accepting that the future of work is as much about *continuity* as it is about *change*.

The Scope of the Analysis

Turning to a number of the terms used in the following account, the first thing which needs clarifying is the word 'work'. Although it can be argued that our definition of work can include a very wide range of activities, and that the future of work debate is itself partly about redefining the category of activities which we include under this heading (see Ransome 1996), we are primarily concerned here with activities for which people receive direct financial remuneration in the context of a discernible and legally sanctioned employment structure. For present purposes then, work is defined as formal paid employment.

Secondly, what do we mean when we talk about the *future* of work? The future stretches from the immediate present to infinity. In terms of this analysis however, we are talking about a more limited period of time associated with the unfolding of recent developments in the nature and organization of work. Although the conclusions reached will certainly have an important bearing on the longer term future, perhaps stretching up to the middle of the next century and beyond, our immediate focus is on developments which are likely to take place during the next twenty to thirty years. A period which could be seen as equivalent to the most active working years of a twenty-five year old person entering the workforce during the late-1990s.

Although this might seem to be a relatively short period of time, it is well to remember that in many crucial respects, the dramatic pace and scope of recent changes in the world of work are such that a great deal can change even within a period of two or three years. Indeed one of the features of the changes which are taking place, is precisely that new orthodoxies and practices are following one upon the other much more rapidly than in any previous period of industrial development.

Thirdly, *whose* future of work are we talking about? Again the potential scope could be very large indeed if it sought to include all the peoples of the world, and the diverse ways in which they organize their economic life. Enforcing our definition of work as formal paid employment, and concentrating on transformative trends many of which are driven by technological advance, we are primarily concerned with the nature and organization of work in societies which already have an advanced industrial infrastructure. Whilst accepting that a number of societies, particularly the Southeast Asian economies of the Pacific Rim, are developing these facilities at an accelerated rate, and bearing in mind the increasingly global dimensions of the division of labour, our main evidence will be based on the situation in Europe and the USA.

Plan of Chapters

Having set a number of preliminary limits to the analysis, the next task is to consider which dimensions of change deserve our closest attention. As already noted, getting a proper grip on the subject means more than simply describing current changes and projecting them into the future. In terms of general approach, and as already discussed above, two broad themes will be present throughout the analysis. The first, is that the future of work involves a combination of continuity and change. There is no point in developing a glitzy sci-fi image of the future of work only to find that the privileged few who are working from home in their electronic cottages, are vastly outnumbered by the millions whose experience of work is still closely circumscribed by the routines and pressures of conventional forms of working. For every graphic designer working with advanced computer-aided-design or virtual-reality software, there are literally thousands of people serving in shops, packing things into boxes in warehouses, driving things from one place to another, or tending to the young, the old and the sick.

The second, is that work involves a combination of ideas and practicalities, of conception and execution. If for example, we observe a technician in a factory or a labourer on a building site, we can produce a

detailed exterior account of *what* they are doing. We can describe their actions and the skills they use, how their work fits in with that of their colleagues and so on. Less easy to describe is their *experience* of work, their *ideas* about what they are doing, and their *expectations* of work. To unlock these interior consequences of work we need theories and methods which are suited to this particular kind of analysis.

The book is structured around a chapter-by-chapter analysis of the leading perspectives and associated discourses and debates which are currently being used in looking at the future of work. As already noted, there is more than one way of looking at the future of work, and thus more than one future of work that can be described. To get the ball rolling we can make a broad distinction between narrative perspectives which tend to adopt a story-telling approach encompassing a number of themes at the same time, and issue-specific perspectives which tend to concentrate on one issue or closely related set of issues. In highlighting the narrative aspects of some perspectives it should be emphasized that we are not only interested in them because of the detailed descriptions they provide, but also because they offer interesting theoretical insights and useful analytical tools which we might want to use in our own analysis of the future of work. From a sociological point of view, the question is as much about *how* and *why* things change as it is about *what* has changed; we need to understand the nature of the underlying processes involved as well as the details. This brings us into the realm of theoretical frameworks and suppositions, and towards a deeper consideration of the methods used and the type of evidence deployed. Since we cannot be certain about what will happen until it actually is happening (and even then opinions will differ), it is quite legitimate to develop theoretical means of predicting what is most likely to happen. An important part of our investigation then, is to look again at what previous theorists have had to say, and to see whether their theoretical propositions continue to apply.

We can identify three main narratives on work which will be discussed in the first two chapters. The first, which we can call the narrative of industrialism, was a response to the emergence of industrialism during the latter years of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries. The key contributors here are Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. The second was a response to the possible transcendence of industrialism by post-industrialism during the 1960s and 1970s. Contemporary debates over technological change, post-Fordism and the so-called flexible future constitute the third narrative which we will be looking at. As we shall see, it is by no means coincidental that these three narratives emerged at precisely the time when the repercussions of the first phase of industrialism (the industrial

revolution), the second phase centred around Fordist-style mass production and automation, and the third phase centred around the development of microelectronic technologies had really taken hold throughout the labour process. The authors of these narratives didn't seek explanations of what was going on just for the sake of it, but because they recognized the significance of the widespread changes which were taking place around them. The same can be said for the author of this book and most likely for all those who are currently concerned about what the repercussions of present changes will be.

Turning to what we are going to call issue-specific perspectives and accepting that these are by no means free of narrative content, we will look in turn at the following. Firstly, and deliberately picking up on issues of a practical nature, chapter three looks at arguments and debates which are based around the idea of the emergence of a new 'technological paradigm'. Whilst these obviously start out from a concern with technological change, they also embrace its impact on issues of skill and quality of working life, on management practices, and on organization and control.

Chapter four looks at the future of work from a feminist perspective. The importance of this perspective is that it has made the most forthright attempt to understand both the increasing role of women in formal paid employment - what some have called the 'feminization' of work - and to consider whether this development has actually been very successful from the point of view of women themselves. Serious concerns are being expressed for example, about an evident concentration of women in particular occupations, many of which are poorly paid and insecure, and about how the labour market operates with various levels of discriminatory segregation. Writers in this field have also made a very significant contribution in bringing into the open important questions about how ideologies of work are gendered, about the role of the household in social reproduction, and of how 'work' should be defined under circumstances where much of the 'work' that women do within the household is effectively done 'for free'.

In chapters five and six we turn our attention towards two of the most important perspectives which have emerged in recent years. We can group the first under the heading of culturalist and identity perspectives which place a firm emphasis on the role of work in providing people with an extensive range of outcomes which have typically been left out of account by traditional labour-process approaches. Here, the main concern is not so much with the practical and material outcomes of work as with the personal, experiential and thus less visible outcomes. These approaches also attempt to reassess the role and meaning of work both in terms of its impact on people's sense of identity, and in terms of where the balance lies between people's activities as workers

and their activities as consumers. If we are drifting towards a more consumption-oriented outlook on life, then important questions arise as to whether the whole experience of work become less important to us.

Chapter six looks at how processes of economic globalization are affecting our perceptions of what the future of work will be like. Whilst it is certainly true that international capitalism has always and necessarily operated between and across nation-states, recent developments have made the global dimension much more explicit. As part-and-parcel of the process of modernity itself, and greatly facilitated by information and other technologies of communication, economic processes and relationships are increasingly being affected by pressures which operate at a global level. Whilst these developments are being interpreted by some as signifying a radical shift in the nature of global economic activity, others have argued that the case for an all-encompassing and convergent notion of economic globalization has been grossly overstated.

In the final chapter a number of conclusions will be drawn about the problematical nature of making clear predictions about the future of work. It will be argued that the various perspectives tend to offer competing views of what the future will be thus underlining the fact that the future of work is a plural rather than singular thing. We will also reconsider briefly the continuing usefulness of the various narrative approaches to the future of work we looked at in the opening chapters, and emphasize that a tension will continue to exist between changes in the structural aspects of work - the practicalities of work and how it is organized, and changes in its ideational aspects - what we think about work and how we would like it to change. It will be argued that ideational flexibility is one of the most important features of the future of work.

1 The Narrative of Industrialism

A Typical Narrative of Work

The first three perspectives we shall be looking at involve a largely *narrative account* of the future of work. Typically within this type of account the future is framed or constructed out of an understanding of what has happened in the past. Notwithstanding the problematical nature of 'knowledge' just discussed, this kind of approach is attractive because we all like a good story. It is also comforting because it reassures us that despite our present difficulties we are all going to live 'happily ever after'. This optimism amounts to a continual refurbishment of the idea of progress. Not only are things going to turn out right in the end, they are going to be bigger and better than they were before. The idea of progress has occupied an important position within both the popular imagination and sociological theory ever since its inception during the nineteenth century. Picking up on one of the leading ideas of the European Enlightenment (see for example Hampson 1990, ch.2, Swingewood 1984, chs. 1 and 2 and Morrison 1995, ch.1), humankind reinvented its own image of itself as 'master' of its own destiny.

Our capacity for creative action motivates us to improve ourselves as time goes by, an improvement which is not random, is not an unfolding of blind chance or fate, but is deliberate and directed towards fairly definite goals which we have set for ourselves. Instead of being fixed in the present, or obsessed with the past, human endeavour became focused on the future. Although the final outcome cannot be known, this merely adds to the excitement of finding out what *can be* achieved. Since society is essentially a product of human effort, human progress means social development. If social scientists could discover the underlying processes of social development, this opened the possibility of using this knowledge to intervene in the next stage of progress. Social-scientific knowledge itself becomes a key ingredient of social development. As Francis puts it:

At the heart of sociology lies the idea that human behaviour is conditioned by social environment.... Armed with [a scientific understanding of man and history] mankind would no longer be at the mercy of blind historical processes. It would be possible to control the course of history by reconstructing society in accordance with the laws of human behaviour. By

perfecting man's social environment one could perfect man himself. (Francis 1987, p.3)

In one of the earliest attempts to define the 'positive' potential of the new science of sociology, Auguste Comte is quite explicit that knowledge of the past has an important bearing on understanding what lessons the past holds for the future:

The aim of every science is forethought. For the laws established by observation of phenomena are generally employed to foresee their succession. All men, however little advanced, make true predictions, which are always based on the same principle, the knowledge of the future from the past.... Manifestly, then, it is quite in accordance with the nature of the human mind that observation of the past should unveil the future in politics, as it does in astronomy, physics, chemistry, and physiology. The determination of the future must even be regarded as the direct aim of political science, as in the case of the other positive sciences. Indeed, it is clear that knowledge of what social system the elite of mankind is called to by the progress of civilization - knowledge forming the true practical object of positive science - involves a general determination of the next social future as it results from the past. (Comte 1822, 'Plan for scientific work necessary for reorganising society', quoted in Kumar 1983, pp.23-4)

In addition to all of this, the arrival of the idea that human society develops through time, provided a conceptual framework for understanding the past. Previous periods in history, previous manifestations of society, could be understood as the earlier stages, the stepping stones, of social *evolution*. Having taken humankind out of history, having separated humankind from nature and fate, it could now be put back into history, and the social and the biological aspects of development could be reconciled. Kumar goes so far as to suggest that the idea of *biological* evolution actually developed out of the idea of *social* evolution:

Indeed it isn't far-fetched to suppose that the attention to change brought by the idea of progress stimulated inquiries in an evolutionary direction in the natural sciences. At any rate, to complement the theory of social evolution ... there was now a highly satisfactory theory of natural - geological and biological - evolution. The natural and social world could now be seen as continuous; human social evolution was a special case of biological evolution in general; the principles of order and change in the one applied equally to the other. (Kumar 1983, pp.18-19)¹

One justification for Kumar's suggestion, is that Darwin's theory of 'natural selection' was published *after* the social theorist and 'gentleman scholar'

Herbert Spencer had popularised his idea that the principal mechanism of biological and social development was through 'the survival of the fittest' (described in *Social Statics*, 1851).

In brief, Spencer identifies three types or levels of evolution and the categories of scientific knowledge and modes of investigation which go with them: the natural sciences (geology, physics and astronomy) are concerned with identifying the mechanisms of evolution of inorganic matter; the biological sciences are concerned with organic matter, and sociology is concerned with the mechanism of evolution of society itself. Sociology then, is the study of the 'super-organic' - a level of knowledge which seeks to unite theories of inorganic and organic evolution into one complete system of knowledge. As Spencer puts it:

The study of Sociology [is] the study of Evolution in its most complex form.... Throughout [the work of sociologists] there runs the assumption that the facts, simultaneous and successive, which societies present, have a genesis no less natural than the genesis of other classes [of phenomena].... Using the analogy supplied by human life, we saw that just as bodily development and structure and function, furnish subject matter for biological science... so social growth and the rise of structures and functions accompanying it, furnish matter for a Science of Society... we saw, on comparing rudimentary societies with one another and with societies in different stages of progress, that they do present certain common traits of structure and of function, as well as certain common traits of development. (Spencer in Thompson and Tunstall (1971), pp.33-43)

Although Spencer's highly naturalistic view of social evolution has been largely rejected by contemporary theorists (Goldthorpe in Raison (ed.) (1979), it is difficult to cast off completely the idea that we and the society in which we live are evolving towards some 'higher' state.

Applied to the world of work a typical narrative might run something like this. Humankind emerged from a primitive state of hunting and gathering during the early stone age (from around 600,000 to 100,000 years BC) into a more settled state of agrarian communities during the middle and late stone age (up to around 10,000 BC). These communities began to coalesce into larger rural and semi-urban settlements during the bronze (3,500-800 BC) and iron ages (from 800 BC), characterized by a more elaborate division and specialization of tasks. Metalworking and thus tool making enabled significant increases in production to take place, which in turn led to the beginnings of non-local trade. The emergence of new hierarchies and distinctions in economic life (for example between slaves, labourers, craftsmen, proprietors and lords), together with the need for governmental structures and administrative systems, was accompanied by the emergence

and consolidation of social and cultural hierarchies. Despite the rather faltering rate of 'technological' progress during the medieval period (typically from the end of the Roman Empire in 476 to the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453) these relationships reached a level of maturity based on the authority of private ownership of land.

The period from the Renaissance in Europe around 1450, up to the emergence of the first industrial revolution in Northern Europe around 1750 was a period of transition, in which many of the constraints of feudal society were gradually displaced and subsequently replaced by industrial society. As far as economic life was concerned, and apart from continuing innovations in agriculture, the most important developments were a considerable expansion of entrepreneurial activity both within Europe and between Europe and the recently discovered 'new worlds', and the expansion of non-agricultural industries in, amongst other things, the mining of coal and other necessary minerals and ores, and in the manufacturing of other desirables such as glass, paper and gunpowder. The earth-bound nature of many of these new activities meant regional concentration of industry. In the same way that it is not practicable to graze sheep in places where there is no grass, it is not possible to mine coal where there is none.

Between 1750 and 1900 industrial society really shifted into top gear. Beginning in the textile industries, the application of new technologies and ways of organizing industrial work in factories massively increased the economic output of the key European players.² By 1781 Arkwright's Cromford factory employed nearly 1,000 workers, while by the turn of the century there were in excess of 150 water-powered factories in northern England and the midlands. By the nineteenth century, the size of the workforce in the average mill was around 500, and steam-power had almost completely replaced water-power. As a measure of production in cotton textiles, imports of raw cotton increased from around 2 million lbs in the 1730s to over 33 million lbs in the 1790s.

Similar dramatic developments took place in iron and steel production (which in England increased from 68 thousand tons in 1788 to 6.5 *million* tons in 1873 and upwards of 9 million tons in 1914), and in coal production which rose from 8 to 50 millions tons between 1750 and 1850 to over 130 million tons by 1875.³ The massive canal- and road-building projects of the 1790s, together with the development of the steam railway (by 1860 over 12,000 miles of track had been laid in Britain) represented both the symbolic and the practical completion of the transition to a fully industrialized economic infrastructure.

With the coming of industrial society the land-based authority of the old feudal aristocracy was more or less completely displaced by the capital-based authority of the industrial entrepreneur. Increasing output in manufactured goods generated large amounts of capital which was eagerly re-invested in new ventures. At the lower end of the social hierarchy, the mass of the working population was settling down to an urban rather than a rural way of life. The natural rhythm of the seasons and cycles of cultivation were almost entirely replaced by clock-based time (Thompson, E.P., 1967). Working had become a distinct realm of activity, a calibrated portion of the day spent at the place of work.

This transition was accompanied by a qualitative change in the nature and experience of work, because now that the worker was paid in relation to the time spent at work, rather than in terms of the product itself, the relationship between the doing of the work and the work done was much more abstract. The most extreme case was in the highly mechanized factory, where mass production was, by definition, concerned with producing large numbers of identical components or products. It therefore mattered very little which individual had produced which particular item. The division of labour in industry therefore required workers who were prepared to forfeit any real or direct conception of how their effort and skill manifested itself in the final product.

This shift into mechanized and factory-based working also brought about an explicit separation of the place of work from the home of the worker. Work had become a public rather than private activity. The new pattern of work also involved a change in the division of labour between men and women as the earlier self-sufficiency of the household based on a sharing of activities between men, women and children, was replaced by a dependent household characterized by a much more explicit division of work between family members (Thompson, E.P., 1963, Anderson 1974, Pahl 1984).

At the turn of the twentieth century, the pattern of development which had begun in Britain replicated itself across Northern Europe and the United States. The industrial revolution had established an economic system based on the production and sale of manufactured goods. The merging of the large industrial firms into a small number of joint stock companies, corporations and industrial conglomerates, together with the development of ever more sophisticated and reliable international networks of transportation and communication, meant that industrialism had become a truly 'global' affair. A rise in standards of living, first amongst the expanding middle classes, and later amongst the working classes, provided an essential market for the increasing variety of manufactured goods.