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The Post-Industrial Artisan Economy

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Abstract

Readers are presented with the idea that something significant and rather unusual is fomenting beneath the surface of the US economy regarding the renewed interest in all things handmade, handcrafted, or artisanally produced. That this interest is more than just a fad, and that its emergence is understandable in terms of theories of post-industrialism is what this essay aims to make clear. Discerning the economic geography of its emergence through empirical analysis is subsequently sought as well. Broader implications regarding the socio-economic impacts of an emergent post-industrial artisan economy are also considered.

Key words: artisan, artisan economy, post-industrial, small batch producers, flexible specialization, techno-economic paradigm, regulation approach, Portland Oregon

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1. Introduction

The New York Times dubbed it the ‘Great Cupcake Rush of ‘09’.¹ From coast to coast, over the past year the United States has experienced what Elizabeth Olson (2009) describes as ‘an almost inexplicable spread of cupcakeries around the country’.² A simple google search for the phrase ‘cupcake bakery’ yields over ten million hits, with top results including several proffered articles on the ‘Best Cupcake Bakeries in America’. Most onlookers, however, chalk up the year’s bumper crop of cupcake shops as merely just another entrepreneurial fad; while other, perhaps more sympathetic observers rationalize the cupcake phenomenon as a cute and ‘nostalgic’ means of portion control for America’s well-known sugar addiction.³ Nevertheless, while both of these perspectives may hold certain degrees of truth (one perhaps more so than the other), the Great Cupcake Rush of ‘09 is also indicative of a deeper movement within the US economy as a whole. Although the business models chosen by the new ‘cupcakepreneuers’ appears to vary widely – from multiple store fronts to online only, and many shades in between – what they share in common is baking in small batches with high quality ingredients, and with an eye towards increasing their variety of non-standard flavors. In other words, no industrial mass production, no catering to the lowest common denominator of taste, and no overriding emphasis on using only the most cost efficient inputs. And while there is no ‘Cupcake Manufacturers Association keeping count’, what is equally as significant is that aside from a very few, it is apparent that the overwhelming majority of cupcake bakeries have no corporate parentage: they are very small or even micro-sized businesses.

The rise of small businesses dedicated to producing ‘specialty’, small batch, or customized goods is not limited to the baking world alone. In small farming and urban agriculture, there is both resurgent interest and demand for non mass produce-able heirloom varieties of fruits and vegetables⁴; beer and wine producers have seen a soaring demand for

¹ <http://boss.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/25/are-cupcakes-a-viable-business/?ref=smallbusiness>

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/26/business/smallbusiness/26cupcake.html?pagewanted=1&ref=smallbusiness>

³

<http://boss.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/25/are-cupcakes-a-viable-business/?ref=smallbusiness>

⁴ <http://news.ufl.edu/2010/01/19/heirloom-veggies/>

'micro-brews' and locally produced small vineyard wines⁵; the custom built bicycle sector is also quickly growing⁶, as is the small manufacturing industry in general⁷; the handmade beauty, health, and homecare products industry is growing by leaps and bounds⁸; and Etsy, the social commerce website dedicated to buying and selling all things handcrafted, reports gross monthly sales figures of between 10-13 million USD.⁹ Moreover, these are just a few of the more obvious areas in which small firm size and craft-like production methods are successfully managing to go hand in hand. In fact however, researchers responsible for the third installment of the Intuit Future of Small Business Report (IFSOB, 2008) are contending that over the next ten years, a general 'reemergence of artisans as an economic force' will happen in the US.

They ground their forecasts calling for the renewed vigor and economic importance of artisanal activities in the ongoing progression of market and production process fragmentation, and increased rates of technological change. Viewed through the lens of theories of economic development, this perspective may at first appear quite singular - as many scholars (see Saxenian 2006 or Crafts and Venebles 2001, for example) typically link these two forces with the growing importance of high-tech and services oriented economic 'clusters' in developed nations, and the concomitant initiation of industrialization in developing economies - not to the revival of the craft-like production methods in developed economies. However, according to the IFSOB (2008, pp. 1-7), not only have economies of scale become 'less important' in the US, with 'mass production no longer determining business success in many markets' - but the structural distribution of firm size within most industries is changing as well - into a 'barbell' like structure, with a 'few giant corporations on one end, a narrow middle, and a large number of small businesses balancing the other end'. This change, together with the reductions in overhead costs produced by technological advances, is the general basis for the IFSOB's call for the reemergence of the artisan in the US. Even so, one may still tend to consider - with just skepticism - that their use of the term 'artisan' is a somewhat hyperbolic and anachronistic

⁵<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123733628873664181.html>;

⁶<http://www.handmadebicycleshow.com/>

⁷http://money.cnn.com/2007/05/11/magazines/fsb/fiesty_factories.fsb/index.htm

⁸<http://www.soapguild.org/industry/industry.php>

⁹<http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1007066>

throwback to the halcyon heydays of butchers, bakers and candlestick makers. However, movement on the ground in certain areas of the country appears to suggest that a return to an artisan-centered local economy is exactly what we are beginning to see unfold in the world's largest economy.

For example, Charles Heying suggests this is the case for Portland, Oregon in his (forthcoming November 2010) book, *From Brews to Bikes: Portland's Artisan Economy*. In it, he describes the city's economic and cultural 'transformation from a mass production to a post-modern economy' through a series of case studies of several of the city's most important artisan sectors.¹⁰ Taken together, the IFSOB and Heying's work on the Portland artisan economy suggest that a new kind of work organization is evolving within the realm of post-industrial economies. An emerging artisan economy seemingly defies the traditional taxonomical bifurcation of post-industrial divisions of labor into elite 'knowledge workers' and their underemployed, undertrained proletarian counterparts (see Esping-Anderson, 1992, p.3-5 for an overview of this issue). If we can uncover evidence indicative of a general emergence of artisan activities throughout the post-industrial landscape, it would necessarily require reconsideration of the theoretical underpinnings of post-industrial class relations, as well as divisions of labor - both within and amongst nations.

Likewise, the idea of an emerging artisan economy also gives rise to questions about the role that economic inequality plays in determining structures of work organization. For instance, economist John Hicks (1973, p.23) contends that the specialization of skilled labor first originated not from the growing size of markets as Adam Smith and his adherents claim, but in service to the demands (or commands, to be more temporally precise) of the ruling classes - thus implying that the reemergence of skilled artisans we see happening today is actually the product of a return to increasing economic disparities - rather than stemming from production process fragmentation and technological innovation as the IFSOB maintains. Indeed, anecdotal

¹⁰The sectors include: the microbrew industry; food; fashion; bikes; coffee; distilled spirits; indie (as in independent) music; indie media, including books, comics, "zines", radio and film; the crafting sector; the recycling and reuse sector; leather; and musical instrument manufacture. The broad array speaks to the almost inexhaustible possibilities for applying artisanal methods to any sector of the economy.

evidence from the expanding hand-crafted cupcake business also appears to support this perspective as well – after all one imagines that the customer base for four dollar gourmet cupcakes must not, in general, be very worried about the continued sustenance of their families and kitchen tables back home.

Bearing the preceding discussion in mind then, the aim of this paper thus seeks to theoretically and empirically account for the reemergence of an artisan economy in the post-industrial landscape of the United States. Is it really happening? If so, then where? And what are the implications – both economic and socio-economic - contained within this (re)emergent form of work organization?

1.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter one seeks to introduce and provide a broad overview of the artisan economy – both what it potentially encompasses and what its reemergence implies with regard towards the ongoing evolution of how we work. It delineates which aspects of artisanal activities this paper will and will not touch upon, and discusses the necessarily exploratory approach adopted.

Chapter two seeks to ground our understanding of the reemergence of the artisan economy in theories of post-industrialism. It introduces three primary theories of post-industrialism that stem from three primary, yet fundamentally different approaches to economics in general: Schumpeterianism; classical economics in the tradition of Adam Smith; and Marxism. By offering an understanding of the reemergence of an artisan economy through these three different approaches, the essay maintains its intended exploratory nature - and at least partially provides the means by which others may later attempt to comprehend and empirically identify the existence of a nascent artisan economy in a manner and method different from the principal one chosen here.

Chapter three goes on to discuss the route by which one of the theories of post-industrialism is chosen above the others to primarily theoretically inform data gathering and

analysis. Because the three theories stem from antecedents that are fundamentally incommensurable with one another as regards certain crucial perspectives, this researcher contends that an attempt to equally combine aspects of all three into some form of empirical analysis is theoretically unsound. That said however, it is explained that the project does retain at least some perspective from each of the theories - although it is to be only one of them that primarily informs data gathering and quantitative analysis.

Moreover, with regard to the chosen method of quantitative analysis, a challenge issued by Heying (forthcoming 2010, ch. 20 p. 4) concerning the ability of traditional sources of quantitative data and data gathering perspectives to identify the nascent artisan economy will be accepted and taken up as an important task of the following chapters. And lastly, because the nature of the nascent artisan economy does not readily suggest the use of any commonly used economic indicators in order to discern its outline, the first in a pair of proxies will be identified as the most appropriate for task.

Chapter four will provide details concerning the data: it will identify its sources and limitations; as well as outline the chosen methods of investigation and the expectations held by the researcher with regard to outcome. In addition, it will also introduce the second chosen proxy used for identifying the presence of an artisan economy. Chapter five will present the results and analysis, while chapter six comprises a discussion of the implications of the findings. Chapter 7 concludes the paper with a summary and suggestions for future research.

1.2 Delimitation and Approach

This paper is an attempt to theoretically and empirically account for the reemergence of artisans and an artisan economy in urban settings in the post-industrial era. It will not touch upon those artisanal activities which have managed to persist overtime throughout rural or underdeveloped economies both within the country and across the world - nor will it attempt to measure the economic contribution of the purported newly emergent urban artisan economy. The reason for this latter delimitation is simply that it is rather premature to attempt to measure the total contribution of something that is still unfolding and has yet to be precisely

defined with regard towards those sectors of the economy where it is and is not occurring. Furthermore, as this is an exploratory paper on the topic of an embryonic event, this essay will itself refrain from making such a definitive pronouncement: although the attempt is made to introduce readers to the notion of a newly resurgent artisan economy, this researcher agrees with Heying (forthcoming 2010, intro p. 6) when he implies that inherently speaking, the ‘new’ artisan economy is not comprised of specific professions or products so much as it is ‘an economic transformation that is changing how we work and live’. The next section will discuss this in more detail.

1.3 Additional Preliminary Evidence: Twenty-first Century Artisans in Context

To put things rather straightforwardly, the digestibility of the rest of this essay depends upon the reader’s willingness to accept that within the US there is indeed a resurgent interest in all things handcrafted or artisanally produced. That this interest is more than just a fad, and that its emergence is understandable in terms of theories of post-industrialism is what this essay aims to make clear. The realization that it is possible to discern the economic geography of its emergence through empirical analysis is what is subsequently sought as well. Therefore, if the above examples of cupcakeries, microbreweries, small manufacturers, and Etsy merchants are not enough to convince readers that artisan production is a thing of fascination to a growing portion of the American public, then please consider this additional evidence in the few paragraphs that follow.

To share a bit of personal experience that highlights this growing fascination, allow me to relate two brief examples: in the fall of 2002, I was working in a café in upstate New York, where much to my bemusement a group of young patrons – all in their early 20s – initiated what eventually became the wildly popular theme of “craft night”. People would bring their arts and crafts projects and work on them in the café setting – both learning and teaching was encouraged, and by the end of my time there, many people who I initially observed struggling

just to hold a pair of knitting needles could ‘stitch a purl’¹¹ without dropping the gaze of the person they were conversing with. My next ‘close encounter’ occurred in the summer of 2008, this time in Portland Oregon, as I was preparing to move from there to Lund, Sweden for grad school. Three friends of mine, all unknown to each other, were kind enough to bestow me with parting gifts that I discovered they had actually made specifically for me: two jars of handmade raspberry jam made with raspberries my friend handpicked herself; a hand knitted hat, pair of mittens and scarf; and a handcrafted glass-blown pen especially made for refillable ink cartridges. It was truly the kind of artisanal send-off that belongs somewhere in the pages of Heying’s book.

Mark Frauenfelder, editor-in-chief of *Make* magazine, and author of (forthcoming May 2010) *Made by Hand: Searching for Meaning in a Throwaway World*, would see these two examples as belonging to what he contends is a fast growing phenomenon: thanks to the ‘great information delivery capability of the Web’ he tells us, a growing amount of people in the US are once again beginning to ‘rediscover the joy of DIY’ and ‘traditional crafting and homesteading activities’ like growing, canning and preserving foods.¹² Frauenfelder (forthcoming 2010, pp. 15-16) relates that in 2005 when he and fellow co-founder Dale Dougherty launched the first issue of *Make*, a magazine dedicated to applying new technologies to do-it-yourself projects, they were hoping for an initial subscription rate of 10,000 in the first year. However, they ‘were off by a factor of four’ – 40,000 people purchased subscriptions in the first year alone. Moreover, *Make’s* similarly aged sister publication, *Craft*, a magazine ‘dedicated to the renaissance that’s occurring in the world of crafts’ - currently receives over a million online readers per month itself.¹³ In addition, since 2006 the two magazines have been the driving force behind Maker Faire, a DIY convention that plays host to ‘thousands of makers’ and their homemade goods and gadgets.¹⁴ The Faire happens multiple times a year in different

¹¹ A purl is a basic yet fairly intricate step in the knitting process – to do it without looking down means that the knitter is accomplished enough to perform the task using only their sense of touch.

¹² DIY: do-it-yourself

¹³ <http://craftzine.com/about/>

¹⁴ <http://www.boingboing.net/2010/05/18/a-maker-faire-previe-4.html>

locations, and has even spread to the UK – and according to the Wall Street Journal, last year a single convention in San Mateo, California attracted around 75,000 people.¹⁵

Nevertheless, Heying (forthcoming 2010, ch.1 pp. 9; 26-36, ch. 2 pp. 42-60) contends that although DIY tinkers and crafters are certainly integral to what he views as the nascent artisan economy - he also teaches us that it is not solely comprised of them. Rather, he posits that what we are seeing is the onset and development of an artisan ‘approach’ to both working and living: an approach that reintegrates design and production; that denies ‘obsessive uniformity’; appreciates durability, local distinctiveness, and the individual uniqueness imbued by discrete and fully discernable producers - a ‘new orientation towards the making and use of goods’ that is occurring in virtually all industries, and that developed as a response to what could be called the post-industrial conditions of life.¹⁶ In the same spirit, yet with regard to a time long since passed, James Richard Farr (2000, pp. 3-6) suggests that the entire spectrum of artisans and artisanal activities of pre-modern Europe should not be understood in terms of their labor- or the specific products of their labor- alone, but through considering as well the life of an artisan: reflecting on the combination of artisanal life and labor as a ‘product of symbolic exchanges, where labor was a sign of social place as well as a means to survival or material accumulation’.

The context in which pre-modern and post-modern artisans operate is certainly vastly different – and the individual motivations that lay behind taking up artisanal activities are necessarily very unlike as well. However, in an era and a country where wages scales are becoming anything but more compact, it is also logical to expect that the nature by which one earns a living will once again increasingly come to symbolize a person’s position within the socio-economic scheme of things. Aside from the fundamental characteristics of artisanal production (listed in the immediately preceding paragraph), the artisanal ability to convey to others the message that one belongs neither to the ranks of the unskilled nor to their masters

¹⁵ <http://www.makerfaire.com/newcastle/2010/>; <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125798004542744219.html>

¹⁶ Some of the conditions Heying mentions include but are not limited to the following: the atrophy of the modern welfare-state; the rise of outsourcing, contract work and labor flexibility; and growing concern for the effect of mass production and consumption on the environment.

also remains the same between pre and post-modern times. However, because the temporal context is different, the meaning of this message has also qualitatively changed – hundreds of years ago it indicated the presence of a certain degree of social rank, but today it connotes something different. It signals that a person has stepped outside the confines of modern relations of production.¹⁷

To the extent that removing oneself from modern relations of production implies the simple act of occasionally making handmade gifts for children, parents or friends on certain holidays or for certain events – something that has undoubtedly occurred with regularity throughout the modern era – the act itself remains inconsequential to the evolution of productive relations. However, when a growing amount of people start to remove themselves for sustained periods of time, or more often and through an increasing variety of means and ways, then we know something is truly afoot. Heying (forthcoming 2010) contends this is the case for Portland, Oregon. Frauenfelder (forthcoming 2010) posits that it is happening in pockets throughout the United States, engendered by the internet’s ability to provide easy access to information. In the pages that follow then, we will attempt to understand the onset and success of that New York café’s craft night in terms of a broader environ of changing relations of production; that is, in terms of ‘a new orientation towards the making and use of goods’ – and likewise, we will ascribe the fact that all of my farewell gifts were handmade not to mere tradition, but to the idea that my friends were signaling their affiliation with the ranks of 21st century artisans.

Now that we have considered this bit of additional evidence, it is hoped that the reader has perhaps a better idea as to what the reemergence of an artisan economy both encompasses and implies. In turn, understanding why such an event is happening now, in the

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that Heying nicely avoids any overtly Marxist tones by describing the same change as a ‘new orientation towards the making and use of goods’. Nevertheless - just to be clear, by using the term ‘modern relations of production’ the author means to imply the notion that the owners of labor are rarely the owners of the (non-human) capital they work with to produce things. Beyond that however, the term takes on a broader meaning inclusive of the setup of workplace relationships and institutional roles that accompany various systems of relations of production.

so-called postindustrial era – and understanding the forces that lay behind these whispers of change - becomes the task of the next chapter.

2. Theory

Delineating the contours of post-industrial landscapes is an undertaking that is, to say the least, not without controversy. However, according to Ash Amin (1994, p. 6; p. 44), there are three perspectives considered by most observers to comprise the theoretical 'heart' of the post-industrial debate. In the same text, Mark Elam explains that these different accounts of the nature of the current evolution away from systems of mass production are best understood as neo-Schumpeterian, neo-Smithian, and neo-Marxist interpretations respectively. One can also think of them as theses on social and economic transformation with differing agents of change: technology; the market/production-process nexus; and the relationship between given methods of economic growth and the social institutions that both animate and guide them. However, determining which of the three approaches most accurately reflects the true nature of post-industrialism is not the point of this essay. Each perspective has its strengths and weaknesses, as well unique insights with regard towards the reemergence (and potential durability) of artisans in the post-industrial economy. Thus, this inquiry intends to introduce and subsequently draw from each of them in turn.

2.1 Neo-Schumpeterian approach: techno-economic paradigms

Because Elam (1994, pp. 44-49) and others partaking in the post-industrial debate (see Hirst and Zeitlin 1991 for example) generally cite the 'techno-economic paradigm' as representative of the neo-Schumpeterian position - this necessarily brief theoretical overview of the approach will also adhere to this convention; however, it should be noted at the outset that there is at least one other noteworthy camp within the neo-Schumpeterian school of thought dealing with the transformative character of technological change in relation to economic growth and development (see for example Dahmén, 1988; Schön's 1989 and 1998 works on 'technology shifts'; and Lundquist, Olander, and Svensson-Henning 2007a, 2007b works on the technology shift and regional economic growth and welfare).

In broad outline then, the techno-economic paradigm approach - as most notably proffered by Carlotta Perez and Christopher Freeman ([1988], also see Dosi, 1988; Perez 2002, 2007; 2010), contends that long term economic growth in a capitalist system is imbued with both a 'rhythm and trajectory'. This dynamic 'growth path' stems from the ongoing development process, and temporally variable rates of utilization, of given 'radical' technological innovations. Although Perez herself does not appear to use the phrase, the term 'general purpose technology' (GPT) is now widely applied to such radical technological innovations - and is linked to their role as incubators of countless other incremental innovations. Bresnahan and Trajtenberg (1995) describe GPTs as 'enabling technologies' that create 'new opportunities rather than complete, final solutions'. Consequently, when taken altogether GPTs and their offspring have the effect of creating qualitative change within society and the economy at large. Historic examples of GPTs and one or two of their major corollary innovations are generally acknowledged to include the following: steam engines → railways; electricity → telephone, illumination; the combustible engine → automobiles; and the microprocessor → personal computers, digitized telecommunications.

Perez (2010p. 187-189) teaches us that the creation of a new GPT and the subsequent emergence of a family of related incremental innovations together comprise a 'technology system'. In turn, she defines a 'technological revolution' as an interdependent collection of technology systems that together form 'a major constellation of interdependent technologies'. That is to say, a technological revolution is 'a cluster of clusters or a system of systems'. The two defining characteristics of technological revolutions are the strong 'interdependence' of all the various technological systems and the markets in which they operate; and the revolution's 'capacity to transform profoundly the rest of the economy (and eventually society)'. It is this second feature that gives rise to Perez's depiction of the history of capitalist growth as being comprised of a series of 'techno-economic paradigms'. As all the various ramifications of the interrelated technologies disperse from the industries that initially saw to their creation - first throughout the rest of the economy and then eventually throughout society as a whole, they create a new set of 'best practices' that come to be shared by most economic agents. 'In time',

Perez (2010, p. 194) relates, ‘a shared logic is established, a new ‘common sense’ is accepted’; ‘old ideas are unlearned and new ones become ‘normal’.

Figure 1. Technological revolutions and their techno-economic paradigms

Technological revolution	Techno-economic paradigm ‘Common-sense’ innovation principles
<i>First</i> The Industrial Revolution	Factory production Mechanisation Productivity: time keeping and time saving Fluidity of movement (as ideal for machines with water-power and for transport through canals and other waterways) Local networks
<i>Second</i> Age of Steam and Railways	Economies of agglomeration Industrial cities National markets Power centres with national networks Scale as progress Standard parts: machine-made machines Energy where needed (steam) Interdependent movement (of machines and of means of transport)
<i>Third</i> Age of Steel, Electricity and Heavy Engineering	Giant structures (steel) Economies of scale of plant: vertical integration Distributed power for industry (electricity) Science as a productive force Worldwide networks and empires (including cartels) Universal standardisation Cost accounting for control and efficiency Great scale for world market power: ‘small’ is successful, if local
<i>Fourth</i> Age of Oil, the Automobile and Mass Production	Mass production/mass markets Economies of scale (product and market volume): horizontal integration Standardisation of products Energy intensity (oil based) Synthetic materials Functional specialisation: hierarchical pyramids Centralisation: metropolitan centres–suburbanisation National powers, world agreements and confrontations
<i>Fifth</i> Age of Information and Telecommunications	Information-intensity (microelectronics-based ICT) Decentralised integration: network structures Knowledge as capital: intangible value added Heterogeneity, diversity, adaptability Segmentation of markets: proliferation of niches Economies of scope and specialisation combined with scale Globalisation: interaction between the global and the local Inward and outward cooperation: clusters Instant contact and action: instant global communications

Source: based on Perez (2002, p. 18).

Source: Perez (2010)

As the table above relates, Perez identifies five major technological revolutions, their associated techno-economic paradigms - and subsequently different sets of best practices - that have occurred throughout the history of capitalist economic development. The first three eras are included to provide a broad picture and better understanding of how practices initiated through the application of new innovations come to be generally dispersed throughout society and the political-economy. However, as this paper is seeking to establish a theoretical motivation for the reemergence of artisans in the post-industrial era, we are primarily interested in her description of the fourth and fifth technological revolutions and their effects on work organization.

Perez (2010, p. 197-198) relates that the 'new principles of organization' are established through repeated and increasingly familiar contact with the various and interrelated technologies of discreet technological revolutions and the market changes they incur. These principles accordingly come to be viewed as 'superior to the previous' and are duly integrated into the 'new common sense for efficiency and effectiveness'. With regard towards these changes, the most pertinent of her observations are highlighted in the table above - thus allowing us to see that the transition from the fourth to the fifth techno-economic paradigm includes the move away from mass production, economies of scale, and functional specialization into the post-industrial 'best practices' of organizational and production processes grounded in market segmentation, economies of scope, and non-hierarchical firm organization.

2.11 Locating artisans in the post-industrial techno-economic paradigm

Perez's delineation of the fifth technological revolution's new set of 'common sense' best practices coincides almost perfectly with the IFSOB's (2008, pp. 1-7) proffered list of conditions that make the reemergence of artisans a likely phenomenon. As previously mentioned, they cite the decreasing importance of economies of scale and mass production, along with the expansion of niche markets as important factors in artisanal revival. Moreover, the IFSOB's other major explanation - which relates the increasing ease and ability of artisans to

establish a business with the falling costs of business infrastructure due to advances in IT technology – is also supported by the techno-economic paradigm thesis.

Perez (2010, p. 195) explains that a vital component in the development of every techno-economic paradigm is the emergence of a 'key input' that characteristically displays the following traits: a relatively affordable cost that is decreasing even further; there is a (seemingly) infinite supply of it; it is apparently universally applicable to any manner of activity; and it is 'capable of increasing the power and decreasing the cost of capital and labor'. Such a tall order as this is fulfilled only by very few materials. In past techno-economic paradigms the role was played by water power, then coal, steel, then 'cheap oil'; today however, that role is filled by the microchip. The IFSOB's rationalization for the reemergence of the artisan is thus nearly flawlessly theoretically informed by the techno-economic paradigm approach to post-industrialism.

However, whether intentionally or not – this approach neatly avoids addressing a major relevant critique that is a focal point of the neo-Smithian analysis of post-industrialism; namely, that the purportedly newly derived forms of production processes and of work and firm organization - including decentralized structures, the proliferation of market niches, and the emergence of economies of 'scope and specialization' – are not in fact new at all.

2.2 Neo-Smithian approach: flexible specialization

Primarily initiated by Michael Piore and Charles Sabel's 1984 book, *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity*, the so-called neo-Smithian interpretation of post-industrialism – more generally known as the 'flexible specialization' approach (see Sabel and Zietlin, 1985, 2002; Hirst and Zietlin, 1991; Winter and Taylor, 1996 for example; and Pietrykowski, 1999 for a positive critique), contends that commodity production by way of small sized firms generating specialized small batches of goods is not, in fact, a new form of manufacture and work organization at all – and that in order to understand the recent move away from systems of mass production, we must revisit their genesis; which, they maintain, is

best understood through a different kind of lens of historical analysis than the one proffered by the techno-economic paradigm thesis.

This body of work posits that flexible specialization – defined by Sabel and Zeitlin (1985, p. 133) as the combination of ‘multi-purpose or universal machines and skilled labor to make an ever changing assortment of semi-customized products’ - first emerged in the in the small workshops of the eighteenth century. In line with Piore and Sabel (1984, pp. 28-33), many authors (i.e. Sabel and Zeitlin, 1985; Winter and Taylor, 1996) subsequently go on to highlight the application of flexible specialization principles in many of the successful Marshallian ‘industrial districts’ of the late nineteenth century - as well as in ‘large firms’ that ‘from the start did not concentrate on the production of standardized goods’.¹⁸ In addition, the crucial passage found in two of the primary works of this research program, Piore and Sabel’s *The Second Industrial Divide* (1984, p. 28) and Sabel and Zeitlin’s *Historical Alternatives to Mass Production* (1985, p. 142), asserts that not only were these firms technologically progressive, but that this dynamism defied ‘the notion that craft production must be either a traditional or subordinate form of economic activity’. Their subsequent suggestion that the innovative capacities of such firms are evidentiary of a ‘craft alternative to mass production as a model of technological advance’ can be taken as the entire research program’s central hypothesis.

However, unlike the preceding neo-Schumpeterian approach and the neo-Marxian one which is to follow, the flexible specialization assessment of the transition into and then away from mass production is not part of a grander thesis seeking to identify and empirically account for a causal mechanism governing the ultimate dynamics of capitalism. Analysis is instead concerned with understanding the causes and consequences of flexible specialization and mass production respectively - which are implied to be the two basic organizational forms of capitalist production. Moreover, while most authors of this bent (see Sabel and Zeitlin, 2002, pp. 29-30 for a discussion on this point) do see the appeal in periodizing the history of capitalist

¹⁸ Sabel and Piore (1984 p. 28) relate that nineteenth century industrial districts operating on the basis of flexible specialization included the following: “silks in Lyon; ribbons, hardware and specialty steel in neighboring Saint-Etienne; edge-tools, cutlery, and specialty steel in Solingen, Remscheid, and Sheffield; calicoes in Alsace; woolen and cotton textiles in Roubaix; [and] cotton goods in Philadelphia and Pawtucket”.

growth and development into a series of eras of continuity and stability - bookmarked by periods of instability and change - they argue for a more fine grained approach in which the two production methods nearly always co-exist¹⁹, and where it is simply the ratio of dominance of one over the other that changes over time. However, this ratio doesn't change according to any inherent logic or 'best practice' embodied within new technologies, but primarily in accordance to two things: the balance of power of assorted vested interests within various geographic scales and territories; and to the relative stability or instability of market demand (see Winter and Taylor, 1996 for role of IT, and Elam in Amin, 1994 pp. 51-53 and Berger and Piore, 1980 for role of market demand).

It is in this second instance that Elam (in Amin 1994, pp. 44; 50) finds justification for his use of the term neo-Smithian with regard to the flexible specialization approach. He explains that in the 'final' decision, so to speak, between chosen forms of industrial organization - that although this thesis does emphasize the primacy of political and institutional contingencies over technologically determined best practices, the 'most powerful political forces' in its investigation 'tend to be reduced to market forces', and the most influential 'exercises of economic power, to exercises of market power'. Thus, we see in the majority of the writings on flexible specialization the contention that when there is mass demand there is mass production²⁰, and in the absence of mass demand, or in the presence of unpredictable rates of demand, there is flexible specialization.

In addition, Bruce Pietrykowski (1999, p. 183-184) cautions us not to conflate the kind of flexibility promoted by works like *The Second Industrial Divide*, with the 'numerical' flexibility by which many sectors of the US labor market are now chiefly defined. He tells us that flexible specialization researchers are concerned with 'functional' flexibility – that is, the substantive and necessarily multi-task contents a particular occupation. Conversely, numerical flexibility is

¹⁹ This coexistence obviously begins after the introduction of mass production - they are not contending that mass production was always around.

²⁰ The converse may be more true to life: that is, when there mass production there is a need for mass demand. Thus, from this perspective, the breakdown of Keynesianism in the US is viewed as leading to the atrophy of mass production and the revival of flexible specialization.

characterized by the division of workers into assorted categories of expendability or temporary employment, and as Pietrykowski remarks – it does indeed belong to the ‘dark side’ of flexible production’. In fact, numerical flexibility is the nadir of Piore and Sabel’s concept (1984, pp. 31-35), as the context in which it operates is characterized largely by the absence of the requisite trust-filled ‘institutional framework’ the authors maintain is necessary for the long-term viability and dynamism of flexible specialization systems of production. Indeed, in the current economic lexicon, the term ‘flexibility’ connotes a whole host of meanings that the flexible specialization research program never intended to apply to their theoretical schema. Thus, for clarification purposes, the following table should prove useful in identifying both the various elements that have come to comprise economic flexibility and flexible specialization generally – as well as the specific features advocated by *The Second Industrial Divide*, and subsequent works that follow in its footsteps.

Figure 2. Varieties of Flexible Specialization

TABLE 2: Dimensions of Flexible Specialization
<p>Production Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • craft-based, capital-intensive • craft-based, labor-intensive • sweated labor
<p>Primary Distribution Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exchange governed by cooperation, alliance, interdependence, familial relations • market exchange (market) • internal bureaucratic exchange (hierarchy)
<p>Internal Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • part of a federated system of producers • owned subsidiary of larger company • unit of a multi-unit corporation
<p>Spatial Orientation, Localization Economies, and Commitment to Community (adapted from Markusen 1996)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marshallian Industrial District—high level of internal trade in intermediate goods and services; high level of consumption of locally produced goods and services; high level of commitment to community and commitment to employer/employee. • Hub-and-Spoke—high-level of internal trade in intermediate goods and services; greater commitment to firm or employer than to community. • Satellite Platform—little intra-regional trade and low level of commitment to community; often high level of commitment to employer due to the parent company’s monopsony power.

Source: Pietrykowski 1999.

Pietrykowski (1999, p. 190) explains that the first item within each grouping, each of which have been highlighted in the figure above, represents the form of flexible specialization promulgated by Piore and Sabel (1984) as the ideal model of a technologically innovative craft-based production system (also see also Hirst and Zeitlin 1991, p. 2-4 for discussion on the finer points of flexible specialization as an 'ideal-typical' model). What is also apparent from this table is that these particular aspects of flexible specialization are not altogether the ones that appear to characterize the current state of industrial organization in today's climate of globalization. On this point, Pietrykowski rather contentiously asserts that Piore and Sabel's model appears to be 'at odds' with the 'conditions most favorable to the success of capitalist economic development'. However, in a perspective that – as we will shortly see - resonates well with Adam Tickell and Jamie Peck's (1995) critiques of the post-industrial landscape from a regulationist point of view, Hirst and Zietlin (1991, p. 2-8) address the issue in a somewhat more sophisticated manner by relating that the 'long term economic success' of either type of industrial organization depends upon the resolution of their respective associated institutional 'regulatory problems' – at both micro and macro levels.

They teach us that just as it is possible for both forms of industrial organization to be dynamic and technologically innovative, 'so too are there stagnant variants of each model' where firm competition is conducted by way of 'squeezing wages', and depreciating 'working conditions and product quality'. In each case, what determines the dynamic or stagnant character of production is the manner in which the micro and macro regulatory problems are resolved. The next section covering the regulation approach will address this issue in more detail.

2.21 Locating artisans in post-industrial flexible specialization

What is important to take away at this juncture is to note that the flexible specialization approach makes clear that craft-like production methods are not necessarily technologically regressive or stagnant, and that under the right conditions, they even make sense as a basis for innovative systems of production. Moreover, while this approach is primarily concerned with

the application of flexible specialization in a factory or industrial district setting, its logic is also easily extended into other spheres of economic activity. That is to say that although a return to flexible specialization does not necessarily herald the resurgence of discrete artisans per se (only their production methods), it does provide fertile grounds for comprehending their comeback in terms of market induced risk-aversion. If market demand uncertainty is what gives rise to flexible specialization in the production process, then the onset of numerical flexibility in the labor market should understandably produce workers looking for a more secure means of livelihood than conventional employers are prepared to offer; thus, a return to both higher rates of self-employment, as well as the proliferation of very small firms operating on the basis of much deeper levels of trust vis-à-vis employer and employee^{21 22}.

2.3 Neo-Marxian approach: Regulation theory

As previously mentioned, the ‘regulationist’ approach to post-industrialism differs from flexible specialization in that it *does* belong to a larger theory seeking to understand the nature and longevity of capitalism as a whole. However, unlike its fellow ‘grander’ narrative²³ within the neo-Schumpeterian camp, neo-Marxist regulation theory is by no means whatsoever predicated upon the immortality of capitalism; rather, it takes as a basis the Marxist notion that capitalism is replete with so many contradictions and conflicts of interest that it is fundamentally unsound, and that with each major systemic crisis it also faces the possibility of its own destruction. The regulation thesis therefore seeks to understand the ways and means by which capitalism manages to reproduce itself as a hegemonic socio-economic system in spite of its systemic tendencies towards crisis and unbalance.

²¹ See Sabel and Zeitlin (2002, pp. 20-23) for a discussion on the importance of trust in dynamic systems of flexible production as well as the importance of agent contextual self-awareness in terms of action-taking and choice making.

²² The difference between the US and other countries (Sweden for example) as regards what are perhaps less stringent repercussions of financial insolvency due to a personal business failing should also be noted as grounds for the more likely emergence of artisans in the US than elsewhere at this point. This notion is also related to flexible specialization’s emphasis on unique political-economic structures giving rise to unique solutions.

²³ The term ‘grander’ is meant to connote something on a lower level than the so-called grand narratives, and subsequently also imply less prediction and more room for contingencies of any kind to affect outcomes – but that there is still something rather quite ambitious about their projects.

The approach is generally considered to have been first delineated by Michel Aglietta in his 1979 book *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*, but subsequently gained currency in a broad range of fields, including - according to Bob Jessop (1991, p. 290), 'architecture, urban planning, radical geography, history, educational research, cultural studies, political science, radical international political economy, and sociology'. The names typically most associated with the approach include members of the influential 'Parisian school': the aforementioned Aglietta (1979, 1982), Alain Leijet (1987a, 1987b), Michel de Vroey (1984), and Robert Boyer (1988; 1990). However, Tickell and Peck (1992, p.191-192) agree with Jessop in his estimation that, rather than a coherent unified theory – the regulation approach is best understood as an 'umbrella term' under which a thematically related 'research program within contemporary Marxist political economy' is carried out. Authors with writings falling within this larger body of work include: David Harvey (1987, 1990), Albrechts and Swyngedouw 1989; Amin and Robbins (1990), AJ Scott (1988), Scott and Storper (1990, 1992), Bob Jessop (1990, 1991) and Adam Tickell and Jamie Peck (1992, 1995) to name a few.

As mentioned above, this perspective's point of departure is the notion that when left to its own devices, capitalist growth inevitably leads to crisis; however, history shows us that there are also clearly rather long periods of relatively stable growth and development. The research agenda is thus centered around investigating the sources of this unnatural stability. In very broad terms then, this approach posits that the character of 'capital accumulation' (read: economic growth) changes over both time and space. It contends that what gives rise to these periods of stability is the confluence of temporally (and geographically) discrete forms of capitalism with a respectively amicable set of equally temporally and geographically distinct institutions and devices of socialization to govern them.²⁴ That is to say that all 'stable' forms of capitalist economic growth are filtered through the sieve of the respective society's norms, codes of conduct, and unique constellations of class and societal relations before they are materially expressed in the real world. Bob Jessop (1997, pp. 289-290) explains that this

²⁴ Socialization is used here in the sense of conforming to the norms, values, and sensibilities of society – and not in reference to socialism.

method of governing the manner in which (capitalist) economic growth is articulated can also be thought of as 'the social mode of economic regulation'. In turn, most regulation theorists prefer to think of it simply as the 'mode of social regulation', or the MSR. The establishment of an MSR prolongs the hegemony of capitalism by way of creating specific arrangements of capitalist growth that are informed by the accepted institutions and norms of a given society.

Jessop (1997, pp. 291-292) goes on to relate other key concepts within the regulationist taxonomy: an *industrial paradigm* is a 'model governing the technical and social division of labor' within a given society (i.e. mass production); an *accumulation regime* is a 'complementary pattern of production and consumption that is reproducible over a long period of time' and are also specifiable as 'national modes of growth'; and a *model of development* is said to occur when an industrial paradigm, regime of accumulation, and MSR 'complement each other' to a sufficient degree so that 'for a time the conditions for a long wave of capitalist development' are met. In other words, in the regulationist schema periods of relatively stable economic growth are characterized by the presence of models of development; which in turn are characterized by the reconcilability of temporally and geographically specific industrial paradigms, accumulation regimes, and MSRs.²⁵ Importantly Jessop also notes that some regulationist thinkers have also suggested a 'fifth level of analysis', variously referred to as 'modes of societalization', 'societal paradigms', or 'culture of everyday life' - which 'refers to the broader social framework and discourses within which a model of development is embedded'. It is primarily within this fifth level of analysis that we first find impetus for comprehending a return to artisanship through the lens of regulation theory.

2.31 Locating artisans in the regulation approach

While the American national dialogue has certainly changed in content and context a great many times since the middle of the 20th century, one of the most enduring currents over

²⁵ With regard towards a regulationist construct of the post-industrial model of development, this researcher agrees with both Tickell and Peck (1995, pp. 373-381) and the flexible specialization researchers Hirst and Zietlin (1991, pp. 2-8) in that neo-liberalism/ the 'Washington Consensus' is not the new post-industrial MSR - or solution to the regulatory problems posed by flexible specialization as Hirst and Zietlin put it.

this time span involves increasing concern over the rising toxicity levels of both our food and environment. To a large extent, the watershed event that touched off both of these issues was the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, which posits that the uninhibited use of pesticides devastates not only wildlife populations, but human health as well. This book had a profound impact on the American psyche and is generally credited as a primary instigating factor behind the birth of the environmental movement; however, it also helped bring the related organic foods movement into the national limelight as well.²⁶

In turn, complementarities between these two related movements are producing a growing social awareness, and concern over all production processes in general. For instance, the extension from conscientious consideration regarding how things are grown to how things are made can be seen in the recent emergence of markets dedicated to 'fair-trade' and 'non-sweated' commodities.²⁷ Moreover, one can understand the reappearance of artisans in the setting of developed, urban economies in terms of extending the logic of this concern over the production process one step further – for example, when those who demand these sorts of products take it upon themselves to become the producers of them.

The environmental and organic food movements are now established, mainstream issues: they have cultivated a broad array of variants and offshoots, and their influence over the national dialogue and frame of mind is virtually undeniable. Evidentiary of this is the substantial effort most multi-national corporations are now putting into 'greening' their reputation and rebranding their products as either environmentally friendly or somehow comprised of 'natural' ingredients. However, while these actions are undoubtedly profitable for the MNCs, they miss the mark in that they fail to appeal to that growing portion of the public whose concerns have evolved beyond the simple desire to eat pesticide-free produce - and moved into the realm of what is generally - if perhaps somewhat ambiguously - described as social and environmental justice.

²⁶ Source: Beyl, C. A. 1992. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, and the environmental movement, Hort Technology 2(2)

²⁷ <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/>; <http://www.organicconsumers.org/clothes/bono060105.cfm>

These are the consumers (and producers) behind the flourishing ‘local food’ movement²⁸; behind the new wave of independent bookstores²⁹, cafes³⁰, grocery stores³¹, and record labels³²; behind the signatures on anti-WalMart petitions; and (potentially) behind the emerging artisan economy. In many respects, yesteryear’s battle against DDT is today’s struggle against the black box of corporate production functions.³³

To say the same thing but with a considerably more cynical twist – a growing portion of the American public now desires to conspicuously consume only that which has been ‘conspicuously produced’ in accordance with the new standards of social and environmental justice.

From a regulationist perspective then – and in line with Tickell and Peck’s (1995) assertion, it appears as if the post-industrial model of development is far from having already been determined. Rather, there appears to be at least two conflicting accumulation regimes³⁴ occurring within the US domestic economy right now: one based on MNCs, labor flexibility, and the black box of corporate production processes; and another centered around comparatively

²⁸ http://www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/content/dec2009/sb20091217_914398.htm

²⁹ <http://www.thestar.com/business/smallbusiness/article/802859--independent-bookstores-make-a-comeback?bn=1>

³⁰ https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/76/new_wave_coffee.html

³¹ http://www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/content/nov2006/sb20061107_801456.htm

³² <http://www.yesmagazine.org/new-economy/a-new-deal-for-local-economies>

³³ The author is aware that many may think the current movement against corporate production methods has stronger historical and philosophical ties with traditional Marxism and the more established antagonism between labor and capital rather than the environmental movement. While this may be true in many parts of the world, this author contends that it does not appear to hold true to the same extent in the US. This is attributed to the unique historical institutional arrangement of the country, including the relatively lackluster reputation of most major contemporary unions, and the extremely asymmetric balance of power between capital and labor in general; and the related yet converse observation that there is a strong tendency throughout the country to adopt the institutional role of ‘consumer’ (rather than ‘worker’ or ‘citizen’ for example) when attempting to affect social change. Ralph Nader, itinerate consumer activist and four-time presidential candidate (twice as a Green party candidate and twice as an independent), is a primary example of the American tendency to conflate consumer related issues with environmentalism, politics, and ideas of social and environmental justice. Additionally, John Bellamy Foster’s 2000 book *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature* is a primary example of recent attempts to (re)integrate Marxism with the environmental movement.

³⁴ Recall that an accumulation regime is a complimentary pattern of production and consumption within a given territory.

small independent businesses, flexible specialization à la Piore and Sable, and the new standard of socially and environmentally informed conspicuous production.

2.4 Summing Up

Because we have just covered so much ground, the following table provides a summary description of the three primary post-industrial theories just considered.

Table 1. Theoretical Summary.

	<u>Techno-economic Paradigm</u>	<u>Flexible Specialization</u>	<u>Regulation Approach</u>
Causal mechanism	Technological innovation	Market demand uncertainty	Confluence of regimes of accumulation & modes of social regulation
Understanding of capitalism	Growth is cyclical; dynamic; ongoing	Implied to be ubiquitous	Inherently self-destructive; models of development provide medium-term 'temporal spatial fix'
Unit of analysis	Techno-economic paradigm	Production system	Model of development
Primary spatial scale	Typically national but not strictly so	Regional	specific to particular model of development; oftentimes national
Characterization of post-industrial landscape	New cycle of growth based on IT	Production system based on flex spec	Non-predictive; competing views on nature/existence of new MSR
Primary scale of analysis	Macro	micro	Macro
Theoretical impetus for post-industrial artisans	Declining cost of business infrastructure/technology and proliferation of market niches engenders artisan resurgence	Return to flex. spec. production processes and risk averting labor market decisions spur artisan revival	Demand for artisanal output as expression of newly developing concerns for production process quality - inherent aspect of potentially nascent regime of accumulation

Source: derived from sections 2.1-2.3 above

The first six categories in the table above are for comparison and clarification purposes. What we can easily see in this table is that all three theories take broadly different approaches towards conceptualizing the dynamics of post-industrialism - which consequently leads to different incentives with regard towards understanding the reemergence of artisans as well. In turn, these different understandings of the post-industrial landscape and subsequently different motivations for an artisanal resurgence also suggest different methods of empirical analysis. The next chapter will discuss this in more detail.

3. Establishing a Method of Empirical Investigation

3.1 Choosing a Theory

As previously mentioned, while it is not the point of this essay to determine which of the three theoretical approaches most accurately reflects the true nature of post-industrialism - this paper does have the goal of empirically identifying whether or not a return to artisanal production methods and work organization is happening in the context of urban, developed economies within the US. And while creating a method of data gathering and analysis that almost completely dovetails with all three theories is perhaps conceivable, it makes for an ungainly project that would no doubt be highly vulnerable to criticism from all three camps.³⁵ To that end, decisions must be made regarding which approach should be the one to primarily theoretically inform data gathering and analysis. Fortunately or unfortunately however, because we are interested in the *emergence* of a new type of work organization and production - which in turn implies that there is a specific logic behind the determination of the locations where it first appears - restrictions on the type of data available render tough decisions between theories a moot point to a very large extent.

For example, in 2001 the US Bureau of Labor Statistics initiated the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS), which at first glance appears as an ideal source for data with regard towards investigating a return to artisanry through the lens of the flexible specialization perspective and labor market uncertainty. However, the format of the survey as it stands right now simply does not allow for analysis at a high enough resolution - as it permits national disaggregation only into 4 large regions, respectively comprised of 9-17 states each.³⁶ Conversely, the techno-economic paradigm approach is not easily translated into investigative projects taking place at scales below that of the nation-state. It posits only that new best practices develop first in the economy and then filter through to social institutions and

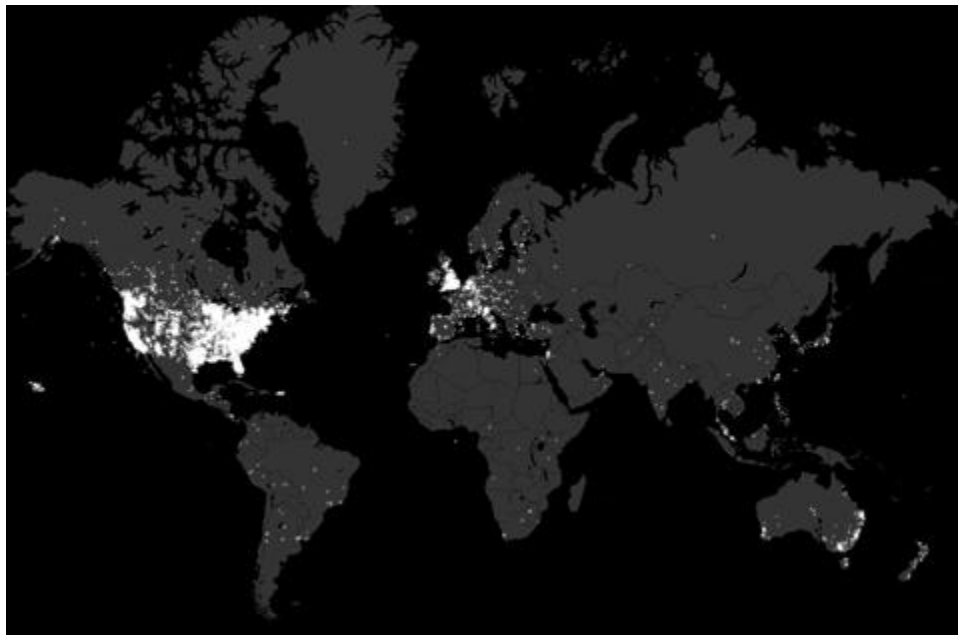
³⁵ See Tickell and Peck (1992, p. 201) for critique against attempting to 'mix theoretically distinct world views', particularly with regard towards the blending of flexible specialization and the regulation approach.

³⁶ <http://www.bls.gov/help/def/jt.htm#region>

methods of governance: its theoretical strengths lie in understanding the mechanisms by which a techno-economic paradigm is brought into being, not necessarily the discrete routes by which particular aspects of the paradigm are materially expressed within geographic boundaries.

For example, we know that the techno-economic paradigm approach calls for a return to artisanry in developed economies through technological innovations that reduce the infrastructure and overhead costs of producing goods and running a business oneself. If we take into consideration the onset and spread of Etsy, the online social commerce website specializing handcrafted goods that was initiated in 2005, we can immediately see the validity of this supposition.

FIGURE 3. Global location of Etsy sellers. 2007.



Source: <http://www.etsy.com/about.php> extracted May 17, 2010.

Figure three shows the position of the artisan producers who sell on the website Etsy, marked in white on the map above. The Etsy website tells us that these sellers ‘number in the hundreds of thousands’ and that the firm’s membership rose to 1.43 million buyers and sellers combined in the first three years of operation alone.³⁷ Now five years out, Etsy has spread its operations

³⁷ <http://www.auctionbytes.com/cab/abu/y208/m11/abu0226/s03>

to over 150 countries.³⁸ In all, both the nature of the service Etsy provides - that is, using technology to lower entry barriers for artisan producers and create a large marketplace for handmade goods - as well as the success that has marked its speedy growth - support the techno-economic paradigm's position on the mechanisms by which an artisan reemergence can be expected. However, while understanding the means by which artisans reemerge is undoubtedly one of the most important pieces of the puzzle, we are still left wondering about the logic governing the location of its material expression. That is to say that if technological innovations provide (at least part of) the means, then what determines the way? What determines the locational pattern of its emergence within national boundaries? It is here that the ideas theoretically informed by the regulation approach are best put to use.

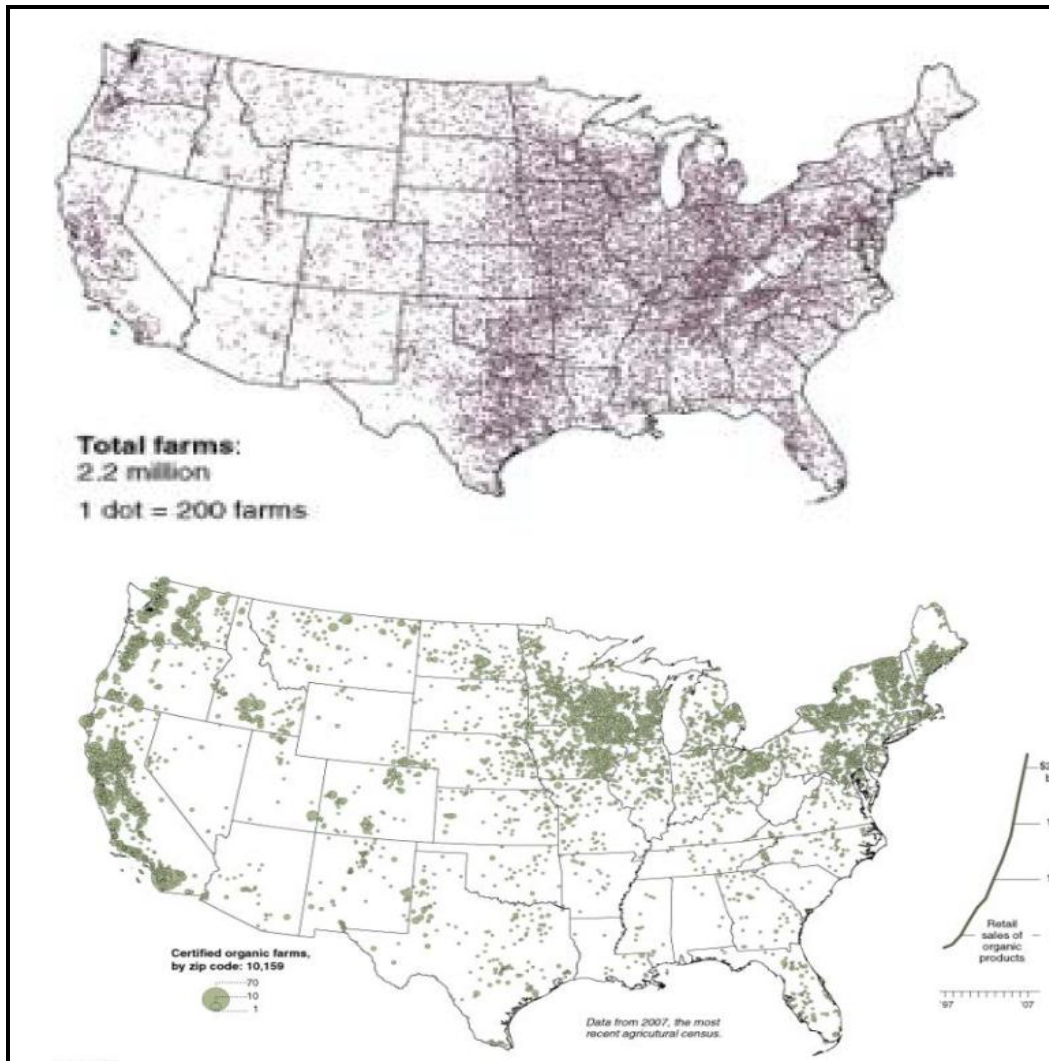
3.2 Developing a Method

If we recall our earlier discussion regarding the nascent emergence of a second regime of accumulation within the US domestic economy - driven by the desire to consume only that which has been conspicuously produced according to the new standards of social and environmental justice - and add to it the supposition that this second regime, so to speak, is not evenly distributed throughout the country but has its own distinct economic geography - we can also surmise that it is in these locations that artisanal activities will reemerge first and foremost.³⁹ Taking this as a basis, the challenge then turns towards identifying an appropriate measurement or feature by which we can potentially identify the sub-national locations of this nascent accumulation regime

³⁸ <http://www.etsy.com/about.php>

³⁹ The notion that this nascent regime of accumulation has (at least to some extent) its own unique economic geography is perhaps most easily, if not the most accurately - accepted and understood through the example of the application of regional nicknames and stereotypes within a national context. For instance, the West Coast of the US is often called the "Left Coast", in recognition of its generally progressive political-economic mores. Similarly, the label "East Coast liberal" is often applied to residents of the Northeastern states for the same general reasons. While these titles are used both pejoratively and proudly by turns, and while they no doubt obfuscate the more complex reality, their usage indicates that there is in fact a noticeable geographically uneven distribution of political-economic values within the country. This in turn, substantiates the idea that the nascent regime of accumulation to which the artisan economy seems to belong, is also geographically unevenly distributed.

FIGURE 4. Total Farms, 2007; Total Certified Organic Farms, 2007.



Source: New York Times (5/3/2009) *The Hot Spots for Organic Food*, derived from US Agricultural Department Organic Trade Association and the 2007 agricultural census

Figure four above displays two maps from the same source that have been resized and put together for comparative purposes. The first one displays the total amount of farms, 2.2 million, in the US. Each dot represents 200 farms. Conversely, the lower figure displays a map of certified organic farms in the US – 10,159 in total. In this figure there are three differently sized dots, with the smallest representing one certified organic farm in a zip code area, the middle sized representing 10, and the largest representing 70 certified organic farms within a single zip code area. The most important thing to take away from this illustration is the

markedly different locational pattern that certified organic farms display as compared to the total number of farms in general. If we deem this pattern of distribution to be influenced by regionalized market demand for locally grown organic food, then the second map also provides us with a general pattern of the distribution of the nascent regime of accumulation to which the emerging artisan economy belongs.⁴⁰ In other words, if demand for locally grown organic food is indicative of a growing awareness and concern for production processes in general, then locations that express such demand are more likely to house other economic activities similarly concerned.

With regard towards establishing a method and means of empirical investigation, our proposition now stands as thus: technological innovation at least partially explains the onset of the artisanal resurgence on a national and even international scale; however, the locational pattern of its emergence *within* the US is accredited to the unique distribution of local economies ascribing to the newly incipient regime of accumulation based on conspicuous production.⁴¹ In sum then, while our understanding of the means by which artisans reemerge is partially informed by the techno-economic paradigm thesis, and our choice to investigate at the regional (rather than national) level can to some extent be seen as derived from the flexible specialization approach, this paper's chosen method of empirical investigation will nevertheless be primarily informed by the regulation approach.

However, in order to ascertain whether or not this latter supposition about the locational pattern of artisan distribution is correct, we need to pinpoint a quantifiable characteristic that is common to all artisanal activities, and compare across regions - using the concentrated presence of organic farms as a proxy for the existence of production process concerns.

⁴⁰ Hannah Fairfield, writing for the NYT (5/3/2009) suggests this is almost certainly the case for farms in the Northeast and Northwest of the country, where 'many small organic farms sell produce directly to consumers'. However, she suggests the relationship between farm location and local demand may not be as strong in California, where large organic farms, the so-called 'organic agri-business', tend to cluster.

⁴¹ The clarification must be made that just because economies are alleged to be a part of the nascent regime of accumulation does not mean that they do not also contain elements of the older regime of accumulation based on MNCs and labor flexibility. At this point we are just attempting to locate the emergence of artisanal and independent economies only – not where they are showing signs of complete triumph.

3.3 Heying's Challenge: the appropriateness of quantitative data

To the extent that small firm size is associated with artisanal production methods and work organization tactics, it seems reasonable to propose that those economies with a higher proportion of small sized businesses are either already marked by artisanal presence, or have the requisite institutional compatibility to become so with regard towards the hard and soft infrastructural needs of artisan merchants and producers. However, in his seminal work on the emergence and development of Portland Oregon's artisan economy (forthcoming 2010, ch. 20 p. 4) Heying quite bluntly challenges the appropriateness of using quantitative data - especially that stemming from traditional sources like the Bureau of Economic Analysis, or the Bureau of Labor Statistics – with regard towards identifying and appraising the economic phenomena associated with the arrival and expansion of an artisan economy. He contends that data coming from 'sources designed to measure things important to an industrial economy, like standard industrial classifications and gross domestic product' – only serve to prevent us 'from seeing what is really changing'. In other words, he is suggesting that we cannot accurately depict the emergence of a new regime of accumulation by using the analytical tools of the old.

Bearing Heying's rather contentious yet still quite valid concerns in mind then, data gathering will remain under the auspices of traditional sources, but we will use this project as an opportunity to investigate and assess whether or not his allegations appear likely to hold true. To that end, if we accept Heying's (forthcoming 2010) assertion that Portland, Oregon is home to a strongly burgeoning artisan economy, we can use results from that city as a means to check whether or not traditional sorts of quantitative data are capable of revealing – to any sort of extent - artisanal presence within a local economy.

4. Data, Limitations, Methods, and Expectations

4.1 Data

The data used for investigating whether or not the regions in possession of certified organic farms also contain a comparatively higher proportion of small sized businesses comes from both the US Agricultural Census of 2007, and the US Census' Statistics of US Businesses (SUSB) series.^{42,43} However, the actual access point for the latter data set was the Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, who in turn provided the data in the format of collated and easy to access excel files.⁴⁴ Specifically, the data collected is a presence-count of certified organic farms by county, and employer firm size according to number of employees. The firm-size data is a 'snapshot' taken each year in the month of March. If a business had at least one employee at any point during the year, they are included in the data, however non-employer firms are not.⁴⁵ In addition, the US Census specifies between firms and establishments - in that an establishment is a 'unit at a single location', whereas firms are 'entities consisting of one domestic establishment or more'.⁴⁶ Because we are interested in discrete firm size, the numbers of establishments will be used rather than that of firms.⁴⁷

⁴² 2007 is the first census for which data on organic farming alone is available.

⁴³ http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_2_County_Level/index.asp; table 43.

⁴⁴ <http://www.sba.gov/advo/research/data.html#ne>

⁴⁵ This is a major limitation because oftentimes artisans only employ themselves and no one else. However, data for non-employer firms is only available in very highly aggregated formats, for instance, in total numbers by state but not by industry, or simply nationally by industry. Unfortunately, this high level of aggregation is not amenable to the spatial scale of analysis adopted for this project.

⁴⁶ <http://www.census.gov/econ/susb/definitions.html>

⁴⁷ The scope of the SUSB series includes all North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) industries save for: "crop and animal production (NAICS 111, 112); rail transportation (NAICS 482); national postal service (NAICS 491); pension, health, welfare, and vacation funds (NAICS 525110, 525120, 525190), trusts, estates, and agency accounts (NAICS 525920), private households (NAICS 814), and public administration (NAICS 92)." The US Census website relates as well that "the series excludes governmental establishments except for wholesale liquor establishments (NAICS 4228), retail liquor stores (NAICS 44531), Federally-chartered savings institutions (NAICS 522120), Federally-chartered credit unions (NAICS 522130), and hospitals (NAICS 622)." Source:

<http://www.census.gov/econ/susb/introduction.html>

4.2 Limitations

The limitations of the data are great indeed. Aside from the previously mentioned major limitation of necessarily excluding non-employer data from analysis, the SUSB has tabulated data on firm size going back only as far as 1988 and extending only through 2006, thus precluding observations on long-term movements to a very great extent.⁴⁸ In addition, changes in enterprise definition and industrial classification systems restrict applications even further.⁴⁹ More specifically, while we are able to collect information on the evolution of firm size for the nation as a whole from 1988-2006, these definition and classification changes prevent us from disaggregating the data any further for the period as a whole.

Moreover, yet another limitation is found when we attempt to garner information on firm size by industry at the metropolitan level. Investigating at the metropolitan rather than the state level is consistent with our interest in the advent of artisans in developed, urban economies - as well as with the notion implied within our hypothesis that their emergence is geographically unevenly distributed. However, US metropolitan data series are only available as far back as 1998, and most metropolitan areas are 'redefined after each population census', thus making comparisons between distinct areas across time very difficult.⁵⁰ On top of that, it became apparent during the research process that the US Office of Management and Budget, the department responsible for defining metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), apparently allows for incredibly rural locales that are seemingly quite isolated from their metropolitan centers to be included within the confines of a metropolitan statistical territory, thus distorting - unfortunately to an unknown extent at the present time - the idea of a metropolis as inherently mostly urban in character, yet also somehow very strongly economically and socially connected to those suburban and rural areas that fall within its boundaries.⁵¹ Thus, for the

⁴⁸ <http://www.census.gov/econ/susb/introduction.html#size>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ For example, the Dallas metro area from 2003 onwards includes the cities of Ft. Worth and Arlington, thus making comparisons with previous years quite tricky, if not impossible.

⁵¹ The primary examples that this researcher found were the additions of Skamania County Washington to the Portland MSA and Baker County Florida to the Jacksonville MSA – both are extremely rural areas compared to the metro regions to which they ostensibly belong – their counties' primary population centers are approximately 50

purposes of our project - while it may be statistically correct to classify a metro region with a single organic farm in the area as belonging to that group of economies exhibiting signs of increasing demand for conspicuous production processes, the actual farm may be so far removed and disconnected from the major population center as to render moot the relationship between it and localized demand.

This discovery, together with initial results from tabulations of 161 of the nation's 366 metropolitan areas showing that out of those - only eight MSAs did not have at least one single organic farm within their boundaries - suggests that the explanatory power of using merely the presence of a single organic farm in a metro area as a proxy for conspicuous production process demand is far too weak.⁵² It was subsequently realized that a more robust method of measurement would be to express the amount of organic farms as a percentage of the total number of traditional farms within a metro area, and set a threshold above which we could expect locations to be in possession of a higher number of small sized firms. However, and quite unfortunately - because the agricultural data are only available by county and not metropolitan area, time limitations preclude the author from completing the multiple steps required to perform the calculation for each metro area within the entire country. Nevertheless, despite these quite daunting restrictions we are still able to forge ahead to some extent – using the years 1988-2006 to observe the evolution of firm-size for the nation as a whole, and the years 1998-2006 for comparing Portland, Oregon with another chosen city in order to observe whether or not 'industrial era' methods and data are capable of identifying the presence of post-industrial artisans.

and 30 miles away from their respective metropolitan population centers, and they have total housing densities of 2.8 and 13 per square mile respectively – compared to housing densities of 663 and 426.3 per square mile for the central counties within the Portland and Jacksonville MSAs. Source: <http://factfinder.census.gov/> (population densities county by state) Source for year of additions to the metro area:

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/metroareas/lists/historical/99mfips.txt>;

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/metroareas/lists/2003/03mfips.txt>

⁵² The 161 MSAs that were initially accounted for were actually those whose names began with A-J, so while there was an order to the list, it was independent of the geography of the physical locations, thus we can assume that a similar pattern will emerge with the other half of the batch.

4.3 The firm-size ratio

The lens through which we will consider the implications of an economy's firm-size distribution is through the 'firm-size ratio'. This ratio is the proportion of the number of establishments with a total number of employees ranging from 0-99, to the number of establishments with more than 100.⁵³ It is considered a more accurate way to evaluate the nature of an area's firm-size distribution than simply looking at the total number of small sized firms because it controls for market size. It is also thought to be a more reliable instrument than simply using the rate of change for small businesses because – while certainly still affected by the business cycle to some extent, it is markedly less so – and thus long-term movements are made easier to identify.

The proportions of 0-99 and 100+ were chosen for several reasons that are easily distilled into two: this researcher heartily disagrees in general with the Small Business Administration's research definition of a small business as 500 or fewer employees, and particularly feels that this benchmark is utterly inappropriate for use with regard towards looking into the emerging artisan economy.⁵⁴ The second reason is of a more utilitarian nature and has to do with the fact that the US Census classification system groups firms according to whether they have either 0-4 employees, 5-9, 10-19, 20-99, 100-499, or more than 500. While the 99-employee boundary may at first appear over generous, it should be noted that there are many possible instances where artisan producers work in settings with more than 18 other people (particularly with regard towards food production and small manufacturing), thus the decision was made to set the limit at 99.

4.4 Expectations

In all then, our expectations at the outset of this investigation are as follows: if the firm-size ratio of an economy is rising over time, it indicates that an area is becoming more

⁵³ Zero employees indicates that the firm had at least one employee during the year, but none in the month of March, when the survey was conducted.

⁵⁴ <http://web.sba.gov/faqs/faqindex.cfm?areaID=24>

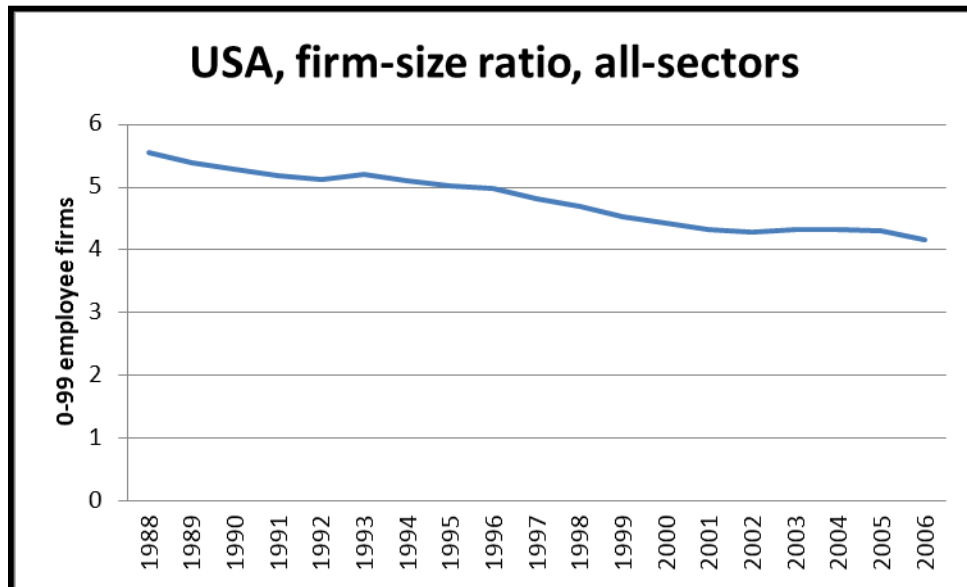
amenable to artisans and the nascent regime of accumulation centered around conspicuous production; if the ratio decreases over time, it is indicative of a decreasing compatibility with the institutional structure needed for artisanal patterns of production and consumption. Furthermore, if we take the national firm-size ratio as a point of reference, we can expect those metro areas with many organic farms to exhibit firm-size ratios higher than the national average; and conversely, those with a very small amount of organic farms or without any at all, should display lower firm-size ratios than the national average.⁵⁵ And lastly, if the results of quantitative investigations using data sourced from 'industrial era' institutions are to be trusted even a little bit with regard towards investigating the emergence of artisan economies, then it follows that we should expect Portland Oregon to display a substantially higher (and possibly rising) firm-size ratio than the national average.

⁵⁵ The inability to run a test against this expectation at the current time has already been discussed. The choice was made to leave it in the expectations section with the intent of bringing it up again when the results and analysis are presented in order to discuss possible threshold levels for future testing purposes.

5. Results and Analysis

The first figure we will look at is the movement of the national firm-size ratio for all sectors of the economy, from the years 1988-2006.

Figure 5. USA firm-size ratio 1988-2006



Source: derived from US Census Statistics of US Businesses via Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy. Extracted May 7th, 2010.

From this figure we can see that the institutional wherewithal needed to support a resurgence in artisanal activities as indicated by the presence of small sized firms, is not present on a national scale. In fact, we see a general decrease in the number of firms with 0-99 employees as compared to those with 100 employees or more over the time period under analysis. The ratio is reduced from approximately 5.5 firms with 0-99 employees per every one firm with 100+ in 1988, to 4.1 firms in 2006 - thus indicating that as a whole, the national economy remains - increasingly so even - quite anchored in a production system oriented towards large scale enterprises employing massive amounts of people. If the artisan economy does exist then, it is certainly not apparent from this highly aggregated perspective.

However, these results should not deter us from pressing on - as generally speaking, only the most established or broadly spread trends tend to show up in nationally aggregated data series. In fact, we could take a positive attitude towards things and contend that this rather dismal national picture is evidential of the notion that the emergent artisan economy is not evenly dispersed throughout the country, and is only just beginning. Moreover, this information provides us with a useful national backdrop for contextualizing and understanding the next few figures that are presented on Portland Oregon and another chosen city. Because the average firm-size ratio in the US fell from 5.5 in 1988 to 4.1 in 2006, we should at least expect Portland – as the alleged birthplace of a thriving artisan economy, to have a significantly higher firm-size ratio than that. Furthermore, in order to advance the supposition that the presence of organic farms can serve as a proxy for the newly emergent regime of accumulation based on conspicuous production, the metro area of Jacksonville, Florida was chosen as representative of those areas with an explicit dearth of organic farming activities, in order to compare firm-size ratios with Portland and the national average.

5.1 Artisan and Non-Artisan Metros Compared

Figure 6. Locations of Portland and Jacksonville; organic farms 2007



Source: New York Times (5/3/2009) *The Hot Spots for Organic Food*, derived from US Agricultural Department Organic Trade Association and the 2007 agricultural census; augmented to include city labels and locations.

The city of Jacksonville, Florida (JAX) was chosen for comparison purposes with Portland Oregon (PDX) primarily because, as one can observe in the map above, the area is remarkable for its lack of organic farms - especially when related to Portland's apparent abundance of them.⁵⁶ Beyond that however, the two cities share in common several characteristics that in turn make for a more credible comparison: both of them are generally considered to have population sizes ranking amongst the 'middle-class' of metropolitan regions⁵⁷; the Port of Jacksonville and the Port of Portland both play a significant economic role in their respective cities; and the two metro areas have very similar incomes per capita as well – in 2008 Jacksonville's income per capita was \$40,028 in current dollars, and Portland garnered a very close \$39,942.^{58,59} In addition, with regard towards the 2003 US Census redefinition of metropolitan regions - both cities saw the addition of similarly very rural counties - Skamania County, Washington and Baker County, Florida.

As far as the presence of organic farms is concerned, Skamania added no additional organic farms to the Portland MSA, and approximately 123 traditional farms. Baker County added one organic farm to the Jacksonville MSA and approximately 344 traditional farms.⁶⁰ In total then, according to data collected from the 2007 agricultural census, 2.6% of the farms in the Portland metro region were certified organic in 2007. The same figure for the Jacksonville

⁵⁶ The reader may notice a small strip of dots indicating the presence of a few organic farms to the southwest of Jacksonville. For the most part these do not fall within the city's 'sphere of influence', and belong primarily to the metro area of Gainesville Florida.

⁵⁷ Although Portland's 2009 metro population stands at an estimated 2.2 million, as compared with Jacksonville's 1.3 million, we can still consider these numbers to be within or around the same order of magnitude – thus we are not trying to compare a global city on the order of NYC or LA with a regional metro area. Source:

<http://www.census.gov/popest/metro/CBSA-est2009-annual.html> extracted May 22, 2010

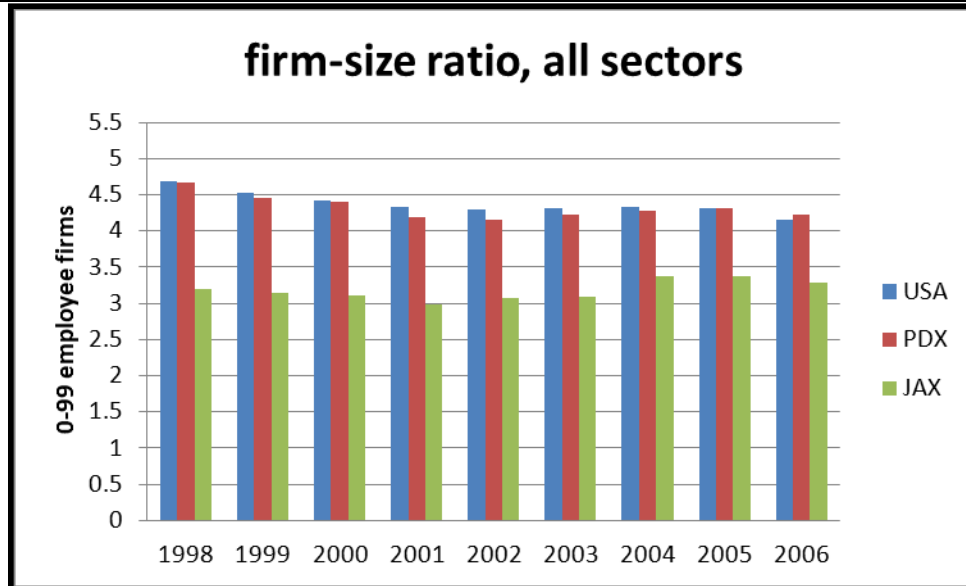
⁵⁸ Source: BEA, <http://www.bea.gov/regional/reis/drill.cfm> extracted May 22, 2010

⁵⁹ This is peripherally pertinent, but this researcher also benefits from having lived in Portland for approximately four years, and having grown up in a town about an hour southwest of Jacksonville. Thus she is quite familiar with the landscape and general atmosphere of both metro areas, and can vouch for the highly visible presence of artisans in Portland as well as their comparatively noticeable absence in Jacksonville.

⁶⁰ Source: 2007 agricultural census, county level data

metropolitan area stood at a much lower 0.1%.⁶¹ If our expectations hold then, we should see a much lower firm-size ratio for Jacksonville as compared to Portland.⁶²

FIGURE 7. Portland, Jacksonville, USA firm-size ratios compared. 1998-2006.



Source: derived from US Census, Statistics of US Businesses via Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy. Extracted May 7th, 2010.

Two things are immediately apparent from figure seven above. The first is that, as we can see, Portland does indeed display a higher firm-size ratio than Jacksonville throughout the entire time period under analysis. The distance between them ranges from almost 1.5 additional firms with 0-99 employees per every 100+ sized firm in 1998 to a low of 0.90 firms in 2004. However, what is also equally apparent is that, although the expectation that Jacksonville would display a firm-size ratio lower than the national average is corroborated;

⁶¹ The actual numbers of organic farms stand at 303 for Portland and 2 for Jacksonville (out of a total of 11,457 and 1,732 farms respectively.) However, due to familiarity with the area, this researcher is critical of the census bureau’s estimation that places either of these two organic farms in the Jacksonville metropolitan region. One of them is in a very remote and rural area and the other should be considered as falling under the sphere of influence of the Gainesville Florida metropolitan region – nevertheless, we will play by the official rules of the game here, and say that Jacksonville has 2 organic farms.

⁶² The reader may be wondering about the applicability of the 2007 Agricultural Census with regard towards firm-size data from 1998-2006: while 2007 is the first year that the Agricultural Census provided data that treated organic farms separately from traditional farms, there is no reason to think that this was the first year such farms were in operation. Furthermore, the US Agriculture Department upholds farms to a ‘wait-time’ of three full-years before bestowing organic certification, during which time documents must be kept detailing the pesticide free status of the entire farm and equipment. Thus, the certified farms observed in the 2007 census were practicing organic farming methods by 2003/2004 at the absolute latest.

according to the information displayed in this figure, the complementary expectation that Portland would have a much greater firm-size ratio than the national average looks to be totally mistaken. For seven out of the nine years under observation Portland's ratio is below that of the national average, and only in the last year of analysis does it reach slightly beyond.

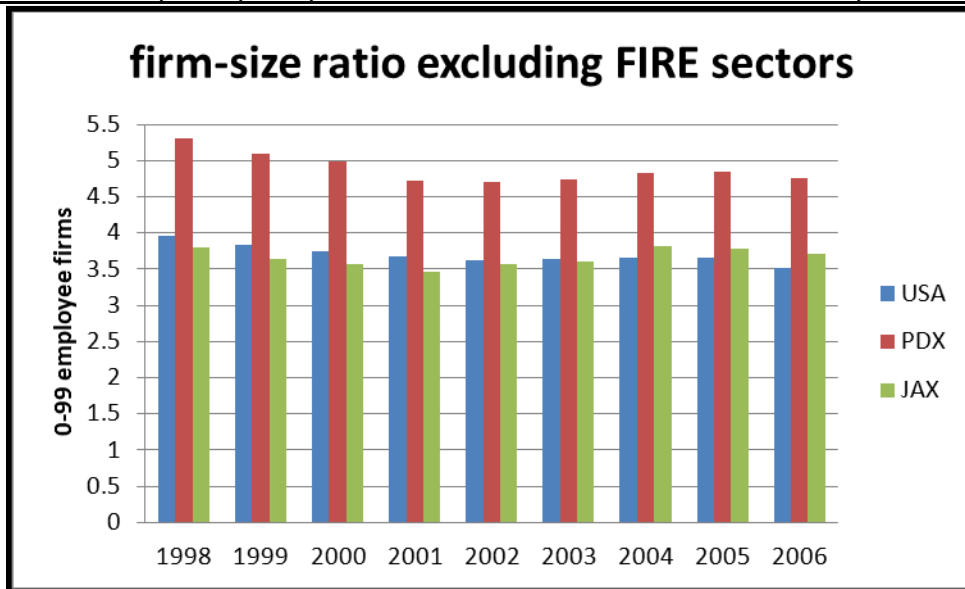
Moreover, the expectation that as the artisan economy begins to take root more firmly, the firm-size ratio would correspondingly begin to rise - is also not substantiated by the data to any great extent. Although we can see a slightly noticeable rise in the firm-size ratio for both Jacksonville and Portland beginning from 2003 and extending through to 2005, one would be mistaken in attributing this to an increase in artisanal activities and not to the general recovery from the 2001 recession. In all then, with regard towards the movement of the firm-size ratio over time, it appears that the data we have does not cover a broad enough span of time in order to be able to discern a general pattern of either increase or decrease occurring apart from the business cycle.

To return to the expected dynamics of the relationships between the USA as a whole and Portland and Jacksonville respectively; what then, to make of a national average that is on par with that of one of the alleged birthplaces of the 21st century artisans? Although in figure 5 we were looking at the national firm-size ratio's movement over time rather than its actual level, the result in figure 7 indicating near equivalency between it and the level of Portland's ratio simply doesn't conform with the idea of a nation that is still embedded in a production system oriented towards large scale enterprises employing massive amounts of people. It hurts to say, but either there is something occurring within the national scope that prevents small firm-size from being a useful proxy for artisanal activities - or we must admit failure as regards this attempt to capture the presence of an emerging artisan economy with 'industrial era' quantitative data.

We shall not give up just yet. To the extent that small firm-size is admittedly a very imprecise proxy for artisanal presence, and to the extent that it was chosen specifically because its generality allowed for a comprehensive measurement of nearly all artisanal firms in all

sectors - we can also logically conclude that the problem with our data lies in the fact that many other types of small-sized firms - besides those artisanal ones we are interested in studying - are being detected through the use of size as a proxy. Unfortunately, this is a problem without an easy solution. Although it was stated at the outset of this essay that the author would refrain from making any definitive statements about what types of discrete economic activities qualify as having the potential to become artisanal in nature - the present situation compels one to do so – at least to some extent. Bearing that in mind then, and recalling that we cannot disaggregate NAICS industrial sectors into their sub-sections due to classification changes that occur during the years under analysis, the conclusion is reached that with regard towards the reemergence of artisanal activities, the NAICS industrial sectors that certainly present themselves as the *least* likely to account for any appreciable artisanal presence at the present time, are without a doubt, the finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) sectors of the economy (NAICS sectors 52 and 53).

FIGURE 8. USA, PDX, JAX, firm-size ratios without FIRE sector, 1998-2006.



Source: derived from US Census, Statistics of US Businesses via Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy. Extracted May 7th, 2010.

Figure eight shows us the firm-size ratios of the US, Portland, and Jacksonville minus those firms located within the finance, insurance and real estate sectors of the economy. As we

can see, Portland now displays the expected substantially higher ratio than both Jacksonville and the nation as a whole, ranging from almost 5.5:1 in 1998 to 4.75:1 in 2006. Furthermore, Jacksonville retains the similarly expected lower ratio than the nation as a whole for the most part as well - with the interesting exception of the last three years under observation. However, whether or not this recent increase is attributable to the growing presence of artisans and production process concerns, or simply to a substantially more vigorous renewal of economic growth following the 2001 recession in general, remains outside the deductive capabilities of this paper and the historically brief amount of data it has to work with.

Nevertheless, another noteworthy result that occurs when the FIRE sector is taken out of the picture is that the levels of the ratios themselves change – but in different directions with respect to the two metro areas and the nation as a whole. In figure five, when the FIRE sector is accounted for, the national ratio never falls below the 4 to 1 threshold; yet when this sector is taken out, the ratio is so much reduced that it never even breaks the same barrier. Conversely, we see the ratios of the two metro areas rise instead of fall. The divergent movements of the national versus metro firm-size ratios are attributed to the notion that metropolitan regions contain the financial centers of their geographic spheres of influence - whereas the national figure contains information regarding all urban, suburban, and rural firms; thus, for those industries in the FIRE sector we see higher than average firm size in metro areas, and correspondingly smaller firm sizes everywhere else.

5.2 Summing Up

In all then, if we accept Heying's contended thesis that Portland is indeed home to an emergent artisan economy, it appears as if our 'industrial era' data is somewhat capable of revealing that emergence - at least to some extent – and albeit with some acknowledged caveats that have been discovered along the way as well. We learned that if one intends to use organic farms and firm-size as proxies, allowances must be made for the distorting presence of very isolated rural areas and non-artisanal small-sized firms. To that end, it is recommended that a threshold percentage of total farms that are certified organic in a metro area be

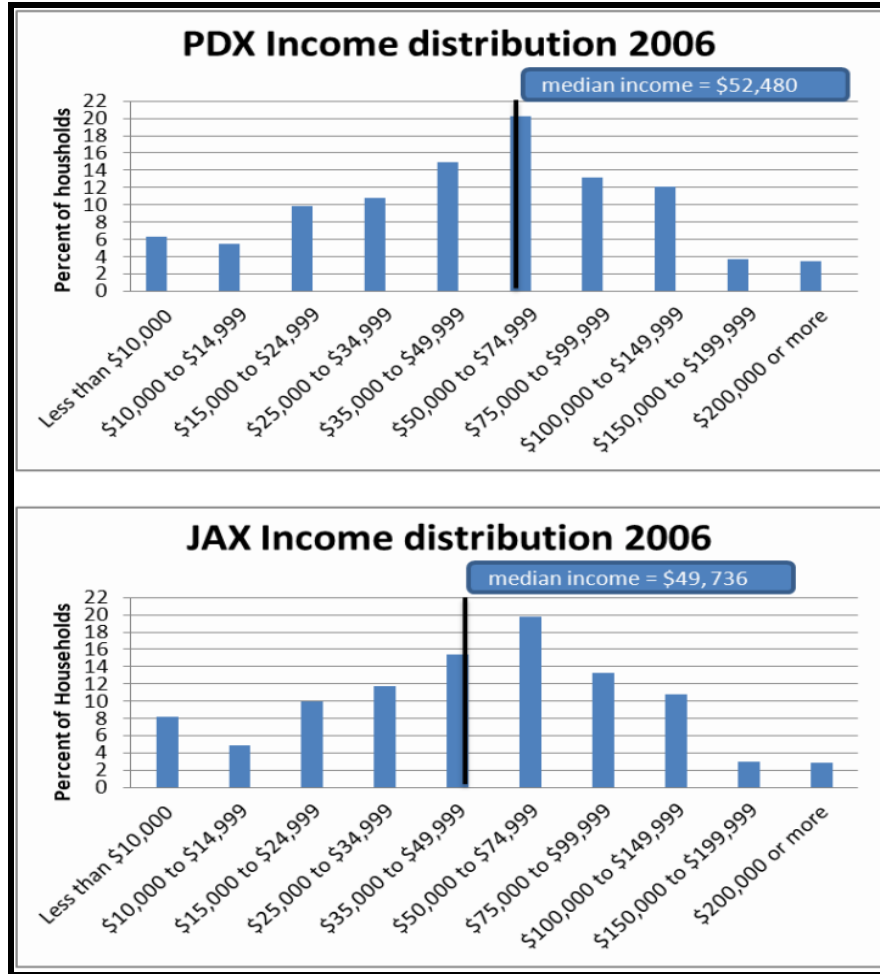
established when attempting to determine the presence of regional market demand for conspicuous production processes. Because this paper takes Portland as a sort of prototype of an emergent artisan economy, and as that city's percentage of certified organic farms stands at 2.6%, this researcher recommends a threshold interval of somewhere around two percent generally speaking.

In addition, the results achieved with the removal of the FIRE sector also suggest that the reemergence of the artisan economy is not only distributed geographically unevenly, but sectorally as well. While this characteristic is in line with both the neo-Schumpeterian notion that major innovations and their attendant practices have their own logic of dissemination throughout economy and society - as well as with the common-sense acumen that tells us the nature of artisanal production and consumption is most easily adapted to the manufacture of things rather than intangible services - its realization is nevertheless a useful guide for future empirical analyses.

However, while through this method we may have found a means for empirically identifying the locational pattern of the emergent artisan economy, it does not tell us anything about the role that economic inequality plays in the actual emergence process.

5.21 Income distributions compared

Figure 9. Portland, Jacksonville Household Income Distribution. 2006. 2006 inflation adjusted dollars.



Source: US Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey. Extracted May 7th, 2010.

Figure nine above displays the household income distribution for Portland and Jacksonville in 2006, not including social transfers. Unfortunately, the information necessary to construct a gini index, coefficient or some other measurement of inequality over time is not readily accessible for US metro areas, and we must suffice with a side by side comparison. With that in mind, this information is displayed with the qualification that it alone should by no means be considered as having a very strong explanatory power with regard towards understanding the effects of income inequality on the revival of artisans - for that we would need historical data. This information should simply be considered for what it is – a snapshot of

time with which we can observe whether or not the presence of an emergent artisan economy may also be associated with an unusual pattern of income distribution. And from the figures displayed above, we can notice that the income distributions of Portland and Jacksonville, the two metro areas this paper considers as respectively representative of economies both with and without an appreciable artisanal presence, actually appear as remarkably similar to one another. Their median household incomes are within \$3,000 dollars of each other, and around 20% of the households in both populations garnered between \$50,000 - \$74,999 in 2006.

However, there is at least one noticeable difference between the two areas. Comparatively speaking in 2006, almost two percent more of Jacksonville's households made under \$10,000 than did households in Portland. Moreover, Portland had a larger share of households making over \$150,000 dollars than did Jacksonville – almost 1.5% more. Although we can draw no firm conclusions from the data presented here, these figures imply that variances at the margins in income distribution may indeed play a role in the emergence of concentrations of local market demand for conspicuous production processes, and the associated reemergence of an artisan economy.⁶³

⁶³ In fact, these figures speak to the notion that people in the lowest income brackets generally do not have the opportunity to voice their personal preferences through the institutional role of 'consumer' – the act of which was previously mentioned as a contributing factor to the emergence of artisan economies in the US (see footnote 32). The ever present threat of poverty commands them to make low prices their top priority, and thus from a regulationist perspective, largely restricts the ability of these least wealthy Americans to participate in the ongoing dialogue that is working to inform national methods of production. This is what Annette Bernhardt (2000) describes as the post-industrial 'Walmart Trap': the flourishing of extremely low wage service sector jobs providing wages that afford workers only the ability to purchase goods at the low-wage (and therefore low-price) outlets that employ them.

6. Discussion on Methods, Theory, and Broader Implications

6.1 Methods

In all then, the data gathered and presented here is not so much conclusive as it is suggestive. The major goal of completing calculations for all of the nation's metro areas is left unfinished. If that were to be taken up as a research goal of another project, it is suggested that the work be complemented with a similar analysis on the movements of income inequality of metro areas over time as well.

With regard to the accuracy of the chosen proxies, this researcher defends the choice of a threshold percentage of certified organic farms as a viable proxy for the presence of production process concerns and indicator of metro area artisanal presence (or institutional compatibility with artisanal presence) - in that through the lens of regulation theory, both organic farms and artisanal production of any sort are economic activities fundamentally concerned with imbuing value through (conspicuous) production rather than exchange. The decision to employ certified organic farms as representative of these sorts of activities stems from the pragmatic need to work with data that is simultaneously available for the entire nation, yet is able to be disaggregated into component areas. The fact that it is compiled by a single reputable source is also considered a major advantage as regards the reliability and accuracy of results. In the end, this researcher believes that certified organic farms are (currently) unique amongst other possible proxies in that it fulfills all of these requirements.

Additionally, to those who may contend that small firm-size is only weakly related to artisanal activity - and has a stronger correlation with other types and forms of economic activity, it should be pointed out that all three of the theories on the nature of the post-industrial landscape broadly imply that large firm-size is related to the industrial era preoccupation with mass production. Conversely, while the regulation approach doesn't have much to say on the physical characteristics of post-industrial firms, both the techno-economic paradigm and the flexible specialization theses in general strongly imply that comparatively smaller firm-size is inherently related to flexible specialization production methods and the post-Fordist onset of the fragmentation of the production process; moreover, both the

IFSOB(2008) and Heying (forthcoming 2010, ch. 2 p. 49) explicitly contend that one of the key physical characteristics of artisan economies is that they are generally comprised of small sized firms.

Nevertheless, to the extent that this paper's chosen proxies for the identification of the emergent artisan economy remain open to criticism, it is recommended that future research include an attempt to "double-check" their accuracy and validity through the use of a combination of what has been called the 'reputational approach', and archival research.⁶⁴

The reputational approach was first created and applied in a 1953 study by Floyd Hunter, entitled *Community Power Structure*.⁶⁵ To give it a brief introduction, it is used as a means of gathering information on events and structural relationships about which not very much is formally known, and very little 'hard' data is available with which to study. Essentially, with regard towards verifying the results and expectations of the present study, it is suggested that trade journals and various other publications catering towards those engaged in artisanal activities, also potentially contain data on reputed artisanal firms and the cities where artisans tend to congregate. With information thus gathered through archival research, the reputational method is applied through contacting individual artisans or other organizations that work with artisans - presenting them with an initial list of inferred 'artisan friendly' areas, and asking them to corroborate the list through identifying any mis-specified locales, or other areas not included on the list that they otherwise view as artisan 'friendly', or comparatively highly engaged in artisan production generally speaking. If the proxies used in the present study are accurate ones, then the list of cities garnered from the combined application of archival research and the reputational approach should also display relatively higher firm-size

⁶⁴ The combinational method of archival research and the reputational approach was suggested to this researcher by Charles Heying during correspondence on April 15, 2010.

⁶⁵ A good overview of the study and its application of the reputational approach by Professor William Domhoff at the sociology department of UC Santa Cruz can be found here: <http://sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/local/atlanta.html>

ratios than the national average, and have a threshold level of around 2% of farms as certified organic as well.⁶⁶

6.2 Theory

The decision to employ the regulation approach to the methods of empirical analysis undertaken in this paper certainly contains the implication that this researcher agrees with the notion that capitalism itself is inherently unsound and self-destructive. However, and be that as it may - what this researcher actually finds the most appealing about the approach is that it is capable of emphasizing the influential role of what are essentially non-economic ideas, movements, and institutions on the evolution of the broader political-economy of times and places. Furthermore, rather than contemplating whether capitalism itself is somehow ultimately untenable - what is far more pertinent with regard to our current investigation is considering the long-run implications the regulation approach holds for the emergent artisan economy. That is to say, should the artisan economy itself also be perceived as somehow ultimately untenable? And perhaps even a bit more relevantly, is the nascent regime of accumulation with which it is associated even capable of extension - or reproducible outside of its current diminutive confines in any broadly meaningful (or stable-growth providing) way?

While it may be slightly premature to reflect upon the possible demise of an event that has yet to even be firmly established as beginning to take place, it is nevertheless worth reiterating that all three of the post-industrial theories considered here rely upon the notion that real economies are never stationary. Each of them in their own way addresses and accepts - albeit to varying degrees and with varying causal mechanisms - the notion that the material expression of the ways and means by which society produces and distributes things changes over time and space. So, according to the theories presented here - yes, in the final analysis the emergent artisan economy is ultimately untenable - just as every other temporally discrete mechanism of production and distribution is as well. However, as regards its ability to become self-sustaining and reproducible over the medium to long-run; in other words, as regards its

⁶⁶ This research has actually already embarked on such a task; however, at the time of submittal, the total number of inquiries sent out and the overall response rate was considered to be too low to incorporate results into the present study.

ability to become the basis of a new era of stabilized capitalist growth - from the perspectives of both the regulation approach and the flexible specialization thesis to some extent as well, the emergent artisan economy (as well its associated nascent regime of accumulation based on conspicuous production processes) appears to face at least one very major regulatory challenge - neoliberalism.

Insofar as neoliberalism can be characterized as an economic regime based on the dismantling of the welfare state and the presence of cutthroat competition within all spheres of economic activity, including of course at the firm-level but also between geographic regions as well - both Tickell and Peck (1995) writing from the regulation approach perspective, and Hirst and Zeitlin (1991) of the flexible specialization persuasion - contend that it is incapable of providing the institutional wherewithal needed for a stable and/or dynamic era of post-industrial economic growth. Tickell and Peck (1995, pp. 368-370) posit that both neoliberalism and its hereditary antecedent, liberalism, are actually simply the names given to that type of inherently unstable, crisis-prone form of capitalism that arises in the absence of a dominant mode of social regulation. That is to say, neoliberalism is that form of capitalism that has *not* been first filtered through the sieve of a society's norms, codes of conduct, and unique constellations of class and societal relations before it is materially expressed: it is capitalism's 'law of the jungle', as they put it. For them, no mode of production is capable of providing the means for a sustained period of capitalist growth until the global regime of neoliberalism is replaced.

Similarly, Hirst and Zeitlin (1991, p. 2-8) contend that both flexible specialization and mass-production become non-innovative and stagnant when surrounded by a regulatory environment that allows for competition through 'squeezing wages, working conditions, and product quality'. They go on to explain that the 'crucial micro-regulatory problem' for flexible specialization in particular is managing to sustain innovation by 'balancing cooperation and competition among productive units'. Moreover, they relate that in *The Second Industrial Divide*, Piore and Sabel argue that because an economy whose production system is rooted in flexible specialization is better able to accommodate rapid fluctuations in market demand, that

there is a heightened 'regulatory need for such an economy to take wages out of competition and maintain welfare services in order to avoid debilitating breakdowns'.

On the same topic but from a different and more precise perspective with regard to the artisan economy, Heying (forthcoming 2010, ch. 2; ch 19, pp. 65-67; conclusion, p. 30) explains that neoliberalism is rooted in the 'accumulation of individual wealth' whereas the artisan economy is steeped in the notion and practice of creating 'social wealth'. He explains that within artisan economies, 'a healthy dose' of community-wide 'soft infrastructure' works to provide 'further monetary, informational, and social resources', so the disproportionate remunerations that prevail under neoliberalism are no longer necessary, or warranted. In addition, Heying contrasts traditional models of growth and development based off of producing things primarily for export by large corporations, with the idea that the 'non-traded' sector is the primary engine of wealth creation in an artisan based local economy - contending that export industries funnel both profits and power upwards and outwards from the communities in which they created, whereas artisan economies that are primarily located within non-exported sectors 'anchor their equity' in the local community.

Through the lens of multiple perspectives then, in order to continue to strengthen and expand it appears that the emergent artisan economy – and the nascent regime of accumulation this paper associates it with – must eventually come to terms with and confront the greater regulatory schema created by neoliberalism.⁶⁷ However, the extent to which the

⁶⁷ Interestingly, in what appears to be an outcome indicative of both Portland's leading role in the emergence of the artisan economy, as well as the notion that it will eventually have to confront the means and ways of neoliberal economic growth and development – in January of this year, voters in Oregon passed the first 'voter-approved statewide income tax increase since the 1930s'. The purpose is primarily to prevent a \$727 million shortfall in the budget of public schools; however, they will also fund various other social services as well. The taxes are aimed exclusively at couples earning more than \$250,000 per year, individuals making more than \$125,000 per year, and corporations 'netting more than \$250,000 annually'. The Oregonian newspaper relates that the Portland metro area's principal county, Multnomah County, was 'key' to the state-wide victory, with 'voters approving the measures by more than a 2:1 ratio'. Although the tax hikes themselves are undoubtedly largely engendered by the current recession, the specific form the tax increases took is consistent with the presence of a concern for maintaining community-wide social wealth creation. For instance, Greg Anrig (2009) relates that other states have confronted their recession-caused budgetary shortfalls either through cutting social services, or through increasing taxes 'primarily in ways that disproportionately hit low and middle-income residents'. (i.e. increasing the sales tax.) sources:

http://www.oregonlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2010/01/voters_pass_tax_measures_by_bi.html;
http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=the_state_tax_wars

emergence of an artisan economy is influenced by the presence of economic inequality implies that the successful resolution of this conflict will also somehow fundamentally change the nature and structure of the artisan economy itself as well.⁶⁸

6.3 Broader implications

To move on to a discussion of the broader economic implications of a resurgent artisan economy – if we make the provisional conjecture that Portland is either already not alone, or very soon to be accompanied, in its artisanal ways – what then, does this imply for the evolution of the national, and even global, economy? It would be quite foolhardy to suggest that an increasing artisanal presence in a few metro areas of one country implies an imminent economic regime change on a global scale. Nevertheless, it does point to what potentially lies beyond (or perhaps simply in the shadow of) the pinnacle of a globally dominant multinational corporate economy centered upon notions of individual pecuniary accumulation. In the post-industrial era, not every metropolitan region can become a ‘global city’ (see Saskia Sassen’s 1991 book, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* for more on this concept), and as Heying points out (forthcoming 2010, ch. 1 pp. 19-26) changes taking place during the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial landscape have left many economically developed metros searching for a new identity.

He teaches us that there have been two conflicting responses to this lack of direction and search for new post-industrial economic identities on the part of metro areas – one by ‘urban elites’ – including those economic developers, urban planners, and elected officials responsible for equipping their locales with the elements necessary for sustained growth – and another response by the underlying population of such areas, what Heying (forthcoming 2010, ch. 1 pp. 19-26) refers to as the ‘grassroots response’. He teaches us that urban elites have reacted to changes in the post-industrial economic landscape with agendas centered upon

⁶⁸ It should be noted that Heying (forthcoming 2010; ch. 20 p. 30) is not inclined to place much emphasis on the role of economic inequality in determining the nature and structure of the artisan economy. Rather, he contends that it has a much greater and more negative role to play in the ‘current economic arrangement’: ‘the equity issue is important, and it should be examined more closely’, he tells us, ‘but it should be put in the larger perspective of who is really doing what to whom’.

transforming their metro economies into either 'entertainment machines', or areas capable of attracting the much vaunted, highly educated yet highly mobile 'creative class'. Meanwhile, he contends that it is the grassroots response to the same situation that has seen to the reemergence of the artisan economy.

With regard towards theories of post-industrial class relations and bifurcated divisions of labor, the fundamental difference between the response by urban elites and the response by the underlying populations of these areas is that the solutions proposed by the former are completely immersed in the same post-industrial economic paradigm, or regime of accumulation, that separates workers into positions of either low wage service sector jobs, or into the elite knowledge-worker positions that manage them and the rest of society. Conversely, the grass roots solution - the renewal of the artisan economy - comes from those people who are intentionally stepping outside the confines of modern relations of production: they are inherently, if not consciously, denying the forces at work by which their labor is funneled into this disjointed division of labor. The variation between the implied trajectories of the two responses is immense: one response is compatible with the mores of neoliberalism, one is not; one response views urban areas merely as platforms for individual or firm-specific pecuniary gain only - the other views urban areas as the manifestation of accumulated social wealth; one response implies the continued stratification of socio-economic opportunities and incomes - the other suggests a route by which we can begin to reduce such stratification.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to theoretically and empirically account for the reemergence of an artisan economy in the post-industrial landscape of the United States. Readers have been presented with the idea that something significant and rather unusual is fomenting beneath the surface of the US economy regarding the renewed interest in all things handmade. America's newfound appreciation for handcrafted cupcakes should not be attributed to an ill-advised attempt at portion control, some anti-intuitive Atkins-esque method of reigning in our love for sweets, but rather to our growing desire to participate as both producers and consumers in the emerging artisan economy. This nascent artisan economy is considered to encompass a growing myriad of economic activities, and redefine the way we both work and make things: reintegrating design and production; denying 'obsessive uniformity'; and appreciating durability, local distinctiveness, and the individual uniqueness imbued by discrete and fully discernable producers.

The theoretical motivation for such an emergent artisan economy has been accounted for through the lens of three primary approaches to the post-industrial landscape: the neo-Schumpeterian techno-economic paradigm thesis; the neo-Smithian flexible specialization perspective; and the neo-Marxist regulation approach. And while the empirical investigation stopped short of the goal of identifying whether or not an emergent artisan economy is occurring in multiple locations throughout the country, the means were provided to easily perform such calculations in subsequent investigations, including a method for double-checking the accuracy of the proposed proxies. Moreover, through the illustrations provided by the Portland, Oregon and Jacksonville, Florida examples, this paper provisionally confirmed – in contradiction to Heying's challenge - that it is possible to depict the emergence of a new regime of accumulation by using the analytical tools of the old. Lastly, the theoretical implications of an emergent artisan economy were discussed, including the inherent conflicts between it and the global regulatory regime of neoliberalism - as well as the implications held for the broader economy with respect towards post-industrial class relations.

With regard to the IFSOB's prediction that the next ten years will see to a general 'reemergence of artisans as an economic force' in the US, let this paper conclude with quotes from the introductions of two articles on the condition of independent small businesses - the first written in 1999, and the second penned eleven years later, in 2010:

- David Morris, writing for the Utne Reader, 1999:

"A thousand farms a week have gone out of business since 1950. Community pharmacies have been closing their doors at a rate of about 1,000 per year for the past five years. In 1972, independent booksellers claimed 58 percent of all book sales. By 1997 their share had fallen to 17 percent. Almost 5 percent of all retail spending today is captured by a single company, Wal-Mart.... Last September, the federal government gave its stamp of approval to the merger of Travelers Group and Citicorp, giving birth to Citigroup, a financial enterprise with \$700 billion in assets that serves 100 million customers in 100 countries. In November, Cargill announced that it would purchase the grain operations of Continental Grain, reportedly allowing Cargill to control as much as 70 percent of the world's grain market... The independent sector is under attack and has ceased to be the dominant organizational form".

-Stacy Mitchell, writing for Yes! Magazine, 2010:

"Locally grown food has soared in popularity. There are now 5,274 active farmers markets in the United States. Remarkably, almost one of every two of these markets was started within the last decade. Food co-ops and neighborhood greengrocers are likewise on the rise...Some 400 new independent bookstores have opened in the last four years. Neighborhood hardware stores are making a comeback in some cities. Most students graduating from pharmacy school report that they would rather open their own drugstore than work for a chain. Last April, even as Virgin Megastores prepared to shutter its last U.S. record emporium, more than a thousand independent music stores were mobbed for the second annual Record Store Day, a celebration of independent record stores that drew hundreds of thousands of people into local stores, became one of the top search terms on Google, and triggered a 16-point upswing in album sales.... people are rediscovering the benefits of an economy rooted in community and small-scale enterprise".

These two quotes both come from publications aimed at the same demographic - and while these brief depictions do not explicitly address artisanal firms, we can nevertheless infer from them that the spirit of the times does appear to be changing in ways that support the IFSOB's forecast, as well as future prospects for increased institutional compatibility with the needs of the artisan economy. From the looks of it, it seems as if we very lately have indeed somehow turned a corner and undergone a break with our most recent, giant firm-sized, corporate past. What remains to be seen is how broad and how deep this change goes.

7.1 Further Research Potential

Because the artisan economy is only in its embryonic stage, as a subject of investigation it is rife with further research potential. Aside from the previously suggested areas, which included completing the calculations laid out in this essay for all of the US metro areas and double checking the validity of the chosen proxies by way of the reputational method – it may also be possible to somehow reconcile past and present industrial classification systems so that more data become available with which to observe the movement of the firm-size ratio over time.⁶⁹ In addition, efforts towards this end may also enable researchers to analyze the NAICS subsectors in more detail as well, thus allowing us to see in which specific areas of the economy artisanal activities show up first and foremost.

Considering the various other implications of an emergent artisan economy is also of great interest as well. For instance, Heying (forthcoming 2010) contends that most artisan producers primarily engage in wealth creation at the community level - but what are the ramifications of this as regards international trade? Does an artisan economy imply decreasing levels of cross-border economic relationships? What about the matter of artisan firm growth? Is there a trade-off between the application of artisanal production methods and a firm's potential to grow and increase output? All of these and related other concerns suggest that case studies of artisanal firms with an eye towards understanding their trade patterns and

⁶⁹ Lundquist, Olander, and Svensson-Henning (2007) have performed such a reconciliation with regard towards past and present industrial classification systems for the Swedish economy.

growth tactics would be a quite fruitful. Yet another field worthy of investigation is looking into the level and type of human capital artisans tend to embody. What is the role of higher education in the artisan economy? Is it necessary (or even worthwhile) for artisans to obtain a college degree?

These are just a few suggestions for further research, but there are undoubtedly many more. The idea of an emergent artisan economy touches upon areas of interest to many academic disciplines within the social science arena, and there are many worthwhile means and ways of investigating it.

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