Managerialism and *'infinite human resourcefulness'*: a commentary upon the *'therapeutic habitus'*, *'derecognition of finitude'* and the modern sense of self

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines new managerial discourses and practices in which the dialectic of labour is reconstructed as a series of acts of self-understanding, self-examination and 'self-work', and through which the 'self *qua* self' is constituted as the central object of management technologies. We interrogate concepts such as 'excellence', 'total quality', 'performance', 'knowledge', 'play at work' and 'wellness' in order to decipher the ways in which managerialism deploys what we term *therapeutic habitus*, and projects a new horizon of 'human resourcefulness' as a store of unlimited potentialities. We invoke management's wider historical-cultural context to situate managerialism within the framework of modernity as a cultural epoch whose main characteristic is what we term 'derecognition of finitude'. It is the modern synthesis – with the 'self' at the centre of its system of values – that provides the ground for current elaborations of subjectivity by managerialism. The paper examines how current vocabularies and practices in organisations use 'work' to rearticulate discursively the human subject as an endless source of performativity by configuring work as *the* site of complex and continuous self-expression. Management itself thus acquires a new discursive outline: instead of appearing as an authoritarian instance forcing upon workers a series of limitations, it now presents itself as a therapeutic formula mediating self-expression by empowering individuals to work upon themselves to release their fully realised identity.

Keywords: managerialism; modern self; therapeutic; habitus; finitude

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Introduction

Over the last twenty-five years or so, 'managerialism' has become an increasingly hegemonic discursive regime with all-encompassing ambitions as a formula of governance in neo-liberal societies. Scholars such as Enteman (1993), Rose (1999), Thrift (1997, 2002), Roberts (2002), Heelas (2002), and Power (1997) examined this phenomenon.

As Margaret Thatcher (in the British context) encouraged managers to reclaim the 'right to manage' from what was seen as a detrimental post-war social contract with trade unions and workers, the cadre of managers and executives grew and the managerial idiom expanded in a variety of ingenious and subtle ways. For many, however, such as Wheen (2004) or Watson (2004), the cultural subtlety of managerial vocabularies and practices remains indiscernible from the proliferation of what they term 'mumbo-jumbo', 'gobbledygook', or 'psycho-babble'. In the field of organisation and management studies, the dominant critical interpretation is that new managerial discourses are mere 'fashions' and 'fads' (Abrahamson, 1991, Huczynski, 1993, or Prieto, 1993).

In this paper, we will interpret managerialism as a more intricate and nuanced nexus in which the meaning of work and 'self' in modernity are drawn in and continuously (re)configured. The argument is that a new logic underpins management today: *to govern work mainly through subjectivity*. Productivity, profitability, efficiency, and effectiveness have increasingly become dependent upon a new cultural and political economy of subjectivity at work. Only if human subjects intensify their contribution *as selves* can they (as human resources) enhance the production process and lead the organisation to success. The omnipresent slogan 'people are our most important asset' is much deeper than the episodic waxing and waning of one fashion or another. Recent managerial vocabularies reveal an important transformation of the position and engagement of the subject in relation to the economy, society and polity. This is not a superficial, temporary and irrelevant accumulation of managerial *mumbo-jumbo*. On the contrary, management deploys cultural resources for governance which engage the total contents of modern subjectivity. The historical conditions which make possible the expansion and dispersion of management mentalities are rooted in the modern sense of self. In modernity, the subject has become its own referential axis in a new matrix of self- and world-understanding.

Various avenues can be pursued to interpret the consolidation of managerialism's new logic of governance. We focus upon what we see as two of its main dimensions: the extensive and intensive mobilisation of what we term the *therapeutic habitus* of the modern self-expressive self, associated with a specific horizon which we term *derecognition of finitude* that marks out the onto-cosmological synthesis of 'Atlantic' modernity at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

The paper, first, describes some of the current tropes of managerialism relating directly to the formulation of the 'self' as the centre of governing work, such as 'excellence', 'performativity', 'knowledge', 'creativity' and 'innovation', 'play', 'fun' and 'wellness' at work. The second part investigates the apparatus of managerialism in its immediate, everyday concreteness, through what we term *therapeutic habitus*. Managerialism becomes, in the latter part of the last century, the way in which the culture of the therapeutic (in Rieff's sense, 1966) emerges as a new modality of governing work. Management itself thus acquires a new discursive outline: instead of appearing as an authoritarian instance which forces upon workers a series of limitations, it now presents itself as a therapeutic formula mediating self-expression

by empowering individuals to work upon themselves to release their fully realised identity. The full realisation of identity, explored in the third part, is predicated upon the concepts projecting 'human resourcefulness' as a store of unlimited potentialities. We introduce the notion of *derecognition of finitude* to capture the basic trend of contemporary managerialism which exhorts every individual to see her/himself as a unique 'finite infinity' who ought to seek in labour the path to find, inhabit, perform and activate his/her own particular endless resourcefulness. Managerial ideology thus projects, through various therapeutic tactics, a new image of 'human resourcefulness' as an 'infinite sphere', with its centre everywhere and circumference nowhere (in Eckhartian terms).

I. Managerial vocabularies and the 'self' as an infinite resource

This section discusses management concepts in which subjectivity has become central to the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 1982, p.220-221) in work organisations since the 1980s. This phenomenon (known as the *cultural turn* in critiques of managerial ideology) has been much debated (e.g. Anthony, 1994; Alvesson, 2002a, 2002b; Heelas 2002; Ray and Sayer 1999; Symon 2005; Thrift 1997, 2002; Willmott 1993). Our aim is to spell out more clearly the shift through which *subjectivity* became the key *locus* of governance in managerialism. The sheer number of concepts associated with the subject requires careful consideration. We analyse the *intensification* of demands placed upon the subject and show how new, richer, more ramified and more demanding ways of involvement in work have become part of the managerial vernacular.

The essential point about the managerial idiom is that it is *conceptual*, in Koselleck's sense (1985, 2002), rather than remaining mere faddish 'mumbo-jumbo' (Wheen 2004, Watson 2004). In other words, it has acquired the power of 'concept' as something decisive in the formulation and contestation of new horizons of expectation regarding the constitution of what counts as 'work' in relation to 'subjectivity' at this particular historical moment. What do we mean concretely? For example, Berg (1995) asks in the *Journal for Quality & Participation*, "What is expected of us?":

> "Long-term customer loyalty. . .
> Employees who are continually expanding their abilities to create desired results. . .
> Energetic commitment to company goals. . .
> Creativity and innovation. . .
> Exceptional teamwork."

In her view, it is only those organisations

> "that provide a fun, pleasant, supportive work environment [that] will have the edge in attracting superior people who view work as a joy and have abundant energy, enthusiasm and talents to focus toward organizational goals. They will also unleash all of the undiscovered innovators-in-waiting who have worked there for years, with no one, including themselves, having an awareness of how much more they could contribute.

We spend too much time at work not to have fun, while we're there; when we wait until we finish our work to play we run the risk of living less joyful lives and operating less successful companies." (Berg 1995)

Terms such as 'continually expanding abilities', 'abundant energy and enthusiasm', 'undiscovered innovators-in-waiting', or 'fun' are now ubiquitous and consolidated within managerial discourse and beyond. What interpretive operations stabilised this new vocabulary?

Chronologically, we begin with the category of concepts generated, in the early 1980s, by the idea that *organisational culture* was vital to competitive advantage. It was a move made in the name of reconstituting 'Western' corporations as reunified social and political entities with a common set of interests. 'Strong cultures' (Deal and Kennedy 1982; Kotter and Heskett 1992) were conceived as the solution for increased quality and productivity. A unified organisational culture appeared as the necessary response to a period of industrial tension and unrest. The aim of managing culture was to recover the managerial prerogative and to marshal organisations around a collective identity underpinned, however, by the attributes of an autonomous, 'empowered', working subject with a 'reengineered' mentality of organisational membership. The ingredient of the collective notion of culture was the powerful governmental concept that continues to frame the relationship between people and organisations: *commitment*. Commitment became the currency for re-enlisting individual subjects in a united mode of work leading to increased performance manifest in 'excellence' and 'total quality' (Peters and Waterman 1982; Wilkinson et al. 1998).

Excellence (alongside *Total Quality Management*) brought forth the process of work and production around the image of an endless path, a continuous 'search' (in Peters' and Waterman's terms, 1982), for a manner of labouring which provides individuals and organisations with a new horizon of 'self-transcendence' in the name of 'total quality'. *"Let us help you know where you are on your journey to excellence"* professes BPA, a consultancy for call centre operators (BPA 2007). Yet when Peters and Waterman published *In Search of Excellence* (1982) the focus fell somewhat predictably upon *excellence* rather than *search*. Although many of the companies held up by the authors to be 'excellent' quickly ran into various financial difficulties, the more interesting and longer lasting aspect of the title – the idea of an endless *search* for the 'holy grail' of excellence – was largely overlooked. The 'search', however, illustrates more clearly what Thrift (2002) calls the 'exploratory mode of capitalism' and perhaps represents Peters' and Waterman's most revolutionary insight.

To 'excel' means to surpass oneself and others, to reach ahead of the actual present, to rise perpetually higher for something which lies outside the realm of the immediate. 'Excellence' is not marginal to the constitution of what counts as the measure of work in everyday organisational practices all over the world. In fact, it has become *the* measure of aspirations of performance today. What is interesting in this discourse is that excellence is not primarily embodied in objects, but it is a primordial moral attribute of subjects who ought to strive continuously to mobilise untapped inner resources to overcome limitations in the pursuit of ever more 'excellence'. Thus it becomes not just a purpose of 'good work' but also a teleological 'hypergood' (Taylor 1989), a source of self-realisation and self-actualisation. Brooks calls this the 'mighty Achievatron' functioning from the very early age on the basis of,

> "anxious parents, child psychologists, teachers, tutors, coaches, counsellors, therapists, family-centred activist groups, and social critics [that] organically cohere into an omnipresent network of encouragement, improvement, advice, talent maximisation and capacity fulfilment." (2004, 142 ff.)

Brooks emphasises however that "nobody planned it. There is no central control deck." (idem) How else could pre-school centres called *'Little Achievers'* – from Essex and Preston in the UK, to New Jersey and Florida in the USA – be deciphered? Equally, how could we account for the image of *'Me PLC'* promoted in the brochure of the careers service of a leading university in the UK? Similarly, how are we to relate to DANONE's talent management system called *Odyssée*?

> "*Odyssée* is based on a trilateral "contract": each team manager must encourage his team career progression, each HR manager must follow everyone's project and each manager must be the main player in his own development." (DANONE People website, accessed June 2007)

Such moves engender a new dialectic between the labouring subject and its own sense of 'self'. This dialectic is emphatically brought to light by the new discourses of *performativity* and *performance management* which have become the generic demand of work. They have established a fundamental link between increased personal engagement with work and an effective production process. Their practical translation is the multitude of techniques of 'audit' and 'accountability' (Power 1997): management by objectives, agreed targets, multi-dimensional appraisals and performance management systems.

The subtle politics of the performance-performativity nexus lies in the message that organisations now rely largely upon performing subjects, rather than performing subjects upon organisations. The key practice is the performance appraisal. Although it takes many forms, it follows a common course. First, the subject of appraisal ('the appraisee') states his/her own view of personal performance in a confessional stage (Townley 1994). Secondly, an examination by the line manager (as appraiser) results in a dialogue whose aim is to negotiate areas of improvement and development that might be addressed through various training opportunities offered both as a chance to improve work results and as a prospect for self-improvement. This process generates an opportunity and an obligation to self-express and self-explore, whilst simultaneously acting as a platform for continuous audit by the organisation. It moves away from traditional forms of monitoring by embroiling the subject in the act of organisational control, coupled with the therapeutic principle that outcomes must always be agreed upon. This changes the approach to what traditionally was seen as the managerial prerogative of control and situates it in a process of double translation. On the one hand, the organisation translates its objectives into performance targets, and, on the other, the subject expresses its own specific needs and makes the organisation responsible for their fulfilment. What emerges is a new mechanism of governance which makes the employee the focus of a quasi-therapeutic encounter. 'Performance' has also become the predicate of the journey towards excellence. It makes manifest, in discourse and practice, the postulate that the working subject is always capable of 'more', of 'becoming better', of learning, creativity, knowledge and 'talent' beyond that which is currently performed.

As the 1980s and 1990s progressed, the set of concepts associated with *'knowledge'* was added to the vocabulary of managerial governance. 'Knowledge' became the great differentiator of performance and main platform of personal and collective success. As '*the* new resource', it was embraced at all levels of government and governance and became the principle of the so-called 'new economy' in which 'information' and 'information technologies' appear to carry the promise and hope of endless resourcefulness. Underpinning it is the expectation that the subject at work should also see itself as participating in a continuous process of knowledge creation. Work is presented as a space for self-expression opened up by the eagerness of organisations to embrace new ideas and changes, to de-routinise labour (no organisation wants to be seen as 'mainstream' anymore). The complement is the willingness of the self to engage in continuous learning, development and creative thinking.

Yet it would be misleading to present new managerial views of human resourcefulness simply as more intense disciplinary matrices which require the construction of working identities around a form of *askesis* based upon self-renunciation. Quite the contrary, we would argue: excellence, performativity, or knowledge point to a very different cultural stratum. Instead of predicating work upon the premise of sacrificing the integrity of the whole person, they draw around work the discursive contours of liberating the entire 'self', releasing it from the erstwhile shackles of 'Taylorism'/'Fordism' or of the 'Protestant Ethic'.

This projection of personal fulfilment, liberation and endless self-realisation is nowhere more visible than in the new discourses of *play* and *fun* at work, as well as *wellness*, *well-being* and *happiness* at work. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, organisations began to deploy systematically *ludic* (play) technologies. From training sessions to entire corporate culture setups, work was reconfigured through play and, increasingly, work was represented *as* 'play'. This subtle yet very significant trend led to the expansion and intensification in the use of 'play' and 'fun' turning work into a potentially 'total experience' of oneself in which spontaneity, eccentricity and imagination are the new mainstream 'disciplinary' formulas (analysed in three authors' articles; undisclosed references). Current references to 'play@work' show that it has undergone a change from being a destructive and disruptive element (e.g. in F.W. Taylor's analysis of 'soldiering'), or a mere 'recreational' complement to work (e.g. Deal and Kennedy 1982), to becoming a 'creative force', a central modality of being at work (e.g. Deal and Kennedy's new take in 1998, Pinault 2004, or Kane 2004). Pat Kane argues in his *Play Ethic* (2004) that it "opens up the infinite possibilities arising from full engagement of heart, body and soul". He sees play as more than enhancing performance:

> "…play forms have become legitimate and effective in improving business performance… but is that all there is to play? Is it just a performance enhancer?

> Like spirituality, play is about a means of transcendence in the everyday - another 'breath of life' (pneuma) that animates fixed situations, accepted boundaries, and puts things 'in play'. Like spirituality, play is about embracing possibility and change rather than fearing it – because play is grounded in a deep common reality for humanity." (Kane 2007)

Moreover, corporations such as Google, Egg:¦, or office complexes such as Chiswick Park in London (operated by www.enjoy-work.com) invest heavily in new architectural complexes which are built around the core value of work as 'playful' and 'fun'.

One further example of a management concept projecting an image of endless human resourcefulness is the new programmatic discourse of *wellness*, *well-being* and *happiness at work*. The predicate of such programmes (see, for example, the *Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development*'s volume on 'Wellness at Work', 2007) is that only a complete 'care package' can do justice to the experience of work as a manifestation of the whole person. The University of Calgary has developed its own *Staff Wellness Centre* whose programme is entitled '*LIVE WELL ~ WORK WELL*' (2007). Its "values flow from the University's human values:

> Respect for the dignity of all persons
> Fair and equitable treatment of individuals in our diverse community
> Highest standards of personal integrity and trustworthiness
> Participation, collaboration, and effective teamwork
> Creativity, initiative, and risk-taking
> Honest and sensitive communication
> Learning, growth and development
> Personal and organizational wellness and achievement." (idem)

The image is of an organisation from which all contradictions have been expertly suppressed by careful management (see Roberts 2002, 17). At GooglePlex (Google's new London HQ – Google 2007), healthy food is provided free throughout the day, fitness facilities are available, and 'fun' is the umbrella of work. Egg:¦'s headquarters in Derby are very similar (see Egg:¦ 2007; and authors' undisclosed reference). Combined with a playful architectural setting, the message is that work is not in opposition to life, that one's working identity should not be constructed against work (as subjugating or sacrificial) but through it, as an opportunity to enhance life without limitations. Managerialism makes significant investments in what Foucault would identify as the territory of 'biopolitics' (Foucault 1997).

To conclude, we wish want to emphasise the new accent of managerial discourses: that work can be seen as a sphere where all aspects of the self belong and are taken care of. Thus fully formulated, subjectivity develops into the predicate of governance through which work is presented as a complete package catering for the well-being of the whole person. These concepts mark a new ethical demand: that work *ought* to become more than just a mechanical means for life; it *ought* to be seen as a possibility of continuous self-transcendence, of excelling, through an ever more intense self-fulfilment.

II. The therapeutic habitus as a cultural resource for managerialism

The logic that unites these vocabularies draws its sustenance from the characteristic self-understanding of the modern subject. Their consolidation is grounded in the deep-seated sense of 'self' which lies at the core of modernity writ large. Despite the fact that it appeared in an unsystematic fashion, subjectivity is the intelligible and coherent nucleus of this idiom. However, the 'modern self' is not an invention of managerial ideology *per se*. The 'modern self' is not a specific formation that corresponds to the regional confines of contemporary managerial discourse with its

distinct historicity. Rather, managerialism has appropriated a diverse but interconnected set of essential and distinctly modern questions regarding our sense of self and work, of order and meaning.

One way to capture this trend is the inspired metaphor of 'soft capitalism' used by Thrift (1997), Ray and Sayer (1999), and Heelas (2002). Ray and Sayer (1999, 17) emphasized that organisational success has become gradually bound up with the ever more intense employment of 'soft' characteristics of the labouring subject. However, the predicate 'soft' must not be confused with the implication that contemporary work has become easy. Rather, as the authors above point out, 'soft' denotes the intensification of demands on the self to become ever more involved in work. Indeed, once the subject is placed at the centre, labour becomes 'hard' in a new way. This specific 'hardship' is grounded in a new type of ethical vector. Tipton (1984) called it the 'ethics of self-work'. Heelas explains that this changes "the locus of authority-cum-value" by situating it in "another kind of individualisation":

> "the self as a self which considers itself to be something more, something much 'deeper', more natural and authentic than the self of what is taken to be involved with the superficialities of the 'merely' materialistic-cum-consumeristic; the self as a self which has to work on itself to enrich and explore itself in the process of dealing with its problems" (2002, 80)

There is a shift both in the position of work in the life of the subject and in the relationship of the subject with work as a social activity.

Work becomes a stage for self-expression. The historical horizon of this transformation lies not only in the last two decades, but in the whole of the twentieth century which brought the concrete modality of self-work, what we term the *therapeutic habitus*, to its full realisation. Moreover, at the heart of contemporary managerialism lies the 'object' which marked the very beginning of modernity, namely, the 'self' as *subjectum*. By designating the 'self' as *subjectum* we refer here to that profound change in the position that the self occupies in the world, to that decisive moment when 'man' took upon himself the responsibility for the condition of the universe and posited 'his' own existence as that which 'underlies' it, that which gives it meaning and value. Here, modernity means a "historical-cultural 'event' which changes the relationship between the universe, its transcendent horizon, and its human interpreter" (Dupré 1993, 249) and generates an original onto-cosmological synthesis whose underlying principle (the *subjectum*) becomes the human subject itself.

The novelty of the intensive appropriation of subjectivity by managerialism lies in the representation of work as a process of releasing the full potentialities of the self, as a locus in which self-exploration and expression are encouraged, as a place where traditional restrictive controls recede into the background. 'Fordist' management (which presupposes the repression of subjectivity in its self-expressive mode and its submission to a variety of externally imposed controls) is replaced by a new style of engagement in which self-expression is encouraged while control is situated in processes of self-examination, evaluation and reflection. In other words, the site of control is also displaced to a significant extent from external authority to inner attributes of the subject who is urged to self-manage. This marks a subtle twist in the cultural dynamic of managerial control: encouraging autonomous employees to use their alleged independence to express their resourcefulness as well as to submit themselves to continuous self-scrutiny and audit in the name of accountability. Power

argues that "This is the real audit society. It is not an adversarial world of external inspectors – although that can still happen. It is the normalised auditable world of self-inspection." (2007, 16).

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

The managerial tactics explored bring the therapeutic into the domain of labour. This can be seen, for instance, in the mechanism through which production and productivity are transformed into acts of 'performance' and 'performativity'. Equally illustrative is the new combination of the work effort with the tropes of wellness and well-being. Managerialism consolidates through the expansion of various therapeutic techniques and mentalities that now straddle both the sphere of production and that of consumption in a multiple array of self-help practices. In Rose's words:

> [The] "Therapeutic [appears], rather, in the sense that the relation to oneself is itself folded in therapeutic terms – problematising oneself according to the values of normality and pathology, diagnosing one's pleasures and misfortunes in *psy* terms, seeking to rectify or improve one's quotidian existence through intervening upon an 'inner world' we have enfolded as both so fundamental to our existence as humans and yet so close to the surface of our experience of the everyday." (1998, 192)

Presenting work as a sequence of opportunities for self-expression, managerialism transforms self-expression into a predicate of organisational and self-discipline, without needing to make recourse to traditional authoritarian vocabularies of control which fade into the background leaving room for the expansion of 'positive', 'developmental' technologies of audit.

The apparatus of soft capitalism acquires its immediate, everyday concreteness through the *therapeutic habitus*. This must be qualified albeit briefly. We use it in the sense associated with Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* (I^{ae}II^{ae} q. 22-48; 49-54): 'habitus' is the way in which human nature acquires the perfection of the 'soul' by balancing the relationships between 'passions' (desires or sensibilities, as Tocqueville put it, 'habits of the heart') and 'reason' in the name of making every human act 'virtuous'. This notion reveals the fundamental historical link between the culture of 'virtue' and that of the 'therapeutic' in the European tradition: virtue comes out, ever since the Hellenistic age, from the proper examination and 'care of the soul' (Patocka 2002, 91-92; Foucault 2005). In Christianity, self-exploration in prayer and confession are the specific practical modalities through which the individual does *therapeia* as the act of 'doing service to the god' (Liddell 1966). Indeed, the relationship between a proper 'habitus' and the continuous self-examination and care for the soul is uninterrupted in European cultural history. Aquinas' conception is, of course, based upon a given theological interpretation; however, taking a leap forward to the latter part of the twentieth century, the secularisation of late modernity makes the human 'self' in its ordinary, everyday life, the ultimate underlying principle of

world order, whose continuous preoccupation with itself grounds the modern version of what Foucault called the 'care of the *self*' as an individuated and self-referential entity. The modern 'ordinary' self (Taylor 1989) becomes, in the twentieth century, the *secularised* locus and object of the 'therapeutic habitus' mediating the search for self-perfection.

We propose this notion here not as a conceptual advancement, but merely as a footnote to the literatures on both the 'therapeutic' (Rieff 1966; Foucault 1967; Rose 1999; Patocka 2002; Furedi 2004) and 'habitus' (from Aristotle's *hexis* and Aquinas's *habitus*, to elaborations in Schiller and Kierkegaard, as well as Mauss 1973 and Bourdieu 1977). Its use is metaphorical; it aims to capture the underlying character of the mentality of self-perfection invoked by managerialism, a mentality best represented by Rieff's image of the therapeutic's 'triumph' (1966). The reference to Aquinas associates it more directly to the sphere of what might be termed the 'modern soul'. This accent moves it away, in this specific context, from the meaning 'habitus' finds, for instance, in Mauss (1973, 73) and which consigns it more to the body. The therapeutic habitus, in our sense, is not to be read in the Maussian key as a routine, or 'technique', of the body, but in a more existential, Heideggerian key, as a mode of projection in which specific orientations towards the future, specific 'horizons of expectation' (Koselleck, 2002) manifest themselves 'habitually' and not simply routinely. Thus 'habitus' indicates here the complex ideatic horizon through which human beings project concretely their potentialities but not merely in the static manner of durable routines for maintenance, but as dynamic articulations through which, in the widest sense, the human sees itself with oneself and with others in the world.

A crucial feature (which cannot be overlooked) of the politics of the therapeutic habitus in managerialism is that its practices do not discriminate between hierarchical levels. Indeed, the entire organisational body politic undergoes many of these treatments. Furthermore, the more intense and more expensive they are, the more likely it is that the subjects will be the managerial cadre rather than shopfloor ranks. The political economy of managing subjectivity no longer displays simplistic class divisions of labour. Organisational cultures are the devices supposed to integrate the subject into a communal symbolic system. They are paradoxical attempts to offer simultaneously a kind of both 'positive' and 'negative' community cure (in Rieff's sense, 1966, 73) by drawing firm ethical boundaries for individuals to organise their experiences as a communal process, yet at the same time offering culture as a *boundless*, completely open social space for self-expression and self-centredness.

The power of the therapeutic lies in this complex positioning of individual and collective subjects. As the 'self' is placed at the centre of the relationship, it is more easily captured by practices of self-improvement, self-development, or self-management which have become leitmotifs of organisational life. The therapeutic brings the self close to itself, it creates a space in which *it* is the focus. It allows individual differentiation as well as the establishment of a personalised rapport between employee and employer. In addition, it projects the self as an always insufficiently utilised resource whose full potential risks remaining concealed unless it is helped to surface through the mediation of experts. The subject thus must take the opportunity to be available and visible to expert scrutiny in the name of improving itself, of accessing its purportedly limitless powers of self-realisation. The therapeutic relationship thus appeals to the ethic of self-work through a promise of discovering a 'better self', or a better way of being oneself. An example are the recent attempts to

include 'wellness' and 'happiness' as elements of the cultural contract of work. Programmes of 'wellness at work' set up a metaphor of a nearly clinical nature that opens up a new avenue for profiling the relationship between one's work life and the rest of personal existence.

The hope of finding unknown potentialities in oneself marks the therapeutic context as a crucial ingredient in the creation of a new subject position: namely, that work provides the opportunity to enhance personal value, to realise previously latent capabilities in the service of self-affirmation and self-realisation. As Bellah et al. (1985, 123) argued, "much of our work is a form of therapy." Work turned into a subject-centred therapeutic process makes possible new forms of self-governance by formulating positive, constructive ideals which link organisational success with personal achievement through self-expression.

Contemporary organisations become a successful normative framework because they mobilise to a large extent this 'therapeutic habitus' in the forms discussed. Work is predicated upon the premise that it has become a place of release from the renunciatory ethos of self-abnegation (clear in the Protestant ethic). Management's invocation of the self and subjectivity (as objects to be cultivated, developed, and enhanced by releasing their full 'human resourcefulness') has made work into an order of therapy *sui generis*. The practices described above deploy the arsenal of the therapeutic as a manifestation of the wider context of modern culture whose canon is the liberation and emancipation of the 'Self'.

III. Is human resourcefulness infinite? Managerialism, subjectivity and the 'derecognition of finitude'

The *self as subject* connects managerialism with the *a priori* historical ground of modernity. As a cultural phenomenon, it can only be elucidated through this fundamental historical dimension. Therefore the interpretive horizon which opens up is much broader suggesting wider implications of managerial discourse and practice.

The emergence of the modern cultural synthesis transformed the way in which we interpret and value the labouring activity as such. Labour now stands as the constituting factor of human existence. In order to locate the origins of this transformation we need to grasp the significance of the profound disintegration of the pre-modern sense of world-order. Modernity dissolved the certainties by which the world appeared as a pre-ordered, supreme 'cosmos', governed by an omnipotent 'Creator' and guardian, in which the human occupied a contemplative, predetermined place. As a consequence of the dissolution of the geocentric world-view, the world becomes an 'infinite universe' (Koyré 1968), a place where humanity is now isolated and where survival can only come from an active engagement with life itself (Blumenberg 1985). The modern 'self' emerges in this order as the sole point of reference. It is thus faced with the only alternative for survival: self-assertion through labour. Nature itself becomes a store of resources for the production of the species' concrete, everyday existence. Thus, despite the loss of previous certainties in an 'enchanted world', the threshold of modernity sees the transformation of 'man' into an individualised self, an autonomous, assertive subject, with an unprecedented freedom and a horizon of endless possibilities. The 'self' as subject became a cultural reality; this is the birth of Descartes' *ego,* of the *vita activa*, and of *Homo faber* (Arendt 1958, 273-280, 153 ff.; Bergson 1960). Though seemingly enabled by this cultural liberation from Medieval dogmatism, the individual ego stands alone in the infinite universe. It has to labour (materially and ideatically) to construct its everyday

existence without recourse to the traditional reference points (divinity and ordered creation). Human life becomes a project whose realisation presupposes that the subject becomes self-expressive as well as self-making (in other words, seeking continuously to fill its life with some form of meaning).

The human being is henceforth converted into the locus of a new system of political ordering and governance. What followed was the designation of new 'places' (*topoi*) where true humanity manifests itself. A new essence of sociality was constituted, together with new institutions, and a new purpose of governance ensued. This happened because, evidently, previous institutions (such as the *polis* of the Greeks, the *civitas* of the Romans, the *ecclesia* of the Christians) could no longer provide a meaningful and articulate framework for governing human self-expression. The appropriate site for self-expression is labour itself and the work-organisation with the subject at its centre.

Thus, managerialism operates with a model of identity revolving around the notion of *Homo faber* (Arendt 1958, 153 ff.). The human subject appears as the measure of all things in the activity of fabrication. The role of work is to give form to the search for a source of meaning and value. Within the modern process of secularisation this search acquires a new temporality. A reoccupation occurs of the position of *'higher time'* (the time of periodic liturgical connection with the divine, or the 'liturgy of leisure' as that authentic private sphere where the real, unalienated self supposedly manifests) by *'ordinary time'*, the urgent time of self-realisation here and now, every day and everywhere. This ordinary time characterises the life of Thrift's 'fast subject' (2002) who is perpetually seeking 'material' to construct its identity as a 'success'.

Thus, life itself (the project of the human subject) becomes a secularised journey towards 'perfection'. The modern self, circumscribed by worldly time, sees itself as a unique 'finite infinity' to be actualised. In an endless cycle of activities of production and consumption, the modern self seeks to fill the vacuum at its core by generating its own substance through practices of self-work and the therapeutic culture which purports to offer endless possibilities. Nietzsche (1983) called it "modern man's small soul". As Dupré argues:

> "In the course of assuming control over everything else the self, as Kierkegaard put it, lost sight of its own identity. Separated from that totality which once nurtured it and largely deprived of the interiority which once defined it, it has become an indigent self." (1993, 119)

But this perpetual search is represented as a release of endless potentialities within. In other words, life is conceived as an endless project through which the 'self' seeks permanent and unlimited fulfilment. Management expresses this search in the current phase of modernity.

Liberated from dogmatic shackles, the foundational question of this novel world-view is how the 'self' is to carry the burden of absolute freedom. Certain transformations occur in the function, meaning and applications of particular metaphors, such as self-actualisation, self-realisation, performance, excellence, total quality, knowledge, or talent. The problem of absolute freedom and the problem of finitude become problems of *measure* in both ethical and epistemological terms. The projection of endless potentialities of the self in the exercise of this newly found freedom is perpetually in search of a measure: if the self always possesses something in 'excess' of what it already is, what is the normative framework, or conceptual

specification, that makes this 'surplus' accessible? Excess of potentiality is a paradoxical notion: it is not a 'beyond' but always something immanent and somehow accessible whilst remaining always an aspiration. Without a measure (a 'hypermetron') of the journey to actualise potentialities, the invocation of excellence, total quality, or continuous improvement is always running the risk of being fraught with the sense of 'being out of reach'. The formulation of such a 'hypermetron' has become the object of the 'audit society'(Power 1997). Its constant multiplication betrays the fact that contemporary management practices, focusing upon the mobilisation of human resourcefulness as that which is always in excess of what it currently is, cannot solve the problem that excess is a pseudo-measure, which refuses to be evaluated and to be measured: "The overflow is not mere abundance of too much quantity but self-withdrawing of all estimation and measuring" (Heidegger, 1999, 176). And yet even though it cannot solve the very problem it sets out for itself, the 'audit society' has become a binding normative framework for contemporary work. It has become a hegemony facing us with perpetual exhortations to overcome our current limits.

Overcoming finitude is used here in this specific way: as an iterative process, a repetition of acts of self-reengineering with the potential that they allow 'endless progress', an endless actualisation of potentialities. Overcoming finitude is not a cultural motif which anticipates an end of this process; there is no *eschaton* to be awaited, no last judgement to be faced. It is not a case that, one day, the 'I' will have become, finally, 'totally excellent'. Thus, to put it more systematically, the overcoming of finitude does not mean, first, a positive affirmation of the (quantitative) infinitude of the human as an animal species. Nor does it, secondly, mean a denial of finitude as such. On the contrary, as Foucault suggests (1994, 312-318), 'Enlightenment science' operated precisely in the key of a finite empiricity. Modernity does not posit the endlessness of the world either. Quite the contrary: the finitude of the 'world' (as a standing-reserve) is manifest in the recognition of ecological limits. Thirdly, overcoming finitude is not even a tragic gesture of turning away from the mortal nature of man. In fact, what characterises our culture is not a sense of hopelessness, or a tragic feeling of 'fear and trembling' (to paraphrase Kierkegaard), generated by the recognition of our predicaments – i.e. it is not a tragic realisation of the limits of modern culture in its current environment. Modernity is not giving up hope; rather it sees its crises as opportunities.

The fundamental dimension of finitude we are emphasising here is not in fact an 'overcoming' at all. The specific meaning of the modern engagement with finitude is, in our view, its articulation as an act of *derecognition*. Hence, we propose that the distinct mentality which articulates managerial vocabularies is what we term '*derecognition of finitude*'. In this sense, derecognising finitude implies, first, a specific form of secularisation. Modernity (in its latest phase) no longer questions human finitude in terms of what comes after death, in terms which imply a transcendent horizon. In modernity, the 'transcendent' actually disappears as a mode of problematisation in the context of the "affirmation of ordinary life" (Taylor 1989, 211-305). The secular modern self does not simply reoccupy the position of transcendent source. Although the ordinary self is situated at the centre of its own universe, it is not projecting itself as a literal divinity. What we are witnessing is not just a degradation of transcendence (as Löwith 1949 would), but rather that transcendence is no longer really a source of reference for the modern synthesis regardless of how much we speak of the 'spiritual' or of various relics of divinity.

Thus, the second sense in which we specify the notion of derecognition refers precisely to the 'economic' as the idealised form of the worldly modern social order, from which we witness a removal of vocabularies of finitude, limits, or the 'tragic' in human life as a central preoccupation of 'existential man'. The 'economy' is no longer conceptualised in terms of the traditional question of limits and scarcity, but rather as a new image of the 'world' where infinitude is immanent in the finite. At the dawn of the 21ˢᵗ century, the economy has acquired its full cultural force as an idealised formula for a social order in which the overcoming of finitude is finally possible. The political economy of neo-liberalism, the hope invested in the 'knowledge economy', as well as in 'information technologies', ideas of endless 'human resourcefulness' (as exemplified above) are all concrete manifestations of this major act of derecognition.

Finally, the most important dimension of what we term derecognition of finitude is a positive affirmation of the worldly overcoming of limits, an intensification of the enjoyment of life in the immediacy of the everyday and with the urgency of permanent positivity. This search for self-affirmation has developed its own practical apparatus. The specific expression of this apparatus is that of various therapeutic technologies encountered in both production and consumption spheres. They replace former practices of self-abnegation, sacrifice, or limitation, in the name of an endless cycle of self-improvement, development and Maslowian actualisation through acts of self-examination, knowledge and expression.

Homo faber, the instrumentaliser, becomes an end in itself and everything else in the world looses its intrinsic value. The mentality of fabrication means that are no longer standards of self-regulation and that there is no stopping the tendency towards limitless instrumentalisation of everything that exists. The attribute of infinity becomes immanent in subjectivity itself because there is no transcendent realm that governs the ends/means mentality of *Homo faber*. What we have been trying to argue is that managerialism has assembled over the last couple of decades a growing vocabulary for ordering work which operates in this horizon of derecognising finitude.

Conclusions

This paper examined the conceptual-cultural moves which link managerialism (as it became configure over the last two decades or so) to the deeper cultural processes which characterise the synthesis we call 'modernity'. What we aimed to show is that the former has reconstructed itself towards the end of the 20ᵗʰ century through a complete turn to *subjectivity* as a central locus for ordering work.

This rearticulation occurred through the proliferation of various vocabularies and practices revolving around the 'self' which have led to a shift in the equation of labour. Work, as action by a working *subject* upon an *object* of work, undergoes in Western production systems a silent but fundamental conversion. The human subject is converted into the main object of the governance of production in general. The traditional source of identity in work – as work upon a particular 'object' – has changed accordingly. By being exhorted to continuously work upon her/his 'self', upon her/his subjectivity, these new discourses position the labourer in a new relation to work. The new dialectic of labour consists of continuous acts of self-understanding, self-examination and 'self-work'. The outcome is a process in which the 'self *qua* self' becomes the object of daily work mediated by a plethora of therapeutic technologies.

Managerialism articulates a new kind of collective and personal *ethos* in Euro-Atlantic organisations and beyond at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The essence of this ethos is two-fold. On the one hand, human subjectivity becomes the central resource of production to the extent that people participate in this process in a perpetual search to mobilise their inner resourcefulness. On the other hand, work offers endless possibilities to search for 'self-actualisation' as main source of both personal and organisational 'excellence' and 'performance'. The experience of work is no longer mere toil, sacrifice and expenditure of the 'self'. 'Excellence', 'performativity', 'total quality' and so on aim to create a framework in which the ambitions of managerialism are no more nor less than to resolve the historical contradictions of labour: between labour as the exercise of thought and reason, and the expression of 'desire', emotion and sensibility; between the fullest expressions of individuality and communal (collective) belonging; between the autonomy of human agency and its determination as an organic body which has to be kept 'well', 'healthy' and 'fit'; and between the finitude of one concrete individual and the infinite universe of which it is a reflection and a carrier.

What we propose is that, in doing so, management is not simply reaching opportunistically for a series of 'pop-cultural' motifs, but that it draws on the central themes which fuel modernity itself: the centrality of the self, expressive individualism framed in endless horizons of self-affirmation, the centrality of ordinary life as the ultimate source of meaning and reality of the self, and the cultural centrality of the 'economy'. The key cultural process signalled here is what we term the 'derecognition of finitude'. This category is used both to describe and analyse the ways in which certain vocabularies of management have become consolidated. These vocabularies (re)present work as an opportunity to fulfil the main promise of modern social order: to secure the basis of individual autonomy and freedom, predicated on the premise of the subject's full engagement in the process of self-making. In this process, management itself acquired a new outline as therapeutic formula mediating self-expression by empowering individuals to work upon themselves to release their fully realised identity.

But can this fundamental tension inherent in the character of modernity receive an answer from a discursive formation such as managerialism? Can the latter, by removing vocabularies of finitude, of limits, or of the 'tragic' (as self-renunciation) in labour, put itself forward as a positive affirmation of the worldly overcoming of limits? Can management ideology truly rearticulate labour as an endless opportunity to enjoy and express life within the realm of everyday practices? Can management reconstruct itself as a genuine form of therapy?

Managerialism requires the attention of scholars because it reconstructs work and the identity of the labouring subject in a new horizon. Loosing sight of this subtle cultural process can undermine our ability to grasp the full force of new forms of ordering work in relation to modern identities. One of the interesting dimensions of the history of management discourse is that it seems to have ignored, most of the time, the logic and dynamic of modernity: self-affirmation. In other words, the typical Taylorist and Fordist preoccupation with controlling labour by limiting the spaces for self-release is replaced at the end of the twentieth century by an affirmation of self-expression as the horizon of human resourcefulness. Perhaps it is only in this late affirmation of subjectivity by management that it, finally, connects with a potential source of historical legitimation. Since the 1980s, management seems to have finally become synchronised with the culture of modernity that centres around the affirmation of the human subject. Management has perhaps 'caught up' with

modernity and become aligned with the entrenched modern understanding of social order which gives unprecedented primacy to the 'individual'. What critiques have overlooked in contemporary management discourses and practices is that they cannot be easily dismissed as mere ruses to perpetuate self-denial in the age of emancipation. What would, anyway, be the category of reference needed to establish why 'wellness at work' or 'excellence' are 'bad' for you, or, in a *real* sense, alienating? Or, indeed, why work in general might be 'bad' for you? So the affirmation of subjectivity by management can be seen as the discursive act through which it constructs not just the identity of subjects but its very own legitimation.

By affirming production, labour and the entitlement to self-realisation, managerialism seizes upon the core values of modernity and becomes a complex mechanism of signification, legitimation and domination. Therefore, an important dimension of social research opens up in relation to management as a modality of governance. The relationships between a self-centred culture and the forms of institutional order it creates, and lives with, will become increasingly important. The (re)presentation of work as the building up of the 'self' raises fundamental questions about our affiliations with economic, political and cultural institutions.

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