

THE FUTURE OF WORK >>

>> COOPERATIVES
AT WORK

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Matt Noyes

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COOPERATIVES AT WORK

The Future of Work

The future of work is a vital contemporary area of debate both in business and management research, and in wider social, political and economic discourse. Globally relevant issues, including the aging workforce, rise of the gig economy, workplace automation and changing forms of business ownership, are all regularly the subject of discussion in both academic research and the mainstream media, having wider professional and public policy implications.

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COOPERATIVES AT WORK

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Matt Noyes (MA, Mondragon University, 2017) is a social movement educator and organizer living in Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA. He is a writer and translator of books and articles on solidarity economy, popular education, worker cooperatives, and union democracy and reform. He is a member of the Grassroots Economic Organizing Collective and several cooperatives, including Social.Coop, May-First.Coop, and the Colorado Solidarity Fund. Matt studied political economy at the New School for Social Research and cooperative organization and social economy at Mondragon

University, and has taught in unions, worker centers, and other movement organizations and universities in the United States and Japan.

Emi Do (PhD, Tokyo University of Agriculture, 2020) is a cooperative educator and organizer living in Vancouver, BC, Canada. Formerly an Assistant Professor in the Department of International Food and Agriculture Science at Tokyo University of Agriculture, she has taught and presented about agricultural cooperatives, cooperative education and governance. Her other areas of research include urban agriculture, local food systems, and food literacy initiatives. She is a member of [unfiltered.coop](#) and [social.coop](#), and sits on the editorial board of the Asia Pacific Cooperative Research Partnership.

Marcelo Vieta (PhD, York University, Canada, 2012) is Associate Professor in the Adult Education and Community Development program and Director of the Centre for Learning, Social Economy & Work at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Marcelo has published on the social and solidarity economy, workplace democracy, and labor activism in the Global North and South, including *Workers' Self-Management in Argentina* (Brill/Haymarket, 2020) and *The Italian Road to Recuperating Enterprises and the Legge Marcora Framework* (EURICSE, 2017). Marcelo serves on the Canadian Association for Studies in Cooperation board and is an Americas representative on the International Cooperative Alliance's Committee on Cooperative Research.

Joseba Azkarraga, PhD in Sociology (University of the Basque Country, 2006) and in Psychology (Universitat Ramon Llull, Catalunya, 2021). He was a member of the cooperative movement of Mondragón for 15 years, as a professor and

researcher at the University of Mondragon. Currently, he is Professor in sociology at the University of the Basque Country (Department of Sociology and Social Work, Education Faculty of Bilbao). He has published on issues of social economy, education, socioecological transition, food sovereignty, and postgrowth/degrowth. His focus is on the radical cultural change required for postgrowth societies. He resides in Durango (Basque Country, in Spain) and participates in the Basque ecological movement.

Charlie Michel (MS, Case Western Reserve University, 2017) is Regional Food Systems Program Coordinator for Mission West Community Development Partners (Ronan, Montana, USA). His background encompasses field work, advocacy, and education in agriculture, sustainability, and cooperatives. He is currently pursuing a Master of Management in Cooperatives and Credit Unions through Saint Mary's University (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada) using his work with the Northwest Food Hub Network as the focal point of his research. He currently resides in Spokane, Washington where he is active in the local food system and cooperative economy.

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PREFACE

Worker cooperatives have held great promise since they first appeared on the economic scene almost two centuries ago. Interestingly, they have roots with *both* organized labor and social reformers at the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. Worker co-ops also stem from efforts by groups of people to control their own economic and social destinies in line with humanitarian, democratic, egalitarian, and sometimes revolutionary values. This vision has been made concrete in countless cases of people taking their work and social futures into their own hands, working against many obstacles and fashioning possibilities that many politicians and business leaders said were unrealistic or even impossible.

Worker co-ops represent one important way to address the multiple, interrelated crises of our times. Social, economic, political, health, and environmental crises have become even more apparent with the persistent pandemic of COVID-19 and its variants. For instance, the crisis of democracy today is bound up with economic inequality, racial injustice, and environmental degradation. The inadequacy of the coordinated global response to the pandemic is due to a variety of factors, but among those are inequitable distribution of resources as well as social and political divisions that

undermine deep cooperation on public health, environmental stewardship, and the dignity of labor.

Worker co-ops have the capacity to maximize democratic practice and provide economic security for workers and their communities. Worker cooperatives at their best maximize shared ownership and self-governance. In places such as Emilia Romagna (Italy), The Basque Country (Spain), Québec (Canada), South Korea, Argentina, Brazil, and India, high concentrations of cooperatives, including worker co-ops, have made significant and well-documented contributions to the health and well-being of individuals, households, and communities.

Some of the most exciting experiments in worker cooperativism are embedded in larger projects and networks that involve community and movement organizing as well as focused development of an enterprise. These efforts are part of a much larger tapestry of initiatives and new organizational forms, including commoning, mutual aid, time banks, bartering, and informal neighborhood organizing. In recent years, many of these efforts have relied heavily on information and communication technology. Still, today, *worker-owned-and-managed* cooperatives remain a small segment of what can loosely be called “the cooperative economy,” which is itself not yet the major force it could be. There is a remarkable array of organizations and initiatives that merge cooperation and work, mostly under the radar of mainstream media. Worker co-ops are thriving on every continent. In this book we step outside comfortable circles and familiar sources to open ourselves and our readers to the true diversity of cooperative enterprises, including related models that fall under different labels.

We have long been intrigued by worker co-ops as a space for robust workplace participation and the democratization of economic life. In the early 1990s, George Cheney decided to

delve deeply into forms of workplace participation, ranging from historical labor movements to business models like quality circles and total quality management to European codetermination models to cooperatives at work. This path led George to the Mondragón cooperatives in the Basque Country, Spain and then back to cooperatives around the United States, then to international comparative studies of worker and other types of co-ops (including consumer, land, and housing). George is formally retired as an academic, but he continues to pursue applied research while also working on cooperative development; wider organizational consulting and community work; and communication about social, economic, and environmental justice.

Matt Noyes began to study worker cooperatives in 2010 – while living in Japan. After years of practical work in union democracy and worker education in the United States, it was the need to engage undergraduate students in a business administration program and a desire to open a dialogue with them on democracy and social transformation that led him to worker cooperatives. Like George, Matt ended up at Mondragón in the Basque Country, where he encountered the MTA and LEINN programs (which will be discussed later in this book), establishing relationships with young cooperative entrepreneurs. Platform cooperativism also became a focus for him that continues today, as does solidarity economy. After moving back to the United States in 2018, he was a caregiver for several years and is now pursuing solidarity economy education and organizing.

Emi Do came to cooperatives as a small-scale urban farmer trying to find a viable alternative to the dominant food distribution chain. The sense of empowerment, mutuality, and solidarity that the experience provided sparked an interest in the cooperative model as a means to democratize and transform relationships across different workplaces and contexts.

Through studying the largest agricultural cooperative federation in Japan for her PhD studies and incubating different worker cooperative enterprises under a new worker cooperative law there, Emi explored organizational practices that foster novel, collaborative ways for people to work together. Recently, she has returned to Canada. She continues to explore forms of solidarity in urban food systems and in environmental advocacy.

Marcelo Vieta arrived at worker cooperatives during his PhD studies. He was taken by the audaciousness of Argentines' taking over streets and companies, seizing plazas, and running entire neighborhoods via direct democracy during the crisis of its neoliberal economic system in 2001. Argentina's *empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores* movement (ERTs) became the subject of his dissertation. Since then, he has researched all forms of cooperatives, especially worker co-ops; collaborated with the co-op sector in Canada, Argentina, and Italy; worked with community-based labor initiatives; studied other business conversions to cooperatives; and investigated avenues to scale up economic democracy and expand the solidarity economy. He now teaches and researches on these and other issues and the emancipative learning that takes place in participatory and solidarity-based organizations.

Joseba Azkarraga has been a member of the cooperative movement of Mondragón for 15 years, as a professor at Mondragon University. He focused on strengthening cooperative identity in a time of globalization (his doctoral dissertation received the Basque Government Research Award). In addition, he consulted for the Mondragon Corporation. Recently, he has explored socioecological resilience, analyzing social movements such as the Transition Movement. Along the same lines, he has been examining food sovereignty and agroecology, with a special emphasis on the pathbreaking work of young Basques immersed in agroecology. In general,

his work addresses the fundamental cultural change required for postgrowth societies to emerge.

Charlie Michel found his way to cooperative studies via agriculture, volunteering through the Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms program and working a season in a peach orchard before stepping into a role as an educator and advocate with National Farmers Union. He is Regional Food Systems Program Coordinator for the Northwest Food Hub Network, a project in intercooperation among farmer-owned food hubs in the United States. He is also a master's student in the International Center for Cooperative Management at St. Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

All of us find inspiration in cases such as: DisCOs, distributed cooperatives pursuing commons-based socioeconomic activity that incorporates feminist economic principles; *Unión Solidaria de Trabajadores* (UST), a construction and parks maintenance worker-recuperated co-op in Buenos Aires that redirects portions of surpluses to aiding surrounding communities; and recent efforts in the United States to bring together labor unions and cooperatives in fields like agriculture, energy, and social services. These initiatives show revolutionary approaches to work, governance, and communication that are not always aimed at a preset outcome but that have mutual support and the broader community at heart. We visit these, and many other organizations like them, throughout the book.

The multiple – and interconnected – global crises of the past few years are leading both to significant shifts in employment patterns and to a deeper rethinking of what jobs, careers, productivity, and organizations mean. COVID-19 brought our attention to other crises and their interrelationships such as the crucial role of “essential” care and service work marginalized by dominant discourses and the inability

of the current market system to respond effectively to immediate local needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also called attention to the acceleration of climate change, mass extinctions, and associated disasters; the pressures and turbulence caused by severe economic inequality; and overdue reckoning and reparations for racial oppression. With these problems at the fore, accustomed socioeconomic and organizational structures are being challenged.

Many workers' and other cooperatives, especially in the Global North, have stepped up to these challenges, rewriting their policies and redirecting their practices in terms of stronger, more proactive principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion – far beyond accustomed public statements of values and principles.

The perspective for this book is multidisciplinary and multitheoretic, meaning that we draw upon a variety of traditions in the analysis of work, business, organizations, and broader institutions, especially when addressing umbrella concepts such as capitalism, democracy, and technology. We strive to be open to diverse viewpoints, frameworks, and types of evidence.

We have also tried to suspend our own biases, preferences, and expectations enough to see potential surprises, contradictions, and different ways of achieving the same goal, even where it concerns our primary focus on worker co-ops. Many of our interviews, for example, revealed long-standing cooperative cases that were new to us and uncovered the importance of cultural traditions that, while falling under many different names, manifest parallel cooperative principles. A few examples are the pre-Incan, Indigenous Andean notion of the *ayllu* (interfamily productive organizing and labor sharing); the Zapatistas' local self-managed councils and governance *caracoles* in Chiapas, México; cooperative health

and educational initiatives in North America; and cooperatives rooted in fair trade and fair work practices in South Asia.

Listening, understanding, and learning are key to a vibrant, ongoing democratic process. In our engagements with the many people and writings represented in this volume, we have tried to exercise a provocative playfulness, especially with terminology and labels. If a co-op board member or manager claims that “the market is driving our decision,” then we ask, “Who or what is the market?” If certain forms of capitalism are claimed to be kinder and gentler, if you will, then we ask, “Specifically how is this being realized?” If a business – whether incorporated as a worker cooperative or as some other form – claims to be deeply democratic, then we ask, “By what practices, what measures, and what outcomes?”

Our sources and methods are also pluralistic. We have consulted many different resources, from academic research, to reports by practitioners, to news and commentary, to popular culture. When reflecting on the present and future it is important to look for signs, trends, and conceivable options in many different locations. Surveys and studies all around the world testify to the persistence of workers’ desires for autonomy, or the ability to shape their own work situation to a significant extent; and voice, or the capacity to contribute not only to discussions about the firm’s future but also to actual decision-making.

For this book and related projects, we have conducted over 100 moderately structured interviews, mostly via telephone or videoconferencing, and hundreds of email exchanges, to ensure we are capturing a wide range of experiences and views of worker co-ops on a global level. We do not pretend to be comprehensive – there is much happening around the world that cannot be easily uncovered – but we do our best to represent diverse types of initiatives and trends. We term the interviews “expert” in the sense of seeking people who are

well-positioned to speak about individual co-ops and communities as well as about wider trends. By following up on referrals from interviewees about others to contact and tracing posts and websites, we have encountered many co-ops and initiatives around the world that have not been much publicized or examined. Still, there are many more conversations that did not occur and cases of which we are still unaware.

There have been important lessons for us along the way of creating this book. Although we began with a bias toward the value of the worker-cooperative model, we sought to reopen a wide investigation about the advantages, limits, and creative possibilities for worker co-ops. We do not view them as democratic and egalitarian business *islands*. In fact, as our interviews have consistently shown, worker co-ops represent an important path for labor, economic, and community justice that are, more than ever, part of a web of formal and informal initiatives all over the world. Thus, we widened our lens to take in many other related business and organizational forms, all in the interest of tracking what work, and the economy would be like if both were profoundly cooperative.

It is impossible in a short book to do justice to our theme, but shortcomings stand out. While we tried to include sources from around the world, the cases we feature and the literature on which we draw remain weighted toward the United States, Europe, and Latin America. There are still too few cases from Asia and the Pacific (only Japan, Korea, Australia, and New Zealand), Africa (only Kenya and Rwanda), and especially, South Asia (India). Most of the literature we cite is in English, Spanish, or French. We are also aware that the Mondragón cooperatives, in Euskadi, the Basque Country (Spain), loom large. This is due to our familiarity with that experience, and the major contributions to practice and theory they have made over their 65 years of existence.

Feminist economics and organizational theory is important to our analysis, but we did not sufficiently address the specific challenge of organizing for women's liberation in the context of worker cooperativism. The same is true for the struggles of BIPOC, LGBTQ+ people, and others, which are important to so many of the people we were fortunate to interview. While we were not able to give many of the cases and interviews the in-depth treatment they deserve, we hope we have sparked curiosity in readers to pursue them and seek out others in their own communities and through their networks.

This volume is part of a series on the future of work, and that focus guides many of the questions that we address. How do worker co-ops figure into the future of work? What unique or at least distinctive benefits do they offer? How can they be part of a larger "eco-system" of cooperative and solidarity-based ventures? How can worker co-ops anticipate still other democratizing forces in the economy and society at large? What cultural, political, and economic conditions favor conversions of existing businesses to worker co-ops in addition to the establishment of wholly new enterprises in local and regional economies? These questions need thoughtful, informed, and timely responses, especially given the relative rarity of worker-owned-and-managed firms in today's economy.

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The direct contributions of coauthors and collaborators draw from the nourishment of communities of people who share interests, curiosity, hopes, and sometimes paths. We are deeply grateful to all the individuals and organizations that generously shared their time, reports, experiences, and insights for this project. All those conversations and exchanges have greatly enriched this book, even though many individuals and

organizations are not mentioned in the text. The same is true for the groups and organizations to which we belong. We also wish to thank our families, friends, and colleagues who have offered crucial forms of support since this project began in January 2019. Ryan Wenzel generously assisted us with tracking down important references. Dean Ritz read the manuscript at the final stage and offered helpful suggestions. Sally Planalp did several rounds of careful proofreading and editing, offering sound advice. Thank you to the staff at Emerald Publishing for assistance and encouragement through every phase of this process.

CRISES AND OPPORTUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

We knew something was different about the workplace and the organization just after we arrived at the Otalora Training Center of the Mondragón Cooperative Corporation. George Cheney and his wife Sally Planalp had the great fortune to spend half of their sabbatical year of 1993–1994 working and living among the Mondragón cooperatives. The director of the center and another staff member introduced us to *all* of the worker-owners or “socios” who were employed at Otalora, including housekeeping and kitchen staff. While this episode of recognition of each worker may seem trivial, it stands in contrast to the ingrained hierarchies that characterize most large businesses and how those show up in everyday interactions.

Over the course of our 6 months working at the Center and living in the nearby town of Aretzabaleta, we came to know everyone in Otalora, often through discussions of their individual takes on the already famous worker cooperatives. The Mondragón case looms large in the literature on worker-owned and governed cooperatives, the cooperative

economy, and the larger landscape of efforts at economic and social equality. It is just one of many cases from around the world that we treat in this book, with idealism but also with a healthy pragmatism oriented toward new possibilities as well as lessons learned.

CRISES AND OPENINGS

COVID-19 had widespread and devastating effects around the world. Yet it became much more than a public health crisis because it also painfully exposed interrelated economic, political, social, and environmental problems, bringing existing divisions into sharper relief. None of the problems facing us are going away anytime soon: political, including threats to democratic institutions; social, especially racial and immigrant justice; economic inequality and disempowerment; public health and the critical need for coordinated community responses; and climate disruptions with desperately needed responses and changes in the way we do business.

The multidimensional crisis associated with climate change includes not just global warming, rising sea levels and ocean acidification, and increased severity of floods and droughts, but also exhaustion of nonrenewable resources; loss of habitat, species and biodiversity; food insecurity; starvation, war, and displacement of populations; and loss of linguistic and cultural diversity (Azkarraga et al., 2011).

It's easy to miss how these crises are interconnected, seeing them simply as happening at the same time, but the first two "pandemic years" of the twenty-first century (2020–2021) showed the world how the crises are interrelated (Gills, 2020). For instance, the likelihood of viral pandemics is increased because of human encroachment on wildlife habitats,

allowing for more cross-species transmissions or “spillovers” (Quammen, 2013). In an intensely globalized world, the virus spread quickly. In addition, the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic is clearly due in part to global inequities that impact both access to healthcare resources and vaccination opportunities within countries and between more and less affluent nations. Further, the erosion of a sense of the common good and social solidarity in a number of nations, especially more individualistic ones, makes confronting the pandemic and addressing inequities more challenging. Finally, the rise of autocratic nationalism and populist “strongmen” in many parts of the world in recent years set up obstacles to the kind of extensive global cooperation needed to address this pandemic.

The crises are unevenly presented and experienced with their epidemiological and socioeconomic impacts most felt by the working poor, women, children, and racial minorities, and other marginalized and dispossessed communities. Nationalist expressions and reactions against many immigrant groups have revealed widespread racism and xenophobia while many centrist or progressive political parties have failed to connect with the concerns of large swaths of working-class voters. Opportunities for “green jobs” within largely capitalistic economies have failed to materialize at the level that is needed to help both workers and the environment (ILO, 2018; McKibben, 2021).

Different ways of organizing the economy and society were already needed. These crises, taken individually and together, add new layers of necessity for change (CICOPA, n.d.). They also reveal opportunities for new ways of doing business. As famed journalist Naomi Klein put it early on in the pandemic: “Crisis blows open the sense of what is possible” (cited in Gaztambide-Fernández, 2020, para 28). Clearly, standard ways of doing business and chasing after consumer

satisfaction are not working. We maintain that a new emphasis on values such as democracy, equity, solidarity, and sustainability can come not only with the advancement of worker cooperatives – our focus here – but also with a much wider web of creative and collaborative structures and processes, which are becoming stronger at this time of widening and deepening crises.

Within this global political environment, it is even more imperative that visions for acts of cooperation move into prominent places in collective consciousness and inspiration for action. Still, in the course of writing this book we have found many reasons to be hopeful – especially in the little-publicized, local grassroots initiatives for community empowerment. As the author of several books on co-ops around the world, E.G. Nadeau said in a published interview in 2021: “More than ever, I think the pandemic is telling us that we need a better way to organize the world economy right down to local community economies” (GEO Collective, 2021, para 5).

Rebecca Solnit (2009) describes so well the capacity of humans for cooperation in dire situations of natural and human-caused disasters in the powerful stories documented in her book *A Paradise Built in Hell*. Examples are myriad, including spontaneous neighborhood organizing during the financial crisis years of 2001–2002 in Argentina; the experimentations of Occupy Wall Street in the wake of the financial crisis of 2007–2008; many instances of cooperation and solidarity during and after Tropical Storm Sandy in New York City in 2012, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, and the Mexico City earthquake of 1985. Now in Ukraine we have reports of acts of resistance, courage and communal sacrifice as the Russian invasion unleashes untold suffering as we write these lines.

Solnit (2009), Klein (2007), Rutger Bregman (2017), Dean Spade (2020), and a growing group of commentators are explaining how, on the one hand, many of our systems – including capitalism, addiction to growth, and symbolically and often physically violent expressions of identity – make some kinds of disasters much more likely. On the other hand, we find that solidarity, mutual aid, and cooperation – rather than highly individualistic pursuits, unchecked greed, and bitter competition – provide what scholar Ana Maria Peredo calls “spaces of hope” amidst all the crises facing the world (Peredo, personal communication, 2021). Among those spaces and inspiring examples are networks of reciprocity and solidarity in the Andes, built on long-established indigenous traditions, allowing communities to better weather the pandemic period and support themselves economically (Córdoba et al., 2021). Worker cooperatives are also among those spaces, as we strive to demonstrate throughout this book.

To underscore the point, more grassroots efforts such as mutual aid, commoning, platform and distributed cooperativism, time banks, alternative trade networks, barter clubs, and related forms of horizontal organizing have been provoked directly or indirectly by the COVID-19 pandemic. A good example is work by the Kola Nut Collaborative in Chicago, Illinois, which is actively promoting the interconnections and synergies among diverse grassroots initiatives with a clear emphasis on collaborative relationships, grassroots democracy, and neighborhood empowerment (Strode, personal communication, 2022). Another timely work is *Pandemic Solidarity* (Sitrin & Sembrar, 2020), chronicling the rise of grassroots mutual aid and other efforts that foreshadowed recent political movements such as Occupy. Many of these movements leave their marks on society but often in non-obvious ways as participants move into other initiatives and organizations (Levitin, 2021).

Work and Labor Today

Today we find revived public interest in organized labor, as well as new organization drives in many countries (Azzellini, 2021). Illustrative cases of recent innovative labor-led initiatives include: efforts by [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) employees to organize the first successful unionized warehouse on Staten Island in New York City (Lapavitsas et al., 2022); the wave of Starbucks unionizing (Molla, 2022); the McDonald's franchise in Marseille that was turned into a social hub and food distribution center for the local community by former employees (Noack & Mehl, 2021); and the rise of care workers, nurses, teachers, and contract faculty organizing throughout the world (Poydock et al., 2022). Although official statistics and reports cite a decline in labor actions such as official strikes in recent years, there has actually been a rise in workers' actions in the years just before and during the pandemic when one factors in multiple forms of workers resistances (Friedman, 2016; Moody, 2017).

During the time we were writing this book, many individuals, households, families, and occupational groups were questioning their jobs, occupations, careers, and even the role of work in their lives. What has come to be called in catchy but nebulous shorthand "The Great Resignation," refers to people quitting their jobs, taking a pause, retiring early, or changing occupations (Chugh, 2021; Parker & Horowitz, 2022).

Still, we are only beginning to understand the range of pressures and preferences that are part of the rethinking of work for many people around the world. This goes far beyond people in health and service professions finding the pressures of their work to be too great during the pandemic. The reasons are multiple, including pressures of responsibilities at home, fear of contracting COVID-19 at work, and the

realization that, if one can manage without paid employment, it might be time to do so. Millions of workers who are able to do so are reevaluating their jobs, looking not only for more hospitable workplaces and organizations but also more fulfilling positions and even reconsidering what work itself means in their lives (Lepore, 2021).

The creative possibilities for survival and revival revealed by the multiple, global, and interconnected crises of our day are only just beginning to appear in academic journals as well as in news and commentary (e.g., Scott, 2021; Smit et al., 2021). It is clear, though, that this phase of reevaluation and rearrangement goes far beyond what was witnessed during the global economic crisis of 2007–2008 and the several years following. Interestingly, many recent publications on work have ventured into deep questioning about the roles and types of work in people's lives in the twenty-first century (Lucassen, 2021).

REIMAGINING WORK AND WORKING TOGETHER

Work is not something to be taken for granted as a concept or set of activities. As the history of work itself reminds us (Ciulla, 2000), changes in occupations occur for a number of reasons, including huge economic forces that have little connection with personal choices. Far too often, as the saying goes, workers have “checked their rights at the door,” in the sense that democracy is not the norm in workplaces and work arrangements, whether those be factories, offices, or networked and technology-enabled businesses. This is true even in many avowedly democratic societies. Far too often, the individual and group rewards of work have been downplayed or even kept out of the design of workplaces and work

organizations. Far too often, some types of work (e.g., the work of reproduction) have been degraded or pushed out of view. And far too often, the potential for collaboration and solidarity in labor processes has been left unrealized or, worse, not even imagined.

A great deal of work and the people who do it remain invisible in that economic and social hierarchies persist in devaluing many lines of work, many occupations. Accordingly, much of the work of “care” for others in industrial societies is neither featured when jobs and professions are discussed nor is it assigned worthwhile value in terms of compensation (Duffy, 2021). For example, Marilyn Waring’s *If Women Counted* (1990) broke ground by detailing the many types of production, like a great deal of care work, that were excluded from measures like Gross Domestic Product. Furthermore, hierarchies by gender and race and education figure into both the visibility of work and the assignment of value to it, such as with doctors versus nurses and in the white male-dominated legal profession and business management.

How work is accomplished and how it is understood is greatly complicated by the roles and influences of technology. Work is already being drastically reconfigured through technological displacement, through freelancing and the celebrated “gig economy,” and through virtual work in many industries. At the same time, concerns about the surveillance of work – in the office, on the shop floor, and at home – are growing (Hodder, 2020).

Precarity, referring to unstable or episodic employment and its effects, is “the condition of our time” as Ana Tsing observes (2015, p. 20). As systems of reliable, long-term employment diminish, most workers experience insecurity, little or no voice, unsatisfying work, and few avenues to enrich their experience. At the same time, there is evidence that many individuals not only accept but actually prefer the freelance or