TEMPORARY TOPICS: CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TEMPORARY WORK INDUSTRY

by

MATTHEW SPARKE


A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Geography)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September, 1991

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Department of **GEOGRAPHY**

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada  

Date 29/8/91
ABSTRACT

In this thesis I critically examine the temporary work industry. I draw on a variety of materials including academic and journalistic writing, as well as extensive interviews with temps and counsellors in Vancouver. Having begun by discussing the politics of my ethnography, I proceed to analyse the implications of how temping displaces and bears witness to the representation of labour as value in capitalism. I then interrogate how the equally "material" politics of gender serve to reproduce temping. Finally, in the last chapter, I make a set of arguments about how the industry intersects with the discourses of rationality operating in the disciplinary, legislative and unionised organisational regimes of modern employment.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It does a grave wrong to everyone who has helped me to cram their names into the half page that requirements demand: my apologies. Firstly, I would like to thank all the temps who agreed to talk to me, most particularly Ona Galbraith, Arlene Carey, and Helen Potrebenko. It is Status in Tonbridge, England that I have to thank for starting me out on this investigation and for my best assignment ever; answering the telephone at the merged mouthful Electrolux/Tricity/Bendix Service.

My gratitude goes to: Suzy Reimer, Noel Castree, Lisa Drummond, Tim Solnick, Cole Harris, Robin Dowling, Bruce Willems-Braun, Chad Staddon, Yvonne Martin, Derek Pohl and Michael Brown. I would especially like to thank David Ley for his careful reading as well as his kind support. Likewise, my thanks go to Derek Gregory, Gerry Pratt, and Trevor Barnes who have given me much encouragement, time and ideas. Eric Swyngedouw, Judy Fudge, Dick Walker, Ernest Akyeampong, Janet Patterson, Ali Bonnett and Jennifer Hyndman have all been very helpful, variously arranging meetings, sending me articles and giving up time to talk.

I can't thank enough Anila Srivastava, Dan Clayton and Debby Leslie, for the hours they spent on my work, providing hatchet editing, parachuted commas, and ace advice. Other good friends: Chris, Sarah, Michel, Cathy, Desmond, Anita, Amy and Anna, Alice, Rhys, Catherine, Tom, Michael, and especially Katharyne, have kept me thinking that this is life.
ETHNOGRAPHY OF TEMPING AND TEMPING AS ETHNOGRAPHY

Author-ity.

On the dust jacket of a novel by Zoë Fairbairns are the following lines:

"There was something pathetic about the way she declared: 'I like temping' as if someone had argued."

Life as a temp at the Here Today agency suited Antonia perfectly. Securely married, she could enjoy stability at home, freedom and variety at work. She preferred to spend no more than three weeks in one job: one week to learn it, one to get used to it, and one to think about moving on.

Suddenly all that has changed. Her husband doesn't want her anymore, and neither, it seems, do the increasingly-automated offices of London. Her home and her health are under threat, and so is her knowledge of who she is: she always knew men wanted her, as wife, as secretary, as lover. What if they don't?

Then Samantha comes into the picture: at first no more than a rumored victim of sexual assault in an office. Searching for truth about Samantha, Antonia finds answers to questions about herself she didn't even know she was asking.¹

Like Antonia, whose experiences I will return to more than once in this thesis, my original interest in the subject began when I was obliged to temp in order to earn some money. Also like Antonia, my first-hand experience of temping was garnered in South-East England, a different cultural, political and legal context from Vancouver where I have undertaken this study. However, unlike Antonia, I am both a man and a student.

Being a student meant that I always knew I had a place and a short term plan for the future to go back to; that this was not by any means my only resource. With generous though not wealthy parents to fall back on, and with my student grant, temping provided me with money for extras like field trips, a hi-fi

and a computer. Likewise being a "young man" and a student from Oxford often gave me a sense that I had curiosity value and power, even kudos, in the offices I worked in. Certainly, it confused outsiders' expectations:

"I'm sorry, I only wanted to speak to the secretary."

"I am the secretary."

My gender and attributed status also gave me the self-confidence to resist being bossed around. Even if I did have to be silent and obey, I could always cheer myself up by saying it was just useful ethnographic experience, or, by patronising the oppressor in my mind - feeling sorry for this 'poor stupid soul whose only satisfaction in life came from ordering temps about.' This is not to say that women who temp and who are not students are divested of all capacity for resistance; in fact, many use the same tactics. What I rather want to indicate here is the way in which my own position structured the way I felt about temping.

My experiences on, or rather, not on the job, became yet further enmeshed with academic concerns when, after a summer vacation of plentiful work, I returned for Christmas only to find that "things were slow." Low skilled temps with little experience, like me, would not be receiving assignments. In the intervening period there had been the 1987 "Black Monday" crash and the lesson was simple, if a little sobering. To wit: if you are a temp, you are a particularly vulnerable member of the workforce. Your experiences, unmediated by more conventional labour market inertias, are rather like an index closely tied to the state of the economy. It was with this lesson in mind, and with economic crisis looming in Canada, that I began this study of the relations, dynamics, meanings and significance of temping in Vancouver.
By beginning with this personal story put alongside a quotation from the cover of a piece of fiction, I am both repeating and disrupting one of the classic tropes of ethnographic writing. My story is a gesture towards having "been there," towards claiming the powerful authority of "real" experience. Yet, by placing it in relation to a politically urgent fragment of fiction I hope to have opened as questions both the fiction of my story's authenticity and the authenticity of the fiction. Alive in the structure of this chiasm are the vital politics of ethnography. Condensed as different moments of authority: the authority I claim from my temping in England; the authority of an academic thesis seeking to represent episodes from the lives of temps in Vancouver; and my authority as a male "observer" of a mainly female temping population, they form the objects of the questions that fill the rest of this chapter's discussion.

Traditionally authority has been the place par excellence of what Michel Foucault has famously called the "repressive hypothesis." Seen as something which people hold or are subdued by - like a sovereign's power - the power of authority is regarded as immanent and immediate, like the descent of the dominating fist. However, as Foucault's work has repeatedly shown, such a conception of power is part and parcel of a way of thinking that successfully hides the mechanisms by which power as authority is constituted. A focus on only the sovereign's ability to dominate, for example, helps to suppress any analysis that might explore how that authority is produced. Such an analysis, argues Foucault,

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2 For a discussion of these questions in relation to disciplinary sociology, see Ann Game's *Undoing The Social: Towards A Deconstructive Sociology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); especially chapter one on "Sociological Fictions."

would instead have to proceed by examining the positioning of that sovereign subject within a complex of intertwining power relations. By looking at power in this way, authority becomes visible as a form of nodality, as that which "names the specific forms in which the facts of power are represented." Such an approach does not try to deny the materiality of authority, it seeks instead rigorously to question it as the condensation point of countless intersecting relations of power. Returning to the context of an ethnographic enterprise, but in the lee of critiques beheading sovereign conceptions of power, it becomes incumbent upon the writer-fieldworker to examine how authority is constructed in the work of moving between field and text.

Normally in the work of social scientists the type of writing with which I have begun here - snippets from favourite fiction, personal anecdotes and the like - are kept for the preface. A scene of supplementary writing, the preface serves as a site for the expression of feelings before the seriousness of science begins, the place where the nitty gritty job of noting special influences and summarising aspirations can be done without risk of formal criticism, the place, finally, of emotion. Subsequently, with all this clutter out of the way, the main text can proceed with its grander contributions to the academic enterprise, always secure in its conviction that it can stand aloof from what went before but was written after.

In his deconstruction of the relation between Hegel's preface and text, Jacques Derrida notes how the former

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is the site of a kind of chit-chat external to the very thing it appears to be talking about.\textsuperscript{5}

Yet, as such, the preface seems to "have always been written [...] in view of [its] own self effacement."\textsuperscript{6} It is in this way that the preface bestows authority on the main text and, like a picture frame that confers the status of "proper art" on to a painting, it does so while dissimulating its own role in the process. The politics facilitated by the organisation of this structure are detailed with precision by Ben Agger. Having dispensed with speaking emotionally in the marginalised preface, "[s]cience silences because it leaves its own voice out of the account."\textsuperscript{7} Derrida's politics - by way of opposition - revolve around a displacing investigation of just such structures of liminality which mark out and secure the authoritative (if fractured) terrain of Franco-German Philosophy - the institution within which he is careful to position himself.\textsuperscript{8} By contrast, my questioning of authority's constitution has to be responsible to more sociological concerns. It is with this in mind that I turn to the example of Michael Burawoy's book, \textit{The Politics of}


\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ibid.} p. 9.


Production. This work has been very influential on my thinking about the politics and discipline of temporary work. Because I take its critique seriously and see its significance for my own project, I also must attend to the implications of how its author establishes his authority.

Burawoy begins his book by using a preface to document some significant personal experiences including those he gained working as a machine operator at Allied in Chicago.9 A quite self-reflective writer, he comments:

As an academic who would be returning to the university after serving his time on the shopfloor, it has not always been easy to interpret those experiences. Without the workers who were willing to allow me into their lives as well as show me the ropes, the accounts that follow would never have been possible. I cannot say that my life on the shopfloor was a permanent joy, but that it was at all bearable and at times amusing was due to the social inventiveness of my companions.10

Subsequently, in the main body of the text, Burawoy draws on the authority of this experience as part of his critique of Braverman and the other marxists, who have, in his eyes, lost sight of the political culture of production in their attempts to chart stark degradation in the labour process.

[Braverman's work] failed to speak to my experiences on the shopfloor, to get at what work meant for me and my fellow operators. [...] Our jobs may have had little skill in Braverman's sense, but they involved ingenuity enough. They absorbed our attention and sometimes even left us too much autonomy. Uncertainty could be as nerve-wracking as it was seductive. Objectification of work, if that is what we were experiencing, is very much a subjective process - it cannot be reduced to some inexorable laws of capitalism. We participated in and strategized our own exploitation. That, and not the destruction of subjectivity, was what was so remarkable.11

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11 Ibid, p. 10.
These are powerful and convincing words that seem to come right from the heart. Nevertheless, even as they convey their truth effects to the reader, Burawoy never pauses to comment on the politics of these and other representations as authoritative "I've been there's". To be sure, his work does not pretend to be ethnography; but because there is no detailed discussion of the place of his workplace in-sights, Burawoy's use of this authority creates problems for the interested reader. In particular, since the prefatorial experiences in the field seem so intimately tied to the main text's theoretical arguments, the reader's acceptance of the latter begins to depend on a form of leap of faith in the former. While it might seem that the critiques, examples and theoretical elaborations of the book stand alone, one always has the sense that for the author himself the "serving [of] his time on the shop floor" was vital. It is in that moment, contemplating the author-ity, that it becomes evident that all one has to go on are the few sparse comments - what James Clifford has called "fables of rapport" - in the preface.\(^\text{12}\)

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\(^{12}\) James Clifford, in "On Ethnographic Authority," chapter one of *The Predicament Of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988). "[W]ithin classic ethnographies," he writes, "more-or-less stereotypic 'fables of rapport' narrate the attainment of full participant-observer status. These fables may be told elaborately or in passing, naively or ironically. [...] The anecdote establishes a presumption of connectedness, which permits the writer to function in his subsequent analyses as exegete and spokesman." (p. 40) Burawoy does not openly claim for himself the status of participant-observer, but certainly this is how the passing remarks in the preface serve to position his place of authority.
I should emphasise that this is less a critique, and more a deconstruction of Burawoy's construction of authority. I agree wholeheartedly with Donna Haraway's claim - made in a much wider discussion about objects and relations of knowledge - that

[w]e need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future.

By following the example of the feminist sociologist Rosemary Pringle, as well as the work of critics like Clifford and Haraway, I want, throughout this thesis, to make thematic - and thereby try to displace - structures of power like those traced in The Politics of Production. Pringle's work on and with secretaries in Australia makes explicit her concerns about these women's awkward relationship with her

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13 It seems to me that 'deconstruction' is used too often as a synonym for 'critique' by writers anxious to mark their up-to-date jargonese. Here, instead, I hope to follow Spivak who, quoting Derrida, has commented: "Deconstruction is not an exposure of error. Deconstruction notices how we produce truths." Page 214 of "A response to "The difference within: Feminism and critical theory", in Elizabeth Meese and Alice Parker (eds) The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1989).


16 Writers like Marcus and Fischer have commented on the danger that "fieldwork introspection endlessly replayed can become a subgenre that loses both its novelty and payoff for developing a knowledge of other cultures," (Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment In The Human Sciences (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 42) a form, as Clifford has referred to it elsewhere, "of elitism, of solipsism, of putting the whole world in quotation marks," (Page 25 of the "Introduction: Partial Truths," in James Clifford and George Marcus (eds.) Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986)) However, it has been the example of Haraway's work - self-reflective but politically engaged in practical study - that has more inspired me to make these questions of authority while continually attempting to address them to my ethnographic endeavour. See especially her Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science (New York: Routledge, 1989).
academic feminism. She also reflects throughout upon her feelings during the research, noting, for example, how she was positioned by lesbian secretaries, or how it seemed easier to interview bosses.\(^{17}\)

Likewise, bringing my 'me' as well as my 'I' into the account, I want to make the personal experiences - as temp, as interviewer and as academic - more than just fables of rapport. Ideally they will turn the chapters into open, but, knowingly narrated documents that clarify the operation and achievement of my authority. Such a notion of 'displacing by making thematic' seems to me to be far more valuable than the utopian impulse to try to step outside authority. Authority cannot be left behind or dismissed by fiat. We always and everywhere inhabit dynamic power relations which enable us to be the subjects that we are. These can, and often should, be changed, but they can no more be put aside than can the necessity of daily food. Nevertheless, if authority is neither intrinsically "good" nor "bad," it is always political, and it is thus the responsibility of ethnography to be as explicit as possible about its positions of interest and histories of influence. To this end I am trying to make every chapter both preface and text - always re-marking upon the undecidable interrelations.\(^ {18}\)

\(^{17}\) Pringle avoids any form of solipsism by always making plain the relevance of her self-reflexivity to the questions she is asking about secretaries. For example, in the case of interviewing managers she elaborates how even as interviewer she was, in part, positioned as secretary. "Managers are more used to interviewing procedures than secretaries are and know how to use these to their advantage. Talking into a tape recorder is second nature to most of them now that they are accustomed to using dictaphones. The secretary's role is to transcribe what others say, not to speak herself." 1988, \textit{op.cit.} p. 29.

\(^{18}\) Like Derrida, I do not pretend to be able to leave this structure behind; I only want to make its workings as clear as possible. He writes: "If dissemination is without a preface, this is not in order that some sort of inaugural production, some self-presentation [in the sense that presents a faith in real presence] can be opened up; quite the contrary, it is because dissemination marks the essential limits shared by rhetoric, formalism, and thematicism, as well as those of the system of exchange." Derrida, 1981, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 35.
In all these ways, my account aspires to move beyond the comfortable admissions of dualism of the sort evinced by Clifford Geertz.

In itself, Being There is a post-card experience ("I've been to Katmandu - have you?"). It is Being Here, a scholar among scholars, that gets your anthropology read [...] published, reviewed, cited, taught.\footnote{Clifford Geertz, \textit{Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 130.}

Left like this, the politics of tracking back and forth between experience and interpretation can all too easily be reduced to those of a scholastic tourism.\footnote{I do not want to imply here any representation of the \textit{whole} of Geertz's opus. I am simply singling out this one phrase as an example of what I want to avoid. Geertz does address questions of anthropology's imperialism, but I would argue that there are very particular limits to his hermeneutic auto-critique. See Graham Watson's valuable discussion, "Definitive Geertz," \textit{Ethnos} v. 54 (1989) pp. 23-30.} Any possibility of questioning an ethnography's complicity with western imperialism, or, more significantly for this study, my complicity with the male voyeur, are kept out of what remains a perfectly pretty picture. However, where to go "beyond" such urbane acts of distancing is a different and vexed question. By taking it up, I want to emphasise both the value of maintaining the \textit{doubly marked} preface-text structure, and the danger of exclusion inherent in projects that seek to found a new ethnographic practice on a putatively free style.

If much of what now goes by the disciplinary name of the "new ethnography" has been criticised \textit{within} anthropology - even so far as being described by one critic as a form of collective student "patricide" against Geertz - it behooves an outsider to at least remember the institutional context and
significance of the claims staking out the terrain of the "new." Such a consideration provides a valuable focus on how the 'opening up' presented by this movement gets 'closed down' by discipline. In particular, it seems to me that in the search for a way of 'founding' the new, of giving it a certain pedagogical force within the institution, a space of what might be called anti-convention has been seized upon and put to work. Like all anti-conventions this one turns out to be perfectly conventional itself. Captured in capsule form by the last two moments of Clifford’s aphoristic telos - "experiential, interpretive, dialogical and polyphonic" - it becomes manifest, as Deborah Gordon has shown, as none other than the aesthetic textualism of the modern avant-garde. Like Gordon, Frances Mascia-Lees et al have further underscored how these are vital questions for feminist

21 P. Steven Sangren in "Rhetoric and the Authority of Ethnography: 'Postmodernism' and the Social Reproduction of Texts," Current Anthropology, v. 29, n. 3 (1989) pp. 405-435. Sangren describes (p. 422) a tendency to repudiate the father figure in some of the essays by Geertz’s ex-students in Writing Culture. This oedipal drama seems to be overdrawn, a symptom itself of what Clifford, by way of response, justly criticises as Sangren’s agonistics. (p. 425) These, along with the unproblematised ethnocentrism and uncritical notion of Science, detract from Sangren’s more valuable criticism of the suggestion found in Clifford, Marcus and Fischer’s writing "that some 'utopian space' can be imagined in which a liminal 'communication' among cultures is possible..." (p. 422)

22 These four modalities function as the heuristic narrative to Clifford’s "On Ethnographic Authority," ibid. The summary form is on page 53 and 54.

research, and it is in the context of this political field that I will move from a brief review of the arguments about "textualism," to question my position as a male observer of a mainly female work-force.

Paul Rabinow, in his chapter in *Writing Culture*, draws attention to what he calls "Clifford's textualist meta-anthropology." In what are clearly echoes of his and Dreyfus's previous claims concerning "the illusion of autonomous discourse" in Foucault's earlier work, Rabinow argues that a form textualism which attaches value to collage, heteroglossia and the like, ends up in danger of clouding both brute materiality, and, more subtly, the real effects of

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24 Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen, "The Postmodernist Turn In Anthropology: Cautions From A Feminist Perspective," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, v. 15, n. 1 (1989) pp. 7-33. These writers usefully mark some of the self-contradictions by Rabinow and Clifford in their essays in *Writing Culture*. However, they themselves might be criticised for constructing a homogeneous feminism after their own image, and of thereby forgetting what Aihwa Ong - among others - notes as the frequent complicity of western feminists with imperialist and racist discourse. See her "Colonialism and Modernity: Feminist Re-presentations of Woman in Non-Western Societies," in *Inscriptions* v. 3/4 (1988) pp. 79-93. In the documented panel session that followed Ong's discussion Donna Haraway raised the question (p. 96) of how valuable it was to keep othering other feminists, to keep criticising what went before. This seems to me - especially as a man who has seen other men operate such strategies more defensively - an important pause for thought. Nonetheless, Ong's arguments seem to afford a vital interruption to claims like those of Mascia-Lees et al. that, "[f]eminists speak from the position of the 'other'," and that, "This is not to oversimplify." (p. 11)

representations like those - in his vocabulary - of colonialist governmentality.\textsuperscript{26} As part of this argument against the "textual radicals," he directly associates himself with the alertness to "realities" of "power" and "socio-economic constraints" found in the discourses of feminist struggle.\textsuperscript{27} Though these associations lie rather awkwardly next to his subsequent claim to be "excluded"\textsuperscript{28} from direct dialogue with feminism, they serve to emphasise how the immediacy of feminist critique often interrupts sanguine claims about, for example, establishing spaces of multiple voices. The persistent practicality of much feminism obliges critics to

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\textsuperscript{26} The earlier claims about Foucault in the first section of Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow's \textit{Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics} (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), seem to me to be overstretched. Again, the reasons for this might be connected to the need to construct a telos of development in Foucault, from an earlier \textit{archeology} to a later \textit{genealogy}, and to thereby undergird the claim that he moved "Beyond." In this effort, it seems to me that they neither do justice to the irony in Foucault's description of "happy positivism," (A.K. p. 125) nor to the subtlety of the doubled play of archeology and genealogy found in the English appendix (see especially p. 234) to \textit{The Archeology of Knowledge} (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) \textit{trans.} A.M. Sheridan Smith. By reading \textit{The Archeology} as a form of mirror of structuralism, they seek to reveal a failed attempt by Foucault to establish "a new domain of serious statements" (\textit{Beyond}. p. 57). In this respect, John Rajchman provides a more edifying approach, noting how Foucault's "turn to the critic or writer as 'specific intellectual' is a move away from a century-long obsession with language." (\textit{Michel Foucault: The Freedom Of Philosophy} (New York: 1985) p. 36.) Nevertheless, there is, in the \textit{Archeology}, a problem of a discursive/non-discursive hierarchy which - as Brown and Cousins noted - leaves ultimately unaccounted the relations of causality between "the enunciative modalities" and "the regularity of statements." (B.Brown and M. Cousins, "The linguistic fault: the case of Foucault's archeology," in \textit{Economy and Society}, v.9, n.3, (August, 1980) pp. 251-278.) It is precisely such relations which Rabinow emphasises in the 1986 essay with the example of "governmentality."

\textsuperscript{27} Rabinow, 1986, \textit{op. cit.} p. 255.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.} p. 258.
\end{flushright}
remember that some people do not even have a voice that can be listened to with the newly fashioned ears of dialogism and openness.29

Gordon develops precisely these political concerns about the limits of polyphony, and directs her attention to the exclusionary effects of a foggy valorization of texts and textual interpretation. She points out how, in his explanation as to why there is no explicitly feminist writing in *Writing Culture*, Clifford rests his case on the argument that the organisers of the "advanced seminar" at Santa Fe "were confronted by what seemed [to them] an obvious - important and regrettable - fact. Feminism had not contributed much to the theoretical analysis of ethnographies as texts."30 Clifford thus uses the benchmark of "theoretical analysis of ethnographies as texts" to explain the absence of

29 Kamal Visweswaran in "Defining Feminist Ethnography," *Inscriptions* 3/4, 1988, pp. 27-44, documents how often running up against the power relations of the moment, women's ethnography tended to question positionality long before it became a paradigmatic style. Using this as her critical grid, she notes the problem with valorising an idea like Bhaktin's heteroglossia because it "does not confront problems of coming to voice." (p. 38) There are other debates, of course, about the non-practicality of some feminism. The "New French Feminism," for example, is often singled out for criticisms of elitist whimsy. Toril Moi's remarks on Hélène Cixous seem typical. "Ermine as emancipation: it is odd that women of the Third World have been so ludicrously slow to take up Cixous's sartorial strategy." *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985) p. 126. It is, however, a sign of feminist theory's vibrancy, that, Moi's work itself - with what appear sometimes as its inquisitorial accusations of "essentialism" - has been criticised for a certain non-practicality; for defining the field "in such an admittedly unsatisfactory way." (p. 131) Donna Landry, "The Word According to Moi: Politics and Feminist Literary Theory," *Criticism*, v. xxix, n. 1 (1987) pp. 119-132.

feminist writings, despite the fact that essays by Asad and Rabinow in the volume are not textual analyses either.

Elsewhere, Clifford seems alert to the dangers associated with illusions of autonomous discourse; but his apologetics when re-read by Gordon show all too well the exclusionary politics potentially implied by a movement seeking to institutionally name a place "beyond." In order to eschew just such dangers here, I will not invoke notions like "polyphony" or "dialogism" as abstract and immanently virtuous styles. Instead, my intention is to try to bring both my own voice, and the voices of temps and employers into the account, while acknowledging that it is still my narrative and still my construction of the field. I will clarify the significance of this apparently slight difference by elaborating some questions relating to my position as a male "fieldworker."

The deep imagery of "toiling in the fields" alludes straight-away to the more obvious problem. In western discourses the meanings associated with the 'field' have not only included its significance as a place of labour or self-

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31 Gordon’s far more extensive argument makes the point that this is coincident with a valorisation of the experimental over the conventional, distanciation over identification, and the feminine over the tendentious (Gordon, op. cit. p. 10). As with the male avant-garde’s celebration of a disruptive femininity, this set of reversals does not seem to stretch to an invitation to the work of actual women. Indeed, perhaps, as Andreas Huyssen has argued with regard to the avant-garde, it in fact depends structurally on a further othering of women. See his "Mass Culture as Woman," chapter three of After The Great Divide (Bloomington: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

development, but also ideas of combat, exploration, property and penetration. In all these ways, the field is coded by patriarchal discourse as a feminine place into which the man enters and proves himself. Male academics are undoubtedly implicated in the social structures intimated by this paleonymy. Indeed, far from a place of graceful neutrality, what was previously seen - the verb is not incidental to the argument - by "men of reason" as lucid objectivity, becomes clear as a very masculine tradition of on-looking, in-sight, gazing and objectification. This is not to argue that the central core of academic authority is simply male authority. The relation is far more complex, less immediate and less essentially visible. Women academics themselves have for some time, of course, been struggling with the

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33 For a further, though not immediately feminist, discussion of the genealogy of "the field," see the debate between the geographers from the journal Hérodote and Foucault. "Questions on Geography," in Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 63-77.

34 These ideas are discussed in James Clifford's, "Notes on (Field)notes," in Roger Sanjek (ed.) Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) pp. 47-70. See especially, page 64.

35 This is not to imply that these determinations of fieldwork practice are necessarily represented by consciously-held ideas. Rather, it is a question of male fieldwork being potentially overdetermined by such historical discourse. Without doubt though, it is only too easy to point to examples of where this metaphorical mechanism becomes visible at, as it were, a point of violent condensation. See, for example, Paul Rabinow's uncritical, indeed, "roguish" (p. 61) account of sex (pp. 68-9) with a native woman during fieldwork in Morocco. In Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

36 Genevieve Lloyd's oft-cited work The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), is not quite perhaps as critical either as it could be, or as those who cite it often imply. Her major argument relates to how reason has been defined by a process of active contrast to a feminised, irrational other. For a further, more radicalised investigation of these questions in relation especially to male philosophy and psychoanalysis, see Luce Irigaray's Speculum of the Other Woman (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press) trans. Gillian C. Gill.
awkward imbrication of their practice in the histories of masculine reason. As a man who wants to contribute to feminism, I must attend here to this historical tradition that constructs male authority. By making it thematic and questioning its place, I want to interrupt its easy intrusion into - or, perhaps I should say, bonding with my work. Including the preface in the text, bringing the field into the work, are valuable strategies to this end. But, perhaps best of all, is to turn myself as participant observer into an observed participant.

I was aware from the start that my interviews with women were always going to take place in the context of a set of social ideas and historical facts about relations between men and women. I attempted, as much as I could, to pre-empt any potentially oppressive situations from arising by, amongst other efforts, explicitly taking up these questions with the people I interviewed when it seemed relevant.

A typical pattern of events that foregrounded my position as a male field-worker sometimes arose on the phone when arranging how to meet. After someone had agreed to do an interview, we had to work out a place and a time that would be convenient. Sometimes this led to chats about good and bad bars, cafes and malls, or about the length of lunch hours and the working day. Subsequently, we usually described what we would be wearing or carrying. Especially with younger temps, this set of exchanges sometimes made me feel that it was all a little like a blind date, and I definitely did not want the women I was interviewing to have this sense. However, my efforts to allay potential fears of this kind were themselves

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37 A tremendous volume of work has been written around this problematic. Sandra Harding's *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) has fast become a classic. Evelyn Fox Keller's work is particularly useful. See her "The gender/science system: Or, is sex to gender as nature is to science?" *Hypatia* v. 2, n. 3 (1987) pp. 37-50.
not immune from a form of epistemic violence. Indeed, my occasional attempts to say something like "I know this sounds a bit like a date, but really, please don’t think that’s what I’m trying to set up," ironically mimicked the assuming and patronizing remarks temps often hear as secretaries from bosses. Both circumstances involve a denial of women’s abilities to make their own interpretations and decisions.

In another instance, the question of whether it was really only me who was pre-emptively sexualising the exchange became explicit during the course of an interview with a young woman called Karen Edwards. The interview was in the coffee-bar at the Vancouver Art Gallery and did not begin before a rather confusing ten minutes of the two of us missing seeing each other, followed by some tentative and, finally, some embarrassed smiles as I walked over to apologise. Karen’s sister had also come along, and so, having sat down opposite both of them, I had begun to ask some preliminary questions.

Matt: So how long have you actually temped now?
Karen: Since the beginning of January - so about three months.
Karen’s sister: Can I just ask a question?
Matt: Yeah, sure.
Karen’s sister: Why... - uh well there’s nothing wrong with this, but couldn’t you guys have done this on the telephone?

38 Her name, like those of nearly all the other interviewees mentioned in the thesis, has been changed for reasons of confidentiality. It should go without saying that such name changes are visible evidence of the busy construction at work in representation.
Matt: Well, yes and no. I mean, like yes we could have done, but later on I want to talk more about feelings, like about how one feels about work, the way you’re treated and positioned by people and stuff like that.

Karen: So you need to get facial gestures and things.

Matt: Well yeah - and like on the phone, I've tried it and it's really weird - people give you a quick answer like "no that never happened," or, "yes it’s OK."

*** Laughing ***

Karen's sister: Just wondering.

Matt: So yeah, it's not my way of trying to get dates, right - that's not what I'm doing.

*** More laughing ***

Karen's sister: I didn't want to say it like that. It just made me, well [laughing] think.

Karen: Well it's a good way to meet people in a new country I guess.

Matt: Yeah right.... So - anyway - what kinds of jobs have you actually been doing on assignments?

It seemed to me - and this can only ever be my "having been there" reconstruction - that Karen's sister felt that the structure of this interview, with its awkward beginning and "there's nothing wrong with this"-questions looked
like a rather duplicitous attempt on my part to arrange something like a date. She told me that she had come along because they were both going shopping downtown, but I think the reasons why an older woman might accompany her younger sister to an "interview" with an anonymous man, also relate directly to very real fears about safety. Karen, herself, with a number of other phrases like "so you need to get facial gestures," seemed to have wanted to preserve the idea that the interview was properly "academic." Yet, she was not at all perturbed by the possibility of its ulterior function as a way of meeting people. Putting her two ways of articulating my position together appears - I think - to recreate quite well a picture of me as an academic male-tourist: the Englishman abroad on his grand tour of educational improvement. With these things in mind, I tried to put the issues as I saw them on the table; but, in the process of doing so, I might well have been assuming something that never was.

In retrospect, perhaps I should have asked more straightforwardly, "do you think this looks like a date?" or, perhaps not have followed up Karen's sister's question in this way at all. But yet, she did go on to say "I didn't want to say it like that. It just made me, well, think." A more radical criticism of my actions might have simply suggested that I should have avoided doing a project like this in the first place.

In response to such an argument, I still want to remain responsible to my original reasons and decision to study temping. Many of my own experiences, most particularly as a temp - while displaced - still gave me something in common with the people I interviewed, men and women alike. Not only did this make interviewing easier, with concerns of temps coming immediately to mind, it also meant I felt the political significance and importance of the subject all the more
closely. My position and the position of the temps interviewed was mediated by more than just discourses of sexuality. Other power relations, like those in force between capital and labour, structured relations of possible commonality as well as difference.

My more general response to the problem of epistemic violence is to invoke a code of responsibility to positioning, an alertness to its critical, constantly changing character, combined with an awareness "of the connections and unexpected openings [such] situated knowledges make possible."39 Always trying to make the power relations of fieldwork explicit is one part of this project. Another, is to remember that this, in and of itself, does not instantly resolve, and may even aggravate the very problems it seeks to resolve. It certainly does not exculpate what might otherwise look like just a new version of the bleeding-heart fieldworker. The question is rather one of keeping what Adrienne Rich has called 'the politics of location' under constant and rigorous vigil.40 It is also to argue for new possibilities; in Haraway's words,

for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives; the view from the body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view form above, from nowhere, from simplicity.41


Returning to the case of the interview with Karen and her sister, the laughing in the exchanges should not go without note. In fact its seemingly "benign" quality - at least as far as I anticipate a certain set of gendered readings - only represents the power of the normal. It thereby makes visible the pervasive hegemony of the structures of interpretation within which my fieldwork was embedded. The resemblance to a heterosexual date, furthermore, is not the only modality of power I want to interrogate. While many interviewees like Karen sought in various ways to foreground or recuperate the "academic" quality of my project, such a quality is itself open to criticism. A sad and long history of oppression lies hidden under a cloak of domineering but very worthy science. In one sense, at least, a date might even seem less imposing than the visitation of academics, less out of the ordinary, a place where tried and tested rules can be put to work. However, in remarking on these ideas, I should re-emphasise that this is not an argument about people - myself or interviewees - bringing a necessarily conscious attitude of dating, or whatever else, to the interview. Instead, it is to

42 Pringle and her co-researchers also found that managers dealt with them, in part, by positioning them as "independent" (1988, op.cit. page 30). For these managers, however, it seems to have been a way of denying the immediateness of the feminist politics by enshrining them outside the workplace. For the temps I interviewed, the reasons for positioning me as academic seemed very different.

43 Haraway's account in Primate Visions (op.cit.) of the imperialism, racism, patriarchy and sadism in primatology make this very clear. Another example, in the disciplinary confines of geography is, what Barbara Rubin called (in "Commentary: Prostitution in Nevada," Annals of the Association of American Geographers v. 65. n. 2 (1975) pp. 113-135), Symanski's "sporting guide for gentlemen" to brothels in Nevada.(See, Richard Symanski, "Prostitution in Nevada," Annals of the Association of American Geographers v. 64, n. 3 (1974) pp. 357-377.) That the author described the work as science was not remarkable. It was as science and as, at the same time, a defence of misogyny, that the patriarchy made itself felt. This was a complicity made all the more apparent by Symanski's insulting reply to Rubin's critique. The pompous high-handedness begins with the opening shot: "I found the commentary by Barbara Rubin amusing and initially I was tempted to ignore it as another statement by an emotional feminist..." ("Reply," in idem. pp. 115-118.)
raise as vital concerns the way my being a male researcher inevitably structured not just my interpretations, but the very patterns of meeting and talking.

The significance of the male researcher/female interviewee dynamic was yet further exacerbated by the ways in which gender and sexuality organise temporary employment, and by the feelings and experiences that this gendered organisation raises. In the context of such subject matter the potential violence of the academic project related not only to the structuring effects of the gendered field-work but also to what I want to call the arrogance of representation.

I have already touched upon some of the colonising implications of benevolent description. Here, I want to focus on only one particular form of imperialism inherent in the Western knowledge-making juggernaut. Academics with a specific interest in a specific object, are all too often led through a myopic and febrile zeal to a hyperbolic vision of this object's significance both to other people and to other processes. In the language of psychoanalysis, this will to power might be tracked as a symptom of a desire for control and simplicity, but, of course, psychoanalysis itself is by no means innocent of arrogating significance to that which it views as knowing best. In fact, the over-burdening causal weight and relevance psychoanalysis attaches to a few specific infantile processes relates
precisely to the danger of arrogant representation immanent in my attempts to
detail the relations between temping and subjectivity.\footnote{Spivak notes how, in Freud's work, the conflict between these two tendencies - critiquing the desire to discipline at the same time as organising institutional discipline - provides "a monitory model for our own desire, to practice and produce an "interested" critique within academic disciplines." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," History and Theory, v. 24 (1985) pp. 247-272, at page 257. The disciplinary replacement of Freud's valuable notion of overdetermination by a positivist and taxonomic diagnosticism thereby presents an example of thematized reduction to linear causality. If I understand Spivak here, the Freudian model provides both at once an analogy and a way of talking about the problems witnessed in social theories' reductions of overdetermination to "many determinations." (p. 258)}

In the following chapters I want to show that there are politically
significant links between peoples' identities and feelings, and the processes of
earning money, feminization and rationalization alive in temping. However, in the
course of this creative description, I want to avoid giving any sense that these
links explain every aspect of my informants' lives and personal development. In
other words (borrowed partly from Paul Abbott), while describing and delimiting
the field of temping as a site for the constitution of subjectivity, and while
remembering that that constitution "is never definitively achieved," I must also
recognise that when temps arrive at their first interview at their first agency, they
do so as subjects "already constituted;" subjects "which would function as
competent and complete were they never to" do a day's work as a temp.\footnote{See Paul Abbot, op.cit. p. 48. His comments are related more specifically to the constitution of subjectivity in the film/cinema experience. Freud, himself, criticised other writers for overextending the claims to causality of particular categories. See, for example, his remarks on theories about the crowd which, attributing all significance to numbers alone, foreclose upon the actual psychic and historical processes that enabled the individuals to take part and act en masse. Sigmund Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (New York: Bantam Books,1960) trans. James Strachey, especially pp. 4-5. Original German publication, 1921.}
Temping is, in this sense, a quite strictly limited field. It intersects with most
temps' lives only temporarily, and is somewhat marginal to the business structures
where they are put to work. Nevertheless, this limit-edness when considered, as it were, from the other side, holds a peculiar methodological advantage. Where temping abuts the routine and hegemonic it presents a whole set of windows or, rather, meeting points where these more general social relations can be felt at work. While this advantage does not by any means mitigate the need for keeping watch against arrogant representation, it turns temping into a critical limit case, and the people who know this best are temps.

**Supplementary knowledge: Temping as ethnography.**

Constantly tracking back and forth from the rest of their lives to a job, and then to another job, and then another, temps are practically obliged to move through the "dialectic of experience and interpretation" that Clifford ascribes to the practice of participant observation. There is certainly no idealism driving this rather *ad hoc* process along, but, instead, the much more practical need of working to earn money to live. As temps move from office to office they cannot help but see and feel the differences and similarities. Moreover, temping is, in this sense, a very active form of participation. There is none of the freedom that comes with the academic's material well-being resting on the "interpretation" side of the dialectic. Temps actually have to "participate" with a will, they have to "go native" in the new office as fast as possible. It is in precisely the context of this movement that they tellingly experience the power relations of the hegemonic and routine.

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46 Clifford, 1988, *op.cit* p. 34.
From the instant they enter a temporary services agency for the first time, temps feel the effects of an institutional apparatus geared to organising adaptation. Crystallised out in the practices of establishing dress codes, forms of speech and rules of behaviour, of testing, interviewing, and teaching, the 'agency experience' event tells a story out loud normally concealed in the whispers of routine of the ordinary office. Likewise, what a temp is practically engaged in seeing on arrival in a new work location is the enormous extent of the local knowledge which complements the more persistent protocols of power in a capitalist and patriarchal institution. A little like the preface-text structure that makes manifest the production of the text's authority, the temporary job makes visible the organising of the general from the unique. It thereby helps illustrate how these general processes are conventional, not universal; how they incorporate the idiosyncratic events of everyday life into historically achieved and lived structures.

47 This mode of conceptualizing might, after Foucault, be called "eventalization." It services, he argues, a means of "rediscovering the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies and so on that at a given moment establish what counts as being self-evident, universal and necessary." Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method," in After Philosophy: End or Transformation. Kenneth Baynes et al. (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 100-18. Such thinking is not without its own genealogy. Louis Althusser, also a student of Canguilhem as well as Foucault's teacher, detailed part of this inheritance when he described the pattern of Marx and Engels' historical studies as being, in large part, studies of exceptions. See "Contradiction and Overdetermination: Notes for an investigation," in For Marx (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) trans. Ben Brewster, especially pages 104-6.
This ethnographic potential becomes realised in various different ways.\(^48\) At its crudest, it is hardly ethnography at all, and appears in the appeals of commercial advertisements that suggest temping is a form of education. One of the key advantages claimed by the temporary employment industry, is that temping prepares the temp to join or re-join the permanent workforce. A message that was repeated at the job fairs I attended in Vancouver was that temping, along with volunteer work, provides a "low commitment" way of learning new skills and of thereby gaining a toehold in a fast-changing, hi-tech labour market. "Why be a Temporary?" asks the Christina Personnel Ltd. handout. The answer, it avers, is that

> [b]eing a Temporary with our firm will give you the opportunity to work in various office settings, meet new people and new challenges every day and ultimately if this is your goal - find a place, where you can fit in well in a permanent position.

Or, as the Olsten: The Working Solution leaflet puts it:

\(^{48}\) One commentator even noted it as a selling point. Linda Gutri, writing for a readership of Human Resource managers, having detected the possibilities, suggested them to be one of the advantages that comes with purchasing temporary labour. "Each temp assignment," she maintains, "means adjusting to new people, strangers. Variety offers opportunity for comparison, and the hoped-for golden element - insight." As a result, "The social atmosphere which greets a temp has another significance as well, one which can have long-term benefits. Because the temp is unfamiliar with an office and its staff she can often detect friction between people, and the bad effects it has on morale and productivity, better than someone who has been there for years and has grown used to it." In "Happy Temps Work Harder," Canadian Secretary, October, (1990) pp. 21-22. While this account (p. 21) has its appeal, I found, as a temp, that even when you can offer advice on more practical matters it is rarely appreciated. Similarly Catherine, a redundant school teacher and temp, for one day, in the same office as Antonia (of Here Today), soon found out that it was better to keep quiet:

> Antonia was still sorting papers. She said defensively, "It'd be much quicker if they were in alphabetical order." "Wouldn't it? Why don't you tell them? Parks didn't take any notice of me, but coming from both of us - " "No fear, I'm keeping my nose clean." "But it's a good idea." "Yeh, but don't you find they hate it when you come in as a temp and on your first day you start telling them they're doing it all wrong, even if they are?" "Particularly if they are, I would have thought," said Catherine.  

Here Today, op.cit. p. 28.
After working for awhile [sic], you'll sharpen your skills, find opportunities to advance and earn more.

Many of the temps that I interviewed, also commented on temping as a way of learning new skills.\(^{49}\)

Sometimes you pick up something new - like at one accounting firm I was at recently, for example, they had a desk-top publishing program I hadn't used and so I got to learn that.

Helen Potrebenko, a Vancouver writer with two and a half years experience as a temp, has similarly noted the possibilities of training in her "Diary of a temp."

I got trained on a number of machines at the bank and immediately fell in love with the Swift Interbank Telex. There is also a Nanotec for transmission to places other than banks not on the Swift system and there are a number of other machines into which I put various kinds of data when there isn't any telexing to do. It was not until the second week when in a gush of insight, I rushed down to the smoking room to phone my dearly beloved: Do you know what these things are??? They are VDTs!!\(^{50}\)

\(^{49}\) This is also a conclusion of the work by Donald Mayall and Kristin Nelson on the "temporary help service" industry in the U.S. (Donald Mayall and Kristin Nelson, The Temporary Help Supply Service and the Temporary Labor Market (Salt Lake City: Olympus Research Corporation, 1982). Also submitted to the Office of Research and Development, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor.) Yet, while they emphasise that temping offers skill-learning opportunities and a way into the permanent labour market (pp. 50-1), they do so occluding the great heterogeneity of people who find themselves temping. As a result, they seem to generalise a model of a temp that is only just entering the workforce, someone who is looking ultimately for permanent positions. This is a tendency made clear in a phrase from their article with Mangum (Garth Mangum, Donald Mayall and Kristin Nelson, "The Temporary Help Industry: A Response to The Dual Labor Market," Industrial and Labor Relations Review v.38, n.4, (July, 1985) pp. 599-613.) While temping provides a foothold in the labour market, the authors suggest, "they have not necessarily reached a safe haven. They may still encounter substantial obstacles in their progress from the periphery into the core." (1985, p. 609) This generalization postpones analysis of the very different experiences of temps, who as, for example, single mothers, or as people needing to make ends meet between jobs, are temping, but who may, for different reasons, look with less rosy eyes on the prospects of always having to meet new challenges. In the 1985 article, they nonetheless make the following note: "Our study was conducted completely from the perspective of labour demand: that of the employers and T.H.S. firms. Much needs to be known about the T.H.S. workers themselves, namely, who they are and whether they prefer this work to other alternatives." Mangum et al, idem, page 603.

\(^{50}\) Helen Potrebenko, "Diary of a Temp," in Hey Waitress and Other Stories (Vancouver: Lazara, 1989), p. 106.
The irony of this writing is, I think, a valuable corrective to becoming blindly benevolent about temping as ethnography in this simple sense of learning by working. Helen Potrebenko continued in the same vein in her interview with me, making this sobering and useful interruption.

Perhaps the best special skill I learnt was how to chase wasps out of management windows. - They're the only ones that open you know.

It is probably more in the unedifying context of the first arrival at the new office, when temps confront the full extent of that office's local knowledge, that the practicality of their ethnography is felt at its most intense.

"To begin with," said one interviewee,

you're often given a male name to report to. Then you're given to a Miss or Ms or something, and then to someone who's just called Julie, and half the time she's desperately enthusiastic, and the other half of the time, she doesn't even know why you're there.

"You have to deal with this all the time as a temp," someone else remarked.

You go in and you haven't got a clue what the office politics are like, as well as everything else, and you have to fit in straight away.

Another woman, Pat Dupont, who was in her fifties and more generally critical of temping, continued what turned out to be the most common type of arrival story.

Normally I ask, "how do you wish to have the phone answered? who have I got? who are the names, and where are the numbers?" and normally it's, "oh, no, sorry we don't have a list," or, "so and so, do you have a list," and so and so never does, and usually the desk - if you get a desk - isn't stocked, there's no paper, you have to ask. I've never been told, well here is the copy room, here is the fax room, here is the mail room, all it would need is a little map or something, - and this is what happens, and you have to find it all out for yourself, and if you ask any questions, you're no damn good. You've four hours to make your mark before you're pulled off or left on the job. If you ask too many questions it shows you're incompetent.

If you are not able to go in and sit down at the desk and know who's who and do what, and how you set up your letters, "Do you like block style?..." you know, just an innocent question, "do you like letters indented?" And then you get, "Well!..." and then, you know, that shows you're no good.
Going native in this context, gaining even a sense of the office terrain, is, thus, a highly fraught affair. It is no accident that Kelly’s Workstyle™ pamphlet, offering "[t]ips from Kelly Services® for managing your work and life 'style'," used as a quote of the month an insight of Eleanor Roosevelt’s:

You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.51

Situated in power relations very different from the academic’s, a temp’s experiences of differences like those, to take Geertz’s example, between a wink and a burlesqued wink, are felt close to the heart and, moreover, are often loaded with oppressive sexual significance as well.

First day in the office all the men come by with some precarious question. There’s often this really silly need for them to comment on the way you look - "you look very professional," "you look very nice" - and you have to get through all this stuff and still look professional. But I think the problem is not so much the complement but the system of expectations which you have to work out quickly.

These remarks by Sandra Rae, a temp of twenty-seven with three years experience, not only make manifest the way secretarial work awkwardly conjoins and falls between discourses ascribing femininity and professionalism, they also highlight how such features of traditional office life are given yet a further twist by temping. The gender coding and positioning of "being professional" are played out again and again such that, sensitised by the repetition, temps feel more dearly the systematicity of these modern and patriarchal social relations.

The feelings, questions and working resolutions that many temps have about the repeated "expectations" of the temping situation, form important themes of two later chapters. What I want to underscore here, is the very clear difference between these appellations of professionalism and those within which

the "professional ethnographer" moves. Even at the more mundane level described by Pat Dupont, there is the problem of simply navigating. As a temp there is no one to buy a map from before you set out; and once there, there is certainly little chance of the classic case of ethnographic bonding through a police raid. In fact, you are lucky if you even get to have a coffee break with the permanent staff. Undoubtedly one of the most distinct memories I have of temping in England is that of feeling like a foreigner, and of being persistently bemused by the amount of

52 On the subject of maps, a patronising article (written by a journalist, Dixie Peterson, but as if by a temp) was published in the "Manager's Journal" section of *The Wall Street Journal* under the title of "Advice From an Office Temp, On Her Own Time." It contained the following sardonic section: "Here are the picky-little things I need to do my one- to two-week job well, things that anyone with an iota of common sense could come up with, but, alas, never does: Maps- Buildings have floor plans, and I need one of the department. Who sits where? I won't need (and don't want) a detailed plan of the whole building, but running from desk to desk reading names off memos - upside down, of course - to find out who's who is not very efficient. Also, when hand-delivering messages it is helpful to know that "Fred" is female and "A Boy Named Sue" grew up and now heads sales." *The Wall Street Journal*, September 17, 1990, p. A 14 (W), col. 3. Elsewhere, Phillip Barnhart - a U.S.A.F staff sergeant - notes the problem of a learning curve. "Many managers complain about excessive orientation time when discussing temporary help." In "Help Temporaries Work To Your Satisfaction," *The Office*, v. 112, August (1990) pp. 62-64. In fact, this theme runs through much of the advice proffered to management on how to make the best use of temps. "When the temporary employee arrives, give a brief tour around the office. Make sure to show the person where to put his or her coat, the location of the restrooms, water fountain, cafeteria, and so forth. Also include in the tour the supply room, copy machine, and any other equipment the temp will need to use." In "Using Temporary Help Firms," *Supervisory Management*, August, 1989, pp. 26-27. Such an exercise must, asserts William Takings, be done with care. "Don't overload temps with too much information at once. Besides learning the work and how to perform it, they must find out what resources are available to them (equipment supplies, etc.) and get used to the work environment and procedures. All of this can be overwhelming to a temp if you don't take time to explain things slowly and offer first day guidance. Provide some information on the "culture" and "norms" of your organization so that temps can fit in comfortably." (p. 60). *The Office*, v. 111, May, 1990, pp. 59-60. See also Blair Warman Nickle, "Train Temporaries To Reach Peak Performance," in *Drake Business Review* v. 5, n. 1, pp. 33-35. These sorts of notes are, in part, a symptom of a nascent science in managing temps, a theme I discuss at greater length in Chapter Four.

detailed knowledge that the permanent staff drew on without being aware that they should pass it on to a temp.

Accruing this kind of ethnographic knowledge, yet without anyone particularly wanting to hear about it, is a problem in and of itself for temps. "It's one of the reasons why I'm glad I'm not a temp anymore," said Helen Potrebenko.

You always have to forget. Like when you get to an office you have to learn everything in ten minutes [...] I filled my head up with so much garbage that way, that I had to train myself to forget everything - and then, of course, when I got good at forgetting, I got those dumb recalls asking for me to go back because "she knows our routine" and then, of course, by that stage, I'd normally got it right out of my mind.

This problem of being overburdened by knowledge was articulated again in a different register by other temps. While one of temping's attractions for many was that it afforded a way of working without getting embroiled in office politics, being a temp turned out to be very rarely as free from the gossip circuit as hoped. In this regard, one interviewee replied to my question about verbal abuse and sexual harassment with the following comments:

No, I never felt I was being harassed. But I often felt put upon with all this knowledge about peoples' lives et cetera [...] that I got told. Because I wasn't seen as a rival and because I was going again, people told me stuff. So that meant I felt like I was being semi-drawn-into all the politics - which was what I was doing temping for in order to avoid.

This, I think, is a strangely inverted reiteration of the story of the ethnographer as flâneur. The mainly female temping population is by no means driven by a desire to dive into the crowd only to climb up out for the abstract gaze. Instead, the tableaux vivants of temping are really lived close up - often in this overbearing way - and the only cause for their fleeting passage lies in their relation to the recursive

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evanescence of a commodity exchange system in which temps insert their capacity to labour as a commodity. In the context of constantly being shifted from workplace to workplace and never knowing quite how long the jobs will last, one temp remarked to me that

what temping teaches you best is how easily you are replaced, i.e. that your job is not the biggest, most important.

It is lessons such as these, stemming from the positioning of temps in particular power relations between capital and labour, which serve as the focus of the next chapter. This chapter begins with a cursory outline of the theoretical theatre in which I have worked on and constructed my account of temporary work. In doing so, I hope nevertheless to avoid establishing a theory-empirics divide. Rather I want to indicate and make explicit the ideas that I have already brought to my selection, organisation and presentation of the "material." This material, I should note, also exists as more than just my interviews with temps and agency personnel, it includes as well a range of readings of journalistic and academic writing on the subject. Drawing again on this range of sources, my arguments in Chapter Three seek to position temping in relation to topics of gendering and sexuality. In this chapter I also mark out more explicitly how I conceive of the relations between feminist and marxist interpretation. In Chapter Four, I add to these discussions a focus on processes of rationalisation. By doing so, I try to make clear how the diversity of discourses by which temping and rationalism are entwined also relate intricately to the dynamics and representations of gender and capital described in the earlier chapters.

Throughout these discussions my aim is to use the stories told by the thirty-eight temps and nineteen counsellors I interviewed as a guiding thread for
They do not provide me with my "sample" so much as a set of resources which have helped me construct what remains very much my own account. Abandoning the myths of empiricist epistemology, I want to underscore how when I use a quotation my aim is to draw out and express themes which I believe are important. My approach, therefore, involves re-reading quotations as exemplary moments of condensation where specific social processes - most particularly those identified as critical in feminist and marxist interpretation - come together in the vitality of social life. However, the reason why I attempt such re-reading relates immediately back to my hope that the thesis will serve to represent the real political concerns of temps.

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55 Only three of the temps that I interviewed were men. Only two counsellors were men and they were both in more managerial positions, a little removed from the actual job of dealing personally with temps. I note the ages of interviewees when I see it as particularly significant. However, as I did not ask all the temps their age, I can only note here that probably about twenty were under the age of thirty.

I met my informants in a somewhat haphazard way, being introduced by friends of friends and letters I asked agencies to send out. As I note in the next chapter, the impossibility of "snow-balling" became a telling sign of the individualism of the work-relations generated by the organisation of temping.
THE VALUE OF TEMPORARY WORK: A CAPITALISTIC REPRESENTATION OF LABOUR

Since becoming Minister, I've been communicating with employers throughout the province, and describing a world in which employers treat employees fairly, in which training is part of the corporate culture and in which there are just as many women managers as men. As fervently as I believe in the future, sometimes I wonder if I'm dreaming. But when I come across an organization like the Federation, I know I'm not. In so many ways, your industry is a prototype for the 21st century. Just look at your record.

The Honourable Elaine McCoy

I feel very used, I feel humiliated, I feel degraded, mostly, I feel used: that I’m someone like a tap that you can turn on when you’re needed and then turn off when they can get a cheaper person. My friend who temps shares my feelings: of a great sense of insecurity, a great sense of uncertainty, a great sense of being apart, because we have nowhere to put down roots, we don’t know where we’re going to be the next day, we can’t build relationships, we can’t make friends, we’re totally isolated from the mainstream of the working populace. We have no loyalties, no, nowhere to go...

Pat Dupont, Temp

The sense of being used and set apart like a mere piece of plumbing was not, of course, the "record" which Elaine McCoy sought to celebrate with millennial tones in her address to members of the Federation of Temporary Help Services. It will be my argument in this chapter, however, that the experiences described by temps like Pat Dupont are, in fact, by no means in contradiction with the aspects of the industry that the labour minister did proceed to evoke: in

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1 A quotation from the Alberta labour minister's address, "An Economy in Transition," to the Federation of Temporary Help Services members from Calgary at the Palliser Hotel (27/2/1991). Extracts of this address were reprinted in the Federation's national journal, Temporary Topics, v. vi, 4, pp. 1-3. The italics were in the original.
brief, aspects of fairness, free choice and free enterprise; of large numbers of women managers; of lack of prejudice; of training; and, of exact corporate responsibility to legislation. To begin to understand why this is so, is to understand the nature of the buying and selling of labour power and its realisation as value in a capitalist society like Canada's. In this regard, the temporary services industry, as a labour market intermediary and private sector business, provides examples of the processes incorporating labour power as a commodity, which I want to narrate here as institutional and, thus, visible crystallizations of persistent tendencies in capitalist social relations. In developing this account, I move from the realm of appearances - including chiefly, discussions of statistical and business narratives - through various abstractions, to arrive at some marxist interpretations concerning the politics of temporary labour. Ultimately, however, I do not attribute all causal and political significance to the field of these particular interpretations. Instead, I show how this abstract field is comprised of various features or aspects that (in the same way as value represents labour) represent but one side of the social activities within which they are embedded. At the same time nonetheless, I emphasise how these capitalistic aspects of temporary work represent practically and politically critical determinants which concentrate with others to constitute the concrete world of temping as the unity of the diverse.

By echoing here Marx's famous words on method in the Grundrisse, I want not only to signal that method as my starting point, but also to clarify how I aim to make a blasphemous break from the marxist tradition of causal hierarchy and
its privileging of the economic as the ultimate axiology of critique. It was, of course, Althusser who most famously returned to the Grundrisse to fashion Marx's "concentration of many determinations" into a theory of overdetermination. However, here I want to remember not the Althusser in which "the concept of overdetermination tended to disappear [with] the installation of [...] determination in the last instance by the economy;" but the Althusser who coupled marxian materialism with Freud's notions of the dreamwork to construct a theory where "[f]rom the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes." It is with respect to this re-reading of marxian method that Chapters Three and Four both continue to examine other processes determining the world of temping in terms of critical axiologies that are not primarily marxist. Ultimately these analyses mark out a spiralling journey where the end is re-articulated as but a displacement and condensation of the various points of origin. To begin with, though, there are just the chaotic appearances.


3 Laclau and Mouffe's accusation is that this was Althusser's "essentialist" move (p. 98). Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).


The data's difféance.

Statistics on temporary work are hard to come by in Canada. Neither the ordinary Statistics Canada Census, nor the various general labour market surveys use the category. However, although this was a problem for my research, the statistical silence when re-considered institutionally, speaks volumes. Not least, it serves as a reminder of how, as a narrative of numbers, statistics stop and start with social relations.

Susan Christopherson, working in the United States, while noting the interruption in data relating to temporary work, has also indicated the aporia's social origins.

The information on the vast majority of these temporary jobs is quite limited because, as yet, no public agency collecting statistics on the workforce differentiates between temporary and full-time jobs.6 It is, of course, often forgotten that statistics have social origins.7 As numerical texts, they frequently hide all trace of how they become what they appear to be as simulacra of purified representationality. In this case, however, the relationship between the set of numbers - or rather, their absence - and the modern state-run institutions that define variables and send out surveys becomes only too apparent.

As far as Canada's statistical bureaucracy is concerned, it seems that "temporary

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7 The plural is important: a gesture to what might be called "causal multiplication." It is, after Derrida, made in a mood of skepticism towards myths of pure presence such as "representative statistics." "For what is put into question is precisely the quest for a rightful beginning, an absolute point of departure, a principal responsibility." In Jacques Derrida, "Différence," in Margins of Philosophy (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), trans. Alan Bass, at page 6.
"work" has not yet become a noticeable variable of any great interest. Only recently, in 1989, has a Statistics Canada special survey appeared, and then, only after its author, Ernest Akyeampong, had attended a conference in Washington D.C. where the topic was a subject of discussion.\(^8\)

The figures for his report were compiled from the Labour Market Activity Survey, an annual household survey from which worker and job profiles can be derived. Yet, because its sample size is relatively small, a special run I requested on this survey's database for the whole of British Columbia\(^9\), finally represented only 9 actual temporary workers surveyed. As such, although the figure could have "theoretically" been extrapolated to a mean of 5,000 for the year, it was "statistically unrepresentative" and, moreover, because of confidentiality clauses, the details were unreleasable.

In Chapter Four I return to this 'non-noticeability' of temporary work before institutions of the state, and detail its implications in relation to labour legislation. Here, however, two further points are worthy of note. Firstly, at a more general level, the lack of statistical data appears symptomatic of the way in which temporary work represents part of some qualitative changes in labour market organisation for which old vocabularies of description seem redundant. This sort of situation presents a problem for those writers party to arguing that there are widespread changes away from labour-use patterns bracketed under the label of "fordism," but, who then find such changes undocumentable in terms of

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\(^9\) For the year of 1989.
the anachronistic categories used by state serviced data collection agencies. Christopherson, for instance, comments:

We are now in a position to question many of the employment assumptions associated with mass production models but are severely hampered by data gathering methods and classifications fixed in now invalid assumptions about production organization.\(^{10}\)

Secondly, this lack of data presents a practical obstacle which I had to negotiate. Other researchers of temporary work, beginning with more statistical information, or having organised large surveys of their own, have been able to track some important relations between temping, the state of local economies, unemployment and the entrance of women into the labour force. Unfortunately, however, the possibilities opened up by these writers for examining such relations, appear too often to be curtailed by a confusion of the "data" with the social activity out of which its variables gain significance.\(^{11}\)

Donald Mayall and Kristin Nelson, working in the U.S., have written probably the most comprehensive work on the subject. Their quantitative survey generated a large database which they were able to use in various ways. Framing their subsequent analyses, for example, they plot statistics appertaining to the volume of temporary work against the "independent variables" of female labour


\(^{11}\) Bernard Casey's work in Britain provides an example where correlation is conflated repeatedly with causality. The most interesting patterns he finds relate temporary work to: a preponderance of women workers (63% of the agency workforce in comparison to 41% of the total working population; pages 19-20); regional concentration in the South East of England (page 19); usage by shrinking or growing, rather than stable businesses (page 50); and, to unemployment (pages 68-9). In, *Temporary Employment: Practice and Policy in Britain*, (Iver, Bucks.: Policy Studies Institute, 1988), in association with the Anglo-German Foundation.
force participation and unemployment. They then conduct regression analysis on this material and find the two independent variables have a combined "predictive value" of 97%, and that female labour force participation alone has the "greatest predictive power" (i.e. in relation to the graph of temporary work volume) where R square = 0.9140. However, the authors do not, in this case, try to unpack what might be the actual social relations that underpin the statistics. There is no examination, for example, of how the notional "independence" from temporary work of the two chosen variables is rendered undecidable by the possibility of a dynamic social connection which the high "predictive value" might be indicating. As a result, there is no explicit effort to come to grips with the processes that account for the elective affinity of temporary work and women.

Almost by a reverse fate, my work has been deprived of the statistical resource to explore just these same sorts of relations. Nevertheless, Akyeampong's study provides a set of figures which at least afford a sense of the developing scale of temping in Canada, as well as "profiling" aspects of the people involved as temps.

In terms of employment levels, the temporary work industry in Canada as a whole is reported as having expanded with a post-recession swing

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from an annual average number of workers (at any one moment\textsuperscript{15}) of 57,000 in 1983, to a peak of 73,000 in 1985, and then back to 63,000 in 1987.\textsuperscript{16} Despite the growth, the industry's share of the national non-agricultural work-force remains small, at about 0.6%. It should be remembered, though, that such statistics only relate to the institutionally marked temporary workforce: that which works through private sector intermediaries. As Christopherson, Mayall and Nelson all note, there are many other forms of temporary work organisation, ranging from infirm "floater" workers to "independent contractors", "casuals" and "informal intermittents" that are not accounted for in statistics such as these. In part because of its greater "visibility," it has been the agency-mediated form of temporary work that has been my focus. For this project, then, the Akyeampong statistics retain a degree of cogency.

The 1986 profile of workers in the industry presented by Akyeampong documents the large proportion of women involved (76%). In the 'temp' workforce, only 41% are registered as married, whereas the figure is 61% for the female workforce as a whole. The study also indicates that 37% of the women employed by the temporary work industry have a post-secondary degree or diploma, which is again in contrast to the figure for all industries of 29%. It seems to me that only part of this pattern can be accounted for in terms of the large numbers of students that agency managers in Vancouver reported as entering the temp workforce during the summer. Other, more complicated processes linked to these statistics, are what call for investigation.

\textsuperscript{15} This is a vital addendum in the case of temporary work employment volume averages. The actual number of people who will have worked as temps through agencies during a year will, of course, be much larger than the mean volume.

\textsuperscript{16} Akyeampong, \textit{op.cit.} p. 44.
A final point of interest that helps to frame subsequent arguments is the information relating to the sorts of jobs occupied by temps (see Table 1 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporary Work Industry</th>
<th>All Industries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Tenure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 4 weeks</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-13 weeks</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-26 weeks</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-51 weeks</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 weeks +</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial &amp; professional</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hourly wage</td>
<td>$8.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$10.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In one sense, of course, any job is temporary. However, these data demonstrate quite clearly the more limited time scale of temporary work tenure, with a preponderance of jobs lasting from four to thirteen weeks. The table also documents the tremendous concentration of work (58%) in what the survey...

17 After Akyemanpong, op. cit. p. 47.
defines as "clerical" occupations. The only other significant percentage of work falls into "managerial and professional" categories. These figures no doubt relate, in part, to the increasing trend towards executive - particularly legal, consultancy and accountancy - temping. But again, my investigation focuses on the most conspicuous group: the people who work in what the survey categorises as, "clerical" positions.

Another potential source of statistics are the publications of the Vancouver department of Employment and Immigration. They provide a provisional form

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18 This is similar to the situation Dale and Bamford (1988, op.cit.) find in the U.K. where temporary work is found to be preponderantly in "clerical," "personal service," "health" and "selling" occupations (p. 200). In the U.S., a survey by the Personnel Journal found that while of the 174 firms responding 91% said they used temporary services, 78% said it was for "clerical/filing/receptionist positions," and 75% said it was for "secretarial/word-processing jobs." The Worklife Report v. 6, n. 3 (1988) p. 17.

19 These figure, like the others derived from the L.M.A.S., are slightly complicated by the fact that the survey also counts workers who are de jure in the industry, but who are not de facto temps. In other words, the management statistics also include those who work as managers and administrators of temp service companies. Mayall and Nelson, note this too in relation to U.S. figures (1982, op.cit. p. 11), but suggest that the permanent staff employees account finally for only about 2-3% of the total statistic.

20 There are a large number of articles documenting this trend in the business literature. See, for example, L. Lincoln Eldredge, "The Executive 'Temp': Do you need help at the top?" Canadian Manager/Manager Canadien, v. 13, n. 3 (Fall) 1988, pp. 15-16. The author is quoted elsewhere as quipping managerially that "[t]he temporary executive is ironically, a permanent fixture in American corporate life." Newsweek, v. 112, n. 23, Sept. 26, 1988, p. 52, in an article entitled, "And Now 'Temp' Managers: Firms use them to cut costs and make quick fixes." A recent Bottom Line article (September, 1990, p. 18) noted an Olsten company report that suggested that "[a]ccounting professionals are now the most requested category of temporary personnel." In noting such literature, it should not be forgotten how it is often used by the businesses concerned to stimulate interest in new areas of diversification, or to give an impression of a particular company's position as an industry leader or watchdog. While the development of exec. temping is nonetheless significant, Vancouver, is so far without a company like "Executives Inc." which began business in Toronto in 1989 (Toronto Star, Sept. 27, 1989, pp. F1 and F11.), specialising in only this field.

21 These are brought out by the Labour Market Information Unit, Sinclair Centre, Vancouver, B.C., under the title Occupational Wages and Conditions Information: C.E.C. Update.
of 'help wanted index' from counts of advertisements in the local paper, and enumerate numbers of new hirings (in positions that are simultaneously marked by the observation: "Many employers using agencies to screen. - High replacement need"), but they present no countable data on temporary work itself. Executives in this department also informed me that they had recently begun to document "live claims" (claims held open during short periods when the worker returns to work) on Unemployment Insurance. They suggested that this category might include numbers of temps who find themselves regularly moving in and out of work. However, the value of a live claim enumeration as a count of temps (even if other numbers contributing to the figure could be controlled for) seemed practically nil in the light of Akyeampong's finding that the proportion of temps who reported collecting U.I. benefits was identical to the all industry average of 17%. 22

Such culs-de-sac in my data only helped to underline still more the insignificance temporary work seems to have for state-run agencies of surveillance. By way of stark contrast, circulating in Canada's business magazines and various finance journals, there is a considerable discourse on the subject. In it, temping appears, not as variables on a survey, but as an immense collection of commodities.

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22 This was the figure for 1986. Akyeampong, op. cit. p. 45. Casey documents a set of inconsistent surveys relating to temping and recurrent unemployment. However, because of his privileging of correlational relations, the account seems to move rather circularly towards sciamachy: temporary workers are found to be sometimes temporarily unemployed because they work temporarily? Op. cit. pp. 67-73.
Commodities and growth.

We’re a very market-driven business.

_Gary French. President of the Federation of Temporary Help Services_23

There is a simple theme in the proliferating business literature about temping which continually reduces discussion to questions of financial gain, loss, growth and security; it is that temporary labour is something bought and sold for profit as a commodity. At its zenith, this narrative is epitomised by an article by Eric Reguly in the _Financial Post_, advising Canadian investors to buy stocks in temporary services companies listed in the U.S._24

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24 To name it a "narrative," is not to render the object, in this case the operational idiom of a written text, any less material or any more aleatory. It is to recall both the objectivity of this text and the textuality, the open-ended, always in-process character, of the object. In this sense, I follow Fredric Jameson’s 1981 argument that: "When properly used, the concept of the "text" does not, as in garden-variety semiotic practice today, "reduce" these realities to small and manageable written documents of one kind or another, but rather liberates us from the empirical object - whether institution, event, or individual work - by displacing our attention to its constitution as an object and its relationship to the other objects thus constituted." (p. 297) In, _The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act_ (London: Methuen, 1981). As Derrida reiterated to his Marxist interviewers, "I have often insisted on the fact that "writing" or the "text" are not reducible either to the sensible or visible presence of the graphic or the "literal"." (p. 64) Jacques Derrida, _Positions_ (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981) trans. Alan Bass. The original French publication was in 1972.
Analysts say the temp business will be one of the fastest-growing industries of the 1990s, economic downturn or not... Now's as good a time as any to peruse the personal services sector. Not only is it growing quickly, it's somewhat insulated, but not immune, from cyclical downturns because it's one step removed from the roller-coaster world of manufacturing. Stock prices of many of these companies have recently slipped but analysts think prices will firm as the U.S. economy pulls itself out of the doldrums.... "The long-term factors are bullish," says Jerry Levine, analyst with New York's Merrill Lynch & Co. Inc. "I think you'll see this industry grow 7%-10% a year for the next ten years."  

Characteristically, as an investor's guide, this account, with its "roller coaster" vision of "cyclical downturns," "doldrums" and "bullish" factors, presents an essentialising focus on the magnitude of growth. This is clearly an indication of its intimate and practical links to the capitalist relations centered around precisely the same essential business of expanding accumulation. The two-way and mutually constitutive nature of these links - the reflexive relation between the material ideology and the work-world it describes and thereby recommends - is forcefully made manifest by repetition. Howard Scott, for example, a president of Philadelphia based C.D.I. Temporary Services Inc. (which has a branch in Vancouver), re-asserts that this "is the second-fastest growing industry in North America, after fast food." That such reiterated asseverations are part - as well as reflection - of a pervasive boosterism is not repudiated, but rather, further emphasised, by equally frequent changes in the details. In another article, for example, the claim is that the industry has the third strongest growth, but, this time, it is surpassed not by fast food but, instead, by the computer and health

25 Eric Reguly, "Investing in a temporary business: Temp services expected to be one of the fastest-growing industries of the '90s," Financial Post, February 12, 1990, pp. 25 and 30.

care industries. Throughout the business literature, the generally conveyed impression is that despite its presently small size, temporary services is a rapidly expanding, "leading edge" industry. The small contingencies may change, but the growth potential remains. Such a message, it seems to me, is at once an allegory, symptom and part of a profit-directed practice which proceeds as if the vicissitudes of the people involved as temps are of no concern. In the subsequent chapters, I return to discuss the practical limits of this "as if" structure, but for the moment, it is its implications that are my focus.

While Reguly's summary of performance may appear to be a rather long way from the day to day experiences of temps - not least, with intimations of the

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27 Don Hogarth, op. cit., p. 6. The estimate, in this 1990 article, of the number of people employed as temps at any one time in Canada is 50,000. This is notably 13,000 fewer than the Akyeampong reported figure of 63,000 for 1987. Aside from the figures, most of the managers or senior counsellors I interviewed in Vancouver chose at some moment to boast of growth. The following remarks were typical: "Our company has been growing at twice the rate of others and our industry, they claim, is the second fastest growing service industry in the whole of North America. Medical care industry is number one, and we are the second biggest service support industry...."

28 A similarly up-beat appraisal of the U.S. scene is reported by Kate Evans-Correia, the "Office Products and Business Systems Editor," no less, of Purchasing Magazine. "The temporary service industry is growing by leaps and bounds - about 15% a year. Industry-wide, in 1980 the number of temporary jobs on any given day was 416,000 and the payroll was $3.1-billion.... Now, however, temporary jobs total over 1-million and payroll income is about $9-billion." In "Temporary solutions," Purchasing Magazine, Sept. 28th., 1989, v. 107, pp. 84-88. Mayall and Nelson's figures for growth in the 1963-79 period, indicate an eight-fold expansion in the numbers of people employed, notwithstanding brief cutbacks during the economic crisis years of '71 and '75. This, they note, was a growth rate twenty times that of the U.S. work-force as a whole (1982, op. cit. p. 12). In the context of 416,000 figure for 1980 (above), they provide a useful clarification of the problem with the mean annual statistic of temporary workers. "[T]he annual number of T.H.S. clients was [estimated as] five times the single payroll figure....[Therefore] as a whole, we arrive at an estimate of 2,500,000 T.H.S. clients nationally in 1979" (p. 12).
high jinks associated with stock market fetishism$^{29}$ - the more tangible political implications of the discourse remain.$^{30}$

As the temp industry becomes more competitive and sophisticated, investors should be wary of falling profit margins. Increased competition is not the only concern. The temp companies are under pressure from the government to provide more benefits to their workers. If those costs are absorbed by the temp companies, profitability will undoubtedly wane.$^{31}$

The simplicity of this account is telling. An overbearing and practical interest in profit maximization, leads directly to a political agenda vis-à-vis labour's need for benefits. Likewise, just as this agenda emerges from a straightforward interest in bottom-line figures - where it is specific results and not social relations that are of immediate concern - so too do management explanations of the temping industry's success proceed on the basis of a simple "it works" theme. One manager of a temporary service company in Vancouver seemed to feel I was fishing for trouble or details of malpractice, and so forcefully asserted:

Look, there's no secret to this business, in fact too many people can just get into it. All we basically do is buy and sell hours of work for a profit.

Only subsequently, are personal anecdote, charm and finesse added to this story of basic profitability. Nonetheless, such anecdotes, as the first-cut abstractions of the actors involved, are significant.

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$^{29}$ Including phrases like: "[t]he general market sell off in the past month has also contributed to the lower prices." Reguly, op.cit. p. 25.

$^{30}$ As Jack Amariglio, Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff have argued with respect to more theoretical neoclassical and Keynesian thought, "it is not that [it is] 'non-political'; it is rather that much energy is spent to efface and ignore the political constitution of such thought." (p. 112) In "Division and Difference in the 'Discipline' of Economics." Critical Inquiry, v. 17 (Autumn, 1990) pp. 108-137.

$^{31}$ Ibid. p. 31.
In an article entitled "Goldrush! Who's Profiting From the Boom in Business Services?" the readership of Success magazine was told of Robert Funk's personal switch to a mission for profit.

Many years ago, Robert A. Funk flopped as a preacher. "I was a disaster," says the 49-year-old-entrepreneur. "I was a terrible speaker. I just felt awkward in the pulpit." So, for the time being, Funk put aside his clerical collar and devoted himself to becoming a successful corporate executive.

One day, Funk had a vision. He saw a great nation cast away its manufacturing base and transform itself into a service economy. He saw legions of businesses starving for flexible work forces, yearning to cut costs and increase productivity. In a flash, Funk knew his destiny was to start his own temporary services agency.  

Clearly a vital backdrop to this revelatory account of fortune and new times is some idealized notion of a past that is being left behind, or at least changed and modified, so as to increase productivity in the present. Other entrepreneurial accounts of the origins of temping repeat the theme of change and continuity. On the occasion of a visit to Vancouver in 1970, Pat Brady, vice president of what was then called Kelly Girl Services, presented a message to local business which seems paradigmatic. Joining together a quasi-Taylorist picture of work with a ready acceptance of the need for increased flexibility, Brady is reported as advising employers to keep their staff hard at it by limiting full time employees to the level just sufficient to cope with normal work flow. Rather like high efficiency electric generator sets, the permanent workers can be kept smoothly and continuously at work dealing with the base load. The employer can meet any spate of work above the normal load by calling in temporary help, preferably from Kelly.  

Here, the galvanic and overflowing-stream metaphors serve, like Reguly's "roller coaster" imagery, and Funk's "vision", as the executive's tool to describe how

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33 Reported in The Province, October 22, 1970, p. 5.
events in the work world are proceeding as if it was all about flows, cycles, or, indeed, a telos of flexibility. There are, I think, reasons why this language seems so appropriate, and proves so workable - even, as in Brady’s case, perhaps, so viable as publicity - in the entrepreneurial discourse of profit. Yet in order to understand these reasons, it is necessary to come to terms with what the executive accounts, located most immediately in the world of exchange, gloss over: in short, the way individual temps sell their capacity to labour and, as a result, make it part of what then appears as the system of profit generation. I will now attempt to examine just this by first discussing attempts to explain the operation of temping in terms of fluctuating labour demand, and, by second, moving towards an account that deals more adequately with the way in which people's concrete labouring ability becomes a commodity that is bought, re-sold and used as abstract labour power.

Commodities and the costs of fluctuating labour demand.

In what curiously became a famous article, John Atkinson, in 1984, drew a picture of work organisation changing according to a putatively new need by management to sustain "flexibility." That his account served to conflate a whole range of changing and un-changing labour practices, and that it was caught up in a specifically British debate over the Conservative government’s privatization

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schemes, are important issues to remember. However, what I want to focus on here is the way in which he conceived of temping as a particular mode of achieving "numerical flexibility." This conceptualization of the place of temping seems, in fact, not so very different from Brady's. In what is perhaps a heuristic gesture, Atkinson uses a dualistic model to locate temporary work as one part of a "periphery" whose role is to buffer an idealised "lean-machine" core of workers from the adverse effects of uncontrollable fluctuations in supply and demand. The 'ideal type' flexible firm complements such outsourcing practices with internal reorganisations - like quality circles - designed to advance "functional flexibility."

Apart from the fact that much of this model is predicated on manufacturing, there are many problems associated with how it installs the already depoliticised notion of functional flexibility simply in the "core." This conceals the systematicity of the political relations and effects strategised as peripheral under the category of "numerical flexibility". As Christopherson notes,

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36 Atkinson, 1984, op.cit. p. 3.

37 This account is coincident with the most common business explanations. Ollie S. Powers et al. provide another example while, at the same time, pointing to the links with broader economic events. "With economic conditions becoming increasingly difficult to predict, uncertainties concerning revenue and expense projections likewise increase. Companies cannot afford the luxury of overstaffing only to be followed by terminations if anticipated business does not materialise. Lay-offs are both costly and damaging to employee morale and company prestige. The maintenance of a relatively lean, permanent staff supplemented with temporary employees can provide an effective solution." Excerpt in Drake Business Review v. 2, n. 2, pp. 34-35.
"[t]he multiple sources of labour segmentation (both old and new) are obscured by [this] dualistic model."\(^{38}\) Not least, such sources of division include the gendering of work and the workforce.\(^{39}\) That around 76% of temporary work in Canada is carried out by women, is a good example of this very segmentation (an indication to one observer, in fact, of a second class "labour ghetto"\(^{40}\)). There is an inkling of an acknowledgment of this effect in Atkinson's account\(^{41}\), but, as Sylvia Walby underscores, this only occurs at the *empirical level* such that the abstract diagram of function and number, core and periphery, remains intact.\(^{42}\) By simply setting up temping and various other "outsourcing" practices as a means of achieving *numerical* flexibility, Atkinson's account, like management accounts, clouds the social relations and politics of work that lie buried beneath the numbers.

To be sure, it is clear that the majority of temporary work, both in Canada and the U.S., as well as in the U.K., affords an adjustment mechanism for client firms with fluctuating labour demands. From the post-war beginnings of the

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\(^{39}\) "Age" is also increasingly becoming a feature which, already segmenting the workforce, is being incorporated into the organisation of temping. Business articles abound which mix sweeping demographics with an easy acceptance of the cost-benefit implications for purchasing labour. See, for example, Ruth Hanley, "Grey Power: As Canada's labor force shrinks, seniors are becoming a reliable source of temporary help." *Canadian Secretary*, v. 14, n. 2 (May, 1989) pp. 29-32. In fact, in Vancouver there is now a company, *Elders Force*, specialising in exactly this form of temporary labour. They do not, however, generally service clerical, data entry, or secretarial positions, dealing instead, more usually, with particular blue-collar or, what the manager called, "specialised knowledge" jobs.


\(^{41}\) This is also noted by Dale and Barnford, *op.cit.* p. 192.

\(^{42}\) Sylvia Walby, 1989, *op.cit.* She critically asks instead: "Do these processes, which have gendered effects, have gendered social forces as their causes?" (p. 131)
industry, temping has developed primarily on the two-fold basis of providing replacement workers and the labour needed to deal with "office overload." Nevertheless, unlike Atkinson, other observers note the importance of seeing temping as representing more than just a means of coping with unpredictability. There is also, the socio-political context against which and within which it has gained a more systematic definition. Recent developments in the industry, having made the nature of this context that much more visible, afford a good example.

Agency managers in Vancouver told me that key to the present phase of expansion is the practice of "vendoring" or, "contract temping." This involves a non-casual supply of labour to a client firm for a particular department or section normally experiencing a high turnover of workers. One senior temporary counsellor, while drawing again on a dualistic model, made the political significance of this practice quite clear.

Control, convenience and cost is why they use us and it's becoming more and more that way. It's quite common for a company to come and tell you that they want sixty people.

I guess you can look at it in terms of investment. Your core workers are those that can appreciate in value. You have invested a lot of time and money in them, and it counts because they, in turn, give back to the company. It's an investment that appreciates. The sort of people we supply normally depreciate. You can spend money on them, but there's a limited return. For example, a mail room clerk. These are high turn-over positions. Data entry people, mail room clerks, they burn out. People don't last long in those jobs and yet big companies have to pay all the same benefits and all the same everything that they have to pay their core people who they get the biggest return from. And so it's not cost effective and plus it's a lot of money to keep replacing them when they quit - and so it's much cheaper to use us.

43 Christopherson, for example, both notes how temping serves for firms as a way of coping when "the pattern of demand is not predictable," (p. 135) - allowing them "to rationalise and standardise their operations and to deploy work hours as needed" (p. 136) -, and yet is, at the same time, alert to the strategic significance of the politics in these operations. This is a politics implied by practices which permit companies to "circumvent the regulatory structures in national economies that inhibit rapid adjustment in quality and quantity of labour." (p. 138.) See 1989, op.cit..
Using temporary labour like this, not least as a way of avoiding paying benefits, is key to a developing practice in which, as Christopherson puts it, "firms are restructuring work to use a 'permanent' temporary labour force." Indeed, for Small Business magazine, the analogy, if not the relationship, with that other icon of post-fordist flexibility, the Japanese just-in-time inventory system, is clear. As part of its "Recession Survival Kit," the magazine describes temping as an increasingly systematic organisation providing a "Just-In-Time Workforce." "Just-in-time manufacturers buy only the materials they need - when they need them," it notes. "Now, the just-in-time workforce can benefit every business." This systematic intent, when considered alongside its political implications, is a far cry from only using temps - in Atkinson's tellingly exclusive and inappropriate vocabulary - for "manning" up and down. While for companies the just-in-time workforce affords a flexibility that translates into "a major competitive advantage," the social relations that yield this economic effect have a very different set of implications for the workers involved. The counsellor's words, describing the formation of an effectively marginal workforce, were set in the financial register of costs and benefits, yet the political benefits and costs, for business and workers respectively, appear poignantly: "the sort of people we supply normally depreciate." The details and more general significance of this

44 Ibid. p. 135.
46 Ibid. p. 31.
47 Atkinson, op.cit. p. 31.
48 Zeidenberg, op.cit., p. 32.
political effect are, I think, usefully explored by unpacking the accounting calculations made by buyers of temporary labour.

For a temp to be able to walk into an agency and get sent out on assignment, not only do the agencies have to be there, but a specific demand for temporary labour must be operating too. This demand has to be such that client firms are willing to pay the considerable mark-up fee charged by agencies for the labour. This fee - in Vancouver ranging between 30% to 60% of the temp's wage - is the primary source of agency revenue and, as such, must cover extensive operating costs, as well as serve as profit. In return, as agency advertisements to business never tire of reiterating, client companies gain the significant boon, summarised by Mayall and Nelson, of eschewing "worker attachment." As these authors describe it, such efforts to procure "detached" labour are based upon transaction cost accounting. Nevertheless, what I want to make clear is that these calculations are only meaningful within the milieux of specific social relations.

The costs of a normal, permanent staff represent, in part, the expense of a company's legal and social obligations to designated "employees." These obligations of expense, what the Drake Office Overload advertisement calls the "REAL cost for staffing," (see Figure One, overleaf) include many of the rights fought for over many years by organised labour: rights to sick leave and maternity leave; rights to paid vacation and bereavement time; rights to health-care, dental

49 Temporary workers for Kelly in Vancouver are shown a video which uses a pie chart to explain how the mark-up money is used to cover various costs ranging from advertisements, to rents, to the wages of permanent employees. This, no doubt, is important for the company given a common suspicion of temps who see the rate the client company pays, and know the difference from their own wages, and wonder where the money actually goes. I discuss, these questions at greater length in a later section.

WHAT IS YOUR **REAL** COST FOR STAFFING?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Average Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid time per employee per year</td>
<td>1,950 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 weeks x 37.5 hours per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid time not worked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation (2 weeks)</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory and other holidays</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sickness</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bereavement, Jury Duty, Doctor, etc.</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idle time - 1/2 hour per day</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total hours paid but not worked</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total hours worked**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Average Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legally Required Payments (Employer's Share Only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Insurance</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workmen's Compensation (Clerical)</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada/Quebec Pension Plan</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers Health Levy Tax</td>
<td>1.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Pension Plan</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental and Medical Plan</td>
<td>0.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash Benefits (Employer's Share Only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severance Savings</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonus and Profit Sharing</td>
<td>2.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Termination Period</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Cash Benefits</td>
<td>1.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring and Training Costs</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Fringe and Other Costs</strong></td>
<td>25.82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on pay rate of $10.00/hour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Average Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pay for 1,950 hours</td>
<td>$19,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plus Fringe and Other Costs of 25.82%</td>
<td>$5,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actual Employee Earnings</strong></td>
<td>$24,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Earnings divided by total hours worked</td>
<td>$24,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therefore, on a base rate of $10.00/hour, your real cost is</td>
<td>$15.49/hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOUR pay scale</th>
<th>YOUR hidden costs</th>
<th>YOUR REAL COSTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$10.00 /hr</td>
<td>$5.49 /hr</td>
<td>$15.49 /hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$375.00 /wk</td>
<td>$205.87 /wk</td>
<td>$250.87 /wk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,625.00 /mo</td>
<td>$892.12 /mo</td>
<td>$2,517.12 /mo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$19,500.00 /yr</td>
<td>$10,705.50 /yr</td>
<td>$30,205.50 /yr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1  The REAL cost for staffing
plans and other "fringe benefits"; rights to severance pay; and so on. For employers, as Drake's advertisement shows with such persuasive statistical aplomb, such rights translate immediately into an economic discourse of cost; avoiding them can thus be a significant benefit.\textsuperscript{51} This is a key social context of temping. Reading the advertisement backwards shows how a whole set of social relations with specific meanings and histories, are equated, through the medium of labour time potential, to percentage differences in revenue and expense. It becomes immediately clear through this operation that the "competitive advantage" represented by temporary labour to business, represents to temps themselves a sweeping loss of worker rights. However, from the most common business point of view there is here no grand plan, no conspiracy against labour. It is simply a matter of a temp's work representing to client companies labour which is not technically the labour of an employee and, as a result, facilitating an often cheaper way of staffing.\textsuperscript{52} What is, like any other, a political organisation of labour, appears and is organised by its representation as an economic saving. Maureen Quinn, vice-president of Manpower Temporary Services, a Milwaukee based transnational agency, makes clear how this gloss of profit orientation covers the ellipsis of "a lot of issues."

\textsuperscript{51} Curtis Simpson, in a \textit{Bottom Line} article (March, 1990, p. 20) made this suggestion as advice to business. He reports: "A U.S. survey estimated that, when added together, costs associated with hiring, training, firing, payroll taxes, vacations, sick pay etc., company paid benefits such as pensions, medical and dental insurance, could amount to 47% of the salary dollar. The same situation could hold true in Canada."

\textsuperscript{52} An article in the \textit{Drake Business Review} (Ollie S. Powers \textit{et al.}, op. cit.) summarises with precision: "The use of temporary help services can prove cost-effective in avoiding employee benefit and employment related costs. The services of temporary workers can be obtained for an hourly rate that is generally much less than the total cost per hour of permanent employees. The cost saving, coupled with the staffing flexibility which temporary help provides, can be significant." (p. 35)
There are legalities involved in having to lay people off... there's a lot of issues and I don't think anybody wants to be in a position they can't honor. It's fair to say companies today don't want to be in a position where they're overstaffed, because profit is the name of the game.⁵³

Clearly part of the accounting which a company deciding to use "outsourced labour inputs" has to do, will involve calculating whether the savings it makes from using non-employee status labour will be greater than the fee it has to pay to the agency. Generally, it seems, that the more rights, benefits and privileges a permanent staff in a particular work place have won, the greater will be the likelihood of a saving when using temps.⁵⁴ This relationship is borne out by Mayall and Nelson's survey of U.S. companies using temporary labour. They found a direct and significant relation between the number of benefits available to permanent staff in a firm, and the probability of that firm purchasing temporary labour (see Table Two, below).⁵⁵

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⁵⁴ This calculation also depends critically on the duration of the hire. After a certain period of time the "marginal saving" of using temporary labour is eclipsed by other forms of detached labour organised internally. Such labour comes with the extra costs of the original selection process, costs normally internalised within the agency fee, but yet without the constant hour-by-hour fee itself. See the graph of this transaction cost analysis in Mayall and Nelson, 1982, op.cit. p. 33.

⁵⁵ It should be remembered, however, that this statistic also reflects the strong relationship between increasing size of firms and temporary labour usage. 56% of firms with 20 or under employees used temps, compared with 99% of firms with 1,000 or over. Mayall and Nelson, 1982, op.cit. p. 38.
TABLE 2: TEMPORARY WORK USAGE BY BENEFIT LEVEL.\textsuperscript{56}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Percentage of firms using temps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-14%</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19%</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-34%</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-34%</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%+</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\* for permanent employees, as a percentage of payroll.

Apart, however, from the saving non-employee labour represents to business - with all the incumbent loss of rights and benefits for the temps themselves - there are other figures that have to enter into the calculations made by the purchaser of temporary labour. For business, one of the drawbacks of turning to temping is the amount of time it takes for temps to adjust to firm-specific work practices. This time of adjustment, of learning and speedy discipline, appears on the balance sheet as lost time and, therefore, as unproductive expense. Having acclaimed temping and asserted the just-in-time workforce's value as a means of coping with the uncertainty of recessionary times, the Small Business article also remarks:

There is a cost, however. Whenever the company brings a temp on board, it invariably suffers a brief productivity drop. "We have our own ways of doing things, and our own equipment," says Pursley [a manager]. "There's always a learning curve for the new employees, but they're usually on-stream after two or three days."\textsuperscript{57}

Reflecting on this link between economics, skill learning requirements and work organisation, Casey, along with Mayall and Nelson, notes how temporary work

\textsuperscript{56} 1982, \textit{ibid.}, p. 39. Mayall and Nelson examined similar figures for other, non-agency, forms of temporary work. They found a much \textit{weaker} relation between numbers of "call-ins" and "long duration hires" and the rate of benefits received by permanent staff.

\textsuperscript{57} Zeidenberg, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 32.
tends generally to be used for occupations seen as involving "general skills." The latter authors point to the strong concentration of temporary work in clerical positions as evidence of this relationship.\(^58\) Casey goes further, and argues that the "large number of temporary clerks and secretaries," is in part "a function of the generality of their skills," and, as such, is representative of the claims of human capital theory.\(^59\)

Casey's argument is a good example of the way in which the costs-based decisions of business produce patterns too easily described in vocabularies that forget the active mediation of work by workers. The positioning of secretarial and clerical work as general skill occupations, low on a hierarchy of "human capital," is typical of a more widespread tendency to demean such workers' skills. What needs to be remembered, I think, is that social processes are at work which have this demeaning effect. A language that fetishises the effect instead, is blind to the social process.

Casey's approach then further forecloses on an analysis of another important set of social relations involved in temping. These are relations involving the discipline of work, and amount to another key cost consideration for businesses. A company with a staff of permanent employees is normally able to

\(^{58}\) Mayall and Nelson, op. cit. pp. 32 and 42. A more recent survey by The Office magazine showed a similar concentration of work in the same categories. In response to the question: "For what types of jobs do you require temporary help?" 64% noted clerical/filing; 31%, computer/data processing; 4%, healthcare; 3%, legal; 12%, manufacturing/light manufacturing; 11%, records management; 2%, sales; 59%, secretarial; and, 46%, word processing. See "The Office Reader Survey Report: Temporary Help in the Age of Specialization," The Office, v. 112, August, 1990, pp. 56-60. Notably, the figure for computer/data-entry was down 10% from the 41% recorded in the survey two years previously by the same magazine. If these figure represent a more general tendency, then the thesis that temping is likely to be linked to highly routinised tasks seems more questionable.

realise the labouring capacity it has been sold by exercising control on the sellers, the workers, through various forms of discipline. This control may be authoritarian, but more often, as Michael Burawoy has shown with his careful comparative analysis of production politics, it operates through a form of consensus that engages workers in actively regulating their own work. The problem with temping, in this respect, is that its very temporariness means that such projects cannot be easily established. What Burawoy calls the "relations in production" are problematised by temps who are always stepping back out of one production site and into another. Three of the five representatives of employers I spoke to in Vancouver said that one of the biggest problems they have with temporary labour is that temps often have little or no "loyalty" to the business. An executive of human resources at one medium sized architecture/engineering design office was clear about the cost of this interruption in discipline.

Well we try to give them the red carpet because we are so thrilled to have someone to help. By the time we get a temp, we are just ready to burst. But then some of them, well you can't get any proper work out of them. They have no sense of duty, they can always leave when they want, and they just don't have the same willingness or need to pull together like the regular staff. Although you do get very good ones from time to time, I sometimes wonder whether it's worth paying all that money. Again, I suppose there is this advantage that you don't have to deal with benefits, unemployment insurance, C.P.P., or their taxes when you get them.

Temporary agencies try to respond to this customer complaint by advertising how they provide "the best" screening and "the best" training programs on the market. In Chapter Four I examine these claims in much greater detail, but for the moment, it is the site of their enunciation that I want to

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60 Michael Burawoy, 1984, *op.cit.* especially pages 32-38.

That agencies try to out-bid each other in attempts to present their labour as better disciplined is again indicative of how temping tends to displace traditional forms of work organisation. As the temps' employers of record, the temporary services companies try to take up as best they can the role of disciplining workers. Yet, distanced as they are from the site of work and because of their so often fleeting encounter with the temps, this effort is always strained.

For the temps themselves, there is, as Pat Dupont's criticisms make clear, strain too. As well as affording an important opportunity for resistance - i.e. the ability to simply leave bad assignments - the displacement of permanent work structures produced by temping all too quickly generates a sense of rootlessness and insecurity. For Janet Rye, one of five "permanent temps" I interviewed, it was a question of positives and negatives.

Well, what you have to remember about temping, is that on the plus side, you know, you always can get up and leave. Although a lot of the younger ones get scared and think this will upset the agency, or they need the money so much they put up with all kinds of stupid shit. But, you know, after you've been a temp for a while you know that you can just say "bye" to the bad guys. So that's the plus side. But on the negative side is that you don't always know whether there'll be a job. Like, right now, things are real slow. And even when you get them, all the moving from office to office wears you down sometimes.[...]
Anyway I won't take short term, same day assignments now, and it's been a real struggle, a real battle with agencies because they phone me just the same. But I won't do it because it stresses me out too much. OK. It got to the point where, right, I needed the money, but I had to take care of myself, I need to be on more than just survival. I needed to take care so I didn't go crazy, actually so I could do a job at all.

This account, by noting how "the younger ones get scared," also underlined how agencies still hold a degree of control in spite of the dispersed, city-wide travels of

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62 To rephrase Foucault: "We must also describe the institutional sites from which the [manager] makes [her] discourse." A.K., 1972, op.cit. p. 51.

63 The relations covered by this juridical term include the obligations of agencies to do payrolling, organise tax deductions, and pay U.I.C., C.C.P. and Workers' Compensation contributions.
their temps. Like many other comments by informants, these reminded me how difficult, indeed, foolish it is to try and theorise control and security in a hard and fast way.

Most temps who spoke about the problems of insecurity also noted how it came together with what they saw as some advantages of a work strategy that was, in a limited way, flexible for them too. The complex, mediated and very much bounded nature of this flexibility became particularly clear in a conversation I had with two temps, Laura Shaw and Sally Rika.

Laura: There's no protection for us as temps. Even when we're working in a situation where the regular staff are unionised.

Matt: There are a few plus sides though perhaps?

Laura: Yeah, I mean if you are weighing pros and cons that way, then there's no real coverage and you've got all the hassles like I have right now in this recession, where you phone up and they say "Don't bother coming down, we haven't got enough work even for those we've already got." But then, at the same time, you have all this flexibility...

Sally: And freedom. I mean if you are after freedom and flexibility that's the way to go, or if you are new in town and you want to put your foot in the door and decide where you want to work. But once you start losing sight of that and they start using you...it's like an American Express card. If you pay it off every month, you don't get to pay interest. But once you get into that temp situation and they con you into doing some full time/part time gig and say, you know, this company wants you for two days a week for the next six months, for example; which is what Lisa almost got into. And I said, "Hey, wake up and smell the roses, and remember why you are really there." - Because Lisa wanted to get a job at the art gallery and I went in there and asked straight up "What agency do you use?" and they said "Kelly." So I told Lisa to go to Kelly and register with them because they've got the art gallery account, and then she got into it. - But then they wanted her to do this full-time, two day garbage. And I said "Lisa, it's going to lock you up. You wont be able to get a full time job." And I said, "Get right out now." And she did, and they brought someone else in and put her elsewhere. And I said, "Don't lose sight of why you're there. Don't get used up!"

As I show later, the reasons why this flexibility is felt as an advantage often relate to questions such as women's double burden, and, thus, immediately problematise any precipitate praise. However, the possibilities for labour's flexibility and resistance facilitated by temping must not be denied; especially in the light of questions like David Harvey's as "to what degree the changes now in motion have socialist potential?" (p. 66) In, "Flexibility: Threat or Opportunity?" Socialist Review v. 21, n.1 (1991) pp. 65-77.
The comparison with using a credit card is, I think, appropriate for a number of reasons. It is an association that draws attention to the liberation many Western women - and increasingly men, perhaps - find in shopping; but it equally underlines how the freedom availed by temping, like the independence of the mall, is enclosed, held in tension, and rendered precarious as well as possible, by the web of money mediated relations upon which it rests.\(^\text{65}\) Despite her ability to actually intervene in the system of contracts that organise temping, Sally Rika’s parting reminder, "Don’t get used up!" revealed an experienced eye for the industry’s unrelenting capacity to appropriate. (Which, of course, is to say nothing about what the "experienced eye" trained in consumerism and first world, hi-tech employment does not so often see, but to which it is related by that very same credit card: namely, the exploitation of women in countries like South Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand.)

Another permanent temp, Cathy Leslie, also registered the possibility of personal flexibility while acutely warning of its limits. Like Janet Rye, she was living alone, totally dependent on her own earnings. As an artist she also enjoyed taking time off work to paint, and it was in this context that temping provided her with a useful employment strategy.

\(^{65}\) For a valuable history of the complex sites of autonomy, resistance and co-optation of women in retailing, as well as their intersection with class, see Susan Porter Benson’s *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986). Nevertheless, the actual practices she describes have changed considerably in more recent years, and it would call for a contemporary analysis of subjectivity and shopping to make any more concrete claims about "consumption therapy," "mall lunches" and identity politics.
Because as an artist I like to have free time and time for travelling, and this gives me a degree of flexibility, I can decide when I want to work, and when I don't want to work sort of thing. So up to a point it's been a benefit, but all that changing around can get to you.[...] And, well, you get to a point in life when you don't want to move around so much and I think that I've maybe reached that stage. I've been temping for twenty years, and I think it's time to settle down. And it's now when I come to do this that I see the problems with temping. They're not doing you any favours. All that flexibility talk they give you, well it's basically flexibility for them, not you. You definitely can't, in my experience, get hours that you want, which they say on some of the ads. And, well, they just don't give you a reliable base in the long run.

Many people who only temp as students, or in between jobs, while all too well aware of problems such as work being "slow," do not see this insecurity so often. Nevertheless, in the case of these commentaries, the uncertainty, as well as the opportunity attached to the movement facilitated by temping is clear. For Cathy Leslie, now looking for more stability, the constant moving around from job to job equated finally with "flexibility for them."66

Unpacking the cost calculations of businesses buying temporary labour has thus led both now, in the case of the expense of displaced discipline, and earlier, with the example of the savings made possible by temps working as non-

66 It seems hardly surprising, in this context, that Norrell's magazine for temps saw fit to print the following poem, entitled "Time," by a Miami temp. (The Touch, v. 2, n. 3 (1990) p. 15.)

In this world of perpetual motion
Sometimes you can lose your way;
You get caught up in trying to grasp
The difference 'tween yesterday and today.

The days, they all blend together,
The hours, they don't even exist;
You wonder what happens tomorrow,
Forgetting about all that you've missed.

For in this crazy world,
There's one way to go that is best;
And that, my friend, is inevitable...
You have to proceed, not regress.
employees, to questions of political significance. At root, both sets of implications for labour - the loss of rights and benefits by temps and the potential for resistance and/or insecurity - relate to how temporary labour represents the labour of non-employees. In Canada, at least, temps are employees of agencies, but nevertheless, at the sites where their labouring capacity is put to work, they occupy a different, less privileged legal space. As Sylvia Walby has indicated, the financial and political advantages accruing to business from having workers in this position, are only possible or meaningful in the context of institutional arrangements - such as collective agreements with unions - secured by previous periods of labour struggle. It is in this limited sense of coming after and in the context of successful fordist employment agreements that the labour organisation and feasibility of temping can be said to be post-fordist.67

The employment protection legislation, won under the pressure of the labor movement, gave protection from dismissal to those workers with a period of full-time employment in one firm. Other legislation gave national insurance benefits to employees who worked more than a certain number of hours, and charged employers for this. The new flexibility offensive is an element of the response to that round of labour movement activity. It does not so much contest the advantages given to those workers by legislation, but rather seeks to side-step these issues by both increasingly employing workers on contracts which do not qualify for this state-backed protection, and enforcing lesser job security on those workers who fall outside the legislation.68

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67 As terms of more general, epochal, and - as in some uses - masterful application, I share Julie Graham's concerns about the politics and epistemology of "Fordism/ Post-Fordism." See her tremendous critique of "regulation theory" in "Fordism/Post-Fordism, Marxism/Post-Marxism: The Second Cultural Divide," Rethinking Marxism, v. 4, n. 1 (Spring, 1991) pp. 39-58.

Walby's account of this post-fordist side-step is clearly predicated on the U.K. experience, and such geographical context is undoubtedly influential. Christopherson, for example, notes how the U.S., despite having fewer labour market rigidities than most western countries, still has a disproportionately larger "flexible workforce." This, she argues, can be partly accounted for in terms of the U.S. workforce's historical vulnerability. Yet while specific historical geographies must be remembered, it also seems that a more general effect of the 1980s supply-side economic agendas has been to spur enterprises around the world into "devising means of reducing the fixed cost of labour."

This pattern seems wholly consonant with the rise of temping in Canada after the '82-'83 recession. In a political environment where a significant sweep of labour and social rights have increasingly become viewed as costs and rigidities, temping has developed, in the words of Federation president, Gary French, as "a tool available to management to change fixed costs into variable costs." Yet courtesy of such a mechanism - itself, an effect made possible by political and economic changes - temping seems to appear at the local business level as a simple tool for managing accounts. The political victories thereby won over labour have thus emerged far less from grand capitalist plans, and much more immediately as

69 It seems to me that one of the signal merits of Scott Lash and John Urry's account in *The End of Organised Capitalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), is that it makes clear how the particular contexts of Sweden, France, Germany, the U.S. and the U.K. have had a critical bearing on the on-set and rate of attrition of fordist relations.


71 Noted by Guy Standing in "Global Feminization through Flexible Labour," *World Development*, v.17, n. 7, (1989) pp. 1077-1095. He continues on page 1079 by arguing that "for many monotonous jobs high turnover may have a positive benefit for employers [...] This is one reason for resorting to temporary employees."

72 Quoted in Reguly, 1990, *op.cit.*
a series of effects stemming from free market decisions made about purchasing "temporary help" as a commodity.

In the next section I elaborate on this argument. My suggestion will be that the political effects noted here relate to how temping institutionalises the separation of the buying from the using of labour power. This is the same separation which, as Marx showed, makes plain the difference between labour's exchange value at the point of sale and its use value (its capacity to generate value, in Marx's schema) at work. It is the market mediated mechanism which allows business to take as its own, the financial difference between what it pays for the labour and the value created by that labour when it is put to work. However, by arguing that temping makes this separation visible, I do not want to draw on Marx's work in order to assert the labour theory of value as a doctrinal proof of exploitation. Instead, I want to use it to explore the politics of how labour, in capitalist societies, takes a particular social form as abstract labour power through the medium of value measured in money terms.
The politics of abstract labour-power made visible.

You see - yes, that's it, that's what I wanted to say - you're a commodity. To the agencies you are not a person, you're a commodity that can earn. And we temps are earning a lot of money. I tell you, I saw that bill for me that went through when I only got $10.50. The difference is huge. [...] It's only an enterprise, it's only there for making money, it's not a service, it's a sales operation. It's not a non-profit organisation, it's purely a sales organisation, and, unfortunately, the goods are the people.

Pat Dupont

Political economy has indeed analysed value and its magnitude, however incompletely, and has uncovered the content concealed within these forms. But it has never once asked the question why this content has assumed that particular form, that is to say, why labour is expressed in value, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product.

Karl Marx

An analysis of temporary labour that deals only with the magnitudes of transaction costs cannot come to terms with how the actions of particular temps become wrapped up in what subsequently appears as this general system of transaction. The system may seem to operate as if the magnitudes alone in their phantom-like objectivity, made sense. But to leave the analysis at this point of fetishistic effect occludes the working lives that serve as predicates of the numbers. Mayall and Nelson, for example, are finally able to place temping on a continuum of business flexibility options that run from using highly contingent casuals in an external market, to core-based internal management options such as redundancy or overtime. Having considered and researched the cost related decisions associated with agency mediated, non-executive temping, they locate this form of

labour supply as an "external market," low attachment option. While this analysis facilitates useful comparisons with other forms of temporary labour, it says nothing about how a person who temps becomes caught up in what starts to look like "self-evident and nature-imposed necessity." The problem seems akin to an inversion of Ricardo's concentration upon measuring the magnitude of value by labour time. In both cases, a keen interest in figures of exchange and circulation casts a mist over how it is that labour comes to be represented in these terms in the first place. For Ricardo, this was a weakness, which, as Marx showed, made him all too vulnerable to the simple criticisms of writers like Bailey.

[Ricardo] does not understand the specific form in which labour is an element of value, and fails in particular to grasp that the labour of the individual must present itself as abstract general labour and, in this form, as social labour. It seems to me that it is only by examining these historical processes by which the individual's labour appears as abstract labour that it is possible to come to terms

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75 A look, Marx argues in relation to Ricardo's formulae, which "bear[s] the unmistakable stamp of belonging to a social formation in which the process of production has mastery." Marx, Capital V.1, op.cit., pp. 174-5. As Slavoj Zizek has recently underscored, Marx's interest in fetishism proceeded less at the level of ideology critique (for example, critiquing those who fetishise certain social categories as ultimately regulative), and much more at the basic level of studying social forms which operated as if they were a system. Marx was, therefore, keen to analyse what can be called "real abstractions." "Before thought could arrive at pure abstraction," notes Zizek, "The abstraction was already at work in the social effectivity of the market." (p. 17) Quoting Sohn-Rethel, he summarises, "The exchange abstraction is not thought, but it has the form of thought." (p. 19) From Chapter One, "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?" in The Sublime Object of Ideology (London: Verso, 1989). It is this form or real abstraction, made operable through the simple market mechanism of buying and selling, that I want to examine in this section. Following Marx, I also want to attend to the limits of this structure, remaining alert to its geo-historicity. By remembering its social construction, I want to avoid falling prey to the timeless of Zizek's account. This appears most redolent in his reiteration of an ahistorical, rule-governed Lacanian lexicon and the patriarchy so often in its train. (e.g. p. 60)

with the seeming contradiction of freedom and exploitation with which I began
the chapter. The best way to begin this examination is to take up the question
that emerged as key in economic decisions about temping: the status of temps as
non-employees at the site of work.

The displacement of traditional employment structures is crucial to the
commercial viability of temping. It works by means of establishing a triangular
relationship, as opposed to the more customary dyadic one. At the apex is the
temporary services company which operates by at once representing labour to
business and business to labour. Coming into the agency are a whole range of
different people who, for very heterogeneous reasons, wish to work as temps. As
socially competent subjects they all have different needs, desires and expectations
concerning pay, conditions and type of work. For the agency, however, temps are
part of a complex balancing act that involves, on the other side, the heterogeneous
needs and expectations of various business purchasers.

During unstable economic times this balancing of demand and supply
becomes very clear. The recessionary crisis, for example, affecting Vancouver at
the time of my research, meant that agencies were being bombarded with requests
for work form would-be temps which they could not meet. Many senior counsellors
noted that, as a result, they had switched their advertising focus from efforts to
attract would-be temps, to programs of more phone calls and publicity directed at
business. During post-recessionary periods, when, as Akyeampong’s statistics and
numerous business articles suggest\textsuperscript{77}, temping experiences rapid expansion, the advertising projects are slowly turned about to focus again on attracting temps.\textsuperscript{78} The general effects that emerge from this balancing act have spatial, as well as temporal patterns. \textit{Purchasing} magazine makes this clear to its readers.

Keep in mind that it is unlikely that you will be able to get the same pay rates nationwide. The demand for temporary help is much greater in Boston than it is in Detroit. Services, therefore, pay and charge more for help in Boston than in Detroit. It would be unreasonable for you to expect the service to do otherwise. They don't control labor supply and demand.\textsuperscript{79}

In this way, temporary service firms act somewhat like an index of a local economy, reflecting back to business - in general terms - the place specific cost of labour.\textsuperscript{80} Agencies also operate in the other direction too; indicating to temps in general terms like "things are slow," the summary state of the local economy.

\textsuperscript{77} The commonly repeated idea being that companies readjusting do so tentatively using temps at first to begin to re-staff. "The only thing certain about uncertain times is that the temporary help industry will continue to grow. [...] Uncertainty is why we have grown the way we have and actually it's one of the fastest growing industries in the country growing by 18\% annually from 1971 to 1985," said Ted Turner, the president of the Federation. (Quoted in Marty Hope, "Uncertain times boost use of 'temps'," in \textit{Calgary Herald}, Sept. 22, 1988, p. F1.) The current president, Gary French, quoted in the Hogarth article, "Temp services see post-recession boom," (\textit{op. cit.}) goes on to suggest that, "our industry tends to be a bellwether to the economy."

\textsuperscript{78} It is this period of "recovery" that seems to best suit the industry. As expansion begins to slow problems again arise. In an article entitled, "Temporary Help agencies struggling to meet demands of robust economy," Howard Scott of C.D.I. is quoted as saying "staff availability could threaten the industry. [...] Temp-help companies are feeling the squeeze, [...] we're having to work harder to find new recruits." \textit{Winnipeg Free Press}, Sept. 27, 1987, p. 20. See too, Craig Tooney, 1987, \textit{op. cit.}. As Mayall and Nelson's work shows, the need for temporary labour is most closely related to businesses either undergoing growth or decline (1982, \textit{op. cit.} p. 38), stasis seems the context for which traditional employment agencies providing permanent workers are better suited. Nonetheless, as managers were keen to remind me, a large proportion of such companies are associated with, or are a subsidiary of a "perm." employment agency. As a result, they can pass business about and, as one executive said, "keep all the bases covered."

\textsuperscript{79} Kate Evans-Correia, 1989, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{80} For a neo-classical economist commenting on employment agencies more generally, it is a question of a geographical interruption in perfect market competition. See Lawrence Fric, \textit{The Role of Commercial Employment Agencies In The Canadian Labor Market} (University of Toronto, Dept. of Political Economy: Unpublished Ph.D., 1973), pp. 26-30.
However, in case it may be mistaken, it is not to these indexical effects to which I refer as making visible the politics of abstract labour-power. To be sure, the fact that temps feel so closely the "roller coaster" effects of economic crisis is vital to understanding their vulnerability. The reflection of crisis in terms of agency labour demand is also an indication that temporary labour - despite an undeniably complex set of links - is finally tied to the organization and reproduction of productive activity. But, these market reflections are only part of the processes whereby abstract labour power comes to be realised as value. Indeed, to preemptively equate abstract labour power with the average costs of labour in a specific region would be to conflate the price business pays for labour capacity with the profitable effects of putting that labour to work; the very distinction Marx sought to emphasise by developing the concept of abstract labour power in the first place.

In the *Grundrisse*, there is an important note that summarises the first part of Marx's conceptualization of abstract labour power. It indicates the two displacing moments of representation upon which surplus labour, and, hence, surplus value are based. In doing so, it also outlines two moments that temping turns into institutional events.

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81 The heterogeneity of temporary jobs means that it is totally unfeasible to make unambiguous claims about the relation of temping to "productive labour" in its strict sense. In various sites and in various ways temp labour can reduce fixed costs, generate flexibility, and externalise risk, but always in a complex, institutionally specific way. In this context, as Richard Walker has noted with regard to white-collar work more generally, "any attempt to carve up a complex, dialectical and structured division of labour into neat boxes of productive and unproductive labour is bound to be futile." (p. 74) In "Is There a Service Economy? The Changing Capitalist Division of Labour," in *Science and Society*, v. xlix, n. 1 (Spring, 1985) pp. 42-83. Nevertheless, as Walker's work shows, whether it is through facilitating expanded circulation, distribution, or even organising production, the needs for and of the so-called "service economy" are intricately bound up with traditional production and the achievement of continued accumulation. See too, his 1991 revised version of this essay with Andrew Sayer, "The Brave New World of The Service Economy: The Expanding Division of Labour," *mimeo*. 
If we consider the exchange between capital and labour, then we find that it splits into two processes which are not only formally but also qualitatively different, and even contradictory:

(1) The worker sells his commodity, labour, which has a use value, and, as commodity, also a price, like all other commodities, for a specific sum of exchange values, specific sum of money, [...].

(2) The capitalist obtains labour itself, labour as value positing activity, as productive labour; i.e. he obtains the productive force which maintains and multiplies capital [...].

The separation of these two processes is so obvious that they can take place at different times, and need by no means coincide. It is exactly this separation that temping dramatises so vividly. Temps see very clearly the spatial and temporal displacement of work sites from the agency, the place where they are paid and first enter into exchange relations. The separation of their labour from its product is staged across a city-wide, microelectronic theatre of alienation. Yet, while the division in this picture is clear, its political significance remains more cloudy. By elaborating what Diane Elson has called Marx's "value theory of labour," I want to make the politics stand out.

Elson's reading is set in stark opposition to other accounts of Marx which, for a variety of reasons, make an equation of equality between value and a

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82 Grundrisse, p. 274. Marx’s exclusive language not only indexes him as "a man of the time," its inappropriateness vis-à-vis women’s labour also presents a symptom of the limits of the economic "dramatis personae" he focused on as predicates of human subjectivity. Noting these limits, I want to underscore, does not in any sense translate into a denial of the effectivity of the economic as predicate. In this respect, though Marx was never able to examine an employment structure quite like temping, it might be suggested that his "reserve army" concept provides a fruitful way of examining the industry. In the light of Veronica Beechey’s work on female labour and the reserve army (see her Unequal Work (London: Verso, 1987)) this proposition seems doubly fertile. Here, however, I have chosen to use Marx’s more general analysis of value, and, in the next chapter, the wider ranging feminist treatments of sexuality and gender, as my frames for a detailed institutional examination.

positivised conception of "embodied labour time." If one of these analytical/capital logic accounts had been used to approach the questions asked by this chapter it would probably have prompted an attempt to measure the value producing capacities of temps at work. From this, a computation of their rate of exploitation might have been made, and hence, their class and political situation identified. Such a reductionist approach would no doubt have faltered almost as it started, with all sorts of questions about whether producing business services really counts as productive activity. Certainly, it would have failed to come even close to what I regard as the important political concerns of temps. By contrast, Elson's account remains alert to Marx's argument that it is socially necessary labour-time which operates as the immanent measure of value. By recuperating how notions like abstract labour power were attempts to come to terms with the

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85 Capital V. 1, p. 129; and, Elson, 1979, op.cit. pp. 137-8. Many marxists use the phrase "socially necessary," but tend, I think, to reify it in a dash to produce a measurable category that can be put to work on questions asked by orthodox economics. Such projects clearly lose sight of the category as an "immanent measure". Instead, what Derrida calls a 'metaphysics of presence' functions to turn labour-time into a countable datum.
condensed effects of diverse social actions, Elson shows there is a way of keeping alive, rather than reifying, the politics of value creation.

Value, Elson says,

is not the same as a quantity of socially necessary labour-time: it is an objectification or materialisation of a certain aspect of that labour-time, its aspect of being simply an expenditure of human labour-power in general, i.e. abstract labour.\textsuperscript{86}

Itself appearing in the form of money, value is at one step removed from the human labour-power it only ever represents one-sidedly, in the abstract.\textsuperscript{87} It emerges, therefore, as the end of a chain of displacements, the first two of which were marked by Marx in the extract already cited from the \textit{Grundrisse}. The non-final, but quasi-completing link in this chain is the profitable sale of the commodities produced by the labour. It is, as Marx showed, through this market mechanism, that the social quality of the whole production process becomes at once achieved and manifest; in short, realised in the full sense of the word.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{86} Elson, 1979, \textit{op.cit.} p. 132.

\textsuperscript{87} For a more adequate and sophisticated analysis of the sign chain of capital, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," in \textit{In Other Worlds: Essays In Cultural Politics} (New York: Routledge, 1988) pp. 154-75. That these representations involve what Elson calls "difference" and "continuity" (\textit{Value}, p. 133), where the categories for Marx are open, remaining interrelated and unfinalised, is indicated by Spivak in the following terms. "[T]he definition of Value in Marx establishes itself not only as a representation, but also a differential." (p. 159) On the subject of how Marx's categories of determination often include as part of their constitution aspects of the reality they determine, see Bertell Ollman, \textit{Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society} Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

\textsuperscript{88} By being exchanged at a price, commodities' qualities as use values are temporarily displaced. "There is nothing left of them in each case but the same phantom like objectivity; they are merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour [...]. All these things now tell us is that human-labour power has been expended to produce them, human labour is accumulated in them." \textit{Capital V. 1}, p. 128.
In this manner the labour objectified in the values of commodities is not just presented negatively, as labour in which abstraction is made from all concrete forms and useful properties of actual work. Its own positive nature is explicitly brought out, namely the fact that it is the reduction of all kinds of actual labour to their common character of being human labour in general, of being the expenditure of human labour power.\textsuperscript{89}

This is the moment, which, coming together with the others, achieves the possibility of the predication of the worker as abstract labour power.\textsuperscript{90}

Putting it this way, avoids the pitfall found in many analytical "continuist" schemas, and stops short of turning value - via a dehistoricised category of "labour-time" - into a fixed metric. Instead, it is a question of seeing value as held in precarious tension in a web of social relations into which it recursively binds workers as social subjects.\textsuperscript{91} It is, in short, a matter of constitutive representation.

Value, therefore, does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyph.\textsuperscript{(my emphasis)}\textsuperscript{92}

This is not mad metaphysics. For Marx, it was as a hieroglyphic, as a social sign, as, indeed, a fetishism, that value had its qualitative and quantitative material force. However, by putting it unabashedly in these terms of representation, I believe a marxian account can be made to make way for different, but equally material predications of subjects. In other words, tracing how temps are embedded

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Capital V. 1}, p. 159.


\textsuperscript{91} "As values, commodities are social magnitudes, that is to say, something absolutely different from their "properties" as "things". As values, they constitute only relations of [people] in their productive activity." \textit{Theories of Surplus Value: Part Three} p. 129.

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Capital V. 1}, p. 167. Marx's language about value is characterised less by the equations of certainty that fill analytical writing, and much more by some carefully judged biological, chemical and semiotic metaphors. Elsewhere, for example, he famously describes the equivalent form as counting "as the visible incarnation, the social chrysalis state, of all human labour." (p. 159)
in social life by means of their labour represented as value does not necessarily foreclose political critiques that attend to their positioning in terms of other systematic representations such as those engendered by patriarchy.\(^{93}\) For the moment, however, I want to stay with the theme of the capitalist relations that organise temping.

As Elson shows so clearly, the politics of exploitation are best understood only by keeping track \textit{at once} of all the displacements in the chain of value. This involves recalling altogether, in a single gesture, the following aspects of the extraction and distribution of surplus value: that workers sell their ability to labour and thereby sign over its use value, its productive and value generating effects, to business\(^{94}\); that they are, from then on, alienated from the material and saleable products of that labour\(^{95}\); that these products are commodities produced by business in order to be sold for a profit; that they are sold for a profit, their representation of abstract labour power realised as value in money terms\(^{96}\); and that that money, as capital, as value in motion, is re-invested in more labour-power and other start-of-production commodities.\(^{97}\)

\(^{93}\) In the terms of Rosemary Hennessey's reappraisal of Althusser, "[s]uch a theory posits the social as an ensemble of productive spheres that are "articulated" or related such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulation." (p. 262) "Materialist Feminism and Foucault: The Politics of Appropriation," \textit{Rethinking Marxism} v. 3, n. 3-4 (Fall-Winter, 1990).

\(^{94}\) \textit{Capital V. 1}, p. 677. This, and the following three references, are intended as pointers. In this context, I can hardly do justice to Marx's broader argument.

\(^{95}\) "[T]he seller of labour-power, like the seller of any other commodity, realises its exchange value, and alienates its use-value." \textit{Capital V. 1}, p. 301.

\(^{96}\) "The equivalent form therefore possesses a second peculiarity: in it, concrete labour becomes the form of manifestation of its opposite, abstract human labour." \textit{Capital V. 1}, p. 150. The section in \textit{Capital} on the fetishism of the commodity contains, of course, a summary form of the argument. See especially, pp. 164-5.

\(^{97}\) \textit{Capital V. 1}, p. 256.
The problem with much socialist critique, Elson argues, is that it loses sight of this dynamic and full picture in which value represents the worker as abstract labour power. It forgets, thus, how value only emerges from the interplay of circulation and production processes. As a result such critique frequently attaches all significance to only one particular moment in the chain. Usually this moment is that of production activity, and a great deal of energy is put into demonstrating this to be the vital moment of surplus value extraction. For Elson, however, the problem is felt most urgently at the practical level of politics in the workplace. Either, she says, workers and unions tend to mobilise against business on the basis of disputes about pay, or, otherwise, on the basis of grievances about conditions. Rarely, it seems, are the two fields of dispute ever brought together in an overarching critique of exploitation (qua extraction of surplus value in its full sense). Nonetheless, at least with ordinary labour disputes there is this limited possibility of bringing exchange and production concerns

98 It successfully ignores the argument in Marx to the effect that: "Capital cannot therefore arise from circulation, and it is equally impossible for it to arise apart from circulation. It must have its origin both in circulation and not in circulation." *Capital V. 1*, p. 268.

99 Ultimately, despite their tremendously valuable discussion of marxian epistemology, this is the problem that Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff seem to run into. See *Knowledge and Class: A Marxian Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). The second half of the book with its attempt to track down deciding criteria of "class and subsumed class processes," stands in marked contrast to the more enabling account of overdetermination in the first half. What seems to happen in between is a form of pre-emptive positivisation of the chosen "entry point" concept, viz., class. As a result, it seems to me, that the book loses sight of Marx's social imagination and the vital politics of class, and thus risks falling itself into the relativism-determinism antinomy which it originally set out to avoid with the notion of overdetermination.

100 Elson, 1979, *op. cit.* p. 172.
together at once.\textsuperscript{101} There is one employer; a single focus of action; and, quite often, a single site where workers, joined together through production, have the opportunity to organise and protest. It is precisely this political possibility that temping denies as it renders socially incarnate the constitutive displacements in the chain of value.\textsuperscript{102}

By institutionally and geographically separating the places of work from the site where temps sell their labour, the organisation of temping not only occludes a space of political action, it does so in a way that reflects and concretises the individualism of the market. Temps rarely meet one another, let alone try to organise protest.\textsuperscript{103} Few I spoke to, for example, were ever able to put me in touch with other temps. The only time they do ever meet is at special breakfasts ("so

\textsuperscript{101} "Limited," in the sense that, as David Harvey has noted, resistance within the workplace is itself isolated. (Harvey, 1982, \textit{op. cit.} p. 108.) The more systemic effects wrought by the \textit{expanded form of capital circulation} call for a trans-geographic resistance all too easily quashed by parochial localisms.

\textsuperscript{102} It might be protested that distanced in offices from more obvious productive activity, the links of temping to value creation are far from clear. There are, I think, two important replies to this objection. First, as a number of marxist-feminist critics have argued, such a view stems partly from a masculinist bent towards privileging blue-collar manufacturing. Secondly, it ignores the valuable research of those, like Richard Walker (see footnote 81 above), who have shown the multiple and critical links between the provision of business services and general productive activity. To be sure, the companies using temps would not be in business were they not trying to make and sell something to generate profit in a capitalist economy. Ultimately, I am uninterested in analytical questions about the rate of exploitation. It follows from this that I see no especial value \textit{here} in examining what Resnick and Wolff (1989, \textit{op. cit.}) call "subsumed class" processes as they might apply to temps. In this context, I should also note that the reasons why state institutions use temps are yet more complex; see Chapter Four and footnote 126 below.

\textsuperscript{103} Catherine, the redundant school-teacher turned temp in \textit{Here Today}, tries at one point to organise the temps. However the first meeting does not get off to a very good start when one of the few men there, changes the tone with a question that blankets the vital issues for women temps. Subsequently, Frank Spivey, from the Clerical Workers Union, stands up to speak. He begins: "The CWU hasn't had a lot of luck with temps. Working in different parts of town, isolated from each other and the branch." (Fairbairns, 1984, \textit{op. cit.} p. 111.) The picture is gloomy, but even having a meeting at all seems an optimistic gesture on the part of the book's author.
you can work afterwards," as somebody put it) or parties arranged by the agencies to celebrate events like National Temporaries Week. Most temps I interviewed were quite cynical about these occasions as blatant P.R.. One woman complained that, "they're a bore." Another, more up-beat, said it was nonetheless a little embarrassing because the only thing to talk about was work, which, she reminded me, "is not what I go to a party to talk about."

Because they so rarely meet one another, temps have little chance of sharing complaints, comparing notes on good and bad agencies, or, of even exchanging their many, and, often, critical stories about work. Any chance of forming solidarity is further eradicated by edicts like Kelly's - "Your pay rate is also confidential and must also not be discussed"104 - and by the competitive individualism encouraged with schemes such as "Temp of the Month."105 I never interviewed a "Temp of the Month," and Pat Dupont told me she thought they were a fiction; but, as one counsellor advised me, to win the award and put it on their C.V., temps have to "stand out strongly apart from the rest of them."

And generally what they have done is: they have been called out at the last minute; they have been woken up out of bed; they have taken assignment after assignment for short term/long term and all different rates - including low and even lower; they've bailed us out in a situation or two; and they've been pleasant and hardworking on assignment. Generally a temporary who has been acknowledged, is a temporary who has been prepared to do things above the call of just, you know, just showing up for the job.

104 In the Kelly video for temps. Many of my informants who temped with other agencies spoke of the need to keep silent about pay as "an unwritten rule."

105 This is how The Personnel Department appeals to temps to "Go the extra distance!" with its "Sapphire Award." "If you have attended one of the Envoy Evenings you are undoubtedly familiar with the extent to which we honour our valued Envoys. Once an Envoy has achieved three years company service, they have arrived at "Sapphire Status" within the organization. This event is honored at Envoy Evenings with the presentation of a stylish Sapphire Pin. [...] The Personnel Department offers this goal to each and every one of our Envoys. Grow with our excellent team and strive to make this goal your reality in the years to come." Printed in the company's pamphlet for temps, The Envoy, v. 3, n. 3, p. 3.
And what do they get, when they get the "Temp of the Month"?

Well they either get a bouquet of flowers or a box of cookies from George, and they get a brass name plaque put on a wooden block out the front there so that all the others can look up to it.

The awards are not a fiction, but even if they were their effectivity at, in Burawoy's phrase, "obscuring and securing" exploitation, seems to me to be certain. I know myself that one week I worked thirty-nine hours of over-time (on the top of seven-hour days), in a vain attempt to win a coveted piece of brass, a rate rise and an elusive bottle of cheap champagne. Moreover, when one adds to the isolation effected by this market finessed individualism, the insecurity, and the exclusion from workplace benefits, it compounds into a picture of the industry that is far from rosy. In striking words, Burawoy summarises this bleak scenario illustrating again its connection with the material displacement of production from exchange.

On one side relations of production often revolve around the temporary work agency. The worker relates to her employer as an individual, receiving assignments by telephone and driving to them in an automobile. Unions are barred and fellow employees unknown. Moreover, the worker is sucked into this oppressive isolation not only by her material circumstances but also in the name of enhanced autonomy - greater "freedom" to balance domestic work and low-paid wage labour. On the other side, she moves from one set of relations in production to another, unless she should prove herself 'worthy' of a permanent job. She has no security of contract, receives no fringe benefits, and cannot bargain over wages. She is at the mercy of her supervisor, who reports back to her employer - the temporary agency. There is no clearly defined job ladder, and the distribution of jobs is clouded in mystery.

Yet, given the dismal quality of this summary, why is it that so many temps say that they find temping useful, or, even likeable? It might be unsurprising that the


testimonials re-printed in agency sponsored magazines are always so merry\textsuperscript{108},
but, in approximately half of my interviews, temps also said something like: "Well I've found temping quite convenient." Certainly, the reasons for this are complex. They have much to do with the contexts out of which temps decide to try temping, and it is these concerns, including, not least, the vital needs many women have for flexibility \textit{vis-à-vis} paid work, which I take up in the next chapter. However, they are also linked to the picture of division drawn by Burawoy. By further examining the implications of this separation of production from exchange relations, I will return to the contradiction with which this chapter began.

In large part, I think that temp agencies and temping are rarely criticised because they always appear so guiltless in relation to the economic problems of work. When "things are slow," the "things" in question seem, and, most often are, beyond the agency's control; it merely mediates the market process. Another example of this effect is provided by the case of a recent piece of legislation in Ontario that requires employers to re-employ workers after injury.\textsuperscript{109} After hearing a delegation from the Federation of Temporary Help Services, the Directors of the Workers Compensation Board agreed that a temporary help company's only obligation should be to put the injured worker back on the roster of workers to be

\textsuperscript{108} Norrell's \textit{The Touch} magazine is probably the best example. Each issue contains a varied selection of always glowing reports on the company. A typical example, from Cecelia Munzenmaier, a temp in Des Moines, Iowa, praises Norrell for making her feel valued (as a commodity?). "A year with Norrell provided a smooth transition, allowing me to explore several types of jobs and making it easy to gain business experience and contacts. Since I was learning new skills and receiving strong staff support, I felt "marketable" instead of demoralised." \textit{The Touch}, v. 2, n. 2 (1990) p. 11.

\textsuperscript{109} Bill 162. See, \textit{Temporary Topics} v. vi, n. 1, August, 1990, p. 3.
contacted. In most agencies, such rosters contain thousands of names. Putting one name back, even if the agency had actually managed to take it off, would be a quite meaningless act as far as the worker is concerned. Ultimately, the implication is that the agency remains free from the legal obligations put upon ordinary employers to provide re-employment. Whether or not a temp is brought off the roster and placed on assignment relates entirely to market conditions. The whole political intention behind the Bill is successfully eluded, and this is without the slightest infringement of its stated protocols.

Equally at odds with traditional employment, agency-mediated work divides and, thereby, often mitigates, if not conquers, criticism. What the temps I interviewed associated first with "Temping" was not so much the work itself - which is paid for by the hour and executed by the hour in various locations around the city - but, instead, the agency. As the place where the temps are paid, the place where friendly people - normally other women - try to help them find work, the agency appears as the very embodiment of economic justice and fair

110 Ibid. It heard the Federation’s lobby during a meeting about exemptions from the bill.

111 In the same section of the journal, "Government Relations: Legislative Watch," there was further comment which made the political stakes that much clearer. "The re-employment provision applies to workers with one year continuous service with the employer prior to the injury. The Federation’s view, which was also shared by the management representative on the committee, is that employment should commence on the date of the first assignment. The labour representative’s view was that employment should commence on the date that the worker originally registers with the temporary help company. Obviously far more temporary workers would be covered by Bill 162 if the WCB adopts the labour position." Ibid. p. 3.

112 Hourly wages - which provide the almost universal medium by which temps are paid - by presenting all labour as paid labour, help conceal the distinction between necessary labour and surplus labour. (Capital V. 1, p. 680) Temping seems to take to an acme these relations whereby "the actual movement of wages presents phenomena which seem to prove that it is not the value of labour power which is paid, but the value of its function, of labour itself." Capital V. 1, p. 682.
treatment. There are abuses\textsuperscript{113}, and there are certainly a whole set of non-economic, yet, oppressive politics at large in agency practice (which I examine in the next chapter), but, in economic terms, agencies represent exactly the values of "freedom" and "non-prejudice" which Elaine McCoy celebrated in her speech. As the Federation’s \textit{A Temps [sic] Right To Know} pamphlet acclaims: "The freedom to choose is one of the greatest benefits of working temporary."\textsuperscript{114} The reason why this is true and possible, however, should not now be too hard to see. Having institutionalised a displacement of production from circulation, temping habilitates agencies themselves within that latter regime, the very sphere of free choice, and fair exchange. As Marx was well aware, such a position is bound to have benefits.

The sphere of circulation or commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. It is the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{113} A fascinating check-list of 	extit{employment agency} bad practice, a catalogue, in fact, of extra-economic coercions, is compiled by Fric, 1973, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 277. It includes the following entries: "(6) Inducing workers, particularly girls, who have been placed to leave, pay another fee and get a 'better job.' [...] (11) Involvement in the 'white slave trade.'" Needless to say, perhaps, Fric does not pursue an interrogation of patriarchy at work any further.

\textsuperscript{114} From the section entitled, "The Facts About Working Temp," in the Federation of Temporary Help Services', \textit{A Temps Right To Know}, page 5. The pamphlet was made available to me by the Calgary chapter president Peggie Jones-Gehl, Amanda Adams Personal Inc.. She informed me that the pamphlet, designed to be circulated to temps, had been a "large success."

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Capital V. I}, p. 280 Bentham’s conception of individual rights was, as Foucault has shown, closely related to a specifically modern practice of surveillance and discipline concentrated on the individual body. Michel Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison} (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) \textit{trans.} Alan Sheridan. In Chapter Four, I discuss these questions in relation to the training and testing organised by temp agencies. Here, after Derek Sayer, I should note that Marx himself theorised how the social individual \textit{qua} "free individual" relating to others as "individuals," was a product of capitalist exchange. "Just as the material specificity of use-value is effaced in exchange value, so are the differential material circumstances of real individuals ignored in the \textit{fictio juris} who is the ideal subject of \textit{bürgerliche Gesellschaft}." In \textit{Capitalism and Modernity: An excursus on Marx and Weber} (New York: Routledge, 1991), at page 60.
Temporary agencies are able to capitalise on this position. Moreover, they do so, having separated it off as their own special niche, liberated from the quarrelsome obligations facing normal employers. The free choice they present in abundance, is the free choice of the market.

**Temping and modernity.**

By literally incorporating the market freedoms of capitalist labour relations, temping seems to capture in microcosm the modernity of those relations. Shattering temps’ links to any particular work-place employer, work-site or group of co-workers, it epitomises the fluidity of capitalistic labour. It makes very apparent how that labour is no longer principally organised by local tradition, ritual custom, or tyrannical control.\(^\text{116}\) As the orthodox economists Martinez et al have argued with regard to private employment agencies in general:

[They] can exist only while labour is a commodity subject to free pricing within a market economy, and when the laborer is free to leave [...] employment or geographic area in pursuit of better wages and/or working conditions.\(^\text{117}\)

\(^{116}\) It presents a perfect example of the relations Georg Simmel described at the turn of the century: "Capitalism and the economic individualism that correspond to it have, at least in part, made work as a whole [...] much more insecure and have subordinated it to many more fortuitous constellations than existed at the time of the guilds when greater stability of working conditions imported a much stricter rythmn to other aspects of life during the day and the year." In *The Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) *trans.* Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (original German publication, 1900), at page 491. Here, as elsewhere, Simmel's keen eye - the eye, as Lukács described it, of a 'philosophical Monet' - acutely marks the social relations condensed in and made mediate through money. Ultimately though, as his translators note, he seems to fall away from these implications, replacing Marx's historically grounded examination of fetishism, with a timeless idealism. See the "Introduction," in *idem*, page 34; and especially Simmel's excursus around page 431.

A video, which new temps working for Kelly are asked to watch, resounds with this image of freedom. It begins with pictures from Australia and the G-7 countries, and celebrates how the temps have just joined a "world family." As members, the video suggests, they are "free" to travel wherever they wish, always with a Kelly C.V. and pay slip (to be "filled-in with care") at hand. They are a new part of the "world team."

Such motifs may seem a common enough part of the contemporary west's advertising lexicon, but the succession of images of big offices in big cities presents a geography which, avoiding all hints of homelife or the non-west, scrupulously delimits the boundary of where the free exchange "world" of temping begins. This is a form of boundary marking to which Marx was particularly alert. Commenting on the limits of modern capitalist exchange more generally, he writes:

But this reciprocal isolation and foreignness does not exist for the primitive community of natural origin, whether it takes the form of the patriarchal family, an ancient Indian commune or an Inca state. The exchange of commodities begins where communities have their boundaries, at their points of contact with other communities, or with members of the latter.\(^{118}\)

The freedom of Kelly's "world team" only lies, therefore, within this quasi-bounded sphere of fair exchange. By performing an effective ritual of amnesia, it

\(^{118}\) Capital V. 1, p. 182. That Marx tended to see social forms outside of capitalism as being of "natural origin" is an indication of how he positioned European capitalism as the "top" of some Darwinesque telos of being. Correcting Marx's naturalistic account of patriarchy, a first step in renouncing naturalism as a masculine apologetics, was, of course, a critical defining gesture of early feminism: a gesture summarised in Simone de Beauvoir's aphorism: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." The Second Sex (New York: Vintage Books, 1952) trans. H.M. Parshley, page 301.
proceeds as if the home-life of women, or the experiences of the non-modern world are not of concern, as if they are not what actually makes possible the temping team's free familial/rity. Nevertheless, representing this always already limited freedom in a social institution, temp agency practice vividly marks the emancipation from non-economic coercion Marx saw as coincident with the rise of capitalism. He might very well have been writing about the industry when he observed:

For this relation to continue, the proprietor of labour-power must always sell it for a limited period only, for if he were to sell it in a lump, once and for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity. He must constantly treat his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity, and he can only do this by placing it at the disposal of the buyer, i.e. handing it over to the buyer for him to consume, for a definite period of time, temporarily.  

This "freeing-up" of labour made thematic in temping is also witnessed in the specific form of "non-prejudice" agencies extol. The third section of the Federation's "Code of Ethics and Standards" presents their general position.

We will as employers, fulfill all legal obligations to our employees and will provide equal employment opportunities to all applicants on the basis of job qualifications and merit.

Nearly every time I raised in interview with counsellors questions of sexual harassment, racism or more subtle forms of oppression, the answer was practically unanimous. The following, is typical:

119 Capital V. 1, p. 271.

120 The code is reprinted in A Temps Right To Know, op.cit.. It was originally drafted in 1973. Section 7, is similar. "We will observe the highest principles of honesty and fair practice in dealing with clients and employees and comply with all federal and provincial labour and employment laws and regulations."
Well no, we don't get any of that very often, although there was this case once [...]. But I'll tell you what. What we do get a lot of, is prejudice from our clients. They'll ask for a "Chinese woman," or a "nice girl," or something. Or, you know, we'll send someone along called Bobby and, after four hours, they'll send him back and either say outright it was because he's a man and they thought he'd be a woman, or they'll say he's not up to the job. Anyway, if I get clients like that, I just say "look we sent you the best person for the job, and if you don't accept our assessment then we will not be able to do business with you."

Time and again counsellors claimed that "it's just not good business" to pander to the "old fashioned" ideas of their customers. Kelly Services, in fact, has a card which counsellors have to read out word for word on the phone to racist or sexist clients. It reiterates that Kelly is an equal opportunities employer and that it will send the best person for the job on the basis of skill. While these statements present a good example of the way agencies operate a very modern form of "non-prejudice," and while also, I think, they represent an often closely felt sense of morality on the part of particular counsellors, the "we will send the best person" clause contains a critical aporia. Since he was primarily attempting to describe the economics of capitalism, this is a political aporia in Marx's account too.

The indication of "merit" or "job qualifications" is intended to be one of objectivity; prejudice is seen to be purged by "skills." In Marx's terms, the use value of the labour power commodity is solely that, when the various skills and capacities it represents are set to work, it creates value. However, as much feminist writing has shown, the presumed objectivity of labour's "skills," their reputed and simple materiality, serves as an effective fiction. More broadly, these skills are better regarded as lying at the centre of multiple relations of power.

121 "[T]he money-owner must be lucky enough to find within the sphere of circulation, on the market, a commodity whose use-value has the peculiar property of being a source of value, whose actual consumption is therefore itself an actual objectification of labour and hence a creation of value. The possessor of money does find such a special commodity on the market: the capacity for labour, in other words labour-power." Capital V, p. 270.
Digging a ditch or doing data entry for a thousand investment trust applications is not only about transforming the objects involved, it also represents other effects in other, and, I would suggest, equally material political fields. Pringle, for example, has shown how secretarial skills lie at the heart, not just of capitalistic discourse, but also in the midst of a multi-layered patriarchy that transforms the definition of a secretary's "qualifications" into a variety of other requirements: that they should be compliant, or wifelike, or sexy, or part of the team, and so on. "Merit" or use-value can thus have no final definition, they are always constituted as categories on a complex and changing political terrain.

It is precisely this aporia presented by the multiple meanings and realities of "skill" or "use-value" which interrupts the agencies' narrative of non-prejudice. The fact that it is mainly women (of the suitable age and racial coding) who seem to have the right skills for temping is something that appears as beyond the agencies' control. "It's their script," as one counsellor put it with Goffmanesque sensitivity. In this context, all agencies have to do is maintain the utmost care in their choice of wording on paper and language on the phone. Moreover because profit and the risks of legal suits are involved, they seem far more adept and rigorous at this endeavour than most latter-day gesturings - e.g. using "she" as well as "he" - witnessed in the irritated ranks of male academia.

An article circulated by the Federation captures perfectly the process by which agencies develop the right vocabulary:

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122 Pringle, 1988, op.cit.. Especially chapters one and two.
The Federation has a long standing policy of insisting that its members comply with non-discriminatory laws and regulations. As a major group of employers, the membership has a special responsibility to treat employees fairly. Regulations are becoming increasingly complex and subtle and require members to keep up to date with the requirements. [...] Questions which are deemed inappropriate to include on an application form include: "If you are not a permanent resident of Canada, can you produce evidence of the right to work in Canada?" An acceptable alternative would be: "Can you produce evidence of the right to work in Canada?" [...] While many customers of temporary help services require knowledge of various languages for their work, it would be inappropriate to ask the question of what languages an applicant knows on an application form as it raises the possibility of a complaint of discrimination based on the nationality, place of origin, race and so on. Legal counsel advises that it is unlikely that an interview would result in a successful discrimination complaint.¹²³

Underpinned by the need to avoid the expense of "successful discrimination complaint[s]," the agency discourse carefully constructs a realm of non-prejudice vis-à-vis an "increasingly complex and subtle" cultural milieu. As long as questions and positionings can somehow be related to "bona fide occupational qualification,"¹²⁴ then the agency will only be mediating definitions used in the market, and thus, further mark itself as a paragon of that market's freedom.

This gesture of negotiation by which agencies achieve "non-prejudice" serves, I think, as a model of the more multi-levelled processes through which their economic practice is always in a dynamic and defining relationship with a cultural "outside." The freedom of fair exchange produced by this negotiation must not be denied. Despite the fears expressed to me by one agency manager badgered by her friends, the industry does not exist as a relic form of slave

¹²³ Temporary Topics v. vi, n. 4, March/April, 1991, pp. 7-8.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 8.
The workers are "free," in the strict market choice sense, to leave and begin whenever and wherever they want, limited only by their "qualifications." Equally, despite a number of abuses, temps are not robbed in any deliberative way. Like Pat Dupont, New Democrat politicians in B.C. have pointed with sharp criticism at the huge differences between temp wages and the fees charged to the clients; but these sums do not represent surplus value, nor do they immediately indicate exploitation in the marxian sense of the term. Most of the extra part of the fee only covers overheads, advertising and agency staff costs. The small part that is profit can only be increased by expanding the volume of trade and thus the marginal return. The limits of temping's market freedom are - as I hope the

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125 It is, in part, because of the accusation of making arbitrage profits dealing in peoples' livelihoods, that most temporary service companies prefer not to be called "agencies." It is a term they see as associated with the more traditional form of private sector perm. placing employment "agencies." These, over the years, have been persistently criticised for, in the terms of a 1901 Connecticut Bureau of Labor Report, "grasping the hard earned money of the poor by charging fees for the supposed service of securing employment [... A practice which] every citizen knows to be wrong." (Quoted in Fric, 1974, op.cit. p. 106) Distancing themselves from this image, the companies I have been researching emphasise that they are "employers of record" for the temps. As I have already indicated, however, this position as employer is somewhat different to that of ordinary employers. So in terms of vocabulary, I have made a decision throughout this thesis to generally use "agency" which apart from being less cumbersome than "temporary service company," is also the term most temps in Vancouver use and recognise.

126 These criticisms were made by Michael Harcourt and Glen Clark in the context of the governing (Social Credit) party's ongoing offensive against the public sector. This offensive has involved the use of temp labour as part of more widespread attempts to privatise government business. That the temps were actually costing more than normal workers was a good indication that the privatisation plan was provoked by a broadly ideological campaign rather than any simple accounting decisions. See Kim Bolan, "Office Help proving costly, N.D.P. charges," Vancouver Sun, June 2, 1988, p. B5. For further discussion of the rise of neo-conservatism in B.C., and the attempts by the Socred government to liberate capitalists from the fetters of a post-war settlement, see William Carroll and R. Ratner, "Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia," Critical Sociology, v. 16, n. 1, (Spring, 1989) pp. 29-51.

127 Gary French, Federation president, suggested "pre-tax operating margins" to be 7% in good years, and 3% in periods of economic crisis like the present. In Hogarth, 1990, op.cit.
example of "non-prejudice" negotiation also made clear - much more subtle and much more modern than the criticisms of arbitrage robbery assume.

Just as a worker's qualifications can be shown to be defined by a whole range of non-economic criteria, other aspects of the use value presented by the labour-power temps sell can be described and criticised in vocabularies outside the ambit of marxian critique. Despite the common impression, it seems to me that in Marx's most rigorous economic text, Capital, the place of use-value as a door to the non-economic is marked with clarity. Indeed, in the very same paragraphs in which he discusses the free ability of workers to sell their labour power he indicates a second sphere of "freedom" that defines what will make the worker's labour available and thereby useful.128

[The free worker] must be free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the other objects needed for the realization of his labour power.129 (My emphasis)

Traditionally this second form of 'freedom from options' has been interpreted by marxists as referring to how people, because they have grown up and live in a certain class context, have no other choice but to sell their ability to work. I believe that this account is far too simple. The power relations constituting the field of "freedom" in which people sell their labour power involve all sorts of non-

128 As Spivak writes: "For use-value, in the classic way of deconstructive levers is both outside and inside the system of value-determinations." In "Scattered Speculations" op.cit. p. 162.

129 Capital V. 1, p. 272.
economic politics of equal and, sometimes, more closely felt significance. As I hope by now is clear, a key set of forces not only structuring decisions to temp, but also, constantly affecting life at work, is that presented by the complex field of patriarchal social relations. It is to this subject, and particularly to the concerns it raises for the temps I interviewed, that I now want to turn.

\[130\] I am well aware that this might seem a counter intuitive use of the word "freedom," but I use it for two reasons. Firstly, put like this it represents the indeterminateness of freedom which Foucault's critique of power as sovereignty necessarily implies. Secondly, and relatedly, it shows how Marx, contra Foucault's accusation of his eschatological politics, did sometimes conceive of power in terms of positioning and "two way flows." As a scholar of Hegel, it might be argued, Marx was, perhaps, already aware of the problems with what Isaiah Berlin was later to call "negative freedom." Freedom to do what one wants, Hegel argued, is a limited form of freedom because it does not ask why those wants are what they are. See Peter Singer's discussion in *Hegel* (Oxford: Fontana, 1983) pp. 25-29.
GETTING OFF WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE IT? DISCERNING FEELINGS ABOUT GENDER IN THE TRAFFIC OF TEMPORARIES

Kelly Girl solves this problem [- of a dearth of "girls" - ] largely through newspaper want ads appealing to the bored or needy housewife. Through the ads, prospective Kelly Girls are assembled in suburban hotels for a pep talk and the showing of a film extolling the benefits of temporary employment. "The next time you get fed up with the household routine," cajoles an appealing male voice, "join the Kelly Girl Service."

"Of course, not all our girls are married." Mr. Kelly's eyes take on an Irish twinkle: "For the single ones, Kelly Girl offers an added benefit. Instead of working in an office where all the men are married, they have a chance to 'case the field' and work in as many offices as they wish in order to expose their charms to potential husbands."

Quotation from The New York Times

Work is being redefined as both literally female and feminized, whether performed by men or women. To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labor force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day; leading to an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex.

Donna Haraway

"Work Temporarily and get off when you feel like it," was the caption used in an advertising campaign run on the B.C. Transit system. The campaign, directed at prospective temps, had been commissioned by the Vancouver branch of Temporarily Yours, a division of Hunt Personnel and one of the largest temp

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1 The New York Times, April 14, 1963, p. 7. Mr. Kelly, founder of the Michigan based, transnational company, was born and grew up on Vancouver Island. (The Province, October 22, 1970.) He returned to Canada from the U.S. in 1968, leading his company's cross-border expansion. (The Financial Post, August 10, 1968.)


3 I would like to thank Suzy Reimer for pointing out this and other advertisements.
companies in the city. Just like the cajoling male voice of the Kelly film show, the ad attempted to appeal both to a notion of freedom, of getting off buses and sky-trains when you want, and, at the same time, to a set of assumptions about women and sex. To be sure, the ad was not as explicit, directive, or uncensored as Mr. Kelly’s twinkling invitation to future wives to "expose their charms." Indeed, because I think its ambivalent hailing of women as decision-making subjects is potentially recuperable with and for a feminist politics, I have made it part of the chapter’s title. But, in the context of a society where what Adrienne Rich has powerfully described as "compulsory heterosexuality" is still the hegemonic rule, this 1990 advertisement reads as patriarchy now, as women’s oppression today.  

I use Michèle Barrett’s unambiguous phrase because, like her book, this chapter is "written for those who do not need to be convinced that women are oppressed; [where] the reality of women’s oppression is assumed rather than argued throughout; [and where] the object [...] is to analyse and understand it." Also like Barrett, in her revised (1988) introduction, I take the categories of "woman" and "oppression" as problematic. That is to say - using 'problematic' in its Althusserian sense of containing a historical crisis managed by "oversight," but which, from a place outside the hegemonic discourse, is re-usable for emancipatory ends - the names define the sites of radical controversy; places

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where, beneath the patriarchal directives, resources for the re-negotiation of subjectivity can be retrieved. As Naomi Schor has suggested for a feminist audience:

Before tearing down the cultural ghetto where the feminine has been confined and demeaned, we need to map its boundaries and excavate its foundations in order to salvage the usable relics and refuse of patriarchy.8

It is towards this end that I aim to move in this chapter through an endeavour to "dis-cern" the feelings of temps and counsellors.

The displacement of the verb is Paul Smith's.9 Following him, I intend it to signal my attempt to interrupt and examine the cern(e)ing of people's (self-) identities; an effort to problematise how subjectivity is centered through a persistent patriarchal inheritance.10 More specifically, I want to develop an account about how women who temp, experience and deal with that abstract "cajoling male voice;" how their home life, background and class enable them to engage with, mediate and sometimes resist their interpellation by various patriarchal discourses. Positing the problem in this way means keeping track at once of two irreducible, but interlinked themes. On the one side it calls for a rigorous attention to the way women's oppression, as Gayle Rubin put it, appears

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10 Smith's pun on the two old english words to cern and to cerne, is explained on page 5 in ibid. The Oxford English Dictionary, he notes, defines "to cern" as a legal word meaning "to enter upon an inheritance." "To cerne" means "to surround." (p. 165)
with "endless variety and monotonous similarity;"\textsuperscript{11} but, at the same time, it demands a feminist will to historicise and move beyond patriarchy; a project, therefore, which anticipates a non-patriarchal future. This, clearly, is no easy task, and the traffic of temporaries affords all too many sobering reminders of the stubborn masterfullness of narratives corseted by the itinerary of masculine desire.\textsuperscript{12} Rubin’s critical development of Lévis-Strauss’s writing about the traffic of women seems to me to be unhappily pertinent to temping in the early 1990s.

Even as I waited to enter the job fair at Vancouver’s "Plaza of Nations," two men in front of me began to talk with relish about "girls," work and sex. The job fair was not just for temps, other employers were there too with glitzy presentations addressed to the audience of largely young women and high-school leavers. However, it was with his eyes turned towards the line-ups at the Manpower and Temporarily Yours stands that one of the men started the conversation.\textsuperscript{13}

So why are you here then?


\textsuperscript{12} As Fraser and Nicholson have emphasised, patriarchy is a "big story," (p. 26) a master-narrative in a very literal sense. See "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism," in Andrew Ross (ed.) Universal Abandon: The Politics of Postmodernism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). To pretend that its practicality can be dismissed with the same easy gesture found in scholastic prohibitions against grands récits, would, of course, be foolish.

\textsuperscript{13} The company name "Manpower," so much at odds with its largest group of workers, carries an interesting heritage. Its linguistic exclusivity and incongruence next to the names of other temporary service agencies like Kelly Girl, Office Angels, Girl Friday and so forth, rest upon the good business to be had out of having the same name in the phone book as the government run Manpower units. Partly because of the large number of calls the company receives as a result of the confusion, it is unlikely to switch to a "gender neutral" name in the foreseeable future.
Oh, I'm filling in for Steve till six at the stand. What about you though, I mean you've got a job, right?

Well I just thought I'd check it out, and, you know [laughing] pick up some girls for a party or something [laughing].

Yeah man! Well if you wait for me [laughing] I could join you with some company... it's awesome, look at that, they just keep rolling in for it. We could take them to Richards on Richards right? It's only a few blocks.

Whether or not these two men were actually going to do what they said was left obscure, but it was clearly important for both of them to indicate their readiness. Treated as pawns in this project of rearticulating masculinity, the objectified women were discursively jostled from the position of applicants for jobs to being mendicants of men. In fact, the conversation makes a good example of the terrain of complex articulation in which Luce Irigaray constructs her radical gloss on Marx. Describing the imaginary of heterosexuality, she emphasises how it incorporates

the assignment of economic roles: there are producer subjects and agents of exchange (male) on the one hand, productive earth and commodities (female) on the other.  

While I believe that these arguments make most sense at the level of people's fantasies and imaginations, their brute realisation in everyday life seems never far away. Ingrid Peritz, for example, reporting for the Montreal Gazette, was able to make this appallingly clear. Going undercover researching her article on temping, she went to a small, back-door type agency, and waited.  


15 I myself am not making claims about this agency being "typical" or "representative." I am rather suggesting how, as an example, it makes evident a set of relations of particular significance for what remains a thesis, and not an attempt to produce testable generalisations.
A surprise: I am whisked immediately through the room into the boss's office. Bob Dickson has a special job for me.

"I owe a friend a favour," says Bob, a nervous man who balances glasses on the tip of his nose. "He wants a girl - a white girl." 16

Combined with racism too, this glimpse of the traffic of a woman as a "favour," underscores the extra-capitalistic politics of the patriarchal exchange. Women exist here, in Irigaray’s phrase: "as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself." 17 Having also noted other criticisms of the industry, it seems scarcely surprising that Peritz saw fit to conclude her article with a disquieting quotation from a staff agency dispatcher.

It's like prostitution.... The agencies are like pimps. 18

This analogy was also commented on by a number of my informants. Two temps, furthermore, when describing how sexual harassment occurred most persistently through "constant belittling and crudeness," told me of men at work who asked them why they did not try and earn more money by switching from temping to prostitution. Yet, while this analogy and its application acutely draws attention to the violent politics of oppression implicit in the feminization of labour, it fails to account for the heterogeneous reasons and experiences by which women become


17 Irigaray, 1985, This Sex, op.cit. p. 193.

engaged in the system of exchange. It is towards these questions that much of this chapter is directed. At the outset, however, I want to describe how I am picturing the negotiation of feminist and marxist interpretation.

*Overdetermination and the limits of essentialism.*

The question we should be asking is not "is this text essentialist (and therefore 'bad')?" but rather, "if this text is essentialist, what motivates its deployment?"

Diana Fuss

As I indicated in the last chapter, I see use-value as the site of a critical aporia in the political narrative of Marxism. Opening up use-values like, for example, the constitution of "nature" before it is commodified, or the gendering of labour-power before it is sold, reveals that destructive and oppressive social processes are at work that would survive even if the exchange/accumulation nexus could be abolished over-night. It makes visible a vast array of extra-capitalistic events and social processes which, while often intricately entwined with capitalism, call for different critiques than the one Marx made of political economy. An emphasis on the multiplicity of these alternative but critical

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19 In her critique of the limits of the "traffic in women" feminist genre, Karen Newman notes how it is "uneasily conjoined" with another theoretical regime, that which "recognizes and analyzes the fragmentary, non-unitary subject in certain critical contexts." In Karen Newman, "Directing Traffic: Subjects, Objects, and the Politics of Exchange," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, v. 2, n. 2 (1990) pp. 41-54, at page 47. It is the aim of my discussion of the feelings of temps, to move my analysis along the lines of this second tradition.

axiologies serves itself as a vital interruption in the histories of homogenization that have convened ‘others’ mythologised by racism, patriarchy, and naturalism on the same marginal terrain.\textsuperscript{21}

Just as capitalism, through exchange, abstracts from these concerns, so too does Marxian critique stop short at the door of use-value.\textsuperscript{22} In \textit{Capital}, this leads to a certain blindness, and, at one point, to a patriarchal reference by Marx to "\textit{femmes folles de leur corps}" ("wanton women," according to the translator).\textsuperscript{23} They are introduced in a footnote as an example of the same commodities described by Marx in the main text in the following terms.

Commodities are things, and therefore lack the power to resist man. If they are unwilling, he can use force; in other words, he can take possession of them.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{21} This means remembering the differences while attending to how, in the words of Andrew Ross, "[a]ny broad understanding of the 'environment' and the 'politics of nature' must also include the full range of issues that have come to be known as the politics of the body: health-care rights, reproductive rights, the politics of the immune system, concerns about diet and nutrition, sexual politics, the ethics of biotechnologies, the politics of skin color, the politics of worker safety, and so on." In, "Getting the Future we Deserve," \textit{Socialist Review}, v. 21, n. 1 (1991) pp. 125-150. The quotation is from page 148.

\textsuperscript{22} In the context of theorising the reproduction of that special use-value, productive labour, Paul Smith has indicated, \textit{contra} Della Costa, the importance of regarding such reproductive labour as non-capitalistic in the strict sense (i.e. not productive of surplus value). He also notes how "[i]t is not Marx who is indifferent to the use-values produced, but \textit{capital}." (p. 214) ("Domestic Labour and Marx’s Theory of Value," in Annette Kuhn and Ann Marie Wolpe, \textit{Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production} (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) pp. 198-219.) By beginning a critique of women’s domestic labour from the perspective that it is relatively autonomous of capitalist relations, I think it is possible to both avoid the representative arrogance witnessed in the overstretching of Marxist categories, while making clearer the cogency of those categories where they do apply.


\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}
These words, written in the same idiom that Marx used so often to describe nature, boldly present their masculine heritage. The footnote mention of women, serves to make this visible, indicating how, in Carla Freccero's words, "Marx could not (or did not wish to) avoid the gendered valence of his discussion." However, having identified this gendered valence, and having noted how the field of use-values harbours, amongst others, the effects of patriarchal politics, the question remains as to how to theorise the way these other strands of determination in social life come together with the exigencies of capital accumulation.

One of the most vibrant traditions of feminist-marxist scholarship, extant in the work of writers like Barrett and Sylvia Walby, has put a continued

25 On the implications of Marx and Engels' naturalism vis-à-vis gender, see Haraway's "Gender" for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word," in Haraway, 1991, pp. 127-148. Haraway's critique here and elsewhere of the society-nature divide, leads her to problematise the limits of the dualism "sex/gender" used by, amongst others, Rubin in the essay cited above. She imagines and invokes an implosion of this universalizing opposition "into articulated, differentiated, accountable, located, and consequential theories of embodiment, where nature is no longer imagined and enacted as a resource to culture or sex to gender." (p. 148)


27 A more traditional marxist approach to this question might proceed via the category of "civil society." John Urry, for example, uses the idea that the use-value of labour power is produced non-capitalistically in civil society, to argue that it is therefore more likely to be mired in the idiosyncracies of local life. See, "Social Relations, Space and Time," in Derek Gregory and John Urry (eds.) Social Relations and Spatial Structures (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 20-48. More recently, Stuart Hall has argued for an expansion of the political field. "Civil society," he says, "is no ideal realm of pure freedom. Its micro-worlds include the multiplication of points of power and conflict. More and more of our everyday lives are caught up with these forms of power and their lines of intersection." ("Brave New World," Socialist Review, v. 21, n. 1, (1991) pp. 57-64) For two key reasons, however, I do not want to proceed along precisely these lines. Firstly, the formulation of civil society as a category was - pace Engels' letter to Bloch - part of a gesture that reasserted its marginality, its being part "of the rest of the idealistic superstructure" (see The German Ideology (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), especially page 98), and it is exactly this form of hierarchisation I want to reject. Secondly, the valuable call to always contextualise which is associated with theorising civil society (as well as the critique of Feuerbach's German Ideology), is already such an important part of feminist thinking. Simply saying "Marx was there first," seems to me to be rather like grace at the table of Marxist manners.
emphasis upon theorising capitalist and patriarchal relations merging and affecting one another in an always historically conjunctural fashion.\textsuperscript{28} Walby describes the need to go beyond dualist accounts which simply argue that some parts of society are the domain of capitalism and others that of patriarchy. Instead, she urges an approach that posits the two forms of social relations as relatively autonomous but always in complex and mutually transformative articulations with one another. This is the approach that I hope to emulate here under the theoretical umbrella term of overdetermination. But an immediate problem, as Walby notes in her criticism of Heidi Hartmann's famous "dual systems" thesis, is the serious puzzle of what exactly patriarchy is.\textsuperscript{29} This question itself expands into others about how to theorise the particularity and form of the determinations that are argued to be "coming together."

Certainly, I think it is vital to remember how, as Laclau and Mouffe put it, "human identity' involves not merely an ensemble of dispersed positions but also the forms of overdetermination existing between them."\textsuperscript{30} Yet even this sophisticated language in which subjectivity is posed "as a colligation of multifarious and multiform subject-positions,"\textsuperscript{31} returns again to beg the question about the "dispersed positions" it posits as mutually overdetermining each other. This form of movement back and forth between describing identities and calling

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\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, especially pp. 43-44; Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,". \textit{Capital and Class}, n. 8 (Summer, 1979) pp. 1-33.

\textsuperscript{30} Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, \textit{op.cit.} p. 117.

\textsuperscript{31} Paul Smith, 1988, \textit{op.cit.} p. 32.
\end{quote}
them into re-negotiation, has been replayed dramatically - and sometimes banefully - by recent debates in feminist and marxist scholarship over "essentialism."\(^{32}\)

In feminism - where the exchanges seem to have been a good deal more productive - critics like de Lauretis and Fuss have indicated how quickly the anti-essentialism argument can spiral into an exclusionary and debilitating elitism all of its own.\(^{33}\) A hypostasised canon serves to legitimate a narrowed concern with 'not

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\(^{32}\) Paul Smith recalls Jane Gallop's phrase: "Identity must be continually assumed and immediately called into question" (Discerning, p. 149); referring to the practice after Naomi Schor (1987, op.cit, p. 110), as "doubling." These approaches, I think, provide a useful corrective to a tendency to which Laclau and Mouffe, for all their invocations of overdetermination, seem prone. Declaring war on essentialism, they spend more time describing what a subject is not, and much less on how people become constituted as competent social agents. In part, this may reflect their project's aims of edification. However, I also think it emerges as a result of their rather uncritical incorporation of Lacanian terminology. In this sense - and running against the claims of Hegemony to reject the discursive/non-discursive binary (1985, op.cit., p. 107) - their subject "constructed through language, as a partial and metaphorical incorporation into a symbolic order" (p. 126) becomes a somewhat paper-thin character, all the while material processes of determination are successively transmuted into a text of the most narrow and literal kind. The danger, it seems, is that once the subject has been "freed-up," and the need for an overdetermined picture of subjectivity specified, an increasingly abstract and even universal taxonomies may begin to occlude the space from where "essentialist" predications of subjectivity have been banned by philosophical edict. On this particular point in the context of Lacanian theory see Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art. Leon Roudiez ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) page 280.

\(^{33}\) See Teresa de Lauretis's criticisms in "The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S., and Britain," differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, v. 1, n. 2 (1990a) pp. 3-37. Writers embracing the critique of essentialism have brought out a number of introductory texts in which so-called essentialist feminists become ostracised and 'being a feminist' comes to be characterised as a form of living oxymoron. In Toril Moi's work it leads even to statements like: "I now hold that feminism is strictly speaking an impossible position." In, "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Style: Recent Feminist Criticism in the U.S." Cultural Critique, 1988, pp. 3-22. More generally, writers of this genre like Chris Weedon (who de Lauretis singles out for criticism -), argue that feminist subjects are always already overdetermined by the patriarchal relations they are struggling to unfix. See her, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); as well as, Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis In Feminist Theory," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, v. 13, n. 3 (1988) pp. 405-436. Fuss, in her helpful criticism of the limits of this argument, writes: "The danger (and the usefulness) of "always already" is that it implies essence. It hints at an irreducible core that requires no further investigation." In Fuss, 1989, op.cit. page 17.
making philosophical mistakes,' and increasingly occludes political self-criticism. Lessons which might be found in post-structuralism, about how critical projects finalise pictures of the world and thereby exclude, are lost. Instead, post-structuralism is itself turned into a handrail for arrogant hermeneuts in a blind alley of universal explanation. Against this current, but still at the risk of canonizing a particular theorist, I want now to turn to the writing of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in an attempt to indicate how post-structuralism can be brought to the always already awkward aid of political critique.

Arguing that feminist, marxist and desconstructionist (the adjective's ungainliness being an index of its inadequacy) discourses should be kept irredicably discontinuous, Spivak has indicated how deconstruction "can make founded political programs more useful by making their in built problems stand out." From this critical epistemological position she has elaborated and worked

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34 This seems a particularly miserable irony given that a less conspicuous and rather different criticism of essentialism has been made by feminist women of colour, and other marginalized groups of women on the very grounds that it excludes. In other words, they suggest that notions like the eternal woman and earth identified woman - figuring in the white writing of people like Mary Daly - exclude women who do not fit the "essentialised mould." Audre Lorde, writing about being a Black lesbian, put it like this: "Being women together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being Black women together was not enough. We were different ... It was a while before we came to realise that our place was the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference." Quoted by Haraway in "'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary," in 1991, op.cit. p. 139. This seems to me to be a very different gesture to the anti-essentialism based on not making a post-structuralist "mistake.

with an axiologics of "strategic essentialism(s)." Describing the space of these political gestures, she comments:

Since one cannot not be an essentialist, why not look at the ways in which one is essentialist, carve out a representative essentialist position, and then do politics according to the old rules while remembering the dangers in this. That's the thing that deconstruction gives; an awareness that what we are obliged to do, and must do scrupulously, in the long run is not OK.

This approach is one in which, as Kathy Ferguson puts it, "genealogy keeps interpretation honest, and interpretation gives genealogy direction." Clearly, it can be applied to marxist as well as feminist interpretation. Indeed, just as it interrupts the easy application of an anti-essentialist canon in feminism, Spivak's careful attention to how "we are obliged to finalize perspectives," also enables a criticism of claims by writers like Laclau and Mouffe and Resnick and Wolff to be purging Marxism of its essentialist orthodoxy. Both these pairs assume that it is possible to be non-essentialist, and while in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy this leads to the obvious contradiction that radical democracy is established ex cathedra and legitimated as a form of non-essentialist essence (rather than being

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36 In making these summary comments about Spivak I feel the problem she herself has noted with respect to Derrida. "It is very risky to generalize about the work of someone who calls the possibility of adequate generalization into question." In "Love Me, Love My Ombre, Elle," Diacritics v. 14, n. 4 (Winter, 1988) pp. 19-36, at page 23.

37 Spivak, 1990, op.cit., page 45. The reference to "old rules" is a quotation of Derrida. I have described this comment as an account of the "space" of axiological politics. This, therefore, is very different from valorising deconstructive gestures as political theory in and of themselves: a sort of negative metaphysics turned idealist political axiom. Following Spivak, I want rather to see deconstruction as a way of watching the limits and the truth-making of politico-explanatory projects.


historically examined as a specifically modern European tradition\textsuperscript{40}, it leads in
\textit{Knowledge and Class} to the rather too urbane comments about \textit{class} as simply a
chosen "entry point," "one distinct process among the many that constitute social
life."\textsuperscript{41}

In the light of (de-) constructive arguments like Spivak's, I do not believe
it is as easy as Resnick and Wolff claim to "distinguish between theoretical entry
points and theoretical essences."\textsuperscript{42} The exclusionary dangers of essentialist
epistemology are not mitigated by catholic caveats about how class is only one of
many entry points.\textsuperscript{43} More valuable, it seems, is a careful and rigorous attention
to how class is a limited concept which from one perspective \textit{must} be deployed,
but which from others has \textit{necessarily} to be brought into crisis. More generally
this means remembering that while the politico-explanatory projects of marxism
and feminism are predicated on specific interpretations of social essence, specific

\textsuperscript{40} Stanley Aronowitz has made this problem with \textit{Hegemony} particularly clear. "The
interviewed by \textit{Strategies} and questioned about "radical democracy" as an essentialist category,
Laclau is forced into giving what seems to be an inverted but still profoundly metaphysical
justification of the term's pertinence. In a politics of radical democracy, he maintains, "what is
affirmed are not \textit{positive} and differential identities but, on the contrary, the \textit{equivalence}
between them. The democratic imaginary does not constitute itself on the level of the (differential)
positivity of the social, but as a transgression and subversion of it." In "Building a New Left: An
Interview with Ernesto Laclau," \textit{Strategies} n. 1 (Fall, 1988) pp. 10-28, at page 19. Insofar as this
is seen as a genealogical gesture which, as in Ferguson's argument, is always somehow grounded
by an interpretive line of critique, it might well succeed in widening "the area of strategic games"
(p. 19), but if it is narrativised and justified as a politics by philosophical \textit{fiat}, then it seems that
it is about suturing a positivity of the social with all the attendant exclusionary dangers. See too
\textit{supra}, footnote 34.

\textsuperscript{41} Resnick and Wolff, 1987, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 111.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{43} It is because of this type of gesture, I think, that writers like Samuel Bowles and
Herbert Gintis see so many affinities with liberalism. See their summary argument in,
"Rethinking Marxism and Liberalism from a Radical Democratic Perspective," \textit{Rethinking
Marxism} v. 3, n. 3-4 (Fall-Winter, 1990) pp. 37-43.
founding accounts of what constitutes the materiality of social life, these accounts themselves are based upon inescapably inadequate representations of materiality. At the level of social subjectivity at which these questions realise their significance for this thesis, the debate over essentialism versus non-essentialism appears misplaced. Nothing seems gained by narrativising post-structuralism and simply inaugurating "a theory of the subject as [a] decentered, detotalized agent." Instead, the interesting and politically important questions are about how subjects become centered. Here, I find arguments about class as "the concept of a particular social process" very useful. Indeed, they parallel - at an irreducible remove - productive notions in feminism like Juliet Mitchell's, of the unconscious as a name for the process whereby subjects incorporate social

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44 "The relationship between the two kinds of representation [of Vertretung - representation as political proxy, and of Darstellung representation as a portrait] brings in also the use of essentialism because no representation can take place - no Vertretung, representation - can take place without essentialism. What it has to take into account is that the "essence" that is being represented is a representation of the other kind, Darstellung." Spivak, 1990, op.cit. p. 109. See too, her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" op.cit.

45 Chantal Mouffe, "Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?" in Andrew Ross (ed.), 1989, op.cit. pp. 31-45, at page 35. Criticising this type of gesture, Spivak writes: "To turn [Derrida's] critique - of a claim to have decentered method, by pointing out that the subject can only ever be posited by the finessing of a graphematic structure at the origin - into merely the story of the individual becoming decentered with late capitalism (Jameson), the passing of the pre-Socratics (Heidegger), the inception of modernity (Habermas via Weber), or the bolstering of Eurocentric patriarchy (Rose), is a plausible but unexamined move." In Brennan (ed.), 1989, op.cit. p. 214.

norms.\textsuperscript{47} Concentrating like this, on the social and psychic dynamics of centering (\textit{i.e.} of overdetermination\textsuperscript{48}), halts the numbing incantation of "race, class and gender" as static definitions of inequality. It instead makes possible an approach whereby the moving and changing essence of the subject-in-process is grasped (using the language of the sixth thesis on Feuerbach) as an "ensemble of the social relations"\textsuperscript{49} that this unholy trinity - race, class and gender - inadequately attempts to name.\textsuperscript{50}

With regard to interpretations of tempsing, the idea that "it is not possible not to be an essentialist"\textsuperscript{47} means considering the political position of temps as overdetermined by a range of essentially, but always also catachrestically defined

\textsuperscript{47} Juliet Mitchell, \textit{Psychoanalysis and Feminism} (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). She writes: "the particular task of psychoanalysis is to decipher how we acquire our heritage of the ideas and laws of human society within the unconscious mind, or, to put it another way, the unconscious mind, \textit{is the way in which we acquire these laws}," (my emphasis) page xvi. However, following Donna Haraway amongst many others, I would argue that the traditions of male psychoanalysis invoked by Mitchell do not, and certainly should not, have a monopoly on describing the space of desire. In an interview, Constance Penley asks Haraway: "When I read \textit{Primate Visions} I have to say that it really gave me a much stronger sense of why it was so important for you to come up with a creature that wasn't about Oedipal subjectivity..." Haraway replies: "Yes, which isn't quite the same thing as coming up with a creature without an unconscious." In "Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway," \textit{Social Text} v. 25/26 (1991) pp. 8-23, at page 14.

\textsuperscript{48} For a similar use of the term in this context, see Hennessy's helpful clarification of ideology as productive material practice in "Materialist Feminism..." 1990, \textit{op.cit.}.

\textsuperscript{49} In "Theses on Feuerbach," addenda to \textit{The German Ideology}, p. 616.

\textsuperscript{50} The "subject-in-process" is, of course, Kristeva's term. While her notion of the subject being centered dynamically in the borderlands of the semiotic and symbolic has been useful for feminist projects (for a summary of this formulation see her "The Speaking Subject," in Marshall Blonsky \textit{On Signs} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) pp. 210-220), Kristeva's infamous political swings have cast a shadow over the value of her theories. Rather than excuse the text of its author's latter day readings, Paul Smith has usefully plotted how Kristeva's reification of the "semiotic chora" allows for the move from feminism to "abjection." In "Julia Kristeva Et Al.; or Take Three or More," in Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof (eds) \textit{Feminism and Psychoanalysis} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) pp.84-104, and in his book \textit{op.cit.} pp.118-130. On the question of thinking the embodied subject as "in process," in time, see Anne Game's discussion of Bergson in Game, 1991, \textit{op.cit.}, especially pages 90-111.
social relations. In the previous chapter, I was able to chart the implications of a
class predication of subjectivity in the terms of temps' representation as abstract
labour power. But, as Spivak has made clear, "[f]eminism must think of the
human being predicated at work in senses other than this definition of work that
produces self-valorizing value."\textsuperscript{51} It is such "other" senses I am examining in this
chapter as the gender predications of subjectivity operating through
representations and self-representations of femininity and masculinity.\textsuperscript{52}
Ultimately, therefore, it is neither a question of giving priority to marxist over
feminist interpretations nor, in de Lauretis' terms,

\begin{quote}
to heterosexism over [...] capitalism, racism, or colonialism, but of understanding the institutional character and specificity of each and then of analysing their mutual complicities or reciprocal contradictions.\textsuperscript{53} (my emphasis)
\end{quote}

Putting the critiques of patriarchy and capitalism into two chapters provides a way of ordering my account, but this must not foreclose a careful
attention to how these technologies of class and gender overdetermine one
another thereby creating significant differences in how the same processes in their

\textsuperscript{51} Spivak, 1990, \textit{op. cit.} p. 111. Of course, examining such other predications may in
fact be vital to clarifying the class account of how the labouring capacity of labour is extracted
and successfully put to work by the purchaser.

\textsuperscript{52} On seeing representation in this sense as a "technology of gender" see chapter one of
de Lauretis's book \textit{Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction} (Bloomington:
Indiana University Press, 1987). In this chapter she also delineates a strategy of going beyond
the double binds of discussions over essence: "the movement in and out of gender as ideological
representation, which I propose characterizes the subject of feminism, is a movement back and
forth between the representation of gender (in its male centered frame of reference) and what
that representation leaves out or, more pointedly makes unrepresentable." (p. 26)

\textsuperscript{53} In Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical
"essential" sense are experienced. In these differences there is, as Haraway evocatively puts it, "the irretrievable loss of the illusion of the one," and it is in the spirit of this loss that I turn from questions of theory back to the topics of temps.

**Becoming a temp.**

'[P]roduction' and 'reproduction,' work and the family, far from being separate territories like the moon or sun or the kitchen and the shop, are really intimately related modes that reverberate upon one another and frequently occur in the same, physical and even psychic spaces.

Rosalind Petchesky

The specific reasons why people end up temping are extremely heterogeneous. However, the results of market surveys as put to use in agency advertising, do begin to indicate some of the major backgrounds from which temps tend to arrive at this form of work. A recent Norrell recruitment campaign, for example, explicitly hailed likely candidates with the question, "are you...

- entering or re-entering the work-force
- a working mom
- out of work
- a student
- in between jobs

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54 As Geraldine Pratt has recently put it for an audience of geographers: "It is not only that there are multiple sites of oppression and that individuals are differently placed in relation to each; the lines of social division overlap: for example, black and white women differ not only in terms of race, but also gender insofar as black and white women experience their gendering differently." In "Feminist Politics: The Danger of Difference, the Place of Geography," paper presented to the 1991 meeting of the American Association of Geographers in Miami.

55 In op. cit. at page 124.

- in need of flexible work?"

When I asked the manager why it was targeted at these groups, he confirmed that it was because they were what his company’s surveys suggested to be the most typical positions of temps. Other sorts of definitions could also be added to such a list, not least, people just entering the city, and women seeking to come back into the work-force and learn new skills after having children. Clearly though, there are considerable areas of overlap between these various positions. Running through many of them are lines of continuity in which the diverse situations of single mothers, of lesbians, of widows, of students, and of wives, all figure significantly as the position(ing)s of women. These places, set amidst criss-crossing social relations, may constitute or may lead to oppression, but they are also sites of agency; sites from which temping can appear as a "convenient" strategy.

I interviewed three single moms who temped. Two of them were friends who had young children just starting school. Both indicated that temping had provided a "useful way of getting by" for the six and nine months respectively during which they had tried it. Phillis Brown’s summary captured many of the features that had made temping a viable option for both of them.

So what was it exactly that put you on to it?

Well, first of all, I guess, it was my girl-friend Sheila. She couldn’t speak highly enough of it although I s’pose that’s like she is, either mad keen or desperate and unhappy. Anyway, I needed the money, and I also needed to be able to take time off in case something happened to Tim, or so I could go off with him to my mom’s place. I’ve got good typing skills - about 90 words a minute on a computer - and so it was sort of easy. But you know, it wouldn’t suit everyone. I mean they go on about flexibility, but really you only get a choice on a weekly sort of basis, not in hours. At the time it was fine for me, but now my part-time job is much better. [...] I have medical benefits, I can be home and collect him from school, and I can get out to do all the other jobs I have to do. That way temping is not really good for doing, you know, "housewifey" type things, it’s better for when you need money and are not sure where you’ll be at in a year’s time.
That it was a "girl-friend" that originally told Phillis Brown about temping seems emblematic of a common experience. It is an indication of the more pervasive set of woman-to-woman relations through which the industry is organised and to which I return in a later section. The more specific suggestion by this working mom that temping provided her with a short-term provisional strategy, is also critical. Without any partner to rely on for money and with only her own mother to fall back on, temping - in what, when she did it, was the "boom year" of 1989 - became a way of fashioning an existence that just hovered above subsistence. However, the insecurity of it all, coupled with the lack of benefits, meant that she, like her friend, ultimately chose to change to a part-time job where she could be more flexible about hours on a daily basis.

As a single mom herself, one of the counsellors I spoke to vividly described the general situation of temps like Phillis Brown:

Not really knowing what they are going to do. But they've done a bit of keyboard work along the line, they want to check out a few companies and see what's up, eh! They want some money quickly, stuck without another source. It would be very tough. If I was temping, I can't imagine how I could live on my own as a temp. You do not really know whether you will have a job the next day. There will come a time like right now, when we're slow, when work dries up, and that's ugly. And you know they're trying to make ends meet. So especially in Vancouver's climate where things are relatively expensive, where things would be very tough. I can see it as say a young woman going through university. But to live on your own with a kid, on a temp's wages, not knowing whether you were going to have a job in a week's time.... No way. May be that's me. I can't live that way, but that's why I think you get a lot of turnover of temps.

57 Isabel Dyck, in her research of working mothers (single and non-single) in Greater Vancouver, also noted the need for provisional flexibility. "The women's occupational histories had a striking episodic nature of wage labour participation as they attempted to combine individual career development, influenced by educational qualifications, with family strategies and aimed to balance the drawing in of a 'family-wage' with the responsibilities of child-rearing." In "Integrating Home and Wage Workplace: Women's Daily Lives In a Canadian Suburb," The Canadian Geographer v. 33, n. 4 (1989) pp. 329-41, at page 334.
By contrast, it does indeed seem to be students - men as well as women - whose schedules interlock most comfortably with temping. For those without children, being a temp - in suitably "fast" economic times - provides a ready source of income to live on and to pay for education. This is not to say that student workers are liberated from the exhaustion, racism and sexism of specific work situations, but they are in many ways more privileged than most temps; even using the work to subsist in a "happy-go-lucky way," as somebody put it, while travelling around the world. In a similar manner, two women I spoke to had turned to temping when coming out of college, undecided over any particular "career options." For them, the industry became, as Sandra Rae saw it, "just a handy tool."

So you just needed the money? Like you were in a situation where you only had to earn something, or were you in it to get experience and stuff, or both, or what?

Well originally, I suppose it was opportunities into new jobs and then I decided I wanted to travel, so it was for both the money and so I wasn't tied down to anything.

And you didn't have any "home" to keep ticking over, any kids or anything like that?

No, I didn't have to worry about any of that stuff fortunately...

In a rather different way, women who do not have children but who live with male partners under whose insurance and medical programs they are covered, also seem able to mould temping into a tactic of convenience.

My boyfriend, well, economically, he carries me, and he works for the railroad, so I don't want a permanent job, because we like to go off hiking and trekking together, and his breaks are so unpredictable and with permanent work I can't just fly off like that, but I still need the money.

A reporter, Deborah Jones, researching a general article about temping, met people in similar positions.
As a career 'temp,' Judy Lewis has held short term administrative jobs in hospitals, an oil refinery and a local utility, while running a lingerie business on the side and making family time a priority. [...] In Halifax, Ms Lewis, 27, represents the satisfied side of the temporary industry. "I feel like I'm doing the best I can for myself." With a degree in secretarial administration and business, she was satisfied with full-time employment until three years ago, when she married a man in the air force. Then she wanted to schedule her vacations with her husband's.58

While in both these cases temping is praised as the fount of flexibility, the reason why that flexibility is sought also comes immediately to the fore. Just as feminist geographers have delineated how women tend to have to find jobs in the vicinity of homes whose locations are dictated by male partners' work places, so too do these temps seek flexibility in a context where their partner's schedules serve as the "given" and inflexible starting point.59 What Barrett defines as "familial ideology" is drawn on by the women in ways whereby they define their own work needs in order to suit and fit in with the exigencies of relationships with male partners.60 It is the resulting desire for flexibility which the temping agencies are able to tap.61


60 Barrett, 1988, op.cit., especially chapter six, "Women's Oppression and the 'Family'."

61 This set of relations seems to work in much the same way as those identified by Kristin Nelson in her account of the links between suburban back offices and the employment of middle-class wives. "Labour demand, labour supply and the suburbanization of low-wage office work," in Scott and Storper (eds.), 1986, op.cit. pp. 149-171. (Compare with the footnote quote Marx includes from the Ten Hours' Factory Bill in Capital V. 1. p. 526.) Nelson is also able to show convincingly how managers found these suburban workers particularly useful as agents of self-discipline, easily internalising company goals. In this respect temping is far more varied and complex insofar as it employs women from a diversity of economic and ethnic backgrounds.
It should nonetheless be remembered that this is only a certain sort of flexibility, proffering advantages to only certain sorts of people. It is not so useful for mothers who want to be home at specific times for their children. As Phillis Brown commented, temping seems better arranged to provide flexibility on a week-by-week basis, rather than in terms of the length of the working day. In a different way, but with similar dissatisfaction, Pat Dupont only turned to temping as a last ditch attempt to keep "a roof over [her] head." Abandoned by her husband at the age of fifty-three, and, in the same year, made redundant from her job in the federal government (due to cutbacks and privatisation), she tried temporary work out of blunt necessity, not as a "handy tool." She had originally gone to agencies to find a permanent position, but agreed also to be put on the temping rosters as a candidate for "temp-to-perm" assignments. The following section of the interview relates the close link between her economic need as a single woman at "home," and what became the painful experience of finding work.

I'm on this $450-00 a month federal pension, but this is not even enough to pay the rent, and I'm too young to retire. It's a disaster. I tell the agencies I want to work at least three days - but for them that doesn't matter. I'm now registered with seventeen agencies and every Friday I phone them and every Friday I don't get a response, except to get a half day here, or a half day there to stuff envelopes etc. And this is terrible because it means even if I only work two days in two weeks it cuts out my unemployment claim for the whole two weeks because it's above the 20%.

What sorts of stories do they offer to explain why?

They don't offer a story. They say simply something like - "we've placed everyone this week" - and, you know, I don't understand it. I'm qualified, I type at ninety words a minute, I get good referrals from where I have worked, I have 120 words short-hand, I can operate a Wang, all the IBM's, the Macs, I'm bilingual.

It's so hard to understand. I mean, can you link it to anything, like say your previous seniority, or something?
I tell them that my lowest rate is $12.00 an hour. I feel that with my experience, that I'm worth a lot more, but however, that's beside the point, going with the market.... And I found that when I was working, that I would have a job, say, for a week and then by quarter to five on Friday night, I had nothing for the next week. And then the agencies phone and this happens with all of them: they say "well we don't have anything for $12.00 next week, but we've got this one at $8.00 or this one at $9.50..." and in the beginning I was so desperate for work - because my unemployment hadn't clicked in - that I'd take things like that, and this is what happens, they'll give you one assignment at the rate you ask for, and wait till the very last moment and give you this decision where you're faced with doing something for $7.50 or nothing at all. They have you in a bind and it's really...it's devastating, when you are ready and willing to produce.

It became clear that Pat Dupont herself thought she was being discriminated against on the basis of her age. She also suggested - in a way that made clear sense to me - that this in and of itself was not so much the problem as what that age represented in terms of her "looks, and self-confidence." Such a condensation of concerns similarly infused other temps' accounts of how aspects of their self-identity ran into and against the gendered, bureaucratic and class relations involved in temping. One woman, Anne Rand, clearly articulated her feelings when, after I had finished the "official" interview (turning off the tape), she presented me with two sheets of paper. I scarcely had time to look at them when she began to say: "This is how I see my problem."

On the first sheet of paper was her C.V.: "the way I am for the agencies," she said. Organised in the usual format, it began:

CAREER OBJECTIVES: To offer my skills, qualities and experience toward a mutually rewarding work environment; To be well renumerated for my contribution.

SKILLS: Excellent communication skills; language facility; Computer: Wordperfect, MS-Word, Lotus, dBase, Accounting programs: Bedford Integrated, AccPac, AES word-processing; accurate typing, editing; bookkeeping, payroll; excellent clerical and receptionist skills; medical terminology.

EXPERIENCE: ...

The second sheet was written for the purpose of a didactic contrast (it was part of a book she was starting to write), and summarised her own self-representation.
I am straddling two realities; I am aware of being astrally connected while I walk this earth and struggle to maintain my balance, integrity and security. From this place of resonance I feel things that others probably do not ever become aware of. [...] However, who is to say just what the particular lessons I am coping with, and how best they shall be faced (and integrated), is a mystery worth pondering.

One can only begin with the problems that face one square on to look for clues to the unravelling of this mystery. In my case, finding remunerative work commensurate with my station and supportive of my need to write this book is a big struggle, given that I am not accustomed to asking to be paid what I am really worth. It has been easier to take what is offered, to coast along, frustrated and angry that I am caught in a web out of which I cannot extricate myself. [...] So, then, what are my options? I have to unplug from the circuit brand, full-time jobs.

I am very responsible, highly ethical, usually good-natured, and exceptionally intelligent. I have earned a university degree [in theology], as a mature student, while being a single parent. I have been a true and loyal friend to many of my co-workers along the way. [...] Would you like to hire me on my terms?

What are "my terms"? Well, I can't work full time; but I need almost full time income if I am to support my child reasonably well.

This, like the section from the interview with Pat Dupont, is obviously a complex document, and here I only want to indicate what I see as some of its most critical themes. Facing the problems "square on," Anne Rand draws a clear picture of division. Using the vocabulary of her mysticism, and including details from her life such as the support she wants to afford for her daughter, she separates out a realm of concerns about "where she is," from how these have to relate to a world where money buys survival and her skills as a working woman are coded and valued - C.V.ed - in specific ways.

I asked her how she subsequently saw her daily life in the light of this thinking: "How do you see the two parts coming together?" Her answer was brief but animated: "I want to make them dance." This, to me, seems a wonderfully strong metaphor for negotiated-agency. But the fact that we met in the middle of the day, in a week when she was unwillingly unemployed, was a bitter reminder
that even as she made temping part of her tactical dance, she was still at the beck and call of the abstract partner.

In the interview that had preceded this exchange, Anne Rand had also told me how she liked using temping as a tactic because it allowed her to avoid becoming "bogged down in the day-to-day routine of offices and office politics." This was a common, though frequently complicated view of many of my informants. Complicated, because just as they spoke happily about how temping meant that they could keep a distance at work and "just get on with the job," many interviewees also indicated that the emotional divide from work place practices was never all that secure, nor that they entirely wanted it to be. The discourse of "being a professional," of "going right in and getting straight down to work," seemed nearly always crossed with stories about how "too much distance is not a good thing."62

In the next sections, I want to elaborate how seeming contradictions like these can be best understood in the context of a critique of modern rationality's complicity with masculinity.63 As Pringle has shown so clearly, the fact that the monadic, self-possessed, male ego is cloaked as the arbiter of genderless objectivity, should warn against attempts to suggest that sexuality is absent from "objective" institutions, or that these are gender-neutral sites of pure work and function.64

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62 This form of doubled narrative is also well expressed by the temps interviewed by Linda Gutri for her article, "Happy temps work harder," 1990, op.cit..

63 See Jessica Benjamin's The Bonds Of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), especially her treatment of Hegel's Master-Slave metaphor and the discussion in Chapter Five on gender and domination. Benjamin's work, born out of a critique of object-relations theory, is not as critical of the limits of psychoanalysis as is Irigaray's, in Speculum, 1985, op.cit..

64 Pringle, 1988, op.cit. especially chapter four, "Sexuality at Work."
Remembering the gendered quality of routine office procedures means understanding how one-off cases of sexual harassment are only the tip of a more mundane and routinised iceberg of sexist oppression. As one temp said to me:

It's general. It's in the daily expectations and things. Like when the Vancouver Sun printed a story on women in space, eh? The headline was 'Sex in Space.' Women in Space equalled Sex in Space.

By attempting to make these "daily expectations" and their implications for temps stand out, I want to follow Pringle's critique:

Sexuality cannot be 'banished' from the workplace. Attempts to treat it as an 'intruder' are basic to the negative representation of women/sexuality/secreteries. It is by insisting on its presence, making it visible, asserting women's rights to be subjects rather than objects of sexual discourses, that bureaucracy can be challenged.65

"Just-a-Temp:" Temporary Solutions or Temporary Ruptures?

The discourse of professionalism is for many temps a form of defence, a way of dealing with institutions which they necessarily have to inhabit. Sally Rika had a catch phrase which tersely captured the situation: "I'm not here for a long time, or a hard time, just a smart time to do the job." By temping, a woman like Anne Rand could parcel her life into two halves and thereby gain a distance from the daily implications of having to work for money. A similar strategy was also put to work by the one woman I interviewed who told me she was a lesbian. She said she liked temping because it helps her avoid being "clamped down" by office routine and attitudes.

I had a good job as an administration manager, but I felt myself being sort of re-programmed as an official "office woman." I was losing my private space.

65 Pringle, 1988, op.cit. p. 100.
Using temping as way of eluding the machinery of office life, she instead feels able to counter its masculine, homogenising reason with flexibility and movement. She also noted how working as a temp helps forestall heterosexist comments from other women. "It’s allowed me to avoid most of the gossip from secretaries." Nevertheless, as she was well aware, there are difficulties with this kind of strategy. In and of itself, the discourse of the "professional temp - just doing the job," is already coded and loaded with the hierarchical oppositions of official/personal, public/private, rational/emotional, masculine/feminine which inhere in the organisation of modern institutions. Being a "professional temp" does not ultimately change these oppositions, but rather rests on ideas of work as public, official, and ungendered objective activity (i.e. rational man’s work). Certainly it can service a strategy of avoidance, a provisional way of negotiating the masculinity of office structures and expectations. But if it "succeeds" as a strategy, it is in part through recalling the myth that work is pure, detachable from emotionality. Other interviews I had, clearly showed the awkward contradictions in this simple story.

Throughout our discussion Janet Rye vacillated between talking as a "professional," and relating her feelings as a "women’s’ activist." Over the ten

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66 Marny Hall, directly addressing the questions of lesbians in organizations, has noted how even if it is possible to survive the various heterosexist assumptions, there remains the danger of succumbing to the organization as a token lesbian after "coming-out." "Stylised out of existence, she forfeits her private mutinies, cannot mobilize the resistance necessary to shield her individuality from engulfment by the collective purpose of the organization. Homogenized, the token corporate lesbian become the consummate "organization (wo)man." See "Private Experience in the Public Domain: Lesbians in Organizations," in Jeff Hearn et al. (eds) The Sexuality Of Organization (London: Sage, 1989), at page 138.

67 Similarly, a lesbian temp told Rosemary Pringle "that she deliberately chose temporary work so that she could move on before having to face the chit-chat over morning tea about private life." Op.cit. p. 95.
years she had been temping she had also given up much of her time to different women's struggles and had, for two years, worked on a rape crisis line. However, when it came to talking about how she used temping to avoid office "bitching" she reiterated - without hints of irony - phrases like "all women are bitches," "they should just do their jobs," "they're all gossiping cows." She had been to a number of self-help classes and had developed a "philosophy of life" that centered about the idea of "making yourself present." The individualism of this thinking seemed to me to compound and support her view that in offices people should just do their particular job.68 As a result, I asked a question about how she might reconcile the social thinking of her activism with the abstract ideas about workplace individualism.

- But if you are going to talk about making people present in an office say, doesn't that mean making them like persons, doesn't it mean making them more than just business machines?

[Silence]

- If you wanted some change right and wanted people to be there and not just acting a role, surely that would involve people stopping being just a service and starting being people as well.

You have to be a person to be a service. That's my definition of a service, it involves being there for other people like managers and that means being very personal and intimate.

[Coffee arrives]

But there's no politics when you're a temp. You don't get involved, especially with the gossips, right. It's sort of clean, it's clean work.

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68 A significant number of my informants were either reading self-help books, or had gone to some session at a point in their lives. I discuss the disciplinary effects of such "advice" in more detail in the next chapter. Here I want to note how the introspection it calls for seems overwhelmingly linked to an individualistic program of development and change. The nadir of this genre is the "counselling" provided by agency journals. Norrell's The Touch magazine (v. 1, n. 1, 1989), for example, informed its temp readers that: "Like everything else in life, achieving satisfaction and happiness is also a cost/benefit relationship." (Page 7)
- In a sense then, could you talk about the agencies' role of "screening," as a sort of code word for cleaning?

Yes, but I always turn that around and get involved in the office. I do the job, but I've got a very strong self. So I get involved and do things like tell my computer "it's rude," and I say, "thank-you," and I say, "worker you'll go to the happy land in the sky real quick."

- So that's what makes the office like a fuller place then?

Yeah I have fun with it.

- But perhaps not everyone can do that?

No, some people are just not choosing, they choose to be victims instead.

- But it's not only a matter of choice surely? People only end up like that because of the conditions in which they grow up and develop, right?

No. That's bullshit. People choose to be victims. They sit around like that gossiping in offices all their life. I chose to be a victim for a long time, for most of my life. It was real simple, I got to be co-dependent and care for other people and then I woke up one day.

These comments vividly document a disjunction in the discourse of rational professionalism as lived by a working woman. Signalled by the coffee's arrival, there is a split between, on the one side, abiding by the business call to perform "clean" work, while, on the other, being "intimate" as a "service." It seemed to me that Janet Rye patched up this crisis in the discourse of masculine rationality by contradicting herself - practically as well as verbally. Her routine as a temp, therefore, was about coping with, and easing the clashing implications: being a "very personal" service as a woman on the job (usually to male managers) and yet, at the same time, dissenting from undisciplined office relations with bitching "gossips" (other women).

Tellingly, in the context of fluid temporary labour, her adjective "clean" recalls Herbert Marcuse's discussion of "sublimated slavery" in advanced capitalism.
This is a pure form of servitude: to exist as an instrument, as a thing. And this mode of existence is not abrogated if the thing is animated and chooses its material and intellectual food, if it does not feel its being-a-thing, if it is a pretty, clean, mobile thing.\textsuperscript{69}

I interpret "pretty" here as a gesture by Marcuse towards what might be called 'co-opted femininity.' Unfortunately, such gestures are the limit of his critique; a limit, I would argue, that is symptomatic of his gender-blind conception of a seamless, colonising rationality. If, instead, that "irrational rationality" is re-appraised as a product of various social histories - including the organisation of masculininity - then not only can the experience of women and men in "colonised" institutions be better understood (i.e. as ongoing re-negotiation), but Marcuse's frightening vision of the rational apocalypse can be rendered less inescapable, open to ruptural reformulation by the very feminised agency it suppresses.\textsuperscript{70} Certainly, in exchanges like mine with Janet Rye, I felt that I could see the story of temping’s rational professionalism being actively retold. While it appeared that she herself was trying to cover over the crises of rationality made explicit by the alternating requests for intimacy and cleanliness, this still indicated a space where other stories could be hatched.


\textsuperscript{70} Benjamin notes that because theorists like Adorno and Marcuse had no theory of intersubjectivity in which they could locate the problem of rationality/ irrationality their "only 'solution' to the impasse of the rational mind, was constant reflection on its tendency toward domination." By contrast, she suggests that a "feminist critique of rationality [...] leads us to redraft our map of the mind to include the territory of self and other, that space in which we know, discover and create the world through our connection to it. [...] To assert that rationality is contaminated by control is not a proposal to scrap it in favor of romantic anti-rationality; it is meant to redefine rationality and expand its boundaries. The point is not to undo all of modern science but to acknowledge the value of what has been banished as irrational and infantile." In \textit{The Bonds of Love}, 1988, op.cit. pages 191-193.
This said, even in Janet Rye's case, I do not want to present a picture of perfect co-optation. Her account seems extremely complex, cross hatched with all sorts of subversions and idiosyncracies. Later on, for example, having noted how she preferred not to get involved with co-workers, she went on to say that after arriving at a new assignment she always liked to put a bowl of candies on the desk in order to start up conversations. Ultimately, however, even her examples of "turning about" the disciplined rationalism of the clean job, all rotated around what was itself an individualistic, if disorderly tactic: talking to the computer. At least as far as her account to me went, it seemed that any possibilities of subverting the relations of ordered office dominance were thoroughly immurred. In particular, the politics of subversion potentially born in women-to-women work relations seemed occluded by her hostile attitude towards office "victims," and others who refused to be professional. That this was possible in the work-life of someone who, outside of the office, was extremely committed to the struggle against women's oppression, seems all the more indicative of the resilience of discourses upholding the rationale for "being professional." However, painting this picture of Janet Rye, I do not want to neglect how other people draw in different ways on the discourse of professional temping.

Knowing that they are just-a-temp, only doing a job for a short space of time, helps many temps cope with a slew of annoyances, sufferings and pain. From surviving work with abusive men, to drudging through a long neglected filing job, to getting the boss's wife flowers, to photocopying for the whole office, the knowledge that it "won't last long" works as a soothing balm. This facility in

71 On the potential for women's subversion of rational office structures see Pringle, *op.cit.*, in particular, pages 228-249; as well as page 83 for a discussion of this question in relation to turning about dominance in woman-boss/ woman-secretary relations.
temping to sharply split "work" and "life," has a similar ambivalence, I think, to the operation of the "team" or "modernity" discourse described by Pringle in *Secretaries Talk.* 72 She shows how for managers, the invocation of a code of professionalism, of all being in a team together, can serve as a way of hiding real relations of dominance. Reversing this usage, the secretaries she interviewed who appealed to the "team," did so in a gesture of resistance: we are all equal, we are all just doing our specific jobs. What seems to happen with temping is that this potential for resistance and co-option becomes contorted and condensed on to the *whole* job itself. As a single, punctual act of individualised labour, the job becomes a way of earning money that is divorced from the significance and personal ties permanent employment may hold; the temp, economic resources permitting, can leave when she wants and/or make risky acts of resistance.

Well I knew the worst that could happen would be just having to go to another job. The agency knew he was an asshole and wouldn't put a black mark against my name. So I said, "Fuck you darling, I'm not your nanny, not your servant. I'm acting as the administrative secretary here, that's my function. You want lunch, you want your shoes seen to, you do it yourself."

Nonetheless, this resistance made possible by being disconnected and 'able to leave' the job, is also useful to employers. They can have the "personal" and "intimate" service so often necessary to supporting their managerial position and yet, at the same time, avoid the more disruptive features that might accompany this labour. 73 The temp, just providing the service, is constrained by time and lack of shared experience from forming solidarity with co-workers who, in any

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72 See Pringle, 1988, *op.cit.* especially pp. 52-55.

73 See Pringle, 1988, *op.cit* especially chapters two, four and eleven. Although many temps do work as secretaries and are subject to the 'master-slave,' 'office-wife' and 'career' discourses described by Pringle, it must also be emphasised that temps also work in a variety of other less secretarial jobs, ranging from mail room clerk positions to telephone pool operators.
case, often treat her freedom to come and go with jealousy. As one interviewee put it:

And you are expected to do tremendous output, to be a production, a one person production unit. Whereas the permanent employees, they sit around, they go out for coffee, they bitch with each other, there's a lot of laxity going on between the permanent staff, but there's friendship too, but you, "you the temp," are cut off from that, unless you say something you don't get invited for coffee. You have to keep at it.

In the context of such isolation, any chance of putting questions of feelings, let alone shared gender oppression, into debate, seem about as well contained as is possible.

In this complex arena of social relations being "just-the-temp" therefore becomes a sharply ambivalent discourse. On the one side it is very clearly, a way of negotiating and dealing with the rigours of the modern office, a tactic of distancing and resistance. Yet on the other side, being "just-the-temp" is a term of abuse, literally and figurally. Not only are temps simply referred to in a nameless and demeaning way as "the temp," they are also given the left-over pieces of work, the grotty bits and bobs that people with proper jobs leave aside. "It's all right, we'll get the temp to do that;" "give it to the temp, she's got nothing to do;" "get the temp to do that, don't waste your time." In a displaced repetition of theories like Atkinson's (see Chapter Two), the actual labour of temps in offices is treated as marginal; it is the bricolage, housekeeping job that sustains the company, cleans up the little exigencies of grand plans in motion, and makes sure the order is met smartly and on time.74 For one counsellor I interviewed, that is why "women are better as temps. They are more flexible, more adaptable, better

74 As Pringle makes clear, this is a way in which secretaries more generally are positioned. "By the late 1960s there was a new image of secretaries as 'Girl Fridays', jacks-of-all-trades and general dogsbodies." Pringle, 1988, op.cit. p. 183.
at fitting-in than men."\textsuperscript{75} It is also a reason why, as Jane Jenson describes it, "[f]lexibility - in which hard-won protections of workers' conditions of employment are lessened - has also brought feminization of the labour force in its trail."\textsuperscript{76} Like the secretary in the mind of the manager interviewed by Ann Game, temps become feminised as "infrastructure, underpinning the system, keeping everything going. [...] He thinks, she does [and they do]."\textsuperscript{77} Haraway's summary is acutely resonant:

To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labor force; seen less as workers than as servers.

At least at one level, this also applies to men who temp. They have, in this sense, to housekeep too. The coding they can thereby receive is made manifest in a few lines by Robin Kendall, a temp interviewed by Vancouver's \textit{Employment Paper} during National Temporaries Week.

\textsuperscript{75} These sorts of assumptions are widely noted in feminist research, but see especially Barbara Baran's account, "The New Economy: Female Labour and the Office of the Future," in Hansen and Philipson (eds), 1990, \textit{op.cit.} pp. 511-534. She notes: "The professional staffs in the new highly automated personal lines centers of the company [...] are so overwhelmingly female that the chief administrator of one joked about being under pressure to develop affirmative action goals for men. She explained that the reason they chose to hire women was that women are more "flexible" than men in adjusting to the computer mediated labor process." (p. 528) It is worth comparing management eulogies to women's flexibility with the situation as particular women workers see it themselves. A UAW flyer on how to fight office fatigue began with the following lines: "Office workers who have to sit in one place for long hours often suffer "positional fatigue." That's a fancy term for feeling pooped out from minimal physical activity, which puts unnatural strain on our naturally flexible, mobile bodies." I also want to note here that the same counsellor I cited, went on to tell me that she thought more men would come into temping as the work became more technically sophisticated. Men, of course, were seen by her as better technicians. "Even little boys are better with machines," she told me when I argued.


\textsuperscript{77} Game, 1991, \textit{op.cit.} p. 118. Her research on boss-secretary relations was part of the same project on which Pringle's book is based.
My father-in-law keeps asking when I'm going to get a real job, but I've been kept more than busy by Temping.\textsuperscript{78}

Here, the "father-in-law" is a specific person with what are no doubt specific views, but, he is also, I think, a salient metaphor of the "law" in a more generally patriarchal society: men should do real jobs, not busy housekeeping. At a different level, however, it seems that when men do work as temps, the jobs themselves somehow change.\textsuperscript{79} In my own experience, as well as in that of the three male temps I interviewed, being a man and a temp meant being seen as something different, "something of a novelty," of more consequence than "just-a-temp."

Being confused with managers is common; being treated as an individual by human resources co-ordinators, almost a rule. In fact, the way in which men seem to up-grade the skill level of temporary jobs - even when, like me, they can barely type - appears as the exception that proves the rule. As Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor put it: "Skill has been increasingly defined against women - skilled work is work that women don't do."\textsuperscript{80}

Phillips and Taylor frame this argument about skill in the same way that I want to here.

\textsuperscript{78} "Temps," \textit{The Employment Paper}, October 14, 1990.

\textsuperscript{79} The male secretary interviewed by Pringle not only felt the force of feminisation - "He gets a lot of flack from young girls who thinks he's not a proper man" (p. 79) - he also wielded a considerable degree of control in his relationship with a female boss. In 1988, \textit{op.cit.} pp. 80-2.

As a use value [...] labour is concrete labour, characterised as much by its femaleness as any other of its attributes - and in our society 'femaleness' is a condition of relative powerlessness.  

Using this schema they elaborate a history of feminisation, explicidy citing temping as an icon of the trend.

The transformation of the male 'black-coated worker' of the nineteenth century into today's temp typist and file clerk occurred through the enormous expansion of all forms of office work in the period following the First World War. The new class of clerical workers had little in common with the clerks of the previous century, and the skill component of their work was immediately downgraded into typically 'female' abilities - including manual dexterity, ability to carry out repetitive tasks and so on. In this case it was not that men's jobs were deskilled, and women drawn into them, but that a new category of work was created which was classified as 'inferior' not simply by virtue of the skills required for it but by virtue of the 'inferior' status of the women who came to perform it.

Skills, in this general sense, are also bound up with what Burawoy calls the "relations in production." The feminisation of temping can in this way be cast as a disciplining process, engaging female workers with that "appealing male voice" into strategising their own exploitation. However, what an argument like Phillips and Taylor's also shows is that to call these relations simply "relations in production" is too limiting a label. Relations about production might be a better term, providing a more open way of conceiving of how the labour process incorporates material ideologies that proceed outside of the work-place. In the case of temping, I want to suggest that this is precisely how feminisation operates. As I indicated with the example of Janet Rye's claims to provide an "intimate service" while simultaneously doing "clean" work, part of a temp's job description


\[83\] Compare Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, op.cit. pp. 78-85.
involves a subtext of gendered expectations. By turning now to another example, I want to make that subtext clearer while still attempting to show how it is negotiated by the temps and the agencies themselves.

Women placing women for women?

Most temp agencies have dress codes, either explicit or implicit, which they enforce with varying degrees of authority. Such codes, which usually demand that women wear skirts if they are going on assignment in downtown offices - men have to wear ties and clean white shirts - are a good example of how temping makes the unspoken rules of workplaces thematic. Preparing the temp to enter an office and offer the desired requirements, means articulating in an immediate and direct way the hegemonic expectations of those offices. This is precisely what dress codes do. By making demands for feminised labour in the form of a direct request, the codes present the feminisation of labour in a documentable way. They show how such a process operates by working with and incorporating sets of ideas about women - and often held by women - that already exist outside the workplace. Directly articulating these hegemonic ideologies however, they also present a clear and contestable focus for criticism.

"Woman offended by skirts-only office rule," was the headline on the front page of the Vancouver Sun. The article that followed it was written by a woman, and it was about a temp, Arlene Carey, who had refused to obey the

84 This and the following quotations are from the article by Alicia Priest, "Woman offended by skirts-only office rule," Vancouver Sun, October 22, 1990, p. A1. In the later edition, the article was moved to page A2. I would like to thank Alicia Priest, Arlene Carey and Anne McBain for their time. I would especially like to thank Arlene Carey for permitting me to use the material below.
agency order that she should wear a skirt. The manager of the agency, Anne McBain, wanted to send her to work in a skirt. She believed that this was the "only respectable" way of starting an assignment.

"To me, it's not a discriminatory thing. If you're looking for work, you have to be a little flexible.... A lot of people feel that in an office environment, an employee can't be professional in slacks."

When asked if she meant "woman employee," McBain said yes. Mediating and making explicit what a "lot of people feel," the agency manager was arguing that the use-value of the commodity she was supplying had to be feminised, and that that meant the temp being professional in a skirt, professional as a "woman employee." It later became clear that the client in question had not mentioned specific requirements of this sort: "I can categorically deny that we said anything to Superior about employees having to wear a dress." But, as Anne McBain told me in an interview, "it was more a general thing about what is seen as proper dress in modern offices." She felt that she was simply reflecting and providing for market demand.

Arlene Carey herself, arriving in Vancouver from Toronto, saw the situation in a very different way.

I told her that half my wardrobe is pants and that I could guarantee I would be wearing pants one out of the three days. When a supervisor phoned me back, she told me their policy for temporary assignments is no slacks. That is archaic - this is the 90s. The bottom line is they are suggesting that I'm not going to look good in pants - I won't look as feminine as in a skirt. But I'm going to work - not out to catch a man.

Having precisely pinpointed the sexist assumption at work, she told the reporter:

The reason I'm making a big deal about it is because it is wrong and I'd like to see it change.

Yet even as she was able to resist like this, and even as the paper was reporting the story, the assignment was given to someone else who would, no doubt, oblige
with professionalism. Moreover, when I asked Anne McBain whether she had suffered from the publicity she replied:

No. Quite the reverse in fact. I had a client ring up and say I did the right thing and that Arlene had probably made herself one of the most unemployable people in the city because of her attitude. In the end Superior probably did quite well out of it all.

The limits of Arlene Carey’s attempts to make some "change" were also made painfully clear by the reply she received after sending her complaint to the B.C. Council of Human Rights. (See Figure Two overleaf.)

The key claim in the letter is that: "A business dress code’s differing requirements of men and women, does not constitute discrimination on the basis of sex." Apart from legal niceties over "differing requirements," what I think this sentence exposes most clearly is the inadequacy of

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85 A few temps I spoke to, nonetheless underlined how being a temp could mean a whole range of jobs and that, as a result, there was a certain freedom from the expectations facing "normal secretaries." I know if I got my hair cut and I got dressed up I’d probably get a lot more jobs - but I refuse to get really dressed up everyday like a secretary, probably as their idea of a Working Girl, moviestar secretary should - but certainly that’s part of it, your appearance matters much more than how skilled you are."
File: 910135

8 April 1991

Arlene Carey

Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Ms. Carey:

Re: Arlene Carey

- and-

Superior Personnel Ltd.

- and -

The Human Rights Act

The British Columbia Council of Human Rights has considered your complaint of discrimination under section 13 of the Human Rights Act. At this stage, the Council must decide whether or not to send the complaint to a full investigation.

The Council has concluded that the imposition of a dress code for business purposes does not constitute discrimination unless it demeans the dignity of an employee because of their sex. A business dress code's differing requirements of men and women, does not constitute discrimination on the basis of sex. The Council has decided to dismiss your complaint under section 13(1)(a) of the Human Rights Act on the grounds that it is not within the jurisdiction of the Council. Therefore, the complaint will not proceed further.

While the Council is unable to assist you in this matter, we thank you for bringing your concerns to the Council's attention.

Yours truly,

Judith Will
Chairman

Figure 2 A letter from the chairman
"discrimination" _per se_ as an axis of critique. What Arlene Carey was struggling against was a more systematic set of sexist assumptions embedded in social relations. She was not pointing to a one-off case of unequal treatment - the supine terrain of legislation on equal rights - but to a series of connected expectations about how she should be as a "professional woman" at work. That is why, as the female chairman [sic] concludes, "the complaint will not proceed further."

That it was a woman who ordered Arlene Carey to wear a skirt in the first place, and a woman who signed herself "chairman" on the complaint rejection letter, points poignantly at the systematicity and institutionalisation of the patriarchal assumptions at issue. It also indicates the importance of considering more carefully the implications of the statement made by Elaine McCoy which I cited at the beginning of Chapter Two: to wit, "there are just as many women managers as men." In fact, there are more than "just as many;" the industry, except at the CEO level, is entirely dominated by women. Nearly all counsellors, just like nearly all human resource department administrators in client firms, are women. Thus, as one counsellor put it to me: "temping is about women placing women for women." One reason for this is historical, and relates to how a large number of small temping companies sprang out of older steno-offices. But, more generally, the most frequent explanation offered to me by counsellors themselves,

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86 As Riki Holtmaat notes in her discussion of concepts like discrimination, "thinking in terms of legal equality and using the principle of equality as a strategic concept and/or an important substantive principle in a legal struggle to improve the position of women is doomed to failure unless we fundamentally examine the gender of crucial (legal) concepts, including that of equality itself." In "The Power of Legal Concepts: The Development of a Feminist Theory of Law," *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* v. 17 (1989) pp. 481-507, at page 490. The problem of 'equality' as presently defined is also noted by Teresa de Lauretis. Having cited the Italian feminist Lonzi's claim: "Equality is a juridical principle...what is offered as legal rights to colonized people," she continues: "Hence, feminism's fight for women's equality is an 'ideological attempt to subject women even further' to prevent the expression of their own sense of existence, and to foreclose the road to women's real liberation." In de Lauretis, 1990a, _op.cit._ p. 18.
turned on the question of the skills needed for the job. The following reply was typical.

Well it calls for a very special sort of person. You have to be able to cope on the market, you know, good at sticking your foot in the door, arguing, begging and pleading with potential clients. But you also have to be a sensitive sort of person, someone who can communicate well with the temps, listen to their problems, get them going in the morning, get them to do the job properly. And to do both of these things well, I think you have to be a woman.

Although these women-to-women relations - between counsellors and Human Resources heads, and between counsellors and temps - might be seen as sites of potential subversion in feminist attempts to change bureaucracies, it seems to me that this contemporary feminization of corporate discourse remains profoundly co-optive. Notions of women's identity being bound up with relationality - which psychoanalysts like Nancy Chodorow have theorised, and sociologists like Nancy Hartsock have indicated as part of a standpoint for feminism, - appear re-cycled by business in a grissly cartoon parody where the one who doesn't stir without the

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87 See Peta Tancred-Sheriff, "Gender, Sexuality and the Labour Process," in Jeff Hearn et al (eds.), 1989, op.cit. pp. 46-54. She refers to the ambivalent position of women though the term "adjunct control work," a name for labour that represents, but remains on the margin of the organisation of a particular institution. She concludes: "Women's sexuality not only constitutes part of the skills of the adjunct control task, but it assists in the solution of one of the managerial problems which is built into the capitalist enterprise." Page 54.


other is the temp jolted from sleep by the jolly voice of a counsellor's wake-up call. Indeed, the fact that women counsellors also have to go it alone and fight off competition in the market, further indicates how feminist calls for women's autonomy - for what Benjamin describes as a balancing of recognition with an assertion of self-identity - can be convoluted into the crudest form of liberal liberation where as Jane Banks and Patricia Zimmerman put it: "one's identity and autonomy [are] defined by money and the commodities it [can] purchase."

Towards the end of my interviews with counsellors, I always tried to ask whether they thought the potential for identification they had with temps was being used by business and turned simply to capitalistic ends. Most found the question incomprehensible answering with statements like, "no, I think I'm well remunerated for what I do." A few, who saw in what I said a potential critique of the industry, replied with a fervent argument about the extent of temping's "feminism;" how it helped single moms survive and other women become entrepreneurs. Certainly, it is true that temping has facilitated a number of

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90 There is here an unhappy similarity with the complicit use of saleswomen in the turn of the century, U.S. department stores described by Susan Benson. "Qualities which had for a century been encouraged in women - adeptness at manipulating people, sympathetic ways of responding to the needs of others, and a familiarity with things domestic - fit nicely into a new view of selling." Benson, 1986, op.cit. p. 130.

91 Benjamin, 1988, op.cit. Her account is far more subtle than such brief summary allows, but with regard to both women and men her argument is that: "Briefly stated, domination and submission result from a breakdown of the necessary tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition that allows self and other to meet as sovereign equals." (p. 12) At a superficial level there are many similarities between her account and Chodorow's, but the critique she makes of the pre-oedipal/ oedipal and intra-psychic/intra-personal divides of classic socio-psychoanalysis totally disrupt any narrow disciplinary interest.

women to rise to entrepreneurship. Indeed, in 1987, *B.C. Business Magazine* declared Barbara Rae, president of Office Assistance, "Entrepreneur of the Year." However, in the subsequent article describing her achievements, the limits of this liberal and corporate feminism are repeatedly exposed.

The article introduces the theme of women in business in the following way:

[H]er entrepreneurship has its focus in a company dealing almost exclusively with women, and is dedicated to being in the vanguard of a better deal for women in business. 93

And then continues:

But it's a mile off track to assume that Barbara Rae lends herself to any trendy movement or soapbox oratory about women's rights. She simply wonders why it's yet to be understood by most companies that woman's careers must follow a different pattern, not necessarily a more costly one for the company. 94

While the magazine goes to unsubtle lengths to assure anxious readers that the award has not been wasted on an iconic bra-burner, Barbara Rae's politics appear themselves with a degree more nuance. She does not espouse simple equality, and is keen to make it easy for women to have babies without losing their jobs. However, these politics only extend as far as Office Assistance's permanent staff, and as one reads on it become more and more clear that a class agenda curtails Rae's "better deal for women" at precisely the same cut off point that guarantees

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93 In "Barbara Rae: Entrepreneur of the Year," *B.C. Business Magazine* v. 15 n. 6 (July, 1987) pp. 8-13, at page 8.

94 Pages 8-9, italics in the original.
the capitalist viability of her temping firm itself. It is not a temp who can have shares as workers in her company, nor is it a temp who benefits from having an employer understanding enough to recognize that the big deal in her life may not necessarily be to shuffle off to the suburbs permanently the first time she misses a period.

Rather than receiving 18 months leave of absence and maternity pay, a temp at Office Assistance can of course get off the job whenever she feels like it. The only catch is that there is no financial security and absolutely no guarantee that there will ever be a job again after the baby.

The limits of the feminism of the "women in business" theme were also commented on by temps themselves. Not least, the question of counsellors as 'identifying communicators' was problematised. Janet Rye, Sally Rika and Pat Dupont, among many others, bitterly complained about the "gushy," "pro-positive," "egotistical," "smiley-blond" women they met in agencies. Some temps, while less critical, were still a little sceptical or noted how they had had quarrels. An account like Sandra Rae's, also made clear how deep feelings of trust and betrayal can be a serious part of the negotiated relations.

I've got a real rapport with Susan. Like she's involved in my personal life. I've let her in on things when I'm sick and stuff.

So it works in this nice, supportive way, but can it work the other way too - like she's got this power over you because she knows you so well?

95 "Class," in the sense I indicated earlier, of referring to a process involving the extraction, distribution and re-application of surplus value. (I use the verb "involving" to mark the undecidability of temping's relations to productive activity.) By saying that class processes curtail Rae's liberal feminist project, I hope also to illustrate the value of thinking about temping in terms of overdetermination. In Laclau and Mouffe's terms, this class based aporia in the narrative of feminist politics is a moment of "antagonistic articulation." See Hegemony, 1985, op.cit. pp.105-134 especially.

That's a kind of base level thing right. Like I trust her and I don't think it's like what you say; work doesn't jeopardise the relationship, and I say what I want to say too. I feel more comfortable, and it enhances stuff. But we do have our differences right, and confrontations. Sometimes when I go to work I can tell within an hour that this is not going to work out, and I've committed myself for two weeks and I want to make it right - so I want to find out from her what the future is going to be, if I can get out of this and tell her my feelings about where I'm at, will my performance level be up to snuff if I'm not happy in a place. And with one job right, after I complained to her and everything, she says look Sandra come on, you've got to give it a try, not everything is going to work out at first, you've got to hang in there. And that really upset me because it made me feel that she wasn't giving me a chance or taking what I said seriously. I could see her point of view in a sense, but not very much. But 'how dare you,' I mean she did have a bit of a patronizing, classy voice. She knew best as the expert sort of thing. And then we didn't talk for a while.

In the end, she did stay on the job and the friendship with Susan took off again. But, although these events can be regarded as well-orchestrated crisis-management, what I rather want to emphasise is the fact that the confrontation actually took place. The relationships with the counsellors are always negotiated and nothing can be seen as foreordained.

Sandra Rae's final point also introduces the topic with which I begin the next chapter: "she did have a bit of a patronizing, classy voice. She knew best as the expert sort of thing." Here again, but in a different register, is the discourse of rational professionalism. The expert counsellor speaks and disciplines the temp through a classy voice. Such moments of condensation, where relations of class, gender, and modern rationality all merge together with effect, are what I want to unpack in the following pages. However, in doing so, I do not want to forget the urgent questions I have reviewed above. The heterogeneous gendered and classed backgrounds from which temps come to temping must be constantly kept in mind. So too the unsettling ways in which the discourse of being "just-a-temp" can work both for purposes of discipline as well as resistance. Most of all, I want to remember how a whole set of expectations about gender are draped beneath the
cloak of rational professionalism. From having to wear a skirt, to being categorised as marginal and low-skilled as a woman, the protocols and effects of "just-doing-the-job" answer to a masculine desire for order that calls itself objective. Attending again to this argument, I begin the next chapter by unpacking the nexus of "discipline," "rationality" and "femininity" found in agency advertising.
INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Combining Vocational Education and Training (VET) extant in the developing countries, one can perceive that it has become a core area of study for the sake of economic development and growth of the labor market.

VET is a process of education and training for acquiring skills that can be used in the workplace.

The purpose of VET is to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to perform their jobs effectively.

In the developing world, VET programs have been established to meet the needs of the labor market and to increase employment opportunities for workers.

The development of VET programs has been influenced by a variety of factors, including economic and political trends, cultural values, and technological changes.

In this chapter, we will examine the role of VET in the developing world, focusing on the economic and social implications of these programs.

Why does IBM recommend Manpower for end-user training on its System/36 and its AS/400 computers?

Because MANPOWER has a nationwide network of 700 offices with training facilities and staff to support Display Write/36, Personal Services/36, AS/400 Office Query, IDDU, System Operator and Data Entry.

Because MANPOWER has perfected a unique disk-based training technique that trains quickly - comfortably - and effectively. It's friendly to users because it was designed by users.

Because MANPOWER has trained its own pool of temporary office workers, successfully, on System/36, AS/400, all popular PC software programs and 9 brands of stand-alone word-processors.

Advertisement for Manpower

This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but on the other hand its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.

Michel Foucault

In this chapter I want to elaborate how temping makes explicit some diverse rationalities of what Foucault called "the political investment of the body." In the first section I address the implications of advertisements like this one from Manpower; examining how they relate to the disciplining of individualised temps. In the subsequent two sections I pursue the question of rationalisation in another direction. By focusing on how temping stands as an exception in relation to labour law and trade union practice, I want to indicate

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1 Printed in the *The Office*, May, 1990, p. 58.

how it thereby throws into a starker light the constitutive assumptions of these modern institutions. Because the temping work-force is comprised largely of women, and because the work lasts only ever for a short period of time, it operates as a form of living "counter-example." It reveals how the discourses of instrumental reason running through discipline, labour law and trade union organisation, assume as their subject that pre-eminent figure of capitalist-patriarchy the individual, male, bread-winner. Thus, throughout, I will contend that Manpower, as the signature of a disciplining agency, can also be read as a more general metaphor for the normalising itinerary of masculine desire.

An appliance of science

As I argued in Chapter Two, the disciplining of temps by agencies is always a strained operation. While separated from the temp's site of work, agencies try as best they can to ensure that the labour they provide can be put immediately on to the job and kept there. That is to say, using Foucault's vocabulary, they attempt to provide disciplined and subjected workers. Unfortunately, Foucault's account in this respect, seems to me to be too often read through the very sovereign conceptions of power he was rejecting (or, more subtly, contextualising). What I rather want to argue with regard to agency discipline, is that it operates via a language of enablement and training, and that it is in this very modern way that it

increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). [... O]n the one hand, it turns [the body] into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection.

Moreover, in temping, this is a supremely hi-tech affair. From the toll free 1-800 numbers temps with Kelly and Norrell are given - which connect them from any part of the U.S. and Canada to problem-solving offices where "expertise" on programs etc. can be immediately accessed - to the computer simulation tests, the aptitudes and capacities most clearly prized by agencies relate to microelectronics. I say "most clearly prized" because while the objective discourse relates directly in this way to computer and keyboard facilities, there are also the gendered "aptitudes" at issue which, remaining less explicit in agency protocol, surface only in examples like the dress codes noted in Chapter Three. What is nonetheless common to both these forms of subjection is their point of departure. Neither aspect of what might be called "worker constitution" begins from a level plain. Rather discipline, like feminisation - to which it is undecidably related - proceeds from and with feelings, ideas and skills which temps may already own when coming into the agency in the first place. To put it another way, the agency event represents a slice into more general social experiences of rationalisation, gendering and their complicitous articulation.

Like the practices of discipline researched by Foucault, agency selection procedures, training and telephone monitoring, operate through the medium of a

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4 The "Kelly Support Line" sticker reads as follows: "The Kelly Services Support Line is available to you during your assignment for assistance on the functions listed in this Reference Guide. The hours of the Kelly Support Line are 8.30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. In the United States (except in Michigan) phone 1-800-332-1xxx. In Canada, phone 1-800-458-7xxx. [...] Be prepared to provide your name, your current order number, and the exact nature of the problem you are encountering."

5 As Haraway comments: "The homework economy as a world capitalist organizational structure is made possible by (not caused by) the new technologies. The success of the attack on relatively privileged, mostly white, men's unionized jobs is tied to the power of the new communications technologies to integrate and control labour despite extensive dispersion and decentralization." See "A Cyborg Manifesto," in Haraway, 1991, op.cit. pp. 166-7.
highly ambivalent discourse concerning health, care, and education. The other name which some temps use to refer to counsellors is "consultants," and both terms retain the sense of an agent who - like the medical expert - is caring, who knows what is best for you and will help you achieve it.

I like to see what we do as education. As consultants, we often have to teach temps how to act in the office, what to wear, how to talk to managers, how to sit even. Some, of course, come straight in and are ready for anything, but others you really have to shape them up, and that's before you start to look at what packages they can handle. [...] But for the most part we try to educate them on their dress and presentation. And we explain to them that especially and specifically that, if they are looking for something more permanent, that there are certain requirements in the industry whatever and we educate them for that.

This really is constitutive expert-care; consulting for labouring life.6 By schooling temps to adapt immediately to the downtown work-place, the counselling makes visible the discipline usually more implicit in the day-to-day practices of ordinary offices.7 One temp I spoke to also indicated how the counselling related to her wider socialisation, not least to her experience of discipline at school and its connection to her father.

6 For a critique of how counselling and psychology in industry serve as crisis-management - yet which also relates how they perhaps need not - see Isaac Prilleltensky, "Psychology in Industry: Origins and Sociopolitical Implications," Critical Sociology v. 17, n. 2 (Summer, 1990) pp. 73-91.

7 In response to my question: "So do you sort of see it as an educational task you have?" another counsellor replied: "Yes, absolutely. You know certain people will have their own comfort zone in terms of what they can wear and there are certain stipulations. If I required you to wear something specific then I should be providing you with an allowance to avail yourself of clothing. But the facts of the situation are that in the industry if you want to be considered professional then there are certain ways in which you must present yourself. Now some people don't want to conform to those social mores and that's fine for them, that's their choice, but unfortunately we have to keep in mind the requirements of our clients and what that means is that it restricts that candidate to only certain companies they could work for."
I was always made at home to do the best in school exams, I had to get 95% always and that was because of an authority figure, basically my dad. These days it still comes out when I'm temping, the counsellors and the managers sort of replace my dad, and I can get given a whole load of work and I sort of try to over-achieve in getting it done and, as a result, I also get a kick out of it.

- But in doing work like that do you think that this over-achiever in you is sort of being used? You get a kick out of achieving, but that this is good for business?

It depends. Most of the time it depends. Not normally. But I do think I'm being used when it starts to cross too much to my personal time, then I start to feel used. Like I don't mind doing extra when there's a deadline, but when it's a daily thing of going into my own time I draw the line and that's when the relations with the agency get sticky. Mind you, they normally get me to stay, I aim to please!

This commentary makes very clear how relations from all sides of people's lives can come together to co-operate with agency discipline. The results of counselling are always therefore a matter of various practical negotiations. However, insofar as many people are affected, even, effected by similar experiences - the dominating father figure, for example - a certain regularity of results is what such counselling practice presumes to achieve.

On the business side of agency practice, the products of counselling are presented in the more immediate terms of instantly accessible labouring capacity, what the Drake ad sensationaly boasts as "0 to 100% Productivity in Minutes." (See Figure Three overleaf.) By making an inter-textual displacement that invokes the idiom of car advertisements (0 to 150 km/h in x seconds), the ad proposes the temp to business as a technologically advanced, "drive-away" type commodity. The cause becomes projected as an effect, and the temp produced by this discourse is pictured as an appliance of science. However, unlike the inert car, temps can feel and mediate what still remains a process of rationalisation.

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8 This noun/verb pun, was used in the U.K. in advertisements for Zannussi washing machines. They arrived from space with similar "speed-stripes" to those in the Drake ad.
From 0 to 100% Productivity in Minutes.

The time it takes to read this ad, is about the time it takes for our temporary personnel to begin tackling your workload. Because Drake Office Overload people arrive at your office, prepared.

They are fully trained on your systems and have been tested and screened, ensuring that their skills meet the demands of your work environment. And they apply the same enthusiasm and efficiency that's equal to your permanent employees, in no time at all.

With Drake Office Overload you get qualified people who can handle a full-time workload without having to pay them a full-time salary.

We are the quick, permanent solution to your temporary staffing needs.

Call us today.

Figure 3  Discipline as an appliance of science
Condensed as it is in the words and actions of the "caring" counsellor, the application of science as "schooling" can become a focus for resistance.

Antonia was rehearsing what she would say while she waited for the lift.
It’s just not good enough. Mrs Hook.
Would she dare?
Anyone would think I was still at school and you were the headmistress, sending for me like that.
Mrs Hook had always reminded her of a headmistress. That was what came of going to Here Today straight from school. Six years ago.9

A little like the "lads" in Paul Willis’s famous study of working class education, Antonia’s school-based approach to authority affords her a way of dealing with Mrs Hook (the counsellor).10 However, also like the "lads," this resource for resistance also becomes its limit. Mrs Hook’s headmistress qualities - as an older woman as well as an authority-figure - finally allow her to gain Antonia’s confidence. This, combined with Antonia’s economic necessities, afford Mrs Hook control.

"If you’re firing me," said Antonia levelly, "you could’ve said so on the phone."
"How dare you? Fire you? As if I’d fire my temp of the year without giving her one last chance. I suppose it doesn’t matter to you whether you work or not, with your husband to support you, and nevermind if you spoil things for everyone else."
There it was. A chance remark but spot on. "I haven’t got my husband to support me."
"Pardon?"
"Paul’s leaving me. He’s moving out this afternoon."
"Antonia," said Mrs Hook after several seconds in which she seemed actually to lose her composure, "why don’t you smoke one of your cigarettes?"
And she brought forth an ashtray from a drawer.

9 From Fairbairns, 1984, op.cit. page 11.

The shock of this calmed Antonia as much as the cigarette did. Mrs Hook said she was sorry to hear the news and went on to express her lack of any intention to probe into what was none of her business. Then she paused expectantly. Antonia just smoked. Mrs Hook seemed to consider her duty done in the way of offering condolence, and returned to business. It might be a timely moment for a new career opening. She planned to set up Here Tomorrow, a word-processing temp service. She should send her best temps on a course and develop them into a crack team. Antonia could be a member of that team provided that between now and the course, she proved herself worthy of the investment. [...] Maggie was told that Antonia must be guaranteed work for the next four weeks: Maggie must monitor this work, asking for reports on Antonia's work and conduct. To crown it all, Mrs Hook dismissed both of them with the words. "Come back in a month please, Antonia. And we'll see if you've improved."

"What is this?" Antonia screamed. "The doctor, or the KGB?"

Maggie took charge and hustled her out of the room, trying to calm her down. "It's just her way. You shouldn't let her upset you."

Fairbairns seems to picture perfectly the multiplicity of dynamics that can run through counsellor-temp relations. Clearly there is confrontation; Antonia is no dupe, she sees the discipline and surveillance, but through the discussion Mrs Hook is nevertheless able to ensure that her temp of the year will set out to return to peak performance.

My interviews with counsellors frequently returned to the same themes of education, care and control. One person, having described her ideal temp of the month - using the example of a young woman who had travelled into work in the snow, on New Year's Eve morning, only to find no one else in the office - responded to my question: "Why do they do it?" with the laughing reply: "It's the fear of God in them, or of me, one or the other." The interviews at agencies were also telling in and of themselves. Many of the counsellors seemed to position me as a temp. They wanted to help me, correct me and give me useful advice. As a result, these were often horribly easy interviews. I had little anxiety about intimidating the interviewee. Instead, I increasingly began to come away feeling

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Fairbairns, 1984, op.cit. pages 15-16.
thoroughly manipulated, that all the questions I had asked had been turned around and that important relations had been glossed with niceties. Yet, I also, and equally often, came away thinking that the counsellor really did care, that her or - as on one occasion - his concern was by no means only strategic. Certainly this last point seems a vital correction to would-be attempts to see discipline as a seamless, all-encompassing cage: the paranoid picture of power certain readers associate with Foucault. As social agents themselves, counsellors also have their own vested interests, feelings and aspirations; remembering this, denies conspiracy.

So far I have chiefly focused on training and control, however it seems that the discourse of scientific temp management comes to its zenith in the organisation of "screening and selection." All the major agencies try to out-bid each other in claims to have perfected the most objective and the most systematically rational procedure for selecting temps, pinpointing their skills, and accurately placing them. They engineer a regime of truth synergised with lists of hardware and software facilities that ooze with the symbology of Science.

"Unique to the industry," readers are told,

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12 The metaphor of the cage, of course, also introduces the analysis of reifying rationality made by Max Weber. I shortly examine the implications of what I am suggesting here to be "negotiation" as it relates to Jürgen Habermas's more recent elaboration of this Weberian theme. However, for a discussion of Weber's account as it might intersect with Foucault's study of embodied discipline, see Bryan S. Turner, "The Rationalization of the Body: Reflections on Modernity and Discipline," in Sam Whimster and Scott Lash (eds.) Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987) pp. 222-241.

13 The mind-set, if not the exuberance, of the agency advertising is summarised with positivist precision in Fric's 1973 thesis. He writes: "To the extent that it is possible to quantify judgment, it would seem possible to reduce the 'matching' process to one involving a purely sorting process. However, to the extent that judgement cannot be quantified, it is likely that the matching process will have to be performed by some individual." Fric, 1973, op.cit. p. 51.
Kelly first introduced its Kee simulator computer in 1983 to provide comprehensive testing and training of its employees on dedicated word processing equipment. These capabilities were further expanded in 1985 with the introduction of data entry testing and, in response to businesses' increasing use of personal computers, Kelly introduced its exclusive PC-PRO\textsuperscript{TM} System in 1987. [...] Kelly recently expanded its evaluation process even further with the introduction of the IBM PS/2 Test Management System [etc.].\textsuperscript{14}

Drake, meanwhile, advertises "The Science of Selection." (See Figure Four overleaf.) The Star Wars imagery of the penetrating, surveilling gaze dominates: Drake, with Science, with Adex, Qualadex and the Omega system, sees all. In a more extended appeal to business, the company elaborates on this vision of profit-making "discoveries":

Breakthrough advances in the Science of Selection make dramatic increases in hiring accuracy possible - increases that average from three to four times higher when compared to most widely used traditional methods. Higher accuracy means substantial increases in the dollar value of new hire performance.\textsuperscript{15}

Quite clearly this is a "political investment of the body [...] bound up [...] with its economic use." "Higher accuracy means," the ad asserts with uncomplicated certainty, "substantial increases in the dollar value of new hire performance."

Clients, furthermore, are reminded that this is all guaranteed by proper scientific practice, including "extensive field testing." The results are incontrovertible, producing - to borrow from Foucault again - "the formation of a whole series of codes of disciplinary individuality [which, in turn, make] it possible to transcribe, by means of homogenization the individual features established by the examination."\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} "Innovation and commitment is the Kelly Services creed," Corporate Profile in Toronto Business Magazine v. 15, n. 5 (May, 1989) page 19.


\textsuperscript{16} Foucault, 1977, \textit{op.cit.} p. 189.
At Drake International, we are committed to developing the 'science of selection', to providing you with certainty in the hiring decisions you make for your organization.

Adex, Qualadex, The Drake Omega System and Drake Performance Technologies—these are the exclusive, leading-edge systems that allow us to select the right candidate and unleash their potential in your workplace.

Discover the science of selection with Drake. Providing human resource technology for the 1990's...and beyond.

Figure 4  Science fiction
By combining the power of Behavior Description technology with personality profiling and computerised data-based management, the Drake Selection System (DSS) makes hiring top talent as accurate, certain and efficient as science allows today.

... And We Can Prove It! ... Field studies and reviews published in top scientific journals support the Drake Selection System's strong claims to hiring accuracy.17

Ultimately this super-abundance of Science makes prediction possible. It is a control system giving accountants the capacity to shun even the uncertainties of time.

Because the Drake Selection System is scientifically proven, we can apply well-known formulas to calculating the dollar costs of continuing to hire the way you do now. We can also project how these costs would be affected by using the DSS. In some instances, because the DSS is so efficient, hiring costs will go down, even after paying the DSS fees.18

It would be comforting perhaps simply to poke fun at the naivety of this "men in the white coats know best" advertising motif; ignore it as a petty case of business deluding business. Unfortunately, however, the ideological implications run deeper than this. Clients are told, for example, that a signal advantage of using DSS (a program clearly intended to apply to permanent recruitment as well as temps) is the way in which it provides a tool for fending off litigation.

Candidates are less likely to start legal action when rejected and less likely to press action once the hiring process has been reviewed for them.19

The objectivity of it all is argued to mitigate the expensive possibilities of criticism: Science-fiction persuades. In the language of Habermas's critique of


18 Ibid. page 13.

19 Ibid. page 13.
modern socio-pathologies, this represents the repression of communicative action by a colonising system of purposive rationality.

It does not have the opaque force of a delusion that only transfigures the implementation of interests. On the other hand today's dominant, rather glassy background ideology, which makes a fetish of science, is more irresistible and farther-reaching than ideologies of the old type. For with the veiling of practical problems it not only justifies a particular class's interest in domination and represses another class's partial need for emancipation, but affects the human race's emancipatory interest as such.²⁰

Habermas's wider investigation of instrumental rationality as ideology is clearly pertinent to this chapter's concerns. As Burawoy shows, it services a helpful way of re-conceiving of systems like Taylorism in a way that - unlike Braverman's account - both does not (mis-)take them as unmediated functionality, and, equally, does not occlude their effectivity as ideology.²¹ An apparatus like the DSS, then, must be seen as materially effective not only because temps mediate the rigours of its "Behavior Description technology," but also because of the wider influences on temp-client-agency relations of the ideology of Science. However, Habermas's categorical split of "system" from colonised "lifeworld"²² also operates as an abrupt limit to this critique; a limit which forecloses the very questions about gender and rationality that seem so significant.

The problem relates to how, as a number of critics have suggested, Habermas turns the protocols of actions-theoretic and systems-theoretic

²⁰ In Jürgen Habermas, Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science and Politics (London: Heineman, 1971) trans Jeremy Shapiro, at page 111.

²¹ He notes: "In failing to distinguish clearly between Taylorism as practice and Taylorism as ideology, Braverman is merely giving expression to appearances." In Burawoy, 1985, op.cit. p. 44.

²² The original German essay translated as "Technology and Science as Ideology," was written in 1968. At that stage Habermas had not yet developed - from Luhmann and Schultz respectively - the terminologies of system and lifeworld. Nonetheless, the distinction is still drawn with diagrammatic force. See Habermas, 1971, op.cit. p. 93.
methodologies into substantive claims about a system-lifeworld distinction. Reifying, or, at least, positivising this distinction, his account, amongst other effects, tends to insulate the "sub-system" of the economy from criticism. More specifically, it glosses how aspects of economic (or politico-bureacratic) processes are only secured through communicative as well as strategic action. This is a problem for my account, because while I have argued that representations like those of gender are key to the ongoing reproduction of temping's economics, Habermas's account denies such "value-commitment" effects any significant role as "interchange media." More generally as Nancy Fraser has made clear, Habermas's
categorical divide between system and lifeworld institutions faithfully mirrors the institutional separation in male-dominated, capitalist societies of family and official economy, household and paid work-place. [... As a result,] it does not make visible the fact that in the paid work-place, as in the household, women are assigned to, indeed ghettoized in, distinctively feminine, service oriented, and often sexualised occupations.

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24 As Thomas McCarthy argues: "If organizations are systems, they are, unlike organisms, systems with porous and shifting boundaries; and if they are constituted by positive law, the legal regulations in question are not merely ideal presuppositions but elements - very important elements, to be sure - in the representations and interpretations that members deploy, at times with strategic intent, at times in the search for consensus." In "Complexity and Democracy, or The Seducements of Systems Theory," *New German Critique*, v. 35 (1985) pp. 27-53, at page 34.

25 See Hugh Baxter, "System and life-world in Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action," *Theory and Society* v. 16 (1987) pp. 39-86. He notes: "[B]ecause Habermas denies that value-commitment is an interchange medium, and because system/lifeworld relations are in his scheme to be analysed as "media-regulated," he cannot explain in this way how values become part of normal political processes." (p. 69)

As Benjamin has noted, this feminist critique can be extended still further. Displacing both the methodological and substantive problems of repressive rationalism to the lifeworld (where they are only ever formalised), Habermas leaves the links between sexuality and instrumental reason in the "system" without criticism. In doing so he

loses interest in the psychological question of what makes rationality instrumental and an agency of domination.27

In this respect, perhaps, it is the less rigorous utopianism of Marcuse - which Habermas had set out to critique - that is finally more valuable. Certainly Marcuse's account of repressive desublimation foregrounds how questions of sexuality are linked with domination by instrumental reason. This, furthermore, leads him, or, at least, allows him to make some useful comments about the mobilisation of sexual discourse in the modern office.

Without ceasing to be an instrument of labor, the body is allowed to exhibit its sexual features in the everyday work world and in work relations. This is one of the unique achievements of industrial society - rendered possible by the reduction of dirty and physical labor; by the availability of cheap, attractive clothing, beauty culture and physical hygiene; by the requirements of the advertising industry, etc. The sexy office and sales girls, the handsome, virile junior executive and floor walker are highly marketable commodities, and the possession of suitable mistresses - once the perogative of kings, princes and lords - facilitates the career of even the less exalted ranks in the business community.28

By examining one more example of agency advertising, I want to indicate how these "highly marketable commodities" are actually marketed using the vocabulary of pristine science.

27 See Benjamin, 1988, op.cit. pages 191 and 288.

28 Marcuse, 1964, op.cit. p. 74. Unfortunately Marcuse seems to imply that "dirty and heavy physical labor" was not similarly sexualised. This implication seems bound up with a set of assumptions about how it is the introduction of women that marks the introduction of sexuality. These assumptions both carry deeply oppressive connotations as well as, at the same time, foreclosing reflection on the historical effects and constitution of masculine sexuality.
In the presentation of the Olsten Precise System (see Figure Five overleaf) the implication for clients is hi-tech, state-of-the-art assured performance: "You're not hiring a temporary. You're hiring a temporary service." Of course, viewers of the ad know that this is not quite the whole package. You also get the woman who smiles, who wears a skirt and has high-heeled shoes. But the ad says nothing about this in words, and simply reiterates that a "he or she" temp selected through Precise System science represents instantly accessible labour. Moreover, because the temp arrives through the medium of computer testing, or - as in the image - with a computer itself, she is no threat, that is why, perhaps, the viewer gets "a lot more than meets the eye."

It seems to me that there is an economy of vision operating here which can be read in the terms of feminist psychoanalytical critiques of fetishism.\(^\text{29}\) The discourse of woman as lacking, of, for example, not having a "man's skills," has to be rehabilitated by a perfect image - a woman given the technological supplement that glosses her difference - so that the man who consumes as he looks and buys is secured from any apprehension of lack.\(^\text{30}\) Taken as a whole the ad seems to highlight in a particularly explicit way, the tendencies of glamour photography delineated by Annette Kuhn. It promotes


\(^{30}\) For a similar 'fetish-structure' reading of images of secretaries and technology, see Pringle, 1988, *op.cit.* p. 175.
Presenting the Olsten Precise System. And what's in it for you.

With an Olsten temporary, you're getting a lot more than meets the eye.

A technological breakthrough.
The Olsten Precise™ System is unsurpassed in office automation. It's your assurance that when your Olsten temporary arrives at your office, he or she has been evaluated, qualified, and precisely matched to your specific needs.

Computer-based evaluations.
Precise is an innovative PC-based system that performs hands-on skill evaluations on the leading word processing and spreadsheet software—with unparalleled precision. It enables us to pin-point each Olsten temporary's exact skill level on the actual software used in your office.

Highly-skilled temporaries.
There's even more to it. Using information from our exclusive Olsten Profiler®, Precise is able to automatically match the right Olsten temporary to the job at hand. The result is that you'll always receive a temporary with the exact skills necessary to get the job done.

Find out just how much is in it for you. For a demonstration on how the Precise™ System can help with your temporary needs, check the white pages for the Olsten office nearest you.

Figure Five: Uncanny Science
the ideal woman as being put together, composed of surfaces and defined by appearance. [Like] the glamour tradition in all its manifestations, [it] may be seen to occupy a place dangerously close to another tradition of representation of women, from myth to fairytale to high art to pornography, in which they are stripped of all will and autonomy. Woman is dehumanised by being represented as a kind of automaton, a 'living doll.'

Certainly there are a multiplicity of other readings, I do not want to pretend to have described the underlying truth or even a sense of coherent unity. Rather what seems so interesting about the ad is the fragmentation itself, the way in which the themes of science and femininity are shown at once as intimately entwined yet wholly disassociated.

For temps themselves the testing and selection procedures are often a lot more mundane than the advertising pretends. This is not to deny how they often involve anxiety or abuse, but it is to underscore how contra the ethereal science-fiction imagery, the actual organisation of selection practices is a rather messy, convoluted and contingent affair. Computers go down, typing ribbons run out, papers are lost, and the people who are administering the test want to go home early. Also, as a number of temps and two client representatives told me, it seems that agencies are very slack about checking references and C.V.s. Not averse to hyperbole themselves, they seem unconcerned that temps may be economic with the truth in exactly the same way. However, despite this form of pervasive muddle, a large number of temps when summarising agency discipline still referred to the testing as "rather clinical," "a bit like a medical," "tense like school exams," and "alienating." One woman described at length what others only mentioned in passing.

I've just gone round most of the different agencies and filled in their application forms and done their little tests [laughing] which is sort of insulting...

In what sorts of ways is it insulting? How do they give you the results?

Some companies are really good, well I'm not going to mention names, but others, they say: "oh you could have done better than that." But when you go to lots of agencies and do lots of tests, you constantly feel like you're going to school all the time, writing tests to please the teacher. I don't do well in tests because I don't like doing tests, I get nervous. But if you put me in an office situation and say, "do the job," I'm fine and can do it. But I have to play the game because I want the job, so it's what I do.

By calling the testing exercises an insulting "game," one which did not reflect real "do the job" ability, this temp was able to fashion a distance between the rubric of the disciplinary process and her own decisions. Clearly, she still did the tests, and they still influenced where she was sent and what she would be paid, but the discipline was by no means unmediated, and certainly a long way from being a flawless system of perfected control. However, what I think is most critical to note about this form of testing/ self-justification relation is the profound individualism of the mediation itself.\(^{32}\)

The disciplinary apparatus - the computer tests, the interviews, the C.V.s and the training - deals systematically with everyone, indeed, every-body as

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\(^{32}\) This is also what makes the resistance Fairbairns imagines in *Here Today* both so different and so improbable. She pictures a temp agency where Catherine, the politically committed ex-school teacher, turns about the very testing process itself as a vehicle for mobilising temps.

'I always listen to the tape straight through first.' 'That's sensible. I won't start timing till I hear you begin to type.' She left Antonia alone to load up the typewriter with paper and turn on the dictaphone. The ear-pieces were cold and damp in her ears. There was a buzz and a crackle and Catherine's voice started, deafeningly loud. Antonia turned down the volume and listened. 'Capital D, capital S. Dear Sister, comma, new paragraph. Capital H. Have you ever considered that, comma, as a temp, comma, you are one of the most exploited members of the work-hyphen-force, question mark? New paragraph. Capital S. Shunted from job to job, comma, lacking security, comma, and not even well paid when you are working - 'Antonia took out the ear-pieces, went towards the doorway and stared across the office at Catherine who was talking to one of the other girls. Catherine saw her and shot her the subtlest of warning winks.

"individuals." The temps, in turn, deal with the process, and are invited to cathect the digital assessments with meaning, as "individuals." Disagreements and arguments are conducted in sound-insulated offices with the parties sitting always one-to-one in comfortable chairs. This, then, is the sort of process by which the actual category of "the individual" becomes filled-out, reproduced and invested with significance. It is a process in which the temp's constitutive relations with other people and non-work contexts become ritually occluded. The C.V., the "turning of real lives into writing,"\textsuperscript{33} is, as Anne Rand interjected, "the way I am for the agencies" (my emphasis). The individual temp emerges as what Foucault called a 'case.'

The examination as the fixing, at once ritual and 'scientific', of individual differences, as the pinning down of each individual in his own particularity (in contrast with the ceremony in which status, birth, privilege, function are manifested with all the spectacle of their marks) clearly indicates the appearance of a new modality of power in which each individual receives as his status his own individuality, and in which he is linked by his status to the features, the measurements, the gaps, the 'marks' that characterize him and make him a 'case'.\textsuperscript{34}

Yet, not only are the practices of testing and consequent individualisation a sign of temping's modernity, they are also, and more practically, another facet of the processes by which the formation of solidarity between temps is disrupted. Furthermore, as I will argue in the next section, there is also a miserable irony in this individualisation of temps. Even as they are coded and valued as useful individuals by agency discipline, they are simultaneously disenfranchised from employee rights predicated in labour law on the model of the individual man. That is to say, there is a dissonance between the way women who temp experience

\textsuperscript{33} Foucault, 1977, \textit{op. cit.} p. 192.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.} p. 192.
individualisation, and the way in which the model of the individual in other social discourses is marked (and betrayed in Foucault’s language) as male.

Recontractualisation: 'employees' and labour law

What employers are looking for through deregulation is greater individualism in the employment relationship: they try to counteract the egalitarian effects of labour law on employment, although labour law itself has been shown to be a source of differentiation between workers and thus ambiguous in its nature. It is not so much that employers reject collective bargaining but they want to fragment it, to choose when and where to bargain.

Sabine Erbes-Seguin

In temping this tendency towards the fragmentation of bargaining is taken to its most extreme. It is reduced simply to the decision the temp makes as to whether to accept an assignment on the terms offered. Basically temping represents the individualisation of collective bargaining; a process which returns the labour relation to one in which the worker only ever negotiates as an individual with a person specific contract. This return to employment relations mediated solely by individualised contracts is what Ulrich Mückenberger has

35 I would especially like to thank Judy Fudge for her help with regard to this section.

36 Sabine Erbes-Seguin, "Flexibility and the Relationship Between The Individual Contract and Collective Labour Law," *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* v. 17 (1989) pp. 307-326, at page 324. The empirical research of this paper was focused on the U.K. and France, but it seems clear that the account of flexibility and the return of individualism in employment contracts is of wider pertinence.
called "recontractualisation." However, unlike most attempts supervised by right-wing governments to "roll back the state," temping has not involved a deployment of state control or special legislation. It rather represents an example of "passive deregulation." As I showed in Chapter Two, it has evolved far less as a clear political attempt to dodge legislated and collectively agreed relations with employees, but rather as the market systematised result of contingent and local decisions to procure the financial benefits of flexible labour. As I also argued in that chapter, temping facilitates these economic effects because of the way it institutionalises the separation of the buying from the using of labour-power. There, my point was that this carries the serious and practical implication for temps themselves of foreclosing a crucial space of political organisation and struggle. Here, I want to extend that argument by exploring how the fragmentation of the employment relation deleteriously effects temps' rights under labour legislation.

Geoffrey England begins his summary of the legal position (in Canada) of workers like temps with the simple claim:

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37 Ulrich Mückenberger, "Non-Standard Forms of Work and the Role of Changes in Labour and Social Security Regulation," *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* v. 17 (1989) pp. 381-402. He describes it as a renaissance of the type of employment relation found in early liberal capitalism; a contractual agreement, "comprehensively regulated by two very simple general principles which facilitated an almost unlimited entrepreneurial predominance: the freedom to conclude contracts of employment and managerial perogative, the right of employers to direct labour." (p. 384)


39 For a comprehensive summary of the legal positions of temporary work in other countries see W. Albeda et al., *Temporary Work in Modern Society: A comparative study of the International Institute for Temporary Work, on request of the Fondation Internationale pour la Promotion de l'Etude du Travail Temporaire* (Zurich: 1978). Apart from anything else, this weighty compendium is an ample index of the significance these legal questions have for employers.
atypical workers [...] are afforded inferior treatment under Canadian labour law than their "traditional" employee counterparts.\(^{40}\)

In the subsequent chapter relating explicitly to triangular employment relations like those of temping, he outlines how the "inferior" status of the workers involved, relates to three critical legal questions. First, whether the legal status of the agency supplied worker is *sui generis* one which precludes her or him from being an "employee" of either the agency or the user; second, as to who is the employer for the purposes of labour relations - the user or the agency; and third, about the potential abuse of workers because of agencies' "superior knowledge of the labour market."\(^{41}\)

I do not especially want to dwell on this third question, although I believe it is important. There is certainly considerable potential for abuse, particularly insofar as agencies seem to often have a monopoly on the "gates" into certain types of clerical position. Even if, like Pat Dupont, a worker wants a permanent job, an agency may well block access, constantly deferring the candidate to unsatisfactory temporary assignments. However, my interviews with counsellors indicated that ultimately it is "not good business" for them to impose rigidities of this sort. Moreover, insofar as agencies operate as labour market intermediaries as well as private businesses, they also provide a limited form of "information" pooling that reduces the costs of more independent job search strategies.\(^{42}\)

\(^{40}\) Geoffrey England, *Part-time, Casual and Other Atypical Workers: A Legal View* (Kingston, Ontario: Industrial Relations Centre, Queens University, 1987). The quotation is from page 2.

\(^{41}\) Ibid. p. 24.

\(^{42}\) Mangum *et al*, 1985, *op.cit* note this in a conclusion (p. 611) which seems, on the other hand, rather blind even to the problems of abuse indicated by England. On the subject of information, Fric notes that an Ontario Bureau of Labor Annual Report of 1901 named ordinary employment agencies "Intelligence Offices." In Fric, 1974, *op.cit* p. 5.
More complicated and more critical are England's first two questions. Citing Patricia Leighton's work on the legal position of temps in the U.K., he describes how temping disrupts the ordinary application of "employee," "employer" labels. Clearly this is the crux of the legal debate around forms of work like temping, and Leighton provides some useful case examples where temps have found their pleas under labour law ruled out of jurisdiction because they are not considered the pleas of "employees." However, it seems to me that by drawing on this U.K. material, England draws a misleadingly simple picture of the situation in Canada. He suggests, for example, that "the agency should be called the 'employer' so that it takes up responsibility," but the point is that in Canada it is called the "employer" and the questions of responsibility are still vexed. To begin to understand why this is, it is necessary to consider the assumptions that are built into the definitional field of "employees."

As Riki Holtmaat has argued, feminist critique usefully indicates how the category of "employee" is based upon particular gendered definitions of the "normal" labour relation. Quite generally this category is predicated on the ideal of the single male bread-winner who has a continuous job, at a single company, for a long period of time. With regard more specifically to Canada, Judy Fudge

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43 See Patricia Leighton, "Marginal Workers," Roy Lewis (ed.) Labour Law in Britain (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) pp. 503-525. One of her most critical insights is that once legal attention is directed at the worker-client relation it becomes "difficult to argue that many workers have the attributes of independence, risk, chance of profit and flexibility which characterise self-employment." (p. 514)

44 That is not to say that he neglects Canadian examples, it is simply that he does not mark the geographical/institutional differences.


46 Holtmaat, 1989, op.cit. p. 481. Her empirical argument is based on the case of the Netherlands.
has indicated the profound implications of this type of assumption. Because, she notes, much of the general working population is employed in ways which defer from the bread-winner model - as casuals, as part-timers, as temps, as nannies and so forth - only half of all workers are protected by labour law and only one third of women workers.\textsuperscript{47} For temps particularly, it seems clear that the always limited length of their contracts implies exclusion from statutory benefits like paid maternity leave which hinge on "minimum duration of service" clauses.\textsuperscript{48} Even if agencies are the "employers of record," such duration stipulations will automatically exclude the temp. Thus the question of the agency as "employer," seems to only become critical in relation to employment standards legislation that concerns employer obligations which are unattached to the specification of duration.

The B.C. Employment Standards Act interpretation section applies the following definitions:

"employee" includes
a) a person, including a deceased person, in receipt of or entitled to wages for labour or services performed for another,
b) a person an employer allows directly or indirectly, to perform work or service normally performed by an employee, and
c) a person being trained by an employer for the purpose of the employer's business.

"employer" includes a person who
a) has control or direction of, or


\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.} pp. 19-20.
b) is responsible, directly or indirectly, for the employment of an employee, and includes a person who was an employer.\(^49\)

A theoretical debate might, I think, be pursued at length in an attempt to clarify England's questions and claims in the light of these definitions. Clearly they are quite inclusive, although the distinction between clause "a" and clauses "b" and "c" of the employee interpretation, again makes explicit the split that is institutionalised by temping. What I rather want to highlight here is that these legal particularities rarely become instrumentalised, and that perhaps more interesting are the reasons why they are not called upon, why, indeed, there are no cases of pleas by temps against, for example, wrongful dismissal. As a Federation representative reminded me on the phone, temps are unlikely to even begin to make a plea of wrongful dismissal in which the question of the agency as employer might become critical. They are always being moved from one job to the next, that is the nature of their employment. They would never be "dismissed," just simply told the job had reached completion. In this sense, the question of the temps as displaced employees is relevant. The fact that they depart from the bread winner model does have an effect. But most commonly it seems to be "sui generis" a pre-legal question.

The other key legal terrain in which the responsibility of the agency and the question of the temp as employee becomes of concern is that of health and safety at work. Mayall and Nelson cite cases in the U.S. where temporary workers have been used in chemical firms for hazardous assignments that permanent staff

\(^{49}\) *B.C. Employment Standards Act* Part 1, paragraph 39,281. Part 10 of this act has stipulations on the registration of employment agencies and also defines the right of the ministerial director to suspend this registration (paragraph 39,355). However, agencies are defined here as intermediaries - "a person who for a fee recruits or offers to recruit employees for employers" (paragraph 39,351) - and not as employers. This might provide for a loophole in the legislation for temp agencies.
refuse to perform; a practice that "has resulted in a number of fatalities in recent years." They note that after one incident in 1979, in a reactor vessel at a Bay Area plant, two workers died, a hundred were injured, and none of them were on the payroll of the firm. Nevertheless, when the director of Industrial Relations in California issued a directive concerning the event, it was the chemicals firm itself and not the "general employer" (the labour contractor) that was held liable. Clearly, I have not researched the use of temps in such areas of employment. However, in the two cases of injury at work that I have discovered, it seems that the temp agencies were fully prepared to endorse claims to the Workers' Compensation Board. Also in each case, the client firms were freed from any expense, responsibility or complication. One woman who had developed tendinitis from a typing/envelope-stacking job, told me that "Kelly were quite supportive at the time, though of course now, the way I am, they can't find me work any more."

I want to conclude this section with two further points. Firstly, it must not be forgotten that as workers on the job, temps have rights under other legislation which does not involve a problematic designation within the field of employer-employee relations. Agencies have to abide by the provincial obligation to pay temps a 4% mark-up on the top of wages in lieu of vacations. They also have to pay temps on national holidays, although, as one ex-counsellor told me, there is often a degree of juggling undertaken to ensure that assignments terminate or commence on either side of such days. Equally, temps - as citizens of Canada - can appeal to human rights legislation.

Secondly, following the example of Holtmaat's piece, I want to briefly note the possibilities and difficulties of labour law reform. She comments:

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The basis for the reform of both labour law (in the broad sense) and the organisational structure of labour to meet the requirements of flexible labour [...] must lie in the balanced consideration of the problems arising from a combination of paid labour and work related to caring for others.\textsuperscript{51}

This therefore is a different agenda from simply extending to workers like temps equal rights with permanent employees. Any reform would have to proceed from the fact that many women use a work strategy like temping as a means to attaining much needed flexibility. (It would also, in my view, have to problematise the social context of those needs.) A provision of paid maternity leave, for example, would have to come without the assumption that recipients will return ultimately to full time, permanent employment. Of course, in the context of capitalism, even such minor schemes for reform immediately sound utopian. The question of how the costs should be imposed on business, for example, directly raises the spectre of capital movement. Moreover, the institutionalisation of rights like the availability of flexible maternity leave, might also risk reifying present social practices - such as female mothering - unless specified in a particularly open way. Without pretending to any simple solutions of these problems, I want now to turn to the question of union organisation and temping.

\textit{Unions, temping and the politics of privatisation}\textsuperscript{52}

From the most common union perspective temps enter the work-world as a potential threat to hard-won agreements. However, union representatives seem equally well aware that it is the implementation of temping as a source of flexible

\textsuperscript{51} Holtmaat, 1989, \textit{op. cit.} p. 487.

\textsuperscript{52} I would like to thank Janet Patterson and other people at the BCGEU for their help with this section.
labour, and not the temps themselves, that present the problem. The BCGEU (British Columbia Government Employees Union) recently published a special issue of its pamphlet for stewards which carefully underscored how union members should remain alert to the situation of temps themselves.

Have you noticed more and more temps in your office? Or perhaps they have been there for years. Underpaid, insecure work, exploiting the work of women. However, you look at it, the increasing use of staff from employment agencies such as Kelly Services, Office Overload, or Bingham Personnel is taking away bargaining unit work and creating working conditions which are bad for temps and bad for union members.53

Most generally it seems that temps are predominantly used in non-unionised parts of the economy: in insurance, banking, advertising, financial and business services. However, in places where agency supplied temps do work alongside unionised staff, the difficulties for the union are clear. Temps are extremely hard to organise. With their own heterogeneous agendas, and as a virtually faceless supply of "labour" constantly turning over, they become political agents who embody the individualism of the market. Because their contracts are always negotiated privately and independently, the sociality of their labour - its social connections, implications and value - rarely becomes of issue. A union is therefore hard-pressed to suggest to temps that its struggles are also their struggles. Nevertheless, as unions well know, the situation of temps does bear significantly on the situation of the union.

As individual bargainers, temps - in the milieu of a specific set of circumstances - choose to work at rates and in conditions that may well undermine those agreed between a union and an employer. In this context, unions have tried two chief sorts of resistance strategy. On the one hand, they have

simply attempted to block the introduction of temps on the grounds that such labour is inefficient, that it threatens the security, safety and the quality of service offered by the office in question. On the other hand, they have tried to secure more rights for temps during their own bargaining with business. Dale and Bamford, for example, note how in the UK, the Transport and General Workers Union launched a campaign struggle with the message: "Temporary workers need permanent rights and part-time workers need full-time rights." In Canada, however, England indicates that this more inclusive strategy for resistance has - if implemented at all - achieved very little. Summarising, he writes:

> collective bargaining has failed to build significantly on the statutory 'floor of rights' in the case of atypical workers.\(^{55}\)

England does note a case in Ontario in which the Labour Relations Board sided with the union's claim that temp workers used by K-Mart Canada Ltd. were within the coverage of the collective agreement. However, to win this case the union had to argue that the temps were specifically "employees" of K-Mart. The seven criteria used by the Board to adjudicate this point would seem to indicate that in most cases of temping, a union could not make a similar plea for the incorporation of temps into the field of rights secured under a collective agreement. The seven considerations used by the Board and its decision on each, are listed below.

1) who exercises effective direction and control over the employees? - K-Mart
2) who bears the burden of remuneration? - The Agency
3) who has authority to hire? - K-Mart
4) who has the authority to discipline? - K-Mart
5) who has the authority to fire? - K-Mart
6) who do the employees perceive as employer? - K-Mart

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\(^{54}\) Dale and Bamford, 1988, *op. cit.* p. 192.

\(^{55}\) England, *op. cit.* p. 3.
7) is it the agency or company who intends to create a *bona fide* employment relationship with the workers? - K-Mart

Over and above these criteria, the Board was also persuaded that K-Mart - having increased its temp usage by 600% since the start of union organisation in the store - was deliberately employing temps as an anti-union strategy. Yet while such strategies seem common enough, unions more generally are not likely to find it so easy to argue that the local employer is the temps' employer too. Most temps I interviewed not only were tied more closely to the agency, they also tended to see that agency as their employer. In this respect, the K-Mart case seems somewhat exceptional.

In B.C., the union which more than most has had to deal with the question of temping has been the BCGEU. As a public sector union, it has been witness to a general program of privatisation and contracting-out instigated by the right-wing Social Credit government. The use of temps - insofar as it is part of this program - has taken on a particularly overt political edge, and has been felt by the union as a direct attempt to erode the size of its bargaining unit and degrade the value of its agreement. This is not to say that every use of temps by provincial government ministries is immediately inspired by the grand project to privatise. Yet, while much of the use is unplanned and piecemeal, the government has gone out of its way to organise blank "standing orders" with chosen agencies in order to make using temps an easy option for ministry managers. It has done this, moreover, at a time when it has simultaneously frozen the ordinary

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employment budget. Even these arrangements might be legitimated as simple accounting decisions were it not for the fact that a key section of the Public Service Labour Relations Act provides a good index of how more immediately political determinations are at work.

According to the act, the designation "employee" does not include "a person employed for a period of less than 60 days." As "non-employees," such "less than 60 day" workers are excluded from coverage under the union agreement. It is in this context that there has been a sudden proliferation of what the union euphemistically calls "59 day wonders." In various ministries, temps are being hired for precisely 59 days whereupon the job they do suddenly seems to cease. The point, of course, is that these workers are being used to do far more than simple, *ad hoc* vacation and overload fill-in work. They are being employed for routine jobs too, jobs that they could do as government employees with a considerable degree more security and protection. Instead, they are employed as 59-day temps while simultaneously the union loses bargaining unit work.

In response, the BCGEU has developed three chief strategies of resistance. Firstly, it has asked stewards to encourage temps to apply as auxiliaries, that is, as part-time, government employees.

The government says that it can't get people to apply for jobs as auxiliaries so they "have" to use temps. If temps are in your workplace, sit down and explain the pay and benefits of working as a government employee.

Of course, if temps apply as an auxiliary and are refused after doing the same work as a temp, the union would be pleased to grieve on their behalf. Such a case would prove the employer is really just using employment agencies to avoid the Collective Agreement.

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This project has met with a degree of success, and I was able to speak to a number of auxiliaries who had previously been temps. However, not all temps see such a switch as a viable option, and the union is meanwhile pursuing a second tactic of resistance to temp labour on the grounds that it presents a threat to confidentiality, and safety. This approach represents a straightforward criticism of temporary agency supplied labour as untrained and unsecured. As non-union staff, for example, temps do not take an oath of confidentiality. The union is therefore able to argue - in the language of the administration - that temps should not be allowed to work in areas where security clearance is required.

The third chief strategy hinges on the strength of union’s agreement which includes a section - the Memorandum of Understanding #8 - that details contractual limitations on the employer. Apart from laying out the precise periods after which temp workers have to become employees, the memorandum also specifies the duty of the government to report the name of the temp, the agency and the length of the appointment on a quarterly basis. This rubric means that it is possible for the agency to monitor violations of the under 60 days rule, and then take up such violations as grievances with the government.

In the context of discussing these strategies the union is very careful to remind stewards that

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60 After 59 calendar days of a limited term appointment (excluding any non-working periods of eight or more days) the temp must be re-employed as an employee of the government. In practice such a redesignation is a quite complicated affair. It is also costly for the government because of a feature of standard agreements with agencies called a "liquidated damages clause." Such a clause details how the client has to pay the agency a release fee for the temp, unless a period of something like 90 days elapses before she or he is re-employed as an employee proper. See Mayall and Nelson, 1982, op.cit. p. 9. Many counsellors told me that they often waive their right to collect this fee in order to maintain good business relations with the client. I was, of course, unable to discover whether the government of B.C. is able to enjoy this sort of benefit.
the people who are forced to work for these employment agencies are not the problem - the agencies themselves and the government which promotes their exploitation are the problem. 61

Yet even as they mark this situation, and even as they attempt to mobilise resistance against the use of temps, union officials told me how they felt torn. As one woman said:

Well we're across a barrel, because we know that the agencies have latched hold of a real need by people, especially women, for flexibility. Ideally, as a union we must try to extend the rights we have to those workers, but that's very difficult.

Indeed, it seems to me that the union's position dramatises all too vividly the strategic value to business of temping as - what I called in Chapter Two - a limited post-fordist employment relation; a relation in which agreements and protections won for designated "employees" are blurred, dodged and effectively nullified. In this context, the attempts at resistance by the union are not only eluded, but run the risk of appearing backward. As the woman I quoted above knew very well, the union along with its master agreements can be made to look as if it is the conservative, even masculinist, retrenching agent. At the same time, the government and the agencies can boast temping as a practice affording valuable flexibility for women. Another official at the BCGEU head-office described the situation with poignant brevity:

Well we're like the old core, right, and what you're seeing is the peripheralisation of the core, and the core-isation of the periphery. It's a whole new rationale, and we're being pushed out.

A CONCLUSION

The title of this thesis announces its project as one of "critical" interpretation. In this conclusion I want to retrace some of my steps and simply ask the question: is it? Does it clarify the political struggles and concerns of temps today? Does it open up and welcome the possibility of re-writing by readers? Most urgently, does it suggest spaces for new stories, new hopes, better lives that remain buried but vital in the reproduction of oppressive convention? I do not want to give conclusive answers, only attend to the conclusions my text - like any other - already claims.

Central to the whole thesis has been the ongoing examination of how temping represents diverse social discourses embodied in the lives of temps. I have suggested that temping as an institutional organisation splits up the dynamics of social representation - the agencies representing business to temps and temps to business - and therefore makes the reproduction of norms and hegemonic relations that much more tangible. It serves as a moment of articulation in both senses of the word: a site where modern, capitalistic and patriarchal representations are operationalised, and a site where that operation has to become thematic, written down, spoken about, felt. It has the structure of a sign. I have focused in particular on the representations identified as material and political by feminist and marxist interpretation, because these are what help me make temping intelligible. However, by turning temping into an "event," I tried to avoid generalisation, and searched instead for how general processes "shape up" in the eccentricity of day-to-day conjunctures.
Putting it this way, I hope my relative silence on critical questions like those posed by racism can be seen less as exclusion, and more as unfinished business. With a couple of theoretical gestures and with one example, I did note that racism was at work in the organisation of the temp labour market. I also indicated with that one example - "He want's a girl - a white girl" - that it was complicitous with a system of patriarchal exchange. But this is not the rigorous attention to the structuring of temping by raced backgrounds, racism on the job and racist assumptions about "skills," that a critical theory demands. The fact that all of my informants except one chinese woman were white is not an indication that racism is irrelevant. Silence, as Adrienne Rich has said, can be a plan, rigorously executed, the blueprint to a life. I want to underscore my summary claims from each of the chapters while remaining alert to this silence that is not an absence.

In Chapter Two my key argument was that temping separates the buying from the using of labour power. By reading business documents and transaction costs analysis backwards, I showed how their cohesion and effectivity rest upon this political organisation of labour that makes temps non-employees at the site of work. Rather than simply criticise the way in which temping affixes a price tag to people, and rather than turning class into a sociologicistic name for status, I argued that this institutionalised separation of production from circulation activities occludes a space of political action. I also indicated how the possibility of solidarity formation is further vitiated by the market individualism incorporated in agency procedure.

It seems to me that these are highly critical questions. However, they do not propose an immediate path of resolution, nor naively point to "bad" jobs.
Certainly, they document the *dynamics* of exploitation and the implications of a tenuous extraction and distribution of surplus value. They underline how temping is capitalist *work*, not "help" as the industry names its function with plush forgetfulness. But by pointing to the systemic way in which peoples’ labour power is engaged in the reproduction of profit, I suggest no grandiose recipe of sudden change, only that the possibility of change exists. Moreover, by insisting that systemic reproduction engages and actively courts worker’s active participation, I have sought to underscore how the flexibility they find in temping must also be comprehended as a moment of opportunity.

To understand the utility and attraction of flexibility I argued that it was vital to take account of the gendered contexts out of which temps come to temping. In Chapter Three I underlined the space in which the "needs" for the industry of "free choice" are thus themselves actively reproduced and that this should halt any pre-emptive eulogy to "flexibility" as a simple boon. Equally, I indicated how gender was *in process* in the work-place and how it articulates with the organisation of labour to secure the maintenance of businesses that are at once ordered by capitalism and masculine desire. As Anne McBain said: "If you’re looking for work you have to be a little bit flexible." Nevertheless, I want to emphasise here that in betraying these social dynamics, temping also points to how that demand for flexibility might be turned about. Surely there is a chance to have work that *is* flexible for workers; where home and paid employment can be organised together; which is legislated for by labour law that grants rights to marginalised "employees;" where intersubjective relations are not co-opted for cynical discipline; where union-won rights are the norm, not the exception that must be extended; and where workers can get a "kick out of working" that is not
a reflex to the authoritative law of the father? I certainly hope so. But I also know that in the context of contemporary capitalism such aspirations too easily court blindness to the exploitation and oppression of millions in less privileged countries; countries who we daily effect and to which we remain tied closely by light speed links. Temps fax photo-copied lists of world-debt too.

Finally I want to ask whether I ever accomplished putting the preface in the text, always re-marking on the links. In one sense, this was a project that was always inadequate to its own aims. However, I think my failings go further than this. One indication of the problems are my often supplementary footnotes. These could serve as a site for clarifying the theoretical and experiential background to particular claims in the main text. However, in a number of places their role seems to transmute into a piece of authorial artifice, a fabulation of rapport with academese itself. There are, I think, fine lines to be trodden here, but the danger I see when I re-read my own text is one of sacrificing the temps’ own commentaries to my own longing to establish authority. On the other hand, I do still want my interpretations to be taken seriously, this is how I want to represent temping. I am not saying any old perspective will do. But I am asking readers to re-contextualise, re-read and re-formulate my readings. I never said anything about what happened to Samantha. I hope now that readers see the search for her as vital, difficult, and open to criticism.
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