Piore and Sabel Reaction

Michael Plasmeier

This was a very interesting piece that I wish I had the time to read a bit more slowly. In particular it lays out the pre-World War II theory of how production was organized from both a craft producers’ point of view and a mass producers’ point of view. Specifically it relies on technology as the driving force. When was technology advanced enough to allow a certain organization of production? When did a certain scale for a market warrant specialized machinery?

Are we returning to an age of specialized machinery again with the advent of tools like 3D printers, water jets, and laser cutters? These machines allow one to create a vast variety of parts. Today the equipment does not offer many economies of scale, but could we imagine a world one day were 3D printers can print many types of items automatically, without needing special skills? This would lead to a return to the flexible specialization.

It is also interesting how the evolution of what is mechanized is society dependent. For example, in Europe I was at a museum where there was only 1 guard who sold tickets. To enter the exhibit you scan your ticket at the turnstile. I have never seen that in America! This is because one is able to hire a low-skilled laborer much more cheaply in the US than in Europe.

How do we know that corporations didn’t push mass production instead of mass productions pushing the creation of corporations? I will posit that the two are linked, but are we able to say that one came before the other.