

# Work and subjectivity

## a review of psychological social and post-structuralist approaches

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*Document Version*

Final published version

*Publication date:*

2001

*License*

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Triantafillou, P. (2001). *Work and subjectivity: a review of psychological social and post-structuralist approaches*.

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Download date: 01. Mar. 2024



**Work and subjectivity –  
A review of psychological, sociological and  
post-structuralist approaches**

**IKL Working Paper, no 39**

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**February 2000**

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## **Abstract**

This working paper reviews and to a certain extent evaluates a certain part of the twentieth century theoretical literature dealing with the relations between work and subjectivity in order to provide a systematic overview of these in terms of their problematizations, ethos, epistemological objects, and analytical framework. The literature reviewed comprises for different approaches, namely social psychology, social (inter) actionism, Marxism and post-structuralism.

Although the review only embraces a few major works within each approach and hence in no way pretends to give a fair account of the richness and nuances within each of these, the paper ventures to pose certain general arguments. It is argued that social psychology approaches are all characterized by a management bias. This does not mean that these studies are devoid of critical arguments about management practices. However, the rationale of their critical enquiry is essentially to improve the efficiency of management practices, rather than questioning, for example, the very social structures in which the companies are imbedded.

The phenomenological inspired Interactionist studies hold a rather ambivalent position with regard to critique. On the one hand, it is clear that none of the interactionist studies hold a management bias in that the improvement of management policies simply does not present itself as an issue on their research agenda. On the other hand, most of these studies can hardly be characterized as critical in any sense in that they essentially do no question the social and political deliberations fuelling management practices. The Neo-Weberian social action inspired studies mentioned above are clearly not fuelled by management concerns. On the other hand, they cannot exactly be characterized as critical of management practices either for rather similar reasons as the interactionist studies.

Marxist inspired and post-structuralist inspired approaches both set out to conduct critical analyses, though in widely different manners. Marxist inspired writings often tend to unfold a total critique of capitalist society which implies that any form of resistance or reform are essentially futile actions that only serve to postpone the only 'real' solution, namely the abolishment or radical transformation of capitalism as a social formation.

Despite several crucial differences between the three post-structuralist approaches, they all share the assumption that man is a product of various discursive practices and that any attempt to fix man's identity – by pointing for example to his 'essential nature' – is but a contingent power-laden relation. Likewise, all of the post-structuralist approaches could be seen as de-normalizing in the sense that they reject the notion of the constitutive subject – whether in its Cartesian, unitary form or in its meaning-searching hermeneutic form - as a Western, metaphysical illusion.

## Introduction

This working paper reviews and to a certain extent evaluates a number of studies on the relation between work and subjectivity. It analyses the similarities and differences of four approaches with regard to their problematization, ethos, epistemological objects and analytical strategy. The studies can be grouped into the following four approaches:

1. Social psychological studies focusing on the relations between the workplace and the individual workers. Four strands are included: human factor industrial psychology, Mayoite human relations, organizational psychology, and human resource management.
2. Social (inter) actionism, namely symbolic/social interactionism (inspired by Mead and Weber) that take individual interactions as their point of departure, and social actionism (inspired by Weber) that take larger value orientations and cultural systems as their basis.
3. Marxist studies focusing on the relations between wider social, economic structures and processes on the one hand and the constitution of the subject at work. The works of Robert Blauner, Herbert Marcuse, Harry Braverman and André Gorz are discussed.
4. Post-structuralist studies questioning essentialist and/or transcendental conceptions of the subject. Three strands of studies are included: Michel Foucault's genealogy, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis.

The four approaches are compared with regard to the following four dimensions:

- Problematization: Key research questions, assumptions and hypotheses
- Ethos: The telos, norms and ethical orientations guiding the analysis (e.g. producing policy recommendations, total critique, or local, de-normalizing interrogation).
- Key epistemological objects – or theoretical objects - such as 'human needs', 'motivation', 'career', 'alienation', 'orientation', 'the symbolic order' or 'technologies of government'
- Analytical strategy: The method or grid of intelligibility utilized in order to shed light on the research questions (e.g. participant observation, interviews, textual deconstruction or genealogy)

It should be stressed that this review paper is analyzing and discussing only a few of the major, exemplary works of literature within each of the approaches. The idea is to point out the major lines of division between the four approaches, and the review must be excused for not taking into account the many variations and subtleties which are found within each approach. Each of the four approaches are evaluated from the point of view of the other approaches. The social psychological oriented studies, for example, are thus evaluated from the perspective of the Marxist and post-structuralist approaches. It may seem unfair not to evaluate the approaches on their own premises, but the rationale of this paper is not to examine the internal consistency of the individual studies, but rather to highlight their advantages and limitations vis-à-vis other approaches.

The evaluation of the post-structuralist approaches is however not confined to the perspectives of psychology and sociology only, but also includes an "internalist" discussion of their respective advantages and limitations. More precisely, Derrida's deconstructionist analysis and Lacan's psychoanalysis are problematized from the perspective of Foucauldian genealogy. This "asymmetrical" review should be seen in the light not only of the author's Foucauldian bias, but also of the fact that Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis – in contrast to Foucauldian genealogy - never intended to deal with the practices of subject formation taking place in such institutions as the workplace.

## 1 Social psychological studies

### *Introduction*

In this section four social psychological inspired studies are discussed, namely human factor industrial psychology, Mayoite human relations, organizational psychology, and human resource management. All the social psychology approaches, save human factor industrial psychology, are inspired by sociological theories and problematizations, and they acknowledge that the constitution of the self should be seen as a social process. Yet in practice, they are characterized by methodological individualism by focusing almost exclusively on inter-subjective actions and explaining behaviour in terms of psychological dynamics.

### *Human factor industrial psychology: the subject of personality and aptitude*

Industrial psychology emerged in the US, Germany and Great Britain during the 1920s (Rose 1975: 66). Human factor psychologists explicitly distanced themselves from Taylor's scientific management. Taylor had conceived of labour as by and large driven by economic (selfish) motives. Hence, the differential price-rate earnings – together with devolution of labour skills into a set of automated routines - was attached with crucial importance to enhancing productivity. The reduction of man to a machine-like thing, divested with personality, instincts, and social bonds, was not only a faulty conception of man, but the management system based on this view also proved to be ineffective because it overlooked the human factors. Consequently, there is no 'best way' of performing a particular task – based on purely physical measures; rather the specific design of the production process ensuring maximum variety had to take into account specific psychological and social circumstances at the workplace (Rose 1975: 84).

The understanding of fatigue was raised as an issue by industrial psychologists in the 1920s partly as a reaction to Taylorist scientific management, and partly by the need to maintain high productivity during the First World War (Rose 1975: 69). Thus, the extreme conditions of the First World War, with its increased bio-psychological pressures on the work force and the lack of unemployment had made the problem of fatigue a pressing one in the rationalization of military production (ibid. 98).

First conceived largely a physiological phenomenon, C. S. Myers, the dominating figure in British industrial psychology, argued from the early 1920s that fatigue in many type of works depended more on individual psychological differences than on the objective physical efforts involved (ibid. 72). In monotonous types of work, subjective psychological perception was seen to play an important factor in productivity. In contrast to Taylor who argued that all unnecessary bodily movements should be eliminated, the German researcher Atzler argued that a certain amount of 'useless' motions actually contributed positively in that they made the worker perceive the work less monotonous and hence made him more motivated to maintain a high level of productivity (ibid. 73).

The idea that monotony is an altogether different phenomenon from that of fatigue was first formulated in 1924 during studies conducted under the auspices of the British Industrial Fatigue Research Board (Rose 1975: 76). It was found that output was stimulated when workers themselves choose the timing of their rest-pauses. This was seen as way of minimizing the 'psychological state' of boredom with monotonous work and hence maintain output. Boredom was seen as a result both of environmental factors (the structuring of production process, lightning, heat, timing and duration of breaks, and – importantly – the extent to which the work took place in social groups), but also as an individually, variable characteristic (depending on individual intelligence, temperament, economic incentive etc.) (ibid. 78-79).

Workers were sought divided, by such industrialist psychologists as May Smith, according to their 'personality'. For example, May Smith made a typology of labour: 'truculent', 'ultra-weak', 'fantacist', and the type that 'seeks a position in other fields' (Rose 1975: 79-80). These personalities were seen as the outcome of the clash between the 'instinct of self-assertion' and the authority relations found at the workplace. In the United States, industrial psychologists would around the same time (1920s) abandon William James' notion of 'instinctualism' in favour of 'aptitude' to describe the individual workers' psychological propensity for work, and aptitude tests would soon prove a viable commercial product for corporate management in search for new ways of speeding of productivity (ibid. 90-91, 97).

In sum, the key objective of human factor industrial psychology is to maintain productivity by examining the psychological causes of industrial fatigue. The worker is viewed not as a *Homo economicus*, but as a being, whose work capability depends on his psychological state which, in turn, is influenced by the organization of the production process and the physical work environment. Human factor psychology moreover furnishes the way for new methodological devices inquiring into the understanding the psychological nature of the worker. The key devices were questionnaires to be filled in by the workers themselves in order to map their psychological propensity for work in general, and their 'aptitude' in particular.

### ***Mayoite Human Relations school: man in need of social belonging***

If our social skills (that is, our ability to secure cooperation between people) had advanced step by step with our technical skills, there would not have been another European War (Mayo 1945: 33).

From the 1920s onwards, it was increasingly accepted that the scientific (Taylorist) management approach carried several deficiencies. Practical experience and various sociological and psychological researches alike, such as the experiments and interviews conducted in the period 1927-32 at the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne Plant, were taken by Elton Mayo and others to show that solutions which only focused on achieving optimum and efficient working conditions supplemented with various incentive schemes that would make the workers work harder, were not working as expected. In the following, I will deal with the writings that largely came to define the Mayoite Human Relations School, namely Mayo's *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilisation* (1933) and *The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilisation* (1945), and Roethlisberger and Dickson's *Management and the Worker* (1939)

A constant theme in Mayo's works is the rootlessness of individual existence and the concern for social harmony in industrialized society. Under due inspiration of Durkheim's analysis of *anomie* and his concern about social solidarity<sup>1</sup>, Mayo found that effective management was a question of furnishing the social bonds between the employees and managers (Mayo 1946 [1933]: 140). However, unlike Durkheim, Mayo ascribed to methodological individualism by viewing the constitution of subjectivity primarily in psychological terms, namely as individual adjustment. Inspired by the French psychologist Pierre Janet's ideas of maladjustment, Mayo tended to represent social conflict as the product of the individual's insufficiently developed or lacking social skills rendering them unfit to enter into 'ordinary' social relationships (Mayo 1945: 23-30). On the other hand, Mayo explicitly distanced himself from Taylor's portrayal of the worker as a *Homo Economicus*. Rather, the workers' actions were viewed being shaped by their need for creating social bonds at work and establishing a meaning with their work.

Social breakdown and industrial conflict could be minimized, Mayo argued, by giving workers the satisfaction of working together, by making them feel important in the organization, and by showing an interest in their personal problems. Accordingly, an elite of socially skilled managers

equipped with the analytical tools necessary to ‘handle the concrete difficulties of human collaboration’ (Mayo 1946 [1933]: 177), should see to that work-groups of large industrial organizations be made the key site of social life (Mayo 1945: 32-33). Thus, if only the social skills (of management) could be developed in step with society’s technical skills a number of industrial conflicts could be avoided. The crucial social skill to be developed were leadership and counseling, which both were seen as aspects of the management’s capacity to build teamwork and thereby expand the worker’s desire and capacity to collaborate more optimally with management.

In a very similar vein, Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) argued in their book *Management and The Worker* that in order to maximize productivity, managers must ensure that the workers’ ‘personal satisfactions’ are met because only then will they be willing to cooperate. Management must accept and cooperate with informal works groups since they provide the social network in which many of the workers’ social needs are satisfied. The first step to be taken by management is ‘to introduce into its organization an explicit skill of diagnosing human situations [at the workplace] (ibid. 604). Only when a thorough understanding of the social relations and bonds between the groups and individual workers is established can effective actions be taken to avoid those phenomena causing drops in productivity. One line of subsequent actions seeking to ensure that the norms of the informal groups are in line with management objectives, is to enable groups to participate in corporate decision-making, because this will make workers more committed to their tasks. Another method is to conduct regular interviews with each worker in an atmosphere of confidence that will allow the worker to express his concerns, ambitions and frustrations. While this may not automatically lead to the solution of what the worker subjectively sees as a problem, it will enable the creation of a social relationship between management and worker serving to alleviate antagonisms (ibid. 597-601).

In sum, the Mayoite Human Relations approach attempted to develop psychologically informed techniques for acting upon the relations between human beings in the name of efficiency, harmony and contentment. The plant was seen as pervaded by an attitudinal and communicative atmosphere, a socio-psychological overlay to the production process itself. With regard to analytical strategy, it is noteworthy that the Hawthorne studies probably is the first example on a long-term, systematized use of participatory observation and interview techniques within labour management studies. Drawing on the principles of anthropological field studies, developed in the beginning at the century by such anthropologists as Malinowski, human relationists found that the only way to reach a true understanding of the workers needs and concerns was to emerge in long-term interaction with the workers through participant observation and interviews. This method was subsequently to be adopted by both organizational psychologists and, in particular, the symbolic interactionists, cf. Section 2 below.

### ***Organizational psychology: man in need of self-actualization***

The fact that the Mayoite Human Relations approach was increasingly discredited by academia from the late 1940s, notably by sociology, did not however imply a diminishing interest in studying the psycho-social life at work. Organizational psychology, articulated in such work as Chris Argyris (1957; 1959; 1961), Douglas McGregor (1960), Rensis Likert (1961), and Saul Gellerman (1963), thus became highly influential in the US and subsequently Western Europe from the late 1950s.

Man is characterized, organizational psychologists argued, not so much by a need for social belonging to a group, as a need for self-actualization. Based on American psychologist Abraham Maslow’s theory of human needs, organizational psychologists argued that human nature is based on a progressive series of needs. Once human beings have satisfied their basic needs of food, shelter, safety, love and esteem, they will look for ways to satisfy their needs for self-fulfillment or self-actualization. Consequently, if non-participatory management strategies in general – and

scientific management principles in particular – tend to fail, this is because they don't respect the social needs inscribed in human nature (Maslow 1973: 17-27). From this, organizational psychologists deduced that only management strategies based on employee participation, which enables the individual worker to realize his creative potentials and allows him to see a meaning with his job functions, will be able to minimize the risk of industrial conflict.

In the article *Understanding Human Behavior in Organizations*, Chris Argyris (1959) argued that human beings 'are are need-fulfilling, goal-achieving unities' who pursue 'various strategies to fulfill their needs and achieve their goals' (Argyris 1959: 115). In contrast to Maslow's essentially biological conception of human needs, Argyris argued that individual needs are constituted through socio-cultural practices, such as education. The normal process of socialization would thus see a progressive change from irresponsible childhood (dependent on external authority) to responsible adulthood where the mature individual seeks to realize his needs through independent actions. However, this normal route of progress is thwarted in industrial society because work is characterized by hierarchical organization structures, directive leadership and managerial control that lead to dependence and constraint. The results are frustration and tension leading to absenteeism, quitting, apathy and defensiveness (ibid. 121). The remedy is, not surprisingly, to treat the workers as mature, self-determining beings by introducing, for example, job-enlargement, participative leadership and decentralization of organizational power.

In his book *The Human Side of the Enterprise*, Douglas McGregor (1960) used Maslow's ideas to distinguish between three types of need: physiological, social and self-fulfillment. McGregor argued that self-fulfillment is crucial for the unfolding of the individual workers' creative potentials, but that most (industrial) organizations – operating according to 'Theory X' - ignored this fact by treating workers as if they were by nature indolent, unambitious and resistant to change. In order to maximize the utilization of their employees' capacities, organizations should operate according to 'Theory Y', which argues that man is basically in need of self-fulfillment and that this can best take place through job-enlargement, participative leadership and decentralization of organizational power (Rose 1975: 188-189).

In his book *Motivation and Productivity*, Saul Gellerman (1963) argued that productivity at work depends importantly on the workers' motivation which, in turn, is shaped by psychological forces outside work (such as childhood experiences) and the environment at the workplace. Motivations are characterized, Gellerman argues, by being dynamic in that the individual's motives will usually change during his lifetime as the result either of their satisfaction or their repression. They may also be masked or substituted by other motivations. Gellerman thus mentions the example of 'excessive wage demands' as a substitute for the 'root of his problems', namely the lacking self-respect caused by low levels of influence on and responsibility for the production process that he forms part of (ibid. 179-181). Management must thus take up the difficult, albeit not impossible, task of re-examining and reforming organization and supervisory methods and take up the 'practical ways of releasing the energy and creativity that now seem to be suppressed in many apparently apathetic employees. It lies in learning to prevent work from preventing people from being themselves' (ibid. 293). In short, only when the workers get the opportunity to realize and find themselves in work will their full creative potentials be released to the benefit of company profit.

In sum, with regard to problematization and ethos, Organizational Psychology remains very close to the Mayoite Human Relations studies in that the former seeks to provide company management with recommendations with regard to labour management that may avoid industrial conflict and spur on productivity. In terms of analytical strategy, both approaches advocate the use of interviews and participant observation – to which Organizational Psychology adds various job satisfaction and personality tests. A major difference, however, lies with their respective ways of objectifying the workers. Whereas Mayoite Human Relations essentially viewed the worker as



in need of social belonging, Organization Psychology – under due influence of Maslow's needs theory – views the worker as in need of self-fulfillment. Consequently, while both approaches advocated labour participation as a means of improving productivity, they did so for somewhat different reasons.

***Human Resource Management: the entrepreneurial/responsible self***

The emergence of neo-liberal political rationalities in the Western countries during the 1980s, which gained particular momentum in the US and the UK, have been associated with a conception of the citizen in terms of entrepreneurship. Thus, the problems of the welfare state that emerged during the 1970s, such as the slump in economic growth, decline of international competitiveness and increasing unemployment, have been interpreted by these political rationalities as being caused above all by excessive dependency on public welfare supplies making way for a dependency culture. This has implied – the liberalist story goes - that citizens have lost their sense of initiative and capacity to conduct an active and innovative lifestyle, and the disintegration of community and family ties in favour of state interventions (cf. Rose 1996). The answer to this problem was above all to be found in the wakening of the entrepreneurial spirit of the citizen who was to become responsible for his own well-being.

In the sphere of production, this conception of the entrepreneurial self was related to the emergence of a body of literature focusing on the delegation of responsibility from management to the workers for productivity, product quality and customer service. The early 1980s thus witnessed a virtual explosion of company excellence literature initially focusing on the actions of management, rather than that of shop-floor employees (e.g. Peters and Waterman 1982). It explained how managers were to promote productivity by thinking of the employees not just as factors of production, but as a source of innovation and quality assurance. Subsequently, the management literature – of which Human Resource Management is but one, though perhaps the most central (e.g. Tichy et al. 1982; Poole 1999) - broadens its focus to include the managing the entire personnel of an organization, including the employee at the shop-floor. Although many academics are sceptical about the newness of HRM as compared to so-called traditional personnel policies (Armstrong 1987). Others argue that HRM is distinguished by its focus on development of the 'management team' (Foulkes 1986); its vesting in line management as business managers responsible for directing all resources in the organization towards enhanced profitability (Storey 1987); and its emphasis on managing the organisation's 'culture' so as to create the employee commitment necessary to ensure the realization of company goals (Legge 1999: 222).

Largely in line with organizational psychology, HRM emphasizes the necessity of designing the workplace in a manner that promotes the individual's commitment to management objectives by allowing him to unfold his creative and innovative potentials (cf. du Gay 1996). The rationale inscribed in the HRM literature from the 1980s/90s however distinguishes itself from 1930s Mayoite Human Relations and 1960s Organizational Psychology by pointing to the delegation of responsibilities to the worker and to the workers' continual development of personal competence as absolutely crucial for company competitiveness. Accordingly, a whole array of techniques are proposed, though usually unevenly implemented - such as psychological testing and screening of employees, individual career development planning, team-building courses, allocation of stocks and options to company staff – in the quest for ensuring company excellence.

In other words, management must ensure not only that the worker is enabled to unfold his creative and innovative potentials – as suggested by Organizational Psychology - but also that the worker is instilled with a strong sense of responsibility for the satisfactory performance of the company. In short, this literature is building on an understanding of subjectivity as characterized as an active and entrepreneurial individual who not only seeks to realize his creative capacities at

work, but who holds the potential of developing a strong sense of responsibility for and commitment to the company's mission.

### ***Evaluation***

From the point of view of sociological theory, the psychological based studies hold a number of limitations. First of all, due to their essentially methodological individualism they all suffer from an under-theoretization of wider social practices, i.e. political and economic processes outside the workplace. While the majority of studies reviewed above recognize the influence of social interactions with various social groups as important for the formation of the self, they fail to provide an analytical framework capable of addressing the ways in which societal (economic, political and social) relations construes the individual. Thus, social relations outside the workplace are included only in a general and abstract way as a background parameter.

Second, the social psychological approaches described above are adopting a rather uncritical and management-biased point of departure (cf. Rose 1975: 193). Similarly, the question of power is systematically downplayed in favour of a search for a set of principles that may facilitate management objectives by optimizing the psycho-social conditions of the production process. Consequently, they have often been criticized by Marxist inspired sociologists of being crude ideological writings serving the interests of management and/or the capitalist class. The strength and sustained influence of particular the Human Relations and Organizational Psychology approaches on management practices – despite their often appallingly low level of epistemological consistency - must no doubt be linked to the way they seek to resolve industrial conflict and optimize productivity without restructuring the social relations of work. On the other hand, important effects are overlooked, if these approaches are viewed merely as ideological schemes. As argued by Miller and Rose (1988; 1995), the reform programs these studies gave rise to have had a crucial impact on contemporary modes of thinking and acting in relation to work.

Third, all the social psychological approaches are characterized by a remarkable lack of historicity. Thus, none of the approaches provide a framework for analyzing how the categories enabling the framing of workers' identities in terms of psychological 'needs' came into being, and what the practical effects of these are for the constitution of subjectivity. It is due to this inability to expose the historical contingency and particularity of these norms, that the social psychological approaches tend to naturalize and, in effect, make them susceptible to unquestioned management intervention. The critical potential of the social psychological approaches is therefore, from a post-structuralist perspective, overtly limited.

Fourth and finally, all of the above mentioned studies conceive the subject in terms of an individual whose actions are solely guided by conscious thought, i.e. the subject is seen as ego only. For example, the theories depicting the individual as driven by certain needs are ultimately viewing the subject as a whole, conscious, self-contained ego (Fink 1995: 36, 91). In other words, they are resorting to the Cartesian conception of the unitary, conscious subject. From the point of view of post-structuralism in general, and Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular, this conception is utterly untenable. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the ego is an object founded on an imaginary relation that is ultimately founded in the symbolic order. The latter is in turn working through unconscious processes to which the subject has no immediate access, except in glimpses, such as dreams and slips of tongue (cf. Fink 1995). In short, what constitutes the subject and provides it with a sense of agency is, according to Lacanian psychoanalysis, not the conscious ego but the unconscious (see more detailed argument in section 4 below).

## 2 Social (inter) actionism

### *Introduction*

This section deals with two major approaches, namely Symbolic interactionism (inspired by Mead and Weber), and social actionism (inspired by Weber). While both focus on how inter-subjectively generated meaning is influencing practices at work, they also differ importantly with regard to their understanding of subjectivity and their analytical strategy.

A number of work studies emerged from the late 1950s that focused on the subjective meaning attached to work. Under due influence of the ideas of the phenomenological actionism formulated by George Herbert Mead, they emphasize the subjective production of meaning through a process of interaction between human beings. Mead argued that the self-concept arises in social interaction as an outgrowth of the individual's concern about how others react to him. By taking the role of the other (the social group) and assume their values and attitudes toward him, the individual acquires from the "generalised other" an experience of himself as a self-contained individual. Likewise, the internal regulation that guides the individual's behaviour is based on the internalization of the attitudes of the social group. Language is the most important element in this process of identity-formation, because it is through language that people internalize the attitudes of the other. Thus, even introspective thinking, which takes place in the form of an internal conversation with our own self, is mediated by social language and meanings (cf. Burkitt 1991: 36-42). However, while the emphasis on meaning is retained by most interactionists doing labour studies, the implications of language in structuring the social self is largely neglected. It has been up to French post-structuralism to deal with this issue in depth, cf. Section 4.

Max Weber's analysis of the particular nature of rationality in Western societies inspired several labour studies during the 1960s. It may be recollected that the vocational ethics as fostered by Protestantism in general and Calvinism in particular, was seen by Weber as a precondition for the unleashing of the productive forces of capitalism.<sup>2</sup> The protestant ethic had important albeit different implications for both the industrial worker and the modern bureaucrat. The installment of discipline in the modern economic organization, such as Taylor's principles of scientific management, adopted in large scale production sites in the industrialized countries from the beginning of the 20th century was preconditioned, Weber argued, by the protestant ethics of hard work (Weber 1978: 1155-1156). In a capitalist economy, the most important motivation for the formally free industrial worker to perform his duties are 'the opportunities for high piece-rate earnings and the danger of dismissal' (Weber 1978: 151). In other words, the industrial worker holds above all an instrumental orientation towards work, which is seen as a means to maintain economic survival.

The orientation of the bureaucratic official towards his work is shaped not so much by instrumental attitude (work as a means of economic survival) as by a specific vocational ethic. Thus, Weber sees the bureaucratic office-holding as a vocation requiring a prescribed course of training. It is further characterized by the bureaucrat enjoying a distinct social esteem as compared with the governed; a social position secured by prescribed rules of rank order; appointment by a superior authority; and normally, a tenure for life is presupposed to ensure independence of shifting political powers (Weber 1978: 956-963). The individual official of the state bureaucracy may and is indeed supposed to question plans and orders that seem incomprehensible or morally dubious. But once his superiors have acknowledged and established the objects of action, the bureaucrat are supposed to be completely dedicated to implement these political objectives. Consequently, the bureaucrat cannot evade the apparatus in which he is harnessed, but is 'chained to his activity by his entire material and ideal existence. In the great

majority of cases, he is only a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march' (Weber 1978: 988).

***Symbolic interactionism: identity through interaction with the other***

Everett Hughes wrote some of the most influential interactionist studies of work. His concern was with the ways individuals struggle to find an identity in the world of work, which he assumed was 'one of the more important parts of his social identity' (Hughes 1958: 43). In the books, *Men and Their Work* and *The Sociological Eye*, Hughes (1958; 1984 [1971]) focuses on the social drama of work, the interaction which takes place at work, and seeks to 'understand the social-psychological arrangements and devices by which men make their work tolerable, or even glorious to themselves and others' (Hughes 1958: 48). However, rather than attuning the study of self at work according to the 'normal' categorization of occupations (skilled, unskilled, professional etc.), Hughes advocated the study of the processual 'career' of individuals, which is 'the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions and the things which happen to him' (Hughes 1958: 63).

Under due inspiration of Weber's writings on subjective orientations based on general types of vocational ethics, Hughes believed that a focus on career would reveal commonalities of subjectively, meaningful action across various occupations and would provide insight into the "'working constitution" of society' (Hughes 1958: 67; see also Hughes 1984: 140). As noted by du Gay, Hughes' preoccupation is not with that of differences and inequalities – with regard to for example power relations and economic income, but rather with that of the similarities of the symbolic processes involved in groups at work in the creation of identity and meaning (cf. du Gay 1996: 33).

The focus on the self-formation of 'lowly occupations', 'deviant' and 'pathological' individuals is a characteristic research method found in many interactionist studies. Thus, a number of Hughes' disciples went to study janitors, junk men, boxers etc. In his study of the processes by which individuals come to be seen as deviants or 'outsiders', which was first published in 1963, Howard S. Becker (1991) – one of Hughes' most prominent academic heirs - argued that deviance is not an intrinsic quality present in some types of behaviour that can be objectified in relation to some statistical, medical or socio-functional standard. Rather, it is 'the product of a process which involves responses of other people to the behavior' (Becker 1991: 14). Deviance should thus be seen as an interactive process of 'labelling' taking place between the person who is judged as outsider and those who undertake the judgement. Deviance is thus conceptualized in cultural relative terms in relation to shifting, socially constructed rules. In a study of marijuana users, Becker squarely rejects the psychological explanation that certain individual propensities and motives lead to marijuana smoking (deviant behavior). Rather, if certain individuals take up a 'deviant career', such as marijuana smoking, it is through learning and systematizing of such practices that the individual becomes motivated for these (Becker 1991: 42).

From Hughes, Becker also adopts the notion of 'status' to study how the labelling of certain persons, as 'doctor', 'negro', 'criminal' etc. tend to structure not only the way that others deal with these persons, but also how these persons tend to conceive of and act on their selves (Becker 1991: 32-34). Becker notes how each individual are equipped with several statuses of which certain ('master') statuses, such as criminal, tend to override other ('subordinate') statuses, such as occupation. If many people who have once committed a deviant act continue to do so, it is often because they are treated by others not as conventional people but as deviants. For example, the marijuana smoker is seen to be 'weak-willed' and unfit to take on a job. Consequently, he will be forced into criminal activities (ibid. 34-35). In short, while the labelling of individuals – according to shifting, socially constructed norms - do not determine their behaviour, it certainly influences and seek to structure it.

One of the most famous interactionist studies, which was setting a standard for the approach, was Goffman's (1968) study of 'total institutions' conducted in the late 1950s. Goffman's work, like Becker's, is one of the rare interactionist studies dealing with power relations in relation to self-formation. Goffman (1968) studied the inmates of 'total institutions' (mental hospitals, prisons, monasteries and barracks) in order to see how the patient's self-concept was modified by their experience within the institution. He argued that total institutions have a vast potential for molding the inmates' self in a way that would not have been possible with ordinary individuals who are free to leave their work. The inmates' former self-concept is systematically broken down by being stripped of their name (and instead provided with a number), their personal belongings (such as clothing which is substituted by a uniform), subjected to forced change of physical appearance (haircut) and various forms of humiliation (confinement, poor diet, and withdrawal of small privileges). From this stage, they are supposed to be born a new in the sense of creating a new self that conforms with the normative standards dictated by the institution – and society at large (Haralambos and Holborn 1991: 442).

Despite the sustained attempt to mortify and change the self in total institutions, Goffman claims that for most inmates a radical and permanent change of self does not occur, partly because of the various modes of resistance adopted by the inmates. Instead, Goffman concludes that 'Many total institutions, most of the time, seem to function merely as storage dumps for inmates' (Goffman cited in Haralambos and Holborn 1991: 443). By implication, Goffman assumes that the social world outside the institution is more often than not more important for self-formation than the practices inside the institution. However, apart from the general formula that the individual's self is formed through the interaction with others, Goffman did not theorize the extra-institutional processes at work in industrialized (capitalist) society and in what ways they relate to the 'total institutions'. Consequently, the social norms or 'official expectations' which are sought imposed upon and shaping the 'moral career' of the inmates in the total institutions are rendered into external forces that are difficult to render intelligible (Goffman 1961: Essay II).

In sum, the interactionist perspective in many ways differs importantly from the social psychological approaches. First of all, the problematization and ethos lies not with the quest on improving management and company productivity, but rather with the attempt to obtain inter-subjective understanding of the role of social and symbolic relations at work. The worker moreover is conceptualized neither in terms of psychological propensities nor as guided by certain social needs, but rather as someone who is constituting himself / his life 'career' through a series of social and symbolic interactions with other subjects.

On the other hand, the interactionists, like social psychologist do not question the social order which is largely taken as a given fact – an unexplicated Other. Instead, interactionists move directly to the analysis of individual actions that are viewed in terms of a 'career' guided by a conscious ego embedded in social interactions. And this regardless of whether these actions are taking place under 'normal' free conditions, such as an ordinary workplace, or under extreme coercive institutional conditions, such as the prison. In terms of analytical strategy, the interactionists resort almost exclusively to long-term and detailed participant observation in order to obtain inter-subjective understanding of the meaning attributed to individual to their social world. In this respect, the interactionist approach is closely affiliated with the discipline of field anthropology.

### ***Weberian inspired studies: instrumental rationality embedded in subjective meaning***

In the late 1950s, several works emerged which sought to incorporate Weber's emphasis on inter-subjective understanding (*Verstehen*) and the particular Western (instrumental) orientation towards work. For example, in *Automobile Workers and the American Dream*, a study of the apparent contradictions between the harsh realities of the automobile workers' situation and the

American success ideology, Chinoy (1955) argued that the workers did not only or primarily seek to intrinsic meaning or value in their work, but also derived these from family, friends and their experiences from the community and the wider society (Rose 1975: 229). The individual worker's adoption of specific aspirations and orientations towards work follows his/her life cycle: in early life promotion and upgrading of work is important, while ensuring security means more later in life. Their redefinition of success criteria is the result of a negotiated version of the dominant value system of society. It is thus the social norms and expectations outside the workplace, which are guiding the workers orientations, rather than the norms and practices at work – as argued by the Mayoite human relationists.

One work in particular has made the notion of 'orientation' towards work a topic of intense sociological debate, namely the study of 'affluent workers' in Luton conducted by Goldthorpe and Lockwood *et al.* (1968). They questioned the importance given to technology – by for example Blauner (1964) - in shaping workers' attitudes and behaviour. Instead, they adopted a social action perspective emphasizing 'the actors own definitions of the situations'. Thus, the workers attitude to work and their behaviour at work is based on the subjective definitions and meanings they give to their work, rather than on the objective characteristics of the technological system. Goldthorpe, Lockwood *et al.* thereby implicitly assumes that the workers' attitudes are basically founded outside and independently of their work.

Inspired by Weber's theoretical notion of *beruf* and his methodological device of ideal-types, Goldthorpe, Lockwood *et al.* (1968) argued that industrial workers' orientations or attitudes towards work could be analyzed according to three ideal-types. Instrumental (work is seen as a means to obtain money in order to realize ends external to work); bureaucratic (work is seen both as a career opportunity and as a moral obligation to conduct one's work duties faithfully), and solidaristic (work is seen not only as a means to obtain money, but also as a socially meaningful group activity involving a certain level of identification with the company and the products which are made). While an element of instrumental orientation towards work – viewing work as a means to another end – is found in all professions, other orientations may play an important role too depending on the type of work (*ibid.* 38-41).

Goldthorpe and Lockwood explicitly reject the normative approaches based on psychology (such as Mayoite Human Relations) and philosophy (such as Marxist alienation theories) which conceive of the individual as one with intrinsic needs for work in order to realize self-fulfillment. Thus, in contrast to the arguments of Maslow and Organizational Psychology, Goldthorpe, Lockwood *et al.* found no correlation between a predominantly instrumental orientation towards work and increasing dissatisfaction among workers over their job situation (*ibid.* 178). The Marxist alienation thesis – in both its subjectivist and objectivist versions – was rejected. If workers are preoccupied with consumerist lifestyles and demonstrate an instrumental orientation toward their work, this should be seen not as a sign of alienation based on capitalist relations of production, but rather as a subjectively meaningful decision based on socio-cultural structural conditions characterizing modern society (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1969: 179).<sup>3</sup>

Goldthorpe and Lockwood thus opted for an action frame of reference in 'which actors' own definitions of the situations in which they are engaged are taken as initial basis for the explanation of their social behaviour and relationships (Goldthorpe, Lockwood *et al.* 1968: 184). Thus, the action frame of reference:

would direct attention systematically to the *variety of meanings* which work may have come to have for industrial employees. And this in turn would then compel recognition of the fact that in modern society the members of the industrial labour force form a highly differentiated collectivity – in terms, for example, of the positions and roles they occupy in their non-

working lives, in their subcultural characteristics, and in the pattern of their life histories and objectives for the future (Goldthorpe, Lockwood *et al.* 1968: 184).

For Goldthorpe and Lockwood then worker behaviour could be explained neither due to some intrinsic need for work, nor due to the effects of technological organization of work. Rather, the key explanation rests with extra-industrial (non-work related) social and cultural value-systems. Thus, workers arrived to their work with a largely pre-set orientation to their work. For the vast majority of workers, this orientation was predominantly instrumental: work was seen as a necessary evil to furnish a good life outside work.

In sum, *The Affluent Worker* assumes that there exist identifiable relations between orientations to work and socio-cultural structures in the workers' immediate (non-work related) social environment. Thus, types of orientation towards work can largely be derived from various – quite vaguely defined - socio-cultural structural factors, such as position on the life and family cycles, the character of the community, social mobility etc. (Rose 1975: 238). Consequently, rather than overcoming the objectivism and structural determinism found in Marxist inspired labour process studies, Goldthorpe and Lockwood end up attributing orientations to work, and hence identity, as the product of socio-cultural structures (cf. du Gay 1996: 26). Moreover, by not pointing out the historical specificity of the posited ideal-types of work orientation, *The Affluent Worker* is neglecting Weber's detailed account of the ways in which instrumental rationality came to be dominating in Western societies.

### ***Evaluation***

With regard to the work studies inspired by Mead's social interactionism, du Gay has argued, in my view convincingly, that 'a unitary social domain is posited – the 'generalized other' – within which the individual subject is unproblematically located' (du Gay 1996: 34). Thus, despite the fact that most authors within this approach attribute a crucial importance of general social practices and structures – such as language, the child's education, the modern nuclear family etc. – they address these only at a contextual level, i.e. as an external object impinging in a rather vague manner on their object of study. In other words, the interactionist approach does not take wider social practices as the explicit focus of analysis and theoretization.

Second, interactionists' tackling of power is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, some – most? – writers tend to neglect the issue. Hughes's focus on similarities between occupations and work experience in the forms of symbolic interaction, for example, systematically downplays the differences in power relations and patterns of economic inequality (cf. du Gay 1996: 33). On the other hand, writers like Goffman and to some extent Becker are acutely aware of the influence of power relations embedded in institutions and social rules which, in turn, serve to structure individual self-conception and behaviour. From a sociological perspective, however, the problem with the latter accounts is that they take the social order for given and do not provide any theoretical framework that may explain how wider societal structures or processes are shaping the functioning of 'total institutions' (Goffman) or the social norms of deviant groups (Becker). From a post-structuralist (genealogical) perspective, the problem lies less with providing a theory of the functioning of power in society than with a lack of an analytical grid for the understanding of the extent to which those power relations seeking to shape the self-formation and behaviour of those dubbed as 'deviant' or 'pathological' are in fact equal to those seeking to shape those who are dubbed normal. Rather than seeing power only as something that enables certain normal groups to force their will upon the deviants, it may be more fruitful to examine the knowledges and techniques that enabled power to work through normalization. Finally, a genealogical approach would try to capture not only the negative, repressive effects of power, but also – in particular – the productive effects, i.e. the ways in which the constitute individuals with a capacity to act in relation, *inter alia*, to norms of appropriate behavior.

Goldthorpe and Lockwood's Weberian inspired study suffers - from the point of view of social psychological theories - from an under-theoretization of the subject. While they do attribute subjective meaning an important role in informing and structuring actions, they argue that these are essentially based not on interactions or practices at work, but on external socio-cultural relations, such as the family structure. Consequently, the workers' 'orientations' towards work are understood neither as innate needs or psychological structures, nor due to social practices at work, but as something that can be read off from external socio-cultural structures.

Finally, both approaches are characterized by a remarkable lack of historicity. In the case of interactionism, which in my view is doing most to theorize changes in identity, temporality remains bound to individual life-stories or 'personal change'. The explanation of changes in individual identity is in this approach bound not to historical shifts in modes of government, social structures, or cultural value systems, but is rather located in the particular experiences that the individual encounters through his chosen 'career'. For example, Becker (1977) introduces the notion of 'situational adjustment' to explain how the person throughout his 'personal career' exercises a role-play and thereby 'turns himself into the kind of person the situation demands' (ibid. 279). With regard to Goldthorpe and Lockwood, it was shown above that they simply fail to address the historical specificity and dynamics of the analyzed work orientations. In fact their approach is actually weaker than Marxist based theories, because it does not develop any explicit theoretical framework for understanding the changing relations between the (non-work related) socio-cultural structures and identity.

In short, none of the approaches provide a framework for analyzing how the norms according to which the interactionist individual 'commits' himself to a career or adopt a certain 'orientation' towards work, came into being. Consequently, both approaches are unable to expose the historical contingency and particularity of these norms and are therefore, in effect, tending to naturalize these. Their critical potential is therefore, from a post-structuralist perspective, rather limited.



### 3 Marxist inspired approaches

#### ***Introduction***

This section deals with Marxist inspired work studies taking their point of departure, more or less explicitly, in Marx' anthropology of work and the notion of alienation found in his early writings. Most of the Marxist inspired labour studies presented here have substantially modified the assumptions made by Marx, such as the conception of alienation as based on objective, class structures, they all work within the framework sketched out by the notion of alienation as intrinsically related to work.

While this is not the place to expand in detail on Marx' writings on these issues, the main propositions may be worth repeating. Man, for Marx, was essentially a Homo Faber in that Man realizes his creative potentials and thereby himself in work: 'The animal *is its life activity*. Man makes his life activity itself into an object of will and consciousness' (Marx 1994: 63, italics in original). The energy and skill invested in the object produced by man is thus the very essence of the person who created it. Consequently, in the natural order of things - that is, in primitive communism - the producer and the thing he produces are one of a kind: 'In the treatment of the objective world, therefore, man proves himself to be genuinely a *species-being*. This production is his active species-life' (ibid. 64, italics in original).

Under capitalist industrialization, however, three developments fundamentally disrupt this arrangement. The first is the institution of private property. Both the means of production and the products are owned not by the producer (the worker), but by the capitalist. Consequently, the worker is separated in legal terms from work. Secondly, capitalism spurs on an increasingly complex division of labour. The consequence of breaking up a task into minute segments is that the workers play an increasingly reduced role and they apply but a fraction of their skill and knowledge. Thirdly, human labour becomes a commodity like all other commodities. This is so because workers in capitalist economy do not ordinarily manufacture things for their own consumption, nor for the joy of it, but for money. Their capabilities – their very selves, in fact – are sold at market prices according to exactly the same principles as that of other commodities. Consequently, the worker becomes a commodity, a thing, the value of which is measured solely in the coin used to purchase his labour power.

Ultimately man, according to Marx, is alienated from himself: 'Alienated labor hence turns the *species-existence of man*, and also nature as his mental species-capacity, into an existence *alien* to him' (ibid. 64).

This is so because all the human/creative elements are extracted from his work by separating him not only from other workers contributing to the production process, but also from the product which is the results of the efforts of the labour of him and other workers, and from his own labour as this is forced upon him due to the fact that he does not own the means of production, and due to the need for economic survival.

In the following, four Marxist inspired studies on the relations subjectivity and work will be discussed, namely Robert Blauner's ideas on subjective alienation, Herbert Marcuse's notion of alienation linked to false needs, Harry Braverman's objective alienation linked to deskilling, and André Gorz' ideas of human emancipation outside work.

#### ***Robert Blauner: subjective alienation caused by technology***

In his famous study *Alienation and Freedom* first published in 1964, Robert Blauner (1967) examines under what conditions the alienating tendencies of modern factory technology and work

organization are intensified / minimized respectively. He did this by examining the behaviour and attitudes of manual workers in various industrial branches in the US.

Blauner rejected the Marxist thesis, which argue that workers in capitalist societies are automatically alienated because of their objective class position in the relations of production. Instead, he viewed alienation as a 'general syndrome made up of different objective conditions and subjective feeling-states which emerge from certain relationships between workers and socio-technical settings of employment' (ibid. 15). Thus, alienation is caused not by the specific social relations of production under capitalism, but solely by the mass production technology found in all industrial systems. Alienation is made up by four dimensions reflecting 'different splits in the organic relationship between man and his existential experience' (ibid. 33). These are powerlessness (when the worker is reduced to an object of control), meaninglessness (when the worker cannot relate his acts at work to a broader life-program), social isolation (when the worker has lost the feeling of belonging to a society or social order), and self-estrangement (when activity becomes a means to an end, rather than an end in itself) (ibid. 16-32).

The more the technological organization of the workplace are characterized by conditions where the worker becomes powerless, where he is reduced to a cog in the machine, and is isolated from a community, the more likely the worker will feel alienated. Consequently, any significant changes in levels of workers alienation will require a change in the technological system applied. This implies first of all that key large-scale production elements, such as the assembly line and the conveyor belt, are avoided as far as possible in favour of other technological systems allowing more worker control in the production process (ibid. 184-185). Because of his technology-based conception of alienation, Blauner is able to pose a reformist vision of the abolition / reduction of alienation. More precisely, he envisaged the level of alienation in industrial societies taking the following course: a primarily non-alienating craft-based work is replaced by alienating machine-attending mass-production, which in turn is increasingly being taken over by less-alienating automated industry where most of the monotonous and mechanical activities are replaced by machines.

### ***Herbert Marcuse: false consciousness***

In *One Dimensional Man* first published in 1964, Herbert Marcuse (1991) argues that the rise of technological world in advanced industrialized societies has led to the control of its subjects. In this technological world, the metaphysics postulating an active subject confronting a controllable world of objects is replaced by a one-dimensional technological world where pure instrumentality and efficacy of arranging means and ends within a pre-established universe is the common principle of thought and action.

Accordingly, the potential for personal development is undermined in advanced industrial society, where work is 'exhausting, stupefying, inhuman slavery' (Marcuse 1991: 25). Thus, the standardization and routinization, though admittedly reducing the physical toil of labour, have detrimental intellectual / mental effects by turning the labour into a mere instrument, a thing, of the production system (ibid. 33). On the other hand, leisure simply involves 'modes of relaxation which soothe and prolong this stupefaction' (Marcuse 1991: 7). It is based on and directed by 'false needs', which are by and large imposed by a mass media controlled by the establishment. False needs, according to Marcuse, are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests and which do not result in true self-fulfillment and real satisfaction (ibid. 5). People no longer seek fulfillment in themselves and in their relationships with others. Instead, 'The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment' (ibid. 9). The result is that industrial man is increasingly alienated both inside and outside work in the sense of identifying themselves with the existence imposed upon them through the media and superfluous products. Thus,

emerges 'a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behaviour in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives .. are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe [of technological society]' (ibid. 12).

In sum, Marcuse is launching a totalizing critique of what is taken to be the unique instrumental rationality as articulated through the capitalist system of production and consumption. The only logical conclusion to draw from this is the whole-sale transformation or eradication of capitalism in order to rid ourselves of the commodification of social relations and hence the impoverishment and distortion of subjectivity.

### ***Harry Braverman: objective alienation***

In his book *Labour and Monopoly Capitalism, The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Braverman (1974) argued that capitalist industrialization has led to the radical degradation of work in two ways, namely through the deskilling of labour and the intensification of management control. The division of manufacturing labour into ever more repetitive and delimited sub-processes in order to reduce labour costs has caused the skills of craftsmen to become increasingly obsolete. Instead, unskilled workers can be increasingly be utilized to carry out the individual sub-processes necessary to make a whole product.

Concurrently with the deskilling process, capitalist production has witnessed a significant increase in management control. The spread of Taylor's principles of scientific management was, according to Braverman, particularly devastating to labour influence on the production process. By collecting the craft-knowledge of skilled workers, taking away from them the 'brain work', and planning in detail the workers actions, the management effectively achieved control over the workforce.

Although Braverman's work offers very limited space for an explicit theoretization of the relationship between the subject and work, it is rather clear that he adopts a number of the assumptions in Marx' anthropology of labour. For example, it is argued that 'Labor that transcends mere instinctual activity is thus the force which created humankind and the force by which humankind created the world' (Braverman 1974: 50). He thus concurs with Marx' *Homo Faber* doxa expressed in *Capital*, namely that by 'acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature' (Marx n.d.: 173, cited in Braverman 1974: 49).

Consequently, Braverman also adopts the romantic stance that condemns machinery, because it is used not for the purposes of 'humanity' but for those seeking control (Braverman 1974: 193). Due to the separation between the ownership of the means of production and those who actually operate these means, advanced machinery becomes for the working population not a source of freedom, but one of 'enslavement', 'helplessness', and 'confinement of the worker within a blind round of servile duties' (ibid. 194).

### ***André Gorz: liberation outside paid work***

In his book *Farewell to the Working Class*, Gorz (1982) argues that most people do not want or need to realize themselves through work. Although Gorz concurs with the Marxist idea that people are essentially active beings, who can find fulfillment only through the exercise of their creative power, he asserts - in contrast to Marx and Marcuse - that emancipatory and creative rationalities can be found only outside work. Wage labour, according to Gorz, is opposed to freedom: 'For both wage earners and employers, work is only a means of earning money and not an activity that is an end in itself. Therefore work is not freedom. Of course in any sort of work, even on an assembly-line, a minimum of freely given commitment is essential. Without it, everything grinds to a halt. But this necessary minimum of freedom is, at the same time, negated

and repressed by the organization of work itself' (Gorz 1982: 2). Paid work is alienating not only due to the particular relations of production found in capitalism, but due to the nature of industrial production in general, such as extreme division of labour, centralized control of the production process and constant pressure for increasing productivity (Gorz 1982: 9).

Hence, what is needed is a 'liberation from work' – a reduction of the working day to an absolute minimum ensuring physical subsistence and an extension of leisure time. Accordingly, the labour union demand for 'the right to work' is squarely reactionary and can only serve to maintain repression of our freedom, which can only be exercised outside wage labour, namely through the creative activities that people freely choose to undertake. Thus, while paid labour, according to Gorz, is alienating and repressive, freely decided work activities are emancipating in that man can realize himself freely in these.

In short, while Gorz' does not formulate an explicit theory of the relations between subjectivity and work, he clearly inherits key Marxist understandings, notably his anthropology of labour. Even if Marx' vision that paid work through the working class' appropriation of the means of production can be transformed into a form whereby man can realize himself is rejected, Gorz retains the assumption that man realizes himself through his creative activities in the sense of freely chosen work activities. This is why Gorz concurs with Marx' argument that paid labour is alienated in capitalist production, though Gorz extends this argument to industrial societies in general. In essence, while the liberating potential of the working class is rejected, Homo Faber is retained as the model for the understanding of the constitution of modern subjectivity and the exercise of freedom.

### ***Evaluation***

The strength of the Marxist inspired labour analyses lies, in my view, with their critical account of the various repressive mechanisms functioning at the workplace in modern, industrialized societies. Moreover, they provide a sophisticated and relatively consistent account of the dynamics of wider social relations and the ways in which they allegedly influence subjectivity.

This being said, the Marxist approaches suffer from several drawbacks, at least seen from the point of view of the other approaches reviewed in this paper. Thus, from the point of view of both social psychological and post-structuralist approaches, Marxist inspired studies suffer from an inadequate understanding of the subject. David Knights has argued, in my view convincingly, that Braverman together with the bulk of labour process theorists have failed to confront the question of the subject and its relation to work (Knights 1990). Most often subjectivity is conceived as human creativity and autonomy unfolding under more or less deterministic (and objective) structures located in the economic infrastructure (ibid. 308). While some of the Marxist inspired works (such as Blauner) do attribute subjective meaning an important role in informing and structuring actions, they tend simply see these as the product of material conditions, such as technology.

Second, the Marxist inspired approaches provide a totalizing critique that may not be very effective. Thus, both Braverman and Marcuse tend to envisage the wholesale commodification and reification of social relations in the context of a totally administered and commercialized society. The results of these types of analysis tend to be either total despair - and therefore the abandonment of any form of resistance - or resorting to some romanticist notion of pre-/non-modern modes of rationality and action located in various non-colonized segments of civil society. If the solution provided is wholesale revolution, the effect may instead be utter pacification, because local and limited oppositions and changes are viewed as useless 'reformist' actions. If the solution is to resort to those segments of civil society, such as various social movements or radical working class organizations, the effect may again be rather disappointing

when it is found out that the new social movements are in fact resorting to instrumental reason – or perhaps even adopt reactionary politics – or when it turns out that the labour class - guided by ‘false consciousness’ – think more about higher wages than restructuring the relations of production.

Third, both the psychological and the two sociological approaches are *unable to question their own role in creating the self*. If we accept the post-structuralist premise that the subject is produced through systems of knowledge, including the human sciences, it is no longer adequate to look for processes of subject formation as something that takes place “out there” in the workplaces or in society at large. Instead, it becomes essential to provide an analytic grid that enables us to expose the ways in which psychological and sociological expertise – seen both as systems of knowledge and institutional practices – are contributing to the making of the subject.

## 4 Poststructuralist approaches

### *Introduction*

This section sets out to survey studies on the relations between work and subjectivity based on one or more of the following three post-structuralist approaches, namely Michel Foucault's genealogical analyses of disciplinary and governmental practices, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of meaning and signification, and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory. It should be noted first that I do not intend to give an in-depth presentation of the three post-structuralist approaches as such, but rather illuminate the theoretical background of those elements that are being dealt with in the reviewed studies of work and subjectivity. This section also discusses the limitations of Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis for the study of work and subjectivity from the point of view of Foucauldian genealogy.

### *Foucauldian inspired analyses: the subject of discipline and self-government*

A number of Foucauldian inspired studies of the relations between work and subjectivity have been conducted from the 1980s onwards (e.g. Miller and O'Leary 1993). However, a large section of these studies are restricted to the objectifying and disciplinary aspects of work (subjection), and tends to ignore the practices of self-subjectification.

For example, in her book *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*, Aihwa Ong (1987) meticulously documents the radical changes of the subjectivity of young rural Malay women who in great number entered industrial life during the 1970s. She shows how in workplaces dominated by strict disciplining of the organization of production, phenomena such as spirit possessions and various everyday forms of resistance - against both factory and family regimes - became an integral part of female subjectivity in this period. Notwithstanding the richness of this analysis, it remains at the level of objectification taking place through disciplinary practices and the resistance to these. It does not analyze those practices - if such exist - by which the female workers are trying to constitute themselves as subjects.

Townley (1993) argues that human resource management practices should be seen as 'mechanisms of registration, assessment and classification' and that they constitute 'a body of knowledge [which] operates to objectify those on whom it is applied' (ibid. 541). The effect of this, according to Townley, is to create 'an industrial subject who is analyzable and describable' (ibid. 541). In her book *Reframing Human Resource Management*, Townley (1994) does devote attention to the practices at work seeking to constitute the individual not only as an object, but also as a subject with the capacity to act through, for example, confessional technologies (ibid. chap. 5). However, Townley fails to account for the reasons why the individual should want to join these games of subjectivity when the overall goals of these essentially is to further company profit. What is missing in Townley's otherwise highly meticulous and interesting account of practices of subjectivity at the workplace is how these link up to the individual's exercise of pleasure and freedom. In short, Townley does not address the ethical practices that the individual exercises on himself and thereby constitutes himself as a free subject.

Likewise, McArdle *et al.* 1995 in their study of Total Quality Management (TQM) in a British electronic company argues that the introduction of TQM techniques aiming to improve product quality and customer service by increasing the workers' participation in decision-making did not empower the workers. On the contrary, the effects were to intensify work, increase the monitoring of labour performance, and forced labour to 'indulge in their own work intensification and exploitation' (McArdle *et al.* 1995: 170).

Certain workplace scholars even tend to take Foucault's study of the disciplines in modern society as a correlate to Weber's and the Frankfurt School's idea of the totally administered society (e.g. Barker 1993). Thus, Foucault is – mistakenly – taking to claim that we are witnessing the progressive spread of increasingly more effective practices of discipline and control, thereby invoking the idea of a 'disciplined society'. However, Foucault went at great pains to stress that although the disciplinary practices have spread to a number of institutions in modern society, they are by no means the only practices by which we constitute ourselves as subjects. Moreover, the disciplinary practices, Foucault argues, regardless of the rigor with which they are sought, schemed and implemented, are failing all the time. In short, we may characterize our society as disciplinary – in the sense of an increasing importance of disciplines in making up ourselves – but certainly not as disciplined – in the sense of a society characterized by increasingly disciplined obedient and controlled citizens. In short, it seems rather odd to utilize Foucault's analytical devices to frame a totalizing critique which bears all the hallmarks of Marxist/Weberian heritage and directly counters the very ethos of Foucault's genealogical analyses.

In the afterword to the anthology *Foucault, Management and Organization Theory*, edited by Alan McKinlay and Ken Starkey (1998), the editors point to the above mentioned tendency in many Foucauldian inspired studies of work and organizations of focusing exclusively on objectifying and disciplinary practices. They propose that greater attention is turned to the exercise of desire and freedom, that is practices of the self by the self, in understanding the way that workers are increasingly being urged to and at times even freely seek to realize themselves in work.

Efforts to analyze self-subjectification (practices of the self exercised by the self) in relation to work have been undertaken by Jacques Donzelot (1981/82). In his study of work and management practices in post WWII France, he argues that from the late 1970s, the state, employers and employees alike tended to view work not as something to be overcome / transcended, but as the site for self-fulfillment. Pleasure was not primarily to take place through work, but in work. According to the new conception, the productivity of the French worker is to be maximized not by increasing discipline and a protestant work ethic, but by inducing the worker's use of his creative capacities through a wide array of new training programs and the reorganization of work. Instead of defining the individual by the work he is assigned to, it regards productive activity as the site of deployment of his personal skills (ibid. 4). Work, in short, became the privileged site for the satisfaction of socio-psychological needs of self-fulfillment.

In their study of the ways in which psychological and managerial techniques and knowledges played a constitutive role in the ways of thinking and acting on the social relations of the workplace in the UK during the 1950s/60s, Miller and Rose (1988) show how the British Tavistock research program on industrial productivity, group relations and mental health played a crucial role in furnishing a conception of production as a social rather than an economic process, and of the notion that work must be understood in terms of psychological fulfillment. The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations – under due influence of Mayoite Human Relationism - contributed to the opening up of the workplace 'to systematic analysis and intervention in the name of a psychological principle of health which was at the same time a managerial principle of efficiency' (Miller and Rose 1988: 186). Viewing work as a social process, in which the group provided the technical means through which subjectivity of the individual might be integrated into management objectives, meant that the industrial relations model of bargaining was replaced by a psychotherapeutic one of 'working through'. The problematization furnished by the Tavistock program thus contributed to a conception of industrial conflict as being based not so much on disputes over wage levels, length of breaks and vacation, but rather on complex forms of inter-group stress and lack of social integration at work (cf. Miller and Rose 1988: 186).

At a more general level, Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (1995) point out that the linking of political reform programs and academic research of work on the one hand, and identity on the other, has been a prevalent feature of the shifting modes of governing work relations in the UK and US since the early twentieth century. However, it is only from the 1960s – with the emergence of organizational psychology - that efficiency and productivity at work is sought promoted by turning work into a site of self-realization. Through a wide set of participatory techniques aiming to promote the making of the workers' creativity and responsibility, the worker is, in effect, provided with a new set of devices and knowledges for constituting him- or herself as a subject. With the emergence of concepts and practices of enterprise during the 1980s as central to neo-liberal political philosophy, the “enterprising self” emerges as the active citizen, which take charge of the activities at work. Through his commitment to his work, the entrepreneurial worker was supposed to be active in seeking to maximize productivity, assure innovation, and enhance product quality (Miller and Rose: 1995: 454).

In his book *Consumption and Identity at Work*, Paul du Gay (1996) poses two major arguments that largely concur with Miller and Rose analysis. First, it is argued that the ‘entrepreneurial self’ has become the dominating model for governing of others and self. Thus, both consumers and employees are represented as autonomous, responsible and calculating individuals, i.e. as individual who are required to be entrepreneurs of their own life. Within the discourse of excellence, which has become dominating in the UK and US from the early 1980s, work is seen as a means of self-fulfillment and as the way to company profit. Moreover, the expert discourse of excellence does not just act as a ‘relay’ between the self-steering capacities of subjects and goals of industry, it also plays a vital ‘translating role’ between the government of enterprise and the politico-ethical government in the UK and US (du Gay 1996: 65). Second, as an effect of the increasing dominance of the ‘entrepreneurial self’ as a principle for government, the distinction between two separate realms of consumption and production / work is increasingly breaking down. Thus, the changes in the modes and techniques of self-subjectification based on the model of entrepreneurship are taking place both in and outside the workplace.

In sum, it is possible to divide the Foucauldian inspired studies of the relations between work and subjectivity formation in two groups. Both groups apply a genealogical analysis of the exercise of disciplinary and governmental practices and rationalities, and the ways in which these are informed by expert knowledge. The first group is however drawing almost exclusively on Foucault’s analysis of the disciplinary and objectifying practices prevalent in modern societies. While these studies acknowledge that the subject’s capacity to act and resist is a precondition for the functioning of power relations, they systematically neglect this aspect in the actual analysis. In a few extreme cases, certain authors even venture to combine a Foucauldian analytics of discipline with the Frankfurt School’s totalizing critique of Western rationality that envisages ‘the totally administered society’. Needless to say this is directly at odds with Foucault’s understanding of power. The second group is taking the concept of governmentality as the point of departure for various analyses of the ways in which disciplinary and objectifying practices interact with practices of self-subjectification and the exercise of freedom. They argue that the exercise of freedom (self-government) cannot take place except in a field of power relations (government of others). In this way, these studies argue, it is possible to make intelligible how the exercise freedom is guided and structured according to larger political deliberations on the one hand, and how individuals actually find pleasure and well-being in these modes of exercising their freedom on the other.

### ***Derridean inspired studies: the subject as a floating signifier***

During the last two decades or so, there has been a tremendous surge in academic research on identity, which has taken as its point of departure the questioning of the Cartesian, unitary subject. Based on the thoughts of Derrida and to a minor extent on Lacan and Foucault, a whole



series of studies have emerged which basically argue that certain categories which tend to be taken for granted – such as gender and race - are in fact contingent, social constructs. Moreover, the very construction of these categories is associated with effects of power in that those who are constituted as subjects through these Western taxonomies are being sought designated to specific cultural roles and modes of behaviour.

Dorinne Kondo's *Crafting Selves* is, in my view, one of the more sophisticated studies of the struggles over 'identity' in two contemporary Japanese workplaces (Kondo 1990). Her study is characterized above all by its focus on meaning and signification. More precisely, based on Derrida's critique of Saussure's theory of the sign, Kondo rejects the representational view of language. Instead, she argues, signification and meaning is generated through discursive processes that are intrinsically unstable and only allow temporary fixation.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, the identity of the subject too is, Kondo argues, produced within discourse and as such characterized by its contingent, unstable fixation. The unitary subject – characterized by a consciousness orientating itself in a world of external sense experiences - is rejected as a specifically Western, metaphysical product. Instead, identity is made up by multifarious and possibly contradictory significations, which are open for battles and contestation. From this basis, Kondo examines how identities at two family run workplaces in contemporary Japan are fragmented and shifting with regard to not only how the individual workers are viewed by others at the workplace, but also how they view themselves. These shifting identities are the object of intense struggles and exercise of power in the sense that: 'Power can create identities on the individual level, as it provides disciplines, punishments, and culturally available pathways for fulfillment; nowhere were these forces more evident to me than in my relationships with the Japanese people I knew' (Kondo 1990: 10).

In the following I will discuss some of the limitations of Kondo's analysis seen from the point of view of Foucauldian genealogy. First, Kondo remains fixed within the schemata of identity-thinking. Although she counters the essentialist, unitary conception of the subject found in much of social science literature, she clings on to the schemata – or problematisation – of phenomenological identity thinking. Identities are not essential wholes, Kondo claims, but subject-positions within unstable and often conflict-ridden fields of meaning (Kondo 1990: 46). However, by resorting to a line of problematisation that takes its point of departure in a conception of the individual as characterized by a search for meaning and identity, Kondo is taking for granted what ought to be the starting point of inquiry, namely: How did we come to constitute ourselves as subject in desire for an identity? Through which practices and knowledges, and at what costs do we moderns seek to answer the question: Who am I? As is well sketched by Foucault not only is there nothing a-historical or universal about the practices of constituting the truth of oneself, they are also shaping our exercise of freedom in very particular ways.

Second, 'politics' and 'history' are reduced to contextual variables in that the family and the company are analyzed separately from larger programs of government. For example, practices of government, disciplinary procedures, bodies of expert knowledge informing political reforms and social norms are all reduced to a context, which somehow diffusely impinge on the object of study. Likewise, the historical emergence and institutionalization of the practices studied are included in a rather unsystematic and ad-hoc fashion so as to provide a *background horizon* for the analysis of current phenomena. By neither providing an account of the historically dated epistemologies (systems of knowledge) through which the Japanese studied are made objects amenable to political deliberations, nor of the functioning of the social norms through which they fashion and restrain themselves, nor of the political technologies through which they exercise their freedom, it becomes impossible to render intelligible the effectiveness of the practices of objectification and self-subjectification taking place in the family and at the workplace. Consequently, despite the fact that Kondo repeatedly asserts that identity formation is directly

linked to power, she does not provide an understanding of the specific power/knowledge relations that enabled certain groups ascribe to the identity imposed on them. Rather, we are provided with a rather vague and common-sensical notion of dominating group (mostly elderly and males) seeking – though not always with success and often met with countermeasures – to exercise power over a subordinated group, notably young people and females. In short, Kondo cannot render intelligible the fact that certain signifiers (such as race or gender identities) remain remarkably durable and effective despite their alleged essential fluidity.

### ***Lacanian psychoanalytical inspired studies: the subject of the Other's desire***

The utilization of Lacanian psychoanalytical theory in studies of the relations between work and subjectivity remains so far very limited. In fact, the only study I managed to identify is the above mentioned book *Consumption and Identity at Work* by Paul du Gay (1996). In this study of the subjectivity articulated in relation to both work and consumption in 1980s/90s UK, Paul du Gay's is combining a Lacanian psychoanalytical inspired theories on the functioning of discourse and ideology (as articulated by Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek) on the one hand, with a Foucauldian analysis of rationalities and practices of government on the other. In the following, I will discuss only that part of du Gay's analytical framework that is inspired by Lacanian psychoanalysis – the Foucauldian aspect being dealt with already in the preceding.

Before proceeding to du Gay's particular use of Lacan, it may first be worth outlining a few key features of Lacanian understanding of the subject. The construction of – what appears to be - a unified, conscious self (ego) occurs, according to Lacan, by a series of 'imaginary' identifications beginning in the 'mirror phase' in which the child becomes fascinated by the reflection of his own image (Lacan 1977; cf. Burkitt 1991: 88). By making itself appear as an object of its own gaze through the aid of the mirror, the child begins to recognize itself as being separate from others. This process is precipitated by the child's passing through and resolution of the Oedipus complex in which the subjectivity of the child is called out by the 'discourse of the other'. In Lacan's account, the oedipal triangle is an interplay of symbols, rather than Freud's personal model of interaction between the child, mother and father. The child's identification is with the 'name-of-the-father', which is the desire for the power that he symbolizes as head of the family, and with command of the mother's love. The child longs therefore not for his mother, but for the 'desire-of-the-mother', i.e. the child wishes to be the object of the mother's desire in the same way the father is. It is through this 'discourse of the other', a power which is working from the outside of the individual, namely in the symbolic order, that the child is gradually provided with a conscious ego that is inherently fragile and susceptible to intermittent interventions by the Other's desire (Burkitt 1991: 89).

From Žižek (1989) and Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) interpretation of Lacan, du Gay ventures to argue that identity is always contingent and is never complete. Identity is constituted only in relation to an outside (the Other – whether as language or the Other's desire), to that which it is not (du Gay 1996: 48). It is the gap between the symbolization of the self through the symbolic order and the Real and the constant tensions this lead to which makes a full ego an imaginary and an impossible constellation. On the other hand, it is exactly this tension that enables the individual to constitute himself as a subject (with subjectivity).<sup>5</sup>

The logic of lack is extended by du Gay to explain the incessant attempt of governing. Thus, it is not only the subject that remains incomplete, but 'Society [too] never fully manages to be society because everything in it is penetrated by its limits, which prevents it constituting itself as an objective reality' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 127, cited in du Gay 1996: 71). Lack of enterprise, from this psychoanalytical grid, is thus akin to a symptom, the point at which immanent social antagonisms erupts. It is the expression of the ultimate impossibility of the projects of corporate excellence and political neo-liberalism – of their 'immanent limits' (du Gay 1996: 72).

Accordingly, the most that government can hope for is to manage this lack without ever resolving it. The very impossibility of government justifies and reproduces the attempts to govern (du Gay 1996: 73).

This attempt to create an analytical framework for the study of subjectification at work by combining Lacanian psychoanalytical theory with Foucauldian genealogy is – at least from the point of view of the latter – associated with at least two fundamental problems. First, the pretension of posing an apparently universal theory on the subject is directly at odds with Foucault's point on the historically specific role of the human sciences in creating modern subjectivity. By following Lacanian inspired psychoanalytical understanding of identity and subjectivity as being constituted in relation to an immanent lack, du Gay is submitting himself to an allegedly a-historical psychoanalytical theory which, implicitly, claim validity in all modern, Western societies. Regardless of the empirical accuracy of this theory, it is nonetheless a historically dated epistemology seeking to provide an account of the allegedly universal mechanisms making up the subject. In this case it matters little that the Lacanian theory of the subject is based on negativity, i.e. on the subject as constituted by a lack and an immanent impossibility to fill this. Despite all its sophistication and nuances and its outright rejection of essentialism and conscious ego-thinking, du Gay is resorting to just another epistemological framework aiming to provide the answer to the historically dated question: What is Man? In short, rather than trying to answer the question 'Who is Man?' by resorting to psychoanalytic theory, Foucault would inquire into the knowledges and practices whereby we came to view ourselves in terms of desire, repression and enjoyment – i.e. modern sexuality.

Second, governmentality is conceived as an a-historical, psychologically conditioned quest. Lack of enterprise, from a Lacanian psychoanalytical grid, is akin to a symptom, the point at which immanent social antagonisms erupts. It is the expression of the ultimate impossibility of the projects of corporate excellence and political neo-liberalism – of their 'immanent limits' (du Gay 1996: 72). Accordingly, the most that government can hope for is to manage this lack without ever resolving it. The very impossibility of government justifies and reproduces the attempts to govern (du Gay 1996: 73). According to this theory government is, always was, and always will be incomplete due to its immanent impossibility. But if it is this impossibility that spurs on governmentality then the quest to govern should also always have existed, and always keep existing. From this perspective, government may change its forms but it essentially remains the same, namely the attempt by one group to govern others.

Governmentality is thereby reduced to a transcendental and essentially undifferentiated (Same) activity. However, as shown not only by Foucault but also by numerous political historians and philosophers, such as Quentin Skinner and James Tully, the problematizations, techniques, and knowledges informing the attempts to govern in Western Europe has undergone several radical shifts just within the last four or five centuries. Moreover, as noted by several authors - such as Nikolas Rose, Peter Miller, Jacques Donzelot, and Mitchell Dean - government has undergone a crucial mutation after WWII with the emergence of neo-liberal rationalities of government in the industrialized countries. In fact, du Gay's own analysis of the emergence of the entrepreneurial self as a model for government, is an excellent demonstration of the transformation of the rationalities and practices of government in the UK during the 1980s. Thus rather than travelling through history in an empty sameness characterized by some abstract will to govern, the notion of governmentality – conceived in terms of rationalities and practices of government – may be more adequately understood as designating a historically specific phenomenon.

### ***Evaluation***

The advantages of the post-structuralist approaches should be clear from the analysis above. Moreover, I have already discussed the limitations of Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian

psychoanalysis from the point of view of Foucauldian genealogy. In the following I will therefore focus only on the limitations of the post-structuralist approaches seen from an external point of view, notably sociology.

First, accusations of idealism are a common-place critique launched against post-structuralist analyses by sociologists. By asserting that all our actions are conditioned by and structured through discourse and by rejecting the rationalist assertion that our knowledge may become in line with an external, represented reality, post-structuralist approaches are seen to be idealistic. A rejection of this accusation cannot be developed in full depth here, but only sketched. Post-structuralist analyses basically argue that discourses should not to be taken as mental representations, but should be addressed rather as practices containing both epistemological and material aspects. Accordingly, all three approaches mentioned here devote crucial importance to the ways in which language and discourse in general are setting limits on the ways we can think and act about ourselves. Consequently, post-structuralist analyses are at the most general level examining the links between language, signs and systems of knowledge on the one hand, and the effects or conditions these pose for our thinking and acting on the other.

However, the three post-structuralist approaches differ significantly with regard to their analytic strategy for addressing material effects in the real. At the most general level, Foucault analyzes the relations between systems of knowledge and power. His genealogies are specifically targeted towards the study of material practices, such as the interrelationship between techniques for governing populations, bodies of knowledge and expertise, and the mundane disciplinary techniques impinging on the body. Lacan's analysis of the elements and processes of the symbolic order – such as the child-mother relation and the child's libidinal investments – and their effects on the constitution of subjectivity should indicate that these modes of analysis are far from suffering from any form of idealism. Only Derrida's theory of signification lacks a grid for analyzing material, non-discursive and institutional practices. Thus, although Derrida himself argued that 'a deconstructive practice which did not bear on "institutional apparatuses and historical processes" ... would reproduce, whatever its originality, the self-critical movement of philosophy in its internal tradition' (Derrida 1977: 117, cited in Dews 1987: 35), he never developed an analytical framework addressing the functioning of such apparatuses and processes. In brief, while none of the post-structuralist approaches could rightly be accused of idealism, it is only Foucauldian genealogy and to a certain extent Lacanian psychoanalysis that explicitly addresses institutional (material) practices.

Second, the lack of a theory of 'society' (social structures and dynamics) is seen by sociologists as a major drawback of post-structuralism. It is correct that none of the three post-structuralist approaches described hold a theory of society. With regard to Derrida and Lacan it is furthermore clear that they devote little attention to social practices outside their specific fields of study, namely processes of signification (textual analysis) and psychological processes. For example, Lacan's theory on the formation of the subject has been criticized, in my view correctly, for being unable to account for the constitution and functioning of the symbolic order through which the individual, according to Lacan, is turned into a subject with an (imaginary) ego (Burkitt 1991: 90). In contrast, Foucault devoted much of his academic work to the study of political and social practices in a range of institutional settings in classical and modern societies. It is probably no coincidence that du Gay (1996), in his attempt to combine Lacanian inspired theory and Foucauldian genealogy, is using the former to theorize – what is apparently taken to be universal mechanisms regarding – the subject, society and the will to govern (as constituted by lack), while the latter is used to undertake an analysis of concrete practices. In short, while none of the three post-structuralist approaches seek to develop a theory of society, Foucault's genealogical analysis proposes a set of highly practical devices for the study of political and social practices in general, and for the ways in which these practices have contributed to constituting the modern subject in particular.

This leads us to the third and final critique posed by certain sociologists, namely post-structuralism's avoidance of providing an explicit normative foundation for their inquiries. This critique is particularly pertinent in the case of Foucauldian genealogies - due to the obvious fact that these are dealing most explicitly with political practices and social norms - which have been criticized for suffering from 'crypto-normativism', and an implicit celebration of unstable and shifting identities (e.g. Habermas 1987). Habermas is of course correct in his critique to the extent that post-structuralist writers, despite their refusal to posit an explicit normative foundation, obviously are ascribing to certain historically dated ideals of freedom in their preoccupations with the subject. However, this does not imply that one cannot undertake effective and critical analyses. The post-structuralists' ceaseless interrogation of what we take for granted, such as the repressive functioning of power, the referential understanding of language, and the individual as a conscious ego, should adequately testify to this point. On the contrary, it could be argued that the very imposition of a moral foundation, such as Habermas' own ideal of communicative rationality, not only serves to inhibit an analysis that serve to unsettle and question contemporary norms, but even contributes to the solidification of existing power relations by posing liberal democracy and a certain mode of discursive interaction as ideals for political practice (Dean 1999).

## Summary and conclusion

As mentioned at the outset, this review does not in any way seek to undertake a systematic survey of all relevant studies on the relationship between work and subjectivity, nor does it pretend to give an in-depth account of the variety and subtleties of the arguments found within each approach. Notwithstanding these limitations, I do venture to draw some conclusions with regard to how the four reviewed approaches are characterized with regard to key problematizations, ethos, epistemological objects, and analytical strategy.

### *Problematization and ethos*

The issues of problematization and ethos, though distinct topics, are in my view so closely linked that I will discuss them jointly in the following. I find it fruitful to divide the studies along two axes. First, whether the studies revolve around the aim of improving management - and thereby essentially accepts the current socio-political order. Or, alternatively, whether the aim is to provide a critical account of management practices and the socio-political order sustaining them with a view to contribute to a – more or less radical – restructuring of these. Second, I believe it is fruitful to distinguish between those studies – whether critical or not – that are - implicitly or explicitly - updating current social norms, and those studies that actively seek to question and possibly even disrupt these.

As should be clear by now, the social psychology approaches are all characterized by a management bias. This does not mean that these studies are devoid of critical arguments about management practices. On the contrary, these works are replete with comments lamenting the state of company management. However, the rationale of this critique is essentially to improve the efficiency of management practices, rather than questioning, for example, the very social structures in which the companies are imbedded. Accordingly, these studies all assume a norm for how individual subjectivity is best developed in order to realize its full creative capacities in line with company management objectives. In their own ways, each of these approaches thus serves to update current norms shaping labour-management relations and make a body of expert knowledge on the subject available to managerial interventions.

The phenomenological inspired Interactionist studies hold a rather ambivalent position with regard to critique. On the one hand, it is clear that none of the interactionist studies hold a management bias in that the improvement of management policies simply does not present itself as an issue on their research agenda. On the other hand, most of these studies can hardly be characterized as critical in any sense. In fact, Hughes' and Becker's notion of subjectivity as based in more or less voluntarily chosen 'careers' seem – at least implicitly – to be accepting the status quo. Only Goffman's studies of 'total institutions' demonstrate an explicit critical edge in addressing various forms of repression and domination. However, even Goffman's critical studies tend to take wider social and political processes and deliberations (the social order) as a given, as something that does not merit particular questioning.

The Neo-Weberian social action inspired studies mentioned above are clearly not fuelled by management concerns. On the other hand, they cannot exactly be characterized as critical of management practices. Thus, in contrast to Max Weber, who went at great pains to elaborate a critical diagnosis of the dangers related to the dispersal of formal, instrumental rationality in modern, Western societies neither Goldthorpe, Lockwood *et al.* nor the other Weberian inspired labour studies mentioned in this review take up these concerns. Rather, Goldthorpe and Lockwood's major concerns were with the – untenability of the – 'embourgeoisment' thesis and with the Marxist alienation thesis.

Marxist inspired and post-structuralist inspired approaches both set out to conduct critical analyses, though in widely different manners. Marxist inspired writings often tend to unfold a total critique of capitalist society which implies that any form of resistance or reform are essentially futile actions that only serve to postpone the only 'real' solution, namely the abolishment or radical transformation of capitalism as a social formation. This is, for example, the only logical conclusion of Braverman's analysis of increasing management control and labour deskilling in capitalist societies. Other writers within this tradition do not see a revolutionary transformation of capitalism carried out by the workers in favour of a communist society as a solution. Whereas Blauner's analysis suggest the reorganization of work processes so as to reduce monotonous manual work, Gorz' critical analysis of industrialism leads him to propose the minimization of the time spent undertaking paid labour in favour of more 'free' time. However, despite the important variations in the proposed cures, the Marxist inspired writers all seek to realign the worker with himself – to reduce alienation - by allowing his capacities to develop more freely. Accordingly, not only do these studies not question the anthropological norm assumed by Marx' *Homo Faber*, they actively, though unwittingly, promote and update it through their analyses and various reform proposals.

The post-structuralist inspired studies of the relations between labour and subjectivity all reject the fundamental assumption of Marxist anthropology, namely that man's true nature should be found in the social relations of labour. Accordingly, the critical instance of post-structuralist analyses lies not with the final redemption of man through his realignment with his own true nature, but on the contrary with the dismantling of the illusion that man do have a true nature. Despite several crucial differences between the three post-structuralist approaches, they all share the assumption that man is a product of various discursive practices and that any attempt to fix man's identity – by pointing for example to his 'essential nature' – is but a contingent power-laden relation. Likewise, all of the post-structuralist approaches could be seen as de-normalizing in the sense that they reject the notion of the constitutive subject – whether in its Cartesian, unitary form or in its meaning-searching hermeneutic form - as a Western, metaphysical illusion.

There are however crucial differences between the three post-structuralist approaches with regard to the issue of normalization. The Foucauldian inspired analyses are opposing the forms of total critique found in much Marxist writings, notably the Frankfurt School. Instead, these genealogical analyses seek to undertake a form of critical and effective histories that involve expositions of the localized working of power relations. Foucault himself advocated a mode of inquiry that ceaselessly question how we became what we are in order to enable us to think and act differently. This has by many been taken as a celebration of fluid and multiple identities, i.e. as an implicit norm for how we should exercise our freedom. Now, it may be that Foucault favoured a mode of being that avoided to be centered around the disciplinary and confessional technologies seeking to answer the question: Who am I? And it may be that Foucault favoured certain ethical practices whereby we consider our attempts to shape and conduct ourselves as an art. However, Foucault decidedly avoided taking these ethical practices as a normative foundation for politico-ethical actions. Consequently, rather than interpreting Foucault's genealogical accounts of the ways in which we seek to shape ourselves through social norms as a celebration of fluid identities, they should be seen as attempts to de-normalize and de-naturalize our ways of thinking about and acting upon ourselves.

The Derridean and Lacanian inspired analysis of the relation between work and the subject are somewhat more ambivalent with regard to normalization. On the one hand, both modes of analysis are characterized by a ceaseless interrogation of what we take for granted. Derridean deconstruction has thus seriously questioned both objectivist (positivist) sciences and hermeneutic approaches favouring stabilized inter-subjective meaning, and Lacan has launched a devastating critique of the conception of the subject as a conscious, self-contained ego and pointed instead to the role of the unconscious in shaping subjectivity.

On the other hand, both these types of analysis are implicitly updating certain political (Derrida) and medical (Lacan) norms. As already noted, Derrida has not been very successful in articulating the relationship between 'deconstruction' in the sense of criticizing Western logocentrism and the metaphysics of consciousness, and more general political concerns. Perhaps this is so because the logical inconsistencies and untenable assumptions that Derrida points to in our language and speech have little relevance for political struggle. At any rate, it is worth noting that when Derrida does undertake explicit social critique he remains within a rather conventional Heideggerian account of the dangers of technology and bureaucracy (Dews 1987: 35).

The basic rationale for Lacan's psychoanalysis was the effective cure of psychopathologies, such as neurosis, psychosis, and perversion. While Lacan went at great pains to provide an alternative understanding of the causes and in particular the cure of these pathologies (cf. Fink 1997), he took the grid of normalcy enframing these pathologies at face value without questioning its historical contingency. Now, it may be argued that Lacanian theory applied outside the therapeutic setting, such as the study of subject formation at the workplace, do not affiliate itself with the dated medical norms of psychopathology. But this does not change the fact that Lacanian psychoanalysis remains bound to an essentially a-historical conception of the subject. Due to its theoretical ambitions, which I will return to below, Lacanian analysis is simply not capable of inquiring into the historical particularity of the system of norms that allows us to distinguish between present conceptions of what is normal and what is pathological. And more importantly, it does not allow us to analyze the historical specificity of the norms guiding the constitution of the subject.

#### ***Epistemological objects and analytical strategy***

By now it should be no surprise that the key epistemological object of the social psychological approaches is the individual, or more precisely the individual as a conscious ego. Social interactions at the workplace and the processes contributing to the constitution of the subject are thus viewed essentially from the point of view of the individual's conscious actions. Moreover, the social psychological approaches are basing their understanding of the individual on a set of intrinsic – or in some cases socially developed – needs of social belonging, self-fulfillment and/or responsibility. While these approaches do recognize the importance of wider social processes influencing individual practices at work, they do not provide any theoretization or analytical framework for dealing with these forces. Hence, the critique of methodological individualism launched by the sociological traditions.

A similar critique has been launched against the particular ways in which work studies have drawn on phenomenological interactionism. Thus, despite the fact that interactionism – as defined by Herbert Mead - opens up for inclusion of larger structures by emphasizing the importance of language, the interactionist studies on work and subjectivity reviewed in this paper fail to include these and remain largely focused on the individual and his 'career'. Like the social psychological approaches, interactionism favour interviews and, in particular, participant observation as means of getting access to the cultural embedded forms of meaning shared between the workers.

In contrast, the more directly Weberian inspired work studies, such as Goldthorpe and Lockwood, are based not on individual psychological propensities or subjective meaning created through interaction, but on 'orientations' towards work based on socio-cultural value systems in general, and the 'protestant ethics' and Western 'formal rationality' in particular. These studies thus draw heavily on Weber's understanding of formal rationality as something unique for modern Western societies, and on his idea that rationalities vary as between specific spheres – such as politics, bureaucracy, science, and economy (including industrial work). However, unlike Weber,



Goldthorpe and Lockwood do not incorporate in their analytical framework the capacity to address the historical and societal specificity of these features. Instead, the formal, instrumental rationality, which providing the precondition for the 'orientations' found in workers' behaviour, is simply taken for granted. Hence, not only the critique of sociology – as launched by some phenomenological interactionists (Burkitt 1991) – but also a-historicism.

The key epistemological objects of Marx' materialistic theory of capital with regard to subjectivity is of course 'alienation'. Although most Marxist inspired writers modify or even downright reject the view that the workers' true being and their true interests can be derived from the 'economic infrastructure', they still view subjectivity and individual practices largely as the derivative of wider social structures and technological systems. Hence, the critique of these approaches for lacking an account of 'agency', autonomy, local social contexts etc. In accordance with this view, the Marxist inspired approaches dealt with in this review tend to neglect interviews and participant observations as means of data collection, in favour of 'objective' data such as description of applied technology, work organization and statistics.

The post-structuralist approaches do not fit very well into the methodological individualism / sociology dichotomy. In fact, despite crucial differences between the post-structuralist approaches, they all reject the essentialism implicit in such categories as the 'subject' (whether viewed as a transcendental, autonomous or conscious ego) and 'society' (viewed as 'thing' in the Durkheimian sense, i.e. with a being that has the capacity to regulate individual behavior). Instead they point to the discursive constructedness of such categories. More precisely, Foucauldian genealogy is focusing on the practices and rationalities through which the subject is constituted both by himself (ethical practices) and by others (through for example bio-political interventions) in order to expose the ways in which current modes of self-subjectification (including the exercise of freedom) is linked to systems of domination and exclusion. Genealogy explicitly rejects the search for an improved epistemology – in the sense of better categories or procedures for speaking the truth – and accordingly rejects to formulate a theory about the subject or the society. In this way the tension revolving around the methodological individualism vs. sociology or agency vs. structure dichotomy is not solved, but simply abandoned. Genealogy at most offer certain notions and devices, such as grid of intelligibility (*dispositif*), governmentality, political rationality and bio-politics, that may serve as provisional and practical analytical devices in the attempt to scrutinize the practices, rationalities and knowledges through which we came to think about and act upon ourselves.

Consistent with his aim of showing the immanent slipping of meaning and truth in Western language and knowledge, Derrida obviously does not pose an epistemology that aims to produce a more true account of reality or a more adequate hermeneutic approach ensuring the stabilization of meaning. Rather, through such notions as 'différance', Derrida sets out to demonstrate the logical inconsistencies of certain crucial assumptions found in Western knowledge, notably those of the transcendental signified, the metaphysics of identity/difference expounded in binary oppositions, and the possibility of fixed meaning. Accordingly, the Western metaphysical understanding of the individual as a transcendental subject endowed with the capacity to provide meaning to phenomena within a given interpretive horizon is seen as the product of the endless play of différance – the intertextual sliding of signification (Derrida 1973: 82, cited in Dews 1987: 19). It should moreover be clear by now that Derrida's analytical strategy of deconstruction consists in meticulous reading of the canons of Western thought – such as Descartes, Rousseau, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger – tracing their attempts to overcome the problems associated with the metaphysics of being and knowing. In sum, it may not be wholly unfair to assert that Derrida is providing a rather abstract text-theoretical set of propositions aiming to prove the incoherence of viewing the individual in terms of a transcendental subject – an analytical strategy that, in my view, does not provide the tools necessary for studying the practices, rationalities and

problematizations by which the modern subject became both the precondition and object for new ways of exercising power and freedom.

We saw that the key epistemological objects in Lacanian psychoanalytic understanding of the subject are desire, the symbolic order, the imaginary, and the real. The ‘symbolic order’, which is the name for the social codes of conduct or plainly the ‘Law’, forces us to constitute ourselves as individuals with a full identity. The conscious subjectivity of the individual – the ‘I’ – is constructed within the ‘symbolic’ realm of signs and language, the latter being seen as a structured system of significations. We are constructed as conscious, desiring subjects within the symbolic, and are bound to live in an ‘imaginary’ relation to the ‘real’, the latter being that which has not / cannot be symbolized in that it is inaccessible to language and signs (Burkitt 1991: 87-88; Fink 1995: 24-25).<sup>6</sup>

Characterizing Lacan’s analytical strategy in so far as it applies outside the therapeutic setting, is hardly possible on the basis of the single example included in this paper (du Gay 1996). In fact, the attempts to apply Lacanian theory within the study of the relationship between work and subjectivity remains extremely limited – perhaps because the principal objective of Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory was to enable effective therapy. Thus, an evaluation of the analytical strategy and utility of Lacanian theory outside the therapeutic setting – such as the workplace – would require a venturing into, for example, Laclau, Mouffe, or Žižek’s applications of this theory. At any rate, as sketched above, the Lacanian theoretical framework hardly possesses the tools for rendering social practices at large intelligible. Moreover, its implicit claim for universality regarding the mechanisms constituting the subject, such as desire and lack - is highly problematic from the point of view of problematizing contemporary norms informing the ways in which we can think and act.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> One of Emile Durkheim's major contributions was to establish an ontology of 'the social'. Thus, social facts, such as values, customs, norms and obligations, should be dealt with as 'things' existing external to the individual and exerting an influence / constraint on him. He opposed psychological reductionism, arguing that even a highly individual act like suicide has to be understood in terms of the individual's integration into a community, rather than by reference to the person's mental state (cf. Watson 1980: 41-42). Modern man to Durkheim was above all a social animal: The advancement in Man's reason and intellectual faculties is caused by the increasing sociability, i.e. by his living in societies with increasing social differentiation. Thus, of the three factors influencing man's psychological life: the organism, the external (physical) world, and society, it is above all the latter that shapes man's mental faculties. Moreover, individual difference – personality – only emerges in complex societies as individuals are no longer urged to behave according to direct, social bonds, but are increasingly allowed to act spontaneously adhering to less rigid bonds of organic solidarity (Durkheim 1984: 284-285).

Durkheim assumed the existence of a collective consciousness impinging on individual behaviour: "because individuals form a society, new phenomena occur whose cause is association, and which, reacting upon the consciousness of individuals, for the most part shapes them" (Durkheim 1984: 228). On the one hand, the common consciousness is unlikely to disappear. On the other hand, it may be weakened and become more abstract in modern societies under influence of growing individualism and differentiation of labour. Consequently, while the division of labour "normally" produces social solidarity it can happen that it turns into various pathological forms, such as hostility and struggle between labour and capital, commercial crises and ensuing bankruptcies, deterioration of norms, and unrestricted selfish actions. Because these signs of 'anomie' (lack of norms) are not inherent to modern societies, but rather a conjunctural or transitional phenomenon, caused for example by forced labour, they can be remedied by various reforms supporting the establishment of voluntary bonds of social solidarity.

<sup>2</sup> Capitalism is characterized, Weber argued, by its rational organization of formally free labour. This implies the availability of a disciplined labour force and a stable legal-administrative environment facilitating the investment of capital. The regular reproduction of capital is associated with a specific, Western ethos, namely the accumulation of wealth for its own sake, rather than for example fulfilling needs of subsistence or creating a powerful sovereign. Thus: 'Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs' (Weber 1992: 53). This moral outlook is distinctly modern and demanding an unusual self-discipline, a 'this-worldly asceticism' based on a puritan Protestant notion of calling (beruf). The notion of calling was introduced by Luther's reformation and essentially comprises the idea that the highest form of moral obligation of the individual is to fulfil his duty in this-worldly affairs.

The notion of predestination, which is found in Calvinist and to some extent also in other Puritan factions of Protestantism was, according to Weber, absolutely crucial for the formation of an ascetic and disciplined labour force. The belief that only some human beings are chosen to be saved from damnation, the choice being made by God, had above all the consequence of creating a "feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness" (Weber 1992: 104). This had two interconnected effects: it became obligatory to regard oneself as chosen, lack of certainty being indicative of insufficient faith; and the performance of good works in worldly activity became accepted as the medium whereby such certainty could be demonstrated. Hard work and accumulation of wealth were thus morally sanctioned in so far as it was combined with a sober, ascetic and industrious lifestyle.

<sup>3</sup> While Goldthorpe and Lockwood rejected the notion of an understanding of alienation based on the objective conditions of work, they did recognise the possibility that the workers may have a subjective feeling of alienation towards their work. However, the instrumental orientation to work in order to pursue greater possibilities of consumption and leisure activities, was to be found not in work conditions, but in

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‘whatever social structure or cultural conditions [that] generate ‘consumption-mindedness’’ (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1969: 183).

<sup>4</sup> In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (1976) argued that the privileging of the signified in the Saussurian sign is tied to the logocentric desire to fix and master meaning as something self-evident to the rational, conscious and self-identical subject. However, the sign, Derrida argues, always already bears the ‘trace’ of difference in that both signifier and signified are defined through difference and absence: ‘the signified is originally and essentially ... trace, and it is *always already in the position of the signifier*’ (Derrida 1976: 73; emphasis in original). This argument is further developed in the book *Writing and Difference* where Derrida (1978) concludes that because the transcendental signified exists only within a system of differences, in which signification and meaning is caught up in an endless play, meaning can never be fixed (Derrida 1978: 280-292).

The notion of ‘différance’, which may be the most important device of Derrida’s deconstructionist enterprise, is pointing to the way in which a differential structure - constituted by difference (in the sense of radical non-identical, other) and deferral (in the sense of perennial postponement) – is constructing what in Western metaphysical thought is taken to be presence (Spivak 1976: xliii). The notion of différance is used by Derrida both to expose the inconsistency of the metaphysical binary (Derrida 1981: 29, cited in Dews 1987: 24), and explode the ‘horizon’ of meaning - assumed by such hermeneutics like Gadamer (cf. Dews 1987: 12-13). Meaning, instead, is seen to be indefinitely disseminated through a ‘logic of supplementarity’, that is an infinite re-institution of meaning generated by an endless chain of intertextual references (Dews 1987: 30).

<sup>5</sup> According to Bruce Fink, the Lacanian subject has two ‘faces’ (Fink 1995). First, the subject is a relation to the Other in the sense of the symbolic order. Lacan later emphasizes the subject is conceived as a stance towards the Other’s desire insofar as it arouses the subject’s desire. More precisely, the subject comes into being as a form of attraction toward and defense against a primordial, overwhelming experience – Jouissance; a pleasure – stemming from the Other’s desire - that is excessive and at one and the same time leads to disgust and fascination (Fink 1995: xii). The second face of the subject is that of ‘subjectivization’, a process of making assuming responsibility for the effects caused by the Other’s desire. This subject only comes forth by taking the ‘causal alterity’ (the foreign power of the Other’s desire) upon oneself, by subjectifying the apparently foreign cause of his existence (ibid.)

<sup>6</sup> In contrast, ‘reality’, for Lacan, is that which is named through the symbolic and thus can be thought and talked about (Fink 1995: 24-25).

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