

Non Classical Work, Organization and Collective Action

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The objective of this essay is to take an in-depth look at the broad concept of Work, Labor Relations and the Social Construction of Occupation (De la Garza, 2006), by introducing the notion of non-classical labor (De la Garza, 2008) and discussing the concept of services. This work will specifically address the “intangible” character of services and its related difficulties, taking into consideration clients and other non labor actors, the intersections of the arenas of production and reproduction, as well as the law and the impact of work in these kinds of activities upon identity and collective action. The author introduces brief notes in regards to the relationship between the value of the merchandise and immaterial work. The examples provided are part of an empirical study on specific non-classical work which was carried out in Mexico City, focused on temporary and permanent vendors in the subway (“*vagoneros*”), taxi drivers, microbus drivers, metrobus (BRT) drivers, as well as employees at Walmart, McDonald’s, and call centers, TV extras, and software designers. The empirical affirmations in this article are based on this research, although realities may differ in other contexts. In other words, this article does not pretend to present an exhaustive review of the complex realities of non-classical labor; however, it does provide information regarding the types of work that are not necessarily present among classic representations.²

1. Regarding the concept of Work

Our definition of Work considers not only salaried labor or work that generates products for the market, but all human activity channeled to produce goods or services to satisfy human needs, in which an object of work is transformed using means of

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² The case by case empirical results can be consulted in: Enrique de la Garza Toledo (2011), *Trabajo no Clásico, Organización y Acción Colectiva*, Vol. I and II. Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés-Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.

production that are operated through work, understood as the interaction of men (workers) with the object and the means of production and with one another (De la Garza, 2002). The character of the value of use of the product does not solely depend upon its physical characteristics, it is valued, both historically and socially, as a product. The former definition is open to production being material or immaterial, that is to say, it may generate objectivized products that are separable from the people who produce them and the people who consume them, or these can be products that only exist at the moment of their production and are automatically consumed or incorporated to the subjectivity or corporeality of the consumer (Marx, 1974). To consider work and material products as the necessary centerpiece of production and social wealth points to a primitive materialism that we could ironically call “physicalist materialism”, thus making the reduction of material goods to physical goods implicit; this interpretation is positioned in a polemic debate belonging to the 19th century regarding the relation between matter and consciousness. There is also naturalism in this position in regards to which values of use will be fundamental and that these should necessarily be the physical products required for human subsistence (food, housing, clothing). This may have been true during the greater part of human history but changes have occurred to the extent that social wealth has increased and values of product use that did not exist in other eras or that were previously seen as superfluous have become necessary. This is the case of the automobile or certain forms of entertainment such as the movies or television (Boltansky and Chiapello, 2002).

In other words, the concept of materiality cannot only be reduced to the physical realm; this concept should be clarified to include everything that is objectified, whether physical or symbolic (Lukacs, 1975). This definition also departs from extreme constructivist definitions that tend to reduce every reality to the subject’s perception, that is to say, to its subjectivity (Potter, 1998). While it is true that subjects’ visions of what is real are always mediated by preconceptions, this does not authorize us to believe that it is only possible to speak of a subject’s preconceptions or his or her subjectively built imaginary (Archer, 1997). There is a field in reality for non-conscious thought, which exists and pressures subjects beyond their own conceptions of an object (Alexander, 1995). In this way, the classical problem of the relation between matter and consciousness has become transformed in the 20th century in regards to the relations between structures (conscious or unconscious), subjectivities (ways of constructing meaning that include, but are not limited to, culture) and actions (De la Garza, 2006). In

this way, the social construction of meaning (an update of the ancient problem of consciousness) can not be simply seen as an epiphenomenon of materiality, rather it truly becomes a problem under construction (Berger and Luckmann, 1979). In this update, objectivity plays a role in constituting the action but the relations with objectivity and with subjectivity, or the process of constructing meaning, should be investigated without reductionisms (De la Garza, 1992). What has been objectified can be crystalized in structures and artefacts that do not determine the action but that do limit, pressure, and channel it; in any case, mediation of subjectivity is indispensable in order to explain the action (Heller, 1997).

Objectified materiality can be something physical (a man-made building that does not only exist at the moment of its creators' practice) and also something symbolic (Schütz, 1996). The objectivation of symbols or codes to construct meaning is part of a tradition that is highly valued by sociology and anthropology, starting with Durkheim and his concept of collective consciousness that cannot be reduced to the individual, continuing with Parsons and his idea of a cultural subsystem that clearly differentiates the personality that elapses in subjectivity to Schütz' socially accepted objective meanings (Schütz, 1996). Along these lines, the objectification or social sanction of meanings could be sharpened a bit more through the differentiation among symbols, feelings and meanings. Meaning could be reserved for those who concretely build the subject in order to understand and act in the correct situation and those who elapse into both social as well as individual subjectivity, which can be social as well as individual (Gurvitch, 1979). But the concrete process of creating meanings for a concrete situation uses cultural codes that are socially acceptable as raw material; based on these, the subject can reconfigure or reconstruct his or her meanings depending on his/her level of autonomy in regards to dominant cultural forms and depending on how routine or extraordinary the events are that need to be signified (Cicourel, 1974). In other words, one form of objectivation is to assign cultural codes that have a transindividual existence although, as in the case of any other social product, these meanings would eventually need to be updated. These objectified cultural codes can be of different kinds: moral, emotional, cognitive or aesthetic (De la Garza, 2007).

On the other hand, given that man's relation to the world is symbolic and practical, the objects of labor, the means of production, as well as products and interactions in the workplace are also invested with meaning (De la Garza, 1997). To this extent, the products of work can have different physical vs. symbolic emphasis but, in the end, all

work includes both dimensions throughout all of its phases, as in trade. When we speak of material production, we should not only consider the generation of physical objectified products, but also the generation of objectified symbols, as in software design. By this logic, it would be superficial to say that immaterial production is the generation of knowledge or emotion. Both could be objectified –cognitive symbols like a mathematical formula or socially accepted nationalist emotions– or could exist only in the consumer’s subjectivity, as in the result of a live concert (Bolton, 2006). Moreover, cognitiveness and emotionality would only be two of the other fields of meaning; at very least, the moral and aesthetic fields would also be missing. Marx is more rigorous than Negri (Negri and Hardt, 2005) in regards to immaterial work, in which the phases of production, circulation and consumption are compressed into a single act and in which the product only exists in the subjectivity of the consumer (Marx, 1974).

According to this reasoning, the problem of the value of both material and immaterial commodities arises. Value has nothing to do with anything physical, although for certain commodities that would be its form of existence, nor anything to do with the value of use, even though value implies the value of use. In pre-mercantile or non-mercantile works, values of use can be created without any value and the same can be said in the case of the value of producing goods or services. That is to say that value is not something physical, rather the result of a type of social relation of production aimed to generate commodities; if a commodity is not sold, the value does not materialize. In other words, according to labor theory of value, the value of a commodity depends upon the quantity of work needed to produce it, but this value also must be socially sanctioned on the market. The quantity of incorporated labor or “labor energy” cannot be assimilated to the concept of energy from physics; it implies physical as well as intellectual wear and tear. Currently, this concept of the intellectual dimension of incorporated labor can prove to be insufficient or it can be deepened through the concept of subjectivity as a process for providing meaning, that is to say deciding, planning, and monitoring between conception and execution. Starting in the 1980’s, if not earlier, it was known that work does not only put cognition (knowledge of science and practical) into play but also one’s emotions, morals and aesthetic feelings that influence both how work is carried out and its results, also guiding corporal physical movement (Castells, 1999). In this sense, “labor energy” is both corporal-physicality and subjectivity tied to productive tasks, whether to a greater or lesser degree. The work needed to dig a well with a shovel can require more bodily physical

strength than software design; the latter is more of a cognitive symbolic task even though it requires physical activity to write or type. Thus, the quantity of work expended always implies both dimensions. The soft factors that influence production, productivity or quality, such as culture, identity, initiative, and the capacity for teamwork are currently broadly recognized as productive strengths (David and Foray, 2002).

To recognize the corporal-physical and the subjective aspects of the labor force and incorporated labor means considering that relations with work objects, the means of production, the product, as well as interactions at work are all embedded with meanings. The incorporation of physicality and meanings into the product constitutes incorporated labor, which in one form or another needs to be validated on the market. The cost of production as a parameter influences this validation, as does the need for the buyer to have value of use. These are also social needs and, thus, do not solely depend on the product's physical characteristics, rather on how patterns of consumption have occurred and how they are socially valued (Beaudrillard, 1987). In other words, the value of use also has physical and symbolic dimensions, so the demand for a value of use is not only in relation to its physical form but also its symbolism (the value of a food does not solely depend upon the quantity of proteins, minerals, etc., but also upon its social appreciation that can change in different historical and cultural contexts and can even have different meanings according to class differences). In material production, both forms are objectified; in immaterial production, the consumer's subjectivity is incorporated at the same time as production. This means that defenders of labor theory of value should not concern themselves with the weight or significance that services have in economies.

2. Services

Modern capitalism began with physical-material production –which does not exclude symbolic production– by manufacturers (textiles) or the mining industry and the modern concept of work revolved around the factory understood as a concentration of salaried workers –with a clear capital/work relation– in a specific physical space and working a different shift than recreational time, using machines and a division of labor. This type of production was the axis of capitalist development until halfway through the 20th century. Economic, social and labor theories were built focusing on the factory worker, as well as forms of organization and struggle, worker demands and rights, as well as

institutional mediators among companies, unions and the State (Bouffartigue, 1997). However, starting in the second half of the 21st century, many industrialized economies have become other types of service economies and, in third world countries, precarious services occupy an important part of the labor force and also represent the better part of the GNP (Cortés, 2000). Conventional economists have not had difficulties in recognizing this transformation because, under this conception, industrial activities in a restricted sense (manufacturing, extractive industries, electricity-natural gas and construction) add value, as do the agricultural or service industries, commerce, finance and even public activities.

From the perspective of a work process, the question is relatively simple because independently of whether or not the labor theory of value excludes the latter activities from the generation of value, work processes exist in each and every production or service; there are even authors who have defined services as activities that generate intangible products (Castells y Aoayama, 1994). This concept continues to be simplistic because intangible means that something cannot be touched, which refers to only one of our human physical senses, that of touch. The situation would have been different if observation via the senses (sight, hearing, taste and smell, in addition to touch), not only tangible, was be considered, because a musical service can be perceived by the ear and a dessert in a restaurant via taste or smell (Lucchetti, 2003). Thus, intangible is not the same thing as something that is not physical (sound can be very physical); in any case, something tangible is something physical whose form and volume can be perceived by sight and not only by touch, that is to say industrial products.

However, this rudimentary distinction has the following complications:

- 1) Not only what is generated by industry or agriculture is objectified; objectified intangibles can also exist (ex. a software program).
 - 2) Services exist in which one part is tangible, such as food in a restaurant. Moreover, tangible production involves many intermediate, intangible operations or phases, such as design, accounting or communications.
 - 3) Many intangible products can be observed using other senses, such as music at a concert or the change in coordinates of time and space for transporting passengers.
 - 4) The acquisition of tangibles always has an intangible component, like a beautiful car.
- This points to the need to turn to more precise concepts than tangible or intangible, such as the distinction between production and material labor (objectively) and immaterial labor (subjectively), in such a way that part of what is material is intangible (De la

Garza, 2007). This is the case of software design where the object to be transformed is previously objectified symbols or programs; the means of production can be physical material such as the computer but knowledge itself and the force of labor is especially cognitive-subjective; in other words, the capacity of a programmer to create a new program that, as a product, is imminently a system of symbols that in turn, as an algorithm, facilitates the solution of certain problems. The interactions with members of a team or with project leaders and even through a network of a community of programmers who support one another are not exempt. Although this kind of service does not appear to present challenges with objectively symbolic products, its highly symbolic content calls for rethinking many traditional definitions: what work time or time on the job means –since the programmer may be thinking about solutions to the program outside of the formal workday; labor relations –when you can communicate through the network with a community of programmers that go beyond a group of formal co-workers and that can cooperate in solutions; the skill of a programmer, particularly in terms of cognitive abilities that are not a lineal result of formal knowledge; the division of labor and whether or not design operations can be standardized in the way in which the so-called software engineering methodology pretends; if there is an identity by “trade” or “craft” which takes prides in its cognitive capacity and the definition of said capacity, if it is not reduced to repetition or the application of scholastic knowledge, rather that important doses of imagination, intuition and creativity that cannot be systematized or reduced to routine are involved.

5) Services that imply direct customer attention at the time the service is provided, whether face to face or virtual through telecommunications, with the peculiarity that without the presence of a client, this kind of service does not exist. In this sense, part of what is being sold is customer service or treatment, to a degree that this may be the most important commercial dimension for some services. Childcare or nanning implies tangibles (food, cleaning, etc.) and care; in the case of this service, some value the latter more than the former.

6) Non-interactive services with the client, such as television or radio.

7) Services where the appropriation of space is critical, such as street vendors, that can be intersected with the previous categories:

a) Who sell in closed spaces where there is no contact with the client during production/in open spaces but only for clients (restaurants)/in spaces that are open to the

public but at a fixed location (street vendor)/home-based/without a particular place in space, mobile (door to door sales, taxis).

This problematization of the concept of services has repercussions in terms of contents or the need to broaden concepts in regards to control over work, labor relations and the social construction of occupation.

3. The expansion of the concepts of control, regulation and labor market

First of all, in regards to control over the work process.³ This concept became popular in labor sociology in the 1950's, 60's and 70's. The underlying image is Taylorized, very controlled work compared to a salaried or a self-employed craft or, towards the future, a worker of automated processes. US political science from the 1960's greatly influenced the classic concept of control, which was understood in a Weberian manner as the capacity to impose one's will upon another being. To this degree, inputs, machinery and equipment, the distribution of physical space, time of work, the operations to be carried out, the skill level, knowledge, work force interactions, culture and subjectivity, as well as labor relations (the entrance and departure from work, promotions, salaries and benefits, training, union affiliation and unions themselves) could all be controlled. Braverman's perspective brought the discussion to a more general level: in capitalist production, in order to exploit the worker, capital needed to dominate the worker within the work process. That is to say that this concept remitted the discussion to the classic problem of political science of power and domination, rather than to control, but in the productive process. Power was classically understood as coercion and domination as consensus, and in an extreme case, as hegemony. In general, the arena of power can imply personalized or even abstract imposition under organizational or technical rules. Dominance comes close to legitimacy of command and, in the extreme, to recognition by those who are dominated by the management's intellectual and moral capacity. In other words, it delves its roots in the field of culture and subjectivity, in the construction of the meanings of labor and class relations in productive processes that entail cognitive, moral, aesthetic and sentimental levels, as well as forms of daily reasoning, summarized in discourse and in

³ The following can be controlled for a job: the schedule and shift, the productive space, the quality and quantity of a product, raw materials, tools and machinery, the method of work, the skill level, the division of labor, training, entrance and exit from the occupation, promotions, the wage or salary, and benefits. In non-classical jobs, control can be exercised by the client, citizens, officials from government agencies, union or trade leaders, the labor community or political parties.

non-discursive forms of consciousness. Hegemony, as well as power and domination in general, can all be conceived as social constructions that imply structures of labor processes and, beyond said processes, immediate and mediate interactions and ways of giving meaning to production and other spaces of interaction and levels of reality (Aronowitz, 1992).

In other words, power and domination in the labor process can be summarized in constellations such as political favouritism, patrimonialism, caudillism, bureaucratic domination, patriarchy, democracy, dictatorship, oligarchy, etc., which can be operationalized under the concept of Control. But control has to be specified as to the concrete kind of relations of production that occur: exploitation, self-employment, family hiring, subcontracting, etc. In this path from abstract relations of power and domination in the labor process to concrete expressions of control in their different dimensions, the typologies of the debate regarding the labor process can be useful – technical control, administrative control or self-control– without forgetting that all forms of control imply certain egalitarian or hierarchical interactions. These interactions place symbols and symbolic exchange or negotiation into play, which imply formal and informal rules in relations with predetermined structures (Cohen, 1996).

Now, in reference to the main types of non-classical work (De la Garza, 2008), the first type (I) is carried out in physical, closed spaces, with or without a wage, but with direct client intervention (for example, on the supermarket floor). The problem of control begins with the control that the employer may exercise and with the workers' ensuing cooperation or resistance. In this dimension, we find the aspects mentioned in regards to control in capitalist labor. But, the control that the client can exercise to a greater or lesser degree or that the community of workers can exercise must also be considered. Client control begins as symbolic pressure for carrying out work in the expected time and space and with the necessary quality. In this type of control, we can find the organizational rules wielded by the client at play or other broader legislative rules, including commercial law, as well as the right to appeal to ethics mixed with emotions. This pressure can turn into interactions, petitions, complaints or even legal claims, depending on the case, including the use of physical or symbolic force by the client or the worker. Our investigation on this category includes MacDonald's and Walmart workers, among whom we found mid to high levels of standardization of tasks; in the case of MacDonald's, we have dared to mention that this is a Taylorized work process for the workers, as well as an attempt to Taylorize the process for the

client, at Walmart as well. In fact, the organizational design of management at these companies explicitly refers to the clients “working” in order to receive services. These are low-skilled jobs (Walmart stockers (Alvarado, 2009) (Conde García, 2009) (Tilly, 2001) or cashiers and MacDonal’s (Gentile, 2003) restaurant employees) who receive low wages, meagre benefits and a great deal of discretionary treatment from management; unions exist but they are in Mexico a simulation in nature. Control over the work process is much formalized through manuals, supervisors, cameras, the “suspicious client” and the employees themselves. The companies try to install an ideology of belonging to a family but above all, these are processes that are highly controlled by the management, seeking to rapidly deactivate any attempt at independent organizing. Struggles to organize at these companies in Mexico have been rare. At one Walmart, negotiations prospered thanks to a corporate union that bargained at a state level; another more independent effort collided with the entire administrative and labor law machinery that backs unions simulated. For these companies, client presence is very important yet it provokes ambivalence: on the one hand, workers seek to provide clients with good services but on the other, clients apply pressure and sometimes even accuse workers of negligence. When a labor struggle has prospered, it has been thanks to worker training or bargaining held outside of the workplace.

The situation becomes complicated for workers in ambulatory sales of goods and services (Esquivel (coord.), 2008) (Regullo, 2003) (Reyes, 1996), taxi drivers (Ibañez, 2008), microbus drivers (Aguilar, 1999) (Cuellar, 2002) (Rodríguez López y Navarro, 1999) who carry out their work in established or mobile sites that are open to interactions with different people on site (type II non-classical work). In the case of salaried labor, the considerations already expressed for the type I employer-employee relation continue to be valid but the client-employee relation needs to be specified. But in the case of self-employment, the worker does not participate in a labor “contract” per se which s/he can formally use as a resource, unlike a Social Security beneficiary who can claim a service that was previously agreed upon. On the contrary, in a best case scenario, more general rules from civil, commercial and penal law, as well as police and health regulations, are considered to apply. But what makes work in open territories truly complex is the not necessarily systematic emergence of actors in the territory that do not reduced to a supplier-worker-client relation; these actors may be transients, police, inspectors, other workers in the same occupation, or leaders of organizations that are not unions of these kinds of workers or activities. Although the relations of the

aforementioned subjects with self-employed workers are not the same as relations with salaried workers in a classic sense, these relations nevertheless have an impact upon work, the use of territory to carry out work, the time of work, the type of product, profit and even the very existence of the occupation in question. Although these are incidental interactions, they are not necessarily extraordinary and many times patterns can be established in regards to the type of actor, the type of interaction, the practical and symbolic contents, as well as the kinds and frequency of cooperation, negotiation and conflict. Our investigation in this category includes subway vendors, street vendors, outdoor market salespeople, taxi drivers, microbus drivers and BRT drivers. Due to the multiplicity of actors involved in their work and the eventuality of many kinds of interventions, these workers have to be on a permanent state of alert, although their main reference for both negotiation and conflict is the government, which acts as a “quasi employer” who controls the use of public spaces. Workers’ organizations are critical for these kinds of negotiations in which the government establishes regulations regarding how work is to take place (e.g. use of public spaces, workers’ registry, shifts, etc.). The main aspect under dispute during conflicts and control is the use of space, whether relatively permanent or in movement throughout the city.

The third kind of non-classical work (type III) occurs in established, closed spaces, whether private or corporate or in some cases confused with reproductive spaces (as in the case of home-based work), in which precise interactions take place among employers, suppliers and clients. The control factor has added complexity in these cases due to pressures applied by the family, in addition to the interspaces and contradictions between workspaces and areas for eating and personal hygiene, childcare, rest or entertainment. Additional actors to take into consideration include children, spouses and relatives who co-exist in the same workspace or neighbours who demand attention, time and affection or other kinds of labours, such as domestic chores, to attend to their vital needs. In this category, our investigation included software designers and TV extras in their businesses modalities. These are extreme cases, although both are workers with special virtues in terms of meanings: in the case of software designers, cognitive capacity, and for TV extras, their physical aesthetic image. Both of these types of workers are poorly protected, although designers may have higher salaries and may base their job security on their cognitive qualities rather than on their contracting, which approaches a new concept of trade. Extras are all temporary workers, subject to the despotism of their employers who may be unions, personnel agencies or producers.

These workers generally experience a great deal of resentment stemming from the contempt, mistreatment and low wages they receive, but also due to the frustration of not becoming full-time actors.

In terms of labor regulations, this topic has been associated with the origin of the emergence of unregulated and unprotected salaried labor for workers since the 18th and 19th centuries. Worker struggles achieved a body of laws and contracts, among others, to regulate labor relations in terms of wages and benefits, the entrance and exit of workers from employment, working hours, work activities, needed skill level, how to climb the promotional ladder, how to resolve disputes between capital and work, worker sanctions when norms are breached, internal mobility, polyvalence, steps on the promotional ladder, and participation in worker or union decision-making in regards to technological or organizational changes. This legal recognition went beyond relations in the workplace to include recognition of unions, in addition to social security and labor justice institutions, as well as broader linkages among the State, unions and employer organizations. For a long time, all of this was considered to only be relevant to wage-earning work since in this kind of labor relation, suits can be filed for infringement of worker or company norms, unlike self-employment where, in the absence of an employer, no labor relation is recognized. In a strict sense, a labor relation can be the relation established between capital and work, that starts from the position of employment and extends to the State and labor justice and social security institutions. In broader terms, a labor relation would not exist without the relations that are established during the work process among different actors that participate in an interested or circumstantial fashion and that influence work performance. With this broadened definition of a labor relation (Durand, 2004) as a social interaction, with attributes of practice and exchange of meanings within determined structures, the actors to be considered are not only those who hire the workforce and those who are hired; depending on the type of work, a very diverse selection of actors may participate who are not necessarily interested in or dedicated to creating a determined good or service, such as travelling salespeople or inspectors (Jurgens, 1995).

In this first type of non-classical work (wage earners in established, closed spaces who interact directly with clients), it is worthwhile to take a moment to focus on the client. Frequently, good client service is one of the terms of the labor relation. For a salaried employee on the floor at a Walmart store or MacDonald's restaurant, a worker's efficient and courteous interaction with the client can be part of formal work

regulations. In the case of noncompliance with this norm, the client can turn to the company or other regulatory bodies –for example, in the case of healthcare– to file a complaint against the worker and can even possibly turn to civil or penal law. However, the most interesting aspect is the informal regulations that appeal to the worker’s ethics in regards to his/her sense of customer service, courtesy or good manners. Depending on the case, feelings of compassion (for people with disabilities) and symbolic or physical pressure from clients who identified with another client’s complaint may influence the worker. Client pressure may be backed by the employer’s company regulations in terms of the starting hour, end of shift or the inconsistencies in the worker’s activity, all of which can be motives for a labor dispute. In other words, bureaucratic company rules can be employed by users and thus, in practice, labor regulations acquire a tripartite nature.

More can be said about rules approved directly by the State –sanitary, criminal, commercial– that the user can appropriate and wield when s/he receives poor service from a worker. These rules may emanate from trade or political organizations to which the worker belongs or to non work-related arenas such as transportation, sanitary, public morality, etc. (type II non-classical work) (Lindón, 2006).

In other words, we can find ourselves in complex situations where formal and informal regulations overlap, which may contain contradictions but to which actors can appeal in the case of violations or in order to gain benefits for receiving future services.

In the case of expanded labor, the concept that possibly summarizes the two former concepts and adds other important elements is that of *the social construction of occupation*. Once again, we must look to the origin of the debate on classic salaried labor. For a long time, the concept of employment, understood as the occupation of salaried workers by an employer, has been construed abstractly as the result of the encounter between the labor supply (K. Marx would say the workforce) and the demand of labor. The key variables that would supposedly explain employment would be the salary and the number of available positions with regard to the number of job applicants, as well as the number of employers offering jobs (others would extend this analysis to the family as well) (Benería and Roldán, 1987). However, in salaried labor, achieving a position of employment maybe explained in greater detail. In regards to workforce supply, this supply is a type of action undertaken by those who seek employment and, like all social actions, stems from situations that the future worker did not choose, the number of available positions, as well as his or her social networks and

own conceptions about work. This supply also stems from a certain structure in regards to the family, income, hierarchies, conceptions of legitimate work, family networks, friendship, and *compadrazgo*⁴ that often allow access to sources of employment (Barrere and Agnés, 1999). Furthermore, the person offering his or her work requests employment with a determined level of education, skills and work experience, gender, ethnicity, urban or rural and regional origin, at a certain moment in his or her vital cycle. On the other hand, the persons are situated in macro structures that can seem invisible to the actor but that influence his or her possibilities of employment, such as the context of economic growth or crisis and the structures of the labor market (Bordieu, 1992). In regards to the demand of the workforce, this is related to the company's microeconomy, the product market, sales, investments, exports and the impact of the macroeconomy (inflation, exchange rate, deficits in current accounts). But this demand is also related to the sociotechnical configuration of the company's work process (technology, organization, labor relations, workforce profile, management and work culture) and the management strategies for personnel, labor relations, etc. When a union is present, union policies for hiring personnel can also influence decision-making, for example, giving preference to family members of current employees. And we should not forget the restrictions of labor laws, social security regulations and collective bargaining agreements.

Different subjects with different interests are involved in the encounter between labor supply and demand: one is interested in being employed under certain conditions and the other in finding the appropriate worker. But these subjects do not act with complete freedom; they are limited to or propelled by the previously mentioned micro, mezzo and macro structures. Situated within said structures, the actors conceive of a labor relation according to their interests, experience and cultural baggage. In the end, the encounter may be a coincidence between the two parties or a frustrated effort.

In non-classical type I work, the most substantial difference with classic is the client's present in the workplace and the fact that the product or service is generated at the moment of consumption (e.g. there is a material product that is sold and consumed at the restaurant). In other words, the construction of the occupation also depends upon the consumer, who does not hire the worker but upon being hired by the company, the worker depends upon the client who is consuming during his or her work activity. That

⁴ Translator's note: *Compadrazgo* refers to the relationship between the parents and godparents of a child in families of Hispanic origin.

is to say, in this case there is a direct repercussion of the product market on the job. The consumer's preference is not only based on the price and quality of the product but also on personalized customer service, in such a way that in the social production of occupation, the labor demand cannot immediately be separated from the product demand, or at least not in two different phases. Moreover, the client's pressure to provide a quality product-service and appropriate sensibility is not only present at the moment of hiring but lasts throughout the entire labor activity. In other words, the social construction of activity is permanent and can be inhibited by poor worker relations with the client or with management. From the client's perspective, the demand for service implies price and quality, but quality includes the warmth of the relationship with the worker and the organization. In some cases, the product may be an action of trade –a purchase in a supermarket, a traditional service at a bank branch–, in others the product is consumed at the site of the workplace –hospitals, hotels, restaurants–, but in all instances, the warmth of worker treatment is an integral part of the service provided. This factor may alter product demand and, thus, affect employment.

The social construction of occupation becomes complicated in open spaces for type II salaried or non salaried workers (Lindón, 2006). Product demand directly influences the construction of this type of occupation that immediately depends upon clients. In other words, the product market, which is affected by inflation, the type of product and the population's income level, is a direct determinant of these occupations. But many other agents can help or hinder the constitution of occupation. First of all, potential non-union trade organizations can facilitate or impede occupation, as can other occupied members of the community or other competitors. Secondly, non labor actors who share the same territory, such as uncompromising or condescending public officials, transients and local inhabitants –citizens who protest due to dirtiness, invasion of public spaces, delinquency or noise– can also exercise influence. Suppliers of inputs or products for sale should also not be forgotten; they can apply pressure on what is to be offered to the client or on prices. Urban or rural, sanitary, labor –when salaried workers are involved–, and fiscal regulations can influence these constructions of occupation, as can corporate agreements between trade organizations and the government. To this extent, we should

not ignore a broad concept of the socio-technical configuration of the work process² that considers the client as an important dimension.

In type III non-classical jobs, in which work is carried out in established, closed spaces, in addition to the characteristics mentioned for salaried work and for clients, suppliers and the product market, we should also mention the family's material and subjective influence, due to the possible contradictions between work space and time, compared to that needed for family reproduction (Benería and Roldán, 1987).

In all instances, the perspective of the subject implies that the structures of work processes, as well as their socio-technical configurations, exercise pressure but do not determine that these pressures will be filtered by the subjectivity of the actors involved and that the construction of controls, regulations or the occupation itself implies decision-making in interaction with other subjects also situated in labor structures or outside of the work arena who are capable of instilling meaning to the work process.

Finally, the problem of standardization or routinization is not exclusive to material production; standardization can exist in the case of symbolic work, for example, repeating a show without public interaction or the efforts of software engineer to standardize program design. However, in its extreme expression, the work of creation-invention carried out by an artist or scientist is less subject to standardization (De la Garza, 2008).

4. Identity

In this section, we will address the problem of constituting collective identities among non-classical workers. The concept of Identity was not part of sociology's key arsenal until the 1970's; proximate concepts such as Durkheim's Collective Consciousness, Marx's Class Consciousness or Weber's Ethos do not correspond exactly with this concept (Dubet, 1989). Parsons mentions it marginally, unlike clinical psychology that time back gave collective identity importance in relation to psychological disorders. The concept of Identity became important to Sociology in the 1980's; its irruption was related to theories on new social movements that arose in the

² By the socio-technical configuration of work processes, we understand the arrangement composed of the level of technology, the type of work organization, the type of labor relations, the workforce profile and the management and labor cultures.

1970's (Murga, 2006) (Di Giacomo, 1984). When an explanation for these new social movements –student, feminist, environmentalist– could not be found in the ascription of the members' class, explanations were sought in cultural and subjective arenas, becoming a key concept related not only to social movements but to mankind's role in postmodern society, linked to the loss of meaning of the present and the future (Castel, 2004) (De la Garza (Coord.), 2005). Without arriving at post-modern extremism, starting in the 1990's, theories arose tying the discussion about Identity to the flexible operations of labor markets and the fluidity of occupations, in addition to labor and life trajectories that would lead to a loss of identity, particularly for workers (Sennet, 2000) (Dubet, 1999).

In our investigation on non classical workers, we asked this same question: can this type of workers, in contrast to former industrial workers, identify with one another to generate collective action and organizations based on their work? To respond to this question, first of all we need to take an in-depth look at the concept of identity, particularly collective identity.

Many have idealized the relationship between Work and Identity from a trade perspective, that is to say a guild or trade of workers who are considered by others and by themselves to possess special capacities for generating a product, capacities that require prolonged non-formal learning outside the classroom through practice, where the product is a motive of pride for the creator due to its uniqueness. Undoubtedly, this problem was a source of conflict when, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, artisans who had entered the factories and were controlled by machines, and were later Taylorized and Fordized, socially lost their skills, giving origin to a modern, industrial working class who does not necessarily identify with its trade. At a stage prior to capitalist mechanization, when the production process was not yet a chain of machines but of men, salaried workers could still assert their knowledge and the quality of the product still depended upon their capabilities. But during the great production of the 20th century, this kind of work had disappeared and there was no longer a reason for the standardized and routinized worker, subjugated to a meticulous division of labor, to feel proud of his or her work. For this reason, the famous crisis of worker identities with the product of their labor dates back, first of all, to the Industrial Revolution and later, was a phenomenon that occurred in large companies over a century ago. Nevertheless, these unskilled workers, who were even less devoted to their product than to their work, were the ones who led the hardest struggles of the worker movement in the 20th century

(Hayman, 1996). Their identity was not forged by their work or their product, rather by their sense of belonging to a community of workers and, from a negative connotation, as those who had been exploited and worn out by the intensification of labor, which was at the beginning reflected in poor living conditions. This was their common factor of identification rather than their trade or profession. In later stages, the sense of identification occurred through their unions or political parties as a means of struggle. In other words, identity with the work, as a concrete activity, and with the product are not the only factors of importance for generating collective worker action. In fact, in the 19th century, this was an obstacle to creating broader identities (for example, a carpenter considered himself to be very different from a blacksmith) and initially led to the creation of craft-specific unions (Melucci, 2001). The homogenization of mechanization and the scientific organization of labor helped workers to see one another as similar, but this assessment could not arise magically from the labor structure, rather it was mediated by processes of abstraction of the differences related to labor practices, particularly worker struggles and ideologies that took root especially when class conflicts arose (De la Garza, 2002).

In other words, Work Identity as a problem cannot be reduced to a worker's identity with a concrete activity and the product that she or he produces because what theorists on the crisis of Identities are actually discussing is the crisis of the current worker movement. To this extent, Work Identity has to be handled in a broad sense, first of all, in relation to a specific productive activity and to the product, in resemblance to a trade identity. But, as we were saying, the history of the worker movement is not only the history of assaulted trade identities but mainly non trade worker identities who rose up in refuse of their working conditions and negative living conditions; they even rose up because they did not identify with their work and were forced to sell their work in order to survive. In this way, the second dimension of worker identity can be an identification with other workers and not necessarily due to the pride of being salaried workers, rather from the affronts and offences received by who are not tied to production. We should also add the identity that unions and even worker parties afforded during a certain period, as organizations that struggled and united workers (De la Garza, 1999). In sum, the problem of Work and Identity should be understood as a Work and as a Labor issue. Within this arena, debate should be encouraged – this issue is not settled by addressing the crisis of a worker's identity with his or her work, the trade worker's identity crisis or

the artisan's crisis in the advent of capitalism, an anachronistic problem in today's context (Muckenberger, 1996).

Norbert Ellis says that individual identity cannot be understood without collective identity and that identity is a process, rather than a condition, of abstraction of differences and identification of similarities. In this sense, the sources of identity can be numerous (e.g. nation, ethnicity, youth, gender, school, work in a broad sense, etc.) and creating an exhaustive list is not the point. The issue at hand is work-related identity which, as we mentioned previously, becomes the identity of workers to possibly carry out collective action. We will begin by saying that although identity is eventually forged in the realm of subjectivity –identity as a subjective configuration to give meaning to belonging to a group–, it cannot be disassociated from the practices or structures in which social subjects interact (De la Garza, 2001). As a result of their practices, subjects may reach a determined identity, taking into consideration both reflective aspects that are involved, as well as others that remain implicit. Identifications do not only depend upon spaces for determined social relations (school, work, family, city, etc.) but also upon the level of abstraction (humanity, nation, class, factory, sector, trade). To say that identity depends upon the role of a subject is as if these roles could be completely separated; in reality, the relations, structures and meanings of others (the family dynamic influences many jobs) influence identity in a realm or level of abstraction to a greater or lesser degree (De la Garza, 1997). In this way, Identity is always “for” something, for work or for school, and there is something spontaneous grounded in daily practice that can be nourished by personal will in the face of these practices. Since identity is a special way of giving meaning to belonging to a social group, the pressure of structures (such as a real drop in salaries or layoffs) plays a role in the process of building identity, but especially cultural codes that help to give meaning to belonging under certain concrete circumstances. Different types of codes can exist: cognitive, emotional, moral and aesthetic; and one can relate through means of formal or daily reasoning. In this way, identity is a configuration of these codes which bestow meaning to belonging; as a configuration, identity is not exempt of heterogeneities and contradictions (De la Garza, 2001).

Addressing these contents in greater depth, with an openness to the creativity of practices and the dimensions of labor identity (with Work, with Workers, and with their organizations), the classic or rather preclassic work identity stereotyped the trade worker who possessed very personalized skills and elements (Paugaim, 1997). Product

quality depended on these qualities of a worker and not on the machines; it was not a standard job and the product was the worker's creation. The worker could feel proud of his or her skills and the creation which he or she shared with other similar workers, giving them a shared identity and solidarity in their trade. However, this identity was able to subsist through mechanized and Taylorized work because standardization never implied zero intervention in the worker's conception; however, when work processes were recomposed under Toyotism and greater worker participation and involvement were proposed, as well as the incorporation of computerized processes or the creation of information and knowledge, some analysts began to think of the emergence of modern trades, even though the contents were less physical than in the past (Micheli, 2006). This is the case of software designers, a job that has resisted standardization and that depends upon worker abilities that are not strictly rationalizable or schoolable. But under circumstances of the extension of immaterial production, that place the worker in direct relation with the client and make the client indispensable to providing a service, relational components –above all with the client– and subjective components –emotion, moral, aesthetic– become essential to the work process and become part of the product itself. To this extent, manual or physical qualities and the handling of tools or machinery are diminished to qualify labor in comparison to relational qualities and the generation of emotional, moral or aesthetic meanings, as when referring to care of the elderly or children, or to the work of a professor (Reglia, 2003; Ritzer, 2002; Handy, 1986; Holm-Detlev and Hohler, 2005). These dimensions of work have always existed and manual or material jobs always included them; the difference lies in the emphasis given to soft components over hard components. An extreme case would be software design which is eminently symbolic in terms of inputs, process and product. In this sense, the capacity for relations and for arousing certain meanings becomes part of the product market that receives both social and labor recognition and can be a cause of worker pride or identity.

One dimension of work that has not been emphasized in classical forms of work is the use of space. In the classical factory, the use of space is commonly designed by management, for use by different departments of the company where workers should produce. But the main problem occurs with jobs where the appropriation of space becomes a means of production of a good or service. These may be private company spaces that may be shared with clients, as in the case of self-service stores where stockers and clients wander through and occupy the same space, sometimes interfering

and sometimes supporting one another. In home-based work, also, the same space is shared between the worker and his or her family members resulting in an interface between production and reproduction, with situations and degrees of interference or cooperation. But the most serious case has to do with public space, both for street workers in semi-established positions and for those workers whose labors imply travelling throughout a determined territory, such as taxi drivers, microbus drivers or door to door salespeople. For these workers, having access to a public space is a necessary work condition and, in this sense, numerous disputes with very different actors can arise regarding the use of public space – taxi drivers vs. traffic police, motorists, pedestrians or other taxi drivers. In this sense, one could speak of a dispute over public spaces that could bring together certain kinds of workers in these spaces and become part of their common identity. In this case, worker pride could come from their capacity for resistance in the face of the battering they receive from many different opposing actors. Solidarity becomes a necessity; without it, the possibilities for success are significantly diminished – this is true in the case of subway vendors, street vendors, open market salespeople, taxi drivers and microbus drivers. In many non-classical, traditional jobs –street vendor, fire-eater, *franeleros*⁵–, the capacity for exercising resistance to daily contingencies on the job could be a motive for identity and pride in the face of danger, violence or arrest. But frequently in non-classical, traditional jobs, the worker's room for freedom is greater than in formalized jobs in terms of the beginning and end of the shift, ways of working, days of rest, etc. Although this does not imply an absence of regulations, which are normally issued by the government or organizations, existing regulations in this arena do not compare to factory regulations. This freedom and the possibility to socialize with clients or neighbours on the job, combining work and leisure, can be positive factors vindicated by these kinds of workers compared to factory work, which could give them identity and satisfaction. Even though work can sometimes turn into a competition and a game among these workers or with the local citizenry to demonstrate their superior talents, as in the case of a taxi or a microbus driver who in an imaginary projection of adventure or conversion into a superhuman shows off extraordinary driving capacities that are praised by the community, this imaginary of power can be another source of identity (Vovelle, 1987) (Senise, 2001). On the other hand, the role of stigmas in these constructions should also

⁵ Translator's note: A *franelero* is a person who waves a rag, or *franela*, to distribute parking spaces on public streets and who watches over parked cars in exchange for tips.

be taken into consideration (Goffman, 1981). For many workers on the street, a stigma exists among the citizenry that they are dirty, delinquents and drug addicts. Sometimes this negative stigma is part of their identity as people who are spurned by society; in other cases, it can become a counter-discourse and counter-culture, as for the artisans/street vendors in the Coyoacan neighbourhood of Mexico City who make and sell handicrafts and who have struggled culturally and politically for acceptance.

Identity does not require face to face contact: virtual identities can exist among software designers who will never see each other in person. Also, social movements are not always preceded by a strong identity; identity can emerge during the movement itself (Heller, 1985) (Habermas, 1979).

In sum, the workspace continues to be a field for socialization and creation of meanings, that can translate into an identity with the job, with the community or with worker organizations. These last two levels are almost always associated with the collective identification of a danger to the workers to be able to carry out their activity or with the identification of an enemy –for street workers, this is almost always the government–; this kind of collective identity can be fostered when the enemy undertakes concrete actions against the source of work. This is almost always the spark that triggers collective action. This action can depend upon organizations but it has its own dynamic among the community of workers, as in the case of street vendors. As previously mentioned, this identity is not always related to the job or to the product –the sale of a certain simple product in the subway is not a motive of identity– rather to the worker’s qualities or skills to carry out the job, above all to be able to survive, or to relate to the client –as in the case of a barber, for example. In other words, more than an identity “with the job”, an identity exists “for the job” and above all, with the community of workers. Neither the absence of a face-to-face relationship –software designers, taxi or microbus drivers, or salespeople who have not previously met– is sufficient reason to annul this type of identity given that the process of abstraction, although it begins with concrete situations, can rise to non-sensitive levels of observation, creating imaginary scenarios of identity among strangers. This has always been the case: national classic workers’ movements did not need face-to-face relations among all of their members; this was not even possible in the case of large companies (Habermas, 1981).

Finally, although temporary work has grown, it does not involve the majority of workers, particularly salaried workers. In this sense, workers with sinuous, fragmentary

labor paths are not the majority. Fractured labor trajectories represent frequent changes between occupations that are not necessarily interrelated. This insecurity of occupation can affect one's identity but is not necessarily an insurmountable obstacle; from within their own situation of fragmentation and insecurity, migrants from Mexico to the United States have carried out collective actions (Herrera, 2006). Student workers at MacDonald's in Mexico have not; however, an unpredictable workers movement has emerged from call centers that seem to depend on young workers who have no plans to remain in this type of employment. The lack of relations among taxi and microbus drivers as they carry out individualized work in open territory does not impede the manifestation of solidarity or collective actions. In the case of microbus drivers, they are almost always subordinated to concessionaries in the battle over routes, although in the past they were able to unionize and carry out important struggles. Taxi drivers, who are predominantly self-employed, face government regulations or competition with other taxi companies. In other words, individualism and competition in these fragile sectors have been incapable of annulling a common identity and collective action (Thompson, 1983) (Zucchetti, 2003).

For the research at hand, in the case of jobs in closed spaces that are open to clients (Walmart and MacDonald's), potential collective identity is not related to the generation of a certain product or service, rather it manifests itself in the micro-support system, in the face of challenges on the job or company pressure, that we find more commonly at MacDonald's (young student workers who articulate their identities in different life spaces, work-school-family-youth lifestyle and tastes). In both cases, there are poor working conditions: at MacDonald's, the vision of the future is mediated by these jobs in transit –while the person finishes school–; and at Walmart, the sophisticated panoptic vision established by the company is important, allowing it to rapidly detect individual unconformities before they become collective. Among software designers and extras, the former have a pride that reminds us of a 19th century trade worker; however, due to their logical capacities, their vision of the future is to set up their own businesses, thus they see their time working for a company as a learning experience. They do not have their own organizations nor are we aware of collective actions in Mexico, although they do participate in forming virtual communities of designers who provide mutual technical support at a distance, without any material interest – this is virtual solidarity grounded in pride in their trade. Among TV extras, we observed more of a frustrated pride; they share the glamour of show business with other actors, yet they are rejected

rather than appreciated. Combined with job insecurity, they face arbitrariness which helps to forge the frustration and nerve that marks their identity. To date, their collective actions have been limited and easily dismantled.

Finally, in the case of workers who work in open spaces, being subject to multiple pressures and daily contingencies contributes to instilling an idea within these workers that they have a great capacity for labor survival that not every worker possesses. This capacity for resistance, which can include the use of physical violence, is particularly employed for appropriating a workspace and is the main factor that gives this group of workers identity. The codes of a “free worker” who is not subject to factory discipline, nor guaranteed certainty in the face of government and organizational regulations, need to be added to this configuration that gives these workers their sense of identity, together with their sociability in the street that allows them to combine work with leisure and fun, as well as their ability to relate to clients. Another factor that enters into play in these codes is frequent stigmatizing by other actors who consider these workers to be crooked, dirty or delinquents; this translates into symbolic meanings regarding these groups and, on some occasions, in efforts to create a counter-culture discourse to the official discourse (as in the case of open market vendors in Coyoacan). All of this contributes to a *esprit de corps*, especially in the face of the external threats to their work, superimposed on the competition among these workers, although some carry out the better part of their job working alone (taxi and microbus drivers). In the case of the latter, we should also take their relationship with the machine into consideration, as well as their reputed capacity of dominion over it and their assumed superiority over other drivers, under a “take control of the wheel” syndrome that is pervaded with a certain aesthetic and morality.

The importance of these workers’ collective action does not lie in their rallies or protests to which they are taken *en masse* by their organizations or other actors, such as the microbus concessionaries, rather in the fact that they spontaneously and daily act in solidarity with fellow drivers in the face of accidents, disputes with other motorists or harassment by authorities, all of which exceed the capacity of the organizations and the need for face-to-face recognition among actors.

In regards to the analysis of the organization of non-classical workers, salaried workers formally have fictitious unions (Walmart, MacDonald’s and call center employees, and TV extras, in general) or no union at all (software designers). But the most organized sectors are the so-called informal sectors, particularly those who work

in public spaces. The daily struggle for appropriation of workspaces places pressures on worker identity, solidarity and organizing. In general, organizations have not arisen at the initiative of the workers, rather of their leaders in relation to governments and political parties; these organizations are highly autocratic. When they do become formalized, they adopt legal status as Civil Associations⁶ or in rare instances become unions, in a manner in which the workers are not workers rather members of the association and supposedly subject to the legal requirements of the civil code. However, since the civil code does not contemplate anything similar to the title of a union under labor law, a multiplicity of organizations exists among these workers, that have distributed workspaces according to the different political influences of their leaders. These realities imply permanent negotiations among organizational leaders and government authorities in the absence of a clear legal framework. In these negotiations, the government appears as a quasi-employer and agent of public spaces, which is the main means of production for these workers. Many times, these negotiations lead to the establishment of worker regulations, including required registry with a government agency or the worker organizations, the distribution of available spaces, work hours, etc. During this investigation, the following worker organizations were detected: 12 organizations among subway vendors; 25 main organizations among street vendors in the downtown historical district; 20 among street market vendors in the Coyoacan town center; 11,400 concessionaries among microbus drivers; in addition to fictitious unions at MacDonald's, Walmart and call centers. These organizations are not characterized by democratic practice; they are commonly informal autocracies that use power in a discretionary fashion. Some are considered dubious in their operations by their members, such as the "*El Salado*" street market; others hold assemblies that are controlled by the leaders; and in a few cases, the workers can express themselves freely, as in the case of some of the organizations in downtown Coyoacán. In general, the workers do not identify with their organizations, although they do consider them necessary for their protection as they mix styles of paternalistic dominion with gangsterism.

All of this leads to a more general problem: whether or not these organizations could be considered corporatist. The highest expression of corporatism in Mexico was carried out by unions between the 1940's and 1980's. It implied a pact between worker

⁶ Translator's note: In Mexico, civil associations, or AC's by their acronym in Spanish, are one of two legal statuses available for non-profit endeavors. This is the status most appropriate for professional or trade organizing purposes since the other (IAP's) is reserved for strictly charitable purposes.

organizations and the State to maintain governability, economic growth with certain spills for workers and certain political and economic privileges for leaders. As a result of this pact, the State guaranteed a monopoly on worker representation through legal and extra-legal means, including obligatory union affiliation and the eradication of dissidents, and through control of union leaders and permanent mediation by the State in labor and union conflicts. Corporatism also permeated the political system to the extent that the organizations carried voters and contingents to public events held to support the ruling party. The huge crisis of the 1970's and the restructuring of the State, the economy and industrial relations in the 1980's, as well as greater political plurality in the political system, weakened but did not abolish corporatism. At the micro level within companies and the mezzo level in the region or trade, corporatism has known how to co-exist with neoliberalism, as well as the change in political parties in power at a federal level starting in the year 2000. This corporatism has not only existed among unions but also among *campesinos* (peasant farmers) and the *poor people in the cities* (*popular sector*); some even purport it exists within businesses. In the case of "popular" corporatism, this ambiguous term refers to professional or trade organizations, but also informal sector and working class neighbourhood organizations, that were formerly gathered together by the PRI political party in the National Confederation of Popular Organizations (CNOP, by its acronym in Spanish). In the case of organizations analyzed under our investigation, we are referring to civil associations (when they are legally registered), composed of non-classical workers, very few of which are unions.

These organizations are not as strictly defined by legislation as unions, in terms of their registry and the character of the bargaining. A civil association must be registered before a notary public with a minimum of requisites and can co-exist with other organizations without having to demonstrate majority membership compared to unions; moreover, other organizations can also exist and be efficient without needing any legal registry. The important issue is how they are able to gain strength and influence to carry out negotiations, particularly with government authorities. These negotiations are not subject to legislation; if they occur, they arise through free will of the parties involved. In other words, State control over the monopoly of representation of non-classical informal workers is more restricted than in the case of unions. This could be the reason why these organizations multiply for each occupation, as in the case of street vendors. However, the State can privilege making deals with some organizations over others and, in this way, favour them; this can marginalize alternative leaderships and lead to a

privileged relationship of material and political exchange between the government and the organization. For the organization, this means gaining access to the use of public space and other kinds of support for its work; for the government, it signifies certain guarantees of social peace and political support in the context of the presence of other antagonistic organizations or political parties and in times of elections. In other words, for these workers, political control through worker organizing is possible, although in a more flexible fashion and dependent upon which party is in power at the moment. As in the case of corporatist unions, the leadership of “informal unions” –as they are called in the Regulations on Non Salaried Work of the Federal District government– tend to perpetuate once in power, although in a crude fashion with their more vertical, violent and less regulated control than unions; in this sense, government intervention in the internal workings of these organizations is less frequent.

The extended presence of flexible and also more autocratic and less regulated corporatism within informal worker organizations than in the case of unions has repercussions on the forms of collective action. When collective action is convened by these organizations, it can take the shape of *accareo*, which is *en masse* mobilization of the membership to support a certain political party’s candidates or against some policies of government; in these actions, the workers are normally passive entities in the face of their leaders’ activism, similar to how some unions operate to this day. But, at times, when the constellation of interests allows, the leadership can convene in defence of the workspace, when threatened by evacuation or substitution by other organizations. In these cases, the interest of the leader can coincide with the workers’ interests. Nevertheless, we should not believe that all mobilizations or confrontations are determined by the workers’ organizations, particularly in the case of workers in open public spaces who daily live on the edge of a knife; collective action may start on the ground, among the membership, in resistance to aggressions, evacuations or invasions of territory and can later be supported and spread by the organization. This latter expression is the most authentic as a true labor or worker collective action.

Finally, we have demonstrated that the possibility and reality of identity, action and collective organization exist among non-classical workers in regards to their work, especially when legal and institutional obstacles are more flexible. This does not mean that workers are in a state of permanent mobilization; this occurs only under special circumstances: in the face of a structural work-based conflict (profit sharing, occupation of space, regulations, competition) and requiring an ignition point so that the movement

emerges in the face of a true offense or something considered unbearable according to the group's feelings, morals or reasoning. This is the case of police aggressions during evacuations, which are seen as humiliating and prepotent acts carried out against humble workers, extortion or illegitimate violence by authorities, favouritism towards other actors, confiscation of merchandise, sexual abuse by company leadership, etc. Under these conditions, structured conflict, whether in the classical capital-work scheme or in a non-classical government(quasi-employer)-worker or other actors scheme, can unleash work-related collective action. In the case of success, it can strengthen identity through myths, epic heroic tales, a clearer definition of enemies and allies, with components of cognition, emotions, morals and even aesthetics and the consolidation of justificatory, Manichaeian discourse that can be registered in collective memory (De la Garza, 1992) (Van Dijk, 1997) (Sewel, 2002).

In other words, there is a common structural situation underlying workers' conflicts, identities and actions, whether they are classical or non-classical salaried workers: they are direct generators of material goods or services and they live off their work. Without failing to recognize that this is a twilight zone, with this definition we are excluding the owners or proprietors who do not directly generate values of use rather who do so only through their employees. This brings us to the need for a broader definition of working class, one that does not negate the limited concept of the proletariat, as sellers of the strength of their labor for capital, with a historical nucleus that has rotated to become workers of the great industry. Here, we recognize that, on the better part of the planet today, structural work-related conflicts are no longer related to the great industry, rather to services, informality, etc.

But this abstract structural situation will need to be specified in the case of Mexico, where 80% of occupied workers are in precarious conditions, with an employer or the State who opposes them and exercises great organizational control over unions. Under these conditions, the actions of classical salaried workers are limited, but the potential and greater potency of non-classical workers are not annulled, particularly those who do not work in formal companies that could be included under the first situation. Corporate organizational controls (such as Walmart's panoptic), together with union corporatist structures for control and permanent State intervention in support of labor peace and a monopoly on corporate representation, constitute an important bridle that curbs workers who have not been educated by worker struggles, given that this is a long-lasting historical phenomenon that needs to hit a even deeper bottom than when conditions of

union freedom and democracy exist. Historical experience in Mexico shows that the classical working class knew how to mobilize to defend its interests at the close of the 1940's and during the 1950's and 1970's. On the other hand, informal non-classical workers have become very conflictive sectors, characterized by rapid mobilization and violent confrontations. They often act under the influence of their leaders or political parties, or other actors who are also not workers such as concessionaries in the case of microbus drivers. However, structured conflict persists because the conditions of precarious labor subsist and, although the persistent mobilizations of these workers are fragmented, trade-based and lacking broad-based membership, their back-drop is the existence of an exclusive economic model, with great labor uncertainty and fragility, and at the same time, a political system that oppresses or ignores them. The transition towards this significance cannot be easy and will require broader events than daily conflicts for survival on the job, but it will not be the first time in history that salaried workers and non-classical workers can create broad-based united fronts, finding common denominators that objectively exist although only fragmentation appears in the subjectivity of the moment. In 1954, the formal working class in the tin mines of Bolivia knew how to come together with peasant coca farmers, informal workers from working class neighbourhoods, professional workers and small-scale producers to carry out the only triumphant revolution by workers in all of Latin America, going beyond their differences and fragmentations. However, this does not happen every day.

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