**Chapter 1**

**Towards a sociology of the sociology of work in the UK since 1945: the myth of the Golden Age.**

**Introduction: scope and limitations**

‘It is the denial of class that I find most problematic […] people are continually identifying how the working class is being stigmatised, and how class itself in being eradicated from our thinking.’ (Jackson, 2017: p. 36)

While there are now a range of exemplary interpretations of the development of the Sociology of Work (SoW) in the UK since 1945 their preference, for the most part, has been to identify the sequential nature of this compelling story. Significant narratives include accounts by Watson (five editions from 1980 to 2008), Grint (2000), addressing the subject thematically with insightful overviews of the subject delineated in five themes, and more exploratory and important analytical work by, for example, Parry et al. (2006); Halford and Strangleman (2009). Strangleman in Edgell et al. (2016) can be understood as a key text problematizing the canon to date and follows the development of an oeuvre which explores the origins, nature (ontology) and status of the sub-discipline. Most narratives begin with the post war labour productivity studies that include the work of Trist and Bamforth, continue with an exploration of the *embourgeoisement* thesis including the Affluent Worker Studies, leading to the workplace studies of the 1960s and 70s, then through to the late 1990s and early 2000s with consideration of the importance of the diversity of the sub-discipline. Some of this has occasioned debate, most prominently between Parker and Strangleman which we reflect upon below.

In the settled narrative, the grand precursor in the development of an identity for the SoW is the nineteenth and early twentieth century sociological canon comprising Durkheim, Marx and Weber which form the bedrock of the wider discipline. This provided the early contours to the framing of debates in the post war period, and has been taken by some as critical to the continuing identity of the SoW. While the founding canon comprises more than the ‘great trio’, this reference to the founding tenets of sociology and the SoW is a necessary means of distinguishing it from economics, economic history and psychology. While not always manifest in debates in the 1950s, the canon remerged in the discussion around the Affluent Worker studies only to be (sometimes too) conveniently ignored in the last quarter century or so.

Taking the latter as the period in which the trio began to be seen by some as having less relevance in defining the bedrock of the SoW, many identify the years, beginning in the late 1970s, as a sign of SoW’s conceptual fragmentation, dissipation, maturation, and occasionally, a combination of all three. Depending upon the conceptual and historical point of departure of the writer, the latter state of affairs has positive or negative virtues and sometimes a mix of both (See, inter alia, Parker, 2015; Strangleman, 2005; Halford and Strangleman, 2009; Beynon, 2011; Edwards, 2014a; Strangleman, 2016; Warren, 2016). Adding to this concern is the deeply worrying existential threat to the SoW posed by the institutional fissiparous character of the sub discipline, beginning in the mid to late 1980s. This too is seen by some to have pros and cons. The location of the SoW in spaces beyond sociology departments, specifically in management and business schools (we use the designation interchangeably), is taken to pose a threat since the institutional context in which the sub discipline is practiced is vital in affirming its DNA. We could describe these, the intellectual-disciplinary coherence and institutional location of the sub-genre, as its intellectual and institutional *spread* and this is a significant concern for Halford and Strangleman (inter alia Scott, 2005): it represents a weakness for them. It is a common feature of many narratives of the formation of the SoW since the Second World War to find the mid-seventies period described as the end of its Golden Age.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Although these two features (intellectual and disciplinary) which we have defined as *spread* are related. It is important to make the point that while both are persistent today they have somewhat different origins and despite overlap, are nevertheless irreducible. The ‘where’ the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of the SoW certainly matter, but one feature of our argument is that the SoW has always been institutionally and disciplinarily contested. A reasonable challenge to those who want to ‘take it back’ from its dalliance, (and the supposed dilution of the genre) is to point out that while its institutional origins may have consolidated in Sociology departments, the SoW was never *only* practiced there, and probably never will be.

To put it bluntly, there never has been an agreed common view, a doxa, when it comes to defining the SoW, as ‘…the meaning of work is contested’ (Warren, 2016: p. 46). We can take Warren’s point as the beginning of our injunction which is that in charting the changing nature of work, the sub-discipline not only mapped the evolution of work in capitalist society but has by necessity, changed in respect of its character, form and methods of enquiry. The implications of this cannot be ignored easily: those looking back at the Golden Age will be disheartened to learn that it will never return. Our view challenges the assumption that the sub-disciplined ever enjoyed a Golden Age characterised by a range of factors including institutional and ontological coherence. This would be to misread the trajectory of the subject within a reflexive account, which is what sociology is, of late capitalism (Jameson, 2014). Given how the Golden Age is typically defined, we argue first that the SoW was never practiced only in sociology departments, by ‘sociologists’, and second, that the meaning of the SoW and its contours have never been settled. This is a critical feature of its strength: the ability to mutate along three dimensions: institutional, ontological and hence, methodological.

Thus, this chapter will consider the changing nature of the SoW in Britain, not only in respect of changing subject matter, but in relation to how these three dimensions have evolved. The narrative will consider these in terms of what we take to be exemplary published research during the course of the evolution of post war British capitalism. Some of our readings can be placed readily in the canon of the so called Golden Age. The fact that what we term ‘the register’, the periodic review of work published in the British Sociological Society’s journal *Work, Employment and Society*, beginning in 1987 with Richard Brown’s editorial, indicates the global reach and disciplinary openness of work, that we would describe as sociological, makes a full account of the SoW unlikely. Moreover, the fact that describing this work as sociological is contested could be taken as illustrating our point about *spread*. A good example of *spread* could include developments drawing on areas of study previously laying outside a SoW agenda, for example radical geography, as exemplified in the work of Herod, Rainnie and McGrath-Champ, (2007). There is also the important theme of work and time explored by Hassard (1996) which we cannot address here though we do so in our forthcoming monograph on the sociology of work in the UK. [Readers can check developments the field of the SOW and related areas of the sub discipline in what we have termed the unofficial register by consulting the following editorials: Stewart (2004) Rainbird and Rose, ( 2008.) Stuart, et al. (2011); Stuart, et al. (2013); Beck, et al. (2016). And of course, as many have noted, many pieces addressing the SoW appear elsewhere and notably in the BSA’s flagship journal, Sociology. An exemplary of this being the special issue from 2009 (volume 43:5) edited by Susan Halford and Tim Strangleman, a number of paper’s from which we engaged with here. Even this does not encompass the full spectrum since SoW is published in myriad other journals including, amongst many others, *Organisations*, *Human Relations*, *Human Resource Management Journal.*

Given that the use of the term ‘the sociology of work’ is as fraught in the UK as elsewhere, it is incumbent that we specify the phenomenon we think it analyses. Indeed, it was well into the 1990s before the descriptor Sociology of Industry fell out of fashion and this is especially interesting when we note its use by Eldridge et al. (1991). Eldridge et al. are of particular interest precisely because the subject matter discussed in their book addresses the relationship between the crisis in the political economy and the crisis they perceive in the study of the political economy by sociologists under the guise of sociologists of industry. In short, industrial sociology was in crisis specifically due to the fact that industrial work was itself in decline. We should state that we pay due homage to their critique which we are more than happy to embrace and in many ways echo. This is the view that the type of sociology of work (industry) practiced in any given era is reflective of the nature and form of capitalist work and employment. Their response to the disciplinary crisis was to reject what they recognised as Hyman’s otherwise fruitful call for the displacement of bourgeois social science by a Marxist critique of the political economy. (We explore the finer texture of this debate in our forthcoming book on the Sociology of Work in the UK). For Eldridge et al., disciplinary renewal would be better served by beginning with an appreciation of sociology’s broader recognition of crisis as set out in the work of, inter alia, Durkheim and Weber. For us, we take both Eldridge et al. and Hyman’s perceptions to hold specific virtues. Our concern is to flag up their place in the sub-discipline’s evolution in the 1990s. Especially, we see Eldridge et al. as illustrative of our claim that while the sub discipline evolves it has always done so with a certain indeterminate focus.

In fact, as the debate about the nature of the SoW demonstrates, following Warren (2016), the concept is contested precisely because the nature of work itself is contested. While we indicate some pitfalls in the use of the concept by others, our usage is not an imperative. With apologies to purists who might prefer a core ontology, the starting point for our injunction is that while the SoW is disputed since the nature of work is disputed, the SoW in late capitalist Britain will change as the political economy evolves, methods change in our research of its form, character and trajectory, and thus the discipline will spread, and deepen, in its impact and influence across a range of disciplinary boundaries (for an exemplary account see Parry et al. 2006). ‘Taking it back’ to the heart land of sociology departments would be a retreat: for us, what we term *spread*, is a strength, not a weakness.

To explore the evolution of the history of the sociology of work in the context of post war Britain is a major undertaking and can only reasonably be achieved through a carefully considered strategic approach in which what we consider to be key textual material is cited. We accept that this is inevitably skewed given our variously different individual formations. Neither can we address specific and otherwise vital debates and new departures in detail, such as explorations of the relationship between the SoW and history, memory-nostalgia, or debates on legacy, occupational identity, or sex work (see respectively, inter alia, Abrams, 1982; Brown, 1992; Strangleman, 2007; Dawson et al. eds. 2015; MacKenzie, et al. 2017; Brewis and Linstead, 2003. Thus, rather than providing a comprehensive annotated bibliography of Britain’s contribution to the SoW we offer for the first time a *sociological* account of the evolution of the sub-discipline through an exploration rooted it in the social, political and economic structures and contexts which have prompted the most significant contributions to its twists and turns over the past fifty years.

We divide our exemplars into three eras in the development of post war capitalism. We intend to achieve this through an examination of what we see as the seminal work exemplifying the significant trends in the sub-discipline. While we note above that the definition of the SoW is not ‘settled’, in order to identify seminal studies, we clarify our political position by drawing reference to what we take to be exemplary studies of work and employment, paid and unpaid, its nature and its absence *in relation to* *class struggle and conflict* and the implications of this for the lives of working people and their class situation. Thus, from within a bourgeois social science, we seek to ask questions about the predicament of labour in a conflicted society. Our view is close to Therborn’s (1974) conjecture on the origins, formation, and *social* orientation of the discipline. For Therborn, since sociology is historically formed, it must be located within the spirit of the age. (1976: p. 37)

**Where and what is the sociology of work: the notion of *spread***

It is not obvious why the SoW outside sociology departments, let alone universities, should be seen as any more problematic than when the sociology of culture or deviance become located in literature and criminology departments. One claim might be that dissipation and fragmentation undermines disciplinary coherence and the long-term survival of the sub-discipline: can management and business schools be left to provide the training for sociologists of the study of work?

This is a reasonable concern, animating many including Halford and Strangleman (2009: p. 819), and while it matters to us as sociologists it is not the central concern of our thesis. Moreover, from one vantage point their handling of the issue might be interpreted as pessimistic and contradictory. On one hand, they argue that the practice of the SoW in management schools has not confirmed earlier pessimisms (p. 818). For example, they write that labour process analysis and critical management studies sit ‘alongside human resource management and mainstream management perspectives’ (ibid). Then with the other, they cast into doubt the possibility that anything of critical importance might be gleaned from working in business schools.

Thus,

‘Nonetheless, sociologists should ask what knowledge is produced under these conditions and what type of sociologist is produced in such circumstances? In business schools what comes to stand for the sociology of work is largely a mix of human resource management, labour process theory and critical management studies, alongside empirical studies of labour market and employment conditions’. (Ibid. p. 818)

At least these authors concede that this is a sociology of sorts, though not a proper one, but one we will have to live with until we can bring it back in-house since sociology is recognisably a product of its societal context. We would interpret this as somewhat myopic, considering the range of critical sociology of work practiced by sociologists working outside sociology departments, including the great bête noir, the business school? In fairness, others such as Elger (2009) in the special issue edited by Halford and Strangleman, have also raised concerns at what they view as the problem of re-institutionalisation beyond the sociology department. Yet, it would be interesting to see exactly what kind of critical SoW is practised in sociology departments. Aside from a handful of institutions, the study of the SoW is honoured more in the breach than the observance. The answer, if we take the practice of the sub-discipline more broadly, is evident: being in a sociology department does not confer the status of a disciplinary radicalism, and sometimes quite the contrary. Alternatively, ‘What might be critical in business schools might not be critical in a sociology department, and what might be critical in the US might not be critical in the UK’ (Parker, 1999, p7). This notion of the social relativism of radicalism is important, ‘In order to understand dissent, we need to understand the dominant’ (ibid).

Suggesting that the study of work outside of sociology departments will have long term negative consequences is misplaced (Halford and Strangleman 2009; p: 820) because, and here we make a contentious point, it was the lack of sustenance of the SoW in sociology departments that created difficulties for the discipline, rather than its reposition in management schools. Thinking counter factually, we have rarely met SoW migrants who would not have happily remained in sociology departments had the environment, both in terms of temper and purpose, been politically conducive. This is a broad statement since it was not as if the sub-discipline ceased to be practiced in departments of sociology. That said, we need to understand the reasons for this migration of approaches within the sub-discipline and why it led, contrary to the pessimists, to its invigoration (Parker, 2015; p: 7). Business schools, after all, did not concoct the so-called cultural turn but they did allow, as a response to the changing character of capitalism and its impact on working class society and labour organisation, space for the focussed study of labour and capital. This became possible for the explicable reason that Business Schools are where management cadre are trained. (See Rowlinson and Hassard, 2011 for an intriguing take on the debate). Put this way, it could be argued that business schools are the best place for sociologists of work to reside.

Yet this is only the first part of the story, though an important aspect of the development of the SoW, since its re-institutionalisation clearly impacted on its evolution. It was important in that it allowed those working within the SoW to address more immediately the agenda of capital and variant management strategies. Moreover, for those interested in the sociology of sociology, it should come as no surprise that as the secular composition of the working class changed, that social scientists and those practicing variant forms of the SoW, should reflect these patterns and concerns, perceiving, misperceiving, or simply not seeing, the development of the new ideologies central to new management practices. Some sociologists, ersatz or otherwise, according to one’s prejudice and purity, took these changes as signs of wondrous new forms of social life, viewing the demise of determinate forms of collectivism through the variously coloured spectacles of capital. This was to be witnessed with the confusion generated by an obsession with the ideology, as opposed to the political economy of individualism and subjectivity derived from the extraordinary discovery that at one moment (historical) people were collectivistic, and at another moment (contemporary) people were individualistic.

Interpreting individual material concerns and subjective fears as having been invented by late capitalism led to the curious notion that collectivism was the antithesis of individual needs, and the obstacle to personal fulfilment.[[2]](#footnote-2) Others, some from radical sociological traditions including those with Marxist and socialist feminist formations, saw the space provided by the business school as a precious opportunity to study capital in its re-foundation after the era of Fordist closure. In other words, and seemingly paradoxically, had it not been for the rise of the business school the SoW – and certainly a radical SoW – might have been eclipsed.

A less generous perspective might be one that harks back to a period of disciplinary closure, dispensing from on high *ex cathedra* truths about the purity of the discipline, whilst nevertheless recognising that the SoW is ‘a contextually produced body of knowledge’ (Halford and Strangleman op cit. p. 818). Alas, full entry in to the pantheon is to be denied, because the products of this ‘contextually produced knowledge’ are despised simply because of their location. Here we fear this contradiction reaches its limits. We can see the inherent bias in this view – sociology departments, source of true sociological radicalism good; business-school-sociology – bad sociology, very easily by turning the question around. If mainstream sociology[[3]](#footnote-3) and sociologists in sociology departments were so radical and committed to a critical sociology of *capitalism*, why was the subject allowed to either atrophy or disappear from so many environments? (Beynon, 2011, p. 19). Given that this impure sociology of work (inter alia, labour process studies, management and organisation research) was still a form of sociology, why was a critical sociology of *work* not so evident in more than a handful of sociology departments?

While this highlights the point about the difficulty of tying the SoW to a determinate institutional space, we are not so much concerned with the professional implications of this issue, so much as with the impact of the changing character of British capitalism on the ontology of the SoW. While the issue of institutional and disciplinary *spread* forms the crux of the debate between Parker and Strangleman, we are interested in the inevitable reasons for this spread. While recognising their concerns - pessimistic for Strangleman, more sanguine for Parker - we interpret *spread* in structural as opposed to normative terms. Considering the implications of *spread* for the kind of research conducted in the area of work (and employment) they dispute the outcomes of fragmentation for prospective sociological understandings of the workplace and wider social change.

For us, the issue is neither whether a fissiparous state – *spread* – is good or bad but rather, in what ways has this been a response to the changing character of capitalism, and to what extent is the SoW itself over-determined by societal change? That is to say, against the idea of a core to the SoW, how is the SoW itself defined by the period of capitalism in which it is practiced?

*Spread* is important, and the fact that today it is different from past *spread* is related neither to loss of disciplinary - sub-disciplinary identity, nor the apparently relentless loss of institutional rootedness in sociology departments. It is more related to the changing relationships between the trajectory of contemporary capitalism, and the ways in which this is interpreted by sociologists of work. This is another way of saying that it is completely possible to be relaxed about the nature of the *spread* of the SoW. By understanding this we can make better sense of the ways in which the sub-discipline has changed in the post war period. Arguing that *spread* has been axiomatic to the SoW allows us to chart what we take to be key moments of change by reference to what we take to be significant and in some instances iconic work. From this perspective, institutional coherence is less significant than is supposed. Furthermore, disciplinary coherence is not reducible to institutional recognition following the subject’s consolidation in the academy between the late 1950s and early 60s (Eldridge, 2009; and Elger, 1975; Beynon, 2011, following Savage, 2010).

Inevitably, since there is a vast quantity of published and unpublished work in the area, we agree with others, in particular Watson (2008 pp. xv and 1-3), who suggests that to attempt a full-spectrum account of the twists and turns since the Second World War presents a near impossible task. In any case, a listing, a dictionary of the SoW, cannot be our intent. Since our chosen exemplars will necessarily miss other notable work, we offer pre-emptory apologies. An apologia also highlights the difficulty with definition and the import of *conceptual spread*. Specifically, there can be no consensus, either about what it is that sociologists working in the sub-discipline mean by the SoW, for the very reason that there is limited agreement on what it is that we mean by work (Komlosy, 2018; Watson ibid; Warren, 2016; Edwards, 2014a; Halford and Strangleman, 2009).

For example, while many would concur with Watson’s view that the subject-phenomenon line must be drawn somewhere, we would demur that drawing it at the interface between paid work and unremunerated work easily sorts out the problem of ‘object of study’ and ‘means of study’ (Komlosy, 2018). Watson’s presentation of the dilemma is particularly apposite and clear, but for us it does not sufficiently resolve the problem. Advanced as a sympathetic critique of Glucksman’s concept of the total social organisation of labour (TSOL) (1995), his argument is that TSOL too readily blurs the boundary between work and what he sees as activity per se; those aspects of work not directly part of the sphere of labour market activity. Recognising Glucksman does this in order to link work and non-work activity, and specifically consumption as a means of redefining the agenda of the SOW, Watson feels this casts the net too wide,

‘If we include in the scope of the sociology of work all task-oriented activity in which effort is expended, then we risk extending our study to such activities as walking across a room to switch on a television set or packing a bag to take to the beach. We need a compromise that gives sufficient focus to our studies without limiting then to activities with a formal economic outcome.’

Yet, it remains unclear why this could not constitute the object of study for the SoW. What is more, even if his ‘object of study’ does not include ‘packing a bag’ for the beach as part of our object of study, why can this not be included as a fruitful field for research? A number of others he cites, including feminist researchers[[4]](#footnote-4) and, in a different register, Marxists emphasise the link between work and non-work activities, as we shall see. For Marxists working in the field, it is precisely the importance of what are conventionally considered to be non-work activities that constitute the terrain of the social reproduction of surplus value. Inseparability does not mean work and non-work are the same but, on the contrary, the meaning of each cannot be understood as being mutually exclusive, as separation occurs within the same domain. Watson counsels compromise to limit the object of study. Rather than study paid work only, and in order to draw in perspectives such as the TSOL, he argues that,

‘There are two main aspects of work that a sociological concept of work needs to recognise. The first is the task-related aspect of work and the second the part played by work in the way people ‘make a living’.

Will this allow us to include aspects from another agenda but in such a way that they might also be subordinated: the TSOL is fine, but not too much of it please? Leave out the bag packing.

Our perspective links societal shifts not only, as we have emphasised, to changes in focus, but more with the way in which the ontology of the sub-discipline evolved as capitalism in the UK, and more widely, changed after 1945. There is no reason why practitioners should not proceed as prompted by Watson, or that they should not adopt an agenda following the ontological commitment of the TSOL. Nor a Marxist perspective, such as our own. What variant understandings serve to highlight therefore, is the scope of the SoW and what the SoW should address and second, that the *object* of study is determined by the *perspective* of study. The latter will always constitute the meaning we attribute to human activity and its significance for the way in which we go about our work in the sub-discipline. Again, our view is that this emphasises the importance of doxa to the perception (and practice) of the sub-discipline.

While disputing consensus around a disciplinary doxa, nevertheless we can be sure that something known as the sociological imagination is necessarily central to the SoW, even though, aside from citing Wright Mills (1959), it is difficult to find a clear explanation of what is meant by this. It is as if the term, Sociological Imagination, itself offers an incantation of protection against common sense and the other social sciences and this is understandable since it is not only ourselves, sociologists of work, who study work, as can be seen in the WES periodic register.

Specifically, our thesis challenges the perception of the sociology of work as a trans-historical discipline standing outside the historical formation in which it seeks to make sense of the world. A note of caution is important for our argument. Some practitioners have indeed seen the SoW as relatively unchanged, as an implement which can be used to make sense of changes in the development of work (and employment) and sometimes in work beyond the labour market. It is not so much that changes in approach fail to register, rather, that for those seeking the core, the SoW should be understood as remaining stable since the war whatever the inquiry into societal change. This is not to deny that changes in methodology, epistemology and broader research agenda are not recognised, rather that despite societal shifts including the rise in the importance of research on gender and ethnicity, some stick fast to an unchanging sociological ethos informing the way in which we go about constructing our research activity. Furthermore, to the extent that it can be demonstrated that this ethos is weak or absent, it is vital that we return to the one-true sociological way. While, as we have argued, it is important in the constitution of the Strangleman (2005: p. 6-9) Parker (1999; 2015) debate on what we describe as the concern with *spread*, it also constitutes an element in the sensibility of more radical writers such as Beynon (2011: p. 21) who argues that despite the pros associated with what he terms “weak professional control” promoting “collaboration and involvement with other disciplines” (2011: p. 21) that,

“‘openness” […] also contributed to the ease with which sociology was practiced outside of sociology departments. This has been most debilitating for the study of work and labour which has been increasingly practiced within Business Schools.’ (p. 21).

While the second sentence certainly does not echo Strangleman’s locational reductionism, whereby management schools undermine the kind of SoW practiced there by dint of department or faculty ethos, orientation and curriculum, nevertheless it insufficiently recognises the political economy in the practice and location of the sub-discipline. Sociologists working in these tainted places, whatever their needs for employment, are participating in ‘arguably a dilution of its critical edge’ (Strangleman, 2005: p. 6). Writing with Halford in the 2009 key note piece this adverse judgment, while less audible, persists nonetheless. Along with Parker we are less gloomy. While Beynon is certainly not arguing that we are witnessing an ersatz SoW in Business Schools (nor applauding by condescension its occasional virtues as does Strangleman 2005) it is nevertheless tinged with regret that ‘the study of work and labour’ often takes place elsewhere. We understand this anxiety and of course more research on work and employment would be welcome in sociology departments. But it has to be remarked that the lack of a required radical political economy understanding of disciplinary *spread* is disappointing.

The time has come to welcome, *spread*, rather than campaign against it. *Spread*, whether in locational or disciplinary terms, has been central to the SoW since the beginning. While changes in the nature and object of study of the SoW are recognised by many, these are understood in terms of methods and agenda, not changes in ontology. It is sometimes a matter of emphasis and thus the search for a core, defining the persistence of sociology in the SoW sui generis, tends to rely on the idea that the SoW has an ontologically distinctive centre. From this perspective, the SoW is a kind of tool kit, ready with some adaptation, for any historical period in capitalism. Clearly, the SoW has certain core obsessions which we consider in the conclusion, but our point is that these should not be understood as acting as a default in thinking about how we go about researching in the field.

Accounts of developments in the sub-discipline for the most part treat the actual changes in the SoW in a relatively unproblematic way, which is to say that while there is recognition of a relationship between what the SoW *does* and the *way* capitalism changes, there is less consideration of way in which the changing nature of capitalism frames the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the SoW itself. That is to say that the actual practice of the SoW is itself a product of the society of which it is a part. In this respect, we argue the need for greater attention to Castillo’s quest, echoed by Strangleman (2005), for a sociology of the SoW. We argue that a sociology of the SoW allows us to detect phases in the evolution of the SoW, delineated by three periods in the development of post war British capitalism.

**Three periods in the development of post war capitalism and the sociology of work**

For our purposes, these periods can be described as Fordism (1945-75), followed by the rise of a period that witnessed the slow unravelling of the Fordist period of regulation (1975-1990s). Often this is described as the period of post Fordism and while we do not think it an entirely adequate descriptor we find it useful, bearing in mind that it is the problematical counter point to everything Fordist. The third, began in the late 1990s taking us in to the 2000s and is the period described as the neo-liberal moment of global financialised capitalism, or following Wilder (2015) ‘neoliberal imperialism’. This latter is taken to represent the current period determining the way in which the SoW is practiced, both conceptually and methodologically. It is important to understand that these three periods can also be seen as illustrative of the kinds of agenda and research practices that defined the SoW historically. Recognising that describing what comprises the scope of the SoW is often a contested matter (Watson, 2009) our view is that this can be taken as measure of the concerns of the current period. Accepting that time categorisation is not straightforward, as some texts overlap what might be seen as neat period boundaries, we see these nevertheless as exemplifying the zeitgeist of the social and political periods within which they were researched and written.

Given the importance of delineating the central characteristics of the SoW, it is hardly unusual that the sub-discipline’s biographers should seek to identify the developing characteristics of the SoW in a linear way. This is not to say that these accounts (above) straightforwardly describe the sequence of new areas of research together with, for some commentators, new departures in capitalism. It is necessary to understand the ways in which various patterns of work, together with the changing *forms* of research practice in the genre, impact on the focus given to research in the area.

It may have been more obvious in the post war period that the SoW could be described as having had an agenda defined by a focus on issues of perceived national importance, above all as reflected in a concern with the social character of labour productivity (Eldridge, 2009; Watson, 2008). By contrast, it is less evident that writers are concerned to make a pitch for similar approaches to understanding the practice(s) of the SoW today. Yet, wider societal changes must be central in accounts of the development of the sub-discipline since the 1960s. As stated, the SoW was a discipline forged by, inter alia, the needs of national reconstruction (Nichols, 1986 and Eldridge, 2009) and while less obviously driven by state *dirigisme* as was the case of the SoW in France, (see Chapter \*\* on France and Durand and Stewart, 2014) arguably the trajectory of the discipline in the UK can be understood in a similar way. Eldridge, (2009) reminds us of importance of the USA in the sub-discipline’s development:

‘The US served as a positive reference point. Between 1949 and 1952 […] some 66 investigative teams went from the UK the US under the auspices of the Anglo-American Productivity Council, funded by the Marshall Plan, looking for solutions to what was perceived as Britain’s productivity “problem”’ (p. 832).

We argue that the need to interpret the relationship between extant ontologies and methodologies of the SoW, and societal change, are less evident in contemporary surveys and accounts of its development.

It is less than surprising that the SoW should have developed as a response to issues concerning the social character of labour productivity by exploring the nature of work place cohesion and social solidarity. The SoW is, after all, defined by its variant interpretations of change, sometimes transformation. Moreover, it always seeks to address the social nature of the forces of cohesion and dissonance at the centre of the social processes of work, and this forms part of our leitmotif. This is concerned with the ways in which the SoW has explored order and conflict in relation to work, and its impact of on working class lives.

**1945-1975**

Whilethere are a range of texts such as *The Management of Innovation*, by Burns and Stalker (1961) and Woodward *Management and Technology* (HMSO 1958), the exemplary pieces chosen from this period are those by Trist and Bamforth’s , *Some Social and Psychological Consequences of the Longwall Method of Coal-Getting* (1951); Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter’s *Coal is our Life* (1956); Lockwood’s *The Blackcoated Worker* (1958); Beynon’s, *Working For Ford* (1973).

Immediately following the Second World War, both the UK government and the academy became concerned with issues of productivity, and the impact of ‘shop floor culture’ on levels of productivity. Prior to the Second World War, the British coal industry was consistently falling short of its international competitors in the USA and Europe. After the war, these problems were exacerbated by labour shortages and a significant reduction in output (Page Arnott, 1979; Supple, 1987). Following the nationalisation of the coal industry in1947, the newly formed National Coal Board (NCB) was tasked with significantly increasing production to power the industrial reconstruction that was desperately needed. Despite gaining their long-term aim of a nationalised industry, miners did not respond positively to the newly introduced mechanised mining techniques, based on the ‘long wall’ system of production which, consequently, made little impact on levels of productivity (Trist and Bamforth, 1951).

Before the introduction of the ‘long wall’ method, coal extraction had been undertaken through a ‘board and pillar’ system of short faces or ‘stalls’ worked by at most, two miners, hewing coal by hand. Under this system, the degree of job control enjoyed by the miner was almost complete. Autonomous in the organization of their own work tasks; responsible for all aspects of coal extraction; and with little external supervision, production workers were controlled only through a payment system based on ‘piece-work’. Importantly, this system of production created an occupational culture that was embedded within the workforce. (Douglas, 1972).

The introduction of ‘long wall’ mechanised mining completely changed the production process to one based on ‘task segmentation, differential status and payment systems, and extrinsic hierarchical control’ all based on a cyclical process of coal getting (Herbst, 1962: p. 1). This system was problematic, in that the work teams on each cycle of the production process were paid differential ‘piece rates’, and were dependent upon the preceding team completing their task. Failure to do so caused conflict between miners themselves, as the wages of all were reduced.

The introduction of new technologies, alongside changed working patterns, brought with them a more controlling technocratic bureaucracy, with the consequence that the new production system was working *against* attempts to increase productivity. The new system was also antithetical to the strong occupational culture defined by previous working practices. The solution to these problems were identified by the miners themselves, when they were given the autonomy to organise their own system of working, thus providing internal rather than external control over the work process. In order to solve the problem of productivity, Capitalism, in the form of a nationalised industry, had given way to the agency of Labour in order to solve the problem of low productivity. The research into the introduction of these new working systems brought a reaffirmation (or perhaps a realisation) that people were a major part of the production process. (Trist and Bamforth, 1951). The socio-technological system brought with it the concept of responsible autonomy - and proof that there was an alternative to Taylorism, as the miners had demonstrated they could find their own ‘one best way’.

This seminal publication clearly demonstrated that to achieve success with any complex technical productive system, a symbiotic relationship between the workforce and the means of production could be productive. Giving agency to workers, placing her/his knowledge at the heart of the production process is essential in achieving the required increase in output. Regarding the claims made about *spread*, it is useful to note that this work was undertaken by psychologists. These findings were central in directing mainstream sociology toward the workplace, beginning the process of developing a SoW, which focused on the ‘agency’ of the worker, rather than the ‘structure’ of the work place. This tells us that the work itself cannot be divorced from the intellectual temper of the times, overdetermined in the case of sociology with the interests of dominant social actors and their agenda of social compromise. Coming in the period that saw the development of the post war social settlement this work was indelibly part of the constitution of the latter’s search to link national economic success to a labour-management paradigm of productivity growth.

*Coal is Our Life* (1956) by Dennis et al. represented a shift of focus from the mine to the mining community, offering insights into the inter-relationship between work, family, and place in a single industry community. Notably, the research was undertaken by a sociologist and two anthropologists.The early chapters provided insights into the community, the people, and trade unionism and also the differential tasks required to draw coal from the earth. The chapter on the miner at work provided the reader with a view of the production process from a Marxist perspective while the chapter on trade unionism demonstrated why, in the mining industry, production workers always controlled the union.

Of particular interest for those seeking an understanding of the social structures of the mining communities outside of the mine, was the role of women within the family. Dennis et al. argued that the nuclear family was created by the coal industry as women were required to meet the needs of both fathers and sons working in the mine, a view echoed later by Beynon and Austrin (1994). As Hall (1981) later commented ‘The male world of the mine was the beating economic heart of the community upon which female life was dependant’. This research demonstrated that the relationship between work, family, and community created and sustained a culture that was as defining of the community, as was the relationship between miners and the organisation of their work underground.

The book provided a shift in sociological emphasis, from individual and isolated social problems, towards more holistic approaches to the sociological study of the interconnections between, ‘work’ ‘culture’ and ‘place’. Taken together with the work of Trist and Bamforth (1951), and despite the fact that they are individual studies based upon social psychology and social anthropology, their combined research provided valuable insights into the importance of occupational culture and the inter-relationships between work, family, and community in the period of the development of the post war social settlement. In this way, both made significant contributions to the SoW, and provided evidence that industrial sociology had much to offer outside of the workplace and moreover that its authors did not have to be sociologists.

In the introduction to the second edition (1969), the authors stated that “this community, without the mine and mineworkers, is in danger of becoming merely an aggregate of socially isolated and culturally condemned human beings”. Given the situation in many of the post-industrial mining communities found in the now redundant coalfields in the UK this can be seen as a prescient comment (Dennis et.al. 1969, 10.) The influence of this research can be seen in the fact that, after its publication, the symbiotic relationship between mining and mining communities was seen as self-evident.

From the outset, a case is made for the sociology of work reaching beyond the narrow parameters of the workplace. Our concern is not only with what occurs ‘at work’ but with the relationship between work and social inequality in all its manifestations and contexts. This implies a concern with the fragility to people’s lives occasioned by the absence of work and employment. Given this scope, Lockwood’s *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness* (1958 and 1989) demands our attention as it addresses how the structure of occupation in the shape of the growing importance of clerical work influences class consciousness and solidarity: an important question for a sub-discipline occupied by Marxist agendas of control, resistance and class. While still located within a canon addressing primarily work, nevertheless we can begin to see an additional concern with issues broader than those of work and productivity, that are both less instrumental and more concerned with the changing and historical character of employment. We are still in the era of the post war consensus where sociologists primarily addressed the interests and agenda of dominant social elites and these included the concern with the fate of male occupational change.

Using a framework aligned to Marxism (with reference to trade unionism, work and market situation), overlaid with a Weberian interest in social status, Lockwood concluded that the market situation of the clerk differed from that of the blue collar and consequently so too did their social values: clerks aligned themselves to the middle classes. He dismisses the Marxist idea of clerks experiencing false consciousness: these workers had a class consciousness, it is just not the one Marxists were hoping for, or had predicted.

*The Blackcoated Worker* was reprinted in 1989, with a substantial post script which sought to examine the impact of change on white collar work as a result of feminization and mechanization. Here, Lockwood dismisses the American Marxist Braverman’s (1974) white collar proletarianisation thesis (for the deskilling of white-collar workers through the adoption of scientific management and the subsequent deskilling and cheapening of white collar labour) as poorly substantiated, arguing that in the 1980s white collar workers continued to experience advantages in wages and conditions over their blue collar counterparts (1989: p. 221). He does however concede to the deterioration of the white-collar work on two specific points. The feminisation of white collar employment and the associated limited opportunity for women workers to climb the career ladder, combined with the fact that the distinction between male white collar and blue-collar work suggested a significant deterioration in the power, status and condition of white collar workers overall (p. 221-223). Both manifestations of Lockwood’s text provide a social history of work and the rapid nature of change, and his updated 1980s account refers to roles long since swept away by functional and numerical flexibility, and the rapid progress of information technology and its implementation under neo-liberalism. In our view, though not necessarily entirely for reasons advanced by Braverman, it would be fair to say that his prospectus has been more clearly borne out by advances in capitalist planning and managerial agenda.

 *Working for Ford* (Beynon,1973), an extended ethnographic study of shop stewards and workers in the Ford Motor Company plant in Halewood, Liverpool, provided an unambiguous insight into the reality of Human Resource Management, and the consequences of scientific management for the workforce (Taylor 1911). The book takes the reader into the heart of a car plant and provides an unequivocal insight into the drudgery and monotony of working on a moving production line. The research findings can be seen as much as a study in social anthropology, as it is study in industrial sociology. This longitudinal study (1963-1971) based on a holistic approach, focusses on shop floor conflict and management control.

Beynon’s work was significant to the extent that it was the first major account of working class discontent by workers in a key in relation to the Fordist compromise (wages as compensation for the ‘death’ experienced within mass production). While industrial conflict was endemic in the post war period, the 1960s and early 70s were to mark the beginnings of the slow breakup of the post 1945 settlement and one of the reasons why we exemplify *Working for Ford* is because it was the first major record of the workings of the social compromise within the workplace together with its various internal and external social and political insecurities. This was a register of the contradictions, the strengths and weaknesses of Fordism that were approached from a perspective otherwise ignored in the sociological canon. The beginnings of a SoW from below.

The book is written in an easily readable style making it accessible to all readers, and most importantly gives a voice to Ford workers. The most significant chapters of the book are, ‘On the Line’ and ‘Controlling the Line’, in which the reader is introduced to the working conditions on the production line, and the shop stewards who stand between the workforce and management. Work on the line is described graphically by those enduring it as a series of dull, boring tasks, repeated every few seconds, leaving them with a deep sense of alienation. Beynon reported that workers took no satisfaction in their work, with the employment relationship simply an exchange of effort for a wage: workers talk of ‘working with blanked out minds’ (p. 117).

Beynon identified an emergent shop floor militancy and the increasing influence of the shop stewards in the constant struggle to control the speed of the production line. He described this struggle in terms of a ‘factory consciousness’ as it was rooted in the workplace,

‘[…] it understands class relationships in terms of their direct manifestation in conflict between the bosses and the workers within the factory. In as much as it concerns itself with exploitation and power, it contains definite political elements. But it is a ‘politics of the factory”’ (p. 98).

In contrast to the miners referred to above, the socio-technical systems Ford workers experienced denied them any form of job control, as such was seen as a direct threat to the profitability of the organization. For those on the line the struggles were often with the trade union organisation itself, as its leadership (TGWU) were frequently at odds with the rank and file worker. This was graphically outlined in the chapter on the 1969 strike, when senior trade union leaders were replaced by the membership.

*Working for Ford* provided a clear and unambiguous insight into the everyday working experiences of workers in a car plant, and the efforts made by them to gain some form of control over the production processes. It also identified an emerging shop floor militancy, and a shift to the left that was mirrored in the wider trade union movement in the UK as the post war compromise became increasingly febrile. Importantly, the book encompassed the emergence of multi-national capital alongside the emergence of a wider class struggle, and Beynon placed the workers in the car industry at the centre of that:

‘If you stand on the catwalk at the end of the plant you can look down over the whole assembly floor. Few people do, for to stand there and look at the endless, perpetual, tedium of it all is to be threatened by the overwhelming insanity of it. The sheer audacious madness of a system based upon men like those wishing their lives away.’ (p. 109).

The book offered a different, more inclusive, way of researching the world of work and set the standard for a longitudinal research methodology that fully involved workers by giving them a voice to tell their own stories. For Edwards (2014b), Beynon’s book represented a ‘foundational study’ in the sociology of work. An appropriate work that arguably bookended the decline of the long post war settlement where a social democratic consensus had seen the institutional bolstering of working class solidarity, and the beginnings of its reconstruction under very different conditions once characterised by Ralph as ‘class struggle from above’ (1989).

Increasingly, the SoW saw the development of a range of different approaches that would parallel the older, conventional mainstream, accounts of class and occupational change. As older social certainties and political compromises began to slowly fragment, sociology and the SoW reflected socio-political change in research that both revealed but also encouraged, a range of dominant social interests, as it had done in the immediate post years. At the same time, some of this effort, reflecting the wider social zeitgeist, sought to dig into the structural and phenomenal character of various changes to class, occupation, and wider social solidarities.

This time however, greater attention would be given to the impact of change on those now subordinated by the new certainties of a developing neo-liberalism. When *Coal is our life* and *Some Social and Psychological Consequences of the Longwall Method of Coal-Getting* were published, they addressed a confident and, from the standpoint of a Gramscian National Popular, a socially integrated industrial and political order. It mattered little, as we will argue later, that Irish and Caribbean immigrants, women, the unemployed and others barely registered in the dominant canon but new cultural insurgencies, including class conflict and struggles around reproduction and sexual orientation would eventually change settled certainties in the study of society, work and employment.[[5]](#footnote-5)

***1975 - 1990s***

Oakley’s *Housewife* (1974); Pollert’s*Girls, Wives, Factory Lives* (1981); Cavendish, *Women on the Line* (1982); Westwood’s, *All Day Everyday: Factory and Family in the Making of women’s lives* (1984)

Oakley published *Housewife* in 1974 in response to the absence of any sociological analysis, or indeed interest in women’s domestic work and its impact on their paid employment. The discipline, dominated by men, colluded with the ideology of a feminine domesticity and as the innate is not the concern of sociology, women’s domestic work became ‘not the concern’ of sociology. Consequently millions of hours of unpaid work which directly benefited both men and capital, to the detriment of women, were erased magically from the sociological agenda. So all-consuming was this ideology of female domesticity, the very validity of women hinged upon their acceptance of the domestic role and their abilities within it.

Oakley challenged this dominant narrative through a socio-historical analysis of the emergence of the housewife role female during the industrial revolution as a consequence of the struggle over women’s labour power in the context of the separation of work and home/family life. Housewife, she concluded, is fundamentally a political term, embedded with power, which both defines and controls women.

While firing a full throttle missile at the neglect of women by male dominated sociology, Oakley used the concerns and vocabulary of the SoW to examine the conditions of work and labour processes of the housewife. Women’s work in the home, she concludes, is the poorest of poor work - unpaid, unregulated, routine, unsafe, isolated, never-ending, unrecognised (it comes naturally, after-all) and unrepresented (by trade unions). The work was consciousness-expanding read which represented a reconfiguration of the SoW. Oakley wrote about the nature of the ‘workplace’ in eh domestic envionrment, tasks and ‘tools’ in a way no other British sociologist had before: the availability of tools (vacuum cleaners, washing machines) and their impact on the burden of work; work tasks (getting a child to sleep, to eat) and meeting the expectations of ‘superiors’ (making something ‘interesting for him to eat’).

Through a series of case studies, in which women from differing class backgrounds provided verbatim accounts of their work, we gain insight into the weight of the work, their emotions and anxieties, the human cost of this type of labour and the ambivalence with which women approached it – none truly hated their work, many felt conflicted, emotionally confused and colluded with the expectations of others. Indeed, ambivalence was one of the central themes explored. Women are bound and defined by this work and yet struggle within it – expectations are passed on from mother to daughter, from mother to son. (One women claimed that she could not meet the expectations of her husband as his mother was ‘an amazing woman’, that is, ‘a gifted housewife’).

Oakley’s work was genuinely seminal, no longer could work legitimately be considered something that happened in the realm only of paid employment. The connection between ascribed roles in the home and outcomes in the paid workplace was firmly established. This is a fundamentally feminist work, not simply because of its focus on women’s inequality but also because it offers a cry to arms - don’t pass on the doctrine of housework to your daughters! Consequently, it became critical to the development of a SoW from below, driven as it was by the energy and anger of the second wave of feminism. As such, it reflected another feature of the idea of the developing *spread* we described above in respect to importance of extra institutional social science ideas and research practices on the trajectory of our work. *Spread*, in other words, from beyond the academy.

It is impossible to think about Cavendish’s *Women on the Line* (1982) without also thinking of Pollert’s*Girls, Wives, Factory Lives* (1981). Published within a year of each other, both sought to fill a gap in understanding of the nature of mass production work experienced by working class women. These are fundamental socialist feminist accounts of the workplace, and unconcerned with dispassion, validity or the potential for the reproduction of the research. Both writers were explicit from the outset about their own socialist and feminist politics. It was feminist curiosity and anger that broadened the focus of attention beyond the workplace – the personal as politics – which links the ideology of femininity to domestic work and in turn to the workplace.

Through differing research methodologies, both produced compelling accounts of the hardship of repetitive manual work, the injustice of what were then understood as married women’s wages, and the negligence of mangers, men and unions to the labelling of ‘unskilled’ or low skilled work associated, unjustly, with what women actually did. These accounts are intimate, angry, and sympathetic and display a curiosity about the lives of women which extended beyond the workplace.

Cavendish did not set out to do research, but rather to experience working class work and to understand working class women and their lives better. Disillusioned by her own political staleness and in teaching ‘the theory of theory’, (1982: p. 2) in 1978 she took a job on the line at a factory which made car parts. The account which resulted from that research provides a moving and visceral insight into the labour of working class women over a seven-month period. With working days running from 7.30am until 4.15pm: she could not physically, economically or mentally sustain the work long-term, despite an initial intention to stay in the job and contribute to the community. This is a deeply affecting account of alienation under capitalism (the physical divisions created by the line, the lack of control, the physical exhaustion) and of the political and human impact of the multiple and interwoven structures of gender, class and race in equality.

Cavendish’s work is remarkable for its first hand and explicit insight into three important aspects of working class women’s work: the enormous challenge of the work itself; the all-encompassing nature of women’s inequality, how that was reproduced and legitimated; how women ‘got by’ in spite of almost impossible circumstances. The vast majority of Cavendish’s colleagues on the line were migrant women from Ireland, the Caribbean or Asia. The women carried out complex work in a time scale neither set, nor controlled by them:

‘most days I worked so hard I could not look up at all, or had to work extra specially fast to unwrap a piece of chewing gum, or take a sip of tea (1982:p.19)…. We could not do the things you would normally not think twice about like blowing your nose or flicking hair out of your eyes; that lost valuable seconds- it wasn’t included in the layout so no time was allowed for it…if you really couldn’t keep up you were out’ (1982: p. 41)

Much of the time away from work was spent recovering, sleeping and eating.

Discrimination against women workers was embedded in every aspect of the work process. In the week before the implementation of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) men were removed from the line and assigned new roles so that their protected status and superior wage could be ‘legitimately’ preserved. Only long-standing women workers were afforded staff status (in-work benefits), while all men and office workers were granted this from the outset. Boys of 16 were provided with training, while women learned their ‘unskilled work’ by sitting next to another who was neither credited, nor paid, for that training. Men had career structures, women had jobs. Women’s work, no matter how challenging, no matter how long it took to perfect, was always considered unskilled or semi-skilled,

‘Men were not a homogeneous group but from where we were on the line, anyone with any skill or any training was a man, anyone in any authority was a man and any man had authority’ (1982:79).

Cavendish’s work explores in detail the intersection of class, race, age and gender in a way few books have done, before or since. Her work illuminated the racist marginalisation and casual discrimination faced by migrant and black British women - black women rarely made it to supervisory levels and never to white collar work.

Pollert’s (1981) ethnographic account of women workers in a tobacco factory provides insight into the narratives that women form about their own lives and work. Pollert notes that younger women dreamed of marriage, children and domesticity as a route to escaping the monotony and of their workplace, while older women bemoan the hardship of the double burden. It is therefore a powerful account of the realities of working class, female manual work, and the ideologies women contend and sometimes embrace.

There is, in these two accounts common themes in terms of class and feminist politics. They sprang from the ‘second wave’ of feminism and specifically from a socialist agenda which engaged directly with class politics and one which sought to ‘get back’ to the point of production. Specifically, they graphically illustrate how the unpaid and paid work of women are interconnected, forged in the ideologically driven notion of the inferiority of their gender. Each has a common feminist connection with the earlier work of Oakley.

Though we have only limited space a tour of this period must surely include reference to Westwood’s political economy of life within and beyond the labour market and specifically a work place occupied by Asian women garment workers. If the setting of *All Day Every Day*, is a Leicester textile factory in the early 1980s, the site of exploration is broader, taking us to the women’s families and their communities in order to show how we cannot explain workplace behaviour, and vice versa, community and home life, without understanding their mutual interpenetration one with the other. *Avant la lettre*, Westwood provides what some today would describe as an account of the intersectionality of labour, ethnicity, and gender in and beyond work. However, she saw these not as separate interacting identities but rather as *the mutually reinforcing identities* of *class, patriarchy and ethnicity constituted by the historically specific dialectics of a post-colonial society.*

These four exemplars provide powerful narratives of survival, aspiration and of the ways in which explicit and inexplicit sexism and racism work against women in the workplace (from employers and male dominated trade unions), the realities of the hardship of the paid work, and the life outside of work. While Beynon wrote of the ability of male Ford workers, though solidarity, to secure wages in compensation for the ‘death’ that occurs within work, Cavendish and Pollert’s women were not able to do so. Much of this can be understood through reference to Oakley’s workwomen seen by employers, male colleagues, trade unionists and often themselves as ‘pin money workers’, supplementing the male wage, drawing upon ‘innate skills’ which were undervalued even where the work was highly challenging.

More broadly, the work we exemplify in this period reflected, as both examination and tribute, the developing break-up of the post war social democratic consensus within the work place. The body of work developed by MacDonald and colleagues (1991; 2005; 2014), which we explore later burrowed into this disintegration in relation to the absence of paid employment, and the impact on community relations. Far from the halcyon days of a newly vibrant SoW studying strongly unionised workers and bosses pulling together, this period required an explanation of the character of variant forms of social fermentation. With Fordist industry in decline, the growing eclipse of the certainties of post war labour regulation, and the consequences of this for work beyond work, a number of work sociologists whose formation had included not only the classic tradition began to exert an alternative influence. Feminists, socialist-feminists, Marxists and others whose formation lay in a range of political and social science perspectives within and outside clearly defined sociological, not to say, SoW, traditions, produced work that became part of the canon of the SoW. Thus, the notion of *spread* can be seen to have another dimension.

We defined institutional and intellectual *spread* with the latter referring to the impact of mainstream academic influences, from economics, and anthropology to history and psychology but now we witness in this second period the growing impact of extra academic ideas from new left Marxism to socialist feminism. In the third period, which sees the rise of neo-liberalism, the impact of class struggle from above can be seen to exert its influence both within the class structure and the working class and the academy and notably the SoW. The work we now exemplify, in various registers, began to examine the nature of class hegemony, community fragmentation and the relationships between the extant decline of collectivist practices and the management ideologies. The latter would prove to be the beating heart of workplace subordinations and eventually more widely, of neoliberalism. Both agent and beneficiary of social democratic decline, the new management practices would prove crucial in providing the narrative for the formation of contemporary working-class practices. This would crucial in the debate over the so-called rise of individualism and the eclipse of collectivism throughout the late 1980s until today.

***1990s- 2000s***

Beynon and Austrin’s *Masters and Servants: Class and Patronage in the Making of a Labour Organisation.* (1994); Garrahan and Stewart’s *The Nissan Enigma* (1992) (NE); Bradley, Erickson, Stephenson and Williams’s *Myths at Work* (2000); MacDonald and Coffield’s *Risky Business*; *Youth and the Enterprise Culture (1991)*; MacDonald, et al. *Growing up in poor neighbourhoods (2005)*; MacDonald et al. *In search of ‘intergenerational cultures of worklessness’: Hunting the Yeti and shooting zombies (2014)*

Beynon and Austrin’s *Masters and Servants: Class and Patronage in the Making of a Labour Organisation.* (1994) took us back to a focus on mining, in particular the history of the Durham coalfield from the beginning of the 18th century, until the inter-wars years of the 20th century. While the book offered a comprehensive view of the development of the coal industry in Durham, the central theme of the book was the struggles of miners to overcome the so-called Durham System. This involved the use of bonded labour and ‘tied’ housing, a system that the authors describe as a pre-capitalist form of contact labour that created a ‘paternalistic-aristocratic form of domination’ (p. 363).

The attitudes of the employers towards the miners of Durham was summed up in the following quote taken from a letter from a colliery manager to Lord Londonderry, a major landowner in Durham, regarding an enquiry into the coal industry in 1842.

‘What we have to guard against is any legislative interference in the established customs of our particular race of pitmen. The stock can only be kept up by breeding, it never could be invented from an adult population’ (p. 27-28)

It was the Durham System of paternalistic practices, such as tied housing, and the ongoing controls of bonded labour, that the miners were fighting against. They saw trade unionism as the only way of freeing themselves from a paternalist system that was based upon aristocratic elitism and the established religion of the Church of England. By contrast,

‘Primitive Methodist preachers appeared as a democratic, progressive form of religion, and one through which the ubiquitous power of the masters could be opposed’. (p.36.)

Following a number of failed strikes during the 19th Century, the Durham Miners Association (DMA) was finally established in 1869, and the hated ‘bond’ was ended. While the DMA was forthright in maintaining centralised control of its own coalfield, it went to great lengths to resist equal centralisation at a national level.

While the authors provided clear insights into all aspects of life in the mining communities of Durham, including evidence of life underground and particularly, the constricted lives of women, the main strength of the work was its account of the formation and development of the trade union that, at its height, represented the largest coalfield in the world. While the fight for trade union recognition by the Durham miners was achieved through radical methods, as it developed organisationally it became part of the Co. Durham establishment, and to a great extent excluded radicalism within in its own fiefdom. Finally, Beynon and Austrin’s work highlighted the extent to which this narrative of working class occupational formation and hegemony rested upon the compelling combination of sociology and history, cultural analysis and an acute understanding of the political economy of temporal class formation. For us, *Masters and Servants* was a crucial study in the development of a radical sociology of work in the tradition that challenged developing nostrums about class as merely one form of identity amongst others, that drove it into analysis of social structure allowing for the re-emergence of research linking change to class structure and class antimonies. In an era when the zeitgeist was to focus on claims of the end of class, in terms of intellectual affiliation and political temper, *Masters and Servants* paved the way for a range of work challenging the new orthodoxies abandoning a focus on class and social inequality.

An example of such was *The Nissan Enigma* (1992) (NE) by Garrahan and Stewart which confronted the new management agenda which determined to break worker and union collectivism. Recognising the salience and power of management’s social techniques of subordination, the NE placed these with the wider political economy of embedded neo-liberalism at both local and national levels. Nissan’s internal factory regime required new techniques of control precisely because management was so invasive within and beyond the workplace. The labour process, the so-called ‘Nissan Way’ (Wickens, 1987), would inevitably create resistance that might be either collective or individual and would, in either event, result from struggles against class subordination. (Stephenson and Stewart, 2001).

Similarly *Myths at Work* (2000) by Bradley, Erickson, Stephenson and Williams, was described by Grint as a ‘welcome return’ to one of sociology’s fundamental tasks, a critical study of work practices and processes. *Myths* challenged dominant narratives that suggested not only was the neoliberal reconstruction of work inevitable, it was good for us. The fundamental building blocks of neoliberal mythology were demolished, chapter by chapter: the ‘death of class’; the ‘economic worker’; the benefits to workers of ‘flexibility and lean production’; the ‘female take over’; the ‘death of trade unionism’.

Conversely, at around the same time a new kind of research became manifest that focussed on the character and form of what was interpreted by its advocates as the demise of workplace collectivism. In tune with the zeitgeist in the academy and in harmony with the increasing embeddedness of neo-liberalism, a new current of thought working within the sub discipline, or allied to it philosophically, became entranced by the revolution in management ideologies. The latter extolled the virtues of individualism wrapped up in a cosy blanket of employee involvement signalled by the arrival, not just of firms such as Nissan and Toyota, but also the new consumerism. Some sociologists and those working wedded to its intellectual milieu, took management and broader neo-liberal nostrums as valid accounts of the genesis and trajectory of changing work place agency. Believing what was portrayed in a range of management ideologies, the end of worker collectivism was announced. This would have been news to many workers who, in the absence of trade unions, had never given up on collectivism but in any event, the issue never should have been about public collectivism including its behaviour referents as Martinez Lucio and Stewart (1998) argued. This group, whom we would define as pessimistic individualists, would not only ignore the radicals but also those digging carefully into the interstices of the management attempts to undermine collectivism. Rich research such as that by Collinson (1994) considered various strategies for resisting management control and demonstrated in case studies both that the absence of collective action did not herald the end of collectivism, and that individual agency can establish collective norms to the benefit of everyone. Ramsay’s (1977) writing about what he termed ‘Cycles of Control’ was highly apposite but the new era of neo-liberalism was different from previous ones in post war Britain insofar as the geometry of the employment relationship was being strategically reconfigured by the state, and by working class political representatives in ways that encouraged ideologies that undermined collective action, if not the collective worker (Martinez Lucio and Stewart, 1997; Stewart and Martinez Lucio 2011).

In the neoliberal period, those social groups driving subordination have been able to eschew social alliances with trade unions. Furthermore, both because of this, and as an essential means of re-establishing a different, unitarist collectivism, in contrast to the past management practices (including management in universities, naturally) a diet of ideological and labour organising devices are vital to ensure the success of management performance targets (see the role of impact factors in university research). These are supposed to work at the level of subjective agency and ideology acting to integrate while disciplining variance from the norm. Intriguingly, while the wider discipline has developed a sound critique of the impact of neo-liberalism on the profession itself, (notably, Holmwood, 2010, 2011, 2013,)

Ironically, the work of some sociologists working within our field frequently takes for granted the verities of the social form as enunciated by everyday neoliberal culture. Since the 1990s the role of the SoW, as a servant of power, has been ambiguous and that the dominant trends followed the interests and concerns of developing neoliberal cultural tropes. Concerns with Foucauldian notions of power, post-structuralism and post-modernism were for a period the prevailing trends in the sociology of work as reflected in the obsession with the rise of individualism as opposed to persistence of collectivism. It could be argued that Sociology began to reflect some of that neoliberal agenda. It led to an agenda of pessimism, a narrowing of expectations for working class people; sociology bought it, took signs taken for wonders (took the image of society as the only true representation of society: See note 3 above). It took for granted that which had to be explained. The problem of the ‘demise of collectivism’ was resolved through a formalist juxtaposition of the relationship between individualism and collectivism. In other work, while the notion of the individual and subjectivity as espoused by Knights and Willmott (1989) and others aspiring to what became known as the Foucauldian tradition, was rejected, nevertheless, a different version of the end of collectivism trope was used as the motor of research. (See Martinez Lucio and Stewart, 1997 for a left radical critique of both schools). This was especially problematical since it either misunderstood, or forgot, much of what we thought we had understood of the complexity of class and agency established in the sub-discipline in the post war period. We were now at a point where the various approaches were talking past one another. Dispersal, if not dissipation.

The radical, non-institutional influences of the SoW is another example of *spread*, beyond the traditional confines of the academy, can be found in the highly acclaimed book, *Willing Slaves: How the overwork culture is ruling our lives*, by journalist Madelaine Bunting. This work we comfortably place in the field since it linked to the genealogy of critical writing and research based on a radical political economy interpreting work defined in and beyond the work*place*.

MacDonald and his collaborators might be dismissed by purists as being outside of the traditional realm of the sociology of work since he does not focus on the workplace but rather on the tenuous and fragile nature of the relationship between poor working-class people, their communities and their work. Over a 20 year period, using a variety of methodologies, MacDonald and his collaborators (only some of their work is examined here) developed longitudinal insight into the how those living in post-industrial communities navigated the end of their industry, the pains of unemployment, the challenges of growing up poor, and the indignity of their work ethic being questioned. The common denominator in these investigations has been the fragility and poverty of available paid work.

Economists and social scientists now recognise that, as a result of the dual pressures of neoliberalism and globalisation, a section of the working class can now better be described as a ‘Precariat’, a group whose work is poor in every way and whose employment is fragile to the point that their very survival hangs by a thread (Standing, 2011; 2014; 2017). As this precariousness results from the insecure and exploitative nature of work and employment, it would be a nonsense for this chapter to exclude studies which focus on those lives and struggles. We cannot, as sociologists of work, see the lives of these people as no longer relevant, simply because work is no longer available to them. In our view, that would be to forget that the longue durée of neo-liberalism is neither acceptable nor inevitable.

MacDonald, and his colleagues provided a blow by blow account of the impact of globalisation and the privatisation of once nationalised industries on the lives of the unemployed, where young people faced the challenge of attaining adulthood in regions where pride in work and self-reliance had been strong. However, these regions became amongst the poorest communities in Britain (focusing primarily on Teesside). MacDonald and Coffield (1991) charted the meteoric rise of industrial Teesside and its equally dramatic decline in the 1980s. State instigated self-employment schemes were revealed as attempts to reduce employment rates and remodel Britain as an economy of the ‘self-employed’. Risky Business (1991) was a visceral account of the human cost of this ‘adventure’. The collapse of employment opportunities and the emergence of workfare-style employment schemes lead one young worker to bemoan, now famously, that all that was left was ‘shit jobs and govvy [Government] schemes’. ‘Restart’ programmes heralded the shape of things to come as the working class was redefined in Government policy as ‘lacking’ in all ways (skill, adaptability, endeavour, work ethic).

MacDonald et al. (2005) longitudinal work on Teesside following deindustrialisation examines how young working class people ‘got by’ with poor quality and intermittent paid employment. Set against the context of a shrinking and hostile state, employment, housing, physical and emotional security is facilitated only by those who share the same plight and consequently the poor are inextricably tied for survival to an environment within which only poverty is available. While the neoliberal expectation is that each individual pursues their own economic imperative, here we see the reality - mutuality and co-operation are essential strategies for survival in poor communities: geographic mobility presents real dangers.

Against the mantra of individualism and competition the explanation for the decline of once vibrant industrial communities has come in the shape of an underclass thesis which placed the blame for poverty at the door of the working class themselves (Murray, 1990). Politicians have insisted on the existence of families where 3 or 4 or more generations had known no work in order to evidence a widespread intergenerational culture of worklessness (Duncan-Smith, 2010; Grayling 2011). MacDonald, et al. (2014) critical case study of Teesside and Glasgow, two of the most deprived areas in Europe, sought to find that culture, with the view that if such a culture existed it would be found in these urban spaces. Their findings confound the ‘worker’ vs ‘shirker’ narrative so popular in the British press, suggesting that a strong commitment to work remained, and, despite the poor availability of paid work, voluntary and community work engagement was high. Work is done and is valued even in the absence of pay, a point supported by McKenzie, in her excellent ethnography, *Getting By* (2015). Families with three generations of worklessness could not be found.

*Shooting Zombies and Hunting Yetis* (2014) did that rare thing of crossing the divide between the worlds of academia, media and popular understanding. The purported ‘death of the work ethic’ among the poor was a ‘Zombie idea’ – without substance it walked among us, undead, serving an ideological purpose, after this work even the popular media had to take note.

Inevitably, this brings us to the defining character of the contemporary zeitgeist and one of the intellectually enfeebling nostrums of our time and from which, inevitably, as the sciences of society, Sociology and the SoW, cannot be immune. From the latter view it can be taken as read that by this we mean rather more the notion that the SoW will reflect what is happening in the world of work it describes. For us, the SoW not only offers accounts of change but will also shape, define, and prosecute social change in and at work. If this was characteristic of leading research in the 1950s, as we have argued, when so many sociologists sought to drive home the importance of national reconstruction, it is reasonable to argue that, pace Althusser, the ideology in which they lived was one that was contested and subordinating even while people struggled against it. And if we wonder who was subordinated, not just by the state and respectable society more widely, a helpful experiment might be to seek out all those studies of WBI workers – women, black and Irish, to mention but three of the typically excluded in society and by our discipline during the halcyon days of the Golden Age. Stick with the main players of post war delight: the gilded, mostly white, blue collar workers, those beneficiaries of post war construction. The wonderful episodes of work challenging the consensus, the key one being in our view, *Poverty the Forgotten Englishmen* (1970) based upon research conducted in the late 1960s, stands as testament to the alter ego of the dominant ideology of the times.

Our period, beginning in the late 1990s, of supposed social fragmentation characterised by the rise of individualism and the concomitant demise of collectivism, can be the story of the success of neo-liberalism. Yet, it is surely too generous to the conceit of this ideology that everyone loves themselves, mostly, and others, much less. Surveying research that takes as wonders the contempt by dominant social groups for those defeated, it is depressing to read in so much work that the reason why individualism is the new big thing is because collectivism is dead. This new narrative is from a story that, as with older versions (Therborn, 1976) extoling the virtues of bourgeois individualism, and with it, implicit notions of individual liberty and choice, takes for granted that the weakness of working class collectivism is due to the demise of working class and, or, its forms of collective action. It is uncommon to see arguments which problematize, by historicising, determinate contemporary forms of working class activity. What is more, this view of class and solidarity only makes sense if one has a view of class conflict as only and everywhere taking the shape of the kinds of class conflict redolent of the Fordist era. Certainly, it will be obvious that a 1950s or 1960s understanding of ideological class formation and activities will be at a loss to explain the actions and successes of workers struggling against the instituted patterns of exploitation and subordination characteristic of the early 21st century platform economy. Collectivism, is not reducible to workers (usually male) marching behind trade union banners or mass strikes even while these still persist (Martinez Lucio and Stewart, 1998; Stephenson and Stewart, 2001).

**Discussion**

In seeking to provide a different narrative on the trajectory of the sociology of work since the Second World War, we have argued that the way in which the sub-discipline evolved necessarily has to be placed within the context of the social concerns of the dominant social alliances of the period. The post war settlement saw an emphasis on the origins and problems surrounding the preoccupation with labour productivity and in so doing produced a sociology reflecting the interests of dominant social groups. Yet, the fact that this is never addressed as part of an internal critique, a sociology of sociology, is itself a matter of interest. This period, from the early 1950s through to the late 1960s and early 1970s, is typically described as a period heralding a Golden Age for the SoW and the wider discipline of Sociology. For us, however, it is the thing – the idea of a Golden Age - that must be explained, because as sociologists writing in the 21st Century given the insights about both newer and older forms of subordination provided by a range of approaches from our own and other disciplines, the myopia of 1950s and early 1960s, work stands like the proverbial elephant in the room. Otherwise, we would have to assume that the great sociologists typically cited in the Golden Age literature simply ignored the plight of the work of newly arrived Irish, Asian, Caribbean workers of whatever gender, to mention, women workers more widely, deeming them unimportant.

In some respects that was true, the discipline did see them as less deserving of study because the SoW was attuned almost entirely to the concerns of the leading beneficiaries of the post war settlement – strongly unionised blue collar workers often with significant workplace control. Today, obsession with the spirit of individualism and consequent paeans to individual freedom are the hallmark of much contemporary SoW, as many recognise. This is because attempting to understand the spirit of the age, and those who promote it at work and in employment, is what the SoW does.

Our wider point is to argue that it is not as straightforward as this. To get a tighter grasp of the nature of the SoW and its formation it may be helpful to take on board Therborn’s view that Sociology, as an ‘historical product’ (1976: p. 37) has to be understood in the context of the spirit of the age. Concerned with making sense of a newly developing industrial capitalism, sociology was an important part of a ‘type of ideological community’ (p. 222) that it both reflected and articulated (p. 224). Moreover, it was central to an ideological community that was terrified of the masses and especially as the 19th century progressed, the latter’s organisation in the form of labour unions and sometimes revolutionary practices. While much of this conservatism was recognised by Wright Mills (the trope of the ‘Cow Sociology’ after the First World War), as highlighted by many in the UK, unfortunately it may be insufficient to let the SoW itself off the hook. Our point is that it is not just those Cow sociologists who are at fault for this is not a question of ‘fault’. Since the point of the story is to show that it has been the job of the SoW to reflect the concerns of the dominant social actors and their discourses, consequently, as these change and society is transformed, it is not just a tale of the actors and narratives.

It is also a tale of the changing character of the narrators themselves. Therborn tells a very interesting story of the opening up of American sociology in the 1960s and 70s to ‘a militant opposition […] the Sociology Liberation Movement […] Sociologists for Women in Society’ (p. 13). This process of institutionalisation-deinstitutionalisation could be seen to provide a helpful framing for our own time. One way to develop this is to go somewhat further than Strangleman’s intriguing socio-historical agenda, after the inspiration of EP Thompson, to restore the lost history of workers in their various attitudes as one of the objects of the sub-discipline. More than this, for it is not about restoring the lost innocence of the SoW, of telling the story of the heroic Golden Age, but rather, that those telling the stories can be reflective of those who were previously (and contemporarily) socially, subordinated and culturally and intellectually excluded. The diversity, the lack of institutional rootedness in departments of sociology, is testimony to the fact that the SoW might now be seen to speak for a range of ‘ideological communities’ now that class solidarities have been redefined in the period of neo-liberal subordination. This matters, for it is visible in the sociologies challenging subordination, that the SoW it is no longer the intellectual endeavour of mostly white, originally mostly middle class, mostly male, academics only. This opposition, this contrast between the SoW in the 1950s and the 2000s in itself goes some way to explaining why the great sociologists from the LSE and Liverpool in the 1950s, did not think immigrants and their work, or women and their work, constituted the most important object of study for the sociology of work. (In a retrospective on his early formation in the sub discipline in the 1960s, Eldridge refers to his work on the Thurley’s project on supervisors which took him to an engineering plant in the English Midlands. While he highlights the fact that all the shop floor works were women it is an observation that does not, even at this distance, bear (re)consideration).

Today’s *spread* of the SoW within and beyond the academy is a positive turn, representing as such an encouraging assault upon the genesis, and the motor, of contemporary patterns of subordination in the discipline and in wider society. Thus, not only was the Golden Age not immune from cultural and ideological pressures. It is not just a question of recognising that the SoW considered different themes and topics as capitalism evolved, but that the way in which it considered different concerns was reflective of the zeitgeist of the era. Today’s zeitgeist reflects a very different set of obsessions as reflected and reproduced in the SoW. As Dardod and Lavel (2013) point out, neoliberal ideologies are not just about economics, but are in the very air we breathe. For the authors, ‘neo-liberalism, far from being an ideology or economic policy, is firstly and fundamentally a *rationality,* and as such tends to structure and organize not only the action of rulers, but also the conduct of the ruled’ (p. 4): it is the ‘*rationality of contemporary capitalism*’. Finally, ‘An historic construct and general norms of existence, neoliberalism can be defined as a set of discourses, practices, and apparatuses’ (p. 7)

It is in this sense that we can begin to understand the absences in the evolution of the SoW. Precisely, from the early post war period until the late 60s, a myopia, or a plain nonappearance, was especially evident when it came to understanding gender and other social inequalities, migrant workers, and until more recently, the existence of class. For sure, there was much discussion of inequality, but this was not the same as discussing the dynamics of class divisions. This period of hegemony, of dominant power narratives of social structure with consequent assumptions about how and what were legitimate fields of study, persisted until the slow breakdown of the post war social settlement in the 1970s and it is to a more recent critical sociology of work *and employment* that we need to reach for contemporary understanding of work.

**Conclusion**

During the 1950s, that the SoW acted in the service of power should not be taken to imply that the sub-discipline benefited capital in some straightforward, instrumental, fashion. On the contrary, this was a social science in the service of a dominant power coalition constituted by social democratic norms and value systems, an ideological community no less, in which sociology played its part. It was a period of ambiguity that resulted from the post war settlement founded as it was on working class strength. As such, while the labour movement may have been complicit as a servant of power, engagement and outcomes were more ambiguous and reflected competing class interests. It was a hegemony that depended upon a vibrant class struggle from below and while incorporation was its vital characteristic, dominant working class communities were its significant beneficiaries. It was not that the excluded, women workers, migrant workers and others were not important. For a sociology of the sociology of work however, it is important that we try to understand the way in which sociologists of work wrote about (or more usually did not) the various social, economic, and political exclusions during the Golden Age.

Neo-liberal rule, characteristic of the current period, is revealing of a different kind of hegemony. Now, inclusion is not through incorporation via collective class institutions. On the contrary, a different type of class struggle, class struggle from above, depends upon incorporation via collective exclusion. The fragmentation of working class institutions has encouraged, while at the same time depending upon, an ideology of individualism, an essential ingredient of Dardod and Lavel’s (p. 4) “rationality of contemporary capitalism”. If the Fordist era can be characterised as one whereby the working class was subordinated by *collective* incorporation, the so-called post Fordist era can be seen as one in which the working class is subordinated by *individual* incorporation even while, ironically, as with group and team building measures, these take pseudo-collectivist forms. Among a range of other things sociologists of work could be expected to unpack are the various conceits lying at the heart of neo-liberal ideologies of victory. One such, is that broadcasting the peculiar notion that individualism is now more salient than collectivism. Despite empirical work illustrating the shaky ground on which this dogma is constructed, it is argued that people today are more individualistic than they were when they voted to go on strike in the 1950s and 1960s. As if, that is to say, it can be argued that the idea of instrumental collectivism had nothing to do with a self-serving individualism in the past.

Thus, the notion of a Golden Age in the SoW is problematical because it assumes that the period of sub-disciplinary consolidation between 1945 and 1975, during which major research was seen to form the basis for the development of what was the SoW genre, was superseded by a period of stasis and then fragmentation, if not dissipation. In short, the Golden Age was followed by the fall. A major drawback with reading the story using this now common narrative (the first part of it at any rate) is that it looks at developments in the SoW in terms of its supposed fragmentation. However, we see fragmentation in two ways which though temporarily related are actually different in kind. One refers to institutional fragmentation while the other addresses the perceived concern of disciplinary fragmentation. Looking at this from the standpoint of a sociology of the sociology of work (Castillo 1999) we can define the concern in two ways, internal and external.

It is precisely this fear of a loss of disciplinary control over the practice of the SoW that has led some to evoke the idea of the ‘Golden Age’. That not everyone constructs a ‘Golden Age’ and uses it in this way goes without saying. It has different purposes according to circumstance, but from our perspective it is problematical for the following reasons.

Firstly, the notion of a Golden Age is typically associated with the 1950s and the perception of its import, a retrospective invention obviously that cannot be divorced from time and context. This was a period of high growth, working class organisation, and the managed economy. Confidence in, and access to, research in industry and working-class communities was possible because of this. The discipline seemed to be coherent and focussed because this was the period of its consolidation in the bourgeois academy committed to, in this instance, exploring issues around conflict and insubordination (order and disorder) and in a world in which labour, and specifically the working class, was presumed to be committed to the great phase of national reconstruction. In other words, this was not so much a Golden Age so much as a context which was relatively fertile in terms of access and opportunity. Had other periods offered such opportunities then they might well have been lauded as ‘golden’ since they also address contexts and structures, prompting disciplinary opportunities, imaginings, new questions and methodologies of engagement.

Second, in relation to the question of social class and inequality, as well as lauding what was produced, we emphasised the question of what was *not* *produced – what was absent*? It is difficult in the sociological canon of the post war period to find accounts of the working lives of non-white workers, migrant workers and almost impossible to find any account of the work of women before the influence of second wave feminism.

Thus, the post war period while important was not the only period in which the ‘best’ sociology was practiced. Migrants, notably those from the Caribbean and Ireland during the early post war period, were central to the nationalised industries and the private building sector. This is germane to our argument concerning the relationship between dominant social discourse, the trajectory of what are perceived to be dominant social groups in society, and the study of these *as they were constituted by the SoW*. Irish immigrants, especially alongside migrants from the Caribbean, while increasingly important to the organised working class, were nevertheless culturally and ideationally excluded from its concerns. (See O’Grady, 1997, for an extraordinary narrative of the travails of post-war Irish speaking migrant workers in London’s building industry unable to communicate in English). Of course it was the latter, the organised working class in all its colour-blind ways, that was of such interest to post war studies of labour productivity, solidarity, order and control. During that so called Golden Age unpaid work and the absence of paid work was not considered worthy of reflection.

The mantra of the Golden Age fails to acknowledge how that context presented opportunities for research but at the same time legitimated and facilitated the narrowness of the gaze of that work (typically *within* the workplace). It elevates an era as though it were the endeavour of the ‘greats’ to produce ‘pure sociology’ without recognising both the limitations of that body of work and the socio-political context that made it possible. This was temporary, and when circumstances changed, access to workplaces would be considerably circumscribed. Future researchers would necessarily explore the absence of work, unregulated work and work in the home. Both the gaze and the access were to be challenged by a range of factors in the 1970s and 1980s; the feminist focus on the nature and meaning of work; the growing acknowledgement of racism; economic decline and the assault of neo-liberalism on work practices and trade unions. If the 1950s in some respects reflected the supersession of equality struggles over class struggles, the late 1990s saw the beginnings of a new focus on class: class from below, as articulated in a series of research agenda whose lineage we trace back to Beynon and then, as feminists trained in the profession, women in paid and unpaid work.

If we are to take as given the notion of the Golden Age as something to emulate or return to, we summarily dismiss the legitimacy of the latter. Feminist SoW explores non-paid contexts and the relationships between the paid/unpaid contexts. The research by those exploring marginalised, migrant and BME workers, and work exploring the fragmentation and fragility of the gig, hyphenated experience, (McDonald et al. and McBride and Smith, 2009) is vital to our understanding of the new terrains of the developing SoW in the UK. Lastly, the pursuit of the so-called Golden Age leads to a neglect of the importance and meaning of work for those who find that their work ‘is done’ (Waddington, 2017; Stephenson and Wray, 2017). To this extent we might say that the Golden Age fostered myopia and neglect, particularly of the vulnerable and marginalised. For the continued renewal of the SoW we might conclude with a new mantra: its muck and brass, not gold that matters and our own, admittedly partial, take on aspects of the SoW points to thematic areas that can be taken further in the continuously *spreading* sub-discipline. Perhaps we should move on from the negative view of struggles by work sociologists within sociology departments, and forget the concern with institutional and disciplinary *spread* since the 1960s. To do so means that we might be better placed to develop a sociology of sociology that can address the issues of disciplinary struggles beyond sociology departments. Thus, can we begin to better position the discipline as an ‘historical product’ (just as important in our time, as it has always been), as a crucial feature of a ‘type of ideological community’ contested in myriad ways according to social class, power, status and orientation?

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1. The role of the early Thatcher Conservative government on directly impacting the development of the wider discipline was evident when with the shift from the SSRC to the ESRC during Thatcher’s first government (the Social Science Research Council founded in 1965 became the Economic and Social Research Council in 1983). The reason for the shift was to commit to social science funding to projects that were deemed more ‘empirical’ and of ‘public concern’. What was critical was that the ideological nostrum then became the rationale for future government support more broadly and was adumbrated by New Labour neoliberal agendas committed to business centred research activity. See Holmwood, 2010, 2011, 2013 and Durand and Stewart (2014) comparing the process of neo liberal formation in its impact on the SoW in France and the UK. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Space does allow a fuller discussion of this aspect in the development of the SoW but the debate about the relationship between individualism and collectivism was to be witnessed in a range of registers. This debate, addressing as it does social change resulting from the structural evolution of late capitalism, comprises a considerable portfolio. See, inter alia, Alvesson and Willmott 1992; Knights and Willmott, 1989; Martinez Lucio and Stewart, 1997; Parker, 1999; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Kunda, 1992; Linstead, 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Whatever ‘mainstream sociology’ is, people often use this phrase without defining it. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See p 2 reference to Pettigrew et al. 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Perhaps the most important work exploring the origins and character of working class exclusion in this era, *Poverty the Forgotten Englishmen* by Coates and Silburn (1970) stands as testament to the post war ideological construction by both social democracy and the Conservative Party that everyone benefited equally from the post ’45 settlement. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)