Changes currently occurring in the world of work are large-scale, affecting what people do every day and altering our relations with one another and with the physical world. There is a shift in the nature of industrial work, from a materiality of labor and product, and specialization of function, to forms of production that are discursive, or symbolic, and highly integrated. Among the far reaching implications of a post-industrial condition is a dissolution of traditional and modern bonds of social solidarity and a metamorphosis of the character of the modern self.

Work, Self and Society examines the relationships between the institutional practices of work under post-industrial conditions and the formation of the self. Drawing on data from field work in a multi-national corporation, the book critically analyzes organizational and cultural practices in contemporary corporate work. The author interprets the deliberate construction of “designer cultures” as a response to the broad crisis in industrial production, work organization and culture. The book also develops a critical social psychology of corporate work. It analyzes the production of “designer employees” and other effects of contemporary corporate culture, and describes and analyzes self-strategies effected by the discursive practices of corporate work.

The author argues that a “post-occupational” condition, an event precipitated and facilitated by new technologies and organizational change, is emerging in corporate organizations. “Post-occupational” work has significant implications for self-identity and social cohesion within the work place, and more broadly, in society. The relationships between the institutional processes of the new work in post-industrial corporate culture, and changes in social organization and self formation have not yet been described. Work, Self and Society offers original analyses of these relationships, and proposes some important new categories by which to interpret the work–self–society relation.

Catherine Casey is a lecturer in the School of Commerce and Economics at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.
For my parents, Hazel and Norbert Casey
# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements viii

Introduction 1

1 CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND THE PROBLEM OF WORK 7

2 THE TRANSFORMATION OF WORK 26

3 DISCOURSES OF THE SELF 50

4 THE WORKING SELF: SOCIALIZATION AND LEARNING AT WORK 74

5 DISCOURSES OF PRODUCTION 89

6 DESIGNER EMPLOYEES: CORPORATE CULTURE AND THE PRODUCTION OF SELF 138

7 REVIVALISM, SELF AND SOLIDARITY 183

Appendix: The field study 198

Notes 205

Bibliography 214

Index 234
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The support and assistance of many people helped make writing this book, and conducting the earlier field work, both possible and worthwhile. The part of this book that describes work, life and culture in a multi-national corporation took me for an academic year into the everyday working life of a corporation. Although the people at the company, and the company itself, must remain anonymous, I wish first to thank them for allowing me to be among them. The generosity and openness which they afforded me made my role as observer and analyst a relatively comfortable one. I thank them all for their time, their stories and their forbearance.

I wish to thank most especially Philip Wexler, my teacher and friend, and the late Christopher Lasch. I am deeply indebted to them both for encouraging and facilitating this work. Among others who have read, criticized and commented on chapters or ideas in this book I thank especially Michael Powell and Barry Smart for their criticism and comments on the chapters, and their warm encouragement. I thank also David Barry and Bruce Luske for their helpful comments at various stages of this research. For many stimulating conversations over ideas and themes in this book, and about much else, I thank Stephen Appel, Roger Booth, Gill and John Denny, Nicola Armstrong, Lynn Vacanti and Doug Noble. And I wish also to thank Brett Warburton, Ilene Wexler, Stephanie Doyle, Trevor Mallard, Flan Lynch, and my family.
Eschatological interests have flourished at the end of centuries before now, and the imminent end of the twentieth century is no exception. It might be that the current interest among a number of social observers in endings and our proclivity toward transformations and beginnings is an effect of some vast cosmic season. On the other hand, the passing of industrialism simply coincides with the passing of the century. What comes after does not begin neatly on a date in our conventional measure of time. The old decays unevenly. It is sometimes repaired and revived and sometimes destroyed and discarded. The new is generated by both the living and the dead. Like Weber still, we do not know what social life beyond industrialism will be like. Without the certainties and hopes of modern thought our readings of this juncture are only modest and reasonable offerings for thinking about the present and the future. And hence I prefer to retain the limited concept of "post-industrial" to describe the changes in modern industrial society we can readily see around us. Post-industrial society provides a way of thinking about these changes as we seek new categories for theorizing a new social formation after industrialism. It is an interim term for an interim condition.

In typical, western industrial society, as Marx, Durkheim and Weber analyzed, the social bases of society were organized around the productive economic activities of human beings. An extensive division of labor, the rationalization of economic and social processes and deep tensions between 
\textit{gemeinschaft} and \textit{gesellschaft} characterized modern society. Our modern forms of social solidarity, in which we became increasingly interdependent, existed amid a complex struggle between classes and power elites, exacerbating conflicts between individualism and community. The increasing rationalization of all spheres of life characterized modern industrial society. Unifying "grand" narratives of social meaning and behavior demanded and achieved, by and large, social conformity to the values and practices of western modernity.

Since the early 1970s social analysts have been proposing that a range of technological and social developments occurring in western societies is
INTRODUCTION

bringing about vast social and cultural changes that are challenging the meta trends of modern industrialism. Although there are evidently continuities in many social practices these post-industrial events are effecting changes in many areas of modern industrial society and not just, although fundamentally, in production, or the postmodern turn in the cultural sphere. Among the far-reaching implications of a post-industrial condition is a dissolution of traditional and modern bonds of social solidarity and a metamorphosis of the character of the modern self. The changes occurring in work and production are large-scale. There is a shift in the nature of industrial work, from a materiality of labor and product, and specialization of function, to forms of production that are discursive, or symbolic, and highly integrated. These practices affect what people do every day, and they are altering relations among ourselves and with the physical world.

The advent of advanced electronic technologies, based upon microprocessor and integrated-circuit technologies, is changing how we produce and exchange both material and discursive commodities. It is also precipitating and facilitating the emergence of new products and practices in service, knowledge, information and images, as well as the globalization of communications and financial transactions. The “global world” is a technological phenomenon. In the midst of these profound changes in the productive sphere, including increasing and persisting unemployment, can work continue to be a primary basis of social organization, and a primary constituent of self formation, as it has been throughout the modern industrial era? Will work and production endure as central organizing elements at this post-industrial juncture, and beyond?

This book offers a critical social analysis of the transformations occurring in the world of work and of the effects of contemporary institutional practices of work on self formation. As we move beyond modern industrialism I imagine that work, as conventionally understood, will no longer remain a primary basis of social organization. But in the meantime, the deep industrial legacy of the predominance of work lingers ominously at this juncture. It is an ominous lingering because we are creating a world in which it seems work for many will be scarce, unrewarding and sporadic as society has the capacity, through technological and organizational developments, to produce more and more (the dream of industrialism) with fewer and fewer workers. Growth without work is a decidedly post-industrial condition. The industrial legacy of the centrality of production and work in social and self formation hovers precipitously with the post-industrial condition in which work is declining in social primacy. Social meanings and solidarity must, eventually, be found elsewhere.

SELF

Talking about the “self” is currently fraught with difficulty. A number of analysts now prefer to emphasize identity processes (Aronowitz 1992,
INTRODUCTION

Giddens 1991, Hall 1987, 1990, Hewitt 1989, Lash and Friedman 1992) although these are usually intertwined with notions of self. Others, in postmodern vein, reject a notion of self (Deleuze and Guattari 1979, Derrida 1982, Lyotard 1984). For the past twenty years much of social and cultural theory in the West has been influenced by the French philosophers Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Kristeva. Their influence, and also that of the American philosopher Richard Rorty, has prompted a contestation of and departure from what they consider to be a modern or humanist view of the self.

It has been argued that the modern view conceives of the self as a fixed, irreducible “solid” entity – the essential core of one’s being. Whether or not this is actually the modern view of self, and there are some, importantly Charles Taylor (1989) who propose that the self, while indeed a modern concept, has always been more contingent and ephemeral than modernity’s critics suggest, it is a commonly held view that is now criticized and rejected by many contemporary and postmodern thinkers. There has been a theme in the modern tradition in which the self is conceived as historically specific and socially and culturally patterned. Marx, Durkheim and Freud each held, variously, the idea that the self is a social construction shaped by institutional processes. Other modern thinkers, notably Mead (1934), Goffman (1959, 1961) and Berger and Luckman (1966), never held the view of self as “fixed entity”, preferring to emphasize the social construction of self through constitutive elements, dialectical processes, self-narratives and displays. The unresolved debate on selfhood continues. I offer from the outset an explanatory note on my usage of the concept of self.

The self may be a convenient fiction, a narrative construct that gives some coherence and continuity to a process of mind–body sensations, conscious and unconscious experiences and meaning-making. To agree with the postmodern critics that the self is not a fixed and solid entity does not require an outright rejection of the concept. Rather, recognizing the self as a pattern or a constellation of constituent events and processes (particles and waves in Zohar’s (1990) quantum physics metaphor) can still enable an understanding of the person who experiences, as we western moderns do, a sense of agency, inwardness and individuality (cf. Taylor 1989). One might hold the “contingency of selfhood” (Rorty 1989) and at the same time, like Sartre and Foucault, espouse the existential project of self creation and self care in the world as it is for us. The self is the fluid locus of one’s subjective experience, it is where affect and reason are experienced and the capacity to act beheld.

The self is the name we have given to the process of modern identity and, therefore, it is often regarded (in the language of industrialism) as an outcome or a social product. If, however, we can take a view of self that encompasses both identity-making processes (including multi-linear
INTRODUCTION

biological, psychological and cultural processes) and outcomes (self-strategies), the self remains not only a useful term in understanding the person, but a worthy project of human endeavor that endures into post-modernity’s pursuit of free play, différence and plurality. The tensions between social production of identity and the existential project of self creation are at the heart of this matter. The emphasis in this book is upon the effects of social and institutional practices, specifically the practices of work and production, on self formation. The discursive constitution of subjectivity manifests itself in the strategies of self that individuals devise and practice within and against the ineluctable constraints of social and cultural conditions. These strategies are processes and representations that are not fixed or essential, rather dynamics in flux and open to multiple configurations.

The dynamics of the various institutional processes of modern society and their relation to self formation have seldom been described and analyzed. In recent decades there have been some important efforts to understand the construction of the modern self (Lasch 1978, 1984, Rose 1990, Taylor 1989) and to describe the dynamics of self processes (Foucault 1988a, 1988b, Gergen 1991, Hewitt 1989, Wexler 1992, Probyn 1993) and identity formation (Aronowitz 1992, Giddens 1991, Hall 1990). Most of them offer a cultural analysis of self dynamics and few attempt to describe the relation of these dynamics to institutional processes. The earlier efforts of Goffman (1961) and of Becker et al. (1968) to study institutions and persons were not widely shared but there are echoes of these symbolic interactionist works in Wexler’s (1993) more recent critical study of institutional processes, in particular schooling, in relation to self formation. Studying the connections between the institutional processes of work and the formation of the self is an even less common endeavor. There are some studies on the relationship between work and personality (Kohn and Schooler 1983, O’Brien 1986). Maccoby (1976), Baum (1987) and LaBier (1986) have studied the relationship between the psychostructure of workplaces and the self, and Hirschhorn (1988) has contributed to this theme in his examination of the “post-industrial” workplace and its organizational psychology. Kunda (1992), Powell and DiMaggio (1991) and Martin (1992), as recent examples, explore organizational cultures and offer critical analyses of new organizational forms and practices. Kondo’s (1990) study of “power, gender and discourses of identity in a Japanese workplace” focuses an anthropological gaze on self processes and western images of work in Japanese society.

Notwithstanding these contributions, the connections between the vast technological and organizational changes currently taking place in production in advanced industrial societies, and their affect on societal changes in self formation and social solidarity need further investigation and interpretation. Work in virtually all sectors has changed in a number of aspects.
The "new" work is characterized by advanced technological developments including in the first instance automation, advanced computer and information technologies in production, and the restructuring of work tasks, occupations and organizational practices. The relationships between the institutional processes of the new work in post-industrial corporate culture, and changes in social organization and self formation have not yet been described.

Work, Self and Society explores the effects on the self of the social relations and institutional practices of a sector of work in post-industrial capitalism. In the 1991–2 academic year I undertook an extensive field study of advanced technological work in a multi-national corporation based in the United States of America (see Appendix). The findings of that study are reported and analyzed in chapters 4–6 of this book, while the first three chapters discuss the problematics of work and self. The book offers a complement to the work of others studying self development now (Gergen 1991, Giddens 1991, Hewitt 1989, Wexler 1992) and also to those studying organizational life (Hirschhorn 1988, Kunda 1992, LaBier 1986, Martin 1992). Its distinctive focus is to analyze the relationship between the “discursive practices” (the communication and cultural practices) of the new production and work organization and self development.

I share with Kunda’s recent book (1992) a focus on corporate culture and advanced technology, but, unlike Kunda, I make a particular effort to explore questions of self formation and social solidarity that arise from the discursive practices of work. Kunda offers an analysis of corporate culture that emphasizes normative control. I interpret the advent of deliberately designed corporate cultures as a post-industrial condition. I propose that “designer cultures” are being constructed in response to the broad crisis in industrial production, work organization and culture. I offer too an interpretation of the technological changes in work in an analysis of what I call an emergent “post-occupational” condition. From such an interpretation, I offer an analysis of self-strategies effected by the discursive practices of corporate production. Finally, I attempt to sketch theoretical propositions of post-industrial, or what I call “post-occupational” solidarity.

The transformation of occupation has implications beyond creative flexibility and enhanced dispensability in the workplace. It is not simply a matter of multi-skilling and job re-design. Rather, “post-occupational” work in large corporations has significant implications for social cohesion within the workplace, and more broadly, in society. The method of the empirical study from which the analyses are drawn is in the ethnographic genre. But I admit that I take, perhaps, a greater risk than is usually taken by ethnographers – away from ethnographic reluctance to attempt broad theoretical statements, to the critical theorist’s passion for them. The reader will decide on the validity of the persuasion.

My objective is to describe and analyze the relationships between the
INTRODUCTION

new work (material and discursive) and self formation and societal changes. I attempt, by bringing critical theory back to work, to develop a critical social psychology of contemporary corporate work. The book offers interpretations of the changes in institutional work practices and their implications for social organization, social solidarity and social life, after industrialism. As all social theory is inevitably political, I declare my implicit value position in an ultimate interest in transformed social organization. It is my (modern) hope that social and cultural life after industrialism will be qualitatively better for selves than that under the iron embrace of industrialism. In this time of postmodern uncertainty, or at least modesty, the interventionary voice of modern radicalism is somewhat quieter, but not yet relinquished. I wish in this book, as primarily a scribe of the end of industrialism, to describe and make some sense of the conditions of this time and to discern spaces of possibilities for self and social creation in the imminent future.

Chapter 1 introduces the problematic of work in contemporary social theory. I discuss the major theoretical responses to political and production changes and consider the place of work in contemporary social theory. I argue for a renewed critical theorizing of work as a path to understanding the self-society relation in contemporary social conditions. Chapter 2 describes and reviews the changes in industrial production and work in the latter decades of the twentieth century. It contextualizes the study of contemporary corporate work developed in subsequent chapters. Chapter 3 similarly traces the historical production of the self through modern thought and contemporary self psychology. It introduces a critical self psychology from which I elaborate a critical social psychology of corporate work in Chapter 6. Chapter 4 examines the working self through the formative experiences of modern forms of work. In Chapter 5 I report and discuss an empirical field study of contemporary corporate work that I conducted in a large multi-national company in the United States of America. The chapter describes the "discursive practices" of corporate work and develops a concept of "post-occupational" corporate work that is emerging in the practices of advanced technological production and organizational reform. Chapter 6 discusses the effects of the discursive practices of work on the self and develops a typology of self types that are being patterned by these discursive practices of work in the corporation. I describe "designer employees" and analyze the relationships between self strategies and corporate culture. Finally, in Chapter 7 I consider the problem of "post-occupational" social solidarity and the globalization of the effects of advanced technological production and corporate culture. I develop in this chapter some propositions for understanding the present juncture as western societies move beyond modern industrialism.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Baudrillard, Jean, 1983, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities ... or the End of the Social, and Other Essays*, New York: Semiotext(e).


Becker, Howard, Greer, Blanche, Hughes, Everett and Strauss, Anselm, 1961, *Boys
in White: Student Culture in Medical School, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Becker, Howard, Greer, Blanche, Riesman, David and Weiss, Robert (eds), 1968, Institutions and the Person, Chicago: Aldine.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


217
BIBLIOGRAPHY


218


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hale, W.D., Hedgepeth, B.E., Taylor, E.B., 1985–6, “Locus of control and


Jameson, Frederic, 1984b, "Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism", *New Left Review* 146, July/August.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHY


226
BIBLIOGRAPHY


227
Parker, Jane and Slaughter, Mike, 1988, Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept, Boston: South End Press.
Rosow, I., 1974, Socialization to Old Age, California: University of California.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHY