



Across the 'Post-Industrial' Divide: Reararticulating the Factory as an Object of Inquiry in History and Anthropology

**Workshop at re:work (IGK Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History)
Georgenstr. 23, 10117 Berlin
Thursday, 3rd May 2018**

Organisers: Görkem Akgöz (re:work) & Nico Pizzolato (Middlesex University)

This workshop aims to bring together historians and anthropologists to discuss new research that chooses the factory as a unit of analysis. The focus is on inquiring new methodological and epistemological perspectives on the subject in order to explore the historical and contemporary dynamics of capitalism at the point of production in an interdisciplinary fashion. The workshop aims to initiate a collaborative, interdisciplinary conversation preliminary to the preparation of a thematic issue on factory as an object of inquiry to be submitted to journals such as *History & Anthropology* or *International Labor and Working-Class History*. Participants to the workshop will contribute to establish an agenda for research, the themes to be explored in the issue and invited to submit their papers for consideration.

The factory along with the industrial worker once loomed large in national historiographies, the former as the emblematic locus of industrialization, the latter as a collective historical agent that would bring about progressive change through industrial action and political mobilization. After the 1980s, and for a generation, both seemed to have disappeared from historians' agenda, relegated to the backwaters of scholarship. After the wave of de-industrialization and factory relocation that characterized western economies, manufacturing was *history*, we were told, and, accordingly, the factory as a workplace and factory work as a specific form of wage labour seemed to have lost their relevance.

However, in spite of the pervasive narratives of a 'post-industrial society' and of an all-encompassing 'knowledge economy', not only manufacturing has not disappeared but also the factory as a model of organisation of production has been arguably adopted by other fields such as the service sector (call centres) and logistics and distribution (warehouses) where workers are highly regimented and constantly gauged against statistical performance standards, primarily speed. These workplaces adopt Taylorist practices that once characterized factory production, such as the strategic use of technology to control the pace of working and the fragmentation and mechanization of tasks to deskill workers. Manufacturing in the GDP of many middle-income developing economies has been rising. Furthermore, not only did the relocation of industrial production create more factory jobs in developing economies, but factories still exist in countries with longer industrial histories, although often off the radar of scholars and the media. One of the emblematic cases of the relocation of manufacturing, the Taiwanese multinational company

Foxconn has set up shops in Central and Eastern Europe, a region which has developed into the second-tier global location in the electronics industry, just behind East Asia. Related to this, the factory as nexus in transnational networks such as commodity chains and commodity flows is an important vantage point for the empirical study of how global capitalism materially connects distant localities and people into an integrated process.

This landscape explains the recent revival of interest in factories among labour historians and anthropologists which deserves our attention, as well as the theoretical and methodological insights advanced in the historiographical and anthropological debates of the last decades. Both anthropology and history study the meaning of factories rooted in time and place and its high time to initiate a dialogue about their insights, methods and analytical perspectives.

We invite historians and anthropologists to reassess together their research questions and conceptual vocabulary regarding the factories to identify the under-researched areas in both disciplines and how to move forward the conversation in an interdisciplinary way. We propose the following non-exhaustive set of questions as a starting point: In what ways are the different methods of history and anthropology produce knowledge on factories? How do we set the borders of our research on a factory/factories differently in history and anthropology? What kind of cross-fertilization has there been in the last four decades between the historical and anthropological study of the factory? How does a factory-level analysis inform larger questions about the history of capitalism? What are the different social and symbolic meanings of the factory for various social agents in and out of the factory? What are the different forms of interaction between a factory and its surrounding as well as the factory and the social institutions connected to it? How do the interactions between the local and the global play out in the factory? How does the production of difference and indifference occur in and around the factory? How is "the factory" produced as a political object at the intersection between production and social reproduction?



Programme

10:30-11:00

Introduction: Setting the Scene: Investigating the Factory in History and Anthropology

Nicola Pizzolato (Middlesex University, London) and Alina-Sandra Cucu (re:work)

11:00-13:00

Roundtable 1: The Factory as an Object of Inquiry in History

Chair: Alina-Sandra Cucu (re:work)

Adrian Grama (Universität Regensburg)

Marcia Schenck (re:work)

Hannah Ahlheim (re:work)

Anna Sailer (Center for Modern Indian Studies, Göttingen)

13:00-14:00

Lunch Break

14:00-16:00

Roundtable 2: The Factory as an Object of Inquiry in Anthropology

Chair: Görkem Akgöz (re:work)

Michael Hoffman (re:work)

Dimitra Kofti (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology)

Andre Weißenfels (Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies)

Christian Strümpell (Universität Hamburg)

16:15-17:15

Plenary Discussion and Conclusions

The Persistence of the Factory: Towards an Interdisciplinary Analysis?