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# Dualism, Job Polarization, and the Social Construction of Precarious Work

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## Abstract

Publication of Arne Kalleberg's *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* provides a welcome opportunity to re-examine the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that scholars bring to bear on precarious employment. An exemplar of what was once called the "new structuralism," Kalleberg's book provides a rigorous, multidimensional analysis of the changes impinging on job stability and security. Although it identifies a vitally important trend toward a growing polarization in the distribution of job rewards, it does so in ways that illustrate the limits of the genre of research to which it belongs. Constrained to view the subjective experience of work as merely dependent variables, the book cannot explore how social, political, and cultural processes have both shaped and legitimated the rise of precarious employment. Drawing on recent studies of the popular business press and other media representations, we document the rise of a culture of enterprise that has idealized the uncertainties that have come to grip the labor market, defining the latter as a site on which individual agency can freely unfold. Only by addressing the interplay between job structures and such discursive and political developments can we hope to understand the rise of labor market precarity, let alone expand workers' rights to protection against market uncertainty.

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**Keywords**

nonstandard work arrangements, temporary work, contingent work, precarious employment, precarity, new forms of work organization, social inequality, economic dualism

The rise of “nonstandard,” contingent, or precarious employment has received growing attention among social scientists, who have begun to produce a sprawling literature that has documented the spread of involuntary part-time, temporary, and contract work; studied the spread of downsizing and outsourcing throughout the corporate world; and debated why large corporations have moved to dismantle the centralized or Fordist bureaucratic models on which they had once relied. Much of this work has operated at a broad, theoretical level, far removed from fine-grained empirical research (Harrison, 1994; Lash & Urry, 1987; Pfeffer & Baron, 1988; Rubin, 1995, 1996; Smith, 2010). Equally important have been studies that have depended on case study methods, achieving an empirical richness, but thereby losing the ability to capture broad structural trends affecting the nature of work and employment today (see Barley & Kunda, 2004; Henson, 1996; Krasas-Rogers, 1995; Padavic, 2005; Smith, 2001).

Sharp debates have emerged over the nature of precarious work, its uniformity, and its meaning for workplace life. Some analysts have celebrated what they see as the emancipatory features of the post-Fordist turn, arguing that flexible, fluid, and project-driven work promises to free workers from the normative constraints that bureaucratic employment is said to entail (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001; Powell, 2001). A large proportion of this literature has focused on knowledge workers of one or another stripe—for example, highly skilled professionals and managers who have been able to embark on self-directed careers as freelancers, consultants, or the owners of new start ups (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Meiksins & Whalley, 2002; Osnowitz, 2010). This view has gathered strength from the appearance of several manifestos that attest to the historic mission of this new class of economic agents, as in Richard Florida’s “creative class” (2003) and Daniel Pink’s “free agent nation” (2002).

Over against this view stands a different and far more critical perspective that speaks of a broad and threatening incursion of market forces into work organizations, a trend that powerfully undermines those organizational and legal protections workers had secured against the ravages of economic uncertainty (Bernhardt, Boushey, Dresser, & Tilly, 2008; Greenhouse, 2008; Hacker, 2006; Rubin, 2012). The argument here is that the dismantling of

Fordist bureaucracies has led to a widespread dissolution of the internal labor markets that had provided access to stable, orderly careers (Cappelli, 1995; DiTomaso, 2001). Even highly skilled professionals and managers are said to suffer this uprooting of opportunity structures, as the threat of downsizing casts a pall over workplace life generally. Some analysts have gone further still, arguing that these conditions represent the rise of a new and insidious form of managerial control, as captured in Burawoy's (1985) prescient concept of "hegemonic despotism" (see Vallas, 2012, chap. 3; Vallas & Hill, 2012).

It is in this context that Kalleberg's *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* (2011) has made its appearance. The book's contribution is twofold. First, it mobilizes a massive array of survey data and official statistics, and uses them to capture trends reshaping the distribution of job rewards in the United States during the last three decades. We view this effort as providing the single most comprehensive and rigorous such attempt to date. As such, the book places the social scientific community in a better position to judge the changing contours of work and employment that have emerged during the last two generations. It leads beyond the existing debate (which, ironically, has been as polarized as the economy itself), counsels against blanket generalizations, and demonstrates that the warring perspectives that have dominated social science research in this field are by no means mutually exclusive. That is, the consequences of precarious employment may often assume two disparate and unequal forms.

This brings us to the second contribution of the book. For a time during the late 1970s and early 1980s, institutional economists and sociologists began to develop studies anchored in the notion of economic dualism. The notion here was that the labor market was not one uniform playing field whose functioning affected workers in an unmediated way; rather, labor markets were highly segmented, or articulated into distinct tiers (Beck, Horan, & Tolbert, 1978; Gordon, Edwards, & Reich, 1982; Wallace & Kalleberg, 1981). Partly because of thorny measurement problems and allegations of tautological reasoning (Hodson & Kaufman, 1982), analysis of economic dualism lost favor after the end of the 1980-1982 recession.

Measured in terms of mentions in English language books,<sup>1</sup> for example, one sees a distinct pattern in the use of the terms "dual economy" and "labor market segmentation." "Dual economy" provides the largest number of book mentions, beginning during the years immediately following the Second World War. Its use, however, spikes during the late 1970s and the early 1980s; during the same period the other three phrases enjoy a similar growth in use. Although both terms continue to appear in texts as recently as 2008

(the last year for which data is available), their use has diminished significantly. Searches of the same terms in English language academic journals catalogued by JSTOR reveal a substantially similar pattern. In all cases, both phrases enjoy their peak audience during the Reagan Administration. In spite of some arguments about “the new dualism” (Harrison, 1994), social scientists have until very recently had surprisingly little to say about such trends toward economic polarization. This is especially ironic in retrospect, for it means that discussion of the structural basis of economic polarization and dualism began to disappear from the sociological lexicon at precisely the moment when inequalities began to grow increasingly pronounced in the United States.

Hence, we see the second major contribution of Kalleberg’s book as lying in its careful analysis of the ways in which work structures have *differentially* shaped the job rewards encountered by labor force participants during the last quarter century and more. Built into the operation of the neo-liberal economy, Kalleberg shows, is a tendency to generate ever-sharper disparities in job rewards. Highly educated professionals, for example, enjoy expanding career opportunities in many fields, even as an expanding proportion of workers—even those with some college—tends to be employed in low-wage and insecure jobs that offer little in the way of benefits or prospects for promotion. As Kalleberg writes (2011, pp. 14-15):

This polarization is not new, but the duality between primary and secondary labor markets has increased along with the disappearance of relatively low-skill, traditional, middle class jobs with good pay and benefits, job stability, and steady promotions . . . While all jobs have become more precarious, some works have been less vulnerable than others, and the labor force has become increasingly polarized into those with more education and marketable skills and those without the human capital attributes.

The book thus draws attention to phenomena whose importance is only now gaining public discussion (partly fueled by the Occupy movement): an unprecedented growth of economic dualism and a structurally rooted trend toward the polarization of job structures.

Kalleberg’s book devotes far less time to discussion of the structural roots or causes of the polarization trend than to their empirical manifestations. To be sure, he does identify a host of causes—an increasingly anemic labor movement that has left workers more vulnerable to hardening employer tactics; neo-liberal economic policies that have weakened economic and labor

regulations and weakened social insurance provisions; sharpening global competition, which has shifted the balance of power to employers; and technologies that render unskilled work superfluous. Yet the greatest share of the book is devoted to a painstaking analysis of each dimension of polarization, the better to document its existence.

In this respect, Kalleberg presents data detailing the duality that has gripped occupational structures (whose middle ranges have demonstrably contracted) and employment relations (where a gulf has emerged between firms taking the “high” and “low roads”). Equal time is given to shifts in the distribution of earnings and benefits, control over work content, and working time itself. Although it is not a central feature of his analysis, Kalleberg notes the importance of gender as a part of this story. If we define “bad” jobs as those providing very low pay and no health insurance or retirement benefits, then men and women have experienced something of a scissors effect: A declining share of women hold bad jobs, whereas men are increasingly found in such work situations (2011, pp. 129-130; see Hollister, 2011). This point deserves greater analysis and discussion than it receives, not only because gender disparities complicate, or overdetermine, the polarization Kalleberg stresses, but also because men’s declining fortunes have political and institutional effects (as both major political parties well known).

Despite the care and cogency of Kalleberg’s analysis, significant issues arise that seem likely to threaten its impact. One stems from a disturbing gap between the rhetoric of polarization that underlies the entire analysis and the empirical pattern Kalleberg so carefully assembles. The other issue is, to our mind, the weightier one, in that it represents a theoretical limit that has hamstrung our ability to understand the emergence and legitimacy of precarious employment as such. We address these issues in turn.

## Boundary Slippage

As noted, Kalleberg’s book works systematically through a mass of survey and other data that provide cross-temporal glimpses of the polarization effect he detects. Yet, in this mass of data, one finds a gnawing tendency for the findings to resist Kalleberg’s thesis at important points. Thus, some measures of job rewards do evince a polarized pattern, most especially in the occupational structure (where both low wage and highly paid jobs have grown, but middle-paying jobs have declined). There is also clear evidence of a polarization thesis with respect to the employment relationship (as an abyss has opened up between those who have access to the standard work arrangement and those who do not) and earnings. But several *other* dimensions Kalleberg

studies simply do not conform to the polarization model, or do so in ways that betray important forms of slippage in the meaning of polarization as such.

A good example is the question of job insecurity. Kalleberg documents many adverse labor market trends, many of which have generated a growing fear of job loss as a relatively generalized phenomenon. Yet that is precisely the point; in making sense of this trend, he acknowledges that it signifies “an equality of insecurity and uncertainty” (2011, p. 86, emphasis added).

This equality of insecurity differs from previous eras, when precarious work was often descried in terms of a dual labor market, with unstable and uncertain jobs concentrated in a secondary labor market . . . Now, precarious work has spread to *all* sectors of the economy and has become more pervasive and generalized: professional and managerial jobs are just as precarious these days as low-end jobs (emphasis added).

Here the polarization model seems not to apply.

This pattern of inconsistency also emerges with respect to intrinsic job rewards (2011, p. 146), which seem not only to have grown over time for *all* groups,<sup>2</sup> but also to betray little tendency toward greater dispersion. Similarly, there is no evidence of a polarization in the intensity of work or of a growing disparity in the degree of satisfaction workers receive from their jobs. We do not mean to fixate on the most granular level of Kalleberg’s results, for indeed, few social trends exhibit a perfect alignment across all dimensions. Rather, we see these inconsistencies as reflecting an important uncertainty that affects the model of polarization that Kalleberg propounds. Which classes and strata have derived the most benefit from the polarization trend? At times, the boundary he detects lies between highly skilled, college educated professionals and managers on the one hand, and the less educated and less skilled employee population on the other. At *other* times, however, one senses that the boundary at issue lies between upper-level managers (the ones deciding whether to outsource or to downsize), and the relatively powerless employees they seek to discharge. At still other times, the gulf the author stresses is the highly ambiguous (even if operationalized) boundary between the holders of “good” and “bad” jobs (the very title of the book).

Our point is that the morphology of the socio-economic system in the United States is not viewed through a clear and consistent lens. Even the hour-glass metaphor is used at times, but on other occasions discarded as insufficient to the task. Greater clarity and consistency on the meaning of so

critical a concept as polarization is needed, we suggest, if the argument is to resonate with and persuade either social scientific or lay audiences.

## **A Dearth of Discourse**

The second major issue we wish to raise here concerns a feature of Kalleberg's analysis that is by no means specific to his work, but instead reflects the scholarly genre from which the book is derived. We see Kalleberg as perhaps the leading exponent of what was once called the "new structuralism" in social scientific approaches toward inequality at work (Baron & Bielby, 1980). First appearing in the 1980s, this perspective sought to challenge the methodological individualism that so heavily informed human capital theory and status attainment models.

The great contribution of this genre, indeed, lay in its insistence that access to job rewards could not fully be explained through appeal to workers' individual characteristics. Rather, the allocation of job rewards—or better, the allocation of people into positions—depends on organizational and institutional processes that inevitably elide a purely individualistic lens.

To drive this point home, new structuralists drew attention to organizationally rooted structures and processes that impinge on the inequalities that workers experience on the job. Thus, the concept of "firm internal labor market markets" arose to describe the institutionalized rules and procedures that were used to sort employees into various positions within the firm (see Althausser & Kalleberg, 1981; Osterman, 1984). The concept of "occupational internal labor markets" gained currency as a means of understanding the ways in which members of a given occupational group or community gained control over entry into and mobility with a given category of jobs (Orr, 1996). New structuralists engaged in a far-reaching debate about the institutional conditions that shaped work structures (Edelman, 1990; Dobbin et al., 1993; Kalleberg & Berg, 1987), and the processes through which gender and racial inequalities grow more or less pronounced (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). Viewed against this background, one sees that Kalleberg's book is a rich and timely application of new structuralist thinking, now applied to the question of job stability, the employment contract, and the shifting nature of work structures in the United States.

The problem we see, then, is not in Kalleberg, but in the new structuralist stars that govern his reasoning. As in this genre more generally (and as reflects the name of this school of thought), it is structures that determine outcomes. The workings of markets, unions, governments, and firms impinge on the work structures that arise. There is room for agency (to some extent),

if marginally (Simpson, 1985), and subjective awareness of work structures is acknowledged, but even more marginally still. Indeed, we see this as a serious limitation, in that *subjective constructs about work are only ever conceived as individual attitudes, and consequently limited to the status of dependent variables*. It therefore becomes impossible to understand how precarious employment has been discursively constituted. This is especially important, if (as we contend) the polarization of job rewards has itself been made possible by ideological processes that are not limited to work organizations, but that impinge on public conceptions of work. Thus *politically and culturally rooted shifts in work expectations have the potential to recast the way workers think about and experience the employment relationship, with effects that can have powerful effects on the outcomes that obtain*. A purely work-centered analysis of the interrelations between the economy and work structures, then, cannot capture these broader (and we contend, critically important) discursive shifts.

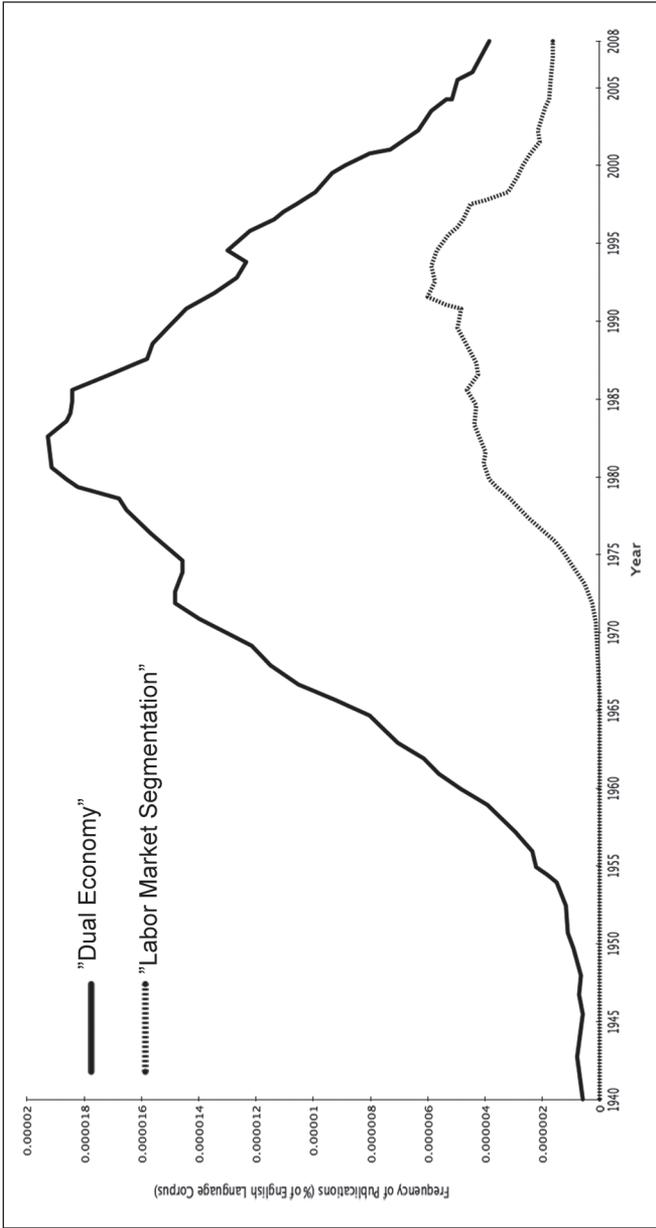
To understand this point, it is useful to reconsider the rise of temporary and part-time employment in the United States. Although the dominant conception of nonstandard work has privileged economic and organizational influences, there is strong evidence that legal, political, and ideological influences have been critical ingredients in the growth of contingent work. Thus, Gonos (1997, 2001) has argued that the very definition of “the employer” is itself a social, legal, and political construct that has varied over time. Prior to the 1950s, employment agencies had difficulty establishing their right to be regarded the legal employers of the workers they funneled to client firms. This, obviously, posed a massive obstacle to the growth of temporary help firms (THFs), whose attraction—their product, really—lies in their ability to assume the responsibility for hiring, allocating, paying, and firing the employees they send to their client firms. For this reason, the temporary help industry engaged in a broad, state-by-state mobilization, led by the National Association of Temporary Services, which led a highly effective campaign to rewrite legislation that redefined the employer role, in keeping with their interests of the THFs. The point here is that the legislative and political arena is a critical part of the narrative to be grasped, and that we cannot view the meaning and role of work structures as self-evident givens to be taken for granted.

A further illustration of this point emerges in the recent studies by Hatton (2008, 2011), whose analysis adds to our understanding of the emergence of temporary work now by pointing to the role played by the discursive constructs and symbolic representations of work that THFs mobilized during the middle and latter part of the 20th century. Hatton shows that great public and

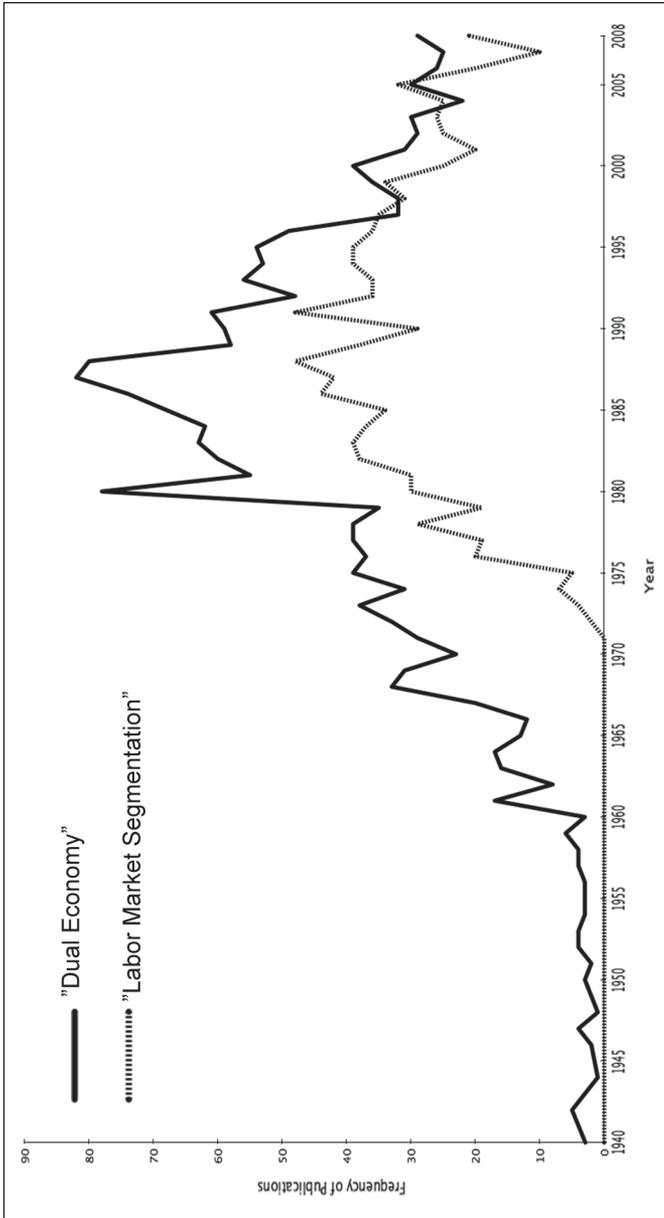
political distrust existed toward employment agencies in the United States in the years leading up to the 1930s. Such negative images were the legacy of ethno-racial bias, bias, in that employer referral agencies were viewed as an outgrowth of the *padrone* system, in which immigrant businessmen profited by supplying pools of immigrant labor to low-wage employers in apparel, gardening, leatherworking, baking, longshoring, and other industries. To counteract this legacy of ethno-racial bias, the major firms in the temporary help industry engaged in a broad public campaign to mobilize an entirely new and far more appealing public image (see Figures 3 and 4). Virtually all the major firms relied on one or another version of the “Kelly Girl” icon: a young, white, attractive, middle-class woman wearing a dress, heels, and even white gloves. This iconic figure in effect replaced Rosie the Riveter, and insinuated itself not only in specialized industry periodicals and personnel magazines, but also in prominent venues aimed at the general public (such as *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*). Temporary help was being publicly reframed, in other words, as the industry used symbolic constructs to redefine its services, and to carve out a new segment of the American economic terrain for itself. Our point is that *legitimizing contingent work required significant symbolic labor on the part of temporary help firms, which mobilized discursive constructs to neutralize the older, unsavory image of the padron, while also seeming to avoid any threat to organized labor or working men generally*. The evolution of work structures was the product of a complex interplay between economic and cultural constructs, or structural and discursive influences. To understand the transformation of employment, then, requires that we acknowledge that work structures cannot be analyzed purely on their own domain.

We believe this point—the role of discursive influences—is crucial not only for understanding the *origins* of the modern temporary help industry, but also the forces that help *reproduce* precarious employment. Indeed, attending to the discursive constructs brought to bear on labor market structures today is vital if we are to understand the conditions under which one or another policy solution might indeed succeed.

To illustrate this argument, below we develop a brief analysis of a discursive formation that we believe has bearing on public representations and experience toward precarious employment. Here we have in mind the rise of an “enterprise discourse” (du Gay, 1996; du Gay & Salaman, 1992) that idealizes flexible employment, invites the worker to construe employment uncertainty as emancipatory, and that conjures the labor market as an arena in which individual freedom and self-fulfillment can be won (see also Vallas & Hill, 2012). This cultural trend, we contend, encourages workers to comply



**Figure 1.** Mentions of "Dual Economy" and "Labor Market Segmentation" in the Corpus of English-Language Books, 1940-2008 (Michel, Shen, Aiden, Veres, & Gray, 2011)



**Figure 2.** Mentions of “Dual Economy” and “Labor Market Segmentation” in Peer Reviewed Journals Indexed by JSTOR, 1940-2008 (Michel et al., 2011)

Everybody  
asks me . . .



what's  
different  
about  
KELLY GIRL  
TEMPORARY OFFICE SERVICE?

A phone call will bring a personal visit from a Kelly girl right to your office. She'll be glad to explain a few of the "exclusives" that make Kelly Girl Service your best choice for temporary office personnel. Like the one-of-a-kind 100% guarantee on your Kelly Girls' work. And the higher Kelly Girl bond. The simplified Kelly Girl rate system . . . and the exacting Kelly Girl testing procedure that assures you the right girl for the right job. There's more, of course. And I'd like to tell you. Personally.

Figure 3. Excerpt from the Kelly Advertising Campaign, early 1960s

Special Training  
equips the "Girl  
in the White Gloves"  
to do a better job  
in your office!

Manpower® White Glove Girls have had special training in adapting quickly, applying skills more efficiently, facing emergencies, blending perfectly with your permanent staff.

Look for the Manpower Training Certificate that identifies all White Glove Girls. This exclusive training makes *the difference* between Manpower White Glove Girls and other temporary office workers.

TYPISTS ■ STENOGRAPHERS ■  
OFFICE MACHINE OPERATORS

**MANPOWER**

The very best in temporary help.  
Over 300 offices throughout  
the world.

©1964 Manpower, Inc.  
Classified by Manpower®



**Figure 4.** Excerpt from the Manpower, Inc. Campaign, early 1960s

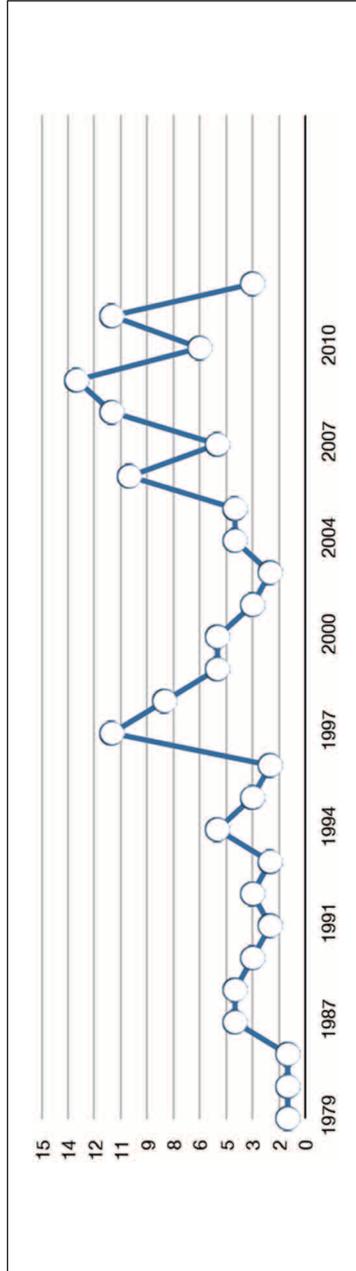
with what has been called “responsibilization,” in which workers are expected to assume the obligation of perfecting themselves, and of bringing out the full value of their human capital, the better to take advantage of the opportunities that exist for the entrepreneurial self.

We see the popular business press as the major progenitors of this discourse (Sharone, forthcoming; McGee, 2005; Vallas & Cummins, 2012), which found

its initial expression in Richard Bolles's massively influential book *What Color is Your Parachute?*, originally published in 1972. Gaining momentum throughout the 1980s, this genre then took on a life of its own, and has shown only increasing momentum since that time. A systematic search of Google Books and of Amazon.com bestsellers during the years 1980-2010 provides some guidance in this respect.<sup>3</sup> Figure 5 provides the trend lines, which we believe depict three distinct periods. The first, which we interpret as an initial response to the deep 1980-1982 recession, began in the latter 1980s and lasted into the mid-1990s, at which point these texts seemed to trail off. Then, the production of such entrepreneurial texts entered a second period, beginning in the latter 1990s (which we see as a response to the 1990-1991 recession). By this second period, the genre seemed to be more fully institutionalized, and the market for these texts more fully established (though still volatile). The third period arose in the middle of the 2000s, when the production of these texts repeatedly reached into double digits for the first time. Interpreting this trend broadly, we contend that there is a lagged effect of economic downturns, which seem to generate increasing demand (and consequent supply) for these worker-as-entrepreneur texts.

And indeed, it is the *nature*, and not the numbers of these texts that commands our attention. One of the most representative expressions of the genre was Daniel Pink's *Free Agent Nation* (2001), an upbeat analysis that spoke in teleological terms of a structurally-determined movement that leads a substantial proportion of the labor force beyond the bureaucratic wage-labor relationship. Pink conjures an image of a national movement of people who use new technologies and new forms of expertise to declare their economic independence from the creativity-suffocating working lives they had suffered for so long. As he puts it, "the new emblematic figure is the free agent—the independent worker who operates on his or her own terms, untethered to a large organization, serving multiple clients and customers instead of a single boss" (Pink, 2001, p. 25). The old social contract, in which workers traded loyalty for security, is no longer viable; now, in the new flexible economy, free agents must approach their talents in the same manner as do finance capitalists, hedging their bets by engaging multiple clients instead of a single boss. Uncertainty soon gives way to exhilaration, as passion and creativity provide fuel for the free agent nation to thrive.

Without a single order being issued or a single memo sent from headquarters, one fourth of the American workforce has declared its independence from traditional work (ibid, 45).



**Figure 5.** Publication trends and entrepreneurial discourse, 1980-2010.\*  
 \*Data were compiled using Google Books, searching for texts that combined terms such as "entrepreneurial," "marketing," "the self," and "branding."  
 See Footnote 4.

The themes that Pink's book develops—the need for economic independence from wage-labor; the rise of a new work ethic built on autonomy and self-expression—are staples of this genre. Yet one additional theme that held only a subordinate role in Pink's book has gained increasingly centrality, especially since the late 1990s: the notion that the self is an asset whose value must be maximized, using all of the branding tactics for which large corporations are infamous. Indeed, where older versions of managerial rhetoric aimed at the organization, now the new discourse seems to advise individuals to internalize corporate practices, and to regard the self as itself a profit-seeking entity.

Perhaps the most important example of this shift can be found in the case of Thomas Peters, a massively influential managerial writer who coauthored the landmark work on corporate re-engineering, *In Search of Excellence* (Peters & Waterman, 1982). After writing this book, Peters abandoned rationalist, quasi-scientific case studies of corporations, and began to write far more normative or even evangelical works that spoke not to *organizations*, but to *individual employees*. This shift becomes quite marked apparent in Peters's later books (1994, 1999), and is trumpeted in a revealing article that appeared in *Fast Company* (Peters, 1997).

Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the position we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: *Me, Inc.* To be in this business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.

Start right now: As of this moment you're doing to think of yourself differently! You're not an 'employee' of General Motors, you're not a staffer at General Mills . . . Forget the Generals! You don't 'belong to' any company for life, and your chief affiliation isn't to any particular 'function'. You're not defined by your job title and you're not confined by your job description.

Starting today you are a brand. (cited in McGee, 2005, p. 134).

Judging by the river of publications that have appeared in the 2000s, the Pink-Peters rhetoric has become commonplace. These are only some of the titles that underlie the trend line shown in Figure 5.

- You, Inc.: The Art of Selling Yourself (Beckwith & Beckwith, 2006),
- Escape from Cubicle Nation: From Corporate Prisoner to Thriving Entrepreneur (Slim, 2009),

- Branding Yourself: How to Look, Sound, and Behave Your Way to Success (Spillane, 2000),
- Self Marketing Power: Branding Yourself as a Business of One (Beals, 2008),
- Career Renegade: How to Make a Great Living Doing What you Love (Fields, 2009),
- The 4 Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich (Ferriss, 2009),
- Career Distinction: Stand out by Building Your Brand (Arruda & Dixson, 2007), and
- The Complete Idiot's Guide to Branding Yourself (Paprocki & Paprocki, 2009)

We contend that this discourse is consequential. It embodies a powerful set of norms that have direct bearing on the ways that economic activity and human subjectivity are to be defined. First, it provides a world-view that invites actors to embrace a seemingly rebellious posture toward bureaucratic employment, construed as anathema to personal fulfillment and creativity. Indeed, this discourse even invokes the labor movement's concept of "wage slavery," using it to evangelize the new form of capitalism rather than to challenge its nature or logic. Second, in a manner that recalls Hochschild's (1983) analysis, the worker's self is now redefined as a commercializeable product. The combined effect of this literature, we suggest, is to circulate a faux-workerist discourse that induces employees to embrace a critique of the very bureaucratic structures that had previously sheltered them from precarity. The growth of precarity can then be internalized and rationalized by workers at firms that wish to "explain away" the changes that workplaces are undergoing, or define the latter as matters that lie within the reach of individual agency and self-determination.<sup>4</sup>

We feel that our task, which Kalleberg's book provokes, is to document the ways and means through which workers come to understand and navigate these dual rhetorics of self-fulfillment and individual responsibility. This is a particularly important challenge within a potential new regime of "flexicurity," which Kalleberg notes may provide the social safety net individuals need to reinvent themselves in between periods of employment. Flexicurity may provide such a social safety net, but the ways and means of reinventing the working self-remain largely undocumented. Should flexicurity become a more widespread phenomenon, such a task of understanding will become all the more important.<sup>5</sup>

Space limitations rule out anything more than this, admittedly the barest outline of an analysis of this discursive trend. But it will perhaps suffice to

make several points that are critical to an understanding of precarious employment today. First, work structures do not develop and survive in a cultural vacuum. Rather, discursive formations (such as the culture of enterprise) occupy significant cultural space, impinging on the view workers adopt toward the employment relationship and even toward themselves. If, as we suspect, this culture of enterprise has significant effects on workers' perceptions, then it (and other ideological influences as well) must be brought into our analyses. This is by no means to suggest that workers are passive recipients of such entrepreneurial texts or cultural dopes who comply with self-help edits received from on high. Rather, it is to suggest that, in the absence of collective alternatives, a discourse such as this can be highly seductive, inviting members of the labor force to view the market as a terrain on which individual freedom can and must be sought. It may even prove useful to suggest that newly hegemonic forms of subjectivity—"identity norms,"—have emerged, inviting young people to engage in serial (unpaid) internships, resume building activities, and participation in voluntary organizations, all in order to comply with the new employment demands (Smith, 2010). The point here is a more general one: that the work structures that emerge and the orientations that workers adopt toward them cannot be studied in a cultural vacuum. Discourses such as the one addressed above may have direct bearing on the posture that workers adopt toward work structures, and even toward their own selves.

## Conclusion

Kalleberg's *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* can be viewed as the culmination of "new structuralist" analysis. As such, it provides a timely application of this approach, and one that returns our attention to the problem of economic dualism that has received flagging attention from organizational sociologists. Yet, in so doing, the book highlights the challenges inherent in modeling the polarization effect, and it illustrates the limits of a purely economic or materialist analysis focused solely on work structures and on individual responses to them. Grasping the forces that explain the emergence and reproduction of the new forms of work organization will require that we broaden our lens beyond work structures—the exclusive focus of Kalleberg's analysis—and begin to explore the normative orientations and discursive influences in which post-Fordist workplaces take root. Failing this, our analysis is likely to elide the social forces that underpin the turn toward precarity. Blind to such social forces, our calls for policy changes are that much more likely to lack their desired effect.

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## Notes

1. These trends are documented here using the Google Books plugin *Ngram*, which allows users to visualize the mention of specific phrases in a number of languages (see Michel et al., 2011).
2. We interpret this pattern as reflecting a broader cultural shift (the growth of a discourse of self-fulfillment) that needs greater discussion than Kalleberg provides. We return to this point further below.
3. The following discussion makes use of the results that obtained when we entered into Google books these search terms: entrepreneurship; self; selling; marketing; branding yourself. We included all general-interest books that focused on employees and the workplace, and were not specific to one particular industry or occupation (for instance, “Filmmaker’s guide to entrepreneurship”). Included were all books that aimed at promoting the ideal of self-entrepreneurship and rejection of more traditional employment, and that encouraged a “work for yourself” mentality.
4. This emphasis on individual agency is hardly new; it was a key part of Reinhard Bendix’s classic 1956 *Work and Authority in Industry*. Our approach rests on more recent theories of systemic individualization (Beck, 2000; Bauman, 2000) of the social pressures that underlie the rise of flexible forms of subjectivity (Sennett, 1998; Foucault, 2007), and du Gay (1996). We find virtue in the argument of McGee (2005), who speaks of a historical shift from the “self-made man” to the “belabored self” (in which individuals are normatively pressured to enhance their personal strengths and labor market assets).
5. Vallas (2012, Chap. 3) develops an analysis of the self-styled movement of the “precariat,” a loose assemblage of the contract workers, the partly employed, and undocumented immigrants, all of whom felt aggrieved by labor market uncertainty, and who developed an inventive transnational movement that in many respects anticipated the Occupy movements that arose in the United States during 2011.

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