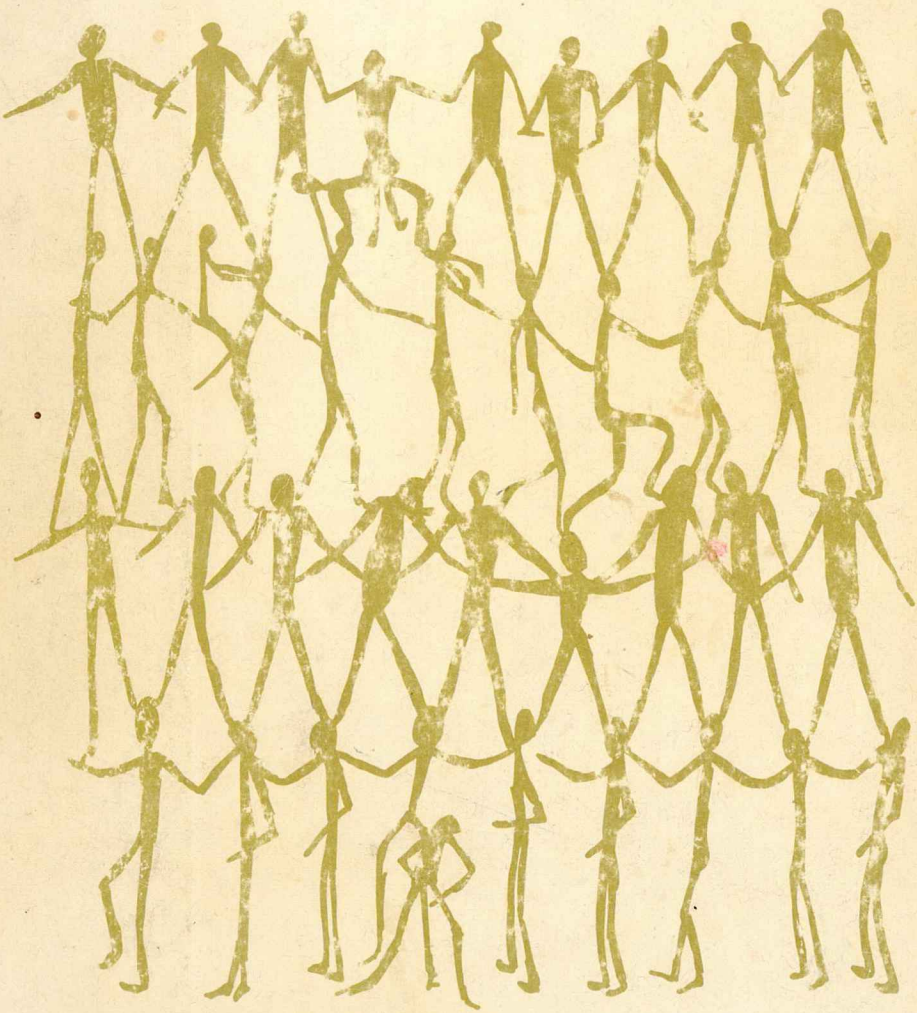
# NEW ZEALAND SOCIOLOGY



MAY 1991 VOLUME 6. NO.



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SOCIOLOGY

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CONTENTS

New Zealand SOCIOLOGY 6 (1) May 1991

# Editorial

With this issue, NEW ZEALAND SOCIOLOGY enters its sixth volume. Survival in the academic market place for five years in these times of financial constraints and market viability is a cause for celebration. It also marks a point of departure. Volumes 1 through 5 have been ably and diligently edited by Chris Wilkes and Richard Harker. They have established NEW ZEALAND SOCIOLOGY as an intellectual presence on the local sociological scene, and we are in their debt.

As the new editors, we intend to continue to produce a fully refereed journal which meets the interests of both sociology staff and students in academia, in addition to being of interest to sociologists working in the public sector. We welcome articles which clarify and develop theoretically informed research in sociology and related disciplines, with a predominant though not exclusive concern with New Zealand. We will also consider shorter pieces, such as work-in-progress statements, perhaps based on postgraduate student research, and are open to ideas for book reviews or review articles.

Essentially, then, we are asking for your continued support, both as subscribers and contributors, in maintaining and continuing the standard established in the first half decade of NEW ZEALAND SOCIOLOGY. We look forward to a tenth anniversary issue.

Paul Spoonley and Roy Shuker.

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# A Durkheimian Analysis of 'Escape Attempts'

*Glenys Barker*

The Durkheimian revival of the last decade has been marked by a distinct move away from past interpretations of Durkheim as the cornerstone of sociological conservatism towards accounts of him being more of a radical critic of the then developing industrial society than as a deterministic reactionary (Fenton, 1984:2). Durkheimian analysis has already been applied to collective actions and beliefs, (Tiryakian, 1981:122) and more recently to the discussion of individualism and utilitarianism, (Abercrombie et al, 1986; Městrovíc, 1985) but has not been readily linked to the idea of individual creativity. In order to put forward the proposition that Durkheimian analysis can accommodate individual creativity, I explore one of the roles claimed by the artist, the role that is routinely described in literary criticism as 'a general permission, given at other times to heroes, saints, martyrs, and in these times to artists, to lend exemplary subversive lives or to create exemplary subversive works' (Sayres, 1990:45). Just as Durkheim showed that suicide was socially grounded action (Tiryakian, 1981:117), I think it can be argued that the artist in modern society, although commonly touted as the autonomous individual par excellence, is similarly socially embedded. The concept of artist is a collective representation in a Durkheimian sense, a means by which society sustains many of its own ideals, (or morals) although this stance is rather ironic if we compare it to what Durkheim had to say about those who professed to stand apart from the rest of society in his own day. After discussing the links I see between Durkheim's theory and contemporary social thought, I attempt to illustrate these by looking at them briefly in relation to poetry, confessional writing, artistic silence and retreat, and end this exploratory essay with some thoughts of three contemporary New Zealand artists who reinforce the idea of the intrinsically social nature or so called escape attempts into liminal areas.

Městrovíc suggests that Durkheim may have regarded the problem of the meaning of life as **the question of sociology** (Městrovíc, 1985:56). Certainly, Durkheim addressed the structure of beliefs which he saw as reflecting the permanent duality and tension between society and the individual. Whereas Weber's prediction for humans was the increasing bureaucratisation of social life with progress achieved at the cost of '...a parcelling out of the human soul'

(Swingewood, 1984:192), Durkheim's complicated epistemology attempted to bridge the object (society) and the subject (individual) and allowed for irrational will in rational theory (Městrovíc, 1985:62). Městrovíc notes that although endless litanies of praise have been sung to Freud's memory for this move, sociologists have yet to acknowledge Durkheim in this regard (Městrovíc, 1985). Durkheim did not believe that scientific thought could rule alone, and thought there would always be room in social life for a form of truth which, although expressed in a secular way, would nevertheless have a mythological and religious basis. He predicted that for a long time to come '...there will be two tendencies in any society: a tendency towards objective scientific truth and a tendency towards subjectively perceived truth, towards mythological truth' (Durkheim, 1983:91). More optimistic is his acknowledgement of the evolving nature of beliefs and values, expressed when he was discussing the possibility of morality without God: '...morality is not always all it ought to be; it must change so as to fit in with the new conditions of social life, which are constantly changing. Yet when the forms it currently displays have been explained, one has still not said what forms it should assume in the future' (Schöfthäler, 1984:187).

Schöfthäler argues that Durkheim's theory of morality was built on two premises: that morality is a socially created reality, with a collective rather than an individual basis, and that morality can be judged independently (Schöfthäler, 1984:188). Durkheim saw the task of the social scientist as being that of uncovering the evolutionary aspects of societal and moral developments in order to apply them for a just society. However, whereas morality has not proved to be readily conducive to scientific analysis, it has remained the subject of discussion within the arts. I will take as a lead a modern derivation of Durkheimian sociology which has described the system of society as evolving from '...the noise human beings produce when trying to communicate' (Schöfthäler, 1984:192) and accepts that not all communication will follow the rational model of science. The artist, the writer, the philosopher can be seen as examples of those in modern society who have continued the discussion of the problem of the meaning of life (or a secular form of truth) and who have taken it upon themselves to undertake a discussion of morality, beliefs and values outside of the scientific mode. In this age of mass communication, they are very surely part of the 'noise' of human beings communicating, either by print, radio or television. I would like to argue in this essay that the contemporary myth of the romantic outsider as somebody who can be a member of society but

simultaneously take a stance against that society is a powerful one which, while lending credibility to the ideas of rebellion, escape and liberation, actually demonstrate Durkheim's notion of the embeddedness of the individual within the social, the impossibility of separating subject from object.

Firstly, in order to justify Durkheim's sociology as useful in describing irrational areas of life, it is necessary to dispose of a sociological myth, specifically a perception of Durkheim as a determinist who abandoned all notion of human freedom, agency and individualism (Městrovíc, 1985:11). Městrovíc argues that Durkheim actually defended individualism and described it as taking two forms, referring to it as both a collective representation (a social force that compels us to respect human rights and dignity) and as an individual phenomenon (egoism, will, something like Freud's narcissism) (Městrovíc, 1985:56). Durkheim's work relies heavily on Schopenhauer's philosophy of the individual 'will to life', with the difference between will and idea corresponding to the distinction between heart and mind (Městrovíc, 1985:57). For Durkheim, society is almost pure 'mind', but the danger is that the heart is stronger than the mind, and therefore the life of the individual was in a constant opposition between will and idea, heart versus mind. The will was composed of dreams, impulses, affection, passion, sentiments and all that is obscure, unconscious and emotional, whereas the collective representations of society and morality consisted of mental images. Durkheim's sociology was aimed at solving the problem Schopenhauer had posed, '...namely how can one embrace the individualism that will be the religion of the future without succumbing to egoism?' (Městrovíc, 1985:56). Because Durkheim was committed to the thesis that social morality (the collective representation) rather than the egoistic individual was essential to a modern and just society, he was apt to underplay individual achievement. For example, Městrovíc describes how Durkheim did not think geniuses were original in the sense that they discovered new facts. For Durkheim intellectual breakthroughs occur when collective representations have changed to the extent that these facts can be appreciated, and that geniuses 'discover' what everyone else already 'knows' rather imperfectly. 'Geniuses are merely more perfect instruments for refracting these facts back to society', (Městrovíc, 1985:92).

In fact, Durkheim was quite harsh towards those who attempted to criticise or withdraw from society in his time, and thought they actively contributed to an ongoing nihilism. 'The anarchist, the aesthete, the mystic, the socialist

revolutionary, even if they do not despair of the future, have in common with the pessimist a single sentiment of hatred and disgust for the existing order, a single craving to destroy and escape from reality. Collective melancholy could not have penetrated consciousness so far, if it had not undergone a morbid development' (Borg, 1988:11). This condition of anomic, collective melancholy was not helped by those who withdrew from the project of developing a moral society. In order to emphasise that truth is a social thing (Durkheim, 1983:97), he was apt to show impatience with those who emphasised the intuitive and subjective notion of the world, which he saw as undermining the collective responsibility of social life. He pointed out the irony in William James's action-orientated pragmatism, for example, when he claimed '...but how, then, can the same philosopher show us as an ideal the ascetic who renounces the world and turns away from it?' (Durkheim, 1983:66). Beliefs, he argued, are

> ...active only when they are partaken of by many. A man cannot retain them at any length of time by a purely personal effort; it is not true that they are born or that they are acquired; it is even doubtful if they can be kept under these conditions. In fact, a man who has a veritable faith feels an invincible need of spreading it. Therefore he leaves his isolation, approaches others and seeks to convince them, and it is the ardor of the convictions which he arouses that strengthens his own. It would quickly weaken if it remained alone (Durkheim, 1912:425).

The social nature of individually held beliefs could not be stated more clearly than this. Durkheim was quite prepared to acknowledge the arts (aesthetic elements, songs, and music in particular) in primitive societies where science and art, myth and poetry, morality, law and religion are all confused, or rather fused (Durkheim, 1983:94) but he saw modern life as progressively differentiating out of this confused and rudimentary state. However, as previously noted, Durkheim did believe that science and myth would remain as two different tendencies in society and, as Městrovíc argued, his epistemology was sophisticated in that it refused to posit an irreconcilable hiatus between object (society) and subject (individual). The way that society was able to view itself was by use of ideas, by collective representation. These ideas are deemed true, not necessarily because they conform to reality, but by virtue of their creative power.

> In the last analysis, it is thought which creates reality; and the major role of the collective representations is to 'make' that higher reality which is society

> itself. This is perhaps an unexpected role for truth, but one which indicates it does not exist simply in order to direct practical affairs (Durkheim, 1983:84).

The problem that Durkheim struggled to come to grips with, that of individualism in social life without succumbing to anomie, has not been solved. It is still very much part of modern sociology, with theorists such as Borg drawing parallels between the critique of early twentieth century nihilism (defined as nothingness) represented by a complete lack of values and true ends (Borg, 1988) and the contemporary concept of the culture of narcissism (or the performing of an inauthentic self). He notes that such concepts are very popular in intellectual circles because they are able to explain, in intellectually satisfying ways (Borg, 1988:114), crises that are going on in many ways on many levels (Městrovíc, 1985:140). Anomie and narcissism are both seen as a result of unrestrained individualism, which Durkheim described as a bottomless pit of human desires which inevitably made human life unbearable (Městrovíc, 1985:56).

The discussion of individualism can be seen as one of the 'given's' of sociological theory. The fact that the individual has remained at the centre of modern discourse should not surprise us, argue Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, as social and political theories have to formulate some theory of the individual, especially in an intellectual context which assumes that individuals count (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 1986:172). And it seems that Durkheim's prediction that man [sic] has become a god for men [sic] in modern times (Městrovíc, 1985:141) has proved correct, and individualism has become a kind of collective representation in itself. Individualism has become the basis, for example, of Americans' understanding of themselves as free, responsible and creative people (Hargrove, 1988:373). But, in true Durkheimian fashion, it has not become a fixed form, unchangeable and unchallengeable. Modern individualism has retained elements of egoistic individualism and benign individuation, described nowadays as 'healthy' and 'malignant' forms of individualism (Městrovíc, 1985:140). As such, individualism is subject to modern critique, as symbolising something about the society we live in, in much the same way as in the late nineteenth century when Durkheim engaged individualism in a polemic against capitalistic utilitarianism.

Today's critique of malignant individualism rages against the narcissistic personality, a performing inauthentic self defined by the culture of post-capitalist consumer-driven society. Whereas competitive capitalism in the past believed the

individual could impose some sort of order and direction on society, the modern individual of the administered society reflects a much more negative and pessimistic view of social order based on centralised control (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 1986:145). Durkheim's vision of a modern world in which the person becomes a sacred being '...a source of autonomous motivations and rational decision, valuing privacy and capable of self-development' (Lukes, 1985:299) is given a different portrayal in modern critique. Larsch gives a chilling description of today's version of egoistic individualism, the constellation of the narcissistic self. He argues that the division of labour and pluralistic values, and the role of science, have not lived up to their expectations. He believes that the workings of the modern economy and social order have become increasingly inaccessible to the ordinary person's understanding, and that art and philosophy have abdicated the task of explaining them to the allegedly objective social sciences, which have themselves retreated from the effort to master reality into the classification of trivia.

> Reality thus presents itself, to layman and 'scientists' alike, as an impenetrable network of social relations - as 'role playing' or the 'presentation of self' in everyday life. To the performing self, the only reality is the identity he can construct out of material furnished by advertising and mass culture, themes of popular film and fiction, and fragments torn from a vast range of cultural traditions, all of them equally contemporaneous to the contemporary mind (Larsch, 1979:90).

The question seems to be for Larsch (as it was for Durkheim, and Schopenhauer before him) how can one tease out a secular truth, a communal sense of a good life from a society which seemingly celebrates the most egotistical and inauthentic personhood? Thus, science has, just as Durkheim predicted, proved to be only one of the truths whereby society represents itself. Myth, song and poetry and imagery have remained as the other 'tendency', as the noise of humans communicating continues at an ever increasing rate in mass culture.

As Abercrombie, Hill and Turner have pointed out in *Sovereign Individuals of Capitalism*, the artist in the popular imagination stands out as one of the heroic, authentic individuals of the twentieth century. Whereas in Durkheim's time, the prophet and ascetic were popularly presented as the ideal of an individual unspoiled by the contaminating effects of society, today serious artists are idealised as unstifled individuality. Individual authenticity in modern mass-

produced culture is represented by the figure of the artist as a '...unique, irreducible character free of the contrivances and conventions, the masks and hypocrisies, the distortion of the self by society' (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 1986:166). The artist has taken on the role of a latter day prophet who can tell us how to live an authentic life. Whereas, as previously noted, Durkheim rather took exception to the idea of withdrawal and retreat as a means of critiquing society, it is difficult to surmise as to what he would make of the contemporary myth 'god the artist' (Gorak, 1987) as collective representation. However, collective representation we can take it to be and as a collective representation it is, in Durkheimian fashion, an essentially social effort. As he explained:

> The only sources of life with which we can morally re-animate ourselves is that formed by the society of our fellow beings; the only moral forces with which we can sustain and increase our own are those which we get from others. Let us admit that there really are beings more or less analogous to those which the mythologies represent. In order that they may exercise over souls the useful direction which is their reason for existence, it is necessary that men believe them (Durkheim, 1983:425).

It is hard to believe he would deny modern people their myth.

Woolfolk also argues that the artist has been presented as the cultural guide to the post-Christian culture of post-World War II society, as one who concentrates on the perennial problem of '...can man alone create his own values?' (Woolfolk, 1986:94). He notes that the writer Camus believed that the task of spiritual guidance had fallen to the literary artist in modern culture. Certainly, poets and writers have undertaken to divulge to the rest of us what is of ultimate good and value. Like the religious callings of earlier ascetic culture, the artist or aesthete devotes themself to exploring knowledge which broadens the mind, living out Nietzsche's maxim '...art, not morality...is the truly metaphysical activity of man.' (Woolfolk, 1986:99). Turner has also proposed that within structured society, there is always the possibility for anti-structure, an area commonly played about in by liminal people, artists, writers and poets, the marginal people, 'edgemen', who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other people in fact or imagination (Turner, 1969:128). Similarly, he agrees that in Western culture, literature and art are accepted expressions of liminality, '...a time and space of withdrawal from normal modes of socialisation as potentially

a period of scrutinisation of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it exists' (Turner, 1974:167).

Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1986) make the distinction between mass popular culture and high culture, arguing that high culture gives voice to the uniqueness of the individual. Poetry, for example, exemplifies benign as opposed to malignant individualism. Hillyer claims that it is only the minority now who read poetry rather than watch television.

> All art, in spite of many modern tendencies to the contrary, is more or less enduring as its intention is more or less communal, granted that the receptive community is the intelligent and responsive part of the general population. That is the minority and always has been (Hillyer quoted in Holden, 1986:14).

The place that poetry, and poets see themselves playing in modern society is that of upholding the value and truth as portrayed in the word. Science, in their eyes, has been replaced by advertising as the true enemy of not just poetry, but truth. Poetry critique points out that advertising has created a world where

> ...children are taught, in lessons compounded every five minutes, that untruth can be uttered with impunity, even with approval. Lying has become a way of life, very nearly now the way of life, in our society. The average adult American of average intelligence and education believes almost nothing communicated to him in language, and the disbelief has become so ingrained that he or she does not even notice it. In short, the advertising business...advertising is the most corrupt and corrupting mental activity of the human race (Holden, 1986:171).

Holden argues that good poetry, because if contains poetic truth, is even more necessary to us individually and collectively than ever before. Poetic truth, he argues, is truth about value. Durkheim's claim that utilitarian philosophy of economic value was not able to define a moral society has continued to this day. Poets try to distinguish for us the differences between true value and market value. The advertising industry makes our life harder or more meaningless in the sense that it becomes both harder to discern and express true value when we are bombarded with words and images from the commercial world which would attempt to style our lives in bad (inauthentic) ways (Holden, 1986:177). Although Holden concedes all art is bound by convention, he argues that in this era of mass culture, it remains one of the very few areas left where significant

individual freedom of action - true authenticity - is possible, and one which is still capable of enlarging our capacity to value life itself (Holden, 1986:185). The critique of the use of language is important if we are to retain any sense of being able to communicate with each other through the medium of words. As Sontag (1982) points out, language must fight to retain its ability to be truthful. She quotes Rilke as describing this dilemma. 'Neither doll nor angel, human beings remain situated within the kingdom of language. But for nature, then things, then other people, then the texture of ordinary life to be experienced from a stance other than the crippled one of mere spectatorship, language must retain its chastity' (Sontag, 1982:XX).

The necessity that words speak the truth is important if we agree with Foucault's dictum that we live in an age where man or woman has become a confessing animal, (Gutman, 1985:104) reliant on the power of words, the powers of discourse. Gorak (1987) describes the complexity of the roles and responsibilities that modern writers have taken on, explaining '...only the idea of the artist as a godly maker suggests the paradoxes and uncertainties of the modern writer - a mythologist trapped in a secular world, a high priest caught in the blessed machine of language' (Gorak, 1987). The two tendencies he sees as contradictory, but prevalent in modern literature, the urge to rejoice in the multiplicity of the universe versus the need to incorporate this variety into a transcendent whole (Gorak, 1987) echoes Durkheim's original statement that there is, and there always will be, room in social life for a form of truth which will perhaps be expressed in a secular way, but will nevertheless have a mythological and religious basis (Durkheim, 1983:91).

The idea of the writer as mythologist dates historically to the confessions of Augustine. The confessions are credited with furnishing the paradigm for the use of certain life experiences as 'parables', both of the person's life and of an era's religion (Kliever, 1986:102). Kliever explains that the fictive theism grew out of evangelical and Enlightenment traditions through to an historical reading of Western culture as a move from myth to autobiography. Augustine invested himself in words, and by the use of words sought to become the author of his own existence. He thereby claimed, by means of autobiography, '...authorship and authority, originality and the right to be taken at one's word' (Fenn, 1986:82). Fenn, indebted to Foucault, argues that Augustine, by rite of language, moved from the position of private individual to public identity, and through the

publication of his own inner thoughts and conversations, set a pattern of public suffering which has lasted for many centuries. Exhibitionistic masochism through public speech and publication became the way to salvation (Fenn, 1986:86).

However, confessional writing did not remain within the theological domain, with writing like Rousseau's confessions taking on the secular purpose of turning a person into an individuated self (Gutman, 1985:103). With Rousseau, the aim was not to glorify God but to provide the truth about himself by revealing himself completely to the gaze of the reader. As Foucault has stated: 'Western man has become a confessing animal. Whence a metamorphosis in literature: we have passed from a pleasure to be recounted and heard, centering on the heroic or marvellous narration of 'trials' of bravery or sainthood, to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of confession holds out like a shimmering mirage (Foucault, quoted in Gutman, 1985:104). The social nature of this emerging truth, the truth of the authentic individual, is described by Gutman. He argues that Rousseau's insistence that he is especially unique, 'I am unlike anyone I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world' (Gutman, 1985:108), belies the fact that his confession is merely a response to social accusation, and that for the 'me' to emerge, there must be a 'not me' to define himself against (Gutman, 1985:112). Durkheim, in his own era, said of Rousseau bluntly: 'If he has been able to escape, to free himself, to develop a personality, it is because he has been able to shelter under a sui generis force' (Giddens, 1972:27).

However, in *Pragmatism and Sociology*, Durkheim states that although it is an impossibility for one individual to be in possession of the whole truth, the search for the truth is still a worthwhile human project.

> But although truth is a social thing, it is also a human one at the same time, and thus comes closer to us, rather than moves away and disappears in the distant realms of an intelligible or a divine understanding. It is no doubt still superior to individual consciousness, but even the collective element in it exists only through the consciousness of individuals and truth is only ever achieved by individuals (Durkheim, 1983:97).

I take this as reading that individuals can make valid offerings to the collective truth of the society they live in. As such, writers can be seen as making a

concerted effort in this regard, by committing their values and beliefs to paper for public scrutiny. The myth of the authentic, free individual is as necessary for the modern consciousness as the mythic hero was to past consciousness. As Kliever explains, traditional myths were 'public autobiographies' just as surely as modern autobiographies are 'private mythologies', and they both function as '...a story which places the individual in a context of meaning and purpose that transcends one's own life and times' (Kliever, 1986:114). They function in much the same way as religion did in the past to convince the individual that they count in the face of absurdity, particularly the absurdity of living courageously and generously in the face of death (Kliever, 1986).

Modern writers, as already noted, are becoming increasingly self-conscious about revealing this purpose of their art. Durkheim predicated this notion when he argued that the expression of reality does have a truly useful function; for it is what makes societies, although it also derives from them (Durkheim, 1983:97). Erica Jong's latest confessional novel *Any Woman's Blues* acknowledges this when she asks, after she has completed the novel, 'What shall I do with this book I left behind, this husk of my old life, of the me I once was, and the other me I once was, heckling her? Is a novel a closed system?' (Jong, 1990:351). She obviously does not think so, as she states a little later: 'I (whatever that is) imagine Leila, who imagines you, dear reader, looking for home, for peace, for mother, for father, for God, for Goddess, and hoping to find the key to serenity between the corners of this book...This is both my prayer and love letter to you' (Jong, 1990:363). In Jong's case, she sees poetry rather than literature as being the only way to express the truth. 'I will henceforth write only poetry because it is only such that, being out of time, transcends time. If I could write in invisible ink, I would' (Jong, 1990:353). In this last statement, we see a wonderful example of what Sontag describes as the vanity of the artist who ever increasingly takes silence as the last stand against the society and the audience they depend on. Sontag's analysis is similar to that of Durkheim's on Rousseau.

> Silence is the furthest extension of that reluctance to communicate that ambivalence about making contact with the audience which is the leading motif of modern art, with its timeless commitment to the 'new' and/or the 'esoteric'. Silence is the artist's ultimate other-worldly gesture: by silence, he frees himself from the servile bondage to the world, which appears as patron, client, consumer, antagonist, arbiter and distorter of his work. Still, one cannot fail to perceive in this renunciation of 'society' a highly social gesture (Sontag, 1982:II).

The discussion of silence leads into another facet of the myth of artistic retreat. Sontag also claims that the art of our time is noisy with appeals for silence, as silence keeps things open (Sontag, 1990:VI-XIII). Turner (1969:259-260) puts it another way when he explains that protracted liminal states demanded by some artists provide the individual with time and space to indulge in proto-philosophical and theological speculation about 'ultimate things'. However, society has ambivalent attitudes towards retreat, the withdrawal from the constant socialisation of everyday life (as demonstrated already by Durkheim). Storr (1988), for example, argues that current wisdom, especially that propagated by the various schools of psycho-analysis at the moment, that a human is a social being who needs the companionship and affection of other human beings from cradle to grave is a myth in itself which needs dispelling. He berates the modern myth that true happiness can only be found in intimate attachment and sexual fulfilment, accusing it of demeaning and stigmatising those who pursue a creative life mostly apart from the conversation of others. Storr lists Descartes, Newton, Locke, Pascal, Spinoza, Kant, Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein as the world's greatest thinkers who did not raise families and form close personal ties. The emphasis on the innate sociability of 'mankind' succeeds, he argues, in neglecting the positive effects of the solitude that genius demands.

These sociological concepts can be readily applied to the local scene. Within New Zealand literature and folk-lore, we have an established genre of 'man alone', and the notion of 'going bush' occasionally as a means of respite from civilisation's demands. Tim Shadbolt (Guthrie, 1990:10) expressed these ideas recently when he confessed that after a fairly devastating 'political hiding', 'I'll admit I'm a bit of a recluse at the moment. I've withdrawn and I'm licking my wounds and having a rest'. Although Durkheim did not express positive views on the 'withdrawal' of prophets and mystics, he did consider the effects of over-socialisation in *Suicide*. Městrovíc (1985:117) argues Durkheim was aware of the ambiguous effects of social integration, and that his work *Suicide* is often cited as buttressing the argument that social contacts and attachment are an unqualified good, and always beneficial. This, he believes, is a serious misinterpretation of Durkheim's thought, which actually distinguished between two aspects of social integration: social contacts versus social bonds. He believed that the former increased as civilisation develops, while the latter declined, thus ripping modern humans apart with two antagonistic forces. That these forces continue to be

grappled with today and are most forcefully described by our writers can be seen in the opening pages of Keri Hulme's *The bone people*. She describes her refuge thus:

> She had debated, in the frivolity of the beginning, whether to build a hole or a tower...but the tower grew...It was the hermitage, her glimmering retreat. No people invited, for what could they know of the secrets that crept and chilled and chuckled in the marrow of her bones. No need of people because she was self-fulfilling, delighted with the pre-eminence of her art, and the future of her knowing hands. But the pinnacle became an abyss, and the driving joy ended. At last there was a prison. I am encompassed by a wall, high, hard and stone, with only my brainy hands to tear it down (Hulme, 1983:7).

This passage reinforces the comments Gutman made of Rousseau's confessions (which are similar to those, again, of Durkheim) when he argues that they illustrate the profound irony of the human condition, whereby '...the great architect of the modern self ends up discovering that the building he has constructed is, when it comes right down to it, uninhabitable' (Gutman, 1985:116).

However, the conversation from the position of 'retreat' continues to speak to us. In a recent (and still current) radio series, *Directions*, writers discussed their beliefs, values and philosophies, and illustrated the abiding relevance of Durkheim's thought. In their discussions, they all demonstrated the tolerance that Durkheim predicted would be the necessary feature of modern life where, as social groups became increasingly complex, it would be impossible for society to have a single view of itself (Durkheim, 1983:92). When discussing impersonal truth and individual diversities, Durkheim (1983:91-92) argued that we cannot exhaust reality either as a whole or in any of its constituent parts; thus individual minds tend to parcel out amongst themselves the questions to be investigated; the diversity of intellectual temperaments can serve the cause of impersonal truth; and that intellectual individualism simply means that there are separate tasks in the joint enterprise. The task of speculative truth, he argues, is to provide nourishment for the collective consciousness, which adds to an increasingly complex reality (Durkheim, 1983:92).

I agree with Turner's (1974:292) suggestion that we stop thinking of mystical utterance as a characteristic of solitary individuals meditating or contemplating in mountain, desert or monastic cell, and see withdrawal as not being necessarily

from the whole of humanity, but from a structure which has become too petrified. The following interviews with writers demonstrate the essentially reclusive character of social life and the interviewees' thoughtfulness reinforces the '...can of human activity' (Giddens, 1982:184). Cartoonist Burton Silver, for example, describes his experience of early education as a type of petrified structure which frustrated his attempts at innovation and unconventional thinking, and asks: '...why should a child who has an extremely good memory be so well rewarded when a child who is capable of manipulating information to come up with new innovation is not?' (Silver, 1989). Although goofing off was a worry to his parents, he viewed it as valuable liminal space, and argues '...that most innovation in the world comes from goofing off'. His life includes many years of travelling, including a period of five months spent totally alone in the Australian bush. In this case, the liminal period of travel and retreat demonstrates the constant interplay between anti-structure and structure which allows vitality and novelty of style to be incorporated back into 'legitimate' social life (Turner, 1974:292). On his return to New Zealand he experienced the power of the Durkheimian 'social fact' of a wide society and norms, and he was under some pressure to do something.

> ...I had this sudden realisation that one is answerable to the land in which one is born. It's alright, ...you can goof off overseas for as long as you like, but when you come back here, you'd better do something, because this community has spawned you, and you owe it something. And that feeling is there. At some point I sat down and decided I would do a comic-strip about a little man who lived alone in the bush (Silver, 1989).

Another aspect of Silver's life demonstrates Turner's description of the power of the liminal state for criticism. 'Each society requires of its mature members not only adherence to rules and patterns, but at least a certain level of scepticism and initiative' (Turner, 1974:256). As a professional spoof-maker, Silver undertakes to live his philosophy of '...always pushing the bounds a bit'. Of his spoofs he says '...I suppose once again, they are playing with the system. Underneath it all they are saying 'don't believe what you see. You/we can be fooled very easily''.

As artists, Silver, and the following interviewee, Margaret Mahey, celebrate the liminal space. The role of the imagination has been described as the power of the individual to create and recreate the world (Gutman, 1985:110). By domesticating the imaginary world, the individual can regain, by means of

imaginary recreation, what has been lost in order to be once again at home in the world (Gutman, 1985). Mahey, children's story writer, describes this as a very important aspect of her writing, both for her readers and for her own life, as she sees the imagination '...as a force for alteration and enlightenment' (Mahey, 1989).

> ...I think quite a lot of the hard times I went through were actually...I was actually able to interpret them as a sort of adventure, because of reading, because of imagination...I did have some sort of imaginative context in which I could command the situation to quite a considerable extent, and therefore I came out of it relatively lighthearted.

She acknowledges the division of labour that enables her to concentrate on what she does best, that is write, noting that in another century she would have been housekeeping at a young age for another family.

> ...I'm also upheld by a lot of people who are collecting rubbish from the house, servicing the telephone...I have a friend and neighbour who comes in and does housework for me and all these people...in some way upholds the work I do sitting in my room writing. And yet writing somehow has an intellectual and imaginative image of itself which places it apart or above those other jobs. But I don't think it is. It's a trade like any other.

Here Mahey acknowledges the myth of the solitary writer, the authentic individual living apart from all societal demands and links, and disproves it. Mahey's philosophy mirrors Durkheim in other ways. The following statement echoes Durkheim's thoughts on the trials of homo duplex, and illustrates the increasing tolerance of a diversity of beliefs he thought would characterise the modern individual. She says:

> I think that there is a great contest between form and chaos, or form and some sort of anarchy. I must say I've gone on record for saying that I think practice as a librarian...you're always standing on the border between form and chaos because a lot of librarianship is concerned with form and making knowledge available, for example, passing on information, and in order to do this you have to give it some sort of form...whereas of course, the amount of information which is potentially available to us, as well as our individual perceptions of the world, as well as acknowledging the validity of other people's individual perceptions of the world, bring us close to more information than our systems can cope with, and we are confronted with a sort of anarchy. I think one is perfectly entitled to try and give form to all of this in order to make it usable.

> I personally think it's a mistake for people to take the forms that they give things and then say this is the true form and everyone else must conform to this.

Finally, I would like to reconsider Durkheim's discussion of the possibility of morality without god, using the words of Wade Doak to illustrate the artistic expression of '...things that are in the air' so to speak. Just as Durkheim believed that geniuses 'discovered' what everyone 'already knew', although rather imperfectly, I would like to argue that the writers, artists, poets of our time perform a similar role of refracting back to society more clearly what is already sensed. If morality is a social construction, which can also be judged independently (Schöfthäler, 1984:188), these interviews can be viewed as part of the 'conversation' of morality. In the *Directions* radio programme, an idea that all the writers expressed was that of the dependency and inter-connectedness of human life with other natural life. Doak (1990) expressed the belief that, however, the consensus, everyday reality does not allow us to look at things closely, and therefore does not allow us to acknowledge the inter-connectedness of all living things. His explorations under water, with just a camera for company, enabled him to examine closely, and in turn to attempt to make clear to others, the importance of looking at human life and religion, from a different perspective than that of the Christianity of the past. His comments, I feel, are representative of a new movement towards a changing morality which attaches a new-found religiosity towards our natural environment. The questioning of past Christian stewardship of the earth's resources is under way, with new ways of looking at 'space-ship earth' being called for (Hargrove, 1988:425). As a writer and explorer, Doak has used the liminal space of under-water exploration to contemplate the inter-connectedness of all living things, and draws different mental pictures for others to ponder and reflect on. When asked how he saw the creation of the universe, he answered in the following fashion:

> ...I see it as Gregory Bateson put it. He is an amazing philosopher, biologist, scientist, he had many hats...and he referred to it as 'mind at large'...that all the universe could be looked at as mind, and that we have mind as much as we can appreciate it. As we know, as our sciences keep telling us amazing things about the very edges of the universe, which means we're going right back in time to the big bang, right out on the edge of the expanding universe...if you go right out there and trace it back to the origins of the earth and beginnings of life, the process of evolution right up to the vertebrates, there is so much evidence of cause and effect, of what we could call mind. But I don't want to

> identify that with the conventional image of an old man with a grey beard...But I do feel that there is an incredible amount of organisation in the universe, which is really inspiring for us to learn and understand, and it answers for us that thing of despair that we get if we follow the existential line of thought. With all that incredible organisation, **surely** human beings can make a better deal of the way we are living on this earth as we have so far...that perhaps we have to look at the natural patterns and just see where we, as natural organisms too, can tailor our patterns of living to fit in with it all (Doak, 1990).

A statement such as this reinforces Durkheim's insight that morality (today expressed in a more respectful attitude towards the earth) does change to fit new conditions of social life. But, whereas Durkheim suggested that those who retreat do so from a need to destroy and escape reality, Doak illustrates that on the contrary, artistic withdrawal allows for a new way of perceiving reality, which is not necessarily destructive at all. However, Durkheim's discussion of the emergent nature of truth does allow for optimistic possibility and the above comments show that his prediction that both scientific and mythological are enduring tendencies in society was correct.

In this essay, I have attempted to use Durkheimian rather than Weberianism theory to explore 'escape attempts' in modern life. With writers, poets and artists symbolising the authentic individual in modern society, I have endeavoured to demonstrate the truth of Durkheim's insight that even attempts at social withdrawal are in fact highly social gestures. I argue that Durkheim's critique of utilitarian individualism has been maintained up until today by poets, in the form of poetic critique of the advertising industry. I also argue that novelists have continued to retreat into liminal states, but return with truths for audiences to participate in, in today's confessional society where discussion of authenticity and individualism has remained an important theme of contemporary life. Whereas Durkheim argued that the prophet, mystic and aesthete showed a hatred and disgust for society, in this essay, analyses of interviews of New Zealand writers demonstrate not disgust but a continuing hopefulness in modern life. They also demonstrate that scientific thought does not rule and that society does have room for both scientific truth and a truth with mythological and religious basis. As such, writers personify modern society's project of defining morality, and the truth by which human beings attempt to '...realise that higher reality which is society itself' (Durkheim, 1983:85). Durkheim was able to show us that suicide, rather than being the exemplary individual act was in fact a highly social

one, and similarly, his thought allows for a parallel analysis of individual creativity.

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# New Skills, New Power: Sub-Editors and Direct Editorial Input

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## Abstract

The introduction of computer technology into the newspaper industry has radically altered the working lives of the people employed by the industry. This paper focuses upon the impact of this technology on one group of workers - the sub-editors employed by Wellington Newspapers.[1] For this group of workers, computers in the news room translated into increased work loads and responsibilities. Sub-editors acquired new skills but found many of their old skills rendered redundant. They also experienced a new set of power relationships both between workers and management and between groups of workers. Computers brought with them new ways of working and also a new physical work environment. These changes had negative consequences for the sub-editors in terms of their job satisfaction and in terms of their health. But, in sharp contrast to the bitter conflict surrounding this technology in other countries, the whole process of change occurred within an industrial relations framework characterised by negotiation and compromise.

## Introduction

The transition from the technology of hot metal production to cold type began in the mid-1970s. Since that time, much has been written about the process of technological change in the newspaper industry. In particular, the demise of the skills, the power and, in many cases, the jobs of printers has been the subject of several excellent studies (Cockburn, 1983; Hill, 1983; Hill and Gidlow, 1988). A major effect of this concentration on the impact of technological change on the printers has been to emphasise the group of workers who have lost most from the introduction of Direct Editorial Input. DEI has, however, affected

[1] The author extends her thanks to all of the workers at Wellington Newspapers who gave their time and their insights into the process of change so freely.

occupational groups within the newspaper industry in a quite uneven way. In direct contrast to the situation faced by the printers, sub-editors have found their skills, their power relative to other workers and their numbers, increased by the new technology. It is the sub-editors, the group of workers who have gained most from the introduction of DEI, who provide the central focus for this case study of technological change at Wellington Newspapers.

## Methodology and Context

This study attempts to analyse the process of change from the perspective of the people who have had to adjust to working with the new technology. In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of twelve workers at Wellington Newspapers. Six of those interviewed were sub-editors, two were printers and four were reporters. Two of the sub-editors had been proof-readers prior to the introduction of DEI. The issues that the sub-editors identified as being of importance provided the starting point for this paper. To provide additional insights into the process of change, a senior manager at Wellington Newspapers who had been responsible for overseeing much of the changeover was also interviewed.

Where possible, subjects were interviewed both before and after the changeover. Nine of the thirteen subjects were interviewed twice, two were interviewed only before the changeover and a further two were interviewed only after the changeover. The two subjects who were interviewed only before the advent of DEI left their jobs at Wellington Newspapers. One was a printer who had accepted redundancy and that their job had virtually disappeared with the changeover in technology, a further printer was not interviewed.

Subjects were selected using several methods. Heads of departments within Wellington Newspapers were asked to identify staff who were both willing and able to talk about using the old and the new technologies. The head of the Printers Chapel was also selected to give a specifically trade union perspective on the changeover. All of those interviewed who did not have a management role were, however, active union members. If there was a bias in the selection of subjects, it was not that they were overly supportive of either the INL management or their unions, but rather they were articulate. Heads of department had obviously selected as subjects those who were most likely to have definite

opinions on new technology. Four of those interviewed were women and nine were men. This gender sample matches the proportions of men and women in the relevant occupations at Wellington newspapers. It was interesting to note that the two occupational groups which largely disappeared with the introduction of new technology were the male-dominated printers and the female-dominated proof readers. The occupation which grew with the new technology was sub-editing in which it was normal to find both men and women.

The interviews began with a standard set of questions about DEI. All subjects were asked whether they considered themselves to have become more or less skilled as a result of the changeover, whether their work environment had changed, and how they viewed the negotiations and the award settlement which had preceded the introduction of DEI. In addition, all subjects were encouraged to discuss any other aspect of the changeover that interested or troubled them. Each interview then concentrated on the issues deemed most important by that interviewee. The major issues which emerged after the 23 hours of taped interviews were analysed included: industrial relations; health and safety; job satisfaction; loss or acquisition of skills; and power relationships between groups of workers.

Before analysing each of these issues in turn, it is necessary to set this case study in its historical context. Hill's research (1983; 1988) on the transition from hot metal to cold type production techniques in another New Zealand newspaper provides a useful guide for anyone interested in the background to this study in that it finishes at the point at which this study begins. Hill explained that in the late 1970s, New Zealand newspaper proprietors chose to place computers in the hands of the printers rather than the journalists in order to avoid the industrial confrontation that had occurred elsewhere (Routledge, 1979; McLoughlin, 1988; Hill and Gidlow, 1988). This explanation was confirmed by the Wellington Newspapers' manager interviewed who stated that the initial changeover strategy in the 1970s 'was formulated on the basis that we would try and avoid the enormous industrial upheavals which were beginning to occur in Britain'. The compromise reached between the employers and the Printers' Union meant that every news story was typed twice, or 'double-keystroked'; first by the journalists on typewriters and then by the printers on computer terminals. That the employers were prepared to sacrifice the huge gains in productivity represented by single-keystroking is an indication of the industrial strength of the Printers'

Union at that time. It is also an indication that the newspaper business was profitable enough to allow publishers to survive without utilising the full benefits of the new technology. That the Printers' Union were willing to sacrifice their victory ten years later is an indication of the extent to which cold-type had weakened and, to a large extent, demoralised this once powerful group of workers.

The people who would have to use the DEI system at Wellington Newspapers were involved in its implementation almost from the beginning (Storey, 1986). They were, however, excluded from the initial process of determining whether or not any such technology should be introduced. A team, composed of representatives from all the unions whose members would be affected by the changeover, as well as management and computer specialists, was sent to Australia to evaluate three different DEI systems in operation. Their recommendations resulted in the board of INL selecting the Atex system. The trainers who taught the workforce to use the system were drawn from that workforce themselves and thus understood both the old way of working as well as the new system. The level of cooperation and consultation between management and workers was not, however ideal. There were some complaints from the workers interviewed that the management ought to have consulted more frequently with them during the changeover period. The management response to this complaint was that they had consulted as often as they had had something to consult about. The major reason given for not consulting was that the management themselves lacked information, particularly about many of the problems which initially occurred. The introduction of new technology by Wellington Newspapers was not, therefore, achieved either quickly or without encountering problems. The remainder of this paper will discuss the major issues identified by the workers who had to use the new system that arose from the introduction of the Atex DEI system.

## Negotiating the Process of Change

The first issue highlighted during the interview sessions was the highly unusual nature of the relationship between the Journalists' Union, the Newspaper Publishers' Association (NPA), and the people at Wellington Newspapers they represented. Wellington Newspapers is wholly owned by Independent News Limited (INL) which is in turn 49.73 per cent owned by Rupert Murdoch's News

Limited. When INL, following the lead set by News Limited, decided to introduce DEI into its stable of newspapers, they moved out of step with other members of the NPA. The majority of NPA members were either unwilling or unable to meet the multi-million dollar costs of computers and redundancy payouts associated with the single-keystroking system. As a manager at Wellington Newspapers put it, 'the fact is that other employers in the country are not prepared to pay to the extent that we have done'. In the end, INL felt that they had to resign from the NPA in order to introduce the DEI system.

The proof-readers, reporters and sub-editors were all part of the Journalists' Union but were affected in very different ways by the introduction of new technology. Single-keystroking offered fewer opportunities for errors which meant that proof-reading disappeared as a separate occupation under the Atex DEI system. Retraining or redundancy were the only options open to this group of mainly older women. Sub-editors were in the reverse position of seeing their numbers and their responsibilities increased by DEI. The nature of their work, however, changed quite dramatically rendering many of their paper-based skills obsolete and forcing them to learn new computer-based skills. Reporters were least affected by the changeover. Although they had to learn how to use the system, many journalists viewed the computer as merely a superior form of typewriter.

The Journalists' Union originally warned their members to be prepared for a fight over the introduction of new technology. This warning was unnecessary as the union settled quickly with the employers on a wage formulae which granted reporters a six per cent wage increase and sub-editors a nine per cent increase. But the journalists interviewed expressed some displeasure at the speed of the settlement, arguing that the union could have negotiated a better deal for them. A small group of journalists eventually staged a short 'wild-cat' strike which was more in protest at the actions of the national union than the actions of their employer. A reporter described the settlement process in the following way:

> What happened was we had this really strange meeting one day and it was really hot in this hall and this woman got up and said, we've been talking round in circles, let's have a vote. So we had a vote and voted to accept the package on the executives' say-so. Everyone got rather 'agro' about it afterwards and said we should have kept the meeting going, we shouldn't have accepted the offer. But you've got a national executive and they advise you

> to take it. You take it because you don't know the mood of the employers. Perhaps we should have gone on strike. I don't know.

The clash between the Journalists' Union and their members centred on a clear conflict of interests. The union believed that their members at Wellington Newspapers were acting out of a misguided belief in the benign nature of their employer and were motivated by promises of short-term private gain. Union advocate Tony Wilton told an **Evening Post** reporter:

> If we had negotiated with individual employers we wouldn't have achieved anything near what we got for those living in small provincial areas. We got the greatest good for the greatest number... and on that basis I'm not the least ashamed of what we achieved.

The dissatisfaction felt by journalists surfaced again during the award round in the year following the introduction of DEI. A strike was held for several days which did not achieve the improvements in working conditions the journalists, particularly the sub-editors, were hoping for. Worse still, from the journalists' perspective, the DEI system enabled Wellington Newspapers to continue publishing despite the strike. Sub-editors and reporters expressed grave concern about the implications of this new technology for the power of their union. One sub-editor explained what happened during the strike:

> The thing I find quite scary is that, when we had strikes in October, that the paper came out beautifully the next day, complete with photographs and everything. Even though the Evening Post had gone out! It was that afternoon, it was the Post, and it came out and looked really good!

As a result, the public would not have noticed substantial differences in the newspaper for several days. The length of time journalists were obliged to stay on strike was thus increased, raising the cost to them in terms of lost wages and increasing the ability of the employer to withstand their action.

During the course of the interviews, it became clear that while the workers at Wellington Newspapers were actively involved in their union chapels, they did not totally support the actions of their national unions. The printers declared that they had won the agreement they wanted despite, rather than because of, the national union. The journalists expressed the view that their interests had been sacrificed in order to bolster the potential wages of other workers who were not

even using the new technology. During the first round of interviews prior to the changeover, workers expressed a qualified faith in the INL management to deal fairly with them. The journalists' goodwill towards their employer was, however, somewhat dampened when they gained little out of their strike and when a ten per cent reduction of staff was announced by INL who were experiencing financial difficulties. This cutback, coupled with the increased work load associated with DEI, left many reporters and sub-editors feeling that they had not been treated well. As will be discussed below, a number of them also developed symptoms of repetitive strain injury in their hands and arms.

**Health and Safety**

All of the subjects interviewed described changes in the physical work environment which they disliked. Their comments centred on two main points: the potential or actual effects that the new work system had on health; and the changes that had taken place in the workplace culture or 'atmosphere' as a result of the way the new technology was used. Concern about the health problems potentially posed by the new technology was expressed by the sub-editors and the reporters. These were the occupational groups who spent most time in front of computer screens and all of those interviewed were worried about the possibility of developing RSI or eye-strain. One sub-editor was also concerned that insufficient research had been done to investigate whether there was a connection between working on a computer terminal and miscarriages rates.

The agreement reached between the unions and INL prior to the introduction of DEI contained extensive provisions related to health and safety, including the right for workers to take regular breaks from the computer terminals. According to Storey (1986), unions place a lot of emphasis on these issues because they are issues which the unions know they can have influence over. This approach according to Storey (1986:61) was '...symptomatic of union helplessness in other regards'. That is, because trade unions involved in the introduction of new technology generally found themselves negotiating away the jobs and work of their members, health and safety issues were the only areas in which they could actually achieve positive gains. Storey found that employers in the insurance industry were happy to ensure that adequate provisions for health and safety were included in the award and the same attitude was found amongst Wellington Newspapers' management by this study. The company had spent millions of

dollars constructing a new building and outfitting it with ergonomic furniture and diffuse lighting. They had also informed staff about exercises they could perform to help prevent the development of RSI.

The workers interviewed generally saw the health and safety provisions of their awards as adequate - even generous - but this did not prevent them from expressing fears about the effects the technology might have on them personally. As one sub-editor stated: 'You can't very well bring a Geiger counter in and say, that machine seems to be emitting more rays of whatever. I mean it's a bit of an unknown'. These fears were translated into actual health problems for many Wellington Newspapers' workers within a year of the new system being introduced. While the unknown 'rays' did not appear to be troubling anyone, there were a number of cases of RSI and eye strain amongst the sub-editors and reporters. As one sub-editor explained:

> The health side of it is not good. People are getting eye strain, having to get glasses. People are getting RSI. People are supposed to take breaks away from the screens which theoretically would help those two things but they don't for various reasons - because it's hard to build them in even though they are catered for in our award. It's hard to build those things into the structure of a day when putting out a newspaper, a lot of the time, is a rushed job where things come in fits and starts and you can't automatically take a break at a particular time of day and that sort of thing. And people are really conscientious and they feel guilty about getting up and walking away from their jobs for ten minutes because of the sake of their health.

Two main reasons emerged as the primary causes of health problems. The first has been described in the above quote. Reporters and sub-editors were accustomed to working as fast as possible whenever there was work to do and to only stopping when the work stopped. By working like this, sub-editors were able to shorten the time they spent at the office. Moreover, if they had slowed the pace of work, the newspapers would not have been produced in time to meet the delivery deadlines. Working fast without taking breaks was thus both favoured by the workers themselves and built in to the production timetable of the newspapers. This situation was exacerbated by the second identified cause of health problems, namely the ten per cent staff reduction imposed upon Wellington Newspapers by INL. While INL had been willing to include generous health and safety provisions into the workers' awards, they had not set up the institutional mechanisms necessary to ensure that these provisions were

actually adhered to. It was not until a number of journalists had contracted severe cases of RSI that Wellington Newspapers called a meeting of middle managers and supervisors to educate them about safe working practices when using the new technology. The attitude of the senior management seemed to be that workers would take the breaks they needed if the award provisions were there. The manager interviewed, who had been a journalist himself, stated:

> I'm not meaning to criticise but journalists are funny people. They like to sort of get on with their work and get through it. And I think this is one of the problems. We've got to try and find a way of maintaining the urgency of producing a newspaper and the speed of work but in some way overlay that with the need to take these preventative measures.

Wellington Newspapers wanted to find ways to protect their workers from injury while inhibiting the work process as little as possible. But it was extremely difficult to achieve this balance when the dangers were posed by computer technology because the hazards only became visible after workers had injured themselves. The workers themselves, who could not see the danger, were not highly motivated to take precautionary measures. Leaving it up to individuals accustomed to working at speed to regulate their own work in order to avoid an invisible hazard was clearly a strategy doomed to failure. And when INL's fall in profitability following the share market crash of 1987 resulted in staff reductions, it became even more unlikely that the remaining staff would be able to find natural breaks in an increasingly heavy workload.

**Job Satisfaction**

The second issue raised during the interviews in connection with the physical work environment was the way in which the layout of the offices and the nature of computer work had disrupted old patterns of work related and social interaction. The issue was strongly linked to the reduction in job satisfaction experienced by Wellington Newspaper workers following the changeover to DEI. The group most affected by the disruption of old social patterns were the sub-editors. When subbing had been done using pens and paper, the sub-editors had been seated closely together around a U-shaped table. The introduction of DEI was accompanied by a shift to individual desks separated from one another. These desks seemed to be unusually large, particularly so because sub-editors seldom had much to put on them. The result was to replace a working

environment in which people worked closely together and could easily talk to one another, with one in which they were separated by large desks and by floor area and in which their attention was focused on a computer screen. One sub-editor complained that:

> Everyone is just sort of slightly out of everyone else's socialising space so that if you want to make any social contact with somebody you've actually got to - physically got to - get up and go over and see them. And when you get there then there's no guarantee that they are going to be in a sort of job situation that's going to be suitable to just stop and talk anyway. And it's literally possible to go through a whole day - and more than a day - saying nothing of any social significance to anybody else. And that's the down side of all this because I've always associated the jobs that I've done in newspapers as having a very high social content.

Another sub-editor complained that: 'You don't actually feel part of a team. You don't know what's going on'. Even the manager interviewed had noticed the changes that the new work environment had wrought on the atmosphere of the once noisy news room, stating incredulously that: 'I sort of get the feeling that people are whispering!'. He did not, however, consider changes to the social nature of the work environment to be an issue with which senior management ought to be concerned. And none of the other interviewees had considered broaching the subject with their managers.

## The Question of Skill

Following the introduction of DEI, the sub-editors interviewed found it very difficult to decide whether their skill levels had been increased or just altered. They all agreed that they had to learn new computer based skills in order to operate the system but they were less sure that this meant that they were now more skilled than they had been. They certainly believed that something had been lost when the computers were introduced. One newly trained sub-editor stated that:

> Things like eye and judgement were a person's requirement. And I think there are a number of people who do have those skills and have them to an extraordinary degree. They have an eye for what looks good in type. They can virtually write a story or sub a story without thinking about it, virtually to the level where it fits and reads well and everything is in its place. Those kinds of people, I think, resent the fact that a machine can do it as effectively.

> They see the loss of those kinds of skills as being something that somebody, somewhere should regret.

Another sub-editor said that she felt there was a qualitative difference between the output she produced when editing a story on a computer screen and editing it on a piece of paper. She explained it in this way:

> Because a pen and paper is sort of like an extension of yourself, there is nothing really there. I mean, you have learnt to write from the age of five or whatever, whereas with a machine it's a new thing... It's just your ability with your pen and paper and what you are doing on paper doesn't translate identically to you working on screen. I'm sure if somebody gave me a story now to sub by hand and I did it, I'm sure there would be differences in the way I would to it... It's sort of hard to explain but I just feel it's just subtly altered the way I work, just how I would do things with words.

However much they might regret the passing of the old skills, the sub-editors interviewed all expressed their admiration for the capabilities of the new system. In particular, they preferred laying out the pages on screen rather than on paper. As will be discussed below, they also enjoyed the increase in control over the production process that the DEI system provided.

The sub-editors' ambivalence over whether or not they had become more highly skilled illustrates the degree of subjectivity involved in assessing the concept of skill (Manwaring and Wood, 1985). What counts as skill in an occupation can vary over time and from place to place. Skill is a concept relative to the technical and ideological dimensions of particular occupations within particular societies (Neilson, 1987). The technical dimension of skill relates to the knowledge, experience and dexterity required to perform a particular job. The ideological dimension of skill relates to the perceived status associated with an occupation which has no necessary connection with the technically defined skills it requires. In this case, the sub-editors were unsure of how to compare their technical skills before and after DEI and of the status attached to their new computer based work.

The sub-editors uncertainty throws into question theories which represent technological change as an almost uni-dimensional process in which the skills of workers are broken down into their simple component parts and then embodied in machines (Braverman, 1974). This account of technological change is

certainly an adequate representation of the aims of Taylorist or Fordist production techniques but it is a far from adequate explanation of the post-Fordist work situation faced by the sub-editors (Rose and Jones, 1985; Littler, 1985; McLoughlin, 1988; Hill and Gidlow, 1988). Rather than fragmenting the work process, DEI saw the tasks formerly carried out by proof-readers, sub-editors and printers consolidated into the hands of one of these groups, the sub-editors. At the same time as this job enlargement process was occurring, sub-editors were very aware that many of their old paper-based skills had been taken over by the computer. Given the complex and contradictory nature of the changes sub-editors faced in their work, it is not surprising that they remained ambivalent about the impact new technology had had on their skills.

## The Question of Power

The final major issue raised by the sub-editors during the interviews was the changes in control over the work process that had occurred as a result of the introduction of the new technology. The two main changes mentioned were the passing of power over the production process from printers to sub-editors and the degree of control exercised by the computer itself over the whole work process. During the days of hot-metal production, printers had exercised a great deal of control over newspaper production and this control was the main source of the printers' power as a union. The introduction of cold-type saw this control only slightly diminished due to double-keystroking practices. It was, however, the beginning of the end. When printers had laid out the pages following the sub-editors' directions, there had been a great deal of interaction between these two groups of workers. One printer noted that the only contact he now had with sub-editors was when they rang to say a laid-out page was ready to be printed. He obviously regretted the loss of this interaction as much as he missed his former control over the production of pages.

The sub-editors interviewed all expressed pleasure with their new powers and did not mention the decline in their interaction with the printers as a negative outcome of the change. A sub-editor explained that:

> We don't have to rely on a certain human error that there was before. I mean, before the pages were put together by people, some of whom were very good, some of whom were not good. The bromides were being cut up with scalpels and being placed on pages by human beings who were sometimes useless and

> sometimes very good. And it varied in every range in between. Now a machine does it and it does it exactly the way you asked it to do it and the pages look cleaner and neater.

Another sub-editor stated that:

> I wouldn't be in a hurry to go back to pen and paper. It's just the sense of control is what has made the difference. The journalists really are in much more control of what goes in the paper now, or how the end result looks. And that's very good. And when we notice something's wrong, it's very easy to put it right. And we don't have to go down on bended knees to the printers.

There was some disagreement between the people interviewed as to whether the computer, 'a mere machine', could be described as having any power of its own (Boddy and Buchanan, 1986: 32). There was, however, complete agreement that all work at Wellington Newspapers now depended upon the computer operating correctly. As one sub-editor succinctly stated: 'The computer has a huge power to stuff us up'. When the Atex system was first introduced, serious problems would develop in the system on an almost daily basis. During these breakdown periods no one was able to do their work until the system started up again. A sub-editor explained that:

> In the old days, if something had ground to a screaming halt, well, people could keep working. I mean, there would be bottle-necks in certain points but at least work would keep going and someone else would have to be working doubly hard when everything was fixed. This way, if something goes, everything goes.

Apart from the loss of work because it had not been saved on computer storage, the major source of frustration about system breakdowns was the fact of now knowing why the computer would not work or when it would be fixed. A printer complained that: 'No one explains what is happening and people get frustrated and they want to pick the terminal up and... '. The main reason for the lack of communication on this issue was that even the people working in computer systems took some time finding out exactly what was wrong with the system. A year after the changeover, major breakdowns were infrequent but were still occurring.

According to Braverman, one of the primary forces motivating companies to introduce new technologies is the desire to increase their control over the production process (Braverman 1974; Buchanan and Boddy, 1983; Child, 1985). In the case of Wellington Newspapers, it was clear that the management had greatly increased the degree of control they exercised over the production of their newspapers. The major way in which they had done this was by curtailing the power of the Printers' Union by deskilling the printers and greatly reducing their numbers. The computer technology enabled the management to produce a newspaper using a greatly reduced staff and incorporating stories already stored in the computer or drawn, electronically, from other sources. The sub-editors might have increased their power relative to other workers but they could not be said to have increased their power relative to their employer. It would be a mistake to see this increase in control by management as the reason for introducing the technology. Rather, it appears that INL needed to increase their power, relative to the Printers' Union, in order to introduce the technology which would enable them to produce a higher quality product more cheaply. Although it was obviously a highly desirable outcome from INL's point of view, their increased power was a means to the end of higher profits, rather than an end in itself.

When asked whether or not they preferred the new technology to the manual system of subbing, the sub-editors interviewed were unanimous that the technology represented an advance. They particularly admired the layout capabilities of the new system. When asked whether they now derived more job satisfaction from their work, the sub-editors were equally unanimous that they did not. One sub-editor added that: 'the new technology is work efficient'. He meant that the technology represented a superior way of sub-editing newspapers but not necessarily a superior way of working for the sub-editors themselves. Another sub-editor asked rhetorically: 'What's happened to the camaraderie of the subs' bench?'. Such sentiments can of course, only be expressed by those who have experienced the changeover in work practices. It would be interesting to interview the sub-editors again in five years time to compare the perceptions of those who have manually sub-edited a newspaper with those who know only the new system.

## Conclusions

Case studies inevitably raise a host of theoretical questions that they are incapable of answering. The main advantage of the case study method is that it enables the researcher to collect data that is rich and interesting (Buchanan and Boddy, 1983:33). While the findings of this research may not be generalizable in the way that broader based research is, they nevertheless provide some useful insights into the process of technological change. The first of these insights relates to the industrial relations process. In Britain, Australia and the USA, the introduction of the technology of DEI had been accompanied by serious industrial conflict. At Wellington Newspapers, the introduction of new technology occurred within an atmosphere of cooperation and general agreement. The major difference between the New Zealand and the overseas experience was that both the employers and the unions concerned had no wish to engage in a lengthy industrial dispute. It was precisely because the introduction of new technology had been so disruptive elsewhere that the New Zealanders were prepared to negotiate. This case study indicates that the particular form and timing of the technological change can be explained as a series of choices and decisions made by workers and managers within a set of limiting constraints. For management, these constraints related to the particular circumstances of INL and to the technological, economic and political environment within which it operated. For the workers at Wellington Newspapers, these constraining factors related to the particular nature of the labour market and the experience of past trade union struggles in this area.

The health and safety issues raised by this case study highlighted the impact posed by new technologies. The hazards associated with the technology of the industrial revolution, with its mechanical moving parts, were obvious. That computers are just as capable of crippling operators who use them incorrectly is less apparent. Guard rails are usually installed to protect workers from moving machinery but few computer systems have programmes which prevent workers from overusing them. This invisible hazard of over-use injury was brought into a work culture which emphasised the virtues of working hard and continuously. Given this dangerous combination, the emergence of many cases of RSI at Wellington Newspapers cannot be seen as surprising. Clearly, organisations must consider existing work cultures and practices when creating and implementing health and safety policies for computer technologies. Moreover, it is clear that

structures must be put in place to ensure that the safe working practices guaranteed on paper are actually implemented in practice.

All of the workers interviewed for this study stated that the new technology had reduced their job satisfaction to some extent. The majority considered that their job satisfaction had been reduced to a considerable degree. The senior manager interviewed did not appear to be aware that this had occurred. When informed that his employees were concerned about the issue of job satisfaction, he stated that this was a middle management problem. It was clear from his response that the effects the new technology would have on job satisfaction were not carefully considered by senior management during the design and implementation process. Once the technology was in place, this manager indicated it was up to managers on the news room floor to ensure that the appropriate levels of team spirit were maintained. The assumption that job satisfaction exists independently of the design and layout of the work process is questionable (Knights and Collinson, 1985; McLoughlin, 1988). The newly built news room may have had plush carpets and ergonomic furniture but its design hindered the previously high level of face-to-face communication. And the majority of the workers interviewed had derived much of their job satisfaction from the level of human interaction. Declining job satisfaction amongst the sub-editors at Wellington Newspapers can therefore be said to have resulted more from the way the new technology was laid out than from any changes it had wrought on job content.

This case study also provided some insights into the way in which workers view their skills. Of the workers interviewed only the printers did not appear to consider skill to be a problematic concept. Given that it was the printers who had lost their jobs and seen their work taken over by computers and sub-editors, it was not surprising that they were easily able to identify their status as deskilled workers. The sub-editors, who had had their jobs enlarged and radically altered by the new technology, were not able to define their new status so easily. Their difficulty stemmed in part from the fact that they were attempting to compare two completely different ways of working. Comparing manual sub-editing with computer sub-editing was akin to comparing two different occupations. It is not surprising then, that sub-editors were unable to decide whether their work now required a higher level of skill or just new skills.

The final issue identified by sub-editors was the changing power structure at Wellington Newspapers. The complex impact that new technology can have on power relationships within the work place was highlighted by this case study. Certainly, the sub-editors had greatly increased their power over the production process while the printers had seen almost all of their power disappear. But, while power over production using the old technology had given printers the power to stop production and thus provided them with an effective weapon during industrial disputes, this was not the case with the new technology. The computer enabled the sub-editors to control the final output of editions at Wellington Newspapers but it also enabled their employer to continue producing newspapers during strikes. Moreover, the technology itself encompassed so much of the production process that a computer malfunction could stop production more decisively than could any industrial dispute with either printers or sub-editors.

The five major issues identified by this case study have thrown up interesting directions for further research. Research topics to be explored further include:

* The effects that the work culture existing prior to the introduction of new technology can have on the way in which that technology will be used.

* The relationship between job design - including the layout of the workplace - and job satisfaction.

* The effects of new technology on the skill levels of workers whose jobs are enlarged by computerisation.

* The shifts in the power structures of organisations which occur as a result of technological change.

Taken together, these research questions highlight the necessity of considering each work site to be a unique matrix which will lend individual shape to the process of technological change.

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# From the Welfare State to the Free Market: Explaining the Transition[1]

## Part I: The Existing Accounts[2]

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**Abstract**

In the second half of the 1980s, social democratic Keynesianism was supplanted by New Right neoclassicism. This paper critically discusses the existing explanatory accounts of this historic shift in policy-making. Most of these accounts have failed to provide an integrated analysis of crisis, class, ideology and the state. While avoiding this problem, those influenced by regulation theory have advanced interpretations of crisis, class and class struggle which can be challenged both theoretically and empirically. In order to develop an adequate explanation, there is a need for an integrated, theoretically informed, and historically grounded analysis of: (i) the underlying structural contradictions of capital accumulation and the specific configuration of New Zealand's integration into the world economy; (ii) class structure and class-based political mobilisations; (iii) the ideology of the New Right; and (iv) the specific institutional structure of the state in New Zealand. While it will not be possible to develop a detailed explanation in the limited confines of this article, I will present, at least in broad outline, the key components of a Marxist explanation of the historic shift from Keynesianism to neoclassicism in New Zealand.

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[1] An earlier draft of this paper was presented to the SAA annual conference at Lincoln University, December 1990. Thanks to those who attended for their comments. Thanks also to Laurel Hepburn, John Freeman-Moir, Jurriaan Bendein, Bob Calkin and Geoff Pearce for contributing to this project in various ways. Finally, the referees provided some interesting criticisms and valuable suggestions for final revision. Of course, all deficiencies are my responsibility alone.

[2] This paper will appear in two parts. The first appears here while the second will be published in the next issue of *New Zealand Sociology* (Volume 6, Number 2). A full list of references will appear with Part II.

## Introduction

Throughout the Long Boom of the 1950s and 1960s, policy-making largely involved incremental changes within the institutional confines of the Keynesian Welfare State. From July 1984, the Fourth Labour Government rapidly and comprehensively implemented policies derived, via the intermediation of Treasury, from the contemporary currents of neoclassical economic theory (Monetarist, New Classical and Supply-Side economics, the Austrian school, and Public Choice theory). The Fourth National Government has merely taken over and extended this policy framework through anti-union industrial relations reform and a fundamental 'redesign' of the Welfare State. Clearly the basic analytical assumptions, ideological values and policy prescriptions of the Fourth National Government remain broadly consonant with those of the Fourth Labour Government.[3] The Fourth Labour Government's programme of economic reform, which involved 'a fundamental revision of philosophy and criteria underlying policy design and conduct' (OECD, 1986/87: 58), has thus set the agenda for policy-making in the foreseeable future. In short, social democratic Keynesianism has been supplanted by New Right neoclassicism.[4]

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[3] There are, however, significant differences with respect to social and foreign policy. In addition, the National Government may eventually be forced towards a more pragmatic and interventionist style of economic management in the context of a serious world recession and a dangerously depressed and unstable domestic economy.

[4] The terms 'Keynesianism' and 'neoclassicism' are derived from G. Whitwell's excellent study of the Australian Federal Treasury (1986, particularly ch. 2). At the risk of oversimplification, it is possible to distinguish Keynesianism from neoclassicism in relation to the fundamentally different assumptions which Keynesians and neoclassicists make regarding the equilibrating tendencies of capitalist market economies, and the differing conceptions of the appropriate role of the state in economic management which they derive from these assumptions (see Roper, 1990c). While for a neoclassicist like Leon Walras, "[full employment] equilibrium is the normal state, in the sense that it is the state towards which things spontaneously tend under a regime of free competition in exchange and competition", for John Maynard Keynes, "the system is not self-adjusting" and, indeed, "seems capable of remaining in a chronic condition of subnormal activity [characterised by high unemployment] for a considerable period without any marked tendency towards either complete recovery or towards complete collapse" (quoted by Whitwell, 1986:27 and 39). Keynesians and neoclassicists rank the major targets of economic policy in different orders of priority (full employment versus low inflation) and advocate the employment of markedly different macro and micro economic policy instruments by government to

This historic shift in the policy-making of state agencies raises the obvious question: why did the Fourth Labour Government implement a monetarist 'disinflationary' macroeconomic strategy supplemented by a comprehensive programme of supply-side microeconomic reform? While most aspects of this policy 'revolution' have been subjected to exhaustive scrutiny over the last six years, much less attention has been paid to developing a theoretically informed and historically grounded sociological explanation of it. This paper is concerned not with policy analysis per se, but with explaining the transition from Keynesianism to neoclassicism.

The organisation of the paper reflects this central concern. Following a brief section in which I argue in narrow policy terms that the Fourth Labour Government's policies were overwhelmingly derived from schools of economic thought within the New Right (Section 1), the remainder of the paper is then divided into two parts (Sections 2 and 3 respectively). In Section 2 the existing explanatory accounts of this fundamental shift in the state's approach to managing New Zealand's long standing economic crisis are critically discussed. This discussion is organised thematically. An attempt is made to draw up a critical balance sheet, identifying, on one side, those insights afforded by existing accounts of the shift from Keynesianism to neoclassicism which must be incorporated within a Marxist explanation and, on the other, the problems, limitations and, at times, obfuscations of the existing accounts. In Section 3, I present the core of a Marxist explanation through an examination of the accumulation crisis (3.1.), class structure and class-based political mobilizations (3.2.), ideology of the New Right (3.3.), and the specific institutional structure of the state in New Zealand (3.4.). The need for brevity inevitably means that this section will be largely synoptic.[5]

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economy will, in the absence of discretionary state intervention, spontaneously tend towards full employment equilibrium, then it follows that the state should play a passive, limited and largely non-discretionary role in managing the economy. conversely, if the economy will spontaneously tend to generate high unemployment and stagnation, then it follows that the state should play an active, extensive and discretionary role in economic management. For elaboration see: Cole, et al., 1983; Grant and Nath, 1984; Levacic and Rebmann, 1982; Nell (ed.), 1984; Smithin, 1990.

[5] This article draws upon my doctoral dissertation (Roper, 1990a).

## 1. The New Right in Power

From the time of its emergence as a significant political force in the second half of the 1970s, the New Right has consistently advocated macroeconomic policies organised around a tough anti-inflationary monetary policy. Fiscal restraint is deemed necessary to support this tight monetary stance and to reduce the level of government expenditure. Floating exchange rates are also desirable not only because they adjust more rapidly in response to alterations in the supply of and demand for foreign currency, but also because they enhance the capacity of the central bank to control the quantity of money in circulation within any given economy. At the microeconomic level, the New Right advocates extensive programmes of market liberalisation. These include the deregulation of the financial sector, liberalisation of foreign trade, elimination of so-called 'rigidities' in the labour market, reduction of marginal tax rates (a low flat rate of income tax is considered optimal) and the taxation of company income, privatisation of commercial operations owned by the state, and the dramatic reduction (and ultimately the complete elimination) of state expenditure on the provision of housing, health, education and welfare.

All schools of economic thought associated with the New Right assume that the 'free enterprise' economy will, in the absence of intervention by the state, spontaneously generate non-inflationary economic growth and full employment. It is also assumed that privately-owned capitalist firms are inherently more efficient than state-owned organisations. Societies are merely aggregations of discrete individuals who are essentially rational and calculative self-maximisers (individual consumers maximise utility, firms maximise profits). An efficient economy thus requires that individuals have access to reliable information (in the form of relative price signals) and that they are motivated by monetary incentives which either reward or punish decisions to save, consume or invest through untainted market outcomes. These conditions can only be met if the state contains inflation (maintains price level stability) and does not intervene actively in markets (maintains an 'even playing field').[6]

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[6] For more detailed accounts of the New Right see: Green, 1987; King, 1987; Levitas, 1986

The Fourth Labour Government implemented a coherent and integrated monetarist macroeconomic strategy which centrally involved Reserve Bank control of the monetary and credit aggregates in order to reduce inflation and maintain price level stability in the medium term, fiscal restraint and an unmanaged floating exchange rate (see Whitwell, 1990). The programme of supply-side microeconomic reform involved the deregulation of the financial sector, liberalisation of foreign trade, attempts to increase labour market 'flexibility', fiscal restraint including major spending cuts, the disassembly of the state sector (commercialisation, corporatisation, privatisation), regressive taxation reform, and the restructuring of the welfare state through a move from universal to narrowly targeted provision. The microeconomic reforms and the macroeconomic strategy were integrated to a remarkable degree by the Labour Government. Ministers of Finance, Douglas and Caygill, repeatedly claimed that the Government's 'strategy requires the application of consistent, balanced and mutually supporting policies as a foundation for long-term sustainable growth (Statement, 1986: 10).' It was assumed by both the Government and its advisors in Treasury that this combination of macro and micro economic policies would generate non-inflationary output, productivity and employment growth in the mirage-like 'medium term' (conveniently unspecifiable in calendar years).

Any objective policy-by-policy assessment of the record of the Fourth Labour Government must conclude that, with the important but only partial exceptions of government expenditure on housing, health, education and welfare provision (where expenditure rose in absolute terms but fell relative to demand), as well as the limited nature of the legislation aimed at increasing 'labour market flexibility', the Labour Government implemented the policies of the New Right more comprehensively than either the Thatcher Government in Britain or the Reagan/Bush administrations in the US.[7] As Boston (1987: 150) has shown, the Labour Government shared with the Thatcher Government:

> the desire to curtail the role of the state in the economy; the commitment to monetary and fiscal discipline; the emphasis on controlling inflation as the primary objective of macroeconomic policy; the quest for efficiency, consistency and predictability; the shift in emphasis from demand management

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[7] For accounts of these governments see: Brenner, 1986a and 1986b; Gamble, 1988; Green, P. 1987; Hall, 1986; Krieger, 1987; Miliband et al., 1987; P. Riddell, 1983.

> to supply-side measures; the reliance on market forces and the desire to make markets work better; and the regular endorsement of TINA (there is no alternative).

From a comparative perspective, the hallmarks of the New Zealand Labour Government's programme of economic reform are the comprehensiveness of policy change, the rapidity and unimpeded ease of policy implementation, and the extremely doctrinaire manner in which the Government employed monetarist and supply-side policy prescriptions.

## 2. In Search of an Explanation

The radical, rapid and comprehensive nature of the Labour Government's programme of reform has stimulated a great deal of policy analysis by academics in a range of disciplines.[8] Much of this work has been of high quality and its value, for those who are critical of the Labour Government's New Right 'revolution' is unquestionable. However, the prevailing emphasis on empirically grounded and, of necessity, largely descriptive policy analysis has generated a serious lacuna in the literature: the limited development of a systematic sociological explanation of this fundamental shift in policy-making.[9] While explanatory accounts have been provided by Jesson, Oliver, Shirley et al., and Wilkes (among others), the literature is, for the most part, narrowly concerned with the formation, implementation and evaluation of specific policies. Of the explanatory accounts which have been developed, the most valuable are those which consider the underlying causes of New Zealand's economic crisis, the influence of the Treasury on the Fourth Labour Government, and the extent to

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8 For existing accounts of this fundamental shift in public policy see: Bollard and Buckle, 1987; Birks and Chatterjee, 1988; Collins, 1987; Boston and Holland, 1987 and 1990; Boston et al., 1991; Easton, 1990; James, 1986; Jesson, 1987 and 1989; Jesson, Spoonley and Ryan, 1988; Muldoon, 1985; Roberts, 1987; Roper, 1988; Rosenberg, 1986; Walker, 1989; Wilkes, 1988a and 1988b.

9 This lacuna itself requires explanation but this is beyond the scope of this paper. In part, it reflects the fact that many of the key insights of Marxian methodology and Marxist theory have been lost due to the dominance of intellectual fashions on both the right and the left which share a virulent antagonism towards, and a dogmatic rejection of, classical Marxism (see n.20 below).

which the shift from Keynesianism to neoclassicism may be understood in terms of a crisis of Fordism. In the following discussion I will attempt to underline the key insights contained within these accounts as well as highlighting their major limitations.

## 2.1. New Zealand and the World Economy

From 1947 to 1966, New Zealand's terms of trade fluctuated around a historically high level. While the terms of trade fell dramatically late in 1966 this fall, which continued unabated until 1970, was offset by the strong recovery in the terms of trade from December 1971 to October 1973 in the context of a world commodity boom (see Department of Statistics, 1990: 610-611). However, following the oil shock late in 1973, the terms of trade plunged and from 1974 to 1987 fluctuated around a historically low levels. Expressed very simply, a decline in the terms of trade of sufficient magnitude will generate a current account deficit and deflate the domestic economy by lowering aggregate demand (consumption, investment, government purchases of goods and services, and net exports). The government can respond either by borrowing to offset the deficit or it can allow the economy to deflate with adverse consequences for output growth and employment.

In light of this, it is hardly surprising that most explanatory accounts of New Zealand's economic crisis, and government responses to it, have placed a great deal of weight on the negative impact of the decline in the terms of trade on the New Zealand economy. Because the terms of trade - the ratio of the import price index to the export price index - reflects the specific configuration of New Zealand's integration into the world economy, the historically low level of the terms of trade in the 1970s and 1980s has led many to investigate the nature of New Zealand's relationship to the world economy. In this vein, Easton (1980), Franklin (1978; 1985), Gould (1982; 1984; 1985) Hawke (1985), Jesson (1987; 1989), Shirley et al. (1990) and Wilkes (1988a; 1988b), all place the emphasis on some aspect or other of this relationship in their explanations of the economic crisis.

New Zealand is a very small advanced capitalist trading nation. On the one side, it has traditionally been dependant on a narrow range of agricultural exports to alleviate the foreign currency constraint on the domestic economy while, on the other, both oil and capital equipment, as well as intermediate inputs for the

manufacturing sector, have to be imported (see Hawke, 1985: ch. 11). The specific problem for New Zealand is that, as Gould (1985: 43) notes, 'there are very few countries, certainly among the high income economies, which have suffered a combination of the effect of the oil shock plus a chronically weakening market situation for major traditional exports'.

The weakness of international demand for New Zealand's pastoral exports was in large part a product of the fact that international trade liberalisation during the post-war era was largely confined to manufactured goods. Hawke attributes considerable weight to this in his account of New Zealand's poor economic performance after 1967: '... the fastest growing component of the international economy during the 1960s was the international exchange of manufactured goods. New Zealand did not share in that experience and its relative income level declined accordingly...' (Hawke, 1985: 327). At the same time that the level of demand for New Zealand's traditional pastoral exports has been weak, a series of supply side constraints have prevented these historically low prices from being offset by a sustained increase in export volumes. Gould observes in this regard that, firstly, 'pastoral production cannot grow very rapidly if the area of grassland cannot be increased; in this respect pastoral farming differs from industry... in which land is a relatively unimportant factor of production' (Gould, 1985: 58). Secondly, whereas for much of New Zealand's economic history following European settlement, major technical advances (refrigeration, fertiliser, aerial topdressing, biochemicals, etc.) greatly increased productivity and output at various stages, no similarly important advance has emerged since 1974. This has led Gould (1982: 12) to argue that:

> ... of the many sources of New Zealand's economic problems during the last fifteen years none is more fundamental than that neither further geographical expansion nor technical advances have been capable during that period of generating continued growth of the output of New Zealand pastoral products at anything like the rate which had characterized most of the country's previous history. More and more of the New Zealand labour force have therefore been employed in, and a larger and larger share of the national product has been generated by, activities in which New Zealand does not have the natural advantage it had in nineteenth-century pastoralism.

In sum, New Zealand has since 1974 (and possibly since 1966) been a 'price taker' on both export and imports markets: so small by international standards as to have little effect on the prevailing world prices for its major exports, let alone

having any real influence over the administrative arrangements governing international trade in agricultural commodities.

There can be no doubt that the specific configuration of New Zealand's integration into the world economy has been a major cause of the comparative decline of the New Zealand economy after 1974 and hence of the economic crisis. However, there are a number of problems with relying too heavily on external factors in explaining New Zealand's prolonged economic crisis.

The economic crisis in New Zealand is, in an important sense, multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. In particular, it is important to distinguish and identify both the historical and the comparative dimensions of New Zealand's most recent long depression. Firstly, in historical terms, the New Zealand economy has performed poorly since 1974 compared to the high growth rates of the period from 1947 to 1973. Secondly, in comparative terms the New Zealand economy has performed poorly in relation to the other OECD countries throughout the post-war era.[10] This distinction is a fairly obvious one to draw but nonetheless it is important precisely because it is often assumed that by providing an explanation of New Zealand's comparative economic decline, one is thereby providing an explanation of the economic crisis per se. Indeed, there are three sets of problems raised by an excessive reliance on external factors in explanations of New Zealand's economic decline.

First, it is not true, as both Jesson (1987) and Wilkes (1988a: 38) suggest, that 'the entry of Britain into the EEC ... meant that a vast market on which we had depended for a century *suddenly* became limited in its capacity to take our products' [my emphasis]. In actual fact, as Hawke's (1985: 58) examination of New Zealand's economic history shows, the significance of Britain as a market for our exports started to decline as early as 1936 and the entry of Britain into the EEC had no sudden and catastrophic effect on this long-term trend.

Second, if official measures of economic growth are used as the primary reference point (principally National Income and Gross Domestic Product), then it is difficult to find any justification for the view of Easton, Hawke, Rosenberg

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[10] Although cf. Easton in I. Shirley et al., 1990:31.

and others that 1966/67 marks the crucial turning point in New Zealand's economic history, separating the long boom of the 1950s and 1960s from the long depression of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (see for example, Rosenberg, 1986: ch. 1). In the five years from 1969 to 1973 inclusive, the average annual growth rate of real National Income at Market Prices was 7.02 percent. That is, the economy grew in real terms by 34.2 percent during the period between the fall in the terms of trade recorded in late 1966 and the onset of the world recession in 1974. Further, while it is true that unemployment rose significantly for the first time since the Second World War in 1967, it remained at extremely low levels until 1974. It would appear to be more appropriate to view the period from 1967 to 1973 as constituting the final overheated phase of the Long Boom rather than the first phase of New Zealand's prolonged economic crisis. Indeed, as Pearce (1986) has shown, while real GDP grew at an average annual rate of 4.67 percent from 1948 to 1973, from 1974 to 1987 this rate was a mere 0.59 percent (and for market production groups only, that is excluding central and local government from the aggregate, the average annual growth rate of real GDP was a mere 0.37 percent).[11] Therefore it is the world recession of 1974, rather than the decline of the terms of trade and the emergence of unemployment in the recession of 1967, which must be viewed as marking the beginning of an epoch of capitalist economic decline in New Zealand.

Third, explanations which predominantly emphasise external factors are problematic because they ignore the evident fact that the major capitalist economies, which do not share New Zealand's difficulties with respect to dependence on a narrow range of agricultural exports to alleviate the foreign exchange constraint combined with a declining terms of trade, have nonetheless experienced historically low average rates of economic growth from 1974 to 1990 *relative* to those experienced during the Long Boom from 1947 to 1973 (see Armstrong et al., 1984: chs. 14-15). Because the New Zealand economy is characterized by the same basic tendencies of development as the other advanced capitalist economies, it is likely that the New Zealand economy would have

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[11] Figures derived from the **Monthly Abstract of Statistics**. If the series is continued from 1974 to the year ended March 1990, then the average annual growth rate of real GDP is 0.92 percent. However, this average will be considerably lower once data encompassing the severe 1990/91 recession becomes available and is incorporated in the series.

experienced an historical decline in economic activity after 1974 even if the terms of trade had remained buoyant.

In short, while external factors have been a major determinant of the economic crisis, internal factors have also been significant and so a sophisticated explanation must investigate both the specific configuration of New Zealand's integration into the world economy ('external factors') and the long term tendencies and recurrent crises of New Zealand's capitalist development ('internal factors'). While it may in practice be impossible to precisely determine the relative significance of the external and internal causes of New Zealand's economic decline, it is important to investigate the interplay between them without exaggerating the significance of the former.

The problematic nature of analyses which overemphasise the significance of the external constraints on economic growth in New Zealand becomes especially clear when they are used to explain the evolution of the state''s policy responses to the unfolding crisis. By suggesting that the source of New Zealand's economic difficulties lies outside the domestic economy it is implicitly assumed that there are no endogenous contradictions within the accumulation process that undermine economic growth in the long term. Further, state economic policy-making is viewed largely in technical and apolitical terms: a fall in the terms of trade presents the government with a narrow range of policy options, the selection of one of these options then has a significant impact on the future course of economic development, and so on.

The state response to economic change is deemed to involve technical decisions about the employment of policy instruments to achieve targets through the impact of these instruments on the economy, the causal relationship between the instruments and the desired effects being specified in an abstract theoretical model. Finally, the fundamental class division between capital and labour is obfuscated in this kind of analysis because, firstly, it rests on a form of methodological individualism (individual households and firms are the basic units of analysis) and, secondly, it suggests that ultimate source of social conflict within New Zealand society is the fall in real incomes which, in turn, has been caused by 'external shocks' which have adversely effected the performance of the domestic economy. Thus the impact of collective actors- principally business associations and trade unions- on the formation of economic policy is largely

excluded from analysis. For all these reasons, the conventional economic view contains both an important insight - highlighting New Zealand's peripheral and increasing precarious position within the world economy - and a series of distortions and obfuscations. The contribution of conventional economic wisdom to the development of an explanation of the shift from Keynesianism to neoclassicism can therefore only be appropriated if due care and attention is paid to identifying its limitations.

## 2.2. Treasury Capture?

According to Boston and Cooper (1989: 123), 'Treasury is the most powerful government department in New Zealand' and its influence 'extends over the whole state apparatus and touches almost every important area of public policy, be it macroeconomic policy, social welfare, education, governmental administration, broadcasting, and even defence and foreign policy'. In light of this, it is hardly surprising that Boston (1990), Easton (1990a), Grace (1990), Jesson (1989), Oliver (1989) and Lauder (1990) have all placed considerable emphasis on the strategic location of Treasury and the Reserve Bank within the state apparatus in their accounts of the policy-making of the Fourth Labour Government.

The power and influence of Treasury within the policy process is derived from a number-sources. First, Treasury has the capacity to 'set the broad philosophical or theoretical framework within which most policy options - certainly in the economic and social policy arenas - are formulated and determined. By doing so Treasury is able to define the central questions for analysis, exclude certain issues from consideration, and reject policy solutions which do not conform to the accepted wisdom' (Boston and Cooper, 1989: 133). Second, Treasury has been able to establish and maintain a dominant position in economic policy-making because 'its traditional function of financial controller enabled it to become involved in the whole gamut of governmental activities' (Whitwell, 1986: 20). Indeed, Treasury is formally required to comment on all department submissions to the Cabinet which have economic implications (Boston, 1989: 72). Because Treasury controls the operation of the budgetary process it is able 'to advise on the overall macroeconomic context within which the Budget is prepared, recommend the appropriate fiscal strategy to be adopted, and comment on the allocations to individual departmental votes, as well as on many of the

programmes and activities ... within each vote' (Boston, 1989: 70). Third, because it has the capacity to employ a large staff of highly qualified research officers (approximately 120), most of whom have economics backgrounds, Treasury is able to engineer a reputation of expertise and intellectual strength (Boston and Cooper, 1989: 126). Fourth, this reputation is further enhanced by Treasury's capacity to obtain and utilise information not easily accessed by officers of other government departments (Whitwell, 1986: 24). Fifth, given the specific institutional structure of the state in New Zealand, Treasury has no serious bureaucratic rivals (Boston and Cooper, 1989: 136). Sixth, Treasury has strong political backing in Cabinet because of the high ranking of the finance ministers (Boston, 1989: 77). Seventh, 'Treasury influence within the bureaucracy, and more generally within the financial community, is enhanced by virtue of long-standing recruitment patterns and career paths. Typically, middle-ranking Treasury officers have been promoted to top posts in other departments, while senior officers have retired and taken up directorships in some of New Zealand's major companies' (Boston and Cooper, 1989: 137). Finally, because of the close links between Treasury and business, a government which consistently ignored Treasury advice would risk losing business confidence.

From 1984 to 1990, Treasury was able to use its dominant position to exercise an extraordinary degree of influence over the policy-making of the Fourth Labour Government. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere at length (1990a: 250) that 'so-called 'Rogernomics' has essentially involved little more than the uncritical acceptance of Treasury's neoclassical explanation of the economic crisis, and the rapid and comprehensive implementation of Treasury's policy prescriptions'. While this may overstate the case, particularly with respect to the period from 1988 to 1990, there can be no doubt that Treasury provided the underlying analytical framework for the Labour Government's policy-making throughout its two terms in office.

As Oliver (1989: 11-12 and 18-19) shows in his detailed historical account of the formation of the Labour Party's economic policy from 1981 to 1984, there was a rapid shift from 'interventionist' to 'free market' positions in late 1983 and 'this shift can be shown to have coincided with a period of close collaboration between Douglas and a Treasury adviser seconded to the Opposition'. Thus, as Easton (1987: 146) puts it, 'some miscegenation, that is dialogue between [Treasury and the right-wing of the Labour Caucus], seems likely to have occurred resulting in

a convergence of approaches'. The result was that 'by the time of the 1984 election Douglas and a market liberal economic policy dominated the Labour Party' (Oliver, 1989: 50). This commitment to market liberalism was cemented in place as Labour assumed power in the context of a serious foreign exchange crisis which it was dependent upon Treasury and the Reserve Bank to resolve. Treasury's 1984 briefing papers - *Economic Management* - presented a vigorous and detailed, though empirically unsubstantiated, set of arguments advocating the implementation of a monetarist 'disinflationary' macroeconomic strategy and a programme of supply-side microeconomic reform. In this respect, Jesson (1988: 41, 1989: 69) has argued that 'a policy coup occurred in July 1984' in which 'instead of Treasury and the Reserve Bank implementing the policies of the Labour Party, the Labour Government implemented the policies of Treasury and the Reserve Bank'.

The Treasury/Reserve Bank framework was in turn derived from a number of schools of thought closely associated with the New Right. Easton (1988) has shown that the theory and methodology of the Chicago School was particularly influential on a key group within the Treasury from the early 1980s onwards (in addition see: Easton, 1989a; 1989b; 1990a; 1990b). More generally, it can be convincingly argued (Goldfinch, 1990; Roper, 1990a: ch. 6) that the Treasury and Reserve Bank policy framework is an amalgamation of monetarism (an emphasis on tight monetary policy targeting the growth of the quantity of the money supply[12]), new classical economics (emphasising the significance of rational expectations, relative price signals and incentives for the success of macroeconomic policy settings), public choice theory (which applies neoclassical economic concepts to the study of political behaviour and which seeks to shift the focus of policy-making away from remedying instances of market failure towards remedying instances of so-called 'government failure'), and supply-side economics (high levels of taxation and government expenditure are viewed as reducing the incentives for increased work and saving thereby undermining investment spending and impeding the growth of productivity, employment and output).

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[12] As Whitwell (1990) has shown, this strategy has proven to be technically inoperable - the Reserve Bank now targets interest rates and the exchange rate rather than the money supply per se.

The claim that Treasury has profoundly influenced the general direction, detailed formulation, and mode of implementation of public policy in New Zealand from 1984 to the present is, in my view, undeniable. This then raises the obvious question: to what extent is the transition from Keynesianism to neoclassicism merely a case of the bureaucratic and ideological capture of the Fourth Labour Government, and now the National Government, by the main institutional adviser to the Cabinet in the New Zealand state system? In my view, it is important not to exaggerate the extent of Treasury's role in the transition from Keynesianism to neoclassicism for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are very real institutional limits to Treasury's power and influence within the policy process: it is, after all, merely the government's chief *adviser*. In New Zealand's system of government, the final decisions are made by Cabinet and a number of other sources of advice and influence exist. Secondly, if Treasury's approach was seriously at odds with powerful class-based interest groups in civil society and these were represented by a dominant faction within Cabinet, then it is likely that steps would be taken to modify the Treasury line and reduce Treasury influence. Thirdly, Treasury has done little more than follow the prevailing economic orthodoxy in its policy advice, albeit drawing on the more right-wing currents of thought within this orthodoxy. To view this historic shift in policy-making purely, or even largely, in terms of Treasury capture, is to ignore a series of other, arguably more important, factors underlying it. Therefore the challenge is to clearly identify the significance of 'Treasury capture' while simultaneously incorporating this within a broader analysis of the causes of this fundamental transition in policy-making.

## 2.3. A Crisis of Fordism?

Conventional economists of various persuasions have tended to emphasise the significance of the decline in the terms of trade as a determinant of New Zealand's economic decline and political scientists have emphasised the significance of Treasury's strategic location within the machinery of government as a determinant of the adoption and implementation of neoclassical policies by the Fourth Labour Government. Neither have been seriously influenced by, nor engaged with, Marxist political economy and state theory. The most notable exception to this surreptitious 'disappearing' of the Marxist tradition in analyses of the Fourth Labour Government is the work of those influenced by the French regulation school of neo-Marxist crisis theory. Calkin (1990), Jesson (1989), Shirley et al. (1990), Wilkes (1988a), and the antipodean exponents of Marxism

Today's 'New Times' line (Maharey, 1990; Maharey and Cheyne, 1990; and to a lesser extent, Neilson, 1990; Walsh, 1990), have all used concepts derived from the regulation school in their work[13]. In my view, these explanatory accounts of the transition from Keynesianism to neoclassicism afford a number of valuable insights and, even more importantly, provide integrated and holistic analyses of recent changes in economy, class, ideology and polity. The following condensed critical discussion attempts a genuine critique in which the virtues (insights) as well as the vices (inaccuracies and obfuscations) of the regulation approach are clearly identified.

Regulation theory was pioneered by Aglietta in his book, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, and popularised by a number of disciples (Aglietta, 1979; 1982; Boyer, 1988; Lipietz, 1985; 1987; 1989a). The major Marxist precursor appears to be Gramsci's (1971: 277-316) fragmentary notes on 'Americanism and Fordism' in the Prison Notebooks.[14] Regulation theory flourished during the 1980s and, by 1990, Jessop (1990: 153-216) was able to identify no fewer than seven distinct currents of regulation theory in his comprehensive survey of the resulting body of literature. (For a more accessible introduction, see Harvey, 1989: 119-198). Clearly, it will not be possible to provide a comprehensive exposition that identifies the disparities and nuances which distinguish the various currents within the regulation approach. Rather, the aim here is simply to provide an expository account of Fordism as an ideal type, the regulation theory of the disintegration of Fordism, and the transition to what has variously been described as 'flexible accumulation', 'Post-Fordism', 'neo-Fordism' and 'New

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[13] Many of those who are developing and applying regulation theory in the New Zealand context are critical of the notion of 'New Times' (eg. Calkin and Wilkes). Indeed, the 'New Times' perspective involves a vulgarisation of the more sophisticated variants of regulation theory.

[14] For Gramsci (1971:291), the key innovation of Fordism was the development of production at diminishing costs which would allow, in addition to an increase of surplus value, higher salaries as well. The result of this would be a larger internal market, a certain level of working-class saving, and higher profits. In this way one would get a more rapid rhythm of capital accumulation...'. However there are very real limits to this because 'Fordism [is] the ultimate stage in the process of progressive attempts by industry to overcome the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall' (Gramsci, 1971:280).

Times'. This is necessary because the regulation school of crisis theory is currently the most influential within New Zealand sociology.

The central concepts in regulation crisis theory are the *regime of accumulation* which refers to 'a systematic and long-term allocation of the product in such a way as to ensure a certain adequation between transformations of conditions of production and transformations of conditions of consumption' (Lipietz, 1987: 13), and the *mode of regulation* which is required 'to bring the behaviours of all kinds of individuals- capitalists, workers, state employees, financiers, and all manner of other political-economic agents- into some kind of configuration that will keep the regime of accumulation functioning' (Lipietz quoted by Harvey, 1989: 122). In brutally simple terms, the mode of regulation consists of the historically specific complex web of institutional forms, general norms, habits, laws and so on which facilitate the coordination of production and consumption (and the production of the means of production with the production of the means of consumption) which defines a particular regime of accumulation. Thus, according to Boyer a regime of accumulation can be identified and classified in relation to the following components: (i) the pattern of productive organisation within firms; (ii) the time horizon for capital formation decisions; (iii) the pattern of income distribution; (iv) the volume and composition of effective demand validating the trends in productive capacity; and finally, (v) the relationship between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production (Boyer quoted by Calkin and Calkin, 1990: 11).

According to the regulation school, the history of capitalism is best understood as involving the successive emergence, crisis and transcendence of distinct regimes of accumulation and the modes of regulation respectively generating, inhibiting and regenerating capital accumulation. In this respect, Clarke (1988: 68) observes that while 'Aglietta did not see the regime of accumulation as a means of overcoming the crisis-ridden tendencies of accumulation, but rather as a set of institutional forms which structure the tendency to overaccumulation and crisis', the regulation approach as a whole 'has tended to adopt a structural-functionalist model of successive phases of structural integration and structural disintegration, which has been used as the basis of a periodisation of the long waves of capitalist accumulation'. Three regimes of accumulation are typically identified by the regulationists: the *extensive* pre-Fordist prior to WWI, *intensive* Fordist initial development post 1918, full development post 1945; and

*flexible* 'Post Fordist' regimes of accumulation -post 1973 (see Lipietz, 1989a: 74-75).

The extensive regime of accumulation was based on the expansion of the scale of production combined with the geographical extension of markets through imperialist colonisation during the nineteenth century. The mode of regulation was characterised by the 'competitive determination of prices, of wages, of the level of production' (Lipietz, 1989a: 74-75) and a state which had a highly limited capacity to intervene in order to ameliorate the recurrent crises of capitalist development. In Marxian terms, extensive accumulation was based on the production of absolute surplus value hence the major barrier to sustained accumulation was the underconsumption of the working class. Growth was thus based on the expansion of the scale of production and geographical extension of markets rather than the expansion of *internal* consumption, credit and state expenditure. This regime characterised the development of competitive capitalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reaching its limits with the emergence of Fordist production methods in the 1920s.

The Great Depression of the 1930s was a manifestation of a fundamental and irreversible crisis of the extensive pre-Fordist regime of accumulation. This regime of accumulation was governed by competitive regulation which became increasingly incompatible with the growing productivity of labour in Fordist mass production. This incompatibility arose because the major barrier to sustained accumulation in the 1920s and 1930s was primarily the limited purchasing power of the mass of the population. The limited extent of working class consumption was largely a result of the competitive regulation of the wage relation and of the limited commodification of the reproduction of labour-power (centrally involving the degree of mechanisation of domestic labour). In other words, the new Fordist methods of assembly line production were not being validated ex post facto in the market by final consumption since working class incomes were insufficient to generate the high levels of mass consumption required to absorb the higher levels of output of the consumer goods sector.

An intensive Fordist regime of accumulation slowly emerged in the context of this crisis of extensive accumulation based on the production of relative surplus

value[15] achieved through the scientific organisation of the collective labour process in combination with the introduction of new more capital intensive methods of production, which made possible an epoch of mass production for mass consumption. The new Fordist mode of regulation transcended the principle barrier to extensive accumulation, i.e. the limited extent of working class consumption, by uniquely combining productive techniques which greatly increased the productivity of labour with new institutional forms governing the wage relation which, through rising wages and social expenditure, 'both reconciled workers to the intensification of labour associated with Fordist methods of production and provided the rising mass consumption which absorbed the growing [output of the consumer-goods sector]' (Clarke, 1988: 64). It was this new mode of regulation of the wage relation, viewed by many as an historic and institutionalised class compromise between capital and labour, which constituted the basis of the massive expansion of the advanced capitalist economies during the post-war era.

There is not the space here to provide a detailed description of the Fordist regime of accumulation. I have attempted to summarise in Figure One the major features of Fordism and 'Post Fordism' as conceptualised by regulation theorists. However, it is worth underlining one of the key characteristics of the Fordist regime of accumulation, namely the Fordist regulation of the wage relation. During the Long Boom of the 1950s and 1960s, this was characterised by: (i) the hierarchically organised utilisation of unionised labour in capital-intensive mass production (ensuring productivity growth); (ii) the centralised determination of wages through collective bargaining in the context of state and employer recognition of unions as the legitimate representatives of workers and (iii) 'the socialised management of the reproduction costs of the wage-earning class' (Aglietta, 1979: 116-117) through the expansion of state provision of health, housing, education and welfare. This was based on the institutionalisation of the class compromise between capital and labour in which the former acceded to the unionisation of the workforce and expansion of the welfare state while the latter accepted that wage increases should not exceed productivity increases, thereby ensuring that profitability and accumulation would be sustained.

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[15] The extraction of surplus value from workers is increased through the reduction of the reproduction costs of labour-power; empirically, labour productivity rises faster than real wages.

The regulation of the wage relation is pivotal to the regulationists' conception of both the emergence and the crisis of Fordism because they hold that the relationship between the growth of labour productivity and the growth of working class consumption underpinned the economic expansion of the post-war era. The root cause of the crisis of Fordism is the slowdown of productivity growth since 1974 due to declining profitability and investment in fixed capital. This has meant that real wage increases can no longer be sustained without this further undermining profitability and accumulation.

While regulation theorists agree that the intensive regime of accumulation entered a prolonged crisis phase in the mid-1970s, there is little agreement as to whether or not it, in turn, will be supplanted by a flexible 'Post Fordist' regime of accumulation capable of generating another long wave of economic expansion. Aglietta and Lipietz (among others) appear to be sceptical that new institutional forms of regulation are emerging which will successfully overcome the current crisis. Indeed, they argue that many of the recent regulatory innovations by governments under the influence of the New Right may simply be institutionalising structural unemployment and economic stagnation. For Aglietta and Lipietz, but not for many of their followers, this is because the crisis of Fordism is ultimately determined by the tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

Jesson's extremely valuable historical account of the rise and decline of the Fourth Labour Government in his book **Fragments of Labour** centres on the emergence and disintegration of a Fordist historic compromise between capital and labour. While Jesson does not directly apply concepts from regulation theory, the central thrust of his argument is consonant with the regulation school's analyses of the transition from Keynesianism to neoclassicism. For Jesson, the core of the historic compromise between the capitalist and working classes was the acceptance by capitalists of the working class goal of full employment and a high level of regulatory control over their activities and, by workers, that wage increases needed to be based on increases in productivity and hence ultimately bound by the exigencies of profitable capital accumulation. This 'historic compromise' disintegrated in the 1980s as a result of the economic crisis, the growing influence of the New Right on key members of the Labour caucus, Treasury's strategic location within the state apparatus, and the failure of the trade union bureaucracy to oppose the anti- working class austerity measures of the Fourth Labour Government. Common perceptions of New Zealand's

history have been transformed in the process, and Jesson (1989: 13) insightfully observes in this regard that:

> ...the welfare state appears no longer as a permanent state of affairs but as an interlude between two periods of relative chaos. The welfare state contained within itself a number of powerful and contradictory forces. It appeared to have succeeded in reconciling them, but it had not at all. All that it had managed was a temporary and long-lasting compromise, which in the 1980s flew apart, leaving many of the old battles to be fought all over again.

Wilkes (1988a) has made the most sustained published attempt to apply regulation theory, as developed by Jessop (1989) in his analysis of Thatcherism, to the collapse of the post-war Keynesian polity and emergence of monetarism in New Zealand. One of the strengths of Wilkes' analysis of class, politics and the state is that he carefully considers the 'Jessop thesis' and the extent of its applicability to 'the case of Labour monetarism in New Zealand' (Wilkes, 1988a) whereas Maharey et al. tend to, as Steven (1990: 5) so delightfully puts it, follow 'the British line more or less as it has emerged from the mother country'.[16] Essentially, Wilkes argues that Fordism in New Zealand differs from Fordism in Britain because: (i) mass production is based on food and fibre production for foreign markets; (ii) mass industrial production for local consumption only developed slowly in the context of mass domestic agricultural production for mass foreign consumption; (iii) Keynesianism developed earlier and lasted longer than in Britain; and (iv) the social democratic compromise of the post-war era was more fully developed in New Zealand to the extent that unemployment was significantly lower than in Britain.

The nature of mass production, mass consumption, Keynesian economic management, and the social democratic consensus in New Zealand have been shaped by 'two tendencies, the one long-term and enduring, the other short-term and susceptible to change' which together offer the 'possibility of explaining why it is New Zealand is presently enduring a transition and what this transition means for class politics' (Wilkes, 1988a: 38). These are:

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[16] For a brilliant critique of the theory and politics of **Marxism Today**, see Callinicos, 1985a.

(1) The long-term international structuring of the New Zealand political economy into a refrigeration-based mass-producer of agricultural products, through the bringing together of (largely) foreign capital, and Maori and imported itinerant labour, this produce to be sold, not in New Zealand, but in Great Britain.

(2) The short-term reorientations in the political economy [which are generated by] the domestic political and economic relations within New Zealand (Wilkes, 1988a: 38-39).

New Zealand's structural dependence on foreign exchange revenue earned through the mass production of agricultural products meant that a long-term decline in the terms of trade (reflecting international relative price movements for agricultural and industrial commodities in the post-war era) would adversely effect output and employment growth in New Zealand. In the 1970s and 1980s, changes in the class structure and a rise in social conflict undermined the bi-polar class compromise which helped underpin the Long Boom of the 1950s and 1960s. The intensification of social conflict engendered a crisis of the legitimacy of the state while economic stagnation and rising unemployment engendered a fiscal crisis. The transition from Keynesianism to neoclassicism can only be adequately understood in this context.

The accounts which Jesson and Wilkes provide of the transition from Keynesianism to neoclassicism are close in many important respects to the one which I will be developing later in this paper. Both place class at the centre of analysis and view the state, not as a free-floating set of institutions whose operation is largely unaffected by the structuration of, and conflicts within, civil society, but as a set of institutions deeply embedded in a specifically capitalist society characterised by fundamental class divisions. Thus, unlike many economists and political scientists, both Jesson and Wilkes (1988b: 96) clearly recognise, firstly, that 'the sweeping changes in the direction of Labour's policies [had] close connections with changes in the class structure' and, secondly, that the Labour Government's implementation of New Right policies was premised upon a major shift in the balance of power between capital and labour in favour of the former.

However, despite containing these and many other important insights, there are some problems as well. While I could not agree more with Wilkes' (1988b: 100) argument that 'class analysis, when undertaken with some subtlety and with

attention to the details of historical events, can show the limits of the political to be closely connected with the class structure that frames our society', I strongly dissent from the view that the decline of social democratic politics in New Zealand is largely a product of the absolute growth of the middle classes (petit-bourgeoisie, old middle class, new middle class) and the relative decline of the blue collar working class. While it is incontrovertible that employment in white collar waged occupations has increased considerably relative to employment in blue collar occupations in the post-war era, and while it is also true that new middle class strata have emerged concurrently, on balance these trends can be plausibly interpreted as reflecting the occupational recomposition (and growth) of the working class rather than its absolute or relative decline. Indeed, due in large part to the massive growth of industrial production in the Newly Industrialising Countries, the *global industrial working class* has *increased* considerably in size throughout the 1970s and 1980s: world employment in industrial production increased by 14.1 percent from 1971-1982 despite a 6.5 percent decline in North America and Europe (see Kellogg, 1987, 105-111; Callinicos and Harman, 1987).

Rather than placing so much emphasis on changes in the class structure, it would be more fruitful, to carefully trace the *historical trajectory of the class struggle between capitalists and workers*, both internationally and within New Zealand, over the period from 1968 to the present.[17] And it is over precisely this point that I must also diverge from Jesson. For Jesson's (1989: 29) claim that 'unlike the working-class movements of earlier eras, the protest movement [of the late 1960s and early 1970s] was almost completely uninterested in economics' and that this period involved a continuation of the post-war 'withdrawal of the working class from politics', is simply not borne out by the data relating to strike activity and real wage growth for the period from 1968 to 1977. This period was characterised by the highest levels of prolonged strike activity yet witnessed in

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[17] Earlier, I argued that 1974 marked the end of the epoch of post-war prosperity; hence I suggest that 1968 marks the end of the epoch of post-war working class quiescence 91952-1967). There is nothing inconsistent in this. Marxists have seldom claimed that there is a mechanical relationship between economic crises and class struggles. The global upsurge in class struggle from 1968 to 1976 took place in the context of the final 'overheated' stage of the Long Boom.

the twentieth century.[18] In addition there is a wealth of historical evidence to suggest that, while the labour movement may have been far from storming parliament buildings and establishing a Workers' State of Aotearoa, there was nonetheless a qualitative leap in the militancy of rank and file trade unionists during the period from the nil General Wage Order issued in 1968 until the defeat of the wage and price freeze in 1976-77 (see Boston, 1984; Roper, 1990d). This question will be discussed in more detail shortly.

More generally, regulation theory has been subject to trenchant criticism on both theoretical and empirical grounds in recent years. While conceding that regulation theory contains a number of important insights[19] and that some extremely valuable historical studies have been conducted using this analytical framework (Davis, 1986), in my view the critics have succeeded in demonstrating that regulation theory is profoundly problematic. The critics have argued that regulation theory is problematic because it: (i) has an inadequate conceptualisation of the major stages of capitalist development (Clarke, 1990: 71-98); (ii) rests on an historically inaccurate view of Ford's corporate philosophy, management practice and production methods (Bellamy Foster, 1988: 14-33); (iii) misinterprets the developmental tendencies of capitalism and the significance of recent changes in the labour-process (Bramble, 1990; Bonefield, 1987; Callinicos, 1989: 121-127; Fostor and Woolfson, 1989; Holloway, 1987; Pollert, 1988; Tomaney, 1990; Williams et al., 1987); (iv) is essentially a 'Marxified' form of structural-functionalism- being more Durkheimian than Marxian in its basic heuristic thrust (Clarke, 1988: 67-69); (v) places an excessive emphasis on system (dis)integration which means that the central dynamic of

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[18] Limitations of space prevent me from including graphs and statistical tables here, see Roper, 1990a: Table 1:10; Pearce, 1986, Vol. 2: Appendix 8. This increase is apparent whether measured in terms of workers involved, working days lost, percentage of workforce involved or working days lost per worker. For example, working days lost increased as follows: 1965: 21, 814; 1966: 99, 95; 1967: 139, 490; 1968: 130, 267; 1969: 138, 675; 1970: 277, 348; 1971: 162, 563; 1972: 134, 505; 1973: 271, 706; 1974: 183, 688; 1975: 214, 632; 1976: 488, 441; 1977: 436, 808.

[19] Particularly regarding the institutional forms regulating the profoundly contradictory relationship between the production of surplus value in the labour process and the realisation of surplus-value in the sphere of circulation.

class struggle is not accorded sufficient weight in both the theoretical framework and its empirical operationalisations.

By placing the central emphasis on the institutional forms which coordinate production and consumption, the regulationists' analysis of the crisis of Fordism threatens to collapse into either a contemporary variant of Marxist underconsumptionism or a straightforward Keynesian analysis stressing the difficulties of demand-management given the international integration of production, distribution, trade and capital flows. Finally, many of those who have relied on the regulation approach (following Lash and Urry, 1987: 161-178) have combined this with a patently inadequate conceptualisation of the class structure of the advanced capitalist societies in which the expansion of white collar occupational strata is falsely equated with the expansion of the middle classes and the decline of the working class, rather than with the recomposition of the working class (cf. Meiksins, 1986; Miliband, 1985). This kind of conceptualisation of the class structure also ignores the crucial strategic location of the blue collar working class at the very heart of the economic system, which endows blue collar workers with the collective capacity to stall, control and redirect material production and distribution in the economy as a whole. These problems have led Clarke (1988: 86) to conclude that:

> The past decade has not so much seen a restructuring of the regime of accumulation, based on the development of neo-Fordist forms of production, as a sustained offensive against the working class, aimed primarily at the destruction of the institutional forms of the Keynesian welfare state which underlay the ability of the organised working class to realise a consumption norm based on a generalised expectation of rising living standards.

## 2.4. Explaining Rogernomics: A Critical Balance Sheet

Having covered a large number of disparate sources in the foregoing pages, at this stage it is necessary to pause briefly in order to clearly underline the key points which have been established by the existing explanatory accounts of the shift from Keynesianism to neoclassicism. Firstly, the specific configuration of New Zealand's integration into the world economy, ranging empirically from the pattern of commodity trade through to the internationalisation of New Zealand's capital markets, is absolutely pivotal to understanding the underlying causes of economic decline after 1973. Secondly, the unitary and highly centralised system

of government in New Zealand, in which Treasury and the Reserve Bank enjoy unparalleled influence in the formation of public policy, is not merely an 'epiphenomenal' feature of New Zealand's recent history. Accordingly the institutional structure of the state must be given sufficient weight in any attempt to develop a holistic explanation of the historic shift in policy-making from Keynesianism to neoclassicism. Thirdly, whatever objections one may raise to the notion that the economic crisis in New Zealand is essentially a crisis of Fordism, those influenced by regulation theory have developed insightful accounts of the shift from Keynesianism to neoclassicism which integrate analysis of economy, class, ideology and polity within a coherent and holistic framework. This represents a major advance on the more fragmentary accounts typically contained within the largely descriptive studies of the formation of public policy in New Zealand.

References appear at the end of Part II.

# REVIEW ESSAY

N. Abercrombie, S. Hill and B. Turner (eds), **Dominant Ideologies**, Unwin Hyman, London, 1990, n.p.

## *The End of 'Ideology'?*

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### Introduction

This volume is the third in what has become a major series of texts on the question of ideology. The latest collection highlights more so than the previous two that the debate around the fate of the 'dominant ideology thesis' is also a central forum for more general and somewhat momentous issues, such as:

(a) Is this the end of 'ideology' as a key concept for sociological understanding?
(b) How can the relationship between sociological theory and research in this area be improved?
(c) Can there ever be a unified sociology of knowledge and belief?
(d) What is the point and purpose of social theory?

Accordingly, I want to review this work by commenting on some trends in contemporary social theory and by drawing into the discussion one or two other recent writings on ideology. Apart from its intrinsic intellectual and political fascination, the current exchange on ideology, and the undermining of the idea of a dominant ideology in particular, raises important questions for the analysis of ideology and politics in contemporary New Zealand. I hope to look at some recent texts in this area in a future contribution. For the moment, the focus is generic.

### The Theory of Ideology

In recent times, there has been a move away from what I would call a 'restricted' definition of ideology to a more 'relaxed' one. A restricted definition would see ideology as referring to those theories, social beliefs and commonsense assumptions which are:

(a) partial, distorted, or downright false;
(b) which in some way can be derived from, or an be perceived to serve the interests of particular social groups (usually dominant economic and/or political elites).

Now interestingly, whilst mainly associated with the so-called vulgar Marxist standpoint, the logical structure of this restricted interpretation was shared by various arch-enemies of the Marxists: American pluralist social scientists, philosophical Popperians, and political conservatives. In each case, the favoured content of ideology and its enlightened other ('science') was radically different. For Marxism, the illusions of bourgeois social science and conservative popular beliefs served to create an aura of 'naturalness' around capitalist social relations, the essence of which could only be penetrated by Marxist science acting in the interest of working class democracy. For the other theoretical traditions, Marxism itself perfectly embodied the operation of ideology: a tightly bound theoretical mythology, fanatically pursued, experienced as conversion, and serving the interests of Communist elites who were sworn to obliterate free thinking liberal democracy.

Over the years, on both sides of this divide, restricted views of ideology have given way to considerably more 'relaxed' interpretations. With this shift has come not only a broadening out of the concept of ideology itself, but also a positive rather than pejorative **moral** connotation. Instead of narrow, theorised dogma, ideology is now widely accepted as a matter of general background assumptions and everyday 'commonsense'. Instead of being the product of indoctrination, ideology is now seen as the way in which we come to inhabit cultural values and adopt context-specific reference points. Instead of being the exclusive preserve of elite groups, we are all now the children of ideology in this diluted and relaxed sense. Also, from being exclusively understood as basically **mental** propositions and processes, ideology has become a more amorphous congeries of images, practices and orientations.

It follows that the 'other' of ideology should no longer be regarded as enlightened science or **truth**, but rather **reflexivity**. And the way to go 'beyond' ideology is not so much to undertake a militant rationalist critique in the pursuit of social and spiritual emancipation, but rather to recognise that we do indeed absorb, all the time, a variety of uncritically processed images, rituals and visions. From the

supersession of ideology in a brave new political world, we move to overcoming it in the here and now, through reflexively monitoring the endless critical dialogues taking place within ourselves.

Additionally, the main social function of ideology is increasingly regarded not so much as the advancement and protection of elite material interests (the 'restricted' scenario), but instead, the part it plays in the formation and recognition of personal and social identity. Now, since identity is something everyone as an individual participant in culture has to negotiate and revel in, it hardly seems appropriate to discuss the ideological conditions of identity formation as just so much externally-motivated **illusion**. A 'relaxed' view of the content of ideology thus leads to a fairly positive moral attitude towards the term itself. After all, human beings do need - don't they? - sources of affective belonging and emotional identification, and these sources are inevitably culturally specific. In this way, ideology ceases to serve as one of the chief swear-words of sociological and political polemic.

It also begins to look suspect even to talk of 'ideology' in general. What is this monolithic singular entity and where is the evidence that 'it' is univocally transmitted and passively absorbed by the 'masses'? When those questions are linked to the notorious issue of whether a 'ruling class' in some economically-defined sense can actually be witnessed as a unitary political and cultural agent within civil society at large, the classical conception of the origins and processes of ideological thought appears to disintegrate.

Within Marxism, to take the most obvious example of a 'restricted' tradition, we find a number of attempts to preserve the classical notion of ideology, but within a more 'complex' theorisation. Beginning with a variety of reformulations of the 'base-superstructure' metaphor, designed to try to allow more autonomy and effectivity to the realm of the 'complex superstructures' (Gramsci), neo-Gramscian currents have developed the concept of hegemony as a solution to the crisis of 'ideology'. Here, hegemony is conceived as a matter of intellectual leadership rather than coercive or simple ideological domination, and is firmly based in the perception that popular beliefs and manifest political concerns have an important face value as well as a hidden rationale in the structures of class society. They are true to experience if not to reality (Gramsci said they have a 'psychological validity').

However, hegemony in Gramsci's hands still recognisably remains within the ambit of classical Marxism. There is, in the end, for Gramsci, a 'logic' (a class logic) of the social which somewhere down the line conditions the character and sets limits to the outcome of hegemonic struggle in the political-cultural realm.

To some neo-Gramscians (eg. Laclau and Mouffe 1985), this standpoint is still not sufficiently free of the 'essentialist' logic of restricted theories of ideology (cf McLennan, 1991). To fully accept the materiality and self-contained effectivity of the ideological realm, all attempts to 'root' the logic of symbolic identification in socio-economic positions or motives must be forever abandoned. 'Hegemony' thus becomes the projection of any 'social imaginary' (not only class-derived articulations) into the unstable field of symbolic and linguistic contestation. From the outset, in this view, it is axiomatic:

(a) that there is no 'social' outside of the play of discourses;
(b) that each attempt to construct a hegemonic 'imaginary' is always only one amongst many;
(c) that a safe and secure 'hegemony' is a logical as well as empirical impossibility.

The meaning of the symbolic is always intrinsically 'polysemic'; the 'articulation' between diverse ideological elements are ever contingent and transient; and the very 'subject' who receives or articulates any specific social imaginary is itself a fragmented, 'open' identity, structured by discursive antagonism and difference.

Interestingly, a number of post-Marxist variations on this theme coincide (eg. Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Unger, 1987; Castoriadis, 1987; Lefort, 1986) in the new post-ideological terminology they develop. For example, the 'social' has been presented as an unstable, uncategorisable 'fold' in the social (Lefort), or a primal 'magma' (Castoriadis), or a 'politico-passionate ensemble' (Unger). This belief in the 'unsuturability' of the social (Laclau and Mouffe) signals a general move away from a sociology of classes and positions to a sociology of movements and impulses (cf Touraine, 1981; Bowles and Gintis, 1986). Now the simple fact is that without a sociology of positions, no 'classical' conception of ideology, ie. one couched in terms of misrecognition and interests can get off the ground at all. The 'End of Ideology' indeed.

Talking of which phrase - but more briefly - the situation in American and other non-Marxist sociologies is equally in flux. With the demise of structural functionalism and political science pluralism, the emerging vacuum in 1970's American and non-Marxist sociology became filled precisely by a significant increase in the level of dialogue between erstwhile positivistic currents on the one hand and continental philosophy and (post-) Marxist theory on the other. Clearly, though, with the progressive crisis of the latter and the break-up of the Cold War, there was little likelihood that a substantive convergence within the sociology of previously-opposed traditions would emerge. Except, that is, in an important negative sense: social theory is visibly in a state of flux and plurality, with many different strands jostling for space in the intellectual market-place. Within this field, there has been something of a resurgence of positivism and functionalism, as well as the several postmodernisms that are in play. Nowadays, as always, analytic styles of theorising sometimes clash with expressive modes, but they sometimes coincide too, and each genre today has learned and eloquent exponents.

As regards ideology, new theories of the 'social imaginary' are prominent in the post-Marxist strand referred to above, but in some quarters there is a return to a 'common values' agenda, and even 'civic culture' research programmes. The question therefore arises: given the plurality of perspectives and the lack of anything like epistemological consensus, is there any future for the theory of ideology?

**The 'Dominant Ideology Thesis' Debate**

The plot thickens and the question deepens, when the contributions of Abercrombie et al over the last decade and a half are considered. For in spite of the element of radical posturing of the post-Marxist writers referred to, one of the latter's uncritical assumptions is that whilst ideology is definitely passé, the concept of a 'social imaginary' is eminently sustainable. Indeed, phrased that way, and still in a 'hegemonic' register, the notion of a social imaginary continues to imply a wholistic, society-constituting, subject-constructing process. To engage with, or be part of, a social imaginary is still, it seems, a powerful and absorbing subjective and political experience. One which is even declared to define 'the social'.

Abercrombie et al have the virtues of being much more lucid and down-to-earth than the post-Marxists in their analysis of the end of ideology (as a concept), and they directly set empirical probes going: do people ever really become absorbed in an ideological discourse? How do we know this? What counts as a 'dominant' ideology? How can we move (if at all) from the (problematic) business of decoding 'ideological' texts to identifying dominant social interests? And even if we can do this (tentatively), how do we tell whether ideological subjects are playing the game of taking it all in (or even some of it)? The merits of this critical agenda are firstly to clearly re-pose the issue of definitions; secondly, close attention is paid to the very different moments and aspects of ideological transmission (text → disseminating group → audience reception); and thirdly, the possibility is mooted that social orders are **not** in fact reproduced in and through ideology at all; but rather by means of more mundane and practical considerations. It is in this last thread that the whole tradition of pragmatic, empirical sociology is invoked, and one of the exciting things about the Dominant Ideology Thesis (DIT) authors' work is that it tangibly brings together the concerns of somewhat different sociological endeavours, laying out an agenda for translating some of the most epistemological questions in social theory into very concrete and practical research projects.

Put like that you might think that *Dominant Ideologies* must be a blockbusting book, but this is not really so: I emphasise that it is the cumulative critical probing over a decade or more that delivers some undeniable gains. The present text is not so much a sustained argument (as was *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, 1980 and *Sovereign Individuals of Capitalism*, 1986) as a framework of questions and a varied handful of case studies. The latter provide interesting and ably condensed summaries of particular national cultures and histories, but some participating authors are much sharper than others in presenting these 'cases' as testing ground for the specific questions which drive the editors themselves: does ideology work; if so, how does it work; do the masses take it in; does it 'cement' dominant groups' own self-images? Only one contributor (Anthony Woodiwis) comes out against the drift of the book, to argue (impressively) that, taking the Japanese case as an illustration, certain legal and ideological conditions for capitalism are necessary after all, especially ideas of private property, and that some kind of mass-targeting exercise in hegemony is absolutely required for dominant groups to establish long-term legitimate control. Generally speaking, the chapters on Argentina, Poland, Britain and Australia go the other way. The

feeling here is either that there is no single dominant ideology, or at least none that takes in the masses as such; or that ideological contestation is often relatively open, sometimes evenly balanced, and sometimes infinitely contradictory.

Understandably, the individual chapters by the DIT authors themselves stand out as most relevant to the theoretical debates. Stephen Hill argues solidly that the 'dull compulsion' of practical life, especially in the workplace, is quite sufficient to lead people to pragmatically acquiesce to social orders they may not especially believe in. A range of empirical evidence now exists to support this claim, including material which (he says) also rebuts the influential characterisation of Thatcherism in Britain as having won the hearts and minds of a great swathe of the people through a strenuous hegemonic project (cf. Hall and Jacques 1983). Indeed, many ordinary people actually hold to strong oppositional values. The existence of counter ideological currents, however, may not in itself entail anti-Thatcherism, for the issue here is not just about the breadth and depth of ideological debate but also about whether ideological influences of any sort override pragmatic orientations. Hill concludes from his own research that for the business class in the UK, a dominant ideology along 'New Right' principles is in place but:

(a) that something similar has been there all along;
(b) that such an ideology does not cut across that group's pragmatic interests and so cannot establish the priority of ideology over the latter;
(c) that there is no need for subordinate groups to subscribe to 'enterprise culture' values for a free market regime to prevail.

Nick Abercrombie's chapter on popular culture is another concise and insightful contribution. He distinguishes between three different social processes in the (alleged) cycle of ideological 'transmission'. First, there are the ideological themes which are encoded within texts. Now, even this 'formal' presence of ideology is problematical, because of course there is a debate about whether any specific decoding can be definitive, and there is an issue about whether we can talk of textual codes as ideologies purely at the textual level, that is, separate from evidence about their reception. Finally, there is the difficult question of how textual encodings (media, film, the arts, sport etc) can be traced back to the personnel, beliefs and decisions of elite/ruling class members (always assuming

the latter can be defined and identified as a coherent grouping). Overall, Abercrombie concludes that it is possible to detect dominant discourses within texts which gives them a certain coherence and bite. However, subordinate discourses also make their presence felt, and indeed media textual formats today seem to be increasingly open to analytic contestation.

The second 'ideological' process Abercrombie deals with is the process of the production of texts. Here the dominant ideological themes must 'pass through' the hands and values of professional groups in the media, the state, education, health and so on. It should hardly need saying that this 'filter' process can drastically affect the ideological product, yet Abercrombie is right to say that this is a much-neglected arena by sociologists.

Thirdly, dominant ideology theses have tended to assume that audiences absorb and receive ideological themes passively and gullibly. Yet studies of television audiences show how complex, pragmatic, and fitful reception is; and indeed how very little in the media actually passes for 'real life'. Lay persons know quite a lot about the operation of narrative in their own experience and its re-presentation in artificial formats. With the move into postmodern culture, with its typical mixture of forms and levels of discourse, and with increasing popular sensitivity to produced effects, 'transmission belt' theories of the media and popular culture are rendered extremely speculative.

In his closing 'peroration on ideology', Brian Turner draws out some general conclusions, relating them to what he sees as a vacuum at the heart of contemporary social theory, a vacuum which he thinks is going to last for some time (forever maybe). Within late capitalism/postmodernism, he argues, we are witnessing a pluralisation of life-worlds, a fragmentation of cultural norms, an increasing autonomy of the cultural and intellectual realm from the economic, and the permeation of discursive constraints within material life itself. Clearly, in these changing times, the notions of (objectively-specifiable) dominant modes of production (eg. capitalism/socialism), of dominant classes as such, and of dominant ideologies become highly questionable.

Turner's 'peroration' virtually closes the book on ideology conceived as some society-wide 'ether' (Marx) which everyone somehow unconsciously breathes in. We should note en passant that aspects of post-Marxism as well as classical

Marxism go down on this one. As for sociology, Turner advocates an abandonment of the stagnant materialism/idealism dichotomy and a return to precise and limited research hypotheses; he proposes a belated marriage between the pragmatic empirical tradition and the various theoretical structuralisms. If ideologies do hold, he implies, they hold only in part and the ideological field represents a plurality of concerns (gender, class, age, ethnicity, nationality, family etc). If ideologies exhibit coherence, he feels, they are more likely to do so when dominant groups require self-definition rather than other-domination per se. It follows that if society (and sociology) are going post-modern, then the only 'common culture' will have to be one of sophisticated diversity.

**In Defence of 'Ideology'**

In my view, the position developed by Abercrombie, Hill and Turner is for the most part very persuasive. Indeed, it could be extended even further. Writers such as Jon Elster (1985) have made the point that crude theories of ideology seem to take the beliefs and values that people hold as single, simple modalities when in fact they are often unresolved and multiple strands in which different cognitive and affective possibilities co-mingle. That line of thought has been valuably theorised and researched under the thesis that most people, most of the time experience ideological dilemmas, rather than 'receive' ideological 'messages' (Billig et al 1988). We could add that tensions or dilemmas are also common where pragmatic considerations collide with ideological ones. Sociologists here have to acknowledge and investigate with psychologists the importance of 'micro-foundations'. In that process, the 'big' concepts need to be severely scaled down and made much more provisional than has customarily been the case.

Of course, within sociology generally, and especially within subject areas such as media studies where notions of ideological saturation are clearly relevant and tempting, there have been many efforts to show how sophisticated or spasmodic audience attention and reception is. Whether in theories of 'structuration' or in research projects on children and television, interest for some time now has shifted away from the assumption that people in modern society are cultural 'dopes' towards the assumption that the ideological field is increasingly partial and contested. Especially in 'postmodern' times, information generally is circulated far more widely, for a greater variety of political purposes, and in a larger number of knowledge 'formats' than ever before. As a minor but telling

example of this, think of the way in which current affairs programmes and news analyses are increasingly and consciously structured around a contrast between manifest events/beliefs and underlying conditions, and think how media journalists are committed to the presentation of alternative perspectives on virtually any issue of importance. Whatever one feels about the depth of these presentational forms, news discussions premised on any kind of pluralistic, analytical atmosphere would have been unthinkable even twenty years ago.

That defenders of 'ideology' in anything like the 'restricted' sense of the concept are in a tight spot is clear. Take, for example, a recent and lucid attempt to systematically chart the field of ideology and stake a claim for a critical conception in something like the classical mode. In spite of militant-sounding promises about defending 'ideology' in this way, John Thompson in fact ends up with the following formula:

> The interpretation of ideology is an interpretation of symbolic forms which seeks to show how, in specific circumstances, the meaning mobilised by symbolic forms serves to nourish and sustain the possession and exercise of power (Thompson, 1990:292).

Far from being bold and fearless in its defence of the classic conception, this formulation is vague and ultra-cautious. No generalities are allowed ('specific circumstances'); the causal links and agencies are extremely slippery (symbolic forms somehow 'mobilise' meanings, and somehow 'serve to nourish' power); and the objective is merely (hypothetically) to help 'illuminate' the two-way 'interrelations' between meaning and power.

I am not complaining about the intellectual hesitancy here, only that it is paraded as boldness. This is especially so since Thompson (1990:294) goes on to characterise his 'interpretation of ideology' as a 'depth hermeneutic' wherein we must be content to 'project a possible meaning, one of several possible meanings'. Indeed, he argues that in arguments about ideology, the analyst him/herself is 'plunged' into such a complex realm of meaning and power, such that no conclusive theses about the 'objective' role and operation of ideology can ever really be arrived at (Thompson, 1990:73). Interestingly too, this book, which promises a systematic theoretical and concretely illustrated defence of 'ideology', contains only one concrete example. This is taken from Harvey Sacks and is given a 3-page re-interpretation by Thompson. Two boys are sharing a

dirty joke; Sacks wants to show how dirty jokes can be regarded as a rational institution for handling and transmitting important cultural information; Thompson re-interprets the conversation as symbolically reaffirming power relations between men and women, and as credentialising the joke-teller amongst his male peers.

Now, again without complaining about the author's judgement here (which I find insightful), the fact that this slim slice of discourse is presented as a key condensation of the whole book and indeed a whole tradition of ideology analysis is somewhat bizarre. In the course of his 'state of the art' review, Thompson almost bypasses altogether the classic 'sites' of ideology (education, law, the state), the media is complexified beyond the reach of straightforward summary and even the 'mundane' example of the boys' joke is interpreted only 'plausibly if tentatively' as being ideological (Thompson, 1990:303). Finally, it is additionally interesting that Thompson, as with most sociologists these days, tends to reach for gender (rather than, as before, class relations) as the most obvious and uncontroversial instance of ideological exchange.

At this point, as ideology in any hard sense, especially in any clear socio-economic sense, seems to have completely faded out of the picture, let me try to mount a final counter-attack. In the first place, and however bland his claim may appear, Thompson is quite right to hold on to the lowest common denominator in the critical, classical sense of ideology. Even if couched hypothetically, and even if mediated in innumerable specific ways, there remains something vital and intrinsic about the connection between symbolic meaning and social power. 'Ideology' alone as a concept brings these connections out. Without this emphasis, we quickly re-enter a social world in which rational actors exchange pragmatic preferences within a context of deliberate coercion and routine compulsion. Now whilst it is true that these factors have been undeservedly played down at times, it does not follow that the teeming realm of subjectivity, mythology and values can be translated without loss into the terms of instrumental adaptation.

Now it is not clear whether Abercrombie et al are developing an anti-ideology position tout court, or whether they are merely advocating greater theoretical and empirical care in using the concept of ideology. That very ambivalence is indeed the first major point of critique one can raise against them. Their closing remark

in *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* was that too much had been heard about 'ideology'. But the implication was not fully spelled out then and it remains unsaid: are theorists of ideology to quieten down or just shut up?

If the former implication is assumed, then fair enough, but let us not erect another set of straw people in so doing. As Therborn pointed out in a brief (1984) critique, Abercrombie et al go on as though Marx knew nothing of 'dull compulsion' (his phrase after all) or as if Althusser or Lenin undervalued straightforward coercion. Perhaps anyone who sees ideology as in some way 'functional' for social order or constitutive of social identity is setting themselves up. But in that case, we do seem to have entered an anti-ideology frame, against which some long-standing but fundamental counter-assertions need to be posed.

Against all 'behaviourist' and 'rationalist' conceptions of human agency, we need to say that although human beings may be interest-oriented actors, their interests are inevitably bound up with values, perceptions and aspirations. And equally necessarily, those values and beliefs (about who we are, about what is possible, about what is good) are culturally and societally specific. It is therefore difficult to see how 'ideology' - at least in the 'relaxed' sense of identity-shaping meanings - could be eliminated from sociological discourse altogether.

More controversial is the notion that a relaxed conception of ideology actually implies a restricted conception. But consider: if we are all subject to value-orientations and if we are in some key ways culture- and position-bound in our social identities and perception, then given increasing societal intercourse as a fact of modern life, contrasts and conflicts between a variety of positional ideologies (relaxed) certainly emerge; and such contrasts cannot but raise (restricted) epistemic issues of truth, cross-contextual adequacy, and universality. So, after all, a restricted notion of ideology spills out of the relaxed notion.

Beyond this general conception of humanity, of course, lies empirical social science. The extent of any given ideology, its sources, its effects and its beneficiaries are matters which only research can establish. Yet it takes relatively little scientific endeavour to suggest plausible ideological connections of a 'classical' kind.

Put it this way: why do political parties and governments persistently seek to define and exemplify the true meaning of 'the national interest' or 'growth' or 'freedom' if nothing much hangs on these terms? Why do big firms advertise their products in a 'lifestyle' mode? Why do states invest in 'education' rather than apprenticeship? Why do employers seek to appear to be fair and caring to their employees? Why do men have to take so much pressure before they even concede in their heads that feminists may have a point about male practice? Why have questions of living standards and the use of tanks been so inseparable from issues of legitimacy, democracy and ethnicity in Eastern Europe and the USSR if ideology is negligible?

I put these questions in an urgent and basic form because neither the intentions nor results of social science research stay away from 'ideology' for very long. The 'Thatcherite' revolution in the UK may have been 'over-ideologised' (Hall, 1989, Jessop et al 1989) but still, some significant ideological change amongst a key sector of the electorate has been generally accepted by political scientists as central to Conservative success in the 1980s.

Another example: let us accept completely that everyday conversation and behaviour is more complex and autonomous than theorists of ideology have been wont to acknowledge. But the 'rhetoric' of everyday justification for action and belief is suffused by ideology, is ideology in a sense (Billig, 1991). The paradigmatically 'pragmatic' and everyday activity of shopping in many city areas in the 1990's, for instance, is tangibly 'alive' with ideological concerns (supermarket images of consumption and success; the widespread white racism surrounding ethnic minority corner-shopkeeping etc).

The media too is clearly a central arena for investigation. Here I would say that for all the complexities involved in researching audience response, ideological transmission can be relatively easily witnessed. In television coverage of the British miners' strike of 1984-5, Philo (1990), for example, shows that news texts generally highlighted employer concerns rather than striker concerns, and Philo's subsequent study of the reception of news amongst very diverse social groupings revealed that although specific subcultural inflections clearly surfaced, all audience groups re-interpreted the political events through precisely the same terminology as the news-discourse. As to the mediating role of professionals, I myself carried out some interviews on the issue of ideological transmission. To

a person, I was confronted with convinced (and convincing) assurances of journalistic and editorial freedom and 'impartiality'. Indeed, today producers and editors are quite familiar with academic debates about 'bias' and ideology, and their occupational culture is certainly relatively free from any sense of slavish obedience to media bosses or government ministries. For all that, a major discrepancy between such professional autonomy and the media product can readily emerge, especially in times of social crisis or alarm (wars, strikes, riots, calamities etc). In this instance, my discussions with BBC editors and journalists were followed the very next week by a set of resounding opening utterances on the '6 News', the most notable of which was: 'Good evening, on Day 2 of the campaign to free Kuwait'. That relatively simple re-description of the 'Gulf War' illustrates how in times of trouble, the routine media profession of 'disinterest' can be itself regarded as subcultural ideology (at least in a relaxed sense).

Finally, in this context, the analysis of 'popular' TV game shows, soap operas etc have shown how open to oppositional readings some of these shows can be, and how diverse the audience response is. And yet, some straightforward ideological tie-ups continue to emerge. After a suitably sensitive analysis of the reception of television quiz game *Sale of the Century*, for example, Zwaga and Bassett have recently asserted, in standardly 'restricted' tones, that such shows:

> ...symbolically represent the role of education in a capitalist society, in which education is regarded as a commodity for obtaining material rewards in the marketplace. The comments of the various family members reflected their acceptance of the validity of the underlying premise which drives the show (Zwaga and Bassett, 1991).

## Conclusion

From these general reflections and research snapshots, let us return to the four 'momentous' issues I set out at the start. Beginning with the relationship between theory and research, Abercrombie et al have usefully emphasised that whilst 'ideology' typically encompasses profound epistemological matters, it is an eminently researchable topic upon which a number of sociological traditions can be brought to bear, and from which they each must learn. What do people believe in? Are ideas important to them? Can regimes get by without ideological legitimation? The theoretical debates in a sense cannot get off the ground without knowing some answers to these probes, and such empirical

knowledge can to some extent be produced without explicit commitment to a specific theoretical or political stance. In the 1970s, the very idea that theory and research could be seen as both mutually reliant and yet as relatively independent would have been anathema; today it seems to signal a more confident profile for sociology as an academic discipline.

Placing the 'empirical' inflection alongside theoretical critique, we can certainly agree to speak no longer (if we ever did) of a single, unified, mass-imbibed dominant ideology/value system/hegemonic project. Ideological reception is usually diverse, contradictory and straddled by dilemmas; coercion and sheer routine are always present and sometimes decisive; ideologies are often more important to (a range of) dominant groups than they are to subordinate groups. All this can be accepted - at least prior to further research and reflection.

Nevertheless, as long as we conceive human beings as thinking, feeling, and limited agents, and as long as traces of 'classical' questions continue to surface in the research, the question of ideology continues to remain central to social theory. And as long as the question of ideology is politically urgent (as seems likely), the cutting edge of a restricted interpretation of ideology will be needed. Here I agree with other defenders of 'restricted' views (eg. Eagleton, 1991): we have by no means reached the stage where (for example) racist, sexist, classist and other elitist ideas can pass as being just some culturally specific values amongst many others. Social scientists, in other words, must be committed to the critique and exposé, as well as the understanding of belief systems if the sum of human knowledge and political self-realisation is to be increased.

It follows (in relation to momentous consequence (a)) that we have not yet reached the end of ideology as a social configuration, nor the end of 'ideology' as an interpretive concept. Even if we replace the idea of 'the dominant ideology' with that of various dominant ideologies (perhaps 'prevalent ideologies' is better still), we are still some way from the idea of an infinite range of social images and identities which in turn bear purely contingent relations to prevalent power structures. Bryan Turner correctly argues that in postmodern times the notion of a unified society having to reconstitute itself on an imaginary plane looks dubious (Abercrombie et al, 1990:243). Instead, we are witnessing a further 'pluralisation of life-worlds'.

In my view, there is a good deal in these postmodern sentiments. But they themselves require much further research before they can be so confidently asserted.

Are we talking here of 'pluralisation' reaching a point where no dominant discourses can be identified at all; to the point where a truly vast range of ideologies bear no 'structural' connection whatever to the social positions of the groups which entertain them? Surely not. Here again, some care in terminology does help to resolve unproductive antinomies. To say that societies, in an epochal sense, develop a certain reproductive pattern and a prevailing batch of discourses and norms, is not as I see it saying that society is a unitary purposive 'entity' or that each society 'necessitates' (in any sense of predestination or logical entailment) any particular ideological configuration. Turner does not seem to go along with some full-blown postmodernists in holding these expressions to be simply variants on a barren functionalist and necessitarium theme. As a discriminating sociologist, he would I am sure, accept (1) that crass critiques of functionalism are as bad for sociology as crass functionalism; (2) that a polarity between sheer necessity and mere accident is totally unproductive, and (3) that 'ecstatic' brands of postmodernism lead us right down that track.

Initially momentous issues (c) and (d) have in a sense been covered already. There is no doubt that a militant 'enlightenment' stance on either count is problematical. It is hard to see how there could ever be consensus or unity around what constitutes 'knowledge' as against 'ideology'. And there will always be different versions of the social formation and impact of whatever 'distorted' ideas can be fingered. So a unified 'sociology of knowledge' can be conceded to be a somewhat archaic and illusory notion these days. Moreover, in the absence of the theoretical confidence deriving from even a rudimentary science-ideology distinction, the very point of social theory becomes blunted. Does social theory exist, for example, to provide knowledge of the societal totality as it evolves - or is it a matter of firing off variously interesting conceptual and empirical probes? These are two very different and competing visions.

Here again, though, the alternative between militant enlightenment and rampant postmodernism looks both unrepresentative and stultifying. Without some notion of conceptual progress and societal coherence ( I would argue) sociologists and social theorists could simply not engage in worthwhile discussion. In that light,

Turner's picture of a 'theoretical vacuum' at the core of social science, one which puts into question all 'positional' and 'epochal' categories (class, capitalism, causal determination) can itself once again be taken - and judged - in two ways. In one aspect, he is clearly right to record the significant disarray and hesitancy in most available paradigms, and the lack of any single leading intellectual force. That is to say, all particular instances of positional categories are under fire - and perhaps deservedly so. A much stronger thesis is that positional categories of any type are illusory and redundant. This full-blown postmodernist critique does not merely put into question 'ideology' and the sociology of knowledge; it rejects the very idea of (structural, wholistic) social theory, however hypothetically framed, sensitively developed and carefully researched it turns out to be. As will be clear by now, I cannot accept this stronger thesis, though it is also noted that I probably cannot 'prove' it to be mistaken as such. Exactly where the DIT authors themselves stand on this I am still not sure. But by rounding off a decade of work on 'ideology' with some ringing pronouncements about the future of social theory, Turner and his colleagues must now either go on boldly to suggest a new postmodernist sociology, or back off somewhat in order to retrieve and consolidate whatever 'modernist' sociology has delivered on ideology and on the very idea of a social science. In the meantime, the concept of ideology remains crucial in helping us understand how it is that societies manage either to hang together or to disintegrate.

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# REVIEWS

## Roy Shuker and Roger Openshaw, with Janet Soler, **Youth, Media and Moral Panic in New Zealand**, DELTA Monograph No.11, Department of Education, Massey University, Palmerston North, 1990 (**$15**).

*Reviewed by Jock Phillips*
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There is much to admire in this imaginative study, **Youth, Media and Moral Panic in New Zealand.** In what is surely a logical and intelligent model for social science writing in this country, the authors begin by examining overseas theory and then move on to local material hoping thereby both to illuminate New Zealand history and also to raise larger questions about the international debate. In this case, the theory they take off from is Stanley Cohen's concept of moral panic contained in his classic study of 'Mods' and 'Rockers'. They take account too of **Policing the Crisis**, an examination of the panic about mugging by Hall et al. Within this framework, Openshaw and Shuker then explore a fascinating series of alleged 'moral panics' in New Zealand. Four concern the behaviour of youth - juvenile delinquency in late nineteenth century New Zealand, the Mazengarb report about juvenile sex in the Hutt Valley in 1954, the Hastings Blossom Festival riot in 1960, and the Queen Street riot of 1984. Four chapters concern panics about the media which influence young people - the movies, video nasties, comics and rock'n'roll.

This is a most imaginative cluster of studies and there is some rich and suggestive material presented. The empirical research on the Hutt Valley scandal of 1954 which was put together by Janet Soler is especially interesting. Inevitably, most of the sources used are derived from the daily press since the role of the media plays such a large part in Cohen's initial model; and from a purely factual point of view, one rather regrets the absence of oral history which might have given the participants' perspective and would also have provided a revealing dialogue with the press's view.

There are also some thoughtful asides in the work on the conflict of high and low culture and some intriguing hints about the very different meanings of British and American popular cultures in this country. I would like to have seen these ideas

further developed. Nevertheless, there is much in the factual detail to interest the historian, even if the large number of typographical errors can be annoying.

But is there much of interest in these New Zealand studies for the student of international theory? Essentially, the book does no more than throw up some of the problems and inconsistencies in the concept of moral panic. For a start, there is the whole issue of just what is a moral panic. The literature assumes that a panic is a social reaction which is out of proportion to the 'real threat'. But how does one decide if a threat is real or not? One suspects that a moral panic is defined as such by the observer if it is a concern which he/she does not share. The result is that all the moral panics in this book, following the British literature, are right-wing responses to youth. But what about left-wing movements such as the anti-nuclear campaign - is that a moral panic, even if one agrees with the aims? The issue becomes especially pertinent in the chapter on video nasties where the authors, influenced by the new feminist critique of pornography, find themselves wondering whether this particular panic was in fact justified.

Second, there is a continuing problem in the model about the role of the media. In Cohen's original work, a schema about the course of panics is developed which emphasises the place of the media in escalating fears. Yet this of course raises huge theoretical issues about the media as social actor and determiner and the media as merely the vehicle for larger social forces.

Hall et al recognised this issue and sought to argue that moral panics did indeed have their origins in deeper social processes. Panics occurred when there was a 'general crisis of hegemony'. This is a slippery concept, but a suggestive one. However, it is not systematically applied in this book. The authors are good at providing a context for the various panics, but they fail to analyse systematically the social groupings involved in promulgating the panics and how the theory of hegemonic crisis applies. The one case study where this is attempted is the chapter on juvenile delinquency in the late nineteenth century, and here the argument is unconvincing. Using American literature, the authors argue that concern about juvenile delinquency emerged from a 'new middle class'. This might have been true in nineteenth century Chicago where large numbers of new professionals were in the ascendant, but such a social development did not occur in New Zealand until the years after World War 2.

To be fair, in their final very brief conclusion, Shuker and Openshaw do admit that their studies have thrown up problems with the international theories. But one can't help thinking that this is where the book should have begun, and that the studies with all their richness of detail could have been used to evolve a much more rigorous and satisfying theory of moral panics. Then this book would have made a major contribution to the international literature rather than serving as an interesting, but essentially provincial, footnote to the British studies.

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## Martin Albrow, **Max Weber's Construction of Social Theory.** Macmillan, London, 1990, 316pp. n.p.

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Martin Albrow's stimulating book can be read on several different levels. Firstly, it provides an insightful and readable introduction to the meaning of Weber's work. Secondly, it contains a number of provocative interpretation's of the Weberian oeuvre that will delight or infuriate detractors and aficionados alike. Thirdly, and sometimes a trifle unwittingly, it represents an excellent example of Weberian analysis. Weber has been rendered more meaningful by being analyzed with methods refined by himself.

Albrow's book is organised into three parts, each section reflecting phases of the process of understanding. The first part examines the origins of Weber's ideas, not strictly in a biographical or historical vein, but in the sense of discovering the forces that drove Weber's creative powers. Albrow, using verstehen seeks, to explore the chain of motives that led Weber to grapple with certain problems and the actions and ideas that were resourcefully used to seek a solution to them.

This exploration, much influenced by Mommsen's work, brings together Weber's scientific and political opinions and sets them within several interconnected contexts. Namely, Weber's personal, and often painful, journey through life; his

intellectual career; and the socio-historical milieu of the changing German state within which he lived.

Weber's life, career and its political context, Albrow argues, all reflected a series of dilemmas, still unresolved, for Weber's own class and its cross-national cultural forms. The inner tensions of the Protestant weltanschauung; the clash between the moral and material imperatives of the bourgeoisie; the intellectual conflict between rationality and irrationality; the debates about fact and value, discovery and explanation; and the political quest for leadership without tyranny; are all irrevocably woven together.

Albrow believes the tension between Kant and Neitzsche best exemplifies Weber's struggle to understand himself and the world. Following Weber's own maxims, Albrow looks for meaning in the context of Weber's own life world, rather than meaning itself. A selective and facile exegesis, the author suggests, misses the taken for granted assumptions that underpin textual creation. For Albrow, 'Weber's work was not a bourgeois answer to Marx, even less a technical means to control the masses. It was a pure expression of the intellectual resolution of the personal problems and practical conduct of the educated classes in pre-1914 Germany' (p.108). Marx, the author persuasively claims, was less of an intellectual challenge to Weber because, unlike Nietzsche and Kant, he operated from outside the bourgeois psyche. Marxism was a stance to be respected, but ultimately to be rejected on familiar Weberian methodological and political grounds.

Weber was thoroughly imbued with the Kantian ethos that supported his own cultural heritage - he strove for order, unity and universality in his life and world view - but he always recognised the tension between reason and feeling. Hence, Neitzsche's concern with power and struggle, asceticism and the multiplicity of values are all reflected in Weber's own work. But Weber, Albrow suggests, cavilled at the idea of superman and never shared Neitzsche's contempt for the masses. Weber also accepted many of Hegel's ideas but rejected his belief in the divine nature of the Idea. In short, Albrow's Weber cannot be easily labelled as an 'idealist' or 'materialist', so attempts to pigeon-hole are as much a reflection of the social context of the labeller as the persuasions of the thinker himself.

What Weber sought to fashion was a mode of analysis that linked experience to reality - the latter reflecting a partial ordering of an immense array of social facts opposed to a world of ideas. The premises and constructs that Weber adopted and refined are displayed in the second part of Albrow's book where he deals with Weber's thoughts on rationality. The author sees Weber eventually producing a thoroughly sociological contribution to a rational methodology that both emerges from and aids our understanding of 'the dominant process of development in world history'. What emerged was an empirical (but not empiricist) social science that was irretrievably linked to the very process that was the focus of study.

This reflexivity lies at the heart of Weber's attempt 'precisely to establish just in what way social structures of meaning existed and the way they have developed over time' (p.96). This task was driven by the question - why do people do things? That disarmingly simple query provoked the method of verstehen, and the troublesome, some might say irrevocably flawed, conceptual distinction between various levels of understanding. This line of enquiry, clearly premised on the belief that only individuals are the bearers of action, inevitably led to an attempt to grapple with the notion that the world of culture - his (Weber) and 'our' world - is and was continually changing through human action. Yet a link must be established between the individual and those collective representations that social analysts so often assign a misplaced concreteness.

That link, as every sociology student knows, was methodologically attempted through Weber's ideal types. Such types (Albrow maintains) were not, as Schutz argued, simply an extension of 'normality'. They were, too use Albrow's phrase, more intense and more extensive. Ideal types were constructed after a more explicit (hence intense) scrutiny of one's own values and thus evoked the possibility of detachment and they were designed to aid the task of generalising beyond the purview of most individual's understanding of their everyday life. Weber's ideal types were not a rebuttal of an actor's meanings, nor were they ever a replica of 'reality'. More provocatively, Albrow claims, they enabled Weber to relate individual meaning to social structure.

He argues this position in his thoughtful chapters on collective action and the historical development of rationality. But the point is best made in the third section of this book, where the author further explores Weber's views on

understanding and social structure, the empirical study of values and his thoughts on the social.

In this section, the author seeks to rebut the common accusation that Weber's method and empirical sociology are quite distinct facets of his work - the latter insightful, the former mistaken. Albrow argues, I believe convincingly, that instead of perceiving a lacuna between 'the ideal complexes of meaning in his ideal types' and 'the psychic reality of the individual' (p.210), Weber's concern with the average or approximated meaning of a plurality of actors, both aids the understanding of individual motives and underpins sociological generalisations about structures of meanings. In a detailed and provocative argument, that I can only signpost here, the author shows how rich Weber's vocabularies of meaning and structure were. What emerges is a highly elaborate sense of different sequences of action and multiple complexes of meaning that defies any facile accusation of Weber's neglect of structure.

Most tellingly, Albrow concludes by stating that: '...ultimately understanding for (Weber) always takes place within a non-meaningful context. Complete structures are unreal or exist only in the human mind: in social reality they are necessarily incomplete at the level of meaning' (p.218). This point raises once again the unease that Weber had with collective concepts. If one argues that every individual, in isolation or collectively, continuously constructs and reconstructs social relations, then 'society' should never be the starting point for sociology - it is the outcome of our empirical investigation of such relations (p.269).

Finally, Albrow assesses the implications of Weber's perspective for contemporary socio-political issues, the current state of social theory and the place of sociology in the modern world. He concludes, reasonably if not a trifle eulogistically, that Weber's thoughts display considerable prescience and the task is to build on the spirit of the Weberian project. Weber's own experience should forewarn us of the difficulties of such an undertaking, but for those forced or willing to enter the labyrinth of Weberian thought, Albrow's book should be an indispensable companion.