

[Generations On The Line]

Working class culture and generational conflict among workers at an Italian factory

Abstract: In their multiple attempts to understand the decline of the working class a number of sociologists have questioned changes in intergenerational relationships, analyzing transformations happened not only within the factory, but also outside it (in school, job market, family relations, labor activism). Inspired by this approach, particularly developed in French sociology, I conducted an ethnographic research among a group of workers employed at a automotive factory in Italy. This paper argues that, if transformations in the contexts of socialization have produced a generational gap within the working class, a conflict between “older” and “younger” workers is activated, in the context of the factory, by specific management policies. Nevertheless, the generational frame represents less a deterministic structure than a “constraining environment” that offers room for a partial composition of the generational conflict and an appropriation of the old working class culture by new generations.

Keywords: Working class; generational conflict; ethnography.

If we bear in mind that every concrete experience acquires its particular face and form from its relation to this primary stratum of experiences from which all others receive their meaning, we can appreciate its importance for the further development of the human consciousness.

Karl Mannheim (1952), *The problem of generations*, in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*.

The generational perspective: a French renewal in working class (decline) studies

A generational perspective to the ‘unmaking’ (Wacquant 2013) of the working class has constituted the main analytical plot of sociological research which, drawing inspiration from the theoretical approach developed by Pierre Bourdieu, has aimed to explain the crisis and the decline of the working class in France. Such studies are characterized by an ambition to go beyond the Marxist approach to social stratification, taking into account not only changes in the system of economic relations, but also those «related to changes in intergenerational relationships and to the building of self-esteem in a social space which itself always keeps evolving» (Beaud, Pialoux 2004:434). The decision to simultaneously analyze the transformations happening both inside the plants and, for example, in the school system, the job market, the domestic space or within the political and symbolic fields was of major importance in understanding the decline of the working class. A major result of these studies (to name just a few, Noiriel 1986; Beaud, Pialoux 1999; Beaud 2002; Beaud, Pialoux 2003; Renahy 2005; Eckert 2006; Thibault 2013; Aucher 2013) has been the interpretation of this decline as the consequence of the existence of a relatively sharp generational gap, which has blocked the transmission of the traditional working class culture.

For Bourdieu it is possible to distinguish specific generations from simple and arbitrary age groups only by knowing the specific history of the field or of the region of the social space (a «class on paper») in which agents are embedded. This is because only structural changes that affect this particular field or class have the power to determine the production of a different generation, through the transformation of the *modes of generation*. By this latter term, Bourdieu refers to the set of social conditions that affect a field or class and that are able to determine

the organization of the individual biographies and to aggregate them in «classes of orchestrated biographies having the same rhythm and *tempo*» (Bourdieu 1979: 530, my translation). Concerning the history of the working class, a substantial number of historians and sociologists have claimed that this concept of generation better suits historical logic rather than socio-occupational categories, because «it is particularly well suited when the research is applied to a group of individuals who have had the same founding experiences and known the same initial forms of socialization» (Noiriel 1986: 195, my translation).

Very much influenced by an approach of this kind, two historical works have proved to be seminal references for all recent studies on the working class in France. First, in his book *Les ouvriers dans la société française. XIX^e-XX^e siècle* (1986), the historian Gérard Noiriel identified three consecutive generations in the history of the French working class. Of these, only the middle generation (the *singular generation*) - born between the two world wars, rooted in the French “industrial bastions” of the north, east and the Paris region, and mostly composed of qualified workers - proved capable of exercising its hegemony on the entire world of labor until 1960-70, especially through the intermediation of communist organizations (the French Communist Party and the CGT). However, fundamental changes in its conditions of production took place following the crisis of the seventies that impeded its reproduction and the transmission of the collective norms of the community to the new cohorts, producing a «slow disaggregation of the group» itself. This analysis is shared and confirmed also by *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale* (1995) by the sociologist Robert Castel, who argued that, after the turnaround of the late seventies, the process of consolidation of wage laborers’ condition has given rise to a growing social insecurity, destabilizing the ways of life of the working classes and producing a new «negative individualism».

These changes thus caused a «crisis of reproduction» of the working classes (Mauger 1998), modifying their «mode of generation» and contributing to the «undoing» of their world (Mauger 1996). But what type of changes are we talking about? Summing up the results of the literature elicited by these studies, the sociologist Gérard Mauger defined four «contexts of early socialization» whose changes most influenced the creation of a generational gap: family strategies of reproduction; the state of the educational system; the state of the job market; and the state of the supply of symbolic goods and forms of control of working class youth (Mauger 2010). According to Noiriel, it was precisely the destruction and the crisis of the “typical” (although “singular”) forms that these experiences and contexts of socialization took during the *trente glorieuses* which caused the decline of the working class by obstructing its reproduction: technological transformations; the emergence of new types of jobs; deindustrialization of towns and cities; the evacuation of traditional residential communities and neighborhoods and their relegation to the peripheries; the rise of unemployment and job insecurity; the crisis of traditional working class forms of political representation; and the “democratization” of the school system that engendered mass education. In this article I will predominantly focus on the rise of precarious employment and on the prolongation of schooling. Although there is no question that similar phenomena had, although with some national specificities, a profound impact on Italian society (Cobalti, Schizzerotto 1994, Schizzerotto, Barone 2006, Reyneri 2005, Magatti, De Benedittis 2006), the issue of the extent to which these phenomena affected the reproduction of the Italian working class, especially compared with its French counterpart, should be answered.

Methodology and fieldwork

This generational approach constituted the general *theoretical sensitivity* (Glaser, Strauss 1967) that oriented my research during four months of fieldwork (March-June 2014), which I conducted among a group of workers employed at an automotive factory (that I will refer to as “Bianchi”) in a small town of central Italy. My research was focused, therefore, on understanding the relationship between different generations of workers, embedded in a cultural context characterized by the progressive disintegration of the so-called “red subculture” and in a productive environment marked acutely by delocalization of production and increasing labor insecurity through the implementation of different contractual statuses.

Having access to the canteen of the plant and taking part in the discussions that take place in the bar next to it, I shared moments of conviviality among a group of these workers during a several-week period. Aware that break time and spaces are an integral part of work situations (Hatzfeld 2002), I was gradually inserted into the

networks of acquaintanceship of my informant among his colleagues and comrades in the labor union. As Stéphane Beaud and Florence Weber have suggested, «without acquaintanceship networks, there is no fieldwork and no ethnographic research» (Beaud, Weber 1998). If this is true, and I believe it is, then we may infer that this angle of observation - itself ethnographic - is one that helps to better highlight the inter-individual dimension of events and people.

Within this network, I was able to conduct 23 biographical interviews (Bichi 2007). The purpose of this typology of interview - «the formulation of an interpretative model able to explain and understand - therefore to reconstruct, within the limits of the itinerary already accomplished - the modes of action, the operating principles, the processes of change, production and reproduction of the social world or of the category of situation studied» (ivi: 238) - seemed to me the most suitable and appropriate for the chosen approach. But in-depth interviews make sense truly only in “context”, depending on the location and time of the interview. In this sense, they benefit from being used as part of an ethnographic study, whose preferred method is participant observation (Beaud 1996). Therefore, being often realized in social contexts (at the canteen or in the bar), the interviews analyzed in this article had themselves an ethnographic character. In fact, the interview situation is, in itself, an observation stage because only the observation of the social scene (people and places) that constitutes the interview can provide the interpretive elements of the interview itself. In this sense, this kind of interview was valuable, especially when discussions between peers were able to clarify the classification systems that “classic” biographic interviews would leave in an implicit state, or to bring up those disagreements that make visible various dispositions incorporated in different contexts of socialization (Mauger 1991).

In fact, the complexity of the history of the plant, tied to changes in the local and national context of recent decades, have delivered a workforce whose composition is fairly heterogeneous. It is nevertheless possible to identify some lines of distinction within this composite group. The plant currently employs about two thousand workers, while there were more than 10,000 in 1980. It is possible to identify two broad, distinct “hiring waves” within this population: one took place in the late 1970s and the other in the 1990s. “Hiring waves” are particularly important from the point of view of the sociology of generations, as they are at the source of the workplace encounter between individuals from different generations in terms of socialization contexts, which often engenders tension (Fournier 2008). For instance, the entry in the factory of several hundred young workers in 1994-95, after years of non-hiring, created a gap between two cohorts of age: the first majorly composed of men hired in the late seventies and now aged above 55 years; the second includes people mostly around 40 years old (with a large proportion of women), who began joining Bianchi from 1994-95.

A conflict of “mentalities”: symbolic struggles between “older” and “younger” workers

The succession of different generations within the factory has not always happened in a conflicting fashion. Let us take, for instance, the generational turnover which happened with the new wave of hiring in the late seventies, which saw young people with a slightly higher educational capital coming in contact with “another generation”, very poorly educated if not illiterate, composed largely of peasants who had become industrial workers. In the narration of today’s older workers, the integration of this new cohort of workers - i.e., themselves - happened harmonically and achieved full assimilation of newcomers into the workers’ group at the plant, thanks also to the integrative capacity accorded to unions or, in general, to moments of public representation of the group, such as strikes or demonstrations (Bourdieu 1984). Instead, these older workers, almost 20 years after the last massive wave of hiring, still tend to attribute the responsibility of the huge changes in the working environment to the younger workers hired from 1994-95. While they may declare an understanding of some of the attitudes of this latter generation, due, in their opinion, to the rise of unemployment and job insecurity, this does not prevent them from blaming the “people who came in ‘94-’95” for the disappearance of the plant’s workers’ group.

Notwithstanding differences in cultural and militant capital that may exist among the members of this older cohort, a uniform narrative frame structures their representations of changes in the factory in recent years. Either by focusing on how work has changed since the automation of certain assembly lines and the introduction of the new system of working movements metric, or by evaluating the transformations of the social context in which the

work takes place (the “atmosphere”, relationships with colleagues, collective struggles), the narration of befallen transformations is structured in the mode of a comparison between “before” and “now”, where “now” always involves degradation, worsening compared with “before”. From this central duality, older factory workers seem to have built an entire system of sharp oppositions: “solidarity” versus “competition”; “group” versus “individualism”; “tranquility” versus “haste”; “altruism” versus “selfishness” and so on. This system of oppositions, in which nouns with positive connotations are always associated with the “before”, structures the older workers’ common discourse about the past.

Furthermore this discourse reveals forms of accusation of the older workers against the younger: blamed for having broken the solidarity of the group and rejected the old working-class culture in the name of ambition to rise faster in their “careers”. The older workers therefore have a very strong perception of the differences that matter between them and the younger workers, a perception which gives great value to the existence of an educational gap. It is the higher level of education of the workers hired in the factory in the 1990s that elicits the search for a higher degree of autonomy and independence from the rules and traditions of the group, which have not been transmitted in the newcomers’ lack of willingness to listen.

Giuseppe: Most of those people [hired in ‘94-’95] haven’t built a group, they tried to assert their own interests... all alone, you know? What do I know! In my day, if you were doing overtime, especially during certain periods, we said: «Overtime ban!» and there was an overtime ban. But... these people... like Luciano, who came in ‘95, ‘94-’95, they chose, you know, all the people... that had a minimum of career. They have qualifications and they have done a bit of work here and there, while me I’m stubborn until the end. I was at the third level and I remain at the third level, and now I will die there. And I don’t know... if I did... honestly, if I did the right thing ... [...] And, I’m a bit closer to Luciano, but still it is they who have changed a bit eh... Those who, like I said, who thought more about their own interests, which didn’t build the group, they have tried to make small steps forward, they tried to find a place... a little better, a little better workshop - what can I call it? - a little better place in the factory, they are the ones who... [...] So of course... they’re all people who had a minimum standard of education, who had some sort of certification... Us, most of us we had hardly finished middle school... [...] Before, I don’t know... perhaps due to a lack of general knowledge let’s say, you listened to your elders more, you know? Then later, perhaps with everyone thinking for themselves, they saw the opportunity... to improve doing it all by themselves. Those who came from ‘95, naturally having studied a little more...

(Interview with Giuseppe¹, 60 years old, joined Bianchi in 1978)

This attitude of the older workers towards the younger intersects a parallel, inverted contempt, that is to say a negative representation of older workers who are perceived collectively as a group of people having the same, pitiful, attitudes. The existence of such representations seems to be related to the defense and enhancement of an alternative way of living as a worker at the plant, via the implementation of a different attitude to work, which distinguishes the younger workers from the older. In the indigenous language this symbolic struggle takes the form of an opposition between two different “mentalities”. This terminology is important, not only because it reflects the penetration of a psychological mass culture within the working classes (Schwartz 2011), but also because the use of a supposed erudite word is itself part of the distinction effort on the part of the younger workers, through the valorization of cultural capital that allows them to “talk complicatedly”.

Luciano: The mentality is different... They thought that if they were sly enough nobody would see them, because there was no interest in seeing them. Because until then the company had no obligation to do so, that is my interpretation... later they put the constraints that the state cannot intervene as before, or to a lesser extent, and the company had to start making a profit while before if they were 10 or one to do the same job, it didn’t matter to Bianchi. As long as there was no need to make a profit in large companies, because there was always the intervention of the state, it is clear they more or less allowed you to work, live and proliferate in a certain way. The problem is that they then had to make a profit, eliminate inefficiencies. And they were there with that mentality, the older workers, they had to show that they were going slowly. If you can make a single line yourself, you cannot pretend it takes two people and that you alone can’t do it, because, what do you think, that the company is stupid? [...] That is to say, this is the mentality of the “Bianchista”. Me, on the contrary, I believe that everyone should do his job and do it properly. [...] As I said when

¹ In order to protect of research participants’ confidentiality, the names of the interviewees have been replaced with pseudonyms.

I arrived, I didn't act in this way, because my mentality was not that I should go slowly to show that I could not do a job. I said: «They work like this, I work like that».

(Interview with Luciano, 45 years old, joined Bianchi in 1994)

The meaning of the word *mentality* has a large extension, which includes the principles that inspire the way to work, the involvement of the worker in his work and his relationships with his colleagues. It exposes the conflict between the principle of «doing as little as possible» and that of «doing the job and doing it as well as possible», by assigning the first to the old workers and the second to the youngsters. This opposition reflects and replicates the system of oppositions built by the older workers, imposing a more legitimate watchword and revealing a certain ideology of work and a certain «cult of performance» (Ehrenberg 1991), expressed in a refusal of output restriction and in a major personal involvement. The old working class culture is thus devaluated and degraded to the rank «mentality», stage at which it can be easily challenged.

The “perverse effects” of mass education and short-term jobs on the making of generations

How can we explain the genesis of such a different relationship to work? Firstly, it is possible to associate it with previous experiences of the younger workers in small businesses, where working conditions and proximity to the manager would have favored major involvement in the work and a higher degree of understanding and compliance with business logic rationality. Indeed, in the productive context of the region in which the factory is situated, employment in small businesses is a fairly common experience, at least since the 1980s, and it is one of the elements that create a «negotiated vision of market ideology» (Bagnasco, Trigilia 1993), a characteristic component of the «territorial political subculture» (Trigilia 1986). Compared with the older workers, younger workers often had longer periods of short-term jobs in small businesses before joining Bianchi. But, as we can observe, more than an “understanding” of business rationality, it is the internalization of the imperative of productive rationalization that distinguishes the newcomers from the older workers.

We should turn, thus, not only towards the submissive effects that job insecurity enhances in workers (Sennet 1998, Gallino 2001), but also to other “contexts of socialization” - in particular, to school. This pattern of analysis is present in the seminal work of Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux, *Retour sur la condition ouvrière* (1999), a long-term ethnographic study at the Peugeot plants of Sochaux-Montbéliard. Beaud and Pialoux put particular emphasis on the “perverse effects” of mass education. They argue that the «loss of symbolic autonomy» of the working class is the institutional counterpart to changes that have occurred in the labor market and the school system in the closing decades of the 20th century. While, on the one hand, the implementation of flexible employment in recent decades seems to have created an opposition between the “stability” of older workers and the “precariousness” of younger ones, on the other hand mass education has engendered a crisis of technical colleges and the rise of unpaid investment in long-term education by working-class families². The process of undoing the working class as a unified whole thus takes the form of a generational conflict inside the factory, where an “old guard” still adhering to the practices and values of Fordism is opposed to a newer generation, better educated but unwilling to accept the old heritage of working-class culture³.

I would like to present the case of Luciano - who has the virtue of synthesizing many features common to workers hired during the years 1994-1995 - to illustrate how similar processes are also in operation in my fieldwork. He was born in 1970, and his longer schooling - until the end of a vocational high school - resulted in a diploma, something which clearly differentiates the workers hired in the 1990s from those hired in the late

2 As Bourdieu showed (1978), the process of translation of the whole social structure caused an *inflation and a devaluation of school qualifications*. From which follows *disillusion* for these young people that is engendered by the gap between the expectations they had at the moment of entering the education system and the position they achieve when they exit it, often returning to the original milieu, which is experienced as a failure. The significance of this analysis, at list for the French case, has been recently reaffirmed by Duru-Bellat (2006). For a sociological critique of this concept see Poullaouec (2010).

3 A reader can find a short but exhaustive English-written recap of this research in the chapters written by Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux in *La misère du monde* (Bourdieu (ed.) 1993).

'70s. His relationship to school alone, although complex and "difficult", puts considerable distance between him and the older workers. When talking about his school experience, in fact, the word that comes up most often is "regret". Although denied repeatedly, that feeling pervades the whole story and is strictly related to the present situation. Son of the owner of a small construction company and a worker in a small clothing enterprise, Luciano dislikes his present situation and believes that his current fate, having descended into the working-class condition, is due to his insufficient scholastic commitment, which did not allow him to "make the most" of his capabilities. The confrontation with his brother, who is "brainy", who attended and later abandoned a scientific high school, and who went on to create a small tannery, helps to reinforce a feeling of *déclassement* (decline in social position). After some jobs in small mechanical businesses and four years working as a plumber, he applied to join Bianchi, "under pressure" from his girlfriend and future wife. He intended this post to last only a short time, but after a few months under a fixed-term contract, he was hired permanently, «now I've been working here 20 years!». While he continues his search for «something that really pleases» him, his status as a married father of two children makes him confess to a lack of «courage» to «start over» at the age of 44. Although his attachment to the job is greater than his work satisfaction, his status of «joker», polyvalent worker, gives him an important symbolic compensation in terms of recognition of his skills. I found it significant that in the interviews that I carried out with him, Luciano tried to find in his schooling and previous working experience the reason for his different work attitude.

Luciano: I think that at one point there was a class consciousness and you knew that «I haven't studied, I don't know what, this is my environment and it will always be my environment, so I have to fight to improve my environment that will be the rest of my professional life». So now we enter the factory like me... that I do not like, but I studied a bit, I consider myself a bit... this is theoretical, right... smarter than the others, so I think me in there... it's something transitory because I think I'll find something that will give me greater satisfaction later.

[...] I worked in a company where I started in the morning at 7am and in the evening I got home at 7pm and I was paid for only eight hours. I was always fighting, because I've always been a guy who argues, then maybe because I could not fight, and instead of stopping at 7pm we always stopped at 7.20pm and we were quarreling all the time. In the evening, I had to start a war to be able to stop working. But when I was at work, I was doing another job than what I do today, and we really worked. If there was a pipe that needed screwing in a strange place, I was a plumber, I did it because I had to do it! When you join Bianchi, you're on the line, if there is a screw that is wrong, you are told: «Leave it!». That is to say, you come into a reality like this and you answer, «Excuse me, what? Leave it? But me I'm at work!». «Because it is the cycle that doesn't work well. There must be more people.», they say. You always blame someone else, but basically...

The process of the deregulation of labor legislation culminated in the 1990s (Gallino 2007). During this decade Bianchi would make extensive use of temporary and part-time contracts. But although on the one hand the generation that joined in 1994-95 was also embedded in a local market afflicted by the rise of unemployment and social insecurity, especially after the Bianchi crisis of the '80s, on the other hand they were able to find opportunities of employment in the industrial districts, which were expanding, taking advantage of the loss of centrality of big industry (as in the case analyzed by Biagiotti 2006). In any case, once they had joined Bianchi, these young workers came to hold positions equivalent to those held by the older workers educated to a lower level. This generation thus witnessed a situation of downgrading produced by the discrepancy between their advancement in the school system (compared with the previous generation) and their "relapse" at the plant from which they were trying to escape.

With regard to this condition, the verdict of Pierre Bourdieu is unequivocal: «the collective disillusionment which results from the structural mismatch between aspirations and real probabilities, between the social identity the school system seems to promise, or the one it offers on a temporary basis, and the social identity that the labor market in fact offers is the source of the disaffection towards work, that refusal of social finitude, which generates all the refusals and negations of the adolescent counter-culture» (Bourdieu 1979: 161). My fieldwork tends to reveal the contrary: for this generation this disillusionment seems to induce an attempt at self-revaluation inside the plant, especially through an over-investment in work in relation to the degree of involvement of the previous generation. As said by Henri Eckert, the graduate inside the factory «since he suspends his aspirations and accepts a situation he wanted to escape», he produces «a realistic adjustment [...] marked by the necessity of reorganizing

his personal project» (Eckert 2005: 298-99).

The modernization of the factory: changing the workers before changing the work

Throughout the 1990s the plant underwent a process of radical, although incomplete, transformation, with regard to its management, social relations of production and its productive process. The cornerstone of this development was the adoption of a new productive model inspired by the one introduced at the Pratola Serra and Melfi Fiat plants (Cerruti 1994, Camuffo, Micelli 1998). The difficult innovation path taken by the Bianchi management has already been studied, employing the rich set of analytical tools offered by the Italian tradition of economic sociology and by mainstream international literature. What is missing, and what is worth focusing on, is a reflection on how the changes that occurred in the factory at that time have affected the workforce. As Danièle Linhart points out, the modernization of the plant has the purpose of «changing the workers before changing the work» (Linhart 1994: 84). We can consider this latter process as in fact double: changing the workers not only means transforming workers' attitudes and practices, but also substituting older workers with younger ones.

According to Henri Eckert, modernization offers «the opportunity, if not the long sought means, of substituting a solid and united workforce, able to resist the transformations of the working process desired by the directorate of the factory, with a younger workforce, judged more malleable and, moreover, less willing to resist the increase of flexible modes of working» (Eckert 2006: 16). We cannot ignore the temporal connection that, in the case of Bianchi, links efforts to introduce a new and more flexible system of production to the decision to hire several hundred of new workers, after that the hiring freeze adopted in 1981 had already halved the workforce. Furthermore, we must insist on a crucial point: in the 1990s, numerous temporary workers (several hundred) were recruited and deployed in the workshops. They constituted a sort of pool, from which the management chose whom to hire permanently. At the same time the management encouraged a considerable number of the old workers to leave, first threatening them with redundancy, then favoring their early retirement.

It is possible to interpret the effects of these employment policies if we consider that for a young man or woman, starting work at the factory constitutes a form of «circumstantial re-socialization» (Fournier 2006) that takes place within the workplace. The circumstance in question is, of course, that their employment is simultaneous with the process of modernization of the factory. This striking condition highlights a shared experience that becomes a «generator of practical unity in the order of referents for action» (ivi : 120). This re-socialization seems therefore able to structure attitudes and practices, as though they could last beyond the moment of those shared experiences that had generated them. Within this perspective, it is worth reporting that many interviewees testified that the first socialization in the factory of this new generation was made, in a sense, aside from the rest of the workers at the plant:

Emilio: And then what did they do in H2? They removed all the older workers! Everybody's young! Either they're part-time or temporary workers or they're people that... when did they start to join? In '95, '96... They all started in that period. All the older workers were moved to H3, someone to the machine shop, many have left, but they had carried out a form of cleansing in there [H2] because there were old men who were saying what you had to do.

(Interview with Emilio, 60, joined Bianchi in 1977)

According to them, the management had adopted the policy of concentrating, at least at the beginning of their new working experience, the newcomers in the new lines of production in the department called 2W, and transferring many of the older workers to the 3W department (whose production was intended to be increasingly reduced over time). Younger workers were therefore brought in to reproduce in the factory the forms of sociability that they had experienced elsewhere, such as at school, and to diminish the old forms of shop-floor sociability (such as those described by Pialoux 1992):

Luciano: It is clear that at Bianchi at that time it was very good because I entered and I was 23 and we were all young people of my age, I thought I was back in school, it is true eh! Ah... I thought I was back at school, that is to say that I was well, but also human relations were different from now, that is to say that before there was even more... a whole

of... there was the pleasure of being together with other people, while now there are several small groups. [...] There was the habit of being together: I remember that in the first period on Saturday night we were going out with the other guys working on the line.

The young newcomers have had a particular propensity to form groups “apart”, which, built on the basis of shop-floor socialization, were reinforced outside the factory through typical forms of juvenile sociability, such as “going out” together on Saturday nights. The concept of generation, therefore, seems here to merge with that of a peer group. Meanwhile, the proportion of older workers in the H2 department had become less consistent, meaning that the social control that the older generation could exercise over the new one (and over all the workforce) became less and less effective and more and more contestable.

Raffaella: [When we started] the old grumbled, grumbled at us a lot, because they saw us working hard, they grumbled and said: Do less, because otherwise we will have to speed up... they'll ask us to do more! - You understand? - They, by that time, they had, let's say, the old habits, you understand? [...]

Me: But at the time, that is to say, when you were told these things, you didn't listen?”

Alessandra: Unfortunately, no, no. Unfortunately no.

Raffaella: Because we had to show that we were good [in order to be hired permanently]. I even said to myself: They say this because they don't want to work”, you understand?

(Interview with Raffaella and Alessandra, two workers who started in 1994-95 at the age of about 20)

From the entry of the new young workers, the company seems to have expected a “chain reaction” to occur, which would have affected the mood and availability of all employees (a similar process is analyzed by Pialoux 1996). The main theme of the '90s was indeed the introduction of “flexibility” and “participation”, which express the will of the management to leverage this technical and organizational renewal, in order to reform the routine attitudes of workers. In the case of those workers who were least integrated into the workers group, because they were less politicized or less inserted into the trade-union milieu, direct contact on the shop floor with the new generation, who were at least initially very involved in the work and submissive towards company's requirements, led to a radical change in their practices.

Me: But when did you start doing overtime?

Giuseppe: I started 10 years ago, with Latini.

Me: How did it go?

G: It was my foreman, we had become friends, so... [...]

Me: But why didn't you do it before?

G: Because they frowned at you if you did, because they hit you in the canteen, you were a little... there was a bit of... the bad thing is that there was even a little bit of fear. Yes, the bad thing is that there was also a little bit of fear. It wasn't nice going to the canteen with them all saying to you «That's the one that...[does overtime] right? You were slapped on the neck, my God, while you were working...» oh, I've seen people doing these things... [...]

Me: But you think you still maintain the old mentality?

G: Listen, honestly... I changed a little... I changed a little, I changed a little... now I'm like... I... I'm a bit of a loose cannon [un cane sciolto]... and if wanted I could really do not that much, but I don't... I'm not saying that now I'm breaking by back to work, but I put myself to work yes. [...] I try to do the best I can and that's it. I make a living like this. I don't go on strike any more. [...] If there's one thing that you really have to strike about, but otherwise when there are these bullshits of half an hour... maybe because the air conditioning isn't working... For this kind of bullshit I don't strike.

Me. And why, if you have the possibility to work less, you don't, do you?

G. I don't work the minimum, because now I have told you that I have nobody who pushes me, I work alone, and I do the things I do, and I do the best I can... the best I can, why? Because it bothers me to have someone that contradicts me, to have the supervisor who says: «Look, why didn't you do it like this, or didn't you do it like that».

Before, the force of social control exercised by the workers' group was a constraint that “compelled” them to adjust with the collective or individual practices of resistance at work (strikes, refusal of overtime, restriction of

output, “showing we can’t do it”) (see also Hodson 1995). Now the old social sanctions are ineffective because the old workers group is numerically and symbolically weakened and the emergence of new social sanctions transforms their practices and attitudes to work. While on the one hand they feel abandoned by the workers’ group, which has not managed to impose its standards of behavior on the newcomers and has left them at the mercy of competition with younger workers, on the other hand they believe they have been betrayed by the company, to which they turned too late. This combination produces a fairly unique relationship to work, which includes an adjustment to new collaborative practices and a rejection of old forms of resistance, but does not lead to a major personal involvement in the work. Indeed, it is as if a portion of the older workers had fallen into the *negative individualism* - the kind of individualism «stems from the lack of frameworks and not from an excessive devotion to subjectivity» (Castel 1995: 759), which Robert Castel diagnosed as a consequence of the crisis of wage-labor society. For older workers, this weakening of the frames that once structured life in the workplace, far from allowing them to better express their identity at work, seems instead to have condemned them to isolation and the loss of collective protection.

Questioning the generational rupture: the resilient reproduction of resistance practices

In the previous paragraphs I have shown how two hiring waves created two generations of workers within the factory. Although these generations seem to have opposite relationships to work, the hypothesis that this cleavage had prevented any transmission of the old practices of resistance at work deserves to be expanded. In fact, this rigidly dichotomous picture appears a bit faded twenty years after the recruitment of the new generation. In the conclusion of their previously mentioned book, Beaud and Pialoux invited future researchers to consider the possibility of continuity between generations. Some recent works have therefore gone back to the question of generational transmission. From this perspective, Martin Thibault (2012), in his research into RATP (Autonomous Operator of Parisian Transports) workers, showed how, as well as the younger workers who are openly involved, there are others who tend to adopt latent and clandestine forms of resistance. Studying apprentices’ relationships to work, Prisca Kergoat has gone even further, affirming that «a number of apprentices produce a relationship to the world which is perfectly original, but which still resonates with what is traditionally called the working class culture» (Kergoat 2006: 558).

We know that older forms of «workers’ tricks» persist, in contempt of new «lean» productive processes (Signoretti 2014). But more than the simple shift between «prescribed» and «real» work, what I intend for resistance at work comes under what Michel Offerlé has called «registers of resilience» (Offerlé 2008) and James Scott «arts of resistance» (Scott 1990). In the context of the factory we should include under this term those practices that enable workers to free themselves from the relation of domination in which they are taken, beyond the very protest practices structured and framed by militant organizations (Giraud 2009). More precisely, I refer to «any individual or small group act intended to mitigate claims by management on workers or to advance workers’ claims against management» (Hodson 1995: 80).

Taking into account all the possible concrete forms that this concept can incorporate would not be possible in a single article. Moreover, what we are interested in is the persistence of the «old» forms, and the process of their appropriation by the new generation. Therefore, I will only make the case of «output restriction», insofar as it has represented the «ideal-typical» form of resistance to exploitation (Bouquin 2011). We have seen that, once they had joined the factory, younger workers were not inclined to adopt these kinds of practice. What has happened since then? All our informants, both younger and older, tend to agree about the fact that the work has become harder in the past two decades, especially after the introduction in 1995 of a new system of working movements metric. The recent evolution of work, while on one hand it has reduced physical effort, especially thanks to a partial automation of the lines, on the other hand it has intensified working time and minimized rest gaps (Durand and Hatzfeld 2002). As one worker told me: «Today you do less physical effort, but now everything is faster. For the time you gain on one side, they make you spit blood on the other». This intensification of work has had a significant impact on the younger workers:

Raffaella: ...After, the lines started to go faster and faster... and people became increasingly cruel and everything got worse... [...]

Alessandra: What really screwed me over was the fact that when we started here we were all 20, we were having fun here at Bianchi, we were seeing each other eight hours and then we were walking out of Bianchi and we were going to have a beer together, it was a pleasure to be together, because in the first two years, it was spectacular, you know? Now we don't have fun like we did before ... Now, I don't even think about working overtime, while at that time I was doing it... I was doing overtime on Saturday, but why? Because [...] there was more familiarity, it was friendlier, but now there is more malice, I do not know... [...]

Me: But why is that?

Raffaella: Because the work has increased, the lines are increasingly faster, people don't have time to even blow their nose. [...]

Me: But how many pieces do you have to make per day?

R: Listen, they have asked me to do as many as 110 of them but I don't manage to make 110, and even if I could manage this, I still wouldn't do it, because when we were working from 8am to 5pm I was making 75 pieces and it worked for them, today I'm working from 8am to 3pm, and they are asking for 110 because the line is running and they need pieces for the next work shift. I don't do it, because if I did, when the line comes back to the normal work shift, they'd remember I was doing 110 of them and they'd tell me "Now you do 110," and I do not want to do it. [...] And I... I try to suck up to the supervisors, I say "Forgive me, but I can't do it! Look, I'm sorry, I'm doing my best, but I can't do more than that... but how could I manage to do it? Teach me! Tell me if there's a trick!" And in the end they get so stressed and say to me "Oh well, just do what you can!"

As we can see, for some of the younger workers, the acceleration of working rhythms and the gradual degradation of factory atmosphere are interconnected phenomena. As suggested by Prisca Kergoat, we could interpret this process as the passage from a «time of enchantment» (related to the first socialization in the factory, to the pleasure of working together and entrance into the wage-labor condition) to a «time of disenchantment» (linked instead to the discovery of the harshness of the factory condition, the growth of competition within the internal job market, and the sensation of *déclassement* caused by the decline of the hope of professional mobility). While on one hand this modality of output restriction seems to rely on a rational disposition towards work (as has been highlighted by the classical research of Donald Roy and Michael Burawoy), once we have made visible the social conditions that engender these practices, we are able to underline the symbolic value that follows the economic one. Moreover, it is significant how output restriction blends with simulation, which, according to Jean-Pierre Durand, today embodies the modern face of resistance: workers simulate attitudes that the management expects of them (involvement, devotion) by taking a personal detachment from the labor process without openly challenging management objectives (Durand 2004). James Scott has observed that resistance is not always performed against the dominant ideology, but out of it and especially out of broken promises. If this is true, the adoption of practices of output restriction and simulation by some of the workers of the younger generation must be understood as a symbolic reaction to the "broken promises" of participation and good ambiance. Furthermore, although it is true that the modalities of this form of action, in the current context, are not collectively orchestrated as they were in the past, it is impossible to affirm that they are only individual (as for Goussard 2008), for the reason that they tend at list to become a sort of collective exhortation towards new temporary and seasonal workers of the factory:

Alessandra: We now say it to those who are joining [the factory], now we're the older workers, so now we tell those who are joining now, because those who join now work hard to show themselves. This is a real change, they [the older workers] told us this before...

Raffaella: And now it's us who tell them [the new temporary and seasonal workers]: «Enough! Go slowly! Why are you running?»

A: «Now we say it to those who join, but those who join do as we were doing at the beginning, they don't listen to us, and so it is our fault, because if back then we were able to make 20 pieces per hour, they try to make 25, then when they not there, it's up to us to replace them, and we have to make 25 [pieces]. Before we joined, people were making maybe 15 [pieces], and we got to 20... and now you can keep up the rhythm for one hour, two hours, but no more...»

The experience of the factory condition and that of ageing seem to have produced a gradual self-identification with the older workers group, in which some of the "older younger" workers assume attitudes and practices that

they previously looked down on. This sense of belonging occurs not without a sensation of distress that is hard to accept («We feel worsened, we feel wasted away»). It is in fact the product of a very different disillusionment to the one analyzed by Henri Eckert that appeared to aptly describe the process that led many young workers who joined the factory in 1994-95 to reject the old workshop culture. In the case of Alessandra and Raffaella, their divestment from the business rationality, although not accompanied by a parallel commitment to collective action, still involves the reproduction of a degree of traditional practices of resistance at work⁴.

Conclusion

Karl Mannheim has remarked that while «early impressions tend to coalesce into a *natural view* of the world», all later experiences «tend to receive their meaning from this original set, whether they appear as that set's verification and fulfilment or as its negation and antithesis» (Mannheim 1952: 298). This is the reason why «the adult, transferred into a new environment, consciously transforms certain aspects of his modes of thought and behavior, but never acclimatizes himself in so radical and thoroughgoing a fashion» (ivi: 300). These observations help us to better understand the «dialectic articulation» of those different strata that characterize the social experience of factory workers. A long-running debate in sociology of labor and sociology of the working class has opposed a tradition more focused on analysis of *relations in production* within the factory (Burawoy 1979, 1985), and another which has been keen to study workers' *world-views* built outside it (Sabel 1982).

The generational approach to working class studies developed recently in French sociology has contributed to the understanding of how transformations in contexts of early socialization can create heterogeneity within the working class, leading to the formation of different generations. However, it has not lost sight of the effect of management initiatives on social relations in the workshop. My research thus constitutes rather a confirmation of the fact that the generational conflict inside the factory is nothing but a reflection of social changes outside the factory, whose social effects can be activated only by specific managerial policies. From this perspective, the issues of modernization of factory organization overlap with those of changes in the education system and the job market regarding the mental and bodily social attitudes they induce (Pialoux 1996). Nevertheless, in confirming the importance of the generational frame, I argue that this frame represents a «constraining environment» more than a deterministic structure (Fournier 2012). In this sense, it offers room for a partial composition of the generational conflict and an appropriation of the old working class culture by new generations. This result is limited and calls for further research to verify the significance for other social scenes of working class experience.

4 The bitter fruit of this process of gradual disillusionment and identification with older workers is also linked to the existence of certain social predispositions, the working-class and/or a weaker educational capital can certainly be elements that promote this recognition. Daughter of a building worker and of a seamstress working at home, Raffaella has not completed high school («Me?! Oh I didn't want to go to school at all! I tried ah but I haven't succeeded, I was always hanging out...»). She also admits that her family's economic situation was acceptable, so she didn't feel the need to put in effort at school, preferring to do odd jobs from time to time. Alessandra, on the contrary, is the daughter of a former Bianchi worker and she obtained her bachelor degree at the Art Institute and began to work at a design firm. But since her salary was insufficient, her father persuaded her to apply to Bianchi. She joined the plant being sure of the temporary nature of this job, but eventually she had to stay (because «it is a safer job»), and give up on her passion. In her case, her father - who seems to have transmitted to her the same dichotomous view of the history of the plant shared by the older workers - seems to have played a crucial role in this process of recognition.

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