

## The 'moralities' of poaching Manufacturing personal artifacts on the factory floor

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**ABSTRACT** ■ Poaching, usually understood as trespassing in pursuit of game, in the context of the French aerospace factory described in this article, amounts to manufacturing objects on company time and with company materials and tools for personal use. These objects are known as 'homers' in English and *perruques* in French. The account of homers by a French aerospace employee presented in this article is informed by other ethnographic accounts of similar practices. These accounts highlight the cognitive contrast between homers and work but also some practical similarities between homer production processes and more traditional work processes. Competing definitions of unofficial (and by contrast official) work emerge from this analysis. The 'moralities' of poaching are therefore multiple and this multiplicity sustains the poaching system.

**KEY WORDS** ■ work, labor, poaching, clandestine activities, factory, aerospace industry, morality, France

The aim of this article is twofold: first, to document a hidden work activity labeled here poaching, and second, to explore this activity to further the understanding of work. Poaching is usually defined as 'trespassing in pursuit of game or taking of game or fish illegally or by un-sportsmanlike methods' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989). In the context of this article, poaching

refers to the use of company machines or material on company time to create artifacts for employees' personal use. In factories where poaching occurs,<sup>1</sup> poaching practices, far from being unusual and marginal activities, share many similarities with traditional work practices. This hypothesis is suggested by the testimony of a French aerospace worker (presented in this article) and supported by other ethnographic accounts of poaching in industrial contexts. Issues of compensation and fairness are, for instance, rampant. Though poaching is a hidden activity and a form of organizational 'misbehavior' (for a review of misbehaviors, see Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), it can still be conceptualized as part of factory work. Moreover, poaching, as will be documented, is an inherently social pursuit (rather than an individual one) and often involves supervisors and middle managers as well as poachers.

The following examples of poaching in an aerospace factory challenge the scope given to the concept of work that is often limited to its productive component, question conventional views of what are the drivers of organizational and semi-autonomous collective behaviors (dynamics of work and poaching), and highlight differences between perceived qualities of poached artifacts and the actual poaching processes that result in these artifacts. Competing definitions of official and unofficial work are mobilized in these poaching accounts. Documenting and explaining poaching also fills a void since 'organizational and managerial theorists have become increasingly estranged from the study of work' (Barley, 1996: 49). Before discussing methods, results, and implications, the article presents clarifications about poaching in work environments.

### Poaching, *perruque* and homers

Stealing from one's employer is nothing new in organizations. Louis XIV, for instance, had his superintendent Fouquet imprisoned on these grounds (Morand, 1961). Poaching, however, at least in its work-related appellation of *perruque*<sup>2</sup> (see below), possesses more attributes than simple theft. '*La perruque* is the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer. It differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. *La perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary writing a love letter on "company time" or as complex as a cabinetmaker's "borrowing" a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room' (Certeau, 1980/1984: 25). 'A homer is an object made for his own purpose or pleasure by a worker using his factory's machines and materials. It is not an object made for sale as an additional income source. The word does not appear in most dictionaries, such as the Oxford or Webster's, but appears to be most widely used in

England and America of a number of variants' (Haraszti, 1978: 9). This use of homer might relate to one of its slang meanings: 'wounds sufficiently serious to cause a man to be sent home' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989). Homers sometimes indeed lead to employee termination.

The French term '*perruque*' and its English equivalent of 'home projects' are used in this article interchangeably to describe those processes that produce homers. A more colloquial English synonym for *perruque* is 'doing government jobs' (Gouldner, 1954: 51; Dalton, 1959: 205), hinting, in derogatory terms, at the belief that public servants supposedly work so little that they can work for themselves while being on the job. In the United Kingdom, *perruque* is also known as 'pilfering' or 'fiddling' (Ditton, 1977: 47; Mars, 1982/1994: 1; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999: 24–7). It is assumed that employees engage in *perruque* when they either use company machines or material on company time to create artifacts for their personal, a friend's or a family member's use. Outputs are typically not sold even if a market for such objects exists. The created materials will be referred to as 'homers'. '*Bricoles*', '*bousilles*' and '*pinailles*' are French synonyms for homers (Hissard and Hissard, 1978: 77). Whereas dreams, fantasies, and other intangible objects might be thought of as variants of homers, this article limits itself to the concrete world. Examples of homers (depending obviously on inputs available, industries and factory traditions) are: 'Key-holders, bases for flower pots, ashtrays, pencil boxes, rulers and set squares, little boxes to bring salt to the factory for the morning break, bath mats (made out of rolls of white polystyrene), counters in stainless steel to teach children simple arithmetic (a marvelous present), pendants made from broken milling teeth, wheels for roulette-type games, dice, magnetized soap holders, television aerials (assembled at home), locks and bolts, coat-holders for the changing room cupboard, knives, daggers, knuckle-dusters, and so on' (Haraszti, 1978: 141). At times or in societies where basic goods are not readily found in stores, homers can take on much more utilitarian forms.<sup>3</sup>

*Perruque* is a fairly well acknowledged yet largely undocumented activity in western industrial contexts.<sup>4</sup> Many factory workers, when asked, seem to know exactly what *perruque* is. Artistic venues sometimes point more formally to *perruque*. For instance, Johnny Cash's 1976 hit song 'One Piece at a Time' provides a candid portrayal of a General Motors' worker in Detroit building a Cadillac by poaching pieces from a factory. In museums or art exhibits, pieces attributed to specific factories and resembling homers also materialize. The art community refers to these pieces as 'outsider art'.<sup>5</sup> Yet formalized data on *perruque* making (and not only the resulting artifacts) are scarce.

Through an illustration of apparently abnormal work practices it is possible to explore normal assumptions around work. Contrasting *perruque* and work can reveal what is taken for granted, thus exposing

cognitive frames that have become obvious to the point of no longer attracting the scholar's attention. Previous research investigating 'abnormal' individuals produced helpful pointers towards 'normality'. Sacks (1993), for instance, studied a person with Asperger syndrome (a form of autism) to explore what being human meant, and Kulick (1998) studied Brazilian transvestites to understand better gender roles in Brazilian society. In the industrial context, the study of *perruque* is meant to highlight the cognitive features of 'normal' work. Such a contrasted reading of *perruque* and work is suggested in some accounts of poaching (Haraszti, 1978; Hissard and Hissard, 1978; Certeau, 1980/1984; Texas Court of Appeals, 1996). At the same time, however, the study will reveal practical similarities between *perruque* production processes and more traditional forms of work ('normality'), thus bringing into question this cognitive contrast. Adults with no intention to work would constitute an ideal sample for a research project around meanings of work. Alternatively, cognitive frames around work and *perruque* among working adults are examined. Some scholars have attempted similar approaches by contrasting work and play (see, for instance, March, 1972/1979). This article builds on these ideas and uses *perruque* instead of play as a strategic research site. This cognitive duality is only meant as a starting point and will be further challenged in this article. Ultimately, it is argued that work and *perruque* are *in practice* two sides of the same coin.

### Richard's divorce and *perruque* at the Pierreville plant

An aerospace factory in France, Pierreville, part of the AeroDyn Corporation, provides the empirical grounding for this article.<sup>6</sup> It primarily manufactures airplane engines and employs several thousand individuals. Pierreville is an assembly and testing as well as research and development site for these engines. The corporation is state owned, a fact that might limit the findings of this article. Historically, major customers were state defense departments but, beginning in the early 1970s, civilian customers were added. Conversations, mainly at their home, with primarily two informants from this factory, took place over a period of a year. One informant, Richard B., is a relative of mine and the other informant is his current spouse. Quotes in this article (not otherwise identified) refer to transcriptions of these conversations and comments from immediate family members.<sup>7</sup> The article, moreover, assumes that appropriate occasions to investigate cognitive frames are when switching occurs. Switching is defined as the practice of individuals, consciously or not, expressing linguistic shifts to emphasize one frame versus another (Mische and White, 1998). In effect, switching reveals common and ordinary assumptions.

Thus Richard's testimony around *perruque* will be analyzed specifically during shifts (denials, surprises, etc.).

Richard worked for most of his adult life at the Pierreville plant. After an apprenticeship, and a short period in the French Army, he was officially hired in the 1960s as an *ouvrier spécialisé* (i.e. an entry level unskilled worker) to help out with ground testing of airplane engines. Testing work involves receiving finished engines and measuring a set of defined parameters over several hours in order to verify that the engines react well under normal conditions. By the mid-1980s, he had been promoted to foreman in one of the several testing units of the factory. A few years later at a family gathering, he showed me a photo of his son, our mutual link, which he carried in his wallet. His wallet also contained photos of his parents, his godchild and a boat. The presence of a boat among these family portraits was intriguing and he started to describe it:

Ulysses was the name of the boat. When I was still married to my ex-wife [this expression was the way he referred to Caroline, the mother of his child] we used to sail all over the [French] Riviera in this boat. Such a beauty . . . I used to take care of it entirely on my own. It was a beautiful piece of machinery. All the pieces were properly maintained so we could go out at sea without any problems. I replaced many pieces myself and made a few of them at work because it was hard to find quality material elsewhere. Nobody ever mentioned my boat to you? (From field notes)

Richard's son and ex-wife had mentioned boat trips but nobody had ever talked about the boat per se, nor was the name 'Ulysses' mentioned on these occasions. When asked where the boat was now, Richard said he did not own it anymore. His son, later pressed to comment on the boat, answered that the boat was his father's 'baby'. 'Richard used to work on it hours without end. It was his pride and joy. The fact that Richard had to sell it in order to buy back part of the house my mother was moving out of, at the time of his divorce, was a painful episode of the divorce settlement.' This settlement was not limited to the house: furniture, photo albums, animals, etc. all entered into the 'accounting' of the separation. But more intriguingly, a small metal shovel was now being kept 'hostage' by Caroline and her father (now living with her) in their new home. Richard had apparently repeatedly inquired about this shovel and Caroline's father comments on that fact:

If he wants that shovel, he can come and get it himself! I'll give it to him [laughs] . . . but we will need to clean it before he gets it. This shovel was made to order in the factory to clean the chimney. It's perfectly flat and is the right size to allow us now to clean the carpet when the cat has an accident. We now mainly use it to clean the litter box, it's really perfect, it works quite well. It's now a litter shovel . . . [laughs] (From field notes)



**Figure 1** Richard's ex-wife in front of 'Ulysses': the propeller, ladder, and seats were manufactured at Pierreville.

This shovel, surprisingly, had also been made inside the factory. During a later visit to Richard's home, when asked about other objects he might have manufactured at the plant, Richard opened cupboards, pulled open drawers and, in the following flow of commentaries on their texture, the machines used to manufacture them, and the friends involved in their production, drew out and put away various objects.

The barbecue in the garden was done with a group of friends. We made several of them because we all wanted one, it was like a small series . . . Here, the metal spikes to cook the meat were also made at the plant . . . Look how nice they are. And here under the garden chairs, I did these caps so the chairs would not put rust marks on our tiles . . . Here this tray, also from the factory. Polished, and everything, we use it for cake or biscuits . . . (From field notes)

I was not permitted to conduct observations inside the factory where my informer works; homer pieces shown outside the factory and the narratives surrounding them are therefore used as my only data sources. Because *perruque* is officially depicted as an illegal activity by company management, explicitly banned by internal codes of conduct, and punishable by firing, the topic per se remains taboo in the factory. Few employees are willing to speak on the record about homers. This can be explained by fear of corporate retaliation but also as a way to protect coworkers. Requests

by the author for temporary employment at Pierreville were turned down and management discouraged overt research on this topic inside the factory. In order to compensate for the lack of direct shop floor observations and in order to inform Richard's testimony, other poaching accounts (cf. Appendix 1) are used in this article. These accounts span epochs (1959, 1978, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1996 and 1999), countries (France, Hungary and the United States) and industries (automotive, aerospace, steel, etc.). They were selected because they provide rare insight into *perruque* activities in the work context of shop floors instead of focusing exclusively on the results of these activities (i.e. the manufactured artifacts).

### *Perruque* as a collective rather than individual pursuit

Collaboration around *perruque* is, first, a practical need. In order to manufacture steel ashtrays or toy rockets, the help of fellow workers is usually solicited. Homer makers collaborate for a variety of reasons: to compensate for a lack of skills, to gain access to certain materials or tools, and to escape time constraints imposed by production.

In the aerospace factory, individuals in the maintenance and project development teams are in high demand from their coworkers. Maintenance teams usually stock materials and tools (like tin sheets, electric saws, etc.) that come in handy when manufacturing homers, much like the project development teams who have access to a variety of tools and inputs to test out manufacturing ideas. Moreover, individuals employed in project development teams have a reputation for excellence in craftsmanship and are referred to by others in the factory as 'golden hands' ('*des mains en or*'). Beaud and Pialoux (1999: 119–20) also note that highly skilled technical workers engage in more *perruque* than other workers. Though Hissard and Hissard (1978: 79) point to some homers that do not necessitate many skills or materials (like dolls and silhouettes cut out in foam), more common homers will at least call for some cutting, sanding or polishing. Any individual's given job may not fully encompass all such activities, thus the need to rely on coworkers. Overcoming time constraints is a second main reason to collaborate. Hamper (1991), for instance, points out occasions in automotive assembly factories when workers double up on a job (i.e. learn their coworker's job) to give the other person time to do something else (in his case games rather than homers). In that same spirit, workers in the aerospace factory sometimes forge their time sheets to engage in *perruque*. Since the introduction of a management technique known as 'product management' at Pierreville, workers in semi-skilled occupations are required, each month, to allocate their working time to specific product lines. Alliances with cooperative individuals in charge of specific time codes allow for

creation of slack time. The precision with which a task is timed is much higher on the assembly line than in the advanced drafting stages. Therefore more upstream teams (such as the product development teams) are at an advantage for engaging in *perruque*.

Homers can be seen as individual acts of creativity, akin to the making of craft or art objects, Haraszti, who worked in a tractor factory in Hungary, remarks: 'connoisseurs of folklore may look at homers as a native, decorative art. And yet, they aren't able to see further than that' (1978: 146). What they miss is that the making of homers is a social pursuit. It is interesting that poachers who get fired are generally already estranged from the factory community and only then get fired for poaching (rather than losing touch with their coworkers because of being fired). Thus *perruque* cases coming up for internal disciplinary hearings or formal legal resolution and poachers 'caught in the act' actually constitute exceptions.

Apart from apparent practical reasons to collaborate (skills, tools and time) other dynamics are at play. Engaging in *perruque*-making signals that the poacher belongs to a community. In the examples given by G r me (1983: 136–42) of retirement homers (gifts given to departing employees), most of the individuals involved in their production are direct or indirect friends. These signals can be weak (mere membership) or strong (not only membership but also indication of a position in that community). Dalton (1959: 201–2) cites the 'association with superiors' and the 'privilege of taking Lincolns and Cadillacs out of the plant for "trial spins" . . . and driving home "on company time" to take their wives shopping . . . as potential rewards of carrying out "intelligence assignments"' [Dalton's term for poaching in service to a supervisor]. These ties constitute unambiguous status cues in the factory environment. Hissard and Hissard (1978: 77) reinforce this point by adding: 'The "big pinailleur" [poacher] . . . has particular status in the factory . . . He is a person one can trust.' Collaborations to produce homers, therefore, need not only reflect practical constraints but also point to shared frameworks of meaning, tacit understandings, and hierarchies for those who engage in them. Moreover, although these ties may span official horizontal and vertical hierarchical lines, they may also sometimes entirely ignore them. Whereas collaborations devised by employees to cope with their productive tasks sometimes redefine organizational linkages (such as maintenance workers dealing directly with machine operators without the intervention of the shop supervisors, c.f. Crozier, 1963), *perruque* links individuals who may not have the same productive work goals in common. For instance, an office secretary in the administrative section of the Pierreville plant types up on a regular basis the minutes of parent-teacher meetings for a fellow assembly line worker. In this example, none of the protagonists utilize, at least directly, their productive function. However, in engaging in such *perruque*-making, they create new



ties or reinforce pre-existing social ties to each other. Thus *perruque* permeates, reinforces and sometimes creates communities inside the factory (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984) in ways that are acknowledged though not openly discussed. Initiation into this community is almost a given when one works on or near the factory floor. Richard's spouse, an office worker at Pierreville, comments:

When I started working for this firm, I did not know what [perruque] was about. Since my father worked also in a similar industrial firm, I asked him: what is perruque? This is not hair? [perruque in French also means a wig]. And he told me what it was. I did not know anything about it at the time, I was a bit naïve but everybody talked about it discreetly. (From field notes)

An intriguing question arises: what happens when employees fail to belong to this community that spans multiple occupations and hierarchical levels in the factory? A US court case (Texas Court of Appeals, 1996) provides a partial unveiling and documentation of such an occurrence. Larry Stephens' employer, Delphi Gas Pipeline Company, claims it 'discharged Stephens because he violated the company's conflict of interest policy in that he used a company employee to install a gasket on his (Stephens') personal air compressor while on company time'. Stephens contended that Delphi fired him because he was contemplating making a claim for worker's compensation due to work-related health problems. He also relates 'three incidents when employees using company time transacted personal work or business, and Delphi did nothing about it', and adds: 'other employees had performed personal chores on company time without being fired', continuing that 'it was customary for other employees to perform small tasks for other employees, and that the company had never before discharged anyone for it'. What emerges here is an account of an employee being fired for something everybody seems to be doing.<sup>8</sup> Poaching might often be a pretext when the decision to terminate an employee has already been taken.

Cases of poachers caught in the act remain exceptional.<sup>9</sup> Much like the widespread informal use of the 'officially' restricted tap – a hard steel screw used to bring nuts and bolts into new but not true alignments (Bensman and Gerver, 1963: 590) – the possibility to manufacture homers (or to use a tap to get a job done) is nested in the community of coworkers and its acceptability is essentially in the hands of this community (which includes workers, supervisors and managers). Poaching, like using a tap, is not officially authorized but is permitted under certain conditions and within certain limits set by the community. Yet by focusing our analysis only inside the factory, the full scope of this community is neglected. Once the homer is brought out of the factory, it is passed along to spouses, parents, children, and friends who do not directly work in the factory. In this way homers



Figure 2 Richard's garden barbecue from Pierreville.

bring to light the existence of a different form of community, one more akin to what Zelizer (2001) labels 'circuits of commerce'. This community does not only include the (rather static) group of homer producers but also the (more dynamic) group of external homer beneficiaries. Homers appear (as in Richard's home) in living rooms as decorations, in gardens as barbecues or in parks as children's toys.

*Perruque* is therefore collective in nature. To repeat an important point, the poacher who is punished with dismissal is most probably fired because he or she is outside the *perruque* community, not because he or she poaches. Moreover, being inside the *perruque* community signifies being considered an insider by one's fellow workers but also by supervisors and managers in the factory. Richard (a foreman) is, for instance, involved in homers. Dalton (1959), Certeau (1980/1984), Gérôme (1983) and Beaud and Pialoux (1999) also stress these managerial involvements. Certeau (1980/1984: 25) reports that managers 'turn a blind eye', Gérôme (1983: 136) notes that

homers are not acts of 'resistance' and that bosses also engage in home projects, and Beaud and Pialoux (1999: 119) remark that bosses are often in the loop, turn a blind eye and are also involved in exchanges of services.<sup>10</sup> *Perruque* therefore involves labor and management, even though legal proceedings tend to minimize this joint involvement.

### 'Moral' artifacts resulting from traditional work practices

The firing of an outsider (though in appearance engaging in insider activity) might therefore not be a surprise for the poaching community.<sup>11</sup> Since one of the aims of this article is to isolate and define distinct attributes of poaching versus work, firing an outsider (a predictable event) highlights the labor-management cohesiveness with regard to the poaching cognitive frame yet not its distinctiveness. Instead, occasions when the poaching community is caught off-guard might be more helpful.

Three such moments (when poaching cognitive frames are derailed) are described below. These incidents of poaching gone wrong constitute switching moments (Gumperz, 1976; Mische and White, 1998) and each moment reveals potential friction between definitions and practices associated with work on one side and poaching on the other. The first incident deals with a request by Richard's supervisor for a 'mass' production of homers. Richard recalls this episode:

We made a small batch of toy replicas of the Concorde [a commercial plane] and passed them around to some friends. A few days later the shop manager saw one of them and liked it. He asked for a whole batch; we were reluctant. He finally ordered us to make that batch so he could give them out as corporate gifts. It did not feel right. We weren't happy about this. We made them because we had to, but this was not really *perruque* anymore, just another job like all the others. (From field notes)

In this account what disqualifies the activity from being labeled *perruque* appears to be its insertion in a hierarchical relationship (the order to produce). Yet examples of collaboration across hierarchical levels exist so that it is perhaps the publicity around these homers which is a more relevant source of discontent. Unveiling hidden practices disturbs. Alternatively, it may be that this supervisor might be only marginally included in the *perruque* community and is being singled-out as a non-participant. Clearly, however, a regular job ('just another job like all the others') differs qualitatively from *perruque*.

The second incident provides an insight into cognitive differences between work and *perruque*. Richard's spouse comments on some homers she owns:

Some engage in *perruque* to make money. I, for instance, bought these lighters [she takes them out of a drawer]. The guy would take real coins and would weld them on these lighters as a decoration. He used to do this on his night shift and sell them. You see, the flame comes up from here [pointing towards the top of the lighter]. Do you really think this was done in *perruque*? [Richard interrupts]. I don't think so. (From field notes)

Going back to Certeau's account of *perruque* (1980/1984: 25) and Haraszti's definition of homers (1978: 9), the selling of *perruque* or homers can almost be seen as a disqualifying attribute or activity. In this incident, Richard has few cues to evaluate the statement of his spouse. Both the sight of the lighter (he does not seem to recognize it) and the fact that his spouse purchased it instill doubt in his mind. Monetary issues seem to negatively taint homer production processes.

A last incident further clarifies the perceived attributes of *perruque*. This incident occurs in the office of a dentist both Richard and his spouse are familiar with. They both noticed a large decorative engine blade mounted on a wooden base behind the dentist's desk. Richard comments:

And there I see a blade on an oak wood base. This is exactly the type of thing we do when someone retires; it's a very classical piece. According to me, he [the dentist] must have gotten it as a gift. So I ask him does this come from my factory? Oh, yes, he answers, Monsieur R. gave it to me [pause]. We were a bit surprised. [His spouse agrees.] When we see this at a dentist's, someone who never worked in aerospace [pause]. Let's say . . . in my home . . . [gesturing an indication of acceptance]. I'm in that field; it would not seem so odd. But here, in this context, and moreover such a huge piece [pause] . . . (From field notes)

The possible implications of Richard's surprise are intriguing and evoke the complexity of the social use of *perruque* products.<sup>12</sup> At first it seems the dentist, an outsider not linked to the industry, is not entitled to participate in the *perruque* activity but allowed to own a homer. There seems to be, however, a suspicion that the homers function like money (evoking the second switching incident), not really an altruistic gift but rather as a species of barter. Besides, even if he did receive it as a gift, the conspicuous display of the blade seems disturbing. Finally, envy is perhaps not entirely absent from Richard's comments. Without working in the factory this dentist gets to own an apparently fairly nice homer.

Purchase and tradability of the product is perhaps not the most disturbing attribute of the dentist's homer. Rather public display and perceived fairness in the acquisition of the artifact might disqualify it from true *perruque* status. In trying to specify what the *perruque* artifact is not (monetary, public and unfair), a sense of what *perruque* might be as a larger



Figure 3 Richard's multipurpose chimney shovel.

social practice (non-monetary, intimate and fair) seems to emerge. This points to contrasting views on organizational life and opens up possibilities of discussing moralities of poaching.

An important starting point is that *perruque* activities are predicated on the mutual dependence of coworkers. In that perspective *perruque* is a highly moral activity: 'a way to force mankind to count on others' (Durkheim, 1893/1991: 394, my translation). Hissard and Hissard (1978), Haraszti (1978), Certeau (1980/1984) and G r me (1983, 1984) all stress the difference between *perruque* and theft. Coworkers are not only mobilized for their skills, tools or control of time but also because they provide tacit approval for a hidden, yet moral, activity. Richard discusses *perruque* as a product that allows for fair treatment, intimate exchanges and non-monetary dealings: in short a rather 'moral' product

(even though internal corporate codes of conduct would depict it as theft). This morality is, however, limited to and bounded by the community involved in poaching (those who order homers, who produce them, who facilitate their production, who benefit from them, who receive them, etc.).

While constructing *perruque* in opposition to work might appear attractive, opposing *perruque* and work does not properly account for the practice. *Perruque* is not built in opposition to work but rather alongside work. Only Certeau (1980/1984), who among the cited accounts of poaching is perhaps the most removed from shop floors, uses the word 'resistance' in describing *perruque* versus work. Haraszti (1978) distinguishes home projects from official work but his account of factory life depicts homers as an integral part of work, and the retirement homers described by G er ome (1983, 1984) oftentimes show work situations (a typical retirement gift will symbolize the work, activity of the departing person such as his tools, the official products worked on, etc.), thus, further conflating these two cognitive frames. These remarks question the distinctions and oppositions (if any) between work and *perruque*. Among the three main criteria for identifying *perruque* artifacts, only one (intimate versus public) seems to hold true across *perruque* production accounts (home project activities are usually hidden from outsiders). The monetary and fairness issues of the artifacts are not as clear cut as they might, at first, appear. *Perruque* artifacts evoke perhaps a romanticized version of non-market based transactions. Yet before even discussing monetary issues involved in the selling of some homers, contractual-like engagements (similar to more traditional forms of work) are observed in the manufacturing process. In exchange, for instance, for allowing a coworker to use his time code, Richard (a foreman) is able to place a *perruque* order:

My father-in-law gave me a gift of an object made out of copper but a piece of it was broken. The manufacturer had shut down. I therefore had no other alternative than to have a piece made to order. So this guy made it for me. He first did a [time] estimate. The first piece he produced was a bit too large, the second was a bit too loose, so he did it a third time. That is an example of *perruque*. (From field notes)

At the same time a pure give-and-take accounting framework is strongly denied. 'The one who worked for another . . . will never say, well I worked for ten hours for you on this piece, etc. and this adds up to this much' (Hissard and Hissard, 1978: 79, my translation). Yet in the same paragraph the same automotive worker explains that there is an exchange measure in the factory: the liter of wine. The use of that currency is somewhat different from the use of money in the sense that wine is shared with friends and rarely brought out of the factory – it nonetheless constitutes a valuation

mechanism for labor involved in producing homers. The following account given by Richard corroborates this:

In general when a guy makes you a homer . . . it leads to a bottle, or you go out, eat with him and buy him a drink, to some people you can give a bottle of alcohol or a bottle of champagne. This already happened to me, when I had stuff done. . . (From field notes)

Furthermore, *some* homers are sold. Some workers described by Certeau (1980/1984) and Haraszti (1978) might disparage them as not being real *perruque* artifacts, but the fact that they were produced in *perruque* is not questioned. Beaud and Pialoux (1999: 119) indicate as well that these clandestine activities can generate income. Monetary exchanges are thought to generally undercut intimacy. Zelizer (2001) has argued that this is not necessarily the case; citing, for instance, the relationships between paid caregivers and their elderly patients, she stresses the non-orthogonal dimensions of intimacy and money. The dynamics of monetary and non-monetary exchanges are in practice not as exclusive as might appear. In his analysis of gifts, Bourdieu (1997: 229–40) argues that the apparent contradiction between the altruistic framing of gifts and the fairly constraining accounting mechanisms that they entail can be resolved by respecting an appropriate de-synchrony in these exchanges. If the gift (or in this case the homer) is returned too early then the exchange mechanisms is uncovered. If, however, a sufficient time elapses, the altruistic framing of these exchanges is respected. Money is one form of valuation of exchanges; other valuation and compensation measures (such as liters of wine) produce similar ordering schemes. In practice, homers are sometimes kept for oneself (Richard's case; Hissard and Hissard, 1978; Certeau, 1980/1984), sometimes given (Haraszti, 1978; G r me, 1983, 1984; Beaud and Pialoux, 1999), other times exchanged (Dalton, 1959; Richard's case; Beaud and Pialoux, 1999) and even, in some instances, 'sold' (Richard's case; Beaud and Pialoux, 1999).

Perceived fairness (in the sense 'fair game') is a second ambiguous criterion distinguishing between poaching and work practices. The participating poachers (and non-participating bystanders) are socially reassessed in the light of *perruque* activities. Whether this provides a different kind of fairness, more fairness or merely reinforces the existing fairness /unfairness in the factory is open to discussion. Taking, for instance, the exchanges between the office typist and the assembly line worker, it can be assumed that previously unrecognized skills (typing) can suddenly be discovered. However, in most cases, core existing and recognized skills are the ones traded. The 'golden hands' in Richard's accounts and the highly skilled worker cited by Beaud and Pialoux (1999: 120) can be seen as sharing their skills, their revenues (regardless of the currency) and status with 'lower

class' employees (whom they work for or give homers to). Alternatively, the higher status individuals in the factory could be increasing social disparities by creating this dependence and reinforcing their position as providers of solutions for less privileged homer producers or seekers. The most respected poachers at Pierreville are the workers already in coveted jobs such as maintenance and development. *Perruque* contributes both to the *social disordering* and *ordering* of the factory. The *social disordering* occurs along hierarchical lines (the homer maker, usually at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder, becomes a key actor), within occupational groups (the most coveted homer maker is not necessarily the most coveted employee in a given occupational team) and between blue- and white-collar employees (manufacturing skills and access to material suddenly gain relevance). At the same time, however, the *social ordering* of the factory is reinforced across blue-collar occupational groups (previously recognized technical occupations acquire even more prestige) and through the fact that supervisors can block or facilitate homer production. An interesting parallel is provided by Stark (1985, 1990) in an account of a Hungarian semi-autonomous subcontracting unit formed by workers to produce goods on their off-hours using factory equipment and known as an 'enterprise work partnership' (abbreviated as VGM in Hungarian). Stark notes that a process of valuation of skills emerges. In a telling episode, two workers decline to attend an after-hours factory award ceremony, preferring instead to work (and earn more money) in their VGM. The untold story, of course, is about those not able or skilled enough to be part of this VGM. 'It [informality] can provide unseen avenues for the powerful and can offer limited protection to the subordinate' (Stark, 1990: 15). Richard's case and other cited accounts of poaching (in Appendix 1) all focus on poachers (not bystanders, i.e.: the ones not taking part in poaching); an overall impression of perceived fairness is therefore projected. Poaching is fair (and moral) to the community of poachers but it may not seem so to those located outside its boundaries.

In sum, then, *perruque* is essentially different from work in the sense that it is not part of a public display and does not rely as openly as work on monetary exchanges, even though alternate compensation mechanisms and desynchronized exchanges permeate poaching practices. Even though poaching is perceived as fair by employees who engage in it, social disordering (reversing current work (un)fairness) and social ordering (reinforcing current (un)fairness) result from this activity. Furthermore, employees not involved in poaching are mostly absent from poaching accounts (including Richard's testimony), so the perception of fairness of *perruque* might be limited only to the community of poachers.



## Competing/complementary definitions of work and poaching

*Perruque* points to competing definitions and frameworks of official and unofficial work in the factory, yet they cannot in practice be constructed in opposition to each other. One framework stresses the fair, non-monetary, and intimate quality of poached objects and, by contrast, highlights the unfair, monetary, and impersonal qualities of work. These frameworks mainly coexist, often peacefully (at least on the cited shop floors), although on some occasions antagonistically (for instance in legal settings). In practice, the manufacturing processes of homers and official work mainly differ in the sense that the former is a hidden activity whereas the latter is a public one. Issues of perceived fairness and the non-reduceability to immediate monetary exchange associated with *perruque* do not in practice disturb this equilibrium. In a similar manner to how the 'common miscognition' of exchange mechanisms (highlighting the altruistic nature of gifts instead of their economic function) keeps the gift exchange system afloat (Bourdieu, 1997: 230), a focus on the more socially acceptable qualities of homers maintains the homer system. Such a double articulation – or what one could label the 'double truth of homers' in reference to Bourdieu's 'double truth of the gift' (1997: 229–40) – highlights the ways in which the moralities of poaching and work are intertwined. Framing poaching as a moral act is both a wish and a necessity. Yet poaching and work are two sides of the same coin. Traditional work relations permeate poaching activities as well.

The more widespread reading of factory work has tended to focus heavily on the sole 'official' components of work. This analysis of *perruque* at Pierre-ville and in other factories questions the relevance of such a focus. Following Mars's work (1982/1994) and his call to consider all dimensions of work, including 'cheats', as integral aspects of work and Ackroyd and Thompson's review (1999) of the many organizational misbehaviors that permeate work, this article extends the understanding of 'normal' factory work by including poaching in the definition of work. Since factory work is frequently considered a benchmark or an ideal type for everyday concepts of work (Barley, 1996: 405), assumptions around factory work, in particular, need reconsideration. Though industrial employment might be in decline, the representations of work that factories evoke remain quite powerful. To reduce work to its sole 'official' productive component even for higher-level executives would appear quite simplistic. Dalton (1959) and Morrill (1995), for instance, have shown how perks and advantages in kind (such as company cars, entertainment accounts, etc.) are all legally recognized forms of *perruque*, or better, perhaps, perks of the job, and are integral parts of such work.<sup>13</sup> In apparently low-level occupations, poaching is also part of work. The account of an entry-level retail (photocopying store) clerk cited by Werther (2000: 64) illustrates this:

There's only two ways you can get fired from Kinko's – number one is if you don't show up for your shift . . . Number two is if you steal money. You can steal products, you can steal service. But if you steal money that's it. It's funny because this guy was applying to lots of graduate schools and he took crazy advantage of the store. He was doing thousands of dollars of work every single week . . . Making catalogues, incredibly professional-looking stuff and spending endless time on the computers and using every single bit of equipment. And they didn't fire him or have any trouble with him. Then he got into school and he missed two shifts and they fired him.

This account shows that gradients of *perruque* are included in work regardless of hierarchical level but that risk levels associated with the practice increase as one descends the hierarchical employment ladder. Productive work and *perruque* are therefore intertwined, at all levels of occupations. The framing of these practices in terms of morality, however, draws a conceptual line between work and *perruque*. As Ditton (1976: 520) notes, the 'debates over the location of this dividing line [between employers and employees] become the core of the problem of (moral) order in the factory situation'. What corporate lawyers might depict with 'moral horror' (to employ Ditton's words) could well be 'morally' accepted practice on the shop floor. What this article mainly suggests, however, is that several moralities coexist. The dividing line is not as clear cut and unique as might be assumed. The moralities of poaching are therefore multiple. The dividing line is not only between unofficial and official work but also *within* each category. Richard's divorce, apart from being emotionally painful, might also have been painful because it reduced homers to simple economic accounting items. Such an interruption of the 'double truth' is an acute moment of crisis and cuts through the assembly of moralities which keeps the homer system afloat. In normal times it is the maintenance, side-by-side, of these apparently competing yet also complementary moralities which allows the homer system to function.

### Appendix 1: Comparative poaching accounts

Below is a list of main sources of poaching accounts used in this article. Among the identified sources referring to poaching, the following were selected because they provide the most contextual details.

- In 1959, Melville Dalton wrote a book titled *Men Who Manage*, partly informed by his own experience as an executive in the United States. The material for his book was gathered from three factories and a department store. The three factories were Fruhling Works (with 20,000 employees), the Milo Fractioning Center (8000 employees) and the Attica Assembly

Line (2600 employees). Dalton was one of the first to question the rational approach of the organized work environment by stressing all the informal practices at work. Inevitably, he writes about doing 'government jobs', another appellation for personal work done on the job.

- Miklos Haraszti wrote an account of his factory experience inspired by his work at the Red Star Tractor Factory in Hungary in the early 1970s. At the time of the publication of his book (*A Worker in a Worker's State: Piece-Rates in Hungary*) references were erased to avoid censorship. He did not work on an assembly line but in a more skilled position in the factory (as a milling machine operator).
- In 1978, Marie-José and Jean-René Hissard, two community activists, sat down with Henri H., a French automotive worker, to record his experience of *perruque*. Henri H. spent most of his working life in the automotive factory he describes and talks about the various unofficial productions he witnessed.
- When Michel de Certeau published in 1980 his book titled *L'Invention du quotidien (The Practice of Everyday Life)* he had several close friendships with individuals known as *prêtres ouvriers* (working priests), a form of religious service to the community involving participation, usually at the lowest hierarchical level, in the workforce. Certeau does not specify where he actually saw poaching occur but provides a fairly rich description of it. He also spent a year in a seminary in Villeurbanne, a fairly industrial suburb near Lyon.
- Noëlle Gérôme (1983, 1984) has written on specific homers, namely retirement gifts given by colleagues to their departing friends. Her observations were made at the Avion Marcel Dassault – Bréguet Aviation aerospace plant in Saint-Cloud (France). She has accumulated extensive knowledge of this industry by spending many years with these workers and writing an historical account of another such plant (Snecma, Gennevilliers) during the Second World War (1999).
- Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux (1999) spent almost 10 years studying workers and their families linked to the Peugeot (automotive) factories in the region of Sochaux-Montbéliard (France). They only touch upon poaching activities when discussing the autonomy of highly skilled workers and a legal account of the termination of an employee caught exiting the plant with company tools.

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## Notes

- 1 All industries and work occupations do not offer equal poaching opportunities. Mechanical industries and, more specifically, non-posted factory jobs within mechanical industries (maintenance, development, testing, quality control, etc.) offer, for instance, usually better access to coveted poaching materials and fewer time constraints.
- 2 The historical origin of the French term *perruque* (meaning also 'a wig' in French) relates to the fact that wigs convey false impressions (in the same manner that work meant for oneself appears to be done for an employer).
- 3 Banville (2001) traces the development of homers to the necessity to manufacture tools and domestic items (such as a lunch box or a pan) and a French factory worker cited by Gérôme (1999: 120) explains how he manufactured a pressure cooker in his factory during the Second World War, at a time when such items were hard to find.
- 4 Banville (2001) provides, for instance, an extensive survey of homers produced in France from the early 1950s to the late 1990s. The range and variety of accounts provided are impressive. Most of these accounts refer, however, to single homer pieces, oftentimes depicted out of context.
- 5 For an extensive review of outsider art see Zolberg and Cherbo (1997) or Colin (2000).
- 6 The names of the corporation, the plant and individuals have been changed to preserve confidentiality. The research on which this article is based is part of a larger ongoing study of poaching practices at the Pierreville plant.
- 7 These quotes have been translated from French by the author.
- 8 Degrees of poaching need also to be taken into consideration. The homer cited in this legal case (a gasket) might be perceived by other factory members as out of line with 'regular' homer production.
- 9 Beaud and Pialoux (1999: 111) evoke a 1990 legal case when a Peugeot skilled worker was dismissed for exiting the factory with a tool (a soldering iron) that he claimed he was 'borrowing' and Peugeot claimed he was

- 'stealing'. During his trial, his coworkers in the audience shouted the names of executives for whom they had conducted home projects.
- 10 The literature on gifts and exchanges has not, at this point, been fully mobilized since too few of the participants in the exchange networks at Pierreville have been encountered.
  - 11 A firing can, however, highlight changes in levels of tolerance within a community. Beaud and Pialoux (1999: 111) suggest this in commenting on the 1990 legal case they cite.
  - 12 The French term *perruque* conflates the poaching activity (a home project) and the result of this activity (a homer), thus adding to the complexity of the phenomenon.
  - 13 A major difference between perks and *perruques* is that perks have a clear legal standing whereas *perruques* do not (see Ditton, 1977).

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