



Cornell University
ILR School

Cornell University ILR School
DigitalCommons@ILR

Visiting Fellow Working Papers

International Programs

10-2017

Industrial Novels in Perspective of Industrial Sociology: A Comparison Between Weimar Germany and post-WWII Italy

Erik de Gier

Radboud University Nijmegen

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/intlvf>

 Part of the [International and Comparative Labor Relations Commons](#), [Labor History Commons](#), [Organizational Behavior and Theory Commons](#), [Other English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Other French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#), [Other German Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Work, Economy and Organizations Commons](#)

Thank you for downloading an article from DigitalCommons@ILR.

Support this valuable resource today!

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the International Programs at DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Visiting Fellow Working Papers by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact hlmdigital@cornell.edu.

Industrial Novels in Perspective of Industrial Sociology: A Comparison Between Weimar Germany and post-WWII Italy

Abstract

[Excerpt] Since the English Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, almost up to the present century, the so-called industrial novel played a significant role in many industrializing and industrialized countries in making aware workers, politicians and policy makers, as well as the general public, of the lack of quality of working conditions in separate enterprises and/or sectors. Also, these novels contributed in a positive way to the emancipation of workers in society. Well-known examples are the famous industrial novels of the English Victorian writers Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell. But also in other countries the genre of the industrial novel became notorious in due course. In France, for example the 'naturalist' industrial novels of Emile Zola, like *Germinal*, had a significant influence on the development of social and labour policies at the time of the French Third Republic. After the turn of the century the industrial novel also became manifest in other industrialized countries; first before World War I in the USA, by the Inter-bellum in Germany and the USSR, and after World War II in particular in Italy. Even nowadays, albeit less frequently and less influential, industrial novels are still being published. Very often these novels were based on extensive desk research and/or even empirical research on site of its authors. For this reason, these novels may also be considered as a form of relevant pseudo- or ex-ante sociological research, regrettably often neglected in the context of vested labour and industrial sociology. From a scientific, but also societal viewpoint this certainly has been and still is a missed opportunity. In this article I will demonstrate this by comparing and juxtaposing systematically industrial novels written in two important European countries in two different time periods: Germany at the time of the Weimar republic in the 1920s, and post-war Italy in the 1950s and early 1960s.

In sum, what in fact could industrial novels contribute to the existing sociological knowledge?

Keywords

industrial novels, industrial sociology, sociology of work, history of work

Disciplines

International and Comparative Labor Relations | Labor History | Labor Relations | Organizational Behavior and Theory | Other English Language and Literature | Other French and Francophone Language and Literature | Other German Language and Literature | Work, Economy and Organizations

Comments

Suggested Citation

De Gier, E. (2017, October). *Industrial novels in perspective of industrial sociology: A comparison between Weimar Germany and post-WWII Italy* [Electronic version]. Paper presented at the 3rd International Conference on Social Boundaries of Work. Methodological and Practical Problems of Research on Work and Employment in Modern Societies, Katowice, Poland. Retrieved [insert date] from Cornell University, ILR School site: <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/intlvf/32>

Industrial Novels in Perspective of Industrial Sociology

A comparison between Weimar Germany and post-WWII Italy¹

Erik de Gier

(Professor emeritus, Institute of Management Research, Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands, e.degier@fm.ru.nl)

Keywords: industrial novels, industrial sociology, sociology of work, history of work

Summary

Since the English Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, almost up to the present century, the so-called industrial novel played a significant role in many industrializing and industrialized countries in making aware workers, politicians and policy makers, as well as the general public, of the lack of quality of working conditions in separate enterprises and/or sectors. Also, these novels contributed in a positive way to the emancipation of workers in society. Well-known examples are the famous industrial novels of the English Victorian writers Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell. But also in other countries the genre of the industrial novel became notorious in due course. In France, for example the 'naturalist' industrial novels of Emile Zola, like *Germinal*, had a significant influence on the development of social and labour policies at the time of the French Third Republic. After the turn of the century the industrial novel also became manifest in other industrialized countries; first before World War I in the USA, by the Inter-bellum in Germany and the USSR, and after World War II in particular in Italy. Even nowadays, albeit less frequently and less influential, industrial novels are still being published. Very often these novels were based on extensive desk research and/or even empirical research on site of its authors. For this reason, these novels may also be considered as a form of relevant pseudo- or ex-ante sociological research, regretfully often neglected in the context of vested labour and industrial sociology. From

¹ Paper presented at the 3rd International Conference Social Boundaries of Work. Methodological and practical problems of research work and employment in modern societies. Katowice, Poland, 27-28 October 2017

² Bauman (2000).

³ Colombo (2008).

⁴ Bowlt (1988). Introduction. In: Bowlt (ed.) (1988, pp. xix-xl).

⁵ Todorov (2009, pp. 193-230).

⁶ Engels (1993); Zola (1991).

⁷ Später (2016, p. 230).

⁸ Kracauer (2013, pp. 10-16).

a scientific, but also societal viewpoint this certainly has been and still is a missed opportunity. In this article I will demonstrate this by comparing and juxtaposing systematically industrial novels written in two important European countries in two different time periods: Germany at the time of the Weimar republic in the 1920s, and post-war Italy in the 1950s and early 1960s.

In sum, what in fact could industrial novels contribute to the existing sociological knowledge?

1. Introduction and methodology

Recently I published a book on the introduction of welfare work by paternalist capitalists and enlightened capitalist enterprises in the heydays of capitalism between 1880 and 1930 in the at that time most important industrialising countries: Great Britain, the USA, France and Germany (De Gier, 2016). In a number of cases capitalist enterprises for various reasons created real existing 'workingman's paradises' from the viewpoint of welfare work. Noteworthy examples were steel enterprise Krupp in the German Ruhr-region, as well as steel enterprise Schneider in French Burgundy, Cadbury's chocolate factory at Bourneville (England), and a number of textile and steel mills in the US. These companies took a lot of far-reaching encompassing welfare work initiatives and in fact created mini-welfare states *avant-la-lettre* in their enterprises. By paying attention to this almost forgotten chapter of labour and industrial history I hoped to demonstrate two things. First of all, I wanted to point to the in my opinion remaining significance of applying a historical approach in the context of sociology, and more in particular industrial sociology or sociology of work. Industrial sociology, or what still remains of it today, has become an almost shadow-like discipline overhauled by a-historical approaches in academia, such as strategic human resources management. In my opinion this has been caused mainly by the fact that the main body of knowledge of industrial sociology, as well as its practical applicability nowadays has become somewhat obsolete in the context of the fundamental transition of the industrial society based on solidarity and class-consciousness towards a liquid non-industrial society in which the applicability of this discipline no longer is naturally².

² Bauman (2000).

Secondly, by applying a historical angle and by coupling this subsequently with nowadays industrial and labour relations I also intended to show that we could still learn significantly from past experience.

In this paper I intend to follow a similar, albeit 'flipside' historical-sociological approach by focussing in this case on a selective sample of industrial novels written in different time periods of capitalism in various industrializing or industrialized countries. In my opinion, as in case of entrepreneurial paternalist welfare work initiatives in many countries in the past, also industrial novels are mistakenly a neglected matter in the context of sociology of work. However, such novels could be considered as useful forms of ex-ante sociology in those cases where these novels aren't fully fictitious but at least partially based on empirical sources. If so, industrial novels are also relevant knowledge sources for industrial sociology.

Industrial novels deal with working and work-related problems of workingmen in an industrializing or industrialized context and as such form a sub-specimen of the so-called social novels. Before the take-off of the industrial revolution in the early eighteenth century in England industrial novels were preceded by *utopias* in which idealistic futures of humanity were sketched. A well-known example is *Utopia* of Thomas More, written in the sixteenth century (1516). The first modernist industrial novels dealing with bad working and living conditions of working men were written in England from the onset of the industrial revolution with the intention to question workingmen's exploitation by capitalist entrepreneurs. The flowering period of the English industrial novel was the Victorian period with well-known authors as Charles Dickens, Elisabeth Gaskell, George Elliot, Benjamin Disraeli, and William Morris. After England the industrial novel rapidly spread to other countries on the European continent and the US. By the end of the nineteenth century Emile Zola dominated this genre in France. *Germinal*, a novel on working and living conditions of a French miners family in Northern France is his best-known naturalist industrial novel written during the Third Republic. After the turn of the century Upton Sinclair started to dominate the genre for a while in the US. His books on the working conditions in the Chicagoan meat industry; on Ford and on the American coal mining industry has become notorious.

Here I want to focus on two relatively latecomers in the field of the industrial novel. These are Weimar Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s and Italy in the 1950s and early 1960s.

The specific nature of industrial novels in these two countries is narrowly related. By contrast to former historical phases of the industrial novel in other countries the 'political' aspect appears to be more outspoken in Weimar Germany and Post-war Italy. Although also the Victorian industrial novels, Zola's naturalist novels and Sinclair's industrial novels undoubtedly influenced social politics in their respective countries it is no exaggeration to contend that the objectives of Weimar and post-war Italian industrial novels had more ambition. In both cases at the background the influence of class struggle in rapid changing economic circumstances and the influence of communist or Marxist political parties is sensible, as well as a wish for fundamental social change. The same could be said with respect to for example industrial novels in Stalin's USSR³, Dos Passos's famous trilogy *USA* (1938) and George Orwell's English industrial novels of the 1930s, with which I will not deal as such in this paper.

In order to be able to understand and interpret Weimar and Italian industrial novels it is necessary to define their nature more precisely. This requires the introduction of two related terms: *New Objectivity* and *Constructivism*. Both terms are connected with avant-garde-art which developed in various countries in the aftermath of World War I. Well-known expressions of avant-garde art were the German and Russian Expressionism (Kirchner, Nolde, Die Brücke, Dada, Kandinsky, Malewitsch), Cubism and Italian Futurism (Marinetti)⁴. The avant-garde didn't limit itself to painting but entailed also other forms of art, such as architecture (Bauhaus), cinema, and literature. A central characteristic of the avant-garde movement was the idea that art wasn't a goal in itself, but also had to contribute to societal progress, social change and even to a new and more just world⁵. Jointly, different avant-garde art forms could *construct* a new *objective* reality. With respect to industrial novels this implied that instead of fiction the *social reportage* or *documentarism* based on empirical data and facts became the dominant form of the industrial novel in the Weimar Republic as well as in Stalinist USSR, the US in the 1930s, Britain in the 1940s, and Italy in the 1950s. There had been some exemplary

³ Colombo (2008).

⁴ Bowlt (1988). Introduction. In: Bowlt (ed.) (1988, pp. xix-xl).

⁵ Todorov (2009, pp. 193-230).

forerunners of the social reportage in eighteenth century England and fin-de siècle France⁶. Hereafter I will demonstrate the fundamental change, which had taken place in the nature and form of the more traditional industrial novel on the basis of two cases: Weimar Germany and Italy in the 1950s and early 1960s.

2. Weimar industrial novels: Kracauer and others

The *New objectivity* in the German industrial novel was primarily expressed in the work of Siegfried Kracauer, a leftist journalist, architect and philosopher of the *Franfurter Zeitung* (a leading Frankfurt paper at that time) linked to the so-called *Frankfurt School* of sociology through his notorious friends Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. More in particular his literary ambitious *Die Angestellten* (1930) -published in English as *The Salaried Masses* dealt in an ethnographic way with white-collar workers in Berlin offices and department stores by the end of the 1920s. It is a classical example of the *New Objectivity*-industrial novel. Other notorious examples, which also will be discussed here briefly are: *Der rasende Reporter* by Egon Erwin Kisch (Kisch, 1924/2006), *Das Leben der Autos* by the Russian writer and journalist Ilja Ehrenburg (Eherburg, 1929/1983), and *Union der Festen Hand* by Erik Reger (Reger , 1931/1992).

Siegfried Kracauer's *Die Angestellten*, published first in 1930 (Kracauer, 2013).

This relatively small book contains some twelve brief, but very concise essays describing impressively the transformation of working life and working culture in Berlin in the 1920s. Then, Germany's capital had become one of its biggest and most industrialized cities. The at the time on-going transformation of working life Siegfried Kracauer wanted to depict, was the revolutionary increase of white collar workers, for a large part women, in big industrial and financial enterprises. His book, covering a, until that moment, more or less terra incognita dealt particularly with the culture and lifestyle of the new white-collar proletariat. The chosen form was the reportage, or in this case more appropriately, a 'montage, that is a mosaic of photographs or samples of reality'⁷. It was mingled with all kinds of relevant statistical and documentary data.

For example, in the 1920s hundred-thousands of white collar workers daily populated Berlin's streets, while in Germany as a whole the number of white-collar workers

⁶ Engels (1993); Zola (1991).

⁷ Später (2016, p. 230).

reached the figure of 3.5 million, inclusive 1.2 million women. Whereas the increase of blue-collar workers only doubled, the increase of white-collar workers at the time was five times higher than before. Half of white-collar workers were occupied in industry, local government and social security organisations; the other half in commerce, traffic and banking. Most numerous were office workers, workers in commerce, technicians and foremen. About thirty per cent of the white-collar workers was organised in one of the then three white-collar labour unions ⁸.

The main background characteristic of the transformation of working life and the organization of work were the intensifying processes of rationalization (introduction of scientific management and Fordism) and mechanisation (introduction of assembly lines) in the German economy, which was occurring for the first time at full scale in German industry and the new services industries. The rapid increase of white-collar workers in this context, both in industry and services, also resulted in the creation of a new manifest until that time absent white-collar culture. That is a culture particularly constructed and perceived by white-collar workers themselves, for example by celebrating extensively weekend entertainment activities and actively exercising sports as new ways of a 'fashionable life'. This culture turned out, so Kracauer, to be 'spiritually empty' and did not prevent worker alienation and feelings of anomia among the middle class ("*geistiger Obdachlosigkeit*")⁹.

Kracauer was convinced that, contrary to let's say one hundred separate factory descriptions, the documentary reportage was an eminent means to construct working life reality. The way he created his reportage was in a certain way similar to formal sociological research ¹⁰. For example, in order to be able to diagnosing correctly the reality of working life changes he conducted first of all a large number of interviews with different types of white-collar workers and their representatives at the company level, and also with entrepreneurs, members of the personnel department of companies, and representatives of white-collar labour unions. He also carried out participant observations on-site and additionally, used relevant social research citations.

⁸ Kracauer (2013, pp. 10-16).

⁹ Ibid. (2013, p. 15). See also: Kaes et al. (1994, pp. 181-194).

¹⁰ Contrary to other New Objectivity-industrial novels, according to Walter Benjamin, Kracauer did not like to see his approach as a mere New Objectivity-reportage. He preferred to offer something fundamentally different, namely a further reaching and more in-depth dialectical 'unmasking' approach. See: Benjamin (1930, p. 116).

Remarkably, Kracauer himself didn't have the explicit intention of formulating practical reform proposals on the basis of his approach. Rather, he considered his cases as exemplary for reality. The results of his efforts were published first as a feuilleton in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* by the end of the 1920s and later also in book form. Interesting is that Kracauer approached his subject not only from different perspectives (workers, bosses, trade unionists), but also by depicting the New Berlin white-collar culture through various aspects, such as the absenteeism of a worker community, the high incidence of worker alienation in case of rationalized and mechanised office work, lack of work satisfaction, planning of work processes, introduction of welfare work, introduction of ideas-letterboxes, career development, the significance of worker age, tariffs, internal company papers, educational level of white-collar workers, and their consumptive needs. In his approach Kracauer didn't warn the use of various illustrative metaphors as well as nicknames, such as cyclists ("Radfahrer") flattering of chiefs and bossing lower levels, mucous gowns ("Schleimtrompeten"), princesses (Prinzessinen), and blood oranges or hypocrites with 'yellow skins and red insides' ("Blutorangen"). All in all, his book resulted in a very comprehensive and succinct description of the white-collar culture at the time in Berlin and also the Weimar Republic, which one could summarize as a new, uniform middle-class mass culture, with comparable uniform labour relations and collective agreements. Compared to the more traditional blue-collar industrial proletariat, the new white-collar proletariat in Berlin of the 1920s was distinct because it was 'spiritual homeless' caused by alienating white-collar work and a flight ahead towards non-politicized weekend amusement and fascination for sports. In a review of Kracauer's reportage Walter Benjamin values Kracauer's approach as a form of 'unmasking reality as a consequent outsider by penetrating deeply into the existence of white-collar workers'¹¹.

Two further notorious examples of New Objectivity-industrial novels in the form of a reportage are *Der rasende Reporter* – 'The Raging Reporter'- by writer and journalist Egon Erwin Kisch (1885-1948), first published in 1924 (Kisch, 2006), and a remarkable not strictly Weimar industrial novel *Das Leben der Autos* – 'The Life of Cars'- by the

¹¹ Benjamin, Walter (1930), *Politisierung der Intelligenz*. In: Siegfried Kracauer (2013), pp. 116-123). Also published as *Ein Aussenseiter macht sich bemerkbar*. In: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Werkausgabe, Band 3, (1980, pp. 219-225).

Russian writer and journalist Ilja Ehrenburg (1891-1967), first published in 1929 (Ehrenburg, 1983), both in the Soviet Union and Germany¹².

Kisch considered the reportage as a form of literary art in which he mingled skilfully observation and narrative. In his own words, 'nothing is more amazing than the simple truth, nothing is more exotic as our environment, and nothing is more imaginative as objectivity'¹³.

In *Der rasende Reporter* Kisch presented a large quantity of documentary reports on a large variety of subjects like the well-known Parisian flea market at Clignancourt, homeless people in London, a shipping exchange, a six-day cycling track match, and a Yiddish literary café. Three of these brief essays deal with industry and work, and more in particular with the heavy coal and steel industry in the Ruhr-region. Subsequently these three reportages offer an illustrative impression of the Krupp steel company at Essen and its then extensive welfare work program and welfare work institutions, the heavy working conditions and labour relations in a blast furnace and cokes factory at Bochum, and finally of the group of important German mining and steel entrepreneurs during the annual gathering of shareholders in a luxury hotel again at Essen, the then coal and steel capital of the industrial Ruhr-region.

In the Krupp-reportage Kisch talks among other things about "*Reiche ... Kr.*" or Krupp-empire in Essen, which owned almost everything in the new industrial suburb Westend and by this controlled almost the whole life of its inhabitants. In Westend we do not only find its cast steel factory, but also a Kr.-churchyard, a Kr.-hospital, a Kr.-consumers union, a Kr.-memorial, etc. Westend, in the eyes of Kisch, actually was the new Essen, which overhauled and dominated from now on the old town. This reportage breathes a strong tension between the huge weaponry profits of the Krupps during World War I and 'Essen's tortuous streets and alleyways', which are "*engbrüstig und schlotterend*" like the bodies of the workers inhabiting this troglodyte kingdom'¹⁴.

In the enormous steel mill at Bochum the workers in the blast furnace were working continually in three shifts per day during their whole life in bad working conditions.

¹² Although strictly seen not a Weimar writer, Ehrenburg's approach had very much in common with his German colleagues dealt with here.

¹³ '*Nichts ist verblüffender als die einfache Wahrheit, nichts ist exotischer als unsere Umwelt, nichts ist phantasievoller als die Sachlichkeit*'. Cit. in Später (2016, p. 229).

¹⁴ Williams (1990, p.103).

Remuneration was modest, by and large 120 marks per month in case of the best performing workers.

Finally, the heavy industry shareholders meeting at Essen was dominated by the then prominent and intertwined entrepreneurial 'types' who managed the German economy like Thyssen, Kirdorf and Stinnes. Although officially the meeting was a democratic public gathering, press was not allowed. Contradiction was not done in this context of the 'big cumulative undertaking' of the German heavy industry, then responsible for the delivery of electricity and light in a large part of the country.

Russian journalist and writer Ilja Ehrenburg published in 1929 his *Das leben der Autos* (Ehrenburg, 1983). Its style is Neo-Objectivity and its form is reportage, mainly about the production of Citroën cars in France and Ford automobiles in the USA in the 1920s, a time of rationalisation, increasing speed, increasing importance of transportation and globalisation. Ehrenburg approaches his subject by combining various aspects of car production and transportation. Important chapters of his book deal with aspects as the assembly line, the production of tyres, gasoline, the stock exchange, etc. The ambition of the author is no less than offering the reader a chronicle of its time, in which cars have become victorious. In its core the book is a satirical montage, in which personal histories of workers and entrepreneurs are mingled with a number of relevant facts and figures. Of particular interest in our context is the chapter on the assembly line. As the other chapters of the book, this chapter is constructed along the lines of personal experiences of workers juxtaposed to the ideas and factual behaviour of Citroën's CEO André Citroën and to a lesser extent also American car producer Henry Ford. For example, Ehrenburg defines the assembly line at the same time as a 'technical miracle', a 'victory of reason', as well as a 'growth of dividend'. But on the other hand the assembly line at the Citroën works fixed 25.000 Citroën workers as 'prisoners in one long shackle'¹⁵. Different tasks have to be carried out by workers in seconds, remuneration remains limited, and although carried out in modern well-organised factories physical work conditions are not without risks. Workers are exposed to skin damaging acids, trek, etc. In one Citroën plant 'in one month 12.000 cars were produced, with a net financial gain of 18.000.000, but also with a loss of 33 cut fingers'¹⁶. On the other hand Citroën considered himself as an enlightened entrepreneur promoting in a non-political way the significance of the

¹⁵ Ehrenburg (1983, p. 31).

¹⁶ Ehrenburg (1983, p. 58).

assembly line, rationalisation and speed. To him his enterprise had become the new symbol of French industry. He wanted to offer Europe 'velocity' like Buddha wanted to offer Asia 'peace and quietness'¹⁷.

The last example of the New-objectivity industrial novel in Weimar Germany is Erik Reger's *Union der festen Hand* (1931/1992). This book is widely considered as the best industrial novel in Germany of this time period. Again, this book is more reportage than novel like the other books mentioned here. For a time Reger (ps. for Hermann Dannenberger, 1893-1954) worked for the Krupp Company at Essen as a press officer. So he knew this company very well from the inside. His extensive book, encompassing more than 600 pages, is a concise objective non-partisan reconstruction of the labour struggle inside the Krupp Company in five subsequent episodes during the 1920s, encompassing the socialist uprising following the German defeat of World War I, the Kapp-Putsch, the French Occupation of the Ruhr region, economic stability in the mid twenties, inflation and rising mass-unemployment by the end of the 1920s, and ultimately the rise of Hitler and Nazism at the beginning of the 1930s. The book also deals with the internal rivalries among the big Ruhr-region industrialists. Reger offers at the same time a very good impression of Krupp's welfare work policy and labour relations at the time. Likewise it is an interesting source from a sociological viewpoint. The Krupp Company appears encrypted as the *Risch-Zander* steel company, and its workforce as "*Rischianer*" instead of the factual "*Kruppianer*", constituting 'one big family' of workers and the entrepreneur and his family, living in a large number of sometimes romantic worker colonies with shops, and all kinds of other facilities, and in the monumental entrepreneurial Villa (Villa Hügel) respectively in larger company town Essen. Though in its extensive form not fully comparable to Kracauer's book, Reger's book in its core may also be considered as a 'vivisection' of its time, dealing with worker alienation¹⁸.

3. The Italian industrial novel in the 1950s and 1960s: Ottieri, Volponi and others

¹⁷ Ehrenburg (1983, p. 67).

¹⁸ Hermand (1965, p. 114, 131). Also Muller (2014).

Italy underwent a remarkable strong economic boom in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s marked by a forceful industrialization¹⁹. Italians themselves speak of a 'second industrial revolution' after a former one by the end of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of the Great Depression of the 1930s. In a quick pace the country transformed itself from a still mainly agricultural nation into one of the most important industrial economies of the world of that time. This transformation required the recruiting of many new industrial workers from the ranks of agricultural workers in a rather brief timespan. This incited large migrant streams from the south of Italy to the north, as well as a rapid urbanization of the North. The majority of important industrial enterprises like Fiat, Pirelli and Olivetti were concentrated in the so-called economic industrial triangle between Milan, Turin and Genoa. Another relevant factor in this context was the will in the country to overcome the political and moral deficit of the previous fascist regime of Mussolini. This, among other things, motivated a limited number of enlightened and reformist entrepreneurs to experiment with industrial democracy and far-reaching social policies inside their companies. One of the most outspoken entrepreneurs in this respect was Adriano Olivetti, the owner of typewriter-producing company Olivetti, first in the factory at Ivrea near Milan, and then also in the new factory in Pozzuoli near Naples. Adriano Olivetti believed strongly in the application of social science at the entrepreneurial level as well as in a narrow collaboration between entrepreneurs and intellectuals (scientists, writers, poets) in this context²⁰. In this Olivetti certainly was not unique. In about the same time, in the 1950s, a number of enterprises started with the introduction of externally oriented company journals, in which renowned scientist, designers, architects, philosophers, writers, poets and arts critics were involved actively. One of the most notorious examples in this respect was the journal *Civiltà delle Macchine* (1953-1979) founded by well-known writer and also engineer Leonardo Sinisgalli and engineer Giuseppe Eugenio Luraghi in behalf of Finmeccanica. This enterprise, a post-war conglomerate of a number of big Italian manufacturing industries like car producer Alfa Romeo, Ansaldo, and Cantieri Navali dell'Adriatico, was founded in 1948 with the intention to contribute actively to

¹⁹ See Ginsborg (1989, pp. 283-343).

²⁰ See Ferrarotti (2015); also Ochetto (2013).

the reconstruction of the manufacturing industry of the country²¹. *Civiltà delle Macchine* and other comparable company journals dealt with subjects like technical innovations, product development, the economic boom of the 1950s, entrepreneurial welfare work policies, and the marketing of products. The particular intention of *Civiltà delle Macchine* was confronting in debate form two until that time opposite cultures in industry: the technical and the humanistic. This resulted in a number of remarkable narrative and descriptive articles on the cultural role of post-war Italian enlightened capitalism, partly based on 'unique' factory visits ("*visita in fabbrica*") and direct observations of working life and working conditions of writers and other intellectuals. Until that moment this never had happened in Italy (Di Nardo, 2009; Bigatti & Luppo 2013; Alberini 2014). Some interesting self-explanatory examples of factory visits are the following articles: "*Un poeta e un pittore in visita ai cantieri dell'Ansaldo*" (A poet's and painter's visit to the Ansaldo works) by Giorgio Caproni (1953), "*La centrale di Cornigliano*" (the powerplant of Cornigliano) by Carlo Emilio Gadda (1953), and "*Ritorno alla Sant'Eustacchio*" (return to the machine factory Sant'Eustacchio) by Emilio Tadini (1956)²².

Apart from the journals mentioned here (see n. 20), another significant event as regards the incidence and development of the post-war Italian industrial novel was a remarkable initiative taken by two authoritative writers Elio Vittorini and Italo Calvino. In September 1961 they published a special number of the new important neo-realistic literary journal '*Il Menabò di letteratura*' (founded in 1959), which was completely devoted to the actual Italian industrial novel. The journal's objective was, like *Civiltà delle Macchine*, to anticipate directly on the fundamental economic and social transformation of Italy during the period of the very forceful economic boom of the country by paying attention to the spectacular growth at the time of the chemical, automobile and electro-domestic industries, the need of social reforms at the entrepreneurial level, social inequality, the rapid urbanization of the North caused by emigration from south to north, the construction of motorways, and real estate speculation.

At the background also the Italian communist party (PCI) played a crucial role, of which both Calvino and Volponi were active members. Its cultural department tried to

²¹ Other examples are *Comunità* (Notizie Olivetti), *Pirelli* (Pirelli) *Il Gatto Selvatico*, and *Rivista Italsider*.

²² Bigatti and Luppo (2013, pp. 115-140).

influence directly the by Vittorini and Calvino initiated writer's debate on the industrial novel. In line with the ideas of famous Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, prisoned in the 1930s by Mussolini, Calvino took the stance that an intellectual should come close to the people in order to be able to produce a "*letteratura nazionale popolare*" (popular national literature), whereas the PCI took the more rigid stance of socialist realism and zdanovism²³.

By publishing a special number on the industrial novel Vittorini and Calvino wanted to give the industrial novel, which in fact already existed in Italy in a more *realistic* form since the 1930's, a new *neo-realistic* boost²⁴. Both influential writers, similar to *Civiltà delle Macchine* and the other company journals mentioned, also considered the factory as a still closed institution, which urgently had to open its windows to the outside world for a critical sociological and anthropological examination of the new Italian industrial reality and the changing world of work²⁵. As a consequence the Italian literary world linked to *Menabò* contributed actively to the renewal of the industrial novel in Italy. In this context one big enterprise (Olivetti) and two important writers in particular deserve further attention here (Paolo Volponi and Ottiero Ottieri).

As has been stated Olivetti stood at the forefront in post-war Italy with regard to welfare work reforms. It was famous for its welfare work programs, which consisted of a number of social services, health care provisions, community centres and a famous company library. Adriano Olivetti also founded the Olivetti company journal *Comunità*, as well as a publishing company (*Edizioni Comunità*) and a political movement (*Il Movimento di Comunità*) to promoting work and industry not only as means for gaining profit and earning a living, but also as a humanistic means for personal self-development, spiritual enrichment and social innovation.

Adriano Olivetti narrowly collaborated with a number of writers, most important among them Paolo Volponi (also called 'il romanziere-sociologo') and Ottiero Ottieri. Both

²³ Fioretti (2013, p. 13). *Zdanovism* concerned a narrow theoretical and practical control of activities of writers and intellectuals by the state or communist party to adapt them to the ideology or politics of the state/party. See *lo Zingarelli* dictionary: Zanichelli.

²⁴ Fioretti considers 1934 as the year in which the modern realistic Italian industrial novel found a clear starting point, in particular with Carlo Bernari's novel *Tre operai* (Three blue collar workers). For the first time in the Italian industrial novel the worker himself became a subject and got a direct voice. (Fioretti 2013, p. 11).

²⁵ Vittorini (1961, p. 19).

authors also worked for a certain time for Olivetti in the personnel departments of the factories at Ivrea and Pozzuoli respectively. They both published authoritative and influential industrial novels based on their company experiences. These books contributed strongly to the Italian debate on the industrial novel at the time in Italy. Paolo Volponi (1924-1994) published in due course various industrial novels and prose. Most important is his *Memoriale* (Volponi,1962). At a later moment Volponi published two other notorious industrial novels: *Corporale* (Volponi, 1974) also on worker alienation, and *Le Mosche del capitale* (Volponi, 1989) on the triumph of neo-capitalism from the 1960s onwards and its effects on working life (the definite rise of the consumer society and the implicit historical defeat of the working class).

Volponi started working for Olivetti in Rome in 1950 and subsequently, between 1956 and 1972, at the main plant at Ivrea near Milan, where he ultimately became personnel director. At personal request of Umberto Agnelli, Volponi ultimately moved to Fiat in Torino in 1972. In 1983 he was elected as a senator for the Italian communist party. *Memoriale* is a novel devoted to worker alienation and its psychological effects. Its main protagonist and voice in the book is Albino Saluggia, a to Piedmont returned sickly German prisoner of war with a traditional farmer background. He finds work as a labourer in the not in the novel as such mentioned Olivetti plant at Ivrea. Saluggia perceives the well-organized factory as a system (based on scientific management and Fordism) and with a professional medical service as operating against his personal interests. Because of this he becomes paranoid and sees a company-complot emerging against him, which prevents him to have a normal working life. He also feels estranged by his work, which consists of monotonous and repetitive tasks. In this 'neurotic' factory context, Saluggia gradually transforms himself from a passive adjusted but dissatisfied worker into a conscientious radical rebel who eventually prepares and organizes a syndicalist factory strike.

All in all, *Memoriale* may be considered as a critical assessment of the Fordist system, which had been introduced at the time on a large scale in the economic triangle of the north of Italy²⁶.

Ottiero Ottieri (1924-2002), a writer also strongly interested in psychology and sociology, started working for Olivetti in 1955 at the new model plant of Pozzuoli near

²⁶ Cascione (2017a).

Naples. After a time Ottieri moved to the Olivetti headquarters at Ivrea (Milan), where he remained until 1965.

It was Adriano Olivetti's intention to contribute in a fundamental way to the solving of the problems, which at the time arose in the South as a consequence of the mass-migration from the south to the north by creating a new sort of humanistic workmen's utopia in the mezzogiorno.

Ottieri wrote three industrial novels based on his Olivetti experience: *Tempi stretti* (Ottieri, 1957), *Donnarumma all'assalto* (Ottieri, 1959) and *La linea gotica* (Ottieri 1963), partly summarized in the fourth special number of *Menabò* (1961).

Most famous is his second novel, *Donnarumma all'assalto* (Ottieri, 1959). Main theme in this novel is also worker alienation. The narrative protagonist of the book is a young company psychologist (apparently Ottieri himself) charged with psycho-technical testing of many potential new factory workers in behalf of the Pozzuoli plant (in the novel Santa Maria), which produces calculators (see also Coratelli, 2012). This almost turned out to be a mission impossible because of the many conflicts and tensions between the company management and the workers, which arose over time in the new model factory, designed by famous Italian architect Luigi Cozenza. Unemployed and semi-literate Antonio Donnarumma was one of the workers after which the novel got its title, but in fact he represents the totality of the new southern workforce. He embodied the at the time typical traditional disordered mentality of the mezzogiorno which at Pozzuoli was confronted with a rational bureaucratic company culture of a modern and progressive industrial company from the North. The book written in the form of a personal diary of the psychologist is strongly autobiographic. It also is very similar to reportage.

The main message of this book and Ottieri's other industrial novels is that in the context of rapid urbanization and social uprooting of entire families, new modes of working and new products, Industry of the 1950s increasingly penetrated the sphere of private life of workers, which even touched their intimate emotions²⁷.

4. Conclusions and discussion

In this paper I dealt with the industrial novel and its possible significance for industrial sociology or sociology of work by paying attention to two remarkable streams of

²⁷ Cascione (2017b).

modernist industrial novels: the Weimar experience of the 1920s and early 1930s and the Italian post-war experience of the 1950s and early 1960s. Both streams have in common first of all that they emerged in the context of periods of intensive economic, social and political change, such as strong economic growth, increasing wealth, strong and far reaching organizational changes (large scale introduction of scientific management and Fordism at the company level), strong migration and rapid urbanization, rising influence of leftist political parties, in particular communism. Secondly, a substantial part of the modernist industrial novels of Weimar Germany and post-war Italy were based not only on narrative, but also on facts and data collected by the respective authors by means of interviews, participant observation, desk research and not in the least also by long-time personal experiences of the writers as collaborators of the companies about which they wrote (Krupp, Olivetti). The often chosen methodological form was the documentary form or the form of a more or less objective reportage. This turns their efforts definitely into ex-ante 'pseudo' sociology or ethnography, which until today has not been taken sufficiently seriously by formal sociology. What is more, as the majority of the novels dealt with, also enlarged their focus from the factory floor to the wider context of family life of workers and the new emerging working man's culture (for example the new white collar culture in Berlin and other big industrial cities at the time of the Weimar Republic) it makes it even more important to consider them as a substantial part of the core body of knowledge of industrial sociology.

Until today industrial sociology has been a very practical discipline, consisting mainly of applicable sociology inside companies. As a consequence, on the whole its core body of knowledge and theory has remained rather limited. At present, also industrial sociology has been partly overhauled by new applied academic disciplines like human resources management (HRM). From the viewpoint of the discipline sociology this is more than regrettable. Therefore, in my view it is worthwhile to search for a new impetus for industrial sociology by integrating in its existing body of knowledge more explicitly a historical angle (see also De Gier 2016) as well as more serious forms of ex-ante pseudo sociology like the genre of the industrial novel. Such a wider scope could make of

industrial sociology a more valuable, but also more interesting, sociological sub-discipline than it is today²⁸.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alberini, Luca (2014). "Civiltà delle Macchine" 60 years later. *Lett Mat Int*, 1: 157-159 (Springer).

Bauman, Zygmunt (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Benjamin, Walter (1980). *Gesammelte Schrifte*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag (Werkausgabe).

Bigatti, Giorgio and Giuseppe Lupo (2013). *Fabbrica di carta. I libri che raccontano l'Italia industriale*. Roma: Laterza.

Bowlt, John E. (ed.) (1988). *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde. Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Cascione, Alberto (2017a). *Un "Boom" nevrotico. L'Italia del dopoguerra sullo sfondo del romanzo Memoriale di Paolo Volponi*. Pdf retrieved from the Internet, August.

Cascione, Alberto (2017b). *Temi e problemi della letteratura industriale nei romanzi di Ottiero Ottieri*. Pdf retrieved from the Internet, August.

Colombo, Duccio (2008). *Scrittori, In Fabbrica! Una lettura del romanzo industriale sovietico*. Ospedaletto: Pacini Editori.

Corratelli, Giorgio (2012). La disciplina di fabbrica. Un studio tematico. Analisi di *Donnarumma all'assalto* di Ottiero Ottieri e *Vogliamo tutto* di Nanni Balestrini, *Impossibilita*, No. 4, pp. 138-155.

Di Nardo, Emmanuele (2009). *Impresa e cultura. "Civiltà delle Macchine" e la letteratura industriale*. Università degli Studi di Bologna, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia. Pdf retrieved from the Internet, Tesionline, August 2017, pp. 2-8.

Ehrenburg, Ilja (1983). *Das Leben der Autos*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Engels, Friedrich (1993). *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁸ By what I mean has aso a lot in common with the approach of the former Frankfurt School of sociology, and in particular of its member Walter Benjamin who approached social science as a cultural science (Benjamin 1980). Significant is certainly also a debate which is taking place momentarily among historians to make a more systematic use of historical artefacts, like novels, by the interpretation of important historical events Schlögel (2017).

Ferrarotti, Franco (2015). *Un imprenditore di idee*. Roma/Ivrea: Comunità Editrice (Kindle e-book).

Fioretti, Daniele (2013). *Carte di fabbrica. La narrativa industriale in Italia (1934-1989)*. Pescara: Edizioni Tracce.

Gier, Erik de (2016). *Capitalist workingman's paradises revisited. Corporate welfare work in Great Britain, the USA, Germany and France in the Golden Age of Capitalism, 1880-1930*. Amsterdam/Chicago: Amsterdam University Press (AUP).

Ginsborg, Paul (1989). *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi*. Torino: Einaudi.

Hermend, Jost (1965). Erik Regers "Union der festen Hand" (131): Roman oder Reportage? In: *Monatshefte*, Vol. 57, No. 3, March, pp. 113-133.

Kaes, Anton and Martin Jay, Edward Dimenberg (1994). *The Weimar Republic sourcebook*. Berkely: University of California Press.

Kisch, Egon Erwin (2006). *Der rasende reporter*. Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag.

Kracauer, Siegfried (2013). *Die Angestellten. Aus dem neuesten Deutschland*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Muller, Francoise (2014). Neue Sachlichkeit und Arbeitswelt. *Germanica* (online), 9-2014.

Ochetto, Valerio (2013). *Adriano Olivetti. La biografia*. Roma/Ivrea: Comunità Editrice (Kindle e-book).

Ottieri, Ottiero (1957/1974). *Tempi stretti*. Torino: Einaudi.

Ottieri, Ottiero (1959/2004). *Donnarumma all'assalto*. Milano: Garzanti.

Ottieri, Ottiero (1963/2009). *La linea gotica*. Milano: Mondadori.

Reger, Erik (1992). *Union der Festen Hand*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag.

Schlögel, Karl (2017). Das Leben der Dinge. Materielle Kultur als Wahrnehmungsregister der Russischen Revolution. *Lettre International*, No. 118, Autumn, pp. 66-73.

Später, Jörg (2016). *Siegfried Kracauer. Eine Biographie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Todorov, Tzvetan (2009). *La signature humaine. Essais 1983-2008*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

Vittorini, E. (1961). Industria e Letteratura. *Menabò*, No. 4. Einaudi: Torino.

Volponi, Paolo (1962). *Memoriale*. Milano: Garzanti; and (1974) Torino: Einaudi.

Volponi, Paolo, (1974). *Corporale*. Torino: Einaudi.

Volponi, Paolo (1989). *Le Mosche del capitale*. Torino: Einaudi.

Williams, Keith (1990). The Will to Objectivity: Egon Erwin Kisch' "Der rasende Reporter". *The Modern Language Review*. Vol. 85, No.1, Jan. 1990, pp. 92-106.

Zola, Emile (1885/1991). *Germinal*. Paris: Fasquelle (Le Livre de Poches).