**Cultures of work**

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**Abstract**: While work is an economic act – work has a price, the wage rate – it is also a cultural act. Culture goes all the way down. It seeps into every aspect of the work process, shaping its meaning, norms, values, institutional settings, hierarchies of control, artefacts, and embodied practices. As an idea the culture of labor was first developed within political economy, and linked in one way or another to issues of social class and transformation. Since the 1970s, however, because of profound shifts in the Global North towards a service-based, post-industrial economy, the political economic interpretation has increasingly fallen out of favor. Instead, the culture of work is more and more understood through the lens of cultural and social theory and drawn frequently from feminism and poststructuralism. Illustrative examples are provided from economic geography, the discipline within human geography most concerned with labor and the culture of work.

A culture of work is a distinct and stable set of shared values, norms, meanings, institutional forms, artefacts, and embodied practices – a culture – that unifies a group of workers as they labor at a given site of employment. A culture of work is not separate from the labor process, an extra, something that is added. Rather, it is there from the very beginning, joined with the labor process, indissolvably connected to it. It shapes how work is performed; the relation that workers have with one another including with their bosses; how things are done and by what means; and, even more fundamentally, what counts as work in the first place.

Recognizing a culture of work is important because it demonstrates that work is more than just a bare economic transaction. Orthodox (neoclassical) economics conceives work as only an economic calculus. In exchange for expending physical effort and/or mental energy to complete tasks set by an employer the worker receives a wage. The wage is the price of a laborer’s work. For neoclassical economics the determination of the wage rate in the labor market is the only interesting fact one needs to know about work. Once the price of labor is determined everything else follows. Such a position is contested by the idea of the culture of work, however. Rather than the wage rate in the labor market determining everything about work, it is everything outside the labor market bearing on work that determines the wage rate. This position is forcefully argued by the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, and whose work will be discussed further below. Orthodox economics begins with an economic relation, the determination of price in the market place that then determines all other non-economic relationships. Bourdieu argues the reverse. It is the non-economic that determines the economic. As he puts it, “it is not prices that determine everything but everything that determines prices” (Bourdieu 2005, 77). The culture of work is part of the non-economic everything, and which gives it central importance.

One more general point: the culture of work is not singular but plural. There is not one culture of work but many. Even at the same geographical site, there can be a multiplicity of work cultures. Those cultures may overlap at different points or they may be separated; they may be tacit or they may be formally articulated; or they may be imposed from above or arise organically from below. To be a culture of work it must be shared, however. A culture of work never pertains to one individual worker. It must have the capacity of being taken up, learned, transmitted and imparted to other workers in either the same place or in other places even if they are half a world away. Exactly how that culture is taken up, learned, transmitted and imparted will vary geographically and historically, but the existence of such a capacity is essential.

This entry is divided into two main parts. The first provides a conceptual framework for understanding the culture of work. As an idea it stems from political economy, but over the last forty years it has increasingly severed those ties, becoming more squarely associated with social and cultural theory. The second provides a set of illustrative empirical cases drawn mostly from research within economic geography, the discipline within human geography most concerned with work and its culture. As a field it has progressively moved away from orthodox economic analysis to approaches emphasizing the social and the cultural.

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**Theorizing cultures of work**

Workers employed in England’s “Dark Satanic Mills” of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism were generically called “the Hands.” It was a term that Charles Dickens memorably satirized in his novel *Hard Times* (1854) set in that ultimate (fictional) gritty industrial city, Coketown. For Dickens, use of the label “Hands” was symptomatic of the cruelty of industrial capitalism that reduced the wholeness of a worker to only two bodily appendages. That at least was how Mr. Bounderby, the anti-hero capitalist at the center of the novel, thought of his workers. But Dickens suggests, and illustrated by one of the novel’s characters, Stephen Blackpool, that workers were much, much more than merely a pair of hands. Work as Dickens portrayed it was always embedded within a larger setting of cultural sentiment and meaning; that is, within a culture of work.

Karl Marx wrote at the same time as Dickens, and in the same city. He too was concerned with the dire and horrific character of work and the fate of workers within English industrial capitalism. But whereas Dickens’ criticisms were couched in terms of morality and sentiment, Marx’s were framed by a rigorous and stark political economic logic. Marx believed that logic incontrovertibly proved the unsustainability of industrial capitalism. His analysis had many elements but one bore specifically on work, and formulated as worker alienation. Alienation occurred because of a disjunction between the nature of workers as fully-rounded human beings and their transformation into less-than-humans under capitalism. At work they were deployed merely as things, inputs, part of the machinery of production. This was at odds with their real nature as sentient humans. Consequently, they were alienated from their product, from their work, from themselves, and from other workers. Workers lost any culture of work. They were simply grunt laborers, employed as Hands, and for nothing else. Marx’s political project was a restorative one: to eliminate worker alienation by re-establishing a culture of work, and which he thought was possible by only a working class revolution. It was his analysis that initiated a political economic approach to the culture of work.

Dickens and Marx in their different ways both pointed to the need to provide a wider discussion of work that went beyond simply a description of acts of labor, and its remuneration. There was a need to situate work and workers within a larger social and cultural context. Subsequent depictions initially followed the political economic tradition of Marx, but later were supplemented, then overshadowed by explicitly culturally inflected analyses.

*Political Economy*

Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels were concerned primarily with factory workers and their work. In *Capital*, volume 1 (1867), Marx relied on reports completed by factory inspectors to document the appalling conditions under which workers labored. The shocking excesses of those descriptions made it clear that work was never simply an economic calculus. Engels saw those factory working conditions up close. His father was part owner of a textile mill in Manchester, and in 1842 he sent the 22-year old Friedrich there to learn the business. Apart from allowing Engels to record working conditions, it also gave him an opportunity to document the pitiful and hazardous state of working class urban life in Manchester. During his time off, Engels peripatetically roamed the city, writing up his observations as *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844).

For there to be a change, thought Marx and Engels, there needed to be a working class revolution. This would happen, they believed, in part because of the alienation of workers at work. Workers would rebel against their horrific treatment. But to mount an effective revolution workers needed to collaborate, to act collectively, to forge a class consciousness, to become a class-for-itself. In turn, that required a working class culture, a culture of work.

That was the thesis at the heart of the British historian E. P. Thompson’s now classic volume, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). It documented for the period 1780-1832 the rise of an English working class consciousness and intimately tied to the experience of work within early industrial capitalism. Perhaps the most important part of his title was the present participle, “making.” It signaled a commitment to understanding working class consciousness as an on-going process that historically and geographically took variegated forms. How workers came to consciousness at their workplace, and the form and consequences that consciousness took, differed substantially across period and place. As Thompson (1963: 9-10) wrote: “Class-consciousness is the way in which experiences [at work] are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms. If the experience appears as determined, class-consciousness does not. We can see a logic in the responses of similar occupational groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predicate any law. Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way.”

Thompson was concerned with the emergence of class-consciousness, the culture of work, during early forms of capitalism. Those forms were in continual flux, however, often undergoing radical transformation. As Marx and Engels (2010: 16) put it, “all that is solid melts into air.” Capitalism was always changing its spots, and as it did so, new cultures of work appeared. The “machinofacture” that Marx, Engels, and Dickens described in which work consisted of feeding inputs into machines gave way by the first part of the twentieth century to a new form, Fordism, in which workers in effect become part of the machinery itself. It was a new culture of work.

The culture was clinically analyzed by Harry Braverman in his book, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974). The beginnings of that work culture were with the late nineteenth-century time and motion experiments carried out by Frederick W. Taylor (1856-1915). Taylor was concerned with designing workplace strategies that would squeeze from workers the greatest amount of work from the least amount of work time. To formulate those strategies, Taylor carried out experiments on workers, varying their work conditions, timing and recording their performances. From those results he developed what he called three principles of scientific management that could be applied to all laborers, and which would maximize efficiency at work. The first was disassociating the labor process from the skills of the laborer. This was what Braverman (1974) later called “deskilling.” Workers were not employed for the manual skills they possessed, but only for their capacity to carry out a minimal set of repetitive simple tasks that required no skill at all. For Braverman, deskilling of labor became ever more marked and pervasive as capitalism developed historically. The second was the separation of conception from execution. Workers were paid not to think (conception) but only to do (execution). Taylor found from his experiments that thinking took time, producing inefficiencies, and requiring elimination. Workers were most efficient when they became part of the machinery, carrying out without thought rote mechanical acts. The third was to use “task cards” to specify exactly what was to be done, how it was be done, when it was to be done, and how long it should take

The new culture of work Taylorism was perhaps best seen in the factories of mass manufacturing production that emerged in the early twentieth century. Exemplified by the Rouge automobile plant in Dearborn, MI (by 1928 the largest integrated factory in the world), and built by Henry Ford, the production method there combined assembly-line techniques with the systematic deployment of principles of scientific management. The culture of work was for workers to stand in place along the assembly line and robotically carry out the same single minimal task over, and over, and over again. It was culture that was spoofed by Charlie Chaplin in his film *Modern Times* (1936, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-mxzp3KVWw>

), and (strangely) celebrated by the Marxist Mexican painter Diego Rivera in his Detroit Institute of Art murals of workers at the Rouge (1932-33, <http://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/michigan/detroit/riveramurals/intro.html>).

The sociologist Michael Burawoy criticized Braverman’s work only a few years after it was published. In his *Manufacturing Consent* (1979), Burawoy argued that the culture of work under Taylorism was defined less by draconian control enforced by authoritarian scientific managers (Braverman’s view) than by a consensual process in which workers agreed to their own domination. In making this argument Burawoy drew on the idea of cultural hegemony originally put forward by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). This was the notion that capitalists exerted social control not by strong-arm coercive tactics but by winning consent from the larger population. Consent was gained by capitalists seemingly granting the masses what they wanted, meeting their interests. In reality, though, as Gramsci argued, the interests of proletarian masses were never met. They only appeared to be met. Consent was secured under false pretenses, with the elite in the end the only beneficiaries. Burawoy took Gramsci’s idea and applied it to Taylorist workers. Under a regime of cultural hegemony, Burawoy argued, workers consented to their own oppression and deskilling. They mistakenly believed Taylorism gave them choice, and widened their work experience. That’s why they consented. In reality it gave neither, allowing capitalist employers to exploit and oppress them to an even higher degree.

Cultural hegemony was also central to Paul Willis’ classic ethnography, again written in the late 1970s: L*earning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (1977). Willis explored less the culture of work than the culture at school that prepared working class boys for Taylorist jobs in a factory. Based on interviews with a dozen school boys who were in their last year-and-a-half at a secondary modern school in Britain’s West Midlands (then at the heart of the country’s automobile industry), Willis identified two groups: “the Lads” and the “Ear ‘oles.” The Lads did not pay attention at school. They were bored by it. Their main aim was “to have a Laff” which they did by resisting school authority in various forms (Willis 1977: 14). The “Ear ‘oles”, in contrast, paid attention, strove to complete their school work, and respected their teachers. Willis’ argument was that the cultures of class and masculinity at the school for the Lads perfectly prepared them for the culture of work in a factory that they experienced once they left. Work like school would also be boring, not require their attention, but it could be endured by having a “Laff,” and by circumventing and subverting authority whenever they could. This was a form of cultural hegemony because the Lads consented first at school and then at their workplace to their own domination. Of course, they did not see it in such terms believing that their acting out provided them freedom and agency, when in reality it met only the interests of capitalists. Working class kids got working class jobs, and the larger system of industrial capitalism was smoothly reproduced

Of course, it wasn’t always so smooth. Even during the Golden Age of Fordism, there were occasional downturns when it was difficult for working class kids to get working class jobs. From the late 1970s, however, there was a tectonic shift in the Global North with massive deindustrialization and economic restructuring that profoundly impacted employment, labor, and work. “Old Father Ford” didn’t immediately die, but he became very poorly, making those 1970s studies, and the masculinist assumptions that underpinned them increasingly redundant as male Taylorist workers themselves were made redundant. This change also brought a tectonic shift in the literature on the culture of work. Up until the 1970s the culture of work for the most part meant men’s work. After the 1970s, however, and in step with the larger structural changes in the economy in the Global North (and for that matter in the Global South too), there was a much more emphasis on examining the work of women. The old political economic perspective with its emphasis on the male working class was out of sync with the new times. Instead, a different, more relevant, theoretical perspective was taken up that emphasized the cultural, drew on feminist and poststructural theory, and conceived class as not only a narrowly economic category.

*Cultural Theory*

Deindustrialization cut a grim swathe across Global Northern manufacturing regions from the 1970s, eliminating an enormous number of relatively high-paying, Taylorist, often unionized manufacturing jobs held by men. Such changed work practices became fodder even for popular culture. For example, the 1997 movie “*The Full Monty*” (1997), later a Broadway and West End musical, featured a group of male Sheffield steel workers who when they were made redundant took off their boiler suits and steel-capped boots and entered what was traditionally a female service sector occupation, exotic dancing.

While that film may have been a Hollywood fantasy, it pointed to a fundamental change around work and its culture. The Global North was moving towards a post-industrial, service-based economy, turning upside down older Fordist nostrums of work. Employment now came in two main forms. There were the “McJobs” which were low-paid and required few skills or much experience. There could be variation even in this general category, though, and drawn precisely along the lines of the culture of work. At the higher end of the hierarchy was employment in establishments of conspicuous consumption such as boutique cafes, or designer clothing stores. At the lower end was flipping burgers in fast-food restaurants or as “associates” working the floor of big-box discount retailers. The other type of service sector employment was in the creative economy, or new economy, or cultural economy. Workers here were often highly paid, and frequently required skills that were formally credentialed. Work could be in existing sectors that had been reconstituted such as in advertising or higher education, or in entirely new sectors like video game or web design. Both kinds of service work – the low-end and the high-end – required embodied interactions with customers and with other workers, calling for cultural, social and even emotional (soft) skills. Unlike in manufacturing where one worker’s body was like another, simply the repository of brawn to be dispensed in the industrial process, in the service sector the body was often a vital part of the product sold. What kind of body made a difference, and how it was dressed, comported, spoke, and looked could be crucial. Out-of-the-box Taylorist management principles were still applied, especially to low-end service work. But typically there was scope, and which increased as one moved up the service sector job ladder, for conception, even creativity and individuality, as well as execution.

Within this transformed setting the culture of work came to mean something different. It didn’t necessarily lead back to class, and to questions of social revolution, as it did under political economy. Central instead were issues of cultural identity around gender, race, sexuality and age. And even when class was emphasized it was conceived differently, with a cultural inflexion.

Bourdieu’s work, especially his book *Distinction* (1984), made that clear. Bourdieu argued that economic differences in income and wealth were not the only, indeed, were not even the most important criteria in determining class membership. For Bourdieu class location was set by three kinds of capital that an individual controlled: economic (money), social (networks and contacts), and cultural (aesthetic tastes). The latter was not just an add on, but for Bourdieu often the most important determining influence, albeit interacting with the other two factors. Furthermore, Bourdieu argued, while economic and social capital were accumulated over time, cultural capital was learned at an early age, inherited from one’s family. Once one’s tastes were fixed, they were then difficult to change, and as a result ossified class distinctions.

The culture of aesthetic distinction channeled different class members into different jobs. For a number of service sector jobs, such as those in the hospitality sector, recognizing distinction was imperative. How one presented oneself, the clothes one wore, the words one chose, the accent in which they were spoken, the manners one displayed, all made a difference. They were the required culture of labor for that job. But it was a culture that you either had or you didn’t depending upon your inherited cultural capital. In Yasemin Besen-Cassino’s (2014) study of youth labor in America, the possession of cultural capital mattered even for minimum-wage service jobs. She researched student workers employed in hip coffee shops in an East-Coast US city. Although remuneration was minimal, to be hired and to keep their job students needed to possess the appropriate cultural capital: to like and to judge the correct music, to be able to converse in a suitable form and on fitting topics, and to look right. The employees may not have had much economic capital, but they possessed cultural capital. Indeed, the economic capital they acquired was quickly turned into what Bourdieu called symbolic goods, commodities whose aesthetic qualities only yet further demonstrated their good taste, reinforcing their privileged class membership.

The work of the baristas that Besen-Cassino (2014: 40-42) studied was, as she notes, not only an exercise in cultural distinction, but in cultural performance. The dais on which the baristas made their cappuccinos and lattes was their stage; the customer line-up, the audience; the physical lay-out of the café, the chairs and tables, the scenery; their smart talk, the script; their uniforms, theatrical costumes; and their accessories, props. Treating cultural and social life as a performance has been discussed by scholars for at least the last half-century. It was found in philosophy in the work of J. L. Austin on “performative utterances;” in sociology in the writings of Harold Garfinkel on “ethnomethodology;” and more recently in feminism in the texts of Judith Butler (and discussed further below). The original use of the “dramaturgical” metaphor as it has been called was with the Canadian born sociologist, Erving Goffman, and his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). His argument was that in order not to embarrass ourselves, and also to control what others think of us, we put on a performance. We use the stage setting and any appropriate props to conjure a positive image of ourselves; to present ourselves in everyday life as we would like to be rather than as who we really are. Afterwards we return backstage, taking off the mask, reverting to our true selves.

Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor seems especially suited to understanding service sector occupations, and in which the culture of work plays such a central part. Besen-Cassino’s case study of college baristas of course is one such example. Another is Arlie Hochschild’s (1983) study in her book *The Managed Heart* that among other occupations examined female airline flight attendants. Hochschild introduces there the idea that some workers are employed to manage emotions, both those who they are serving as well as their own. In both cases there is a performance of what she terms “emotional labor.” First, the worker tries to cultivate in the customers they are serving the “right” emotions, “right” in the sense that it allows the customer to appreciate properly the service they are purchasing. Second, for this to happen, for it to be authentic, like all good actors the workers must also induce within themselves the “right” emotional feelings, while at the same time suppressing any “wrong” feeling that might disrupt their performance. In the case of female flight attendants, a main task is to quell any emotional fears passengers might have from flying. This is “managed” by the attendants persuading passengers that the flight is an exotic journey, luxurious even. Hence the smiles, the trolley of drinks and tasty snacks, the in-flight entertainment, the jokey even flirtatious chit-chat, the short skirts, the tailored uniforms, the coquettish headgear. But there is also the need for the flight attendants to manage their own hearts which, as Hochschild shows, can be difficult. Apart from boorish talk and occasional violent acts by passengers, there is the treatment of the attendants by the airlines. They are subject to: horrendously long and physically taxing work days; meticulous disciplining of bodies and appearance; and continual surveillance and control – moral, corporeal, and work –both inside the cabin and out.

Hochschild shows the dark underbelly of the culture of work, and located within a larger force field of changing relations of power, sometime positive, often not. Here there are connections also to the French social theorist Michel Foucault and his concern with power, surveillance, control, and the body. Foucault’s ideas certainly link to earlier formulations of the culture of work put forward by Frederic Taylor. Taylorist workers are nothing if not controlled, disciplined and surveyed. But Foucault’s interests apply perhaps even more so to the contemporary service sector, and the bodies that perform it. The body is so important to Foucault because it is a site on which so many discourses are inscribed: gender, race, sexuality, disability, age, and others. The consequent cultural identities, in turn, shape what kinds of jobs people undertake, and their experiences at work.

The body as Foucault suggests can also be a site of potential resistance, and a theme further developed in Judith Butler’s work, especially *Gender Trouble* (1990), that provides a critical feminist reworking of the idea of performance. For Butler gender is always performed. That performance takes the form of repeated iterations, and which can mistakenly give the illusion that gender is fixed and natural, rather than socially constructed and continually remade. Of course, there are immensely powerful regulative discourses that maintain the performative iterations of gender. But, and this is where there is at least the possibility of bodily resistance, one iteration may not be exactly the same as the one before, and raising the possibility of progressive change however incremental. The idea that performances of the culture of work can produce at least a possibility of progressive change has become a strong theme in the geographical literature, and to which we now turn.

**Cultures of work in geography**

Within human geography, work as a topic has been most often discussed by economic geographers, and linked to discussions of the labor market. Very little has been written explicitly on the *culture* of work, however. Instead, it needs to be teased out from individual studies, and the intent of this section.

From its very beginning economic geography recognized that labor influenced the location of economic activities. Initially, that locational influence was conceptualized (as in, for example, Alfred Weber’s classic location triangle) in terms of the cost of workers (i.e., wages), and not their culture. The first glimmer that the culture of work might also have locational effect came with geographical studies of industrial districts undertaken during the 1940s. An industrial district is a tightly bound area within a city specializing in one particular type of industrial production, e,g., the garment district. The turn-of-the-twentieth-century British economist Alfred Marshall was the first to recognize the phenomena of industrial districts, explaining them as a consequence of agglomeration economies. He came to realize, though, that this explanation went only so far, and he augmented his account with the additional factor, “industrial atmosphere.” Subsequently, Marshall’s “atmosphere” has been interpreted as the force of culture; it was the missing ingredient that explained why industrial production geographically clumped rather than dispersed. Specifically, the culture of work, in this case interpreted as common social ties and institutional affiliation linking similarly skilled workers, was used to explain why particular types of employees cluster in one part of the city, and which then functioned as an inducing labor pool for an industrial district.

For the next two decades or so after the end of World War II the topic of work mostly disappeared from the agenda of economic geography. The focus was on labor and final output rather than work and the production process. That began to change from the early 1970s with emergence of political economy. David Harvey, the most prominent geographer writing within that tradition, at first made little of work (and even less of culture). Labor for him was simply the kick start of value – “LP” in his schematic (Labor Power) – and which then began a complex geographical circulation (Harvey’s central preoccupation). That changed in the early 1980s when both the topics of work and culture became more prominent. That was the result partly because of the Global North’s firestorm of industrial restructuring and deindustrialization that made work, or the lack of it, so prominent; and partly because of the beginnings of feminist geography that started with a discussion about women and work, the so-called domestic labor debate. Those two approaches, political economy and feminism, opened up the idea of the culture of work for scrutiny.

The hollowing out of manufacturing led those in the political economy tradition to attend directly to work. That involved partly enumerating the hemorrhaging of manufacturing jobs, but also describing changes in the nature of the industrial work that remained. Along with deindustrialization went also industrial restructuring, a move from an older Fordist form of work based on a Taylorism to a new (leaner) Post-Fordist form based on labor flexibility. Here workers learned the manual, could potentially operate at any work station, contributed ideas to “quality circles,” could stop the assembly line when they saw flaws (the ultimate no-no under Fordism), and were paid to think as well as to do. It was a new culture of work, and which those from within the political economy tradition began to describe variously as post-Fordism, lean production, or flexible accumulation (Amin 1995).

Doreen Massey’s writings, especially her volume *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (1984), were particularly important during this period. It directly applied ideas of culture to work. An especially potent case study was her analysis of the South Wales economy that shifted in the late 1970s and early 1980s away from its historical specialization of heavy industry (coal, iron, and steel) to the assembly of electronic goods. Carried out by primarily American and Japanese multinational firms, they were drawn to South Wales by the prospect of realizing a particular culture of work. It was to be realized, though, not by men, the traditional employed worker in the region, but by women. The corporations wanted an educated, Greenfield, and female labor market that was geographically trapped, and consequently would be cheap, pliable and knowledgeable. Massey argued that the culture of South Wales had created just such a workforce. The culture of male workers of South Wales’s heavy industries had in effect produced a pool of potential female workers who, while they had gone to school, because of the region’s masculinism and patriarchy had not generally worked outside the home. When retrenchment started in heavy industry, female partners went out to paid work, although they remained geographically constrained because of demands to continue domestic (household reproduction) duties. American and Japanese multinationals were waiting for them.

The other strand pushing the culture of work in geography, and again one in which Massey was also central, was feminism. In the early 1980s feminist geographers attracted to political economy followed the larger socialist feminist literature that at the time was preoccupied with the question of female domestic labor and household reproduction. That literature identified the household as a site of (re)production. The household produced workers, and future workers (children), ensuring that they were clothed, fed, and sheltered, ready to turn up to work (or school) the next day. But how should the unpaid domestic work of women, and who (re)produced the central commodity of capitalism, labor, be treated conceptually? On the surface it appeared as if the work women did in the home was different from laboring in a factory. It was different culture. Work disappeared. But the classical economistic and functional Marxist interpretation reduced domestic labor, women, and the political ends of feminism only to class position. Culture disappeared.

Partly as a result, from the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a break as feminists in economic geography moved away from Marxism toward poststructural theory that emphasized the cultural. Often the focus was the body, both men’s and women’s, and the various (Foucauldian) social and cultural discursive inscriptions written on it.

One of the first studies bearing on work from this new sensibility came from Doreen Massey who shifted her focus from a declining old industrial economic region, South Wales, to a brand new one, the Cambridge (UK) high-tech research triangle. In both regions, though, there was a distinct culture of work in operation. Massey along with her co-author David Wield showed in *High-Tech Fantasies* (1992) that the culture of work was inextricably joined with the culture at home. The seemingly disembodied discourse of science and rationality practiced by the overwhelmingly male research workers at high-tech companies in the Cambridge research triangle was possible only because of the embodied labor of the overwhelmingly female partners at home and female support staff at work. The culture of work was possible because of the culture of home.

Later works drew especially on Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor, as well as Butler’s poststructural feminist version, to reveal cultures of work. Philip Crang’s (1994) study of a themed restaurant somewhere in Southeast England disclosed that everyone, both workers and customers alike, adhered to a cultural script, dressing up, using the right prop at the right time, and saying their lines when prompted. Especially interesting, Crang argued, was when things went wrong: people muffed their lines, they didn’t follow stage directions, the props broke. Those moments were like when the curtain went up prematurely revealing the backstage. It showed just how the front stage presentation was pulled off.

A more politically pointed use of performance following Butler and focussed on gender and the body was Linda McDowell’s study of merchant bankers in the City of London, *Capital Culture* (1997). Like other service workers, bankers must not only talk the talk, but walk the walk. They embody the product they sell. They are finance incarnate. McDowell was especially interested in how gender and sexuality were performed as the culture of work. It was done by clothing choice (leather skirt or demur suit); by language (English public school or the street market); and by acts and gestures (a head nod or a flapping arm). McDowell showed how narrowly constrained and vigorously policed such cultural performances were. Transgressive moments were necessarily subtle and fleeting. A grey suit that was just a little too grey, a hand gesture in the trading room that was just a little too enthusiastic. They might not be transgressions that would bring down financial capitalism, but they could get you fired. Or they just might, following Butler, redefine an acceptable culture of work in the performance of gender and sexuality.

Another related example, is the cultural performance of race at work. Beverley Mullings (2012) research about male and female sex-trade workers in the Caribbean showed that just like gender race is performed into existence. Sex-trade workers in her study used their bodies to perform that version of race expected of them by their often European (colonial) clients. Race like gender, then, was pliable, taking on different forms. It was not natural but always a performance, always a response in this case to the larger culture of work in which it is situated.

There is one more form of performance around the culture of work, the performance of academic researchers as they try to change the culture of work that they are investigating. J. K. Gibson-Grahams’ book *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It*) (1996) was pioneering. They used their workshops, focus groups, and interviews with the female partners of Australian miners working in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria, to perform a different version of what a miner’s partner might be. Gibson-Graham tried to create a space for feminist politics that not only altered the culture of home life, but, through the effect on the male partner, altered the culture of work life as well. Perhaps the end point of this trajectory is when academic research becomes literally a stage performance. Geraldine Pratt’s work on Filipina domestic workers in Vancouver, Canada, has become that. Initially written up in standard academic prose, Pratt subsequently transformed her research materials about Filipina domestic workers into a theatrical script for performance on stage (*Families Apart*, 2012). That production was a critical exploration of the culture of work of Filipina nannies in Vancouver. Through influencing its audience, like Gibson-Graham’s project, it aspired to change the current culture of work; to perform a new world of work into being.

**Conclusion**

The culture of work is an overstuffed term. It seems like it contains everything interesting that is left out of the standard economic account of the labour market, and which is an enormous amount. The theories reviewed in this entry try to give the culture of work a more precise shape and definition. The political economy approach conceives the culture of work as an addendum to class, and which has the potential to be used strategically both to advance class interests (raising class consciousness, for example), but also to thwart them (as cultural hegemony, for example). The other approach, cultural and social theory, resists linking the culture of work only to class. Instead it seeks to explore the full spectrum of its elements – gender, race, sexuality, disability, age, and so on. Both approaches have their origins in part in the character of the work to which they have been applied. Crucial here, as suggested, was the profound shift during the 1970s and 1980s in the nature of work in the Global North as it moved from a manufacturing economy to a service-based one. It was a trigger in changing the conception of the culture of work. Unchanging, though, is the need to remember that the economy, including work, is always linked to culture. Perhaps that is the most important role of all that the idea of the culture of work plays.

SEE ALSO: ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY; EMOTIONAL LABOR; GENDER, WORK, EMPLOYMENT; KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY; LABOR GEOGRAPHY; LABOR MARKET; RACE, WORK, EMPLOYMENT; RESTRUCTURING; SOCIAL REPRODUCTION.

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