

From Paradigms to Styles: Current Sociologies of Work in France

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The sociology of work in France today presents all the appearances of a paradox. On the one hand, it brings together a whole body of researchers of different generations whose output is both visible and prolific. The simplest measure of the dynamism of this speciality is the ongoing success of the *Journées de sociologie du travail* which bring together biennially between two and three hundred contributors. Organized around specific themes, these gatherings lead to publications which provide a good reflection of the state of the field and the directions in which it is progressing (*Sociologie du travail*, 1986; Michon and Segrestin, 1990; La Rosa, 1999, 2004; Alaluf, Rolle and Schoetter, 2001; Durand and Linhart, 2005; Aballéa and Lallement, 2007; Appay and Jeffries, 2009; Jacquot, Higelé, Lhotel, and Nosbonne, 2011; Alaluf, Desmarez and Stroobants, 2012).

On the other hand, French sociology of work seems to be stacking up a number of handicaps. First and foremost it suffers from considerable intellectual diffuseness. In the various introductions to the Proceedings of the abovementioned *Journées*, the organizers continually deplore this paradigmatic scattering of focus. It is certainly true that the analytic horizons are extremely varied. The principal theoretical frameworks adopted in the papers presented during these gatherings over the last two decades oscillate between Marxism and Neo-Marxism, interactionism, the economics of convention, the theory of social regulation, institutionalism, or the psychodynamics of work. Added to which, the sociology of work is sometimes accused of being a dated speciality which is having trouble renewing the basis of its interrogation and its problematics. Finally, it suffers from a chronic theoretical deficit. Is it not fair to claim that the greater part of the research undertaken in this field is devoted to accumulating empirical observations, which certainly are often very interesting, but without ever undertaking any new theorization of what is the nature of work today?

Taking this observation as its starting point, the goal of this article is twofold. It aims firstly at putting forward a reasoned overview of the current intellectual state of French sociology of work.¹ Rather than putting forward a new history of the discipline, it is a matter of identifying some of the structuring markers of the field as well as the lines of demarcation that distinguish them. The second goal is to account for the absence of any homogeneity in French sociology of work other than in terms of a crisis or of paradigmatic tension. More precisely I will be advancing the hypothesis that, at a time when work is undergoing change and, along with it, the sociological community, an

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epistemological reasoning founded on the notion of ‘style’ is capable of elucidating the contemporary situation.

To bolster such an intuition, we will begin by pointing out the limitations of a paradigmatic approach. In counterpoint to this we will propose an epistemological diagram directly inspired by the studies of Paul Feyerabend. By means of the categories of perspective, semantics, strategy, and rationalization, the schema will be applied to four ‘styles’ which may be considered as having been the dominant ones over the last two decades in the field of contemporary French sociology of work. In doing so, the following pages will constitute as much an in-depth epistemological reflection as an X-ray of the metamorphoses of work such as sociology apprehends them today.

Work in terms of paradigms

When it comes to looking reflexively at their own discipline, French sociologists freely have recourse to the language of paradigms. In this context, the implicit reference is always to the major study devoted by Thomas Kuhn in 1962 to the structure of scientific revolutions. Significantly, the general assessment of the state of French sociology of work put forward only a few years ago by Jean-Pierre Durand and William Gasparini (2007) carries the title of *Le travail à l'épreuve des paradigmes sociologiques*. Yet in the sociology of work, as in other specialized domains, the notion of a paradigm has rarely been worked through in any depth. It serves as a handy substitute for the idea of theory. To be fair, though, it is appropriate to recognize that Pierre Tripier (1991) was the first to have taken seriously the theses of Kuhn and to have applied them other than simply metaphorically to French sociology of work. From Kuhn Tripier retains the notion that any scientific community is organized by means of certain base assertions that define its field of investigation. From this perspective, a paradigm is that which defines the total sum of the concepts, instruments, methods, and questions activated by the members of the said community.

Pursuing this line of argument, Tripier affirms that such a framework is no different for contemporary sociology, for which he distinguishes three characteristic and concurrent paradigms – approaches around the individual, the nation, and around class. He goes on to assert that the disciplinary matrix of French sociology of work is structured around two poles: consultation (studies which, in one way or another, follow the tradition initiated by Elton Mayo) and futurology (more general perspectives on the future development of industrial society, such as those of Georges Friedmann for example). For Tripier, ‘the force field organized by the paradigmatic tension in the disciplinary matrix of industrial sociology exists uniquely by according an epistemological and methodological privilege to the work situation’ (1991: 99). During the 1980s, he observes, French sociologists came up with a new paradigm for which ‘interactionism’ constituted the most evolved expression. By putting in one basket the issues of the labour market, career paths, workers’ identities, the way jobs are learned etc., they put forward a dialogic and genetic sociology which may well have shifted their centre of interest from the idea of work to that of employment.

Although they allow the provision of a thematic structure to the sudden discovery of the virtues of the Chicago School of Sociology by French industrial sociologists who had, for the most part, been formed in the traditions of Proudhon or Marx, the propositions of Pierre Tripier present two major limitations. Firstly, his schematics leaves aside a whole series of studies which can legitimately claim integration into the field of the sociology of work. I am particularly thinking of the sociology of industrial relations which, if in France it does not enjoy an academic recognition as strong as that accorded in English-speaking countries, nevertheless has long been shedding excellent light on the worlds of work (Bevort and Jobert, 2008). The same observation is applicable with regard to the sociology of the business enterprise which developed in France from around the middle of the 1980s (Sainsaulieu and Segrestin, 1986; Segrestin, 1992). Secondly, it is difficult by

means of the logic of paradigms to comprehend the success of the sociology of activity which, in its own way, restores priority to the place of work. Certainly one can persuade oneself that several paradigms coexist henceforth and that they do so in mutual tension each with the others. But this form of reasoning invites one to give up the principle of the domination of one particular paradigm which sets the direction, at any one time, for 'normal' science. In other words, so doing means accepting operating at considerable distance from Kuhn's point of view, with the risk of weakening or even completely denaturing the sense of his argumentation.

This observation simply actualizes a classic criticism of Kuhn's approach, namely its inability to recognize the explanatory pluralism which prevails in the social sciences. Kuhn conceives the dynamic of knowledge from the standpoint of a strong hypothesis, in virtue of which 'the successive transition from one paradigm to another via revolution is the usual developmental pattern of mature science' (Kuhn, 2012: 12). Apart from the recognition that, since its emergence as a discipline, it has continued existing on the plane of permanent crisis, sociology in fact completely eludes this interpretive schema. The difficulty is increased by the earlier-mentioned fragility of the notion of paradigm. A very careful commentator of Kuhn's key work has counted twenty-two different usages of the term in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Agreeing himself that there was a problem, Kuhn (1977) suggested retaining two definitions only. The first, general, one associates a paradigm with everything to which a scientific group adheres. The second designates more specifically the cognitive operators which allow the members of a scientific community to reach common judgements about the world. But even armed with these more comprehensive definitions, it is still hard to see how the previously mentioned difficulty may be overcome.

Sociology as art

This heading is an intentional nod in the direction of Paul Feyerabend's text *Wissenschaft als Kunst* (1984) in which the author draws up a suggestive parallel between the history of art and the history of science. While his principal interlocutor in this dialogue was the Hungarian philosopher of science Imre Lakatos, Feyerabend also offers, it seems to me, a stimulating alternative to the approach by the paradigms of Kuhn. Following in Feyerabend's footsteps – though not always precisely so, I must admit – I propose to call *scientific style* a set of practices, whether discursive or not, which are oriented by a concern for truth. Like all social practices, those that are associated with a style² have no reason to always and everywhere respond to a same set of preoccupations, nor to mobilize the same means to produce a discourse that a scientific community can judge admissible. Furthermore, the more general the problem to be solved, 'which means in effect that the more its significance for the culture is important, the less susceptible it is to an unequivocal solution arising out of materials supplied by empirical knowledge, because of the more involved ultimate axioms, eminently personal, of faith and axiological concepts' (Weber, 1965).

If one is to take seriously this affirmation of Max Weber's, which is of course in no way equivalent to a declaration of relativist faith, one can deduce from it that the normal regime for the production of knowledge is not the consensus but the coexistence of concurrent points of view and actions. Contrary to the paradigmatic approach, that by way of styles thus incites consideration not only of the epistemological and methodological choices made by those who produce pieces of knowledge but more generally of the totality of the actions, interactions, and representations involved in the struggle to claim the monopoly of legitimate knowledge. Contrary to what is postulated by the partisans of Kuhn, scientific practices and derived knowledge are never exempt from contradiction. As Weber showed (1965), they must allow for certain internal tensions that are immanent within them. I am also adopting for myself this way of addressing the search for truth which, for convenience's sake, we could call the 'lemma of tension'.

To sharpen the sense of these assertions, I would like to propose three hypotheses to assist in buttressing the picture of contemporary French sociology of work which will follow. The first hypothesis is: insofar as it contributes to knowledge about the world, a style is firstly defined through a perspective and a semantics which are particular to it. A perspective first of all: in *Against Method*, Paul Feyerabend notes that a particular style offers a vision of the world that an artist, and through him, various of his contemporaries, transmits. In a painting, each brushstroke can thus be interpreted as the expression of implicit hypotheses which govern our way of seeing and thinking the world. An 'archaic style', to take up Feyerabend's expression, is not foreign, for example, to the fact that people feel guided in their actions and their representations by external forces which hang over them and exercise a domination over them. Besides a perspective, a style claims its own semantics. Feyerabend draws broadly on the hypothesis of Benjamin Whorf according to which languages are not simply instruments serving to describe events. They give shape to them as well. As a consequence of this, there exist linguistic limits to what might be said in any given language.

Applying this idea to the object of my analysis, one could say that, speaking as a Marxist or a psychologist, the language of exploitation or that of mental stress prevents understanding, or even seeing, what work owes to individuals' passionate involvement in it. I draw two major consequences from this first hypothesis. Because they share a same point of view on the world and activate a similar semantics, several different theories of work can cohabit with a same style, including theories which tend habitually to be set in opposition one to another. In difference therefore from the theory of paradigms, method is not, for styles, a determinant criterion. This is not really a surprise. In this field, as one recalls Feyerabend saying, 'anything goes'.

My second hypothesis is that, insofar as it is shaped by the social world, a style is defined by strategies. These are essentially of two orders: a discursive strategy (a single way of reading history and one's own history) and a non-discursive one (mobilization of allies, a policy of symbolic and material conquest of the field through publications, appointments to high positions in universities, etc). Given the limits of this article, I am unable to describe all the composite aspects, and at this stage I wish simply to point up the common mythic source from which French sociologists of work draw as it suits them to establish their intellectual legitimacy. This discourse, which textbooks take on the job of repeating just as our ancestors repeated their foundation stories, has a dual origin. This derives both from the change in thinking brought about by Elton Mayo (allegedly the father of industrial sociology) and more recently, from the reworking of the discipline after World War II, when French sociology was reborn by discarding the heritage of Durkheim which was no longer regarded as of interest.

From this latter point of view, even if many French sociologists of work have a more or less confused awareness of the certainly radical and exaggerated character of the three propositions that follow, it is not inaccurate to consider that these latter serve to provide the common base for a shared myth. The first proposition is: the focal person of industrial society to whom sociology has principally directed its attention is the 'qualified industrial worker of the major industries, who is male (and preferably aware of his situation and unionized)' (Monjardet, 1985: 116). The second proposition is: following the apt metaphor employed by Pierre Tripier, like classical theatre, French sociology of work has long been governed by a principle of three unities: unity of place (exclusive focus on the workshop or factory floor), unity of time (research interest directed solely at the working hours), and unity of action (analysis of the physical work undertaken). The third proposition is: the sociology of work emerged as a discipline thanks to and under the leadership of two important men: Georges Friedmann and Pierre Naville. The former exercised a determining intellectual and material authority over the field, while the latter, even though he proved to be more relevant in his approach over many aspects, faded subsequently from the landscape because of a less certain institutional attachment.³

My final proposition in respect of styles is that, still in line with Feyerabend's intuitions, the artist along with the scientist must follow two contradictory objectives: respecting an internal imperative of perfection while describing in all its complexity the reality that they are representing or analysing. This observation is, in my opinion, simply a new translation of the lemma of tension put forward by Weber (cf. 1965). Perceptible in all registers of social activity, this tension sets the formal rationalization of social processes against their substantive aspect. In the field of law, for instance, elaborated by professional jurists, formal rationalization consists of systematizing according to an internal logic a body of abstract juridical rules and concepts. Substantive rationalization refers to those interests that are extra-judicial (economic, political, ethical, and so on) in the generation of laws, norms, etc. But, as Weber showed in relation to the dimension of the economy, 'formal and substantive rationality, no matter by what standard the latter is measured, are *always in principle* separate things' (Weber, 1968: 108) The process is no different, as we shall see, within scientific styles.

Styles in the sociology of work

Because they are the products of history, styles do not compose a homogeneous and finite whole of which it would be relatively simple to produce a typology through a purely deductive process. In the case of the sociology of work, consideration of the contributions to the different *Journées* mentioned in my introduction allows for the identification of four major and competing styles in the sociology of work which correspond, drawing of Feyerabend's expression, to a similar number of selective choices 'from a great number of forms compared to reality'. At the risk of being over schematic, it furthermore may be declared that each of these styles is born and reborn from its own ashes over periods when work in the broad sense becomes the object of major mutations (the external context), but also when, with the social sciences themselves, the balance of forces is affected by the decline or, on the contrary, the growth in strength of certain disciplines or schools (the internal context).

Far, however, from being reduced to simple intellectual rationalizations of worlds in the process of recomposition, styles are also practices which have implications, directly or indirectly, for the actors, the spaces, the mechanisms, and so on which they elaborate as objects of study. In every case, though, it is above all the manner of defining work as an object of scientific scrutiny which allows the differentiation of the styles from each other. I will therefore introduce each of these styles, starting with the one whose perspective is the most micro-social to reach at the end of the process that which, in reverse, transmits the most macro-social representation of work.

The focus on work as task (first style) may be understood as a propensity to celebrate Prometheus for two different reasons. Firstly, the waves of rationalizations of work which have followed each other since the Second World War; secondly, the intention to introduce into the sociological space the pragmatist demand arising out of the American tradition. Work as interaction (second style) may be read similarly as the concrete expression of an intellectual development (the success of interactionism) during the 1980s but also of the collective coming to awareness, in the following decade, that work is less and less an action performed on material things and more and more an activity performed upon and with Another.

Work as integration (third style) directly echoes the deprivation of employment that many workers have unwillingly had to undergo since the 1980s. But this style is also the negative consequence of the success of the propositions around desinstitutionalization which have marked French sociology since the 1990s. Finally, work as value (the fourth style) refers to the concerns that were particularly echoed in the middle of the 1990s, more precisely in a period when the 'modernization' of business enterprises reached its apogee and engendered grave doubts in a large part of the salaried workforce as to the meaning that should be attributed to an activity subject to organizational rationalizations which were sometimes as absurd as they were dangerous to health.

Table 1 accentuates the principal points of contrast by which each of the four styles just referred to are differentiated. It also briefly summarizes the exposition that follows.

Work as task

The affirmation that work is first and foremost a task to be performed constitutes the prime conviction of two contemporary approaches which, together, form the first style of the sociology of work. The first of these derives largely from the intuitions reported early on by Georges Friedmann in virtue of which ‘work, to the extent that it implies a constraint, differs in many cases from action, which is something free, as sometimes may be considered the action of the artist bringing to fruition a long-term project without being under the constraint of need. But such cases seem rare according to what the creators themselves report’ (Friedmann, 1960: 688). From such a perspective, which fairly naturally links to the point of view of Marx (1990) on the alienation of work, the task may be considered in terms of its contrary nature. To be sure, when he defined the sociology of work in the first article of the opening number of the journal of the same name (*Sociologie du Travail*), Friedmann gave it a broad definition. ‘The sociology of work, he wrote, may in effect be considered in its broadest extent as the study, under their various aspects, of all the human groupings which come together on the occasions of work activities’ (Friedmann, 1959: 2). In his most influential works, Friedmann (1950; 1956) in reality invites his readers to give particular consideration to a singular aspect of the modern evolution of these collective groupings, being the tendency to increase, sometimes to absurd lengths, the division of the labour to be undertaken and its effects on the individual capacities of the workers.

By designating such a direction of study, one which Pierre Naville (1961) took up as well in his own way in his brilliant studies on automation, Friedmann gave impetus to research centred on the manner of living and performing work tasks in a factory or workshop. It is from this perspective that, concerned about not letting themselves be taken in by managerialist fables, sociologists who have

Table 1. Four styles of contemporary sociology of work.

<i>Work as ...</i>	<i>Task</i>	<i>Interaction</i>	<i>Integration</i>	<i>Value</i>
<i>Components of the style</i>				
<i>Perspective (level of analysis)</i>	Micro (individuals)	Meso (individuals, groups)	Meso (groups)	Macro (groups, societies)
<i>Semantics</i>	Subjectivity, action, activity	Negotiation, identity, regulation	Labour market, segmentation, institutions	Boundaries, meaning, axiology
<i>Discursive strategies</i>	Discourse of rupture: nostalgia for the past, affirmation of radical change	Discourse of rupture: rejection of determinist schemas like Marxism and structuro-functionalism	Discourse of rehabilitation for subordinate (women) or marginalized actors (enterprise)	Discourse of rehabilitation of meaning: place of work in history, relationship to work of social groups and societies
<i>Tensions between formal and substantive rationalizations</i>	Interpretation by assertion of dominance vs descriptive demands of work activity	Tetrachoric modelling vs analysis of social environments as provisional compromises	Organizational grammar intended as exhaustive vs non-cumulative multiplication of typologies of forms of work	Perception of work as an expression of instrumental rationality vs lumping of all forms of activity in the category of work

rubbed up against Marxism seek today to understand how work crushes the identity of the workers, and how these latter can knowingly resist the pressures bearing upon them. The most recent manifestations of this sociology of work bring to light the recruitment of subjectivities (Dujarier, 2006; Linharet et al., 2008; Linhart, 2015) or, if one still prefers, the voluntary servitude induced by the new forms of neo-production line organization in the manufacturing industry (automobile manufacture, agri-food enterprises ...) as in service industries (transport, distribution, fast-food restaurants ...).

More effective than the older 'scientific management' theories of Frederick Taylor which were directed at reducing the down time of each worker, just-in-time production puts materials into constant motion (thus increasing the rotation rate of capital) and invents a management principle of the power of work which, while avoiding an over-strict structure of supervision, (so reducing costs) self-engages and self-motivates workers on task-objectives that they make their own (hetero-suggestion) and which concretely rules out times of inactivity. (Durand, 2004: 365)

The surveys conducted by the French Ministry of Labour under the title 'Conditions de travail' do not completely dismiss such a hypothesis. It appears in effect that, during the 1990s, wage-workers experienced gains in their level of autonomy (the proportion of workers who reported receiving precise instructions on how to proceed in their tasks diminished to some extent), but more particularly felt the pressure of constraints on a daily basis (pressures from clients, from their peers, from supervisors and bosses).⁴ The consequence of this 'constrained autonomy' is that, in the range of work pathologies, stress, harassment, and suicide have now replaced the fatigue, depression, and general lassitude of yesteryear (Lallement et al., 2011).

The second approach associated with the style related to 'task' is more recent. It derives directly from the pragmatist shift in direction negotiated by French social science during the 1980s. The intent of researchers linked in with this new direction is still to treat work as a task to be performed, but now conceiving it as a complex operation that is in the process of being achieved. Work must therefore be analysed as practical accomplishment. For this reason, the sociologist must put the accent on the here and now, consider the forms of institution of work through language (Borzeix and Fraenkel, 2001), draw attention to the relation of the individual worker to his/her peers, and so on. Having both a pragmatist and phenomenological inspiration and fostered by the anthropology of technology, this approach makes use of the vocabulary of action, activity, and operations (*Sociologie du travail*, 2008). It reproaches the preceding tradition for making work disappear, or at least for ignoring its complexity. For this reason, the favoured option is to cast work as narrative by going beyond the contrast between work and job (as in the preceding case) to see it preferably as the articulation between the worker and the activity. In both cases, however, there is a common semantics which draws on the vocabulary of task, action, and solidarity.

Whatever way it is related in this singular style, the history of French sociology of work oscillates between lost tradition and innovative break-through. What the two approaches have in common is elaborating the style with reference to a rupture judged to be as radical as it is decisive. Originally, say the tenants of the first approach, the sociology of work was a sociology of the factory or workshop, and that was highly appropriate. It has subsequently gone off on the wrong track by abandoning its privileged places of observation. Above all, it lost its critical soul when, in developing a discourse around the enterprise, for example, it did little more than rationalize a managerialist type of rhetoric. The propensity towards a hyper-empiricism marks a supplementary rupture. 'May one not see in that a sort of euphemization of conflicts, of power and class relationships?' (Durand and Linhart, 2005: 7).

The kind of sociology of work which seeks to restore pride of place to activity puts forward a history which, not at all by chance, promotes the preceding sociology – and it alone – to the rank

of an outdated model needing to be left behind. The sociology of work, we are told more precisely, was born with as its point of reference the ideal of an artisanal world in which the worker was not distinct from his job nor the kind of work he was undertaking. From this there derives a major consequence: time and technology are thought of in abstract fashion (Bidet, 2006). Time, under the old sociology, was that of the decomposition of the artisanal model. Entirely tied in to the register of instrumental rationality, technology was considered only to the extent of determining whether or not it was threatening the skill-set of the worker. Against a Heideggerian background, the sociology of activity claims to be able finally to pass to the stage of the concrete by analysing activity in its temporal density and by conceiving the world of technology as a world populated by actants. The man–machine dialogue or the ways of investing the body in action have given rise, from such a perspective, to some interesting monographs on the conditions of work as practical achievement (Dodier, 1995).

The links which tie together these two constituent theories of the style that associates work with a performable task are at the very least eclectic. Whereas the first remains above all faithful to a sociology of Marxist tradition, the second draws more of its inspiration from related disciplines like ergonomics, psychology, pragmatist philosophy, or even linguistics. In consequence, it draws instruction in very disparate fashion from a set of studies whose coherence is far from being reliably tested to this day: activity ecology, distributed cognition, situated action, regimes of familiarity, the activity theories of Yrjö Engeström, theory of socio-technical linkages ... The ways of analytically rationalizing work reflect these two distinct ways of thinking. Whereas the sociology of work of Marxist inspiration coherently subsumes all the events it observes under the single seal of the opposition between capital and labour (formal rationalization), the second is tempted by the practices of ethno-methodological inspiration which, in the name of the complexity and fluidity of the real (substantive rationalization) hold firmly to observations that are sometimes extremely banal and which, in particular, grandly ignore the structuring role of social relationships.

Work as interaction

This second style of the sociology of work has become more prominent since the 1980s, due in part to the discovery in France of the work of the Chicago School of Sociology, and further, to the growing success of the theory of social regulation formalized by Jean-Daniel Reynaud (1989). These two approaches, which are quite close to each other in various aspects, have particularly in common that they propose an identical perspective on the social world and call on a semantics which borrows broadly from game theory (Lallement, 1994). Notions of determinant rules, strategies, and negotiation and convention are in effect abundantly engaged both by the sociologists of work who take their inspiration in France from Erving Goffman or Howard Becker and by those who, as J.D. Reynaud was the first to do, make use of game theory, appropriately amended, as a privileged method for understanding the social process.

From this style and its two theoretical approaches emerge two founding propositions for the French sociology of work of the present day. The first is that it is interaction which produces the worker or more exactly the worker's identity. 'Anyone studying identity must necessarily thoroughly examine interaction: it is in fact during the interactional confrontation, and thanks to it, that one can best evaluate both oneself and others' (Strauss, 1992: 47). Such an assertion has served as the basis for numerous empirical studies which have allowed the establishment of typologies of identity (of workers, of the chronic unemployed, of those on precarious incomes etc.). In this area the research of Claude Dubar has marked an important step. Following on from the Chicago School, Dubar distinguishes four ideal types of professional identity which, equally, offer the same number of socially recognized ways for individuals to establish their identities with one another.

Constructed in the work situation and the product of biographical pathways, these identities have been subjected to pressures and tensions which up to this point have become so strong and multiple (weakening of trade communities, the expunging of class conflicts, the individualization of the work relationship, and so on) that, in Dubar's view (2000) one can in every case speak of a 'crisis of professional identities'.

The second proposition of the interactionist style constitutes the symmetrical reflection of the previous one: work is produced in interaction. To say this comes down to declaring, in the manner of Reynaud, that 'work is essentially a rule-based activity. To produce an object, an article or a service is to follow certain technical rules [...]. To work in a team is to accept rules of cooperation, authority and control' (Reynaud, 1991: 121). In other words, the rule becomes established as the over-arching social fact, the prism through which one should read the meaning of working. Based on the necessity for observation of concrete work situations and social negotiation, such an approach postulates the existence of a plurality of sources of regulation, most prominent of which are the groups of those performing the work (autonomous regulation) and those directing it (control regulation). Such conjoint regulation can thus be defined as a process of encounter and articulation between these diverse normative sources, a combination which in any given system results in the promulgation of particular rules. Although locally derived and potentially subject to continual renegotiation, such functional rules nevertheless possess a certain permanence to the extent that they are the result of a compromise which would be costly to revisit at any random moment.

Beyond the strong influence of the theory of social regulation in the sociology of organizations and in the domain of industrial relations (Terresac, 2003), this style which marries work and interaction has significantly influenced the research which, breaking with the simple reflex of industrialism, has given primacy to observing the relationship of service. This is not surprising when it is observed that presently almost seven French wage-workers out of ten state that in their work they are in contact with the public. In studies devoted to this service relationship (in the Post Office, at supermarket checkouts etc.) the question of managing the 'right distance' between the workers and their clients is often at the heart of this consideration, along with the closely related issue of the multiple skills that an employee must demonstrate to satisfy the demands directed at her or him. Observations have shown how these employees are conscious of how to make use of specific strategies (don't do any task that the client could do for himself, constantly respect the good conduct code to the extent of relying on standard expressions of courtesy to handle an angry or abusive client ...), and calling upon their experience of how to present themselves (controlled emotion, warmth, personableness ...), to ensure the interaction between themselves and their clients remains positive. But these interactions also have their downside, since situations of tension are common and have the effect of increasing the stress of work (Buscatto, Loriol, and Weller, 2008).

The principal discursive strategy employed by those researchers adhering to this style of the sociology of work consists in positioning themselves in opposition to a Marxist, and in particular a structuralist-functionalist, tradition. After the foundation studies of Renaud Sainsaulieu (1977), which themselves drew their inspiration from a Hegelian-style philosophy, the sociology of identity firmly established itself in France by initiating a break with a conception of the social world which confines identity to a single status – that of the employer or the worker – by reducing the work relationship to one of class. In symmetry with this break, the theory of social regulation has been constructed in opposition to the form of sociology which assimilated the world of work to a sphere of total dominance (where the factory is seen as the expression of the disciplinary society, with the production-line system as a devious scheme of capitalist rationality ...). To counter this latter way of thinking, social regulation theory has notably allied itself with that heterodox and typically French current of economics which proposes distancing itself from neo-classical theory with the aid of the notion of convention.⁵

To complete our consideration of this second style, it is possible to declare that the clearest propensity for promoting a formal intellectual rationalization is the evidence of the sociologies of identity which, in France at least and following upon the work of Claude Dubar, systematically analyse the worlds of work with the help of a model with four components (tetrachoric modelling). Whatever might be the populations, their histories, and their particular characteristics that are being studied, a quaternary typology is always able to encompass their diversity. In reverse, since it invites conceiving of the social world as the product of a permanent and ad hoc negotiation, the theory of social regulation shies away from broad-scale conceptual elaboration for fear of amputating the 'real' from its inherent complexity. In that vein we are typically in the register of substantive rationalization.

Work as social integration

The third style of sociology currently practised in France examines work from the standpoint of its capacity to create social inclusion or, if one prefers, to integrate individuals into the society. It is not by chance that this style has emerged from the middle of the 1980s, at a moment when the weight of mass unemployment drove sociologists to consider the meaning of work in a different light. It was at that time that the sociology of employment first appeared. This direction of sociology is developed by researchers who observed, after a period of constant growth in which the feminization of the work-force steadily increased, the extent to which gender inequalities weigh upon the labour market (Maruani, 1998). Part-time work, for example, is particularly discriminate of the genders in France: of the four million workers to whom this work-status applies, 80% are women.

The extension of this form of employment can be therefore only be understood if we take into account the social norm which assigns part-time work to women: part-time work is a form of employment socially constructed as female. It constitutes an example of the social segmentation of the modes of employment: a socially constructed distribution of the conditions and forms of employment that escapes the observation of a strictly economic analysis of the market mechanisms. (Maruani and Reynaud, 2004: 64)

For the two authors of the work from which the above quotation was drawn, the sociology of employment must mark itself off from the classical sociology of work by effecting a triple radical shift in perspective: this requires passing from the analysis of the work situation to that of the labour market, from the study of the engaged workers themselves to that of the whole active population and finally, from consideration of the individual job to that of employee mobility. With regard to such an approach, we now have to hand numerous quantitative studies and monographs devoted to the conditions of employment and the work-related trajectories of the unemployed, of workers filling temporary positions, of young workers in precarious work situations etc. All these studies show both that behind the administrative categories designating workers there are social realities which are often very different and that career pathways are much less linear than before (Nicole-Drancourt, 1998; Paugam, 2000; Castel, 2009).

In symmetry with this initial entry by way of the labour market is a sociology which wishes to takes seriously the business enterprise as an institution. This approach by way of the business became prominent during the debates of the *Journées de sociologie du travail* of 1985 (as recorded in the 1986 issue of *Sociologie du travail*). The central argument was as follows: to the extent that, up until the 1970s, the dominant labour cultures were those of the workers themselves and of the working class, the business occupied only a marginal place in French society. But times have now changed. The reduced reliance on production-line methods and the greater autonomy of employees

in their jobs, the decline of cultures based around work categories, the greater capacity for mobilization of all the actors of a business to face up to the constraints of economic crisis, all these reveal how the business has become a central institution in society, on the same level as the school or the family. One must therefore concede to it the capacity to produce not only rules but a common cultural foundation. The appeal of the business is thus apparent in the observation of reduced recourse to economic assessments and, in contrast, to more intensive mobilization through collective values and beliefs. The demonstration of a plurality social worlds centred on the business (Francfort, Osty, Sainsaulieu, and Uhalde 1995) or the elaboration, at the heart of organizations, of new power games or new applications of the effects of close working relations (Berrebi-Hoffmann, 2005; 2009) are among the most notable results of this current of research which, broadly speaking, has nevertheless found fewer ready to follow it than the sociology of employment.

By discovering almost simultaneously that the labour market and the business organization both possessed capacities for integration and segmentation, French sociologists have themselves been led to revise in their own way the history of their discipline. In the first of these two cases, it is initially and essentially through the lens of gender that work identity should henceforth be analysed, after a long period dominated by a sociology which took little account of the relations between men and women (Laufer, Marry, and Maruani, 2003). In the second case, the invention of a sociology of the business enterprise allows a distancing from a Marxist schema which assimilates organizations of production to simple focal points of exploitation.

This sociology of the business enterprise embodies furthermore, in the style discussed here, the pole of formal rationalization. When the ambition is a taxonomic one, there is often a great temptation to wish to lay out an elementary grammar (based, in the case of Renaud Sansaulieu's group, on the notions of legitimacy and dynamism) which would allow sociologists to capture and characterize the whole range of the social worlds put into the field of observation. The sociology of employment, in contrast, suffers from an inverse impediment: the multiple typologies of the particular forms of employment which have been produced by French sociologists end up in almost every case with different classifications which vary according to periods, to the sites investigated, and the priorities and interests of the particular research. In short, this is an indicator of substantive rationalization *par excellence*. Despite the accumulation of empirical research on employment, the conceptual coherence of the studies in this particular domain remains, up to the present time, more than problematic.

Work as a value

In a similar way to the style which has just been discussed above, that to which I am now turning my attention has engaged fewer researchers than the first two that we examined earlier. Nevertheless, this fourth style has met with a certain success over recent years, notably through the public debates on the supposed 'end' of work or, inversely, on the desire expressed by certain political leaders to see a revaluation of the nature of work. In the sociological field, the perspective more precisely proposed by this style of sociology is based on a fundamental questioning of the place of work in society, on its significance for certain sectors of the population (notably for the young), as well as on the manner of designating and distinguishing the activities which might be thought to arise, or not, out of work.

On the semantic level, the key term is that of 'value' in both its economic as well as its sociological sense. In relation to the economic sense firstly: more and more, the matter of the production of wealth imputable to the tertiary sector, but also to domestic, community, or other activities is disturbing the old certainty that only industrial work is productive. Seen another way, it is the very frontiers of work which are now being questioned. Secondly, considering 'value' in its sociological

sense: research undertaken from this perspective poses the question of what value individuals put on their work: is work a source of happiness? Is work more important than health, family, friends ...? Considered across social classes, across different countries, are the scales of value and the means of establishing these comparable?

In France, scarcely a year before the translation and publication of Jeremy Rifkin's book on the end of work, Dominique Méda brought out a book with a title which also sounded premonitory: *Le Travail, une valeur en voie de disparition*. Drawing on successive generations of philosophical thought on the matter, Méda (1995) drew attention to the fact that the category 'work' is the product of historical invention. Deploring the increasing hold that this singular activity has over contemporary society, the author makes an earnest appeal for a sharing of one's time that is more respectful of the family and of engagement in public affairs. However, being seen as a plea directed against the dominant place of work, the book rapidly stirred up reactions in certain sociologists. It is one of the triggers for example from the great enquiry into happiness and work undertaken by Christian Baudelot and Michel Gollac in the first few years of the new century. By means of a wide-ranging survey, these authors showed notably that work remained a value broadly affirmed by the French population. In the first, open, question of the survey, the respondents were asked what counts most for them to be happy. Work is identified as such, directly or indirectly, in a third of all the responses. Naturally however, the relationship with work varied according to the social status of the respondents. 'The increase in the amount of time it is necessary to work at a high rhythm has little effect on the level of happiness of senior executives and middle managers. But it diminishes the happiness of lower-level white-collar workers, massively reduces that of skilled industrial workers and has a dramatically negative effect on unskilled workers' (Baudelot and Gollac, 2003: 323).

Such an enquiry on the meaning that individuals attribute to happiness is not purely a product of that time. Numerous studies, around youth in particular, (Roulleau-Berger, 1991; Nicole-Drancourt and Roulleau-Berger, 2001) had already questioned the meanings young people gave to work and the strategies developed by the youth sectors of the population to address a labour market that was very unfavourable towards them. More recently, other studies of a comparative nature have brought into perspective the place of work in the hierarchy of values particular to each society. It appears firstly that work remains in the lead group of the most important values in the eyes of Europeans (Galland and Lemel, 2007). More precisely, the use of large-scale surveys (like the European Values Surveys, the European Social Survey, or the European Social Survey Programme) bring out a peculiarity in the attitudes of the French. The latter are the most numerous in Europe in asserting that work is important or very important, but they are also those who declare most strongly that work should occupy a lesser place in their lives (Davoine and Méda, 2008; Méda and Vendramin, 2013). The interpretation of this type of paradox calls for multiple hypotheses which bring into play as much the variable of religion and the organizational modes of business as the subjective perceptions relating to the chances for social mobility.

Because the researchers who dedicate their professional attention to the style around 'value' make up a group that is even less homogeneous than in the other groupings considered, it is tricky to define a dominant type of strategy for this style, whether discursive or not. At the risk of becoming polemical (Godard, 2005), the most radical version declares that, under the deleterious influence of Marx and the nineteenth-century thinkers, the sociology of work had made a fundamental choice at its foundation. By assimilating work to a potentially emancipatory practice, it therefore ruled itself out from understanding that work is in fact a purely instrumental activity and in this guise it is ontologically negative. In a certain way this is an intellectual wager similar to that operated by those who, drawing on the principles of the psychodynamics of work, associate work almost systematically with suffering.

Finally, this style does not escape the logic of the tension described by Weber any more than do the others. The temptation of formal rationalization is that of those who, influenced by the categories of German philosophy (and those of Hegel in particular), enclose work within the domain of instrumental rationality, at the risk of considering that, to the extent that they concern the space of the family, domestic activities are not accorded the status of being work. There is a symmetrical danger (substantive rationalization) in those analyses, though not very frequent in sociology it is true, that assimilate many social activity to a form of work and which, in doing so, dilute the notion of work itself (Cardon and Cassili, 2015).

Conclusion

In the course of a very few years, French sociology of work has changed considerably. At the beginning of the 1990s, Pierre Tripier was still depicting a field that was structured in the greater part by a central object of analysis (the workplace) and which was still largely impermeable to the theories of interactionism and the problematics of employment. Granted, by opting for a reading based on the notion of paradigm, Tripier was led into taking a harder line and into minimizing more than I have done the differences of perspective between sociologists of work. By choosing an epistemological reflection inspired by Feyerabend, however, there is by contrast a danger of over-accentuating the diversity of the ways of perceiving work and the ways of analysing it sociologically.

It seems to me nevertheless that, as well as avoiding the simplistic diagnosis of a structural crisis in the sociology of work, such a position presents two other advantages. It firstly allows for a rapprochement of the various sociologies (Marxism/pragmatism, employment focus/enterprise focus, and so on) which, spontaneously, we have habitually tended to oppose. It also allows an understanding of the extent to which, outside of certain shared beliefs, the history of the sociology of work can give rise to multiple interpretations directly linked to the research perspectives favoured by different researchers.

This latter observation may well explain why French sociology of work is attracting much less attention outside of France than it did in the 1970s. It is symptomatic of this relatively low profile that the overview of the theories of the work relationship sketched just a few years ago by Bruce Kaufmann (2010) does not include any reference to French studies. One can find various explanations for this marked lack of attention, beginning with the loss of influence of French sociology in general on the international scene.

Given that no definitive conclusion on this subject is possible, it seems to me that another aspect merits consideration. This is the general morphology of the community of sociologists of work. By a mechanism that Durkheim contributed to emphasizing, the growth of this professional sector has stimulated a division of tasks as well as a specialization by functions and themes. This process also certainly explains the propensity for the development of new styles of analyses, their division into multiple strands,⁶ and finally the difficult readability of this field of speciality outside of France. It is very probable, with a few exceptions, that this observation is valid outside of the narrow field of French sociology of work at the present time.

Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

Notes

1. French sociology of work has recently benefited from the self-reflexive contributions of sociologists of work who have inquired into their own discipline from a sociological point of view. I am thinking in

particular of the investigations of Anni Borzeix and Gwenaële Rot (2010) on one hand, and of Lucie Tanguy (2011) on the other. For a discussion in English of the organization, themes, and debates of French sociology of work between the immediate post-war period and the mid-1970s, see Rose (1979). From a German perspective, Düll (1975) remains the major work on this subject. But to the best of my knowledge, there are no studies comparable to those of Rose and Düll for the contemporary period. In the absence of these, some reference to the question can be found in the chapter relating to France written by Pierre Desmarez (2002).

2. For convenience I will henceforth simply use the term *style* in place of the fuller expression *scientific style*.
3. In a certain way it is that same outlook that Anni Borzeix and Gwenaële Rot (2010) assert anew in their history of the journal *Sociologie du travail* by granting the platform almost exclusively to the ‘founding fathers’ of the discipline: Michel Crozier, Jean-Daniel Reynaud, Alain Touraine, and Jean-René Tréanton.
4. For the period round the turn of the century, the ‘Condition du travail’ investigation paints a less pessimistic picture. It reports a ‘pause’ in the intensification of work between 1998 and 2005 (Bué, Coutrot, Hamon-Cholet, and Vinck, 2007; de Gaulejac and Hanique, 2015).
5. From the viewpoint of the theoretical current which in economics is associated with this term, one may define a convention as ‘a system of reciprocal expectations around competences and behaviours conceived as being implicitly expected and which will so continue without direction’ (Salais, 1989: 213).
6. The picture painted in this article does not fully cover, far from it, the complexity of the French sociology of work. Other styles, though admittedly more marginal ones, could be described: clinical sociology (Gaulejac, Hanique, and Roche, 2007), the socio-economics of conventions (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991), the sociology of professions (Tripiet, Dubar and Broussard, 2011), or the one that I myself have sketched under the heading of the sociology of the work institution (Lallement, 2007).

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