

## Chapter 9

# Places of Work

*Jamie Peck*

---

Labor is at the same time “the most fundamental and the most inherently problematic of all economic categories” (Block, 1990, p. 75). Contemporary economic geography now takes it as axiomatic that work and workplace restructuring are inherently social processes, that labor markets are structured by power relations and institutional forces, and that above all these are *social-spatial* phenomena. But it was not always so. Neoclassical economics maintained that labor, which after all is bought and sold on labor “markets,” should be regarded like any other commodity. Along with capital and raw materials it is simply another “factor input” to the production process, whose price (wages) will fall when supply exceeds demand and rise when there is a shortage of workers, and so forth. When economic geography was in thrall to neoclassical economics, back in the 1960s and 1970s, this was how labor was conceived. As just another economic variable, labor represented little more than an accounting line in the calculus of industrial location, its price and availability routinely quantified and mapped. In these ostensibly apolitical accounts, labor was rendered an unproblematic category. Workers did not seem to strike, raise children, or make creative inputs into the production process. And while the economic geographers of the time might study journey-to-work patterns, they rarely delved into what the workers were *doing*, either at home or at work.

Some time in the 1970s, this began to change. A new generation of economic geographers, taking their cues from Marxian political economy rather than orthodox economics, sought to place labor–capital relations and workplace reorganization at the very center of their accounts of industrial restructuring and regional economic change. This new concern with “labor geography” represented more than a shift in academic fashion, for it reflected profound changes that were underway in the world outside. Waves of job losses and plant closures had begun to sweep through the old industrial heartlands of North America and Western Europe, triggering defensive responses on the part of communities and labor unions. As Bluestone and Harrison (1982) saw it, this new process of deindustrialization and disinvestment was pitching “capital against community” in ways that were profoundly destructive but also potentially radicalizing. Many of the old certainties,

indeed the economic “rules of the game” themselves, were being brought into question, as large-scale labor-shedding and unemployment became persistent realities. Few could be certain about the future course of events, but most agreed that neoclassical notions of “equilibrium” and seamless economic adjustment were now singularly inappropriate.

Over the 25 years that have passed since the emergence of “labor geography,” this vibrant subfield of economic geography has continued to thrive and develop. In the early days, the focus was on the ways in which the changing organization of work and production systems in manufacturing industry reflected the deep dynamics of capitalist accumulation and restructuring. More recently, issues of race and gender, political agency, and worker identities have received attention, along with a consideration of the institutional and social “embeddedness” of labor markets. Empirically, the field of vision has been broadened to encompass domestic and service work as well as factory labor, while at a theoretical level there is a greater concern now with complex processes of governance and regulation as well as with the underlying dynamics of capitalist accumulation. Issues around labor, and its roles in production and reproduction, open up these questions in ways that are often challenging but never less than revealing. Indeed, for Harvey (1989, p. 19) “[t]he history of the urbanization of capital is at least in part a history of its evolving labor market geography.” The purpose of this chapter is to highlight some of the key developments, directions, and debates in labor geography, starting at the beginning and with some of the fundamentals – the process of industrial restructuring.

### **Restructuring Industrial Regions**

In the early 1960s, the manufacturing regions of North America and Western Europe had never had it so good. Employment was plentiful, wages had been growing year-to-year, and the conspicuous benefits of the “consumer economy” had filtered down to the men and women who *made* the automobiles, the washing machines, and the electric toasters. The big factory and the suburban home came to epitomize the “modern” economy. But some time in the late 1960s, the trend began to bend, silently at first. The onset of “deindustrialization,” signaled by absolute declines in manufacturing employment and output, represented a key moment for what all had grown accustomed to calling the “advanced industrial nations.” In the 1970s and 1980s, many communities – which in an earlier era had literally been built by industrialization, and had evolved distinctive working-class cultures and patterns of political organization – found themselves abruptly abandoned, or held to ransom, by industrial capital. As the “rustbelt” regions of North America and Western Europe went into apparently terminal decline, and as factories and jobs relocated to low-cost, non-unionized locations, critical attention was focused on the underlying *causes* of these changes in the restructuring of production. The concerns of economic geography assumed an unprecedented relevance – and indeed a political potency.

The main challenge was to provide an explanation for a phenomenon that was clear to everyone – that the shifting geography of industry and employment was somehow related to processes of restructuring. Were the problems of capital flight and economic decline problems *affecting* the region or problems *in* the region?

Perhaps the most compelling response to these questions came in the form of Doreen Massey's notion of the "spatial division of labor," which linked economic development and restructuring processes at the regional and local scales with wider, national and international changes in the organization of production. Massey explored the relationship between the changing imperatives of production and the emerging geographies of employment, arguing that these shifts in the "spatial structures of production" should be understood as:

...changes in class relations, economic and political, national and international. Their development is a social and conflictual process; the geography of industry is an object of struggle... [So] new spatial divisions of labor are more than just patterns, a kind of geographical re-shuffling of the same old pack of cards. They represent whole new sets of relations between activities in different places, new spatial patterns of social organization, new dimensions of inequality and new relations of dominance and dependence. Each new spatial division of labor represents a real, and thorough, spatial restructuring. There is more than one kind of "regional problem" (Massey, 1984, pp. 7–8).

Massey's account rested heavily on the "labor factor" in the process of industrial restructuring – an analytical privilege also assigned by Storper and Walker (1983; Walker and Storper, 1981) – but she did not *reduce* the industrial location decision to this single dimension. Rather, she stressed how changes in the workplace and in the wider division of labor are deeply implicated in processes of economic restructuring. So it is not just the labor process (the social relations of work at the point of production) that "determines industrial location, but the search after profit and the fluctuating conflict between capital and labor" (Massey, 1984, p. 25). Decisions about labor and location are inescapably entangled, but one does not determine the other.

Massey's account reveals how geographical differentiation itself is exploited by capital in the competitive search for profit. Crucially, geography is part of the calculus of profitable production here: changes in production generate new demands for labor and therefore new locational imperatives; in turn, these reorganized landscapes of labor trigger further restructuring opportunities/threats. Her central contention is that production is organized systematically – not randomly – over space, the underlying dynamic of the system deriving from the competitive search for profit. Massey's analysis of the changing geography of production is embedded within a Marxian framework in which the interactions of economic, social, and political factors are afforded significant roles – an approach which marked a fundamental break with the neoclassical tradition. Hers is a complex and nuanced account, but at root it can be summarized in six points:

- Imperatives of global competition are driving processes of industrial restructuring.
- Restructuring is in turn entailing the reorganization and "breaking up" of established labor processes and production chains, as managerial functions ("control") are increasingly separated from those of manual labor ("execution").
- The separation of control from execution has a geographical manifestation, as different functions are located in accordance with the geography of their preferred labor supply (typically, with "deskilled" execution and assembly functions

locating in peripheral areas, whereas control and R&D functions concentrate in dominant cities and their satellites).

- This process is conceptualized as one in which “rounds of accumulation” unfold across the economic landscape, producing in their wake new geographies of production (Walker, this volume) and new sets of relationship between places (which may be gaining or losing functions in new rounds of accumulation). Consequently, the “layering” of successive rounds of accumulation results in changes to both the pattern of regional inequality and the form of inter-regional relationships, as regions gain or lose control functions, such as headquarters operations, for example.
- New spatial divisions of labor are forged through the complex process by which new rounds of accumulation (say, in financial services or biotechnology) interact with, and remake, pre-existing geographies of production and social relations, resulting in a range of locally contingent “combination effects.”
- A reciprocal relationship is therefore envisaged between local economic, social, and political conditions and unfolding rounds of accumulation, one conceptualized through the notion of the spatial division of labor.

The spatial division of labor framework consequently permits analysis along two dimensions. First, processes of restructuring in companies and sectors can be conceived in terms of unfolding *rounds of accumulation*, “a product of the interaction between, on the one hand, the existing characteristics of spatial differentiation and, on the other hand, the requirements at that time of the particular process of production” (Massey, 1979, p. 234). From this sectoral perspective, the fundamentally uneven development of production (and its associated social relations) can be conceptualized within a framework that foregrounds the strategic calculations of profit-seeking capital confronted with constantly shifting landscapes of labor qualities and (therefore) of opportunities for profitable production. Secondly, the changing economic fortunes of individual *localities* (both “internally” and relative to other places) can be understood as a “complex result of the combination of [their] succession of roles within the series of wider, national and international, spatial divisions of labor” (ibid., p. 235). Local economic and social structures can consequently be seen to derive, in large part, from the distinctive role played by localities in successive spatial divisions of labor, understood here as a cumulative, local “layering” of rounds of accumulation, mediated and shaped by specifically local interactions and responses, such as those associated with local political systems or labor-union traditions (“combination effects”).

This notion of layering has led some to suggest that Massey’s framework rests fundamentally on a geological metaphor, in which:

... successive rounds of accumulation deposit layers of industrial sediment in geographical space. That sediment comprises both plant and persons, the qualities of the latter, deposited in one round, being of primary importance at the beginning of the next round. ... The chain of reasoning about the political effects of industrial change [is] a direct one, from industrial structure, through occupational structure, to regional class structure. This is not necessarily an objectionable initial procedure, but it renders all spatial effects as class effects (Warde, 1985, pp. 196–7).

Massey herself has never used this simple metaphorical device, and has since laid stress on the complex interactions between class relations and non-class relations. Nevertheless, Warde's critique is revealing as it draws attention to the way in which her account of regional economic change is unambiguously anchored in the dynamics of *accumulation* (see Herod, 1997). Although the imperatives of profitable production and labor control may be relatively unambiguous in the abstract, the particular forms these take locally are in fact quite variable. Moreover, the profit motive itself does not determine which labor control strategy is adopted. As a result, the outcomes of restructuring have been rather more variegated than was apparent in Massey's early work, which at least empirically was a product of both its time and its place – the onset of deindustrialization in the UK (Lovering, 1989).

Together with the parallel work of Storper and Walker (1983) and Bluestone and Harrison (1982) in the USA, Massey's spatial division of labor approach helped to establish a new orthodoxy in economic geographical research in the 1980s. Issues relating to the "labor factor" were foregrounded as researchers sought to chart the restructuring strategies associated with different industries/sectors and different regions/localities (see Clark et al., 1986; Cooke, 1986; Martin and Rowthorn, 1986; Scott and Storper, 1986). Reflecting the material conditions and political concerns of the time, much of this work focused on the interrelated processes of deindustrialization and job loss, the reorganization of corporate hierarchies and work systems, and – perhaps above all – regional economic decline.

In retrospect, we can now see that this "restructuring approach" had been forged through an analysis of what would later be characterized as the "Fordist crisis." The 1970s had witnessed an historic downturn in the mass production economies of Western Europe and North America, coinciding with political and institutional attacks on the Keynesian welfare state and organized labor. What is striking is that, prior to the mid-1980s, comparatively little attention had been given to *growing* regions or *growing* industries, the other side of the coin of "restructuring." In a remarkably prescient article, Sayer (1985) observed that much "radical" research of the time seemed unduly preoccupied with mass production or assembly industries, employing male manual workers, and typically based in working-class regions with traditions of combative industrial relations. But this was about to change, as the focus shifted from the old industrial regions of Fordism to the new economic spaces of "flexible accumulation."

### **Flexibilizing economic spaces**

By the late 1980s, the buzzword "flexibility" had become a powerful political-economic signifier for a host of changes in production and labor relations. Accounts of economic change increasingly began to deploy "transition models" that contrasted the (old) mass-production regime of Fordism with an ascendant regime of flexible accumulation or "post-Fordism" (cf. Amin, 1994). Both conservatives and radicals began to point to what many saw as structural shifts in the organization of labor markets and production systems. On the one hand, a range of managerially orientated, prescriptive studies of the "new flexibility" not only described, but actively advocated and even celebrated, moves towards flexible employment arrangements and lean corporate structures as "solutions" to the problems of low

profitability and productivity. On the other hand, writers drawing on the regulation approach, and working at the macro rather than the micro level, underlined the unstable and contradictory nature of “after-Fordist” experiments in the production system and labor market. Somewhere between these two positions, another influential group of researchers drew attention to a series of meso-level shifts in industrial organization and regional growth systems, which they saw as indicative of an emerging paradigm of “flexible specialization.”

In pronounced contrast with much of the previous work on industrial restructuring, with its focus on the (slowly moving) deep dynamics of capitalist profit-seeking and labor control, the transition models focused almost exclusively on *change*. They drew attention specifically to *new* forms of production organization, *new* methods of labor management, and *new* geographical dynamics, purposefully contrasting these with the previous practices of Fordism. Table 9.1 provides a stylized account of the key differences that have been identified between Fordist and contemporary, “flexible” labor markets. The far-reaching “flexibilization” of labor markets is an indisputably significant development, but there is continuing debate over what it means causally or historically. Specifically, does this represent a new “regime” of post-Fordist labor relations, or the continued unraveling and restructuring of the Fordist system? Transition models, of course, tend to privilege the former interpretation, though there is clearly a danger that, in focusing on change and discontinuity, a host of loosely-related contemporary developments are bundled together indiscriminately, when all they share is the (causally trivial) characteristic of novelty. Moving beyond such simplified “binary histories” (Sayer, 1989), of an institutionalized, rigid past and a market-orientated, flexible future, calls for a careful analysis of the logic, sustainability, and incipient contradictions of contemporary developments.

It must be acknowledged that real-time analysis of such potentially “systemic” shifts in economic structures and regulatory conventions is never going to be an easy task. Theoretically informed analyses of suggestive empirical developments, however, may open up new and productive lines of inquiry or fields of debate. Take the geography of post-Fordism. It has been argued that flexible production systems are associated with distinctively new spatial dynamics, underlined by the shift away from the sectorally specialized, old industrial regions of Fordism to what Scott has called the “new industrial spaces” of flexible accumulation. The locational logic of flexible accumulation consists, according to Scott (1988c, pp. 11–15), of a dual tendency for, first, the evasion of Fordist labor pools (with their politicized working class, institutionalized labor processes and high cost-structures), and second, the selective re-agglomeration of production in locations socially or geographically insulated from the core regions of Fordist industrialization. Empirical examples of new industrial spaces include regions of conspicuous growth and dynamism, such as Emilia-Romagna in Italy, Baden-Württemberg in Germany, Cambridge in the UK, and Silicon Valley in the United States, but nodes of flexible growth have also been identified in the central business districts and suburban extensions of cities like Los Angeles. Significantly, flexible production/labor-market norms established in these new industrial spaces are also seen to be imported back into the old industrial regions, through a sort of “backwash effect,” as the new regime of accumulation becomes established. Through this process, the logic of flexibility assumes the role

**Table 9.1** Ideal–typical forms of work organization in Fordist and after-Fordist labor markets

	Fordist-Keynesian labor markets	After-Fordist labor markets
<i>Production organization</i>	Mass production, typified by the large, integrated, capital-intensive factory producing standardized outputs	Flexible production, typified by the networked, vertically-disintegrated firm producing specialized goods and services
<i>Labor process</i>	Deskilled and Taylorized, based on a detailed division of labor and routinized tasks; socially alienating work regimes	Flexible, based on increased use of contingent labor and cross-skilling/adaptability amongst core workforce
<i>Industrial relations</i>	High union densities; worker rights strongly embedded in law and convention; centralized bargaining	Disorganization of trade unions; individualization of employment relations; decentralized bargaining
<i>Labor segmentation</i>	Institutionalized; rigidly structured work hierarchies according to skill and status; large, internal labor markets	Fluid; deepening segmentation between core and periphery; break-down of internal labor markets
<i>Employment norms</i>	Privileging male, full-time workers; occupational stability and job security	Privileging “adaptable” workers; normalization of employment insecurity
<i>Skills and training</i>	Occupationally specific; focused on young workers, typified by the trade apprentice	Generic, broad-based training; lifelong learning and reskilling, typified by the part-time student
<i>Income distribution</i>	Rising real incomes and declining pay inequality	Polarization of incomes and growing pay inequality
<i>Domestic sphere</i>	Unacknowledged appendage to the “mainstream” economy; presumption of women’s unpaid domestic labor, reinforced by gendered welfare regime	Commodification of domestic economy; rising female participation in wage labor; cuts in welfare; displacement of job-market risks to households
<i>Macroeconomic strategy</i>	Maintenance of aggregate demand; smoothing of business cycles; securing rising productivity and incomes	Maintenance of low inflation; deference to international financial markets; enforcement of labor flexibility
<i>Labor market policy</i>	Full employment: secure and high level of male employment	Full employability: ensuring workforce adaptability
<i>Welfare regime</i>	Expansive welfare state, based on (legally embedded) principles of entitlement and universality; welfare as a wage “floor”	Localized workfare systems, based on mandatory participation in work or simulated work; enforcement of contingent work
<i>Local characteristics</i>	Distinctive, specialized and relatively stable regional employment systems	Flexibly localized and volatile employment systems; ubiquitous rise of service employment
<i>Scale characteristics</i>	Privileging of national economy for macroeconomic management and labor regulation	De-privileging of national scale; deference to global economic imperatives; decentralization and devolution of labor regulation
<i>Geographical tendencies</i>	Dispersal of employment and production	Agglomeration of employment and production

of the dominant mode of organization in both production systems and labor markets.

Scott's (1988c) theorization of new industrial spaces begins with the reorganization of the production system, but is closely attentive also to the parallel ways in which labor markets are being restructured. In particular, he highlights a trend towards dynamic vertical disintegration in the production system, as companies seek to enhance their flexibility and responsiveness by "externalizing" many of the functions previously performed within the firm. This amounts to more than a "breaking up" of established production chains, because flexible production systems are portrayed as expansionist and innovation-rich: as the system expands, new and independent forms of specialist production emerge. In turn, this creates a deep and complex social division of labor, as individual producers become locked into "networks of extremely malleable external linkages and labor market relations" (Scott, 1988a, p. 174). The growing importance of small, specialized producers (of services as well as goods) is associated with heightened interdependence in the production system, as firms become deeply embedded within complex webs of inter-organizational transactions. This is where new geographical dynamics become evident, as the dual imperatives of minimizing external (inter-firm) transaction costs and of establishing an appropriate set of labor-market relations bring about a marked agglomeration of economic activity. New industrial spaces, then, are seen as densely networked centers of intensive innovation in production and labor practices (Amin, this volume). Empirically, they were also the "hot-spots" of growth in the late 1980s, the mirror image in many ways of the declining industrial regions of the 1970s.

Contrary to those, such as Hudson (1989), who see the trend towards "flexible" labor markets as a plundering strategy on the part of capital (exploiting labor's vulnerability under conditions of high unemployment and political disorganization), Storper and Scott (1990) seek to attach these developments to the flexible reorganization of production. They point to three important restructuring strategies that are currently being used by firms in their attempts to "flexibilize" labor relations:

- There is an attempt to individualize the employment relation, moving away from institutionalized collective bargaining and negotiation systems in spheres such as wage-setting and training.
- Firms are seeking to achieve enhanced internal flexibility through labor process changes such as multi-skilling and reduced job demarcation.
- External flexibility is being sought through strategies that enable rapid quantitative adjustments to the labor intake to be made in accordance with fluctuating production needs (such as the deployment of part-time and temporary workers).

Scott argues that the search for labor-market flexibility serves to intensify agglomeration tendencies. "Flexible workers" tend to be drawn to large, volatile job markets, where their chances of finding (and re-finding) work are highest. In turn, employers of such workers gravitate toward the spatial core of their preferred labor supply. Scott suggests that processes of local socialization reinforce these agglomeration tendencies, as workers become acclimatized to particular work rhythms and as they develop appropriate job-market coping strategies. Over time, patterns and



processes of labor-market behavior thus become locally embedded and, to a degree, self-perpetuating.

Scott's account of the locational dynamics of new industrial spaces is attractive, in part, because it is linear and logical: first, uncertainty and fragmentation in markets leads to dynamic vertical disintegration in the production system; second, this increases the reliance of firms on external transactions, both with other firms and in the labor market; and third, spatial agglomeration enables these external transaction costs to be minimized, while also embedding flexible employment norms as the dominant ones in local labor markets. Lovering (1990) has argued, however, that the effect here is to privilege a particular form of restructuring strategy, when in fact firms tend to mix and match different strategies in a wide variety of ways. Lovering maintains that the outcomes of restructuring are more complex, contingent, and contradictory than Scott allows for.

The tendency to prioritize certain restructuring strategies, and then to seek to link these in a quasi-functional way with particular spatial outcomes, is in many ways a recurrent theme in economic-geographical research. Scott's stylized account links flexible production and the flexible utilization of labor with the emergence of new industrial spaces: flexible production  $\Rightarrow$  flexible labor utilization  $\Rightarrow$  agglomeration. In some senses, this represents the flip-side of the restructuring strategies which were emphasized in the early 1980s, when the drive to maximize profits was equated with the intensification of work and the de-skilling of labor, and subsequently with the creation of "branch-plant" economies: dynamics of accumulation  $\Rightarrow$  labor control  $\Rightarrow$  decentralization. In reality, of course, firms are confronted with a wide range of possible restructuring strategies; some involve spatial relocation, whereas others do not. Likewise, while the reorganization of labor relations invariably plays an integral part in the restructuring process, it is not (pre)determined by this process.

Thus there is no one-to-one correspondence between restructuring imperatives, labor strategies, and geographical outcomes, but a picture of considerable variety and contingency, within which the "contextual" circumstances of different local labor markets and regulatory regimes tend to assume particular significance. For example, the imperative to drive down production costs while weakening the influence of organized labor might result, under one set of local circumstances, in a firm relocating to a greenfield site, complete with its typically "green" labor supply, while in other local circumstances a firm might utilize *in situ* restructuring strategies such as subcontracting or homeworking (Peck, 1996). The cost and viability of alternative strategies tends to be strongly conditioned by local labor-market factors – such as the pattern of inter-sectoral competition for labor, the local industrial relations climate, and the social organization of the labor supply. Thus local labor markets are not simply by-products of employers' restructuring strategies, or the "background scenery" of the restructuring process, but are deeply implicated in shaping and structuring these strategies.

### **Localizing Labor Markets**

"Unlike other commodities," Harvey (1989, p. 19) has pointed out, "labor power has to go home every night." Labor markets should not be conceived as narrowly "economic" systems; they are also "lived," social spaces. The capacity to work

– labor power – is socially produced and reproduced; processes which tend themselves to be culturally embedded, institutionalized, and locally specific. Local labor markets develop distinctive characters, structures, and dynamics, in part by virtue of the way that the institutions of labor reproduction (education systems, family support networks, social service regimes, and so forth) evolve in a geographically uneven fashion, but also because the daily mobilization of labor for waged employment is essentially a local matter. Storper and Walker note that,

... labor's relative day-by-day immobility... gives an irreducible role to place-bound homes and communities... It takes time and spatial propinquity for the central institutions of daily life – family, church, clubs, schools, sports teams, union locals, etc. – to take shape... Once established, these outlive individual participants to benefit, and be sustained by, generations of workers. The result is a fabric of distinctive, lasting local communities and cultures woven into the landscape of labor (1989, p. 157).

Local labor markets do not exclusively mirror the (unmediated) imperatives of capital accumulation and labor control, but reflect the strategies – individual and collective – of workers, at home, at work, and in between (Hanson and Pratt, 1995; Wright, 1997; McDowell, 1999). They are also deeply structured by race and gender relations. These are not simply “secondary” influences, but profoundly shape the ways that labor markets work. For example, McDowell (1991) examined how changes in the prevailing “gender order” are deeply implicated in patterns of economic restructuring. The crisis of Fordism was not only associated with the destruction of manufacturing jobs, it also signaled the demise of certain forms of patriarchal, working-class community and of a particular pattern of industrial masculinity. Working-class young men in deindustrialized areas, in particular, were denied access both to factory jobs and to one of the principal means of affirming their masculinity and independence, with social alienation being the predictable consequence. On the other hand, the “post-Fordist” labor market is, in some respects, a feminized one. Not only do women comprise a large share of the workforce, but the design of jobs themselves has also been feminized in the sense that job characteristics like flexible work scheduling, service cultures, and multi-tasking – established features of “women’s work” – are fast becoming normalized. The decline of the old gender order of Fordism – based on full-time male employment and a masculine factory culture, nuclear families reliant on the unpaid domestic labor of women but headed by male “breadwinners,” and underpinned by a Keynesian welfare state which presumed (and reproduced) these gender relations – illustrates how processes of economic change do not just “result in” new gender divisions but are themselves constituted in part through gender relations.

Gendered identities are not simply “taken to work,” but are also reproduced through workplace cultures (see McDowell, 1999). Moreover, “work” and “home” are not the hermetically sealed, separate spheres they were once assumed to be, but interpenetrate in a variety of ways, strongly conditioning the job-market behavior of both men and women. Hanson and Pratt (1995) reveal how both landscapes of employment opportunity and channels of access to jobs are spatially uneven, creating a situation of “labor-market containment” in which women’s marginality is reinforced. They demonstrate, for example, how labor-market

participation is profoundly shaped by the networks of spatial-temporal routines which women must construct (and repeatedly renegotiate) between waged work on the one hand, and various domestic and caring tasks on the other. This has the effect of “trapping” women spatially, as well as occupationally, within the labor market. Hence, daily processes of getting by and making do are linked with structures of gender segregation and with the very functioning of localized labor markets. In this way, the routines of daily life are connected to the distinctive *local and social* form of labor markets: “the friction of distance not only helps generate and sustain gender divisions of labor but also is central to the construction of different places... [as] labor market segmentation is literally mapped onto the ground” (Hanson and Pratt, 1995, p. 224).

The spatial organization of labor markets and local patterns of labor segmentation consequently reflect and reproduce gender relations. This is one of the ways in which labor markets are socially embedded in a range of (locally variable) institutional, political, and cultural structures. These are not rigid and unyielding structures, but have their own dynamics that are not crudely reducible to an “economic logic.” Importantly, they also bear the imprint of labor’s *active* struggles – notably, the collective agency of workers – the focus of an important strand of contemporary labor geography (Herod, this volume). Through explicit means such as union strategies and disputes, through the daily routines of the workplace, through historically embedded custom and practice, and through formal channels such as legislation and administrative regulation, labor exerts an influence on work practices and on the functioning of labor markets. Much of this activity is defensive rather than proactive, but it is also historically cumulative. For example, many of labor’s incremental gains around issues like working time, pay rates and systems, welfare entitlements, and apprenticeship arrangements have become enshrined in legislation and/or normalized as an element of taken-for-granted practice, such that they become difficult for capital (or the state) to reverse. Once enshrined, these historically embedded norms, conventions, and laws in turn shape the subsequent strategies and practices of firms, in ways that are sometimes defensive (e.g. capital flight to low-wage, “deregulated” locations) and sometimes creative and productive (e.g. the adoption of “high-road” competition strategies, based on highly-skilled labor processes and quality outputs). This means that the labor-capital relationship is not a zero-sum game, in which labor’s gain equals capital’s loss. Rather, *qualitatively different* developmental trajectories and restructuring strategies become feasible/desirable under different local conditions (with their distinctive regulatory environments, characteristic gender and race relations, cultural conventions, patterns of power relations, modes of institutionalization, and so forth).

This underscores the fact that taking labor seriously does not simply mean highlighting the capacity of workers to *resist* or *ameliorate* the restless imperatives of capital, though this is certainly part of the picture. In a more complex fashion, the institutions of social reproduction and the (past and current) active strategies of labor serve to shape the social form of the accumulation process itself. To take one example, once welfare provisions were established on a generalized basis in the Atlantic Fordist countries of North America and Western Europe (themselves the outcomes of prevailing gender orders, race politics, and workers’ struggles, as well as

“concessions” from the state and capital), then the nature of labor-market relations and rules were altered in a fundamental way: competitive pressures were somewhat ameliorated and channeled, thereby shaping the design of jobs, gender relations, wage differentials, rates of exploitation, and so on (see Martin and Sunley, 1997). Geography, institutions, and politics matter here. As Dunford (1996) demonstrates, each national welfare regime was associated with a particular pattern of labor-market regulation, exclusion, and inclusion.

More generally, Rogers Hollingsworth (1997, p. 265) maintains that modes of economic regulation and governance in general, and the strengths/weaknesses of different “national capitalisms” in particular, are themselves “embedded in social systems of production distinctive to their particular society.” This means that phenomena like Japanese work practices, American models of work-based welfare reform, or German labor union strategies cannot simply be transferred from one spatial context to another, because they are in a sense rooted in historically and geographically embedded regulatory frameworks, political structures, social norms, and so forth (Martin, this volume). This leads some to conceive of the process of international competition (and capitalist development more generally) as an ongoing political and economic struggle between different “varieties” of capitalism (see Albert, 1993; Rogers Hollingsworth and Boyer, 1997).

More often than not, these varieties of capitalism are substantially defined by reference to their distinctive labor practices and systems of social reproduction. Yet while social and institutional specificities may be most boldly expressed at the national scale – reflecting national legislative systems, policy regimes, and political struggles – they are not, either in principle or in practice, restricted to this scale. Distinctive regulatory configurations have indeed been identified at the local and regional scales, particularly with respect to social conventions concerning (paid and unpaid) work, and the governance of labor markets and inter-firm relations (see Jonas, 1996; Peck, 1996; Storper, 1997; Martin, 2000). This has potentially significant implications for arguments that the putative regime of flexible accumulation is rooted in a set of “common causal dynamics” (Scott, 1988b). If the new industrial spaces of Emilia-Romagna, Silicon Valley, or Baden-Württemberg can be shown to be regulated in locally specific ways (DiGiovanna, 1996), or indeed if they can be shown to be embedded in distinctive ways within their respective national regulatory frameworks (Gertler, 1992), then it follows that the underlying sources of competitive flexibility may not actually be “common” at all. In reality, there are many (local) forms of “labor market flexibility.”

The process of labor regulation plays a key role here. This tends to be especially “locally embedded” due to the fact that labor itself – reflecting the social nature of its production and reproduction – is the most place-bound and geographically variable of the “factors of production.” The production and reproduction of labor-power is dependent upon the supportive effects of certain key social institutions and, as a consequence, requires a substantial degree of stability and longevity. Following this logic, the social institutions that underpin the regulation of labor markets tend themselves to take on distinctively local forms. Labor markets can therefore be seen as one of the most socially – and in this sense also *locally* – embedded of economic systems, a theoretical contention with empirical echoes in the distinctive, “subnational” geographies of union militancy, systems of skill formation, gender

relations, welfare regimes, employment norms, pay bargaining arrangements, and so on (Hanson and Pratt, 1995; Peck, 1996; Herod, 1998; Martin, 2000).

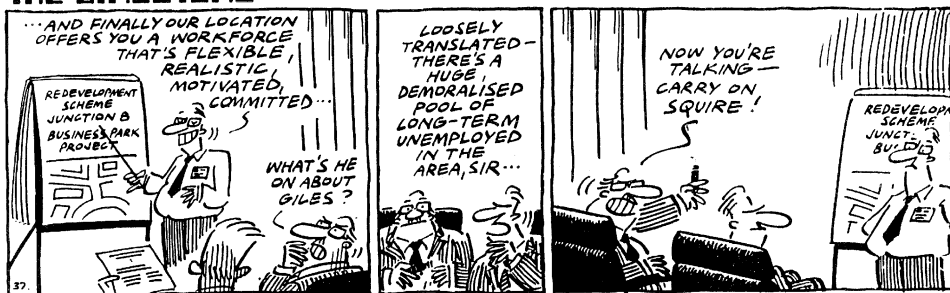
This leads Walker and Storper (1981, p. 497) to conclude that “a strong argument can still be made for the primacy of labor over all other market factors in influencing industrial location.” But this is not simply a case of capital getting a once-and-for-all “lock” on the map of labor qualities. The process is a dynamic one, in part because the landscape of labor is itself constantly on the move. The “slash and burn” logic of uneven development is reflected in capital’s periodic abandonment of regions in which socialized labor practices are seen to have fallen out of step with the current requirements of profitable production (Webber, 1982). Places that have evolved traditions of union militancy are often most susceptible to disinvestment: castigated for their “rigid” working practices and oppositional politics, such areas will often find themselves deserted by capital in search of greener pastures – and “greener” labor. Peet (1983) accounted for the “Rustbelt–Sunbelt” shift in the United States in just such terms, demonstrating how the pattern of new investment tended to favor “low class struggle” states in the south and west.

Relocation, of course, is not always an option for capital. Some organizations have high “sunk costs” in the form of long-term fixed investments, some are tied to localized markets or suppliers, others are heavily dependent on scarce labor supplies or the local (physical or social) infrastructure (see Harvey, 1982; Cox and Mair, 1988; Martin et al., 1993). Yet while globalization discourses tend to exaggerate the mobility of capital, the comparatively place-bound nature of labor (and social reproduction), combined with the *potential* for capital flight, mean that capital has the advantage of *relative* mobility. Even if capital does not move, the threat of movement can be used as a potent weapon against labor and as a lever in workplace negotiations, the practice of “whipsaw bargaining” (see Hayter and Harvey, 1994; Herod, 1994). This is another dimension of the asymmetrical power relation between capital and labor (see Offe, 1985), one which is increasingly tipping in favor of capital. Burawoy (1985, p. 150) sees this as a new form of capitalist despotism, observing that whereas:

... labor used to be *granted* concessions on the basis of the expansion of profits, it now *makes* concessions on the basis of the relative profitability of one capitalist vis-à-vis another – that is,

## THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG



**Figure 9.1** “The Directors”

Source: *Private Eye*, No. 974, 16 April 1999

the opportunity costs of capital. . . . The new despotism is not the resurgence of the old; it is not the arbitrary tyranny of the overseer over *individual* workers (although this happens too). The new despotism is the “rational” tyranny of capital mobility over the *collective* worker. The reproduction of labor power is bound anew to the production process, but, rather than via the individual, the binding occurs at the level of the firm, region or even nation state. The fear of being fired is replaced by the fear of capital flight, plant closure, transfer of operations, and plant disinvestment.

The tyranny of (potential) capital mobility, coupled with the erosion of welfare systems which previously afforded workers some measure of protection from the vagaries of the labor market, threatens to unleash a “race to the bottom” in labor standards (see Peck, 1996). One consequence of this is that workers’ class positions are complicated by geography, as they become engaged, for example, in efforts to attract or retain investment (Sadler, this volume). Herod (1997, p. 16) argues that they do this “not as cultural or class dupes but as active economic and geographical agents.” This is one of the many ways in which, in Herod’s terms, labor seeks to assert its own “spatial fix” – pursuing investment not for its own sake but in the defense of jobs, livelihood, and community. Thus while capital exerts a profound and pervasive influence over the way that local labor markets work – configuring the design of jobs and attendant patterns of labor demand, establishing working time and payment systems, shaping through hiring and selection procedures the distribution of waged work (and therefore unemployment) between individuals and social groups – it does so under conditions that are not entirely of its own making.

### Conclusion

This chapter has charted some of the changing material concerns and evolving analytical strategies in the field of labor geography. There have been continuities as well as changes. In some of the early research on industrial restructuring there was a curious echo of the neoclassical preoccupation with managerial decisionmaking: while orthodox analysis tended to reduce labor to a *statistical variable* (calibrated according to wages, skills, etc.) in the locational calculus of profit-maximizing firms, radical researchers tended often to reduce labor to *variable capital* (subject to commodification and control) in the profit-driven accumulation process. In contrast to these mechanistic treatments of labor, in recent years there has been a growing acknowledgment of the (pro)active role of labor in shaping the landscape of capitalism and the geographically distinctive ways in which workers themselves are produced and reproduced. Particular attention has been paid to the gendered nature of work and to the process of economic restructuring itself. Along the way, contemporary economic geography has become rather less concerned with asserting the pivotal importance of the “labor factor” in industrial location, focusing more on the variegated and culturally inflected ways in which work regimes and labor markets are *socially* constructed, restructured, and lived.

The preoccupation with transition models, in which the complexities of labor regulation and restructuring were collapsed into a simplified “binary history” of mass production/flexible accumulation, seems to have passed. But one of the useful legacies of the flexibility debate has been a deeper understanding of the “light sides”

and the “dark sides” of the restructuring process, and their connectedness. It is now widely accepted that the evolution of capitalism is not a unilinear process, towards de-skilling and decentralization; neither is there a straightforward trend towards flexible re-agglomeration. Rather, each time the geography of labor is remade, contradictions and counter-tendencies are set in motion. Regimes of labor regulation – themselves subject to perpetual reform and restructuring – variously seek to sustain productivity and competitiveness, and to ensure the reproduction of labor-power, but do so in ways that are inchoate and imperfect. Maps of labor, just like the more restless geographies of capital accumulation with which they intersect, are therefore in a persistent state of remaking.

### Acknowledgment

Thanks to Andy Herod and Eric Sheppard for helpful comments on a previous version of this chapter.

### Bibliography

- Albert, M. 1993. *Capitalism vs. Capitalism*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.
- Amin, A. (ed). 1994. *Post-Fordism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Block, F. 1990. *Postindustrial Possibilities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bluestone, B. and Harrison, B. 1982. *The Deindustrialization of America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Burawoy, M. 1985. *The Politics of Production*. London: Verso.
- Clark, G. L., Gertler, M. S, and Whiteman, J. 1986. *Regional Dynamics*. Boston: Allen & Unwin.
- Cooke, P. 1986. The changing urban and regional system in the United Kingdom. *Regional Studies*, 20, 243–51.
- Cox, K. and Mair, A. 1988. Locality and community in the politics of local economic development. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 78, 307–25.
- DiGiovanna, S. 1996. Industrial districts and regional economic development. *Regional Studies*, 30, 373–86.
- Dunford, M. 1996. Disparities in employment, productivity and output in the EU: the roles of labor market governance and welfare regimes. *Regional Studies*, 30, 339–58.
- Gertler, M. 1992. Flexibility revisited: districts, nation-states, and the forces of production. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 17, 259–78.
- Hanson, S. and Pratt, G. 1995. *Gender, Work, and Space*. London: Routledge.
- Harvey, D. 1982. *The Limits to Capital*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harvey, D. 1989. *The Urban Experience*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hayter, T. and Harvey, D. (eds). 1994. *The Factory and the City*. London: Mansell.
- Herod, A. 1994. Further reflections on organized labor and deindustrialization in the United States. *Antipode*, 26, 77–95.
- Herod, A. 1997. From a geography of labor to a labor geography: labor’s spatial fix and the geography of capitalism. *Antipode*, 29, 1–31.
- Herod, A. (ed). 1998. *Organizing the Landscape*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hudson, R. 1989. Labour market changes and new forms of work in old industrial regions: maybe flexibility for some but not flexible accumulation. *Society and Space*, 7, 5–30.
- Jonas, A. E. G. 1996. Local labor control regimes: uneven development and the social regulation of production. *Regional Studies*, 30, 323–38.
- Lovering, J. 1989. The restructuring debate. In R. Peet and N. Thrift (eds) *New Models in Geography*, Volume one. London: Unwin Hyman, 198–223.

- Lovering, J. 1990. Fordism's unknown successor: a comment on Scott's theory of flexible accumulation and the re-emergence of regional economies. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 14, 159–74.
- Martin, R. L. 2000. Local labor markets: their nature, performance and regulation. In G. Clark, M. Gertler, and M. Feldman (eds) *A Handbook of Economic Geography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.
- Martin, R. and Rowthorn, B. (eds). 1986. *The Geography of De-industrialization*. London: Macmillan.
- Martin, R. and Sunley, P. 1997. The Post-Keynesian state and the space economy. In R. Lee and J. Wills (eds) *Geographies of Economies*. London: Arnold, 278–89.
- Martin, R., Sunley, P., and Wills, J. 1993. Unions and the politics of deindustrialization: some comments on how geography complicates class analysis. *Antipode*, 26, 59–76.
- Massey, D. 1979. In what sense a regional problem? *Regional Studies*, 13, 233–43.
- Massey, D. 1984. *Spatial Divisions of Labour*. London: Macmillan.
- McDowell, L. 1991. Life without Father and Ford: the new gender order of postfordism. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 16, 400–19.
- McDowell, L. 1999. *Gender, Identity and Place*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Offe, C. 1985. *Disorganized Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Peck, J. 1996. *Work-Place*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Peet, R. 1983. The geography of class struggle and the relocation of United States manufacturing. *Economic Geography*, 59, 112–43.
- Rogers Hollingsworth, J. 1997. Continuities and changes in social systems of production: the cases of Japan, Germany, and the United States. In J. Rogers Hollingsworth and R. Boyer (eds) *Contemporary Capitalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 265–310.
- Rogers Hollingsworth, J. and Boyer, R. (eds). 1997. *Contemporary Capitalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sayer, R. A. 1985. Industry and space: a sympathetic critique of radical research. *Society and Space*, 3, 3–29.
- Sayer, A. 1989. Postfordism in question. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 13, 666–96.
- Scott, A. J. 1988a. Flexible production systems and regional development: the rise of new industrial spaces in North America and Western Europe. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 12, 171–86.
- Scott, A. J. 1988b. *Metropolis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Scott, A. J. 1988c. *New Industrial Spaces*. London: Pion.
- Scott, A. J. and Storper, M. (eds). 1986. *Production, Work, Territory*. Winchester, MA: Allen & Unwin.
- Storper, M. 1997. *The Regional World*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Storper, M. and Scott, A. J. 1990. Work organization and local labor markets in an era of flexible production. *International Labour Review*, 129, 573–91.
- Storper, M. and Walker, R. 1983. The theory of labor and the theory of location. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 7, 1–41.
- Storper, M. and Walker, R. 1989. *The Capitalist Imperative*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Walker, R. and Storper, M. 1981. Capital and industrial location. *Progress in Human Geography*, 5, 473–509.
- Warde, A. 1985. Spatial change, politics, and the division of labor. In D. Gregory and J. Urry (eds) *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*. London: Macmillan, 190–212.
- Webber, M. J. 1982. Agglomeration and the regional question. *Antipode*, 14, 1–11.
- Wright, M. 1997. Crossing the factory frontier: gender, place, and power in the Mexican *maquiladora*. *Antipode*, 29, 278–302.