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# **POST IRONIC SOCIETY**

Corporate Modernity and the appropriations of self

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

The University of Leeds  
Department of Sociology and Social Policy  
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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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I dedicate this work to the memory of my mother Marlene Ann Cremin.

## ABSTRACT

Through illustrative examples of the processes towards which a person becomes or remains employable, the question of the self in contemporary society is addressed. It is argued that how individuals perceive and orientate themselves to others - the mapping out of a person's life - is increasingly governed by self-conscious transformations and adaptations to standards set by employers. Words associated with work gain ascendancy within a popular discourse that articulates, in various ways, a person's self-understanding: the 'team', 'CV' biographies, 'networking', 'interpersonal' and 'transferable skills'. It is essentially the nomenclature that defines, in employment terms, the ideal person.

As some traditional forms of association atrophy others, perhaps understood within a neo-liberal capitalist context, impress themselves more fully: the person becomes subject, through active participation, to a depersonalisation and homogenisation of the self at variance to a commonly understood social diversification. It is a process that begins before the person enters into employment and is, potentially, embedded into a form of reflexivity understood here as *reflexive exploitation*: the identification and marketing of personal attributes that have been developed and/or recognised for their value to employers.

I move beyond some of the assumptions made in postmodern thinking about a free-floating self, and question the extent to which uncertainty produces short-term personal strategies. Concepts such as 'inclusivity' and 'empowerment' are re-appraised, alongside familiar arguments about contemporary social patterns and relations between individuals. Consideration is made of the psychic consequences of a competitive and personalised labour market, and concepts are developed for appreciating this. Finally, the notion of 'post irony' is introduced to summarise arguments, explained, in brevity, as an assimilation to pervasive and contradictory social norms, through a conscious filtering out of thoughts and emotions that give rise to an irreconcilable unease with the norms governing conduct and determining behaviour towards a certain end. As such, the thesis raises questions about the nature and development of individuality through theoretical example and empirical substantiation.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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### Introduction

In this chapter I set out the aims of the project and the purpose of each subsequent chapter to the overall thesis. I shall begin with a hypothesis that draws together the two central themes of subjectivity and (neo-liberal) capitalism, and articulate these in the project specifics. Thus, in this chapter I shall provide the following:

- A description of the central claims of the thesis.
- A summary of the core arguments.
- A description and justification for the sequence of chapters.

My entry point into the project was a concern that the proliferation of identity norms and knowledge about the self produces, under specific conditions, a reflexive orientation to capitalist relations. The conditions referred to, contemporaneous to Britain, pertain to an extension and expansion of commodity relations across different areas of social life. The phrase neo-liberalism, as employed here, refers to the assignment of value through market-style mechanisms and the processes by which agents increase their worth in market terms. This is illustrated through examples of labour, or employment, by connecting economic categories with those defining the individual. I examine questions of subjectivity through notions of power, the psyche, and class and inclusivity. There is interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data and references to relevant literature. Specific claims of the thesis are detailed in the section below.

### *Central Arguments*

Let us begin with a hypothesis: *principles underlining neo-liberalism are transposed on to subjectivities through a reflexive application of knowledge for 'empowering' the self 'proactively' to survive in the vicissitudes of a market economy.* Or, in other words, that *proactively, reflexive knowledge tends to orientate the self to values coterminous with and beneficial to neo-liberal capitalism.* So, put another way, *reflexive application of knowledge is integral to the 'empowerment' of the individual as a 'proactive' subject vis-à-vis neo-liberal capitalism.* This is tested out through analysis of job advertisements, schoolchildren's biographies, careers advice, company profiles and self-help guides. We locate the individual as subject to employment norms. It will be shown that devices, or technologies, serve to orientate

the person as a free subjectivity to prevailing structures of neo-liberal capitalism. I generalise on this 'orientation' by viewing it as one that is freely subscribed to as representing values integral to the self in knowledge of the economic and power relations that govern behaviour. As such, the 'structures' or ideologies often associated with neo-liberalism - corporations, enterprise - are recognised as performing a series of dualities for defining and assigning value to a coherent range of practices and for enabling or embedding a meaningful subjectivity through the appearance of an ideologically diverse sociality. I am critical of poststructuralism and fashionable ideas such as reflexive modernisation (individualisation and risk) by emphasising the insurmountable materiality of social life. I also register points raised in Foucault, Deleuze, Giddens and others about relationships between individuals and social processes and trace them, in their specificity, to contemporary issues. The principal aim of this dissertation is to show, through empirical example, the usefulness in working with an eclectic range of ideas or epistemologies; and for illustrating and advancing understanding of the contours of subjectivity to the current phase of 'enterprising' or 'dedifferentiated' capitalism. Over the course of the analysis the following general claims will be made:

1. A proliferation of social identities coincides with changes in the workplace for recognising and advancing the subject as an enterprising entity.
2. Increasing amounts of labour time are necessarily expended in the cultivation of personal characteristics for employment success/competitive advantage.
3. At a critical stage people freely identify their selves with, and adapt to, enterprise as those embodying human subjectivity.
4. The exploitative relationship between company and worker is transposed as a reflexive consideration of subjective value to employers for self-validation.
5. Knowledge empowers the individual reflexively to acquire or to recognise the value in particular activities and expressions as a form of disempowerment vis-à-vis employers.

These claims, in themselves, are not particularly controversial or specific to this study. However, in this research I also show:

1. Tangible changes in demands placed upon workers across a range of employment sectors over time.
2. How and why values that serve the interests of occupational elites are disseminated to and integrated by individuals.
3. The signification of words commonly used to define the self in employment.
4. The nature of subjectivity as analogous to a heterogeneity of values, cultural norms, and notions of difference; and the structural limitations of these concepts.

5. The relationship of reflexive knowledge and neo-liberal capitalism as illustrated through employment.

So, from this, we return to the principal aim or, in moving ahead of ourselves for the moment, the claim that: *In order to grasp the significance of subjective orientation to current socio-cultural and economic practices, it is necessary to re-appraise existing theoretical models and to synthesise these to account for the limitations in each.*

I am less concerned about what happens at work, the organisational or managerial culture, than about how the structures and principles of work impacts upon and conditions the person in their general lives. Later, a culture is described that completes an affective bond between 'corporation' and 'individual' in the notion of 'career'. What is studied are the qualities as an ideal type that the employment market, in generality, prescribes; how we, as individuals, incorporate them, and the extent to which employers inform our lives in the broader sense. In contradistinction to organisation theory, organisational methods are not analysed nor how effective they are in producing successful businesses; rather, information that might be presented to the would-be employee is looked at for its influence in shaping (self) reflexive processes in general. It is how this 'culture' surpasses the ideals of work and influences social interaction that is of concern here. In particular, the ways in which messages are absorbed into daily routine, critical self-appraisal and reflection, and the mechanisms through which identification with the corporation (as a symbol of how a certain ethos dominates social life), for example, is made possible. These arguments are situated within the arrangements of each chapter as described below.

### ***Logical Sequence of Dissertation***

To begin with we look at some of the important ideas that are referred to throughout the dissertation. Chapter two is a summary of arguments on subjectivity ranging from critical theory to psychoanalytical concepts and poststructuralism. It is not an exhaustive account, but rather an examination of ideas for their importance to the thesis. The aim of the chapter is to outline the conceptual boundaries for exploring the relationship of the individual, in the first instance, to society.

Chapter three takes this analysis further by looking at the broad categories of individual and society within the theoretical contours of employment culture. There is a discussion on (post)modernity developing into separate arguments on bureaucracies, organisations, individualisation, flexibility and so on. The aim here is to bring together distinctive points that connect our discussion on employment so that in later chapters we can concentrate on new data and analysis.

Hence, in chapter four, after setting out the methodology or thinking behind the use of empirical data, we begin to examine the historical development of a language of personality in employment. This is achieved through an analysis of newspaper situations vacant columns (SVCs) over a 100 plus year period and the words contained in the job advertisements there. The point is to contextualise later arguments about the subject in order to highlight temporal differences in adaptation to working norms. Factors that give rise to changes in the extent and intensity of personality language across employment sectors are discussed in chapter three and in subsequent chapters.

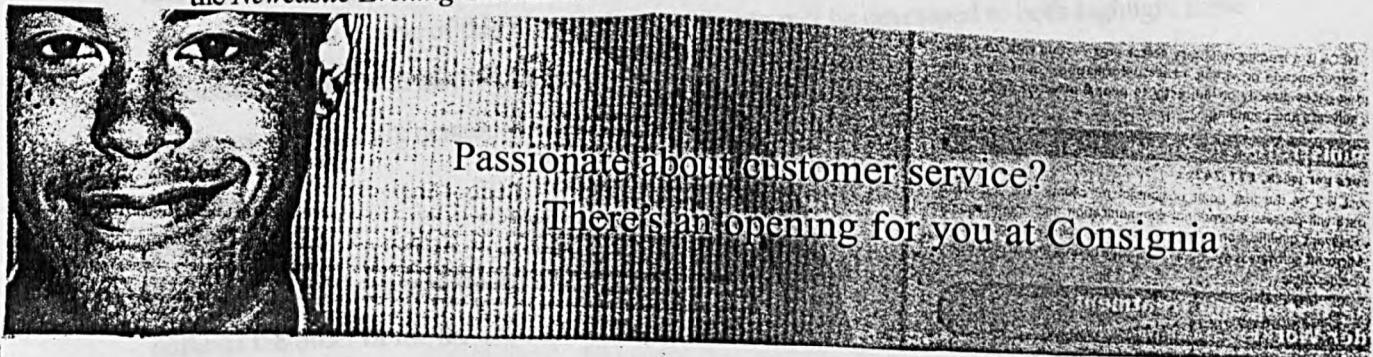
For example, in chapter five the words associated with subjectivity are deconstructed with reference to additional material, including quotations from employers, and the overall findings of SVC data. This is summarised through an argument on commodification and personal orientation to employment norms. We look at changes in the frequency of words describing the self and their meaning, then, in chapter six, consider the importance of teams and the curriculum vitae to the discussion. Six is a bridging chapter between a presentation of values prescribed by employers in job advertisements and associated material (chapters four and five), and their reproduction by individuals as pro-active subjects (chapters seven and eight). So, after relating teams to community and surveillance the CV is separated into its constituent parts for a discussion that, broadly, looks at the significance of completed personal experiences, attitudes, behaviour and values, and the signposting of future activities for employers. Some of the points are tentatively developed here and substantiated through schoolchildren's records of achievement (ROAs) presented in chapters seven and eight.

In chapter seven there is a discussion on the usefulness of ROAs as a dataset on how students reflexively incorporate the values inscribed in SVCs. This is followed with an account of methodological issues and the presentation of some of the data. Here I consolidate some earlier theoretical points by extracting from student descriptions substantive arguments on subjectivity and neo-liberalism. This is taken a stage further in chapter eight when the connection between social activity and work is illustrated. Notions such as inclusivity and performance are challenged and a framework for conceptualising reflexive adaptation to employment norms posited and elaborated in the concluding chapter nine.

The logic of the sequence is to build, layer by layer, a substantive account of the relationship between subjectivity and values specific to contemporary society. We can view this as an imbrication, beginning with abstract theorising (chapter two) upon which concrete examples of employment are placed (chapter three). This is followed by information on the changing demands of employers on individuals (chapter four) and interpretation of these (chapter five). Then I add a more speculative appraisal of the component parts of a CV (and teams) to connect the values prescribed by employers to those governing social values and behaviour generally (chapter six). An analysis of biographical accounts of schoolchildren

parallels information hitherto presented through general examples to specific attempts by students to demonstrate subjective worth (chapters seven and eight). Together these chapters formulate a coherent argument on a complex issue that, while never exhaustive, offers, in embryo, the possibility for developing additional tools for understanding the relationship between the individual subject and norms governing society. In the final analysis we have a framework for conceptualising the central themes and directions in which to develop further empirical analyses.

As an illustrative example of the work undertaken, here is a typical advertisement from the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*:



Passionate about customer service?  
There's an opening for you at Consignia



### Contact Centre Advisors

Consignia is an organisation that is committed to its employees, so a training programme that is second to none matched by an ongoing personal development programme come as standard, depending upon your personal aspirations.

We are looking for enthusiastic and dedicated individuals to resolve customer enquiries; both in writing and by telephone.

You will have a passion for Customer Service and have experience in the retail or service industry. Maybe you haven't worked in a Contact Centre before but you will have worked in teams and possess keyboard skills. Combine this with a flexible, confident and hardworking approach and you could be just what we're looking for.

In return you will receive a competitive salary, opportunity to join our company pension scheme and five weeks paid holiday. The starting salary is £10,400 rising to £13,000 within 18 months, subject to achievement of NVQs 2 and 3 in Customer Service. In addition, this competitive salary is further enhanced by an employee incentive scheme.

Situated close to the A19 on the Doxford International Business Park, the site benefits from excellent public transport as well as modern facilities and a free car park. An active Sports and Social Club offers subsidised events and trips, contributions towards membership of a health club can also be provided.

Working for Consignia brings excellent career prospects. And if you have the commitment, we will repay this with ongoing vocational training to NVQ levels 2 and 3 in Customer Service along with training towards the Institute of Customer Service Innovation award.

We currently have vacancies for full and part time staff with some attractive shifts to suit your lifestyle.

If you would like more information about how you can join our team, please telephone our recruitment line on 08457 413015 between the hours of 5pm and 9pm on Thursday 12th September and Friday 13th September. After these dates please call Toni on 0117 921 8414. You can also e-mail your details to [toni.harrison@consignia.com](mailto:toni.harrison@consignia.com)



INVESTMENT IN PEOPLE

Consignia plc is an equal opportunities employer

(Newcastle Evening Chronicle, 12/09/02: 18)

This advertisement implies that a person should feel intense emotional passion when acting as a filter (agent) between company and customer. Being accepted on the 'team' may require the equivalence of what Walter Benjamin (1970: 233) says about the movie star who, 'fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of personality," the phoney spell of a commodity.' The passion here is commensurate with company interests and principles (calculative, profit-orientated) upon which the organisation is founded. The advertisement promotes a complete system that serves as a community (team... social club), a cultural formula (subsidised events and trips), a *modus vivendi* (lifestyle), and a means through which a mind-body balance can be found (sports... health club). There is a suggestion of the type of character who should apply for the job in the self-satisfied expression on the face of the young man in the picture, and in the glib words to describe him.

Passion in this context is arguably absurd. The words expose, perhaps, the indignity of working in such organisations: that a person should identify with the company as if they are identifying with another human being, or, even, recognise in themselves (their personality) the equivalence to a commodified object. What makes this argument poignant is that, as shall soon emerge, the expectations of this company are typically found in advertisements for many jobs. Moreover, accompanying careers advice, the systematic use of CVs and/or information of a personal nature to secure employment, and the importance of personal history as a signifier of a person's suitability to an occupation, all contribute, alongside additional factors, to a situation that has the potential to transform, in a generation, the individual character and interpersonal relationships for a 'free-market' capitalist working environment.

Over the course of this dissertation arguments will be developed to both highlight these processes and question their value to people – whether or not they can be seen as beneficial. Sufficient analyses are contained elsewhere to explicate, qualify and advance points raised here.

### *Summary*

In this chapter I have introduced an hypothesis, elaborated on the aims of the project and outlined the order of the dissertation. At each stage there is a justification for the approach taken. In later chapters these arguments are fleshed out as the extent of the thesis is further clarified.

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## CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORETICAL CONTOURS OF SUBJECTIVITY

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### Introduction

Over the next two chapters I shall elaborate on the theoretical arguments that underpin my work. Chapter Three concerns the themes specifically relating to employment. Here, in Chapter Two, the theoretical contributions of some key thinkers are connected in a discussion on subjectivity, the individual and society.

Let us begin with a simple premise: *that an employment 'culture'* - which might include careers advice and profiles, CVs, or technologies to initiate a person into working norms (see Du Gay, 1992, p. 625) – *emphasises the self as a series of marketable personal and social categories reminiscent of a general 'neo-liberalisation' of socio-economic relations*. How can this be mapped out sociologically? Implicit is an object external to people in the form of an 'employment culture' that engages them in some undisclosed way. But the 'subject' here is also characterised apropos of commodities as a set of alienable qualities. There is an historical dimension to this 'objectification', a rupture, perhaps, or a process that includes distinct points of transition between different states (individual or otherwise). So what concerns me is how, and to what extent, is the person implicated into social relations that are, by and large, liberalised or disembedded from hitherto certainties of subject formation. In chapter two I discuss the constitution of the subject; in chapter three I describe the context of my study through a discussion on employment 'culture'.

So, to subjectivity: it is not my purpose to discuss empirically the genealogy of the subject through philosophy or sociology. My interest is to bring together some of the more salient arguments, so that eclectically a framework can be developed for approaching the themes of the project. Subjectivity is important here because it serves as a starting point in the tension between the society, as described in relation to capitalism, and the individual, or how that entity is understood. My conception of the subject intimates the (im)possibilities of human action within and adaptation to a given situation: hence the relevance of this discussion to the question of self-orientation to 'enterprising' socio-cultural norms.

Where ideas cross-pollinate one another, categories or labels to describe them are often misleading. Reluctantly, I delineate between different arguments here on an imputed meaning of labels. So, from a Marxist understanding of social and economic relations, follows revisions in critical theory, structuralism, poststructuralism/postmodernism, and psychoanalysis. These

connect in different ways, making any neat attempt to discuss critical theory, say, without psychoanalysis or even poststructuralism problematic. The chapter is organised, then, through a nexus of interrelating ideas on the human subject.

I begin with a discussion on the individual and society duality to ease the reader into work on subjectivity through a range of seemingly incompatible theories. Those sections are divided into two parts. The first begins with Althusser and follows an argument through to Habermas; the second begins with Freud and concludes with Žižek. Finally, the two interconnected parts are drawn together in the concluding section. The last section, on use of concepts, is included to remove potential confusion with words used throughout this dissertation.

To summarise, in this chapter I:

- Explore subjectivity through theoretical models of the relationship between individual and society.
- Evaluates the importance of these theories through critical analysis.
- Attempt to draw theories together in conclusion and to propose a theoretical basis to the dissertation.
- Clarify the use of familiar concepts to this study.

### *Individual and Society*

As an entry point into this discussion, and for purposes that will become clear in due course, Durkheim (1984: 61), in *The Division of Labour in Society*, argued that ‘Two consciousnesses exist within us: the one comprises only states that are personal to each one of us, characteristics of all us individuals, whilst the other comprises states that are common to the whole of society. The former represents only our individual personality, which it constitutes; the latter represents the collective type and consequently the society without which it would not exist.’ He went on to say that ‘the farther we go back in history, the greater the homogeneity... the more we reach the highest social types, the more developed the division of labour.’ (ibid: 92) In other words, the more homogeneous is society the less individuality exists. As the division of labour increases there should, therefore, be an increase in the amount of personal freedom. How is this possible? It happens because the common consciousness ‘increasingly comprises modes of thinking and feeling of a very general, indeterminate nature, which leave room for an increasing multitude of individual acts of dissent.’ (ibid: 122) This differs from Weber (1965: 76) who, in contrast, claimed that ‘it is one of the fundamental characteristics of an individualistic capitalist economy that it is rationalised on the basis of rigorous calculation’. While Adorno (2001: 202), through a cultural critique, suggested that for the individual ‘life is made easier through capitulation to the collective with which he identifies.’ Similarly, André Gorz (1999: 42) argued

that 'everywhere the subjectivity and 'identity' of individuals, their values and their images of themselves and the world, are being continually structured, manufactured and shaped.' In other words, in the modern age, the person is subject to formalising pressures even as the division of labour is characterised by increased levels of specialisation than was apparent, for example, during the 'Fordist' phase of production. A society that has evolved to incorporate generalised principles of organic solidarity, in the example of Britain, is structured ideologically to countervailing economic and power relations that recreate or enhance mechanical solidarity in new formations of social organisation. In Durkheim's thesis society manifests in the common consciousness. It is a misleading attempt, however, to connect the individual with society in that it fails to grasp the relationship for all its immanent contradictions, such as in terms of rationalisation, that occur.

Elias (1991: 16) bridges the concepts of individual and society by applying a framework through which in an 'ineradicable interdependence of individual functions, the actions of many separate individuals... must incessantly link together to form long chains of actions if the actions of each individual are to fulfil their purposes.' This is less problematic than Durkheim's account because it fuses together the individual in the singular with the abstract notion of society in the general – through internalisation of fears and anxieties into functioning self-constraints (see later discussion on psychoanalysis) - without devising a schema that, however unintentional, separates the two. Elias's approach has the potential to incorporate a range of complexities that affect and regulate the individual. 'The more differentiated the functional structure of society or a class within it,' he argued, 'the more sharply the psychological configurations of the individual people who grow up in it diverge.' (ibid: 60) In figurations such as classes, bureaucracies etc, these structures impinge upon the individual. However, as with Durkheim, the more diverse these structures the more heterogeneity prevails. Elias explained this with reference to a civilising process. Yet as institutions diversify in their practice and incorporate differentiated forms of identity, it does not necessarily imply that the individual is enjoying, in consequence, a broader range of fulfilments or freedoms. It is entirely possible that while at one level freedoms of one kind increase, at another there is a real sense of them atrophying. How we understand diversification depends on how, potentially, the individual is drawn into processes of homogenisation through the very inclusion that institutions command.

We can begin to elaborate on a controversy centring on the idea of heterogeneity. There are three issues I want to highlight here: one, the substantive meaning of heterogeneity in concrete social relations; two, the net beneficiaries of an apparent diversification of socio-cultural practice, institutionally or otherwise; and three, the potential for ideological challenges to capitalism under circumstances normatively understood in those terms. Critical theorists and (post)structuralists put forward important insights in this area. I discuss these along two theoretical strands.

Beginning with structuralism, I shall draw parallels between Althusser, Foucault's earlier work and Goffman. Then from Bourdieu through to Habermas a connection is made with Baudrillard to complete part one of the analysis. This paves the way for a second theoretical genealogy, loosely connected to Freud, that relates critical theory to poststructuralism via Marcuse, Adorno, Deleuze and Guattari, and Žižek (Lacan). Finally, the two strands are brought together as a coherent framework for interpreting the subject and society.

*(Part One) Subject and Subjectivisation: From Althusser to Habermas*

For Althusser (in Žižek (ed.), 1994: 136) 'the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'.' (Althusser's emphasis) What does he mean by this? That persons already are constituted through authorities that they falsely recognise themselves as freely orientating towards. Or, analogously, an authority commands or *hails* me by calling out a name that by now I already recognise and accept as belonging to me, and so, by turning towards it, I am interpellated. By way of example, we might cite the division of personal characteristics into categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine'. I am hailed by parents, teachers and so on, as characterising the former, and recognise and respond to that call as a fully constituted male. But at which point did I begin to recognise myself in that naming? And what if I *decided* to turn away from the authority or, even, to seek one out for what it proposes I could be. A person may pursue the 'feminine' because it signifies a quality - say 'homosexuality' - that exceeds their self-recognition through a given authority as masculine. That, in other words, one is conscious of a gap between subjective understanding and the authority that subjectivises which, in turn, gives way to a subjective uncertainty: should I turn this way or should I turn that way, do I want to turn any way?

In Foucault, power subsumes the individual through them. So, as television, for example, hails me towards my masculine characteristics, so too does the person, man or woman, sitting next to me on the sofa where I am watching it. That analogous to a (prison) Panopticon, *power-relations* function as 'the curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of a child, the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying and punishing. The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed.' (Foucault, 1997: 202)

In short, people regulate themselves to existing structures (of power) through the complex macro and micro effects of surveillance (technologies). Individuals are conscious of the possibility that at any given time a camera or an eye could be trained upon them, monitoring their every move. In a police state, for example, surveillance is an institutionalised abuse of

power. What Foucault is interested in, however, is the nebulous effect of power relations in everyday interactions between people as illustrative of Bentham's Panopticon: a prison system designed for maximal exposure of the inmate. Every cell is visible from the observation tower in the centre: a design that produces, in the inmates, the ever-present uncertainty of whether or not someone is watching them. Hence, we must be on our guard at all times lest someone is observing us!

It is possible to detect here the structuralist tendencies to Foucault's (1997: 194) argument when he says of the individual that it 'is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; but... also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power... called 'discipline'...' He goes on to say that:

It is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power, it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. (quoted in Gordon, 1988: 98)

As with Althusser there is a problem of how people contest power. Are we to assume they freely give themselves to the power that belabours them? Judith Butler (1997: 94) suggests that in Foucault while the subject is repeatedly constituted in subjection it is through repetition that it is inadvertently enabled by its constant reconstitution. Later, Foucault called for the re-imagining of subjectivity against, what he perceived as a double bind of liberal state subjective individualisation with a totalisation of modern power structures. We can see this in *bio-power*, in which persons are categorised simply as living bodies, or biological life. Politically, physical existence is called into question and for the 'first time in history, the possibilities of the social sciences are made known, and at once it becomes possible both to protect life and to authorise the holocaust.' (Foucault *quoted in* Agamben, 1998: 3) The technologies of *bio-power* give rise to a configuration of the human as a docile body malleable to capitalism but do not, however, exclude the possibility that subjectivity can be recovered through different versions of modernity. This later Foucault relates to the poststructuralist tenet of multiplicity critically evaluated in part two of the discussion.

Continuing the theme of 'subjectivation', I want to discuss the resemblance between Goffman's central thesis and the earlier Foucault.

In *Asylums* Goffman (1961: 168) argued that:

Each moral career, and behind this, each self, occurs within the confines of an institutional system, whether a social establishment such as a mental hospital or a complex of personal and professional relationships. The self, then, can be seen as something that resides in the arrangements prevailing in a social system for its members. The self in this sense is not the property of the person to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connection with the person by himself and those around him. This special kind of institutional arrangement *does not so much support the self as constitute it.*

Goffman's work on asylums mirrors Foucault's on prisons. Both, it seems, have drawn conclusions that are comparable. They are concerned with the regulatory power of the other observing us in a kind of voyeuristic interrogation. While Foucault places emphasis on the powers of surveillance Goffman uses a dramaturgical metaphor. If Foucault's concept of power can be described as more nebulous and discreet, then for Goffman it is as if we are aware of the centrality of our performance given the presence of the audience before us. The problem with both theories is the implicit suggestion that we are somehow *performing* or, in Foucault's case, *only behaving that way through fear of social opprobrium.* An interesting question is how conscious the social agent is of this and whether, or to what extent, the Panopticon and audience have been internalised as a superego of sorts. Should the power (of the other) be removed would the inmate/actor behave any differently or, in other words, is there an authentic self hidden underneath the performance? Central to the issue of power is the question of who wields it and in whose interests it is being wielded. This can be elaborated upon in Bourdieu's work.

For Bourdieu (2003, p. 123), socio-cultural (class) conditions are strategically constituted within the individual's 'habitus' and structured through the mutual relationships of those subjectivities within a given field. Habitus is not a fixed disposition but constantly adapts and amends to ongoing structural changes as a constitutionalised second-nature. Elias (above) makes similar claims in his civilising thesis. Important to Bourdieu (1984: 243) here is the concept of affinity. This refers to the 'spontaneous decoding of one habitus by another' as 'the basis of the immediate affinities which orient social encounters, discouraging socially discordant relationships, encouraging well-matched relationships, without these operations ever having to be formulated other than in the socially innocent language of likes and dislikes.' A parallel can be made with Foucault and the micro-effects of power in everyday social intercourse. Except in Bourdieu, similarly to Goffman, there is a strategic addition that formulates the habitus to these practices or fields. The more competent the agent is in adapting to the symbolic arrangements within a given field the greater the accord or economic/cultural/social capital relative to it. So 'as one moves from the artists to the industrial and commercial employers, volume of economic capital rises and volume of cultural capital

falls' (Bourdieu, 2003: 116). Which, to simplify, is to say that ... capital corresponds to the particular field; so that, as an example, my familiarity with Wagnerian opera achieves a value relative to the interests structuring the social formation: i.e. high amongst 'classical' music lovers, low amongst teenage 'happy house' lovers and significant to the norms governing access to particular sites of socio-economic power; my exclusion, therein, is a form of 'symbolic' violence. Yet while I have agency in accumulating the symbols of ... capital - gaining insights into and knowledge of celebrated philosophical works, say - at the same time I am structuring my 'tastes', and material and ideological outputs, to the qualities the field determines. Hence, we can see how liberal socio-cultural and economic principles come to pervade subjectivity, not through interpellation, as such, rather in how we seek out certain values as they are structured. The problem, however, is that the access that agents have to certain sites through their acquisition of cultural capital, say, cannot neatly be defined. That there is perhaps a levelling out, to some extent, of the capital a person needs to acquire in becoming accepted within different spaces. Put another way, the field, as it were, is becoming ever more inclusive, but the material and power inequalities remain stubbornly the same. Hence, Bourdieu with his emphasis on symbolic capital misses the point that it is the material relations that matter. Comparably to Althusser and Foucault above, there does not seem to be a prospect in Bourdieu for the subject to properly distinguish and appreciate the qualitative differences between different affiliations and make choices accordingly. Nor, it would seem, a consideration of whether this would affect the social field anyhow.

Bourdieu grapples with ideas current to Marxism but could be accused of forming a critique that is not adequate in addressing core issues raised in Marx. As with postmodernism, there is a problematic emphasis on symptoms as constitutive of the very object of inquiry. We can observe a maturation of this logic in the work of Baudrillard who, along with Bourdieu, couches arguments in a way that has some explanatory value for assessing tendencies this modernity gives rise to.

According to Baudrillard, there have been three orders of simulation since the renaissance, the first, the *counterfeit*, is based upon a 'natural law of value'; the second, *production*, on the 'commodity law of value'; and the third, *simulation*, is governed by the code. 'Whereas representation', he argues, 'tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelopes the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum.' (Baudrillard, 2001: 172). Prior to the renaissance 'each sign refers unequivocally to a (particular) situation and a level of status.' This was undesirable, Baudrillard claims, because when such an order 'was composed of ferocious hierarchies; the transparency of signs goes hand in hand with their cruelty.' (Ibid: 139) The sign, then, is bound by representation. Whereas in simulation, it is as if we are all acting out the roles of soap opera characters inspired, through the observations of the writers, from our own soap opera lives. Representation

transforms from being a reflection of reality to having no relation to reality at all. So when Baudrillard claims the universe is not dialectic – it moves to the extremes (a radical antagonism) – he not only separates himself from Enlightenment thinking but all arguments that point to some form of redemption. ‘To the more true than true’, he claims, ‘we will oppose the more false than false. We will not oppose the beautiful and the ugly; we will seek what is more ugly than the ugly: the monstrous. We will not oppose the visible to the hidden; we will seek what is more hidden than the hidden: the secret.’ (ibid: 188)

The self, then, has no authentic basis and, indeed, subjectivity becomes a self-referential circulation of non-meaning. Culture, as such, is a simulacrum, a radical antagonism that contains no truth. So, from a ‘cultural renaissance’ of the British city, that situates the ‘continental café’ as a signifier of... what?, to the various identity postures of a ‘cosmopolitan’ public that tell us... (less than) nothing?, simulacra abound. Only had not this already been observed when Marx (and Engels, 1985, p. 83) famously said of the drive for capitalist appropriation that ‘all that is solid melts into air’? Or, that, in Deleuze and Guattari’s (2003) words, capitalism ‘deterritorialises’ *but* crucially it re-inscribes, or ‘reterritorialises’ (neo-territories) meaning in the form of socio-cultural, political and legal norms. The latter are discussed in more detail later. Here we can tentatively propose that simulacra have performative value for the market by anchoring the subject to an idealisation that has been thoroughly commodified. Or else the subject performs to the simulacrum without prospect of the ontological security of an authentic act. Would this signal a radical antagonism or perhaps an intensification of the same: the power of multinational capital to usurp, occupy and create – commodify – heterogeneous sites of incommensurability as in Jameson’s (1991: 87) critique of ‘late capitalism’.

It is a question of who controls the sign that lends Baudrillard, through his conclusions, its pessimism and, by a subtle reinterpretation, its possible praxis. What is required, if we are to rescue Baudrillard from bleak resignation, is an emphasis on those aspects that are as yet self-referential or can be re-appropriated, as simulated acts, into a dialectical model. We should not overlook the source of Baudrillard’s concern - mass consumption and the media – and our ability to transform them according to standards other than those set in favour of certain interests. The question moves beyond authenticity, or simulation, and to the ability of people to adapt – to transform history - according to principles other than those prevalent now within the free-market capitalist politic. Which brings us to Habermas.

It is not the system per se that Habermas is critical of, rather an instrumental logic, as a feature of bureaucracies, which has entered a sphere of life (the lifeworld) where emotion, spontaneity, personal communication and association might otherwise prevail. He summarises this as follows: ‘capitalist modernisation follows a pattern such that cognitive-instrumental rationality surges beyond the bounds of the economy and the state into other, communicatively

structured areas of life and achieves a dominance there at the expense of moral-political and aesthetic-practical rationality... *a colonisation of the lifeworld*... 'the imperatives of the sub-systems make their way into the lifeworld from outside – like colonial masters coming into tribal society – and forces a process of assimilation upon it.' (Habermas, 1987: 304-5) Habermas provides a notion of the individual in distinction from the automaton – the happy consciousness in Marcuse's say (see below) – in terms of communication and how language is controlled. By way of example, 'networking', the idea of building contacts with others for economic gain rather than out of social and emotional interest, highlights this system encroachment into the lifeworld.

What Habermas seeks is a notion of ego identity that is realised through a '*communicatively shared intersubjectivity*' (see introduction to Habermas, 1981: xxi). The person reflects on an affective and practical level, to extend language to incorporate an intersubjective appraisal of the social world and its place within it. This implies a form of reflection that includes the lifeworld as a rational category, so that we do not assume its orientation any more than we would that of the system. 'Horkheimer and Adorno', he argues, 'failed to recognise the communicative rationality of the lifeworld that had to develop out of the rationalisation of worldviews before there could be any development of formally organised domains of action at all. It is only this communicative rationality, reflected in the self-understanding of modernity, that gives an inner logic – and not merely the impotent rage of nature in revolt – to resistance against the colonisation of the lifeworld by the inner dynamics of autonomous systems.' (ibid: 333) This is also a challenge to Marcuse's (see below) idea of non-repressive sublimation as, clearly, any such action would ultimately end in a non-reflective state. An ideal speech situation – detectible, in part, in existent speech – is the heuristic utopian moment of communication, through which, entirely free from domination (consider Foucault and Bourdieu here), individuals would be equally disposed to speech acts (knowledgeable and articulate) and free to communicate and arrive at conclusions on the basis of the better argument as opposed to authority, coercion and so on. By constructing a communicative rationality through a reflected intersubjectivity, the lifeworld is resistant to the encroachment of system rationality and can endure in a way that informs and enhances the overall social organisation. Simply put, a critical use of language challenges the unquestioned logic of system thinking and provides the means for developing alternative modes of existence that are not predicated simply on ideological constructs. It ceases to be an argument between rationality and irrationality but between different possibilities that germinate from communicative action / ideal speech situations. To that end, Habermas proposes a way forward that neither Horkheimer and Adorno, nor Baudrillard, is able to provide.

Here we can thread the various arguments from part one together as a critique of Habermas. How, given the interpellation of the subject (Althusser), its subjectivation (Foucault),

structuration of the habitus (Bourdieu), and the simulacrum (Baudrillard), does Habermas's communicative theory stand? I would suggest that the principles obtain to a liberal-ethical view of the world and are not practicably formulae for overcoming coercion as therein understood. As Derrida (2001) and others point out, communication encounters the imponderable, or, otherwise, at least the ideological. Perceiving the argument as a critique of capitalism, it is rather muted because, problematically, in order for Habermas's ideas to have currency, a break with the productive relationships governing society may first be required. These points can be developed in consideration of the psyche as a concept connecting a number of important ideas.

*(Part Two) Exposing the Psyche: From Freud to Žižek*

The level of abstraction with which ideas relating to the *unconsciousness* are often discussed complicates a thoroughgoing analysis of psychoanalytical themes. In this section I shall withdraw from commonsense suppositions about the self by selectively with Freud, Marcuse, Adorno, Deleuze and Guattari, and Žižek (Lacan). It does not claim to be a comprehensive study but one that illustrates important theoretical arguments that relate to this analysis.

Freud's central achievement is to have created an entire lexicon for understanding the human mind in much the way Marx developed a conceptual framework for understanding capitalist society. Freud's legacy to sociology is encapsulated in *Civilisation and its Discontents* which, as we shall see, illustrates the usefulness but also exposes some the difficulties with his work

Freud's inquiry centres on a problem we are already familiar with from Durkheim. It can be summarised as follows: 'A great part of the struggles of mankind centres round the single task of finding some expedient (i.e. satisfying) solution between... individual claims and those of the civilised community; it is one of the problems of man's fate whether this solution can be arrived at in some particular form of culture or whether conflict will prove irreconcilable.'

(Freud, 1994: 27) He continues:

The existence of this tendency to aggression which we can detect in ourselves and rightly presume to be present in others is the factor that disturbs our relations with our neighbours and makes it necessary for culture to institute its higher demands. Civilised society is perpetually menaced with disintegration through this primary hostility of men towards one another... Culture has to call up every possible reinforcement in order to erect barriers against aggressive instincts of men and hold their manifestations in check by reaction-formations in men's minds. Hence its system of methods by which mankind is to be driven to identifications and aim-inhibited love relationships; hence the restrictions on sexual life; and hence, too, its ideal command to love one's neighbour as

oneself, which is *really justified by the fact that nothing is so completely at variance with original human nature as this.* (my emphasis) (Freud, 1994: 40)

Freud here identifies the source of conflict in society with individual nature and not, in contradistinction to Marx and others discussed previously, with the cultural, economic or power relations that constitute it. So what Marx identifies as the source of human aggression are the ones that for Freud exist to repress it. He sees the individual as driven by their own ego concerns and not, as could plausibly be argued, communal patterns of sociability. Through this underlying assumption we discover the justification for the brutality that leaders have imposed. Guilt and anxiety turn into qualities that feed into and reinforce the superego; to keep people in check through a system of self-regulation of the kind Elias depicts. So, as the individual is, by nature, aggressive, this quality is internalised and 'sent back where it came from, i.e., directed against the ego... in the form of conscience, [and] exercises the same propensity to harsh aggressiveness against the ego that the ego would have liked to enjoy against others. The tension between the strict super-ego and the subordinate ego we call the *sense of guilt*; it manifests itself as the need for punishment.' (Freud's emphasis. Ibid: 51) In other words, we are condemned to violence whether, preferably, against ourselves or, in conflict with civilisation, against others. Although, to emphasise the degree of faith required to recommend Freud's theory, we may not actually perceive this sense of guilt because it may in fact remain 'to a great extent unconscious' (ibid: 62). In sum, *we are naturally aggressive; it manifests in feelings of guilt in a civilised society* (an increase in guilt leads to an increase in civilisation); *and we may not be conscious of this.* Uneasiness and discontent are discernible forms of guilt that psychoanalysts are trained to observe. They act, like a medium conducting a séance, to reveal that which, to the untrained eye, is invisible.

This view on nature contrasts with Marx (*in* McLellan (ed.), 1990: 82) who regarded humans as essentially sociable and benign though corrupted through alienation: 'productive life', he says, 'is species-life. It is life producing life. The whole character of a species, its generic character, is contained in its manner of vital-activity, and free conscious activity is the species-characteristic of man... Alienated labour reverses the relationship so that, just because he is a conscious being, *man makes his vital activity and essence a mere means to his existence*' (my emphasis). Durkheim (1968: 252), on the other hand, may at first glance appear to have more in common with Freud when he argued that 'man is governed not by a material environment brutally imposed upon him, but by a conscience superior to his own, the superiority of which he feels. Because the greater, better part of his existence transcends the body, he escapes the body's yoke, but is subject to that of society.' But in Durkheim it is through the collective consciousness that the brutality of existence, in terms of physical

survival, is transcended, while anomie is a product of insatiability not aggression. Durkheim did not regard society as a force for repressing our tendency towards destruction, rather as a regulator of excessiveness and as mechanism for engendering togetherness.

In Marx's work, human sociability, in the first instance, is taken as given, it is how the organisation of production affects the species that concerned him. In this sense, similarities are found between Marx and Durkheim in that both, for different reasons, saw the modern epoch as psychologically problematic. The former regarded the division of a labour as consequential on alienation whereas for the latter it is potentially a means for engendering organic solidarity and, eventually, dismantling forms of anomie. Given the assumptions that Freud makes, (which is not to say problems cannot be found in either Marx or Durkheim) is there anything we can take from his view that is useful? Perhaps Vance Packard's (1991: 209) analysis of the advertising industry provides a clue. He questioned the morality of the industry in the practice, for example, 'of encouraging housewives to be non-rational and impulsive in buying the family food... playing on hidden weaknesses and frailties – such as our anxieties, aggressive feelings, dread of non-conformity, and infantile hang-overs – to sell products... or manipulating small children...' The point is that, in recognising the value of Freud's work, the advertising industry has turned human irrationality into a powerful tool for ensuring products are desired and bought in mass quantities. Commerce seems to prove Freud's thesis, or does it? While people may be capable of 'irrationality', or even aggression, it does not mean that such qualities are intrinsic to our nature. Packard's argument could equally lend support to Marx's analysis in that it is not we who are by nature irrational, but the society or the civilisation that constitutes us. Then again, what is irrational about a civilisation that is organised and functions upon such principles? For whom, it should be asked, are these arrangements irrational? Furthermore, how is one to conceptualise the superego in an age of disembeddedness or reflexivity? The interesting question here is the culture that impregnates the superego with values that induce guilt and anxiety of a kind. Let us consider some of these arguments with the aid of Marcuse, who attempts a synthesis of Marx capitalist critique and Freud's emphasis on repression.

Marcuse appraised the logic in Freud's work that civilisation depends on human subjugation. Happiness, he argued, 'must be subordinated to the discipline of work as full-time occupation, to the discipline of monogamic reproduction, to the established system of law and order.' (Marcuse, 1970: 23) It is a conflict, as Marcuse explains, between a pleasure principle and a reality principle. The question at the centre of his thesis, and the one I want to focus on here, is whether there is a possibility of 'a non-repressive civilisation, based on a fundamentally different relation between man and nature, and fundamentally different existential relations?' (ibid: 24) Marcuse explored this question in the light of Marx, when arguing that 'domination and alienation, derived from the prevalent social organisation of labour, [and] determined to a large extent the demands imposed upon the instincts by this reality principle.' (ibid: 111)

Accordingly, the performance principle of Freud's conceptual framework incorporates, in practice, those aspects of the prevalent social organisation as described by Marx, to enforce a repressive organisation of sexuality and destruction instinct. In a similar way to Elias, existing social relations shape the way in which impulses are constrained in the id/ego/superego dynamic. In this instance, the character of economic and social relations - namely capitalism in the current epoch - underlies the individual psyche.

Marcuse contended that by making the institutions of the performance principle obsolete the organisation of the instincts would be brought into obsolescence. 'This would imply the real possibility of a gradual elimination of surplus-repression, whereby an expanding area of destructiveness could be absorbed or neutralised by strengthened libido.' (ibid: 112) The reconciliation of the pleasure and reality principles has parallels, Marcuse argued, in sensuousness and reason. The former of which requires a self-sublimation and the latter a de-sublimation so that these two antagonistic impulses are reconciled. This differs from Freud since for him sensuousness is organised repressively through the repressive structures of reason, whereas in Marcuse 'The Orphic and Narcissistic experience of the world negates that which sustains the world of the performance principle. The opposition between man and nature, subject and object, is overcome. Being is experienced as gratification, which unites man and nature so that the fulfilment of man is at the same time the fulfilment, without violence, of nature.' (ibid: 136) Here also we encounter the principle underlying non-instrumentalised activity, the apotheosis of freedom: whereas 'repressive sublimation prevails and determines the culture, non-repressive sublimation must manifest itself in contradiction to the entire sphere of social usefulness; viewed from this sphere, it is the negation of all accepted productivity and performance.' (ibid: 168) From this position Marcuse reconfigures Marx's notion of alienation when he argued that 'progressive alienation itself increases the potential of freedom: the more external to the individual the necessary labour becomes, the less does it involve him in the realm of necessity.' (ibid: 179) Parallels with Durkheim are obvious here and, indeed, the insatiability that Durkheim concerned himself with is resolved through a shift in emphasis in which the 'inexhaustible instinct towards satisfaction' is turned away from modes of domination to serve its opposite in the eroticisation of 'non-libidinal relations,' which 'transform biological tension and relief into free happiness.' (ibid: 182)

Marcuse, in many ways embraces the logic of a 'do-it-yourself' subjectivity by highlighting the potential that we all have of individual inner transformation. What should be remembered, however, is that Marcuse saw transformation as a means through which to transcend existing social relations and not as a means simply to improve them. The argument here turns away from a dialectical class transformation and poses the subject as a transformative category in itself. This, as we shall see, presupposes that such a reversal, should it occur, actually renders the subject incompatible with the structures Marcuse is clearly critical of. What

if, for example, the free happiness he describes turns into another category for appropriation into capitalist object relations. That, in other words, what is achieved is a more efficient and productive subject (to capitalism) who simultaneously embraces an-otherness and acts, without the collective vocabulary and concomitant social anchoring, to advance their individualistic (libidinous) desires as encountered through the commodity.

For example, Lasch focused on what he saw as the psychological disorders that emanate from the US model of consumer capitalism. Here is a 'narcissist' whose independence as a source for insecurity is overcome 'only by seeing his 'grandiose self' reflected in the attention of others, or by attaching himself to those who radiate celebrity, power and charisma.' (Lasch, 1979:10) The media, accordingly, 'give substance to and thus intensify narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encourage the common man to identify himself with the stars and to hate the 'herd,' and to make it more and more difficult for him to accept the banality of everyday existence.' (ibid: 21) So it is with a sense of boredom and restlessness, fuelled by seductive media images, that the narcissist seeks, through a fascination with itself, some form of validation for their otherwise monotonous existence. This has structural consequences as '(I)nstead of attempting to change the conditions of his work', the tired worker', Lasch contends, 'seeks renewal in brightening his immediate surroundings with new goods and services.' (ibid: 73) Similarly, for Marcuse, the *Happy Consciousness*

reflects the belief that the real is rational, and that the established system, in spite of everything, delivers the goods. The people are led to find in the productive apparatus the effective agent of thought and action to which their personal thought and action can and must be surrendered... Conscience is absolved by reification, by the general necessity of things. (Marcuse, 1968: 79)

Or Adorno, for whom people are not only

falling for the swindle; if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them. They force their eyes shut and voice approval, in a kind of self-loathing, for what is meted out to them, knowing fully the purpose for which it is manufactured. Without admitting it they sense that their lives would be completely intolerable as soon as they no longer cling to satisfactions which are none at all. (Adorno, 2001: 103)

As Lasch (1984: 30) later argued, "the conditions of everyday social intercourse, in societies based on mass production and mass consumption, encourage an unprecedented attention to superficial impressions and images, to the point where the self becomes almost

indistinguishable from its surface.’ Or again Adorno (2000:65) when, in *Minima Moralia*, he said that narcissism, ‘deprived of its libidinal object by the decay of the self, is replaced by the masochistic satisfaction of no longer being a self, and the rising generation guards few of its goods so jealously as its selflessness, its communal and lasting possession.’ Or the early Baudrillard (2001:25) who, in *The System of Objects*, argued that ‘human relations tend to be consumed... (in the double sense of the word: to be “fulfilled,” and to be “annulled”) in and through objects, which become the necessary mediation and, rapidly, the substitutive sign, *the alibi*, of the relation.’ (Baudrillard’s emphasis)

A simple response to these arguments would be to reject them on the basis that they assume a character-type incapable of self-distanciation, one hopelessly immersed in activities that are, by implication, crude and socially destructive. One could almost substitute the names of these recognisable critics of capitalism – Marcuse, Lasch, Adorno – for that of a popular social commentator such as Melanie Phillips despairing in a decline in social values, and discover a similar line of reasoning. The dilemma for these writers is how to confront an apparent impotence in the historical class agent defined by Marx without their work being reduced to an exercise of criticism for the sake of it. Baudrillard, of course, is the most pessimistic of these and attempts no class reconciliation. But it is too simplistic to dismiss either Marcuse or Adorno on similar objections to those often raised against writers such as Althusser and Foucault: because both, as Marcuse above, have attempted to discover a kernel of agency in human subjectivity for achieving - not a deeper embeddedness in bourgeois social mores (conservative critics) – rather a means to confront the underlying dilemmas capitalism poses.

So, in a challenge to a perceived teleology in Marx, Adorno’s negative dialectics (cf. Eagleton in Žižek ed., 1999, p. 201) questions the commensurability between distinct phenomena, say different commodities or between the subject and object (identity), and thus he positions himself against homogenising tendencies in society (between people, things, etc). In a similar vein to Weber’s depiction of an iron cage of bureaucracy, Adorno (2002, p. 155) perceived a moment when we encounter a system ‘covered by an all-comprising net of organisation with no loopholes where the individual could “hide” in the face of the ever-present demands and tests of a society ruled by a hierarchical business set-up.’ Negative dialectics, however, can be seen as an argument for increasing or multiplying subjective orientations as a reversal of a homogenisation process. This resonates with arguments common to poststructuralist thought. In late Foucault, for example, we had the idea of competing modernities. We can also see, in Deleuze and Guattari, the idea of a ‘multiplicity’ of subjective orientations that undermine a fixed ontology.

The language employed in poststructuralist thought is often abstruse, unnecessary, contradictory and confusing, lending the arguments a certain mystery, engendering even prestige in those to have apparently understood them. The popularity of poststructuralism may

partially be accounted for in the very inaccessibility of the writings. Although of course there are substantive points requiring attention not least for the impact they have had on current thinking. I shall draw on some of the ideas here at a conceptual level in order to develop a critique that accounts for them in more concrete terms in my empirical chapters.

Capitalism, according to Deleuze and Guattari, 'deterritorialises' and 'decodes' social relationships only to replace them with 'reterritorialised' (i.e. identity) formations defined through an Oedipal fantasy. In other words, cultural traditions, institutional norms, subjective identities and so on, are emptied out of their substantive features or characteristics (deterritorialised) and re-inscribed and defined through new relationships: ostensibly through the idea of a formative dynamic between the father, mother and child (Oedipal fantasy). We come, therefore, to falsely recognise ourselves through familial relationships already conditioned or 'reterritorialised' by capitalism. In relating this argument to the self-help culture, what is recognised and engaged with as belonging to the self is already inscribed with the values sustaining capitalism. To overcome this dilemma we have to 'transcend' Oedipal by deconstructing familial relations and entering into a 'pre-Oedipal' sense of 'becoming'. Whereas Adorno advocates 'heterogeneity' as a response to the dilemmas posed, Deleuze and Guattari awkwardly call this deconstructivist motion 'schizoanalysis': the 'tirelessly taking apart of the ego and their presuppositions' – desires - to liberate 'prepersonal singularities' from the Oedipal daddy-mummy-me triangulation (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003a: 362). So what they see as presuppositions forming the subjective identity can be split open in a deconstruction of the Freudian Oedipal relationship. This can be developed further.

Deleuze and Guattari have built an entire vocabulary that aims to unsettle and undermine: to follow the trajectory of indeterminacy or *becoming*. What they mean by this is a self that never settles on a point of being or a stable identity position. They saw their work, rather confusingly, as 'transcendental' in that inquiry begins with a genetic pre-subjective or pre-being; a questioning of any assumed position outside experience. They sought to 'transcend' the assumptions through which we recognise being by liberating experiences from interpretations of them. Their work, therefore, is posited as an immanent critique of metaphysical assumptions or is a transcendental (pre-conceptual) empiricism. Concepts themselves enter into 'virtual' relations, a becoming, because they never actually are. So to gauge the scope of this for 'subjectivity', in their book *a thousand plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (2003b: 3) state as their aim to 'render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel and think', to reach a point 'where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I.' So in removing explanation as a device for configuring the self to capitalist relations, they aim to open up the person to a radical fluidity for undermining the desires that subjectivise us to them. Here we can see the 'poststructuralist' aspect to their argument and the connection to late Foucault.

Thus confrontation with a theoretical void of subjectivity releases the person from the Oedipal investments that sustain capitalism by codifying desire as an unresolved familial lack. This is a principal argument in their book *Anti-Oedipus* that, as Patton (2003: 5) describes, 'might be understood as a theoretical relay of practical resistance to the role of psychoanalysis in the repression of potentially revolutionary expressions of desire.' In sum, we are *desiring-machines* that are artificially territorialized or encoded with Oedipus as 'a factitious product of psychic repression.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003a: 115). So the aim of *schizoanalysis* is to 'analyse the specific nature of the libidinal investments in the economic and political spheres, and thereby to show how, in the subject who desires, desire can be made to desire its own repression' (ibid: 105).

Derrida's deconstructivist logic and Baudrillard's interest in the simulacrum bear comparison to Deleuze and Guattari's epistemology. But as Badiou (2000: 43) claims, the *being* that is characterised in Deleuze is a Nietzschean simulacrum of superficiality that appears to 'relieve thought of all pathos concerning the ground.' So if being can only be 'virtual' there is no reason for the self to look for anything that is more essential to it. Hence, 'multiplicity', or the phenomenological equivalents of social diversity, multiculturalism, and so on, restates the obvious – that people are different – but does not address the concrete situation that subjects encounter (Badiou, 2002). Or, as Žižek (2004: 67) argues, 'The moment we pass from the single underlying antagonism to the multitude of antagonisms we endorse the logic of nonantagonistic One-ness'. Both Badiou and Žižek highlight a problem central to poststructuralist/postmodernist thought. That if the subject is not ontologically grounded and is perceived in terms of a multitude of appearances, how do we orientate ourselves socially in order to confront the issues we face. In other words, Deleuze and Guattari lead us to an individualism that is incapable of being organised substantively, say in terms of class, in opposition to capitalism. Here, both the radical antagonism of Adorno's negative dialectics and Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis are insufficient in countering a tendency towards an individualism that reinforces the position of the subject as self-orientating to a market regulated set of exchange values. This argument will be developed empirically in later chapters.

Between these abstruse theoretical positions is a tension that, once situated sociologically with the aid of empirical data, helps conceptualise the relationship between the individual and neo-liberalism. With this in mind, let us return to Žižek.

In the postmodern subject there is seen as a constant splitting up of false and repressive subjectivities that produces, according to Žižek (2000: 373), an 'indefinite plasticity', 'a horrifying void', or an 'uncanny, anxiety-provoking feeling of a loss of one's identity'. We see this in Bauman (1995: 88), for example, who claims that:

In the life-game of postmodern consumers the rules of the game keep changing in the course of playing. The sensible strategy is therefore to keep each game short – so that a sensibly played game of life calls for the splintering of one big all-embracing game with huge stakes into a series of brief and narrow games with small ones. ‘Determination to live one day at a time’, ‘depicting daily life as a succession of minor emergencies’ becomes the guiding principles of all rational conduct... to sever the present from history... To abolish time in any other form but a collection or an arbitrary sequence of present moments; to flatten the flow of time into a *continuous present*.

It is the lack or loss, reflecting Lacanian psychoanalysis, which, according to Žižek, constitutes subjective desire and produces ideological fantasies in the form of antagonisms towards the other. Hence, the rage unleashed against Jewish homes on *Kristallnacht* ‘is an unconscious awareness of the missed revolutionary opportunity’ that could, in other circumstances, have afforded the German people (Žižek, 2002: 23). Critique should, therefore, expose the fantasies permeating the ‘decentred’ subject. What does he mean by ‘decentred’? It is employed in a Lacanian sense to describe how fantasies constitute and organise the self but cannot consciously be experienced. So in the above example of *Kristallnacht*, we may think we know what motivates us but what actually determines our actions is inscrutable. Here, in Lacan’s view, the psychoanalyst can deprive the subject of the regulative power of this fantasy over their (self) experience. It is the gap, or void, between phenomenal self-experience and the inaccessible phenomenon of unconsciousness that empties out the subject or decentres it (Žižek, 2004: 96). Similarly to Deleuze, then, the subject in Žižek is, theoretically at least, ‘nothing’, but is not an effect of desire rather of lack that manifests in symbolic representations or ideological fantasies that needs confronting.

Žižek’s work problematises the praxis in Deleuze’s thesis - and, by extension, advocates of anti-capitalist multiplicity (in terms of a plurality of subject orientations with the same objective) such as Hardt and Negri (2001) - by arguing that the capitalist market is the medium through which the multitude is regulated and, as such, is always already incorporated. For example, in the notion of ‘inclusivity’ there is a censoring and substituting of ‘any notion of a vertical *antagonism* that cuts through the social body’ (2002: 65). Instead we encounter ‘horizontal’ differences of a neutral universal plurality.

To recap, the problem of subjective identification with capitalist exploitation in its various forms, is overcome by Deleuze and Guattari in a constant opening up of the self (its desires) to a pre-Oedipal unsettled (virtual) state of becoming. In Žižek, by uncovering the fantasies that condition subjective identification we can assume our position as class agents in

confrontation with capitalism. We observe, then, similar concerns but different approaches to Adorno, Marcuse, Foucault and others.

There are problems in Žižek's avowed quasi-Marxist anti-capitalism, in that it makes no apparent concession to the productive constellation of political forces arranged against exchange relations. Secondly, that Žižek conducts no empirical work for arriving at his position. Third, his arguments for agency are sketchy at best; he opens himself up to accusations already levelled against Althusser and Foucault about contestation of power (although he has made attempts to clarify this in more recent works (for example, Žižek 2004b). Third, while not in itself a criticism, on his general analysis of society he poses a dilemma not dissimilar to either Adorno or Marcuse that can only properly be addressed dialectically. However, in sum, there is an impressive exploration of the subject in the body of his work, but the unveiling of the contours of fantasy - as with desire in Deleuze and power in Foucault - is posited as *the* epistemological device for transporting critique to its chosen target. In Žižek this opens a lot of often wilfully self-contradicting possibilities. Nevertheless, he does highlight the productive force of psychoanalysis in critically examining the subject in capitalist society and employs his references in ways that has an explanatory value to phenomena discussed in this dissertation.

In the next section the ideas sketched out here will be synthesised with part one to form the theoretical basis of my inquiry.

### *Towards a Theoretical Model*

It is premature to proclaim a solution to the aporias arising from an integration of the ideas discussed thus far. Instead I would like to propose a use for each of the above theories to my inquiry and, in so doing, arrive at a synthesis. An alternative to this approach would be to situate my work in one or another paradigm: to accept, for example, the principle of subjective multiplicity contra artificial inscriptions of desire as a position from which to question each of the arguments encountered. This would impugn my research through a possible hypostasis of that for which there cannot be sufficient data at this stage. Nevertheless, I shall make a number of propositions that underpin my theoretical approach. So, with respect to the title of this chapter, I should like to explore the contours of these from the earlier question of how, and what extent, the person is implicated into social relations that are, by and large, liberalised or disembedded from the hitherto certainties of subject formation.

Let us begin with the startling idea of the subject essentially as non-existent. The impregnation of the subject with value, as such, is determined through the various arrangements of a given society. 'Subjectivisation' occurs to contain the aggressive ego (Freud), to keep people in a state of domination (Foucault), or to inscribe ideological fantasies upon the unbearable void of the Real (Žižek). In Althusser we are interpellated as subjects of authorities that we recognise as representative of ourselves. Or, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, through

the territorialisation of capitalist desire upon the social body we desire our own repression. What connects each theory in parts one and two is a critique of the concrete situation as encountered by the individual subject. Each highlights, in different ways, the potential for the person to become fully implicated in to relationships whose basic structure is essentially oppressive. Only Freud, by accepting the legitimacy of current social arrangements, sees this as subjectively beneficial. The first working proposition, then, is that *the subject is constituted and self-constituting through social relationships that in their structuring favour specific interests.*

Then there is the question of an homogenisation of the subject to a totalising authority. Each warns of the potential for this and, in different ways, structure their arguments to resolve this dilemma of modernity. Here the differences are more sharply defined. I began this chapter with a discussion on Durkheim and Elias; both present important arguments for heterogeneity corresponding to a discursive (hegemonic) liberal-bourgeois social model. This is also apparent in Freud whom Deleuze and Guattari exposed for subjectivising the person to capitalism through a familial Daddy-Mummy-Me construct. Marcuse also transformed Freudian categories through a negation of a negation of free happiness. Žižek, likewise, reconfigured Freud (through Lacan and Hegel), so that psychoanalysis instead of inscribing the capitalist subject, releases them from fantasies that obstruct a revolutionary emptying out of it. Each, from Althusser and Foucault, through to Habermas and Lasch, acknowledge the implications of a capitalist modernity upon the subject and develop arguments to challenge homogenising tendencies. My second working proposition is that *the complexity of subjective forms has to be understood in relation to actually existing and emergent socio-economic structures.*

Here, Habermas proposes a communicative theory that under existing conditions can be adapted to revitalise the *Enlightenment* project. This differs from earlier critical theorists who saw the Enlightenment as giving rise to the very conditions that subject humans to object relations. Or, in Foucault, a biological reductionism of the species. Hence, we discover in Foucault multiple modernities to challenge the singular modernity of bureaucratic rationalisation; negative dialectics in Adorno as a multiplying effect of (non) identity as an uncommodifiable (non) category; in Marcuse, a gradual elimination of surplus repression as a response to the domination of the (rationalised) reality principle; and schizoanalysis in Deleuze and Guattari as a constant deterritorialisation of repressive desire. Herein lies the mode of action in a society in which the historical class of the proletariat ceases to be or presents itself as a plausible *class for itself*. But as Žižek and Badiou have shown, the political consequences of multiplicity is a sterile inclusivity that makes of difference something which it is not: an antagonism within capitalist homogeneity. Moreover, that heterogeneity (difference), as such, is entirely consistent with capitalist appropriation of difference through market regulation. We might describe this stage as a feature of ‘late capitalism’ or ‘neo-liberalism’ when coherent opposition to capitalism dissolves in the singularity of infinite plurality.

So my third working proposition, as adapted from these arguments, is that *subjectivity in contemporary societies is homogenised through its non-antagonistic heterogeneity*.

The fourth working proposition I make as a reference to arguments contained in later chapters: *the empowerment of subjectivities within existing structures of domination is reflective of subjective incorporation into the capitalist (free) market*. There is an implication of a lack of agency here. By the concluding chapter qualifications to this proposition will hopefully be made. As these are all working propositions, it goes without saying that *all previous propositions are subject to re-evaluation*.

It has been my aim in this chapter to describe the controversies surrounding some of the more pertinent theories to this study. I have engaged mainly with ideas that begin with a critique of capitalism inspired, in degrees, by Marx. New interpretations of, and solutions to, the problems identified with capitalism have emerged with a rejection of teleology.

In later chapters there will be additional discussion on some of the arguments raised here, alongside others omitted or insufficiently covered. In the next chapter these ideas will be grounded within the empirical thematics of the study. Before moving on, as an excursus to this chapter, I will add an explanatory note about the use of concepts here.

#### *Excursus: the Use of Concepts*

Throughout this dissertation certain words will be employed to describe phenomena as commonly understood. For example, 'character', 'personality', and 'corporation'. Some explicit definition and clarification of these would be useful before proceeding to the next chapter. Where certain words or phrases have not been qualified they can be interpreted in the sense that they are commonly recognised. So, for example:

##### 1. Personality, character and identity

In attempting a definition of personality, Sennett (1993: 153) offers a useful contrast between that and 'character'. 'Personality', he says, 'varies among people, and is unstable within each person, because appearances have no distance from impulse; they are direct expressions of the 'inner' self. That is, personality is immanent in appearances, in contrast to natural character, which, like nature itself, transcends every appearance in the world.' Personality, it could be said, is a manifest expression of a person's character, a code that transmits a certain mood, humour or attitude to the outside world. Weber distinguishes personality as that which is different from nature: 'The freer the action... i.e. the less it has the character of a natural event, the more the concept of personality comes into play. The essence of personality lies in the constancy of its inner relation to certain ultimate values and life-meanings, which, in the course of action, turn into purposes and are thus translated into teleologically rational action.' (quoted in Rogers

Brubaker, 1984: 95) Here personality bears some relation to Marx's 'species being' in the sense that what defines us as human beings is our ability to transcend nature through rational activity. It is like a code that communicates between our inner selves and the outer world of objects. The problem with both Weber and Marx is an a priori notion of authenticity. We might, for example, refer to Deleuze and Guattari's pre-subjectivity or Žižek's (Lacan's) decentred subject (see above) as invoking the idea that 'personality' is an inscription of various codes. The latter regards personality as a 'partial object' or an 'organ without a body' which resists integration into the bodily whole - the person - not as a 'thing' but through its incommensurability as a libidinally invested supplement. So the personality cannot become reified from an organic whole when it already is a reduction of the person to a partial object (see Žižek, 2004: 175). Nevertheless, Weber's definition serves as a useful benchmark from which to analyse personality in its common usage as that which distinguishes me subjectively. The interesting question is not whether personality, as such, is intrinsic – my early position would be that such notions are unhelpful and misleading – but how 'personality' is constituted and adapted to embody codes commensurate with particular ideologies, say. In which sense it is the fashion by which a partial object manifests itself and signifies the self that concerns this study. Moreover, in my self-recognition as subjectively embodying a certain personality I also, by my own standards, open up the possibility that what I recognise as intrinsic to me is also already objectified. It is through this common understanding of personality as signifying the 'personal' that concepts such as 'reification' are employed.

We can extrapolate from the discussion in this chapter that 'identity' is also problematic: it is a power-relation through which people become cognisant of differences and embrace them, perhaps for security or to articulate an opposition. We encounter relativisation of identity by the creation and recreation of categories each of which can be owned, objectified, and turned into fetishises to condition social intercourse. Stuart Hall describes identities as 'points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us' (Hall and Du Gay (eds.), 1998: 6). In itself, this definition does not account for the processes by which people 'choose' their identities nor whether identities, as such, produce consequences that reinforce certain repressive norms. But it does provide an ambiguity between subjective choice and social structuring that, given the social dimension to all identity formations, must, in the final instance, correspond to social norms of a kind.

Character (as opposed to 'characteristics', which is essentially a figure of speech to explain anything that has differentiated features), is another common word whose meaning is not altogether clear. Gerth and Mills (1954: 22) describe it as 'the relatively stabilised integration of the organism's psychic structure linked with the social roles of the person.' Habitus might be understood as strategically embedded 'character' or distinction that we carry

with us to each situation. Where I refer to character, it is with respect to a more stabilised set of distinctions that, nevertheless, have their origin and are stabilised in social relationships.

In sum, we could say that while identity is how we come to understand ourselves in affinity with others, personality communicates our inner character – as we perceive it – to others. It is feasible, perhaps, that we could change our character (as in Marcuse) – our individual nature as Sennett puts it – yet still be constrained by the restrictions society places on how appropriate our affinities are (whether we can function within the setting (see Bourdieu)). The less embedded the quality of self, the more vulnerable it is as a personal quality the more, arguably, we are freed from externalising constraints. The point here is that character, personality, and identity, retain an affective correspondence to subjectivity as commonly understood.

## 2. Corporation, neo-liberalism and the commodity

The ‘corporation’ is a commonly used noun in this study. The term is used illustratively to represent the type of company that has become dominant in contemporary Britain. As distinct from a local council, say, the corporation is characterised here as a type of organisation at the forefront of changes in employment practice, customer relations, and also in urban landscapes. These are businesses with the power to transform city centres through the visible manifestations of the consumer and leisure boom. They also impact on the way companies in general – including in the public sector – structure their workforces and introduce market principles into their operations through pressures to increase productivity/efficiency for competitive advantage. When referring to a ‘corporate ethic’ or a ‘corporatised personality’ the terms are not intended to be specific to multinational corporations, but to organisations and institutions generally that embody the principles that underlie neo-liberal capitalism (see below). While it is acknowledged that this is a generalisation of the company, it is not problematic because what is considered is the affective way in which individuals identify themselves with ‘employers’ as typically representative of the norms and values associated with employment in a capitalist context. Perhaps this occurs in the person’s reflection on whether they possess the requisite ‘transferable skills’, valid to companies, organisations, and institutions generally. Of significance is whether a person develops the characteristics to be able to transfer between companies/institutions.

Neo-liberalism signifies the deregulation of markets and their incorporation into public spheres as rationalised systems of financial distribution. The net beneficiaries are, to an increasing extent, business corporations (this is discussed further in chapter three). It is the effect that the extension of free-market principles across different areas of social life – the regulation therein of the individual – that is addressed. How individuals evaluate the merit of

their own actions and that of others bears correspondence to economic restructuring and broader social transformations associated with the term neo-liberalism.

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## CHAPTER THREE: THE THEORETICAL CONTOURS OF EMPLOYMENT

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### Introduction

In the previous chapter the theoretical contours of the study were addressed through an abstract discussion on the question of subjectivity. Here I intend to place that in context through concrete examples of changes to the labour market that affect personal adaptation to it. It will mean, given changes in working practice particularly during the past quarter of a century, situating it within the context that best defines, in generality, the conditions of labour in Britain today. Hence, this chapter will cover the following:

- A brief historical overview of structural changes in the organisation of capitalism.
- A discussion on individualism, enterprise and the bureaucracy.
- An analysis of the subject in relation to employment norms.
- A brief consideration of organisational culture.
- Quotations from careers advisers to illustrate my argument.

On the last point, I will be taking examples from careers manuals, company brochures and so on, as a reference point to the discussion. These are not intended as proof, as such, of the phenomena described but to contextualise the arguments through recognisable examples.

I shall begin, then, by summarising structural changes in the organisation of capitalism from 'old' modernity to 'new'.

### *Old Modernity*

It is a truism that the world we inhabit today is different to the one of fifty years ago. Yet it is a world that is also familiar, economically (capitalist mode of production) and politically (liberal-bourgeois). Differences are more apparent at the technological level (intensification of labour exploitation, etc), culturally (as a consequence of globalisation, for example, and the re-imaging of 'class' as a non-economic 'identity'), and organisationally. Modernity, as a term appropriated into 'post'... thinking as a distinct period in contrast to today, can be characterised in a number of ways: ideological battles between 'left' and 'right', Fordist employment structures, authoritative forms of bureaucracy, mass movements based on class, a more state orientated capitalism, and technical and scientific rationality. Polarised and formal patterns of association and identity are often perceived as belonging to a past whose norms impinged (past tense) on

the emotional and psychic development of the individual. Let us explore this argument, then, in relation to rationalisation and bureaucracies as a basis for developing the broader question on employment norms today.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber (1965: 76) argued the following: ‘... it is one of the fundamental characteristics of an individualistic capitalist economy that it is rationalised on the basis of rigorous calculation, directed with foresight and caution toward the economic success which is sought in sharp contrast to the hand-to-mouth existence of the peasant...’ In modernity the bureaucracy had come to be characterised as incorporating the rigorous calculation Weber described through, ideally, the even hand of the bureaucrat. As Merton (1968: 252) argues, the ‘bureaucratic structure exerts a constant pressure upon the official to be “methodical, prudent, disciplined.” If the bureaucracy is to operate successfully, it must attain a degree of reliability of behaviour, an unusual degree of conformity with prescribed patterns of action.’ Du Gay (2000: 3) critically summarises the postmodern view of this modernist institution when he says that, as therein perceived ‘bureaucracy fosters only rational and instrumental human faculties, to the exclusion of an individual’s sexual, emotional, or other substantive dispositions, that it must be seen as a fatally flawed vehicle for the realisation of moral personality.’ However, as Weber suggested, the bureau should be valued for the contribution it makes to society and not judged according to the standards we might otherwise judge the entire individual. The ideal bureaucrat, according to Weber, would be uncontaminated by ‘love, hatred and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements.’ (quoted in Fineman (ed.), 1993: 9). Attempts ‘to establish commandments of identical content’ across ‘life orders’, whether motivated by management or philosophical understanding, was, in actuality, an ‘unworldly’ enterprise (quoted in Du Gay, 2000: 8). It is an important distinction that Habermas (1981: xxxvi) makes when he argues that the rationalisation of the lifeworld, ‘makes possible a systematically induced reification *and* opens up the utopian perspective from which capitalist modernisation has always been faulted for dissolving traditional forms of life without salvaging their communicative substance.’ In other words, the distinct spheres of system and lifeworld possess qualities that are essential to society that, through a re-evaluation of communicative structures, we can establish norms that prevent the encroachment of bureaucratic forms into areas of life where the kind of detachment Weber describes are detrimental.

There is a tendency in sociology of viewing much that is synonymous with modernity - bureaucracies, obedience to authority, rationalisation - as diminished, conceptually useless or destructive to individual subjectivity. Arguments levelled against practices associated with modernity often either exaggerate the problem (it is the bureaucracy that is to blame, rather than the organisation of capital which the bureaucracy is defined by), confuse it with an issue - such as reification - that is inseparable to capitalist appropriation, and often view subsequent

structural changes as potentially beneficial to the health of the individual and society (see Giddens et al, below). The defence of the individual subject against the behemoth of the institution has led to a deeper penetration of market principles into those categories – the individual, emotions, personality – Weber sought to delineate. This is consistent with the inflections of neo-liberal capital as a more inclusive regulatory device. Here is Habermas again: ‘The communicative practice of everyday life is one-sidedly rationalised into a specialised-utilitarian lifestyle; and this media-induced shift to purposeful rational action orientations calls forth the reaction of a hedonism freed from the pressures of rationality.’ (ibid: xxxii) This compares to Lasch (1979: 93) who argued that ‘(I)mprisoned in his self-awareness, modern man longs for the lost innocence of spontaneous feeling. Unable to express emotion without calculating its effects on others, he doubts the authenticity of its expression in others and therefore derives little comfort from audience reactions to his own performance’. Both Habermas and Lasch, in different ways, dichotomise the subject to the role without, as with Weber, providing an adequate account of the incorporation of subjectivity in these practices. That, whereas the *appearance* of the ‘traditional’ bureaucracy is one of subjective disempowerment, in a simulacrum of self-expression, later institutional formations appear empowering to the individual while intensifying the person’s (pro-active) subjectivation to the commodity form. In other words, the problem of the traditional bureaucracy from an organisational perspective is not that it prescribes behaviour norms but that it appears to do so. This is a point that seems to have been missed by those, such as Bauman, advocating a withdrawal from the Weberian bureaucratic ideal (see Du Gay, 2000); which, perhaps inadvertently, lends ideological muster to neo-liberal restructuring but singularly fails in its necessary critique of the capitalist bureaucracy. This argument can be developed with a look at the current situation.

### *New Modernity*

According to Frosh (1991: 195), modernity is not monolithic. ‘Progressive solutions to the crisis of identity recognise this, absorb the reality of contradiction and conflict, and provide kernels of identification and challenge that encourage and support people to face this reality.’ For Bauman (1995: 81), identity can be described as creation in modernity and recycling in postmodernity: ‘how to avoid fixation and keep the options open.’ Bauman highlights the insecurity inherent in contemporary patterns of association, although it will later be argued that it is a point that is potentially overplayed. ‘Old’ and ‘new’ modernities intersect in the assertions of postmodern theory, an eclectic mix of ideas that, in many respects, share little in common. For present purposes, Mestrovic makes a useful summary of these. It is, he says, a combination of...

...neo-conservative ideology, reactionary sentiments, cynicism, a rejection of narrative structure, parody, stylistic promiscuity, pastiche, schizoid culture, excremental culture, a preference for visual images over words, fantasy, a 'post-tourist' search for spectacle, the epistemological equivalence of past and present, end of the Eurocentric perspective, commercialism, nihilism, and a penchant for 'hyper-reality' in which distinctions between real and unreal are no longer valid. Above all, postmodernism is defined as an attack on the 'myth' of modernity, the belief that the progressive liberation of humanity shall occur through science. Postmodernist philosophy disregards historical and social contexts, and mixes contexts freely... At the same time, it caters to nostalgia and images borrowed from the past. (1992: 20)

Postmodernism contains, in other words, a range of ideas that are often contradictory and incompatible within a coherent theoretical position. So it is important, therefore, to separate the ideas contained within the label and apply them discriminately whenever they can be substantiated. In chapter two some of these theories were addressed in relation to subjectivity. We might, crudely, place within this umbrella term late Foucault, Baudrillard, and Deleuze and Guattari, as covered there. Rather than rearticulate these points, let us pick up, briefly, on the cultural dimensions of postmodernity. Jameson (1991: 87) suggests that far from being destroyed by the logic of late-capitalism, the 'autonomous sphere of culture' has instead expanded prodigiously to the point where everything can be said to have 'become 'cultural' in some original and yet unauthorised sense.' The incorporation of pre-capitalist enclaves into a postmodern, global culture, 'is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination' (ibid: 57). Awareness of the culturally dominant within the 'purer stage of capitalism' - of which aesthetic appropriation is a feature - means we avoid a reductionism, he argues, through which critique is lost to a 'spectacle' that Guy Debord (1983: 42) falsely describes as 'the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life.' Postmodern culture is thus understood by Jameson as the attempt by multinational capital to usurp and occupy potential sites of resistance.

Harvey (1989: 174-9) offers a useful account of different conceptualisations on the contemporary phase of capitalism, particularly in relation to politics and economics<sup>1</sup>. His extensive list will not be reproduced here, instead I want to summarise some of the more salient changes from the different sources he cites as follows: increase in corporate power coupled with a decline in state regulation; geographical specialisation in services (increase in service sector in core economies as industrial production shifts to developing countries); flexible and small batch

production; multiple labour tasks; more horizontal labour; and workers' responsibility. To this can be added the shift from permanent employment to contractual labour and 'modernisation' processes generally, which include the creation of internal markets, competitive tendering and so on. Harvey (Ibid: 107) neatly summarises the modernising dynamic of capitalism with reference to Marx: 'Capitalism... is a social system internalising the rules that ensure it will remain a permanently revolutionary and disruptive force in its own world history. If, therefore, 'the only secure thing about modernity is insecurity, ' then it is not hard to see from where that insecurity derives.' The flexibilisation of production, and organisation generally, continue processes by which continuities in the social fabric are transformed to reflect these disruptive principles.

The importance of the relationship between corporate organisation and the role of the (corporately organised) individual within it is underestimated in much contemporary theory. Sennett (1999: 59) attempts to address this by arguing that people are coerced into change through a 'reinvention of bureaucracy, flexible specialisation of production, concentration without centralisation.' He goes on to say that in 'the revolt against routine the appearance of a new freedom is deceptive. Time in institutions and for individuals has been unchained from the iron cage of the past, but subjected to new, top-down controls and surveillance... Flexibility begets disorder, but not freedom from restraint.' Flexibility (also see Hakim, 1990) matters because it alludes to choice (subjectivity) on the one hand – a discourse at the heart of postmodern thinking – and freedom (disembeddedness) on the other and underlined by the temporality of contractual labour and casualisation of work. Gorz (1999: 42) situates this argument within post Fordism: 'By the instability, volatility, flexibility, ephemerality and insubstantiality it produces in all fields, material and immaterial, post-Fordism produces the ideological and cultural conditions required for it to dominate its 'involved' workers.' Fordism, on the other hand, sought to 'discourage enterprise and independent thinking and to make the individual distrust his own judgement, even in matters of taste.' (Lasch, 1984: 29) (see Burrows and Leader, 1996 on the 'Post-Fordist Welfare State') Bureaucracy, however, is not defunct it is transformed. Sennett (Op. Cit: 56) explains this as "concentration without centralisation", which is 'a way of conveying the operation of command in a structure which no longer has the clarity of a pyramid'. So the organisation becomes more cumbersome and the notion of "debureaucratisation" misleading as, according to Sennett, 'domination from the top is both strong and shapeless.'

Lash and Urry (1994), in *Economies of Signs and Space*, emphasise the impact of service work on employees across the workforce (the notion of 'services' is so broad a term as to question what exactly it pertains to (see Allen and du Gay, 1994: 265)). The tenet of their

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<sup>1</sup> See also Wagner, 1994 for a useful summary of post/modernity in relation to self-identity and Taylor-

argument is that services increasingly shape and condition how information and symbols are incorporated and accumulated within post-industrial space. Basso (2003: 23) challenges ideas about post-industrial society (see, for example, Bell, 1974) by showing, as an illustration, that there were three and a half times more people, in absolute terms, employed globally in industry in 1995 than in 1950, during which time the world population doubled. Even in the 'core' economies, such as Britain, industrial production has increased while employment in industry has declined, exposing the lie to the idea we live in a 'service economy' (Ibid.). By specifying a problem to a certain industry or country the relationships central to that development are often overlooked or devalued. For example, in the 'periphery' economies of the so-called third world, 80% of global industrial work is done (Basso, 2003: 23). In view of the impact that 'services' have had on the rest of the workforce, Basso (2003: 61) contends that the industrial principles of Toyotaism (as opposed to Fordism) as a system of 'just-in-time' production (see May, 1999) - which requires from the worker free cooperation in the most effective use of their labour time - has been transposed to 'service work'. A comparison might be made with the 'teamwork' phenomenon that began in industry (see chapter six) and has become a system of self-surveillance in office environments.

Flexibility, then, is an important facet of contemporary employment structures. But what does it mean in practice? Tim Strangleman and Ian Roberts (1999: 54) interviewed workers at a light engineering firm on Tyneside. The following transcripts prove illuminating:

Part of the training involves helping people to 'open up' their mind and get rid of any 'mind sets' which they may have, e.g. 'that's not my job' or 'I'm not paid to do that'. This new approach is not welcomed by all employees, and the percentage of people who could not foresee themselves accepting change and being trained in new concepts of thinking, decided to leave through the 'window of opportunity'.

(Company document)

So (for) people who'd worked for a long time, the company chose to open what they called a 'window of opportunity', it wasn't a redundancy situation as such, because they had to recruit new people to follow in their jobs... about 42 people chose to take the 'window' and that was there for people who could just not accept these changes were going to occur.

(Team leader)

They're the ones you tend to find the trouble with, the older ones. That's not something I could statistically back up, it's just an observation. They're the ones that can remember the good old days, when you built it from start to finish, you worked on your own or with your mate, all of this. They do tend to be the ones you have trouble with because in their way they've lost status, I think that's what the problem is, they've lost status.

(Manager)

These examples provide an insight into what flexibility may mean in practice to a workforce. It illustrates ways in which the contemporary workplace prescribes a culture that subtly relegates, after a fashion, concerns of older employees (also see Pialoux and Beaud in Bourdieu, 2000). Working practices are introduced that demand particular responses from workers who, by and large, are going to respond more favourably when alternative working methods have not been experienced and/or are faint uncertain memories. Let us relate this to the more hopeful language of 'reflexive modernisation'.

According to Giddens (1991: 2) there is an 'emergence of new mechanisms of self-identity which are shaped by – yet also shape – the institutions of modernity. The self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences... individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications.' By 1994 Giddens (Beck et al. 1994: 106) describes a 'post-traditional' society – a global society – of 'infinite space' where 'social bonds have effectively to be *made*, rather than inherited from the past' which is a 'fraught and difficult enterprise, but one also that holds out the promise of great rewards... decentred in terms of *authorities*, but recentred in terms of opportunities and dilemmas, because focused upon new forms of interdependence.' The chance, in other words, to shape history to our own design is made possible as a consequence of processes that might otherwise seem destructive. It is a diagnosis that alludes to an imaginary crossing of a pain threshold so that people can enjoy the benefits of a more open society. Similarly, for Lash, reflexive modernisation involves individual empowerment through an objective re-evaluation of company excesses and the implementation of rules and resources that distinguish the former 'meso-economic' horizontally and vertically structured firm to the new 'networked districts of small, relatively autonomous knowledge-intensive firms.' (Ibid: 112-3) Although new insecurities manifest as unintended consequences, the change, according to Lash, is essentially a positive one in that new, previously unimagined, forms of liberation occur.

In his recent book, *The Brave New World of Work*, Ulrich Beck (2001 (1999): 21) describes a 'Brazilianisation of the West' in which inequalities increase as permanent work is only available to the privileged few and the culture of flexibilisation is endemic. In this scenario, the reflexive modernisation of 'second modernity' is characterised by the 'unintended

and unwanted consequences of its own success'... in which boundaries collapse and social conditions inherent to 'first modernity' are set aside by further modernisation. At this stage the fundamental categories and concepts of first modernity are contested including the idea of a rational solution to the consequences of modernisation. A 'destandardised, fragmented, plural 'underemployment system' characterised by highly flexible, time-intensive and spatially decentralised forms of deregulated paid labour' is symptomatic of a 'risk regime' that 'prevails in every field' and compels a person to choose from a range of unpredictable outcomes (ibid. 70-77). Beck's argument emphasises some of the problems associated with 'reflexive modernisation' and questions some of the optimism often attributed to these developments. But is it appropriate to interpret these developments as new to society or are we seeing a continuation of modernity by which, as production is concentrated in the 'periphery' through cheap labour, workers in the 'core' economies are encouraged to find new ways to 'compete'. There are no 'multiple' modernities, as such, but spatial differences in the modernist project. I return here to Badiou (2002) who claims that difference is what there is, what matters is how we are the same. Arguments are salient for what they show us not for what we already know: in the context of this discussion, it is important to gain perspective on how the changes that occur, as predictable as this argument may seem, are situated within the enduring context of (global) capitalist society. By the same token, cultural individualisation is a refraction of these processes which we shall look at in the next section.

This completes a brief overview of the intersection of 'old' and 'new' modernity. So far we have concentrated mainly on changes in working relations and capitalist appropriation. These can be said to have occurred through structural transformations of the previous twenty years. In the next section some of these arguments are fleshed out through themes integral to this dissertation.

### Defining the Central Themes

If we can pinpoint the axis of inquiry to the thesis it lies somewhere between the 'intersections' described in the previous section, as that between 'enterprise', the 'individual' and 'capitalism'. These vague notions settle upon more specific discourses referred to here and picked up again in later chapters.

#### *Individualisation*

In general terms individualisation refers to a situation in which traditional social anchors and moral authorities have broken down and individuals now define themselves according to new, often self-constructed, principles. It is, in a sense, a continuation of Elias's thesis, a realisation of the consequences of increased interdependencies. For Giddens this manifests itself as the 'do-

it-yourself' reflexive biography (in Beck et al., 1994: 15). Social 'disembeddedness' (Giddens, 1991: 15) releases us from traditional bonds and raises the opportunity for forging new relationships on grounds of reciprocity. It is an argument that chimes well with contemporary notions of choice and self-determination while providing support to Elias's civilisation process. It is such 'glib optimism,' however, that Meštrović (1998: 3) finds problematic when he argues that Giddens 'on the one hand... advocates agency, individual power, and emancipation, but, on the other... advocates... submission to rationally planned and created traditions in the name of democracy.'

Elias (1987: 11) countenances the idea of a 'circular movement between inner and outer controls, a feedback mechanism of a kind', through which people relate to both natural forces and each other in society. In contrast to Giddens, this idea establishes the impact of both internal and external controls as *irreducible* to an understanding of how people reflect upon themselves and take action. When accounting for the dynamic shifts in patterns of internal and external control within the *civilising process*, self-conscious interpretation (of self and society) and behavioural processes may, however, lead to tendencies that reasonably can be seen as 'decivilising' or, even, barbaric. Elias deals with this in *The Germans* (Elias, 1996) when he considers the question of whether 'Things that were once forbidden are now permitted' (ibid: 31). I suggest that his thesis is not sufficient in addressing anomalies or changes in perception or feeling (of civilisation) at one level (*habitus*) – and how acts of barbarity by one state/person against another state/person are legitimised, and gain popular support, by recourse to (contradictory/ethnocentric) notions of civilisation - against the actuality of it (the impact that micro and macro figurations have on people) in local and global contexts. Nor is there a sense of how, given these anomalies – including the perceptions of agents living under conditions *sui generis* – an adequate critique of prevailing structures is possible when - even taking into account Elias's view that people are today more conscious of themselves and social formations - in practice, bodily repression of others is, in the main, justified by those self-conscious agents from and within the specific social arrangements of their society. What changes, in other words, is how repression is justified and the extent to which, more or less, it happens beyond the visible. Questions of involvement and detachment (see Elias, 1987), how a person incorporates irrational (emotional) and rational (cognitive) principles, into ongoing processes of self and social change require, for their relevance as contextual analytical tools, the addition of a more substantive account of ideology, power relations per se, and the historical imperatives – economic and social relations - bound-up within the dynamics of a particular system, than Elias provided.

What Giddens does, within his concept of reflexivity, is to miscalculate, by his logic – in different ways to Elias - how the individual would be exposed to power in a *less* diluted form; that is, without the collective strengths and reference points traditional social anchors may

otherwise have provided. Giddens' says that 'disembedding mechanisms intrude into the heart of self-identity; but they do not 'empty out' the self any more than they simply remove prior supports on which self-identity was based. Rather, they allow the self (in principle) to achieve much greater mastery over the social relations and social contexts reflexively incorporated into the forging of self-identity than was previously possible.' (Giddens, 1991: 148) If we assume that Beck and Giddens are correct in their analyses of society – that indeed these traditional anchors have broken down – we are left with forms of division that may help to invigorate conformity to particular modes of behaviour disseminated by those institutions and authorities that retain the greatest influence over social life. It is a concentration of power within certain organisational spheres that marks a transition over time, concomitant with disembedding mechanisms, that makes Marx's account of tendencies in bourgeois capitalism in *The Communist Manifesto*, both prescient and relevant to contemporary social processes. The advance of the multinational corporation – the influence it has locally and globally - might be a potent example of how the individual is potentially (re-)embedded into social frameworks of a peculiar value-orientation.

David Riesman makes a complete characterological assessment of the individual through three key (historic) stages. He summarises these as tradition-directed, inner-directed, and other-directed. The first, in brief, is a person who barely recognises himself as such (similar to Durkheim's tribal mechanical solidarity), preoccupied as he is with the duties and prescriptions of a tight-knit community. The second, by contrast, has access to capital, greater personal mobility, and lives in a world that is rapidly expanding and changing. He predates the other-directed type who, fully immersed in the contemporary setting, has to contend with mass communications – vicarious appropriation of experience – the collapse of moral traditions and the defining of self through one's peers as opposed to one's elders, family or embedded social norms (compare to Giddens). 'Under these newer patterns', Riesman (1950: 21) argued, 'the peer-group... becomes much more important to the child, while the parents make him feel guilty not so much about violation of inner standards as about failure to be popular or otherwise to manage his relations with these other children.' These patterns, he contends, 'are reinforced and continued... by the mass media: movies, radio, comics, and popular culture media generally.'

However, it is Sennett's (1993: 5) assertion that we are moving towards an *inner-directed* individual that I want to consider. '(C)onfusion has arisen', he argues, 'between public and intimate life; people are working out in terms of personal feelings public matters which properly can be dealt with only through codes of impersonal meaning.' 'Destructive *Gemeinschaft*', he continues, is the 'growth of a common personality created in the public sphere, and sustainable through acts of fantasy... thinking of themselves still as part of a group, perceiving social life "in terms of personality states and personal symbols"'. (ibid: 223) So, in

other words, public life has created a kind of personality whose loyalties to a specific group belie the tenuous link between that person and their adopted sociality: it is the *affect* of inner-directedness without the potential benefits that go with an inner-directed characterisation that produces a corrosive, and misleading, form of *Gemeinschaft* with the phoniness of intimacy supplanting the bureaucratic as an arbiter of power. This bears comparison to Habermas's colonisation thesis in which intimate relations become impregnated with the rationalised system. Points of reference between individuals alter and the system (re)asserts itself through the interchange of bureaucratic structures and personal intimacy; the one comes to resemble the other. This argument can be developed via a brief discursive detour into enterprise culture.

### *Enterprise Culture*

On Sellbank staff reports there always used to be... a section 'personality', they used to mark you for 'personality'... I always had been personality plus. At Drawslay Street branch I used to organise the Christmas Party, organise the football team, and I think it was felt I had the personality to manage.

*Bank employee (from Halford et al. 1997: 162)*

The idea of an 'enterprise culture' in Britain can be traced, in its contemporary manifestation, to Thatcherism and an emphasis on entrepreneurialism, the incorporation of flexible processes of accumulation and a shift away from collective socio-economic frameworks on to the efforts of individuals to acquire the social and cultural goods of the age (see, for example, Heelas and Morris (eds.), 1992: 2; Abercrombie and Warde, 1992). People become the constellation of differentiated and competing points of tension that coalesce into a shared embodiment of values intrinsic to enterprise (universalised competing subjects). These are inscribed, according to Du Gay (1992: 625), 'into a variety of mechanisms, such as application forms, recruitment 'auditions', and communication groups, through which senior management in enterprising companies seek to delineate, normalise and instrumentalise the conduct of persons in order to achieve the ends they postulate as desirable.' On the notion of free competition, Marx argued that this 'kind of individual liberty is... the most complete suppression of all individual liberty and total subjugation of individuality to social conditions which take the form of material forces...' (quoted in McLellan (ed.), 1990: 372) There is not, so to speak, an interplay between complete personalities, when it is the identifiable characteristics - categories or subdivisions - of the self that are open to competition in which employers are de facto arbiters of success. There is a hermeneutic function to the technologies Du Gay refers to for apprising the person of the value of *the person* to employers.

Whereas the 'enterprise culture' and the 'enterprising personality' describe an individual in relation to a neo-liberal socio-economic polity, my contention is that the inculcation of technologies on the self (see Rose, 1990 and 1996) and the vocabulary by which individuals, arguably, come to reflect upon their selves have superseded their immediate economic relation and are transformed into a reflexive dynamic, albeit regulated by market value, yet understood as its own signifier. Ideologically, or in affect, 'Culture' becomes self-referentially independent from the economic sphere while, concretely, or in effect, the constellation here described masks or ameliorates the exploitative dimensions of, in this example, employment. Let us summarise this argument by introducing, as discussion aids, two new concepts 'personality culture' and 'reflexive exploitation', the latter of which returns us to the economic dimension of culture.

The field we are exploring - such as job advertisements, careers advice and practice, CVs and job applications - is historically specific and has become an indispensable source of knowledge to people. It is specific in the *extent* to which an enterprising self-governance (cf. Gordon in Burchell et al, eds., 1991) or reification of personality, as a means for subjective competitive advantage, is promoted as an employment norm today. It is indispensable for appreciating the marketable value of the 'self' to employers for career success. As Nikolas Rose (1996: 154) says, the 'enterprising self will make an enterprise of its life, seek to maximise its own human capital, project itself a future, and seek to shape itself in order to become that which it wishes to be.' Employers and interested agencies promote a neo-liberal organisational form of competitive self-evaluation that refracts enterprise as a project of personal fulfilment: so that persons freely configure and market themselves 'as enterprising subjects' through an interpretation of the values associated with enterprise as those embodying social values per se. A person might, for example, reject the idea of itself as a 'teampayer', in opposition to the norms governing employment practice, but recognise the value of being a teampayer (as appropriated and (re)signified by employers) as contemporaneous to a society that the company merely reflects. In other words, human conduct has been *detrterritorialised* (see Deleuze and Guattari) and inscribed with the values of (business) enterprise. So, adapting Alain Badiou's (2002) dissection of contemporary ethics, one may oppose, in principle, fidelity to a 'good sense of humour' (as prescribed by employers or in popular magazines etc) or 'democracy' (as in the liberal form) *because* they are simulacra of universal truths inscribed with the interests of a certain class etc. Here I employ a placeholder phrase, 'personality culture', to disentangle a problematic 1980s connotation with business in the phrase 'enterprise culture', and to emphasise the following: a normative situation whereby the person incorporates into a reflexive self-evaluation, values associated with enterprise generally - or neo-liberal capitalism - as underpinning personal development; or a commodification of personality to employment norms as signalling human nature, as such. Additionally, the notion 'reflexive exploitation' (discussed

in more detail in later chapters) is postulated as a counterpoint to Giddens (1991: 52) when he describes reflexivity as '*the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography.*' This relates Giddens' concept of reflexivity to the extraction of value apropos of capital as marketable commodities peculiar to a contemporary 'flexibilised' (cf. Harvey, 1989) labour market. In other words, we reflect upon the value of characteristics etc ((un)knowingly) in relation to the norms governing (i.e.) employment practice.

So, with reference to Bourdieu, the *personality culture* is akin to a dominant *field* as a conduit through which a person's *habitus* is increasingly attuned. The implications of this argument are developed throughout this study as a core theme.

So, to give a concrete example, I return to Basso (2003: 39) again. That unlike *Taylorism*, which posited work as onerous but necessary, *Toyotism* wrings 'out of the workforce a real, 'sincere' cooperation with company management, while snatching not only their muscular and mental energy but also their soul.' This can be elaborated through additional discussion on the bureaucrat.

### *Emotional Detachment and the Bureaucracy*

Let us recall, *tout court*, the bureaucratic ideal of a distinction between the ethical demands of the role and the emotional faculties of the person. Enterprise culture transforms this precarious relation by, as Basso illustrates with his Toyota example, subsuming a person's emotional reserves more fully into the working role. So instead of reinforcing subjective distancing as an ethical prerequisite to bureaucratic even-handedness, critique of the bureaucracy centres on those faculties such as emotion that are seen as excluded from the role, as if this signifies a neutralisation of emotion and ipso facto dehumanisation. But instead of engendering a more emotionally responsive form of governance, the 'excluded' psycho-social characteristics enter into an 'inclusive' commodified relation. Here my humanitarian passion to promote employment access to a normatively recognised 'minority' identity equals my enthusiasm to promote recruitment methods that extract ever more value from those potential employees. Such a subjective investment in the working role forecloses critique of it. In Marcuse's (1970) terms, the objectification of necessary labour is internalised as representative of the subject itself (reality principle).

Here Du Gay (2000), by characterising contemporary enterprise in terms of emotional arbitrariness underestimates the significance of the personality culture in absorbing subjectivity to an organisational mode. Emotional detachment is not sacrificed rather it is included as an expression of the rationalised organisation (see Mestrovic, 1997). What is left out, as it were, are the plural life orders as delineations of the person in comparison to the bureaucracy. So, in other words, the 'postmodern' (managerial-style) bureau advances upon its modernist equivalent by further reconfiguring subjectivity to its practice. Du Gay is correct to point out the

sophistry in ideas – particularly in Bauman – that conflate the bureaucracy with some of the worst excesses of modernity. As Du Gay (2000: 44) claims with reference to Weber, the concrete direction of bureaucratisation is not explained without analysing in each historical case the factors that give rise to it. However, by this token our own liberal-ethical assumptions must also be scrutinised as well as the bureaucratic arrangements that have served them historically. In the concrete reality of 20<sup>th</sup> century work, the bureaucrat is subjected to long hours of service for the maintenance of social and economic norms that produce poverty, violence and alienation. Du Gay's defence of a Weberian ethic would be strengthened if applied to an alternative historical context / working structures. Otherwise, the argument remains flawed. Hence we can say, therefore, that Bauman's critique coincides with changes in organisational demands as a discourse that conforms to a neo-liberal inclusive model of a bureaucracy. Du Gay's thesis can be transposed here, so that it is not a critique of a form of bureaucracy, as such, but the commodity relations that engender it (neo-liberalism). However, by focusing his argument on the organisational structure and not the relations that condition it his praise of the modernist bureaucracy is unsupportable because it is only as good as the system that produces it.

As an illustration of the working time dilemma, it is worth noting that there has been no effective reduction in the amount of working time in the most powerful economies since World War II (Basso, 2003). Moreover, more working time per hour is being extracted from the workforce now than in previous decades. As a consequence of flexibilisation, the hours a person works also tends to be more irregular. This is not, as Marx argued, a phenomenon new to some enterprising schism but a tendency of capitalism:

To appropriate labour during all the 24 hours of the day is... the inherent tendency of capitalist production. But as it is physically impossible to exploit the same individual labour-power constantly during the night as well as the day, to overcome this physical hindrance, an alternation becomes necessary between the workpeople whose powers are exhausted by day and those who are used up by night.

(Marx, quoted in Basso, 2003: 70)

Du Gay's contribution is a timely critique of the peculiar association of bureaucracy to all that stifles human vitality, but still he underplays the rationalisation of emotion in the enterprising form or how, for example, capitalist labour structures occlude the Weberian ideal. The postulated benefits of enterprise to the subject as embodying the liberal-ethical dimensions of power – 'freedom', 'choice', 'equality' and so on – are here drawn into their subjective negation. This argument relates to discourses on anxiety and risk.

*Anxiety and Risk*

Letter to advice column:

I keep missing out on promotions to management positions despite the fact I have a reputation for being hard-working and reliable. What am I doing wrong?

*HD, marketing assistant, Leicester*

Reply:

It's a mistake to expect promotion in return for doing your job well or being conscientious...

Being described as a hard worker can sometimes mean you're seen as struggling to keep up, poor at delegating or not enough of a team player. It's not so much hard work that gets rewarded, but working hard at whatever is seen as significant by those in charge...

Those who appear to have meteoric career progression are quick to pick up on the management's latest pet project and become involved in it. They are even faster at distancing themselves from work that's losing its prestige...

Because advancement is their main priority, they put effort into areas that are sure to win approval in a way that gets noticed. Managers promote in their own image, so study the behaviour, appearance and language of those who've leapfrogged you. How do they fit in with the organisation, and what could you do to be more like that?

If the idea of modelling yourself on the management fills you with horror, that could be the reason you're not getting the chance to join them.

*Irene Krechowiecka (advice columnist)*

(The Guardian, 05/10/02: r4)

The above quotation from a careers advice column suggests, as Bauman (1995: 89) argues, that standing still, as here defined, is not an option. The words call for a constant upgrading of the self and, logically, its invalidation as an authentic category. As Marx said in the *German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1989: 54) of a non-alienated society, I 'do one thing today and another tomorrow'. Or in Adorno's negative dialectics and Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis the idea is comparable: a dismantling of subjective presuppositions, except here it involves a re-inscription of the principles these writers oppose. Such a re-embedding, however, has its concomitant risks: that, unlike Žižek's concern about indefinite plasticity of the postmodern subject, we centre upon and recognise ourselves by that which is alien or only partial. The enterprising subject is caught in a double bind: as long as they adapt they sustain

socially and economically a-version of the self that, under conditions of employment uncertainty, enjoins the risk of eventual dis-parity with both employer demands/competitive field and a secure ontology. Sennett (1999: 91) again: “Never getting anywhere,” “always at square one,” confronted by seemingly meaningless success or the impossibility of reward for effort: in all these emotional states... the person in these toils becomes prisoner of the present, fixated on its dilemmas.’ Let us develop this with the concept of ‘risk’.

To Giddens (1991: 28), ‘living in the ‘risk society’ means living with a calculative attitude to the open possibilities of action, positive and negative, with which, as individuals and globally, we are confronted in a continuous way in our contemporary social existence.’ It is this self-confrontation with a ‘risk society’ that informs Beck’s (et al, 1994: 5) critique as he understands modern social processes and how they produce consequences we all must individually assess in order to function. An anxiety-ridden weighing-up of the situation calculates the importance of taking steps to improve our position. As Sennett (1999, 88) argues, the point about risk is not so much the question of strategies, game plans, costs and benefits, it is more fundamentally about the ‘fear of failing to act.’ (also see Lash et al, 1996 and Lupton (ed), 1999) Risks are, however, structured to a range of possibilities within a certain context. For the purposes of this inquiry, we can understand this in relation to careers.

### *The Enduring Career*

People’s perception of work is changing. It is no longer something done purely for money, but increasingly being seen as a way of finding a new and stimulating direction which will lead to personal fulfilment. (Foster, 1998: 1)

There is no job-for-life these days... Security does not come from working over 40 years for one company. It comes from knowing yourself and your skills and building on your experience.

Carl Gilleard, Association of Graduate Recruiters, chief executive (*The Guardian*, 16/09/00:r5)

Weber recalls the ascetism of the Protestant movement and the making of money in excess to material need. As an ethic, this filters through into modern working relations as a principle to ensure conformity to the rules of capitalism and fuel the system’s further development. Because of the economic necessity of conforming and the peculiar nature of the system, labour must ‘be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling.’ (Weber, 1968: 62) Rose (1998: 160) points out that today it is presupposed that the worker will seek out meaning and fulfilment in their job as a site in which they can ‘represent, construct, and confirm their identity’. Yet it is

the flexibility implied here that prefigures a notion of an unquestioning acceptance of the role (see Gabriel, 2003 on the idea that work is experienced today as a 'glass cage'). We cannot reasonably accept a working role, given changes in the workplace towards 'flexibilised' regimes, without first asking the question: 'what do I have to gain from all this?' The 'career' understood as a lifelong vocation, or vertical motion towards the apex of a hierarchy, transposes its definition to include those jobs of a short-term, insecure nature, that in combination constitute a coherent Curriculum Vitae (see chapter six) and *employability* (competitive advantage over other people). In that sense a career defines the activity of both the 'professional' and those engaged in work of a normatively recognised more routine nature. As Gordon suggests: 'The idea of one's life as the enterprise of oneself implies that there is at least a sense in which [even when unemployed] one remains always continuously employed in (at least) that one enterprise, and that it is part of the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one's own human capital' (entire section quoted in Rose: 161). Grey (1994: 495) contends that, 'It is only because of the many difficulties, challenges and hazards of the 'career ladder' that career is capable of being sustained as a meaningful project of the self.' However, Mckinlay's (2002: 597) definition of a career as a 'permanent nexus between the individual and organisation' is reasserted in contemporary society as the nexus between the individual and *organisations* with the compulsive aspect of that relation obscured in how a person self-reflexively appreciates the benefits in having a good career. This brings us to organisational culture.

### ***Organisational Culture***

According to Parker (2000: 25) 'most of the managerial culturalist literature is less about what organisations are like than about what they should be like... Most of this work is hence an amalgam of mythologizing and mystification couched in marketable quasi-anthropological language.' (2000: 25) Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* (1995(1982)) epitomises the motivational thinking of this strand of organisational theory. They highlight US companies that, in their view, are 'success stories' due to their 'people orientated' programmes (see section on company profiles in chapter five). Companies that connect with people by blurring the distinction between boss and worker, and turn the whole organisation into a community of friends, is supposed to increase loyalty, productivity and a sense of well being amongst their employees (see Knights and Willmott, 1999; Roberts, 1984; Thrift in Hay and Marsh, 2000). The style and jargon is upbeat and not dissimilar to self-help books with their emphasis on 'pro-activity', 'can do' and personal 'empowerment' (see later chapters). 'Treat people as adults', Peters and Waterman say, 'Treat them as partners; treat them with dignity; treat them with respect. Treat *them* – not capital spending and automation – as the primary source of

productivity gains... There was hardly a more pervasive theme in the excellent companies than *respect for the individual.*' (ibid: 234)

William Ouchi, author of *Theory Z* (1981), couched his argument in a more sociological language by claiming that organisations could tackle the problems of anomie and normlessness by improving well-being in employees through a sense of security. The following quotation from that book is illustrated in Parker:

In a market each individual is in effect asked to pursue selfish interests. Because the market mechanism will exactly measure the contribution of each person to the common good, each person can be compensated exactly for personal contributions. If one chooses not to contribute anything, then one is not compensated and equality is achieved.

In a clan, each individual is also effectively told to do just what that person wants. In this case, however, the socialisation of all to a common goal is so complete and the capacity of the system to measure the subtleties of contributions over the long run is so exact that individuals will naturally seek to do that which is in the common good. Thus the monk, the marine, or the Japanese auto worker who appears to have arrived at such a selfless state is, in fact, achieving selfish ends quite thoroughly. Both of these governance mechanisms realise human potential and maximise human freedom because they do not constrain behaviour.

Only the bureaucratic mechanism explicitly says to individuals, 'Do not do what you want, do what we tell you because we pay you for it.' The bureaucratic mechanism alone produces alienation, anomie and a lowered sense of autonomy. (Op. Cit: 14)

The idea of *reflexive exploitation*, touched upon earlier, utilises the market mechanism as evaluation of *personal* contribution as a *depersonalisation* of the individual. Significantly, while these ideals, above, do not, given the nature of employment – i.e. flexibilisation – compare favourably to workplace regimes nor present a convincing argument for the success of certain companies, they inform the ideology that simulates these effects upon a workforce keen to apply such techniques to improve competitive advantage over others. Organisational differences abound. For example, according to Ritzer (see ibid: 24; Ritzer, 1993), *McDonald's* fast-food chain can be interpreted as a Taylorist organisation in which procedures are laid down in a manual and the individual rationalised formally to the organisation. Other companies will employ different organisational methods that appear to counter the formal rationality of the bureaucrat. In whichever way the individual company is organised the personality culture helps

standardise access to work generally through subtle shifts in human subjectivity. The personality is regulated, therefore, not by the specific requirements of a given company/institution - as flexibilisation introduces a temporality to employment via contractual labour and ongoing assessments of the position – but in the general ideology that permeates employment. A long-term employment strategy depends upon this. It is why a more detailed analysis of organisational literature – the specifics of each company - and different management techniques is superfluous to a debate that focuses on broader considerations.

Applying a Foucauldian analysis to the enterprise logic, Nikolas Rose (Heelas and Morris (eds.), 1992: 146) argues that enterprise is given ‘a ‘technological’ form by experts of organisational life, (by) engineering human relations through architecture, timetabling, supervisory systems, payment schemes, curricula... to achieve economy, efficiency, excellence and competitiveness.’ Because there are tangible advantages to an individual that adapts to company requirements – renewed contracts, employability, etc - formalisation is transcended if only through an *impression* of autonomy and the *idea* that change is freely incorporated as a project of self, not as a personal infringement.

### *Summary*

In this chapter I have taken the reader through a discussion that centres on working structures, including (post)modernity, individualisation, enterprise culture, the bureaucracy and career. I have explored organisational practices such as flexibilisation and drawn upon a literature that situates the individual within a competitive employment context. The phrase ‘personality culture’ has been introduced as a more satisfactory alternative to ‘enterprise culture’ as signifying an embeddedness or *territorialisation* of enterprise norms into categories of human reflexivity. I have touched upon a connecting argument, ‘reflexive exploitation’, to posit ‘reflexivity’, as such, within the context of an exploitative labour market that requires, from the individual, a cognisance and promotion of the value of their personalities to employers. These arguments are given empirical substance in later chapters when I evaluate the content of newspaper situations vacant columns and schoolchildren’s records of achievement.

In combination, chapters two and three, the theoretical ‘contours’ of subjectivity and employment begin to define the field of inquiry. We are concerned here with the way human subjectivity parallels changes in society through an empirical evaluation of the person in relation to employment. So far, these chapters together have made use of a range of theories. I engage aspects of Marx’s labour theory of value and an understanding of the capitalist mode of production as a dialectical critique of tendencies in capitalist accumulation and how this refracts socially. Du Gay clarifies points about the Weberian bureaucracy and, therefore, changes in working practice. Adorno reinforces some of the bleaker concerns of Weber in his cultural critique which adapts to an understanding of enterprising norms as further example of the

rationalisation of everyday life. Althusser's analysis contains none of the concessions that Giddens makes about two-way process between agent and structure. Extrapolating, we can suggest that, in Althusser, enterprise norms represent an interpellation of the subject by, for example, the corporation. The former would attempt to show how the subject is able to negotiate this relationship. Goffman's dramaturgical approach reveals how the positioning of different agents, say the employer and employee at the simplest level, is enacted in terms of their differentiated roles. In Foucault the enterprising subject makes use of technologies to subjectivise itself to the power relations that flow through social encounters. Bourdieu presents us with the idea of a strategic assimilation of these socio-cultural and economic flows as they occur in each field: recruitment norms perhaps, or in flexibilised working structures. The simulacrum, as a concept adapted to Baudrillard's work, highlights the inauthenticity of the subject in simulated free-floating signs. We might say, for example, the notion of personality, as signifying an intrinsic quality comes to represent nothing at all: it is a simulation of a simulation. But here we return to Deleuze and Guattari by claiming that personality, as such, is re-inscribed or reterritorialised as a signifier of business through which desire is channelled. But the enterprising self is caught in a self-delusional fantasy that shelters it from the unbearable void of the real, as Žižek might claim. The solution? To expose the ideological fantasies of the decentred subject. Or in Marcuse, to externalise necessarily labour: to resublimiate the pleasure principle and desublimiate the reality principle. Or in Adorno: to combat homogeneity with identity confounding heterogeneity. Or in Habermas: to reinvigorate the Enlightenment through rationalised communicative action. How do we conceptualise the subject at this particular juncture, then, when, seemingly, traditional social anchors or forms of subjectification have broken down?

Firstly, we need to be cautious when claiming that changes, as described in chapter three, represent a substantive break with modernity. It is more appropriate to evaluate these changes as belonging to a process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation as intrinsic to a free-market modernist dynamic.

Secondly, on homogenisation: the antithesis – heterogeneity - is misleadingly postulated as the ineluctable condition of contemporary living as apparent in the corporate (enterprise) endorsement of multiplicity (inclusivity). We should be clear that, in contradistinction to Žižek and Badiou, the principle of multiplicity or the multitude (Hardt and Negri, 2001), or even negative dialectics, is not realised in this hypostatised example. In relation to a 'personality culture', diversity turns into a free-market principle inasmuch as it is predicated on, or enjoined with, values homologous to a particular definition of the subject. In other words, heterogeneity is incorporated as a simulacrum of the imputed meaning of the term. Accordingly, as with Žižek and Badiou, the notion of multiplicity, or negative dialectics, must be seen as a principle that contains within its praxis no guarantee against incorporation into the values embodying the

capitalist free-market; that, we must assume, without a dialectical class critique connecting the various elements of the multitude, the tendency is towards commodification of the vitality of the social – disparate subjectivities – as re-vitalisation of capitalist exchange relations.

Thirdly, the subject itself: Taking into account the complex interdependencies that Elias refers to it is indisputable that people are different. This, in itself, tells us little about the complexion of contemporary social relations when in all human societies subjective variation is a feature. The interesting question is how, and through which processes, do we come to be the same. My work explores these processes (employment) and their inscription into the person (subjectivity) as a dynamic that takes account of different ideas on how this happens. Because it is similarities that concern me, the concept of subjectivisation, as described in Althusser and Foucault, makes a useful starting point that can be qualified through later critiques and contextualised in the example of employment, for arriving at some sort of synthesis. In Chapter Four I introduce situations vacant columns as a documentary source for exploring this discourse.

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## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY IN CONTEXT: SITUATIONS VACANT COLUMNS

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### Introduction

In the previous two chapters a theoretical position was set out from an understanding of subjectivity and employment. In this chapter we begin by explicating a methodological position as a foundation to my empirical work on newspaper situations vacant columns and subsequent inter-relational analyses. This chapter, then, sets out to achieve the following:

- To discuss epistemological issues pertaining to the inquiry.
- To introduce the overall methodology for empirical sections.
- To relate methodology specifically to this chapter on situations vacant columns.
- To outline alternative methodological approaches and possible avenues for further inquiry.
- To present the overall findings of my situations vacant columns study.

### Methodological Overview

We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material processes. (Marx and Engels, 1989 (1846): 47)

Marx's famous quotation from the German Ideology serves as a useful starting point for summing up the character of sociological inquiry. What separates sociological research from metaphysics is that reflections and observations are subject to scrutiny by empirical tests. It is important to show that an hypothesis is more than a product of one person's delusion and has actual implications, significance, for others. An empirical study should reveal something of the validity and extent of what is being suggested. If my thoughts are phantasmal it is important to demonstrate in which ways they are connected to real-life processes and, therefore, in the mind and manifestations of other people. Hence, how I come to be constituted or subjectivised in relation to others has implications in concrete reality.

I am interested in the processes and manifestations of human behaviour/interaction, alongside the perceptions of individuals manifest in the material processes of everyday life.

Elias (1994) employs this understanding in *The Civilising Process* through a painstaking study of manners books. Here, the same logic is applied in my study of newspaper situations vacant columns (SVCs): they connect with real-life historical processes which, in turn, has implications in how the individual relates to and organises themselves in society. Bourdieu (1993: 10) makes clear in his study of different cultural texts, that the object of analysis is not the arrival at its own explanation, rather it is to understand the social relations that make that text possible. SVCs serve as a template for adding contextual dimensions to an argument. It is to bring the words found in advertisements alive by deconstructing their meaning with the aid of secondary literature and comparable documents. Catherine Casey (1995), for example, who studied the effects of changes in management techniques on employees, indirectly provides clues for how the language in SVCs might be applied to workers in practice. My own work will connect the data from SVCs with illustrative examples of careers advice and, later, Records of Achievement (ROAs) to demonstrate the extent to which people today apply the words found in SVCs in an everyday understanding of the self vis-à-vis employment. Although advertisements, in themselves, do not show us how people think, they do, in the case of job advertisements, point to the kind of characteristics that employers recognise – and candidates should promote – as integral to the job.

Let us explore some epistemological issues before setting out a research strategy.

### *Epistemological Considerations*

Berger and Luckmann (1967: 15) summarise the sociology of knowledge as an ‘*analysis of the social construction of reality*.’ This is important in transcending theoretical postulations that underestimate or discount how people view reality in everyday life. It is how a collective understanding of various criteria has come about that makes the phantasmal an important, i.e. unavoidable, part of social inquiry. If ideology, as Mannheim (1952) declares, infiltrates the mind of all human subjects, then how I understand reality is, in itself, contingent. Nevertheless, what I study becomes relevant to others through an intersubjective knowledge or shared understanding. Social theory, if it is to succeed as an account of society, must relate to others. The problem here is when the thing that is described appears counter-intuitive or alien to individual conception. This can be overcome by developing a scheme – categories, methods - for relating the particulars of the argument to tangible social processes in which a method can help demonstrate the validity of a claim. It might involve, as Elias contends, interpreting a significant event that has immediate consequences from a long-term historical perspective. Such a method ‘opens the way towards a greater detachment from the wishes and fears of the moment, and thus from time-bound fantasies. It increases the chance of a more fact-orientated diagnosis.’ (Elias, 1987 (1983): xv) Bourdieu argues that to mitigate the ‘double bind’ of the sociologist – applying the instruments of their profession in a matter-of-fact way to the object of

their study (substituting the naïve doxa of commonsense for the naïve doxa of scholarly commonsense), a person would combine ‘an advanced mastery of scientific culture and a certain revolt against it, or distance from, that culture... that pushes them not to “buy it” at its face value’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 5). Sayer (2000 (1984): 49) asserts that: ‘*Although social phenomena cannot exist independently of actors or subjects, they usually do exist independently of the particular individual who is studying them.*’ It is the ‘thought objects’, or concepts employed for interpreting the world, that are also open to scrutiny (see also Bhaskar, 1989 and Collier, 1994). One useful technique for overcoming a situated bias to the subject matter is to construct a method through which material outside of the researcher’s historical context can be analysed. This is not always possible, but if achieved it allows for the study of processes beyond my immediate capacity to understand them. More importantly, it might reveal patterns that are otherwise inaccessible for explaining such and such an outcome. In this respect, the object of inquiry might be viewed in the context of an historical *process* and reveal to the observer a decline or an advance in what had initially been considered. By the same token, any study – historical or comparative - requires a level of detachment if personal feelings etc are not to distort what is actually there to be observed.

So apart from contextualising the *social construction of reality* today – i.e. to uncover the mechanisms that shape it - the features of that ‘reality’, how it manifests in the contemporary setting and its possible function to that setting, should also be revealed. Chris Rojek and Brian Turner describe a *decorative sociology*, characterised in cultural studies by an absence of historical and comparative research, and the politicisation of the researcher with their subject matter. This contrasts with Elias’s involvement and detachment approach and, relatedly, as Rojek and Turner (2000: 643) note, Sennett’s insistence on connecting the personal, in his work, to the wider examples of political economy without resorting to deterministic value-judgements. Here, Weber’s idea of value-neutrality as a mediation between abstract empiricism, say, on one hand, and speculative accounts of social phenomena, on the other – value-distanciation and value-affirmation – serves as an important epistemological model (Shils and Finch (eds.), 1949). In practice, however, the sociologist cannot gain sufficient distance from the object of inquiry to mediate in a value-neutral way. It is appropriate to acknowledge the colourations of the practitioners’ approach and, to an extent, openly reflect upon these for their valid contribution to discourse. My subject matter – the impact of observable social processes on individual agents – cannot be sufficiently disentangled from my personal experience for me to be certain of complete detachment (see Garfinkel, 1967 and Pollner, 1991 for an ethnomethodologist perspective on such dilemmas). Instead, it is hoped that sufficient data is provided, alongside sociological analysis, to substantiate my hypothesis sufficiently enough for it to constitute a credible and relevant account of, what I consider, social trends that are by now broadly established as reality.

### *Constructing a Research Strategy*

My research consists of three interconnected elements. The first is a study of newspaper situations vacant columns outlined in this chapter in which words describing *personality* are catalogued and counted, alongside the amount of times CVs and ‘teams’ (chapter six) are requested by advertisers. The second comprises a selection of information including self-help books; internet careers advice; literature given to careers advisors and careers advice for public consumption (*inter-dispersed throughout*). The third element to my research is an analysis of Records of Achievement that have been completed by forty-nine schoolchildren at the ages of fifteen and sixteen (chapters seven and eight).

These three parts to my inquiry connect in ways that inform and broaden the scope of each, as an ongoing generative theory. Wallace’s *wheel of science* comes to mind here. In his model ‘Theories are framed in abstract terms and are concerned with the identification and explanation of regularities. Specific hypotheses are derived from these theories and state where and when regularities should be found. These hypotheses are tested through observations of various kinds. Observations inform generalisations.’ (Pawson and Tilley, 2000: 84) The theory is then adapted, where necessary, to the new set of generalisations to improve and advance the initial hypothesis. Chapter by chapter below, this process unfolds. The choice of each research element is determined by the need to generate a three-dimensional perspective on the relevant issues.

The study of SVCs involves a statistical and analytical account of a lexicon of the self in employment. This provides a framework for testing out and analysing the contextual significance of statistical findings with the aid of contemporary career-related literature – including data on CVs - and complemented by an historical analysis of self-improvement books. This, in turn, sets the context in which young people today are being equipped in schools for the employment market through a comprehensive autobiography, known as *Records of Achievement*.

It is not my aim to use a triangulated approach as such, which is acknowledged for its inherent problems (see Blaikie, 2000: 266-70), but rather to apply what could loosely be described as a multimethod analysis. This is in the sense that each research element will engage a particular methodology. However, a limited *Between-Method Triangulation* (see Denzin, 1970: 274) is used for studying documentary sources, employing both qualitative interpretation of data and quantitative statistical evidence in the case of SVCs. As Scott (1990: 32) argues, ‘frequency’ is not the same as ‘significance’, and it is necessary for researchers to justify, in each case, *why* a frequency measure of significance is appropriate... The content analyst must engage in an act of qualitative synthesis when attempting to summarise the overall meaning of

the text and its impact on a reader.' The three research strands can be summarised as they evolve from this chapter:

- Job advertisements in newspaper situations vacant columns (SVCs).  
Historical statistical and interpretative analysis over a hundred year period.
- Statistical and interpretive analysis of CVs and teams.
  
- Secondary literature.
- Career guidelines.
- Career advice from internet career sites.
- Personal discussions from internet career sites/forums.
- Brief historical analysis of 'self-help' books.
  
- Personal statements from teenagers' Record of Achievements.  
Qualitative analysis and minor reference to statistical frequency.

#### *How will Chosen Sources Constitute Evidence?*

For each strand of inquiry there are limitations upon what can be discovered. Situations vacant columns, for example, tell us nothing about why the employment culture changes or how it affects individuals, but data could show how language changes over time and to what extent references to personality, in conjunction with other data, are potentially put into effect by individuals. It is possible to indicate the point and speed at which new terminology and personality criteria come into popular usage. A *personality culture* (see glossary), as such, can be demonstrated according to the commonality of personality requests in job advertisements and their significance for individuals with reference to additional information presented.

Furthermore, the terms used in these advertisements and the frequency of their use tell us something of the values and attitudes that are being promoted. A picture emerges of a personality-type that is most apposite to the contemporary workplace/employability. This is evaluated by employment sector and historical period, so that it is possible, with reference to secondary literature, to construct an idea of changes in the individual over time and the specific characteristics of the person today.

Elizabeth Jagger (1998) employed a similar approach to this when researching dating advertisements in national newspapers. She coded 'lifestyle interests', for example, and 'personality attributes' according to whether they were 'masculine' or 'feminine'. Her study, however, was for a four week period and, therefore, had limited historical use. Similarly, Adorno (2002) studied astrology columns from the Los Angeles times over a short period of

time. His content analysis described the way astrology columns serve as a device that reflects a person's concern about themselves in their world through subtle psychological tricks that perpetuate ideology. The data facilitated a critical evaluation of seemingly benign cultural practices. The value of this work is recognised to sociology even as, it should be said, the source was of limited empirical use. My analysis of content in situations vacant columns improves upon Adorno's on astrology columns because of, (a), the historical and quantifiable sweep of the analysis and, (b), the argument refers more specifically to the data and whatever can be gleaned in connection to the wider sources mentioned.

Additional analysis of career-related information, CVs and so on, advance consideration of how processes observed at the level of work affect the individual in a broader capacity. In the sequence of my study it is possible to check for a convergence between my data, the work of other sociologists (through different generations), and the contemporary careers material I discuss. The significance of these cross-data findings can be weighed against alternative analyses, counter hypotheses, and, specifically, my own initial theory.

The more data gathered from these different sources the more credible the theoretical argument. However, data on job advertisements only provide a top down perspective on the personality culture. Further data is necessary in order to understand whether this information is absorbed into popular consciousness. To this end autobiographical data, such as that found in Records of Achievement, career forums and secondary source interviews from different sociological analyses, help in this endeavour.

By bringing together and relating different viewpoints on what is essentially the same area of analysis, a top-down and (illustrative) bottom-up perspective is achieved. Rather than arguing points that cannot possibly be observed in a single research, a multi-method analysis covers the issues pertinent to the social construction of personality, identity and self.

### *What are the Practical Considerations in my General Approach?*

A research based on several separate sources of evidence can only be undertaken when it is clear that necessary resources will be available. Each strand of research is therefore weighed against the amount of time it takes to generate relevant data. To that end, every inclusion is justified on these grounds, so that self-improvement manuals, for example, form only a minor part of the research because a systematic study would likely detract from more precise sources of data. The outcome of these measures is to prioritise research around the key themes to be explored in a way that is practicable and manageable. It is also primarily why the decision was taken not to conduct interviews (see below).

Questions of accessibility also condition what research is undertaken. There were no problems gaining access to SVCs over time. Whereas, on the other hand, historical data, such as application forms, for example, interview procedures and, especially, human resource materials

proved difficult to access in any way that would be useful for analysis. Instead, it was felt that the information I had, SVCs for historical data and ROAs and careers advice elsewhere, were sufficient in constructing a coherent analysis. Had I included contemporary human resource literature in this study, of which there is much, it would neither add any dimension to my work nor would it aid an understanding of processes that are not already discussed. In addition, the constraints on space, the particular emphasis of this dissertation, meant that the utility of the data had to be considered against that which was already being used.

### *What Other Approaches could have Worked?*

Within the corpus of Marx's work and Weber's, to Elias – *The Civilising Process* – and Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd*, there are no interviews. Elias (1994), as has been noted, used manners books whereas Riesman (1950) in places referred to interviews, but quoted from other sources. Recent examples might include Beck's (1992) *Risk Society*, Giddens' (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity* and Meštrović's (1997) *Postemotional Society*. Each of these writers, in different ways, influence my work and construct elaborate interpretations of social processes without recourse to interviews. Clearly there is precedent.

On the other hand, there already are significant interview studies of people's attitudes at work in relation to themes I do cover. Examples of these include, for example, Casey (1995) on corporate employees; Strangleman and Roberts (1999) on workplace identity; Grey (1994) on careers; Garrahan and Stewart (1992) on teamworking. Were I to conduct interviews, with the limited resources available, I would likely be reproducing data already available in other people's work. It was decided at the planning stage that, given the character of the project – the cross-cultural references that are made in respect to the workforce/employability – interviews would impede rather than enable the work I set out to do. Themes that are here developed would be eliminated or narrowed to the specifics of the interview findings. Which is not to say that interviews are not useful, rather they are more relevant, perhaps, when a more targeted approach, on the basis of findings here, is possible.

Furthermore, an extensive research into the sociology of work and unemployment could add a further contextual dimension to my argument and situate the study specifically within the processes of subjectivity occurring in the workplace. This was omitted here on the grounds that it would deviate from a broad theoretical exposition deriving from different sources of data on the general value (in relation to self-reflection) attached to the idea of having access to a job. Later, however, some of my arguments could be fleshed out with specific reference to work conducted on workplace relations in this field.

Other possible avenues for research that were considered include documentary analyses of additional historical material. This is a question of accessibility and practicability. I conducted research on popular magazines over a fifty-year period (at the British Library

London) to analyse the connection between popular culture and employment culture. A decision was made to omit these findings on the grounds that their inclusion would necessitate a substantial amount of work on leisure/popular culture, for which there was not enough space. Instead I developed tentative connections between employment and leisure within this study.

Additional material was gathered, including personal diary entries from Leeds University archives, completed application forms for a post at a particular company, and company brochures/material accompanying job vacancies at different companies. Human resource departments were also contacted for guidelines on interviews etc. These were generally omitted on grounds that they failed to add anything significant to what was ultimately included. Personal diaries tended toward a certain social class and were very difficult to obtain after a certain point in time; the completed application forms did not reveal anything more than had been shown in less personal data; company brochures, etc, were more systematically addressed from information in *The Guardian* newspaper supplement 'rise'. Access to older company material and personal CVs proved difficult. Human resource literature, again, was not sufficient to warrant inclusion except in the few examples peppered throughout this study.

A more systematic research of self-help books was intended. Due to the substantial number of these books that have been printed in the last two to three decades, and the difficulty in making general statistical comparisons upon the content of them given the time it would take to access (from the British Library if printed in the UK) a sufficient number, I chose, instead, to include an illustrative reference to them by focusing on some of the most popular books in recent years and highlighting common themes.

Historical research, then, into material that might substantiate some of the contemporary findings beyond the connections already made, is always an advantage. This, however, is a difficult undertaking without data that can be systematically compared. Advertisements in SVCs are an ideal resource in this sense. There are not many examples like these either available or realistically accessible. An analysis of literary fiction, cinema and cultural content generally, might provide clues about changes in the individual. Such a project is beyond the scope of this research.

### *Avenues for Further Inquiry*

Additional research could be conducted in the following areas:

#### (1) Historical Analysis

This might include examples given in the above section to further substantiate findings. It would require access to resources of a relatively consistent nature.

#### (2) Socio-Cultural Analysis

The question of the extent and significance of what is studied would benefit from research on contemporary patterns of association outside the context of employment. It would be useful to explore issues of consumption and leisure and their relation to my findings. I want to observe, in particular, material that questions the extent to which changes in the workplace/organisation of capitalism influence and reflect individual behaviour outside of work. It would also be useful to explore the relationship between, what appears as, disparate social/identity formations and anti-social behaviour/psychosis and neurosis with concepts developed in my argument.

### (3) Comparative Analysis of Practices and Outcomes in Different Countries/Regions.

Research already conducted in this dissertation could be undertaken in other countries. The purpose of this would be to identify temporal and spatial differences in adaptation so that specific patterns in countries can be observed. For example, if it can be shown that developments are more advanced in the US than Germany, reasons for this can be explored. It might be to do with the form of capitalism in each country, cultural differences, or the specific practices of companies and how that manifests in individual consciousness, for example.

### (4) Qualitative Analysis of the Individual.

With the benefit of a coherent framework for analysis that this dissertation provides, it becomes possible to do targeted interviews (group sessions, etc) to reveal the significance of key concepts that have emerged. Rather than follow the pattern of existing material on interviews, as in the aforementioned examples, qualitative tests can show not only the ways people access work, but how various strategies – self-marketing techniques – are incorporated into lifestyle and thinking – self-reflection – beyond what is shown here.

While the findings could be substantiated in the above ways, research within anthropological and economic fields could aid contextualisation of my work. As an example, anthropologically it would be interesting to observe reflexive processes, say, within different cultures/peoples so that a more thoroughgoing critique of contemporary patterns described here can be made. Economically, it would be useful to examine the details of macro and micro economic strategies within given areas and how these relate to unfolding social processes. Principally, I would like to analyse and compare societal norms and values across differentiated economic and cultural spaces so that questions about our own society – notions of alienation, anxiety, fulfilment, dignity and so on – can be examined from different cultural vantage points. The study here serves as a basis from which the question of the contemporary character can be explored in such ways.

*The Limitations of Research and the Space for Alternative Interpretations*

My research is limited to what can reasonably be shown through the methods employed and the data used. This does not preclude the possibility for developing frameworks for understanding broader social processes and individual behaviour, but means that claims cannot be made to the effect that  $X + Y = Z$  when discussing the specifics of how people consume the material being studied. That is not my aim. What can be shown, with reasonably accuracy, is the type of qualities companies/institutions tend to demand - their historical significance - and how the individual, in visible ways, incorporates this information into lifestyle and reflexive processes. The extent to which my hypothesis is, in practice, contested in everyday situations – by groups and individuals - or through strategies not apparent from my findings and observations, is not clearly apparent. As my study unfolds qualifications are made and the speculations, in this regard, underlined.

Research on variables such as age, gender and profession might reveal subtle differences in how people approach the dilemmas I pose. It is not thought that the general findings are affected by these issues, given my emphasis (see discussion in chapters two and three), except where stated. Future research that targets particular categories of individual through interviews, say, might help to further clarify this.

Certain orthodoxies in sociology are challenged and arguments are presented to question new ideas, reintegrate old ones and, in places, reinforce current thinking. This work belongs to a discourse on the kind of society and individual to emerge in recent years. As such, the themes and concepts are there to be challenged with data that contradicts my findings and through a dissection of the ideas contained within. This study is part of a process which is never complete. Alternative explanations to the ones I give are undoubtedly possible. As Borges said, 'The concept of the "definitive text" corresponds only to religion or exhaustion.' (quoted in Wood, 2003: 171) They might include a consideration of the themes, commodification of personality, for example, as benign and complementary to individual personal development. It could also be argued that what I consider today as specific to our times is, in fact, a situation consistent through history. Both of these arguments are challenged in later chapters and throughout attempts are made to highlight potential inconsistencies and incorporate or deconstruct them within the overall hypothesis.

In summary, the data on situations vacant columns works in relation to other material – empirical and theoretical – distributed throughout this dissertation. It serves to highlight long-term processes in employer character requirements and, with reference to statistical data, underpins a content analysis of the words themselves. Before detailing the findings, some additional background to the study on situations vacant columns is required.

The Rise of Personality in Situations Vacant Columns

**POTENTIAL CANDIDATE**

**TELEPHONE SALES EXECUTIVE**

**Enthusiastic! Persuasive!  
Committed! Hard Worker!  
Self Motivated! High Achiever!  
Creative and Dynamic!**

Basic PC skills and GCSE or O' level standard  
in English and Maths

Experience of face to face and/or  
telephone sales

GSQ, excellent communicator, well motivated,  
minded individuals and begin a new career  
with the North East's leading newspaper  
publisher and information provider.

ARMACY  
All time experienced  
**DISPENSER**

We're  
but if you  
earing  
st Cutler  
dedicat  
commi  
certain  
As St O  
es prot  
family life  
training  
Family  
and son  
provide  
House  
small  
All you  
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Look at  
OF  
JUL  
Apply  
to the  
11 Moor  
Newcast

# Are you our ideal advert?

In return for your dedication and commitment we offer an excellent salary package, 5 weeks holiday, Staff Discounts, Trinity Mirror Sharesave Scheme and an ongoing training programme to ensure you succeed.

## What are you waiting for?

Please forward your up to date CV and covering letter including salary details and tell us why we should consider you to:

**Jane Hudson, Human Resources Officer,  
Newcastle Chronicle and Journal Limited Groat  
Market, Newcastle, NE1 1ED**

Email: [jane.hudson@ncjmedia.co.uk](mailto:jane.hudson@ncjmedia.co.uk)



**NEWCASTLE CHRONICLE  
& JOURNAL LTD**

A Trinity Mirror business



(Newcastle Evening Chronicle, 27/05/03: 23)

In chapter three I introduced the terms 'personality culture', in relation to 'enterprise', and 'reflexive exploitation' as a commodified 'reflexivity'. Here the discourses that these arguments centre upon are placed in empirical context through a study of situations vacant columns (SVCs). In concluding methodological concerns I will first address some of the specifics of the actual study I conducted, before revealing the data itself. We can then begin to interpret the findings (chapter five) and connect them to these earlier arguments in chapters two and three.

In the 1950s Vance Packard wrote about how the advertising industry manipulates individual desire. Technologies to understand the human psyche in respect of products could also be used to control individuals in the workplace. He illustrated a case in which the Armco Steel Corporation was able to reduce by up to five percent the number of 'undesirable or borderline personality' traits by auditing employees' personalities upon application for promotion (Packard, 1981: 169). By now there are a number of methods through which the personality is screened and those traits that are undesirable isolated. Individuals versed in the styles of presentation and cognisant of what makes a good 'and' bad 'personal' profile and CV

embrace assessment technologies. These indicators of value are found in job advertisements telling us how many requests of a certain characteristic employers make, which 'type' of employer makes them, and how this changes over time. Awareness of employment orthodoxy steers reflexive attempts at self-improvement towards the interests of employers/business enterprise in attempt to acquire work. Behaviour is arguably regulated and updated – made efficient – to business requirements. Here we learn which qualities are the ones most likely to win success through (vicarious) experience of failure and knowledge of 'successful' personality types in order to display/incorporate these into behavioural standards commensurate with the company.

Here, I look for historical evidence in these newspaper situation vacant columns to explain the specific character that has emerged/extended through structures affecting and channelling personality/behaviour.

It is contentious to suggest that personality is being appropriated – transformed – at work. After all, a person's personality is the very thing that makes them individual and work, to many, is an unfortunate necessity and not at all reflective of a person's values. It is not so much the specifics of a single employer that illustrates my argument, rather the impact that a broad and indivisible (from everyday life) phenomenon has on general personal development. The phrase *personality culture* refers to this indivisibility. We can speculate that younger people without ideals to shore up subjectivities in contrast to the ones employers promote are prone, arguably, to uncritical acceptance of a personality ideal as defined in employment. Regardless, it is not clear that the qualities employers request are any different from the ones a person ordinarily expects from their friends and associates. In due course I shall explain the difference here, or why, in principle, demands by employers on individual personality should be subject to critical evaluation. In a vocabulary of everyday life in which career progress, interpersonal and transferable skills, personal profiles, and CVs are often taken for granted, this study becomes the equivalent of putting an everyday object in an art gallery so that we might view it with a different gaze. It is to this end that I now turn to situations vacant columns.

### *Background to and Presentation of Data from Situations Vacant Columns*

Situations vacant columns (SVCs) are not an obvious choice of data when looking for evidence of intensification of demands on personality by employers. Yet, providing the appropriate source is used, they offer an unambiguous and possibly unique glimpse into the historical use of personality language in the employment market. In a single newspaper series it is possible to discover a century of job advertisements structured in such a way that a system of measurement is made possible. This allows for an analysis into the degree that personality is a specified job request at any given time and also a definitive account of what, in employment terms, it



implications for subjectivisation and self-reflexivity in general. Later evidence explores this argument.

As to the origin of the language (the second point), the issue is how far employers have crafted a normative understanding of the words or, to a significant extent, are reflecting broader social developments. There are various pointers that suggest a range of factors at play. 'Employers' do not construct these words so much as influence the meaning of them. Advertisements allow us to evaluate the values promoted by 'employers' in a way that connects the particular (employer) with the universal (employers). Regarding the genesis of the terms, this is discussed in due course (see Rose, 1990 and 1996).

On point three, it is not clear what personality actually means to the employer. To take the Oxford English Dictionary definition of personality as 'The quality, character, or fact of being a person as distinct from a thing' is to accept a literal meaning that takes no account of either the social construction of 'personality' nor the discrepancy between a normative understanding of the word and how people engage it. In singling out personality as a 'must have' quality – something to be acquired and rationalised into individual employment strategies – the OED definition is turned on its head. A similar argument pertains to a whole raft of traits from having a 'GSOH' (good sense of humour) to being 'fun' or 'dynamic'. Job advertisements do not give us a clear definition of the words used. The meaning is normative in the first instance, but to appreciate their significance empirically one needs to look beyond commonsense definitions and evaluate the words with the aid of other employment sources, such as careers advice, company statements and so forth. Here I also use a critical method, similar to Adorno in *The Stars Down to Earth* (2002) on astrology columns, to extract from words their immanent ideological content, or hidden meaning, as alternative explanations to a commonsense interpretation. For example, 'networker' suggests a number of qualities: good 'communicator', 'sociable', good 'connections'. Each of these derivatives is also ambiguous. But a way to examine the differences between 'networker' and '*networker*' is through context, application and effect (affect). At the most elementary level we all, it could be said, 'network', just as we are all, unless socially dysfunctional, 'teampayers' in a certain sense. So the requirement to be a 'networker' or a 'teampayer' is the requirement, up to a point, to engage the human faculty of social interaction. In deconstructing 'networker' we can, for example, simply divide the word into its constituent parts 'net' and 'worker'. The latter, in a capitalist society is caught within an exchange relation - the selling of labour power – constitutive of class. A net-'worker', then, utilises the faculty of social interaction, in the *context* of employment, as an exchange relation whose value is recognised in the employer request for a 'networker'. In *application*, it is specific to the instrumental requirements of the employer: i.e. in 'facilitating' added value (profit or, for example, in public institutions using market-style organisation methods for 'quantifiable' 'service' 'improvements'). In terms of *effect*, we can

speculate that the signification of the word ‘networker’, or ‘teamplyer’ as a more pervasive example, is emptied out of its everyday meaning – useful social interaction (networker) or cooperation towards a given end (teamplyer) – as it is transformed *de facto* into an instrumentalised commodity relation. Further to this, we can tentatively inquire into the implications of application (the *effect*) upon human reflexivity and subjectivity per se (or how it is *affected* by the person). Now let us consider the fourth point.

This regards advertisements lacking requests for personality. It does not pose the kind of problems to my data as one might initially suspect. It is evident that I cannot know for certain that if there are no advertisements wanting personality in the entire 1930s that, therefore, there was no pressure on individuals consciously to market their personalities. By the same token, I cannot rule out that because 50% of advertisements make such requests in 1994 and only 20% in 1984 that personality was in any less demand earlier. But, through empirical rigour I hope to show that it is most unlikely and, where there are clues to an earlier marketing of personality, I will try to explain them. The essential difference between the 1930s, say, and the 1990s, is the level of saturation of a ‘personality culture’ across what, in many respects, are now de-differentiated industries in the sense companies are, broadly speaking, increasingly run (with qualifications (see chapter three)) according to the same management principles (see Thrift in Hay and Marsh (eds.), 2000). The advertisements reflect the state of the employment setting and the information received by potential job candidates. The greater the number of requests the more likely an individual is aware of the need to demonstrate personal characteristics. Should an advertisement request a university degree, for example, it is unlikely that a candidate would consider applying for the job without one. The statistical data shows that personality (as reflexively understood) *is* a core request in the latter stages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with no comparable evidence of this at the beginning of that period. Furthermore, as we delve into associated information from our time – careers advice for example – the pattern is more transparent and it becomes possible, with the aid of other studies, to claim with reasonable certainty that situations vacant column (SVC) data definitely reveal the rise of personality requests and the institutionalisation of what I term a personality culture.

With these concerns tentatively addressed we shall move the discussion forward and begin by looking at some of the methodological issues encountered when compiling this data.

Starting with the basics: this study centres upon job advertisements extracted from the *Yorkshire Post*, a local newspaper for the Leeds and surrounding area. It is a newspaper synonymous with the region and is part, one could say, of the communal fabric, and has been so for over one hundred years. What is more, throughout its duration it has carried a(n) SVC that is long recognised as a major, if not the major, source for job information in the area.

The region the newspaper covers now exceeds some two million inhabitants and, more importantly, employs people in a diverse range of industries. Leeds, in particular, is the hub of

the region, centring on textiles during the industrial revolution and transforming itself into a prosperous financial and consumer locale in recent times. Throughout its recent history – the period my study covers – there have been jobs advertised in management, services, sales, accountancy and so on. There is not a period of any noticeable dearth in advertisements for a particular sector, excluding those, such as computers, that have only materialised in recent years. The advertisements are therefore likely to be typical of those potentially found across Britain. A reading of foreign newspapers (see below) may reveal differences in the timescale of change, for example the points at which personality terms become a common feature, but the general patterns and interpretations are likely to be unaffected where evidence of this can be shown. With these and the above considerations in mind, the Yorkshire Post is ideally suited as a focus for a regional study (with implications farther a field).

And I will here emphasise that all of my data, whether SVCs or otherwise, refer specifically to this country unless stated otherwise. So the arguments I make are based on observations here in the UK although parallels can be made with findings of other studies in different parts of Britain and elsewhere. Nevertheless, the implications are generalisable (although not empirically demonstrated) to Western Europe, the United States and other parts of the world where organisational similarities exist. With the aid of my theoretical framework – our global interrelatedness - the nature of corporate – transnational – power, and consequences of a globalising media, culture, economy and society, it is possible to speculate on how some of my findings might be significant elsewhere.

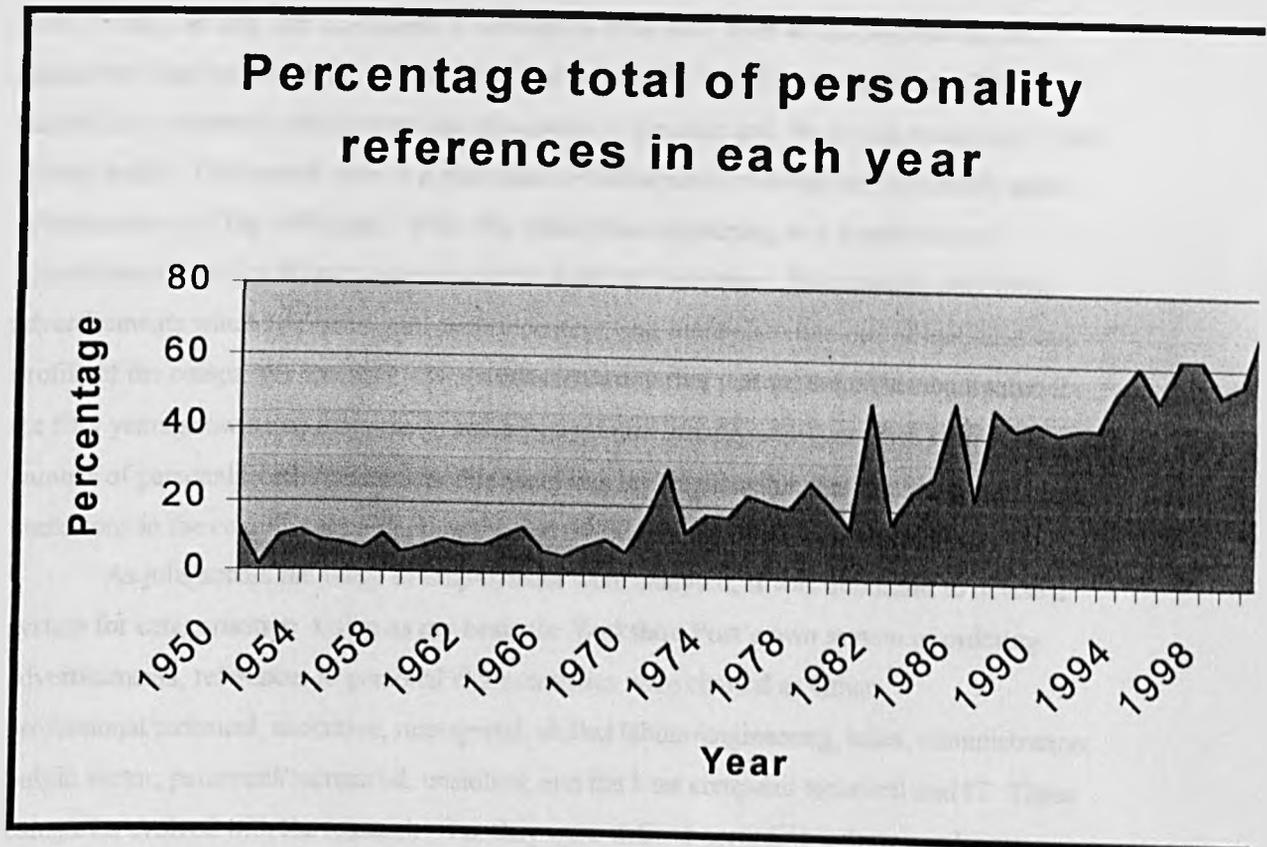
Two studies were conducted. The first a cruder, though more thorough, statistical one, with a limited qualitative dimension, covering the period in question; and the second a more detailed qualitative analysis of the information. I shall describe the process of analysis with the first study and then go on to highlight the differences between this and the second.

*(First) Extensive Study of Situations Vacant Columns*

It can be claimed that personality is achieving a recognisable equivalence with product by a person's intersubjective knowledge of how qualities are singled out, impregnated with value, and marketed as virtual commodities in the process of job application. The emphasis society places upon 'personality' makes access to the language to conceptualise it a potent tool for social/career advancement. However, this does not exclude the possibility that we no longer own our personalities in some normative sense or are always prone to adapt to corporatised notions of achievement and success. Nor does it tell us whether there is anything new in being aware of and promoting personality. Even in commodification we are not necessarily altering our condition any more than it has been altered for generations, or that what is being commodified belonged to us in the first place. Here it is important to stress the false dichotomy between commodification, as representative of the inauthentic, and non-commodification, as

representative of the authentic. If there is no personality, as such, in the first place, commodification of 'it' opens us to the void of personality as a sentimentalised construct. Without the emotional faculties to come to terms with such a proposed reality, commodification of personality survives as an ontological problematic to the subjectively comforting ideal of an individual personality.

Here is an overview of the data from my first (extensive) study.



Graph 1.1 Yorkshire Post

SVCs were analysed from the 1890s until the present day. As broad changes appear to occur over a matter of decades as opposed to days or years, only a handful of SVCs are sourced pre-1950 - when few references to personality are made - to allow more focus on SVCs during periods of content change. This means that the bulk of the analysis concentrates in the last fifty years explaining why only that period is represented here. In each year from 1950 onwards an entire SVC was scrutinised for changes in style and content. By counting and listing every advertisement alluding to personality and lifestyle, or broadly anything outside specifics of educational qualifications, work experience and technical skills (advertisements listing more than one personality requirement were only counted once), it was possible to observe long term patterns in employer demands. For example, whereas in the 1950s an average of 10% of

advertisements referred to personal characteristics, by the 1980s that figure was up to approximately 25%.

Thursday is the day of the week in which most jobs are listed (there are no days for specific jobs in the Yorkshire Post), so apart from times when this not the case, data was taken from the Thursday newspaper. To avoid any seasonal blips in information, December issues were avoided and papers were viewed in about 13 month intervals.

This method of recording personality references is likely to produce a small margin of error. Firstly, as only one newspaper is counted in each year, there is the potential for an anomalous reading. Secondly, that an advertiser asking for 'good communication skills' is quantifiably indistinguishable from one requesting 'a dynamic and fun loving personality' (see second study). The second issue is a particular problem when counting the personality prone advertisements of the 1980s and 1990s. So, rather than registering as a positive every advertisement that listed just 'communication skills' or 'initiative', for example, only those advertisements which had additional personality content, and more elaborate use of language - profile of the company's 'personality' - were counted during that period. With the figures for the fifty years showing no major anomaly, and a general and broadly consistent rise in the number of personality advertisements over this time, it is highly plausible that the above limitations in the counting method do not undermine the legitimacy of the overall findings.

As jobs across the range of employment were analysed, it was important to devise a system for categorisation. Using as my basis the Yorkshire Post's own system of ordering advertisements, references to personal characteristics were charted as either professional/technical, executive, managerial, skilled labour/engineering, sales, administration, public sector, personnel/secretarial, unskilled, and the later computer technical and IT. These categories evolved with the research - i.e. they were defined according to how employers conceptualise themselves - with new categories added as and when necessary. The primary purpose of this categorisation was to avoid drawing conclusions on data that could only indicate changes in specific areas of employment, or those jobs which are more prone to personality requirements, such as sales or 'front of stage' work generally. What my first study shows is that although some of the more graphic examples of personality employment are found in sales work, there are few areas (with the exception of unskilled labour perhaps) where heavy stress on personality is not at some point made. Moreover, at a statistical level there is no evidence of a personality culture that is specific to sales related work. As a general rule it could be argued that companies with a corporate, 'progressive', or customer focused outlook, tended to require personality traits more than companies with a social, professional, or 'blue-collar' outlook.

Advertisements for multiple posts, which were not so numerous, were largely ignored, to avoid counting only one or all of the jobs listed for the same company. Council and civil service posts (to this day it is unusual to find the mention of personality in public sector and

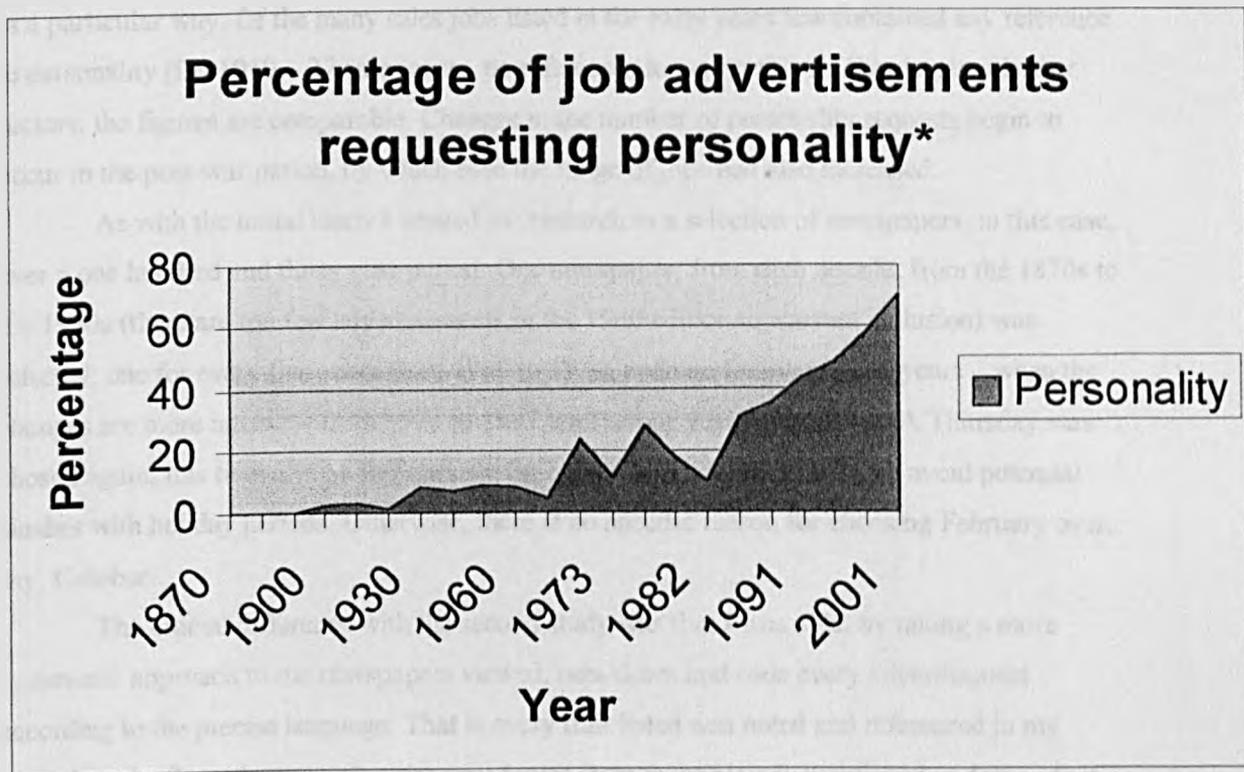
civil service positions, although, unsurprisingly, exceptions to this are jobs for care assistants and social workers) were the most significant omission here. Although with multiple job advertisements listing work across the sectors of employment, the discriminatory effect of this was negligible.

There are contrasts between advertisements in the early editions and those that are by now familiar to many of us (see examples above). The 'letterbox', 'small ad' style, format dominated until the mid-1960s, although these were often several inches long. From the starting date of my sample until the post-war period the changes in both content and style, however, were mostly indiscernible. Occasionally one would find a small reference, i.e. a single word, to personality for a sales job or a managerial post, although it is misleading to suggest there were enough of these to indicate any pattern. As the modern large format advertisement became more popular the increased space was rarely used for personality requests until after the mid 1980s as revealed in the coded evidence from the second study. For these reasons I made a conscious decision that was carried through into my second study, only to consider the modern form of advertisement from the late 1960s.

Essentially, the first study is based on statistical evidence with some qualitative analysis of content through many of the words, phrases and sentences that were noted down. The second study involves a more thoroughgoing analysis of content than was otherwise possible from a pioneering study of SVCs in which it was not at all clear what the data would reveal or how it should be organised.

*(Second) Intensive Study of Situations Vacant Columns*

Below is a summary of the findings of my second study.



Graph 1.2 – Yorkshire Post

\* Only personality requests coded 1 or above included (see section on coding below)

According to the second study, by 2001 the actual percentage of advertisements that contain explicit references to ‘personality’ has reached a not insignificant 70.58% of all advertisements across different spheres of employment. Although there are variations in the amount of jobs containing explicit personality criteria in each employment sector - sales jobs, for example, are predictably more demanding in this regard than, say, computing jobs – my findings also demonstrate that the same lexicon can today be found in jobs as diverse as sales, accountancy, computer programming and management; although admittedly there were too few examples of manual work to make any serious claims. One could assume, given the penetration of personality requirements across different sectors, that this would to some extent be reflected in manual jobs. But more research would need to be done to test this possibility.

Throughout this period there have been a number of changes, reflected in the data. The diversity of jobs has increased - sometimes misleadingly described as service work (see chapter three for a discussion on this<sup>1</sup>) - particularly ‘financial services’. There are no significant examples of personality requests in the pre-war editions, however, that would skew the findings

<sup>1</sup> Where I refer to ‘services’ it will be assumed that the reader takes into account my qualification of this term.

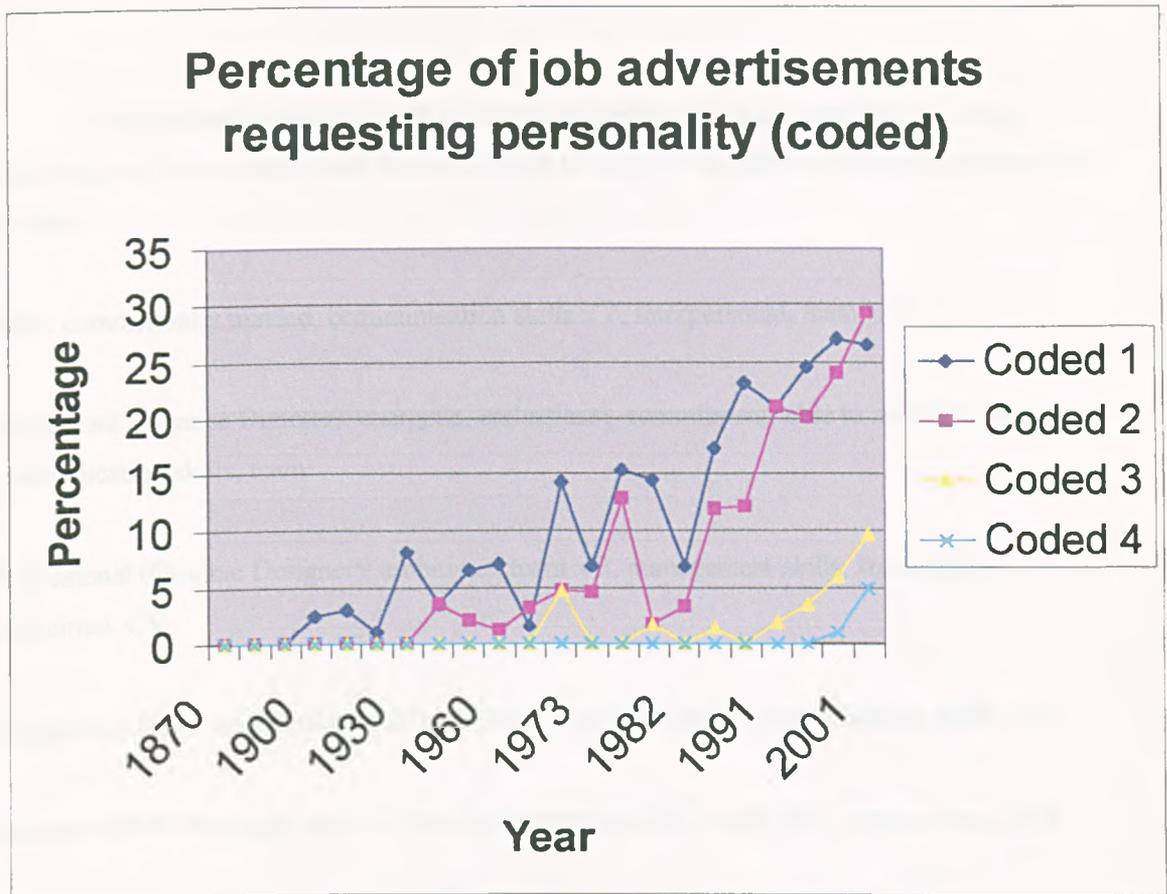
in a particular way. Of the many sales jobs listed in the early years few contained any reference to personality (i.e. 1910 – 27 sales posts, no references to personality). Likewise, in all other sectors, the figures are comparable. Changes in the number of personality requests begin to occur in the post-war period, by which time the range of jobs had also increased.

As with the initial study I limited the research to a selection of newspapers, in this case, over a one hundred and thirty year period. One newspaper, from each decade, from the 1870s to the 1930s (there are too few advertisements in the 1940 edition to warrant inclusion) was selected; one for every five years from 1950 to 1970; and one for every three years – when the changes are more intense – from 1973 to 1997 with a four year gap to 2001. A Thursday was chosen again, this time always in February for continuity and, specifically, to avoid potential clashes with holiday periods. Otherwise, there is no specific reason for choosing February over, say, October.

The crucial difference with the second study was that I was able, by taking a more systematic approach to the newspapers viewed, note down and code every advertisement according to the precise language. That is every trait listed was noted and referenced in my second study. So with every advertisement (apart from those already mentioned under my first study) and all personality terms noted and counted it was possible to code the advertisements according to the demands placed upon the individual. With a range of 0 to 4<sup>2</sup> I could test for changes in the intensity of requests per advertisement. 0 signified an insufficient reference to personality to warrant counting, while 4 meant there was a high use of personality language. Anything coded 1 or above is considered explicit enough to count as a job advertisement containing personality criteria. The graph above (1.2) includes all advertisements coded 1 or above. The following graph (1.3) separates the advertisements according to code.

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<sup>2</sup> This method is clearly imprecise as it is open to interpretation, but the more advertisements that are coded the more any anomalies balance out in the overall data.



Graph 1.3 (coded 1 = low personality value; coded 4 = high personality value)

It is interesting to note how advertisements coded 2 and above parallel the increase in those coded 1. It highlights the considerable increase in personality demands over recent years, particularly the amount of references in a single advertisement.

It is pertinent here to clarify what is meant by an advertisement coded 1 or 4, say. Here are some examples from my research.

Coded '1' (1979) – Marketing executive: 'communication skills', 'enthusiasm', and 'initiative'

Coded '2' (1994) – Operational Auditor: 'proactive', 'positive', 'self-starter', 'communication skills', 'integrity', 'team...'

Coded '3' (1997) – Buyer: 'communication skills', 'negotiator', 'organise', 'team-work', '(self) confidence', 'personality', 'positive', 'enthusiasm', 'commitment'

Coded '4' (2001) – Customer Services Manager: 'love a challenge', 'thrive on... keeping customers happy', 'team has great laughs', ('forward looking company'), 'upbeat', 'upmarket',

'real commitment', 'true people person', 'team...', 'enthusiasm', 'absolute passion', (include CV)

The following examples illustrate how personality criteria are applied to a range of different jobs. I have categorised these according to 'sector'. All of the examples are coded 2 in my data.

Sales: commercially minded, communication skills x 2, interpersonal, team x 2, CV

Accountant (Finance Director): energetic, enthusiasm, commitment, able to motivate others, communication skills, team

Professional (Graphic Designer): ambitious, team x 2, management skills, freethinking, committed, CV

Engineering (Shift team leader): self-motivated, team leadership, communication skills, CV

Manager (Shift Manager): team x2, man management skills, leadership, common sense, CV

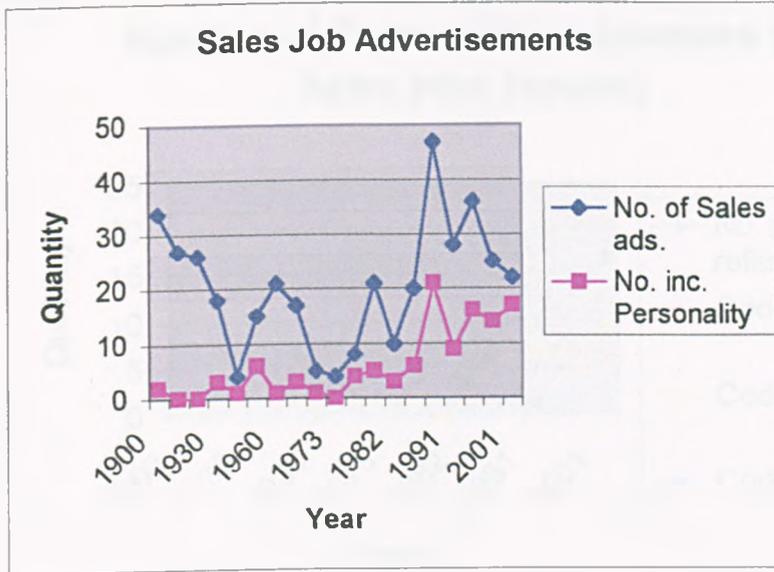
Technological (Tech Support Programmer): team, self-motivated, communication skills, initiative, interpersonal, enthusiasm, CV

Notice the similarities between each. A graphic designer, for example, is expected to be 'ambitious', while a programmer should be 'interpersonal'. Almost every job requires 'communication skills', and is placed within a 'team' setting (see chapter six).

While there are typically more personality requests in management and sales jobs, there is also a high number in accountancy. In fact, there is an increase in every sector at around the late 1980s at the same time as increases are shown in graph 1.2 above. This indicates that demands on personality are not just limited to frontline services but extend across the workforce, embracing both the public and private sector.

Where an advertisement does not mention personality, with reference to an earlier point, as with many professional or creative jobs, and even in sales, it cannot be assumed that certain qualities are not required. It is more likely the case, where there is clear evidence of a saturation of personality terms, that such specifications are taken as given – the request for a CV in many advertisements which do not request personality is some indication of this. However, without further research into the records of the companies themselves, we can only assume this to be the case and point to generalities in SVCs.

If we explore differences between sectors graphically – taken from intensive study - these issues become more apparent.



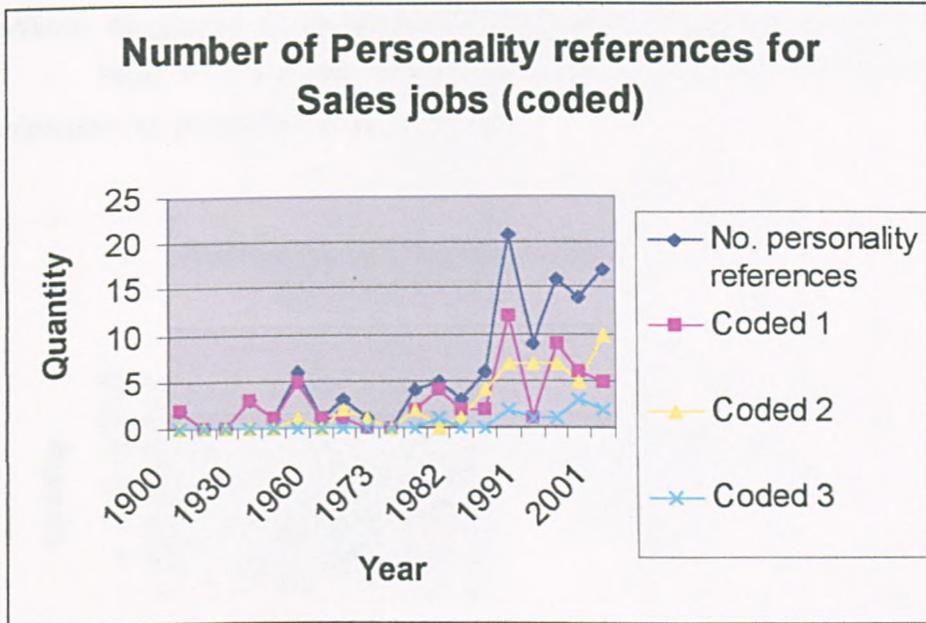
Graph 2.1

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970
No. of Sales ads.	34	27	26	18	4	15	21	17	5
No. inc. Personality	2	0	0	3	1	6	1	3	1
As %	5.88	0	0	16.66	25	44.44	4.76	17.64	20

1973	1976	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1997	2001
4	8	21	10	20	47	28	36	25	22
0	4	5	3	6	21	9	16	14	17
0	50	23.8	30	30	44.68	32.14	44.44	56	63.63

The revealing line in each graph is the pink (square motif) one denoting *number* of personality advertisements coded one and above. The erratic blue (diamond motif) line, in the sales example above, indicates only the *number* of sales advertisements. In 1991, where there is an anomalous peak in the pink line, there is also one in the blue. So in fact, as the table reveals, the rise in personality terms is more or less steady. The gap between the square and the diamond line gives some indication of percentage difference that, if displayed in this way, would be misleading. See, for example, on the table, 1955. Here the figure is 44%, a level not sustained until the 1990s. How is such a rise possible? Well of the 15 advertisements, 6 of them had references to personality. By 1988 there were 47 sales advertisements and 21 listing personality: a much less likely anomaly given the amount of advertisements. Moreover, when compared to graph 1.3 on coded references, it is clear that an additional difference between 1955 and 1988 is

the breadth of the language. I should like to demonstrate this, in the sales example, by separating these figures according to code.



Graph 2.2

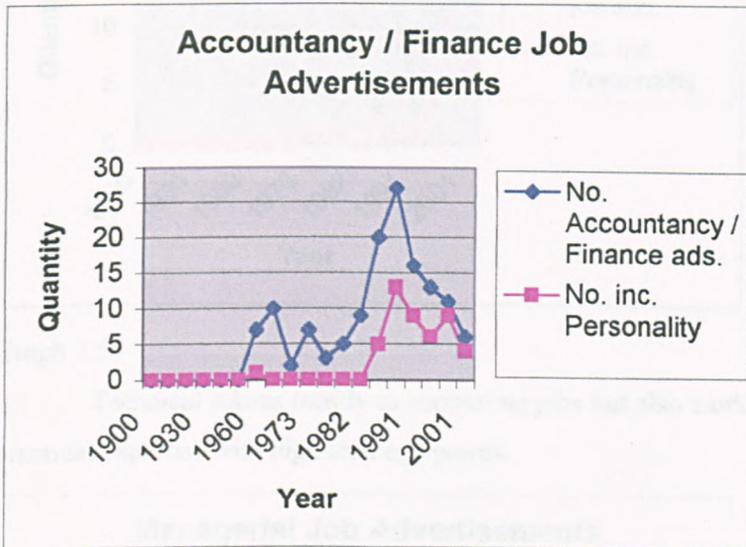
	1900	1910	1920	1930	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970
No. Personality references	2	0	0	3	1	6	1	3	1
Coded 1	2	0	0	3	1	5	1	1	0
Coded 2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1
Coded 3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

1973	1976	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1997	2001
0	4	5	3	6	21	9	16	14	17
0	2	4	2	2	12	1	9	6	5
0	2	0	1	4	7	7	7	5	10
0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	3	2

The table accompanying 2.2 shows how the number of references coded two and above rise unevenly as a percentage of all advertisements during the 1980s and 1990s. It can also be observed that a not insignificant half of all advertisements are coded two in 1976. This figure has to be weighed against the fact there were only four personality references of a total eight that year. Does this mean the data from this period is irrelevant? No, because if one looks at the quantity of sales advertisements in preceding years against the number of personality advertisements (graph 2.1) the number of personality references is insignificant. Additionally, as the contemporary large advertising format (see contrast between this and letterbox style above) becomes popular by the late 1960s, and there is a palpable drop in the number of advertisements

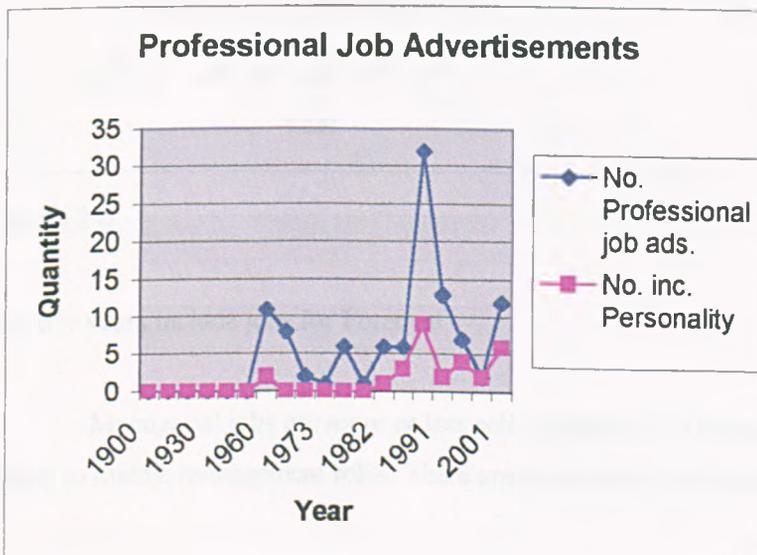
counted, as a greater number of advertisers use this format (see 1979 – 1985 in table accompanying graph 2.1) there is no evidence of a surge in personality advertisements. It is after 1985 (see graphs 1 and 2) that the amount of such language increases significantly and, in addition, the quantity of advertisements approach levels that rule out anomalous readings.

These observations are the more apparent as we look at figures from jobs where the importance of 'personality' is not so obvious.



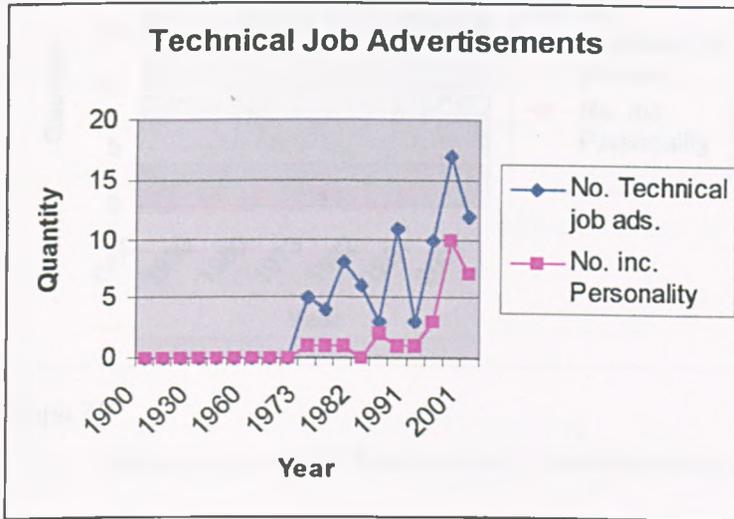
Graph 2.3

Accountancy / Finance covers work in sectors where there is a specific economic/auditing role.



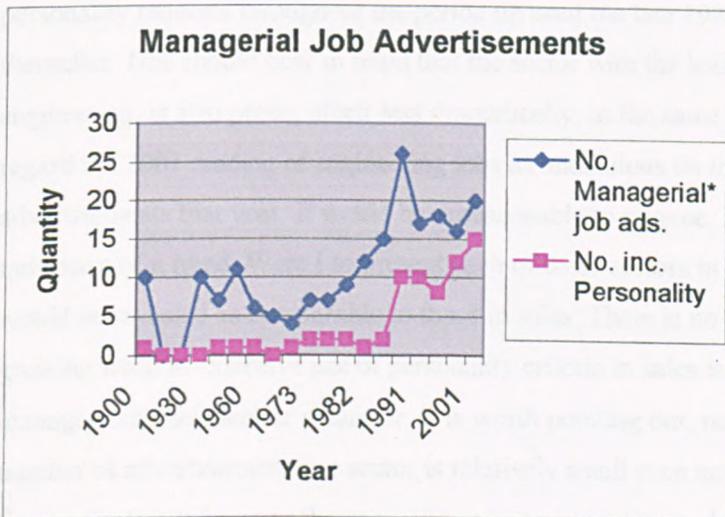
Graph 2.4

'Professional' includes teaching, academic, medical professionals, and anything that requires an advanced level of expertise not covered under the other categories.



Graph 2.5

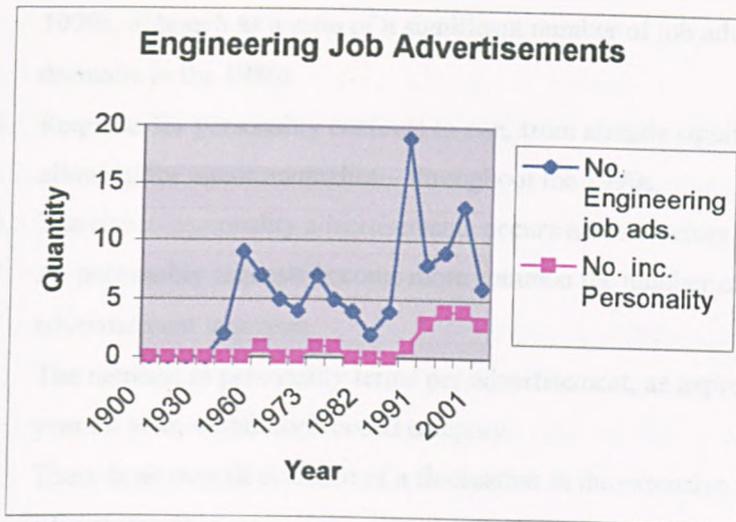
Technical relates mostly to computing jobs but also work in fields that require a practical expertise with high-tech equipment.



Graph 2.6

\* Early years include jobs for Foremen

Managerial jobs are more or less self-explanatory. The majority of these advertisements relate to middle-management roles. There are occasional executive posts.



Graph 2.7

Engineering posts are those invariably described in the advertisements as ‘engineering’.

So to re-emphasise in the light of the above differences: jobs in all sectors covered – even those such as secretarial not highlighted here – show a rise in personality references around the same time. All of these sectors, including sales, show few or no examples at all of personality requests throughout the period up until the late 1980s and a significant increase thereafter. One should bear in mind that the sector with the least amount of such references, engineering, is also prone, albeit less dramatically, to the same tendencies. I am inclined to regard the 2001 reading of engineering jobs as anomalous on the grounds there were only six advertisements that year. It would be unreasonable to assume, however tempting, that 66% is indicative of a trend. Were I to present each of these sectors in codified form, the findings would be revealed as comparable to those in sales. There is no evidence to suggest that the growing trend in extensive use of personality criteria in sales is any different in accountancy, management, technical or whatever. It is worth pointing out, nevertheless, that the actual number of advertisements per sector is relatively small even now. Why I do not dismiss these figures for this is because they are repeated across sectors and, therefore, in my overall findings (see graphs 1 and 2). Should this rise occur only in sales, for example, different conclusions would have to be drawn.

So what can be extrapolated from the data alone? I propose the following:

1. Personality requests in job advertisements increase substantially after the mid 1980s.
2. Until the mid 1980s requests were limited to few examples even in sales.
3. Sales jobs account for the highest amount of personality advertisements.

4. There is a significant increase in requests for personality from zero or near zero from the 1970s, although as a ratio of a significant number of job advertisements, the rise is more dramatic in the 1980s.
5. Requests for personality continue to rise, from already significant levels, year on year – allowing for minor anomalies – throughout the 1990s.
6. The rise in personality advertisements occurs across sectors of employment.
7. As personality requests become more common the number of personality terms in each advertisement increases.
8. The increase in personality terms per advertisement, as expressed in coded form, increases, year on year, within each coded category.
9. There is no overall evidence of a fluctuation in the extensive use of personality language per advertisement.
10. Advertisements coded ‘1’ historically precede those coded ‘2’ which, in turn, precedes ‘3’ and ‘4’ respectively.
11. The increase in coded ‘2’ advertisements parallels and eventually surpasses those coded ‘1’.
12. The use of both subtle and more extensive personality language becomes the norm in SVCs by the mid-1990s. It is at this stage that it is possible to appropriately describe this phenomenon as *integral to the employment culture and indicative of a ‘personality culture’*.
13. The data is not conclusive on whether personality language is the norm prior to the 1990s. Prior to the 1970s there is no evidence of common use of personality language in advertisements (this does not preclude the existence of a prior ‘organisation’ or ‘bureaucratic’ personality).
14. Historically, these patterns show that while persons are made aware of the value of personality through SVCs prior to the 1970s, although from this evidence only by the 1990s can this argument be generalised (see discussion below).

Having set out the basic conclusions that can be made from the data alone, I now want to develop some broader interpretations. The bulk of the qualitative analysis is found in chapter five. Before attempting these broader points a few preliminary arguments need to be made in relation to the context or theoretical background in which this discussion takes place.

### *Discussion*

From the data can be extracted the idea that personality language and conscious (self) appraisal of personality for its exchange value is a recent phenomenon. As indicated in point 14 above, this is not necessarily the case. Earlier evidence of conscious efforts to understand and implement changes in the way individuals relate to companies suggest that the technology was already in place and, if anything, not fully disseminated and applied across the employment

industry. Rose (1990: 44), for example, points out that research by wartime psychologists on individual morale and organisational efficiency, was later taken up by social scientists who sought to improve the individual's subjective relationship to the situation. It was thought that the objectives of the organisation – army, factory – could be inculcated in the individual through attachment to a primary group of workers. A strong working ethos is disseminated through other workers rather than through the company management. This bears comparison to the team phenomenon analysed in chapter six. Importantly, what is being implied is that there is a systematic dissection of the individual within various institutions that then, in recent years particularly, spreads throughout the business environment leading to new forms of organisational management and control. Is this what the rise in personality language mirrors?

Wright Mills (1951: 186), as early as 1951, highlighted the recommendations in career guidance literature where 'a personable appearance is emphasised as being more important in success and advancement than experience or skill or intelligence.' Later I shall give more contemporary examples of this; at this point the existence of such material, in the US at least, is demonstrated as early as 1951.

By the 1970s writers such as Baudrillard were describing the individual character in terms of phoniness:

the connotation of reciprocity and 'warmth' is written into the planning and exercise of the function. It is the key asset in job-finding, promotion and salary level. Having 'human qualities', 'interpersonal skills', 'warmth', etc. We are surrounded by waves of fake spontaneity, 'personalised' language, orchestrated emotions and personal relations. (1998(1973): 161)

Goffman argues similarly:

In their capacity as performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged. Because these products are so numerous and so pervasive, the individuals who are performers dwell more than we might think in a moral world. But, *qua* performers, individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realising these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realised. (1971: 243)

Contained within these quotations, as with Riesman and Lasch, is the notion of an individual who crafts a strategy, by reflecting on various indicators, to maintain the appearance

of the personalised codes of normality. It is the language of personality, sourced by people wanting access to a job, that provides guidelines for them to follow when, arguably, prescriptive codes of behaviour from an earlier 'bureaucratic' period (see chapter three) atrophy. It could be assumed, therefore, that what my findings reveal is the extension of a set of personality indicators into most / all employment contexts. Career manuals provide the individual with the translation tools for making sense of these words and employers, through a gradual shift in cultural imperatives – latterly accelerated in neo-liberal thinking perhaps – begin to disseminate this in their job advertisements. The data becomes an historical record of the loss, or appropriation, of personality by employers who, themselves, have gradually – or one might suggest rapidly (see data from late 1980s onwards) – applied the techniques for achieving this. My findings point to a general lag between the 'discovery' of a new technology, its implementation – first gradual, then rapid – and, eventually, its saturation into everyday employment strategies. Certainly, with regard to earlier insights, the information in SVCs does not show the precise time at which an interest in these technologies begins to emerge. It is more likely, if anything, that SVCs document the moment when such thinking began to cross-pollinate the employment industry and reach a more general hegemonic level, or when these technologies became standard orthodoxy in human relations strategy and, arguably, employee reflection.

The usefulness of the data, then, lies in its ability to reveal the extent to which a peculiar notion of 'personality' is an employment norm. It shows how earlier discourses, often emanating from abroad, may relate to my findings. Whereas CW Mills describes the salesman, as I have shown, these very characteristics are today found across different industries. 'Personality', however, is a 'floating signifier', whose meaning shifts temporally and spatially according to cultural and productive relations. In certain fields – contemporary employment norms, say – the meaning stabilises according to more-or-less dominant codes of behaviour which saturates the social body (colonisation of the lifeworld). SVCs reveal this temporal shift and stabilisation – as opposed to the notion of disembeddedness – as a range of secondary terms to describe 'personality'. Hence the meaning of personality, or the qualities we may each aspire to in general life, is synonymous with the language that manifests in the rise of personality as shown in SVCs. A proper assessment of this requires a fuller analysis of the language.

*Summary*

In this chapter the theoretical points have been developed from previous chapters by providing empirical data that connects definitions of the self to employment as an increasingly important signifier of the complete personality. The data proceeds a discussion on methodology which grounded the study as a principal component of the dissertation. Whereas here there is a quantitative emphasis to the discussion, in the next chapter we shall examine the data qualitatively.

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## CHAPTER FIVE: THE LANGUAGE OF PERSONALITY

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### Introduction

This chapter begins by employing a more qualitative analysis of the content of situations vacant columns (SVCs) with some reference to quantitative examples. Here the data is contextualised through both evaluation and illustrative examples from employers/careers advice. I explicate the notion of 'commodification of personality' through a discussion on Marx and ground the concept of 'personality culture' to the data from chapter four. In other words, we begin proper to synthesise the abstract discussions from chapters two and three, and the data from chapter four, with a thoroughgoing analysis of the meaning of the words contained in job advertisements and, by extension, the field of employment.

To summarise, this chapter:

- Explores the meaning of the language contained in job advertisements.
- Situates the language in the wider employment context.
- Advances previous discussions by grounding them to the data.

### *Preamble*

Communication, interpersonal skills and success all play a role in defining our personality. Let us consider two advertisements, one from 1953 and the other, a more recent example, from 1984.

**SOLICITOR'S MANAGING CLERK**  
(Unadmitted) required by leading Insurance Company and Trust Corporation in the City of London as Assistant in the Department of the Secretary.

Applicant, whose age may not exceed 42 years, must be of pleasing personality, possessed of a high degree of tact, and have had at least 15 years' experience in the management and administration of Trusts including Trust Accounts.

A sound knowledge of Probate and Conveyancing (particularly as between Landlord and Tenant) in addition will be a distinct advantage; permanent and interesting appointment, subject to medical examination, with non-contributory pension scheme; excellent working conditions, including free lunches; good salary and steady prospects for the right man; highest references essential.

Write with full particulars but without testimonials, to Box 290, c/o Walter Judd Ltd., 47, Gresham Street, London, E.C.2. Applications treated in strict confidence.

**A LEADING AUSTRALIAN WORSTED MANUFACTURER** specialising in high-

## PRODUCTION MANAGER

**STEEL STORAGE TANK and VESSEL MANUFACTURE**

An opening exists for a highly motivated, professional engineering manager to take charge of all aspects of tank manufacture.

Experience in the industry is absolutely essential. A good, in-depth knowledge of welding techniques is required together with substantial experience in man management. Total dedication to the profit motive is required.

Responsibilities include manufacturing control, work study, labour control, analysis of results, customer and supplier liaison.

This position is a challenge, it requires a high degree of enthusiasm and dedication. It is unlikely that candidates under 35 will have had sufficient experience.

Salary will not be a bar to the right person.

*Apply in writing in strict confidence to:*

The General Manager,  
**COOKSON AND ZINN LTD.**  
Station Road Works,  
Hedleigh, Suffolk IP7 5PN.

(Yorkshire Post, 14/05/1953 (first) and 01/11/84 (second))

Both advertisements, in different ways, pertain to this thing called personality. The first uses the word overtly: the person 'must be of a pleasing personality'. The second, on the other hand, is more specific when it asks for 'Total dedication to the profit motive'. In counting personality references in my extensive analysis (from which these are examples), each would have been given the value of one. They both would have counted as advertisements listing 'personality'. Had these been counted for my second analysis, the former would still have received a value of one, the latter a (high) two. Why make this differentiation? '(P)leasing personality' is highly ambiguous. Like the word personality itself, 'pleasing' is entirely subjective. 'Total dedication to the profit motive', on the other hand, prescribes, quite simply, the values a person must possess to apply for the job. As a signifier the latter is far more precise in its implication to individual personality. What is more, the context of the 1953 advertisement was far less certain in SVCs than was found in 1984 and, particularly, later. A 'pleasing personality', without additional qualification is likely, by the 1990s, to signify the kind of sentiment made explicit in the 1984 example above. It cannot be assumed that in 1953 these two words pertain to the same thing as they would today; not without additional advertisements from the same period that help decode the meaning. What is striking here is there is no early equivalent (probably pre 1980s and certainly pre 1970s) of the 1984 advertisement while by the 1990s there is nothing unusual about it at all.

However, let us view these two phrases again through a re-interpretive 'double-take'. Transposing both advertisements to the year 2000, say, which one, the 'total dedication...' or 'pleasing personality' would most constitute a potential incorporation of the person into an employment relation? A clue would be the one that is most inclusive. What I mean by this is that in the former the person is already identifying with the exchange relation or is, notionally, able to recognise itself in distinction from the espoused values of the advertisement. In the latter instance, the boundary between objective role and self-recognition is more ambiguous. Once 'personality' settles on a more definite (instrumentalised) relationship to work, as shown in the SVCs data from the 1990s, the word already signifies what, in many ways, the 'total dedication...' advertisement makes clear: that 'personality' represents a person's usefulness to employers. 'Pleasing personality' softens the distinction between use and exchange value so that one becomes assimilated into the other and the genesis – are employers adapting to me or I am being interpellated by them/freely choosing to adapt to them ('their demands are so reasonable!')? – obscured and made irrelevant with the foreclosure of a (misleading) structure/agency dialectic: we are 'always already' represented by employers and wanting to represent their needs.

We are moving ahead of ourselves here. Let us return to the earlier job advertisements and unpick our way through to the current period.

### The Meaning of Job Advertisements Before the 1980s

In this section, we shall look at job advertisements during different time periods and extract meaning from advertisements as if from the gaze of a person living during that time. We shall do this by recovering the immanent signification of the language contained in the advertisements and with some reference to contemporaneous literature.

Up until recently – perhaps as late as the mid 1980s - job advertisements tended only to provide information about the job, its availability, and the pay. Although examples of 'personality' can be found as far back as the 1950s and, to a lesser extent, before, it is not really until the 1980s and particularly the 1990s that personality requests become the norm. Characteristics mentioned in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were less about personality and more about intelligence, dress code or the ability to get up in the morning (see chapter seven on *Stage One* characteristics). In 1910 the closest we find to personality, in a sales job even, is for a representative who is a 'Smart man' and a 'good interviewer'. Elsewhere in the same year there is a request for a traveller who is 'energetic'. By the 1980s it is more common to find requests for sales jobs such as this one: 'outgoing, buoyant personality... articulate, confident, ambitious and not afraid of a challenge' (Yorkshire Post 01/1981).

In communicating attitudes, beliefs, outlooks, ambitions and a lifestyles in a way synonymous with those which employers appear to represent, career prospects are increased and the person can recognise themselves in structures that might otherwise seem oppressive. In contrast to this logic, the individualisation thesis proposes that 'it is becoming questionable to assume that collective units of meaning and action exist' (Beck, U. Beck-Gernsheim, E. 2002: 14). The findings from SVCs question the idea that society is more fluid today than it was fifty years ago by highlighting the nature of that fluidity as integral to an extension of the market economy across space and into the social body. Free competition between agents opens the subject/body/socio-cultural nexus onto a mercurial substrate of commodity relations upon which capitalism thrives. In other words, if in becoming employable means recognising or adapting to that which gains a competitive advantage -or, at least achieves, commensurability with the Other - then, freed from moral/ethical consideration – the justification, should one be required, of 'if I don't do it someone else will' or 'I don't want to be excluded' – I make myself visible as a carrier of value: I fetishise difference. Let us deploy this argument historically beginning with 1891.

#### *Situations Vacant 1891-1949*

While presentation was clearly different in these earlier examples of SVCs – both in terms of style and content - the expectations, as noted, were also different. Comparisons in the types of work advertised can be made with contemporary advertisements (see chapter four), although there is nothing to suggest that the few examples – one lists 'character' – could in any way provide a sense of how that individual should be. There is no mention, after all, of 'teammaker', 'interpersonal' or any number of traits regarded as crucial in today's employment culture. Only through wider social signifiers is it possible to take anything at all from what is found here. While an employee who maintained good relationships with others would no doubt have been appreciated for their character, the difference here is that such an individual may not have considered this or been aware of it in applying for many jobs. They may not have developed strategies in advance of interviews for *improving* or fetishising their personality vis-à-vis employers.

Mckinlay's (2002: 599) study of the rise of the modern career (see chapter three) in Scottish banking is a case in point. His research on managerial bureaucracy in the twenty years before 1914 reveals how employees were subject to various disciplinary procedures and forms of character assessment in the selection of candidates for promotion. The new recruit, he says, was scrutinised for 'tidy handwriting and boyish enthusiasm.' This bears out in some of the advertisements from that period where 'smart appearance' or 'enthusiasm' was sometimes requested (see below). However, he goes on to say that 'more experienced employees were evaluated on a host of intangible signs that were read as proxies of class, character and

commitment.’ This is not clear from SVCs, but is suggestive of procedures at certain companies once the person is employed in the job. The question I pose is whether this constitutes a conscious and reflexive assessment of the self in relation to values disseminated by employers in advance of, or despite, the particulars of a given job. The differences between surveillance procedures traditionally applied by companies to ensure conformity and the way in which people adapt freely to the cultural and behavioural expectations of employers today, is clarified in the course of this dissertation.

A typical example of a section from a SVC can be seen in chapter four (letterbox example advertisement); the extent that there is no example of a lexicological development specific to personality in relation to employment during this time is in itself revealing.

So what exactly is found during the period in question? It can be summarised as follows: on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1900, under jobs for ‘Agents, commissions, travellers, &c.’, there is one advertisement requesting ‘pushing men’ (canvassers), another for someone who is ‘persevering’ or ‘energetic’, while others request ‘determination’, ‘respectability and energy’, ‘first-class’ and ‘smart man’. Under the category of ‘Managers, foremen, &c.’, there are requests for a ‘competent man’ and someone who is ‘steady’. Words such as ‘first-class’, ‘smart’ or ‘determination’ (without additional signifiers) would not qualify, in my coded study, as a personality reference. Nor, in isolation – in contemporary advertisements – do words such as ‘energetic’. Had I included single vague references as these the figures would be even higher but still insignificant in earlier advertisements. ‘Energy’ (and its derivatives) is interesting, however, because it is a word that consistently appears in SVCs (31 times before 1986 – the fifth most popular word). It is synonymous with youth and an associated enthusiasm. If we take energy as a *foundation word* from which other, specific definitions emanate, it is possible to observe how it evolves or transforms into aggression, drive, can-do, up-for-it and so on. ‘Energy’ in the early 1900s had no apparent equivalents in words of that kind, so, in isolation, says little about someone’s personality. ‘Enthusiasm’, which, arguably, is interchangeable with ‘energy’, serves as another *foundation word* from which malleability, dedication, identification, keenness and so on follow. Enthusiasm is the second most popular word at least until 1986. It features 46 times during that period. However, without evidence of additional material such as commonly accessible careers advice, CVs or anything that would show evidence of a thriving human relations industry, it is difficult to sustain an argument of equivalence between energy or enthusiasm with similar words found today; or, with reference to an earlier point, that a company/person distinction could not have been maintained.

Certain words began to filter through in the late 1940s that have more in common with today’s nomenclature. In 1949, for example, we find sales advertisements requiring men who are ‘progressive and active’ (pro-active?), and with characteristics of ‘reliability and adaptability’. Men responding to these advertisements would probably have a sense that a

display of their 'progressive' tendencies or 'adaptability' would help secure and maintain the job. What 'progressive' actually means, though, is not clear, for it is a word that changes according to who says it and when it is said. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word is "(C)haracterised by (the desire to promote) change or innovation, or experiment..." In the language of employment it could imply being 'open to the latest working methods', or 'to share the bosses' profit motivated outlook' (getting familiar with the double-speak of words in SVCs is part of the technique of learning how to adapt to work). A 'flexibility towards work' and an 'openness to (business) ideas' is possibly a more accurate definition, which today could also translate as good interpersonal skills, teamwork ability and appreciation of customer and management needs. So from the word 'progressive,' too, there are words that splinter off from it. Unlike energy and enthusiasm, though, progressive is not commonly used and its meaning is much more dependent, in the first instance, upon context. Progressive, as found in SVCs, is intangible as a notion that alludes to anything other than business, although it is rarely found in recent advertisements it does indicate some vague prescription of attitude.

As advertisements in SVCs begin to list more personal qualities, there is a clearer idea of what personality is because the words and phrases share a relatedness that could be described as belonging to a lexical set. However, before 1950 there are not even enough personality words in isolation in advertisements to make broader observations. It is necessary to look closer to the present if connections are to be made.

### *Situations Vacant 1950-1969*

While the number of advertisements listing personality remains low in the 1950s and 1960s, the content is a little more revealing than in previous decades. On 20.10.1950, for example, of the six posts asking for personality, two were for salesmen, two secretarial and two managerial. It is around this time that the now familiar phrase 'work on own initiative' (for a Personnel Manageress) is used, and goes on to appear more than any other phrase in the pre-1990s period. The term initiative, however, pertains more to independent thinking than it does to personality per se. By itself, 'initiative' cannot be taken as evidence of a personality culture in employment and was not counted in my second (intensive) study. 'Ambitious' (Salesman), however, is a word deserving more scrutiny.

Ambitious is a word that appears with some frequency in sales jobs and latterly throughout the employment market. Associated with the notion of a career today, ambition need not imply a self-centred ruthlessness; it could intimate a keenness to succeed in a range of capacities. The implication here, in job advertisements, is, however, arguably inclined to the former meaning and inseparable from the idea of climbing the metaphorical career ladder. 'Ambitious' joins a group of words – related to 'progressive' in a neo-liberal context where competition underpins moral and social frameworks – in a grouping that helps to define the

individual in a way peculiar to capitalist society. Words such as ‘aggressive’, ‘competitive’, ‘go-ahead’, ‘go getter’, and ‘successful’, found in advertisements in this study, would have different meanings in contexts other than the one(s) we are dealing with here. In a neo-liberal capitalist economy they are a call to arms: weapons in the battle for individual supremacy. Indeed, if we relate these words to character, Eric Fromm’s (1988: 109) argument strikes a chord: ‘A society whose principles are acquisition, profit, and property produces a social character orientated around having, and once the dominant pattern is established, nobody wants to be an outsider, or indeed an outcast; in order to avoid this risk everybody adapts to the majority; who have in common only their mutual antagonism.’ Not only are such words defined, in this context, according to capitalism, they symbolise the struggle people, as success-orientated individuals, cannot easily shirk away from. ‘Successful’ is fused with ‘ambitious’ and ‘competitive’ today, although it is not altogether clear whether the connection was quite so apparent in the 1950s. Turning to self-help authors such as Stephanie Myers (1995: 114), the significance is entirely transparent. She reassures us that: ‘Some of those who appear to be doing better than you at the moment, will give up, get lazy, retire or burn out. As long as you’re still trying, there’s every chance that you’ll overtake them.’ This, of course, sustains the myth of equality: that a person who works hard – and has good luck (a quasi-spiritual quality) - eventually prevails over others who are presumably (quantitatively) less hardworking and lucky. When the employment structures do not appear to exclude or to victimise (even on the basis of talent?), it is the individual upon whom the pressure lies to become more competitive.

Ambition today is seen as a positive quality: it is the fuel to a successful adaptation to working norms. As has already been noted, C. Wright Mills (1951: 186) referred to such qualities when discussing personnel literature of the 1950s variety in which the “ability to get along with people and to work more co-operatively with them”, as well as the “ability to meet and talk to people easily, and attractiveness in appearance”, were the most valued traits, in sales work in this case. There is some evidence of this message in the 1950s advertisements of my study. Examples such as ‘good presence, cheery enthusiasm’, or ‘must have personality’ (both sales, 09/06/55), and earlier, ‘presence, personality and knowledge essential’ (Sales Rep, 21/04/52); although, it should be added, that even these, exclusively sales, examples are a rarity in the 1950s. Comparatively, it could be noted that, in the US at least, success and personality were being synthesised into working practices earlier than here: ‘Kindness and friendliness become aspects of personalised service or of public relations of big firms, rationalised to further the sale of something. With anonymous insincerity the Successful Person thus makes an instrument of his own appearance and personality.’ (ibid: 182)

The advertisements that do ask for personality traits in the 1950s are fairly illuminating. On eight occasions the word ‘personality’ is specifically mentioned. A typical one is for a Technical Representative (01/05/58), where ‘only those with personality... should apply’, or as

in the 1953 advertisement above. It is not enough, as already suggested, to make the kind of observations that are possible with more recent examples. Many of the words sourced in the 1950s, such as 'enthusiasm', 'adaptability', 'conscientious', 'tact', 'drive', 'personable' and 'initiative', however, can be found in a more concentrated form in present day SVCs. The 1960s continued this trend with few discernable differences between the two decades. Let us turn to the 1970s.

### *Situations Vacant 1970-1979*

The wording of advertisements in the 1970s is much closer to that of the 1980s and 1990s. Product and personality become more closely entwined (i.e. 25/05/78 Sales Representative: "have a personality which successfully reflects a quality product"), and a notion of the ideal employee is more clearly advanced. By now it is possible to begin identifying which characteristics are most appropriate, what kind of outlook and ethos people should have, and how, as social beings, they should operate. The number of advertisements specifying personality begins to climb too, particularly towards the end of the decade.

The language is more extensive in the 1970s, and already there are examples of how a family of expressions, that are by now familiar in SVCs, focus the individual to the specific requirements of the company. By combining or abbreviating two words into a single pithy phrase, an expression is created that, to paraphrase Baudrillard, implies a personality that is even more able than able and better than the best. In these words we have the employment equivalent of the Neitzchian *Übermensch*: a self-starter (appears in my study in 1975), self-motivated (1977), pro-active (early 1990s), can-doer (mid 1990s), interpersonal (late 1990s), personality-plus individual. It is the beginning of the now ubiquitous 'All-rounder' (20/01/2000) who, amongst other things, has a 'sense of humour' (29/11/73) to ensure a smooth operation. It is a personal mythology that has yet to reach saturation levels in the 1970s, but has already begun to seep into the language of job advertisements and reaches hegemonic proportions in the 1990s.

### **Making Sense of 'Personality' in Employment Today**

In this section our attention focuses on the more pronounced examples in SVCs from the recent period. Here a more thoroughgoing analysis of the data will enable us to ascertain differences in how the language of personality is signified today.

While some words vaguely pertain to character - 'communication skills' (see below), 'commitment', 'self-motivated' - others are more explicit: 'sense of humour', 'people person', 'outgoing personality'. The juxtaposition of these descriptive terms in a single advertisement, and the consistency of employment language generally, constructs an idea of a complete

character. The customer service job (coded 4 in chapter 1 above) implies a 'fun loving' / 'outgoing' personality with a zest for life and a zeal for challenge. Yet the words alone do not convey strongly enough what it actually means to be 'upbeat' or what having 'a great laugh' entails. As noted, a person must draw upon wider cultural signifiers to gather what a 'sense of humour' means in this context, or what is expected of someone with an 'outgoing personality'.

Important in understanding the differences between SVCs in previous decades and those of the (late) 1980s and beyond, is the style and similarity of the language. This is especially so when considering that, unlike previous decades, we are not comparing a few anomalous advertisements listing personality but an entire quantity that latterly makes up over 50% of all advertisements counted. Before discussing the broader implications of this, I want to relate recent developments to a homogenisation of language - the hidden meanings - and the implications of an objectification of personality.

Here are two examples of advertisements from the period in question. Both are taken from the Yorkshire Post, the first 20/01/2000 and the second 06/04/1989.

## A brilliant conveyancing opportunity.

### Excellent Salary & Flexible Benefits Package

HammondsDirect, a division of Hammond Suddards, are soon to launch a revolutionary on-line conveyancing system which offers anyone who has access to the Internet the opportunity to keep track of their personal case through e-mail updates and personal on-line contact 24 hours a day.

Just as important as your extensive skills in Conveyancing is your dynamic, outgoing and friendly personality. This is a new challenge and it needs someone who combines all the pre-requisite skills with an ability to communicate, generate ideas and inspire others to work in a close knit team environment.

So, if you have the personality to drive this unique service forward, then please apply either in writing or by e-mail, enclosing a full CV and current salary package, to:

Debra Slater, Personnel Manager  
HammondsDirect

Pennine House, 39-45 Well Street, Bradford BD1 5NU

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## NOTICES

### Cobol Analyst/Programmer

The Company is an established manufacturer of chemicals for worldwide use and employs 400 people at its 26 acre site close to the motorway network in attractive countryside.

An Analyst/Programmer is required to join our small team to work on the design and programming of both new and existing software. Currently all software is developed and maintained in-house, however packaged software and 4GLs are expected to be selected over the coming year. Candidates should have a minimum of 18 months COBOL programming experience which will ideally have been gained in a software house or manufacturing environment.

Applicants should be self-motivated and energetic with strong interpersonal skills and should expect to play an active and vital role within the department. The ability to work with the minimum of supervision and to be confident in their approach to solving user problems is essential.

The hardware used is a Texas Instruments System 1500 running under UNIX. Whilst experience of this machine is not essential, as training will be provided, preference will be given to applicants who have mini-computer or UNIX experience.

In addition to an attractive salary other benefits include five weeks holiday and a profit related bonus.

Please write in confidence, enclosing full career and personal information to:  
Mrs J. Gallagher, A H Marks and Company Limited, Wyke Lane, Wyke, Bradford BD12 9EJ

The language is taken up several notches from those found in earlier decades. SVCs in the 1990s and currently are full of advertisements such as these now typical examples. What such words create is a much stronger sense of the individual as an appendage of/fused with the corporation: self-assured, pro-active, competitive, and with a personality to disarm clients. Even in computers (above) and for the shop job in the advertisement below, similar characteristics

surface again and again. This suggests not only a synchronisation of requirements between one job and another; it represents a hybrid hetero-homogenisation in which corporate (managerial) values are dispersed. Or, to put it another way, a heterogeneity of character-types, attitudes and values which are brought into contact with one another, or gain legitimacy, in their homogenisation to principles driving corporate ideology. This argument is developed in later chapters. Here we should understand by this term hetero-homogenisation the following: arrangements that sponsor (the appearance of) a diversity of personal orientations, which are predicated on conformity to the principles being described in this dissertation as manifest in personal relationships, cultural norms, reflexivity and career aspirations. Empirically, this argument is being substantiated as the study progresses.

## **alpha@graphics**

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### **CAREER OPPORTUNITY**

Alpha Graphics UK is part of a worldwide chain of rapid response franchise outlets operating within the printing and communications industry.

We have a vacancy for an enthusiastic young person (aged 21-30) with a degree or formal training in either marketing, business studies, languages or computer sciences.

To cope with our demanding and absorbing business environment we need someone with enthusiasm, energy, a sense of humour and good communication skills.

In return we provide a comprehensive training and development programme, 5 weeks' holiday per annum, a competitive salary and the opportunity to travel.

If you are interested in joining our team please telephone Tracey Mortimer on 0723 500450 for further details.

**Alpha Graphics Ltd.**  
**Pavillon House,**  
**Valley Bridge Road,**  
**Scarborough,**  
**North Yorkshire YO11 1UY**

*Closing date for applications*  
*10th September, 1993*

(Yorkshire Post, 26/08/93)

### ***Hetero-homogeneity and the inter-personal***

The contextual dimension of job advertisements is made apparent by our very understanding of the words contained within them and knowledge of the acceptable boundaries to behaviour within the *field* (see Bourdieu, 1984). The wording of advertisements in SVCs emphasise these limits and, through doing so, promotes a corporatised ideal of self. Differences in age, gender, class, ethnicity, and culture generally are shorn of their distinctions only to become tokens of

the selves each may otherwise reflect (see Casey, 1995: 152). The imprecision of the language generates a character-type through which most people can, with varying degrees of success, adapt to. It advances a heterogeneity, or plurality of expressions, to a culturally circumscribed – corporately informed – set of characteristics.

SVCs today may list a variety of traits, but some characteristics – judging by their frequency and contextual dimension – appear more significant than others. My findings here are comparable to research carried out by other sociologists. Paul Du Gay (1992: 629), for example, lists ‘energy, initiative, calculation, self-reliance and personal responsibility’ as being commensurate with enterprise. Paul Heelas (Keat, and Abercrombie 1991: 80) refers to Thatcherism and individuals imbued with ‘self-motivation’, ‘personal drive and vitality’, self-assertion’, and ‘self-reliance’. Garrahan and Stewart (1992: 98), who studied work practices at Nissan, found that the company divided workers according to ‘doers’, ‘thinkers’ and ‘carers’. This trichotomy is frequently reproduced in recent SVCs, where such characteristics as ‘pro-active’ (doer), ‘imagination’ (thinker), and ‘empathy’ (carer) can be found in varying measures according to job type. Increasingly, however, broader areas of employment are demanding the same qualities traditionally associated with the salesman. The contemporary examples below, from my intensive study, illustrate the subtle differences between different jobs, while also revealing their similarities.

*Nurse*: self-motivated, caring attitude, communication skills, flexible, adaptable, professionalism, initiative, leadership, team culture

*Sales*: buoyant, outgoing personality, self-confidence, enthusiasm, communication skills, team culture

*Surveyor*: all rounder, flexibility, commitment, pleasing personality

*Fundraiser*: perseverance, tact, sense of humour, outgoing personality

The popular graduate careers manual ‘*Prospects Directory*’ (distributed freely to students at universities) outlines qualities employers look for as well as expectations graduates have. Individually, students and employers appear to place considerable emphasis on ‘interpersonal’ skills, ‘drive’, ‘teamwork’, ‘confidence’ (71% of students) and communication. In the 1999 (page 21) edition, the results of a questionnaire that asked 127 graduate employers to rank, from a list of ‘over 60 skills and qualities’, the ‘top 12 attributes’, show the following:

1. Willingness to learn	93%
2. Commitment	88%
3. Dependibility/reliability	88%
4. Self-motivation	88%
5. Team work (see section 2.2)	87%
6. Communication skills (oral)	87%
7. Co-operation	86%
8. Communication skills (written)	86%
9. Drive/energy	84%
10. Self-management	84%

11. Desire to achieve/motivation	84%
12. Problem solving ability	84%

It is not particularly useful to this study to note the relevance of these characteristics to enterprise when it is the principle of self-adaptation to enterprise that concerns me. I do not challenge the view that the above, for example, are necessary qualities for either the individual (to succeed in the workplace) or the company (for worker productivity) given the cultural values that employers disseminate. To reiterate, my concern is the impact that a clearly defined range of characteristics that are prerequisite to getting a job has on subjectivity (reflection upon and orientation to norms consistent with those qualities). Or, from another angle, the extent to which a neo-liberal competitive framework is inscribed into individual self-evaluation. To understand the significance of these words to capitalism, let us engage in some deconstruction work, starting with the recent and now common 'interpersonal'.

'*Graduates' Work*', a manual specifically designed for graduate/university careers advisors, attempts a definition of 'interpersonal' (Harvey, et al. 1997: 63). It is an ambiguous term, they say, because such skills are 'rooted in personal attributes; that individuals' personal development or early socialisation influences their capacity to interact with and relate to others...' leading 'some employers to place a lot of emphasis on graduates' personal attributes when recruiting.' This is illustrated for career advisors with a few quotations from employers:

When you are working with people the first thing is that you have got to be approachable, come across to people as approachable, sincere, knowledgeable on your subject, warm, caring, those sort of things, they are interpersonal skills.

(General manager, small registered company)

Or, for example, the following:

... it is very important that the person we take on fits in. You have got to have somebody who has a sense of humour... If they don't appear as if they will fit in socially then we have got a problem. It isn't just somebody who is really good at doing debits and credits, I need somebody who can work with the people out there.

(Sales manager, multinational reprographic equipment manufacturer)

Lastly:

You have to feel quite confident talking to clients and inspiring trust and confidence and communicating. You are representing (the company) – a sort of

corporate communication... Generally, I would say, that working in a building like this, you have to get on. And being out here as well, there's even more pressure on personal relationships to work. Because it is really quite a pressurised job and you can't really afford to have people not getting on.

(Project manager, small design and communications company)

Here 'interpersonal' connects in each quotation an expectation that a person will perform to a task consistent with maintaining a social front beneficial to the company. It is not enough, in other words, to 'just' do the job or even to bluff at interview that the work is wanted for every reason other than money: the successful worker will appear to enjoy the conviviality of work for the benefit of the employer all of the time as a function of the task. Returning to our system of evaluation described in chapter four - context-application-effect - 'interpersonal' reveals itself prior to evaluation as a word describing what people do: socialise with one another on a convivial basis. Splitting the word creates 'inter' and 'personal', a relational and an intimate, a mediation of intimates. In *context*, the mediation occurs through the organisational requirements of the company. In *application*, the intimate, which we might suppose to mean feelings, emotion and personality, is mediated through the company as the glue that connects each (individual) subject for as long as it serves the organisational demands. In *effect*, the intimate and its intersubjective relation is turned, as it were, into a set of 'interobjectivities' irreducible to and inseparable from their subjective equivalent. In other words, the person is invited to embrace a form of intercourse configured to company norms that already prevailed in broader social networks and is undermined through the competitive logic that an enterprising culture promotes. So in 'interpersonal' we are offered back in a specific and calculated way that which is being disrupted in the pressures upon us to succeed.

'Just' doing the job is neither enough for the company nor the individuals working there when each person will be interacting over long periods of time. But what do we suppose is the relationship between the worker and organisation? Or the worker in the job and the worker outside of it/in other capacities? Moreover, to what extent does knowledge of company requirements, and the technologicalisation of principles such as 'interpersonality', affect the subjective development of the individual? These questions are addressed in due course. For now I will concentrate on the between power and technology to this discussion.

Foucault's conception of power within macro and micro relations is employed by Rose (Heelas and Morris (eds.), 1992: 142) who describes it 'not as a negation of the vitality and capacities of individuals, but as the creation, shaping and utilisation of human beings *as* subjects.' Elias (1996(1989): 33) refers to power through 'changes in the relation between external self-constraints and individual self-constraints.' So that alternations in behavioural

codes vis-à-vis formalisation and informalisation affect and condition variations in personality and group.

The language of SVCs signifies and codifies human behaviour into a 'Will to Power' that can reflexively be orientated by the subject to success as understood in employment terms. This should be qualified through Bourdieu (1991 (1983): 113), who contends that 'By focusing exclusively on the formal conditions for the effectiveness of ritual, one overlooks the fact that the ritual conditions that must be fulfilled in order for ritual to function and for sacrament to be both *valid* and *effective* are never sufficient as long as the conditions which produce the recognition of this ritual are not met'. In other words, the conditions or field in which power functions and is legitimised must exist a priori to its expression for informal approval. The extent to which a 'personality culture', or a technologicalisation of the faculties of human subjectivity, is mapped out and prevails over human relations generally, is indicated in SVCs by the extent to which a signified language of personality to employers proliferates the advertisements (this is discussed in more detail below). This never represents a fixed point of reference, however, as the ideals always relate to the changing expectations of enterprise.

The technologies that produce an enterprising language of personality are transmitted within a cultural context in which individuals are already preoccupied with concerns about how to improve the self and gain access to the material and cultural goods of the age. Hence the audience (using Goffman's terminology) is attuned to the language of personality in SVCs. Baudrillard (1998: 109), for example, refers to 'cultural designers' (say, the human relations industry) as the power behind this technology in which 'in a society where individuals are severely affected by the division of labour and the fragmentary nature of their work, they [cultural designers] seek to 'redesign' them [people] through 'culture', to integrate them into a single formal shell, to facilitate interaction in the name of the promotion of culture, to promote an ambience for people, as design does for objects.' Sennett (1993: 238), as previously discussed, articulates Baudrillard's concerns in terms of a 'destructive *Gemeinschaft*': 'A society with a very low level of interaction between its members', he argues, 'dominated by ideas of individual, unstable personality, is likely to give birth through fantasy to enormously destructive collective personalities... Such a community is hostile to outsiders and competition is rife among those within over who is 'really' an embodiment of the collective personality...' So whereas Baudrillard plays upon the idea of cultural engineering as a mechanism for homogenisation, Sennett sees it as a consequence of the opposition between individuals who each try to exceed one another in demonstrating their identification to the ideological cause. Casey (1995: 152) relates this idea specifically to the company which, she says, 'seeks to integrate all of its employees... into a restored Protestant corporate culture of dedication and deference to the company'. Ashford and Mael (Turnbull, 1999: 137), in concert with an Eliasian discourse, look at interpersonal relations and suggest that 'through interactions individuals learn

to ascribe socially constructed labels such as *ambitious, engineer, and upwardly mobile* to themselves and others’.

What each of these views share is a concern for the social integration of the individual under circumstances that do not altogether promote societal felicity. Sennett’s ‘destructive *Gemeinschaft*’ thesis is useful in relating the possible consequences of a corporatised notion of personality upon an individualised society (*hetero-homogeneity*). In his terminology the corporate community would be a fantasy that we try to emulate. It is important, however, to qualify this because the language of personality signifies the qualities we *need* to possess if we are to succeed in the capacity of work (not so much a Will but a compulsion to Power). For this reason it is more than a fantasy and an economic imperative that lends the impetus to this specific kind of community. The corporatised individual is a homogenised category constructed from the available signs that make up human relations *per se* as constitutive of success in a field that, with reference to Bourdieu above, is shifting and shaping to the vicissitudes of capitalist production. Let us develop this argument by turning our attention away from the interpersonal and on to the communicative, or ‘communication skills’.

### *Communicating Success*

The narcissist was earlier summarised, through Lasch (1979: 85), as someone who identifies with ‘winners’. Important to this discussion is what precisely we mean by ‘success’ or ‘winning’. Lasch himself placed these within inverted commas. He contends that ‘To the performing self, the only reality is the identity he can construct out of materials furnished by advertising and mass culture, themes of popular film and fiction, and fragments torn from a vast range of cultural traditions, all of them equally contemporaneous to the contemporary mind.’ (ibid: 91) The ‘winners’ are essentially those held in adulation in popular culture; it is the celebrity, the hero, the famous entrepreneur, the perfectly formed fashion model, and the clean living people that exude confidence. This is summed up by Adorno (2001: 36) when of ‘classical’ music he says, ‘the most familiar is the most successful and is therefore played again and again and made still more familiar.’ The winner is that category of person who permeates our everyday existence by becoming part of a cultural fibre whose very indistinctness as a social relation creates, in grandiose abundance, a reassurance of the a priori superiority of peculiar modes of behaviour. The category of the winner requires, for its comprehension, few translation tools. Success equates with being a winner, and in the language found in SVCs, it is measured, according to Paul Heelas (Keat and Abercrombie, 1991: 80), through profit:

Goals such as the desire to be an artist, an ‘ivory tower’ academic or a self-actualised human being are much less highly valued and are often criticised: their activities are deemed not to provide ‘real’ success... success depends on

the person functioning as a 'business', treating psychological life... as the means for obtaining these financially measurable rewards.

Success here is more a product of corporate engineering than it is of media output. The relationship between business and culture should not, however, be overlooked when ascertaining how notions of success congeal in the language of personality. The homogenisation of a self-descriptive vernacular around specific characterological notions underlines the desirability of particular traits. Heelas understands this in terms of value (see next section) whereas Lasch's narcissism illustrates a more injurious decoding of success. SVCs are a part of this. They help people in the organisation with a lexicography to understand what characteristics are most useful to have. The frequency of particular words and phrases indicates popularity and normality. Words and phrases that are mostly or entirely absent from these columns slide into the ether, forgotten as anachronisms, superfluous to company requirements. A phrase such as 'Must have aesthetic sensibilities' cannot be found. 'Should be critically aware'? There is nothing in my study to indicate such a demand. Likewise, 'Not afraid to question authority' unless translated into 'leadership skills', which is not exactly the same. Indeed, it is possible to seek out examples given here that, if not presented exactly in this way, have a comparable meaning. Does 'creativity' or an 'eye for detail', for example, resonate the same meaning as aesthetic sensibility? It is necessary to refer to the context in order to appreciate the limits of these words. Even those qualities that, in another situation, may appear positive, are here transformed into something that is focused upon business/institutions and, with the centrality of employment to our lives – whether through education or beyond – the meaning of the words in SVCs is key to understanding their commonsense identification. Whenever qualities are listed, even those omitted from SVCs, the conditions are created for their reification so that the personal is turned into categories amenable to commodification. The London/Manchester newspaper *The Guardian* provides an example of the way people are categorised by ideas of success and how that is potentially achieved. Their Saturday graduate employment column 'rise' has a regular feature comparing individuals in 'top rung' and 'bottom rung' jobs. This identifies the qualities a person needs to 'get on the ladder' (bottom rung) and 'rise' to the top of the profession (top rung). It helps people, as pro-active (and 'enthusiastic') 'job seekers', to identify the attitudes and qualities that are required. Moreover, it highlights the link between the language in SVCs and the advice being disseminated in the media.

Here are a few examples (all from *The Guardian* 'rise' section):

### *Top Rung*

- Pat O'Driscoll (vice president, retail North-west Europe Shell Europe): 'Must-have qualities: The intellect to produce workable solutions to problems and the ability to mix with people of varying backgrounds and different ways of thinking.' (Date 02/09/00: 3)
- James Eadie (managing director bananalotto.co.uk): 'Must-have qualities: "Enthusiasm, determination and intelligence – a will to learn and develop, ability to communicate, a passion for business and technology and a team-player."' (17/02/01: 4)
- Matthew Eastlake (sales and marketing director for UK, DFDS Seaways): 'Must-have qualities: "A 'can-do' attitude with a sensible level of energy and enthusiasm. Also, an open mind and a desire to learn from the basics."' (09/03/02: 4)
- Steve Harvey (director of 'people, profit and loyalty at Microsoft'): 'Highpoint so far: "Microsoft coming second in *The Sunday Times Best Companies To Work For* survey for the past two years'... Must-have qualities: "Graduate recruits should have positive energy, a sense of fun and adventure and a passion for technology."' (04/05/02: 3)

#### *Bottom Rung*

- Nicola Marsh (human resources adviser Shell Europe): 'Ambitions? "For now I am focusing on becoming competent in what I do and building my skills."... Graduate tip: "Look at your qualities and what you enjoy doing and try to find a career that fits with that."' (02/09/00: 3)
- Jody Pearmaine (graduate trainee banana lotto.co.uk): 'Ambition: "To progress quickly, develop my sales and marketing skills, make a lot of money and retire at the age of 35."... Sales pitch: "Online entertainment is fun. challenging and very interesting. If you work hard there are exciting opportunities and good career prospects."' (17/02/01: 4)
- Pal [sic] Gleed (marketing planning analyst, DFDS Seaways): (different questions here to previous ones) 'Thoughts? "It's a new role, so a lot of work is being passed to me to run with which can be daunting, but one should expect that."' (09/03/02: 4)
- Janeen Finneran (graduate trainee at Microsoft): ' "The graduate programme is extremely flexible, allowing all graduates' needs to be met. There is a massive amount of training available. I have received technical training, attended soft skills courses and I have two mentors."' (04/05/02: 3)

It is worth noting that these examples were taken at random from a series of 'rise' sections collected over a two year period. No effort was made to pick out issues with the most revealing quotations. In short, these are typical of the content found each week in 'rise'. Implicit here, and elsewhere in the newspaper section, are definitions of success and attitude circumscribed to employers and promoted as examples for students/graduates to learn from and

follow. It continues a now established tradition in career/personality guidance from technologies applied at school (see chapters seven and eight) through university and beyond. The seemingly innocuous comments of a young trainee help cement the words of SVCs into a coherent code that is contextualised in examples of 'normal' working practices so that each person can interpret and project the code in a fashion commensurate with enterprise.

One of the 'top rung' graduates James Eadie regards the 'ability to communicate' as essential to success. It is a characteristic sentiment in the lexicon of employment that is more specious than might appear without critical reflection. There is an implication that 'communication skills' have a specific meaning here and not understood in commonsense terms. By way of clarification, *Graduates Work* (Harvey et al. 1997: 67), the guide for university careers advisors, offers the following quotation from a partner in a large law firm:

... it is something we have thought about over the years and we've tried to develop the meaning and establish really what are we looking for when we say that we want someone with communication skills, because it has so many ramifications and permutations that not all communication skills necessarily are relevant to what we do.

The meaning is far from transparent. Nevertheless, it is telling that when an employer requests communication skills – and the majority do – these are qualities specific to the organisation - 'not all communication skills necessarily are relevant to what we do' - and not necessarily useful or desirable outside of that context. In building upon our 'communication skills' we are shaping oral and written interaction to the needs of enterprise.

Habermas (1981) regarded a form of communication free from coercion as the yardstick of a rational praxis. Is the above example a form of communication 'free from coercion'? By what token should Jody Pearmaine's wish to develop her 'marketing skills' be viewed? Or Nicola March, who suggests we look at our personal qualities and find the company to match? Janeen Finneran, for example, considers Microsoft as a company that allows 'all graduates' needs to be met'. Perhaps an analogy can be made with Starbucks coffee houses: comfortable, good service, nice coffee, but predictable, without distinction and culturally prescribed (albeit, perhaps, after extensive market research). It is not the point that conditions of employment are *necessarily* worse today than in previous decades, rather that how the company identifies with the person and the person *necessarily* identifies with the company, has deleterious consequences for the 'project of self' and cultural diversity in the main (see Sennett, 1999: 138 for an elaboration on this).

Returning again to our method of deconstruction – context-application-effect – each of the words used in the above examples can be re-evaluated and their ideological content

revealed. Let us concentrate here, though, on the seemingly self-explanatory and ideologically neutral 'communication' skills. We have already discussed the context in which the word appears and that it signifies an ability to transmit a code peculiar to the particular organisation which, given the propensity for companies to request 'communication skills, can be assumed to have a generic meaning to employers. In *application*, the person gives themselves over to their (subjectivised) machinic ability to confer upon the other knowledge of a given thing. In *effect*, this configures communication as a tool for intersubjective communication, or the testing out of validity claims (Habermas), into a device for empowering the individual to succeed in carrying out the organisational needs and advancing the self in career terms. Hence, communication is released from its principal social relation and instrumentalised principally for its economic and power relation. The distinction between the two, following the personality culture hypothesis, is blurred or, likely, reinforced as representative (communication skills) of the former social relation.

How expectations adapt to the working environment is illustrative of how the relationship between company and individual is balanced. Pal Gleed, for example, 'expects' a lot of work to be passed his way. It is often the status of the company rather than, perhaps, the actual work itself that foremost justifies the relationship, as Steve Harvey suggests when he says that his company came second in the *Sunday Times Best Company to Work For* survey two years running. For such graduates, happiness is not in the thing we do it is how what we do is vindicated in the eyes of others. This brings the argument full circle, back to narcissism, to the other-directed self (Riesman), to dramaturgy, to hetero-homogenisation, because 'all graduates' needs' are met within a situation that provides for and sustains a sense of well-being on the basis of equivalence between personality and corporation. Later, I shall argue that to understand this dynamic it is necessary to look beyond concepts such as narcissism and the other-directed self.

The 'marketing skills' that Jody Pearmaine, above, seeks, structure and organise communication skills to the specifics of free-market capitalism. Pal Gleed expects a lot of work and does not complain because, it could be surmised, as a graduate entering the contemporary workplace he lacks knowledge of and opportunity in alternative business practices to question the basic ethos. Gleed's 'ability to mix with people...' and Matthew Eastlake's 'can-do attitude' are phrases that exemplify a conformity to the corporation. Words like communication, interpersonal, success and so on, are seemingly free from ideology because they allude to qualities arguably intrinsic to socialised individuals. However, in decoding the language of personality in the context of employment an altogether different interpretation can be made. In this context, words such as these are potentially *more* destructive of the conscious development of personality than 'aggressive', say, or 'dedication to the profit motive', as we are more likely to question the latter's significance to a personal sense of integrity. In due course, the meaning

is potentially altered for business, transcribed to the individual, and filtered through communication and reflexivity. This draws us, once again, into a discourse on commodification, a word that, connected to personality, requires additional explication.

### *Commodification of Personality*

Here, I want to detail the relevant personality words that have surfaced in the course of this study, before putting the objectification of personality (commodification) into perspective.

Below is a definitive list of the qualities requested in the SVCs studied in this research:

ability	adaptability	aggressive	alert	ambitious
aptitude	articulate	authoritative	calm	can-doer
calming	cheery	commercial(minded)	commonsense	communication
competent	(self)confidence	conscientious	courage	creative
dedicated	determined(to succeed)	diligent	doer	drive
dynamic	efficient	energetic	enterprise	enthusiasm
flair	flexibility	forward looking	friendly	get on(with others)
go-ahead	go getter	good appearance	happy	imagination
independent	initiative	innovative	integrity	interpersonal
keen	leader(ship qualities)	like meeting people	lively	mature
(self)motivated	optimistic	organiser	outgoing	patient
perceptive	persistence	personable	personality	pleasant manner
pleasing	positive	presence	proactive	professionalism
profit orientated	progressive	purposeful	relaxed	reliable
resourceful	responsibility	right outlook	self-reliant	self-starter
sense of humour	sociable	social skills	successful	team(player etc)
tact	willingness	young	zest	

Taken together these qualities resonate a corporate ethic. 'Tact', on its own, says very little about one's personality. Yet alongside 'willingness', 'right outlook' and 'self-starter', the corporate ethic reveals itself. Some words, as has been noted, are more popular than others. Words such as 'diligent' hardly feature at all<sup>1</sup>. This list effectively stands for personality today and, on account of the synthesised meanings of these words, they conform to business standards. These classifications render personality into an object. As Hannah Arendt said, 'the things of the world have the function of stabilising human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that... men, their everchanging nature notwithstanding, can retrieve the sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table.' (quoted in Lasch, 1984: 31) Can the same really be said of personality? That it enjoys equivalence in objective form? Even if this was the case, it does not mean that personality necessarily achieves a commodity value. I want to explore this conceptual issue - without resolving the issue of whether or not personality is commodified (even as a virtual commodity (see below)) - so that a simplified language can be applied to the subsequent debate on personality culture.

<sup>1</sup> 'Relaxed' and 'calm' are almost identical in meaning and, for this reason, some synonyms are excluded.

Marx (quoted in McLellan, 1990: 226) wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* that 'a class of labourers, who live only as long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital... must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.' This rather misleading definition of labour as a commodity is later refined in *Capital* as labour power; it is from that analysis that the basis of my argument on personality as a commodity is taken. However, there are salient points here that are worth emphasising. It has already been noted that providing a quality can be objectified it can potentially be exchanged. If SVCs are any indication of market demand for characteristics then those who present personal qualities to access employment are prone, arguably, to the vicissitudes and fluctuations Marx describes. Personality, in contradistinction to production, falls into the realm of the sign. It is a simulated commodity – a fetishisation - it does not exist as a tangible reality. I concur, in this respect, at least, with Baudrillard (2001: 183) and others when relating personality to commodities and will expand on this argument, through Marx, below. A commodity, however, is a measurable quality and, in relation to an earlier discussion, depends on a level of homogenisation or, in Foucault's (1997: 184) words, 'normalisation' which 'individualises by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another.' Discourses on emotion, principally influenced by Hochschild's study of Air Stewardesses, make claims that are comparable to this one on personality. As Hochschild (1983: 14) says, 'when emotional labour is put into the public marketplace, it behaves like a commodity: the demand for it waxes and wanes depending upon the competition within the industry.' (see also Fineman and Kruml) It is C. Wright Mills (1951: 182), perhaps, who makes the most explicit reference to personality commodification when, in *White Collar*, he argues that 'in the new society of employees, they first of all sell their services. The employer of manual services buys the workers' labour, energy, and skill; the employer of many white collar services; especially salesmanship, also buys the employees' social personalities.' Applying some of Marx's (see Marx, 1999) conceptual framework to these arguments, then, I would like to attempt an early sketch of commodification of personality through the language illustrated in SVCs.

Beginning with the idea of labour power, we can make comparisons between that and the use of personality today. If we consider that labour power as a commodity lies at the centre of social relations in an industrial age, then as we enter a service age (with necessary qualifications found in chapter three) it is perhaps personality power that becomes an accentuated - *virtually* distinctive - feature of the labour commodity. Personality achieves a use-value when it is activated in human interaction, and congeals in the commodity form in the provision of a paid service. Expert advice, information services, and sales, all require an investment of personality. Characteristics achieve varied use-values according to the types of

service being provided. Hence, *empathy* may be of more use in a charity organisation than at a car showroom where *charm* may be more relevant. Nevertheless, there are 'characteristics' common to all or most services: *interpersonal*, *GSOH* (good sense of humour), *outgoing*, *pro-active*, *team-player* etc. These form the bedrock of *transferable* qualities today (see chapter seven), the ones that achieve a high use-value from one 'service' job to another. Specific characteristics such as *diplomatic* are peculiar to certain types of work whose use-value is insignificant in many working environments, although potentially important in other spheres of life. Through these variations emerges a kind of *division of personality* (see below).

Crucially, it is not the fact that personality is expressed at all that makes it a commodity. Only by achieving an exchange value-like status does personality rank as a marketable quality. With a majority of employers specifying a range of personality traits that are by and large circumscribed to a corporatised notion of self, the question of one's own personal integrity is drawn into focus.

While physical activity or labour time is accorded a wage, the extraction of personality does not directly command a value. A person is not paid according to the number of smiles or 'pleasant' conversations. Any value accrued from personality is expressed as a part of labour. 'Personality power' has an *unspecified value*, and is, as such, *commodity-like*. Although it can, in many jobs, take on a central function, the actual price of personality is calculated *indirectly*, as an outcome of career/job success. Particular jobs, especially service jobs, are contingent on personality. *The higher the contingency the greater the exchange-value as a part of the overall labour commodity*. Or, put another way, the more added-value that personality gives over to a product or service the greater its worth as an aspect of labour power. The unspecified value of personality is important in masking its commodity-like quality. This matters precisely because should one conceptualise and value personality as one does a product, the comforting distinctiveness of this notion is lost and, arguably, ideological obstacles to alienation breakdown. The personality relation, then, is necessarily abstracted in the labour process.

The characteristics of an individual's personality may be well defined, but not necessarily recognised for a monetary value. The division of personality helps change this. It is not the quality of *being* an accountant, per se, that wins the contract but the fact that he is personable, fun loving and dynamic. Adorno offers an early definition of this, without actually naming the concept as such.

In appealing to the fact that in an exchange society the subject was not one, but in fact a social object, psychology provided society with weapons for ensuring that this was and remained the case. The dissection of man into his faculties is a projection of the division of labour on to its pretended subjects, inseparable

from the interest in deploying and manipulating them to greater advantage.  
(2000: 63)

Personality takes the division of labour beyond the distinctions of labour and onto the subjective categories defining personal qualities, enabling the salesperson, for example, to be broken down into a number of subcategories. This distinguishes one worker from another not as a person but, arguably through their corporatised personality, as a generic set of commodities. The more refined that character is the better placed to transfer between different job roles. Whereas once personality was not a significant contingent, it is now arguably *the* quality par excellence, replacing trade specialisation and even educational qualifications (beyond a certain point) as the best guarantor of work. My findings here strengthen this point.

SVCs highlight the division of personality into categories that delimit what it actually means to have personality; a quality turned into fetters through a corporate engineering that mocks the idea of competing value-orientations entertained by Weber. We may want to prepare ourselves to consider the possibility that, as with Horkheimer and Adorno (1995: 167), the 'most intimate reactions of human beings have been so thoroughly reified that the idea of anything specific to themselves now persists only as an utterly abstract notion'. It is a critique in need of qualification, for it is not entirely clear that personality is entirely without distinction. The notion of commodification is useful for understanding the consequences of a reified set of characteristics and helps to place the significance of the lexicon within a critical setting. However, while there is an implication that, through homogenisation of personality language, each person can, to various degrees, affect their personality to suit the employer, it is not entirely clear that they entirely do. Advertisements in SVCs reify personal qualities in as much as people engage with them in this way. If that link can be made, it is a small step to giving personal qualities exchange value equivalents. Later I shall make a stronger case for the synthesis of reified personality language, self-perception and self-marketing.

So let us take stock of where we are in this discussion. So far I have analysed the content of SVCs over different periods of time. I have concentrated on the meaning of words in more recent examples by revealing their ideological function and giving comparative examples from the employment field. I have developed arguments on the basis of this analysis and expatiated the commodification of personality. Now we shall progress the concept of a 'personality culture' through empirical data.

### The Personality Culture in Employment

To recap, a 'personality culture' in employment refers to a reification of personality (in the language in job advertisements, careers advice, and recruitment procedures) that, potentially,

filters through into commonsense notions of the self and subsequently transforms the behaviour and motives of people towards one another as acting subjects<sup>2</sup>. This connection is implied in my research on SVCs. Now I would like to consider the possible causes and implications of the dramatic rise in the use of personality language during the 1980s and 1990s as noted in the following tables.

### *Statistical Evidence for a 'Personality Culture'*

Consider that of the coded references in table 3.2 below, those awarded a value of 2 and above reach a substantial 44.11% of all advertisements by 2001. So if we were to eliminate advertisements from my count that arguably make only subtle references to personality and concentrate, instead, on those which are more explicit and less ambiguous in their content, we discover a rise during the 1990s that incorporates almost half of all advertisements. In considering every one that qualifies, according to my analysis, as a personality advertisement, then throughout the 1990s, and from as early as 1985, the figure is constantly above 50%. By 2001, of course, that figure has reached 83% of all advertisements: a sizeable majority. The consistency in these figures and the level at which they reach in 2001 – with practically identical results from different newspapers in my original extensive analysis (see graph 1.1 in chapter four) - illustrates that, in SVCs, there is a saturation of personality references that is both extensive and intensive, and of a magnitude which is hegemonic and accurate to describe in terms of a *personality culture*.

Table 3.1: Advertisements denoting personality

	1960	1965	1970	1973	1976	1979	1982	1985	1988
Total ads	84	63	21	43	39	55	58	75	173
Total P.	10	4	5	6	13	18	13*	43	87
Total P. %	11.9	6.34	23.8	13.95	33.3	32.72	22.41	57.33	50.28

	1991	1994	1997	2001
Total ads	105	114	99	102
Total P.	63	70	64	85
Total P. %	59.99	60.8	64.64	83

P. = Advertisements denoting personality

P. % = Percentage of advertisements denoting personality

Table 3.2: coded personality references

	1960	1965	1970	1973	1976	1979	1982	1985	1988
0 as %	3.57	1.58	0	2.32	5.12	14.54	12.06	26.66	15.02

<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, van Krieken (1996: 213) advances the idea of a 'proto-governmentalisation' to describe people as 'potential acting *subjects* of power' especially where 'power relations are *not* being challenged or resisted.' So that a 'personality culture' is merely ourselves organised collectively.

1 + as %	8.33	4.76	23.8	11.62	28.2	18.18	10.34	30.66	35.26
2 + as %	1.19	3.17	9.52	4.65	12.82	3.30	3.44	13.33	12.13
3 + as %	0	0	4.76	0	0	1.81	0	0	0

	1991	1994	1997	2001
0 as %	16.91	13.15	6	12.74
1 + as %	43.8	48.24	58	70.58
2 + as %	22.85	23.68	31	44.11
3 + as %	1.9	3.5	7.07	14.7

See chapter four for explanation of coded references. The figures represent percentages of the total amount of advertisements; so 2 + as % denotes *all* advertisements coded 2 and above.

# 10-KEYS LTD.

Originator and Market leaders in the field of  
**GROUP OWNERSHIP**

of Continental and UK properties.  
need an assistant to the Marketing Director.

The successful candidate  
will probably be over 35, have a mature  
and businesslike personality, inexhaustible  
patience and an unflinching sense of humour.

A background in property or the  
travel industry will be useful, as will:  
a working knowledge of Spanish  
and a recognised golf handicap  
and the ability to swim and play  
a decent game of tennis.

Personal ties should not inhibit  
his/her ability to travel extensively at  
home or abroad, organise exhibitions and  
accompany clients on inspection visits.

A Driving Licence is essential.

We need a determined, self-confident  
but friendly type who will enjoy working the  
often arduous and irregular hours.

Academic qualifications are secondary  
to a talent for perceptive communication  
with clients in the leisure property field.

If you think you can measure up to  
these attributes and can contribute to our  
rapid expansion story, write in the first  
instance for an application form to:

**Mr. T. Johnston, 10-Keys Ltd.**  
**Group Ownership Specialists**  
**'Northfield', Snelsins Road, Cleckheaton,**  
**West Yorkshire BD19 3UE**

(Yorkshire Post, 27/10/1983)

10 Keys Limited, above, advertised this post in 1983. This particular advertisement contains, for its time, quite unusual content that, even today, would be exceptional. The initial request for a 'business-like personality, inexhaustible patience and an unfailing sense of humour' is fairly normal in the 1990s. What is unusual is the desire for applicants to possess 'a recognised golf handicap and the ability to swim and play a decent game of tennis'. CVs, as will be discussed in the next chapter, routinely contain sections on hobbies and interests, though it is highly irregular to find such an explicit mention in a job advertisement. What makes this particular advertisement intriguing is the contextual implication. Does the talk about golf and tennis, for example, reflect the employers' 'unfailing sense of humour' or is it indicative of a growing tendency in employment vernacular? Would such advertisements appear strange, even humorous, at that time or even twenty years earlier? While today such content may not seem entirely out of place, in 1983, given the amount of jobs specifying personality at that time, it is questionable how a potential applicant may have viewed the advertisement. In the context of a personality culture, where requests for particular traits are a normal feature of job advertisements and a part of everyday life, it is unlikely that an individual applying for this post could risk approaching it in a jocular or ironic way. The above could be a precursor – here an example of the rarefied executive working culture that is less in evidence today (see, for example, Argyris, 1964; Whyte, 1957; Thrift in Hay and Marsh, 2000 on changes in management culture) - of a later phase characterised by a personality culture in which the absurd is normalised and our responses to commodification are conditioned in a normalisation of these words. In sum, what occurs in this advertisement is a subject-object relation that explicitly challenges the distinction between the two in that the self that is characterised is ready-made for the company. What we might suppose, then, is that how the company defines itself is indistinguishable from how it defines the person. We shall investigate this aspect.

### *'Profiling' the Company*

Amazingly, I got my current job from the first proper interview I'd ever had.  
All I remember about it was that I smiled a lot and tried to let my natural  
personality shine through.

Anna Douglas TMP Worldwide (BA (honours) Communication Studies, graduated 1996)

(Prospects Directory 1999: 52)

On being interviewed:

‘... as well as anticipating their criteria you must also make the human signals mentioned earlier. Show confidence, smile, be natural and enthusiastic. The ideal candidate demonstrates impeccable preparation and comes across as human too.’

(Ibid.)

Natural personality, enthusiasm, preparation and promoting oneself as human, these, it would appear from here alone, are requisite qualities of a successful interview candidate: to be, in other words, *preternaturally* human. Yet is not this simply a practical requirement that institutions have to categorise – and therefore – recognise the person they are communicating with? As Jenkins (1996: 83) says, ‘categorisation is a routine and necessary contribution to how we make sense of, and impute predictability to, a complex social world about which our knowledge is always partial.’ Bourdieu states that:

practical knowledge of the social world that is presupposed by ‘reasonable’ behaviour within it implements classificatory schemes... historical schemes of perception and appreciation which are the product of the objective division into classes (age groups, gender, social classes) and which function below the level of consciousness and discourse. Being the product of the incorporation of the fundamental structures of society, these principles of division are common to all the agents of the society and make possible the production of a common-sense world. (1984: 409)

This is underscored, however, by a dialectic dominant and dominated. ‘The same classificatory schemes (and the oppositions in which they are expressed) can function, by being specified, in fields organised around polar positions.’ (ibid: 409) So that an antagonism is created which defines the fields of action. In a way similar to Foucault’s analysis, the individual is enmeshed in a set of relations prescribed by power and, in Bourdieu, by class. But as Du Gay emphasised, the principle of the bureaucracy was to delineate between the ethic of the task and the emotional constitution of the individual so as to preserve both. Within a personality culture these categories of distinction are reinforced to emphasise – for what reasons we can speculate (see Thrift in Ray and Sayer (eds.), 1999 on the rise of a managerial soft capitalism) – the essential and irreducible ‘human’ as that which signifies Me as something marketable to employers (employability equals personality). It is this development that, far from breaking established codes of practice between individuals and institutions, is a constituent part of ‘late’

capitalism (socio-economic, political, cultural, technological, etc, developments) and not, as it were, a resolution of previous antagonisms associated with modernity. The personality culture appears non-dialectical inasmuch as the characteristics highlighted in SVCs are not prescribed but offered up for selection to an audience wanting to improve their lives through the means available to them. A company that presents itself as human is simultaneously de/constructing a fantasy: that of the individual personality. This opens the way to an absurd configuration: the subjective institution as the embodiment of all those employed there as a collective personality seeking to attract kindred spirits. We shall explore the content of company literature to evaluate the kind of images organisations like to present of themselves as an illustration of the subjective institution.

### *Reflexive Companies*

Let us first relate the subjectivised company to a question raised by an employee to *The Guardian 'rise'* (14/09/02: r6) advice column. The accompanying response is also reproduced.

Help: I crave recognition and respect!

My job is made really difficult by the fact the organisation I work for is not well known or respected. I feel I'm fighting a losing battle.

NT, campaigns organiser, London

What is your reaction now to being responsible for improving their image, making them better known and promoting their vision? If you don't believe in them enough to want to do this, you should ask yourself why you're staying.

Irene Krechowiecka (advice

columnist)

Now re-read the reply by replacing the last word 'staying' with 'friends'. The point being that a description of a company, its values, ambitions and motives has increasingly become interchangeable with how people, as enterprising subjects, recognise themselves. We can develop this through employer branding, an idea that compares to the instrumental evaluation of acquaintances, friends and sexual partners. The phantasmagoric media equivalent of this is 'reality' television which allows the show's participants (and viewers) to weigh-up each other's 'pros and cons' and 'evict' one another from the programme. So, to employer branding: on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2000, *rise* (p3) carried an article entitled 'Are you a model candidate: a 2:1 who's fun?' According to Simon Barrow, 'Employer branding gives companies a coherent management strategy for keeping talent within the organisation.' Essentially, 'employer branding' denotes a company that is open to the scrutiny of potential employees by

giving access to information, such as staff e-mail addresses for communication. Companies are marketing themselves to appear 'cool'. The qualities, as *The Guardian* likes to show, indicate the way companies define themselves as 'progressive', 'forward thinking', and 'dynamic', and how they identify themselves with the demands of 'successful' personalities.

#### 'Cool Companies'

- Maersk Ltd: 'offers the opportunity of an exciting and challenging career at sea... leads to a recognised qualification and the opportunity to progress into management...' (02/09/00: r5)
- Xebec McGraw-Hill: 'If your colleagues are regularly drawing on your skills and knowledge to perform their tasks, and you have adapted to this trouble shooting role with an easy grace but scant rewards, it may be time to re-engineer your career... [this] is a highly valued skill at Xebec... part of a transatlantic corporation... and a world leader...' (17/02/01: r3)
- Marriott Hotels: 'aim is to encourage individuality, its graduate management programme enables candidates to build a recognised portfolio of skills, learning about reception, reservations, guest relations and housekeeping.' (09/02/02: r5)
- Wood Group: 'The company can list BP, Shell, Texaco and ExxonMobile, GE, Rolls Royce, ABB, Siemens and National Power among its roll of call candidates... one day they could be working at its head office in Aberdeen, the next in South America on an industrial gas turbine.' (04/05/02: r5)

These examples can be viewed from two opposing perspectives. On the one hand, the companies, and many others listed each week in *rise* (this list was chosen at random), offer the potential for a varied and challenging career with training perks and, probably, high salaries. On the other hand, they represent the power of big business over the lives of individuals. The examples are phrased in ways to encourage 'high-flying' applicants that have the ability to reflect the demands of a 'high profile' organisation. The positive language has the potential to seduce the reader by pre-empting and transfiguring the emotional response. In much the way advertisements help situate new products within an everyday setting, so companies champion links with multinational corporations, say, as an *obvious* plus point. It means that competing value orientations are crowded out by the logic in working for a successful company on the world stage as a 'good' thing. The more certain qualities are presented in a positive light and they, in turn, reflect those qualities that appear to symbolise positive relations between individuals, the more the person-object melds into the structure-subject.

In 1982 Peters and Waterman (1995: 243-258) cited examples of US business practice to illustrate how an operation should be run. It exemplifies, perhaps, what Giddens intended by the notion institutional reflexivity. Here are a few examples from that book:

- On RMI: 'The company's logo is a smile-face'; the headquarters is nicknamed 'Smiles, Ohio': 'Big Jim (CEO) spends much of his time riding around the factory in a golf cart, waving and joking with his workers, listening to them, and calling them all by their first name – all 2,000 of them.'
- On Wal-Mart: 'Sam Walton (CEO), or "Mr Sam," as he's called in the company... quite simply cares about his employees... almost all his managers, at his insistence, wear buttons that say, "We Care About Our People."... Everyone... feels like a winner.'
- On McDonald's: ' "Cashiers must make eye contact with and smile at every customer."... The important thing was that you got to wear an All-American patch on your shirt.'

Prospects Directory, which is published every year for students, and *The Times top 100 Graduate Employers* guide contain additional data to illuminate on the flexibility of companies and connect the above examples of a cultural managerialism from the US to Britain. A few examples from each are quoted below:

*The Times top 100 Graduate Employers* guide (1999-2000)

- Bass: 'The leisure industry is competitive, dynamic and innovative. The graduates we recruit possess the same qualities. We look for energy, vision and fresh thinking. Our graduates need astute commercial minds for a very demanding international arena because our industry demands that we are able to anticipate, innovate and turn change to our advantage.'
- DESG: 'We need people who are interested in defence who are technically competent; effective communicators; well organised; excellent negotiators; motivated and determined.'
- PriceWaterhouseCoopers: 'Academic achievement is, however, only part of the equation; we are looking for candidates with a high level of interpersonal skills, achievements and drive.'

Prospect Directory 1999

- Ove Arup Partnership: 'We seek young people with good honours or postgraduate degrees in engineering or associated subjects with good social, interpersonal, communicative and technical skills and an enthusiasm for design engineering.'

- Cargill Plc: ('The Right Candidate') 'You should be able to demonstrate examples of commercial awareness, initiative, leadership, analytical thinking, decisiveness and good interpersonal skills... be able to work well in a team.'
- Greggs Plc: 'We are looking for graduates with lively, practical and analytical minds who can demonstrate sound common-sense, flexibility of approach and an eye for detail. Ours is a people business and the ability to communicate effectively is vital, as is the potential to lead a team and motivate others.'

In decoding a company profile we discover the same logic in SVCs: that equivalence between company and personality is sought. 'Interpersonal' and 'communication', as previously described, are words rich in corporate meaning. 'Flexibility' is the regulation of the worker to a corporatised regime, not the opportunity to fashion a lifestyle according to individual priorities. In these words are observed the antithesis of Weber's bureaucratic personality. Now an employee is increasingly required to make a show of their 'natural personality' and possess the 'drive' to push the company into new, previously untapped, social territories ('turn change to our advantage' – Bass above). The company may have developed from the old-style (and sometimes concurrent) anonymity of Fordist production methods, that it has happened is for the company's benefit. Any advantage the worker may accrue is secondary and counterbalanced to the negative consequences of changes in organisation discussed in chapter three. As RK Merton (1968: 250) once said about bureaucracies: 'it becomes plain to all who see that man is to a very important degree controlled by his social relations to the instruments of production. This can no longer seem only a tenet of Marxism, but a stubborn fact to be acknowledged by all, quite apart from their ideological persuasion.'

### *In Summary: The Personality Ideal*

Business has provided us with a glimpse of the new individual: he or she is a good communicator, a teamplayer, has interpersonal skills, drive, dedication, is a people person, likes to be part of a thriving company, is not afraid of a challenge, and enjoys the benefits of a flexible organisation with possibilities for vocational training. They have natural personality, are preferably young, and are emotionally attached to the (insecure) work they do. The image of the company matters to them because it is through the company profile that their chosen path is legitimised in the eyes of others and their own personal 'profile' is valued. Credibility engenders respect and offers the hope of easy transfer between companies (as and when required) and, necessarily, more demanding roles. Purpose and fulfilment are packaged by the company for the company and imbued, for individual consumption, within the personality culture. The personality ideal, then, *from the point-of-view of the company*, is illustrated throughout these chapters on SVCs through the words/phrases outlined.

It is now possible to speculate, with the aid of various sources (especially within the sociology of work/enterprise culture material) that personality requests in advertisements for jobs rise disproportionately during the 1980s-90s because of, at one level, economic, industrial and political changes: the free-market economy, flexible accumulation, and Thatcherite policies generally. It could be added that personality requests change in relation to the growth of the service industry, free-market ideology and the homogenisation of work itself through so-called modernisation (flexibilisation) processes. With the more significant rises occurring sometime after the 1980s, however, these processes are consolidating, expanding, or perhaps being expressed through some kind of lag and only now becoming embedded within a personality culture and a part of the vocabulary of self-evaluation generally.

In this chapter, and in chapter four preceding it, I have summarised the data from SVCs and have critically evaluated the content of job advertisements and related material. The pattern of my thesis is presenting itself more clearly as the work progresses. We can visualise an imbrication of its development from abstract analysis on subjectivity, to a more grounded account of the person in relation to employment, to an historical quantitative analysis of the subject being 'hailed' by companies, and to a qualitative analysis of context that uncovers what, if anything, is being called for. From ideas through to concrete relations, the foundations are laid for further inquiry into self-conscious orientation to employment/cultural norms. In the next chapter I conclude the data from SVCs with an analysis of teams and CVs, which, given their cultural significance, deserve a chapter of their own. After that autobiographical accounts of schoolchildren are related to the findings here. To summarise the work so far, we have shown that:

1. Subjectivity is critically evaluated in a variety of interrelated ways.
2. Following this we can question the relationship between the human subject and employment norms.
3. Changes in employment structures have important implications for human self-understanding.
4. How we relate to and identify ourselves in employment is relative to, but not necessarily entirely evolving from, the social and economic relations of society.
5. There is an intensification and extension of language associated with 'personality' in employment criteria that develops over time, in particular since the mid-1980s, constitutive of a cultural phenomenon.
6. Data from situations vacant columns show that employers embrace the language that defines the individual subject as a signification of qualities requisite to getting a job.

7. The meaning of the language contained in job advertisements and, by logical extension, employer expectations, transcends its commonsense evaluation and has a particular association to the interests inscribing (corporate) neo-liberal ideology.
8. There is a dialectical relationship between the person and company that is masked or ameliorated through a reconfiguration of the individual/organisation relationship (hetero-homogeneity).
9. The person, in recognising themselves in the company, and vice-versa, promotes a commodified version of the self as a means to individual advancement (this is grounded more empirically in later chapters).
10. Concepts such as personality culture, commodification of (corporatised) personality, and reflexive exploitation (discussed in more detail later) serve as useful explanatory devices that help extract from words such as 'flexibility', 'personality', 'empowerment', 'inclusivity', 'culture' and so on, their (capitalist) ideological content.

We shall move this discussion forward with a look at teams and CVs.

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## CHAPTER SIX: TEAM SPIRIT AND THE CURRICULUM VITAE

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### Introduction

This chapter concludes the presentation of data from situations vacant columns (SVCs) with a statistical look at the amount of requests for 'teams' and 'CVs' (Curriculum Vitae). The bulk of the chapter, however, will be taken up with a qualitative analysis of these: the former seen, simply, as a simulacrum of community, the latter in its component parts as signifiers of employment norms. The arguments contained here are substantiated further in chapters seven and eight. So, to summarise, I shall:

- Initial presentation of statistical data on teams and CVs.
- Evaluate the meaning of these in the context of employment.
- Formulate discussion through an analysis of the constituent parts of a CV.
- Connect the arguments contained here with those in preceding chapters.

The rationale for including a specific chapter on teams and CVs emerged when counting the words in my SVC study. It became apparent that, by the late 1980s and, especially, the 1990s, teams and CVs had become a standard request amongst employers: that, in particular, this could be observed historically and in conjunction with an idiomatic personality culture. More than any other word in the SVC study, 'team...' is today expressed in everyday language quite apart from its employment context and distinct from and more widespread than its recent historical use, i.e. football team. An etymology of team, pertinent to this study, is required if the importance of the word to this argument is properly to be appreciated. CVs, on the other hand, have a specific relation to employment as a summary of a person's skills and experiences. The value of a 'good' CV, however, and the pressures upon people to develop and maintain one, illustrates clearly the way social life is rationalised to the employer. In this chapter we place greater emphasis on the way subjectivity – the person – is self-consciously instrumentalised for the company. In other words, it is not that people 'are' teamplayers that here concerns us, rather that a person identifies the (exchange) value of being one and seeks out experiences - much like the Protestant already chosen by God as signified by the fact of their productivity – that prove it.

### *Overview of Data*

In 1958 Herman Hesse (1995: 150) wrote in the novel *Demian*: 'All this communal spirit from student club and glee-club to the same spirit in the government was an inevitable development, it was communal life based on anxiety, fear and opportunism; within it was an outworn and indolent life approaching its collapse.' If the 'leaner, meaner' neo-liberal corporation is the glee-club in Hesse's story, then it is one by now in which an engineered scarcity of membership cards are available not only to an 'old boys' network, but to those willing to prove themselves as fit for working in a personality culture. Membership to the corporation can mean a number of things, as Andre Gorz argues:

In a disintegrating society, in which the quest for identity and the pursuit of social integration are continually being frustrated, the 'corporate culture' and 'corporate loyalty' inculcated by the firm offer the young workers a substitute for membership of the wider society, a refuge from the sense of insecurity. The firm offers them the kind of security monastic orders, sects and work communities provide. It asks them to give up everything – to give up any other form of allegiance, their personal interests and even their personal life – in order to *give themselves*, body and soul, to the company which, in exchange, will provide them with an identity, a place, a personality and a job they can be proud of. (Gorz, 1999: 36)

... But he also overplays the extent to which this form of organisation subsumes the individual. Already the qualities characterised by employment norms – whether we are describing a small firm or a large multinational – are discursively filtered into technologies of the self such as CVs prior to and independent of a particular job. So when Lasch argues the following:

The 'education' of the masses has altered the balance of forces within the family, weakening the authority of the husband in relation to the wife and parents in relation to their children. It emancipates women and children from patriarchal authority, however, only to subject them to the new paternalism of the advertising industry, the industrial corporation, and the state. (Lasch, 1979:74)

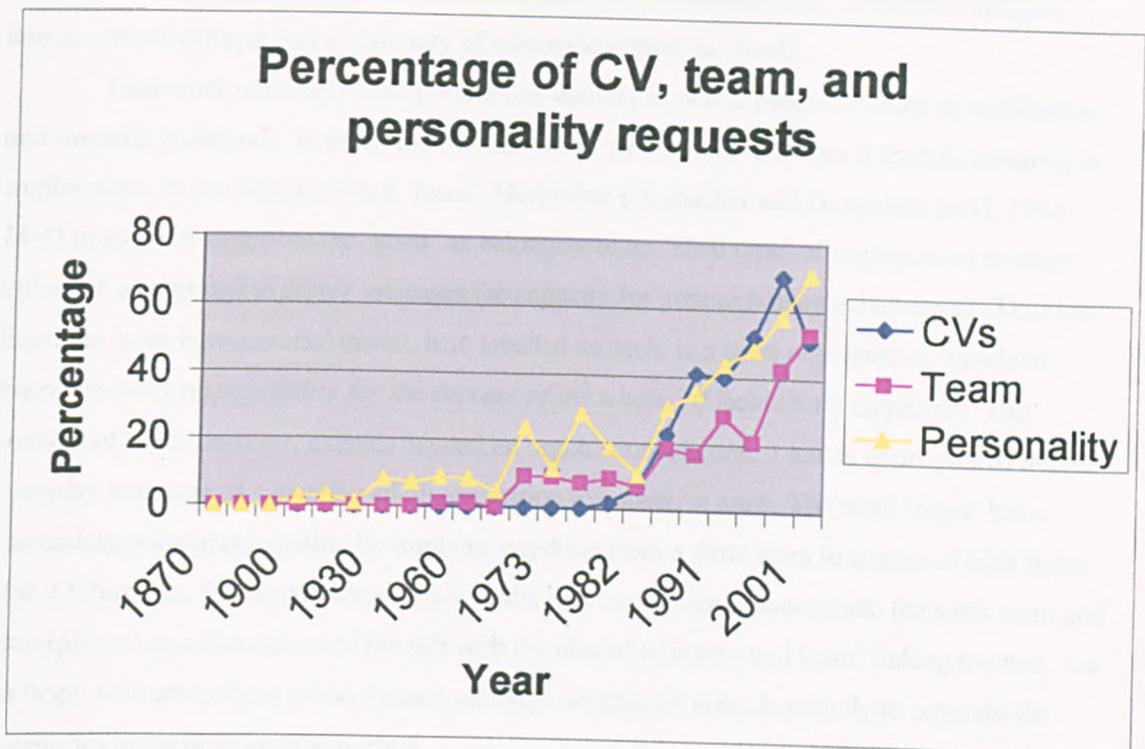
... he misplaces, in this account, the character of the emancipation from and subjection to the institutions he describes. The values inscribed in former arrangements belong to a dynamic that never settles on a single or permanent definition – nor necessarily dissolves - of socio-cultural

norms. If we can encapsulate the principle of this argument as consonant with neo-liberalism, it is that the subject is the self-defining category whose meaning is derived from their self-recognition in the other. Which is meaning-less without consideration of the power of the institutions Lasch names to promote values recognisable as important to the individual. This self-negation in identification with a company is apparent in the following quotation from *Graduates' Work* (Harvey et al, 1997: 75), the guide for graduate careers advisors, on the subject of teams.

In a team you need to be more or less all the same, look similar and do similar things, if you are very different you have to be better than everyone else to get away with it, if you are aren't then you can be picked on. Normally it is easier if you are samey as far as team work is concerned. Everybody can pull together, and everybody knows what everybody else is doing, the team work is much more coherent. If you take it too far it becomes too sterile and everybody is exactly the same. (project leader for a multinational computer service company)

At one level this can be read as mechanical solidarity, except it occurs under conditions wherein the individual is more likely to be conscious of the company expectations and have reflected on their compatibility to them. In other words, conformity is conditional upon the person's self-recognition here or acknowledgement of the benefits in conforming. Teamwork characterises a tension between the subject/object. CVs, on the other hand, characterise how a non-dialectical employment culture is structured as a concrete example of an ontological gap – and its fulfilment - between the person and institution. Let us first evaluate this interpretation as it appears statistically in my data.

Below is a graph showing the number of times teamwork – teamplayer or similar words – and 'CV' are mentioned in job advertisements from the intensive SVC study described in chapter four. The advantage in using the same data is that it allows a direct comparison between the rise in team requests, CVs and 'personality'. There are three lines to the graph, each representing a percentage. The team line (pink squares) shows the percentage of advertisements per SVC that contain at least one reference to the word team. The yellow (triangle) line is the same set of figures as in the graph in chapter four. The blue (diamond) line represents the number of CV requests per SVC.



Graph 3

Here, as previously, the data is unambiguous: there is a clear correlation between the rise in personality references, CVs and team requests. The trends in CV and team usage are practically identical. The difference lying mainly with the point at which each term comes into common use – team in the early 1970s and CV in the early 1980s – although neither reach significant levels until the 1990s. CVs appear to peak in 1997 (69.69% of all advertisements counted) – although the 2001 reading could be something of an anomaly – with team climbing to the 2001 level of 52.94% of all job advertisements.

On this reading alone, then, team requests are arguably a feature of the personality culture and the use of CVs can reasonably be described as pandemic. The latter became common currency by the 1990s although, as a concept, it has been around much longer, both here and in the US in the form of a 'resumé'. Before evaluating the meaning of CVs I should like to explore the significance of the word 'team' to my study.

### Analysing the Team

In this section I shall refer to secondary literature in relating the team to my study, first with reference to work and then in how it corresponds to the self. This enables us to discern between a commonsense meaning of the word and what, in practice, it implies about employment culture and subjectivity. Having addressed this, we can then dissect the CV into its various parts and

develop discussions from there. Both of these issues can be assimilated, in the final analysis, into an overall critique and a summary of where the argument stands.

Teamwork notionally incorporates any activity in which people function as a collective unit towards given ends. In much the way the word 'personality' assumes a specific meaning in employment, so too does the word 'team'. Heckscher (Heckscher and Donnellon (eds), 1994: 24-8) prosaically describes the 'team' as belonging to an 'ideal type' of organisation in which *influence* as opposed to *power* increases the capacity for greater human achievement. Thus the fictitious 'post-bureaucratic' model, here labelled as such, is a team organisation '*in which everyone takes responsibility for the success of the whole.*' (Heckscher's emphasis) The concept of team, however, extends beyond an organisational context and is appropriated into everyday language as a signifier of an orientation to collective aims. The word 'team' has a misleading polysemous quality by implying anything from a darts team to a team of high flyers. But it bifurcates, for the purposes of this study, into two critical components: the work team and team(player) as a description of the self with the idea of a 'communal team' linking the two. Let us begin with an analysis of the former, although no attempt is made entirely to separate the categories given their interconnection.

### *The Work Team*

The idea of 'teamwork' plays on human identifications with community. In employment terms, the 'team' creates a sense of unity, diffuses hierarchy, and acts as a surrogate for community, family, and social and political association. The team benefits corporations in a number of ways: it creates the impression of self-management; reduces social isolation; encourages both self-surveillance (not wanting to let the team down<sup>1</sup>) and surveillance of others ('we're not meeting production/sales/etc targets because X is not pulling their weight'); and serves as an efficient way to disseminate strategies and ideologies. According to Sennett (1999: 106) teamwork 'takes us into that domain of demeaning superficiality which besets the modern workplace' and 'exits the realm of tragedy to enact human relations as a farce.' Meanwhile, Garrahan and Stewart (1992: 89) claim that it is the notion of team 'which, appealing to workers' class experience of collective effort and community experience of solidarity, can be used to 'con' workers into accepting what is mostly old wine in new bottles.' In this sense, the teamplayer is the tragic organisational kernel from which pretensions of historical class agency have been removed.

The team is not new to companies, there are precursors in older production sites that signal an evolution of the practice into workplaces described as 'service' industries (see chapter three). Blauner (1970: 177), for example, in a classic study of automation in the automobile

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<sup>1</sup> Jobmag advises to 'Join a club at work that offers team sports. It's a good way to meet people while keeping fit – and 'not letting the side down' is great motivation for keeping up regular exercise.' (uk.topjobs.net/marketing)

industry in 1964, describes the effective use of small work teams to engineer discipline (also Danford, 1998). His point is the same as the one I make above: 'Men perform up to standard', he says, 'because they do not want to let down their workmates or their department' (see Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992 for a recent example of this at Volvo). Goffman (1971: 108) situates the team within a dramaturgical structure. His definition is pertinent to the work team. It is 'a set of individuals whose intimate cooperation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained... it is a grouping not in relation to a social structure or social organisation but rather in relation to an interaction or series of interactions in which the relevant definition of the situation is maintained.'<sup>2</sup> This is not dissimilar to Bourdieu's definition of a field. Both examples underlie the team structure and exemplify its system of control in which the inherent relations of power are disguised through individual maintenance of the situation.

Vance Packard's 1957 (1991:164) observation also situates the team in bureaucratic employment structures that are assumed by some to have been superseded by now. 'People who coalesce into groups,' he contends, 'are easier to guide, control, cope with, and herd. The 'team' concept was an aid, if not an outright necessity, to the big business, big labour, and big government that came increasingly to dominate the American scene at mid-century.' This observation, along with others emanating from the US, parallels processes happening, perhaps later - and adapted, for example, to the service industry (as broadly defined) generally - in Britain. Catherine Casey (1995: 153) makes a connection with older forms of industrial production when she argues that the team 'is an effective organisational structure... that... allows for integrated knowledge of work to be performed and disseminated, and... serves as a collective corporate site of anxiety displacement... It resuscitates an old form of industrial solidarity... that provides a credible social sphere in the semblance of warmth, caring and belonging.' Because teamworking is suggestive of solidarity and productive communication between workers, it is a change that is often willingly embraced. Garrahan and Stewart (1992: 94), for example, say that if 'we can describe flexibility and quality as the organisational and technical means by which the company seeks to ensure subordination, control, surveillance and exploitation, teamwork represents the critical social form in which workers consent to these processes of domination... it shifts the locus of control on to the individuals, who perceive themselves as guardians of quality and flexibility.' Bacon and Blyton (2001: 270) studied the introduction of a team culture at an iron and steel works. Changes were positively received with the promise of empowerment and flexibility while producing concomitant reductions in job security (through the introduction of sub-contracting), little in the way of job rotation and disenfranchisement from the company as a whole. Teamworking, they say, 'involved a major

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<sup>2</sup> In *Strategic Interaction* (1970) Goffman elaborates on the various strategies and roles a person occupies within social units, such as the team. It is a useful account of the dilemmas the team poses for an individual.

upheaval to occupational distinctions and hierarchies... was accompanied by increased workloads, and yet was introduced without any sign of industrial conflict.' As Casey earlier suggests, the team provides some form of 'anxiety displacement'. Although, as Sennett (1999: 108) found in his study, 'the emphasis on being flexible and open to change made members of the team susceptible to the slightest twitches of rumour or suggestion from others on the party-office-lunch network.' Anxiety, then, is potentially exacerbated in the team culture where 'interpersonal relations' substitute the transparent role of the employer as boss. If, with respect to Elias (1996(1989): 28), this can be described as an 'informal setting', it is one in which the context or behavioural boundaries are narrowly defined within a field (see Bourdieu, 1991(1982): 113) whose social codes are culturally assigned to evacuate the economic antagonism from the relation.

### *From Communal Team to Self Team*

Companies like 3M have become sort of a community centre for employees, as opposed to just places to work. We have employee clubs, intramural sports, travel clubs, and a choral group. This has happened because the community in which people live has become so mobile it is no longer an outlet for the individual. The schools are no longer a social centre for the family. The churches have lost their drawing power as social-family centres. With the breakdown of these traditional structures, certain companies have filled the void. They have become sort of mother institutions, but have maintained their spirit of entrepreneurship at the same time. (Peters and Waterman, 1995: 261)

Teamwork situates the person within a community of individuals each one of them reinforcing the outward expressions of the other (see Goffman above). It embeds us within relationships that are tailor-made to the flexible needs of companies. This differs from the traditional community - the family, the neighbourhood, the co-operative, the local drinking club - characterised by Tönnies as *Gemeinschaft* because whereas here association was built upon established traditions and moral authorities, now, within the corporation, it depends upon critical self-appraisal and adjustment so that conformity to a continuously changing environment is assured. It is this continuity of flux that results in relationships that are predictable for their structured uncertainty, not, perhaps, an avoidance of fixation as Bauman describes (1995:88). The behaviour necessary to function in the team setting - conformity, adaptability, innovation - is at once individualistic and communal; it reflects the changing needs of business and primes each individual for tasks within both current and future work teams. This strikes a chord with Riesman (1950: 21) who maintains that while the goals of the other-directed

change through the guidance of others 'it is only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals from others that remain unaltered throughout life.' (Riesman's emphasis) It might be said that the individual is stabilised because the underlying framework or ideology – personality culture – is not open to negotiation and, therefore, beyond the scope for reflective consideration – i.e. whether or not to subscribe to its values.

To assume that the individual is constantly reflecting on their position in the team would be to question whether the team can function at all. *Reflexivity* (as self-reflection; see Giddens, 1991 for example) is important for accessing the appropriate goods for employment (and implementation of employment strategies). But in the everyday working role the skills may be incorporated into a person's habitus so that a *reflex* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) reaction is made possible. Adequate socialisation to the team setting involves the skills to be self-aware and also sufficiently tuned-in to the immediate needs of the group in order for it to succeed.

AP Cohen (1998(1985): 58) describes communities as co-existing *symbolic constructions* through which individuals attach meaning. In the team, each person subscribes to the particular organisational ethos while, also, enhancing their long-term employability by retaining sufficient knowledge and skill to adapt to whatever changes may occur in their working position. Teamplayers are neither inner-directed – they are open to constant (self) scrutiny - nor other-directed – because the values are underscored by employers and congeal in an individualistic perception of the self as a teamplayer.

It could be suggested that the team is an exemplification of Durkheim's dual consciousness through which each individual actively engages in a collective effervescence for maintaining a dynamic between the interests of one (enthusiastic team member) against the responsibilities of being part of social unit. The ego, in Freudian terms, is tamed via the countervailing tendencies of corporately induced patterns of association - an engaged detachment – that, in point of fact, is neither we-less nor exclusive to the individual ego. Cohen (ibid. 116) suggests that forms of mechanical solidarity are consistent with organic structures in that communities (as mechanical forms) are networked (organic) as a constellation of significant others. The team mimics and induces a kind of mechanical solidarity – a 'generalised other' (see Gerth and Mills, 1954(1961): 95-8) - that is potentially beset by frictions between its competing/cooperative individual members. A destructive *Gemeinschaft* (see Sennett, 1993: 222), in which people recognise in the group something that, in point of fact, does not exist, potentially causes tensions that are irreconcilable. So, in distinction from Bourdieu (and Wacquant, 1992), who argues in *An invitation to reflexive sociology* against commonsense dichotomies such as *individual* and *society*, or Elias (see 1991 for example) whose 'interdependency' concept transcends the duality in Durkheim's work, there is an *affective*

separation of the person from the community in the pursuit of individual advantage, and a problematic re-incorporation of that person into a community that *effectively* substitutes one form of association prescribed by communal norms for another, prescribed by the company. As Casey (1995: 154) puts it, 'employees both collude with and resist the simulated sociality of the team-family. They suspect that the workplace is not a family, but are confused and frustrated by the rhetoric that claims it to be so, and their wish to believe it.'

Unlike a family, or community, the corporation can screen for candidates likely to fit together. New recruits can be selected according to a division of personality appropriate to the function. Categorised, as such, personality is organised into a corporatised community of friends or subject-institution. As a simulacrum it is a poor substitute for the communities that are created out of the shared grievances of industrial workers, say, whose togetherness derives from a commonality that is materially pronounced in opposition to the corporation but also, potentially, by values that conflict with those espoused in managerial terms.

An article in *The Guardian* 'rise' column asks the question: 'Be honest are you *really* a team player?' (23/03/02: r4) In a standard test, presented as a fun exercise, it begins by saying 'You may think you work pretty well in a group – making a contribution, helping others to make theirs. But are you doing these things in the right way?' The reader is invited to answer a multiple-choice questionnaire (a to e), with 'c' exemplifying the team player: 'you have the knack of bringing out the best in people. You listen to their views, you support their efforts, you offer good advice and you try to help them wherever possible... this makes them look good, but, more importantly, *it makes you look good* – perhaps *even feel good*. But *be on your guard*: less scrupulous sorts may exploit your generosity.' (my emphasis) This represents the synthesis of the team ideology as a community, regulated through an interdependency, in which each member competes for individual prizes. As Cohen (1998: 117) argues, 'boundaries consist essentially in the contrivance of distinctive meanings within the community's social discourse. They provide people with a referent for their personal identities. Having done so, they are then themselves expressed and reinforced through the presentation of those identities in social life.' In such a fashion the personality culture filters into interpersonal relations generally.

The teamplayer - as an integration of the teamworker into an identifiable personal characteristic - emphasises the double bind of an impossible singularity (individual difference) and universality (structural sameness). Because 'teamplayer' is not a value-neutral term, but has etched into it the values of a cultural (capitalist) enterprise, our self-identification therein draws upon the values of enterprise. The curriculum vitae aids a reordering of the self to the priorities revealed in SVC data.

### Analysing the Curriculum Vitae

In this section, I shall outline the importance of the CV to this argument by breaking down the document into its various parts and developing a discussion therein.

The Curriculum Vitae is a biographical configuration of the individual that foremost summarises its relationship to work. In the 'rise' section of *The Guardian* (17/06/00: r10) it is suggested that the 'purpose of the CV is to reveal your accomplishments and qualifications to a potential employer. And if they like what they see, they'll soon be in touch for a face-to-face meeting.' We can apply this logic to Habermas (1999(1989): 164-5) when he describes how discussion is cultivated through a 'tendency toward rational public debate' in which conversation is administered and increasingly 'assumes the form of a consumer item.' Through a rationalisation of the self in a documentary format, personal qualities – experiences and so on – help secure and sustain employment. Experience, attitude and activities, in short those qualities that notionally separate one individual from another, are incorporated into the document. An 'activity', as such, can be understood from the perspective of a CV framework in the following ways:

- (1) Doing something *for* the CV.
- (2) Doing something *sympathetic to* the CV.
- (3) Doing something *adaptable to* the CV.
- (4) Doing something *incompatible with* the CV.
- (5) Doing something *retrospectively providential to* the CV.

(1) is self-explanatory; (2) is an activity recognised for its value to CVs though not necessarily undertaken for that principal reason; (3) is an activity that can be reframed as something of value to a CV; (4) is an activity that has no foreseeable benefit to the CV; (5) is an activity completed with no consideration for its relevance to the CV but retrospectively valued for its benefit.

Here these five points will be illustrated through examples that highlight the way persons orientate themselves to employment culture. We will learn about the component parts of a CV and relate each of these to the above points through the constellation of employment. This will enable us to examine the central arguments of the thesis in how they are structured to a CV and how, in the various illustrations, the everyday activity increasingly resembles that of a CV biography.

Giddens (1991: 54) argues that: 'A person with a reasonable stable sense of self-identity has a feeling of biographical continuity which she is able to grasp reflexively and, to a greater or lesser degree, communicate to other people. That person also, through early trust relations, has

established a protective cocoon which 'filters out', in the practical conduct of day-to-day life, many of the dangers which in principle threaten the integrity of the self.' The CV is akin to the protective cocoon Giddens describes, as a filter that separates the value of one activity – integral to employment – against that of another – superfluity.

Employers do not always request a CV and often, such as during periods of employment, a person does not need one. The significance here is the way an 'imaginary CV' scores upon life-experiences an imaginary lattice of exchange-values. The CV is a referent that conceptually marks the person out for their value to employers. So in pursuing a career, for example, care is required to nurture the requisite qualities and signs of achievement to bring to fruition a convincing argument for access to a job. As work becomes more insecure the CV is substantiated as a sign of a continuous career path. It makes, from a series of temporary and short-term posts, a holistic perspective from which to evaluate the success of the person; it also reflexively signals the capital a person has acquired and what persists as lacking. As such, the end of a contract does not imply a breakdown: it is disjunction transposed on to a contiguous development of the person. Which means that each contract and activity has an instrumental value whose dividends are traded at a future date. Potential is accrued and registered in the (imaginary) CV referent in exchange for future inclusivity into and advance along career pathways. In sum, the CV figuratively represents the life-chances of the individual and its success at fulfilling subjectivity with values coterminous with employers.

### *New Biographies*

The more self-conscious people are of the relationship of the activity to the job prospects the more, it could be said, people reflect upon their biographies and engage in activities according to their value to the CV and, in a broader sense, the employer<sup>3</sup>. So, for example, as someone working in the field of sociology I might want a job as a *sociologist*. I might attend conferences, publish papers, volunteer to teach and seek out opportunities within the university for improving skills of one kind or another. I might also tailor my work to current research and theoretical orthodoxies: quantitative data, for example, within areas with a specific policy emphasis. My CV and/or general 'profile' would reflect this. In other employment fields, how I conduct my life, that is spend my time in an extracurricular capacity and approach various tasks (demonstrations of personal character), will affect my general chances for achieving employment. Realistically, it could be said, for success within many employment capacities people are compelled to engage their lives in such ways. So, in other words, people must necessarily pre-empt the demands of employers by continuously and consciously adapting

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<sup>3</sup> A useful summary of the CV can be found in Metcalfe, 1992.

themselves to the norms and values set by them however detrimental they might be to their sense of self, integrity or lifestyle. Or, in simple terms, doing something *for the (imagined) CV*.

According to Miller and Morgan (1993: 136) the guidelines for CV construction are increasingly rule governed through 'formal and informal advice (that) invites the writers (and, by implication, the readers) to steer a path between the public and the private, the relevant and irrelevant, the general and specific, and between quantity and quality.' Essentially the CV is a selective autobiography of a person's life in relation to work. Experiences completed in the past through non-instrumental expressions of feeling, become subject - in the present - to commodification by dint of being included within the CV and, relatedly, application forms. Increasingly, the individual calculates the value in taking part in an activity according to whether it would 'look good on the CV'. This encourages a career instrumentality systematic to the past as retrospectively interpreted and re-packaged for the employment market; the present as experienced with a view on the value of the moment to employers; and the future as a venue in which compensation for perceived deficiencies regularly highlighted in career advice forums can be met. While there are niches against this logic, as Gergen (1991: 184) argues, 'the person is a constructed category, someone to be created in the form of a resumé or references... Students clamour for extra-curricular activities, research assistantships, summer jobs, and the like not out of intrinsic interest... but as the raw materials out of which applications and resúmes can be constructed.'

The CV, or the principles it inscribes, is by account of the data on SVCs pervasive. Even those activities that are incompatible with employers may be recognised as such before embarked upon. From this follows the negation of the often heard statement: *it would look good on my CV*. It questions whether an activity should be undertaken, not for lack of value per se rather because it is not exchangeable. As Fran Wilson, a human resources advisor, says: 'Look at how the experience you've gained from your interests is applicable. Make it easy for an employer to see the connections. If it's potentially controversial, why include it?' (*The Guardian*: 11/05/02: r5) The president of a Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) student society recognises this too: 'I put president of the LGB society on the second page of my CV and don't go into detail about it unless asked. It's there amongst a range of other interests and not everyone is aware of what the initials stand for. I'd probably give it greater emphasis if it had been a more mainstream society.' (ibid.) 'Gradunet', an internet career forum, produces a guide on how to 'earn CV points' while at university. It separates activity between the standard three university years (see [Gradunet.co.uk/scripts](http://Gradunet.co.uk/scripts)). For reasons that will become apparent, and because it is entirely typical of the genre, it is reproduced at length (my emphasis throughout):

### Year One

- ‘As you embark on your new-found academic life, getting a job at the end of it may seem a too-distant prospect to worry about. However, there are things you can do that can help. Indeed, you’d probably do them anyway – *even if you think you’re just having fun.*’
- Freshers’ Fair: ‘join a society that you will still want to be a member of in three years time... by then you will have achieved responsibility and your CV will show *determination and staying power.*’
- ‘Save up, or get a part-time job, to earn enough money to go somewhere. Graduate employers appreciate applicants who have *good experience of cultures.*’
- ‘Make sure that you put in the academic hours... *employers may get the impression that you’re a poor time manager, so get those good results!*’

### Year Two

- ‘start thinking about work experience... *large companies save something interesting to do for interns because of the low pay... you should gain useful insights...*’
- ‘If you are achieving the grades you want and you’re confident enough, why not take up a strange and unusual sport. This always looks excellent on your CV, and *makes you look healthy, energetic and interesting.*’

### Year Three

- ‘many companies *will not take applications after December*, so get in contact as early as you can.’
- ‘start to think about how the *personal qualities that each company requires resemble you in some way*. Take a look into the murky depths of your past, and *dredge up anything you did well*, and then use these as examples to show how you demonstrate the qualities required.
- ‘Naturally, this advice depends very much on the nature of your course. With the change towards semester-based teaching, traditional schedules are having to be modified. *Keep ahead of the rest: start as soon as you can.*’

Metcalf (1992: 630) says, with reference to CVs, that rather ‘than feeling that labour-power is only *fictionally* a commodity, or that they are only *treated* like commodities, students are encouraged to seek fulfilment, pride and pleasure through their worth as commodities.’ We can apply this observation here: it is not that the above is presented as a chore that one must necessarily commit to which singles the example out. Rather, the process is integral to the *experience of doing* a degree. Here, in the mode of doing I am becoming through my actions the

very thing that presents itself as alien to me, or which takes what already belongs to me (a past experience) and is misrecognised through a perception compatible with employment goals. It is, drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari (2003a), a virtual image of the self as an employable set of values or the desiring of self-repression through a complicity in the construction of the self as an object for work. The main point, though, is that persons are prepared to adjust – reflect upon – their lived experiences so that at some indeterminate future point they can, in retrospect, coruscate to the biographical expectations of a company. Put another way, if today I am nothing – of no value – then tomorrow I will be something – of value – to reference (in)definitely – a true self – to the changing needs of enterprise. The performative aspect of this argument is discussed in chapter eight.

Here we can introduce another notion: *biographical commodification*. The phrase *CV personality*, then, is suggestive of a self-activated interplay of personal experiences and their signification through the perceived needs of a neo-liberal employment culture. The person appropriates into their actions signifying criteria: capital providential to enterprise as constitutive of the self.

#### **Breakdown of a Standard CV<sup>4</sup> into its Component Parts**

So far, I have adapted the arguments about language in chapter five to the notions of teams and CVs. Both have been shown to be of significance to employment culture in my SVC data and, in dissecting the meaning, pertinent to the values of the self in society. We recall that work teams and team players are a symbiosis of current organisational practices with a collective class kernel as a culture whose economic and power relations have been obscured. The curriculum vitae is posited as a document that frames a person's lived experience to employment structures and serves as an ever-present reminder of the ongoing benefits of actions to employers. Culture, then, is encoded in both the team and the CV as a transposition of class solidarity and unconscious or non-work related character development for their employment value. The CV, in particular, challenges the view that society is becoming more differentiated and structures more irrelevant, when the principles that govern CV construction are, *prima facie*, those which configure the person – however and for whichever purposes – to employment norms. We should examine this further by considering each section of a standard CV and illuminate upon some of the disparate themes contained therein.

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<sup>4</sup> The examples I base a 'standard' CV on include approximately 20-30 CVs sent to an employer (name omitted for anonymity) for secretarial work, including those that proved successful; templates from various employment brochures including *Prospects Directory 1999, 2002*; career advice pamphlets distributed to students at Leeds University; and careers websites including *gradunet.co.uk* and *Doctorjob.co.uk*.

*(1) Name and Address*

A name and address as signifiers do not require elaboration here. I would, however, like to refer to one aspect of names: their gender and ethnic dimensions. Or, more broadly, how difference is incorporated into employment. This is relevant to the argument to clarify what we mean by 'inclusion', for example, in this sense and whether the norms individuals adapt to when making themselves employable constitute heterogeneity as such. This can first be examined through a brief aside on gender.

Marx said that 'Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex.' (Marx and Engels, 1985(1848): 88) He failed to recognise at the time many of the concerns that feminists have since raised. The fundamental point, however, is essentially correct: business, and by that I include institutions run on a market basis, is interested in profit; if it can rationally select its workforce, unencumbered by social values, including prejudice, it will do so. Corporate capitalism, it could be said, sweeps away the advances each of us has made towards a more distinctive and emancipated form of individuality and appropriates each one of us into a corporatised personality type: personal characteristics as identities to swap, change and adapt. As Ehrenreich and English (1979: 280) say on marketplace psychology: it 'assumes a false equality, and denies that women have any special needs or experience any special discrimination as women.' In chapter two I challenged Durkheim and Elias's views that the individual becomes more differentiated over time. If there was a tendency towards differentiation between people in more complex societies this has stabilised through the incorporation of difference, as such, in the cultural norms pervading society.

It is popularly assumed that personality can be divided between those characteristics that are 'feminine' and those that are 'masculine'. SVCs can be interpreted in this way. Nursing jobs, for example, frequently ask for a 'caring' personality. However, with 'equal opportunities' inscribed in company policy and backed by legal regulation and judicial precedent, the formal equality of citizens, as understood within a system based on private property produces, d'Errico (1996/7: 111) argues, 'a corporate managerial class whose plans and desires become the integrating mechanism of society, without explicitly mandating this mechanism.' The free-market logic is indifferent, on the whole, to social norms when they do not encumber profitability. When change is demanded it is introduced in ways that may benefit a company's image and help foster new, and often, divisive systems of rationalisation – such as positive discrimination. Also, the concrete inequalities, say between men and women, and the disadvantages of certain groups (often defined in terms of access to employment), that have stoked a politics of difference, is not resolved in phrases used by employers such as 'investor in people' and 'positive about disabled people'. Instead, what they achieve is a devaluing and demeaning of lived experiences to a cynical and fetishised indifference that props up, and

reinforces, the ideological principle that everybody is included (if only one were reasonable). Companies are arguably reflexive with the qualification '*as long as it is not incompatible to our interests.*' Indeed, if outmoded or illegal working practices are repealed and legislation compels a company to change, these can be used – as in the above examples - to promote the idea of a caring business and, as d'Errico suggests, invigorate a personality-type compatible with corporate interests.

According to Catherine Casey (1995: 149), employees derive a 'sense of relatedness, relative meaningfulness and higher productivity, from participation... in their own self-production in collaboration with the corporate processes of acculturation and identification.' Yet in a culture of 'equal opportunities', the commensurability of men, women, blacks, gays, and so on, denies important differences in broader society. Halford et al (1997: 89-90), however, suggest the homogenisation of men and women in the workplace could be overstated when ideals of competitiveness, innovation and dynamism are part of an arguable synthetic male ideal in which a 'hard managerialism' comes to dominate. Another issue is that male patterns of sociability continue to shape working relations with home life as an afterthought to career. My argument is not concerned with whether men and women effect an equilibrium, it is that a homogenised characterisation in which people can fit, however unevenly different identities are distributed within that ideal, pacifies issues that might otherwise question employment standards and the relationship between people and employers.

## *(2) Education*

Within an employment market we have, what is sometimes described, as credential inflation where one job candidate seeks to improve upon the skills of another in a continual process of striving towards excellence. This assumes, however, that credentials, be they educational certificates or examples of life experience, represent measurable qualities and are not simply impressions of what is normatively understood as such. The competitive dynamic between individuals manufactures a tendency in which particular standards are simulated as realistic attempts to achieve synchronicity with the arguably absurd range of skills, qualities and experiences employers require. So when we refer to the process of adaptation to employment norms through CVs, teams, or words to indicate compatibility, it cannot be assumed that these words actually mean that, for example, the person really has 'good' 'interpersonal' skills when describing them. Instead persons identify themselves with the ideology and recognise in the representation subjective configurations or a likeness to self. The notion of 'decentred' subjectivity is apparent to this argument because what we come to recognise as belonging to ourselves cannot be experienced except through fantasy (cf. Žižek, 2004). This distinction can be examined in less abstract terms with reference to educational achievements.

Data from internet websites here and the *rise* section of *The Guardian* newspaper predominantly concern graduate students. However, with the numbers of young people going to university increasing and the type of jobs graduates applying for encompassing those previously available to school-leavers, the strategies being encouraged in university students are equally applicable to candidates for most jobs. Habermas explains how at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century sections of the petty bourgeoisie were incorporated into the educational strata. Owning an encyclopaedia was a sign of being educated; it created a standard by which increasing numbers of the lower classes could gain access to cultural capital. The market, he says, creates a distinction by creating ‘an initial access to cultural goods for a public and then, in keeping with the cheapening of the cost of the products, *economically eased* the access for an ever larger public; or whether it adapted the content of the cultural goods to its own needs in such a way that it also *facilitated* access for broad strata *psychologically*.’ (Habermas, 1998: 166) This argument can be adapted with reference to a university degree certificate and the example from Gradunet above on year-by-year employment strategies for university students. Which is to say that the rationale for pursuing a degree increasingly centres on the question of job opportunities. This could be for a number of reasons including the empty phrase ‘credential inflation’, but more meaningfully because changes in working structures precipitate the need for workers to adapt through their own training initiatives. As Beck (2001: 70) says of the ‘risk regime’, ‘people are expected to make their own life-plans, to be mobile and to provide for themselves in various ways.’ Education, amongst other self and social enriching goods, is increasingly, and necessarily according to the logic of risk, instrumentalised for its economic benefits and mitigation of uncertainty in individuals exposed to the vicissitudes of insecure labour. Following the pattern of neo-liberal institutional reform, the university also adapts to this new (engineered) sociality.

We can parallel this argument on education to managerial discourse as a set of values that postulate a version of a world as uncertain and knowledge as a key resource to navigate through this uncertainty (Thrift in Ray and Sayer, 1999: 153). Mr Kroc, the entrepreneur behind McDonald’s, is reported to have said: ‘“One thing I flatly refused to give money to is the support of any college. I have been wooed by some of the finest institutions in the land but I tell them they will not get a cent from me unless they put in a trade school.”’ (Peters and Waterman, 1995: 257) At Leeds University, two McDonald’s sponsored students recently achieved their award by working in one of McDonald’s restaurants for at least six months. They competed amongst ‘thousands of entrants [and] were judged upon their business acumen and academic credentials. They first had to write an essay of 3,500 words on the topic: “The world is changing, what skills, knowledge and personal attributes do students need to equip themselves for lifelong success in the company.”’ (Leeds Student Newspaper 10/2001: 5) *The Guardian* (11/09/00: G2: 2) uncovers the extent to which business is integrated into university life.

Cambridge University, for example, 'possesses a Shell chair in chemical engineering, BP professorships in organic chemistry and petroleum science, an ICI chair in applied thermodynamics, a Glaxo chair of molecular parasitology, a Unilever chair of molecular science, a Price Waterhouse chair of financial accounting and a Marks and Spencers chair of farm animal health and food science. Rolls-Royce, AT&T, Microsoft and biotechnology company Zeneca have all set up laboratories in the university.'

Elite specialisation and professional control is eschewed at university in favour of, what Parker and Jary describe as, a Fordist-style production approach. It is the integrity of the professional that is undermined as a consequence of the ensuing credentialism, managerialism and careerism. As Parker and Jary (1995: 325) say, 'If the knowledge is not perceived as useful for students' performance in a credentialised labour market or the academics' performance in an assessed research market, then it must be of no use at all.' Here we note a 'McDonaldisation' (see Ritzer, 1993) process that rationalises knowledge as a CV credit. Meštrović (1997: 130) explains this phenomenon as 'the American embodiment of efficiency and standardisation... extended to all social realms...' The CV is an example of US standardisation that has made its way into everyday life here. These are values whose introduction into areas of civil society has impacted much like Riesman (1950: 131) describes other-directedness to have 'spread at such a rate as to hit certain sectors of the economy before these sectors have solved their technological problems.' The McDonaldisation of academia leads to an academic who 'becomes an organisation person, someone dedicated to a 'career' with certain progressions and rewards, and someone who knows their (and others') quality ratings.' (Parker and Jary, 1995: 329)

### **(3) *Employment Record***

As earlier discussed, the employment record increasingly resembles a continuous career path. What has not been considered is what happens in those moments between jobs or where there is no effective continuity. Let us complete this argument with reference to this.

Students may include in their employment record examples of work during holiday periods or evening work during term time. Older people may construct a CV narrative that justifies their current search for work by highlighting examples from their past that speaks of a competence, reliability, consistency and drive. A logical career progression, as understood in terms of the job being applied for, will improve the employment prospects of a candidate. If employed in contractual work or laid-off after a number of years of service, a person should describe their working history *as if* each job were part of an overall employment strategy or explicable as useful to the employer. Younger people frequently explain 'time-out' of work as a 'gap year': a period that is neither paid labour nor unemployment (for examples see below). The time may include 'voluntary work'. Principally, a 'year off' alters when time is valued for its productivity and benefit to employers even if only through the indirect benefits that 'experience'

has on subjectivising an 'all round' (empty) character. So that if the activity cannot relate to the CV then it is not simply use-less – an empty signifier - it connotes a negative meaning. Hence, doing something *incompatible with* the CV is not an option: the time must at least be *adaptable* or *sympathetic* to the values employers recommend. As Martin Thomson, director of national volunteering charity Timebank, says: ‘ “Volunteers who take a year out should consider it to be a type of apprenticeship. Graduates will be able to build key skills that employers value such as team work, communication and leadership skills.”’ (*The Guardian*, 09/02/02: r5) As *Prospects Directory* (2002: 49) tells us, employers will recognise the following advantages in taking a year out:

‘Broadened horizons’

‘Greater confidence, adaptability, the ability to plan and to take responsibility for yourself’

‘Language skills, understanding of other cultures, and resilience’

‘Relevant voluntary work experience’

So while a university degree is a mark of academic excellence, a trip to another country, for example, shows ‘understanding of other cultures’. We return to the argument at the beginning of this section on how the person cannot experience, as such, the qualities they are constituted by: instead the notion of ‘experience’ is emptied out of its meaning. So in the ‘round-the-world’ ticket as a romantic nod to a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ adventure, we have instead a journey structured by the limitations work imposes: a finite number of destinations within a timeframe that does not take the person out of the employment loop –nor indeed their own cultural assumptions - and which exemplifies, in a seemingly ineluctable simulacrum, the characteristics and experiences employers value.

It is a certain cultural capital that some, perhaps through economic advantage and a socialised predisposition to particular norms of behaviour and/or knowledge, have become more attuned to than others who, perceiving a deficiency/disadvantage in their life chances (perhaps through difficulties in attaining certain economic and social positions), make compensations for via additional efforts to conform. Here we pertain to the levelling of difference in current working practice or, in other words, the appropriation into working structures a commodified social body. So that when we talk about inclusivity we increasingly mean by this word the enjoyment of the same principles of exchange: opportunity to be rendered as commodified subjects. Once accepted as such we can then subjectivise ourselves to the sporting ideology of self-enrichment for career gain. In the example of ‘gap years’, Carl Gillcard, chief executive of the Association of Graduate Recruiters tells us: ‘ “As with any career decision you need to weigh up the pros and cons. If you do take a year out you need to be able to explain why to prospective employers. It may surprise some, but if you have done something constructive, you

can present a year out in a positive light.” (*The Guardian*, 17/02/01: r3) On the same theme, gradunet ([www.gradunet.co.uk/scripts](http://www.gradunet.co.uk/scripts)) presents a contemporary dilemma for, in this case, a 25 year old student who asks whether taking a year off will harm his career. Is ‘there any norm or rule in the UK’, he says, ‘about which employers do not care and others which do?’ Gradunet replies: ‘it depends how you spend your gap year... It is beneficial to do something which will improve your prospects of employment and something you can put down on your CV as work experience.’

Voluntary work captures the spirit of such advice. Martin Thomson of *Timebank* claims that “Volunteering gives graduates the opportunity to take an active role in the charity. Graduates can have the opportunity to experience first hand management and see the strategic view of an organisation. A high-flyer couldn’t get better work experience than taking on a role like that.” (*The Guardian*, Op. Cit.) According to a survey printed in the same newspaper, 90% of the population agree that ‘a society with volunteers shows a caring society.’ (ibid.) What matters, it seems, is the appearance of being charitable not the underlying motive.

These examples illustrate how moments seemingly divorced from work – such as those in which childhood dreams are potentially fulfilled - are spent under the approving gaze of an imaginary employer. As an arbiter of experience, the as yet manifest boss assumes a God-like pose. It is a complex and internalised structure of surveillance whose visibility as a reflexive knowledge on the qualities employers appear to require, makes the mode of appropriation, in contradistinction, visible as a lifestyle choice. There is not the structure or language (justification), if ever there was to those for whom work is a necessity, for periods abroad in which a person simply ‘drops out’, ‘has fun’ or works towards a goal independent of its value to career.

#### ***(4) Skills and Experience***

This section of a CV, which continues the theme of (3), tends to include on-the-job skills typically in IT or anything a person can comb from their experiences that they think might impress an employer. It is the section in which voluntary work is mentioned and specific experiences from the ‘gap year’. It is the part where, as ‘Dr Job’ (online career advice website) ([www.doctorjob.co.uk/career](http://www.doctorjob.co.uk/career)) tells us, you should:

‘get examples from your own life that translate neatly into skills. Dredge up information from schools, holidays, university, leisure time – anything that means that you’ll be able to confidently answer that dreaded question – ‘are you a team player?’”

Something, then, is always available to identify people to corporate ideology. Or are we simply constructing fictions through knowledge of what is being demanded of us? Being economical with the truth is a strategy that career experts are at pains to warn about. Lying is a 'waste of time' according to ([www.stepstone.co.uk](http://www.stepstone.co.uk)) and certain embellishments for ([www.gradunet.co.uk](http://www.gradunet.co.uk)) are quickly spotted by an experienced recruiter who has learnt to 'decipher coded messages'. *Gradunet* (ibid.) also advise, in response to a student on their open forum, that 'most employers will recognise a CV that has been designed by someone else'. Lying, it should be noted, requires not only a certain confidence to perform the role: it requires a continual engagement with a fiction that may already have displaced the identity that has carried the subject beforehand.

### *(5) Hobbies and Interests*

This is the least likely section to feature on an academic CV. It is normally reserved for younger people, although it is not uncommon for those with more 'experience' to include it. Areas covered include those specifically relating to a person's non-work activities ordinarily engaged in for their own sake. So that, it might be claimed, a CV helps people to objectify play through its market relation in employment. This is relevant to our discussion because it highlights the way in which, potentially, all experience is configured or reflected upon for its benefit to employment. At the end of this chapter the notion of a complete commodification of the person is addressed. Here, I would like to weave into a comparative theme of hobbies and interests some examples that give rise to this dystopian suspicion.

A correspondent to *Gradunet* (Op.Cit.) open forum suggests to someone worried about having a First Class degree and being seen as a 'technical machine' to 'work particularly on your hobbies and interests.' For example, did 'you do anything spectacular at uni? [sic]'. What about 'voluntary work? Do you state that you have a good sense of humour or generous nature?' She goes on to suggest that hobbies should include: 'something that makes you seem a team player'; 'something educational'; 'something that displays a good sense of fun.'

Interests achieve value in much the same fashion personality does by redefining the activity in accordance to its benefit to employers. Competition between workers pressurises us to look increasingly at anything that might provide an edge when it comes to employment. We are more interesting, much like the organisational man of the 1950s who played golf (Whyte, 1957), if we engage in or manufacture hobbies and interests that are, in Adorno's (2001: 188) words, 'preoccupations with which I had become mindlessly infatuated merely in order to kill the time'. This view is insufficient given that simply to 'kill time' or be preoccupied with a 'mindless' infatuation would be to suggest indifference to career goals. 'Hobbies' have an entirely new validation when translated into the CV. It is not the 'unfreedom' Adorno describes. Instead the hobby is a purposeful activity (partially, totally, or eventually) understood for its

value to work, that removes the irony in the phrase 'leisure industry' because leisure here is not distinguished from work as freedom: the personality culture collapses the work / leisure simulation into a proper singularity that, even when engaging in the thing for itself (the pure act!), the activity may have a *retrospective* use. Consider the following quotation:

Did you know that workers that take less than half their statutory annual holidays, take more than twice the amount of sick days than the average worker? So get down to your local travel agent or search online for some time in the sun.

Jobmag ([uk.topjobs.net/marketing2/summerjrm/page1](http://uk.topjobs.net/marketing2/summerjrm/page1))

Here we find that a 'holiday' even has its rewards. According to Stephen Kline's (1995: 111) analysis of children's culture play, he says, 'is rapidly being re-configured as the primary lever for expanding children's consumerism based upon marketers' converging interests and symbolic resonances created between media personae and fantasy play.' For Marcuse (1970: 176) the 'typist who hands in a perfect manuscript, the tailor who delivers a perfectly fitting suit... the labourer who fulfils his quota – all may feel pleasure in a "job well done". However, either this pleasure is extraneous (anticipation of reward), or it is the satisfaction (itself a token of repression) of being well occupied, in the right place, of contributing one's part to the functioning of the apparatus.' The ludic encounter escapes the 'non-repressive' instinctual order to become a spirited supplement to the occupational (psychic) hazards of competitive advantage. Zizek (1999: 81) incorporates Lacan's definition of *jouissance* to situate this in terms of fantasy and desire. We perceive a barrier erected by the other to prevent us from fulfilling desire. This block/impediment leads to fantasy; the small pleasures we gain, as servants, are just so many of the crumbs we steal (are tolerated) from the master in a kind of 'libidinal bribery' that satisfies our position in servitude. It is a metaphor that illuminates the present problem inasmuch as the personality culture is the barrier, the other the corporation or employer, and the crumbs (*jouissance*) the pleasure in stealing an advantage on our competitors (workers). People embrace this example of play as they take up hobbies, join student societies, or develop interests in order to reinforce their CV (see chapters seven and eight for empirical support for this). Sequestered behind the façade of highly standardised and commodified forms of leisure are the rare moments that escape or are as yet fully incorporated into the corporate domain. Activities whose benefit to employers, hitherto undetected or dismissed, have become commonly recognised, encouraged and embraced in knowledge of such connections. For example, *Jobmag* ([topjobs.net/marketing](http://topjobs.net/marketing)) tells us:

Fast sports like squash, which require rapid reactions, are helpful in improving decision-making back at the office. Also, the heart pumping faster means that more oxygen gets to the brain which makes it more alert and improves your ability to concentrate on attention-demanding tasks... Keep at it regularly, and your boss should appreciate the difference.

This is the point that is often missed. Workers do not engage in activities in ignorance of how they (in)directly benefit employers: they may do so in knowledge of and for this very outcome. If the activity is engaged in independently of the boss (we can speculate on the unconscious dimensions of this possibility), recognition that the boss benefits too (or more generally that career prospects increase) legitimates the activity socially. We might say the same of an 'artist' whose position is only validated once the work is either exchanged for money or sufficiently 'recognised' to advance that person's social standing and, therefore, career. Thus considered, activities that lack a potential benefit to employers (physically, emotionally, intellectually) would more likely constitute a disagreeable or destructive activity. So what are we arguing then? Not simply that the social character is or should necessarily be separable from the working role, rather that the value of the activity increasingly is recognised (culturally encouraged) in terms of work for the benefit to it: subsumed into or in opposition to employment benefits, as a means for comparative advantage over other (potential) employees or as the thing that makes me the exception and, therefore, not subject to the same commodified order. As Žižek (2002: 85) notes, 'Withdrawal into privacy today means adopting formulas of private authenticity propagated by the recent culture industry – from taking lessons in spiritual enlightenment, and following the latest cultural and other fashions, to engaging in jogging and body-building.'

In institutional practice, taking older workers as an example, Sennett (1999: 93) points out how they are often characterised as organisational '“deadwood”' lacking the 'sheer physical energy needed to cope with the demands of life in the flexible workplace'. While this was taken from the US *Californian Management Review*, there are connections here in Britain to the way companies are also seeking out younger employees and offering fitness perks to their workers. Perhaps the latter is a benign development. It may also be indicative, say with the proliferation of fitness clubs, of a pattern that can only fully be explained in the light of this analysis. It is not inconceivable that, in a future scenario, people will undergo surgery, pay for various implants, and select their children according to genetic profiles so that their offspring remain competitive. A scenario that, as Bill McKibben warns (*The Guardian*, 03/05/03: weekend magazine), could produce biological obsolescence in populations as each rising generation incorporates the most advanced technological upgrades. Under such circumstances even the biological differences between people, currently excluded from competition on grounds of prejudice, are subject to the

same pressures. It is an extreme example that puts a self-configuring subjective competition described here in sharper relief. However, I am inclined to view the sort of dilemma Sennett poses as one that is resolvable within existing paradigms of employment, when persons described are prepared and subjectively (i.e. not physically) able to make changes coterminous with neo-liberal working cultures. Exception or exclusion remains structurally acceptable when it does not concern the biological animal (except where justified on grounds of 'positive discrimination') - skin colour, sex, or physical aspects beyond the agent's power to change (for now) - or factors deemed intrinsically or effectively to be beyond a person's ability to change (sexuality, religion, etc). All else, personality, fitness, biography, culture (with superficial qualifications) and so on - in other words, everything that, in principle, is malleable to the agent - is game. Hence those examples which might be agreed upon as beyond a person's ability to change - i.e. age (or the factors affecting performance over time (at current technical levels)) - for which there is insufficient legislation, will sooner or later be incorporated into 'ethical' practice and presented as evidence of the humanitarian and progressive nature of multinational capital. Otherwise, relative educational poverty, lack of cultural capital, and the financial inhibitions and emotional dilemmas of class, gender, ethnicity and so on, gain a sympathetic audience in sectors that provide the opportunities for catch-up to those willing to embrace the particular values. The excluded is the stubborn remainder.

#### ***(6) Additional Information***

On a CV this section is sometimes included where Hobbies and Interests or Skills and Experiences are omitted. An academic may have additional information relating to the specifics of their field of inquiry. The space might also be used to explain how a life experience relates to the particular job; to mention, for example, if applying to work with asylum seekers, of encounters with refugees; or if wanting to work with the disabled, familiarity - and empathy - with their needs. Here, I want to use this space to expand on the idea of a CV personality as an archetype by summarising arguments that connect us with the thesis.

Gergen (1991: 15) stresses that as 'we absorb the views, values, and visions of others, and live out the multiple plots in which we are enmeshed, we enter a postmodern consciousness... in which we no longer experience a secure sense of self and in which doubt is increasingly placed on the very assumption of a bounded identity with palpable attributes.' It is unclear what Gergen means by a 'secure sense of self', whether such an entity existed or why such a notion should be attractive given the assumptions present in whatever that self was or is. Moreover, there is no delineation here between the power of one set of values and another, nor of how they connect with and score the social body. Gergen tells us nothing that has not already been said about the person: that s/he is the insecure outcome of complex interdependencies. If we accept, along with Gergen, Beck, Giddens and others, that, in different ways, identity is fluid

and attributes are, as such, open to self-confrontation, we must move beyond platitudes to consider the extent to this argument. In other words, to address the ways in which structures effectively determine the ontological limit of self-experience. Riesman (1950: 277) said of the other-directed that he 'has learned, if he is adjusted, to look like those others with whom he has been brought up... to forget aspects of his character that are not "social," not other-directed.' The employer, in my argument, becomes the Other transposed onto the plane of self-identity and experience and signposted with the aid of a curriculum vitae. It is to imagine a cultural hub (employers) whose spokes extend out to the various nodes of existence (the self), connecting and stabilising each one of them via their relationship to the centre. How these nodes relate to one another is immaterial; except where they belong to alternative constellations of power that disrupt the centrifugal momentum of the (employment) hub, and the spokes that sustain (recognise) its signifying power. For Bauman (1997: 88), constructing the self around changing demands is potentially a waste of time when identities 'can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume.' In other words, there is so much flux as to render the project of self still-born. This is specious logic. The potential for the self to adapt and change continues to be premised on social and economic relations that calibrate the nexus of an apparent indeterminacy. The curriculum vitae underlines the abstract argument about self-orientation to employment norms as a concrete example, if still it is required, of how the person self-consciously connects with those relations. We should add, by an oft-repeated or implied qualification, that CVs, teams or SVCs are not *the* mediators of capitalist relations, but part of a significant constellation that regulates and informs the individual as a (sufficiently) stable and reflexive social entity to an intrinsically adaptive modernity (see 'post irony' in conclusion (chapter nine) for a further clarification of this argument).

### **(7) References**

We have explored the different sections of a CV through discussions that fill-in gaps in the argument on subjectivity and employment. Each time we have returned to the specific topic of this chapter and appraised the CV document. The final section of a CV requires only a cursory mention in this particular dissertation. I should like, therefore, to raise some points about the power-relation between worker and referee before developing an unconnected argument to referees on application forms, the purpose of which is discussed below.

It is vital to a person's future prospects that individuals commanding positions of authority are willing to provide a reference. Often that reference is specifically required from the last employer. Good relations with the relevant people are vital in securing that recommendation. Short-term work will potentially assume the character of a lifelong job when the next role is contingent on performance there. From the point of view of the referee, the recommendation is an additional choir to attend to. The one person will have an impact on the

other's life-chances. It is a power-relation that neither party arguably wants though both are compelled to engage in.

The final entry of a CV will usually contain the name/s of at least one referee as a seal of approval: proof that the person is who they say they are. It may be the case that a referee avoids certain truths, exaggerates qualities or simply lies for the benefit of the individual. References, however, are like a code; they contain information between the lines or in the phrasing of the words. Interviewers are trained to look for these signs and, among hundreds of applications, are in a position to discriminate on the slightest concern. It is unclear, however, the extent to which a person conforms to a particular role or exemplifies good practice in order to gain a 'good' reference. In the following chapter, on records of achievement, the reference is juxtaposed to students' autobiographies and elaborated on there. Of concern to employees, perhaps, is that work contracts run smoothly enough so that a recommendation can be made and transition to the next job eased.

This brings us to application forms. Often employers will ask for one of these and not a CV. Cosmetically their function is identical: in both the candidate presents a history of themselves to advertise qualities they hope will appear salient and not otherwise deficient to the job. The CV, however, surpasses the application form as an imaginary document to constantly refer to and frame experience. I want to showcase an actual example of an application form here so that it can be compared to the arguments in this chapter and to illustrate a process involved in getting a job. The one presented is for a shelf-filling/cashiers job at ASDA supermarket chain<sup>5</sup>. It is an interesting example because the company was recently acquired by US retail giant Wal-Mart. A direct comparison can be made, therefore, between practices in the US and here in Britain.

At the front of the application, which incorporates in the title the words, "to join the team at ASDA" is a folded section with the heading "read me first!!" The background is bright yellow with, what appears like, purple clouds and, on the inside, a yellow smiling face (not the smiley face of 'acid' culture) in a lighter hue. The impression it seeks to create is one of friendliness, inclusivity and fun. Indeed, ASDA are keen to emphasise, twice, that we "are proud to say we are an Equal Opportunity Employer which means we don't discriminate on age, sex, religion or disability" (even though the design of the form suggests a determined effort to appeal to young people). The yellow folded section highlights the company's achievements, why they are successful and what kind of people they are looking for: "They are confident, enthusiastic and helpful... also flexible, adaptable and keen to contribute to success... To succeed you need to love selling and serving people..." Success is a buzzword here that tells of a person who has purpose and finds achievement in the routine tasks being required of them. As

the application boasts, the company is “the fifth Best Company to work for (Sunday Times survey)”. This validates, for the candidate, the choice in working for ASDA by offering a comparison between their (potential) job and that of others. It is a marketing technique universities routinely employ to relieve students’ and parents’ insecurities about the worth of their choice of institution.

The next part of the form describes the selection procedure. The application is the first stage, “scored against some set criteria to ensure fairness...” and followed by a telephone interview. The personality is assessed using quantitative measurements and checked through a telephone call to enhance the reliability of the method. The application does not say when the call will be made, only that if it happens at an inconvenient time ASDA can call back. Potentially the call will be received at a time when the candidate is relaxed at home. It is questionable whether the person would refuse the call if they want to be sure of being contacted again.

After this, the person is invited to a “group session” with “up to 11 other candidates.” It will be “relaxed and fun”; a way to “get a good idea of your personal qualities, for example, how you interact with others and how you work within a team... We will ask you to talk about yourself and to spend a little time on the shop floor”. The mood is pre-set and the person should act as if amongst friends, i.e. to be ‘genuine’. The session is two hours long: “Sounds like a long time but it’s a big decision for both of us and worth it in the end!”

After passing this stage there is a one to one interview with the manager, followed by “a couple of hours on the department... [to] ‘have a go’ to ensure you are 100% sure you will enjoy the job.”

Finally, if chosen “there will be a full induction and a 12 week training period during which you will learn a great deal more about ASDA, how we work together and how we involve all our colleagues in the running of our business.” At the bottom of the application, above the smiley face, there reads in big letters: “... let your personality shine through!”

Overall, the language is informal, as if written to a friend. The idea of a caring company ‘with personality’ is constantly emphasised. It is clear, however, that the candidate is being tested to the full and the company is using a presentation device that distances it as much as possible from a business that exploits its workers and subjects them to a high level of scrutiny. Here we have the subject-institution recruiting the object-individual as a reversal of the presumed character of subject-object relations. Practices such as ‘non-discrimination’ are turned into company virtues. At every opportunity the business is equated with a friend as if the application does not signify a job at all. ASDA pre-empts the disquiet of the candidate by transfiguring the negative into positive associations. Here is a sophisticated filter that sieves out

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<sup>5</sup> There is a useful parallel between the argument here and the one made by du Gay (1996: 139) about the

undesirable personalities and leaves behind a residue equal to the company image. The induction period disseminates the ideology and reinforces the company as a partner. Below is a copy of the section of the application form 'you describing you':

### WHICH IS MORE LIKE YOU?

- |  |                       |   |                       |
|--|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1. A) I am orderly   | <input type="radio"/> | 10. A) I am quiet                             | <input type="radio"/> |
| or B) I am easy going  | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I am outgoing                           | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. A) I like a job where I can work at my own pace                       | <input type="radio"/> | 11. A) I enjoy talking in groups              | <input type="radio"/> |
| or B) I like a job that requires a lot of energy                         | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I enjoy talking to one person at a time | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. A) I am absorbed with ideas   | <input type="radio"/> | 12. A) I work best without pressure           | <input type="radio"/> |
| or B) I notice things around me  | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I enjoy time pressure                   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. A) I like working as part of a team                                   | <input type="radio"/> | 13. A) I show my feelings                     | <input type="radio"/> |
| or B) I like solving a problem on my own                                 | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I keep my feelings to myself            | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. A) I like a job where I need to be careful about what I say to others | <input type="radio"/> | 14. A) I like to plan things in advance       | <input type="radio"/> |
| or B) I like a job where I am able to speak openly and honestly at work  | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I like to take things as they come      | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. A) I like telling other people what to do                             | <input type="radio"/> | 15. A) I don't need praise                    | <input type="radio"/> |
| or B) I enjoy discovering that people like me                            | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I need praise                           | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. A) I like being recognised for my achievements                        | <input type="radio"/> | 16. A) I am energetic                         | <input type="radio"/> |
| or B) I like being told that I am better than others                     | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I am relaxed                            | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. A) I am talkative   | <input type="radio"/> | 17. A) I am argumentative                     | <input type="radio"/> |
| or B) I am reserved  | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I respect authority                     | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. A) I like to use tried and tested methods                             | <input type="radio"/> | 18. A) I am curious about people              | <input type="radio"/> |
| or B) I like trying something different                                  | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I am curious about how things work      | <input type="radio"/> |
|  | <input type="radio"/> | 19. A) I am calm                              | <input type="radio"/> |
|  | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I am lively                             | <input type="radio"/> |
|  | <input type="radio"/> | 20. A) I follow the rules                     | <input type="radio"/> |
|  | <input type="radio"/> | or B) I try to find short cuts                | <input type="radio"/> |

Psychometric tests, of which this is a loose example, are designed to ascertain the personality in how the questions are answered. The dissection is crude and unscientific, yet it deployment of 'enterprising technologies of regulation' in the retail industry.

masquerades as science by presenting itself as fair and deliberate. Which, essentially it is, since all clients are judged by it and the 'square pegs' are fitted into 'round holes' by forcing answers to questions with highly prescribed (and limited) variables. The answers help determine the positions deemed suitable to a personality fit. It is similar to how teams draw together variables to complete the personality of the company. At the bottom of the document (not shown here) there is an open-ended question. It asks applicants to list 'non-work' activities and *reflect* upon what those activities might suggest about them (the applicant not the company). The person should be conscious, it seems, of the meaning behind the things they do in order to turn those activities into marketable assets.

The significance of this application form, and the reason why it can be assumed to be specific to the contemporary period, is (1) the type of job being applied for; (2) the way the company presents the exercise as being *for* the individual and, therefore, 'fun'; (3) the notion of inclusivity inscribed in each part of the application; (4) the neither institution nor individual (it is unclear, given the terminology, whether we are describing a friend, family or community: the job, and economic-power relation, is hidden behind these floating signifiers).

There are parallels between the evidence in this ASDA UK example and the parent company Wal-Mart. The sociologist Barbara Ehrenreich (2002) recently published her experiences working for Wal-Mart in the US in the mass-market publication 'Nickel and Dimed', where she cites similar practices, including personality tests, the importance of demonstrating passion and identification with the company. The global character of corporate enterprise as embodied in the multinational company means that many ideas pioneered in one country can quickly or simultaneously be implemented elsewhere.

#### In summary

1. The job is arguably at the very bottom of the employment hierarchy. The application process has much in common with high-end corporate graduate positions illustrated in the *rise* section of *The Guardian* newspaper.
2. The applicant is subject to a series of tests that check 'authenticity' by ensuring that representation is reality (see earlier argument).
3. The company identifies itself with the individual as 'fun' and attempts to collapse the distinction between the person and company.
4. ASDA exemplifies findings elsewhere in my study: the commensurability between person and company; the personality culture; and the possibility that these processes have not fully, or evenly, matured, given the extensive nature of the tests at ASDA and the possibility that trends in the US are in advance of those here.

For a brief account of interview techniques, online career website *stepstone* ([stepstone.co.uk/artikler/interview](http://stepstone.co.uk/artikler/interview)) further emphasises how important it is that the individual recognises themselves in the company (their emphasis throughout):

- ‘Think about your *weaknesses*... They (the interviewer) will appreciate your candour... However, ensure that whatever you disclose can be easily remedied.’
- ‘Make sure your past history, academic and work, is *achievement driven*... Explain how you feel/felt about a success or failure. Feelings are important.’
- ‘Respect business values and conventions.’
- ‘offer a firm handshake, call the recruiter by name, smile and maintain eye contact without glaring.’
- ‘Be on guard for any nervous mannerisms... Be pleasant with everyone you meet.’
- Be enthusiastic and positive when focusing on work experience ‘it should help you package yourself more attractively.’
- ‘Feedback from interviews where you have been turned down will be invaluable. Uncover what they felt you lacked and for what they were looking.’

The last point here about feedback adds another important nuance to the application process: it is part of an ongoing discourse with the employer about what to do to improve presentation skills, experience and/or actual personality<sup>6</sup>. Interviews are predominantly about self-marketing, but it is the person that is being marketed. After a period in which they have nurtured a viable commodity and learnt the presentation skills, they are ready to attract employers who become akin to shoppers at a department store: ogling at and treating themselves to the fancy wares on display.

### Choice and Consumption

I want to conclude this chapter by elaborating on the theme of consumption as an implicit issue from the above analysis. It is the idea that we choose our identities – consume them – and, in doing so, question our own authenticity. We have already seen that the dichotomy between authenticity and inauthenticity is a misleading one given the ambiguity of what we must therefore assume to be intrinsic. Likewise, the dichotomy between consumption and non-consumption, as that between two different modes of being, should also be clarified. A

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<sup>6</sup> It is often advised in careers forums, centres and books that a rejection for a job should be followed up with an enquiry into why this happened so that improvements can be made for next time.

condensed summary of some the views on this will be followed by a conclusion on some of the key points from this chapter.

### *Discussion*

Walter Benjamin (1970: 225) contrasted the idea of 'aura', as a way of understanding 'authenticity', with that of modern consumerism whereby the 'uniqueness of every reality' is overcome 'by accepting its reproduction.' It is an important distinction that others, including Adorno (2001: 67), make, when he argued that the consumer 'cannot digest anything not already pre-digested.' For Marcuse (1968: 9) people identify themselves through commodities, 'their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment.' Packard (1991: 46) offers some evidence of this in the way advertisers sought to create personal identification with product. He quoted an 'image building' professional who argues that 'Basically, what you are trying to do... is create an illogical situation. You want the customer to fall in love with your product and have a profound brand loyalty when actually content may be very similar to hundreds of competing brands... [the] task is one of creating some... individualisation for the product'. We recognise the same qualities in a product as we do ourselves... we buy into ourselves (see also Lasch, 1979 and 1984 on narcissism).

Fromm (1988: 83) dramatically equated consumerism with death. 'In the having mode', he says, 'there is no alive relationship between me and what I have. It and I have become things, and I have *it*, because I have the force to make it mine. But there is also a reverse relationship: *it has me*, because my sense of identity, i.e. my sanity, rests upon my having *it*.' So, in other words, the way we are seduced into wanting products (see Packard) creates a double bind through which we are consumers of them and consumed by them. As Rose (1990: 226) emphasises, 'every choice we make is an emblem of our identity, a mark of our individuality, each is a message to ourselves and others as to the sort of person we are, each casts a glow back, illuminating the self of he or she who consumes.'

Baudrillard (2001: 25) puts the argument thus: 'human relations tend to be consumed... (in the double sense of the word: to be "fulfilled" and to be "annulled") in and through objects'. It is the lived relation that is being consumed through the objects that become its sign, an extension of Fromm's argument, that consumerism integrates the individual in a series of objects which, in effect, substitutes, or becomes differentiated, from what it would otherwise signify. Guy Debord (1983: 42,55) explained this in terms of need. 'When economic necessity is replaced by the necessity for boundless economic development, the satisfaction of primary human needs is replaced by the uninterrupted fabrication of pseudo-need of maintaining the reign of the autonomous economy.' Accordingly, 'The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained total occupation of social life.' How, then, does this differ from Marx (1999: 43) when he argued 'the existence of the things *qua* commodities, and the value-relation

between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have *absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relation arising therefrom*? (my (latter) emphasis) The distinction lies in the former in the way the individual is subsumed into the commodity not, through their investment of labour, rather in the fact of being consumers, or mere spectators; in effect they lose their reference as an historical class in opposition to a phantasmal commodity form; hence the material relation is transcended by the relation of signs or spectacles.

Žižek's *interpassivity* is more abstruse than Debord's notion of the spectacle. It is a term employed to illustrate the way in which consumers are invited to witness the enjoyment implied in the product without actually experiencing it. So the 'other' (product) relieves the individual from the burden of pleasure and the 'monstrous *duty to enjoy*'. (Žižek, 1999: 114) This returns us to Adorno's earlier critique of hobbies and the fetishisation of people.

Bauman (1997: 14) seeks to differentiate between types of consumer for an argument on social exclusion: 'Those left out, the dirt, are 'flawed consumers'. They lack the resources so cannot respond to enticements and therefore are not 'free individuals', in the sense that freedom is defined by consumer choice.' It is an interesting perspective on the issue that draws parallels with Marcuse's thesis where consumerism was the undoing of freedom whereas here our freedom, or how we are defined in contemporary capitalist relations, is relative to our ability to consume. It is a double-edged sword that marks us out as individuals – i.e. how much we can consume - and at the same time compels us to the anonymity of the masses – we are all consumers. To not consume, however, is to be stripped of any worth as a human being. This is a potent analogy to CVs when considering that without a well-constructed and opulent personal document reflecting our success as consumers, efforts to gain employment amount to little and access to further consumption as compensations for perceived deficiencies reduced. The CV is about consumption<sup>7</sup>, it reflects, in a rationalised form, the extent to which, on paper at least, we no longer exist as individuals rather we are generic values exchangeable for job opportunities and, therefore, money.

But does the CV entirely consume or annul the individual? Alan Warde (1994: 891) suggests the idea that 'identity-value has entirely supplanted use-value and exchange-value' is exaggerated; that, amongst other issues, consumer discourses are informed more by information from advertisers and market research than they are from individual consumers (see Warde, 1996: 257). I have sympathy with this view, even though much of my argument stems from the kind of research Warde questions. The use of such data in this dissertation is premised on the important distinction that, unlike the advertisements of products, SVCs and so on require the 'consumer' to exhibit the qualities being promoted. If we contrast this with a car advertisement

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<sup>7</sup> Also see Miller and Rose (1997) for a useful summary on the subject as consumer; and Lee (1993)

intimating the kind of person who would drive a particular vehicle, it is not important that consumers identify themselves, as such, or reflect on personal biographies in order to complete the purchase. How we consume or integrate the qualities employers seek is only of superficial comparison to how we consume or integrate product. Primarily, status concerns, identity and culture, while variable in importance to the working role, mediate the ineluctable economic relation. If consumption consumes the character, the economic residue is an immanent reminder that a synthesis between the product of capital and the worker that creates it is neither stable nor plausible. It is important to recognise the continuities in consumer activity over the ages and the space for agency outside of that narrative. To conclude that we are entirely constructed around consumption and our values, actions and so on, determined by it, is to ignore some of the crucial features of contemporary society, including those present amongst groups and individuals who actively resist it. As Warde reflects, how do we explain our own position as social scientists when clearly we are critically engaged with the subject? The CV is a manifestation of the individual; it is structured around a need for work and reflects a consumer discourse inasmuch as the document emphasises the individual (as a consumer of experience) in such a way. As Casey (1995: 156) argues, 'Employees are required to be self-denying, hard-working, cooperative team players committed to cheerful service and long hours of work. At the same time they are required to be self-seeking consumers who find gratification of an endless hierarchy of needs in the consumption of mass products.' In the CV, characterisations of self are the virtual commodities we buy into and a person's biography becomes subject to market pressure engineered through the (idea of the) company. The individual turns itself into the equivalent of a product inasmuch as that person is actively engaged in making itself *appear* that way. This is not to say they are passively rendered an object. The whole point of a CV is that we are actively involved in manufacturing/presenting ourselves as objects for access to employment.

Douglas Ezzy (2001: 641) suggests 'It is too simple to celebrate consumerist choice, or the 'postmodernist erasure of the self' without a concomitant analysis of the socially constructed nature of consumerist choice, or the ongoing social structuring of the self.' A personality culture reinforces the individual as a selection of dedifferentiated objects by separating and categorising the particles that embody the self into their universal equivalent with the corporation/institution as denominator. In a way, the process uncovered here, that of reflexive adaptation to employment norms, reinforces the conceptual weakness in a normative subjectivity. The CV reminds us that the self is structured, perhaps unevenly - but structured nevertheless - to persistent relationships of economy and power. This does not register as a passive or unconscious internalisation of corporate values; it requires a level of intellectual sophistication and engagement to be able to keep up with the cultural imperatives that broadly transmit the changing expectations of employers. If work causes us to seek out and value the particularistic

as exchangeable-like objects and to be prepared to be flexible about how we interpret these, far from reinforcing a non-dialectical postmodern subject, we lift the (cultural) veil on the relations that drive capitalism through a(nother) neo-liberal phase.

### *Summary*

In this chapter I have concluded the data from SVCs by looking at the phenomenal rise of CV and team requests in job advertisements. This has stimulated a debate on the implications of these for subjective attachment to working norms. We have developed our thesis on a personality culture in employment by deconstructing the 'team' as a community/worker solidarity simulacrum, and the CV as a document for showcasing experience as temporally instrumentalised for employment. We have disassociated ourselves from arguments that subsume the person, in their entirety, into commodity relations. Instead, we have posited the view that what is objectified, at one level, exposes ruptures at another. In other words, the processes here defined do not complete individuals nor entirely nullify them, they require skills that reflexively question a normative subjectivity and to productively engage it for employers. This returns us to the principal concerns of the economic and power relations that govern or determine whether, how, in whose interests and to what extent we adapt. Without appreciating the conditions under which this happens we could be forgiven for concluding that the processes being described liberate the individual from all manner of repression. Whereas it is more accurate to suggest that repression, to use that word, is more discreet, informal and, consequently, all the more powerful, pervasive and irresistible. A purpose of this dissertation is to examine these seemingly benign and ideologically neutral social and cultural developments in order to contribute to a purposeful critique of them.

We have shown following the summary at the end of chapter five that:

1. Requests for teams and CVs have risen proportionately with requests for 'personality', inclusive of all words pertaining therein.
2. 'Teams' and 'CVs' relative to each named skill or trait in a SVC are pre-eminent in employer demands.
3. Teams indicate a system for organising the workforce through discreet methods of surveillance, intimations of 'community', and displacement of the 'worker' antagonism in self-identified 'teampayer'.
4. The CV documents the values of the Other (employer) as an ongoing impression about the worth of different completed, concurrent, and future activities.
5. The CV registers difference inasmuch as difference is marketable or commonly incorporated into exchange relations.

6. Pressures upon people to adapt to a competitive working environment leads to the seeking out of signs – through qualifications, experiences, etc – whose (assumed) intrinsic value become indeterminate.
7. The principle of the CV as signifier of credentials instrumentalises non-work relationships to their employment value, so that ‘free time’ even acquires a zero-advantage stigma.
8. The CV is a de facto example of the structuring of the self to concrete employment relations.
9. The processes governing consumption of experiences for a CV are more economically pronounced than those governing consumption of goods for self-identity.

In the next chapter, a new data set is introduced to shore up these arguments and to examine the way information contained in SVCs and related material is incorporated into individual biographies or personal profiles.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN: PROFILING THE PERSONAL: FROM DISCIPLINE TO TRANSFER

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### Introduction

Situations vacant columns - and the material juxtaposed to illustrate values being presented to people looking for work - give us some idea of the norms, one might say paradigm, that subject the free individual to ongoing structural demands. Employing the word structure sometimes provokes strong reaction when institutions, corporations, etc, have so successfully incorporated the language of personality - the subject - into their business models. We might be mistaken for thinking that there is no thing external to the subject at all, but instead a network of 'intersubjectivities' of which employers are a part. 'Structuralism' - in its various meanings - invokes an image of an Orwellian-style regime under which we have no control. Let us reappraise the relationship between the individual and society not as one in which power bears down monolithically and ruthlessly upon us. Instead, let us view, with healthy suspicion the relationships through which we are governed/govern ourselves. So far my data has focused on the norms that proliferate through into everyday discourse in job advertisements, career information and so on. This has shown us that a coherent set of values - broad enough for most people to engage with and specific enough to have meaning for employers - is widely disseminated to guide job candidates and those pursuing a career in the qualities that constitute successful attachment to social (employment) norms. Because this is a general observation, the argument made is one intended to uncover the *tendency* of personal adaptation, the *context* in which it occurs and the *implications* for the individual. I take on some postmodern assumptions about the independence of people to construct meaning and confirm this, within my paradigm, as fundamental to understanding the power of neo-liberal ideology in accommodating difference as a productive force to capital. I have only touched upon, or hinted at, how individuals actively pursue a course of action that knowingly invalidates claims to authenticity or denies the very thing by which individuality is normatively defined. Over the next two chapters this argument will be developed by employing a data set that advances upon the empirical work thus far, in that it demonstrates the ways in which individuals actively incorporate those values into their own biographical understanding. Here, in chapter seven, I shall explore methodological issues before introducing the first part of the data on records of achievement (ROAs). This will lead us into a discussion on some theoretical points from the information. Additional material on self-help books will further illustrate these points. In chapter eight a presentation of the data will be

concluded and, in comparison to the overall findings of the thesis, a number of propositions made. These will be summarised in the concluding chapter.

So, in this chapter, I shall:

- Introduce records of achievement as a data set for examining subjective adaptation to employment norms.
- Discuss methodological issues relating to the study.
- Present and analyse the data on ROAs.
- Advance the overall argument with reference to the data and additional material from self-help books.
- Conclude the chapter with a summary that takes us into the second part of the data in chapter eight.

### *Records of Achievement in Context*

A (National) Record of Achievement (ROA) is the final document given to schoolchildren at the end of their eleventh year (15 to 16 year olds). It is a personalised brochure, of some length, that catalogues achievements in much the way a CV does. One section covers personal details – name, date of birth, etc – another, qualifications and credits. Elsewhere, achievements in education are listed. The focus of this study are the sections entitled ‘Achievements in Education’ – a description of work experience, sporting activities and so on written by the teacher in consultation with the student - and a ‘Personal Statement’ which is a ‘reflective and evaluative account in the student’s own words.’ Forty-nine ROAs are analysed as part of a broader study on processes through which people constitute and validate themselves in relation to employers. First, however, the data will be put in context.

For an initial sense of the design and purpose of a ROA, it would not be inappropriate to make a comparison with the Curriculum Vitae. Both documents enable a person to frame activities according to a perceived value to employers (see Morgan, 1993: 136; Metcalfe, 1992; Gergen, 1991: 184). A person may, for example, engage in an activity for how it will look on their CV, or consider an experience or personal quality as more significant than another for a similar reason. ROAs are a more detailed and verifiable (through the school) ‘CV’ that positively connects the person’s character and experiences with employment norms. They mark, in many ways, what increasingly appears to be happening in a competitive employment market: that to improve ‘employability’ anything that might signify compatibility between a person and (prospective) employer is drawn upon from personal insights (about the self) and experience.

The data here will further illustrate my argument by looking at how the principles contained there are implemented by students. It will show that school pupils are acquainted with and practised in the value of their ‘personalities’/experiences to employers through the

technology of ROAs. Unlike Willis who, in *Learning to Labour* (1977), sought to identify conflict in education through a limited study of working-class boys' attitudes towards processes of socialisation/incorporation into capitalism, I make no attempts here to explore empirically subjective interpretations of the situation. Whether in some indirect, contingent or ideological way students can be shown to oppose or contest these exercises, as might be expected, does not mean that, in practice, they do not perform or are unaffected by them in their relationship to the employment market. The critical value in showing that empirically the ROA exercise is contested (although still carried through), would be limited in a study that aims to evaluate the principle of self-marketisation/reification of personality as integral to (pre)employment practice.

To summarise the purpose of this part of my inquiry, the empirical value of the data lies in (a) the illustrations of how students frame subjectivities in relation to employers; (b) the extent to which a certain language and instrumentality permeates, in principle, the reflexive categories of (self) interpretation; (c) the relevance to other data, including my own, in situating the structural demands of 'enterprise' vis-à-vis the 'reflexive' subject as politically problematic.

### **Methodological Background**

Studies of ROAs have been conducted through governmental departments. Broadfoot et al describe their holistic function when saying that '... the well established boundary between 'academic' and 'pastoral' is being increasingly overtaken by the recognition that knowledge, skills and attitudes are all interrelated and cannot be divided into different domains.' (quoted in Ball and Butcher, 1993, p. 25) The Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) funded brochure (ibid.), from which this quotation comes, explains 'The use of reflective documents, such as profiles and Records of Achievement, reflect a seamless mesh of learning, personal and career development.' The ROA is designed to integrate different spheres of a person's life into the *academic*: 'those which are explicitly concerned with students' educational performance on a given course programme'; *personal*: 'those which focus mainly on the development of a range of self management skills'; and *career*: 'those which are concerned primarily with the issues of career choice and transition.' (ibid.)

Due to the sensitivity of the information contained in these ROAs, all names, and references to a specific location, have been omitted. To avoid self-conscious attempts by students to alter content, the precise remit of the inquiry was not discussed, although the students and tutors/teachers were generously willing to provide the information on that basis on the understanding of anonymity. Because of the difficulty in securing agreement and in overcoming the practicalities of access to an entire data set, my work centres on one school in one particular year. Before the students received finished copies of their ROA, the sections already mentioned were photocopied and given to me. This amounts to 49 separate ROAs from a cross section of girls and boys of various abilities and backgrounds. I found no convincing

evidence to indicate gender differences, say, in the content of ROAs, although it could be supposed that the more successful ROAs were those written by students who are more articulate in their communication of attitudes and experiences (possible class connotations). An advantage to this study is that in gaining information on schoolchildren, their views as a sample do not represent those of people from any particular industry, class, gender or academic ability.

The school is an average comprehensive. The students' backgrounds vary according to class, if understood in terms of parental occupation. There is limited ethnic diversity (i.e. the students are mostly white). However, the ROA supports, in theory, the principle of inclusivity: that everybody potentially has something to offer to employers. Because it is the principle of competitive adaptation to employment norms that I am interested in, it is not my interest to show empirically that demands employers make are fairer to one class, gender etc than another. Rather, the scheme can be challenged in itself on grounds that are generally applicable (see later discussion in chapter eight on *Stage Four* argument). Therefore, the findings are not proof that students conform, as such; they show how personal narratives can be adapted to the perceived demands of enterprise, as explicated in ROAs, as required. As ROAs are administered across the country (at the time of writing) using the same guidelines discussed below, the findings represent an argument on how young students are made aware of, and practice in, the techniques for improving and marketing the self to capitalist employment relations as currently anticipated and encountered.

Each ROA was read thoroughly and catalogued using the same procedure throughout. From the 'personal statements' various anomalies and consistencies were recorded then checked off against the 'experiences and achievements' section. Personal statements are, on average, between 1-1.5 A4 pages of continuous prose (no subdivisions), using 12 font and 1.5 line spacing with minor variations. Experiences and achievements are written by the teacher and cover no more than a single A4 sheet in 12 font and 1.5 line spacing. Variations in length here often reflect the relative marketability of the student. The shortest is about half a page long.

The personal statement is supposed to be in the student's own words, but the teachers aid structure (see below). The section on 'Experiences and Achievements' is written in the third person and is constructed by the allocated teacher after 'consultation' with the student. In statistical terms, the variables (content) are not so consistent or revealing as to enable calculations based on specific responses. As such, the analysis is mostly qualitative.

On the fact that guidelines for tutors/teachers do exist: students do not write personal statements without being influenced by what is considered as appropriate for inclusion. What ROAs reveal, however, is that students do reflect upon themselves by referring to examples of feelings, values and experiences that are difficult to 'make up'. I do not rule out the possibility that students suppress contrary feelings and experiences from the document nor that some antagonism to the exercise may be felt by both students and teachers: but the point, as discussed

before, is that students will reflect upon and articulate characteristics and experiences within the context of employment norms. With a ROA each student will have practised these techniques and be able to reflexively apply them as pressures to develop 'interpersonal' skills relevant to CVs/employers are likely to increase.

### *Guidelines for Tutors in the Construction of ROAs*

Below is a summary of the guidelines teachers/tutors receive on what to include in a Personal Statement (officially numbered 5, but from now on referred to as 1) and Experience and Achievements (numbered 4, but from now on numbered 2) sections. It is the basis of the structure of each ROA, although as the form tutor in charge of administering ROAs, who was not privy to the themes of my study, informed me: 'You will note that not all tutors [teachers] and students adhere strictly to these guidelines. There is quite a bit of flexibility.'

#### 1. Personal Statement

(a) 'Introduction' - The personal statement should, according to the guidelines, contain an introduction with information on punctuality, dress and appearance, conformity to college rules, and cooperation with teaching staff. These emphasise, above all else, attitudes towards formal organisational structures.

(b) 'Attitude to work' - 'reminder - positive comments only'. Here the child should consider whether they are reliable, able to persevere, complete work to deadline, prefer working in groups, class or alone, whether they can 'cope with working alone', good at organising others, and to 'try and think of examples that would demonstrate these statements... and... ways of gaining written evidence of them in your portfolios.' Students should also reflect on the reaction of the 'profiling done in year [10] and the actual profile... received at the end of it' and the targets they set for themselves as a result.

It should be noted that 'evidence' is provided for student/teacher statements to employers if they require them (see below) and that students reflected on and discussed each other's 'profiles' the previous year as part of the exercise. Thus, in such fashion surveillance/disciplinary techniques are incorporated.

(c) 'Particular interests in and out of school' - This asks which subjects were enjoyed and why, and whether non-timetabled activities were engaged with after school. It is a forerunner to the student society at university in which willingness to take part in activities is evidence to the employer of a well-rounded personality.

(d) 'Impressions of how you felt about Work Experience': feelings about work placement and having a career in that field; whether they were apprehensive/confident beforehand and how afterwards; and if they related to their work colleagues. Like much else in ROAs the guidelines encourage students to think about themselves, their attitudes and emotions, in relation to (marketable) experiences (they are told explicitly *not* to lie). All 49 students took part in work experience.

(e) 'Social Life' – This asks how easily the student gets on with others; whether they are happier with a small circle of friends or relate to everyone; how they spend their 'free time'; what 'exactly' their social life consists of; whether they would consider themselves 'very lively, outgoing... or basically shy'; and if they have a 'quiet sense of humour or... prefer to take centre-stage'. The characteristics referred to emulate the qualities demanded in job advertisements in situations vacant columns, including the usual 'teampayer', 'outgoing personality', and 'GSOH'(good sense of humour). It separates the normal from the weird or the conformist from the outsider. ROAs encourage a reflexive approach to activities, lifestyles and personalities in relation to employers without a broader consideration of the critical implications of this.

(f) 'Hopes for the Future' – this part should explicitly ask: 'Which particular qualities do you have that you think would be important for the job of your choice?' If intending to continue in education the student should consider the 'eventual career' they have in mind. Hence, the basis for activities instrumentalised in anticipation of qualities an employer is likely to require.

## 2. Experiences and Achievements

The tutor should cover the following: work experience ('how long – when – dress – behaviour – responsibility – attitude... develop and quote any comments made by the employer'); college work ('No statements should be made about level of potential in any concrete way, but it may be hinted at, obliquely...'); college trips; college activities; extra-curricular activities; and punctuality and attendance ('only if positive comments can be made.' Otherwise 'use good or excellent'). Each section should finish with 'Evidence for many of these statements is available in ..... 's portfolio. The remaining evidence is held centrally at the college and can be verified upon request.'

ROAs, then, serve as evidence of a child's performance at school, willingness to partake in extra-curricular activities, relationship and attitude to others, attitude to work and so on. Unlike the CV, which may be difficult to verify - especially apropos of attitude - the student's claims are validated via external monitoring. This information is then tailored to the presumed needs of employers, and serves as a biography and blueprint of the person's pre-work life, that

simulates techniques required for sustaining competitive advantage in employment. In this respect, the exercise may help students to adjust to changing work/life norms, for which its success to enterprise should be judged. This, however, is essentially an argument whose validity lies with a standard *a priori* acceptance of employment norms and not as an analysis of the principles governing them.

### **Evaluating Content of Records of Achievement using a Hierarchy of Personality Model**

I approached job hunting very seriously in terms of thinking what I really wanted and what I had been working towards since I was about fourteen, probably. I wasn't someone who just went to university because I didn't know what I wanted. I always wanted a good career... and of course I tried to make sure I didn't work all the time because I knew they (i.e. potential employers) want more than just a good academic record... so I did things like running the Golf team. It all shows that you can take responsibility for things.

*new recruit at auditing company (in Grey, 1994: 485)*

Three themes emerged when compiling the data and these have formed the basis of the presentation. First are qualities describing the person in their general conformity to basic organisational structures (time keeping, physical appearance, etc); second are more informal qualities associated with *transferable skills*; third concerns the value of social and cultural experiences in improving a person's employability (covered in chapter eight). A fourth category is added as a hypothetical (business) ideal that conflates a person with the organisation (covered in chapter eight). These four themes presented sequentially parallel processes of credential inflation in employment and constitute a *hierarchy of personality*, from a basic organisational discipline to a total orientation of the self to company norms. The first two stages will be covered in this section.

The hierarchy illustrates the degree to which a person is subjectively integrated or personally identifies with employment practice. The more successful the ROA as a document advocating the student's employability, the more thoroughly each stage is represented. So we begin, at a basic level, with qualities of limited significance to the individual personality wherein the behaviour is easily distinguishable from the character. As we ascend the hierarchy, the articulated values, characteristics and experiences of the individual more closely correspond to the personality as such. The themes of each stage will unfold in the presentation of the data and can be summarised as follows:

*Stage One - Organisational conformity*

*Stage Two* - (demonstration of) transferable skills

*Stage Three* – Extra-curricular/lifestyle equivalence/compatibility

*Stage Four* – (Orientation to and) identification with the company (CV personality)

I have argued that demands placed upon job candidates do, in the main, necessitate some awareness and articulation of personal characteristics, lifestyles and experiences. 'Credential inflation' corresponds to a neo-liberalisation of the employment market. Instead of relying on collective bargaining and the provision of secure working arrangements, persons are encouraged to evaluate themselves in order to improve their competitiveness in mimicry of the principles governing 'free trade'. Exposed to the uncertainties of capitalist society, a successful person is more likely to embody the characteristics employers appear to need. These might include qualities normatively understood as 'belonging' to the self, precariously situated as sites for discovering the future commodities of competitive advantage. The following data reveals the generality of this argument and the intensity of its application by school students about to enter the employment market.

***Stage One: Organisational Conformity***

Nearly every personal statement emphasises a positive attitude to/record with punctuality, neatness, deadlines and conformity to school rules. 22.1<sup>1</sup>, for example, typically explains that 'I am quite punctual and have only been late a few times... I am always well turned out, clean and tidy, I value my appearance a lot. I follow the college rules and get on with most teachers.'<sup>2</sup> This is confirmed in 22.2 where the teacher points out that staff are 'always' commenting 'on her conscientious and mature attitude to work... excellent record of attendance and punctuality.' These qualities are instilled through a disciplinary drill that schools have long maintained, arguably necessarily, to simulate lifestyles governed by timetables, complex forms of social interaction, and established patterns of order. Failure to conform to standards of punctuality, dress and explicit rules, or to learn the basic codes necessary to adapt to a given situation, indicates a personality type incapable of functioning in an organisation or formal setting, such as higher education. It is possible to understand here the significance of each entry on a ROA, in relation to a hierarchy schematic, whereby the person necessarily attains these basic criteria without which any amount of charm is functionally useless in employment. It is worth noting, in relation to data on job advertisements in situations vacant columns, that prior to companies systematically requesting personality traits, the Stage One characteristics would, at least, have been entry-level requirements for work. *Organisational discipline*, then, is the foundation level or Stage One of the hierarchy and predates a mature personality culture.

### *Stage Two: (Demonstration of) Transferable Skills*

The corpus of characteristics that have greatest exchange-value within a Personality Culture are those we describe as transferable skills. These temper the uncertainty and discontinuity that are features of short-term employment and the fluctuations of fortune characteristic of contemporary life. 'They are the sort of skills that don't stand still. They need to be nurtured and nourished so that they are kept fresh and vital.' (Foster, 1998: 12). These include, according to Val Foster (ibid.):

self-awareness; self-management; interpersonal skills; flexibility;  
communication; problem solving; team-working; business awareness;  
networking; negotiation; leadership; computer literacy; language skills; driving  
ability.

Most of the qualities listed here have been deconstructed elsewhere. In combination they complete the project of self and represent a kind of Holy Grail of personal (character) achievement. As a subject configured to a business ideal, transferable skills underline the qualities that combine as an 'all-rounder'. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels (1989: 117) contended that 'private property can be abolished only on condition of an all-round development of individuals, because the existing character of intercourse and productive forces is an all-round one, and only individuals that are developing in an all-round fashion can appropriate them'. It is the distinction between the 'all-rounder' as Foster describes it, and the 'all-rounder' according to Marx and Engels, that exposes a semantic trick that attempts to foreclose critique by signifying a normative totality wherein the word embraces every possible posture. The extent of the phrase 'all-rounder' is reflected in its use. In deconstructing the term we find its *logos* within a (neo-)liberal subjectivity. Here the meaning applies in a narrow sense: as a character-type whose faculties are directed towards the institution and the excrescent expressions, those untimely manifestations of the same characteristic qualities, suppressed. The 'all-rounder' is a teamplayer who also knows when it is time to employ leadership skills and has developed their person to be able to comprehensively engage organisational needs. So, as Foster (ibid.) tells us: 'If you concentrate on developing [transferable] skills, you will be a well-rounded, self-reliant and confident individual – and there will be no reason why you shouldn't be right at the very front of the queue when it comes to personal career growth.' Neatly, she summarises career and personality as an inextricable relation: a point we cannot traverse, if only because class as an historical relation (as opposed to a sentimentalised cultural one) has been disavowed. In a 'game' analogy, Bourdieu (and Wacquant, 1992: 98) says, with reference to 'fields', 'there are cards that are valid, efficacious in all fields – these are the fundamental species of capital – but their relative value as trump card is determined by each field and even

by the successive states of the same field.' Each workplace is constitutive of a different field but they belong to a constellation through which transferable skills can generally be applied. Gramsci's (2003) notion of hegemony as an ideological map that blankets every contour of society is analogous here. Because choice, material abundance, and cultural multiplicity as celebrated features of neo-liberal society invite, by definition, everybody into their fold: the subject is denied rational grounds to oppose it. So that objection to the thing (transferable skills etc), where it does occur, is characterised as emotional inadequacy or is discredited because superficially there is little to distinguish between a principled objection to commodification, say, and indifference or failure to regulate the ego to social norms (social inadequacy) – the imponderables of surplus and necessary repression (see Marcuse, 1970). Transferable skills are not representative of something alien to us; we are always-already subjectivised by them. Instead they *name* our experiences, attitudes and behaviour by inviting us to recognise and harness them - in contrast to and by displacement of other terms of reference - for their exchange value: we have the choice of whether to invest ourselves within such discursive frameworks (see chapter eight for an elaboration of this argument). Here are some examples from ROAs that illustrate this process of recognition.

We can see this in relation to teamwork: 'I prefer working in small groups or individually as opposed to larger groups' (4.1); flexibility: 'I can work independently and in larger groups as well. I can cope alone...' (18.1); initiative (not drawing upon company resources): 'I am capable of making decisions myself, without the need to constantly ask others for advice' (34.1); networking (friends/colleagues organised in relation to work): 'I do not think it is advisable having very close-knit friendships at school because it may interfere with schooling' (44.1); leadership: 'I find it easy to organise others who are willing to work' (28.1); and communication: 'I am good at communicating with other people' (27.1). Core transferable skills such as teamwork, flexibility, initiative, networking, leadership and communication are well covered in ROAs. Where there are gaps, such as 'enthusiasm and determination to succeed' (21.2), the tutor can compensate. Identification and integration of characteristic traits with and into their work relation, or *transferable skills*, defines the second layer (Stage Two) of the hierarchy. Without a range of these skills a person is ill equipped to meet the needs of a modern, flexibly organised, workplace. Failure or inability to incorporate them eliminates the job seeker from contention in a number of capacities. Weber's claim that 'the capitalism of today, which has come to dominate economic life, educates and selects the economic subjects which it needs through a process of economic survival of the fittest' (quoted in Brubaker, 1984: 23), is the part of the fear and reality that makes the idea of 'pro-active self-improvement' a seductive and rational one.

Synonymous with attitudes to work is the material that demonstrates a practical application of transferable skills. Work experience is an important corollary to attitude as

tangible examples of ability to succeed. Even if this amounts to voluntary work, weekend/evening jobs, or work placements, providing there are no inexplicable gaps in a CV – which will not be the case for a schoolchild – the Stage Two biography is assured. All students provide examples to this effect through their work experience, including 36.1 who enjoys ‘the atmosphere that the office provides and prefer it to any other places that I have worked, not only do I enjoy the work that I do in the office but my co-workers are all very knowledgeable and I learn a great deal about the functioning of this type of company which with any luck should lead me to success...’ 14.1 ‘had a really good time during work experience I found in useful for later on in life when I get a real job, everyone that I worked with was really nice and I got on with everyone there...’ 26.1 ‘was part of a team so I helped run our role-play as a company in advertising.’

It is important to demonstrate that, if nothing else, a person gets on well with colleagues, as 5.1 found. She would not want to continue with hairdressing as a career, in this case, although while there ‘was communicating with lots of people mainly adults and pensioners but I thought how I could use this with a job even the boss of ..... said I had a quality with communicating.’ Negative experience with work placements is not uncommon and where, in the rare case, the student fails to provide a positive gloss, the tutor, as in 28.2 fills in with ‘he did draw from this experience and understanding...’ In the main, however, tutors tend to report ‘a confident and professional attitude and was praised for her willingness and eagerness to learn... she sees a career in this area as a distinct possibility in the future’, of which 21.2 is a typical example.

The syntax used for students reflecting on work experience is more irregular than either Stage One or transferable skill identifications and the language more negative. This suggests a more open account of a person’s feeling towards the role. There could be a number of reasons for this. Self-appraisal of work performance encourages a more genuine response that mitigates outright fabrication and thus prepares a student to re-orientate their biography to employers. The presentation is never entirely negative though, as the language is measured and the tutor, as shown, will compensate for personal statements whose negativity is not reconstituted as a worthwhile experience. In 13.1, for example, the student simply stated the work (in a nursery) ‘was cold and wet and I do not wish to make a career of this line of work.’ The tutor (13.2), on the other hand – presumably after consultation with the student – says he ‘carried out a successful week of Work Experience... and... still regards it as a helpful learning experience and his outlook remains positive.’ 6.1 goes as far as to say his job ‘was so boring and you do not get a lot of money for it’, although he ‘generally got on well with the people’. The tutor’s comments describe the student’s working role saying merely that it was ‘a successful week’. In all other cases the tutor, as instructed, provides either a positive or glowing account of the student’s first institutionally organised encounter with work.

Feelings towards work are also structured according to whether the student felt apprehensive or confident before attending and, crucially, how they felt afterwards. 1.1, whose shop experience taught him 'different ways to approach tasks such as angry and difficult customers', was 'confident... and had no problems making new friends and being set new tasks to do every day.' 19.1, on the other hand, was initially confident but 'felt more apprehensive' later; this is put into perspective when the tutor (19.2) claims 'she did draw from this experience some valuable points and gained confidence working alongside other people.' Typically, though, as 4.1 shows, while 'apprehensive and excited' about a primary school placement beforehand, on the job she 'related well... and was able to communicate at an appropriate level to each' (staff and pupils). Work experience can also include part-time work as useful indicators of compatibility to employment. 32.1, for instance, is 'fairly confident with people.... reflected in my part time work at the local Post Office.' Knowledge, then, of the *value* of experience and the commodity relation of personal characteristics to employers is well recognised at this age and confidence, or how *anxiety* was mitigated, informs perceptions of work. If work experience reassures the student, attitude to work, arguably, is improved and conformity prevails. When a young person is already trained in teamwork skills and has learnt to reflect upon herself as a commodity, becoming a teamplayer feels natural so that a potentially alienating process is not fraught with anxiety and does not, in point of fact, feel alien.

This completes the first two stages of the hierarchy of personality model. I will conclude with the final two stages in chapter eight. Here the discussion is continued in light of the presented data.

### *ROAs and SVCs*

So far, then, we have seen the proximity of the words describing personality in SVCs to the language students employ to describe themselves in ROAs. As a minimum, it shows that the data corresponding to previous chapters is not situated as a cryptic and anonymous cultural aside but an outcome of processes proliferating the employment scene. The language is registered, however that occurs (here in the example of young students' ROAs), for its significance in deciphering the self and organising activities through the putative lens of employers. As a maximum, we can say that with each rising generation the presence of a personality culture - as symbolic of an incorporation into reflexive understanding norms broadly governing employment practice in neo-liberalism - increasingly and extensively subsumes the social body and is reproduced across the body of competing older generations. Occupying the field between this empirically verifiable minimum and indicative maximum is each individual negotiating their self *qua* competing subjects. We can add, with some confidence to this minimum, a further proposition deriving from the data: that the occurrence of self-conscious subjective orientation to criteria structured to advantage corporate enterprise is posited, or

hegemonically incorporated, as normative socio-cultural and political practice. The data cannot show us the extent of simultaneous resistance to these norms, individual strategies for subjective distancing, or collective attempts at forging value-orientations in distinction. As I have said, it was not the aim of my research to explore such variables, but to make a case for how each (subjective) position is incorporated or affected by general tendencies in employment structure/broader society. In chapter six I developed the argument that antinomies between, say, subject and object, inclusion and exclusion, approval and rejection (of employment norms), are misleading in the extent that each is constituted through the other and lacks a disjunctive moment. Hence our relationship to the themes of the data is ineluctable but variably appropriated.

The vernacular describing the self in ROAs compares to that in self-help books. The former is an exercise constructed to improve the student's life-chances as a working subject. The latter are pitched to consumers as a way to overcome personal deficiencies and to live a full life. By comparing the two we can see that, far from offering the prospect of inexhaustible and heterogeneous personal development, both ROAs and their self-help equivalent filter the same ideology. They aid a development of the requisite skills to seize and advance the opportunities modern society affords as an independent, freely choosing and, therefore, personally responsible subject. We shall evaluate this forthwith.

### The Self-Help Phenomenon

Learn how to become calm... no matter what circumstances or workmates do to test your patience, no matter how much doom and gloom the newspapers preach, no matter where the economy is taking your income, you'll still feel good about your work... you'll look forward to going to work each day with a childlike enthusiasm. (Wilson, 1998: 29)

Work, and then work, and then work.

Never, never, never give up – keep it going, going, going

Tell yourself every day of your life until you believe it away down deep that you shall never think of failing. (Peale, 1974: 213)

I finally learned there is really only one person in the world who can make me happy, and that is ME! (Jeffers, 1991: 55)

Therapies, Rose (Heelas, Morris, (eds.), 1992: 151) argues, help us in 'become enterprising, take control of our careers, transform ourselves into high flyers, achieve excellence and fulfil

ourselves not *in spite of* work but *by means of* work.’ At the core of the self-help logic is the idea of positive thinking. It works on the principle that the more a person *actually* believes something the more it is the case<sup>1</sup>. Voltaire satirised such notions in 1759 when he created Dr Pangloss who argued that ‘It is demonstrably true... that things cannot be other than as they are. For, everything having been made for a purpose, everything is necessary for the best purpose... Consequently, those who have argued that all is well have been talking nonsense. They should have said that all is for the best.’ (Voltaire, 1998: 2) While this was a thinly veiled attack on Leibniz, its humour resonates as an antidote to functionalist ideology and the writings of Anthony Giddens. We discover in positive thinking the final argument in defence of the status quo. It is a cynical or even a realistic expression; an act of resignation to a situation we tell ourselves cannot be changed. Self-help books promote the idea of positive thinking through one set of words or another. Yet it is not an existential argument they present as the society into which we subjectively enter is presupposed. Sartre (1987: 54), in distinction, argued ‘there is no sense in life *a priori*. Life is nothing until it is lived; but it is yours to make sense of and the value of it is nothing else but the sense that you choose.’ Self-help books, by contrast, prescribe a morality that is cleverly situated within an empowering idiom. Susan Jeffers, for example, whose book is highly regarded in psychiatric circles and is an international best seller, includes the following programme for the book’s centrepiece (paraphrased in Jeffers words unless quoted directly (Jeffers’ emphasis throughout)):

1. Listen to 20-30 minutes of inspirational messages on tape every morning.
2. Pay attention to positive quotes written around the house.
3. Put calming music in tape recorder.
4. Dress with music in background and repeat positive affirmations in front of mirror for at least 10 minutes. ‘Outtalk chatterbox’ in your head.  
In the beginning do not turn on radio or television for the news. ‘If it is your habit to read newspapers as you eat breakfast, avoid the horror stories on the front pages, and concentrate on the encouraging articles, or read one of your self-help books.’
5. If you exercise ‘pump’ your mind with affirmations about your body.
6. Play affirmation tape on walkman on the way to work. ‘I listen to either motivational or inspirational messages or stirring music, such as the movie score for *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, *Rocky* or *Chariots of Fire*.’
7. Be aware of positive messages you’ve placed around your workplace. ‘Again, chuckle to yourself. It helps you to lighten up about *everything*.’
8. Open diary and write down daily affirmations. ‘Every time you refer to your diary, say the affirmations over and over again.’
9. ‘As daily pressures and doubts begin to seep in, simply give yourself a “fix” of positive energy. All you have to do is repeat your affirmations over and over again until you feel your strength and optimism return.’
10. ‘Before you go to sleep, put a relaxation tape into your recorder and let in the soothing messages.’

<sup>1</sup> On a similar vein, see Derrida (1982: 21) on the ‘alterity’ of the ‘unconscious’.

Please believe me when I tell you that if you commit yourself to such a program your whole world will turn around. (Jeffers, 1991: 81-4)

What could justifiably be called the self-help industry is a feature of the personality culture and, arguably, part of a wider *personality industry* in which advice books, therapy, careers interviews and so on are a part. It is perhaps as relevant to use this term today as it was for Adorno to coin the phrase *culture industry* fifty years ago. With millions of sales each year across the globe, it is only now, despite a long history, that these books have become a cultural phenomenon. Susan Jeffers and Louise Hay are two of the leading self-help authors (for additional critiques on self-help see, for example, Ehrenreich and English, 1979; Forest, 1998; Rimke, 2000; Ryan et al, 1994; Schilling and Fuehrer, 1993). Below is a list that Louise Hay regards as 'Affirmations for Everyone':

'I am patient and kind with all whom I encounter each day.'  
 'I am willing to see life in a new and different way.'  
 'I dwell in a world of love and acceptance.'  
 'I surround myself with positive people.'  
 'My dreams are a source of wisdom.'  
 'I ask for help when I need it.'  
 'I am willing to grow and change.'  
 'All that I have and all that I am is safe and secure.'  
 'I radiate acceptance, and am deeply loved by others.'  
 'I constantly increase my awareness of myself, my body, and my life.'  
 'I LOVE MYSELF!'

(Hay, 1998:

235)

It is easy to interpret positive thinking as an inherently beneficial mental health exercise. These books may indeed function for those, for example, with chronic low self-esteem, although, considering their content, it could be supposed in much the way becoming a member of a religious group or joining a dogmatic political organisation would. In the context of the personality culture, however - and perhaps the 'enterprise culture' of the 1980s generally - labour is increasingly flexibilised, competition is internalised as a feature of self and a lexicon of personality emerges to inform the process of adaptation to the norms reminiscent of corporations. Thus, the advice that Susan Jeffers and Louise Hay give above, feeds into a destructive cycle in which unease with the employment situation leads to therapy, acceptance of work and, eventually, *if the programme is successful*, adaptation to employment norms in which, potentially, ongoing psychic tension endures. In other words, in this particular context, self-help books are akin to a safety-net to capture people failing adequately to match the requirements of employers, or for those who feel uneasy or unhappy with the demands made of

them in their working role. In due course, the person is reconstituted as a healthy employee who, nevertheless, has internalised conflict as a continuous source that inspires the reflexive project of self. It is a kind of 'repressive desublimation' (see Marcuse, 1970 (1955)) in which that which is dysfunctional to the norms governing society is, in this case, identified and subsequently controlled.

In this regard, Bourdieu's (2003) cultural capital thesis requires some revision. Neo-liberal social and cultural frameworks operate within a capitalist dynamic: by now everybody can, in principle at least, have access to different sites – employment, educational, leisure, etc - regardless of background or symbolic capital. Exclusion is legitimated, as previously described, on the grounds of a person's inability (unwillingness) to be enterprising; or, in other words, to commit symbolic violence against the self by excluding the uncommodified remainder from subjectivity recognised through its exchange value. What matters is that I can find a commodified niche for my vulgar preferences and sentimentalise my impoverished roots as a cultural identity; to relativise and discredit content and values that are not easily accommodated into commodity relations or are so despite the actual motives of the actor. Hence the principal measure of the value of an object, service, culture, knowledge or person is money. Because ROAs and self-help books provide us with the means to recognise success, we only have ourselves to blame if we fail to enact upon that knowledge. By the same token, in committing symbolic violence against ourselves we deservedly take up our place within the particular institution. In the context of everyday experience, the argument here is commonsense.

Self-help books, then, are empowering inasmuch as they help us confront personal issues and enable us to cope with the contradictions we encounter through a reflexive strategy that filters experiences through certain ideological devices. Here we appraise moments and resignify them to suit a version that appears constructive to a phantasmal orientation. Let us explore this through a further articulation of *reflexive exploitation*.

### *Reflexive Exploitation*

Positive thinking helps set the parameters for a reflection on *the possible* and amelioration of the potential for anomic suicide and related disorders. So when Giddens (1991: 52) argues that self-identity is '*the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*', he correctly observes the process but fails sufficiently to examine how the biography itself is being shaped, and even re-interpreted, by way of market pressures in which choice is substantively chimerical. Moreover, in weighing-up the various options and considering the variables likely to affect our choices, it is unlikely that we are fully cognisant of what we are choosing or that the information we trust is reliable. To what extent, after all, do emotional or psychic influences shape the substance of the choices we make? Self-reflexivity is a misleading individualistic substitute for collective orientations against the objective dimensions of a free-market

capitalism and is, as such, an expression of relative *powerlessness*. The reliance on expert systems, self-help books, ROAs, and so on, contrasts to the disembedded agency implied in the term. As Žižek (2000: 278) puts it, 'in a tragicomic way, these very attempts [at reflexivity] are supported by a host of *specialists* who teach us how to discover our true spontaneous Self...' It is more apt, therefore, to qualify reflexivity as a conforming impulse and a regulatory device to capitalism as *reflexive exploitation*. Through reflexive exploitation, power relations shift from the worker/boss dichotomy to an internalised struggle for successful adaptation to the corporatised norm (symbolic violence against the presumed self). Were individuals able to develop their personalities without the constraints of commerce, it would be questionable whether personalities commensurate with enterprise would emerge, be so prevalent, or be recognised for their value as such. Self-reflexivity becomes a process through which commercially unviable characteristics are filtered out or suppressed, and commercially proven ones elevated to prominence. Control over personal time is harnessed via reflexive exploitation and each of us discovers anew the value in experiences fading out of consciousness. In much the way a corporation rationalises its operation for survival so an individual will do the same to sustain and advance profiles for employment.

Nevertheless, the self-help tradition is compatible to any society in which the psychic functioning of the individuals benefits the social functioning of the whole. It is perhaps why the telos is evident in writers such as Aristotle. More recently, the 19<sup>th</sup> century self-culture movement promoted ideas that are not dissimilar to those of today. Here are two examples:

Wanted, a man who will not lose his individuality in a crowd, a man who has the courage of his convictions, who is not afraid to say "No," though all the world say "Yes." (Marden, 1896: 10)

... one-sided development is an injury to any one. I think that the cultivation of the physical, the mental, and the moral natures should go hand in hand. (Chester, 1891: 10)

Alternatively, from 1930s USA:

An insincere grin? No. That doesn't fool anybody. We know it is mechanical and we resent it. I am talking about a real smile, a heartwarming smile, a smile that comes from within, the kind of smile that will bring a good price in the marketplace. (Carnegie, 1997(1936): 84)

The final quotation is from the seminal *How to win friends and influence people*, which, after numerous reprints, went on to sell over 16 million copies worldwide<sup>2</sup>. In many ways it bridges the style of the 19<sup>th</sup> century self-culture with the books with which we are more familiar today. Whereas self-culture is a more overtly prescriptive style, authors like Susan Jeffers create systems through which individuals can pro-actively transform themselves through a process of reflection. Carnegie, in certain respects, anticipates the personality culture by prescribing the values or techniques that a networker or an all-rounder would internalise today. However, neither these earlier illustrations nor contemporary self-help books aim to open a space through which an individual can take a critical and holistic approach to self. They exist in cultures that are prescriptive in different ways: the former<sup>3</sup>, in simple terms, is characterised more by external authority and ideas of tradition while the latter recreates this through the choices that nourish a sense of personal achievement harmonious with corporate thinking. To clarify, whatever we think of the world and how we perceive our interactions within it, the world continues along its course regardless. The gap between perception and reality is one matter. Another is that there is sufficient means to individually recognise the contradictions inherent to a situation but a perceived futility in acting in ways other than those advanced by documents such as ROAs. So, when Foster says:

... if you want to improve – or even maintain – your employability, the best way to do that is to train and develop your skills. In short, *stay marketable!*  
(Foster, 1998: 4)

... she is not disguising the implications to personality here. She reminds us, in case we have forgotten or have just been smuggled in from abroad, that success is predicated on an ability to recognise, enhance and promote the self as a set of commodities. This much knowledge already exists: we are not privileged to forget it, even though we may employ devices that tell us otherwise. The same principles are encouraged in our relations with others. We deploy the skills as a charm offensive to hook people into our social networks for what we might achieve. Let us explore this idea of networking before concluding part one of this discussion.

### *Networking – ‘it’s only natural!’*

<sup>2</sup> There are many contemporary guides for success in business. For example, Avis, 1986; Garfield, 1986; Kiam, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Bauman (1972: 71) claims that self improvement during the time of the labour aristocracy included material and spiritual factors: thrift, for example, as a core virtue, alongside education: ‘The desire for learning ran parallel to the pressures of industry, whose increasingly sophisticated technology needed workers with improved skills and background.’

Every time you borrow a CD from a friend, seek advice from a tutor or wander into Tesco's on the off-chance of a temporary job, you are displaying embryonic networking skills. You already spend a large part of your life talking to people and asking them to help in some way, so it's only a natural extension to apply this approach to choosing a career.

(Prospects Directory 1999: 48)

record when you spoke to someone, exactly what their company and position was, key points of your conversation, and any further ideas or contacts they gave you... if gossiping and going out for coffee are an integral part of the job hunting strategy, who's complaining?

([www.gradunet.co.uk/Scripts](http://www.gradunet.co.uk/Scripts))

Networking is a two-way operation. You have knowledge which other people could benefit from. You know someone who might help someone else. The more positive energy we can give out in helping others, the more we help ourselves.

(Alexander, 1997: 13)

If someone is not valuable to you, don't switch off – they may be valuable to someone else in your network.

([www.doctorjob.co.uk/career](http://www.doctorjob.co.uk/career))

Networking embodies a rationalised ethos towards processes of interaction. In Giddens (1992: 58), the 'pure relationship' is described as 'a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake... and is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it.' To Weber the 'psycho-physical apparatus of man is completely adjusted to the demands of the outer world... in line with the demands of work procedure, he is attuned to a new rhythm through the functional specialisation of muscles and through the creation of an optimal economy of physical effort.' (quoted in Brubaker, 1984: 14) Formal rationality supplants its substantive opposite as the principle guiding capitalism and capitalist relations. Marx, in a lucid articulation of alienation says that 'in general of every relationship in which man stands to himself is first realised and expressed in the relationship with which man stands to other men... Thus in the situation of alienated labour each man measures his relationship to other men by the relationship in which he finds himself placed as a worker.' (quoted in McLellan, 1990: 83) For Durkheim, (1968: 210), 'in a cohesive

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<sup>4</sup> Prospects Directory 1999: 48

and animated society' there is 'a constant interchange of ideas and feelings from each and each to all, something like a mutual moral support, which instead of throwing the individual on his own resources, leads him to share in the collective energy and supports his own when exhausted.' This is a useful description of 'networking' which without reference to Weber and Marx lacks the explanatory power for understanding the relation within a corporatised setting. Underlying a 'constant interchange of ideas' is 'man' standing in opposition to 'man' in a mimesis of the principle of the free play of capital. Competition arguably so defines interaction within the network that - as the fourth example from 'doctorjob' in the quotations above suggests - engagement is premised directly and indirectly on the instrumental goals of the actor. Weber, if we recall, delineated between the qualities of the bureaucrat and those of the complete individual. However, as the ethical dimensions of the bureaucratic role are substituted for an enterprising discourse in which the bureau adapts to the vagaries of neo-liberalism, the individual is further subsumed into a relation that undermines the precarious balance between person and institution. How are we to regard the 'networker' in this context? As someone who carries out their work as a loyal servant to the organisation? This seems unlikely when the spatial and temporal dimensions to work collapses in the new enterprise as the boundaries between work, leisure and 'free' time blur. These quotations above are not given as guidance for how to act in the job or how to behave when in a specific situation: there is no delineation. To the networker, 'both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning, to which man's conduct must be orientated if it is to bring salvation and after which it must be patterned in an integrally meaningful manner.' (Weber in Brubaker, 1984: 76) To what extent is the prophet that Weber refers to akin to this characterisation? The personality culture replaces religion as a unifying theme, to ameliorate the consequences that formal rationality would have upon society through the individual, by imbuing us with goals and values of a coherence that each one of us, in our separate capacities, can seek out and nurture within a success-orientation that pitches self to a collective effervescence which *transforms the fact of our alienation into the foundation that enables proactive assimilation to the corporate mode*. Thus alienation is a necessary prerequisite to corporate affiliation, functionality to contemporary life and social conformity in the context of a personality culture.

The link between personal qualities and business ones is made irrelevant when their meaning is interchangeable. What suffices as good career advice is apt recommendation for a general personality overhaul. Career advice is barely discernible from personal advice, not because, as has been shown, the qualities business require are commensurate with Marx's ideal conception of the all-rounder, rather it can be argued that personal success depends on our ability to successfully adapt to the career norms of the day as determined by employers. The personality culture embodies the values we must necessarily subscribe to and recognise

ourselves by if we are to fit-in. The unique aspect to this ideology is the way the more active we are in questioning and adapting self – for the purposes of career – the more likely we are to assimilate to the setting. In other words, a reflexive and transformative – as opposed to unquestioning and fixed – posture lies at the characterological core. This is a key source of confusion when contrasts are made between earlier traditions in which moral authority was arguably handed down by the family, church, and community, say, and now, when these agencies have been transcended by a ‘reflexivity’ that contains a crucial *exploitative* element, in which adaptation marries the individual to enduring (capitalist) social relations.

### *Summary*

In this chapter we have shifted our attention from the material that employers want us to see and we must necessarily engage with for access to a job, on to some empirical outcomes of this as illustrated in the *hierarchy of personality* schematic. I have previously shown that the needs of business, varied as they are, can be accounted for in the data from SVCs. We have seen that a coherent, recognisable and, at the same time, discreet ideology forms around the interests of occupational elites and is presented to us in a number of ways. The data reveals points at which the values of elites intersect with popular discourses on characterological norms. This is presented as an historical development culminating in a personality culture today. ROAs are a systematic account of that outcome by showing us that in an entire data set students as young as fifteen recognise themselves for their value to enterprise and, in the main, are capable of referring to their lives in those terms. This has important implications for social theory. It realigns some of the arguments made popular in postmodern theory and reflexive modernisation, by giving emphasis to the continuing influence that capitalist structures – employment norms – have over our lives and by questioning the substance of the choices we make. By the same token, we have to look beyond some of the basic arguments in structuration theory if we are to confront the reality that people really do think they have control over their lives as individual agents. This is a powerful ideology, although what of the possibility that simultaneously we are each aware that as individuals we have very little substantive control or choice over how we live (and divert that knowledge unconsciously?). As Agamben (1998: 121) notes:

It is almost as if, starting from a certain point, every decisive political event were double-sided: the spaces, the liberties, and the rights won by individuals in their conflicts with central powers always simultaneously prepared a tacit but increasing inscription of individuals’ lives within the state order, thus offering a new and more dreadful foundation for the very sovereign power from which they wanted to liberate themselves.

At the point at which we are seemingly most free, disembodied from tradition, surrounded with unimagined choice, and floating in a pool of unlimited potentiality, we most are in danger of compromising everything to the rationale of commodity exchange. For this reason alone, the substance of that freedom, that choice, that vitality, the individual, has to be reappraised. This is not the moment for celebrating the end of history. Instead, ROAs, self-help books, the language of networking, reflexivity, and so on must be stripped of their veneer and the capitalistic relations that shape them uncovered.

So far, ROAs underline the organisational discipline and transferable skills reflexively summoned by individuals for self-promotional purposes. This has been cross-referenced to self-help books and career advice from a number of sources. The central argument is that people engage in a reflexive exploitation to isolate those qualities immanent to the self as exchangeable values and to disentangle the non-commodified or function-less (useless) remainder. Because of the active participation of persons in this (reflexive) 'symbolic violence', tension subsists, whether consciously or unconsciously, via an inclusion and exclusion of certain personality traits in communication with corporatised social networks. This argument is advanced in the next chapter where we shall conclude our investigation of ROAs.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT: PROFILING THE PERSONAL: FROM THE EXTRACURRICULAR TO THE NEO-LIBERAL SUBJECT

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### Introduction: concluding the data on ROAs

Victory as determined through market value incurs, in its achievement, subjective loss: acknowledged, perhaps, as sacrifice to a necessary pragmatism; or unconsciously filtered into seemingly disconnected, compensatory, activities and values that feed back into, enhance, and legitimise free-market capitalism as embodying social diversity. The persistent feeling that success may be elusive or that failure is imminent, is a structural condition of what Beck (1992) calls the 'risk society', whose consequences are more than symbolic: our ability to succeed as enterprising subjects affects our ability to command a salary and gain access to a corporatised nexus of leisure pursuits. However, the fantasy of success is named for us in the symbolic lifestyles of those who have come to represent de facto 'personalities'. Here, the activities of students are illustrated and configured in ROAs to emphasise a certain idea of success. They are (defined as) purposeful, deliberate, and consistent to a bourgeois instrumentalised ethic. In this chapter we examine the naming of activities hitherto undefined, the performative consequences of this, and the possibility that, herein, authenticity as an important corollary to self-defined 'personality' is reinforced. These arguments will be cross-referenced to information contained in ROAs and advanced through data.

If we recall that in the previous chapter we looked at organisational and transferable skills as key characteristics for reflecting on and adapting to employer norms today. Here I present information on the last two stages of the *hierarchy of personality*. The four stages, to remind us, are:

*Stage One* - Organisational conformity

*Stage Two* - (demonstration of) transferable skills

*Stage Three* - Extra-curricular/lifestyle equivalence/compatibility

*Stage Four* - (Orientation to and) identification with the company (CV personality)

In this chapter I shall aim to achieve the following:

- Continue the argument from Chapter Seven, by presenting the remainder of the data on ROAs.
- Situate this data as part of the hierarchy of personality model.

- Advance theoretical concerns through empirical illustrations.
- Develop a theory from the overall thesis by drawing on the naming, performance and authenticity of the neo-liberal enterprise subject.
- Sketch out a preliminary argument as a basis for a concluding discussion on post irony.

We begin, then, with data on ‘stage three’ of the hierarchy of personality schematic.

### *Stage Three: Extracurricular/Lifestyle Compatibility*

How people relate to others and interact at work can potentially be different to how they relate to people and interact outside of work. There are broad social uses in techniques employed to demonstrate an appropriate front (cf. Goffman, 1971) or managed emotion (cf. Hochschild, 1983). Whereas Goffman constructs a dramaturgical model of human behaviour that situates a person according to a metaphorical stage performance, Hochschild argues that, in view of her study of air-hostesses, people engage in an *emotional labour*, a forced smile, for example, that eventually feels genuine. If it is now appropriate to describe the employment market as a ‘culture’ that aids a reflexive understanding of the self in relation to employers through ROAs, CVs, careers advice and so on, there is a question about the long-term effects that such processes have on the self. This can be speculated upon with reference to my data. In ROAs students relate activities undertaken voluntarily – social and cultural experiences, say – as important indicators of appropriate personal qualities. Whether viewed as genuine expressions of self or not signifies, regardless, recognition of and ability to adapt those expressions to their potential commodity value.

### *Organised Trips and Activities*

While examples of organised trips are many, they are almost exclusively included in the (tutor’s) Achievements and Experiences section. Through the filter of the school experiences can later be referred to, and interpreted as evidence of compatibility to enterprise. 8.2, for example, ‘participated in many College trips, most notably to ..... where she got the chance to develop her language skills and acquire a taste for travel.’ Or 22.2, whose visit to ‘war memorials brought History lessons to life and, in Year 10, [she] enjoyed the vibrant atmosphere of an England football international with ...’ Several ROAs list school trips without any reference to their worth. Elsewhere there is no mention of organised trips at all. It can be inferred from this, given the content in some of these cases, that lists of school trips are often made because there is a lack of *suitable* material to include. Here, to enhance opportunities, a person draws from the past evidence to indicate a balanced or sociable individual.

School activities and voluntary exercises raise the profile of the student's suitability to the organisation and their willingness to 'go the extra mile' in maintaining an impression of compatibility. 11.2, for example, 'received various commendations for her dedication and commitment... for the helpful and courteous manner in which she has guided visitors to the college around the campus on a number of occasions, including Parents' Evenings'. Or 22.2, 'has been praised for her maturity, politeness and neat appearance' when taking parents around the school on open days. Such activities underline the character of the person and promote the student as a 'winner'.

### *Organised Leisure*

'Leisure' activities emphasise the degree of balance in a student's life; they indicate the potential to become a career 'all rounder'. 18.2 not only volunteers for parents evenings, she is 'regularly attending sports clubs, participating in tournaments and enjoying school trips... is [also] involved in various activities outside college... dancing, swimming and going to gym.' There is enough information here for school trips to be given only a cursory mention. This is not an unusual account. 3.2, for example, is able to list drama productions where she 'was very proud of her performance and commitment... and especially enjoyed the group co-operation', and who also lists 'guitar, walking, cycling and jogging' as 'free time' activities (3.1). 9.2 'coped well with organising school coursework and maintaining other interests such as dance, drama and sports' outside of school. Frequently, the ROA from both the perspective of student and teacher emphasises activities as productive and invites the reader to conclude that the balance struck between work life and leisure makes the student a prime candidate for employment. As 48.2 notes, 'I am sure he will be a great asset to any organisation in the future'. The same is not said of 12.1: 'I don't go to any after school clubs but I do go to science and maths club to improve my grades...' His life chances are potentially fewer by the fact others can offer a raft of additional (informal) experiences as evidence of a commensurability he cannot. To refer to 6.1 again: 'I do not take part in college activities because there are simply not enough of them.' His Achievements and Experiences section is very brief. It illustrates the significance placed upon school, and university in subsequent years, as a training ground for personality, in which reports, references, ROAs and, eventually, CVs are certificates of self-validation that, in common with vocational qualifications, need constant updating.

### *The Socialising Profile*

Some idea of the student's character will have come across in the information included thus far. The final signifier of a Stage Three personality is how a person identifies with others socially. Both students and tutors place a lot of emphasis on this. The former describe themselves in relation to 'sense of humour' and the extent to which they are 'outgoing'. Tutors include

additional details to situate those qualities within the language of a personality culture. 37.1 is a 'quite lively person', for example, and has a 'good clean sense of humour.' This is confirmed when the tutor (37.2) describes him as a 'confident and popular student' with a 'cheerful and confident manner.' 3.1 is a 'lively and cheerful person with a loud humour in the right circumstances' who is 'pleased with [her] development as an individual'. 21.1 is 'very lively and out going' and likes 'to be centre of attention in most circumstances.' Students are encouraged to value themselves dramaturgically as audience members or centre stage. 11.1, for example, is 'very lively and outgoing' but 'quite shy and quiet' with strangers, although, 'I do have a sense of humour but I don't like to take centre stage.' Shyness, or a 'lack of humour', is something students go to considerable length to justify or emphatically deny. 15.1 says 'When I'm with people I know I'm not shy, but even when I with people I don't know I'm not shy. I'm not a shy person but I'm also not a really lively person either. I think I have a good sense of humour, but I don't like being the centre of attention.' 45.1 is more opinionated on this matter: 'I am a very lively outgoing person I do not agree with being shy you will not get anywhere if you take that attitude. I do not have a quiet sense of humour at all I always seem to be centre stage even when I try not to be.' 34.1 is not so certain: 'I do not think that I have a shy nature, however I would not say that I like to take centre stage and be at the middle of attention because I have a quiet sense of humour. I enjoy having a good time and a laugh with my friends though.' While 34.1 feels that his 'personality would suit' a city job 'for a large company', he is aware of the value in configuring his 'quite sense of humour' so that it does not impact upon his life-chances.

By looking at themselves in this way students learn to market their more 'outgoing' qualities and order potential glitches of personality into the background. Thus, reflexive exploitation configures the self to a corporate ideal of the person by discounting or re-interpreting certain qualities so that they are either transformed or managed through advice, say, or example. If someone reflexively asks: 'Am I shy?' they are questioning their ability to socially succeed. By relating this to the potential for gaining employment the question changes into 'How can shyness effectively be marketed/managed?' The answer lies, perhaps, in a reorientation of the self and the engineering of experience as a kind of pseudo-activity for future CV inclusion. Or a 'repackaging' so that sensitivity, compassion and a 'quiet' humour add up to a convincing argument for why a person should be employed ahead of others. Those who are more anxious about themselves and lack experiences to orientate that anxiety against corporate ideology are, I would suggest, more prone to want to 'repackage'.

#### *Stage Four: Orientation to and Identification with the Company (CV Personality)*

So far we have discerned three aspects to extracurricular/lifestyle activity that can be seen as comprising stage three: organised trips, organised leisure, and social profiles. The examples that

students give demonstrate a relation to enterprise. They signify knowledge of the values business places on activities and attitude so that we might claim that here students pro-actively orientate themselves to that knowledge. What remains for us to do is to underline this relation as an adaptation in which there is no discernible gap between the ontology of the person and the values of enterprise. Empirically, this is a difficult argument to prove definitively. So what I am here describing is an affect that effectively or seemingly produces a conflation between the person and organisation as conceptually problematic. Orientation to a stage four characterisation has to occur - if we are to follow the logic of the argument from stage one through to three thus far - *knowingly*. For example,

At selection centres, be yourself. It's pointless to put on an act because having a few weaknesses doesn't rule you out. If they like you and see you fitting into their organisation, they will offer you a job and work on your weaknesses with you.

Retail Marketing graduate (*Prospects Directory* 1999: 55)

We are advised by a graduate here to 'be yourself' but also to be prepared to change to fit in to the company. The 'yourself' in question is like an entry-level subjectivity that will necessarily be upgraded (or 'matured') as the job progresses, presumably to gain inclusion into more prestigious social spaces. The logic of the ROA exercise - the promotion of individuals who compete in knowledge of their marketable skills, values, experiences and so on - is predicated for its success on the application of knowledge in the rendering of the subject as a commodity: that cognisance of the contradictions between the individual as a distinct entity and the procedures for conforming are characteristic of a neo-liberal (reflexive) subjectivity in which that knowledge is held in suspense (see concluding chapter). In other words, what we already know about the processes in gaining recognition as a competitive subject is sufficient to question the project of self as a concept meaningful to individuality external to exploitation. We can choose not to make use of this knowledge, strategically for gaining inclusion into work, but can already recognise that doing so will undermine our material and social prospects. A decision of such kind, within a personality culture, has to be judged on a practical level against the situation of the person. Thus, a value-orientation in contradistinction to enterprise is privileged to those able materially to sustain such positions. We could surmise that active opposition to the norms articulated in a ROA have an appearance of subjective irrationality, naivety, inadequacy or emotional imbalance.

ROAs teach us the essentials: the tricks for survival in a society in which the collective means to produce an alternative to subjective competition appear exhausted. Without access to alternative social frameworks, reflexive exploitation is the more successful the greater the

knowledge we have of the implications of what we are doing: if we are prepared, or see no alternative, in utilising that knowledge individually for competitive advantage over others. This argument does not appear as if from nowhere. It is a *logical* summation of the points raised through the empirical data. This is expounded on in the concluding chapter when the title of the thesis - 'post irony' -- is clarified.

Already we are moving ahead of ourselves. Let us return to the theme of this section by tying-down 'stage four' within the hierarchy of personality, before elaborating on some of the theoretical points to emerge from the ROA data.

The hypothetical Stage Four represents a measure of the extent that ontological security relies on an objectification of the self as in the exploitative evaluation of personal qualities, lifestyles and experiences. Here the person knowingly and enthusiastically gains validation as an individual in that which effectively denies them substantive characterological development.

For Adorno (2001: 39): 'The more inexorably the principle of exchange value destroys use values for human beings, the more deeply does exchange value disguise itself as an object of enjoyment.' ROAs, on the other hand, reveal the knowledge a person has of themselves as a commodity, but cannot foreclose the possibility that this knowledge gives rise to simultaneous contestation of or exception to such norms. Nevertheless, given the extent to which the content in ROAs reflect employment norms in what increasingly appears like a personality culture, the exercise can principally be viewed as a device engineered to orientate the person, as a reflexive and pro-active agent, to employers. As such, Stage Four represents a logical goal of the exercise as a reflection of the concrete reality we encounter.

### Further Theoretical Remarks

The four stages of the hierarchy of personality have been illustrated in the last chapter and in this one through examples from individual ROAs and by developing the analysis to include a hypothetical argument. I would like to ground this hypothesis further by centring on two points already touched upon elsewhere and to extend them. These are the *naming of practice* and *performance as social regulator*. The chapter ends with a summary of the two chapters on ROAs. These points are argued through with the use of data presented in the three stages, and with reference to additional material.

#### *Naming the Practice*

Derrida (1994: 166) says in *Specters of Marx* that 'as soon as there is production, there is fetishism: idealisation, autonomisation, dematerialisation and spectral incorporation'. So while social relations are mystified they are also at the same time objectified. As Marx (1999: 43) puts it, in a commodity 'the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective

character stamped with the product of that labour.’ Commodities are ‘social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.’ In a ROA sign-value is being produced, and calling into existence that which prior to naming (or consciousness) may have had a more ethereal quality: the subjectivity coterminous to social relations, simplistically viewed as a gift of nature perhaps. So when respondent 26.1 says ‘[I] was part of a team so I helped run our role-play as a company in advertising’, a quality that was already subjectivised (cooperation) is now objectified as a definite productive relation. This corresponds to Foucault (2002) who, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, studied the way discursive relationships give substance to ideas. So, for example, subjection, as Butler (1997: 84) recognises, is ‘the *making* of the subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced.’ Similarly, on ideology, Althusser (Žižek (ed.), 1999: 124) claimed ‘it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that ‘men’ ‘represent to themselves’ ... but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there.’

With reference to respondent 4.1 from chapter seven, this student explains how she ‘related well... and was able to communicate at an appropriate level to each [member of staff and pupils]’ during her work placement at a school. She has already appropriated the codes for *interaction in a given setting (a school) and between significant members there*. Moreover, she recognises the value of her communication ‘skills’; they have been named for her: she identifies herself through them and has her subjectivity vindicated by an authority that rewards them. At the same time, she knows that in presenting herself as such the prospects for getting a job, perhaps one that appears to satisfy a lack, are increased. She freely gives herself over to a naming so as to have a realistic opportunity to command a wage in a capacity chosen as feasible to and/or in common with her situation. Whereas once she practised ‘communication’ through everyday encounters, now she is made aware of the power of communication to enhance her prospects of fulfilling herself as a worker. Whereas once communication was a ‘providential’ part of her maturation or developed ‘extraneously’ to market need, now it is a device for garnering value as a commodity. The practice forever changes in meaning and from now on, both retrospectively and through future engagements, her subjectivity in this respect appears as an object for exchange while retaining the appearance of a natural endowment.

Contra Bourdieu (2003) whose analysis centres on the acquisition of social and cultural capital as a means for inclusion into productive networks, the symbolic violence here is to an extent self inflicted. Which is to say that given the quality of being a teamplayer is, for example, already immanent to subjective formation through the civilising process - using Elias’s (1994) terminology - it is what is *excluded* in that naming as a business relation that defines the parameters of the word’s meaning and signifies objective concepts as alien qualities for acquisition. My inclusion within a social field is predicated therefore on what I simultaneously exclude. We might return to the Freudian superego here as an equivalent social regulator, except

that it is the competitive pathologies intrinsic to a capitalist society that are often commodified and potentialities for challenging these relations that become the useless/repressed remainder. In other words, it is a simple truth that the usefulness of an object vis-à-vis its exchange value offers no guarantee of its deserved place in a hierarchy of social values. The dilemma is that in adopting the name we open ourselves up to potential commodification. In opposing the name - as in earlier examples from chapter seven from ROAs and internet forums whereby the person questions and objects to the values expected of them - we potentially reject our socialisation, concrete opportunities, or become incorporated through other means. What we recognise, then, as belonging to the self and how that quality is signified - and in relation to other qualities - affects the structuring of subjectivity.

In sum, prior to accepting the name of a quality *qua* subjectivity, there is a reflexive moment of recognition. Between the naming and reflexivity lies the gap between structure and agency. If the quality does not surface during the reflexive moment (recognition), it cannot be promoted as constituent of ontology (see below on the performative). Here enterprising survival techniques (doing something because it looks good on a CV, for example) are activated to fill the gap between the person and the institution; otherwise there are grounds to exclude the person for their lack of enterprise or experiences appropriate to a competitive CV. Having recognised the quality as constitutive of the self, the person may still fail to impress this upon the other. Herein follows additional reflection, further enterprise and, like a politician that struggles to gain approval, new ways to 'get the message across'. The unnamed, unnameable or contextually useless faculty (attitude, characteristic, experience, value) becomes like an uncommodified excrescence whose lack of articulation frustrates subjective maturation and social relationships within their capitalist matrix. A tragic individualism that nobody arguably wants prevails as the corollary of the struggle for approval as representative of traits synonymous with the norms governing (competitive) market relations.

ROAs illustrate and reinforce this relation. So when respondent 28.1 says he finds it 'very easy to get on with others', a simple phrase has to be understood on account of (a) the relationship to others; (b) the constitution of others; (c) the intended meaning of the assertion; (d) the implication of the assertion to the subject within given structural contours. This final point brings us to the second aspect of this discussion before we draw upon the question of performance. These words from an employee writing on an internet forum:

I'm getting really annoyed with everyone I work with and with the clients and I just want to lock myself in the toilet and cry... I spend all my waking time worrying about work and I don't have any time for anything else... I'm going to explode at someone very soon. I've read stuff about stress management... I find it hard to trust the people I work with to do their jobs... Part of me wants to

just quit, but I've done that in the past when I've been in similar situations. I think that maybe I just hate work.

Respondent:

... it felt like I was reading my own story... I've had a week off and don't want to go back... I hate it... Please help me as I need some advice.

(doctorjob.co.uk/forum)

ROAs do not prepare the child to withstand a negative perception of work, except, perhaps, in self-deprecating terms such as laziness, incompetence, irrational aversion (as above), shyness and so forth. However, these very words may provoke an exercise in self-improvement or serve to reinforce the sense of powerlessness as a purview on the pain society has inflicted upon us. Hence, if we learn to justify our experiences – our failings – through the same codes that we justify ourselves by in ROAs, we may gain a sympathetic audience. ROAs, as indicative of a calculative bourgeois ethic, encourage explanations calibrated to a liberal sociality as values of humankind. Trauma, misfortune, irrationality and ignorance have a value if situated accordingly through example but punishable in exclusion if not verbalised as such. The following extracts are from gradunet.co.uk career forum:

An extract from a discussion in which a Ph.D. student writes about their employment concerns:

As I don't think I'm stupid or have no communication or analytical skills or whatever they are looking for, I guess it has to do with the fact that I'm not conformist enough, not the same age as the rest of the batch, not as easy to form and impress...

A student in a similar position offers some advice in reply:

However people can perceive you as having no inter-personal skills so you have to convince them that you are not a mad lonely person obsessed with one subject. My funding body paid for me to go on a five day residential course 'graduate school' looking at team building and business issues.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno (1995: 133), 'Not to conform means to be rendered powerless, economically and therefore spiritually'. Weber (1968: 72) was more blunt when he claimed that 'Whoever does not adapt his manner of life to the conditions of capitalistic success must go under, or at least cannot rise.' For Durkheim (1984: 60) conformity is benevolent: 'we all know that a social cohesion exists whose cause can be traced to a certain conformity of each individual consciousness to a common type, which is none other than the

psychological type of society.' Elias (1991: 25) argued that people change in relation to each other and are 'continuously shaping and reshaping themselves in relation to each other'. Gergen (1991: 85) puts a more Goffmanesque perspective on this: 'As we begin to incorporate the dispositions of the varied others to whom we are exposed, we become capable of taking their positions, adopting their attitudes, taking their language, playing their roles.' Neo-liberalism engenders a specific form of conformity through a process that is legitimised in the success of the individual agent to acquire the goods (i.e. a career) valued in the particular social setting. The individual determines how equivalence to a set of norms is accessed through a series of contestations fought out at school, at interviews, in the workplace, and via social networks that lead to potentialities dependent on how well that person has adapted their self to prevailing social norms. Through fear and anxiety, and ideological unease with the standards being required, the person steers themselves into positions that appear more likely to engender success. Below is an extract from Gradunet from the same conversation shown above:

PhD student rejecting idea of a 'fast-track' scheme:

... not the sort of thing that appeals to me. Herds of recently employed students being taught mission statements and managerial skills in a large, impersonal company just so that we can repeat the process on the next batch...

Alternatively, Casey (1995: 174) outlines different positions to conformity in what she misleadingly describes as 'post-industrial' labour (see Basso, 2003 for a challenge to this concept):

When we learned how to work as a team, we could problem-solve everything. And it was amazing, really... I was working 70-80 hours a week, sometimes 90, but it was just part of the job, and we did whatever was needed to get the job done. But it was great, it was great. We were running before we could think... Like we went on all these 'sensitivity' classes...

.... things like the President's Award, and things, mad the difference between me being 'Joe Doke's average' and being somebody, and I really feel that I am somebody, and I was somebody.

(post-retirement contract employee)

According to Casey, ritualised outpourings of official corporate narratives help displace feelings of anxiety by closing down critical thoughts. Casey's 'colluded self', above, has potentially incorporated such as strategy. However, the same is arguably true of the 'capitulated

self' - who compensates for company demands through a 'pragmatism' and 'reluctance' that is both *strategic and instrumental* - and even the 'defensive self' who Casey (ibid: 165) found to be 'especially ambivalent about the quality of their working lives... but... none the less continued to work hard and serve long hours, to try to be teamplayers and be proud of their products.' There is a sense here that in each of the positions identified the person conforms albeit a different view on the procedures (see below on the performative). Tim May's (1999) overview of organisational literature also points to different ways in which people resist working cultures (see also, for example, Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1986; Knights and McCabe, 2000). However, as Jenkins (1996: 124) argues, 'marginality, deviance or non-conformity (do not) necessarily imply normative dissent.' It is important to recognise that while, in one firm, an individual, through various associations, reactions and genuine grievances, contests aspects of the working culture, it does not necessarily imply either an identification or a rejection of the values inscribed within an overall social polity. It is quite feasible that a person joins in industrial action at a company and also enthusiastically signs-up for teamwork courses and looks for ways to improve job prospects via reflexive exploitation. This is the dilemma that my argument poses, that without a direct challenge to the commodification of personality and corporate expropriation of modes of communication and association as a totalised system, then resistance is only ever partial and never sufficient given the way incorporation occurs: preventing the introduction of a team system at one company does little to ameliorate the need to identify and develop team-skills in the self for career. We can view this in emotional terms, as a point of psychic contention about to erupt. Wouters (1998: 146) makes the following observation:

if these tensions do not rise to an explosive level, it seems likely that an 'emancipation of emotions' will be continued, coming to include more feelings of superiority and inferiority. In that case, the level of reflexive civilising of social and psychic authorities will continue to rise also, strengthening the development of a 'third nature' type of personality. This would imply that feelings of inferiority and superiority will be further admitted into consciousness, while, at the same time, they will come under a stronger, that is, more comprehensive, more stable and subtle (ego) control.

Yet as Marcuse (1968: xii) argued, the 'containment of social change is perhaps the most singular achievement of advanced industrial society'. So *reflexivity* (the general mode of adaptation to named characteristics in Giddens (1991)), *exploitation* (as enduring social relations in capitalism in Marx (see, for example, McLellan, 1990)), and *marketisation* (the principle through which recognised qualities are promoted in C. Wright Mills (1951)) coalesce into a character dynamic in their self-appraisal, vulnerable to their emotions and conformist in

their positioning upon the social plane. 'Steering media' encode, as Habermas (1981: xxx) contends, forms of purposeful-rational action as generalised symbolic categories of rewards and punishments that, it could be said, regulates the 'third nature' Wouters describes. So, as Hopkins says in *The Official Guide to Success*:

Winners almost always do what they think is the most productive thing possible at every given moment; losers almost never do. When you look at what winners and losers actually do moment by moment, the difference between these two divisions of the human race really is that small. (1985: 7)

Knowing what differentiates the 'winner' from the 'loser' is key to regulating the self as viable to employment practice. This brings us to a connected part of this discussion: the performative role of the individual.

### *Performance as Social Regulator*

As students of enterprise, we have responded to the naming of the practice in words contained in situations vacant columns and echoed them in our earnest attempts at demonstrating worth in ROAs. We may lack the vocabulary to mount a sustained critique of these procedures, but we have learnt how words can serve to justify our position as (potentially) failing individuals. Here I shall evaluate the performative aspect of such acts to ascertain the viability of subjective distanciation.

We can situate this discussion with reference to some additional content from ROAs. Respondent 30.1, for example, claims he was a 'big hit in the office, they said I was great fun and hard working, the sort of person they like to employ.' He is also a 'great team player'... facilitated by his long-term membership of a scout group. Whereas, more subtly, 42.1 reveals, 'post-emotionally', his maturity: 'I always pick up my [skate]board and walk round an elderly person or a mother with a child in a pram.' Children learn at an early age which behaviour elicits sympathy and advantage. The tutor describes 42(2) as having a 'conscientious' attitude. On the other hand, 5.1 notes that whereas her 'attendance has been really poor', she's 'changed'. Others describe an improvement in punctuality and appearance, including 21.1 and 26.1, the latter of whom originally 'saw school as tedious but now I see it as an opportunity to learn and gain qualifications.' This reflects a growing awareness of a personality culture and the need to regulate behaviour to its norms. ROAs highlight the process, nascent in some and more advanced in others, through which orientation of self to career gathers momentum as children prepare for their final years at school. The 'profile' of the student is drawn into focus and they reflect upon themselves as a project of self-improvement. For example, 17.1 'does not consider myself to be a very outgoing person but more of a shy person.' Yet, 'If I am at work I have a big

sense of humour as I get on with everybody there but if I am at school I am very quiet because in a way I am scared of saying or doing the wrong thing.' He concludes: 'I always think that common sense, a pleasant personality and a willingness to learn will be just as important.' The tutor resituates aspects of this self-perception by describing 'a cheerful personality... a good sense of humour... confident but friendly manner'. There is reflexive dissection and configuration of the student's qualities, emphasising their value to the employer, typical of all the ROAs covered. What 17.1 does is to illustrate how anxiety with the self is transformed through the experience of work and how a shift in emphasis can compensate for whatever that individual may otherwise lack. Anxiety is hierarchical inasmuch as it corresponds to and signifies a person's relation to work in the first instance, with other, non-work, manifestations of anxiety subordinated to secondary issues.

So what do we make of each of these comments? In different ways, each person focuses on an aspect of behaviour, a perceived personality trait, or an attitude, to show an ability or willingness to conform to a(n) (un)defined standard. We have already explored how this standard is shaped discursively through a variety of practices and how it filters into self-reflexivity proper. What is not clear by the above utterances is whether the students are being sincere and how, if not, they otherwise see themselves or, indeed, whether an oppositional subjectivity is substantively different or opposed to that being constructed here. Berger, for example, makes the following point on alternation:

We go through life refashioning our calendar of Holy days, raising up and tearing down again the signposts that mark our progress through time toward ever newly defined fulfilments. For it will be clear by now that no magic is so strong that it may not be overcome by a newer brand. Old markers may be retrieved from the debris of discarded chronologies... And completely new ordering categories may be imposed on the same past... And do on ad infinitum – and ad nauseam.

(Berger, 1969:  
73)

The point here is not that each refashioning occurs independently of the society, it is a consequence of changes therein. By framing an activity in a certain way, the student reinforces their subjectivity even in the mode of performance. In disclaiming an affinity, for example, the person is turning to and strengthening an alternative construction as intrinsic to self that has, through other means, implicated them in subjectivisation. ROAs do not lend themselves to a singular message of corporate affinity because each stage – as per the hierarchy of personality framework – captures the person in different ways (indeed, the strength of 'corporate' ideology

is its appearance as heterogeneity). We have the unambiguous organisational affinities concerning time keeping, dress code, and discipline; the transferable skills that criss-cross the subjective construct; and the lifestyles that incorporate the active body. Given the saturation of a personality culture across social space, my subjective distancing here ('I'm punctual because I have to be') aids my incorporation in other respects ('The 'graduate programme is extremely flexible, allowing all graduates' needs to be met', Janeen Finneran (quoted from *The Guardian* 'rise' column (chapter five))). Because the neo-liberal enterprise is a 'friendly' subject-organisation, as we recall from the ASDA application from chapter six, we can think we merely perform certain roles when we are already subjectivising ourselves through disclaimer – we gain a sense of personal distance as individuals as we are incorporated in arrangements that appear benign. It is a powerful means to ensure conformity when we think perhaps that we have duped the institution and have preserved an authentic subjective core. Advertisers recognise this through self-deprecating marketing techniques. Typically, a (valid) critique of the particular company is referenced so that the obdurate consumer gains recognition for their objection to a practice – and can celebrate their own astuteness – and gain affinity with the company/product in having their individual posture represented. It simulates a mutual disclosure that bolsters the ego: an authentic core encoded in the performance (in synchronicity: 'we/I see the world as you do!') that, as with an elite conspiracy, only the more astute individuals are privileged to share. Let us expand on this with the idea of 'reframing'.

According to Val Foster (1998: 5), 'If you can identify gaps in your skills knowledge – and fill those gaps – you will be of more use to your employer, you'll enhance your career prospects and you'll find life more rewarding.' This is a typical sentiment that, in this instance from a popular career advice book, helps to situate the above critique within the employment context. For example, Jobmag ([www.jobmag.com](http://www.jobmag.com)) advances the idea of 'reframing': 'you take the (irksome anomaly or deficiency) issue and turn it on its head, until the negative comes to be seen as a positive.' Elsewhere, for an 'instant confidence booster', 'Work out how you want to feel. Bold and confident? Clear and sharp? Funny and relaxed?... Re-live that magic moment as vividly as possible.' (*Ibid.*) Each example interprets the past from the point of view of the career. The first applies in cases where the personal experiences cannot match corporate requirements and so the dynamic shifts to the engineering of experience in the future. The second takes what may otherwise have been interpreted as a negative experience and reconfigures it into a positive one. The third emphasises experiences that affirm a person's character as compatible with the needs of enterprise (in this case at the interview) as a form of selective memory. Each one, in their own way, transforms personal history into an amalgam of career-related experiences.

The above examples, however, do not disclaim affinity when they suggest that persons will feel more satisfied in adapting themselves to the object. Likewise, ROAs work towards the

same principle by asking of the student an appraisal based on their 'real life' experiences, feelings and values. Reframing, or the engineering of identifications over short periods of time, unsettles and blurs a distinction that may have obtained between sincerity, on the one hand, and insincerity on the other. Within the neo-liberal humanistic rubric the 'reframing' or the shifting of values happens increasingly against an assumed established or positive principle of consistency but engenders adaptation to current patterns of (material, cultural and social) production. In this context we can see how acts of sincerity, such as public apologies and displays of feeling (see Meštrović, 1997 on postemotion), that appear consistent to a previously articulated position, are judged favourably because they simulate, ipso facto, an association to moral probity even as the consequences of a sincere action are often catastrophic. Here is a quotation from Richard Sennett (1993: 39):

In a milieu of strangers, the people who witness one's actions, declarations, and professions usually have no knowledge of one's history, and no experience of similar actions, declarations, and professions in one's past; thus it becomes *difficult for this audience to judge*, by an external standard of experience with a particular person, whether he is to be believed or not in a given situation.

By repositioning the idea of consistency, ROAs mitigates this by embedding at an early stage the enterprising self as an authentic representation of the person. This serves as a referent to the student in later life as the qualities are reproduced and adapted over and again elsewhere. By reframing activities a person does not violate an authentic moment, they merely respond to a naming of an activity that was already present to them, and adapt consistent to the 'enterprising self'. This may produce uncertainty regarding the motives of a particular candidate and concern for the maintenance of an ethical standard. But neo-liberalism overturns standards professionally upheld or aspired to by opening each working site to whoever adopts the characteristics currently valued to the operation. If this increases opportunities for wider sections of the population to access different jobs, it does so in ways that undermine the position of workers across sectors of employment by increasing competition, reducing labour costs and increasing productivity in each worker.

There is a tendency, according to the logic of this analysis, for the individual to incorporate an *in effect* truth – or a moment that feels genuine – on the basis of social arrangements that are intrinsically coercive, phantasmal and counter to psychic health. According to Riesman (1950: 194) the yearning for sincerity when there is so much apparent insincerity shifts judgement away from content or substance, honesty and skill, towards the performance of the actor. As with Goffman, the presentation of a feeling becomes central to the encounter. Similarly, Bauman claims 'the inauthenticity of the allegedly authentic self is

thoroughly covered up by the spectacles of sincerity' (2000: 86). Turnbull (1999: 129) notes Solomon's study on managerial roles where the 'opportunist' and 'chameleon' characterise doing what it takes to succeed or whatever it takes to please others. This form of 'emotional labour', in which 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' (Hochschild, 1983: 7), is a typical act of insincerity. But as Hochschild pointed out, providing a smile feels authentic, even if prescribed by the company, there is not a conflict with how the person feels (see Hochschild, 1983: 136). It does not matter whether this form of sincerity adheres to our own ethical standards, what counts is how that individual believes their presentation as a genuine reflection of self or representative of commensurability to career. Here is the crux of our neo-liberal society: without a challenge to the principles that sustain it we can only defend the (lack of) choice of the individual. A sincere act here is not necessarily a true one, although can it be interpreted as a distortion or even false consciousness?

The individual is not so much as falsely conscious, as Engels once described, rather he or she is engaged in an affective *verisimilitude* of the self, the *as if* free floating and *in effect*, 'true self'. The self-help author Stephanie Myers (1995: 78) explains an aspect of this: 'No one can make you feel anything; love, hate, happy, sad, worthless or special. You choose your reactions to people and situations, and your emotional responses.' The presentation is chosen – and appears suspicious to the other – but does not feel phoney if incorporated into a *verisimilitude* of self wherein the moment is neither true nor strictly false. There is no underlying 'true self' that we can consciously refer to, only untapped areas of consciousness or connections and interpretations of who we are.

Dick Pels (2002: 69) makes a similar argument when referring to 'imaginary objects which continually hover between fact and fiction; partial realities which are not present in any rounded or fully accomplished manner, but are implicated at each and every instant in the process of realisation and derealisation.' The person contributes to a performative circle in which reifications come to resemble or come to be assumed as social facts. Pels gives the example of the way a politician, for example, is sometimes described as having been 'tarnished' or 'damaged' by some revelation or other, so that the act of intimation leads to a self-fulfilling realisation. Žižek (2000: 256) explains the emancipatory aspect to this in criticising Foucault who 'does not consider the possibility of an effect escaping, outgrowing its cause, so that although it emerges as a form of resistance to power and is as such absolutely inherent to it, it can outgrow and explode it.' Succinctly, 'the effect can 'outdo' its cause: it can be ontologically 'higher' than its cause.' (ibid.)

If, therefore, ROAs are constructed through performative acts, subjectivity is produced/reframed as an effect of enterprise and reproduced as a possible challenge to it. In other words, in releasing subjectivities already designated by capitalist filiations, in the first instance, the enterprising self, at this 'late' stage of social development, pro-actively

incorporates into a 'genuine sense of self' those same filiations through other means: knowledge, reflexivity, calculation. Yet in so doing they open themselves - in rejection of a bourgeois natural authenticity - to the possibility that orientations can rapidly be formulated for sustaining and substantiating a class opposition to capitalism. ROAs and related material expose this self-transformative dynamic as a feature of subjectivisation. At issue here is not self-conscious adaptation, as such, rather the *modality of adaptation* as governed through ideologies and brokered through necessities. Hence the importance of dialogue for uncovering the exploitative relations that underpin ROAs and associated material, and the attempts of individuals to subjectivise their inclusion into corporatised spheres of power.

### *A Summary Account of ROAs*

In earlier chapters we deconstructed the meaning of words found in situations vacant columns, accounted for their frequency and their significance. We looked into the relationship between the person - how they are constituted - and structures, especially within the constellation of employment. The temporal features of a CV focused the discussion on the lifecourse, and how the person's ontology is recognised in exchange value. This raised a number of issues about subjectivity, already framed in the theoretical chapters, but now given empirical substance. In the course of the two chapters on ROAs, arguments about reflexivity and self-orientation to the career have been played out through student appraisals. We recall how an enterprising subjectivity is nurtured through such documents and signifies more than a relationship to work, because we are describing an entire constitution. Self-help books reinforce this message as tools to aid personal configuration to an idealisation rooted in a capitalist ethos. We showed how notions of inclusivity figure within neo-liberalism along a different epistemological plane to the once more exclusionary procedures that governed social mobility: no longer legitimated on factors that the agent cannot reasonably be expected to control, but upon the agent's refusal to act according to a normative socio-ethical framework. Hence, the biological subject is excluded on grounds of their incapacity to inscribe particular values. In examining this framework we drew upon reflexivity: as the pro-active moment of the human subject as an exploitative extraction of value in order to succeed in terms already defined externally and implicated within a person's habitus. In this chapter terms were employed for exposing neo-liberalism as a set of relationships that forestall the critical component of social formations through identification with a putative free and authentic subjectivity. The remaining content of the ROAs was presented to complete a picture on the ways in which people orientate themselves to career goals. We saw that from simple organisational norms, through to lifestyles and interests, students learn to recognise the value of informal experiences and the gaps that undermine presentation.

The logical outcome of the study of ROAs was an account of the configuration of knowing agents to that which negates the premises that sustain them. Here we referred to a neo-liberal subjectivity and a hypothetical orientation of the self to the company. This led to a further clarification of the process through which a person adapts to enterprising norms: through the naming of a practice, reflexivity and recognition within one's own biography, and self-marketisation as a form of identification. We then tackled the question about distanciation and whether performance is a likely or useful explanation of the person's engagement with ROAs and associated material. My conclusion traversed the boundary dividing appearance from reality and, by following the argument, brought us down on the side of the latter. This does not foreclose the fact that whatever we think we are, forces beyond that which we necessarily observe at a given moment already implicate us. At a time when individual perception increasingly shapes argumentation, the method of analysis undertaken in this thesis uncovers those forces as points of reference, in response to the problem of relativisation, for a proper examination of ethical value.

The ROAs analysed above offer convincing evidence that 15-16 year old school children are familiar with and engage in methods, identified under the broad notion of a personality culture, that rationalise the self to the interests of the market (even though they may not perceive it exactly this way). This specific data do not reveal differences over time; arguments that indicate the processes uncovered here as new, or historically significant, are made elsewhere in this thesis. In summary, my analysis of the ROAs highlights the following:

1. Successful adaptation to the corporate norm is variable.
2. How commensurate/adaptable a person's qualities are to employers in the first place, through providential or extraneous means, determines the extent to which conscious attempts at compensatory forms of self-improvement vis-à-vis employers are necessary.
3. The value of someone's personality is institutionally conditioned in such a way that can lead, eventually, to an evaluation of self with respect to corporate interests.
4. Reflexive exploitation occurs in anticipation of the employment market and through the pressures to conform socially.
5. Career pressures inspire extracurricular activities.
6. Career pressures are a feature of life prior to actual employment.
7. The personality skills that a student develops ensure equivalence with other students. ROAs help encode this in career terms.
8. Alternative moral frameworks in relation to careers are neutralised through the ROA filter so that each student has the best opportunity to succeed at work.
9. A person's social position, their experiences and characteristic traits, is defined in relation to the personality culture.

10. The hierarchy of personality shows the sequence through which employment opportunities manifest themselves and, therefore, affect a person's material opportunities. It does so by distinguishing between the qualities that are essential to most if not all jobs, to those which demonstrate and embody characteristics essential to a person adaptive to the varying and increasing demands of corporations.

In the concluding chapter I shall point to ways in which this analysis can be developed, by drawing together the arguments contained in the overall thesis.

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## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION: A POST IRONIC SOCIETY?

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### Introduction

Over the course of this concluding chapter the question posed in the title will be addressed by bringing together the different arguments contained in the overall thesis. This will be done by careful examination of the empirical evidence and by elaborating on the themes already covered. In this chapter, then, the following will be achieved:

- A chapter by chapter overview of the content of this dissertation.
- A summary of the main points contained there.
- A synthesis of the different research strands.
- Examination of the theoretical issues to have emerged from the data.
- A summary of the contributions to sociology.
- Speculative argument on post irony to conclude on points raised.

To begin, then, let us remind ourselves of the theoretical and empirical progression of the research and, as the discussion unfolds, to make connections that synthesise it.

### Chapter by Chapter Overview

In this section a summary of chapters one to eight will lead onto a general overview of the findings.

#### *Chapter One: Introduction*

In chapter one, the introduction, I set out the aims of the project. They were defined in terms of an employment culture that people are increasingly subjectivised to and gain a sense of individuality by. It was thought that instead of examining subjectivity as heterogeneous and as (inexhaustibly) contested practices within a equally varied social milieux, current socio-economic and cultural norms would be better understood if we sought to identify the practices that draw us together. In short, my hypothesis was that: *the principles underlining neo-liberalism are transposed on to subjectivities through a reflexive application of knowledge for 'empowering' the self 'proactively' to survive in the vicissitudes of a market economy. Or that proactively reflexive knowledge tends to orientate the self to values coterminous with, and beneficial to, neo-liberal capitalism. That, simply, reflexive application of knowledge is integral*

*to the 'empowerment' of the individual as a 'proactive' subject vis-à-vis neo-liberal capitalism.* This was the starting point, i.e. the processes that incorporate subjects into modes of behaviour reminiscent of free-market ideology. The aim was to identify how a supposed proliferation of cultural values, or heterogeneity of character-types, is self-regulated to a coherent set of employment practices. My task was to explore data that could show or discount the historical progression towards a subjective embodiment of the values enshrined in free-market capitalism. This had to be achieved in terms of frequency of occurrence and signification of findings. Information would have to satisfy the question of the extent to which knowledge of employment norms is used reflexively as a means for gaining competitive advantage in the marketplace (as a simulation of the free-market logic). Thus the remit was to examine the hypothesis as a plausible account of the processes that govern subjective orientation to employment as an illustration of broader social changes. With theoretical propositions underlined by empirical data, a general account of the subject in neo-liberal capitalism could act as the foundation for future inquiries into matters rarely broached in empirical terms. Here was the basis for addressing problems evident in ideas ranging twentieth century thought, covered in the theoretical chapter, two.

### ***Chapter Two: Theoretical Background***

The purpose of chapter two was to examine theoretical approaches to the question of subjectivity through distinctive lines of inquiry. Instead of concentrating on a particular argument as encapsulating the essence of the research, a more eclectic analysis of seemingly incompatible ideas was developed. The overall theme of subjectivity laced the different approaches together and the more salient examples in each were highlighted for their explanatory purposes here. I compared critical theorists (Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas) to 'structuralist' ideas (Foucault, Althusser) and developed these arguments through 'poststructuralism'/'postmodernism' (Deleuze and Guattari, Baudrillard). I encountered Durkheim, Elias, Marx, Freud, Bourdieu, Lasch and Žižek through these discourses and by asking about the heterogeneity/homogeneity duality in some of their works. The achievement was to have brought together structuralist and poststructuralist concepts and insights, with important questions on the unconscious and decentred subjectivity, and to situate each of these as part of a Marxist critique of capitalism. The advantage in this is to have formulated avenues for investigating the subject as the principal category to neo-liberalism.

A variety of theoretical instruments are stitched into the fabric of the overall thesis. Sometimes these are referred in later chapters directly to their theoretical source but often they flow from the analysis of data and thus substantiate, in a somewhat contingent way, the arguments already posited. Thus the Hegelian inflections in the dissertation are born out of the various readings and, not necessarily unconnectedly, my own interpretation of the material

under scrutiny. I have avoided defining my position vis-à-vis these ideas except to acknowledge indebtedness to Marx and the usefulness, up to a point, of the theorists already named. It enables me to avoid some of the pitfalls of a rigid Marxist analysis and subsequent revisionist theories by examining social change more imaginatively through a range of theoretical devices. The changes here alluded to were addressed in the second theoretical chapter on employment.

### *Chapter Three: Theoretical Setting*

The aim of chapter three was to bring together the emergent themes of the study by examining the relationship between capitalism and subjectivity through changes in employment. Because the aim of the research was to pick up on generalities applicable, I could reasonably claim, to most people, particulars about certain companies were avoided except where illustrative of the argument being made. This meant that the focus of chapter three would be on overarching concepts such as 'capitalism', 'individual', and 'enterprise'. These three ideas in particular underpinned additional arguments on 'individualisation' / 'reflexive modernisation' / 'risk', 'flexibilisation', 'careers' and 'organisations'. Their conceptual relevance, however, is defined through changes in capitalist social relations. Of the three, enterprise becomes a more important motif conjunctive with 'free-market' ideology: which displaces assumptions about 'modernity', as that word misleadingly comes to signify all that has gone before us. Following this logic, bureaucracies give way to flexibilised systems of organisation that, in turn, require from workers more individualistic efforts – training, self-improvement, marketing skills - to secure employment. If the enterprising orthodoxy encourages in the person a more emotional response to their labour it does so at instrumental levels hitherto unrealised. As such, we can observe that the form of the bureaucracy adapts to a more systemic mode of capitalist appropriation in the principle of exchange value.

Neo-liberalism, as the *modus operandi* of our times, is a less constrained form of capitalism. Put simply, value determined by more ambiguous social indicators such as benefit to society, typical of a state orientated model, gives way to value determined by levels of consumption. This happens through the introduction of quantitative market indicators applied even in those areas, such as education and health, where competition – as between products – was at most only partial. Hence, a commodification of public services extends more pervasively into a commodification of aspects of human subjectivity that may previously have seemed immune from objectification. *Reflexive exploitation* distinguished the form of reflexivity under conditions of (and the imperative for) personal adaptation to the exploitative relationships governing neo-liberal capitalism. The *personality culture* described a point when the values of enterprise signify the ethical dimensions of human behaviour as normative to society. There is no referent to 1980s entrepreneurial capitalism intended by this term. These arguments, however, were not made in a vacuum; they corresponded to the theories covered in chapter two

and the insights contemporaneous to the field of inquiry, or setting, in chapter three. Now they required analysis through additional data for substantiation.

#### *Chapter Four: Methodology and Situations Vacant Columns*

I began this chapter by making some general points on epistemology before setting out methodological considerations for conducting a research. I wanted to show how an employment culture, as a crucial facet of people's lives, permeates social values and is encoded into the language of self-reflection. Interviews would have enabled us to test how some individuals engage with the demands of employers. But the hypothesis required that I first examined the substance and extent of employer demands across different sectors of the workforce. Moreover, I needed a dataset that could show whether and to what extent these demands change historically. Situations vacant columns (SVCs) spoke to the problem by enabling both a long-term overview of these concerns and comparative analysis of job requirements across different employment sectors. It was a way of overcoming the problems of studying a particular sector or group and making general points on that basis. This was one aspect of a multi-method approach. I also wanted examples that would indicate a general pattern in how this information is reflexively utilised by individuals for job purposes. Autobiographical records of achievement were an ideal source for showing how people assign the emergent values of occupational elites to their own lived experiences. Data could then be further cross-referenced to careers advice, self-help manuals, and company brochures to place notions of 'inclusivity', 'empowerment' and 'difference', as embraced by organisations, in the socio-economic context in which individuals act. Secondary interview data from other sociological research, businesses and career forums, would complete the study. However, it was data from SVCs that would frame additional research and provide an early account of the frequency of occurrence of a language describing 'personality' over time.

In this chapter, graphs showed the rise of a language of personality over more than a hundred years of SVCs. This information was coded according to density of language in each advertisement, and separated by sector. We saw an intensification and extension of 'personality' across different sectors of employment from zero or near zero until the 1960s/1970s to a substantial 83% of 102 advertisements in 2001. This intensification corresponded to changes in employment outlined in chapter three. Rose's argument provided some background explanation to the 'technologies' that were implemented by employers to extract more value from the workforce. We could see that through empirical indicators the technologies only became fully effective or generalisable to subjective practice by the late 1980s to mid 1990s. Here was evidence that employers required from potential candidates knowledge about the self for entry into and achievement in the workplace. Without interpreting the words contained in SVCs, however, we would only be describing quantifiable changes. Some analysis was conducted on

key words according to context (in which they occur), application (the purpose for which they are utilised) and effect (the outcome of their use in the specified way). This would be developed in chapter five in order to have a critical understanding of the language of SVCs.

#### *Chapter Five: The Meaning of Situations Vacant Columns*

Here we looked at words as an enclosure of the use value/exchange value relation within employment norms. I provided examples of language that appears divorced from ideology but is already transcribed to indicate a commodity. This analysis was drawn from the temporal changes observed in the SVC data. So that it was postulated that through the decades the signification of a word adapts to its context and, therefore, in the use of personality language today infers a specific meaning. Words contained in advertisements prior to 1950, then, cannot be assumed to imply the same as they do today. The data was substantiated by cross-referencing secondary sources such as sociological literature and careers advice. Contemporary words such as 'interpersonal' and 'communication' could be excavated with the aid of information from career manuals and appraised with reference to context, application, and effect. We saw how words in combination, 'pro-active' say, are like a will to power that signify a certain dynamism or willingness to perform at a particular level. Collectively, the words represent an impressive list of a diversity of human qualities understood here in terms of *hetero-homogenisation*. It is heterogeneity of values homogenised to the field of employment, or more loosely, neo-liberalism. By describing it in this way we shift discourse away from misleading dichotomies such as between the singular and the plural, structure and agency, to situate the proliferation of values and identities within a context that increasingly constrains and delimits subjectivity to the commodity.

The historical process illustrated in SVCs cannot be understood as mere evidence of a proliferation of personality types. It is, with reference to other sources and careful scrutiny of the information, a homogenisation of the person through a heterogeneity rationalised for employment success. This led to a discussion on the commodification of personality and *division of personality*. The latter referred to the conceptual fragmentation of the self into categories of personality for appropriation into working structures. So an 'accountant' is also, at the same time, 'interpersonal' and a good 'networker'. We found evidence of a personality culture in SVCs in considering the quantity of references to character, their meaning and that, over at least the last decade, the language has been integral to employment success across different sectors. Finally, I addressed the notion of 'institutional reflexivity' by looking at company profiles. The notion of *subject-company*, as in the example of 'friendly' companies, highlighted the morphology of language describing the person and institution. The notion pointed to the serious consequences that personal orientation to employment structures, masquerading as inclusive, might have on subjectivity itself. What concerned me here was not

that we are shaping up to the company but that the company is shaping up to us and, thus, removing a distinction between the person and their role as an alienated labourer. These arguments were developed in subsequent chapters beginning with a look at teams and the curriculum vitae.

### *Chapter Six: Teams and the Curriculum Vitae*

Our survey of SVC data was completed in chapter six. Advertisements had been indexed for the frequency of requests for teams, and derivatives, and CVs. The combined total of all personality requests approximated the individual number of team and CV requests. I explored the conceptual significance of the word team from its everyday meaning to its inscription as a 'work' team and a team 'player'. The former is akin to a simulacrum of community, while the latter integrates a personal quality with the functioning of a collective unit. This was described in terms of surveillance and a loss of class agency: the singularity of the competitive subject with the universality of the community. However, if the team situated the person within a community of sorts, the CV ensures a biographical commodification of the self as 'teampayer' to that community. Whereas the requests for CVs in SVCs is, for practical purposes, total, the power that CVs exercise over the individual occurs symbolically. This is in how life-experiences are relative to their value to the document as representative of a person's career. I described the CV here as an imaginary (employer) that journeys with us through life as an arbiter of the value of activities. The discussion was split into interconnected parts each pertaining to a standard CV document. I examined how the logic of a CV undermines the neutrality of time and instead scores each moment in relation to its purposefulness to employers: that 'free time' potentially incurs a zero advantage stigma. There were implications about the privacy of the individual. On instrumentality, we were concerned about the extent to which past activities are valued for their benefit to employers and how we might plan activities for their value to a CV. It was thought that inclusivity here is judged through our relationship to employers (analogous to a cultural hub) and is, to an extent, immaterial to how we relate to one another outside those terms. An application process for a job at ASDA was appraised. Here was a subject-company/institution that went to considerable lengths to describe itself as fun and friendly.

A discussion on consumption completed the chapter by distinguishing the lack of choice in orientating to the values CVs represent. Nevertheless, repression, it was said, is more discreet when we already identify with that which belabours us. This point was developed empirically in chapter seven. Records of achievement (ROAs) lent substance to some of the more speculative arguments contained in this chapter.

### *Chapter Seven: Records of Achievement One*

ROAs were introduced by comparing them to CVs then by looking at government produced literature on the purpose of them. After discussing methodological issues, the guidelines given to teachers and the implication of these for the exercise was addressed. The personal sections were examined because they provide a detailed account of how students view themselves, or learn to describe their values and experiences, as an enterprising subject. In short, ROAs encourage a systematic appraisal of the individual through a reflexive knowledge on the values employers seek. Students learn to evaluate their lives by emphasising compatibility to employment norms. This registers cognisance of those values, willingness to support them through example, and understanding of the importance in demonstrating equivalence for career success. The teacher checks and embellishes, in a separate section, the information the student provides to give credence to the claims made. As such, the information supports data from previous chapters by looking at how the language of personality is reflexively engaged by the student in appraisal of personal history. Hence, we have a reliable account of the application of knowledge about the self for employers and evidence of a biographical commodification vis-à-vis the CV.

The content of the ROA was separated into sections. This was framed as a *hierarchy of personality*, beginning with 'organisational discipline' followed by 'transferable skills' and, in chapter eight, additional categories discussed below. Or, described in stages: one, *organisational conformity*; two, *transferable skills*; three, *extracurricular activity*; four, *identification with the company*. We saw that students matched their life-experiences to organisational norms such as dress code, time-keeping and rule adherence (stage one). Students emphasised the importance of these when describing attitudes towards organisations. These norms were compared to those prevalent in early SVCs as common to most occupations in capitalist society. Students also gave accounts of their transferable skills (stage two) - including teamwork, communication, and pro-activity - through examples of practice that compared to requests made in more recent SVCs. These words described a situation the students had been active in but emphasised for its work relation. So I was able to cross-reference between the use of language here and the arguments made earlier on the significance of the language of SVCs. It was said that transferable skills represent the qualities people have already been subjectivised to, except here they are given a specific meaning. ROAs were compared to self-help books as a device for self-orientation to a normative situation. The similarity between the two was some evidence of the personality culture as enterprising norms representative of human nature. Both ROAs and contemporary self-help books are born out of the same relations. This argument helped illustrate a more detailed exposition of *reflexive exploitation*. Additionally, the *networker* was claimed to epitomise a tendency towards an instrumentalised merging of work and social life relationships for their monetary value. Arguments were tentatively made about (reflexive) symbolic violence in view of personal commodification for inclusion into employment

networks. In this regard, alienation (through commodification) was seen as a driving force for adaptation to a neo-liberal exchange modality. These points were articulated more comprehensively in chapter eight.

### *Chapter Eight: Records of Achievement Two*

The principal objective in chapter eight was to bring the presentation on ROAs to close and ground earlier theoretical arguments through piecemeal exposition. The strength of the analysis resided in the fact that with each subsequent 'stage' of the ROA presentation there were broader implications to the overall findings. So, *stage three*, on extracurricular activities, connected us with some of the more speculative aspects of the previous chapter six on teams and CVs. Here was evidence of how students reflect on completed activities to improve their career profile. This helped (further) substantiate arguments on how leisure is organised or reflected on for its value to employers. It meant that the personality culture argument was in evidence here: in that subjectivities are governed through a calculated use of available knowledge to produce the most efficacious image of the self as defined by free-market indicators. Therefore, a successful personality - or a person adequately adjusted to 'society' - is an enterprising one whose subjectivity is valued as an indication of individuality in competitive distinction from others.

There are significant implications of this to theory that were drawn out of the analysis on ROA content. I conceived of a hypothetical *stage four* of the hierarchy of personality. Here, through a logical progression of the previous stages, the idea was explored that knowledge is the means for successful adaptation to corporate norms. The process of the naming of a quality was described, followed by reflection, recognition, and the eventual promotion of the named quality as the property of the individual. The point, to recall, is that we already own that which we now have to reclaim by other means. And, in extension of an earlier argument, by promoting that quality as belonging to myself I encourage, through competitive advantage, others to do the same. So we return to SVCs and how qualities are named and resignified by employers and necessarily reflected upon by job candidates. If this process constitutes a commodification of personality then it is that which cannot as yet be commodified that is either unnameable or useless. The quality is unnameable in that as soon as it achieves the semblance of a concrete thing it opens itself to territorialisation (see Deleuze and Guattari, 2003a) and commodification. But it was said that a quality must be named if it is to signify its antagonism consciously as opposition to capitalism. Hence the point that adaptation to neo-liberalism engenders, makes palpable, through a deterritorialisation of a stable self-identification, a self-conscious (re)turn to an emancipatory subjectivity as a non-commodified antagonism.

Examples of 'reframing' were presented to progress an argument on sincerity, and adaptation as indicative of authenticity itself. It was claimed that the performative role of the person implicates them already in a subject-organisation when agreement between the person

and company occurs in often discreet and seemingly benign ways (perhaps through disclaimer). Furthermore, the performance renders the act into the substance of what is recognisably the self. The affective is effectively the real, which does not prevent a contestation of norms through which the affective is enacted. Nor does it suggest that what is valued as reality is constitutive of it. In sum, the ROA embodies the principles and facilitates an encoding of the subject as a corporate entity.

This is a condensed summary of the development of the thesis through each chapter. It shows the logic of the theoretical progression and connects earlier arguments with empirical content presented in later chapters. There is substantiation of earlier points through additional data that obtains an overall coherence to the dissertation in adherence to the aims. Together, the seven chapters (not including introduction and conclusion) address the central concerns and are a promising basis for additional research.

### **An Overview of the Main Achievements of the Thesis**

In this section the main points developed in the thesis are underlined through subsections whose titles bear their achievements. Before proceeding, I shall offer a brief summary of the main arguments.

A Marxist critique of capitalism was qualified and strengthened with recourse to ideas on power, desire, fantasy, culture and language/communication (see chapter two). This provided a theoretical base from which to tackle complex arguments on processes relating to subjectivity and modernity: bureaucracies, enterprise and working culture (see chapter three). We gave substance to arguments on commodification, especially in view of subjective appropriation of knowledge about the self, through data on SVCs (see chapter four). The plurality of concepts signifying the person was understood as hetero-homogeneity, a specific form of homogenisation to a neo-liberal individual diversity (see chapter five). The key finding of chapters four and five can be summarised as: an approximate year-on-year increase in the use of language describing the subject for competitive advantage in employment, since especially the mid-1980s, culminating in an intensive and extensive use by the mid-1990s, signalling evidence of a personality culture.

Teams and CVs are the most requested objects in SVCs: the former transcribes class agency into workplace conformity and surveillance; the latter is representative of an imaginary (employer) as an arbiter of the value of completed experiences and those not yet undertaken (see chapter six). ROAs substantiate SVC data by showing how the information contained there is reflexively applied. They demonstrate cognisance of the values of enterprise, willingness to configure biographies to them, and understanding of their importance for career success (see

chapters seven and eight). The category of 'organisational discipline' corresponds to earlier SVCs. 'Transferable skills' are the already existent qualities refined as commodities for exchange through a reflexive symbolic violence (see chapter seven). Content on extracurricular compatibility shows how the values present to SVCs and career advice generally are reinforced through example, giving substance to arguments in chapter six (see chapter eight).

The concepts of reflexive exploitation and personality culture, and the principles governing incorporation into working norms are developed throughout. Chapter eight contains a comprehensive analysis of personal adaptation to neo-liberalism. Here the idea was addressed that knowledge, reflexivity, and calculation combine as a force for personal empowerment within relations that already disenfranchise and disempower the individual in another sense. This discussion will be continued in the third section on avenues for further inquiry. Now let us turn to some specific claims.

### *Exposing the Inadequacy in Concepts*

From the early stages of the thesis there has been cause to suspect the explanatory value of a number of concepts. In the first theoretical chapter, two, inadequacies in structuralist and poststructuralist arguments were highlighted, as well as problems in critical theory and psychoanalysis. A Marxist perspective would, however, need to take into account developments in capitalism underlined in chapter three; although SVC data also highlighted inadequacies in ideas about class fragmentation.

Beginning with reflexivity, this argument, as part of the 'reflexive modernisation' thesis, is wholly incapable of addressing the significance of reflexive adaptation, as economic necessity, to employment values. It was shown that the language of reflection – the named qualities – is appropriated into (see chapter four) and signified by (see chapter five) employers through a coherent ideology: an employment culture as transfigured into a *personality culture* (see chapters three and five). Furthermore, it was shown through a number of examples from sources such as career manuals and company statements (see chapter five), and even self-help books (see chapter seven), that the values presented conform to standards common to existing productive relations. As such, institutional reflexivity is, at best, an attempt to incorporate the person into intrinsically exploitative structures and a subject-institution mimicry that aims to unsettle and undermine distinctions between the self and the company (see chapter five). In sum, we uncover an historical shift from a prescriptive form of organisational conformity to a self-reflexive mode of identification with employers as representative of society.

Information from ROAs showed that students reflexively apply knowledge about themselves in order to gain acceptance into working structures (see chapters seven and eight). Hence knowledge is a source of *disempowerment* because it is means through which persons subject themselves to the needs of capital and not, as it were, a source for contesting or

transforming capitalistic relations (see chapter eight). This produces a kind of 'embeddedness' (see discussion below on post irony) or 'community' simulacrum (see chapter six).

While we pro-actively identify ourselves with employers it does not mean that either our needs are met or that we no longer question the values employers represent. The concept of 'inclusivity' emerged as conceptually redundant (see chapters six to eight) and with it poststructuralist ideas about multiplicity (see chapter two). The problem in the word centres on the impossibility of what it promotes. Inclusivity should be recognised, alongside concepts such as democracy (liberal) and humanitarianism, as widely circulated myths. Which brings us to a general argument to emerge from the thesis: that the forms of subjectivity, bureaucracy/'modernity', personality, temporal orientation and association, reflexivity, and authenticity, independently and collectively point to the following conclusion: that current socio-economic and cultural arrangements are likely to intensify psychic pressures as problems that begin at the structural level are transferred on to the individual as an enterprising subject. Yet an increasing sophistication in self-knowledge, as a consequence of pressures individually to adapt to enterprising norms (see chapter seven), makes it more likely - as political and economic uncertainties continue - that self-conscious challenges to structural arrangements increase but are just as rapidly, though not inevitably, appropriated into commodity relations (see chapter eight). Hence, in different ways, we challenge both optimism and pessimism in individualisation theses and postmodernism, and also the ineluctability of enterprising norms.

Overall, this dissertation qualifies certain misapprehensions about subjective choice (see esp. chapter six), the heterogeneity of identities (see chapter five), and explanations that regard the subject as impotent and/or ignorant of the position they are in (see chapter eight for a related discussion). Next we shall examine where this thesis substantiates theory.

### *Substantiating Theory*

The design of the project enabled us to test out a number of propositions (see chapter two), of which one is that *the subject is constituted and self-constituting through social relationships that in their structuring favour specific interests*. The principal relationship we examined was that of subject (labour) and employment (work). The person can no longer be defined simply according to the work they do. Jobs increasingly demand a range of qualities associated with the informal characteristics of the subject outside of work. There is a tendency here, which we can trace in poststructuralism/postmodernism, reflexive modernisation, and enterprise cultural critiques, for viewing this development as a break with the formal arrangements representative of 'modernity' (see chapter three). We could observe the logic of such arguments historically in SVCs (see chapter four) but the analysis brought to attention a certain point: that the qualities named, appropriated and resignified by employers is consistent with a culture or ideology (see chapter five) that has the appearance of (identity) multiplicity. Moreover, that subjects formerly

constituted through a labour function – i.e. ‘plumber’ – are still being constituted as personalities for work. That, in other words, we are not describing changes as much as an intensification of the inscription upon the social body the subject in relation to work (see chapter five).

We had already rejected some of the limitations to structuralist theory (see chapter two) and wanted to devise a more satisfactory way to address the above concerns through acknowledgement of a more conscious and active subjectivity. It seemed clear from the analysis that unlike the acquisition of a trade skill, a sophisticated and reflexive understanding of the self was needed for successful employment today. Information on careers advice (see chapter six) and self-help (see chapter seven) showed, for example, the importance of ‘technologies’ for ‘improving’ the self to enterprising norms. CVs would aid people in the framing of their experiences through economic pressures and an emotional need for recognition/inclusivity (see chapter six). The position that people were *self-constituting* was strengthened by evidence from ROAs, a document written by students in their final year of school. Here we could observe how the qualities listed in SVCs, signified according to the worth to employers, were reflected upon and helped define the value of each student’s personal biography (see chapters seven and eight). Hence, the research substantiates proposition one, and lends credence to the importance that employment has in structuring subjectivity and in giving rise to new or more proliferated forms of self-evaluation/self-constitution. Emphasis shifts to the individual as an enterprising entity whose (socio-economic) life-chances are predicated on an ability to compete effectively against others through manipulation and promotion of characteristics valued for their worth to employers.

*The second proposition is that the complexity of subjective forms has to be understood in relation to actually existing socio-economic structures.* This argument supports a materialist position. We have shown over and again that cultural accounts of the dispersal of subjectivities along a plane of ‘dedifferentiation’ reinforce a sophistry at the core of our understanding about contemporary society. The critique of inclusivity focuses the point that the recognition of identity corresponds to the structural forms supporting capitalist exchange (see esp. chapter eight). This assertion is made in view of the data on SVCs (see chapters four and six), the critical evaluation of them (see chapters five and six), and the content on reflexivity in ROAs (see chapters seven and eight). Conceptualisations that do not take sufficient account of material factors are only illustrative of certain phenomena. An objective of this analysis was to look critically at processes that impact at a general level of society hitherto obscured by arguments overly concerned with the symbolic. By the same token, such arguments should not be overlooked when they seem to resonate with subjective interpretations of society. In each chapter of the thesis these positions are weighed against one another and, in the final analysis, the scope of the inquiry affirms proposition two.

*Proposition three is that subjectivity is homogenised through its non-antagonistic heterogeneity.* This is a challenge to Adorno, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, late Foucault, and Hardt and Negri, to name a few. Support for this thesis is found typically in Žižek, Badiou and Marxist dialectics generally. There is not a simple dichotomy between the two camps. The heterogeneity as described in the range of qualities requested in SVCs (see chapter four) does not conform neatly to the multiplicity typically advocated, say by Deleuze and Guattari. If anything, the examples given lend weight to Adorno's (2001) cultural critique, Deleuze and Guattari's (2003a/b) challenge to identity formations, and Derrida's (2001) logocentrism argument (language). But they also expose the folly in underestimating the extent to which, in a highly competitive society, individuals necessarily acquire the skills, characteristics and identities to ensure compatibility to dominant forms of interaction and communication. ROAs show how homogenisation occurs through descriptions of difference as each student adapts their biography to the demands the workplace exerts upon them (see chapter eight). Hetero-homogeneity was suggested (see chapter five) as a way of overcoming the false dichotomisation of the two. The position progressively developed was that it is a feature of neo-liberalism that structures take account of shifting subjectivities by constantly (re)inscribing them into commodity relations. Proposition three is supported by the data (see chapters four, five and six) but, given the processes by which people increasingly have to adapt to working norms (see chapters seven and eight), the relationship between the individual and institution is contingent on the need for people to adapt to company values.

*Proposition four is that the empowerment of subjectivities within existing structures of domination is a consequence of subjective incorporation into the capitalist (free) market.* This relates to choice. Personal qualities were marked out as commodities for consumption in the analysis of SVCs (see chapter four). But these are not ordinary commodities because we need to acquire them for job success (see chapter six) and already possess them as non-exchangeable, unidentified, values (see chapters seven and eight). Hence, it was shown that we are empowered to possess what is already ours as something (already) alien to us. What matters, therefore, is not only how a use-value becomes an exchange-value, but also how a non-commodified, unnamed, quality becomes an uncomfortable remainder or a repressed cipher. If the quality is named and given support it is open to incorporation as a commodity. Which is not to suggest that the thing cannot deliver a social good once commodified but that its existence *qua* a commodity is increasingly, through evidence on SVCs and ROAs, its justification.

In chapter six, we posited the category of 'Doing something *sympathetic* to the CV' as pertaining to an activity recognised for its value to employers though not necessarily undertaken for that principal reason. Or, in chapter eight, we substantiated this idea by giving examples of how an activity is *retrospectively* configured as an exchange value. In the main, my argument is that knowledge of the power that certain qualities and experiences engender produces a

tendency to 'self-improve' for instrumental purposes. So, in terms of proposition four, above, the empowerment of subjectivities in a 'free-market' setting is predicated on an ability to succeed through exchange. Empowerment, in this context, improves the competitiveness of the subject and their ability to shape institutions for competitive purposes, even as these may coincide with ethical discourses at the public level (see chapter six).

Finally, it goes without saying that *all previous propositions are subject to re-evaluation*. This must always be the case for any argument, whatever its empirical strengths. However, the issues raised in this dissertation, consistent with concerns of sociologists and theorists working with different propositions, require additional research.

### ***Summarising the Contribution to Sociology***

Let us remind ourselves of the chapter one hypothesis: *the principles underlining neo-liberalism are transposed on to subjectivities through a reflexive application of knowledge for 'empowering' the self 'proactively' to survive in the vicissitudes of a market economy*. Or, in other words, that *proactively reflexive knowledge tends to orientate the self to values coterminous with and beneficial to neo-liberal capitalism*. We can now say in view of the above that this hypothesis is substantiated in a number of ways:

1. Through a careful consideration of the theoretical merits of contributors that directly and indirectly address the hypothesis (see chapters two and three).
2. Through a consistent record of the historical development of a 'language of personality' in SVCs (see chapter four).
3. Through a critical examination of the significance of the data on SVCs and the language found in them (see chapter five).
4. Through comparative examples from career manuals, company brochures, secondary literature, web sites and official documents to improve the accuracy of interpretation (see chapters five and six especially).
5. Through the use of ROAs as illustrative examples of the way students reflexively incorporate knowledge about the employment market into their personal biographies (see chapters seven and eight).

The findings, which summarise the contribution to the sociology of employment in particular, are:

1. The request for personal characteristics by employers is both intensive and extensive across different employment sectors (see chapter four).
2. This has increasingly been the case since the mid-1980s (see chapter four).

3. There is a pattern in the qualities being requested which corresponds to values promulgated in other sources (see chapters five and six).
4. Systems for adapting to the employment culture and maintaining subjective equilibrium therein are an established part of self-orientation to social norms (see chapter six).
5. There is a necessity for the self-conscious configuration of values, experiences, and attitudes to employers and an engagement in activities for their career benefits (see chapter six).
6. Students reflect on the values employers promote, decode the language used, and recognise themselves through material that aids subjective orientation to work, as a means for competitive advantage (see chapter seven).
7. Each facet of a person's life is subject to the same methods of evaluation, as labour demands increasing levels of commodification of the workers' subjective existence (see chapter eight).

Extracting from the central points, and with reference to additional arguments made elsewhere, the thesis can make further substantiated claims that:

1. An enterprise culture in employment has been transposed as subjective orientation to normative values vis-à-vis a 'personality culture' (see chapters three and five).
2. A commodification of personality occurs through the transformation of characteristics into specific exchange values (see chapter five).
3. A division of personality distinguishes one person from another by their successfully promoted personal characteristics (see chapter five).
4. Hetero-homogenisation distinguishes the form of heterogeneity to a market-regulated sociality (see chapter five).
5. The company is posited as a friend, or subject-institution/organisation/company, and blurs the distinction between work life and the life of the individual (see chapter five).
6. The team or community is a substitute for class affiliations and serves as an effective system of internal and external surveillance (see chapter six).
7. Completed acts and activities yet to be undertaken are instrumentalised with reference to a imaginary CV as a structural inhibition, or reframing, to social activities and biographical interpretation (see chapter six).
8. Reflexive exploitation accounts for reflexive orientation of the self through identification and promotion of values and characteristics likely to induce success within capitalist society (see chapter seven).
9. Knowledge of the self increases subjective adaptation and empowerment to competitive employment structures (see chapter seven).

10. A person commits symbolic violence against itself by gaining incorporation as an enterprising subject. Inclusivity, therefore, is predicated, equally, on what is excluded in that relation (see chapter eight) and how the recognised quality is appropriated as alien.

With the above points in mind, we can conclude the thesis with a speculative argument, drawn from this analysis, relating to the title: Post Ironic Society.

### A Post Ironic Society?

Here, in this section I shall attempt to bridge a discrepancy between the knowledge of the reflexive agent on the one hand, and positive orientation to objectifying practices on the other. The argument developed is a speculative one that emerges from the research.

#### *Introducing the Concept*

It has been said elsewhere that repression is more discreet, informal and, consequently, all the more powerful, pervasive and irresistible through processes of personal adaptation to corporate norms. It was also claimed that neo-liberalism attacks the conceit of subjectivity by claiming the subject as a malleable object: that the personality culture represents, effectively, an institutionalisation of individuality. So, by this logic, the more knowledge we have of ourselves as objects the better equipped we are successfully to commodify that knowledge or adapt to working norms. Post irony, to apply a simple analogy, is like having knowledge about the result of a football match but still being carried away by the drama of the repeat as if the event is live. In collective terms, we may each share in a conspiracy of the known result by reinforcing through our behaviour the idea that the game has never been played.

The phrase 'post irony' is often used in journalistic writing but is employed here to illustrate a subjective orientation to emergent socio-cultural norms. It is not intended to replace or add to an already overcrowded lexicon of words to describe a 'post' modernity. Relevant to this thesis, the 'irony' motif identifies positions relative to knowledgeable detachment to help conceptualise and conclude on methods of personal adaptation specific to our time.

We can follow this concept through four stages of subjectivisation towards a personality culture:

1. **(Subjective) Determination:** Subjective position stabilised through a (pre-determined) collective identity. Initially the wage labourer sells trade skills. The functioning bureaucracy characterises a professional separation between the person and the role (see chapter three). Post-war political settlements stabilise class divisions (stable identity configurations).

2. **(Subjective) Disjunction:** Action consistent with identification potentially, though not necessarily, opens gap between stable subjective position and pressures to socially/reflexively adapt to structural changes. The 'enterprise' ideology and structural transformations of the 1980s mark a rapid acceleration in the shift towards an enterprising mode of subjectivity (see chapter four). Sharpening of political divisions during period of transition as there is a (psycho-socio-political and cultural) lag in the person's orientation to emergent organisational norms.
3. **Adaptive Normalisation:** Destabilisation of subjective position through reflexive adaptation to social change. Saturation of free market principles in public life increases recourse to ironic detachment as coping strategy (strategic adaptation). Consolidation of free-market ideology as 'end of history' thesis.
4. **Critical Suspension (of conflicting knowledge):** stabilisation of subjective position though suspension of knowledge likely to cause disjunction (see point 2). Enterprise values embedded as personality culture exhaust strategies for personal distancing: competitive advantage necessitates subjective identification with enterprising norms representative of successfully socialised individual (see chapter eight). Neo-liberal political ideology (including 'New Labour' socialism) of inclusivity, humanitarianism, choice and empowerment; class antagonisms repressed and redirected into individualistic 'projects of the self', multiplicity, and search for new collective (cultural) identities.

Determination describes a *pre-ironic* or stable (non-reflexive) phase of subjectivity; disjunction describes a non-ironic consistency between (reflexive) knowledge (of situation) and action integral to that knowledge (and disjunction as in the potentiality for opposition to or perceived subjective incompatibility with emergent socio-cultural norms); adaptive normalisation describes an *ironic* self-distancing as strategic attachment to socio-cultural norms, otherwise pragmatism; critical suspension describes *post irony* as a pro-active closure of the gap between knowledge of a situation and opposing subjective orientation: or suspension of critical knowledge of object. Each of the categories refers temporally and spatially, in singularity and conjunctively, to the complexities of self-subjectivisation to neo-liberal capitalism.

Post irony, then, marks the point of *critical suspension*, or a losing of oneself in the pleasure of that which is already known to symbolise that which is opposed. We can observe this in situations that appear oppressive, or where norms are saturated, to an extent that self-distancing is difficult to sustain; so, to retrieve or engender pleasure, or to sustain a feeling of self-distancing, happiness or ontological 'closure' with observable contradictions, the *signification of the situation is deferred so that a particular object can be enjoyed. Hence, with reference to the personality culture, I postulate that a person can gain (a nominal sense of) subjective distancing, as a commodified set of categories, by suspending the knowledge of*

the implications of lifestyles instrumentally configured to maximise competitive advantage in employment. Important to the understanding of this concept is that the knowledge a person has of the situation is suspended but not extirpated from memory. Knowledge dwells as an uncomfortable remainder (reminder) of the situation to which the person identifies. Which leads us to two additional stages of subjectivisation:

5. **(Subjective) *Withdrawal***: the situation becomes unstable and/or is open to contingent factors that undermine, temporarily or partially, ability of agent to suspend knowledge that undermines self-orientation to situation. Akin to a metaphorical tap on the shoulder to a person seemingly in a trance, to jolt them, as it were, and remind them of knowledge they already possess that is critical to a particular orientation.
6. ***Potentiality***: critical engagement with the object leads to new cycle of subject integration.

The fifth category is not to be confused with *determination* - or a (re)turn to a pre-established sense of authenticity - when that pertains to specific embodied characteristics typical of a given paradigm or stable relation. New orthodoxies may re-emerge, but here withdrawal through *potentiality* engenders a multitude of possible responses including *disjunction* and *determination* depending on the socio-political context or situation. In a personality culture withdrawal may occur on any number of planes: resistance in the workplace (see May, 1999), unease with employment demands (see, for example, Casey, 1995), recognition of the performance in a given situation (see, for example, Goffman, 1970). However, as previously discussed in chapter eight, these are only partial and temporary withdrawals and do not constitute a withdrawal, as such, from the personality culture. Neo-liberalism as ideology is neither invasive nor singular, so a *neo-liberal* subjectivity lacks the ideological support for achieving a stable sense of security – *determination* – as a *relatively* fixed set of identities. Thus we are adaptable to the ‘vicissitudes of the free-market’ – *suspension* - open to periodic uncertainties – (temporary or partial) *withdrawal* – and *potentiality* (rapid adaptation) in view of new situations or paradigms. A neo-liberal subjectivity characterised in this dissertation is weak, impressionable and suited to a competitive adaptation to capitalism, though, by the same token, vulnerable in its advocacy of those arrangements.

These points have been referred to already in the dissertation. To summarise, we observed a development of a *neo-liberal subjectivity* through SVCs (process towards personal commodification as general principle of self-governance) and ROAs (reflexive orientation of the self to employment norms): individualism predicated on incorporation of sorts (see chapter six). These sources, and associated technologies, tell us that knowledge about the self and the values that permeate society, if directed to favour the desired object, can yield significant results. It was argued, against the idea of performance, that the person is subjectively implicated

in this process (see chapter eight and also chapters five and six on subject-institution). However, because the object (company or team) cannot deliver its promise (fulfilment of desire/substitute for class solidarity), the reflexivity (self-improvement) through which the subject gains incorporation, or suspends knowledge, is sustained through post ironic deferral of the meaning of the situation. Withdrawal occurs, as in number five above, because the person's orientation to the situation is volatile and subject to rupture (material/ideological/emotional 'tap on the shoulder') but feels stable up to that point. In other words, neo-liberalism – *apropos* of the enterprising self - is historically the most effective set of relations for regulating the subject to capitalism through individual endeavour and also, analogous to the fragility of an ecosystem, ideologically the weakest. It is a society whose relations have never been as transparent to so many people and the technologies so accessible: the principal and unsustainable strength of neo-liberalism. Hence, a 'post ironic society' is a volatile one. It is suggestive of subjectivity in transition, though suspended, as it were, at a liminal phase between past and future states: one from which we are forever exiled, the other whose form is imponderable but terrifying for what we suspect, at least, it may obtain. Yet if neo-liberal subjective configurations are intrinsically shallow, the subject, poised always to (re)appropriate the symbols that empower it, continue to hold them as if in indefinite suspension (the appearance of a non-dialectical moment).

The above arguments correspond to processes uncovered in the thesis. Thus:

1. Evidence from SVCs (saturation) (see chapters four, five and six) and ROAs (reflexivity)(see chapters seven and eight) of *understanding*.
2. Information from career sources and ROAs that validation occurs through identification with employment norms.
3. Extrapolation from above sources: arguments on hetero-homogeneity (chapter five), inclusivity (chapters seven and eight), and enterprising subject as empowered.
4. Evidence on personality culture from SVCs (see chapter five).
5. Content of ROAs through the three empirical 'stages' (see chapters seven and eight).
6. Extrapolated through evidence of adaptability of competitive subject (see, esp., chapters seven and eight (self-help and ROAs)).

When disjunction leads to adaptive normalisation, feelings of solidarity or principled assertion are replaced by feelings of alienation or resignation. Suspension leads to emotional exhaustion in the hankering after an illusive ontologically settled state. Žižek (2000: 373 (see chapter two)) is correct to challenge the 'indefinite plasticity' of the postmodern subject as exposing a 'horri-fying void'. However, the libidinal investments in 'empty' signifiers such as nation (we recall the 'patriotism' whipped up during football tournaments, focus on the *symbolic* arguments about EU membership, and fear of asylum seekers/immigrants), the

‘emancipation of emotions’ Wouters (1998: 146) described in chapter eight, and the vagaries of a market economy, are increasingly indicative not of ‘Enlightenment’ but of a process that may yet undermine the small gains of a society in transition. Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* ((1944)1957) warns of the consequences of a free-market with a detailed account of 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalism. Here our analysis of subjectivity makes a contemporary assessment of the possible developments from the current experiment with free-market structural change.

So when Deleuze and Guattari (2003a: 105) described as the aim of *schizoanalysis* to ‘show how, in the subject who desires, desire can be made to desire its own repression’, they refer to a partial aspect of the above argument: relating to a fixation on symbols. Post irony displaces critical knowledge: to embrace the thing (i.e. curtailment of civil liberties) *because* it recognisably denies that which we, perhaps vaguely, (continue to) associate ourselves with/define ourselves by (i.e. ‘freedom’) but feel incapable of practising (i.e. (im)possibility of acting upon knowledge, or an orientation to a principle, in a way compatible to it). The ‘tap on the shoulder’ metaphor describing *withdrawal* above, emphasises the point that repression is conditional. Cognition is such that the person is able to *turn away*, in contrast to interpellation, but not, of course, dissolve their subjective relation to the norms through which they are ‘subjectivised’. In this respect, adaptation engenders *potentialities* external to instances of subjective framing or already integral to the self. When Horkheimer and Adorno (1995(1944): 153) said that ‘Everyone must show that he wholly identifies himself with the power which is belabouring him’ they omit this important corollary. Riesman’s (1950, 277) view is also problematic. The contemporary character, he says, has learned, ‘if he has adjusted, to look like those others with whom he has been brought up... to forget aspects of his character that are not “social,” not other-directed.’ He was not able to account for the vicissitudes of neo-liberalism, its inclusive modality, post ironic suspension and subjective vulnerability, each of which advance on and refine Riesman’s analysis. Hochschild’s (1983) emotional labour thesis is too narrow in its focus properly to address the commodification of personality argument in relation to reflexivity, self-promotion and adaptation to a neo-liberal milieu. Žižek, on the other hand, describes a ‘false transparency’ through the ‘paradigmatic case’ of ‘making of...’ films such as *Terminator 2* and *Indiana Jones*:

far from destroying the ‘fetishist’ illusion, the insight into the production mechanism in fact even strengthens it, in so far as it renders palpable the gap between the bodily causes and the surface-effect... In short, the paradox of ‘the making of...’ is the same as that of a magician who discloses the trick without dissolving the mystery of the magical effect.

(Žižek, 1999: 102)

It is the point that knowledge of the thing reinforces our identification with the absurdity of it. We can take this a stage further by proclaiming that our knowledge of the 'mystery' is what pushes each one of us to a point of post ironic *suspension*.

So in answer to the question posed in the subtitle of chapter nine (a post ironic society?): the combination of data, content and analysis conducted throughout this thesis would lead to a 'post ironic' explanation as one plausible outcome of a neo-liberal self-subjectivisation. This argument is presented to the reader as a summation of the previous points to have emerged in the course of this study. It is posited, as an outcome of the research, as a hypothesis for a future project. Thereby, the contribution to sociology is summarised in the previous section and illustrated, through example here, as a fertile and productive point of theoretical departure.

Lastly, the discussion will be drawn to a close with a brief overview of this chapter.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

In this chapter we have summarised each of the previous chapters of the thesis, synthesised them, and highlighted the contributions made to sociology. This is not an exhaustive account of the arguments made nor of the ideas they challenge and confirm. These details are to be found within the pages of the main body of the thesis itself. Here we have provided a logical overview of the main achievements and referenced the sections where each point is developed. Judged as a preliminary attempt to synthesise eclectic theoretical arguments with empirical research, the project achieves its purpose of laying the groundwork for future inquiry. We began with a review of subjectivity, continued on to substantive empirical chapters, and concluded on the thesis title as an illustrative example following logically on from previous arguments. This chapter brings the thesis to a close and invites us to organise new research projects for developing the themes further.

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