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The dominant narratives

Introduction

All societies have to produce, distribute and allocate the goods and services required by their citizens. Every society, therefore, has an economy of some type. Economies, however, can be organized in various ways. To depict the configuration of economies, many commentators commonly differentiate three modes of delivering goods and services, namely the 'market' (private sector), the 'state' (public sector) and the 'community' (informal or third sector) (Boswell, 1990; Giddens, 1998; Gough, 2000; Polanyi, 1944; Powell, 1990; Putterman, 1990; Thompson *et al.*, 1991), although different labels are sometimes used, with Polanyi (1944) referring to 'market exchange', 'redistribution' and 'reciprocity', and Giddens (1998) discussing 'private', 'public' and 'civil society'.

Taking these three modes of delivering goods and services as its starting point, this chapter will reveal how a widespread consensus exists on how work will be organized in the future. First, it is believed that goods and services will be increasingly produced and delivered through the formal (market and state) sphere rather than through the community or informal sphere (i.e., henceforth known as the 'formalization' thesis). Secondly, it is held that this formal production and delivery of goods and services will increasingly occur through the market sector (rather than by the state or informal sphere). This will be referred to as the 'commodification' thesis. Finally, this process of commodification is asserted to be increasingly taking place within an open world economy in which businesses operate in a de-regulated seamless global marketplace (i.e., henceforth known as the 'globalization' thesis).

Here, it will be shown that these three meta-narratives about the future of work, namely formalization, commodification and globalization, are widely accepted as truths, even 'facts', about how work will be organized in the future. Yet despite being viewed as descriptions of the future, and visions challenging them denoted as prescriptive utopianism, this chapter uncovers that evidence is seldom sought to corroborate these supposed trajectories of work.

The formalization thesis asserts that goods and services are increasingly provided through the formal economy (the state and market spheres) and that the informal economy is in demise. Here, the intention is to reveal how this vision of the future of work, often seen as descriptive of what is taking place rather than as prescriptive of what should occur, not only constrains what is considered feasible and valid in the future but also marginalizes those contesting this vision as prescriptive utopian dreamers, despite the lack of evidence to corroborate this thesis.

To know whether goods and services are increasingly provided by the formal economy (the state and market spheres) and the informal economy dwindling, it is necessary to be able to differentiate 'work' from 'leisure' since unless this is done, one cannot know whether there is an ongoing shift in work from the informal to the formal economy. Some might assert that it is whether a task is paid or not that defines whether an activity is work or leisure. This, however, is not the case. Many unpaid tasks are viewed as 'work' so far as those doing these tasks are concerned, including housework, do-it-yourself activity, and caring for children and elderly people. Alternatively, therefore, it might be suggested that work can be distinguished from leisure according to the type of task being conducted. Yet, although tasks such as watching films, cooking or writing can be leisure, they can also be work. Film critics are engaged in work when watching films, chefs when cooking and authors when writing.

The most widely accepted way of distinguishing work from leisure, therefore, is to assess whether the task under consideration could be conducted by a third person (see Reid, 1934). If one is engaged in cooking as a leisure pursuit, for example, a third person could not undertake this task. A third person could undertake the cooking, however, if this task were perceived as work. The third-person criterion, or what can be seen as the possibility of labour substitution, thus distinguishes activities in the fuzzy area between work and non-work. Using this distinction between work and leisure, one can then evaluate whether a formalization of work is taking place. That is, it enables the differentiation of work from leisure so that one can assess whether an increasing amount of the total workload is being conducted through formal employment and a decreasing amount through 'informal' work, an accurate adjective that portrays how the social relations differ from the more 'formal' social relations of official employment.

Evaluating the amount of formal employment is relatively straightforward compared with evaluating the amount of informal work. Data is readily available in many countries, for example, on the numbers in employment, the hours worked and so forth. Determining the amount of informal work and how it is changing over time, however, is less simple and data not so readily available. A common way forward, therefore, is to break down informal work into its component parts for the purpose of estimating its

Exchange	Paid		Unpaid	
	Formal employment		Volunteering	
	Undeclared work		Reciprocal exchange	
Non-exchange	-		Self-provisioning	

Figure 2.1 A typology of work

magnitude. As Figure 2.1 identifies, there are at least three distinct categories of informal work. These are as follows.

1. 'Self-provisioning': It is unpaid work undertaken by household members for themselves and each other. This ranges from domestic labour through unpaid caring activities conducted for and by household members to do-it-yourself home maintenance and improvement work.
2. 'Unpaid community work': It is work provided on an unpaid basis by and for the extended family, social or neighbourhood networks and more formal voluntary and community groups, and ranges from kinship exchange, through friendship/neighbourly reciprocal exchanges, to one-way volunteering for voluntary organizations.
3. 'Paid informal exchange': Here legal goods and services are exchanged for money, but these exchanges are unregistered by, or hidden from, the state for tax, social security or labour law purposes. Although some of this work is market-like and conducted for profit, some is also conducted as paid favours for kin, friends and neighbours and more akin to unpaid community work than market-like employment (Williams, 2004a).

Each form of work, to reiterate, is not composed of different tasks. For example, it cannot be asserted that cooking is domestic work and window cleaning is employment. Cooking, for instance, can be conducted as unpaid domestic work (e.g. where one cooks for oneself and/or one's family), unpaid community work (e.g. where one cooks for neighbours or friends on an unpaid basis), paid informal work (e.g. where one cooks in a restaurant on an off-the-books basis for 'informal' payments that are not declared to the government for tax, benefit or labour law purposes) or formal employment (e.g. where one is a formally employed chef either registered, self-employed or paid on a PAYE basis). Therefore, it is not the tasks that differentiate one form of work from another, but the social relations within which the work is embedded (Gershuny, 2000; Morris, 1994; Pahl, 1984; Williams and Windebank, 2003a). In the formalization thesis,

the trajectory of work asserted to be taking place is one in which goods and services are increasingly provided through the social relations of formal employment. The shaded segment of Figure 2.1, in other words, is depicted as expanding, and the informal spheres of self-provisioning, unpaid community exchange and paid informal work as contracting.

This narrative of formalization is not only widely held but also at the heart of some of the most popular depictions of the trajectory of economic development. Consider, for example, how the world is conventionally divided up into First, Second and Third worlds. The First World, the supposedly 'advanced' economies of the West, is in major part so defined because it is viewed as having already undergone the transformation from informal to formal modes of production to the greatest extent. Based on the view that formalization is a natural and inevitable trajectory of economic development that all nations will and must follow, these First World nations are thus placed at the front of the queue in this linear and one-dimensional vision of economic development while those nations in the second and third worlds are positioned behind them in the queue due to their slower progression towards formalization. The way in which economies that are more grounded in 'community' or 'subsistence' are labelled 'backward' compared with economic systems that rely more on formal employment, meanwhile, is nowhere better seen than in those countries aggregated together under the banner of the Third World. Labelled 'developing', 'undeveloped' or 'under-developed' countries precisely due to their slowness in moving towards formalization, these name tags denote clearly that there is only one possible trajectory, as well as a singular 'route to progress', and it is towards formalization.

This powerful discourse of formalization, however, does not only describe the direction of change, hierarchically ordering countries in the present and informing them of their trajectory, but also serves to shape thinking about what action is required by supranational institutions, national governments, economic development agencies and individuals themselves. Take, for example, Western governments. Grounded in this grand narrative that details what constitutes 'progress', governments of Western nations have tended to concentrate exclusively on developing the formal economy and viewed informal work as at best playing a supporting role, and at worst deleterious to development and something to be formalized so as to allow this future of work to be implemented. It is similarly the case in the ex-socialist bloc of East-Central Europe where the whole thrust of economic policy has been focused upon how to facilitate the 'transition' to a formal market economy. In the majority (Third) world, it is again the pursuit of formalization that sets the economic policy agenda. One has only to consider the structural adjustment programmes applied to these countries to realize that a strong normative view exists that progress lies in encouraging a successful transformation towards an economic system where the formal economy becomes an increasingly dominant mode of producing and delivering goods and services. Throughout the world, therefore, the narrative of formalization whereby the formal economy replaces the informal sphere is not only a thesis viewed as descriptive of the trajectory of economic

development but also a thesis that has shaped what is viewed as 'progress' (i.e., it asserts what should occur).

The formalization thesis, in consequence, is not just a theory that is seeking to reflect the supposed reality but is also being used to shape how work will be organized in the future. As Carrier (1998: 8) puts it, there is a 'conscious attempt to make the real world conform to the virtual image, justified by the claim that the failure of the real to conform to the idea is a consequence not merely of imperfections, but is a failure that itself has undesirable consequences'. In this so-called 'virtualism', the formalization thesis is thus more than merely a theory seeking to portray the trajectory of work. It is a prescriptive discourse 'driven by ideas and idealism [and] the desire to make the world conform to the image' (Carrier, 1998: 5). This is nowhere more finely displayed than in the seminal work of Escobar (1995) who displays how the so-called 'Third World economies' became viewed as a problem due to their lack of 'development' (i.e., formalization), and charts how a whole range of institutions and practices were constructed to help them conform more to the desired image.

The formalization thesis is therefore not so much a theory about the trajectory of work but more a prescription that superimposes onto formal and informal work normative judgements about their desirability. The formal economy in this thesis represents progress, modernity and advancement while the informal economy is indicative of backwardness, under-development and traditionalism. As such, this formalization thesis depicts the formal and the informal economy as what Derrida (1967) calls a 'binary hierarchy'. For him, Western thought is dominated by a hierarchical binary mode of thinking that, first, conceptualizes objects/identities as stable, bounded and constituted via negation and, secondly, reads the resultant binary structures in a hierarchical manner where the first term in any dualistic opposite (the superordinate) is endowed with positivity and the second term, the subordinate (or subservient) 'other' with negativity. Read through this lens, the depiction of the formal and the informal economy in the formalization thesis is one in which the informal economy represents the subordinate 'other' endowed with negativity while the formal economy is read as a superordinate and is attributed with positivity.

Indeed, to see how the informal economy is read in this dominant narrative as a subservient 'other' endowed with negativity, whose meaning is established solely in relation to its superordinate opposite (the formal economy), one needs look no further than the numerous adjectives to denote this sphere. As Latouche (1993: 129) recognizes, 'most of them simply qualify – either directly or indirectly – whatever is meant, in a negative way'. Various referred to as 'non-structured', 'unpaid', 'non-official', 'non-organized', 'a-normal', 'hidden', 'a-legal', 'black', 'submerged', 'non-visible', 'shadow', 'a-typical' or 'irregular', this sphere is thus denoted as 'bereft of its own logic or identity other than can be indicated by this displacement away from, or even effacement of, the "normal"' (Latouche, 1993: 129). It is described by what it is not – what is absent from, or insufficient about, such work – relative to the formal sphere and this absence or insufficiency is always viewed as a negative feature of such work.

It is not simply the adjectives used to denote this sphere, however, that display how the formal/informal economy is represented as a binary hierarchy. The narrative of what constitutes progress in the formalization thesis similarly privileges the superordinate over the subordinate other. The informal sector is read as primitive or traditional, stagnant, marginal, residual, weak and about to be extinguished; a leftover of pre-capitalist formations that the 'inexorable and inevitable march of formalization will eradicate. Indeed, a universal natural and inevitable shift towards the formalization of goods and services provision is envisaged as societies become more 'advanced'. The persistence of supposedly traditional informal activities, therefore, is taken as a manifestation of 'backwardness' (e.g., Geertz, 1963) and it is assumed that such work will disappear with economic 'progress' (Lewis, 1959). Informal work is read as existing in the interstices, or as scattered and fragmented across the economic landscape. Formal work, by contrast, is represented as systematic, naturally expansive, and coextensive with the national or world economy.

Such a hierarchical and temporal sequencing of formal and informal work in the formalization thesis, therefore, focuses upon the imminent destruction of the informal economy, its proto-capitalist qualities, its weak and determined positions, viewing it either as 'the mere vestige of a disappearing past [or as] transitory or provisional' (Latouche, 1993: 49). Never is the informal sector represented as resilient, ubiquitous, capable of generative growth, or driving economic change in the formalization thesis. Nor is it represented as part of a multitude of different forms of work coexisting in the contemporary world but instead is always positioned in a temporal sequence where the informal sphere is characterized as a remnant of the past and 'backward', whilst the formal sphere is characterized as 'modern' and 'progressive'.

In the formalization thesis, furthermore, the informal sphere is near enough always viewed as possessing wholly negative attributes whilst the 'progressive' formal sphere is assumed to possess positive features. To see this, one needs look no further than how the populist commentator Jeremy Seabrook (2003: 9–10) views those working in the informal economy: 'The Western poor are dead souls... hustlers and survivors, economic shadows in the shadow economy, the discouraged and despairing who have fallen through the bottom line of accounting systems.' Such a negative depiction of the informal sphere is not confined to populist commentators. Many political economists, recognizing that the informal sector is persistent and growing, have portrayed it as a new form of work emerging in late capitalism as a direct result of the advent of a de-regulated open world economy, which is encouraging a race-to-the-bottom. In this reading, informal workers are viewed as sharing the same characteristics subsumed under the heading of 'downgraded labour': they receive few benefits, low wages and have poor working conditions (e.g., Castells and Portes, 1989; Gallin, 2001; Portes, 1994; Sassen, 1997). In sum, the depiction is of the informal sphere as a pre-modern sector composed of workers engaged in exploitative and oppressive work, and thus a hindrance to 'progress'. Seldom are positive attributes assigned to the informal sphere, such as how this work is autonomous and often rewarding in nature for its participants.

The outcome, and whether the First, Second or Third Worlds are under the spotlight, is that the trajectory of work has become closed. There is only one future of work organization in this story and it is one in which there is a linear development path towards a formal world. Yet despite the widespread acceptance of this thesis along with its normative propositions, little evidence is ever brought to the fore to corroborate that this is indeed the direction of change and that formal work possesses positive attributes and informal work negative features. Instead, it is simply assumed that this is the case. Given that no other idea in the social sciences (with one or two exceptions discussed below) is simply accepted without evidence, there is a dire need for some rigorous investigation of this thesis, especially when it is recognized that it not only seeks to reflect lived practice but also acts as a narrative that is being used to shape how work will be organized in the future.

Imagine just for a moment that such an investigation revealed that economies were not becoming ever more formalized and that the formal sphere was actually receding in many quarters of the globe as a mode of producing and delivering goods and services. Rather than the future being cast in a straitjacket of the ever wider and deeper encroachment of the formal economy, the future would suddenly become much more open and full of endless new possibilities. For those believing in the grand narrative of formalization, this probably comes across at best as a romantic dream of somebody who wishes the future to be a return to some primitive past, and at worst as nonsensical. In Chapter 3, however, this questioning of formalization will be shown to be far from some pipedream. Once this narrative of a linear development path towards formalization is rigorously evaluated rather than merely accepted as 'fact', it becomes quickly apparent that some large question marks are required over this purported trajectory of work and that it is perhaps those assuming the ubiquity of formalization who are romanticizing the future rather than facing the stark reality that economies are moving in heterogeneous directions.

The commodification thesis

It is not only the story of an ongoing formalization of work whereby goods and services are increasingly produced and delivered through the formal (market and state) sphere rather than using informal work (e.g., unpaid self-provisioning, volunteering, reciprocity) that narrows the scope of what is considered feasible, valid and possible regarding the future of work. A further dominant narrative that severely constrains how the future is envisaged is the story that the formal production and delivery of goods and services is increasingly occurring through the market sector (rather than by the state or informal spheres). This is here termed the 'commodification' thesis but might also be termed the 'commercialization' or 'marketization' thesis.

At the present moment in history, the near universal belief is that of the three modes of delivering goods and services, the market is expanding while the other two spheres are contracting (e.g., Lee, 1999, 2000a; Polanyi, 1944; Scott, 2001; Smith, 2000; Watts, 1999).

Few can today imagine a future based on anything other than the further encroachment of capitalism. As Amin *et al.* (2002b: 60) pronounce, 'the pervasive reach of exchange-value society makes it ever more difficult to imagine and legitimate non-market forms of organization and provision'. This belief in the growing dominance of capitalism not only has few doubters but to even question such a belief is near heresy in the current climate. To do so results in one being marked out at best as prescribing some unachievable utopia, and at worst as some idealistic dreamer who is way out of touch with reality.

How, therefore, does the commodification thesis view the trajectory so far as the production and delivery of goods and services is concerned? Breaking this thesis down into its component parts, first, the belief is that goods and services are increasingly produced for exchange; secondly, these exchanges are seen to increasingly take place on a monetized basis; and, finally, this monetized exchange is viewed as increasingly occurring for the purpose of profit.

Given this definition of commodified work (monetized exchange for the purpose of profit), its opposite, non-commodified work, can be divided into three distinctive types of work (Figure 2.2). First, there is non-exchanged work, often referred to as 'self-provisioning', 'self-servicing', 'housework', 'subsistence' or 'domestic work'. Secondly, there is non-monetized exchange where goods and services are exchanged but no money changes hands. Finally, there is monetized exchange where the profit-motive is absent, as found in the public and 'not-for-profit' sectors.

For adherents to the commodification thesis, the shaded area of Figure 2.2, namely monetized for-profit exchange, is seen to be expanding while non-commodified economic practices are contracting. Although few would assert that the process of commodification is complete, the near universal belief is that economies are rapidly shifting towards such a situation. Populist writers such as Rifkin (2000: 3) argue that 'The marketplace is a pervasive force in our lives', political economists such as Ciscel and Heath (2001: 401) argue that capitalism is transforming 'every human interaction into a transient market exchange', while anthropologists such as Gudeman (2001: 144) purport that 'markets are subsuming greater portions of everyday life', and Carruthers

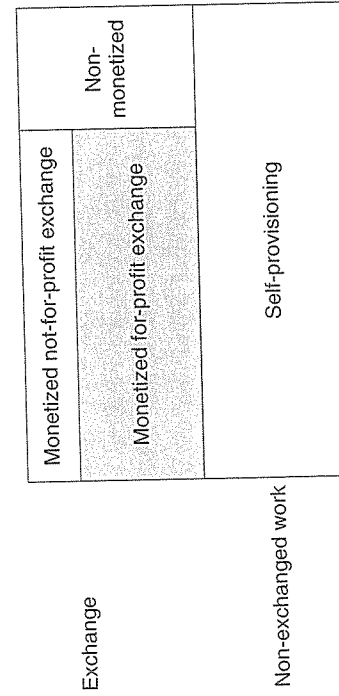


Figure 2.2 Forms of economic activity

and Babb (2000: 4) believe that there has been 'the near-complete penetration of market relations into our modern economic lives'. As Gough (2000: 17) puts it in the context of the changes in East-Central Europe,

Following decolonization and the collapse of state socialism at the end of the 1980s, few areas of the world remain to resist the logic of capitalist markets and economic enterprises. This in turn is imposing the needs of capital in more and more areas of life and is weakening the resources of states and citizens to fight back.

Castree *et al.* (2004: 16–17) argue, similarly, 'that this is a predominantly capitalist world seems to us indisputable... there's scarcely a place on the planet where this mode of production does not have some purchase... this system of production arguably now has few, if any, serious economic rivals'. As Dicken (2003: 579–80) puts it,

More than at any time in the past 50 years, virtually the entire world economy is now a *market economy*. The collapse of the state socialist systems at the end of the 1980s and their headlong rush to embrace the market, together with the more controlled opening-up of the Chinese economy since 1979, has created a very different global system from that which emerged after World War II. Virtually all parts of the world are now, to a greater or lesser extent, connected into an increasingly integrated system in which the parameters of the market dominate.

The outcome, in the eyes of a leading neo-liberal economist is that 'Capitalism stands alone as the only feasible way rationally to organize a modern economy' (De Soto, 2001: 1) and asserts that 'all plausible alternatives to capitalism have now evaporated' (De Soto, 2001: 13). It is not just neo-liberals, however, who view this to be the case. As one of the key intellectuals of the Western left, Perry Anderson, asserts, 'For the first time since the Reformation, there are no longer any significant oppositions – that is, systematic rival outlooks – within the thought-world of the West; and scarcely any on a world scale either, if we discount religious doctrines as largely inoperative archaisms' (Anderson, 2000: 17).

For adherents to the narrative of commodification, in sum, one mode of exchange is replacing all others. The commodified realm is becoming *the* economic institution rather than one mode of producing and delivering goods and services amongst many. This is seldom questioned. The notions that the commodified realm is expanding and the non-commodified sphere shrinking have today taken on the aura of uncontested facts.

The only debate and discussion seems to concern the pace, extent and unevenness of this process. Take, for example, the extent of commodification. For some, the process is rather more complete and the commodity economy more hegemonic than for others. Comeltau (2002: 45), for example, talks of 'its almost *exclusive* use to solve the great majority of economic and social problems', while Thrift (2000: 96) asserts that 'What is certain is that the process of commodification has reached into every nook and cranny of modern life'. For others, however, there is still seen to be some distance to travel before

the total commodification of working life is absolute (e.g., Gough, 2000; Lee, 1999; Watts, 1999). As Watts (1999: 312) puts it,

The process by which everything becomes a commodity – and therefore everything comes to acquire a price and a monetary form (commodification/commodification) – is not complete, even in our own societies where transactions still occur outside of the marketplace. But the reality of capitalism is that ever more of social life is mediated through and by the market.

Amongst such commentators, therefore, there is no questioning of whether a process of commodification is taking place. The only debate is over the extent to which it has so far colonized the non-commodified realm and the distance that needs to be travelled before the process is complete. To assess this, and as can be seen above, commentators seldom offer more than some broad-brush qualitative judgement. None attempt to measure, even in the crudest terms, the extent of its encroachment. Instead, it is more examples that tend to be provided, such as the one shown in Case Study 2.1, as evidence that its tentacles are stretching wider and deeper.

Case Study 2.1 The commodification of communities of interest

To display how the commodified realm is supposedly stretching its tentacles ever wider into previously inviolable sanctuaries, Rifkin (2000) points to how social relationships are becoming commodified. Whereas in the past, communities of interest might have developed organically around hobbies and were firmly anchored in civil society, today, commercial companies for profit-motivated purposes are asserted to manufacture communities of interest with the intention of nurturing longer-term customer-supplier relationships so as to extract 'lifetime value' from the customer.

Cross and Smith (1995) identify four key stages for businesses when developing 'communities of interest'. Stage I is 'awareness bonding', where the customer is made aware of the firm's product or service with the expectation of negotiating a first sale. Stage II is 'identity bonding', where the customer identifies with the firm's product or service and incorporates it into his or her sense of self (e.g., driving a VW beetle becomes a social statement as much as a means of transportation). Stage III is 'relationship bonding', where the firm and customer move from an arm's length relationship to an interactive one, where customer intimacy is developed, such as by sending birthday and anniversary cards. Stage IV is 'community bonding', where the company brings its customers into relationships with one another based on their shared interest in the firm's products or services. This establishes long-term commercial relationships for the company and optimizes the lifetime value of each customer. For the customer, to break this bond means to break social ties.

Rifkin (2000) provides examples of how these communities of interest are created using events, gatherings and other activities to bring customers together to share their common interest in the company's brand. For example, the recreational vehicle (RV) industry has more than 30 manufacturer-sponsored RV clubs that draw members who own the same kind of RV together into a community. The Winnebago-Itasca Travellers Club, for example, has 19,000 members and its 250 chapters hold frequent rallies throughout the US and Canada with members receiving a monthly magazine and perks, including travel route advice, insurance product discounts and even a mail-forwarding service when on the road. The club accounts for more than 20 per cent of the company's annual motor home sales.

That commercial firms nurture long-term 'customer intimacy' and 'community bonding' as a surrogate social sphere within a commercial wrapper displays for adherents to the commodification thesis, such as Rifkin (2000), how the commodified realm is permeating wider and deeper into everyday life.

It is similarly the case that few seek detailed empirical evidence when discussing the pace and unevenness of commodification. On the pace of commodification, it is often simply remarked that it is speeding up. On the issue of the unevenness of its penetration, broad-brush qualitative judgements are again made rather than measured evaluations. As Harvey (2000: 68) posits with regard to what he considers a highly uneven process,

if there is any real qualitative trend it is towards the reassertion of early nineteenth-century capitalist values coupled with a twenty-first century penchant for pulling everyone (and everything that can be exchanged) into the orbit of capital while rendering large segments of the world's population permanently redundant in relation to the basic dynamics of capital accumulation.

Indeed, this is the consensus. Even if the commodified realm is forever stretching outwards to pull in more spheres of life and colonize areas previously untouched by its hand, this is widely regarded as a highly uneven process. This is clearly seen in discussions and comparisons of the First, Second and Third Worlds. In nearly all analyses, the stark differentials between the penetration of the commodity economy in the First World compared with the Second and the Third Worlds are continuously drawn so as to highlight the unevenness of commodification. Few, however, doubt that the overarching global trajectory is towards commodification.

Neither is there much difference between right- and left-wing political discourses. Both sides of the political spectrum concur that the overarching process is one of commodification, even if their reasons for asserting this and normative views on its consequences vary considerably. As such, besides discussions on the pace, extent and unevenness of the process of commodification, there are also contrasting normative positions about, first, whether it is to be celebrated or not and, second and often inextricably interrelated, whether it is a 'natural' and 'organic' or a 'socially constructed' process.

Commodification: a positive or negative trend?

On whether this turn towards a commodified world is to be celebrated or not, various positions exist. At one end of the spectrum are those neo-liberals for whom commodification is a positive trend that results in liberation, freedom and progress from the irrational constraints of tradition and collective bonds, creating a social order from the market-coordinated actions of free and rational individuals. This advocacy of commodification is often inextricably tied to a view of market-oriented behaviour as the natural basis for all social life. Depicted for instance in Thatcherism, a cultural and political revolution is viewed as required to remove from social life anything that might reduce the centrality of market models as the basis of social order.

As Block (2002) points out, this celebratory view of capitalism in neo-liberal thought has taken on board many of the tenets of what originally was a critical Marxian discourse. On the one hand, the very term 'capitalism', that until the late 1960s was unused in polite company, has now been adopted by neo-liberals in a much more positive sense to convey the type of society being sought. On the other hand, the core Marxist idea that economic organization sets the basic frame for the larger society, previously considered objectionable and rejected as 'vulgar materialism', is now widely accepted by neo-liberals. The result is that today 'capitalism' is the name that the business media uses, and the idea that the structure of the economy determines the wider society has been transformed from 'vulgar materialism' to common sense. Even more importantly, the fundamentally Marxian claim that capitalism as an economic system is global, unified and coherent was embraced by Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and other apostles of neo-liberal ideology in order to encourage their goals of privatization, deregulation and public sector retrenchment. In an increasingly global capitalist economy, it was asserted that countries had no choice but to follow such a path.

For many on the left of the political spectrum, meanwhile, commodification is again accepted but seen more negatively. For them, the increasing penetration of the market is highlighted so as to display how it leads to an eroding of communal life and has deleterious consequences for social values that might stand above the merely economic measure of price (e.g., Comelieu, 2002; Slater and Tonkiss, 2001). As Comelieu (2002: 45), for example, states,

wherever market rationality acquires dominance, it transforms *social relations in their entirety*. Resting as it does upon private appropriation and competition, it entails individualist rivalry far more than mutual support as the basis for relations among the members of a society. It thus has a destructive impact upon the 'social fabric' itself.

This highlighting of the deleterious impacts of commodification, of course, is by no means new. Indeed, Beveridge (1948: 322), widely recognized as the founder of the modern welfare state, was seriously concerned about the emergence of what he called the 'business motive'. For him, there was a need to hold onto 'something other than the pursuit of gain as the dominant force in society. The business motive . . . is . . . in continual or repeated conflict with the Philanthropic Motive, and has too often been successful.'

He concludes that 'the business motive is a good servant but a bad master, and a society which gives itself up to the dominance of the business motive is a bad society'. The negative view of commodification thus views the implementation of an implacable logic of quantification and formal rationality as producing inequality, social disorder, loss of substantive values and a destruction of both individual and social relations.

Commodification: a natural and inevitable process?

Interrelated to this debate on the virtues and drawbacks of commodification is a discussion concerning whether such a trajectory of work is 'natural' and 'organic', or 'socially created'. For neo-liberals, commodification is usually seen as a natural or organic process whilst for those critical of the consequences it is more commonly viewed as socially constructed. Before analysing these contrasting positions, however, it is necessary to reiterate the shared 'buying into' the meta-narrative of commodification by both bodies of thought. As Slater and Tonkiss (2001: 3–4) assert, 'recent political and economic orthodoxies treat markets as self-evident, permanent and incontestable'.

In the 'natural' or 'organic' view, this trajectory towards capitalist hegemony is portrayed as inevitable, all-powerful and all-conquering, even a supernatural force that is unstoppable. Indeed, this natural force is even sometimes assigned with human characteristics and emotions. In the business media, for example, markets are often described as buoyant, calm, depressed, expectant, hesitant, nervous and sensitive. Sometimes the pound sterling, euro or US dollar has a good day, at other times it is ailing or sinking fast. Markets seem, therefore, to be ascribed with human attributes beyond the control of mere mortals. They are superhuman figures. This is more than simply a ruse to make them more comprehensible to the public by financial journalists. It is imbuing markets with the force of nature, giving them a divine will. The result of such imagery becomes that 'there is no alternative' but to obey the logic of this all-powerful force. Read through this lens, capitalism is constructed as existing outside of society or even above it. Reflecting the stance of many economists and formal anthropologists, the economy becomes a separate differentiated sphere. Instead of economic life being part of broader social relations, these relations become an epiphenomenon of the market; there is an economization of culture.

For those more critical of its consequences, however, this 'unembedded' and organic view of capitalism is rejected. For them, this economy is socially constructed and although the momentum is towards an ever more commodified world, this does not mean that it cannot be stopped. Following Polanyi (1944: 140), it has been widely recognized that 'the road to the free market was opened and kept open by an enormous increase in continuous, centrally organized, and controlled interventionism' and, as such, that commodification is a created system rather than an organic one.

One way in which this view of commodification as a created system has come to the fore, albeit implicitly, is in the literature on the 'varieties of capitalism' (e.g., Albert, 1993;

Berger and Dore, 1996; Coates, 2002a,b,c; Crouch and Streek, 1997; Hollingsworth and Beyer, 1997; Orru *et al.*, 1997; Whitley, 2002). The contention that different varieties of capitalism developed in Anglo-Saxon countries, Continental Europe and East Asia, for example, displays that there is no one single variety with one uniform logic but a multiplicity of strains reflecting the different social systems in which they are created. The key problem with this varieties-of-capitalism literature, however, is that it has been largely silent on the critical issue of capitalism as a natural system (Block, 2002). Although implicit is the idea that there is no single unified system that operates like a force of nature, it is seldom explicit. The outcome is the persistence of a view that capitalism is some natural or organic system beyond the control of the societies in which it exists.

Nevertheless, even when depicted as a created rather than organic system, the validity of the commodification thesis is still not widely questioned. A commodification of economic life is still seen to be taking place. Although in principle, social constructionists need not argue this since they recognize that commodification is not inevitable, in practice, few do so. To transcend the commodification thesis, in consequence, it is necessary to investigate much more directly whether there is evidence to support this meta-narrative concerning the direction of work.

Where is the evidence to support the commodification thesis?

Given the widespread belief that a process of commodification is taking place, one might think that there would be mountains of evidence in support of this view of the direction of work. Yet a worrying and disturbing finding, once one starts to investigate the musings of adherents to commodification, is that hardly any evidence is ever brought to the fore either to show that a process of commodification is taking place or even to display the extent, pace or unevenness of its penetration. For example, the above-stated pronouncements by Rifkin (2000: 3) that 'The marketplace is a pervasive force in our lives', Ciscel and Heath (2001: 401) that capitalism is transforming 'every human interaction into a transient market exchange' and Gudeman (2001: 144) that 'markets are subsuming greater portions of everyday life' are offered to the reader with no supporting data of any kind. Similarly, the assertion by Carruthers and Babb (2000: 4) mentioned earlier that there has been 'the near-complete penetration of market relations into our modern economic lives' is justified by nothing more than the statement that 'markets enter our lives today in many ways "too numerous to be mentioned"' and the spurious notion that the spread of commodified 'ways of viewing' particular spheres of life signals how commodification is becoming hegemonic. Watts (1999: 312), in the same vein, supports his belief that although 'commodification is not complete... the reality of capitalism is that ever more of social life is mediated through and by the market' merely by avowing that subsistence economies are increasingly rare.

The thin evidence offered by these authors is by no means exceptional. Few commentators move beyond what Martin and Sunley (2001: 152) in another context

term 'vague theory and thin empirics'. Perhaps because it is a widely accepted canon of wisdom, evidence is seldom deemed necessary. If this were some minor inconsequential academic theory, this might not greatly matter. However, commodification is seemingly the principal rationale underpinning the restructuring approach adopted in both 'transition' economies and the 'Third World'. It is also the main concept underpinning the focus upon the market in economic policy in Western nations. It is thus crucial that this key issue is interrogated. Unless this occurs, it will not be known whether the current focus of economic policy upon the commodified realm is built upon firm foundations or not.

Perhaps the process of commodification, akin to formalization, is so obvious to all concerned that there is little need to provide evidence. Perhaps, however, it is not. As mentioned above, no other ideas in the social sciences are accepted without detailed corroboration and there are no grounds for exempting the commodification thesis from a similar process of enquiry. Perhaps the only reason for exempting it is if one believes that it is an irrefutable fact. If so, then interrogating that this is indeed the case should be welcomed, especially given the paucity of evidence so far provided.

Why, therefore, is evidence not sought? One principal reason is that the emergence of commodified 'ways of viewing' each and every aspect of daily life is mistakenly taken to signify a process of commodification. To take just one example, recent years have seen the advent of discussions of a 'marriage market' whereby people seek out and take decisions on partners much like any other profit-orientated investment. Yet just because a sphere of human life can be read in a commodified manner does not mean that this sphere is now commodified. Just because one can read marriage and partnership in a commodified way does not mean that everybody now marries or chooses partners for profit-motivated purposes. The advent of a commodified way of viewing some aspects of life does not delineate that it is now commodified.

Just because the language of commercialism is now colonizing more and more areas of human existence, reaching far into inviolable sanctuaries, such that we can now talk of emotional investments and of the returns on our relationships, does not mean that all human relationships are now commodified. Making such and such a friendship might pay dividends, be profitless, rewarding, cost us dear, we may shop around for new friendships, be in the market for a new relationship, have the assets of our youth, intellect or energy so that we can make capital out of them, there may be pay-offs, bonuses to be had and meagre returns from friendships, and we may all have our price, but this language does not mean that commodification is omnipresent. When Wolff (1989: 76) argues that the logic of the market has increasingly penetrated our most intimate social relations of family and community, and 'in a way unprecedented in the American experience the market has become attractive not only in the economic sphere, but in the moral and social spheres as well', the advent of a way of viewing is being confused with a process of commodification itself.

Despite this imagining of an increasingly commodified world from the development of commodified 'ways of viewing', commentators must know that this is not the case.

They live in societies and understand the social mores that prevail. Those living in Western societies must know that seeking monetary profit in all social transactions is widely deemed unacceptable and inappropriate. Even if one acts in a market-like manner in commercial transactions, the same cannot apply to exchanges between friends and kin where reciprocity, altruism and charity should and must prevail. Different exchange relations are appropriate and acceptable in different social situations. Doing a favour for kin, friends or neighbours is very different to selling a service to a client, and disputes over whether something is a favour or a service is a dispute over whether the relationship is friendship or commerce. Just because an altruistic favour can be read as market-like and profit-motivated does not make it so.

There are thus well-defined socially constructed boundaries that it is unacceptable to cross, or what Block (2002) calls 'blockages to commodification'. Indeed, such blockages or barriers have been the main theme underpinning some 'blockbuster' movies. An example is the 1993 film tellingly entitled *Indecent Proposal*. Starring Robert Redford as a Las Vegas playboy who pays \$1 million to spend a night with Woody Harrelson's wife Demi Moore, despite her initial protest, 'The dress is for sale, I'm not', this movie deals with one particular type of 'blocked exchange'. Indeed, the fact that this type of exchange remains 'blocked' well over a decade later is evident from the wide media coverage given to a case in the UK involving a married multi-millionaire who had supposedly offered a husband the sum of £1 million if his wife spent the rest of her life with him. The publicity surrounding the case and the fact that this 'market exchange' reached the High Court reflect the fact that this remains a 'blocked exchange' that crosses the boundaries of what is an acceptable transaction. Another example, provided by Hochschild (2003), concerns the degree to which it is acceptable to buy various intimate services (see Case Study 2.2).

Case Study 2.2 Commodification: the boundaries of acceptability

To display the barriers to the commodification of intimacy, Hochschild (2003: 30) reproduced the following advertisement for her students that apparently appeared on the Internet on 6 March 2001:

(p/t) Beautiful, smart, hostess, good masseuse – \$400/week

Hi there.

This is a strange job opening, and I feel silly posting it, but this is San Francisco and I do have a need! This will be a very confidential process.

I'm a mild-mannered millionaire businessman, intelligent, travelled, but shy, who is new to the area, and extremely inundated with invitations to parties, gatherings

and social events. I'm looking to find a 'personal assistant', of sorts. The job description would include, but not be limited to:

- being hostess to parties at my home (\$40/hour)
- providing me with a soothing and sensual massage (\$140/hour)
- Coming to certain social events with me (\$40/hour)
- Travelling with me (\$300/day + all travel expenses)
- managing some of my home affairs (utilities, bill-paying, etc.) (\$30/hour)

You must be between 22 and 32, in-shape, good-looking, articulate, sensual, attentive, bright and able to keep confidences. I don't expect more than 3 to 4 events per month, and up to 10 hours a week on massage, chores and other miscellaneous items, at the most. You must be unmarried, unattached, or have a very understanding partner!

I'm a bright, intelligent 30-year old man, and I'm happy to discuss the reasons for my placing this ad with you on response of your e-mail application. If you can, please include a picture of yourself, or a description of your likes, interests, and your ability to do the job.

NO professional escorts please! NO sex involved!

Thank you

You can e-mail me at . . . '

Hochschild (2003) asked her upper-division students at the University of California their response to this advertisement. Responses were largely negative ranging from anxious refusal ('he can't buy a wife') through condemnation ('he shouldn't buy a wife') to considerations of the emotional and moral flaws that led him to write this advertisement, thus displaying the well-defined blockages to commodification. For Hochschild (2003: 31), therefore, this is evidence that a 'commodity frontier' exists. As women enter the labour force, personal tasks are becoming monetized and impersonalized, but there remain frontiers beyond which it remains unacceptable to pass so far as the commodification of intimacy is concerned.

Many further examples can be provided of how profit-motivated transactions are blocked. Society expects professionals such as doctors, lawyers and architects not simply to maximize their incomes, but to obey a series of ethical injunctions. Of course, professionals might sometimes ignore these ethical considerations: journalists may slant their coverage in exchange for personal favours or gifts; or surgeons may recommend the same lucrative operation to patients whether they need it or not. The point, however, is that the effective functioning of these institutions is compromised if these ethical injunctions are disregarded. If, for example, accountants were simply to charge a little extra to approve a firm's balance sheet no matter how much financial fraud is involved,

economic activity would quickly grind to a halt because investors would no longer be able to trust the financial information that they were receiving.

Further evidence that commodification is blocked in contemporary Western society can be seen when considering the flow of money between people. Domains can be identified where, although money may not be completely excluded, its use is often highly constrained or restricted. Take, for example, the exchange of gifts. Although the giving of gifts is a universal trait, its pattern and meaning vary cross-culturally (Bloch and Parry, 1989; Carruthers and Espeland, 2001). In many Western societies, gift exchange tends to be personal and altruistic relative to impersonal and self-interested commodity exchange. As Gregory (1982: 12) states, 'commodity exchange is an exchange of alienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal independence... Non-commodity (gift) exchange is an exchange of inalienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal dependence.' Gift exchange establishes and/or maintains a social relationship between the giver and recipient. A gift invokes an obligation – a relationship of indebtedness, status difference or even subordination. As such, the meaning of the gift must be appropriate to the relationship. And in contemporary advanced economies, money is seldom seen as an appropriate gift. As Carruthers and Espeland (2001: 301) state,

some exchanges are protected from monetization and commodification because of their inappropriate ethos. Money in our society is so strongly identified with market exchange that its attachment to something brings with it strong 'economic' connotations that may be deemed unsuitable. In many situations, the use of money violates and endangers the spirit of gift-giving. Consequently, money is generally inappropriate as a gift, and even when it is used as such, all kinds of restrictions, framings, markings, and reinterpretations come into play.

Furthermore, one would never offer money to somebody who invited you to dinner as a substitute for returning the favour. The debt is personal and direct and must be repaid in kind. Norms of exchange evolve, however, and are not timeless and unchanging. What is inappropriate at one time period or place can become acceptable later or elsewhere.

Similarly, there persists in some liberal Western middle-class circles a perception that one should not employ 'domestic workers' to undertake one's housework since this is deemed an unacceptable exploitative practice that smacks of domestic servitude. The point quite simply is that blockages are always present. Although these blockages change over time and space, there are always blockages of one form or another. The argument of exponents of commodification, therefore, can be read as contending that the spheres subject to blocked exchanges are dwindling in number over time as the tentacles of commodification stretch ever deeper and wider. Until now, no evidence has been provided of whether this is the case. This will be evaluated in Chapter 4. The strong consensus embedded in the commodification thesis, nevertheless, is that the commodity economy is increasingly totalizing, hegemonic, all encompassing and universal. Indeed,

it is this assumption of an increasingly commodified world that underpins the final meta-narrative, which often delimits what is considered valid and feasible to discuss regarding the future of work.

The globalization thesis

Imagine a manifesto for global capital, written by a guru of globalization. Its object would be to present a picture of the world in which opposition to globalization and to capitalism itself would be futile, a world in which the best we can do is go with the flow, lie back and think of Nike... it would probably begin by insisting that the globalization of capital and the integration of the global economy have so transformed the world that the nation-state has become a fiction, as capital flows have far outreached the borders and the powers of the state. The world is now essentially ruled by the impersonal laws of the global market. (Melkiss-Wood, 2003: 61)

The above quotation captures the essence of what is meant by the globalization thesis. It is not simply believed that goods and services are increasingly produced and delivered by capitalist firms for the purpose of profit (i.e., the commodification thesis). In the globalization thesis, these capitalist firms are also increasingly viewed as operating in a borderless and seamless open world economy in which hyper-mobile and homeless capital restlessly roams the globe unrestrained in search of profit-making opportunities.

Globalization, akin to formalization and commodification, is frequently presented as some natural and inevitable process that is unstoppable. Indeed, politicians around the world often hold up their hands and lay the blame for the need for austerity policies, including all manner of reductions in welfare spending, at the door of this seemingly unstoppable force called 'globalization'. Yet it takes only a moment's reflection to realize that this is anything but a natural or organic process. As Farclas (2001: 67) puts it,

Corporate globalization is presented to us as inevitable... discussed in the media as if it were a natural phenomenon. But can the most massive transfer of wealth in the history of humanity from the poor to the rich sponsored by the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (WB/IMF or 'the Bank') and enforced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) under the agenda of corporate globalization be considered natural?...

For many, therefore, the process of globalization is socially constructed. As Held (2005: 8) argues, the ongoing stripping away of national and international regulations is a direct product of what is known as the Washington Consensus or Washington-led neo-liberalism that advocates the following measures:

- Free trade;
- Capital market liberalization;
- Flexible exchange rates;
- Market-determined interest rates;
- The deregulation of markets;

- The transfer of assets from the public to the private sector;
- The tight focus of public expenditure on well-directed social targets;
- Tax reform;
- Secure property rights; and
- The protection of intellectual rights.

The outcome of this Washington-led neo-liberalism is four trends. First, there is asserted to be a process of 'economic globalization' in which free trade occurs in an unrestrained manner and, secondly, a process of 'financial globalization' in which a seamless world of hyper-mobile and homeless capital emerges resulting in the end of geography (O'Brien, 1992) and a 'borderless world' (Ohmae, 1990). This, moreover, is accompanied by a third process of 'political globalization' in which nation states witness a diminution in their ability to regulate either national or international capital as an unregulated global capitalism takes hold resulting in the 'end of sovereignty' (Camilleri and Falk, 1992) and the end of the 'nation state' (Ohmae, 1990). As Kindelberger (1969: 207) puts it, 'the nation state is just about through as an economic unit' since states are increasingly decision-takers and not decision-makers. Finally, running alongside is seen to be a process of 'cultural globalization' in which an homogeneous global culture emerges founded upon what might be called 'Westernized' or 'Americanized' cultural values (e.g., Held, 2005; Held *et al.*, 1999; Reich, 1991).

For globalists, therefore, economic, financial, political and cultural globalization is real and tangible. The impacts can be witnessed everywhere. National finance, cultures, economies and politics are subsumed under networks of global flows. These lessen local and national differences, autonomy and sovereignty, and result in a more homogeneous global culture and a global market for goods and services. Globalization, for many, is thus an unstoppable and inexorable trajectory, with any attempts to resist it doomed to failure. As Reich (1991: 3, 8) puts it,

We are living through a transformation that will rearrange the politics and economics of the coming century. There will be no national products or technologies, no national corporations, no national industries. There will no longer be national economies, at least as we have come to understand that concept... As almost every factor of production – money, technology, factories, and equipment – moves effortlessly across borders, the very idea of an American economy is becoming meaningless, as are notions of an American corporation, American products, and American technology. A similar transformation is affecting every other nation, some faster and more profoundly than others; witness Europe, hurtling toward economic union.

That we live in a globalized or globalizing world is such a dominant narrative that it today heavily determines what is considered feasible regarding the future of work. Many academics, journalists, commentators and politicians, embracing such a narrative, claim little scope for manoeuvre. To embrace the globalization thesis therefore leads to a disarming and debilitating attitude, diminishing severely the scope of what is considered achievable.

This process of globalization, however, is viewed as having markedly different outcomes. Similar to the commodification thesis, believers in globalization can be divided into those who celebrate its advent and those more pessimistic about its consequences (see, for example, Cochrane and Pain, 2000; Seabrook, 2004).

Positive globalists

'Positive globalists', or optimists, highlight the advantages of globalization and view the outcomes as something to be welcomed. They focus on how the advent of an open world economy and unrestrained capitalism will improve the quality of life, raise the living standards and bring people together. This, in turn, is seen to promote the sharing of cultures and understanding among nations around the world – in a sense making us all world citizens through global communication. Although they sometimes recognize dangers inherent in this opening up of the world economy such as global environmental pollution, optimists believe that these problems can be overcome and that the net effect is a positive one.

Not all positive globalists, however, are the same. Indeed, Cochrane and Pain (2000) break down positive globalists into two camps: those who focus on the progressive possibilities of the 'global village' grounded in the work of Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s and those neo-liberals pointing to the democratic nature of the free market and the benefits of greater choice. An example of the former is Friedman (1999: xvii–xviii), who argues that

What is new today is the degree and intensity with which the world is being tied together into a single globalized marketplace and village. What is also new is the sheer number of people and countries able to partake of today's globalized economy and information networks, and to be affected by them... This new era of globalization... is turbocharged.

Far more numerous, however, are the neo-liberals celebrating the advantages of a global free market and unrestrained capitalism who want goods, services and capital to flow without restriction across national boundaries. For them, global 'free market' capitalism is a positive trend that will benefit consumers by increasing the scale and allocative efficiency of markets for both goods and capital. National regulation is held to be futile, and welfare and workers' rights above a low international norm are seen to simply damage national competitiveness. Indeed, these economic liberals have been highly successful in their advocacy of the deregulation of trade, investment and capital movements (see Dawson, 2000). For them, any risk that results is an unavoidable symptom, and resultant uncertainties are viewed as potentially exhilarating and innovative forces that provide opportunities for risk-taking entrepreneurs. Moreover, the volatility and unpredictability in the employment-place resulting from global markets is seen as a driving force for innovation and adaptability of individual workers and firms.

Pessimistic globalists

'Pessimistic globalists' in contrast, although accepting that economic, financial, political and cultural globalization is taking place, view this in a largely negative manner. They accept the apparently inexorable and unstoppable replacement of regulated national and international capitalism by an unregulated global capitalism but condemn it. An example is Altvater and Mahnkopf (1997) for whom the triumph of the global marketplace is intensifying the tendency towards a process of 'global disembedding' in which the market is becoming increasingly separated from its social bonds. For them, as 'commodification envelops the global system' (Altvater and Mahnkopf, 1997: 451), temporal and spatial co-ordinates become compressed by the growth and speeding up of commodification, resulting in a range of not only negative economic and social impacts but also serious environmental problems as natural resources are used up and not replaced.

For these 'global phobics' – a somewhat derogatory term used by optimists to denigrate pessimists – globalization is to be resisted if at all feasible due to its largely negative impacts on the majority of the world. As Boron (2005: 3–4) explains,

While a handful of developed capitalist nations increased their capacity to control, at least partially, the productive processes at a global level, the financialization of the international economy and the growing circulation of goods and services, the great majority of countries witnessed the growth of their external dependency and the widening gap that separated them from the centre. Globalization, in short, consolidated the imperialist domination and deepened the submission of peripheral capitalisms, which became more and more incapable of controlling their domestic economic processes even minimally.

For Hardt and Negri (2000), nevertheless, although opposing globalization, a different viewpoint is adopted. For them, there is the gradual disappearance of a territorially located centre that 'organizes' the international structure of domination meaning that the classic distinction between core and periphery, North and South, is vanishing. In its place is the primacy of a global logic of domination. Castells (1998: 70–165), in another vein, argues that globalization creates a global elite with a similar lifestyle in every big city of the world. At the same time, he says, it generates a pool of migrant and local labour that exists at the bottom of the labour market in every world city. He uses the notion of the 'Fourth World' to define these populations excluded from participation in the new global economy. The 'Fourth World' for him is composed of multiple holes of social exclusion that are present in nearly every country and city. A further pessimist is Pettifor (2003a,b), who adopts yet another viewpoint:

Globalization has not been 'corporate-driven' nor is 'technology' responsible. Instead... the origins lie with the United States' need to finance the post Vietnam War deficit. This led US politicians, backed by the UK government, to lift controls over capital markets – so as to tap their resources to fund the US deficit. Globalization, therefore, was created by politicians and can be reversed by politicians. (Pettifor, 2003a: xxv)

For some of these pessimists, one apparent outcome is a trend towards a global homogenization of cultures that again is seen as having many negative impacts, not least that everywhere is becoming like everywhere else, with standardized global cultural products being created by global corporations. As Norberg-Hodge (2001: 182) puts it, 'people around the world are being bombarded by media and advertising images that present the modern, Western consumer lifestyle as the ideal, while implicitly denigrating indigenous traditions'. A global culture is seen to be emerging, therefore, that is Westernized or Americanized in character.

Globalization: a natural or constructed trajectory?

Amongst adherents to the globalization thesis, there are not only those optimistic and pessimistic about this apparent trajectory but also, as indicated above, those viewing it as a natural tendency and those viewing it as socially constructed. On the whole, positive globalizers, especially of a neo-liberal persuasion, concoct globalization as natural and inevitable. For them, the inexorable rise of an open world economy is part of an organic and immutable tendency towards free markets about which little can be done. As Boron (2005: 14) states, there is a view that 'the irresistible rise of globalization is a natural phenomenon as uncontrollable as the movement of the stars'.

Pessimistic globalizers, in contrast, view globalization as socially constructed (e.g., Castree *et al.*, 2004; Massey, 2000, 2005; Norberg-Hodge, 2001; Seabrook, 2004). For them, globalization is not predestined but chosen. As Norberg-Hodge (2001: 179) puts it, 'Globalization is often portrayed... as an inevitable evolutionary trend. But it is far from a natural process: it is occurring because governments are actively promoting it and subsidizing the framework necessary to support it.' Massey (2005: 5) reinforces such a view:

'globalization' in its current form is not the result of a law of nature (itself a phenomenon under dispute). It is a project... statements... such as there is no alternative... is not a description of the world [but]... an image in which the world is being made.

For some pessimistic globalizers, globalization is thus viewed as a discourse being held up as a benchmark against which 'progress' can be measured and the reality found wanting. It is, in other words, a performative discourse used to shape the world rather than merely to describe it. As Cameron and Palan (2004) argue, globalization is less a real objective process and more a form of storytelling driven by powerful interests. It helps create the realities it purports merely to describe. For them, even if globalization is demonstrated to be no more than a myth as some have claimed (Shipman, 2002), this is still insufficient to invalidate this thesis. What is required is a critical evaluation of this narrative of globalization (see Chapter 5) and a re-reading of the trajectory of development from other viewpoints so as to provide alternative narratives. We will return to this in Part III.

Conclusions

We have allowed ourselves to be boxed in by words, by slogans whose content we have not tried to clarify, and by methods of conceptualization, accounting and analysis which distort social reality. We have let ourselves be trapped – or, to be more precise, ‘alienated’ – by constraints which, though certainly real and present, have been wrongly taken as divine decrees, or at least as imperatives inherent in the nature of the world and the ‘inescapable’ laws of economics. For in fact, these constraints are the results (intentional and unintentional) of human decisions that it is possible for us to question, at least partially and on certain conditions. (Comelau, 2002: 130)

In this chapter, three grand narratives – formalization, commodification and globalization – have been introduced that currently dominate how the future of work is envisaged and close off other possibilities from consideration. All three adopt a similar storyline of a single linear trajectory of work that marshals differences across space into a temporal sequence. Through this temporal convening of spatial difference, they close off not only the notion of difference but also the idea that multiple trajectories are being pursued in different places.

Formalization, commodification and globalization, therefore, can be seen as the grand narratives that at present shape how the future of work is envisaged and what is considered feasible and valid to discuss (e.g., Beck, 2000; Comelau, 2002; Massey, 2005). All propose futures that are inevitable, inexorable and unstoppable. In this chapter, however, attention has been drawn to the lack of evidence provided to support these theses and the literatures that highlight how these are not only far from natural and inevitable processes but also (per)formative discourses that act to shape the reality rather than merely reflect it. In order to assess whether the future of work is more open than these grand narratives suggest, therefore, each will need to be evaluated critically in turn. This is the subject matter of the next three chapters.

Further reading

Gershuny, J. (2000) *Changing Times: Work and Leisure in Post-industrial Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This is an excellent detailed review of the shifts in how people spend their time in 21 countries. In highlighting the changing amounts of time spent on paid and unpaid work by various populations, it provides a wealth of evidence with which to question the universality of formalization.

Polanyi, K. (1944) *The Great Transformation*, Boston: Beacon Press.

The ideas in this book are at the heart of much contemporary writing on marketization/commodification and there is no better place to start than this seminal text that offers the reader a balanced portrayal of the transformation towards market society.

Block, F. (2002) ‘Rethinking capitalism’, in N.W. Biggart (ed.) *Readings in Economic Sociology*, Oxford: Blackwell.

An excellent short introduction to the concept of commodification that covers the major perspectives and issues involved, as well as the evolution of thought on this subject.

Held, D. (2000) (ed.) *A Globalising World? Culture, Economics and Politics*, London: Routledge.

This edited volume provides a good introduction to the concept of globalization, with clearly written and well-structured chapters that review in turn economic, political, cultural and financial globalization.