

1 Encountering Working and Organizing Under Contemporary Capitalism

Introduction

Viewed through history's rearview mirror, modernity has never seen a period when work wasn't undergoing dramatic change. Whether transformations in the workplace are seen as the result of demographic, technological, political, or competitive forces, shifting work arrangements have always drawn scholarly attention. The claims are everywhere: social critics, politicians, and management gurus proclaim a new era of capitalism, a "new economy" promising a working life characterized by either a utopian freedom and self-determination or a dystopian servitude produced by constant surveillance, competition, and insecurity (including the threat of job loss because of automation—a risk not only for so-called blue-collar workers) amid weak global economic growth (e.g., McDonough, Reich, & Kotz, 2010), with few pronouncements falling between those extremes.

By way of illustration, consider the consulting and accounting firm PwC's recent publication, *The Future of Work: A Journey to 2022* (Rendell & Brown, 2014). After noting that "disruptive innovations are creating new industries and business models" (1) and challenging readers—it targets human resource managers in for-profit enterprises—to consider what this means for their businesses, the report paints three scenarios, three prospective "worlds of work." What it calls the "Blue World" is where large multinational corporations dominate, where firms refine employee measurement and management efficiencies, and in which employees trade personal data for job security. In the "Green World," companies are portrayed as developing a social conscience and sense of responsibility such that firms offer ethical values and work-life balance in exchange for employee loyalty. Its "Orange World" speaks to the decline of large corporations and the ascendancy of small, nimble, networked, and technologically sophisticated firms. Here, job security disappears and in its place are the flexibility, autonomy, and attractiveness of new challenges that accompany the contract-based work of "portfolio careers." Of course, these worlds ignore a good deal of organizational forms, and all three are prevalent today; the lesson offered by the report, however, is

2 *Encountering Working and Organizing*

that constant and thoroughgoing change is on the horizon—change that threatens the viability of existing organizing practices.

To be sure, there are good reasons for skepticism about claims of grand, sweeping changes in the workplace, particularly when proffered by a company peddling its consulting services. One such reason is that we may be experiencing a break less radical than proposed. A key lesson offered by observers of capitalism over time (e.g., Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005) is that newness is ever present; there is always a contemporary set of unique arrangements that calls upon analysts and observers to develop conceptual schemes to illuminate, describe, and explain prevailing modes of production and accumulation. Capitalism modifies itself to respond to challenges to its legitimacy and, in so doing, protects itself from transformative change. Examining the mutable texture of capitalism is crucial for the field of organization studies, since what we take to be its key foci—work and organization—are being re-configured and re-understood in this “new economy.”

A similar argument can be seen in Marxist discussions about work and labor, where the notion of “periodizations” speaks to changes in the economic, political, and ideological conditions, which may—or may *not*—be associated with shifts in the mode of production. As Fine and Harris (1979, p. 109) observe,

The effects of the development of the forces and relations of production on the *form* of social relations within a mode [of production] define the transformation from one stage of a mode to another . . . such a periodisation will reveal itself through transformations in the methods of appropriating and controlling surplus value.

Given capitalism’s fluidity and capacity to adapt, changes in patterns of social reproduction may well be indicative of deepening long-standing patterns rather than dramatic alterations in the underlying mode of production. In other words, it is probably impossible to determine, definitively, whether changes in the mode of production and accumulation are occurring.

An inability to substantiate claims of dramatic change occurs not merely because of capitalism’s protean shape-shifting; nor is it because there exists no Archimedean point from which such a definitive statement about economic change could be advanced. Rather, the very notion of an economy existing “out there” as if objective and external to scholarly analysis is misguided. We—students and scholars of organization (a group we take to be the primary audience for this book)—attend to particular issues, write about them, teach them, present them as factual. In so doing, we tell a story about a “new economy” that is *performative* in its effects: It participates in the enactment of the reality it seeks to describe. We shall say more about performativity in Chapter 2, but in the main part of this chapter, we depict some of the most repeated

stories told about sea changes in the terrain of working and organizing under contemporary capitalism.

Our Guiding Question and the Pursuit of Novelty

The aim of this book, then, is to examine how developments associated with contemporary capitalism—as well as the stories we tell about them, which are part of the developments themselves—bear consequences for how work is both accomplished and organized. Our particular concern is the extent to which customary frames and tools of scholarship in organization studies are up to the vital task of addressing social problems associated with shifts in capitalism. Rather than assessing those frames with a desire to judge their (in)adequacy, however, we ask in this chapter about what our stories are *doing*. Where are they leading, and where do they become stuck? Are there other fruitful stories to be told? Accordingly, our guiding question is this: *What have work and organization become under contemporary capitalism, and how should organization studies approach them?*

Addressing this question should begin, of course, with a consideration of how the field of organization studies has taken up capitalism, contemporary and otherwise. There are two dominant approaches. The first has been to treat capitalism as background, an uninterrogated frame for the conduct of work and organizing. Research of this sort often is functionalist in orientation, as seen in scholarship on entrepreneurship, for instance. Although there is a growing body of scholarship that critically examines entrepreneurship's antecedents and unintended consequences, the lion's share of research here considers the characteristics (of individuals, firms, and markets) associated with entrepreneurial success, processes through which new ventures emerge, and how states, communities, and even universities might foster greater entrepreneurial activity. This work tends to be guided by the assumption that entrepreneurship produces economic and social utility, often invoking the Schumpeterian notion of disruption, though it rarely examines that assumption's veracity (Shane, 2009). A market-based system of exchange, a system of economic relations, is the implied (but rarely interrogated) background upon which entrepreneurship unfolds; if it is invoked at all, it is to point to the ways the system enables and constrains the phenomenon of interest.

A second approach has been to suggest that capitalism generates the class distinctions upon which organizing proceeds (Roediger, 1999; Thompson, 1963). Here it is the economic system that produces social ordering, distinction, hierarchy, and distributions of resources that are unequal, but this system is understood as intimately bound up in the production and valorization of identities, communities, and forms of work. For instance, analysts have studied how the “working class” assimilates members into “blue-collar” values through cultural practices, forms of speech, and practices of (self-)discipline that produce group-based

4 *Encountering Working and Organizing*

distinctions, construct subjectivities, and assert the superiority of the class against others (Lucas, 2011; Philipsen, 1975; Willis, 1977).

As plotlines, these broad approaches have borne significant fruit in the story of working and organizing. In this book, we build upon the solid foundation they have established, but our storytelling employs what we shall call *relational ontologies* to portray capitalism not as a figure lurking in the background, nor as an external force impelling particular forms of system organization, but as a participant inextricably bound up in socioeconomic practice. In other words, the perspectives we pursue (we shall offer three conceptualizations of what we term *communicative relationality*) are not offered to mend gaps created by other approaches, but because their distinctive conceptualizations offer inventive lines by which investigations might proceed. Relational ontologies have begun to garner significant attention in organization studies (Ganesh & Wang, 2015; Orlikowski, 2007; Vosselman, 2014), yet scholars—ourselves included—are struggling to elucidate the implications of this ontological turn for analyses of working and organizing, as well as the methodological claims it makes on our scholarship (see, e.g., Mutch, 2013). This book directly engages with these struggles in order to articulate concrete possibilities whereby relationality can facilitate novel ways of attending to social problems. In this way, we endeavor to tell a meaningfully different story about working and organizing as we (might) know it.

In this first chapter, we initiate pursuit of our guiding question—again, *what have work and organization become under contemporary capitalism, and how should organization studies approach them?* In the section to follow, we outline key stories scholars have told about the major transformations in working and organizing associated with contemporary capitalism. It is important to stress that, in framing scholarly accounts as “stories,” we do not mean to belittle them. All theories put forth a narrative of things, and we do not take such narratives lightly. This book is simply more interested in their *production* rather than *truth* value. In other words, we are less concerned with the extent to which scholarly accounts correspond with some external reality and more concerned with how they participate in the making of certain realities and futures. This is *not* an abdication of facts in favor of relativism, as we shall see. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that shifts in capitalism are not somehow apart from the theories that punctuate their existence and occurrence. Theoretical stories contribute to the very developments they claim to study. This is precisely why we are so interested in them—in their possibilities *and* limitations, and in the promise of other stories to be told.

Our review of key stories pays particular attention to *communicative* forms of work. As we show next, work is increasingly about the analysis and manipulation of symbols, the interactive production of feelings, and the generation of images—forms of work that self-evidently revolve around actors engaging in communication with others. However, working and organizing are not merely symbolic: As we demonstrate, there is a wide

(and shifting) array of forces at play, requiring an approach to studying them that foregrounds multiplicity, relationality, and transformation. This book is intended as a contribution to organization studies scholars' capacities to undertake studies of working and organizing when multiplicity, relationality, and transformation are configured as central features of the scene.

Conceptualizing "Work(ing)"

Before we encounter contemporary currents in working and organizing, we should clarify what we mean by "work." Certainly, *work*, as an activity, can take various forms and occurs in and through many domains; it has also been conceived differently depending on the historical circumstance of the writer. Unsurprisingly, then, definitions of work likewise abound. At an abstract level, work is about deeds, tasks, and instances of labor; it is "action or activity involving physical or mental effort and undertaken in order to achieve a result, esp. as a means of making one's living or earning money; labour; (one's) regular occupation or employment" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). It indexes the amount of effort necessary to complete a task or create an outcome; that outcome can involve providing the social/artificial world with things distinct from those found in our natural surroundings.

Work is, moreover, sometimes understood as "the creation of material goods and services, which may be directly consumed by the worker or sold to someone else" (Hodson & Sullivan, 1995, p. 3). In other words, though work is sometimes reduced to a noun—to the thing produced by activity—the term also implies *working*, the gerund indicating the action of bringing about deeds.

Other conceptions distinguish between forms of work. Bertrand Russell (1935/2004), somewhat playfully, held work to be of two kinds: "first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth's surface relative to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so" (p. 3). Still others distinguish work from play, suggesting that work is serious and solemn, whereas play is frivolous and joyful (e.g., Burke, 1981). Thomas (1999), seeking to capture the central elements of the range of conceptions depicted here, offers this encapsulation:

Work has an end beyond itself, being designed to produce or achieve something; it involves a degree of obligation or necessity, being a task that others set us or that we set ourselves; and it is arduous, involving effort and persistence beyond the point at which the task ceases to be wholly pleasurable.

(p. xiv)

Across definitions such as these, Daniels (1987) argues that work tends to be portrayed as (a) public, rather than private, activity; (b) requiring financial recompense, and (c) gendered, in that traditionally masculine

6 Encountering Working and Organizing

activities are more likely to be considered work. All of these features, she argues, tend to relegate unpaid and invisible labor—not coincidentally, many activities coded as feminine—outside the realm of “work” (as “labors of love,” for instance). In an effort to clarify what we mean by work while remaining open to the kind of activity to which Daniels draws attention, we depict work(ing) as *the practice of focusing labor toward the production of “objects” with value*. As the scare quotes suggest, objects may take many forms. Moreover, their value may be a matter of contestation; as we will show, value is rarely as simple as that which it is taken to be on its face.

Our aim in characterizing work(ing) this way is to suggest several important elements of contemporary renditions of work and working. This book seeks to understand the processes and products of working (as well as of organizing), acknowledging that work relies upon, and generates, objects that are simultaneously material and symbolic—objects that have the potential to participate in the (re)inscription of the relations of capitalism. Conceiving of work in this way is agnostic as to the sources of influence over the trajectory of the practice, being open to the multiplicity of forces initiating, pushing, and benefiting from work (or, perhaps, considering these issues topics for examination). As we address in the next sections (and in more detail in Chapter 3), we see communication as axial to understanding working, but only if we avoid the common relegation of communication to the realm of the *merely* symbolic, interactional, and imaginative. We shall argue, instead, that communication is the force that *constitutes* working (and organizing), which also, in turn, constitutes economic realities.

The Story of the New Economy in Studies of Work and Organization

What stories about the contemporary socioeconomic scene are told in the organization studies literature? To what factors do analysts point, and what consequences, in the sense of social problems, do they note? And, importantly, what are the assumptions about communicating and organizing that mark their thinking? A point to which we turn at the end of this chapter is that organization studies should think carefully about how it conceives of such “factors,” because these conceptual foundations matter for our epistemological and methodological engagement with working and organizing.

The story is often abbreviated as *neoliberalism*, the ideology that subsumes social and political life into the capitalist logic of accumulation and, according to many analysts, does so in deterministic fashion: “Neoliberalism transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic. All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics” (Brown, 2015, p. 10). Whereas some argue that neoliberalism is the antithesis of (pure) capitalism, the term tends to direct attention to the reduced role of the state and the increased power of the market in contemporary governance brought on by right-leaning

Western governments, particularly of the Reagan-Thatcher variety (though, as Harvey [2005] notes, its seeds were planted several decades earlier), which sought to ease restrictions on capital flows and to make privatized enterprises out of what had previously been public services.

Neoliberalism is not only about the production of new subjects and their conduct; it also heralds an enlarged corporate power in public life, one in which corporations have been the beneficiaries (and often coauthors) of laws, policies, and rights that previously had been the sphere of persons and publics, and governments have learned to operate like commercial firms (Coates, 2015). Neoliberalism is a loose and shifting signifier, and a detailed historical account of its origins, emergence, and variations is beyond our scope here. Yet we note that neoliberalism's preference for capital over labor, management over trade unions, individuals over communities, work over welfare, and markets over governments animates the stories told about contemporary capitalism.

With respect to working and organizing, one consequence of neoliberalism is the rise of the "entrepreneurial self," a subject who pursues enterprise—monitoring the self, building personal skills, and displaying individual productivity, both within and beyond the boundaries of the organization—not only because work increasingly demands it but also because entrepreneurialism has become situated as the source of personal meaningfulness (Pinchot, 1985). The protagonists in the neoliberal story are rational actors who are granted the right to pursue their economic self-interest by using property as they see fit, and the entrepreneurial self is an archetype of this brand of individualization (Bröckling, 2015).

Tales of entrepreneurial success are contemporary heroes' journeys (Watt, 2016; Whelan & O'Gorman, 2007) in which the individual doggedly pursues a vision, overcoming a hostile marketplace (and often governmental impediments) to achieve renown and financial prosperity. The notion of difference is present here: Those who distinguish themselves as courageous and technologically sophisticated entrepreneurs are worthy of praise, whereas those who are unable to do so, or who are not imaginative enough, are left behind in the neoliberal world. The valorization of this sort of entrepreneur tells us at least as much about the contemporary economic scene as it does about the characters involved.

Although these developments point to important changes in capitalism, using neoliberalism as synecdoche—as a covering term for an array of related processes—risks missing the various and complex relations of power, struggles over meaning, and forms of contingency that mark working and organizing. We thus unpack these more nuanced plotlines in what follows.

Post-Fordism and the Organization of Work

Early efforts to tell the story of change in working and organizing coined the term *post-Fordism* to describe how workplaces were moving from large and vertically integrated economies of scale (as in Henry Ford's

8 *Encountering Working and Organizing*

factories) to networks of small and agile enterprises connected through more informal means of control. The change, which began in the 1970s and has been noted in several cultural contexts beyond the for-profit firm (Kumar, 1995), was made possible by

the growing significance of global competition, freedom to locate in different parts of the world (in order both to cheapen production and on the other side to access distinctive new knowledge), and new forms of innovation that undermined the sort of long-term planning characteristic of the large managerial hierarchies.

(du Gay & Morgan, 2013, p. 16)

This picture is certainly changing, but it has shaped thinking about the distribution of work for decades. The concept of management participated as well: The task of managing became not simply one of planning, coordinating, and controlling production, but of a constant search for flexibility and cost-efficiency—a stance that separated production from particular persons and places while simultaneously creating the conditions for the ascendancy of finance in organizational decision making.

Consumption, too, was key to the shift. As mass consumption declined and market segmentation rose, Baudrillard (1998) noted the ascendancy of a “consumer society” where people defined themselves through their consumption choices. Aligning with this, Schulz and Robinson (2013) show that, after WWII, consumers became less interested in purchasing power and more concerned with choice and feelings of well-being achieved through consumption. Although many have suggested that the consumer society shifts emphasis from production to consumption, emphasizing consumption alone misses an important element of the story. Specifically, a consumer society creates a need for flexible specialization in *production*. An important consequence of this flexible specialization has been the development of a global division of labor, where production of goods occurs in low-wage countries, largely in Asia and the global South, while marketing, accounting, management, consulting, and other high-wage activities are located in richer northern countries. Flexible specialization and globally distributed production were enabled, many commentators suggest, by technological developments that allowed design, distribution, and communication to be easy, cheap, and located anywhere (e.g., A. Friedman, 2000).

In the developed world, the technological advances that ushered in post-Fordism created a division of labor that separated intellectual and manual work (Florida, 1991; Pleios, 2012). The new information and communication technologies meant that workers’ time and activity could now be *flexible* such that they could work whenever and wherever necessary. Workers—but also consumers and firms—who benefit from these post-Fordist changes are those who can be mobile, whose bodies and

minds can move easily (Sennett, 1998); they thus create a differential between themselves and those who are slower and sedentary.

Considering such a disparity in benefit created by a post-Fordist capitalism—not to mention the well-known disparities in wealth and income across the globe (Spinello, 2014)—an obvious question is why has the world seen so little in the way of resistance or generation of alternatives (Crouch, 2011)? One response has been that resistance becomes more hidden, subaltern; resistance may not look like the large-scale social movement of which (post-)Marxists dream, but alternative subjectivities and subtle moments of creative interrogation are opened up in post-Fordist work (Ashcraft, 2005; Mumby, 2005).

A second response—and another way to tell the story of contemporary capitalism—is seen in Boltanski and Chiapello's aforementioned *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Harkening back to Max Weber, they define a spirit as the ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism, capable of supplying not merely technical logics, but *moral* justifications for participants; these motivations “inspire entrepreneurs in activity conducive to capital accumulation” (2005, pp. 8–9). Capitalism's shifting spirit (they note three distinct versions) affords actors justifications for their actions, furnishing them with beliefs about the creation of the common good generated from capitalistic practices.

Boltanski and Chiapello emphasize that the spirit is not merely about defending an economic order; it is at least as much about securing commitment and attraction to it. The spirit secures commitment by presenting participation as stimulating, exciting, and secure—as the site for a free realization of a stable self over time and space such that capitalism is seen not only as an acceptable but also as a *desirable* order of things. Because these spirits are embedded in rules of conduct, language, institutions, practices, and cognitions, they are difficult to challenge, and even when challenges hit their mark, capitalism finds new bases upon which to mount its justifications (cf. Jessop & Sum, 2006).

The Project as Iconic

Boltanski and Chiapello demonstrate their thinking on the self-sustaining logic of capitalism with an analysis of its present spirit, one that aligns with many of the claims of post-Fordism. The contemporary spirit curbs the assumption that large firms comprise the standard conception of capitalism, vaulting the *project* to a position of conceptual centrality instead. Projects activate a section of a network for the duration of a shared task; once the job is completed, the links stay alive but less active, as seen in the “adhocracy” (Bennis & Slater, 1964), and the freelance work associated with the “gig economy” and its digitally enabled mobility (Fish & Srinivasan, 2011; Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005).

In a project regime, firms hire employees on short-term and flexible arrangements, often as independent contractors who complete a task in a

defined time period. Although labor markets establish wage rates, this flexibility is seen as desirable for organizations, since firms can more quickly adapt to economic fluctuations without the burden that long-term employment relationships imply. Individuals, then, rather than firms, assume risk. Gerald Friedman (2014, p. 171) sums up the individual-organization relationship thusly, “There is no more connection between the worker and the employer than there might be between a consumer and a particular brand of soap or potato chips.”

Those workers, in turn, measure their (and others’) activity in terms of their success attracting (and consuming) gigs—success that depends crucially on extending and “capitalizing” on personal networks. They are, consequently, constantly on the lookout for additional projects through their networks:

What matters is to develop activity—that is to say, never to be short of a project, bereft of an idea, always to have something in mind, in the pipeline, with other people whom one meets out of a desire to do something.
(Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 110)

Those who are busy are esteemed, but, beyond that, it is those who cultivate a sense for valuable ideas, projects, and people who have real status in this world. Developing communication skills that lend themselves to effortless adaptability, inquiry, enthusiasm, and self-promotion are therefore crucial for actors inhabiting this world. They also must rely on computerized networking technologies; these factors also become part of the network. And because such networks run on information and a communitarian ethic, actors prevent each other from hoarding information and closing off networks.

As a mode of capitalist production, the project claims to produce social benefit by encouraging integration into networks, enhancing employability and self-determination, and fostering a sense of meaningfulness rarely found in large bureaucracies (Peters, 1999). Project-based capitalism, consequently, is self-sustaining in its ability to marshal a set of connections that bring particular objects and subjects into existence; these objects and subjects create a world that portrays both personal value and social benefit as arising from this version of economic order.

The Rise of the Knowledge Economy

Associated with the move to project-based work is the rise of what has become known as the “knowledge economy” or “information society”—terms introduced to highlight how data, information, and knowledge, as opposed to machinery, land, and physical labor, are now regarded as the primary elements of capitalist production and accumulation (Castells, 1996; Drucker, 1992; Thrift, 2005). Especially in the post-industrial Western world, the value of a worker often appears as a feature of the

mind and not the body, and organizations of many sorts seek to attract, manage, and build storehouses of knowledge (Adler, 2001).

As Powell and Snellman (2004) mention, however, the notion of a “knowledge economy” can refer to increased attribution of economic value to either (a) certain sorts of work and occupations that qualify as knowledge-intensive, such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, service-based work, and finance jobs, or (b) intra-organizational processes of learning, continuous innovation, and creativity. And although there are significant debates about the extent to which the knowledge economy, like post-Fordism, is a cause or an effect of advances in information and communication technologies (Lilley, Lightfoot, & Amaral, 2004), as well as about whether the increased emphasis on knowledge has created fundamentally different forms of work than in the past (Kochan and Barley, 1999), few deny the power of the proclamations of a new economic order revolving around knowledge (OECD, 1996).

Knowledge, in this line of thinking, is considered an “intangible” asset—one that participates in the production of value for both individuals and organizations, but upon which it is difficult to place a price. Prices are difficult to establish because knowledge cuts across functions and does not apply only in discrete units of time, making it less amenable to standard models of accounting despite being celebrated as the primary source of competitive advantage in contemporary firms (Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996). Thus because knowledge is not a typical commodity, and because it is seen to “stick” to its locations (Szulanski, 2003), actors have a vested interest in guarding what they and their organizations “possess” (Teece, 1998) as well as in managing others’ impressions of their knowledge (Alvesson, 2001; Treem, 2012).

Communicative Knowledge

Literature on knowledge work is often characterized by claims about the broad sweep of this work and its increasing cultural centrality in Western economies, but critics suggest that developments in informational capitalism are more likely to produce low-level service jobs, particularly those in interactive service work, than the technologically adept symbolic analysts typically taken as characteristic of knowledge workers. When the “service encounter” becomes a key source of organizations’ operational focus, employees’ technical abilities are prized less than their aesthetic and social competence. Embodied communication practices thus become key to working, and organizations are increasingly aestheticized (Bryman, 2004; Korczynski, Shire, Frenkel, & Tam, 2000; Kuhn & Jackson, 2008; Thompson, Warhurst, & Callaghan, 2001; Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003). The notion of difference, mentioned earlier in the introduction of entrepreneurship, enters here as well: Only particular forms of knowledge work are valorized, only particular bodies are associated with service work (work that is often dismissed, as we did earlier in this paragraph, as “low

12 *Encountering Working and Organizing*

level”), and only particular sorts of activity are acceptable to “contract out” to contingent workers (Rennstam & Ashcraft, 2014).

The question of how to manage workers whose labor is less explicitly connected to their bodies also arose with the post-Fordist knowledge economy. The story told about knowledge workers suggests that they seek challenge and meaning in their work, and that they reject traditional command-and-control approaches to management. Shaping hearts and minds in the organizational interest, accordingly, became central to how management saw its task. Somewhere around the 1980s (though see Barley & Kunda, 1992; Ouchi, 1980), managers recognized the need to encourage knowledge workers to identify with organizational cultures—for workers to see themselves as engaged not only in an economic exchange but also in a moral and emotional relationship. Knowledge workers were then understood as members of communities rather than as occupying a position in an impersonal bureaucracy, and normative and ideological control, as well as making the workplace an enjoyable experience, became managerial imperatives (Alvesson, 2000; Fleming & Sturdy, 2011). Difference enters here as well: Strong identification and the conception of work as a personal relationship are encouraged with only particular workers; others not fitting the mold are subject to the post-Fordist model of contingency and flexibility (Gossett, 2002).

Accompanying the rise of a post-Fordist economy has been the importance of what Rennstam and Ashcraft (2014) call *communicative knowledge*. Communicative knowledge, for them, is a form of knowing located not merely in brains, bodies, routines, or texts (cf. Blackler, 1995) but as also (and inherently) *in* and *about* interaction. Communicative knowledge

generates interactive experiences that attend to the (often strategic) use of symbols, but the experience cannot be reduced to the symbolic. Instead, communicative knowledge resides in practice, ‘between’ the knower and its object of knowledge . . . [it] entails the merging of presence, physicality, situational familiarity and sensitivity, practical know-how, and action—embodied capacities honed through practice over time. Interaction here becomes a craft, trade, or even art unto itself—a social task that is also technical.

(pp. 10–11)

Although communication, as a form of knowledge and knowing, has typically been relegated to a secondary status in management and organization studies thinking, it is increasingly understood as a key site of value production (Mumby, 2016; Witz et al., 2003).

In a following section (on precarious and immaterial labor), we shall augment this interest in communicative knowledge, but, for the time being, our point is that capitalism revolves more around communication than ever before, and one important upshot of this is that

pinpointing *the* point at which value production occurs becomes more challenging than ever before.

The Knowledge of the Crowd

An additional line of inquiry connecting with knowledge is literature on crowdsourcing. *Crowdsourcing* is a model of organizing and accomplishing work that begins with a call to a large (and often reasonably undifferentiated) group; using Internet-enabled information and communication technologies, the crowd generates responses to the call. As an approach to managing complex tasks, crowdsourcing uses online communities—it employs the “wisdom of the crowd”—to foster scientific breakthroughs, generate responses to persistent organizational problems, and gather citizen input in community planning.

Some uses of crowdsourcing are relatively straightforward, such as when “the crowd” is asked to process large data sets, as is the case with Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (Irani, 2015). Other uses are more about knowledge creation, as when the phenomenon in question is spatially and conceptually distributed and crowds are needed to generate maps, as when organizations seek to assemble information scattered around the Internet or residents of a city provide information about infrastructure problems that need repair (Brabham, Ribisl, Kirchner, & Bernhardt, 2014). And what Brabham (2012, 2013) calls *peer-vetted creative production* describes the crowdsourcing case where there exists no correct answer to the problem at hand; the aim is instead to generate and assess new ideas or to ascertain the level of support for an organization’s idea (or marketing campaign).

The individuals who comprise the crowd rarely receive financial remuneration for their work (some, such as the individuals populating Mechanical Turk, are paid relatively paltry sums), raising the question of personal motivations and the specter of exploitation. We shall return to this theme next in a discussion of digital “free labor”; our argument here is that the story of knowledge production in the “new economy” is not merely one of prizing individual knowledge workers organized in professional-service firms. The story is, instead, a complex one in which technologies, communication practices, communities, firms, and knowledge expropriation intersect in the pursuit of solutions to pressing problems.

Financialization and Algorithmic Culture

Contemporary capitalism takes this valorization of knowledge further, framing an ever-wider array of elements as assets to be evaluated and exchanged in the pursuit of profit. The term often employed to describe such changes is *financialization*, and those telling the story of the new economy using this notion refer to both (a) the dominance of securities markets and the financial sector’s speculative activities in the governance

of Western countries and (b) “the processes and effects of the growing power of financial values and technologies on corporations, individuals, and households” (French, Leyshon, & Wainwright, 2011, p. 799). The term thus embraces a wide array of activity:

Financialization . . . includes everything from the growth in size and scope of finance and financial activity in our economy to the rise of debt-fueled speculation over productive lending, to the ascendancy of shareholder value as a model for corporate governance, to the proliferation of risky, selfish thinking in both our private and public sectors, to the increasing political power of financiers and the CEOs they enrich, to the way in which a “markets know best” ideology remains the status quo, even after it caused the worst financial crisis in seventy-five years. (Foroohar, 2016, p. 5)

Ushered in by market-oriented policy changes encouraged by devotees of the Chicago School of economics, including securities and bank deregulation, monetary devaluation, separation of corporate ownership and control, and tax reform (Nussbaum, 1997), financialization became palpable in organizations when investors began to demand continual appreciation in the value of their investments.

For publicly traded corporations, financialization framed value as encompassed by (or reduced to) the stock price; this framing fit well with the portfolio conception of the firm and the associated agency theory, which saw lines of business as cash flows (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Krippner, 2011). Managers’ tasks became the configuration and maximization of those cash flows, and their interests became aligned with investors’ goals; maximizing shareholder value—the shareholder value thesis—quickly became a prime managerial directive (Lazonick & O’Sullivan, 2000; Stout, 2012). Managers learn, often in business schools, to minimize costs, restructure internal labor practices and relations, and continually reorganize to attract investment capital in ways that give an unquestioned priority to shareholders’ interests (Froud, Haslam, Johal, & Williams, 2000).

Writers on financialization point to the influence of investment bankers concentrated in global financial centers, such as Wall Street and the City of London and created by some of the world’s top universities, in the shaping of a widespread attention to short-term stock returns. In her ethnography of Wall Street bankers, Karen Ho makes the connection unambiguous:

Through their middlemen roles as financial advisors to major U.S. corporations as well as expert evaluators of and spokespeople for the stock and bond markets, investment bankers work to transfer and exchange wealth from corporations to large shareholders (and their financial advisors), hold corporations accountable for behavior and

values that generate short-term value, and generate debt and securities capital to fund these practices.

(2009, p. 5)

The raw materials for investment bankers' work, then, are assets that can be securitized (i.e., made into tradable securities), and a key consequence of that work is the promulgation of the aforementioned shareholder value thesis. The logic is justified by references to the workings of "the market," an abstraction of prices and exchanges portrayed as both separate from any given workplace practice and as embodying a form of rationality, of "natural" inevitability (Davis, 2009; Fox, 2009). That market, despite its contributions to global economic instability (Dore, 2008), is increasingly portrayed as superior to governments in the ability to provide both liberty and opportunity (Peck, 2010).

Beyond managers and bankers, financialization alters "shop-floor" labor processes because it gives license to managers to reduce labor costs (especially wage levels and head counts) and engage in the sort of restructuring moves that foster worker insecurity in the service of demonstrating short-term profits (Cushen & Thompson, 2016). The story analysts tell about financialization in and around organizations, then, is one in which finance, originally developed as a tool to facilitate business, became businesses' driving force, making firms and their managers beholden to parties with little interest in the production of goods and services—parties disconnected from the accomplishment of work.

Moving beyond workplaces, financial centers, and corporate boardrooms, individuals' lives have become financialized in terms of the expansion of consumer (including mortgage and student) debt, the securitization of that debt, the move from defined-benefit to defined-contribution retirement plans, the privatization of welfare, and the decreased impediments to speculating on securities markets. The financial system depends on the cultivation of consumption needs and converts those needs into reliable revenue streams, including interest on the debt incurred by individuals and households to meet those needs. This debt production means that individuals' subjectivities revolve around consumption and investment—in other words, subjectivities are disciplined by financial markets—far more than in times past (Allon, 2010; Erkturk, Froud, Johal, Leaver, & Williams, 2007; Langley, 2008; Leyshon & Thrift, 2007).

One of the more fascinating elements of financialization, as practiced in financial centers, is its reliance on large sets of data, along with mathematical formulas (algorithms) to make sense of those data. Decisions about workforce scheduling, setting prices, trading securities, monitoring citizens' electronic messaging, estimating the size of a market, and setting rates on insurance (among many other things) are now the province of algorithms, which can consider much more data, be more sensitive to contingencies, and choose more quickly than could any human (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013).

One concern, of course, is about privacy, with increasing efforts to create massive data sets. The more significant issue for social critics, however, is governance: The use of fast networked computers running sophisticated algorithms shapes what counts as knowledge in organizing—but that knowledge is shielded from interrogation because the values guiding the algorithms are rarely reconstructed, reflected upon, and argued through (Bidhé, 2010; Flyverbom & Rasche, 2015). Big data, and the algorithms that process those data, present themselves as “the market,” yet they “are selective in the sense that they employ a set of implicit and seldom discussed values that determine how information should be interpreted and visualized, and how prices should be calculated” (Arvidsson & Peitersen, 2013, p. 12). Consequently, choices become framed as purely technical and mathematical concerns, and less so as moral issues. This is not to imply that humans are (or ever were) more judicious or moral than algorithms, but that considering only what can be quantified limits actors’ capacity to challenge the status quo and insert alternative considerations into the dominant models of working and organizing (Totaro & Ninno, 2014, 2016). And to the extent that management of organizations is increasingly accomplished by and through the application of algorithms to big data (Schild, 2017), the problems and possibilities they afford should draw the attention of those who study work and organization.

A striking example of financialization’s impact on work is the prevalence of algorithmic scheduling in retail work. Increasingly, workers in retail and service jobs are scheduled in a “just-in-time” manner—a notion borrowed from inventory control production processes developed in Japan (and particularly associated with Toyota). Algorithms built on sales patterns, forecasts for customer traffic, and other data apply the same logics to employees, seeking to yield maximum flexibility while minimizing labor costs. Because most retail workers are paid hourly, these algorithms track customer demand, modifying employees’ work schedules as often as needed to maintain lean staffing.

Algorithmic scheduling can reduce staffing costs dramatically—and because many retailers operate with razor-thin profit margins, managers often see these systems as survival tools—but other costs are borne by the employees whose work hours are subject to the algorithmically empowered passion for schedule optimization. Workers often receive work schedules with little advance notice, and they are expected to be always available for subsequent shifts; when working, they can be dismissed early if the algorithm suggests fewer staff are needed than had been anticipated. Planning for life outside work, managing family demands, and receiving a stable paycheck are all threatened for those who work under such systems.

Here again is an example of how the conditions of work appear rather different to those in different social locations: Hourly retail workers are subject to algorithmic scheduling systems, while so-called knowledge workers are largely ignorant of their existence. For the beneficiaries of financialized capitalism, “flexibility” may mean working from home

or shifting hours to accommodate non-work needs; for low-wage retail workers, however, it often implies instability and risk. Financialization's provision of algorithms and large data sets to managers seeking greater profitability produces a work world in which work/non-work negotiations become significantly more challenging for low-wage workers. The point is not that the technologies alone produce these outcomes—indeed, scheduling algorithms could be employed to generate greater predictability—but, appropriated under a set of workplace logics associated with financialization, these algorithms generate significant burdens for those whose work is subject to them.

Branding and the Extension of Organization

The rise of both the knowledge economy and financialization suggest a shift in the sort of assets considered key to the production of value. When value is not tied directly to “objective” characteristics of a product, intangible features become emphasized. However, because those features are interpretations, they are part of an ongoing negotiation—a struggle over meanings. In other words, a brand is not merely the image of a product created by a corporation's advertising; it is the set of associations and feelings publics experience with respect to the target in question. Moreover, branding has moved past a desire to create product distinctiveness and customer loyalty and has become about the generation of consumer needs via the seduction of the consumer (Olins, 2003).

Branding, and brand management, is increasingly about creating shared symbolic experiences and a common identity (Arvidsson, 2005). Scholarly analyses of branding activity tend to highlight the importance of “intangibles” such as images, symbols, and aesthetic associations in the creation of value, where a product or company cultivates affective relations with consumers, employees, and other stakeholders. In the marketing literature, these elements are often explicitly divorced from “tangible” elements: For instance, Keller and Lehmann (2006, p. 741) define intangibles as “aspects of the brand image that do not involve physical, tangible, or concrete attributes or benefits . . . [that] transcend physical products”; likewise, Ailawadi and Keller (2004, p. 333) observe that “brands are being positioned on the basis of their intangibles and attributes and benefits that transcend product or service performance.”

We shall argue in this book that such simple divisions between tangible and intangible elements is misguided—and that interesting lines of inquiry open up when we reject the division—but for the present purposes, our point is that the branding literature tells the story of the new economy by portraying branding as not only about differentiating products but also about crafting identities. Consumers increasingly inhabit identities that respond to, and even require, brands: “The process of branding impacts the way we understand who we are, how we organize ourselves in the world, what stories we tell about ourselves” (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 5).

From these constructed identities emerge brand communities where members organize around their affinity for, and identification with, the brand (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). Recognition that identity is increasingly linked to brands also leads marketers to target not only consumers but also employees as potential members of brand communities and as producers of the organizational image (Kärreman & Rylander, 2008; Mumby, 2016; Rennstam, 2013). Branding, thus, is both a business strategy and a model of subjectification.

Branding is about building the value of a product, service, or organization, and this work demonstrates that value exceeds what analysts have typically thought of as “work.” Production and consumption have long been considered distinct in both spatiotemporal location and with respect to value (i.e., production creates a good’s value, whereas consumption depletes it; production is what paid laborers do, whereas consumption is what people do after they’ve purchased the product), but this distinction no longer holds. Instead, branding increasingly is the domain of “prosumers” (Toffler, 1980; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) who participate in the “co-creation” of brand value. These prosumers may be found on social media discussing their attraction for the brand and their kinship with other prosumers (Bertilsson & Cassinger, 2011); they supply the “free labor” of content contributions to social media sites (e.g., customer ratings or personal posts) (De Kosnik, 2013; Terranova, 2000).

This vision of branding represents a significant break from traditional-media conceptions of marketing because it can “put consumers to work”:

Co-creation represents a dialogical model that no longer privileges the company’s vision of production and thus what constitutes, in the jargon of the marketing profession, “customer value.” Therefore, rather than putting customers to work as more or less unskilled workers to further rationalize (Fordist) production processes and their focus on predictability, calculability, and efficiency, co-creation instead aspires to build ambiances that foster contingency, experimentation, and playfulness among consumers. From this perspective, customers are configured as uniquely skilled workers who, for the production of value-in-use to occur, must be given full rein to articulate their inimitable requirements and share their knowledge.

(Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008, p. 166)

Co-creation is based on the concept that communication occurs in a complex, constant, and instantaneous network of interactions among a wide array of actors, often in online contexts. As the Zwick et al. excerpt demonstrates, marketers see the consumers populating this communication network as a source of continually updated socio-cultural knowledge to be exploited (Tapscott & Williams, 2006). Value production thus occurs increasingly in the “social factory,” beyond what has traditionally been

taken to be the point of production; as Mason (2015, p. 33) asserts, “once every human being can generate a financial profit just by consuming—and the poorest can generate the most—a profound change begins in capitalism’s attitude toward work.”

Observers of this form of co-creation—what Cova, Dalli, and Zwick (2011) call “collaborative capitalism”—frequently assert that this free labor is a form of exploitation. Prosumers are generally not paid for the work they contribute to the building of these brands; instead, their creativity and participation are marshaled for the financial benefit of the corporations that own the brands. Consumers’ communicative practices produce information, and information is the key resource in branding. Sometimes consumers are well aware of the model of value generation and choose to participate without compensation because they enjoy participation, they seek to develop new skills, or they are generating a portfolio of work to be used in the pursuit of future employment (Cova & Dalli, 2009).

In other instances, it is not so conscious, such as when consumers use corporation-provided (“free”) resources to shop, network, search, and chat online. In these cases, their contributions are captured for the benefit of the brand, but “they do not freely choose to exchange their personal information for convenience but do so under conditions structured by the private ownership of network resources and the attendant low level of awareness about actual tracking practices” (Andrejevic, 2013, p. 157). It is possible, then, that a reliance on publics for the production of value carries with it the possibility that those publics will introduce additional, and even conflicting, criteria of evaluation regarding economic exchange (Arvidsson & Peitersen, 2013). The question of exploitation, then, is about the openness of branding to alternative conceptions of value, whether the domains of leisure and work are still distinct in contemporary capitalism, and the degree to which choice is a meaningful concept in a consumer society.

Venture Labor, Precarious Labor

Earlier, in our presentation of financialization, we discussed how a drive for short-term results is underwritten by (what appears to be) an unassailable discourse of the market. Not only has this drive shifted the models of capital accumulation; it has also created a pattern of financial crisis and widening socioeconomic inequality that have made working and organizing in all sectors of the economy considerably more uncertain—one of the key problems with which analyses of contemporary capitalism are (or should be) concerned (Marens, in press). Freelance work, intermittent work, and jobs based on short-term contracts (as well as those without contracts at all) often provide both low pay and little certainty about the future (Kalleberg, 2009). Enabled by both flattened organizational structures and nation-states’ trade agreements, labor is often the target of outsourcing, which is typically justified in terms of reducing costs, boosting profits, and, thereby, enhancing shareholder value.

Shareholders and executives tend to benefit from outsourcing, whereas workers experience insecurity—even if it is merely threatened (Collinson, 2003).

One stance on insecurity is outlined by Gina Neff's (2012) ethnography of Internet-based creative and culture industries in New York City's Silicon Alley. Among these "knowledge workers," an ethic of individualism had taken hold over the past few decades—one in which flexible, short-term, and project-based work came to be seen as standard. This individualism created greater insecurity; Neff labels their strategy for positioning themselves in relation to work as *venture labor*:

Venture labor is the explicit expression of entrepreneurial values by non-entrepreneurs. Venture labor refers to an investment by employees into their companies or how they talk about their time at work as an investment. When people think of their jobs as an investment or as having a future payoff other than regular wages, they embody venture labor.

(p. 16)

Workers in the culture industry were thus expected to be continually self-monitoring and self-reflexive and to be the sole engineers of their careers—and thus also to be the site of blame for shortcomings.

Interestingly, Neff found that the risk accompanying insecurity was understood by workers as *desirable*—evidence of challenging and fulfilling work. A key problem with this model of working and organizing was that the social capital cultivated by workers tended to benefit their companies, but did little to protect individuals during economic downturns such as the 2001 bursting of the dot-com bubble. In other words, venture labor was a resource to build companies—companies that promised substantial wealth accumulation for knowledge workers. However, when the economic winds shifted, workers found themselves with little control over their workplaces or their financial futures.

A second perspective employs the term *precarity* to name the condition of instability associated with forms of labor that are flexible, contingent, invisible, or easily moved. However, there is more to the notion:

Precaire signifies both the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living and, simultaneously, new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union. This *double meaning* is central to understanding the ideas and politics associated with precarity; the new moment of capitalism that engenders precariousness is seen as not only oppressive but also as offering the potential for new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics.

(Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3)

In other words, precarity is a perilous condition that follows acute social and material vulnerability. Precarity is amplified as multiple vectors of

vulnerability and violence collide with one another, such as those stemming from relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, nation, citizenship, migration and immigration, religion, and other forms of dispossession. Put differently, while we are all relationally precarious, in that our very bodies and selves are bound in ties of social and material interdependence, precarity—as used here—is a hazardous mode of (wobbly, barely) living that is magnified in particular forms of labor, performed by particular bodies, in particular places, and under particular forms of duress (Butler, 2004; Puar, 2012). In colloquial terms, there is the inescapable precariousness of making a life, and then there is *precarity*, wherein making even a volatile life is, inescapably, a dicey daily endeavor. Importantly, however, the routine strains of precarity are also a potential source of reflection on and resistance to the relations of contemporary capitalism.

One inspiration for the dual sides of precarity—as insecure living that can breed a new politics—is rooted in work associated with the body of thought known as Autonomist Marxism, an offshoot of Marxism developed in the 1960s and '70s, particularly in Italy. The focus of Autonomists is often on what they call *immaterial labor*: that which develops affective, cognitive, or cultural meanings rather than transforming physical materials. As Lazzarato (1996, p. 133) portrays it, “immaterial labour involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as ‘work’—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms and, more strategically, public opinion.”

Although it is possible to fault this work for neglecting material and contingent work in its attention to immaterial labor (Dyer-Witheford, 2001), it can also be said that by recognizing work that aligns with, and creates, cultural standards, Autonomists show how immaterial labor depends upon the *general intellect*. The general intellect was Marx’s term for the common knowledge of a society that must be developed outside of the point of production but is brought into it through the vehicle of workers’ embodied interaction—what Williams and Connell (2010) refer to as “looking good and sounding right.” Communication, then, is not merely that which one does during a job; it is the site of value production and, thus, of capitalism’s reproduction (Carlone, 2008; Greene, 2004).

The second inspiration for the dual conception of precarity emanates from Autonomist Marxism’s belief in labor’s capacity to alter capitalist relations apart from political parties and labor unions. Autonomists assert that solidarity among precarious workers is possible; that they can reflect on their shared positioning (even if it does not appear shared at first) and find common cause. Doing so will aid them in recognizing the power to *refuse* work and, concomitantly, to choose forms of engagement in the social detached from (and even in opposition to) capital—in this sense, refusal, seen as freedom, concerns less the uncompensated labor of the prosumer than the freedom *from* work—a freedom from the belief that work is the primary path to economic security and self-actualization (Beverungen, Otto, Spoelstra, & Kenny, 2013).

22 *Encountering Working and Organizing*

Lazzarato claims, “It is by sympathy, mutual assistance, collaboration and confidence that creation takes place” (2004, p. 206). Autonomists suggest that the creative forms of organizing they proffer would be immune from capture by capitalist logics of appropriation and accumulation such that it would not be merely work, but *life*, that would be autonomous from capitalist relations of production (Hardt & Negri, 2000).¹ Notwithstanding its rousing force, this stance has drawn significant criticism from those who foreground how concrete relations of difference (e.g., race, nation, sexuality) *matter* to relations of precarity, which are invariably lived out in particular bodies, not by mythic generic subjects. For instance, McRobbie (2010) roundly critiques Autonomist analyses for rendering gender invisible and ignoring feminists’ accomplishments, as well as setbacks on the very scores Autonomists appear to romanticize.

Skepticism, Critique, and New Directions

The preceding section presented a story of the “new economy” by describing not the unfolding of its plot over time, but its central themes, origins, and consequences. The story tends to be one of dramatic change in the way working and organizing proceed. Two issues are relevant at this point in our discussion. The first is about accuracy, or what we earlier called *truth* value: Is there evidence that these changes are actually occurring? The second is about analytical frameworks and their *production* value: How do tales of radical change explain the emergence and influence of the “new economy,” and what do they suggest we do next?

Suspicious About the Scope of Change

In several quarters, there is doubt about the facticity of the changes presented earlier, some skepticism that precarity, branding, post-Fordist organizing, project-based work, and immaterial labor are as significant to the global economy as the authors surveyed earlier claim. For instance, there is reason to believe that, at least in the U.S., the prevalence of the “gig economy” has been overstated. The trend toward freelance work, sometimes also called the 1099² economy, may not have grown to the extent commonly reported. Using figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Dourado and Koopman (2015) and Grose and Kallerman (2015) found modest gains over time for 1099s as compared to W-2s, and that gains in 1099s now outpace those for W-2s, but that the rise is not as stark as those proclaiming its economic dominance would have us believe.

Fox (2015) suggests that poor methodology is largely responsible for the assertion of supremacy, but acknowledges that change is afoot, perhaps currently on the fringes of the labor market. Countering this claim is work by economists Lawrence Katz and Alan Krueger, who are, at the time of this writing, developing a paper from data displaying a sharp rise in “alternative

work arrangements” in the U.S., from 9.3% of all employment in 1995, to 10.1% in 2005, and up to 15.8% in 2015—23.6 million workers. Katz and Krueger hold that this increase in nontraditional work, which includes the gig economy, accounts for the vast majority of net employment growth in the country (Wile, 2016; see also G. Friedman, 2014).

In the sociological literature, a similar debate swirls around social theorists’ assertions about the very story of the “new economy.” Some take aim at Sennett’s (1998, 2006, 2008) depiction of the contemporary workplace—specifically, its demands for short-termism (e.g., temporary and project-based work), flexibility, and mobility—which, in his telling, foment insecurity and degrade work experiences. Those features of work, Sennett argues, damage workers’ character, craft, relationships, and even their communities such that “changes in modern work have eroded both the critical grasp of workers on what they do, and a clear view of the place of work in the larger social structure” (Sennett, 2005, p. 131).

Critics, however, contend that the transformation of work has not been at all as dramatic as theorists such as Sennett imply. Reacting to Sennett’s anecdotal approach, along with the case study approach used by many others, Fevre (2007) and Doogan (2005, 2009) examined government-collected data on employment in the UK, EU, USA, and Canada, and found no evidence of a dramatic growth in transitory or insecure employment, though Green (2009) found greater insecurity for women, minorities, and older workers. Something similar can be seen in Johnson, Wood, Brewster, and Brookes’s (2009) 12-year survey of human resources professionals in 22 European countries. They found evolution and change in the workforce in line with the claims earlier, yet they also noted that the transformation was rather uneven and that nation, sector, and organization size mattered a great deal. Investigations such as these challenge the sweeping claims of the sort presented earlier; furthermore, the authors of such studies submit that claims of widespread insecurity can further discipline workers, making them feel more vulnerable than is necessary and, in turn, leading them to accept state policies and organizational practices unfavorable to their interests.

These allegations about the lack of empirical evidence for the pervasiveness of the gig (i.e., 1099) economy and of Sennett’s vision of a new model of capitalism are important and demand further investigation. Specifically, they force scholars to clarify the place of ideology in their portrayals of working and organizing under contemporary capitalism. A crude way of putting this is to ask if our interest is in how work “actually” proceeds (the scare quotes signaling skepticism about the objectivity implied in such analyses), or if instead there is another story to be told about working.

Our interests tend toward the latter, so we align with authors such as Tweedie (2013), who suggests that the anti-Sennett analyses tend to miss both the social locations in which the transformed work practices are their sharpest (e.g., high-profile firms, entrepreneurial sites) in their

use of census data. Tweedie also suggests these analyses miss one of the key points of the attention to work under new capitalism: that the loss of a job, and the loss of income it generates, is only one of many possible forms of insecurity associated with work. Collinson (2003) suggests that insecurity likewise derives from individuals' attachment to particular notions of the self, particularly those associated with work. And of course, relations of difference noted earlier, such as nation and citizenship status, race, religion, ability, gender, and sexuality—to name a few—matter profoundly to the insecurities of work as well.

Yet critiques such as Tweedie's run the risk of missing how stories that find traction, regardless of empirical evidence or other indicators of truth value, enjoin workers (as well as those about to enter the labor force) to orient to these new "realities." That is, the ideology, as cultural force, is portrayed as so pervasive that it must inevitably shape how people approach working and organizing. In other words, workers have been told repeatedly that career is a personal responsibility, that achievement is a product of self-discipline, and that continual enterprise is essential to being a competitive workplace commodity (du Gay, 1996; Grey, 1994; Vallas & Cummins, 2015). As noted earlier, theoretical stories cannot be taken lightly precisely because those that find footing act on the world they claim merely to study, enacting and enforcing the realities of which they speak.

Critique of Existing Frameworks for Understanding

Assuming, then, that the aforementioned changes to working and organizing under contemporary capitalism are worthy of attention, one might wonder how the authors surveyed here might explain *why* such transformations are occurring—to return to the terminology mentioned earlier, when telling the story of the "new economy," to what actors and factors do they turn in developing explanations? Culling from the discussion earlier, we can identify the following, offered in no particular order:

Work flexibility, Chicago School of economics, securities and bank deregulation, monetary devaluation, separation of corporate ownership and control, tax reform, portfolio conception of the firm, shareholder value thesis, consumer debt, retirement (in)security, welfare privatization, big data, branding, globalization (including the global division of labor), bodily mobility, technological change (especially in information and communication technologies, but also automation), decline of trade unions, crowdfunding, welfare reform, project work and the gig economy, class, capital liberalization, knowledge, individualization, agency theory, general intellect, personal networks, post-Fordism, "the" market, labor, entrepreneurs, investment bankers, consumption/prosumption, algorithms, service work, communicative labor (and knowledge), neoliberalism, brand communities, risk, precarious labor . . .

This set of factors is obviously multifarious, dense, even dizzying. And that's the point: Attempting to trace causes and effects through this byzantine, recursive, and shifting array of elements—elements that writers also see as occurring at different levels of analysis—should lead one to doubt the possibility of generating any single and straightforward story.

Given our interest in considering what working and organizing have become under contemporary capitalism, such a list is not terribly helpful, because it fails to help navigate through the thicket of factors. The question, then, becomes what sort of framework would be suitable to access such a complex arrangement of elements involved in accomplishing contemporary capitalism.

One route would be to identify the “real” structures operating beneath the surface of the factors mentioned earlier—a reduced set of forces generating the observed changes in working and organizing (Fleetwood, 2014; Thompson & Harley, 2012). Moves like these—often associated with the versions of critical realism associated with Roy Bhaskar and Margaret Archer—assume that working and organizing can be explained with reference to underlying causal (generative) mechanisms. As with Fevre's, Doogan's, and Johnson et al.'s analyses of the “real” landscape of work, there is an implied objectivism in the analyses—one characterized by both an assumption of causality and the assurance of epistemological certainty in determining the character of that causality. Explanations such as these can be attractive until one recognizes that they leave little room for contingency, contestation, or creativity; they constrain a consideration of agency and the emergence of alternatives in our examinations of, and interventions into, working and organizing.

A second path would be to draw upon tools complicated enough to match the intricacy of the world they endeavor to grasp. This is the domain of models of the social world that endeavor to capture a long list of variables and combine them in computer programs that can manage the large data sets and produce probabilistic claims about likely trajectories. Computer modeling of complex economic systems is common in economic science (Foster & Metcalfe, 2001; Markose, 2005) and has gained adherents in the social sciences as well (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999; Harvey & Reed, 1997); they tend to be interested in balancing the ability to include a wide range of factors, exploitable by advanced computing power, with producing parsimonious models of the social and organizational phenomena (Corman, 1996). Other approaches in this second path are more inductive in that they attempt to analyze naturally occurring data, such as the wealth of talk produced in organizational life, through the application of heuristics techniques, linguistic tools, and data reduction tools (Contractor, Wasserman, & Faust, 2006; Corman, Kuhn, McPhee, & Dooley, 2002).

A third route would be to suggest that the various disciplines and lines of thought each offer unique and insightful views of the set of factors. Fields oriented toward “macro” issues would examine issues different from those focusing on the “micro,” economically minded scholars would

take up topics different from those of interest to humanistically oriented thinkers. On this path, intellectual communities assert the value of their distinct “perspectives” or “takes” on working and organizing in late capitalism (Leonardi, 2017), and somewhere in the conversation, a commentator inevitably introduces the parable of the blind men and the elephant to both chastise the analysts and suggest the presence of a “real” object waiting to be discovered if only scholars would follow a path to overcome the obstacle of disciplinary fragmentation (March, 2005; Zorn, 2002).

An Alternative Approach

A fourth possibility is to start with the suggestion that both the search for simple underlying causes and the effort to create complex systems models are the product of scholars looking in the wrong places and asking the wrong questions. Once again, we mean “wrong” in the sense that they yield predictable traps, or that we continually find ourselves stuck in familiar ways when we follow their lead. Specifically, all three of those responses separate the world from scholars’ and practitioners’ efforts to understand it. In those approaches, subject and object are split such that the scholarly task becomes one of mapping theory onto (an external and unquestioned) reality. The criterion of research quality in both those approaches is one of *correspondence*, where models that *fit*, that mirror the (putatively) objective external world, are desirable (for critiques, see Deetz, 2003; Rorty, 1979).

In the plotlines of contemporary capitalism, some of the elements in our long list noted earlier are portrayed as agents, some as conditions, some as tools, and some as outcomes. Some are framed as human and others non-human. Some are seen as material and others symbolic or ideational. In an alternative framework, such preordained, a priori assignments of roles and positions do not hold. Beginning with a recognition that those elements exist and are associated with one another only in and through working and organizing, a key break is to foreground a different unit of analysis. The scholarship presented earlier tends to rely on units of analysis familiar to many social scientists: individuals, organizations, and networks.

The question with which we began, in contrast, was not about individuals, organizations, or networks, but about *working* and *organizing*—the gerund signifying our commitment to shifting analytical attention from traditional units of analysis to practice, activity, and accomplishment. The market is a composite of practices, entrepreneurship is a set of practices, and financialization is an array of linked practices; if analysts endeavor to understand *how* markets, entrepreneurship, and financialization work, if they seek to generate novel insights into the operations of these phenomena, they will be hamstrung if they allow the notion of empirical correspondence, and an ever-growing set of elements, to guide their examinations. By foregrounding practice—and specifically communicative practice—as a means of contrast, we see the possibility of framing routinized action as

the ongoing, continually reconstructed product of an array of forces that gain status as elements, as *agencies*, only through their connections with other elements in the carrying off of the activity in question.

This fourth view, which is thoroughly *relational* in orientation, is the story we are eager to tell in this book, for we find it especially conducive to writing new plotlines for attending to social problems. Relationality is an ontological move that begins with the claim that it is less helpful to posit substances—to assume the existence of bounded entities that predate the interactions in which they engage—than it is to suggest that the elements of the long list noted earlier are participants in, and simultaneously products of, practices. Relationality posits that what is commonly taken to be actors and factors creating contemporary capitalism—individuals, organizations, markets, public policies, structures, as well as the very figure of the “new economy”—emerge from, and are performed in, communication (when communication is understood as a dynamic practice). Efforts to understand a phenomenon such as financialization should resist assuming that actors draw upon policies and tools to create a financialized world; a relational analysis would instead start with the personal and organizational *practices* that grant priority to monetary instruments.

Further, this orientation denies any subject/object split, refusing to portray the various (and often taken-for-granted) participants in working and organizing as *either* discursive or material, tangible or intangible, human or nonhuman. In place of those dichotomies, relationality highlights agential hybridity, multiplicity, interdependency, and indeterminacy in suggesting that the identification of participants is an epistemological choice that must always be grounded in a comprehension of a practice. Barad (2012, p. 32) explains what relational ontologies aim to offer:

The point is not merely to include nonhuman as well as human actors or agents of change but rather to find ways to think about the nature of causality, agency, relationality, and change without taking those issues to be foundational or holding them in place.

Relationality, then, is not a claim that the social and the material are connected, but that the demarcations “social” and “material” are *effects of practices*—including the practice of scholarly writing. It is also a recognition that all agency, all acting, occurs *conjointly*. Reconfiguring our conceptions of the division between the human and the nonhuman also carries potential ethical implications: If the nonhuman cannot be rendered solely an inanimate “thing” in the service of human interests, if we instead understand practice to be the product of entanglements of agencies, then we may well be forced to revisit the ethical principles guiding action (Dale & Latham, 2015). This is the project of Chapter 2, in which we present conceptions of relationality to analyze not only their onto-epistemological assertions but also their capacity to contribute novelty to investigations.

Communication, as we shall present it in Chapter 3, can augment a shift of this sort. In the work presented earlier, communication (when it's attended to at all) is usually relegated to that which *occurs in the conduct of* working and organizing; it is seen as just one process among many necessary in re-producing a pre-existing and objective economic sphere. We shall make a bolder claim: that working and organizing—and, thus, “doing” capitalism—is communication. We shall suggest that a reworking of our guiding question is in order such that it becomes *how are we to conceive of communication such that it can magnify our insights on working and organizing in contemporary capitalism?* In Chapter 3, we argue that if a view of communication grounded in relationality is to play a heuristic role, scholars must marshal a conception of communication rich enough to illuminate (and reframe) the practices of contemporary capitalism.

The remainder of the book illustrates how scholarship might pursue these multiple visions. We present three case studies to demonstrate both how analysts might proceed when seeking to examine working and organizing in the “new economy” grounded in a relational ontology. The first, in Chapter 4, is a study of the becoming of an idea in the context of a creative event, from its inception to its prototypification. The second, in Chapter 5, is an examination of the multiplicity of “the product” in high-tech startup entrepreneurship. The third, in Chapter 6, offers an examination of academic publishing and commercial aviation. We follow these studies with a concluding chapter that draws out the implications of the approach we term communicative relationality for organization studies in terms of the methodological approaches they employ, the claims they make, and the implications they bear for organization studies' explorations of working and organizing under late capitalism.

Notes

1. Although this is an alluring vision for many, some communication scholars harbor important concerns about its treatment of communication. Autonomists, especially Hardt and Negri (2004), rely on what appears to be a simplistic version of interest representation in locating that common cause. Communication is portrayed as necessary to recognize shared interests and to build networks that can support an alternative form of the commons (Brophy, Cohen, & de Peuter, 2016). Communication, in this perspective, is that which (a) merely expresses persons' pre-existing meanings and experiences, and (b) is oriented toward commonality, neglecting the inevitability of (and even, perhaps, desirability of) difference (Dempsey & Carlone, 2014). As we shall illustrate next, such a conception of communication is a significant limitation on the utility of the theory.
2. The concept “1099” refers to the U.S. tax forms that (are intended to) capture income earned by organizations' employees through salaries, wages, and tips—those associated with sporadic and contract work—as opposed to more traditional employees who use a form called the W-2 to report salaried workers, those with (putatively) more stable employment.