Managerialism, the *therapeutic habitus* and the self in contemporary organising

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, managerialism (Enteman 1993) has become consolidated on multiple fronts. As a formula of governance, it has elaborated various vocabularies: the 'audit society' (Power 1997, 2007) has become entrenched in all types of organisations; surveillance methods (Lyon 2001) have become increasingly dispersed and insidious; and – alongside – 'new' concepts of subjectivity and the 'self' are used to frame more intense regimes of self-discipline or what Tipton (1984) called 'self-work'. These moves have been captured by Thrift (1997), Heelas (2002) and others in the term 'soft capitalism'. In this essay, we reflect upon this phenomenon by analysing some examples: 'culture', 'performativity', 'knowledge', and 'wellness'. Although they belong to a group often described as 'fads' and 'fashions' and dismissed as managerial 'mumbo-jumbo', we suggest that their proliferation indicates a more stable cultural tendency of management discourses to capture subjectivity in its general agenda. We attempt to offer a historical-cultural interpretation from which this range of managerial concepts might be viewed. Our argument suggests that they have a certain cultural coherence that can be perhaps better glimpsed within a wider historical context. As a particular way in which managerialism frames its logic, analysing 'soft capitalism' historically offers a reasonable basis for understanding the strength of its hard disciplinary edge as a regime of governance.

Context

Transitions in forms of 'government' or 'governance' can be investigated in a variety of ways. They depend, among other things, on the unit of analysis upon which the investigation is focussed. Legitimate units of analysis can be: institutions and institutional frameworks (states, bureaucracies, corporations, markets, networks, etc.); geopolitical, or spatial scales (global, national, regional, local levels); or technologies of governance (such as mass-media, telecommunication, or surveillance systems). Indeed, others are also conceivable: environmental concerns could take precedence over other criteria. The analysis can, however, equally pursue the cultural sensibilities of the *human subject* of governance as a focus for investigation. The hypothesis behind the latter is that forms and contents of governance processes cannot be fully understood without grasping the self-understandings that are constitutive of them and of their institutional forms. The sphere of such an investigation is the historical constitution (or genealogy) of matrices of self- and world-understanding which ground the cultural possibilities of certain discourses of governance. In this paper, we propose to pursue this latter line of analysis. In order to clarify our speculative position, we need to spell out its confines.

How then do we configure its sphere? First, managerialism has developed over the last two decades an intricate and multifaceted framework which combines concepts and techniques underpinned by several logics that are often contradictory in tone and purpose. Although they are difficult to disentangle, it is useful to group them in three major 'families': (a) managerialism has produced a wide-ranging series of *audit* techniques and vocabularies (as Power has extensively shown in 1994, 1997, 2007); (b) there has been a significant proliferation of *surveillance technologies*, especially during the 1990s (as exemplified in the work of Lyon 1994, 2001); and (c) there has also been a growth in concepts and techniques which focus upon specifically *human attributes* of working subjects such as 'culture', 'performativity', 'knowledge', or 'wellness' (discussed, for example, by Anthony 1994; Alvesson 2002a; Alvesson 2002b; Symon 2005; Willmott 1993). In this paper, we focus upon this latter category.

Secondly, an important delimitation of this argument relates to the difference between concepts about the nature of the human subject used in management vocabularies, and their practical social effects. We discuss here the former, namely the area of managerial discourses which aim to establish particular subject positions in the governance of work processes. These discourses are deployed as a public code presenting work as a particular form through which human 'selves' ought to express their inner potentialities. However, in concrete social practices and contexts these discourses create a new kind of political space for their own contestation, disruption, transgression and subversion. As has been evidenced by numerous empirical studies, discourses of 'cultural management' are often met with various tactics of deliberate transformation and resistance. We are not engaging in this paper with such practices of resistance and transformation of managerial concepts of subjectivity. Rather, we are investigating the historical and cultural conditions of possibility of their appearance within the wider context of modernity as a specific overarching synthesis. The way we deploy the term 'modernity' in this article should not be construed as a moral, political judgement. We are not implying in any way that we can find a position outside of this history and weigh its 'goodness' or 'badness'. Rather, we use the category of 'modernity' to guide a historical speculation about the specific character of the epoch in which managerialism manifests itself in order to understand

the concrete discursive forms it is taking. Moreover, we are not using the notion of 'modernity' with totalising ambitions. In other words, we are not claiming to offer an alternative account of the totality of what might be seen as the 'modern epoch' against major existing histories and analyses (like Marx's, Weber's, or Durkheim's, Horkheimer's and Adorno's, Heidegger's or Arendt's, Habermas' or Giddens'). We do not treat the structural aspects of the historical processes underpinning capitalism, but rather the cultural sphere in which certain enduring themes emerge. The key theme of modernity used in this paper is the centrality of the 'self' as the subject of political, moral, and cultural discourses.

Finally, we must clarify the way in which we use the category of 'self'. We use it as a general notion as it appears in concepts such as, for example, 'self-actualisation' in the Maslowian vocabulary of motivation, or 'self-development' in techniques such as the 'Personal Development Plans', which imply a particular engagement with work. In other words, we do not deploy the notion of 'self' to impute to concrete persons a static formula of feelings, actions or reactions in work. Quite the contrary, it is important to make clear that agency often destabilises and contests managerial vocabularies that prescribe and confine the sense of personal existence to a disciplinary ethical matrix. The meanings of managerial concepts are unstable and contested in the concrete contexts into which they are inserted.

Hence we focus upon the rise and consolidation, over the last twenty-five years or so, of a persistent set of vocabularies and practices in which the 'self' and subjectivity have become central motifs in the lexicon of management. Subjectivity is a fundamental topic in the history of European thought, and for modernity in particular. However, we cannot develop a satisfactory overview in this paper. For detailed elaborations, see Carr (1999), Hall (2004), or Strozier (2002). Over the period we analyse, themes such as the management of organisational culture, commitment, performativity, knowledge management, and, more recently, wellness at work have become leitmotifs of the managerial repertoire. We explore some of the cultural-historical sources that may account for the consolidation of this trend. We place this attempt alongside, and not in contradistinction to, other approaches which pursue different units of analysis (for example, studies of consumer culture such as Lee's 1993; Lury's 1996; or Slater's 1997, to mention but a few).

Although critical debates about the appropriation of subjectivity by corporations are well-established, a relatively under-examined dimension concerns the historical conditions of the increasingly intensive cultural appropriation of subjectivity as a modality of ordering relationships at work. Some of the reasons relate to the fact that, on the one hand, much of what managerialism pretended to offer as novel in the 1980s could easily be interpreted as a new tactic to cover up management's attempt to undermine the interests of workers by capturing their 'souls' and leaving as little room as possible for resistance. Of course, this appeared to be the case when considering the systematic destruction of trade unions, alongside the systematic construction of a 'shareholding' and 'home-owning' middle-class ideal in a newly 'democratised enterprise culture'. These structural changes appeared to provide sufficient cause for radical shifts in management approaches. Indeed, they ostensibly continued the normal dynamics of capitalism. This interpretation characterised the explanations of various Marxian- and Frankfurt-oriented scholars (especially those informed by labour process analyses). The dialectical mechanism of historical materialism was mobilised to account for the emergence of a new 'rhetoric' of social unity meant to hide the usual 'reality' of a divided society, with opposing interests and historical destinies.

What is perhaps more surprising, in hindsight, is that the so-called 'post-structuralist' and 'post-modernist' accounts eventually led in a similar direction. Many interpreters of Foucault, for example, almost literally juxtaposed his 'Discipline and Punish' (1977) onto the managerial complex and concluded that the latter performs a similar feat of social control via relatively brutal technologies for re-engineering organisational cultures, for panoptic surveillance, and for the internalisation of controls. Perhaps even less fortunately, many interpreted literally Foucault's famous dismissal of the 'Enlightenment subject' (the frequently misinterpreted 'death of the subject') as a concrete, almost material dissolution of the bases upon which the 'individual' may retain some sense of being an independent, autonomous, dignified agent, capable of making ethical decisions for itself. This perception of Foucault's analysis of modern culture was crystallised eventually into an account that made the subject a victim of managerial and panoptic manipulation. This was easily combined with other 'post-modernist' tropes, such as the 'collapse of metanarratives', generating a sense that everything that had been solid had melted away into an endless play of simulacra.

What we offer here is an addition to these critiques. We re-problematise some aspects of managerialism from the perspective of cultural history looking at modernity as a cultural synthesis with the 'self' at its centre. We hypothesise that managerialism also expresses, and draws its cultural sustenance from, this historical process. In other words, a significant segment of contemporary management is made possible by certain sensibilities of the modern conception of 'self' thereby giving shape to a relationship with work which revolves around this concept. The subject or 'the self' to which managerialism refers in some of its discourses is the same 'self' that lies at the centre of modernity.

We develop this speculative position, first, by mapping the rise of certain vocabularies of subjectivity in the governance of work in contemporary organisations, and, secondly, by providing a historical account of the centrality of a specific conception of 'self' and 'work' in modernity as a whole. In conclusion we will argue that dismissing these trends in management as mere 'fads' and 'fashions' (see, for example, Abrahamson, 1991, Huczynski, 1993, or Prieto, 1993) risks ignoring an important cultural sign of new processes of governance. We suggest that taking the 'self' as the unit of analysis illuminates further transitional elements in the governance of work at the dawn of the 21st century. As a locus of governance, the 'self' shows both cultural continuities within modernity and subtle shifts in the dynamic of its central themes.

We argue that the way in which subjectivity has become entrenched in the governance of work follows a more complex cultural-historical path with origins in the wider horizon of modernity. In other words, we cannot simply explain this phenomenon as a pure continuation of the permanent dialectic of capitalism, nor as an element of historical novelty with no precedence or antecedence (the 'post-modern'). In addition to these interpretations, our conjecture illustrates how one of the main dimensions of modernity (the centrality of the 'self') has elective affinities with the growing use of managerial vocabularies focussing upon subjectivity.

Section I. Vocabularies of subjectivity and the governance of work in contemporary organisations

In this section we map some of the ways in which subjectivity was appropriated in the governance of work since the 1980s. This phenomenon (known as

the *cultural turn* in managerial ideology) has been much debated (e.g. Anthony 1994; Alvesson 2002a; Alvesson 2002b; Symon 2005; Willmott 1993). Reopening it here aims to spell out more clearly the shift through which *human subjectivity* became a significant trope for governing work. This section offers a working typology of specific moves characterising this cultural turn.

The list of such moves has been expanding over the years. Although disparate and frequently contradictory, they share a common ground: they are all important indicators of one of the paths through which the subject is governed at work. Their general effect is that management has developed, alongside audit and surveillance, a new logic: namely that productivity and profitability, efficiency and effectiveness are increasingly dependent upon a new cultural economy of subjectivity at work. Put simply, human subjects are exhorted to expand and intensify their contribution *as selves* (as 'human resources') in order to enhance production, maximise value, thus leading the organisation to success. The slogan 'people are our most important asset' left deeper traces than the episodic waxing and waning of one fashion or another. Although it is not easy to differentiate them (because they are, indeed, linked by a common meaning), the following typology aims to show how subjectivity is broken down in multiple aspects, and how it is reassembled around an idealised 'better self' created by a variety of 'therapeutic' techniques and tactics.

This brief overview is organised along three dimensions. The first represents the *extension* of attributes of subjectivity enlisted in the managerial vocabulary of the last twenty years. The proliferation of concepts associated with the subject at work demands careful consideration. The second follows the *intensification* of demands placed upon the subject which has accompanied these new concepts. This shows how new, more ramified and demanding ways of involvement in work have become part of the managerial vernacular. Finally, the main effect of this change in managerialism is the *transformation* of a discourse which functioned initially as an interpretation of the crisis of Western business organisations in the 1980s (due to new and very powerful competitors, especially Japan) into a prescriptive, normative framework for the governance of work.

1. The governance of culture and commitment

Chronologically, it appears appropriate to begin with a category generated by the idea that an organisation's *culture* is key to competitive advantage. It was a move made in the name of reconstituting Western corporations as reunified social and political entities, centred around an alleged common set of interests. 'Strong cultures' were conceived as the solution for increased quality and productivity. This notion appeared as an appealing response to a period of industrial tension and unrest. The aim of managing organisational culture was to recover the managerial prerogative and to marshal organisations around a collective identity. Associated in this category were tropes such as increased participation, employee involvement, empowerment, teamwork, self-managed teams, and Quality Circles. They became favoured managerial discourses recasting the subject at work as a *unified collective* political body. Equally, they provided ways of reshaping organisational forms through downsizing, delayering, or lean organisations. Their aim was to reconfigure corporate identity around the attributes of an autonomous, 'empowered' subject with a 'reengineered' mentality of organisational membership. The vital ingredient of the collective notion of culture is the governmental concept that continues to frame the managerial discourse surrounding the relationship between people and organisations:

commitment. Commitment became a key discursive currency used to re-enlist individual subjects in a united mode of work. In more general terms, this first category groups ideas revolving around a new *politics of attachment* underpinning the governance of organisations through the couple 'strong culture – strong commitment'.

Changing organisational culture was a first step in reconstituting individual and corporate identities. Concretely, it meant the elaboration of new programmes embodied in mission statements, visions and new value systems facilitated by a plethora of consultancy interventions, aimed at reinventing both the identity of the corporation and of the subjects within it. These interventions consisted in significant investments of time and money, in endless sequences of training, team-building exercises, self-managed teams (configured according to ideal recipes such as Belbin's), or the introduction of cross-functional working. Their aim was to foster innovation and implement 'total quality management' as the goals of empowerment and participation. 'Culture' was presented as a cure for the rift between organisations and employees by flattening hierarchies, widening participation and restructuring traditional frameworks of authoritarian control. The outcome of efforts to reengineer organisational culture opened up new kinds of social spaces that created the conditions of possibility for the expansion of therapeutic relationships as mediators for governing work.

2. *The governance of performance and performativity*

The second category of discourses placing the human subject in a new light was generated by the subtle shift in the vocabulary of productivity: the emergence of *performativity*. In this group we can associate a variety of managerial topics: 'total quality', 'excellence', 'flexibility', 'performance management'. These categories established a fundamental link between increased personal engagement with work and the success of the production process. The subtle politics of the performance-performativity nexus lie in the message that it is organisations which now rely to a large extent upon performing subjects, rather than performing subjects upon organisations. The slogans 'an organisation is only as good as its human resources' and 'people are our greatest asset' illustrate this rhetorical reallocation of subject positions. The discourse of performativity also accompanied the vast expansion of mechanisms of financial audit. It allowed the translation of subjectivity through a multitude of techniques of accountability such as management by objectives, agreed targets, multi-dimensional appraisals and performance management systems, 'economic value-added' measurements, or balanced scorecards (as analysed extensively by Froud et al. 2000; Erturk et al. 2004).

A key practice of performance management in relation to subjectivity is the performance appraisal. Although it takes many forms, it follows a common course. First, the subject of appraisal ('the appraisee') states his/her own view of personal performance – what we might term a confessional stage (following Townley 1994). Secondly, an examination by the line manager (as appraiser) results in a dialogue whose aim is a negotiation identifying areas of improvement as well as developmental needs that might be addressed through various systems of training offered as 'therapeutic' techniques both in terms of improving work results and as development of the individual. This process constitutes a context which creates the obligation to self-express and self-explore, whilst simultaneously acting as a platform for continuous monitoring and audit by the organisation. It allows a move away from traditional forms of monitoring by embroiling the subject in the act of organisational

control, coupled with the therapeutic principle that outcomes must always be agreed upon. This changes the approach to what traditionally was seen as the managerial prerogative of control and situates it in a process of double translation. On the one hand, the organisation translates its needs into performance targets, and, on the other, the subject has the opportunity to express its own needs and make the organisation responsible for fulfilling them. This is a new mechanism of governance which makes the employee the focus of a quasi-therapeutic encounter.

3. The governance of knowledge production, creativity and innovation

As the 1980s and 1990s progressed, another set of concepts was added to the vocabulary of managerial governance. The idea that 'knowledge' was the great differentiator of performance and a main platform of personal and collective success became seductive (perhaps even more rapidly than 'culture' and 'change' in the early 1980s). 'Knowledge' as '*the* new resource' was embraced at all levels of government and governance. The 'knowledge economy', the 'knowledge-creating company', knowledge management and knowledge workers became important concepts of the so-called 'new economy' in which 'information' and 'information technologies' appear to carry the promise of endless resourcefulness. Associated in this category are themes such as creativity, innovation, continuous improvement, the learning organisation, lifelong learning, Human Resource Development, and talent management. Underpinning them is the expectation that the subject at work should also see itself as participating in a continuous process of knowledge creation. Thus, work is presented as a space for self-expression opened up by the eagerness of the organisation to embrace new ideas, changes and to de-routinise labour (no organisation wants to be seen as 'mainstream' anymore). It also presupposes the readiness of the subject to invest itself in a continuous act of creative thinking, to give of itself to work in a new way.

This trend further entrenched the link between organisational performance and its 'human capital' or 'human potential' (as exemplified by Mayo 2001). This link now spans societal, institutional and individual levels; it is the central axis of a new narrative of present and especially future success. Improving knowledge, mobilising creative potential, and being innovative draw new contours for work. They articulate a narrative of hope in endless progress unleashed by the potentially infinite power of knowledge to overcome various critical points in the lives of individuals and collectivities. The cultural politics of this category hinge on the 'magic' of mastery and expertise through the powers of 'Reason'. A recycled Enlightenment ideal, 'knowledge' appears as power in itself, endowing its individual or collective 'bearer' with competitive advantage. 'Knowledge work' is one of the most emphatic affirmations of the resourcefulness of the subject.

In practice, knowledge management took various forms. Dominant was the notion of exploring the hitherto untapped possibilities of 'tacit' knowledge. In the name of making it explicit and of 'socialising' or 'capturing' it in visible forms, organisations reprocessed many of the practices of culture management: brainstorming, 'thinking outside the box', multi-disciplinary project teams, and 'communities of practice' (e.g. Brown and Duguid 1991; Nonaka 1995; Wenger 1999). The intention was to create new kinds of interaction supposed to mobilise and integrate individual and collective tacit knowledge in increasingly visible and manageable ways. The characteristic of these new spaces for the socialisation of knowledge was the expectation that subjects are willing to articulate their previously

hidden domain of ideas and skills. The hope was that skill and craft locked in brains and bodies become communicable in codes and systematic knowledge. Associated was the belief that computational technology could capture fleeting but valuable insights in some form of permanent repository. Paradoxically, the creative and innovative were to become routinised. This created a new position in which the subject is both master and owner of this new fundamental resource, and at the same time the target of ceaseless exhortations to release it into the public organisational arena. New forms of confessing one's thoughts, in the name of actively sharing personal and collective knowledge, became central to interactive database systems as new forms of socialisation.

4. The governance of wellness, happiness and self-actualisation

A more recent category of subject attributes which have become legitimate managerial territory consists of a multitude of ways of addressing the *subject in its totality* as an object of governance. They are captured under a variety of names: emotional intelligence (measured by 'Emotional Quotients), organisational spirituality and spiritual intelligence (measured by 'Spiritual Quotients'), the 'work-life balance', self-realisation and self-actualisation, programmes for health at work, 'wellness at work', and 'happiness at work'. Moreover many organisations now use the trope of 'fun' to present what it might mean to work for them. Some increasingly see their cultures in terms of a combination of work and play. Thus, the entire meaning of human life becomes in varied guises the preoccupation of management, which presupposes the cultural legitimacy of blurred boundaries between working life and life outside work. This category marshals no more and no less than an imagery of total well-being at work, invoking it as an opportunity for personal completeness, for a harmonious and full life. The value of exchanging labour as an employee is thrust into a cultural sphere with entirely new dimensions. The idea that one's employer provides some sort of totalised care for the worker's wellness opens up a powerful horizon for expanding the boundaries of organised work.

In practice, the wellness agenda is being formulated through the appropriation and conversion of more traditional discourses concerning absenteeism, cost-reduction related to health and safety, incapacity benefits, stress and mental health costs. This has led to the formation of new concepts that attach themselves to these discourses multiplying their forms, expanding and intensifying the areas in which subjectivity becomes an object for political-governmental intervention at multiple levels. For example, in the case of the UK, both the government and the *Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development* (CIPD, the professional body for those involved in HR) spell out this managerial expansion (e.g. CIPD's *Change Agenda* on *'What's Happening to Well-being at Work?'* 2007a). In their most recent document dedicated to this topic, CIPD states that:

> "Well-being initiatives include: Almost half of organisations provide all employees with access to counselling services as part of their well-being initiative. This is followed by employee assistance programmes (31%) and 'stop smoking' support (31%). Around quarter of employers also provide health screening, healthy canteen options and subsidised gym membership to all employees." (CIPD 2007b)

A key ingredient of such wellness programmes are various counselling and therapeutic services which have a common denominator: they project work as a sphere where all aspects of the self belong to, and are taken care of. The entire gamut of subjectivity is incorporated by these discourses in the governance of work. They often present employment as if it were a complete package catering for the well-being of the whole person.

Finally, we want to single out one of the key episodes of the invocation of the subject in managerial discourse: the rise of *Human Resource Management* as the new general umbrella of 'people management'. Although HRM shares the features of the managerial tropes categorised above, it also has distinct characteristics. This loose, complex phenomenon is perhaps the most important exemplar of the trend to appropriate subjectivity as a whole in the managerial agenda. The reason is that HRM has managed to expand its language and logic to include in one way or another all the categories discussed above. In doing so, it has become consolidated in its own right, more than any others, as a durable framework for governing people at work. It is a legitimate part of organisational structures, it developed its own departments, it became an academic discipline in its own right, it elaborated its professional canon (through organisations such as the CIPD), and led to the emergence of a significant consultancy sector. HRM has gradually expanded its range to incorporate many of the ideas and practices mentioned above. It has brought them together and dispersed them throughout the managerial idiom. The ideological and technical apparatus of HRM performs nowadays the function of legitimating the utilisation of subjectivity as the key resource for productivity and competitiveness. Moreover, the discourses of HRM imply that it does not simply serve the strategic purpose of organisations, but that it also serves the strategic purpose of a meaningful working life for the members of organisations.

To conclude this section and lead into the interpretation that follows, we want to specify more clearly our hypothesis: the consolidation of these vocabularies and practices of governing work through subjectivity is grounded in the deep-seated sense of 'self' which lies at the core of modernity writ large. What unites the concrete practices discussed above into a coherent cultural nexus draws its sustenance from the underlying logic that characterises the specific cultural self-understanding of the modern subject. In the next section, we will elaborate this link.

Section II. The subject of managerialism: the 'therapeutic habitus' and the modern sense of self

To posit the cultural coherence of these practices does not imply in any way, at least in our understanding, that they emerged somehow as a 'whole' at once. Nor do we imply that they were formed as a quasi pre-planned, self-conscious ensemble which was rolled out wholesale. The various attributes of subjectivity which have come to be included in the managerial agenda are often divergent and not necessarily consistent in each and every combination. Most of the time, they are not all employed simultaneously in any one organisation. Moreover, the piecemeal manner in which these ideas emerged does not allow for an account of their history as an intentional, calculated or purely cynical managerial ploy. Despite the fact that they appear in an unsystematic fashion, subjectivity – as the common theme that underlies them all – becomes their intelligible and coherent nucleus requiring further analysis.

One way to capture the common logic of these new forms of work governance is the (inspired) metaphor of 'soft capitalism' used by Thrift (1997), Ray and Sayer

(1999), and Heelas (2002). Ray and Sayer (1999, p.17) emphasized that the logic of organisational success has become gradually bound up with the ever more intense employment of 'soft' characteristics of the labouring subject. However, the predicate 'soft' must not be confused with the implication that contemporary work has become easy. Rather, as the authors above point out, 'soft' denotes the expansion and intensification of demands on the self to become ever more involved in work with its whole subjectivity. Indeed, once the subject is placed at the centre of work governance with the entire range of its attributes, labour becomes 'hard' in a new way. The specific 'hardship' of labour which lies at the centre of soft capitalism is grounded in a new type of ethical vector. Tipton (1984) called this new ethics the 'ethics of self-work'. As Heelas (2002, p.80) explains, this new form of work ethics changes "the locus of authority-cum-value" by situating it in "another kind of individualisation". This individualisation refers to:

> "the self as a self which considers itself to be something more, something much 'deeper', more natural and authentic than the self of what is taken to be involved with the superficialities of the 'merely' materialistic-cum-consumeristic; the self as a self which has to work on itself to enrich and explore itself in the process of dealing with its problems" (idem.)

This ethic changes both the position of work in the life of the subject and the relationship of the subject with work as a social activity. Work becomes another stage for self-expression alongside the spheres of consumption and leisure. The historical horizon of this transformation lies not only in the last two decades, but in the whole of the twentieth century which made the concrete modality of self-work increasingly visible. We refer here to the consolidation and expansion of various therapeutic techniques and mentalities that now straddle both the sphere of production and consumption in a multiple array of self-help practices (Lasch 1979; Miller and McHoul 1998). The apparatus of soft capitalism acquires its immediate, everyday concreteness through what we term the *therapeutic habitus*. Managerialism, in the latter part of the last century, uses (alongside audit and surveillance) elements of the culture of the therapeutic as new modalities of governing work. The managerial tactics explored in the previous section mobilise the ethics of self-work in the sphere of organisations. They bring the therapeutic into the domain of labour. This can be seen, for instance, in the mechanism through which production and productivity are transformed into acts of 'performance' and 'performativity'. Equally illustrative is the new combination of the work effort with the tropes of wellness and well-being.

What is novel about the intensive and extensive appropriation of subjectivity by managerialism from the 1980s onwards is that the logic of work is presented also as a process of releasing the full potentialities of the self, as a locus in which self-exploration and expression are encouraged, as a place where traditional restrictive controls recede into the background. 'Fordist' management (which presupposes the repression of subjectivity in its self-expressive mode and its submission to a variety of externally imposed controls) is replaced by a new discourse of engagement in which self-expression is encouraged while control is situated in processes of self-examination, evaluation and reflection. In other words, the site of control is also displaced to a significant extent from external to inner attributes of the subject who is urged to self-manage. This marks a subtle twist in the cultural dynamic of managerial control: encouraging autonomous employees to use their alleged independence to

express their resourcefulness as well as to submit themselves to continuous self-scrutiny and audit in the name of accountability.

As Rose (1998, p.192) argues:

> "[The] therapeutic [appears], rather, in the sense that the relation to oneself is itself folded in therapeutic terms – problematising oneself according to the values of normality and pathology, diagnosing one's pleasures and misfortunes in *psy* terms, seeking to rectify or improve one's quotidian existence through intervening upon an 'inner world' we have enfolded as both so fundamental to our existence as humans and yet so close to the surface of our experience of the everyday."

Seeing the therapeutic in this way, we can also grasp some of the important changes in the systematic governance of subjectivity in everyday work. Using multiple tactics to present work as a sequence of opportunities for self-expression, managerialism transforms self-expression into a predicate of organisational and self-discipline, without needing to make recourse to traditional authoritarian vocabularies of control leaving room for the expansion of 'positive', 'developmental' technologies of audit. As Power (2007, p.16) argues: "This is the real audit society. It is not an adversarial world of external inspectors – although that can still happen. It is the normalised auditable world of self-inspection." Power draws attention here to the ways in which audit is hidden in the vocabularies and techniques of the 'therapeutic'.

Comprehensive appraisal and performance management systems are manifestations of how the therapeutic is enlisted in the audit process itself. They position 'manager' and 'managed' in a therapeutic context in which the former acts as quasi-therapist filling in a 'case history' and decides, together with the latter as 'patient', a course of future treatment (through the rubric of the 'Personal Development Plan' for example). Indeed, the manager is not exempt from her/his own appraisal: *360° Degree Appraisals* expose everybody to comprehensive scrutiny.

A crucial feature of the therapeutic habitus embodied in the cultural turn is that its discourses and techniques claim that they do not discriminate between hierarchical levels. Indeed, the entire organisational body undergoes many of these treatments. Furthermore, the more intense and more expensive the technique (especially those involving external consultants), the more likely it is that its subjects will be the managerial cadre (executives) rather than shopfloor ranks. The therapeutic disperses itself throughout organisations just as it has throughout the wider culture both in acts of production and consumption. To the extent that everybody is a 'self' in this sense, everybody may be subjected to such practices.

Collectively, culture management has become the envelope within which commitment therapies are performed. Culture functions as the mechanism through which every organisational member commits to the symbolic order of the community. Reintegrating the subject into the communal symbolic system presents managed organisational cultures as forms of community cure in themselves. Culture draws the boundaries which establish the corporate identity within which individuals are to organise the range of their own experiences.

The power of the therapeutic context lies in this complex cultural positioning of the individual and collective subject. As the 'self' is placed at the centre of the therapeutic relationship, it is more easily captured by practices of self-improvement, self-development, or HRD, by practices of appraisal, teamwork, self-management, or in assessment. The therapeutic relationship brings the self close to itself, it creates a

space in which *it* (the self) is the focus. It professes to allow for individual differentiation and for the establishment of a personal contract between employee and employer. This context also portrays the self as an always insufficiently utilised resource, a resource whose full potential risks remaining concealed unless it is helped to surface through the mediation of experts. The subject thus must take the opportunity to make itself available and visible to expert scrutiny in the name of improving itself, of accessing its purportedly limitless powers, as a path to self-realisation.

The therapeutic relationship thus appeals to the ethic of self-work through a promise of improvement, of discovery of a 'better self', or of a better way of being oneself. An example which makes this logic clearly visible are the recent attempts to include 'wellness' and 'happiness' as elements of the cultural contract of work. Programmes of 'wellness at work' aim to transform the space and modalities of governing by repositioning the subject in relation to itself and work. The invocation of a metaphor of a nearly clinical nature opens up a new avenue for profiling the relationship between one's work life and the rest of personal existence. The promise of finding unknown potentialities in oneself marks the therapeutic context as a critical ingredient in the creation of a new subject position: namely, that work provides the opportunity to enhance personal value, to realise previously latent capabilities in the service of self-affirmation and self-realisation. As Bellah et al. (1985, p.123) argued, "much of our work is a form of therapy."

The positioning of work as a subject-centred therapeutic process of continuous development makes possible new forms of self-governance. As the predicates of subjectivity are used to formulate positive, constructive ideals which link organisational success with personal achievement through self-expression, the inclusion of the therapeutic in managerial idioms becomes a new kind of disciplinary matrix rooted in the therapeutic habitus of the modern self.

The notion of habitus and the self

In this context, we must introduce, albeit very briefly, the notion of 'habitus'. We propose this notion here not as a conceptual advancement, but merely as a footnote to the literatures on both the 'therapeutic' (Rieff 1966; Foucault 1967; Rose 1999; Patocka 2002; Furedi 2004) and 'habitus' (from Aristotle's *hexis* and Aquinas's *habitus*, to elaborations in Schiller and Kierkegaard, as well as Mauss 1973 and Bourdieu 1977). In its long history, the category of 'habitus' has been developed in two main senses. Until its twentieth century uses in sociology, its main philosophical reference was to the ethical horizon or tradition in which the 'soul' was to search for a path to virtue and self-perfection (especially developed in Aquinas 1976). In sociology, its accent shifted radically to the body and to the relationships between embodiment and sociality. Mauss (1973, p.73) consigns it specifically to the body *in its present* and aims explicitly to remove any of its former references to the 'soul'. In Bourdieu (1977, p.78-87), *habitus* refers more to those behaviours which are derived almost unintentionally from objective structures in which the subject finds itself in a particular 'present'. *Habitus* becomes a matter of what he calls "intentionless intent" (1977, p.79), it is the outcome precisely of the fact that "subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing" (idem).

In this paper, we use the term *habitus* in its traditional sense, the one which it has acquired in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* (I^{ae}II^{ae} q. 22-48; 49-54): 'habitus' is the way in which (as far as possible) human nature acquires perfection

through the *intentional* mediation of the practical relationships between 'passions' (desires or sensibilities, as Tocqueville put it, 'habits of the heart') and 'reason' so that every human act becomes 'virtuous' in some way. The use of *habitus* here is metaphorical; it aims to capture the underlying character of the mentality of self-perfection invoked by managerialism, a mentality best represented by Rieff's image of the therapeutic's 'triumph' (1966). The reference to Aquinas associates it more directly to the sphere of what might be termed the 'modern soul'. The therapeutic habitus, in our sense, is not to be read in the Maussian key as a routine, or 'technique', of the body, but as a mode of projection in which specific orientations towards the future, specific 'horizons of expectation' (Koselleck 2002) manifest themselves 'habitually' and not simply routinely. Thus 'habitus' indicates here the complex discursive horizon through which the 'self' is exhorted to project its potentialities not merely in the static manner of routines of self-maintenance, but as a dynamic through which the subject ought to continuously work upon itself to become a better 'human resource'.

At this point emerges the critical historical link between the culture of 'virtue' and that of the 'therapeutic' in the European tradition: virtue comes out, ever since the ancient Greeks, from the proper examination and 'care of the soul' (Patocka 2002, p.91-92). In Christianity, self-exploration in prayer and confession are the specific practical modalities through which the individual does *therapeia* as the act of 'doing service to the gods' (Liddell 1966). Indeed, the relationship between a proper 'habitus' and the continuous self-examination and care for the soul can be seen as an uninterrupted feature in European cultural history (from Plato, to Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Duns Scottus, William of Ockham, de Montaigne, or Descartes).

Although Aquinas' conception is, of course, based upon a given theological interpretation, taking a leap forward to the latter part of the twentieth century, the secularisation of late modernity makes the human 'self' in its ordinary, everyday life, the ultimate underlying principle (subject) of world order (Taylor 1989), whose continuous preoccupation with itself becomes the basis of what Foucault (2005) called the 'care of the *self*' as an individuated and self-referential entity. The modern 'self' becomes the locus and object of the 'therapeutic habitus' in its twentieth century sense.

Contemporary managerialism aims to establish a normative framework by mobilising this 'therapeutic habitus' in the forms discussed previously. Certain segments of managerial discourses about work are predicated upon the premise that it has become a place of release from the renunciatory ethos of self-abnegation (especially in the Christian tradition that informed Aquinas, Luther or Calvin). Management's invocation of the self and subjectivity (as objects to be cultivated, developed, and enhanced by releasing their full 'human resourcefulness') portrays work as an order of therapy *sui generis*. The claim that underpins the cultural logic of the nexus of practices described in the previous section is based upon the arsenal of the therapeutic as one manifestation of the wider logic of modern culture, whose main aim is the liberation and emancipation of the 'Self'.

Modernity and the centrality of the 'self'

In this last part of the argument we explore further the hypothesis that management's 'turn to the self' is a significant cultural phenomenon because it is rooted in one of the fundamental features of modernity: the centrality of the self and of self-assertion. The modern 'Self' provides a historical-cultural link between

managerialism in some of its latest incarnations and modernity as a cultural epoch and synthesis. The historical horizon which opens up is thus broader than that of the last twenty-five years. We suggest that managerialism has appropriated a diverse but interconnected set of fundamental modern questions regarding the sense of self and work, of order and meaning.

What do we mean by 'modernity'? 'Modernity', in this context, "is a historical-cultural 'event' which changes the relationship between the universe, its transcendent horizon, and its human interpreter" (Dupré 1993, p.249). This happens because it formulates a new ontotheological synthesis (Dupré 1993, p.249 ff.) whose underlying principle (*hypokeimenon* or *subjectum*) becomes the human subject itself. *Hypokeimenon*, or *subjectum* (etymologically, 'that which lies beneath') means, in philosophical terms, the elementary level of being. This is reoccupied in modernity by what we call the human 'subject' or 'self' as the primordial source of meaning and value (a position previously occupied by gods, ideas, nature, or substance (*ousia*)). Perhaps it is possible to see some of the links between the growth of certain managerial discourses in recent forms and the centrality of the 'self' and 'self-progress'. The dispersion of managerialism throughout contemporary culture appears, in this light, as one of the expressions of the general logic of modernity.

In modernity, a crucial transformation takes place in relation to work as the way in which the modern self interprets its existence. Labour (work) becomes the realm in which humans express their true humanity (Hegel 1986, Marx 1975, Weber 1958, Bergson 1960, Arendt 1958, Löwith 1965). It is precisely because of this transformation of the labouring activity as an 'expression of life' (among others) that modernity distinguishes itself from previous historical epochs. In Greek Antiquity, for example, such an interpretation was literally inconceivable. It was the determination of 'man' as the *animal rationale* that prohibited the Greeks from conceiving labour as an expression of life. For them, to be a human meant exactly the opposite; it meant freedom from the necessity of labour, liberation from its derogatory and animal nature in order to create the space for the exercise of reason within the *polis*. Thus, slavery was seen as necessary since it protected humanity against any subjection to necessity, against any attempt to infringe on the claim to be human. As Arendt (1958, p.83-84) shows,

> "To labour meant to be enslaved by necessity, and this enslavement was inherent in the conditions of human life. Because men were dominated by the necessities of life, they could win their freedom only through the domination of those whom they subjected to necessity by force."

The precise opposite characterises modernity. Labour is no longer an activity that occupies a derogatory position in the axiomatic scheme of humanity and nature. Rather, it becomes the 'expression of life' itself, a process which gathers its specific momentum with the rise of secularised industrial societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and which finds its latest expression in the ethics of self-work and the centrality of contemporary work organisations. This process is synthesised in modern political economy and acquires a new metaphysical coherency and dynamism with the thought of Karl Marx (1975). Marx remained himself a key exponent of the idea that labour expresses true *humanitas* (on that basis, this idea developed into one of the most important parts of his system, the theory of alienation). Furthermore, Max Weber (1958) showed the links between the Protestant Ethic and the centrality of work for the Christian vocation and the emergence of capitalism.

The modern cultural synthesis has as one of its fundamental dimensions the fact that labouring activity, work as such, becomes the constituting factor of human existence. This occurred because the profound disintegration of the pre-modern sense of world order dissolved the certainties by which the world appeared as a pre-ordered, supreme 'cosmos', governed by an omnipotent 'Creator' and guardian, in which the human occupied a rather passive, contemplative, predetermined place. As a consequence of the dissolution of the geocentric worldview of early Christianity, the world becomes an 'infinite universe' (Koyré, 1968), a place where humanity is now alone and where survival can only come from an active engagement with life itself (Arendt 1958; Blumenberg 1985). The modern 'self' emerges as the sole point of reference of the new synthesis, faced with the only alternative for survival: self-assertion through labour. Nature itself becomes a store of resources for the production of the species' concrete, everyday existence. Thus, despite the loss of previous certainties in an 'enchanted world' (in Weber's terms 1958), the threshold of modernity sees the transformation of 'man' into an individualised self, an autonomous, assertive subject, with an unprecedented freedom and a horizon of endless potentialities. The 'self' as subject became a cultural reality; this is the birth of Descartes' *ego*. Though seemingly enabled by this cultural liberation from the shackles of Medieval dogmatism, the individual ego stands alone in the infinite universe. It has to labour (materially and ideatically) to construct its everyday existence without recourse to the traditional reference points (divinity and ordered creation) – what Arendt called *vita activa* (1958). Human life becomes a project, the realisation of which presupposes that the human subject becomes self-expressive as well as self-making (in other words, seeking continuously to give its life meaning). As Dupré (1993, p.119) argues:

> "In the course of assuming control over everything else the self, as Kierkegaard put it, lost sight of its own identity. Separated from that totality which once nurtured it and largely deprived of the interiority which once defined it, it has become an indigent self."

Nietzsche (1983) called this phenomenon "modern man's small soul". Seeking to fill the meaning-vacuum at its centre, the modern self generates its own substance through practices of self-work and the therapeutic culture which purports to offer endless possibilities.

The 'self' becomes, in modernity, the central subject of its own order. It was henceforth converted into the locus of a new system of political ordering and governance. What followed was the designation of new 'places' (*topoi*) where 'true humanity' manifests itself. A new kind of sociality was constituted, new institutions emerged, and a new purpose of governance ensued. This happened because, evidently, previous institutions (such as the *polis* of the Greeks, the *civitas* of the Romans, the *ecclesia* of the Christians) could no longer provide a meaningful and articulate framework for governing human self-expression. The site for self-expression crystallised partly around labour itself and the work-organisation with the subject at its centre, and also around the celebration of consumption and leisure.

Contemporary work organisations and the highly urbanised spaces which resulted from the concentration of labour represent this reality. Governing the social relations of human productive activity is now one of the poles of political discourse, practice, and institutions.

Concluding remarks

Several major trends characterise contemporary managerialism: the expansion of audit technologies at all levels of governance, the intensification of surveillance especially through increasingly sophisticated information technologies, and the growth of vocabularies that attempt to enrol subjectivity (in various guises) as an essential ingredient of organisational performance.

In this paper, we offered a historical-cultural commentary upon some of the discursive changes accompanying this last category. We have grouped these changes around 'culture', 'performativity', 'knowledge' and 'wellness at work'. We argued that these are not a superficial, temporary and irrelevant accumulation of managerial *mumbo-jumbo* (Wheen 2004, Watson 2004). Rather, the aim of this speculative exercise is to draw attention to the wider historical-cultural horizon in which the roots of these subject-centred managerial concepts may lie. The adoption of such concepts for the mediation of relationships at work has led to the emergence of new cultural boundaries in which governance has become a more demanding process calling the 'self' increasingly into question. What characterises the restructuring of techniques of management as a consequence of this 'turn to the self' is the mobilisation of what we termed 'therapeutic habitus' as one of the features of 'soft capitalism' and its ethic of self-work. The reason for this analysis is to draw attention to how managerialism expands its range of tropes and sites to include a broader spectrum of the modern identity at work in the pursuit of economic rationality. Therefore, we suggest that possible transitions in contemporary forms of governance need to take into account, amongst other avenues of analysis, this expansion of management in the sphere of the modern 'self'.

The notion of 'therapeutic habitus' has been used to refer to the wider historical horizon which makes possible the expansion and intensification of these management approaches. They can be thus linked to a 'long revolution' (in Raymond Williams' terms) in the constitution of the modern sense of 'self'. Modernity is important in this context because, as a cultural-historical epoch, it is characterised by a specific matrix of self- and world-understanding in which the 'self' has become the central referential axis. As the process of secularisation of the modern world inexorably unfolded, it was accompanied by a re-centring of cosmic order around the 'self'. It is in this context that the colonisation of the modern sense of 'self' by managerialism is a significant phenomenon which cannot be easily dismissed. In this horizon we make the case that subjectivity has become an important site and object of governance. Its specific sensibilities, mentalities and ethos must be analysed in parallel with other investigations of institutional forms that have traditionally informed our understanding of government and governance. The managerial concepts examined here require the attention of scholars because they project new horizons in which work is conceptualised and the identity of the labouring subject is colonised.

This essay has of course its obvious limitations. It is based on a general type of historical speculation. We have not covered here well-known empirical work which shows how the application of these techniques generates their own contestation in practice. There are well-documented instances which show how people resist, undermine, transgress or transform them through their engagement such practices. This is a very important aspect of governance and it is in these processes of contestation that the future of such managerial discourses lies. Our analysis focussed on pointing out some of the conditions of possibility for the rise of this specific aspect of managerial discourse in the last part of the twentieth century and the early twenty-

first. It would be foolhardy to even attempt to predict what the future of governance will bring. The therapeutic culture of the 'self' may or may not continue to be one of the central resources of future governance (especially at work). However, it may still require analysts' attention in the future as much as other units of analysis.

Given the centrality of the 'self' in modernity, the process by which the 'self' and subjectivity are appropriated as key ingredients of ordering society, economy and polity should not be treated dismissively or superficially. In this sense the fragments of practices and discourses discussed here are relevant indicators of this process. Our attempt is to provide a basis for debate and not to resolve, or close dogmatically, the questions we raise. On this basis, we propose it as a contribution to the wider discussions on the nature and place of managerialism in contemporary society and culture.

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