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978-0-521-09852-6 - Community and Occupation: An Exploration of Work/Leisure Relationships

Graeme Salaman

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Introduction

Some themes and issues from the classics: the theoretical background

My interest in occupational communities falls within the main-stream of sociological theory and enquiry and has a respectable sociological pedigree. In this introductory chapter some of the themes, issues and problems of the early sociologists that were relevant in the research will be discussed. It would be grossly presumptuous to suggest that these issues and themes are more than connecting threads; certainly there was no intention of testing, clarifying or operationalising them. Quite simply, my interest in occupational communities derived from my earlier interest in these broader theoretical issues and ideas.

It has been convincingly argued that the early ‘founding fathers’ of sociology were reacting to and attempting to describe and explain the processes of social change that were going on around them. Nisbet refers to these as the two great Revolutions: the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution.¹

This interest led to a concentration on one – or possibly two – central sociological problems: social order and social control.²

One of the most important elements in the approaches of the founding fathers to these problems was the nature of work, the increasing complexity of the division of labour, and their relationship to the form and type of community and group structure and life. These broad areas of interest were of central importance to the early sociologists.

Nisbet has argued that at a time when the old order was thought to be breaking up, sociologists, historians, philosophers and others rediscovered the central notion of community – and its obverse, alienation – which they tried to use to describe the processes of social change that were taking place. Indeed

1 Robert Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (London, Heinemann, 1967).

2 See Alan Dawe, ‘The Two Sociologies’, *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 21, no. 2, June 1970, pp. 207–18.

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he claims that ‘The most fundamental and far-reaching of sociology’s unit-ideas is community.’³

Marx and Alienation

Marx’s interest in the nature of work and man’s social or group life is mainly revealed in his writings on alienation. By alienation⁴ he meant the separation or estrangement that follows from loss or lack of control and the consequent submission to an external person or system that exploits, and oppresses and is hostile.

Under alienation,

‘The social character of activity, and the social form of the product, as well as the share of the individual in production, are here opposed to individuals as something alien and material; this does not consist in the behaviour of some to others, but in their subordination to relations that exist independently of them and arise from the collision of indifferent individuals with one another.’⁵

Marx considered that the worker is alienated from his *product* in that it bears no relationship to his needs or creativity, but is merely the result of his supervised production in a system external and hostile to him. The product is hostile in that it is produced for someone else within an economic system that is oppressive and exploitative, *and* because by producing the alienated product within a capitalist system he actually recreates the ‘inhuman power’ of the system. Marx writes:

‘But if capital thus appears as the product of labour, the product of labour also appears as capital – no more as a simple product, nor as exchangeable goods, but as capital; objectified labour assumes mastery, has command over living labour . . . the product of labour, objectified labour, has acquired its own soul from living labour and has established itself opposite living labour as an alien force.’⁶

Marx also considered that man is alienated from his *labour*. He did not think that work was necessarily an *inherently* depriving or alienating activity.

3 Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, p. 47.

4 This discussion of Marx and alienation owes a great deal to Richard Schacht’s *Alienation* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1970), and to I. Meszaros’ *Marx’s Theory of Alienation* (London, Merlin Press, 1970).

5 David McLellan, *Marx’s Grundrisse* (London, Macmillan, 1971), p. 66.

6 McLellan, *Marx’s Grundrisse*, p. 100.

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Indeed, he made it clear that work could be a satisfying and intrinsically delightful activity. Thus, 'Work is a positive, creative activity.'⁷ But in capitalist society work *is* alienating, and this alienation involves a number of elements. These are presented in a famous passage:

'First, that the work is *external* to the worker, that it is not a part of his nature, that consequently he does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery, not of well-being, does not develop freely a physical and mental energy, but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, *forced labour*. It is not the satisfaction of a need, but only a *means* for satisfying other needs. Its alien character is clearly shown by the fact that as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion it is avoided like the plague. Finally, the alienated character of work for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but to another person.'⁸

Alienated labour is work done for reasons other than its intrinsic interest and delight; it is work done for someone else — the person who owns and controls the work situation.

The third type of alienation is alienation from other men. It is in the worker's relationships with his colleagues that his alienation is manifested and expressed. Marx anticipated numerous more recent studies in his analysis of the relationship between alienated work and men's inter-relationships. In a society based upon capitalist exploitation alienation is inevitable. In consequence men's relationships will be characterised by calculation, selfishness and self-interest.

In fact men's relationships will reflect their situations as workers.

'If a man is confronted by himself, he is confronted by the other man. What applies to a man's relation to his work, to the product of his labour and to himself, also holds of a man's relation to the other man, and to the other man's labour and object of labour . . . one man is estranged from the other.'⁹

7 McLellan, *Marx's Grundrisse*, p. 126.

8 Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in T.B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel (eds.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963), pp. 177–8.

9 Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1967), pp. 72–3.

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This alienation of man from man involves a lack of co-operation and friendliness and marked, overt rivalry and competitiveness. However, Marx considered that this state of affairs was not an inevitable aspect of capitalist society, for the time would come when workers would develop close, solidary relationships among themselves. This is clearest where he speaks of the conditions under which the proletariat will cease to be a class in itself – an incoherent mass scattered over the country and broken up by mutual competition¹⁰ – and become a class as a community, a class with a self-conscious sharing of interests and true class consciousness – a class for itself.

Finally, Marx saw alienation in terms of man's view of himself and his ability to develop himself, his potential and his vision. This form of alienation has been called 'dehumanisation' and refers to three basic human characteristics: man's individuality, his social relationships and his 'cultivated sensibility'.

It is important, incidentally, in order to do justice to Marx's notion of alienation, to appreciate that he considered it to be a consequence not of the structure or organisation of any particular firm or work place, nor merely of particular types of supervision or control, but of the capitalist system itself and its emphasis on profit making and the institution of private property. 'Private property is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence of alienated labour, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself.'¹¹

Obviously there are a number of themes in Marx's analysis of work, alienation and the bases of community that are relevant to our purposes. The first of these, quite simply, is that he was concerned about the meaning of the work experience in an industrial society. Secondly, he was interested in the relationship between the way in which people relate to each other and the work that they do. These constitute two of the central themes of this study.

But a warning, and digression, may be necessary. In an article, Feuer has asserted that the concept of alienation in Marx's writings changed in both meaning and application.¹² The notion of 'career' could equally well apply to the changing uses to which this concept has been put *since* Marx. Few concepts can have been used in so many ways by so many people. It is easy to see why Schacht, after bravely reviewing the numerous ways in which alienation has been employed, heads his final chapter with a quotation from Ogden

10 See K. Marx and F. Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto', in Bottomore and Rubel, *Karl Marx*, p. 192

11 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p. 76.

12 L. Feuer, 'What is Alienation? The Career of a Concept', *New Politics*, vol. 1, No. 3, 1962, pp. 116–34.

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and Richards: 'The temptation . . . to use (those) words which are most likely to attract attention and excite belief in the importance of one's subject is almost irresistible.'¹³ And Schacht explores in some depth the various uses within sociological literature. A number of points emerge. For one thing it is clear that the usual sociological usage is different from Marx's. This difference is two-fold. First, Marx considered alienation to be a result of the capitalist system, not of a particular work situation. Secondly, Marx is not simply dealing with feelings. Most industrial sociologists are, however. Indeed for most sociologists alienation now means certain sorts of answers to certain test items. If you tick *a*, *b* and *c* you are alienated . . . the concept is now 'operationalised'. The next question to ask is: Given that we now have 'measures' of this thing called alienation, what is it? And how does it help us increase our understanding of problematic issues? The answer would seem to be that it helps very little.

It is interesting to consider the reasons for the quite remarkable trivialisation of the concept 'alienation' in industrial sociology. It is tempting to postulate that the shift in emphasis that has taken place may not be unconnected with acceptance, by some sociologists, of the values and concerns of industrial society and industrial management. Alienation thus becomes a sort of attitude survey technique, an investigation of workers' morale.

Tönnies

Tönnies' work on *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is sufficiently well known and so obviously fundamental to the topic of this book that a lengthy exposition is redundant. However, a brief sketch of the main elements of his view of social development is in order.

According to Tönnies there are two basic types of social relationship or social organisation: the *Gemeinschaft* and the *Gesellschaft*. The former is a relationship characterised by harmony and familial relationships, by 'common goods – common evils; common friends – common enemies'.¹⁴ The use of a common tongue reinforces the shared sentiments, values and beliefs that are typical of the *Gemeinschaft*. And this form of social organisation is bound together by a consensus which 'represents the special social force and sympathy which keeps human beings together as members of a totality'.¹⁵ *Gemeinschaft* relationships are 'organic' in nature and are of three types: neighbourhood,

13 C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949). The quotation is from Schacht, *Alienation*, p. 237.

14 F. Tönnies, *Community and Association* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), p. 57.

15 Tönnies, *Community and Association*, p. 53.

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kinship and friendship. Members of the *Gemeinschaft* are all involved in a shared common will, the product of their separate and similar volitions. The development of individualism is minimal.

The *Gesellschaft* type of relationship or social organisation is in marked contrast to the *Gemeinschaft*.

‘The theory of the *Gesellschaft* deals with the artificial construction of an aggregate of human beings which superficially resembles the *Gemeinschaft* in so far as the individuals peacefully live and dwell together. However, in the *Gemeinschaft* they remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in the *Gesellschaft* they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors.’¹⁶

In the *Gesellschaft* individualism is highly developed, and relationships tend to be based on calculation, on exchange rather than on traditional trust and mutual knowledge. In the *Gesellschaft* ‘everybody is by himself and isolated, and there exists a condition of tension against all others’.¹⁷ This form of society is not a natural, organic type like the former; it is artificial, based not on family law and consensus, but on contract. ‘In *Gesellschaft* every person strives for that which is to his own advantage and affirms the action of others only in so far as and as long as they can further his interest.’¹⁸

In sum, the differences between these two types, community and association, are represented by Tönnies in a famous passage:

‘There is a contrast between a social order which, being based upon consensus of wills, rests on harmony and is developed and enabled by folkways, mores and religion, and an order which, being based upon a union of rational wills, rests on convention and agreement, is safeguarded by political legislation, and finds its ideological justification in public opinion.’¹⁹

There is an obvious similarity, frequently remarked upon, between Tönnies’ typology and Durkheim’s subsequent twin concepts: mechanic and organic solidarity. Tönnies saw societies as moving from the earlier, *Gemeinschaft*

16 Tönnies, *Community and Association*, p. 74.

17 Tönnies, *Community and Association*, p. 74.

18 Tönnies, *Community and Association*, p. 88.

19 Tönnies, *Community and Association*, p. 261.

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type, which is clearly closely-related to medieval society, to the *Gesellschaft* type, which refers to modern society.

Tönnies' interest in and concern for the processes of social change are well within the sociological tradition of concern over the decline of community. As Nisbet has noted, the idea of community was tremendously important to the early sociologists in their attempts to describe and explain the social and intellectual changes they saw going on around them. Nisbet writes:

‘Through this typology (of Tönnies), the momentous historical transition of nineteenth century society from its largely communal and medieval character to its modern industrialised and politicised form has been taken from the single context of European history in which it arose and made into a more general framework of analysis applicable to analogous transitions in other ages and other areas of the world.’²⁰

As one of that group of writers which was particularly and most explicitly concerned with the notion of community, Tönnies is of considerable importance in our discussion.

But our interest doesn't stop there. Tönnies also talked about the nature of work in the two types of society. *Gesellschaft* society is capitalist society: at one stage he actually talks about ‘bourgeois *Gesellschaft* society’. It involves a drastic change in the nature of the production process and the organisation of labour, as well as changes in the methods and types of exchange. It also involves changes in the meaning that men attach to their work. In place of the old, *Gemeinschaft* orientation of the craftsman to his craft, who ‘gives himself limitlessly to his job without calculation of units of time and compensation’,²¹ there now arises a calculating – what might be called today an instrumental – approach to work. Work is seen in terms of its production of commodities, not its intrinsic satisfactions. As Tönnies says:

‘To the latter (*Gesellschaft*) belongs manufacturing as contrasted with creation; therefore we speak of mechanical work . . . referring to forging plans, machinations, weaving intrigues, or fabrications which are directed to the objective of bringing forth the means, the exclusive determination of which is that of producing the outward effects necessary to attain our desired ends.’²²

20 Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, p. 71.

21 Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, p. 76.

22 Tönnies, *Community and Association*, p. 17.

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However, it is important to note that Tönnies did not see the relationship between changes in forms of social organisation and economic changes in the same way as Marx. On the contrary, he saw the changes in forms of economic organisation and exchange as the *results* of the move from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*.

Weber

Weber's contribution to the themes and issues of this discussion comprises two inter-related themes: bureaucracy and rationality. Once again his work is too well known to require a lengthy exposition, but his views on bureaucracy are clearly closely related to discussions of work organisation and organisation structure, and should be noted.

It has become almost a truism that rationality is one of the central themes in Weber's thought and that this concept, which, it has been suggested, can be seen as analogous to Marx's concept of alienation, served him in his description and evaluation of the process of social change.²³ Certainly rationality or rationalisation was a process that Weber saw taking place in many aspects of life: art, music, religion, etc.; and it is an aspect of, or orientation to, social life that he introduces in his typologies of social action and types of authority. Freund has said:

'increasing rationalisation and intellectualisation have had one decisive consequence, on which Weber laid great stress: they have disenchanted the world. With the progress of science and technology, man has stopped believing in magic powers, in spirits and demons; he has lost his sense of prophecy and, above all, his sense of the sacred. Reality has become dreary, flat and utilitarian, leaving a great void in the souls of men which they seek to fill by furious activity and through various devices and substitutes. A prey to precarious relativism to uncertainty and tedious scepticism, they attempt to furnish their souls with the bric-a-brac of religiosity, estheticism, moralism or scientism – in brief, with a sort of pluralist philosophy which extends an indiscriminate welcome to the most heterogeneous maxims from every part of the world. Mysticism becomes mystification, community becomes communitarianism and life is reduced to a series of unrelated experiences.'²⁴

23 For a cogent argument to this effect see J. Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber* (London, Allen Lane, 1968).

24 Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber*, pp. 23–4.

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Weber's own personal comments on rationalisation as a general process are mostly confined to his essay on 'Science as a Vocation'.²⁵ There he makes two remarks on the meaning of rationalisation. First, although this process is clearly and structurally tied to the development of science (he says it is 'created by science and scientifically orientated to technology'),²⁶ it does not simply mean the increase in the individual's knowledge and mastery of his environment or the technology that serves them. As he remarks, most people's knowledge of the technology they rely on is what Berger and Luckmann have called recipe knowledge, that is knowledge of how to use it – or how to get someone else to use it – but not of how it works.²⁷ This latter type of knowledge is not necessary normally because as Weber says, using the example of a streetcar, 'He (the individual) is satisfied that he may "count" on the behaviour of the streetcar, and orients his conduct according to this expectation',²⁸ in other words he takes its efficient operation for granted. Weber notes that in this respect modern man knows far less about the workings of his technology than does the savage.

If rationality does not mean increased knowledge in this sense, what does it mean? Simply that it is *possible to know*; that 'if one but wished one could learn it at any time'. He continues, and this is the crux of the matter,

'Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service.'²⁹

For our purposes the most interesting application of rationalisation in Weber's works is his notion of the ideal type of bureaucracy. This view of bureaucracy, which, as Albrow has suggested, is 'the single most important

25 Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), pp. 129–56.

26 Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', p. 139.

27 In so doing, of course, they are following Alfred Schutz. See P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (London, Allen Lane, 1969), pp. 56–7 and on.

28 Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', p. 139.

29 Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', p. 139.

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statement on the subject in the social sciences',³⁰ emphasises the importance of rules and formal procedures and the employment of full-time, trained experts and officials. It is characterised by a high degree of predictability, formality, calculability, impersonality, specialisation and stability.

Weber clearly believed that the bureaucratic organisation was likely to be efficient because of its characteristics, and for this reason was likely to develop. He writes: 'Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs – these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration.'³¹

Weber goes to some trouble to point out that this type of bureaucracy is also highly rational. It is important to analyse what he means by this. It is clear that he does not mean to equate rationality with efficiency. While not denying that Weber considers bureaucracy to be efficient – and in particular more efficient than other forms of organisation – it should be emphasised that he saw a clear conceptual separation between efficiency and rationality. Efficiency refers to the costs of production and hence to the appropriateness of means to ends. Rationality refers to the application of technical or expert rules to cases. This operation Weber considered rational.

As Albrow has convincingly argued, the relationship between rationality and efficiency is best illustrated by considering the methods used to assess efficiency – which are clearly related to efficiency, but are not the same thing. Accountability, calculability, predictability, reliability are all dominant bureaucratic characteristics (they may or may not be efficient). They are achieved through the impersonal application of expert knowledge and technical and procedural rules to cases. These are the characteristics of rationality.

How is this relevant to this discussion? First, Weber saw this rational type of bureaucracy becoming increasingly common. Therefore an increasing number of people would be employed in the role of salaried official or employee. He thought that such employees would be separated from the means of production in the same way as the manual worker. Secondly, he foresaw that this sort of work situation would not be without its problems and difficulties. He considered that the elimination of 'love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation'³² was a defining feature of bureaucracy. Further than this, he saw bureaucracies

30 M. Albrow, *Bureaucracy* (London, Macmillan, 1970), p. 45.

31 Max Weber, 'Bureaucracy', in Gerth and Mills, *From Max Weber*, pp. 196–244, p. 214.

32 Weber, 'Bureaucracy', p. 216.