

Critical Social Theory and the Will to Happiness: A Study of Anti-Work Subjectivities

David Frayne

School of Social Sciences
Cardiff University

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

December, 2011

ABSTRACT

It can be argued that we live in a ‘work-centred’ society, since not only has society witnessed a massive quantitative expansion of paid-work, but many also accept that, at this present historical moment, the tasks, relationships and time-structures of work occupy a central place in people’s sense of well-being. Critical social theorists have advanced an alternative perspective and undertaken a critique of work, responding to the interlinked social problems of mass unemployment, inequality, environmental degradation, and low well-being, by promoting an anti-productivist politics which calls for a *decentralisation* of work in everyday life. Theorists such as André Gorz have suggested that such proposals resonate with a cultural disenchantment with work, as well as a growing desire for non-material goods such as autonomy, free-time, good-health and conviviality. Such claims, however, have rarely been explored on an empirical level. One of the central questions that remains unanswered is whether and how it is actually possible for people to live with significantly lower levels of work. In response to this gap in the literature, the present study undertakes a qualitative investigation into the lives of a diverse sample of people, each of whom has chosen to work less or to give up working altogether. In-depth interviews explore the work experiences and moral priorities that informed the participants’ lifestyle changes. Also explored are the trials of working less, including how participants coped with less money, and how they coped with the stigmas attached to working less, in the midst of a society that continues to attach moral significance to having a job. Are the participants deviants, malingerers, and failures, or might society learn something positive and inspiring from their actions and choices?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a thesis is a sometimes frustrating form of work because, like all writers, the author of a thesis may never feel finished. An author perhaps never fully accomplishes the task of putting thoughts into words, but simply chooses a logical point at which to stop writing. My first thanks goes to my excellent supervisors, Ralph Fevre and Finn Bowring, for seeming to understand this well, and for striking the right balance between encouraging me to make much-needed improvements, and urging me to simply hurry up and finish. Their feedback was both detailed and essential to the completion of the project, and I hope we keep in touch long into the future. I would also like to thank the following respected thinkers: Ed Appleton, Jamie Tinto-Cradick, and Simon Booth. Though I have not always kept in touch with them as much as I should have, their friendship has been a blessing. When we did have time for academic matters, our late night conversations would often yield more progress than weeks of reading.

In a more personal capacity, I also want to thank Nicola and the rest of my friends outside the university. It was good knowing I could call on them when I needed to escape. The care and support of Terry and Gaynor is also something for all parents to aspire to. (Dad, you have influenced my choice of topic more than you might know). Thank you as well to Jen, for the good times, for tolerating my thesis blues, and for waiting so long for a holiday. (I've finished now, let's do something amazing).

Finally, I want to express my sincere gratitude to everybody who took part in the study. On so many occasions, I was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and hospitality of the research participants. I want to thank them for sharing their stories and also for making it so enjoyable.

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
1. Human Well-Being and the Critique of Work	7
2. The Need to be Employed	34
3. Doing Research Slowly	58
4. Case Studies	75
5. The Break-Point	97
6. Consuming Less	127
7. Disrespect	156
8. Conclusions	177
Bibliography	196

INTRODUCTION

I just have this excitement that I've done the thing that so many people want to do – walked away from that sort of rat race experience and go towards something. It felt like growing up because I was doing things I had consciously chosen to do for the first time. (Samantha)

You know when you're young you've sort of got other people hassling you about what do you wanna do or sort of, y'know, if you haven't got a career path or – but I'm not really bothered about all that any more. (Clive)

These quotes are drawn from the present research: a project which explores the experiences of a group of people who, whilst demographically diverse, are united by a common attempt to decentralise work from everyday life. From the graduate who feels he will never find a home for his talent in the labour market, to the stay-at-home dad; from the 'downshifter' who values free-time more than money, to the retail worker who has simply had enough; the participants studied here are not political activists or 'anti-capitalists', but everyday folk for whom the full-time working week has become intolerable. Personal conflicts with work are not, of course, atypical, but what marks the present participants out as unique are their concerted attempts to take matters into their own hands. Whilst some participants, as we will see, have reduced their hours by small amounts, others have only been satisfied through complete disengagement with the world of work. In the study I will explore the moralities and experiences that led to these sometimes drastic lifestyle changes, as well as the pleasures and trials of working less in the context of our current 'work-centred' society.

Throughout the three-year period in which this research was conducted, many colleagues and acquaintances seemed to identify with the topic, and often shared their own frustrations and private (but unrealised) desires to work less. Many have also asked how I became interested in studying people who are resisting work – a topic on which, at my time of writing, there are few dedicated studies. My interest has a number of origins, the most academic of which is my reading of critical social theory. In this time of mass unemployment, social inequality and environmental concern, the core questions posed by this imaginative sub-discipline of sociology seem more

pertinent than ever. It is entirely appropriate to ask, without the reservation of being labelled an idealist, whether productivism can continue to serve the well-being of western societies and, more specifically, whether a full-employment society remains a desirable and realistic goal in the twenty-first century. Might there be an alternative? I will begin the present study by suggesting that if academics and policy makers are going to confidently answer such a question, it is important for us to first learn something about whether and how it is possible for individuals to live with less work. Are there individuals out there who are already pioneering an alternative to the work-centred lifestyle, and can we learn anything from their moral perspectives and personal experiences?

CHAPTER 1

HUMAN WELL-BEING AND THE CRITIQUE OF WORK

Few sociologists would dispute the fact that well-being matters, and a number of contemporary sociologists have been inclined to return to traditional philosophical questions surrounding human well-being and the ‘art of living’. Critical authors such as Erich Fromm (1979), Juliet Schor (1998) or Ralph Fevre (2000), for example, have adopted the classic concerns of philosophers such as Aristotle or Rousseau, becoming occupied with questions such as how to live in a satisfying and meaningful way. The issue of ‘happiness’ has also now established itself as a substantive field of social-scientific research. The economist, Richard Layard, has proclaimed happiness a ‘new science’ (Layard, 2005) and there are a growing number of commercially successful books devoted to the critical analysis of happiness and its social mediation (for example, DeBotton, 2004; James, 2007). The commercial success of these titles perhaps attests to the widespread feeling of malaise and disquiet that many feel pervades society. In the words of Jack (a participant in the present study):

Look at the world, read the papers and look at the planet, and if it’s so good and working so well and it’s so right, then why are people so ill, why are so many people taking medication, why is everybody so stressed out? (Jack)

Jack is not alone in his vexation, his concerns mirrored by a range of social commentators. Wilkinson and Pickett, for example, introduced their evidence-based analysis of inequality and well-being by noting the remarkable paradox that, ‘at the pinnacle of human material and technical achievement, we find ourselves anxiety-ridden, prone to depression, worried about how others see us, unsure of our friendships, driven to consume and with little or no community life’ (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 3). A generation earlier, Fromm went further, boldly proclaiming the capitalist society a ‘sick society’ (Fromm, 1963), and ‘a society of notoriously unhappy people: lonely, anxious, depressed, destructive, dependent’ (Fromm, 1979: 15).

The issue of well-being is also gaining interest at the government level. In 2008, the President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, invited Joseph Stiglitz and colleagues to explore whether GDP can be used as a reliable indicator of social progress (Stiglitz et al, 2010). The authors' report emphasised the need 'for our measurement system to *shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being*' (Stiglitz et al, 2010: 10 emphasis in original), stressing, among other things, the important role of health, leisure time and the environment in the emotional prosperity of individuals. In a move that has perplexed the left-leaning pioneers of happiness studies, even the Conservative leader David Cameron has begun touting a measure of social progress that accommodates well-being (Stratton, 2010: online).

At the heart of the present study is a questioning of the relationship between productivism (or what the sociologist John Barry (2010) has ingenuously called 'growthmania') and human well-being. There is a mounting body of evidence to suggest that capitalist development is characterised by a 'happiness curve', in which the subjective well-being of individuals rises in the early stages of economic growth, before levelling off in the later stages (Easterlin, 2007; Layard, 2005; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Summarising the trends, McKibben suggested that Western capitalism has moved past the 'sweet spot' of economic growth, with growth now having turned from something positive, which contributes to human felicity, into something negative, which threatens the long term well-being of both humans and the environment (McKibben, 2007). A number of studies by Robert Lane also suggest that the material goods provided by a growth economy may only be weakly related to the things that make people happy, such as autonomy, tension-free leisure time, friendship, and a healthy family life (Lane, 2000, 2000a).

At its broadest level, the present study is also motivated by an interest in human well-being and, like the research before it, questions the relationship between productivism and emotional prosperity. I note this cautiously, however, since it must be recognised that the social-scientific study of human well-being is fraught with complexity. Zygmunt Bauman suggested that the only thing one can confidently assert about happiness is that it is better to be happy than to be unhappy (Bauman, 2008: 26).

Debate continues on whether and how it is possible to measure well-being (Oswald, 2010), which social variables have the biggest impact, and whether ‘happiness’ can even be considered the most realistic and desirable of goals. In particular, critical sociologists have been uneasy about the resonance between the modern obsession with ‘pursuing happiness’ and capitalism’s proviso that individuals consume and compete their way into the material good life. Bauman believed that the conscious pursuit of happiness may have a self-defeating nature, given the impossibility of reaching a fixed state of harmony – of ‘complete, unquestionable, *je ne regrette rien* fulfilment and satisfaction’ (Bauman, 2008: 27). Concerns such as these lead into a semantic debate about what is best to call that which we want most. A more elegant proposal than that we (as individuals or a society) pursue happiness, may be that we seek a more refined *ars vitae* or ‘art of living’. The art of living entails a broad conception of well-being that encapsulates not only the hedonistic gratification of desires, but also an Aristotelian understanding of the good life as achieved by living wisely, justly and in harmony with the world (DeGeus, 2009).

These issues aside, the biggest questions faced by scholars of human well-being aim to identify which factors have the most significant impact. There are of course a huge range of factors, and which variables are emphasised – including whether these are biological, psychological or social in nature – will depend partly on the researcher’s own academic background. The present research begins with the well-established understanding that there is a highly significant relationship between human well-being and those variables related to *work*, including employment status, job quality, and working hours.

Firstly, employment status has an intimate relationship with well-being, research more or less consistently showing that unemployment has negative personal consequences (for example, Jahoda et al, 1972; Hayes and Nutman, 1981; Waters and Moore, 2002). It is argued that the negative personal effects of unemployment stem not only from a loss of income, but also from a loss of the social and psychological benefits of paid-work (an argument I will explore further in chapter two). Work routines are said to lend everyday life a comforting level of habit and predictability, such habituation carrying with it ‘the important psychological gain that choices are narrowed’ (Berger

and Luckmann, 1967: 71). By providing a stable background to daily existence, a job might provide relief by widening the sphere of the taken-for-granted. Even Bertrand Russell, who famously argued for the expansion of leisure, maintained that individual well-being is only achieved when open, indeterminate sectors of life, are balanced with a degree of routine (Russell, 1956: 198-202). Employment may also be important for psychological well-being in a society where paid-work acts as ‘the basis of social belonging and rights, and the obligatory path to self-esteem and the esteem of others’ (Gorz, 1999: 5).

As well as employment status, the psycho-social qualities of jobs themselves also have a significant impact on individual well-being. The *quality* of the work that capitalism provides has been a central concern of sociologists since Marx’s classic theory of alienation (Marx, 1969), and Weber’s analysis of the rationalisation of work (Weber, 2002). A number of quantitative studies have provided evidence to suggest that a poor quality job may have a worse impact on mental health than unemployment. The most recent study by Butterworth et al (2011), for example, analysed data supplied by respondents of working age from an Australian national household panel survey (n=7155). The researchers ranked the psychosocial quality of jobs according to four self-reported ‘job adversities’ (high job demands and complexity, low job control, job insecurity and unfair pay) and the mental health of participants was measured using the Mental Health Inventory (MHI). The research found that ‘the mental health of the unemployed was comparable or superior to those in jobs of the poorest psychosocial quality’ and, furthermore, that ‘the transition from unemployment to a poor quality job was more detrimental to mental health than remaining unemployed’ (Butterworth et al, 2011). These findings support an earlier study conducted by Broom et al (2006), which found that people in jobs with poor psychosocial quality reported similar levels of physical and mental health to those who were unemployed. There is also good evidence to suggest that jobs which are (either objectively, or subjectively perceived to be) insecure, may be as damaging to health as being out of work (Benach and Muntaner, 2007). In a summary of the literature, Nolan et al summarised that job insecurity produces a disturbance of ontological security or a deficit of ‘situational clarity’, which is related to a sense of being out of control or helpless (Nolan et al, 2000: 185). Research has also connected

job insecurity with mood (Barling and Kelloway, 1996), sleep disturbance (Mattiasson et al, 1990), and a diminished ability to plan one's life (Burchell, 1994). In sum, research suggests that the psychosocial qualities of jobs have a relationship with well-being that is equally as significant as whether or not one has a job.

Finally, researchers have also been concerned with the relationship between working hours and well-being, and it is now commonplace for journalists and trade-unions to refer to a 'culture of overwork' (for example, Bunting, 2005; TUC, 2002). Whilst a review of the literature on working hours by Roberts suggests that there is no country with uncontested evidence of a new 'long-hours culture', it is certainly the case that some individuals and occupational groups are working notably long hours (Roberts, 2007), and a range of studies have shown that long working hours have a negative effect on both mental and physical health (Shields, 1999).¹ Researchers have also documented the negative effects of overwork on family relationships. Arlie Hochschild, for example, recognised that many people in the more affluent societies are experiencing 'time-binds', and must deal with stressful decisions about how to divide their time between paid-work and the family (Hochschild, 1997, OECD, 2002). As well as the family, work may compete with time for political or civic participation, as well as time for the play, relaxation, self-initiated activities and joyful spontaneity, that make up the rich content of everyday life. Both Arendt and Russell were concerned that too much work can condition people to forget the pleasure and the value of leisure (Arendt, 1998: 5; Russell, 1967: 231).

With all this work and all this consumption something has to give, and so there is no time or space now for playing music together, for ritual, prayer, writing diaries or long letters to friends and lovers, for idly wandering in the countryside, for contemplation. (Fevre, 2000: 203)

To summarise, it is clear that work has an intimate relationship with human well-being, with employment status, the psychosocial quality of jobs, and working hours all having a highly significant influence on the individual's emotional prosperity.

¹ In Japan, where working hours are notoriously long, there even exists a word to describe the biggest cost of long hours: *Karoshi*, meaning 'death by overwork'.

A Work-Centred Society

The relationship between work and well-being is of particular interest since it can be argued that, since the capitalist-industrial revolution, we have been living in a ‘work-centred’ society. Note that ‘work’ here does not refer to work in the philosophical or anthropological sense, as Marx and Engels used the term. In Marxist terms, ‘work’ can refer to productive activity in general and, when defined in this way, is regarded as the most fundamental of human activities; ‘work’ is a mode of self-realisation and ‘the first premise of all existence’ (Marx and Engels, 1970: 48). According to Marx, work is the ‘means by which human beings develop and become fully human’ (Sayers, 1998: 108). It is not this definition of work, however, that is being referenced when calling society ‘work-centred’. The kind of work being addressed here is specifically *paid employment*, or the kind of work André Gorz defined as ‘performed in the public, not the private sphere’, that is ‘intended for others as *social*, not private individuals’ (Gorz, 1994: 54, emphasis in original). This definition is to the exclusion of socially necessary but unpaid work such as domestic work, and a whole range of productive and creative activities that are performed outside the sphere of market relations.² The ‘work-centrality’ of society (defined in this way) has both an objective and a subjective dimension. Objectively, society has witnessed a massive quantitative expansion of paid-work since the pre-industrial period, with most people now engaging in paid-work for much of their lives. Subjectively, it is also thought that people now attach a very high emotional, cultural and psychological significance to having a job.

I will explore these ideas further throughout the thesis, but first it is necessary to place the work-centred society in its historical context. The Marxist scholar, Sean Sayers, argued that attitudes to work in any given historical period are socially and culturally produced and must be analysed as such (Sayers, 1998: 53). Historically speaking, it is clear that work – even in the broader sense of ‘productive activity’ – was not always valued as a personal boon. For example, it is known that for the Ancient Greeks,

² For the sake of ease, in the remainder of the thesis I will use the terms ‘employment’, ‘work’ and ‘paid-work’ interchangeably, in order to refer to the activity of formal paid-employment. When I wish to discuss work in its philosophical or anthropological definition, I will make this clear in the text.

work was regarded as menial and coloured with the sense of burden felt in words like toil, chore or travail. In his critique of work, the sociologist, P.D. Anthony, reflected on the meaning of work for Aristotle and Plato. These philosophers held work in low regard, designating labour as something to be performed by slaves. Labour was seen as a necessary evil that got in the way of the more proper or noble pursuits of a citizen such as politics, art, and quiet contemplation (Anthony, 1977: 17). In societies where necessary labour was allocated to slaves, ‘work was not worthy of a free man’ (Fromm, 2001: 80).

The historical contingency of today’s work-centred society was also explored by Weber in his classic, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002). Weber gave an account of the ‘traditional society’, where labour remained undesirable and people limited the amount of labour performed in accordance with a moderate and well-defined set of needs. Weber wrote that, in the traditional society, ‘a man does not “by nature” wish to earn more and more money, but simply to live as he is accustomed to live and earn as much as is necessary for that purpose’ (Weber, 2002: 60). The harvester, offered a higher rate of pay, did not wonder about how much extra money he could earn, but about how much less work he could do to earn the same comfortable amount as before (Weber, 2002: 61-2). ‘One worked in response to a concrete demand and with a concrete aim: to earn one’s livelihood’ (Fromm, 2001: 81). According to Weber, this traditional attitude towards work was transformed by the rise of a Puritan morality that installed work as a virtuous activity. He traced the moral obligation to work back to Christian asceticism which, having moved out of the monastic cell, was transferred to the worldly life of work in the form of a vocational calling (Weber, 2002: 123). The influential Christian teachings of Richard Baxter taught that the generation of wealth through work was a form of duty. The exploitation and the ‘joyless lack of meaning’ entailed in capitalist relations of production were to be tolerated by the individual on religious or ethical grounds (Weber, 2002: 282). The teachings of John Calvin developed these ideas further by spreading the belief in predestination. Calvin taught that success in work was a sign of God’s grace and acceptance into the kingdom of heaven, whilst failure in work signalled damnation. The main legacy of these puritan teachings is their paradoxical command to ‘deny the world but to live in the world, to work hard to accumulate

wealth but not to spend it on oneself' (Parker, 1972: 35). Work was to be performed as a self-justifying end.

Weber did not argue, of course, that ascetic moral values continue to motivate individuals to work in modern societies. According to Weber, the ascetic compulsion to work led to a process of rational organisation whereby, as capitalism developed, entrepreneurs who failed to run an efficient and competitive business went bust (Weber, 2002: 68). With the development of capitalism, the 'idyllic state', where work was pursued as a spiritual vocation, eventually 'collapsed under the pressure of a bitter, competitive struggle' (Weber, 2002: 68). Weber argued that this process of rationalisation produced the capitalist machine or the 'spirit of capitalism' which, having established itself as a 'tremendous cosmos' or as a universe in which individuals were destined to participate, no longer required moral ascetic values as its supporting pillar: 'Capitalism at the time of its development needed labourers who were available for economic exploitation for conscience sake. To-day it is in the saddle, and hence able to force people to labour without transcendental sanctions' (Weber, 2002: 282). So entrenched is the felt need to work that according to Sharon Beder, in her recent chronicle of the work ethic, few people today can imagine a society that does not revolve around work, and people rarely reflect on the reasons for why they work (Beder, 2000: 1).

The social-historian, E.P. Thompson, in his classic essay, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism' (1967), joins Weber as an author seeking to understand how people were subjectively reconciled with labour in the industrialising society. Thompson argued that the 'transition to a mature industrial society entailed a severe restructuring of working habits – new discipline, new incentives and a new human nature upon which these incentives could bite effectively' (Thompson, 1967: 57). His essay documented the various means by which the correct attitudes towards work were configured. Like Weber, Thompson described a marriage of convenience between Puritan morals and industrial work-discipline. Puritan moralists mounted an attack on idleness, concerned that the irregular cycles of traditional self-directed working patterns led to the development of personal vices and social ills. Thompson quoted from a pamphlet written by Rev. J. Clayton in 1755. Addressed to the people

of Manchester, Clayton's *Friendly Advice to the Poor* warned against the shameful waste of time at the tea-table, midnight revels, public loitering, and slothful mornings in bed (Thompson, 1967: 83). Thompson also discussed schooling as a universe of disciplined time, intended to socialise the child into the rhythms and sacrifices of the working day (Thompson, 1967: 84).

According to Thompson's account, the freedom of the individual to structure and organise their own time was wrested from them on moral grounds, but the preaching and teaching of the work ethic had a less significant effect on work-discipline than transformations in the working day itself. Like Weber, Thompson invited a contrast with more traditional orientations towards work, recalling a time where 'work' and 'life' were symbiotic rather than oppositional categories. The tendency of craftsmen in peasant societies was to adopt a task-orientated approach to their work, in which discipline was not dictated by a steady timetable, but was customised according to natural rhythms. Fishermen worked by the rhythms of the sea and farmers milked their cows when the cows needed milking. Thompson argued that wherever individuals were in control of their working lives, their work pattern would tend towards 'alternate bouts of intense labour and of idleness' (Thompson, 1967: 63). Recognising that this work pattern still persists among some self-employed people (farmers, house-husbands / wives and doctoral students, for example) Thompson wondered whether this way of working could therefore be considered more 'natural' (Thompson, 1967: 73).

Having provided an outline of traditional orientations to work, Thompson explained how work-discipline became less task-oriented and more regularised in the industrialising society. As per Benjamin Franklin's well known dictum, 'time is money', time in the industrialising society became increasingly commodified. Under the exploitative relations of capitalism, payment of workers became tied to the amount of time spent in the workplace rather than piecework. The individual's freedom to self-manage and self-limit his or her labour was eliminated as work became increasingly heteronomous. 'Work' and 'life' became increasingly separate spheres of existence and a marked boundary grew between the time that belonged to employers and the time that was one's own (Thompson, 1967: 61). A widespread

diffusion of clocks and the rise of ‘clock-time’ also harmonised with the increasing demand for the synchronisation of labour in the industrialising society and punctuality, efficiency and productivity, became the watchwords of the working day (Thompson, 1967: 69). Finally, work-discipline was also strengthened via technological developments in machine-production. The time and motion studies famously pioneered by Frederick Winslow Taylor, for example, turned work-discipline into a managerial science, and workers lost further control over the structure of their day as the pace of work was regulated by the ever-moving assembly line. Lacking the aid of an assembly line to increase the pace of work on his shop floor, English potter Josiah Wedgwood sought a novel method of disciplining his workers, and the first clocking-in machine was also born (Thompson, 1967: 83). Thompson summarised:

In all these ways – by the division of labour; the supervision of labour; fines; bells and clocks; money incentives; preachings and schoolings; the suppression of fairs and sports – new labour habits were formed. (Thompson, 1967: 90)

Through historical analysis, authors like Weber and Thompson demonstrate the processes by which humans became habituated to the rhythms and rigours of working life. For some authors, the historical contingency of the work ethic attests to its false or ideological character. Sean Sayers, however, whilst noting the historical contingency of work discipline, argued that this is a problematic assertion (Sayers, 1998: 53). He followed Marx in adopting a dialectical understanding of human nature, which led him to the conclusion that, whilst work-discipline is historical in nature and our relationship with work has undoubtedly undergone dramatic changes, the need for employment remains an ‘ineliminable need of contemporary psychology’ (Sayers, 1998: 53). According to Sayers, human nature has changed. Many now accept the idea that we have reached a historical point at which access to work – its tasks, relationships and time-structures – has become absolutely key for individual well-being and that we are now, subjectively as well as objectively, a work-centred society. Sayers’ view is reflected in the government’s enduring emphasis on employment as a condition of social inclusion and a requirement for a civilised and

healthy life.³ I will explore the work-centred foundations of both contemporary social policy and sociological research in chapter two, but first I want to explore a perspective that is much less accepting of today's work-centred society.

The Critique of Work

Whilst many believe that work is now essential to individual well-being, critical social theory has advanced an alternative view and argued that the work-centrality of everyday life is opposed to the freedom and happiness of individuals. Authors in the tradition of critical social theory (or what is sometimes called 'end of work' theory) such as André Gorz, Herbert Marcuse and Bertrand Russell, have supported an alternative agenda, arguing for shorter working hours and the displacement of employment from everyday life. It is not possible to offer a comprehensive overview of critical social theory here (for a thorough and insightful review of the literature, refer to Edward Granter (2009)), though this section will introduce some of its key principles.

In his famous essay, *In Praise of Idleness* (1967), Russell pointed to the irrationality of a society that strives for full-employment, despite having developed the technological means to conquer scarcity:

Modern methods of production have given us the possibility of ease and security for all; we have chosen, instead, to have overwork for some and starvation for others. Hitherto we have continued to be as energetic as we were before there were machines; in this we have been foolish (Russell, 1967: 237).

Whilst all societies must perform work in order to survive, Russell's objection is that gains in productivity have not been matched by a liberation of time for non-work activities. Marcuse presented a similar argument in *Eros and Civilisation* (1998),

³ I do not want to misrepresent Sayers' perspective here. Whilst he believed that modern subjects were irreversibly attached to work, his argument is more thoughtful than the authors and policy makers who share his view, in that it clearly accounts for the degradation of work in capitalism. For example, whilst arguing that the need to be employed is now a psychologically entrenched need, Sayers did recognise that his philosophy seems 'grotesquely at odds with the reality of work as the majority experience it' (Sayers, 1998: 39).

using a terminology borrowed from Freud. Marcuse recognised that the biological needs of humans require a level of ‘basic repression’ or ‘self-sublimation’, whereby the urge for uninhibited pleasure and self-expression must be temporarily suspended in order to perform the labour necessary for survival. He argued, however, that the exploitative relationships of capitalism repress humans beyond the necessary or ‘basic’ level. The repressiveness of modern civilisation is no longer justified by natural limits, but is perpetuated in the interests of domination and the accumulation of surplus profit; capitalist society is a society characterised by ‘surplus repression’ (Marcuse, 1998: 35). This is the ‘foolishness’ of capitalism: that in spite of its tremendous capacity for productive growth, the wage-relation continues to require humans to work well beyond a level that is necessary for their comfortable survival. The essence of the ‘end of work’ argument is its call for ‘a sensible re-balancing of necessity and freedom, so that working time is reduced and labour becomes the servant rather than the master of people’s lives’ (Bowring, forthcoming).

The distinctive nature of ‘end of work’ theory can be grasped by considering its departure from a more orthodox Marxism – a departure which is most clearly articulated in Gorz’s work. Like the critical social theorists who drew upon his work, Marx was concerned with the ‘ontological distortion of the ideal role of labour under conditions of capitalist production’ (Granter, 2009: 56). He argued that private ownership of the means of production, the detailed division of labour, and advances in productive technologies, were having a degrading effect on work in the capitalist society. There was a growing rift between work, and aesthetic creation and work was no longer the self-creating activity of the individual but was forced, servile and unpleasant. What Marx believed to be the very essence of humanity was becoming ‘a mere means for his existence’ (Marx, 1975: 328). Bouffartigue eloquently summarised the central concerns of a Marxist critique of work:

The intensification and debasement of work make it very difficult [for employed people] to carry out their allotted tasks in accordance with the technical, aesthetic and psychological criteria (efficiency, beauty, usefulness, recognition) that give it meaning. (Bouffartigue, 2010: 211)

In what Booth (following G.A. Cohen) has called the 'Plain Marxist Argument' (Booth, 1989: 207), the problem of workers' emancipation is approached as a problem of *ownership*. It is argued that the exploitation of the worker would eventually be countered through the collective appropriation of the means of production. According to Marx's dialectical materialism this was inevitable, the revolutionary consciousness of workers being 'hastened by the ever more serious crises experienced by an (exploitative) system which pays a subsistence wage to the producers of a growing surplus' (Gorz, 1982: 45).

Critical social theorists or neo-Marxists have seen fit to revise Marx's theory. In his critical essay, *Farewell to the Working Class* (1982), Gorz criticised the Plain Marxist argument for a number of reasons. Firstly, he argued that Marx's theory was culturally disconnected, governed by philosophy rather than by the experiences and capacities of real workers (Gorz, 1982: 19). Wryly referring to Marx as 'Saint Marx', Gorz argued that Marx 'retained the principal characteristic of the Hegelian dialectic: that history has a meaning which is independent of the consciousness of individuals and realises *itself*, whatever they may think, in their actions' (Gorz, 1982: 18, emphasis in original). In Gorz's view, Marx made an unjustified leap from asserting the proletariat's objective goal to a belief in the inclination and capacity of real, flesh-and-blood workers to achieve it. Secondly, Gorz argued that whilst alienation can be attenuated, it cannot be completely eliminated from work in advanced industrial economies (Gorz, 1982: 9).

Capitalist development has endowed the collective worker with a structure that makes it impossible for real... workers either to recognise themselves in it, to identify with it or internalise it as their own reality and potential power. (Gorz, 1982: 29)

In reality, the hierarchies and processes of advanced industrial production have created a situation where the proletariat is dispossessed of their work, awareness of their latent creativity and sovereignty largely destroyed by scientific management (Gorz, 1982: 46). In Gorz's view, the inertia and the alienation entailed in industrial work produce the opposite traits than those of Marx's revolutionary proletariat and, though the possibility of negating class relations exists ontologically, it does not

necessarily exist in cultural terms (Gorz, 1982: 44). Thirdly, Gorz doubted the revolutionary goal of collective appropriation due to his understanding of power ‘as a system of relationships [or] a structure’ rather than the ‘property of individuals freely defining the rules and goals of their collective actions’ (Gorz, 1982: 52). In Gorz’s argument, management of the ‘industrial-bureaucratic megamachine’ by means of voluntary social collaboration is, quite simply, an unattainable goal (Gorz, 1988: 42-3). For all of the above reasons, Gorz controversially concluded that Marx’s vision of a post-capitalist industrialised society, ‘which presents itself to each individual as the desired outcome of his or her free social cooperation with other individuals’, was an impossibility (Gorz, 1982: 76).

These criticisms led Gorz to declare collective appropriation a ‘myth’, and formed the basis of his radical approach to the problem of workers’ emancipation. Rather than the more traditional themes of exploitation and property relations, Gorz’s later works were primarily concerned with the restriction of individual autonomy in capitalist societies. Significantly influenced by Sartre and the existentialist movement, one of the key questions that animated Gorz’s work was: ‘When am I truly myself, that is, not a tool or the product of outside powers and influences, but the originator of my acts, thoughts, feelings, values?’ (Gorz, 1986: 138). Believing that modern forms of work offered meagre opportunities for challenge and creativity, Gorz moved away from the possibility of freedom *in* work to focus on the expansion of a realm of autonomy outside social labour. Gorz believed that humans could now only truly be themselves in their leisure time, that ‘real work is no longer what we do when “at work”’ (Gorz, 1999: 3) and that creative activity can only be made truly autonomous by freeing it from the restrictions of paid-employment. Along with a number of other authors, Gorz also recognised the ecological problems generated by a productivist theory of human development. As Soper has explored, the anthropocentric or instrumental attitudes toward nature inherent in Marx’s dialectical materialism have been particularly troubling for environmentalists (Soper, 1996: 83). For all of the above reasons, critical social theorists have broken with Plain Marxism and, rather than arguing for the liberation of individuals *in* their work, have instead focussed on the liberation of individuals *from* their work, through the reduction of working time.

Critical social theorists' break with Marx should not be over-emphasised, however, since the Plain Marxist argument is only one facet of Marx's oeuvre. Whilst Marx did assign work a key role in the development of society and of the human subject, Edward Granter argued that there is an important and interesting degree of ambiguity in Marx's later work. Alongside Berki, Granter suggested that 'Marx himself... could not clearly decide if communism meant liberation from labour or the liberation of labour' (Berki, 1979: 5). Granter explored the post-work Marx who, like the critical social theorists that followed him, valorised free-time as the real measure of wealth, arguing for a realm of freedom (leisure) emancipated from the realm of necessity (work). Marx argued that the tremendous productive capacities of capitalism could, in principle, be directed towards a new wealth of free-time. Granter quoted the Marx of the *Grundrisse*:

[Capital] is instrumental in creating the means of social disposable time, and so in reducing working time for the whole society to a minimum, and thus making everyone's time free for their own development' (Marx, 1972: 144).

In this quote from Marx we find a central premise of the 'end of work' argument, which is founded on the assumption that 'advances in production technology (automation), are increasingly eliminating the necessity for human work' (Granter, 2009: 5). Inherent in this idea is a dialectical theory of modernity, since whilst capitalism is characterised by exploitation, its forces of production are also believed to carry the promise of freedom from necessity. However, driven by the capitalist emphasis on the expropriation of workers' surplus labour, gains in productivity are not utilised to liberate leisure time, but are channelled into further production:

Though machinery be the most pertinent means for increasing the productivity of labour, that is to say for reducing the amount of labour time necessary for the production of a commodity, in the hands of capital it becomes the most powerful means... for lengthening the working day far beyond the bounds imposed by nature (Marx, 1974: 428).

Under capitalist relations of production, the time generated by gains in productivity does not manifest as free-time for the individual to use as they please. It is instead

reinvested in new forms of work which may be socially ‘unproductive’⁴, or devoted to the production of consumer goods that meet superfluous needs, or that meet basic needs in an increasingly profligate manner (Bowring, 1999). Time that is not reinvested in forms of unproductive work is translated into unemployment – a kind of dead-time, troubled by stigma and financial worry. Bowring described job scarcity as ‘the perverted form of a potential blessing’ (Bowring, 1999) since, by failing to respond radically to the problem of unemployment, society ensures that ‘unavoidable leisure shall cause misery all round instead of being a universal source of happiness’ (Russell, 1967: 230). It is argued that the time saved from gains in productivity should be distributed evenly ‘on the scale of society as a whole so that each man and woman can benefit from them’ (Gorz, 1988: 191). ‘Unemployment’ would then become a more humane form of non-work time, in which the individual would be free to pursue self-directed activities. Theorists criticise capitalism for continuing in denial of the fact that it is gradually disposing of the need for human labour. This insight has led a number of theorists to renounce capitalism as a ‘phantasm’ (Hardt and Negri, 1994: 282) or a ‘confused anachronism’ (Forrester, 1999). ‘We are still fiddling with the vestiges of that [old] world, busily plugging up gaps, patching up emptiness, fudging up substitutes around a system that has not just collapsed but vanished’ (Forrester, 1999: 2). ‘We live in societies with tremendous productive potential yet we apparently must commit more and more of us, and more and more of our lives, to work’ (Fevre, 2000: 206).

It is proposed by critical social theorists that an overall reduction of working hours and a more equitable distribution of the available work would give everybody more free-time to develop themselves socially and culturally. Olin Wright has summarised critical or ‘emancipatory’ social theory as a theory that privileges ‘human

⁴ Bowring defined ‘productive’ work as work that is *socially* productive, in that it ‘*saves society labour and gains society time*’ (Bowring, 1999: 74, emphasis in original). This is to the exclusion of ‘an increasing range of unskilled or common-skilled services, the growth of which is disguising the underlying contraction in the volume of productive labour’ (Bowring, 1999: 75). Falling into the unproductive category are the jobs described in Gorz’s notion of a ‘tertiary anti-economy’ (Gorz, 1994: 79) – jobs and services which, had people the time, they could by themselves perform equally as well and efficiently as paid workers. This does not include skilled work such as teaching or healthcare, but does include jobs such as cleaning, childcare, home delivery, catering, and aspects of household maintenance. Bowring argued that there is no productive rationality in converting such activities into forms of paid-work because the skills involved are not precious or rare, and that unproductive jobs serve only to disguise the overall reduction of necessary labour.

flourishing’, defined not only as freedom from material deprivation, but as the freedom to realise individual talents and capacities, whatever these may be (physical, artistic, intellectual, social, moral or spiritual) (Olin Wright, 2010: 14). The humanistic motives for moving beyond the work-centred society are also joined by a potent new motive, namely, the need to respond to the environmental impact of productivism, which poses a threat to human well-being in the long term. The New Economics Foundation, for example, recently proposed a shorter (21 hour) working week as a way of confronting a range of interlinked problems, including overwork and unemployment, as well as overconsumption and high carbon emissions (NEF, 2010: 2). Similarly, in his progressive book, *Sharing the Work, Sparing the Planet* (1999), Anders Hayden suggested that a programme of ‘work-time reduction’, coupled with a more equitable distribution of work, would be the most ecologically sound response to the problem of unemployment. He not only argued that this would prevent the wastage of natural resources on the creation of work for work’s sake, but also that the free-time afforded by shorter working hours would allow people more time to cultivate environmentally friendly practices, ‘opening up opportunities for more “simple” ways of living based on lower consumption and higher quality of life’ (Hayden, 1999: 32).

The Critique of Work Today

By arguing for a radical departure from the work-centred society, critical social theory moves away from the view that work is integral to the well-being of individuals. Instead of extrapolating from the present, this imaginative sub-discipline of sociology ‘enjoins us to think first about where we want to be, and then about how we might get there’ (Levitas, 2001), ‘provid[ing] us with [a] distance from the existing state of affairs which allows us to judge what we *are* doing in the light of what we *could* or *should* do’ (Gorz, 1999: 113, emphasis in original). As a body of thought, critical social theory has tended to remain at the margins of sociological thinking. It can be argued, however, that its themes remain highly relevant in relation to contemporary concerns about the quality of available work, as well as the growing discussion about

‘work-life balance’. In this section I will briefly consider the enduring relevance of the critique of work in relation to these social problems.

Following Marx, commentators such as Harry Braverman have described the effects of the division and subdivision of labour on the experience of work in the industrialising society. Braverman recalled how, via regimes of scientific management, workers were dispossessed of their work. The essential effort of Taylorism, he argued, was to ‘strip the workers of craft knowledge and autonomous control and confront them with a fully thought-out labour process in which they function as cogs and levers’ (Braverman, 1974: 136). Under a regime of scientific management, competences such as initiative, creativity and good decision-making, were not only superfluous, but also suppressed as dysfunctional (Braverman in Offe, 1985: 328). As the ‘human factor’ was systematically rationalised out of the labour process, the subjective experience of work or ‘the cluster of obligations and claims associated with ‘producer’s pride’ and its social recognition’ were undermined (Offe, 1985: 142).

Braverman’s concerns about the degradation of labour were based on research and firsthand experiences of working on an industrial production line. His account of the worker as a lever or cog brings to mind the now relatively archaic image of Charlie Chaplin wrapped around a flywheel in *Modern Times*, and we would be forgiven for thinking that Braverman’s critique no longer applies to work in the post-industrial society. In the early eighties, Claus Offe indeed optimistically argued that the intensification and debasement of work associated with rationalisation were weakening in a post-industrial context. He was optimistic at his time of writing that the transition from productive to immaterial or service-based work signalled the reintroduction of normative rationality or the ‘human factor’ into work. According to Offe, the non-standardised and less predictable nature of service work make it more immune to rationalisation. He declared service-work as having its own ‘separate rationality’ (Offe, 1985: 137-8), falling somehow ‘outside the sphere of profit, the law of value, and the command of capital’ (Granter, 2009: 138):

While one can subsume the greatest part of work performed in the ‘secondary’ (i.e. producing industrial goods) sector under an abstract common denominator – that of technical-organisational productivity and economic profitability – these criteria lose their (relative) clarity when work becomes ‘reflexive’, as it does for the most part in the ‘tertiary’ sector of service work (Offe, 1985: 137).

Offe believed that the technical measurement of efficient profitability was being replaced by ‘qualities like interactive competence, consciousness of responsibility, empathy and practical experience’ (Offe, 1985: 138). Imagined in this way, service work counters alienation, offering the worker new opportunities to feel morally attached to his or her work and to experience it in a meaningful way. However, as Granter argued, Offe’s assertions have become increasingly contestable in the last quarter of a century and it is pertinent to question his optimism with the benefit of hindsight (Granter, 2009: 138).

It can be argued that the management strategies and divisions of labour that concerned Marxist commentators continue to colour the experience of many forms of work today. Walker and Fincham argue that whilst the forms of available work have changed over time, changes in the way in which work is *experienced* are far less evident (Walker and Fincham: 2011: 40). Phillip Brown has also favoured an image of continuity in assessing the experience of work. He suggested that the knowledge-based work characteristic of a modern economy is subject to rationalisation in much the same way as work on the industrial production line:

If the twentieth century brought what can be described as *mechanical Taylorism* characterised by the Fordist production line, where the knowledge of workers was captured, codified, and reengineered in the shape of the moving assembly line, the twenty-first century is the age of *digital Taylorism* (Brown, 2011: 72).

The proliferation of ‘one best way’ initiatives in knowledge-based jobs, and the codification of workers’ knowledge into online process manuals and computer programs, transforms knowledge-work into ‘working-knowledge’, allowing jobs to be performed without the skill or initiative they may have once demanded (Brown, 2011: 66). When organised according to the principles of digital Taylorism, knowledge work may offer little in the way of satisfaction or sense of challenge. Whilst he did

not use the term directly, Richard Sennett illustrated the effects of digital Taylorism in his case study of working life in a modern bakery. According to Sennett, the computerisation of bread production directly contributed to the diminishing satisfaction of the job. Sennett observed that the baking process had been reduced to superficial 'surface work' in which workers 'baked' by manipulating on-screen icons, with few bakers even getting to see the bread (Sennett, 1998: 68). Whilst Sennett resisted romanticising the labour-intensive methods of the traditional bakery, he concluded that the ease of modern work creates the conditions for workers' apathy. The mindlessness of the work in the modern bakery corresponded with a weak sense of identification with the job and confusion about what makes the worker a 'good worker'. In his description of the bakers he resisted using the word 'alienation' in the traditional Marxist sense, in which it marks the beginning of the worker's struggle, instead suggesting that the bakers were merely 'indifferent' to their work. In Sennett's case study, both the ease and the 'illegibility' of work made it a meaningless experience.

Offe's optimism for the civilising or rewarding benefits of service work can also be challenged because he did not anticipate the extent to which human conduct (interactive competence, empathy, responsibility etc) could itself become subject to a criterion of efficiency, as the personality becomes a unit of capital. Though discretion and disposition are more important for the performance of service or 'public contact' work, Arlie Hochschild has argued that it is common for corporations to utilise the personality in order to provide a more economically competitive service. In *The Managed Heart* (1983), Hochschild studied the work of air hostesses, exploring how corporations utilise the workers' personality, and capacity to work at the 'rules of feeling and their display'. Hochschild called this affective work 'emotional labour', and it has been suggested that the modern corporation rarely demands that the worker mobilise their hands, but rather puts their hearts and minds to use instead (Warhurst and Thompson, 1998: 1). Bunting provided examples of emotional labour in her discussion of a call centre owned by the *Orange* phone company. She described the way in which workers were berated for sounding glum, told to 'speak as if they were smiling', and permitted a strict eight seconds 'composure' time between phone calls (Bunting, 2005: 62).

Hochschild observed a particular set of personal consequences arising from the utilisation of the personality as a form of capital. For example, she noted the potential for workers to ‘burn out’ or suffer from emotional numbness when they are systematically encouraged to emotionally identify with their work (Hochschild, 1983: 187-8). The other extreme is that the worker, realising the phoniness or insincerity of their interactions in the workplace, adopts a cynical distance from the work that is done (Hochschild, 1983: 187). Efforts to find a compromise between these two extremes or, as Hochschild defines the task – to ‘adjust oneself to the role in a way that allows some flow of self into the role but minimises the stress the role puts on the self’ (Hochschild, 1983: 188) – are antagonised by the heteronomous conditions of work, and the aim of managers to enforce standardised rules on how to feel and behave in a given situation (Hochschild, 1983: 189).

In sum, it can be argued that the ‘human factor’ is not, as Offe suggested, necessarily liberated in the service or ‘public contact’ work available in the post-industrial society. We cannot, of course, presuppose the impacts of particular work regimes on the experience of work, since experiences can only be grasped through empirical research. (As Walker and Fincham (2011: 41-2) suggest, for example, repetitiveness at work may make work feel tedious, but it could equally give work a sense of traction). It is only through the narratives of workers themselves that researchers can really know the experience of doing a job (and later chapters in the present research will indeed explore such narratives). Nevertheless, the argument stands that recent transformations in the world of work are not necessarily equated with new opportunities for the individual to find meaning and satisfaction in their employment, or to experience the labour process as autonomous moral actors. Whilst alien goals and unfavourable working conditions do not preclude any possible satisfaction in work, a number of theorists and researchers agree that in a capitalist economy, ‘most people for most of their work lives face job opportunities which offer meagre opportunities at best for creativity and challenge’ (Olin Wright, 2010: 48). For this reason, the critique of work remains an important aspect of sociology.

The critique of work also resonates with the growing discussion surrounding ‘work-life balance’, which has been concerned about the amount of time left to individuals, after work, for the pursuit of non-economic or self-initiated activities. I have already touched upon the personal costs of long working hours above – be it work-related stress and illness or the diminished time for family and friends – but importantly, it must be recognised that issues of ‘work-life balance’ are not only relevant to people who are actually in employment. Given the imposed and poorly resourced nature of their situation, it cannot be said that the involuntarily unemployed simply step into a world of abundant free-time. It can be argued that people’s free-time is in jeopardy outside work, between jobs, and long before they even step into the world of employment, given the need to search for work and to spend time cultivating the skills and personalities required to access a job. In the congested modern labour market, with its emphasis on employability and self-entrepreneurship:

[Individuals] must manage their human capital throughout their lives, investing in it continually in the form of training, and they must understand that the possibility of selling their labour-power depends on the unpaid, voluntary, unseen work they put in continually to reproduce it anew. (Gorz, 2010: 20-21)

Similarly, in her forthright book, *One Dimensional Woman*, Nina Power recognised that the ‘demand to be an “adaptable” worker, to be constantly “networking”, “selling yourself”, in effect to become a kind of walking CV is felt keenly by both sexes in the developing world’ (Power, 2009: 21).

These observations about employability are embedded in a broader concern that, as capitalist economies continue to expand, selling oneself increasingly extends to all aspects of existence, and that the enjoyment of life is increasingly subordinated to personal cultivation for the labour market. ‘More and more effort, time and money is spent doing what is necessary rather than for any intrinsic purpose’ (Brown, 2003: 161) and individuals have less time in which they are ‘free for the world and its culture’ (Arendt, 1977: 205). Job scarcity exacerbates this problem because the fear of being economically useless increases the premium on a person’s ability to ‘produce themselves’ for the labour market, yet the worry that life is business is a longstanding

feature of critical theory. Fromm, for example, suggested that the archetype of late capitalism is the ‘marketing character’, who increasingly evaluates his or her activities in terms of their exchange value (Fromm in James, 2008: 47). Similarly, Horkheimer discussed the increasingly practical orientation to the world and the ‘loss of interiority’ concomitant with the development of capitalism, suggesting that ‘personal cultivation [for its own sake]... is being replaced by modes of sensibility and behaviour which are proper to a technicised society’ (Horkheimer, 1974: 13). Success through the conventional channels of the labour market carries the danger of turning the self into a commodity, with the successful jobseeker always able to summarise where she has been and how she has made profitable and productive use of her time (Power, 2009: 23). Everything – attitudes, personalities, bodies, knowledge and skills – becomes a material to be manipulated in the interests of employability.

The logic of capital, of life turned into capital, takes over all the activities and spaces in which the production of the self was originally supposed to flourish as the free expenditure of energy to no other end than to develop human capacities to their highest degree. (Gorz, 2010, 23)

In a competitive labour market, education is an area of life that becomes particularly vulnerable to commercialisation. The knowledge accessed through education can be gathered instrumentally, for the sake of employability, or it can be valued as a form of wealth in itself. Fromm described these different orientations towards education as the difference between learning in the ‘having’ mode and learning in the ‘being’ mode (Fromm, 1978: 27) and, more recently, Brown described this same dichotomy as the difference between ‘acquisitive’ and ‘inquisitive’ learning (Brown, 2003: 160). In the acquisitive ‘having’ mode, learners instrumentally seek to possess knowledge, but ‘the content does not become part of their own individual system of thought, enriching and widening it’ (Fromm, 1978: 37). In the inquisitive ‘being’ mode on the other hand, learners are ‘occupied with the topic and it interests them’ (Fromm, 1978: 38). Learners are receptive and use the ideas they study to reflect on their own set of problems. The learning affects and transforms the student, and his or her emphasis is on the internal journey, not the extrinsic reward of credentials. When knowledge is seen as wealth it is a source of meaning and an end in itself (Gorz, 2010: 95), but the intrinsic value of learning is undermined by credentialism and the impetus of

employability. Ronald Dore has called this process of undermining the ‘diploma disease’, i.e. the conversion of learning from a form of wealth to a means of certifying oneself for work (Dore, 1976). In sum, the critique of work also remains salient in a context where individuals may be increasingly short on time in which they are free to perform activities whose primary goal is not the service of biological or economic needs.

The Subject Against Work

Bowring has suggested that one of the strengths of critical social theory and its post-productivist agenda is that it is culturally attuned to the demands of contemporary social movements. Such movements have issued a ‘demand for a better quality of life... for a less aggressive and individualistic culture, for more child-friendly policies and spaces, for a recognition of the environment as a source of aesthetic and spiritual nourishment, and for more free-time and a less commodity-intensive existence’ (Bowring, 2011: 150). Kate Soper indicates a similar cultural enthusiasm for a post-productivist politics in what she refers to as an emerging culture of ‘alternative hedonism’ (a concept I will explore further in chapter six) (Soper, 2008). Soper argues that a growing number of alternative hedonists may be questioning the subjective gratifications of the consumerist lifestyle and emphasising non-material goods such as free-time, well-being, conviviality and a more relaxed pace of life. Gorz too was particularly confident in the cultural resonance of his theory. He framed his work as something more than an experiment in emancipatory thought, suggesting that his anti-productivist politics reflected an actually emerging culture of resistance to the demands of economic rationality, or a growing demand for those non-material goods (free-time, autonomy, conviviality) that would be more readily available in a society where individuals were not obliged to spend most of their lives working:

Once a certain level of culture has been reached, the need for autonomy, the need to develop one’s abilities freely and to give purpose to one’s life is experienced with the same intensity as unsatisfied physiological necessity. (Gorz, 1967: 105)

In *Farewell* Gorz referred to the rise of the ‘non-class of the neo-proletarian’, who fight not for workers’ rights, but for a greater level of autonomy outside work. Updating his argument in a more contemporary context, he also described an ‘unheard’ revolution in cultural mentality, in which increasing numbers of people may be withholding their hearts and minds from the world of employment (Gorz, 1999). This view was also reflected by Offe who, in the eighties, argued that the dubious quality of available work and a high rate of unemployment would lead to a diminution in the ontological status of work in the eyes of the individual (Offe, 1985). Finally, the New Economics Foundation, in their manifesto for a 21-hour working week, also referred to ‘shifting expectations or moralities regarding the use, value and distribution of work and time in society’ (New Economics Foundation, 2010: 4). In spite of such claims, however, there has been little empirical research conducted to verify the extent to which critical social theory is culturally resonant, and theorists’ descriptions of where and in what form resistance to work may be occurring remain under-elaborated. Furthermore, whilst theorists have argued for a society of abundant free time, what is less clear is how and to what extent it is possible for individuals to live with significantly less work.

In an attempt to learn more about the possibility of a life with less or without work, the present study will explore the lives of a diverse range of people, each of whom has attempted to decentralise work from their everyday lives. If productivism meets an environmental limit in the finite nature of natural resources, it also finds an existential and a cultural limit in the finite time and energy of these subjects. In the present study we will meet, among others, the graduate frustrated by the lack of continuity between his interests and his job, the older worker disappointed by the deskilling of his work role, the parent made anxious by the lack of time to play with his children, the artist who struggles for money, the house-worker whose work goes unrecognised, and a number of men and women who have come to experience work as a threat to their mental health.

Critical sociologists have assigned a number of labels to the ‘anti-work’ subjectivity, from the neo-proletarian (Gorz, 1982), to the non-integrated individual (Marcuse, 1968: 187), or the investor in ‘inappropriated sociability’ (Papadopoulos et al, 2008).

None of these terms are satisfactory for my purposes because they are either too broad or exclude certain sample members. Among the diverse sample are those who define themselves in terms of cultural labels such as *downshifting*, *idling*, or *slowness*. Other participants have never encountered such labels. The degree of each participant's lifestyle change is also variable. Whilst some have given up working altogether, some have opted for self-employment, and others have reduced their working hours by smaller amounts. Finally, participants also vary in terms of the degree of success achieved regarding the extent to which, against practical odds, they have been able to maintain a shorter hours lifestyle. Whilst some have been able to live in close alignment with their values, for some, the gap between subjective values and objective circumstances remains significant. By embracing this diversity I aim to explore the possibility that resistance to work is not the preserve of intellectuals or the 'idle rich' but, as Schor noted in her study of downshiffters, may be the pursuit of the 'person next-door' (1998).

A number of key questions will guide the analysis. First, I will explore why participants have been motivated to resist work. This involves researching their biographical experiences, especially their previous experiences of employment. It also involves an attempt to explore the core moralities and personal priorities that motivate and inspire participants in their daily lives. Second, I will explore the pleasures and problems involved in working less, investigating how participants cope practically and emotionally with their disconnection from the world of work. In light of these questions, I will ask: to what extent can the individual, acting alone, realistically hope to reduce the role of work in their lives?

As I have suggested, critical social theorists have tended to presume that cultural resistance to work is a process that, if not yet formulated into a political struggle, is well underway. Whilst there has been very little empirical research to verify and flesh out this claim, there are some notable exceptions. Lefkowitz's *Breaktime* (1979), which explored the lives of the voluntarily unemployed in 1970's America, is one of two journalistic studies in this area. The other is Leff and Haft's *Time Without Work* (1983), which explored the same phenomenon in 1980's America. More contemporarily, the sociologist, Juliet Schor, has studied the phenomenon of

‘downshifting’ in America. In *The Overspent American* (1998) Schor was particularly interested in the negative experiences that motivated her participants to make lifestyle changes, as well as the difficulties of living ‘more simply’ in the midst of consumer culture. Another notable contribution is Mary Grigsby’s recent study of the ‘voluntary simplicity’ movement (also in America) in her book *Buying Time and Getting By* (2004). Grigsby’s study is informative as an ethnography of a movement which has a number of key similarities with the subjectivities studied here. Lastly, Anders Hayden’s book, *Sharing the Work, Sparing the Planet* (1999) is worth another mention. Whilst Hayden did not conduct any research into the experience of working less, he did think systematically about the pleasures and difficulties that might be entailed. All of these studies will offer useful points of comparison in my analysis chapters.

The structure of the thesis will proceed as follows. In chapter two I will look in more detail at the individual need to work, exploring a number of different perspectives on why work remains central to everyday life. By understanding the need to be employed, my aim is to forge a hypothetical understanding of what it might mean to *refuse* employment, generating research questions and themes for deployment in my fieldwork. In chapter three I will outline my research methodology, justifying my in-depth or ‘slow’ approach and explaining some of the fieldwork strategies that were used. In chapter four I will introduce the findings via descriptive accounts of several research participants. Then, in chapters five to seven, I will take a more thematic approach to analysis, developing a number of discussions around the data. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I will reflect on the sociological significance of the research findings. Are the participants simply deviants, malingerers, misfits and failures, or might society learn something positive and inspiring from their actions and choices?

CHAPTER 2

THE NEED TO BE EMPLOYED

In order to explore whether it is possible and desirable to live a life in which work is decentralised, it is first necessary to form a foundational understanding of why individuals experience a need to be employed in the first place. To fully understand this need, it is necessary to consider not only the individual's felt need to engage in employment, but also *society's* need for work to be done. A valid analysis of the need to work must therefore focus not only on the practical and psychological incentives of work for the individual, but also on the ways in which the felt need to be employed is morally and materially reinforced through cultural and structural mechanisms. By deconstructing the need to be employed, my aim is to form a theoretical understanding of both the difficulties and the pleasures that might be encountered in *resisting* employment. Given the exploratory nature of my method, my aim in this regard is not to generate rigid interview questions, but to develop the more general research themes that will give shape to the fieldwork.

The following discussion is separated into two parts. In the first part, I will explore the work ethic and the psychological significance of employment for human well-being. A number of sociologists and psychologists, for example, have suggested that the need to be employed represents a deeply rooted psychological need, and a key means by which individuals orientate themselves in the world. I will critically explore this argument, and also look briefly at its relationship with the increasingly stringent welfare reforms that currently characterise public policy in the UK. In the second part of the chapter I will move on to consider the significance of employment in providing the income needed in order to consume. Employment has instrumental as well as inherent value because it resources people with money for the consumption of the goods and services necessary for basic sustenance, as well as for the fulfilment of felt needs beyond the strictly 'necessary', such as the desire for novelty, self-expression and entertainment. The need to be employed and the need to consume are

thus analytically inseparable and, accordingly, the final sections of the chapter will move on from the need to be employed to also deconstruct the need to consume.

Employment and Psychological Well-Being

In the late sixties, *New Left Review* published two volumes of *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts* (Fraser, 1968; 1969). In these volumes, workers from a wide range of jobs – from the steelworker and the miner to the teacher and the actor – were invited to write detailed accounts of their subjective experiences of employment. The strength of these volumes is that they showed, in the language of the workers themselves, how people really felt about their jobs. The accounts added texture and poignancy to theoretical discussions of work experience by grounding sociological concepts like ‘alienation’ or ‘deskilling’ in terms of the little pleasures and gripes that made up the daily working lives of the authors. Drawing on results from a number of surveys, and via a close reading of the *Work* volumes, the sociologist Stanley Parker attempted to isolate a set of criteria that determine whether a job is satisfying or not (Parker, 1971). The data Parker drew on included a range of job types (including industrial, administrative, professional and artistic jobs) and his criteria continue to serve well as rough indicators of job satisfaction today. By Parker’s definition, a job is satisfying if it meets the following criteria to a good standard: if the job involves a feeling that the worker is participating in an act of creation; if it allows the worker to use ingenuity and skill; if it promotes working wholeheartedly rather than work-avoidance; if it allows sufficient scope for the worker to use initiative and feel a sense of responsibility; if it brings the worker into regular contact with others; and if the fellow workers ‘know their jobs’ (Parker, 1971: 44-47). Conversely, Parker concluded that bad jobs are characterised by repetitiveness, intangibility caused by an excessive division of labour, a sense of the job as socially useless or meaningless, job insecurity, and a feeling of being too closely supervised (Parker, 1971: 49).

It is clear that those who are fortunate to possess one of Parker’s good jobs will have access to certain psychological benefits. A good job may stabilise a person’s sense of identity by providing him or her with a vocation, or it might inspire feelings of social

solidarity and fellowship. Even where a job is of dubious social benefit, it will not be experienced by everybody as boring and oppressive. Gorz argued that ‘participation in the social process of production [is] an essential factor of socialisation and of membership in socially formalised communities and groups’ (Gorz, 1992: 182). Arlie Hochschild demonstrated the value of employment in a different way. Her research on the experiences of working mothers in an American corporation demonstrated the value attached to employment as an escape from a more mundane or stressful home life. Hochschild wrote that most of the working mothers she talked to did not just work for the money, but told her that ‘they would “go bananas just staying at home all day”’ (Hochschild, 1989: 242). Where home life is felt to be boring, employment may provide a socially stimulating environment in which a person can feel valued and recognised. A paid job is also widely understood to provide some regular and healthy distance between a person and the emotional demands of his or her family, giving many people the refreshing chance to engage in activities independently of their loved ones (Doherty, 2009: 93). It should be emphasised that access to employment has allowed women in particular to transcend their previous confinement to the private sphere.

The importance attached to employment in terms of psychological well-being is fully grasped when one considers the difficulties experienced in unemployment. The sociological literature widely understands unemployment as entailing disastrous personal consequences since the loss of a job not only reduces income, but may also attack happiness directly by destroying the self-respect and relationships that may have been provided by paid-work (Layard, 2005: 67). The rapid de-industrialisation of South Wales in the 1980’s provides a poignant example of what can be lost in unemployment, with mine closures representing the destruction of an entire way of life, in which work was historically bound up with a sense of community and self-identity. The pleasures of work and the devastations of unemployment were also captured in a seminal study by Marie Jahoda and colleagues (1972). The authors’ case study was the Austrian community of Marienthal, following the closure of a textile factory in the 1930’s. The research was eventually translated into English in the 1970’s and its commendably sympathetic portrayal of the unemployed made it a valuable resource in the ideological struggle against the ‘victim-blaming’ tendencies

of the Thatcher government (Cole, 2008: 28). The Marienthal study warrants further attention here, since it has been influential in social scientific understandings of the relationship between employment and human well-being.

Like the mining communities of South Wales, Marienthal's local identity was constructed around industry: 'the history of the factory is also the history of the village' (Jahoda et al, 1972: 12). By 1932 the closure of the factory had tragically left around 77% of families without a single employed member. The authors painted a bleak scene of the town: 'from their windows at home, the workers look out onto a heap of rubble, dented boilers, old transmission wheels and crumbling walls where once had been their place of work' (Jahoda et al, 1972: 14). On the basis of extensive ethnographic work, encompassing a broad range of research strategies, the researchers concluded that Marienthal's inhabitants were on a slippery slope of despondency and resignation, displaying 'a diminution of expectation and activity, a disrupted sense of time, and a decline into apathy' (Jahoda et al, 1972: 2).

In the spirit of the psychological tradition, the authors developed a positivist theoretical model for understanding the negative experiences of the ex-workers of Marienthal. In this model, employment was valorised as a medium through which individuals sustain well-being and a sense of orientation in the world. The researchers argued that paid-work fulfils a specific set of core psychological needs – for shared experience and a sense of collective purpose, for a structured experience of time involving regular activity, and for a sense of status and self-identity (Jahoda, 1982). Conversely, unemployment was analysed as a deficient state of being in which the individual is cut off from these needs. Jahoda et al were initially modest about the generalisability of their study, warning against an interpretation of their work as something which completely explains the experience of unemployment (Jahoda et al, 1972: 2). However, the authors' claim to understand only a particular unemployed community does not mute the powerful suggestion inherent in the positivism of their theoretical model – the suggestion that joblessness is fundamentally connected with misery. The Marienthal study indeed spawned a legacy of research into unemployment and 'needs deprivation' (for example, Hayes and Nutman, 1981;

Waters and Moore, 2002; Goodwin and Kennedy, 2005) and I will hereafter refer to this approach as the 'deprivation model'.

The deprivation model suggests that joblessness is inherently debilitating because it severs people from society and places them in a state of temporal chaos. A major criticism of this approach is that by approaching the jobless as a singular type with predictable psychological responses, it casts the individual in an existentially dependent relationship with employment. A number of studies have attempted to correct this problem by embracing complexity and doing justice to the qualitative differences in the experiences of joblessness. A study by Fryer and McKenna, for example, used qualitative interviews to compare experiences among a mixed sample of unemployed men, some of whom had been made permanently redundant, and some of whom had been temporarily laid-off for seven weeks and were expecting to return to work (Fryer and McKenna, 1987). The variations in the researchers' findings were indeed beyond comprehension through the narrow analytical scope of the deprivation model. With regards to differences between the groups, the researchers reported general 'evidence of more temporal problems in the redundant than in the laid-off group, in terms of both incidence and severity' (Fryer and McKenna, 1987: 68). For example, many of the redundant men reported a 'dragging' experience of time. By contrast, there was more evidence of self-developed routines among the laid-off men, many of whom said they enjoyed their free time and raced to do self-defined activities before returning to work (Fryer and McKenna, 1987: 68).

In relation to these findings, it appears that it is not joblessness per se that causes distress but redundancy, though it is not possible to generalise, since Fryer and McKenna also reported a marked variation within groups. Given variations both between and within the sample groups, the researchers concluded that responses to joblessness are shaped by a complex range of variables. Factors they discussed included the jobless person's level of 'self-directedness', as well as their level of anxiety about the future, with the threat of continued joblessness appearing to have a crippling effect on the ability to make plans or initiate activities (Fryer and McKenna, 1987: 72). In another study, Fryer suggested that the loss of income and the experience of relative poverty are the most salient factors in shaping the experience of

unemployment (Fryer, 1986; 1992). A study by O'Brien also highlighted the significance of the jobless person's prior experiences of work in shaping his or her response to joblessness (O'Brien, 1986: 197). In the case of Marienthal, perhaps it was indeed the prior institutionalisation of the ex-workers as labourers, rather than the workers' 'core psychological needs', that shaped their debilitating experiences. Employment *itself* may be held partly responsible for the negative experiences of joblessness because, in allowing the individual only a limited space in which to cultivate other facets of experience, it may leave the unemployed person with few personal and social resources to fall back on (Cole, 2008: 38)⁵.

The specific findings of the above studies are perhaps less important for the purposes of the present research than the overarching point that the experience of joblessness is shaped by a complex range of factors. The particularities of personality, prior experience, financial resources, the manner in which a job was lost, prospects for future employment and access to social networks outside employment, are a few of the many potentially significant variables. The value of research in the vein of Fryer and McKenna's is that it prompts researchers to think in a more sophisticated way about the experiences of joblessness. They have shown that the experience of joblessness is varied, and that there are contributing factors beyond those included in the deprivation model, which is narrowly fixated on severance from the purported functions of work. Crucially, the nuance of these studies moves us beyond simplistic dichotomies such as 'employment is good for health, joblessness is bad' and into a theory of complexity. A simple binary understanding of the relationship between work and health generates a fear of joblessness, whilst the advantage of an appropriately complex understanding is that it does not foreclose the idea that life outside work can, in theory at least, be active and morally purposeful. The current study presents an opportunity to learn more about the complex relationship between

⁵ This supports Bertrand Russell's contention that 'a man who has worked long hours all his life will become bored if he becomes suddenly idle' (Russell, 1967: 231). Russell argued that the ability to use leisure wisely is a 'product of civilisation and education' (Russell, 1967: 231). In his view, leisure is something that the individual must be prepared for, its enjoyment depending upon time to cultivate aptitudes and passions. Hannah Arendt mirrored his concerns about the work-centred society when she suggested that a society on the verge of liberation from the fetters of labour might have forgotten 'those higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won' (Arendt, 1998: 5).

employment and human well-being. Interviews will aim to find out what participants do with their time outside work and explore the pleasures and trials of disengaging from paid employment.

The Moralisation of Employment

The sociologist, Matthew Cole, whilst recognising the value of research on the experiences of unemployment, warned against the moralising tendency of thinkers who frame paid-work as a primordial source of human well-being and civility (Cole, 2007). In an interesting analysis of the moral biases that underpin the research of Jahoda and colleagues, Cole highlighted the normative status of employment in the imaginations of the researchers. He took issue with Jahoda's suggestion that a jobless life is 'undisciplined and empty' (Jahoda, 1977: 66), disputing the portrayal of the unemployed in 'animalistic' contrast to the 'cultured humanity' of employed people (Cole, 2007: 1137). In particular, Jahoda et al's idea that humans have a core psychological need for 'regular activity' seems to suggest that stillness and quietude are primitive habits, particularly for men, whose idling outside work puts them at the wrong end of a gender hierarchy (Cole, 2007: 1140). Furthermore, the researchers' assertion that employment is crucial for 'status and identity' places undue bias on what a person does for work, rather than on who they actually are (Cole, 2007: 1140). According to the deprivation model, unemployment represents an injured identity, or an identity in abeyance until the period of 'doing nothing' draws to a close and another job is found:

Nowhere is the unshakeable faith in the equation of work with the purpose of human life clearer than here, where to be unemployed is to be compromised as a human being – to be identity-less (Cole, 2007: 1411).

The deprivation model deems employment essential for a humane existence and, as a consequence, presumes that without paid-work, there exists no moral code around which to orient a day-to-day ethic of living (Cole, 2007: 1138).

Cole's reinterpretation of *Marienthal* is persuasive, but we must of course credit (as Cole does) Jahoda et al's good intentions as researchers of unemployment. More

dubious, however, are the intentions of those who extol the virtues of employment in a contemporary political context. Right-leaning agendas have a considerable history of representing those who do not or who cannot work as a moral threat and a drain on public resources⁶. The Left have been less malevolent, but have nevertheless still approached jobless people as objects for management and rehabilitation. Walker and Fincham suggest that research which supports the positive relationship between employment and human well-being has provided an ideal context for successive administrations to make employment central to their management of public health (Walker and Fincham, 2011: 14). Dame Carol Black's government review of public health (2008) provides a good example of current thinking, a hallmark of which is a tendency to imagine the relationship between employment and human well-being in terms of the simplistic dichotomy described above ('employment is good for health, and joblessness is bad'). Black's White Paper, *Healthy Lives, Healthy People*, categorically stated that 'being in work leads to better physical and mental health' (Department of Health, 2010: 5). Similarly, Theresa May, previous shadow minister for Work and Pensions, suggested that 'in giving someone a purpose and a routine [employment] can improve health, self-esteem and social inclusion' (May, 2010). Having a job is seen as essential to people's usefulness, economic participation and thus their social worth, whilst people without jobs are the focus of moral concern. As a result, increasingly stringent welfare-to-work policies strongly encourage everyone to work if they are classified as capable.

This emphasis on employment as a primordial requirement for a civilised and prosperous life has been a mainstay of mainstream British politics in recent history. New Labour arrived in office resolving to 'rebuild the welfare state around work' (DSS, 1998: 23), and previously protected groups of welfare claimants, such as lone parents and disabled people, were increasingly expected to seek paid-work (DWP, 2006: 19; Levitas, 2001). The most recent political development at my time of writing is the ConDem Coalition's 'big bold plan to get Britain working'

⁶ This is a history that continues to be written. At my time of writing, the work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith had recently declared it a 'sin' for an unemployed person to refuse work (Wintour, Ramesh and Mullholland, 2010). David Cameron had also depicted benefit claimants as malingerers, 'sitting on their sofas waiting for their benefits to arrive' (Conservatives, 2010a: online). There are numerous further examples I could have used. Whilst the official discourse of the Right refers to a reciprocal 'bargain' between the government and the responsible jobseeker, momentary slips like these disclose a more hateful philosophy.

(Conservatives, 2010: online). Amongst the changes in the government's new Work Programme are a mandatory Work Capability Assessment for existing Incapacity Benefit claimants (to confirm their eligibility for the renamed, 'Employment and Support Allowance'), and varying benefit sanctions (including complete benefit withdrawal for periods of up to three years) for those who refuse to accept 'reasonable' offers of paid work (Conservatives, 2010a). The government also aim to tackle the bad 'habit of worklessness' by enforcing compulsory periods of unpaid work for benefit claimants who cannot find a job (Helm and Asthana, 2010). It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to provide a detailed account of welfare reforms⁷, and it is not entirely necessary to do so, since whilst the sanctions for those who do not co-operate in the 'welfare bargain' are becoming more stringent, the overall ideological thrust of policy remains constant. As Granter summarises, 'government policy... continually refers to paid employment as the normatively positive state to which citizens should aspire' (Granter, 2009: 148).

There are some preliminary criticisms of the moralisation of employment – both in sociological research and government policy – that I wish to offer. These will be developed in relation to the findings of the present study. The first major criticism is that those who moralise work often fail to evaluate the psychosocial quality of the actual jobs that are available today; any job is generally considered better than no job (Beder, 2000: 2). 'The emphasis on getting people into work for their own good is stripped of any notion of what work means, and what forms of work do to people' (Williams, 2010: 198). The DWP, for example, in defence of workfare reforms, have referred to the benefits of the (singular) 'work environment' (cited in Helm and Asthana, 2010), whilst neglecting to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' jobs. Cole also noted the conspicuous absence of any substantive discussion of actual forms of work in the research of Jahoda and colleagues, who took the suffering of the unemployed as evidence that 'the mirror of unemployment – paid work – is a remedy for those sufferings' (Cole, 2007: 1135). Such faith in the health benefits of employment clashes with the large body of critical sociological literature on modern

⁷ For a more comprehensive account of welfare reforms, refer to Grover and Pigott (2007) or Walker and Fincham (2011).

forms of work, which has often described work as alienating, insecure or characterised by the subjugation of the worker.

A second major criticism of the moralisation of work is that it fails to recognise the legitimacy of forms of social solidarity, work, and social contribution, which do not produce economic value or which sit outside the scope of exchange relations. Such short-sightedness is grasped when one considers the narrowness with which 'work' is generally defined. It is specifically 'paid employment' that is deemed most worthy of social recognition, and there is scant acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of non-work activities or the importance of forms of unpaid work, such as voluntary work or domestic labour⁸. It is possible that the present research will provide an opportunity to develop these criticisms further. It is interesting that given the espoused psychological benefits of work that here, in the present study, I have recruited (with relative ease) a group of participants who have made a conscious choice to disengage from the world of employment. The research partly consists of an attempt to understand why the participants have resisted employment (when paid-work is generally deemed so significant a part of everyday life) and whether they have been successful at constructing and maintaining a rewarding life outside work. Are there moralities other than the work ethic around which a day-to-day ethic of living may be structured? Furthermore, what sorts of problems arise when a person attempts to resist employment in a culture that attaches moral value to it, and in a social system which does its best to denigrate those who do not feel that they want to, or necessarily can, perform paid-work?

Working to Consume

In exploring the need to be employed, I have so far considered the psychological functions of work, as well as the normative injunction to be employed. Missing from the picture, however, is a consideration of the significance of employment in

⁸ Consider that although domestic work is absolutely vital for social reproduction, it receives less social recognition than paid employment. Gorz, for example, wondered: why indeed *do* we say 'they do not work', of a person who devotes their time to bringing up their children, but 'they work' of a person who gives part of their time over to bringing up other people's children at a nursery (Gorz, 1999: 2)?

resourcing the individual with the money necessary for consumption. In the remainder of the chapter I will turn my attention from the need to be employed to the need to consume, arguing that the two are analytically inseparable. A foundational understanding of both of these needs is crucial for the present research, since it is reasonable to assume that a significant consequence of participants' reduced hours will be a tangible reduction in their consumption levels.

In *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), Daniel Bell argued that the felt need to consume was increasingly coming to surpass the felt need to work, and that the sense of moral duty that Weber famously argued had initially educated people to labour (Weber, 2002), was increasingly being replaced by an acquisitive form of hedonism. Bell described Weber's Protestant ethic or Puritan temper as 'codes that emphasised work, frugality, sexual restraint, and a forbidding attitude towards life' (Bell, 1976: 55). The Puritan was devoted to work and accumulation though 'got nothing out of his wealth for himself but proof of his own salvation' (Bell, 1976: 82). By contrast, Bell charted the more recent emergence of an acquisitive consumer culture, in which bourgeois values were becoming increasingly irrelevant. In contradiction with the Puritan temper and its distaste for the spontaneous enjoyments of life:

A consumption society was emerging, with its emphasis on spending and material possessions, and it was undermining the traditional value system, with its emphasis on thrift, frugality, self-control and impulse renunciation (Bell, 1976: 65).

By the 1950s American society was not concerned about 'how to work and achieve, but how to spend and enjoy' (Bell, 1976: 70), the old value system falling under siege to the multiple distractions and stimuli of urban life.

One of the central questions that arises from a reading of Bell is whether consumerism undermines the individual's commitment to paid-work, or whether the desire for commodities is merely a modern substitute for the work ethic, leading the worker to become entrenched in what Schor calls a 'cycle of work-and-spend' (Schor, 1998). In *Cultural Contradictions*, Bell supported the former argument. His central thesis was that a capitalism driven by Puritan industriousness was inherently contradictory, the

traditional bourgeois value system sowing the seeds of its own demise in the very bourgeois economic system or 'free-market' that it spawned. This is because the latter produces the commodities, luxuries and abundance that – according to Bell – would eventually tempt the individual away from their work. In his account, the abandonment of the Puritan temper leaves capitalism with no transcendental ethic, as the sensuous appetites of the consumer come into conflict with the personal restraint demanded by employment:

On the one hand, the business corporation wants an individual to work hard, pursue a career, accept delayed gratification – to be, in a crude sense, an organisation man. And yet, in its products and its advertisements, the corporation promotes pleasure, instant joy, relaxing and letting go. One is to be 'straight' by day and a 'swinger' by night (Bell, 1976: 72).

Whereas Puritanism arose in a time of scarcity, and is characterised by delayed gratification, and restraint on gratification, the claim of the post-war American economic system was that it had overcome scarcity and provided abundance. Correspondingly, the individuals of the post-scarcity society embodied an attitude of prodigality, extravagance and *carpe diem*, which would eventually lead to an intolerance of the self-restraint required in day-to-day labouring. This aspect of Bell's argument echoes Marcuse in *Eros and Civilisation* (1998), with both authors tracing a counter-cultural impulse in the erotic or sensuous desires of the individual. Marcuse, for example, sensed an incompatibility between Freud's pleasure principle – with its timeless desire for gratification – and the dismemberment of pleasure characteristic in the working lifestyle, in which time is rigidly divided between segments of enjoyment and segments of toil. Marcuse thought that it was in the interests of capitalist domination to subdue sensuous gratification because its 'unrepressed development would eroticise the organism to the extent that it would counteract the desexualisation of the organism required by its social utilisation as an instrument of labour' (Marcuse, 1998: 39)

Following this line of argument, it would be reasonable to assume that the distractions and gratifications of consumerism represented a threat to the work ethic, and to the willingness of individuals to submit to work. Yet it is clear that despite this apparent incompatibility between hedonism and commitment to work, society still remains

employment-centred. Marcuse indeed revised the above argument in the more pessimistic book, *One-Dimensional Man* (2002). In this later work, Marcuse moved away from the idea that hedonism represents a threat to the self-restraint demanded of the worker. His revised theory of 'repressive desublimation' described a containment of the pleasure principle's counter-cultural impulses by capitalism, or an apparent *harmonisation* of sensual gratification and cultural conformity. Interpreting Marcuse's theoretical evolution, Bowring recognised this process of harmonisation in contemporary consumer culture, 'which uses erotic associations and imagery to sell all manner of spurious products, the purchasing of which ties consumers ever more tightly to a regime of ugly and desensualising toil' (Bowring, forthcoming). According to the repressive desublimation thesis, rising levels of consumption serve only to strengthen the unfreedom of the individual, not least because they increase the individual's dependence on an employment generated income. Bauman presented a similar argument, also pointing to the repressive potential of the 'freedom to consume' – an extension of liberty that actually enrols the individual more deeply into the exploitative relations of work (Bauman, 2001: 16). These authors were both supported by Granter, who argued that Bell had over-dramatised the anti-bourgeois affectations of his new culture of materialistic hedonists, and that 'rising levels of consumption appear to necessitate the intensification, rather than the elimination of work' (Granter, 2009: 159).

In the eighties, Claus Offe, distinguishing between the moral and material regulation of the worker, suggested that the motivations of workers were becoming increasingly material in nature (Offe, 1985). This argument was prefigured two decades earlier, in Goldthorpe et al's (1968) study of Luton car-workers, which explored the instrumentalist, consumption-focussed attitudes of the affluent employee. Yet there is perhaps insufficient evidence to confidently state the extent to which the need and the desire to consume have replaced the work ethic. A number of authors, for example, continue to detect a strong moral attachment to work in western societies, and find it unlikely that most people work for purely instrumental reasons, or simply to pay for their pleasures (Fevre, 2003; Granter, 2009: 140). However, regardless of the extent to which the need to consume has replaced the moral motivation to work, it remains true that there is a significant relationship between the rise of consumerism and the

maintenance of work. Paid-employment is the most significant means by which individuals generate the income necessary to access commercial goods and services, whether these serve primary needs or the less practical desires stimulated by a culture of consumerism. With regards to the present study, this introduces the possibility that participants who are attempting to work less may to some extent be motivated by an ethic of anti-consumerism; it is possible that a disaffection with consumer culture is allowing them the freedom to turn away from work. This possibility will be explored further in my fieldwork. Finally, the need to consume can also be understood in terms of a set of barriers to working less. The present research also therefore represents an opportunity to explore the extent to which the various incentives and injunctions to consume compromise the freedom to turn away from work.

In sum, it is clear that in order to fully prepare for an investigation into the experience of resisting work it is not only necessary to deconstruct the need to be employed, but also the need to consume. In the remainder of the chapter I will therefore reflect on key theoretical approaches to consumption. By deconstructing the need to consume I aim to generate further research themes and gain a preliminary sense of the pleasures and practical challenges that might be involved for participants who are choosing to earn and spend less.

Consumption and Selfhood

A central and academically divisive issue confronted in theories of consumer need is the question of consumer sovereignty, and the extent to which consumption is an 'elective' as opposed to a 'prescriptive' practice. Is consumer behaviour a matter of individual choice, or is it 'the altogether less voluntary effect of transcendent economic and social structures and their systemic pressures and forms of social governance' (Soper and Thomas, 2006: 21)? The former, agency-focussed perspective, is favoured in what might be termed the *semiotic* approach to consumption, which emphasises the autonomy of the individual consumer rather than the determinate role of broader economic factors (for example, Fiske, 1991; Willis, 1991). Proponents of a semiotic approach have distinguished themselves in a

deliberate fashion from the consumer critics of the twentieth century (such as those of the Frankfurt School), who generally saw consumption as a repressive device, and analysed the prescription of consumer needs 'from above'. Reflecting upon the 'elective / prescriptive' impasse in theories of consumption, Juliet Schor summarised that, in the eyes of the semiotic theorists, classic critiques of consumption 'failed to give the consumer sufficient credit for acting intentionally and with consequence... portrayed too unitary a consumer marketplace... [and] were elitist, indeed reactionary, in their privileging of high rather than popular culture' (Schor, 2007: 17). The semiotic approach to consumption represents a conscious attempt to move away from classic consumer critiques, and it achieves this by beginning its analysis with the individual, rather than the economic.

The semiotic approach to consumption emphasises the 'sign-value' of material goods and rationalises consumerism on the grounds that it provides the raw materials for symbolic interaction. Drawing on Claude Levi-Strauss' notion of the individual as *bricoleur* (Levi-Strauss, 1972), this approach has tended to think of the consumer as an agent who appropriates material goods, stitching together symbolic meanings to create and maintain a self-identity. Conrad Lodziak (though highly critical of the semiotic approach) summarised it well, describing it as an approach that focuses on the symbolic meanings of consumer goods, rather than their material use-value, and that emphasises the significance of shopping for the formation and maintenance of lifestyles (Lodziak, 2002: 1). Against a perceived elitism in classical consumer critiques, cultural studies authors have rejoiced in popular culture, tending to think of the market as an arena of choice, and of the consumer as an expressive or 'symbolically creative' agent (Willis, 1991). Featherstone, for example, celebrated the 'new heroes of consumer culture' who 'make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearances and bodily dispositions, [which] they design together into a lifestyle' (Featherstone, 1991: 86).

At a time where there is mounting concern surrounding the environmental and cultural impact of high-consumption lifestyles in the West, the semiotic approach is curious in its celebration of symbolic consumption. Its emphasis on the importance of

shopping for self-identity mirrors the very ‘ideology of consumerism’ that academics have traditionally tried to expose (Lodziak, 2002: 48). One of its biggest weaknesses is that it depoliticises the debate on consumerism. In focussing on the significance of consumption for contemporary selfhood, the semiotic approach replaces critique with interpretation, leaving behind the issue of overconsumption to focus on the aesthetic meanings of consumer goods. Nevertheless, what the semiotic approach does perhaps share with more critical perspectives is the notion that consumption increasingly represents a ‘life-focus’. Though their tone has not been celebratory, theorists of ‘reflexive’ or ‘liquid’ modernity, for example, have also explored the seemingly central role that consumption plays in contemporary selfhood (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2001). Where institutionally and socially guaranteed forms of existential security such as close kinship networks or jobs-for-life are lost, consumption is thought to provide a compensatory source of meaning and identity (Soper and Thomas, 2006: 21). Bauman, for example, whilst critical of consumerism, analysed the appropriation of material goods as a method of stabilising the self. According to Bauman, through shopping, the individual attempts to ‘compose individually the continuity which society can no longer assure’ (Bauman, 2001: 24). The common element in all of the above theories – be they broadly celebratory or broadly critical of consumer culture – is a focus on the importance of consumer goods for contemporary selfhood. In relation to the present research, and the potential challenges faced by those who choose to work less, these theories suggest that the threat of a reduced income embodies a kind of ‘symbolic poverty’, or an impaired ability to participate in normatively approved lifestyles. I will explore this issue further in chapter six.

The Production of Consumption

A key problem with an agency-focussed or semiotic approach to consumption is that it dispenses with any critical, macro-level analysis of how consumers’ needs and desires are configured. Whilst the meanings and incentives of consumption for the individual are considered in depth, what is neglected is the important fact that capitalism *needs* consumers. This is foundational in Gorz’s analysis of consumption. Gorz viewed consumer culture as driven by the imperatives of production rather than

the aesthetic imagination of the consumer, emphasising capitalism's inherent need to perpetuate the demand for commodities for its own survival⁹. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Gorz argued that, at a historical point where primary needs have for the most part been satisfied by capitalist production, there theoretically exists an opportunity for a relaxation of production in favour of a radical expansion of leisure time. This proposal presumes, however, that capitalism operates according to a human rationality; that capitalist production is a science for utilising natural resources in order to furnish primary human needs. Following Marx, however, Gorz argued that capitalism operates according to an economic rationality, rather than a human or substantive one, and that the intrinsic purpose of capitalist production is not to meet the primary needs of the social whole, but to privately accumulate surplus profit (Gorz, 1967: 69). In capitalism, consumption is economically necessary for unlocking the surplus value preserved in goods produced in exploitative relations of production. According to economic rationality, the rate of production is not adjusted according to human needs, but human needs are adjusted according to the economic demands of production.

As Marx had foreseen, monopoly capitalism found itself faced with the problem of shaping subjects for the objects to be marketed; not of adjusting supply to demand, but demand to supply. (Gorz, 1967: 70)

In his *Critique of Economic Reason* (1988) Gorz developed this argument, arguing that it is in the interests of economic rationality to perpetuate a consumer ethos of 'the more the better', and to eliminate the criteria which allow individuals to be satisfied with what they own (Gorz, 1988: 144). His argument is supported by Bauman, who also recognised that the finite and instrumental character of primary needs represents an obstacle to consumer capitalism. Bauman described how the market increasingly seeks to profit by operating on desires and wishes, which are more transient and elusive than needs, and therefore easier to exploit (Bauman, 2001). The self-limitation of individual needs is to be actively discouraged by capitalism, which has

⁹ Soper also highlighted this need, recalling the aftermath of the 9/11 twin-towers attack and the way in which American consumers were beckoned by the government to shop 'patriotically', in order to demonstrate their allegiance to the Western way-of-life. Soper interpreted this as a remarkable reminder of the dependency of corporate power on a cultural loyalty to consumerism (Soper, 2006: 568).

‘no room for authentically free time which neither produces nor consumes commercial wealth’ (Gorz, 1988: 115).

To summarise, in contrast with an agency-focussed or semiotic perspective, authors influenced by Marxism, such as Gorz, have argued that the need to consume is driven by the imperatives of capitalist production. The central question then becomes one of *how* the need to consume is shaped and exacerbated in capitalist societies. This is a complex and academically sensitive question, and I only have space to deal with it briefly here. Leaving Gorz’s own response to this question aside for the moment, it can be summarised that the production of consumer needs has been theorised in two senses: firstly, in terms of the *cultural* manipulation of needs and, secondly, in terms of the *structural* induction of needs. I will explore these approaches in turn, since an understanding of both is valuable in hypothesising the barriers that participants in the present study might encounter in their attempts to work and spend less.

The Cultural Production of Needs

An account of the cultural production of consumer needs is largely concerned with the effects of advertising on the consumer’s material aspirations. There are numerous intellectual attacks on the manipulative qualities of advertising, the most well-known perhaps being Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957). Packard was concerned with the strategies of advertisers who, in the 1950’s, were first beginning to refine their techniques of consumer persuasion, moving away from the traditional ‘hard-sell’ to the more subtle processes of psychological bullying and seduction that occur ‘beneath our level of awareness’ (Packard, 1957: 11). Packard addressed his book to the public in the hope of encouraging a greater level of scrutiny towards the advertising industry, though the dumb suggestibility of the consumer implied in some of his passages has made Packard a favourite intellectual enemy of academics who adopt an agency-focussed approach to consumption.

Whilst Packard has been accused by his critics for providing a Machiavellian account of the advertising industry, his core ideas remain influential. More temperate

critiques of advertising continue to emphasise the influence of symbolic manipulation and lifestyle connotations on the psychology of the consumer. It has been suggested, for example, that the manufacture of shame continues to be pivotal in the selling of material goods. A range of media present the individual, on a daily basis, with images of ‘lavish or fashionable lifestyles... behind which many feel ashamed to lag, and which can only be realised via the magical transactions of the commodity economy’ (Bowring, 2000: 315). The exploitation of shame was a prominent theme in a number of studies by Helga Dittmar and colleagues. With particular interest in young people’s ideas about the perfect body, Dittmar argued that advertising works by ‘creating a reality that is not real’, exaggerating individual needs and aspirations, and presenting the product as a lifestyle solution (Dittmar, 2007: 24). The strength of Dittmar’s analysis is that it shows the susceptibility of individuals to strategies of persuasion, without subscribing to the derogative stereotypes often attributed to consumer critics by proponents of an agency-focussed perspective¹⁰. A common criticism presented by academics who support an agency perspective, is that the consumer critics of the twentieth century tended to approach the consumer as a ‘passive dupe’, or wrote with a lack of respect for the mentality of ordinary people (for example, Nava, 1991: 162; Mackay, 1997: 3; Edwards, 2000: 65). Yet it is clear that Dittmar, for example, is in no sense sneering at ‘passive dupes’ when she suggests that it is incredibly difficult to remain untouched by continuous exposure to ideals of the material good life portrayed in the media (Dittmar, 2007: 24). The production and exaggeration of consumers’ needs is, in truth, a process of prolonged exposure to norms, pressures and imagery:

Nobody believes they will transform into a supermodel or celebrity if they buy product X. Rather, consumer ideals have indirect, but powerful effects on individuals’ thoughts, feelings and behaviours, which take effect over time. (Dittmar, 2007: 25)

Advertising does necessarily cultivate false needs, but aims to sell false means of satisfying true needs, such as the need for social acceptance, respect and esteem. The

¹⁰ One such stereotype is encompassed in the ‘hypodermic needle’ analogy of media messages – a derogatory blanket term used in the cultural studies classroom to dismiss the arguments of consumer critics. The hypodermic needle analogy and its rudimentary image of media messages being ‘injected’ directly into the audience member’s skull is incompatible with cultural studies’ favoured notion of the active consumer. However, as a collective term for a body of thought, the hypodermic needle analogy represents an inaccurate and reductive approximation of the critique of consumerism.

sell is a subtle process in which demand is slowly cultivated via images of aspiration, luxury and the material good life. One does not need to be a ‘passive dupe’ to be drawn in, since the ubiquity of such imagery leaves everybody, to a certain degree, vulnerable to subtle and subconscious adjustments in their material aspirations. The manufacture of shame and the proliferation of aspirational lifestyle imagery have indeed inspired a growing body of popular anti-consumerist literature. Recent non-fiction bestsellers such as Oliver James’ *Affluenza* (2007), Alain De Botton’s *Status Anxiety* (2009), or John Naish’s *Enough* (2008), to name but a few, have all exposed the commercial advantages of comparative aspiration, and coached their readers to make themselves less susceptible to the market’s invocation to ‘keep up with the Joneses’.

The above authors represent one particular approach to the question of how consumer needs are produced, highlighting the cultural production of needs by the media. In a judicious article, in which she reflected upon the state of the academic argument on consumption, Schor bemoaned the disaffection with critique in the increasingly popular, agency-focussed, approaches to consumption. She partly explained this disaffection in terms of a tendency for agency-focussed authors to presume that consumer critics are only interested in the manipulation of consumers by the media. This oversight leads the debate into a ‘theoretical cul-de-sac’, or a reductive quarrel surrounding whether the consumer is free-agent or a manipulated dupe (Schor, 2007: 24). What this unhelpful dichotomy disguises is the fact that consumer needs are produced through structural, as well as cultural mechanisms, and that a critical approach to consumerism need not (and in most cases, in fact, does not) rest on a disrespectful image of the consumer as a dupe.

The Structural Production of Needs

The second way in which consumers’ needs are said to be produced is via *structural* mechanisms. Lodziak, for example, argued that much individual consumption is not produced by means of ‘hidden persuasion’, but is actually best understood as obligatory, or made objectively necessary by capitalism (Lodziak, 2002: 91). Adorno

and Horkheimer also suggested that cultural manipulation cannot be offered as the sole explanation for high levels of consumption, arguing that ‘cultural monopolies are weak and dependent’ (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979: 122). Gorz, and Lodziak following him, agreed that they operate on individuals already compelled to consume due to the alienation of labour:

[The consumer] is not created by capitalism altogether by means of advertising, fashion and ‘human relations’, as is often asserted; on the contrary, capitalism *already* creates him within the relationships of production and the work situation by cutting off the producer from his product. (Gorz 1967: 71)

According to this argument, the hidden persuasions of the advertising industry are merely the surface of a deeper phenomenon, whose root is in the capitalist relations of production. It can be argued, for example, that the norm of full-time employment reinforces consumer spending by depriving individuals of the time necessary to self-furnish their needs. It encourages consumption ‘by resourcing individuals, via income, for consumption, and under-resourcing individuals, by devouring time and energy, for autonomy’ (Lodziak, 2002: 89). Gorz also argued that alienated labour produces a need to consume by creating an identity deficit or feeling of unhappiness in the individual, which is compensated for via the consumption of material goods. On the basis of prior pre-conditioning by the alienation of labour, ‘monopoly capitalism can play on the passive and individual needs of consumption, can propose ever more complicated and sophisticated modes of satisfaction, develop the need to escape, [and] sell means of forgetting, of distracting oneself from the pressures of industrial organisation’ (Gorz, 1967: 72).¹¹ This idea that the alienation of labour produces forms of compensatory consumption has been supported by a number of

¹¹ The compensatory forms of consumption listed in this passage are described by Gorz as ‘*real* needs within the present process of production and work’ (Gorz, 1967: 73, my emphasis). The reference to needs produced by the alienation of labour as ‘real needs’ is tactful phrasing on Gorz’s part, and contrasts with Marcuse’s discussion in the first chapter of *One Dimensional Man* (2002), where he argues that many needs of the modern consumer are ‘false needs’. Bowring has noted how the notion of ‘false needs’ tends to offend the non-judgemental sensibility of those who support agency-focussed approaches to the consumer (Bowring, forthcoming). In spite of the different phrasing, however, Gorz and Marcuse are perhaps ultimately making the same point here, highlighting the repressive character of consumption needs which are created by the alienation of labour, and which gratify the individual in the short-term, but leave ‘fundamental dissatisfaction’ (Gorz, 1967: 72) or the ‘disease of the whole’ (Marcuse, 2002: 7) intact. Given the recent academic animosity towards Marcuse’s notion of ‘false needs’, Bowring has suggested that a more felicitous term might be ‘repressive needs’ (Bowring, forthcoming). Gorz steers around this semantic niggles entirely, simply by acknowledging that consumer’s needs, whilst repressive, are ‘real’ and genuinely felt.

contemporary theorists. It has been suggested, for example, that the consumption of post-necessity goods provides compensation for the ‘unmet needs of the spirit’ (Soper, 2008: 576), or for the dissatisfaction and ‘weak sense of identity’ experienced in unpleasant forms of work (Lodziak and Tatman, 1997: 73). Bauman also suggested that people enjoy the frivolity and impulsivity of the shopping experience as a contrast to the austerity of employment (Bauman, 2001: 15). Consumption is theorised as an individual attempt to create a private niche of enjoyment that compensates for an alienating experience of work – a private realm over which the individual can rule as ‘solitary sovereign’ (Gorz, 1967: 68). Given the supposed connection between unsatisfying work and the need to consume, it will be interesting to explore the effect of reduced hours on consumption levels in the present research. Might a reduction of working time, for example, *permit*, as well as demand, a reduced level of consumption? The logic of the theories described here suggest that this would be the case, since reduced hours would provide participants with the temporal autonomy required to self-furnish needs, rather than meeting them with commodity consumption, and also to reduce the need for compensatory forms of consumption by distancing them from alienated labour.

There are several further ways in which consumer needs are produced and exaggerated structurally, and an understanding of these is crucial in order to grasp the nature of the challenge that the participants in the present study face in their attempts to work and spend less. It can be argued, for example, that attempts to consume less may be stifled by a process of commercialisation, in which the goods and practices required to satisfy daily needs and desires are becoming increasingly commodified. It has been argued, for example, that in capitalist societies leisure is becoming increasingly commodified. The commercialisation of leisure is reinforced through the withdrawal of public amenities such as public libraries and subsidised leisure centres, or by the under maintenance of public parks. The commercialisation of city space has also been a prominent concern for sociologists of urbanism such as Sharon Zukin (1995) or Anna Minton (2009), who have critically explored the redevelopment of the post-industrial city. There is a feeling of frustration in this literature, which suggests that efforts to gentrify defunct industrial areas amount to ‘the creation of a new world, where town and city centres are becoming little more than shopping complexes...

described by their critics as “malls without walls” (Minton, 2009: 19). There also exists an array of more fundamental needs that are subject to commercialisation, owing to the privatisation of utility industries and public transportation, as well as ‘the introduction of quasi-market principles into housing provision, the education system and the health service’ (Bowring, 2000: 312).

Under the umbrella of commercialisation also exists the phenomenon of planned obsolescence, which encourages consumption and disposal rather than the values of preservation and frugality. Planned obsolescence has both a material and a symbolic dimension. In the first instance, manufacturers are said to exacerbate the needs of consumers by making goods which are poorly made or disposable, or by selling products with no serviceable parts. This is complemented by symbolic obsolescence, in which the throw-away-attitude of consumers is intensified as goods, once valued for their functionality, are increasingly marketed according to their aesthetic qualities. The proliferation of the mobile phone market is a good example. Like most goods, mobile phones now ebb and flow with the tides of fashion, and this places increasing pressure on consumers to ‘keep up’ by replacing their old, aesthetically obsolescent products. Finally, it can also be observed that a range of basic needs once readily met without consumption have also become commercialised. The need for hydration, for example, is increasingly satisfied not by turning on the tap, but by buying a manufactured and branded ‘drink’. The astonishing success of the bottled water industry indeed represents a prime example of capitalism’s ability to commercialise needs that could otherwise be met at negligible financial cost to the individual.

In sum, critics have pointed to a number of ways in which consumers’ needs are produced in accordance with capitalism’s need for consumption. These range from the cultural production of needs by advertising, to the structural production of needs by the alienation of labour, or by a process of commercialisation. In terms of the present study, it can be hypothesised that the various modes by which the need to consume is reinforced represent a potential set of barriers for participants in their attempts to work and consume less. In chapter six, I will indeed return to the themes introduced in the latter half of this chapter, to look at the difficulties that participants reported, and the many ways in which these were negotiated. Horkheimer argued

that, as more and more cultural functions are handed over to the activity of consumption, ‘the escape to a slower pace of life is closed off for the individual because he would not survive economically’ (Horkheimer, 1974: 26). Within this context, what scope is there for participants to successfully work and consume less?

Summary

Before exploring whether and how it is possible to live a life in which work is decentralised, it has first been necessary to form a foundational understanding of why individuals experience a need to be employed in the first place. In the present chapter, I have explored the psychological attachment to paid-work and the work ethic, as well as the significance of paid-work in providing the income necessary for consumption. My overarching aim has been to provide a solid theoretical context in which participants’ experiences of working less can be elicited in my fieldwork, and interpreted in my analysis. Given the ‘slow’ or exploratory methodology that I have chosen to adopt (outlined in the next chapter), the topics discussed here will not be rigidly translated into research questions, rather, they represent general themes I will remain sensitised to during the fieldwork process. I will indeed return to many of the discussions in the present chapter in my data analysis, where I will explore the ways in which participants rationalised their need to disengage from employment, as well as the pleasures and limitations that they reported in their attempts to work less.

CHAPTER 3

DOING RESEARCH SLOWLY

In chapter one I explored the neo-Marxist critique of work, showing how the departure of critical theorists from an orthodox Marxism corresponded with the valorisation of a range of politically interesting subjectivities. This theoretical shift can be observed in the work of Gorz, for example, whose existential Marxism shifted its gaze beyond Marx's proletariat and the classic struggle for the collective appropriation of capital, to focus on the perspectives of subjects on the margins of the labour market, who defend their autonomy from processes of commercialisation (Gorz, 1982, 1999). The authors I described in chapter one – as social theorists and philosophers, rather than researchers – have not generally supported their theories with empirical evidence, and their descriptions of subjects who resist work remain under-elaborated. In some cases, critical authors have tacitly assumed that their anti-productivist politics are culturally resonant, but in truth there has been very little academic research to support this claim.

The relative novelty of this area of study called for an exploratory methodology, capable of generating research themes and examining the participants' moralities and lived experiences in detail. My key methodological problem was how to access what Cohen and Taylor have referred to as the 'concrete problem of living', which is less concerned with abstractions than with everyday experiential themes such as 'boredom, elation, despair, happiness [and] disappointment' (Cohen and Taylor, 1992: 30). In the simplest terms, my methodological strategy consisted in an attempt to get to *know* participants – something which needed to be accomplished in a relatively limited time-frame, and with limited resources. My primary method of data collection was the in-depth qualitative interview, though I also had a number of opportunities to perform participant observation and engage in shorter conversations with people outside the main sample. In the present chapter I will outline my approach in more detail, reflecting upon the strengths of my methodological choices and explaining the challenges that they presented.

Sampling

I used a purposive sampling strategy, recruiting participants by advertising the study through a number of channels (described below). The most effective purposive samples aim for maximum variation: a strategy which requires the researcher to identify key variants within the prospective sample population and seek representation from each group (Seidman, 1998: 45-6). In the interests of maximum variation, I attempted to cast a broad net in my call for participants. Prospective participants were encouraged to take part if they had ‘made a conscious decision to reduce their working hours’ or if they believed themselves to hold an ‘alternative perspective’ on employment. The eligibility of those who responded to this initial call was then evaluated in a phone conversation, during which respondents were asked to introduce themselves and provide some basic background information. As well as demographic variations such as gender, family-situation and cultural background, I sought participants at different stages of the life-course, with varied incomes and varied reasons for reducing working hours. I also sought to recruit participants with differing levels of political consciousness. One of the most significant variations within the sample was therefore the split between participants who consciously perceived themselves as ‘alternative’ or belonging to a cultural movement against work (such as ‘downshifting’ or ‘idling’), and those who did not.

After this filtering process, the final sample included seventeen core members, who participated in one or more in-depth interview, plus a larger number of peripheral members. (Those sample members described as ‘peripheral’ did not participate in a full interview, but consented to take part in shorter conversations or be observed during fieldwork). The loose sample criteria were effective at generating responses from people with a broad range of views and employment situations. Whilst all participants had reduced their hours, some had retired early or worked a shorter day, some were self-employed, and others had given up work altogether. The result was a bricolage of alternative perspectives and experiences and, whilst the sample size is relatively small, its size is justified on the basis of the intended depth of the data and analysis.

Channels used to advertise the study included *The Fatherhood Institute*, a UK-based think-tank who circulated a call for participants to their subscribers on my behalf, yielding a number of respondents who reduced their working hours primarily for childcare reasons¹². The secretary of the community drumming band *Pandeiro* also agreed to circulate a call for participants amongst the band's eighty members, yielding a number of less consciously political participants, with a variety of backgrounds and motivations for reducing their hours. Furthermore, the founders of an online community known as *The Idle Foundation* (hereafter *TIF*) also granted me permission to seek candidates by participating on its internet forum. Several participants were recruited in this way, and my gradual acceptance by *TIF* also resulted in invitations to national social events held by the group. At these social events I was able to conduct participant observation, talk with members (both 'on' and 'off' the record), and recruit a number of further core participants. Finally, two participants were located via an internet search for the term 'downshifting'. After respondents were confirmed as eligible for the sample, they were sent an information sheet containing details about the nature of the interviewing process, confidentiality issues, and their right to opt out. They were asked to read the information sheet before signing and returning a consent form. Finally, before interviews took place, participants were also mailed or emailed a brief questionnaire. On the questionnaire the participant was required to provide basic demographic information and short answers to a number of open-ended questions about their working history and personal interests. Data gathered from these questionnaires was used to create a record of participants as well as to create personalised interview schedules (a process described below).

There were several advantages to the sampling methods used. Existing mailing lists and the *TIF* internet forum provided an efficient means of advertising the study, allowing direct access to a large and varied base of candidates, some familiar and some unfamiliar with 'anti-work' discourses. Recruitment via *TIF's* internet forum was a more delicate process than anticipated, requiring a measure of patience and discretion. My motivations and intentions as a researcher were gently scrutinised when I initially joined the forum, and it was necessary to spend a couple of weeks

¹² For a number of practical reasons, none of the respondents affiliated with *The Fatherhood Institute* made it into the final sample.

earning the trust of *TIF* members before posting a call for participants. Rubin and Rubin suggest that interviews are more likely to be rich if the researcher avoids meeting participants as a 'rootless stranger' (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 92). The researcher and participant need not, of course, become friends, but there are a number of modest ways to pierce anonymity which have an effective impact on the interview situation. In the case of *TIF*, it was with pleasure that I took part in discussions about books, films and music, in order to become familiar with forum members. I was careful, however, to refrain from discussions relating to the research topic, believing that to join in may have encouraged participants to mirror my views or provide 'favourable' answers in their interviews.

Since qualitative research typically demands a higher degree of interest and time-commitment on the part of the participant, it was also necessary to consider the problem of participant retention. To illustrate the difficulty of retention by way of an example, in the early stages of the fieldwork, I piloted a photographic research method. After the participant's eligibility was confirmed, he or she was given the option to undertake a photography exercise in the weeks before the interview. Participants who opted to do the photography exercise were supplied with a disposable camera and invited to take photographs of things that were important to them. This invitation was deliberately vague, allowing participants maximum room for interpretation. The camera was returned, and then I developed the photographs and brought them to the interview. Following the main portion of the interview, the photographs were laid out and participants were encouraged to steer the interview by talking about what their photographs represented and why they took them. This method elicited some interesting and unanticipated data, some of which could not have been generated by a more traditional method of questioning. The method was successfully used in four interviews but, as the research progressed, was abandoned for practical reasons. The issue of participant retention instead became central as I realised the principal importance of minimising the time between initial contact with participants and confirmation of an interview date. Whilst participants were generally very enthusiastic, asking too much from them too early was more likely to cause them to lose interest. Confirming interview dates became my priority and, ideally, an interview date was scheduled within a fortnight of initial contact. As well as

disposing of the photography exercise, I also gave participants who were slow to respond the option of skipping the pre-interview questionnaire and moving straight to an interview. After an initial interview, all participants were happy to help further if it was deemed necessary. In five cases I decided it was worthwhile to conduct a second, shorter interview, and in two cases I conducted a supplementary third interview.

'Slow' Research

I used a combination of qualitative methods to collect data. For example, throughout the fieldwork, I had several opportunities to conduct participant observation at national social events held by *TIF*. Events included a dinner, a walk in the countryside, trips to the pub, and manning a promotional stall at a music festival. At these events I was able to gain an insight into the community and engage in conversations with members outside my main sample. Brief notes were taken and permission was given to record snippets of the conversations I shared with members. It was through participation in these events that I began to immerse myself in the culture of the idlers. Other measures taken to increase my immersion included reading literature recommended to me by participants and observing activity on *TIF*'s internet forum. Participant observation was not, however, my main research method (used mainly to recruit participants and supplement interview data rather than produce large bodies of primary data) and as such, the present discussion will focus on my main method of data collection: the in-depth qualitative interview.

Of all the available methods, the qualitative interview gives participants the greatest scope to provide in-depth representations of their attitudes and experiences. Qualitative methods also humanise participants, often forcing the readers and interpreters of research to revise common stereotypes and preconceptions about the social group being studied. The nuances of qualitative data urge us to confront the research participant as a fellow human being – not as 'this' or 'that' but as a complex embodiment of moralities, dispositions and past experiences. The qualitative interview was thus a particularly useful method in relation to my openness to move beyond stereotypes of the anti-worker (as lazy, or as over-privileged for example) to

make a sincere attempt at understanding and interpreting the experience of resistance to work. Interviews were usually conducted in a face-to-face format, though in the rare cases where a meeting was not feasible, they were conducted on the telephone.¹³

Qualitative interviewing is not a science and is not reducible to a formula or a set of techniques. In the qualitative interview the researcher must use the interactional competences of everyday life – he or she must be able to listen carefully, respond meaningfully, and display courtesy and empathy. Seidman suggests, quite realistically, that a researcher's conduct in everyday life is likely to reflect his or her conduct in the interview (Seidman, 1998: 78). No technique exists that can substitute genuine interest in, and respect for, the participant and his or her account. To list my interview strategies here without this caveat would be to misrepresent the interview situation which, as far as possible, was not approached instrumentally but allowed to unfold in a more organic fashion. Rather than tactically 'eliciting data', the aim was to sincerely try and get to *know* participants – to understand what motivated and inspired them and to hear about their most significant experiences (though this is not to say, of course, that the aim was to fully *identify* with participants). However, whilst the qualitative interview does draw heavily on the 'soft skills' of everyday life, it does not follow the rules of everyday interaction. It is perhaps best described as a 'structured conversation' (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 129) or as a conversation with a purpose, and there are strategies that can be utilised to meet that purpose more effectively.

My own interview strategy is perhaps best described as a 'slow' approach – a term I have borrowed from several of my research participants. As I will show in my analysis, slowness is a prominent theme in the current dataset. In his self-help title, *In Praise of Slowness* (2004), Carl Honoré warned against the modern obsession with

¹³ For the sake of convenience, I conducted most follow-up interviews over the telephone. However, with the exception of two participants (Jon and Terry), I met every core participant for a face-to-face interview at least once. Terry declined to meet in person and requested to be interviewed only by telephone. In the case of Jon, a face-to-face interview was not possible because he had moved away from the UK. Jon and I successfully conducted an interview using the computer software, *Skype*, which allows users to make free voice calls using an internet connection. A second computer program called *Power Gramo* allowed me to record Jon's interview. Conducting the interview online carried some unexpected advantages, such as Jon being able to show me websites he was interested in and photographs he had taken.

doing things quickly. In Honoré's view, speed is the hallmark of modern life, characterising the way people in advanced capitalist societies work, play and interact with one another, be it at the dinner table or in the bedroom. Members of the 'Slow Movement' express a desire for more time to indulge in those activities which are best experienced without time constraints. It can be argued that qualitative research is just such an activity and is best performed with a large investment of time. My shortest interview time was around an hour and a half, whereas the longest cumulative interview time, excluding breaks, was around four and a half hours.

Erica Owens suggested that the main challenge for the interviewer is to slowly expand the 'conversational space' of the interview, i.e. to expand the boundaries of conversation or the arena of topics that are tacitly deemed appropriate for discussion (Owens, 2006). In my own experience, the most rich and thoughtful interviews occurred when the participant was relaxed. One of my key aims was therefore to expand conversational space by making interviews a comfortable and enjoyable experience. To this end, participants were allowed to choose their own setting for the interview. Whilst some chose pubs and cafés, some preferred their own homes, and one participant asked to visit my home. Time was spent chatting or having a snack before each interview and, during this time, I took the opportunity to brief participants, telling them that they would be allowed to speak freely and that there were no right or wrong answers. I also decided early on that I would never rush my meetings with participants. One of the benefits of conducting research on the experiences of people who have reduced their working hours is that they generally have time to spare. If the participant wanted me to go on a walk, accompany them to the local shops, help them in the garden or take a tour of their home, I always agreed.

Such techniques are constructed to help the research process become a much more involving and respectful process that breaks down more traditional research power hierarchies to do research *with* people rather than *on* them. (Clark, 2010: 406)

Interludes and activities allowed participants to relax before and between periods of interviewing, and also yielded some interesting data in their own right. I often found that where participants were initially tired, a small break gave them the energy to

carry on. I also deemed it important to minimise the amount of fussing with tape recorders, interview schedules and notebooks during the interview. During a previous study in a similar area, I found that these ‘research props’ tended to disrupt the conversational flow of interviews by reminding participants that they were not taking part in a ‘normal’ interaction. Using a digital recorder with a large memory and a good quality microphone meant that, after notifying the participant that I was beginning the recording, I was able to place the recorder out of sight. In order that I would be able to give my full attention to interviewees, I also took care to learn my interview schedules beforehand. Whilst many of these techniques may seem trivial, they culminated in a slow and relaxed approach to interviewing that was very successful in yielding personal and often revealing data.

Questioning

I used a semi-structured approach to interviewing, with the flow of interviews loosely directed by a guide. The construction of guides was an ongoing process of reflection and refinement that took place over the duration of my fieldwork. A master interview guide was constructed based on my literature review – particularly chapter two, where the discussion was explicitly directed towards the generation of research themes. The interview guide covered areas such as the experiences of employment, attitudes towards work, personal priorities, attitudes towards consumption, and the difficulties of working less. The data collected from pre-interview questionnaires was then used to adapt the master template to fit the different circumstances of each individual interviewee. Based on the data that questionnaires generated on earnings, employment history, interests, and reasons for taking part in the research, questions and themes were added, changed or removed from interview guides as they were tailored in the lead-up to each interview. The master guide itself also evolved as my insight into the topic area deepened. Rubin and Rubin suggest that studying cultures is an iterative process of continuous research design, in which the researcher must continually re-adapt to what they have learned as they gather evidence for, test out, and sometimes alter their emerging impressions (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 63). The principle of slowness was therefore also adopted between interviews, with time

designated for the preliminary analysis of transcripts, and for the incorporation of emerging themes into the blueprints for later interviews. Emergent themes related to the different varieties of stigma surrounding joblessness, as well as participants' attitudes towards people who are unhappy in their unemployment. Prompts and questions were designed in order to cover these areas in remaining interviews.

Whilst interview guides were produced with care, in the practical reality of the interview situation I was of course willing to work beyond the guide and embrace the natural flow of the interview. Effective questioning in qualitative interviewing is context-bound, and anxiously sticking to pre-planned questions and prompts can make the interview mechanical, inhibiting the validity of the data.

The truly effective question flows from the interviewer's concentrated listening, engaged interest in what is being said, and purpose in moving forward. (Seidman, 1998: 77-8)

Given my slow approach, time was available to accommodate the spontaneous discussion of unanticipated topics. In many instances, participants took the lead and gave extended accounts of their experiences. I also sometimes found that there was little use for the interview guide since, given time, participants would often cover the key research areas without much prompting. I resisted interrupting participants or initiating sudden topic shifts and, when talking to participants who were less confident, maintained an encouraging attitude. As participants spoke, brief notes were made regarding points of interest that I wanted to explore further and participants were encouraged to come back to them later on. Seidman's mantra of 'listen more, talk less' was heeded throughout (Seidman, 1998).

Though effective questioning is context-bound, there are a number of interrogative strategies that can be used to encourage the generation of in-depth data. Kvale suggests that asking participants to introduce themselves often yields 'spontaneous, rich descriptions where the subjects themselves describe what they experience as the main dimensions of the phenomena investigated' (Kvale, 1996: 133). Open questions were used at the beginning of interviews or when moving on to a new topic, allowing participants to set the scene. Questions and prompts such as 'how do you feel you fit

into the study?', 'tell me about some of the jobs you've had', 'when did you first start thinking about making changes?' or 'there must be something hard about your lifestyle' elicited extended accounts and gave interviews momentum. In their responses to open questions, participants would usually outline the areas that were important to them, providing a blueprint for the remainder of the interview. I moved interviews forward by repeating words and phrases that the participant used in their initial responses or by asking them to elaborate on aspects of their account. It was also sometimes appropriate to ask participants to reflect upon the non-verbal cues that they had given in previous answers, asking them to explore why they had laughed, sighed, smiled, frowned, hesitated, or struggled to articulate something. During these instances, the data was often at its most revealing. I also made sure to be prepared for less forthcoming participants by designing a number of direct questions and prompts.

Finally, in four cases the opportunity arose to interview participants with their partners. I wondered whether interviewing in this arrangement might distort the data, given the tendency of groups to tend towards a consensus. I also wondered whether a slow approach of careful listening and context-based questioning might be more difficult to manage with more than two people in the interaction. Nevertheless, in the four cases where the opportunity arose, I agreed to interview participants with their partners and was pleased with the results. This arrangement allowed me to see participants in a context which was closer to their everyday lives. In some cases, for example, particularly where the participant felt stigmatised as the result of their lifestyle choices, I was able to directly observe the role of the partner as a provider of emotional support. The presence of partners also appeared to help expand the conversational space of the interviews. New topics were often opened up as a result of partners prompting one another, asking each other questions, or jogging one another's memories. Some of the study's richest data was produced in this interview arrangement and I would relish the opportunity to interview participants using this method in future work.

Why Do People Participate in Research?

Given the diverse nature of my sample, the research process gave me strong occasion to reflect upon the reasons why people participate in research, as well as upon the implications of this in terms of data collection strategies and data validity. Taking part in qualitative research takes up participants' time, as well as putting them at risk of discomfort, intrusion, and misrepresentation, so some may think it curious that people choose to participate (Clark, 2010: 400). Thinking on this topic rarely goes beyond a consideration of how to persuade participants to give up their time (market researchers or researchers conducting clinical trials, for example, will often entice participants with gifts), though a number of qualitative researchers have compensated for the lack of thought in this area. Peel et al (2006) for example, in a study on patient experiences of a diabetes service, incorporated an interview question to investigate why people chose to take part in the study. A thematic analysis of 40 responses revealed that a number of participants took part for altruistic reasons, believing that their participation would help improve the diabetes service. Many also took part because qualitative research was viewed as an inherently innocuous process, meaning that they had 'nothing to lose' by participating. More interestingly, however, it was found that participation was felt by many to be inherently rewarding, and that participants saw interviews as a forum to talk about their experiences and get things 'off their chest' (Peel, 2006: 1344-5).

Following Peel et al, Clark (2010) also studied the question of why participants take part in research. Clark asked experienced qualitative researchers (n=13) to reflect on their previous research projects, and to consider the motivations that they believed had stimulated participation. Clark's thematic analysis grouped these motivations into those that occur on an individual level, and those that occur on a collective level. On an individual level, the researchers believed that participants engaged out of interest in the topic or because they were curious about the experience of taking part in a research project. Like Peel et al (2006), Clark also concluded that interview-based research has a therapeutic function for the participant, offering him or her an opportunity for disclosure and introspection. The reflexive turn in social science methodology acknowledges that research is unavoidably an *intervention* in the world

and that, by doing research, the researcher not only observes people's lives, but also changes them in small but potentially significant ways. Accordingly, feminist sociologists have stressed that research interventions require reflexivity and care on the part of the researcher. Duncombe and Jessop (2002) for example, point out that participants have a right not to be made conscious of their innermost feelings. By contrast, feedback from participants in my own study indicated that they enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on and clarify their values and choices. For example, the participant Emma enjoyed her interview because it presented her with an opportunity to systematically think through her views: 'I've thought it before, but definitely my conclusions after talking today is that I want to stay on the periphery of workin' life and do it my own way' (Emma). This quote illustrates the interventional nature of research well (even where this was not the original intention of the researcher), as Emma left the interview with an altered point-of-view.

The therapeutic aspects of interviewing described by Clark (2010) are also especially prominent in studies like my own, which deal with marginalised or silent groups in society. My own research experience suggests that many participants – especially those who were not consciously affiliated with a subculture – were not accustomed to people asking them to talk about their views on work. Evidence suggests that participants enjoyed interviews because they felt validated by the academic significance being assigned to their lifestyle – a lifestyle that may (as I will explore in chapter seven) often be disrespected. An extract from my field-notes says:

She continued to reassure me that she wanted to carry on talking and at the end of the interview, solemnly thanked me for 'being quite rare', listening, and 'not making comments and assumptions' about her. (Field notes: Lucy)

Finally, Clark's research suggested that the therapeutic or validating quality of interviews with marginalised individuals may also derive from the opportunity they present for the interviewee to compare themselves with culturally similar others, who are also participating in the study (Clark, 2010: 407). Many participants had not heard of cultural movements such as 'downshifting' or 'idling' and, in these cases, participation expanded their awareness of themselves in reference to more broadly held cultural attitudes.

As well as there being individual motivations to take part in research, Clark's study also suggested that participants may be motivated by incentives on a collective level (Clark, 2010: 410). Participants in health-based research, for example, may feel that their participation will inform policy or service changes and help people in similar circumstances (Peel et al, 2006: 1341). In my own study, participants who saw themselves as belonging to a cultural movement sometimes viewed the research as an opportunity to represent their views to an external audience, or to persuade others of the personal and social value of their lifestyle. Demonstrating their active interest in the topic area, a number of participants continued to enquire about the progress of the research and its publication long after they were interviewed.

Conducting research with participants who possess active motives for participation can present a number of issues. For example, since the researcher ultimately has the final word on how to represent participants and their experiences, a tension arises when the research analysis fails to represent the participant's world-view in a way that he or she perceives to be positive (Clark, 2010: 412). To give an example from my own study, those participants who were affiliated with a cultural movement were often keen to present their lifestyles in an exclusively positive light. As well as stressing the pleasures and the value of their low-work, low-consumption lifestyles, a small number (as I will explore in the analysis) also expressed the optimistic view that *anybody* can reduce their working hours with the correct amount of determination. This is a sensitive idea in an unequal society, and presented a point of conflict as my analysis grew to focus not only on the pleasures of working less, but also on the difficulties of sustaining an alternative lifestyle. The inconsistency between my analysis and the perspectives of specific participants became particularly troublesome in the case of Cheryl, with whom I maintained contact after fieldwork was completed. As a public supporter of downshifting, Cheryl sought to promote her lifestyle through her participation in the research. After she had given so generously of her time, it almost felt deceptive to be contradicting her views in my analysis. During the late stages of the study, Cheryl visited me in my home and asked me to participate in a promotional film she was making about downshifting. Whilst I felt I owed Cheryl some reciprocation for the time she had given to the study, I also felt unable to take

part in the film without compromising my honesty as a researcher. Cheryl seemed surprised and somewhat disappointed by my (relatively) consumerist lifestyle, and this made me wonder whether I had won her participation on false premises, with Cheryl believing me to be a fellow promoter of downshifting, rather than a sympathetic but disinterested researcher.

Attempts to study what motivates people to participate in research are stimulating insofar as they sensitise researchers to this relatively ignored aspect of empirical work. If researchers understand their participants' motivations, they will be better equipped to manage the research intervention with the sensitivity it demands. Nevertheless, the above studies by Peel et al (2006) and Clark (2010) are limited, in that they both miss an obvious opportunity to reflect upon the possible impact of participants' motivations on the validity of data. As I became increasingly aware of my own participants' reasons for taking part, I attempted to account for their motivations during both the interviewing and analysis phases of the research. The overall keenness of participants was generally very welcomed, but in the case of those who sought to promote their lifestyles, it often took some effort to penetrate the 'fronts', self-presentations or performative voices that were adopted. A key methodological problem became how best to pull participants out of rehearsed narratives to report in a more honest and reflective fashion on their direct feelings and experiences, especially where potentially negative aspects of their lifestyles were concerned.

Participant honesty was encouraged through careful question design. By avoiding abstract questions and instead asking participants to talk about their experiences, I encouraged them to suspend their 'public voices' and give a more spontaneous or unrehearsed account of their lives. For example, rather than asking interviewees about what happiness meant to them, it was better to indirectly elicit an account of their views by asking them where they saw themselves in the future, whether certain periods in their life were happy, or whether they enjoyed living in their area / being their age / doing their current job. Rather than asking participants to talk about their 'work-life balance', it was better to ask them how they felt when they got home from work, or what they actually *did* with their time. A reflexive consideration of

participants' motivations for participating was also exercised during the analysis stages of the research. Whilst I was not emphatically suspicious about the truth of participants' accounts, I was careful to weigh the validity of the data against their potentially distorting motivations for participating.

Analysis and Presentation of Data

Like the design and execution of interviews, my approach to analysis was also characterised by the principle of slowness. Preliminary analyses were conducted whilst the fieldwork was in progress, transcriptions created following each interview, and initial findings used to inform research questions and strategies for future interviews. A full and rigorous analysis was then conducted over a number of months following the completion of fieldwork. I began by familiarising myself with the data, before moving into an initial phase of thematic analysis. The interpretative psychologists, Braun and Clarke, suggest that whilst thematic analysis does not, by itself, have the power to interpret data, it is a valuable tool for identifying and reporting patterns in large qualitative datasets (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). I began my own thematic analysis by parsing the data multiple times, isolating extracts, and assigning themes to each extract. 'A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82). Themes were identified using a combination of inductive (or data-driven) reasoning and deductive (or theory-driven) reasoning. This approach contrasts with the recommendations of grounded theorists and authors of a number of popular guides to qualitative research, who often talk about the 'emergence' or 'discovery' of themes (for example, Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 210), or who suggest that the main purpose of the researcher is simply to 'give voice' to research participants (Fine, 2002). Braun and Clarke have argued that the pure realist approach implied here is naïve:

An account of themes as 'emerging' or being 'discovered' is a passive account of the process of analysis, and it denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns and themes. (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 80)

In truth, the researcher is inseparable from his or her theoretical and epistemological position and cannot help but project their knowledge and interests onto the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84). My assignment of themes was indeed significantly informed by my reading around the topic area and my overarching aim to investigate or add texture to existing theories and studies using empirical data. However, since this is a study of a relatively under-researched area, I was of course sufficiently open-minded in my analysis to learn from the culture I was studying and develop unanticipated themes.

Data extracts were placed in a table in a word-processing programme and labelled with their relevant codes. I decided not to break participants' accounts down into small, atomised fragments, preferring to preserve the context of the data by opting for longer extracts with multiple codes assigned to each. When this process was completed, my coding scheme was refined. Code titles were evaluated and codes that were deemed too similar or too specific were merged with other codes. One of the risks of the refining process is that if the researcher is too heavy-handed, he or she risks compromising the nuances of the coding scheme. I thus kept a record of all the changes that were made, in order that they could be later reversed if necessary. This flexibility was valuable when I periodically returned to the raw data to ensure that my coding scheme had not abstracted too far from the original accounts of participants. The next task was to begin the slow and patient process of grouping and organising the data. Codes were written onto separate pieces of card and I experimented with arranging the cards to produce 'mind-maps' of the dataset. I tested out different systems of thematic organisation, grouping codes into hierarchical clusters of nodes and sub-nodes until a final decision was reached on the best method of organisation.

The structure decided upon is reflected in the presentation of the analysis in chapters five, six and seven, though prior to these chapters I will spend chapter four introducing the reader to the data using case studies. The writing of case studies is not only an effective way for researchers to familiarise themselves with data, but is also a valuable method of reporting data, as case studies provide a more holistic description of participants than is possible in a purely thematic discussion. By painting a broader picture of the participants, they also afford the reader of the study a

degree of opportunity to contest the researcher's analysis and interpretation of findings. Whilst a thematic discussion cuts across the data in a way that is useful for identifying trends, a purely thematic report is delivered at the expense of individual biographies. Character and biography are important elements of my analysis, because it explores the possibility that resistance to the ideology of work is not the preserve of stereotypes; of malingerers, intellectuals or the 'idle rich'. It would have been preferable to provide a detailed introduction to every participant but, in the interests of space, I have limited myself to nine case studies which, when read together, reflect the range of the data.

Finally, I wish to briefly address the issue of participant anonymity. In accordance with common ethical practice, participants were reassured that their identities would be kept anonymous. Many, however, protested their anonymity and explicitly asked to be identified in the thesis. In this sense, my own participants were much like the non-working people interviewed by the journalist Bernard Lefkowitz:

Most of the people I interviewed did not ask anonymity in return for their candor. They believed that the transition from work to not working had taken courage. They felt that if I disguised them it would imply some guilt or shame on their part. (Lefkowitz, 1979: foreword)

Although – unlike those interviewed by Lefkowitz – not all of my participants had given up work altogether, many did share the pride and the desire to be recognised that Lefkowitz describes. Their participation in the study represented an affirmation of their life-choices and many therefore expressed a desire to be identified. Whilst I fully appreciate this, like Lefkowitz, I have chosen to go against the wishes of these participants, providing pseudonyms and changing the identifying details of their accounts. Their experiences usually involved friends, families, colleagues, bosses and, in a couple of cases, other participants. I thought it appropriate to disguise their identities in order that they not be held accountable for the stories that they have kindly shared.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDIES

This chapter presents a number of case studies from the fieldwork, selected with the intention of reflecting the range of the data. Given the shared themes between each case selected, and in order to avoid repetition, I have opted to highlight the passages that made each particular case distinctive, rather than provide a comprehensive summary of each participant's account. The tone of each case study is purely descriptive, setting the scene for the analytical discussions in the subsequent chapters. The first case study comprises a collection of thoughts and observations gathered during fieldwork at social events organised by *The Idle Foundation*: an online community of people who are resisting work. The remaining cases move on to describe specific participants. At the end of the chapter I have also included a brief introduction to those participants whose accounts, for reasons of space, could not be represented in detail.

1. The Idle Foundation

As an Idler I pledge...

To strive not to work ridiculous hours, especially not for some corporate wankster. To strive to eat nice stuff that doesn't go pinging at the end. I will not let stress intrude upon me where possible. To procreate and make idle babies. To eat slowly. To drink real ales frequently. To sing more. To smile more. To step off the 9-5 merry-go-round before I get queasy. To amuse myself in public as well as in private. To strive to amuse others as well as myself. To know that work is merely for paying the bills. To always remember that friends are a source of strength. To enjoy the simple things. To spend quality time in nature. To spend less with big businesses and corporations. To make lots of nice things instead. To go against the grain. To strive to make a difference, to the world and people around you... however small. To be happy!!!

(A list of pledges made by members of *The Idle Foundation*)

When asked to define idling, one of *The Idle Foundation's* (hereafter TIF) co-founders said to me: 'I can't, because idling is a lot of different things to a lot of different people'. The above list of pledges, appearing on the front page of *TIF's* website, captures the range of issues that are important to members. Whilst delivered in a light-hearted tone, there is a note of earnestness in these pledges that discloses an aversion to work, a thirst for conviviality, and a strong desire to live a meaningful and autonomous life.

Over the course of the study, I was warmly welcomed to a number of social events organised by *TIF*. The first of these events was a private function at a pub in Birmingham. Around forty members had travelled from across the UK, not to sternly discuss politics, but to eat, drink, and enjoy some live music. The event in Birmingham was a space not for idling in theory, but for idling in practice. During the event, I coaxed the two co-founders of *TIF* (a man and a woman, good friends, and both in their thirties) to sit down with me and explain the foundation's origins. *TIF* was established in 2008 as a reaction to the closure of an online forum called *The Idler* created by Tom Hodgkinson, author of popular books such as *How to Be Free* (2007), and long-time editor of *The Idler* magazine. The founders of *TIF* believed that Hodgkinson's decision to close the website was based on the disparity between his intention to create a space for the serious discussion of alternative lifestyles, and the more trivial chatting and bantering that increasingly became the forum's reality. *TIF* was founded in deliberate contrast with Hodgkinson's website, and is celebrated by its founders as inclusive and cheerful.

TIF actually hosts two websites. The first (<http://idlefoundation.org/>) hosts the foundation's manifestos, whilst the second (<http://idlefoundation.net/>) comprises an active forum¹⁴ and chat-room. A scrolling masthead at the top of the former website conveys a good sense of *TIF's* aims and attitudes. It initially reads:

The Idle Foundation is a group that promotes the importance of leisure time over the work ethic. We place value on doing work that is enjoyable, spending quality time with friends and family, and living a freer life. (The Idle Foundation, 2010: online)

It then scrolls across to read:

¹⁴ At my time of writing (11pm on a Tuesday evening) there are just under three hundred people browsing the *TIF* forum.

We are interested in exploring the practicalities of idleness so that we can demonstrate that it is possible to live sustainable, alternative lifestyles. We are Bohemians and proud of it! Come and join us, there is plenty of room. (The Idle Foundation, 2010: online)

Though the stated aim of one of *TIF*'s websites is to 'campaign against the work ethic', the majority of activity occurs on the second website, which serves as a forum for people with similar interests to stay in touch, talk about current affairs, share practical advice, and discuss books, films and music. During my visit to the event in Birmingham, the founders of *TIF* also expressed their desire to 'bring it more into the real world', using the internet forum to co-ordinate national social events. They also hoped that if *TIF* gained sufficient popularity in the future, they would be able to set up regional cells of the foundation.

Several months after the Birmingham event, I attended another meet-up in Cambridge. Unlike the Birmingham event, however, the Cambridge meet-up comprised an attempt to *promote* the foundation's principles (and, as such, was the first overtly 'political' event the foundation had hosted). The idlers who came to Cambridge hoped to spread awareness of 'the idle way', and several had a particular interest in catching the attention of students, who were believed to be at a pivotal point in their life courses. A leaflet explaining *TIF*'s core values was being handed out, though *TIF*'s founders seemed to have reservations about this new, more serious direction. The stall was being supervised by Helen and Mike. I interviewed both Helen and Mike on later occasions, and each gave their accounts with a notable earnestness and sincerity. In Cambridge, however, they operated the stall with a good sense of fun. A number of times they told me, 'we don't want to force our views on anyone', and often, when I passed the stall, they were engaged in friendly debates with sceptical passers-by. One of the most common criticisms they confronted that day related to an image of *TIF* as a collection of rich people, free to resist work only by virtue of their privilege. I also heard one passer-by say that *TIF*'s resistance to work was inappropriate in the context of a society in which many people are simply grateful to have a job, especially in light of the economic recession. After having spent time with the group, it was clear to me that the image of *TIF* as a meeting place for the 'idle rich' was not entirely fair, since *TIF* members came from a range of different backgrounds. (A glance at the internet forum, for example, reveals the many ideal-types of cultural aversion to work. It is used by those who are active in opposing the work ethic, as well as people interested in 'voluntary simplicity' or 'green lifestyles', people who have given up work altogether, people who have

moderated their 'work-life balance' in a less extreme way, people who have expressed a desire to spend more time with their families, and people who simply seem to be seeking an intelligent conversation). Despite criticism, the idlers at Cambridge were patient and tolerant. The internet forum advertises itself as a place where 'everyone is welcome', and Helen and Mike lived up to this promise throughout the day. It was my personal impression that *TIF* creates a comfortable atmosphere for outsiders and prospective 'idlers', both online and in person, balancing strong attachment to their values with levity and a sense of humour.

2. Jack (*You Can't Put a Square Peg in a Round Hole*)

Jack was a man in his late thirties whom I met several times, during the course of my fieldwork at *TIF* social events. I persuaded him to sit down for an interview the second time we met. I noticed Jack at the event in Cambridge (described above) lazing some distance away from the stall. He seemed fairly uninterested in the promotional aspect of the event and gave me the impression that he liked *TIF* mostly for the company and conversation. When I approached Jack to get his consent for an interview he was initially unsure but, despite his initial reticence, eventually gave an articulate and thoughtful account of his experiences. He listened carefully when I was talking and took time to consider his responses. Jack's was a philosophical and reflexive account, in which he reflected upon his views and choices, methodically contrasting them with his perception of the cultural status quo.

In his thick midlands accent, Jack explained that he worked part-time as a 'librarian on a social housing project'. He wished to clarify straight away that he didn't view his employment as discordant with his status as an 'idler'. For Jack, idling was not about opposing work per se, but was a more specific statement against the heteronomy of certain jobs. He said he hated 'being made to do things' at work. He also saw idling as a statement against the constraints of the standard eight-hour working day. Jack believed that creativity develops through relaxation, conversation and reading, and is thus stifled by the standard working week, which he said made him feel drained, or disinclined to do much with his free-time. The purpose of switching to part-time work or 'idling' was to feel less exhausted and reclaim the thirst to undertake creative activities, one of which was writing.

Central to Jack's philosophical outlook seemed to be a strong sense that all people are different. He talked at length about different 'moulds' of people, and strongly

believed that people must be permitted the freedom to choose the general direction of their lives, and to perform work that utilises their talents:

I think that in our culture people are forced into doing things that, that isn't essentially in their *being*, and I think that then they become very stressed out and possibly ill. There's almost hidden messages in society that say "you can't make a living like that" y'know, it's shoved in your face, careers interviews at school and everything else... and it's *harmful* because later on in life you find that that isn't the real you, and you *can't* live like that. (Jack)

Jack was a keen reader and had read several books on the topic of idling. He said his reading had led him to the belief that working 'three or four hours a day and having the rest of the time to yourself' felt like a 'perfectly natural thing to do'. Jack's image of 'the natural thing to do' was contrasted with his account of the 'way we've chosen to live'. I believe Jack was referring to the pervasiveness of the work ethic when he described the way the majority of people live as 'like a religion or some kind of *madness*'. He was troubled by what he perceived as a rigidity in people's orientations to work and 'acquisition', in spite of the fact that 'the planet is dying... and everybody is so stressed out'. In sum, Jack's interview disclosed a strong sense of both himself and *TIF* as standing in contrast with the society 'out there', or with the lifestyles of the majority.

Another distinctive aspect of Jack's account was his emphasis on community. Though Jack himself seemed to be a fairly shy character, he had a view of most people as uncongenial or socially staid. Jack said it hurt him that people think it's 'cool to be a philistine', and regretted that 'TV's and smart-phones' had become a more likely focus of people's conversation than 'who they saw last night, or some wonderful book they've read'. He thought that commercial entertainment was replacing 'a sense of connection between people'. Jack recognised that one of the advantages of work is that it creates social networks and puts one in regular contact with others but, in light of his own experiences in the workplace, generally saw the sense of community at work as 'artificial, y'know, they're not really your friends'. By contrast, *TIF* represented the qualities of authenticity, friendliness and conviviality. During the interview Jack expressed sincere thanks to his friends in *TIF* for taking him seriously and encouraging him to continue with his writing.

3. Lucy and Matthew (*The lows of work and the stigma of opting out*)

Lucy and Matthew are a welcoming and unassuming couple, recently married and in their early twenties. The couple were recruited via a 'snowball' method, via the recommendation of another participant, who herself was recruited via my advertisement to the community band, *Pandeiro*. Over the course of the study, we drank cups of tea and talked for many hours about their views and experiences. I liked listening to them because, although both Lucy and Matthew had clearly thought reflexively about the meaning of work, their accounts were among the more spontaneous in the research. With those participants who chose to give their accounts on a more philosophical level – particularly those affiliated with *TIF* - it often took some considerable effort on my part to elicit a more direct or natural account of daily experiences. In this context, Lucy and Matthew's interview was refreshing. Unaccustomed to talking about her views on work, Lucy's comments in particular were unrehearsed and surprising, both to herself and the researcher. This case study is primarily about Lucy.

Lucy said she enjoyed being next to the water where she lived, 'reading a lot', crafts and 'making things', looking after her pets, bird-watching, watching television series' on the internet, and playing video games. She said that she found it easy to keep herself amused: 'everyday I'm *excited* to get up'. Her husband Matthew shared many of the same interests and, when I met with them, the two were fairly new to the city, having recently moved there for Matthew to study philosophy at the university. Lucy expressed an interest in contributing to the study because, at the time we established contact, she did not have a job, and nor was she looking for one. In her own words: 'I don't have a job, um, I don't *want* a job, I don't get any benefits and I don't really like the working environment'. It was decided that Matthew would also join us in the interview because he claimed to have opinions about work that colleagues in previous jobs 'just *couldn't* get their head round'. I am glad Matthew joined us, not only because his views turned out to fall well within the remit of the study, but also because Lucy's decisions – as things which affected them both - were something that they had reflected on together. Matthew's affectionate reassurances to Lucy, who at times was experiencing discomfort in recalling her experiences, also helped me more fully appreciate the importance of moral support for a person who has decided not to work. It is not easy to summarise our interviews since they spanned most of the major themes in the present study. Most prominent in my mind, however, are Lucy's negative accounts of working, and the practical and emotional problems she felt were being presented by her decision not to work.

Lucy had previously held three jobs in total, all of which seem to have played a profound role in shaping her considerably negative view of work and what it can offer. She described her first job, working on the shop floor for a well-known shoe company: 'they didn't treat their staff very well and I got paid very badly... nobody really trusted you there and there were always high targets'. In her second job, in a smaller family-run shoe shop, 'things were being stolen, managers nicking money and, like, taking three-hour lunch breaks'. Things escalated when Lucy witnessed a manager stealing money out of the till, an incident which led to tighter levels of control over the staff: 'the rules went up and everyone got stricter, and so we had the boss's girlfriend as a manager, and it just got *worse*... we were being punished for someone else's mistake... it just got really bad, so I ended up leaving'. Matthew, who had also worked at the shop, described it as 'built on fakeness and office bitchiness'. The boss of the shoe-store offered Lucy a job in another branch when she moved city, but the commute from home to work was over thirty miles and would have cost around thirty per cent of Lucy's wages. Matthew was outraged at the suggestion:

[Our boss] said that commuting's just a way of life nowadays, but on the train it's about forty-five minutes and then a twenty minute walk. That way of life leaves you with no life whatsoever, y'know, you wake up at about six and get back at about seven so what's that? About four hours? Of life? (Matthew)

Lucy's third job was at the household goods store, *Homeware* – a job in which she remained for less than one month. Lucy was daunted by the anonymity involved in working in a larger store. The high level of control over employees and the crushing mundanity she associated with the role allocated to her had made it difficult for her to stay:

They'd just got this new manager and he was really strict and, I never, I'd never been in such a strict *environment*. Like it was strict at my previous job but um, strict as in you have the manager telling you what to do, not like word of mouth like in a big company, cos it was so big and there was so many staff... I don't know if I can ever buy cushions again, cos that was all my job was, was *shoving* cushions in a place they didn't fit, and it was like their *lives*, they were like "oh cushions have to go three that way, three that way, three that way", and I was just like "they're *cushions*!" At the end of the day people

will see them, and like them, or hate them, and it doesn't matter how they're displayed. It just drove me insane. (Lucy)

Lucy made me laugh when she said that working for a length of time at *Homeware* was analogous to waiting around to die. Matthew said that working had 'messed Lucy up' and, over the course of our interviews, it emerged that Lucy had experienced feelings of (what might be called) agoraphobia, and had found it very difficult to be active and in public on a daily basis. Furthermore, whilst she thought she was good at selling shoes and interacting with customers, and said she liked doing retail work in principle, she had found it very difficult to remain involved in workplaces she thought were characterised by control and unfairness. Telling me about the qualities she valued most in a job, she said she had never really felt a sense of achievement in her work, but that she didn't think this was as important as being valued or 'praised for work'. She added, however, that she had never really felt valued either, and explained this partly in terms having always been 'paid very badly'.

Lucy also said that her job at *Homeware* had several intolerable effects on her home life. Her job required that she work a less conventional shift of 11am until 8pm. The couple could not afford a car, and given that the job was on a retail estate in an isolated, poorly lit part of town, Lucy felt she needed Matthew to walk and collect her from work every night. She told me that 'the job also makes you feel more tired, so it makes you feel that your evening has been taken away from you'. Giving an example, the couple bemoaned the change in their diet during the time that Lucy worked at *Homeware*. Whilst the couple shared their cooking duties, Matthew complained that Lucy's shifts only allowed them time to 'have like a really simple meal because there's no time to make anything fairly decent'.

Over the course of our interviews, it emerged that there were a number of core values important to Lucy. She understood that she was vulnerable to the upset caused by unfulfilling jobs and the difficult process of looking for work and, accordingly, placed a great amount of value on leisure time unencumbered by thoughts about these things. Another of her core values was the importance of being recognised as an individual. She told me a story about her grandmother who said that she liked it when Lucy worked at *Homeware* because 'some other family member was a textile person'. Lucy said defiantly, 'argh that's got nothin' to do with me'. She did not like the idea of following in her family's occupational footsteps and, throughout the interview, gave a clear sense of the importance that she attached to

'doing her own thing' in life. Another of Lucy's core values was a belief that she should invest time in her relationship with Matthew. She thought that being off work had allowed her to be more patient with Matthew and 'help him with stress'. Both Lucy and Matthew talked about what they wryly called 'marriage time', in which they made a conscious effort to do fun things together.

A combination of negative work experiences and the core values described above had led to Lucy to a conscious decision to cease looking for work. She stressed many times throughout the interview that she was satisfied with her daily activities – 'a lot of people I think would be bored with what I do, but I just really enjoy myself every day' – but she did identify a number of things that she thought she might be 'missing out on' because she was not working. Though she had never felt pride about working in shops, she did see her jobs as providing her with a conversational gambit. 'You could talk to people and they'd go "ooh I know where that is, I shop there sometimes", so it's almost some way to *chat*, but I was never *proud*'. She also recognised that work holds a certain value in providing a social forum, even if she had never really made any friends at work herself.

Despite claiming that she generally 'felt really good', Lucy also confessed to being quite deeply affected by worries that her aversion to work was causing her and Matthew problems. Whilst the couple were by no means acquisitive, money was obviously an issue. Lucy had chosen not to claim benefits and the pair got by solely on what little money they had saved, combined with Matthew's student loan and a hardship fund from the university. The couple said they wanted to try for a baby as soon as they were able, but believed that they were not yet in a good enough financial position to raise a child. The more prominent issue than finances, however, was Lucy's feeling that, by not working, she was being 'a let down'. She thought that others regarded her main goal - to have baby and be a stay-at-home mum - as homely or unambitious. Matthew reassured Lucy, and regretted that a woman could be 'looked down on' for wanting to raise children – 'that is a full-time job in itself'. In a sociologically imaginative move, Matthew explained Lucy's feelings in terms of her conflict with a broader cultural attitude regarding the ennobling properties of work. He believed that this attitude was epitomised in the views of Lucy's dad. Matthew said to Lucy: 'I remember talking to your dad about "constructive members of society" and all these little unemployed people, just skankin on¹⁵ society'. It was perhaps a combination of the morally confrontational nature of Lucy's choices, coupled with the couple's financial situation, that had led Lucy, after our initial interview, to apply for

¹⁵ 'Skanking on' is derogative slang, meaning to 'steal from' or 'leech off'.

jobs in retail. At my time of writing, however, Lucy had once again decided not to look for work. She had found the job hunting frustrating: 'People want experience, but you need to get in there to *get* experience and not hearing back as well, that's disheartening'.

4. Cheryl (*Living simply is cheaper and healthier*)

Cheryl is a middle-aged woman and proud 'downshifter'. I recruited her after discovering her website, which describes her as a 'committed ambassador of simple, green living'. She stood out in my sample because, like the founders of *TIF*, she considered herself to be a pioneer of an alternative lifestyle. In contrast with several of the other participants, who either reported feeling isolated in their attempts to live differently, or who had not settled on a label for their lifestyle, Cheryl squarely identified herself as a 'downshifter' and a 'less conventional' person, carrying these labels with unshakeable confidence. In the course of our meeting, I also got the opportunity to interview her husband Ben. Ben shared many of Cheryl's views and talked at length about his experiences in work, but in this case study I will focus on Cheryl.

Cheryl and I met for a whole day at her home in a village in the south of England – a day in which we talked, prepared food, worked in the garden and went for a walk along the coast. When we were organising our meeting, Cheryl was relaxed and unconcerned about what time I would be arriving. When I did eventually arrive, a note taped on the front door invited me to let myself in. Having read about Cheryl's lifestyle on her website, I had already made a few guesses as to what Cheryl's home would look like, and it turned out that I had many details right. In the centre of the kitchen was a sturdy pine dining table, messy with craft materials and plates of homemade bread. In the lounge crackled an open fire, drying the laundry which was hung up on ropes over the fireplace. Though the children were not home there were signs of their presence – games scattered on the floor and crayon drawings stuck to the fridge with magnets. Cheryl appeared, hugged me hello, and put the kettle on.

Cheryl had previously worked as a sales representative for a company that sold alarm systems, earning £36,000 a year. Her account suggests that she quite enjoyed her work, and felt valued by her employers, but she said that the arrival of her first child had caused her to reflect on her priorities: 'the more money you spend, the more you're out there earning it, and the less time you get to spend with the

people you love'. Though Cheryl chose not to disclose her household income, following her 'downshift', her family was relying on Ben's earnings combined with the irregular earnings Cheryl got for being a freelance writer. Cheryl is the author of *Green Ideas for the Home* – a compendium of tips for reducing waste and saving energy around the home. Part of her time is also devoted to writing an internet blog about downshifting, volunteering for the *National Association for Children of Alcoholics*, hosting her show 'Slow Down and Green Up' for a local hospital radio station, and accepting occasional invites to speak on national television and radio.

Though the birth of her first child had acted as a catalyst, Cheryl was also one of only two people in the sample who were ecologically motivated to work and spend less. She repeatedly expressed a hatred for wastage during our interview, as well as a desire to 'consume ethically' – 'to think about where I spend my money, it's important to me'. She had moral objections to supermarkets such as Tesco ('Depress-co') for their food wastage, and to high-street stores such as Primark, for lowering prices through unfair trading. Cheryl believed that time was more valuable than money, and said she was unprepared to forfeit time to working simply in order to have more material possessions. Cheryl also seemed to simply no longer enjoy spending. Several times she expressed a desire to 'clear out' her home, or said that she took little pleasure in shopping: 'it's a very soulless experience y'know, plodding along'. She said, 'I'm not a *covet* kind of girl y'know' and carefully explained how she had decoupled consumption from her sense of personal worth. In sum, although there was perhaps an element of performance in Cheryl's interview (understandable, given that she was accustomed to promoting her way-of-life) I found her to be sincere and overwhelmingly friendly; she believed with absolute conviction in the personal as well as ethical value of her actions and choices. For Cheryl, 'downshifting' offered a multitude of benefits since not only did it represent an environmentally friendly way of living, allowing her the time and energy to be careful about consumption and disposal, but it also gave her more time with the family. Cheryl did not have a single negative thing to say about her experiences.

5. Clive (*Taking back control*)

Clive was in his late forties and married with two children. He was recruited via the community band, *Pandeiro*. At the beginning of our interview, he said he thought he had matured, reaching a point in his life where he was no longer worried about his career. He said that when people ask him what he 'does' (shorthand for 'does for a

job’) he would sometimes answer, ‘I don’t have time to do much cos I’m working’. He laughed: ‘y’know that’s just me trying to be clever’. Although Clive did not have any career aspirations, he still stressed the value of being ‘useful’, and qualified this by saying that, in his view, being useful is not about ‘generating large amounts of money for companies’ but about ‘helping people who are disadvantaged’.

Clive had been unfairly dismissed from his job as a care worker for people suffering from mental illnesses. His unfair dismissal had since been contested and settled in his favour. Clive was, in a sense, grateful for his dismissal, recognising that it had prompted him to reflect upon his lifestyle. It ‘actually made me realise that uh – how bad the job situation had got, cos I’d got a sort of *deranged* employer’. Clive described the period of joblessness following his dismissal as one in which ‘a weight had been lifted, if that makes sense’, saying that it had caused him to realise how stressed he had been in his job. Clive remembered thinking, ‘maybe this is a time to do different things and reshape my pattern of work’. He seemed aware that this might be an exceptional reaction to losing one’s job. He said that when people become unemployed ‘the stereotypical thing is y’know, you immediately have a week’s worth of beard and you lapse into a heroin addiction or something’. By contrast, Clive described himself as a person who never got bored – ‘if I’m sort of presented with unexpected free time I immediately plan too much stuff to do in it’ – so although his unfair dismissal had been upsetting, Clive had also found himself welcoming the extra time.

At the time of interview, Clive worked as a ‘mental capacity advocate’ (a job that involves making sure the views of people with mental illnesses are represented in official decisions about their course of treatment). He worked around twenty-nine hours per week – substantially less than before – and described his decision to reduce his hours as him ‘taking back some control’. Clive was aware of movements against the work ethic and was familiar with terms such as ‘idling’ or ‘downshifting’, but didn’t label himself in these ways. He said ‘then it sort of becomes a target, and there’s enough targets set for people in life aren’t there’.

6. Rachel (*Work is dreadful, but it’s scary to leave*)

Rachel is a polite and cheerful single woman in her early fifties, who volunteered for the study on the basis of her decision to move jobs, and to switch from full-time to part-time work. She was recruited via the community band, *Pandeiro*. Rachel

discussed the benefits of her decision largely in terms of her personal health and well-being. Since switching to part-time employment she had been developing an interest in 'life coaching', so it was unsurprising that her account was sensitive to the personal costs of working.

Rachel's full-time job was as a human resources manager for a local charity. A number of factors had coincided and contributed to her leaving the job, one of which was a vague feeling that she didn't belong there: 'you know how sometimes I s'pose people just don't, quite, *fit*, and I didn't quite fit'. Rachel felt that she had been bullied by her colleagues and retrospectively saw this as a big knock to her confidence. She also said that her career aspirations had dwindled, explaining that she had previously stepped down from her role as a manager to become a HR officer: 'in work I don't want the buck to stop with me'. Another factor that had contributed to her eventual decision to leave the job was her mother's deteriorating health. Leaving the job was a way for Rachel to spend more time with her mother, which was especially important given that her siblings all led busy lives, and were not able to do the same. These factors combined to create a situation in which Rachel felt compelled to leave her job: 'I found myself getting more and more stressed and I eventually jacked it in without knowing what I was gonna do, knowing that otherwise my health was gonna suffer'. It had not been easy to leave the job because Rachel had felt she was trapped in a 'Catch 22' situation: she had lost confidence in her ability to do the job, but also lacked the confidence to leave and look for part-time work.

I kept looking at 'well what happens if I'm ill', or 'what happens if the company I'm temping for don't need me after all' or 'we don't want you' or 'you're not doing what we thought you could do', and they can just finish you tomorrow, whereas the safety of a permanent job meant sick pay, meant paid holidays, meant that if it wasn't working out they would be obliged to help me. There was a nasty voice in my head saying 'this isn't gonna work'. (Rachel)

Eventually though, Rachel did pluck up the courage to 'make the jump and take the risk', deciding to quit her job at the charity and begin looking for something with 'more satisfaction and more freedom'. At the time of interview, Rachel was working as a part-time HR officer for a different company. She had initially been frightened about the precarity of temporary employment and about losing her 'financial safety net', but said she had learned to relax about future uncertainties.

When we spoke, Rachel was enjoying the less harried nature of part-time working, saying that she had become more relaxed in all aspects of her life and missed nothing about full-time employment. She had a number of interests and said that she tried to cultivate a new one every year. The ones she spoke about included cookery classes, playing in a samba band, doing yoga, and walking. Rachel said she had made a lot of friends through these activities, meaning she was rarely at home alone. She also seemed proud to report the fact that she had gradually learned to cope well with less money – ‘my relationship with money has changed’.

I think that whilst it means I don't have foreign holidays and I don't have a new car, the whole sort of – the need to earn more money – I'm not bothered about it. I enjoy my own company, I enjoy going walking and I enjoy my hobbies, and I feel much *better* in myself, more comfortable. (Rachel)

Rachel was surprised at how well she was managing with less than £800 a month, realising that a reduced income ‘wasn't so scary after all’. ‘What really matters... for me it's my friends and having nice company and being able to get out and about’. Since ‘in reality you've never got enough money’, then why not settle with less?

At the time of interview, Rachel had no intention of going back to a full-time job after her mother passes away. ‘My confidence is back up again and I think well, would I really want to work five days a week again?’ She said she would never give up working altogether because she likes the fact that her job gives her a ‘tag’ or the ability to say ‘this is what I *do*’, though she much prefers to be thought of as a life coach than as a HR officer. She recognised the value of the social contact that employment provides – ‘the office banter and the fun’ – but in an ideal world would like to work no more than two days a week, devoting the extra time to voluntary work.

7. Adam (*Computing the meaning of life*)

Adam is a lively and witty young man in his mid twenties. His ‘big lifestyle change’ consisted in a move from London to Tokyo where, at the time of interview, he was working as an assistant English language teacher and freelance computer programmer. I contacted Adam when I stumbled upon a website he had set up called the *London Simplicity Circle*. Though the website had never really been active and Adam no longer lived in the UK, he suggested that we conduct an interview anyway using the online voice-call program, *Skype*. Adam was wildly excited when I

called him up, shouting, joking, and venting steam about his past experiences as a computer programmer in London.

Adam's undergraduate degree had been in computer programming, so a programming job had seemed to him like the 'clear thing to do'. However, when he got his first job in London (a very well paid job for a single person of his age) Adam 'slowly gained the feeling that, from maybe the first week, something was very *wrong*'. Adam said he had really enjoyed computer programming at university and had undertaken a number of self-initiated projects, unrelated to his degree. This enthusiasm was crushed by the job in London. Adam was annoyed that his bosses had pressured him into using computer software that he didn't believe was the best for the job. He also complained about the length of the working day which, if a programming deadline was imminent, could be as much as sixteen hours long ('plus the commute', he reminded me). Adam would often go into the office on weekends too, without pay, which was against his ideal to be in work for strictly as long as he was paid to be there. Adam also complained about the little irritations of the office environment: the headaches induced by the computer screen and the annoying music that his colleagues would often play. Adam said the work often made him intolerably tired – 'too tired to do my job'. On his lunch breaks, he had begun using a spare room to have a half-an-hour nap, 'which was fine for a while til the boss got wind of it and decided that it was now policy that *no-one* could sleep in the office at lunchtime'.

Adam saw himself as a skilled worker and didn't feel that his efforts were recognised. He felt that the bosses had viewed him as a 'number' rather than as a person:

There was no kind of 'you're a human being, thank you very much for keeping my company going', but just uh 'come in when you're meant to, work on this big long list and we'll complain at you if it doesn't work' and – OH THIS IS ANOTHER THING, they called everyone '*resource!*' [laughs], I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT! 'Yeah we need more resource on this project', and I'm thinking 'what do you mean by resource? Oh you mean *people!*' (Adam)

At university, Adam had experienced a continuity between his work and his leisure, doing programming in his spare time, but his unhappiness at work had led him to see his life as increasingly divided into compartmentalised spheres of work and relaxation. He was very clear about this: 'there was the *work* me and the *home* me'.

Both during and after his programming job, Adam said he had spent a lot of time wondering whether it was that specific job that he didn't like, or whether it was something more fundamental about the experience of formal employment that was causing his upset. He had wondered, for example, whether things would improve for him if he sought out a job with a different programming company:

I wasn't sure whether it was just that job or work in general, and then when I became a freelancer I decided that yeah, it's *everything* about work that I don't like. All jobs are basically horrible, it's just *grades* of horrible. (Adam)

His initially high expectations of employment had been disappointed at a relatively young age. Adam was outraged, for example, to discover how few holidays he was entitled to in his programming job. His optimistic expectation was that he would get at least a few weeks worth of holidays (though 'a few months would make more sense') but, in reality, he only got twelve days of annual leave. This would have increased by five days had Adam stayed with the company for more than five years. He sarcastically remarked, 'yeah, I'll certainly stay on the job in order to get FIVE DAYS of extra free-time!'

At some point during his programming job, Adam said he began to ask himself 'what do I want to *dooooo* with the rest of my life?' The job was 'just this big turd in the middle of my day, when I could've been doing things I wanted to do'. He was soon working in a purely instrumental fashion; Adam decided he was going to raise the money he needed to move to Japan and teach English. Having now made this bold move, Adam described his new role as 'being the face of foreign and saying "English is very exciting!"'. He said the job was 'amazingly fantastic', describing it as the antithesis of his previous job, in light of the recognition and gratitude that he received on a daily basis. 'People come up to me and I can *explain* things to them, and they say "thank you, now I understand that"'. He said, 'when I started doing the English I was like "whoa, you can enjoy yourself", so I can't go back to those earlier jobs now'.

One of the main things Adam valued in his new life was the increased time available 'to think'. His biggest complaint about the full-time working lifestyle was that it leaves a person with very little time for contemplation – 'that's why people say "oh the shower is where I think, the toilet is where I think"'. Adam wryly told me that his most recent hobby was to 'solve the question of the meaning of life'. He regretted that few people spend much time asking themselves what they want to do with their futures, when 'surely it is the key thing you should be asking yourself before you can get on

with anything else'. His image of most people was that they conducted their lives in an unquestioning, trance-like fashion: 'they're going around doing their jobs and eating and meeting people', but not consciously thinking about the choices available to them.

His response to this has been to invent a web-based computer programme called *Life Mapper*, which is designed to intelligently suggest potential interests to the user by analysing their current tastes and ambitions. Adam sees *Life Mapper* as a bit of fun, but is sincere about the ideas behind it. During the interview he recalled that, from a young age, he had often tried to provoke people into questioning the general direction of their lives, identifying this as an uncomfortable or taboo area for many. '[People] give you a quite flippant answer, which is their way of saying "oh, don't ask me that"'. Adam objected to the defeatism of people he had known in London who were financially comfortable, but still put up with jobs they hated. 'They're quite happy to talk about other things and engage in small talk, but no-one really wants to talk about these deep issues'. He wondered if his insistence on doing just that had caused some people to see him as an eccentric.

8. Gerald (*Carefully disconnecting*)

Gerald is in his late fifties, has a PhD in marketing, and at the time of interview had been several years retired from his job as a university lecturer. He was recruited via *Pandeyro*. I interviewed him on a weekday morning at his home, his wife Sally (also a participant) drifting in and out of the interview whilst doing some chores. (Sally was a social worker who had recently made the decision to become a part-time freelancer. She said that one of the benefits of freelance work was that she was allowed the convenience of getting her odd jobs out of the way in the morning). Gerald stood in contrast with many of the participants in my sample because his identity was strongly centred on employment. His volunteering to take part was not, like many of the participants, due to their disenchantment with work, but due to his deliberate decision to retire early. Since retiring, Gerald had been head-hunted for a £75,000 per annum professorship but, sticking to his guns, had turned the post down: 'good work-life balance, that's what I'm trying to do'. Gerald's account provided insights into the experiences surrounding a transition from absorbing, high-status work, to a period of retirement.

Gerald had identified very strongly with his work and told me many stories about the joys of writing, teaching and going to conferences. He emphasised many times that

he had never seen work as a burden or merely a source of money, and said he could not comprehend the views of young people who dream of winning the lottery in order to escape work: 'they'd feel lost because work adds structure to your day. What *would* you do with yourself if you didn't have work?' Gerald's personal investment in employment is understandable given the nature of his work, which he rated highly in terms of the levels of autonomy and satisfaction involved. He enjoyed praise for the books he had written and believed that his high wage was good for self-esteem, as a tangible indicator of success.

Gerald first cemented the idea of retiring early after a rousing argument with Sally – an argument which the couple both believed was rooted in the work-related stresses they were under. Gerald said: 'I cut back at university and aimed to be completely out of there within a five year period'. I wanted to know if Gerald had encountered any problems in his attempt to distance himself from his job. Money was not an issue for Gerald. He was the most financially wealthy participant, partly because he continued to receive royalties for his text-books. Gerald was acutely aware, however, that given his strong attachment to the job, he would need to be cautious about the speed and nature of his disconnection from work. He said, 'when you retire you lose your social connection, there's a whole set of groups you're not part of any more'. Gerald had tried to avoid a sense of social isolation by keeping in touch with old colleagues and by doing the odd bit of writing or what he called 'hack work' at home. Though he maintained some connection with ex-colleagues, he remained worried about losing status: 'I'm worried I'm losing my credibility now because I'm not teaching any more, I'm not research active, my contribution is not as much'.

Successful retirement was, in Gerald's eyes, something that required considerable care and thought. 'Retirement can either be a dream or a nightmare. I don't think people plan enough for their retirement'. Gerald led an active lifestyle post-employment, writing, tending his allotment, cooking and flying. He thought that it was tremendously important, however, that he developed his interest in these activities whilst still in employment. He said 'your interests need to be in place, so you don't feel like you're finishing work and then starting this *lesser* thing'. His fears about retirement were also fuelled by memories of his father:

My dad retired at sixty-four and he thought 'there's all those jobs around the house that I can do now', but he *didn't*. It would take him a whole day just to write a letter or something because that element in him just wound down, and in just over a year he was dead and I thought, 'there's a lesson there mate',

you've gotta plan for it, get things lined up and start doing them before retirement. (Gerald)

Gerald also wanted to make sure that Sally did not find him boring. Both Gerald and Sally placed value on having their own interests and making sure that, as they got older, they still had plenty to talk about. They were terrified, for example, that they might become 'one of those couples' who sit silently in bars and restaurants, 'just passing time, waiting to die'.

9. Samantha (*I'm crafting my own life*)

Samantha is a thirty year old woman with a PhD in genetics. She responded to a call for participants I had placed on the message-board on *TIF's* website over a year and a half earlier, when she was still working as a patent attorney in London. When she saw my message, shortly after it was posted, she sent me an excited email in which she exclaimed: 'About to quit my job! Working my notice and no new job to go to!' We made the arrangements for her to take part in the study but, months later, Samantha had returned none of my emails. Nevertheless, a year and a half on, when I had long given up on getting an interview, a letter from Samantha arrived on my desk, detailing her experiences over the year. Since we had initially spoken she had moved away from London, undertaken six months of voluntary unemployment with the aim of 'doing nothing', and also worked in a number of different jobs. The changes seemed radical. Though I had decided to conclude my fieldwork several months prior, I could not resist interviewing Samantha.

Given Samantha's turbulent employment history, it is useful to provide the reader with a timeline. Samantha gained a PhD in genetics before becoming an attorney in London, working in the field of biotechnology patenting. Whilst in that job, Samantha moved to a housing co-operative. During her time there, she eventually decided to quit her job. She then underwent six months of voluntary joblessness before working for a short time as a private tutor in order to make ends meet. Shortly afterwards, Samantha moved to just outside Newcastle, where she worked for a year as a waitress in a café bar. At the time of interview she had given up the waitressing and was training to be a psychotherapist. Perhaps the most striking thing about Samantha's interview was her insistence that she make conscious and thoughtful choices about how to live. She told me: 'I'm crafting my own life'.

Samantha had chosen to work in the field of biotechnology patenting because she thought that this would allow her to utilise her background in genetics. She said she actually found fewer opportunities to use her knowledge than she anticipated and was disappointed with the scope the job gave her to 'engage in the real world'. Reflecting on her time as an attorney, Samantha described a feeling of having reluctantly reached a 'dead end' in her life, where she should realistically anticipate no further major or exciting changes. 'I felt like uh "this is it now", I didn't feel like I was taking responsibility for my life'. Samantha also remembered constructing imaginary scenarios such as 'what if someone in my family was ill and I had to be with them?' Thinking like this would make her upset about the inflexibility of her career-focussed lifestyle. (One such scenario indeed came to fruition when Samantha quickly and unexpectedly fell in love with a man from Newcastle. Having quit the attorney job, she was able to move to be with him: 'I figured well I've got this freedom now so I *can* do it, move up north and start a new adventure').

When Samantha eventually quit the attorney job it was with the clear aim of 'doing nothing' – 'nothing, at least in the sense of not bringing in income anyway'. She thought she would enjoy the abundance of free-time but only remained unemployed for six months, retrospectively interpreting her decision as an overreaction to the stresses and constraints of her job at the time.

I'd always thought that what I wanted to do was nothing. I couldn't imagine anything more incredible than being completely free, but what I actually found was that it was extremely difficult. I just learned quite a lot about myself through that which was, basically, that I didn't want to do nothing and that I am quite excited about doing work that I love. (Samantha)

Samantha said that her course in psychotherapy had taught her that there were many different kinds of people with many different needs. She saw herself as a person with a need for 'structure' and described her period of unemployment as one in which she 'lost structure and lost status'. Following this period, she worked as a freelance home-tutor and as a waitress. She described these jobs fondly, saying she had met 'nice people and had nice conversations'.

She thought her lifestyle changes had made a positive impact on her sense of well-being but, as in many of the other cases here, her choices had drawn criticism from her family. Samantha's choices had also led to financial difficulties, and she said that her drastic drop in income was often a source of worry. Since many of her friends

were 'settled and [had] plenty of money', she wasn't always able to join in on their plans. She said that, given her financial precarity, she could understand why some might see her choices as strange. However:

For me it feels massively indulgent. I think I have *more*, but more of different sorts of things. Like, when I talk to my friends in London they're all knackered and working really long hours and haven't got time to have a chat on the phone and I just think god, y'know, *that's* the lifestyle that feels self-hating and puritanical. (Samantha)

The Rest...

Regrettably, space has not allowed me to provide an introduction to every participant. Those participants who have not been introduced, but who are referenced in the following chapters, include the following.

Anne is in her thirties and one of the founders of *TIF*. She had given up a stressful job in television to become a freelance photographer. She valued the extra free-time afforded by freelance work, partly because it allowed her to take care of both her own health complaints, as well as her disabled father, whom she was living with.

Mike is also in his thirties and a self-proclaimed 'idler'. He is a father of two. He had given up work partly in order to spend more time with his children. He and his wife (a teacher) had agreed that they would subsist as a family on her wage alone. When Mike did do a period of work, he was strictly instrumental in his approach, 'working to live', and not the other way around.

Helen is an 'idler' in her forties who also had a strictly instrumental attitude towards work. She structured her life around bursts of temporary employment and long periods of time-off, and wondered why other people did not do the same.

Emma is a woman in her late thirties (recruited based on a recommendation by a member of *Pandeiro*). She is the only participant to have a diagnosed disability and to be claiming incapacity benefits. Whilst it was not originally her own decision to give up working, and the isolation and financial difficulties of being out of work had often been tough on Emma, she also wondered whether she could tolerate work again after tasting the benefits of time-off.

Ffion and Rhys (recruited via *Pandeiro*) are a couple in their late twenties who, despite strong aspirations to live self-sufficiently, continue to occupy full-time jobs in a university.

Larry (recruited based on a recommendation by a member of *Pandeiro*) is a longstanding social-worker in his sixties, suffering from stress. He was dismayed about the changes in his work role that had occurred over the years. He had reduced his working time by one hour per day, for no reason other than to improve his 'chance of feeling half decent'. At my time of writing, news reached me that Larry had stopped working altogether, due to stress.

The following chapters also refer to two participants with whom I did not conduct full interviews, but met several times during the course of my field-work with *TIF*. **Nikki** is in her early twenties, and had quit her job in a call centre to work part-time in a high-street store. **Paul** is a graduate in his mid-twenties with a history of mental ill-health. He had quit his job as a care worker due to stress and feelings of depression. At the time of interview, he had no plans to look for work.

CHAPTER 5

THE BREAK-POINT

For each participant in the present study, the regular full-time working week had become intolerable. The nine-to-five had come into conflict with aspirations to do meaningful and interesting work or to live a life in which time could be expended on the fulfilment of moral priorities. Whilst personal conflicts with paid-work are not atypical, what made the participants unique was their determined attempt at resolution. As the strains of their conflicts bubbled to the surface, participants were motivated to make changes in their lives, even if these changes compromised their material wealth and social standing. Whilst some reduced their hours, others were only satisfied through complete disengagement from the world of employment for the foreseeable future. In these more extreme cases, the choice to disengage from work led participants into morally uncharted and financially precarious territory. For some the changes were relatively easy to adjust to because they had a financial buffer to protect them or friends to lend them moral support. For others the changes were more difficult, thwarting financial stability and leaving them vulnerable to doubts about the social acceptability of their chosen lifestyle. Regardless of these differences, all participants noted a significant improvement in their general well-being, and agreed that their chosen ways-of-life were far preferable to full-time employment. Furthermore, when asked, all those participants whose financial and familial circumstances had only allowed them to reduce their working hours by a relatively small amount said they would gladly reduce them more if it became practically feasible.

In the coming chapters I will look more closely at the reported pleasures and difficulties encountered in working less. In the present chapter, however, my aim is to summarise the set of experiences and rationalities that shaped each participant's disaffection with employment in the first instance. Why did participants feel the need to disengage from paid-work and, after reducing their hours or giving up work, what did they do with their time that was so important to them? In his study of the

voluntary jobless in America in the 1970s, the journalist Bernard Lefkowitz referred to the 'break-points' of his interviewees (Lefkowitz, 1979). A play on words, the break-point referred not only to the point at which his interviewees decided to take a break (usually a permanent one) from employment, but also to the moment that they 'broke' in an emotional sense, their accustomed way-of-life becoming at best, undesirable, or at worst, miserable and destructive. Each participant in the present study also discussed his or her own break-point, and spent a large proportion of the interview reflecting on the frustration, malaise, and intolerable situations encountered in the full-time working lifestyle. Such experiences are my central concern in this chapter, but before I look at them more closely, I will briefly reflect upon the nature of the break-point itself – a key moment in each participant's biography. This involves a brief excursion into the sociological critique of consciousness.

Break-point

The participants' break-points can be analysed in terms of a transcendence of the phenomenon known in social theory as 'reification'. Originally used by Marx, the concept of reification was adopted by Peter Berger and his colleagues, who lifted it out of Marx's utopianism and applied it in their sociological critique of consciousness (Berger and Pullberg, 1965; Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Like Marx, Berger et al began with the principle that humans are self-producing beings engaged in a dialectical relationship with the world. The social or institutional order that shapes human nature is, in other words, itself an 'ongoing human production' (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 69). Importantly, the authors also emphasised that social order can only *ever* be the result of human enterprise (Berger and Pullberg, 1965: 62).

It is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity. (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 78)

It is this active role that humans play in the shaping of the world that separates the species from non-productive animals who, unlike humans, are destined to experience their world as an external facticity. Remembering this *a priori* principle of humans as self-producing beings is important if humans are to experience the world as a world

‘open’ and awaiting their influence (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 65). By contrast, the concept of reification describes a state of consciousness whereby the world is apprehended as something other than a human production. Reification, occurring with the development of a complex social and institutional order, entails ‘the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly supra-human terms’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 106). The social world confronts the individual as an objective facticity:

Through reification, the world of institutions appears to merge with the world of nature. It becomes necessity and fate, and is lived through as such, happily *or* unhappily as the case may be (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 108).

Owing to its apprehension as an externality, the world loses its status as an open horizon of possibility in the consciousness of individuals. The world is inert or non-human; it is simply ‘there’ or ‘as it is’, impervious to human wishes. The institutional determinants of social reality are taken as given and natural and, as a result, it becomes impossible to imagine any alternative reality (Cohen and Taylor, 1992: 231).

Berger and his colleagues discussed reification at the level of social institutions, but also at the level of social roles. The reification of social roles is particularly relevant to my concern with the biographical break-points of the present study’s participants. Berger and Pullberg suggested that ‘roles are reified by detaching them from human intentionality and expressivity, and transforming them into an inevitable destiny for their bearers’ (Berger and Pullberg, 1965: 67). In the original article, this statement was linked to a critical commentary on the reifying effects of a sociology that speaks of ‘roles’ instead of people, but it can equally be read as a comment on the automatic or pre-reflective manner in which people generally go about their daily lives¹⁶. For most people, the role that they inhabit on a daily basis is one that is ‘taken for granted and lived through as a necessary fate’ (Berger and Pullberg, 1965: 64). This pre-reflective mode of consciousness signifies a feeling of relaxed ‘at-homeness’ in the role that a person is occupying. Cohen and Taylor echo this idea in their suggestion

¹⁶ Berger and Pullberg arrange the various levels of consciousness of the world into three tiers, beginning with pre-reflective consciousness and moving on to a reflective, and finally, to a social-theoretical level of consciousness (Berger and Pullberg, 1965).

that, for the typical individual, the default state of consciousness in daily life is one of ‘unreflective accommodation’ (Cohen and Taylor, 1992). The participant, Rachel, summarised this as going about one’s life ‘on autopilot’. In relation to the work-role, this observation calls to mind Weber’s concept of the ‘spirit of capitalism’. By describing capitalism in these quasi-sacramental terms, i.e. as possessing a ‘spirit’, Weber highlighted the unquestioning manner in which the work-role is generally adopted. According to Weber, whereas workers were once consciously motivated by a protestant morality, the world of work now appears to the individual as a ‘tremendous cosmos’ in which they are destined to participate (Weber, 2002: 282). Generally speaking, the need to be employed is not something that is painstakingly rationalised, but accepted as an inevitable part of daily life.

By comparison, the participants’ break-points represent the moment at which they began to seriously question the legitimacy of the work-role. The biographical ruptures that characterised their break-points were moments of *de-reification*, whereby they claimed to have ‘seen through’ (Mike), ‘challenged’ (Helen) or ‘woken up to’ (Anne) the socially constructed nature of society and, more specifically, the need to be employed. Jack, for example, described his break-point:

The trouble is that once it’s happened you can’t really see things in any other way because it’s almost as if you’ve seen what’s – it’s like seeing through a *disguise* actually, it’s a lot like that – it’s like kind of the adult equivalent of realising that there is no Santa Claus. (Jack)

The break-point represents the point at which the participants’ lives took on a feeling of malleability. Many were exuberant as they described a shedding of accustomed roles and a rediscovery of their lives as open possibilities. For example, Rachel recalled excitedly asking herself ‘what is it I really *want*?’ By moving from an automatic to a reflective level of consciousness, the participants felt empowered to deconstruct their daily lives and make autonomous and non-conformist choices about how to live. After experiencing a break-point, several participants indeed became critical of the automatic nature in which daily life is generally lived. They spoke out against the world of timetables, routines, and rules, which they saw as threatening to their ability to maintain an image of themselves as unique, deliberative, and

responsible individuals. For example, several criticised the unquestioning manner in which their colleagues and bosses appeared to go about their daily lives. These participants caricatured an older person from a previous job: the person ‘who had just been there for twenty years’ (Helen) or the person who had ‘been there forever and just didn’t have a bad thing to say about it’ (Lucy). These caricatures called to mind Robert Merton’s ideal-type of the ‘ritualist’, who carries out his or her role without any conscious reason or end goal in mind (Merton, 1938: 676). Owing to the habitual, automatic nature of their behaviour, these colleagues acted as anti-role-models: that which the participant should strive *not* to become.

In contrast with the colleagues they described, the participants’ own interviews were full of explicit rationalisations about why they worked exactly as much as they did. These rationalisations were often the essence of their interviews. Time and energy were seen as precious resources, and how best to spend them was a matter for conscientious reflection. Samantha, for example, valued members of *TIF* because she believed that the people there were ‘in touch with what they want’. Similarly, Adam said he reflected regularly on what to do with life. He said:

A career is just sort of one job plugged into another job, plugged onto another job, and if you don’t really know why you’re doing it all – not to know is to admit that you’re wasting your life. (Adam)

Like many of his fellow participants, Adam was emphasising the value of conscious choices over habituation and routine. In some cases participants even ventured to theorise the need to work, explaining why they believed it to be a social construction. This was especially typical of the self-defined idlers, who often had a clear sense of themselves as having been socialised into a particular institutional order, and as now trying to re-establish themselves as free-thinking subjects. They often talked about the ‘hidden meanings’ (Jack) in society, or the ideas (i.e. ideologies) that are ‘constantly shoved in your face’ (Matthew) and their attempts to resist these. Many also reflected on their experiences at school and condemned their respective institutions for attempting to shunt them into careers. Mike, for example, said: ‘I realised... the authority that came from teachers didn’t *really* mean anything... and I didn’t have to be what they wanted me to be’.

As well as delineating the concept of reification in abstract terms, Berger and Pullberg attempted to theorise the concrete socio-historical constellations that might lead to de-reification (Berger and Pullberg, 1965). The authors were interested in de-reification on a macro-scale, but it does not take much imagination to apply their insights to the individual biographical ruptures experienced by participants in their break-points. De-reification occurs when the taken-for-granted nature of the world disintegrates. Berger and Pullberg argued that this can occur in situations where there is a mixing of cultural values or a ‘clash of worlds’ (Berger and Pullberg, 1965: 70). This was reflected to a small extent in the present findings, with both Anne and Helen reporting a strong desire to reduce their working hours after sharing experiences with people from more leisurely cultures whilst travelling in Africa and the East. In these examples, travelling abroad had induced a sense of cultural relativity, and hence triggered reflections on the work-related customs and habits of the participants’ own lives and culture. What is much more prominently represented in the findings, however, is Berger and Pullberg’s suggestion that de-reification occurs in periods of crisis; in ‘times of trouble’ or ‘axial times’ which bring forth doubt and scepticism about the previously taken-for-granted (Berger and Pullberg, 1965: 69). In the context of the participants’ biographies, the break-point was indeed almost always the result of a personal crisis. In a small minority of cases this crisis was described as happening very quickly. In particular, birth and death (and the anticipation of birth and death) – as the most fundamental events in life – appeared to have a de-reifying effect, taking the participant off ‘autopilot’. Several participants recognised the destabilising power of pivotal life events:

My step-dad died when I was ten and that was a kind of wake-up call, it puts a lot of things in perspective. It set me on a path of thinking ‘well life’s too short, it can be over just like that and so I’m gonna do my own thing’. (Mike)

I mean bereavement or redundancy and those can be good things sometimes, forcing people to make that move and realise that doing the same job for the next twenty odd years, nine-to-five is not the only option. (Rachel)

In the cases where children had been born or where somebody in the family had died or fallen ill, participants were given occasion to re-evaluate their attitude towards work, and chose to work less. In most cases however, the break-point was described

as the result of a more prolonged or gnawing experience of malaise, caused by the growing divergence between what participants expected and desired in their lives, and the reality of their day-to-day experiences. As suggested above, a pre-reflective mode of consciousness signifies a feeling of relaxed ‘at-homeness’ in the role that a person is occupying. Generally speaking, when people feel at home in their roles, they do not experience a need to rationalise their behaviour. It follows that hidden beneath each participant’s tendency to make their life choices the object of reflexive attention, one discovers experiences of unhappiness, emotional strain and ill-health. These discomforts represent the desire for change in its germinal form. The break-point on the other hand represents a ‘crunch’ moment, where pressures at work or home and a nagging sense of neglected priorities had climaxed in a need to *escape*.

For reasons I will continue to explore as the thesis progresses, relatively few people respond, or are in any position to respond, to the need to escape in the (sometimes extreme) manner that the present participants did, by reducing their working hours or giving up work. Cohen and Taylor, for example, in *Escape Attempts* (1992), discussed some of the more conventional tactics that people use to escape the mundane responsibilities of everyday life. They considered, among other things, the key role that fantasy, games, holidays, and art play in allowing people to tolerate the realisation that much of their time is shaped by prescribed regularities. They also stressed the psychological significance of conscious reflection on the world:

Our very reflection upon the determinancy of life, pushes us back into an area of freedom... we can distinguish ourselves from [those wrapped up in routines], reflect upon their unreflective practices, show some sense of self in what we do. (Cohen and Taylor, 1992: 52)

In Cohen and Taylor’s view, the mere act of reflexively apprehending the world allows people to experience relief from the assault of routine: the ‘self simply leans back and regards this assault, and in so doing reaffirms its own inviolability’ (Cohen and Taylor, 1992: 55). The authors went on to delineate a range of psychological manoeuvres that individuals make in order to reassert their individuality against the routines of daily life – from cultivating self-irony to performing what Goffman called ‘role-distancing’, whereby individuals consistently remind themselves and others that

they are something more than what they do¹⁷ (Goffman, 1972). (Participants in the present study who still worked could indeed be observed practising role-distancing in their interviews. Clive, for example, made a show of answering the question ‘what do you do?’ – a customary invitation for him to disclose his occupation – by replying, ‘as little harm as possible’. Like many of the other participants, the message Clive wanted to communicate was ‘I am not my job’). Cohen and Taylor’s analysis of escape is highly resonant in today’s work-centred society, in which there is a growing concern surrounding ‘work-life balance’, yet the escape manoeuvres discussed generally amount to ‘putting up with it’, allowing people to assert their individuality whilst remaining fixed in an accustomed way-of-life. Malaise does not develop into a tangible change, but is only temporarily escaped through fantasy, role-distancing and brief periods of respite¹⁸. In the case of participants in the present study, the kinds of escape attempts discussed by Cohen and Taylor were evidently not enough to keep growing dis-ease at bay. Participants felt driven to make real, tangible adjustments to their lifestyles by reducing working hours or giving up work for the foreseeable future.

Having developed an understanding of the ‘break-point’, in the remainder of this chapter my aim is to summarise and make sense of the experiences of emotional strain that shaped each participant’s need to escape. I will discuss a number of themes from the data, including the participants’ negative experiences of the workplace and of home-lives lived in the shadow of work. I will also focus on the participants’ moral priorities – including their emphasis on family-care, self-care, and the intrinsic and social value of activities outside work – all of which served to sharpen the contrast between the lives that they aspired to live, and the lives that they really lived before turning away from employment. Whilst I will explore these themes separately, note

¹⁷ It can indeed be argued that many modern, emotionally demanding forms of work militate against a person’s attempts to distance herself from her work-role in the ways that Cohen and Taylor describe. Arlie Hochschild’s research into the experiences of air hostesses (in the wonderfully titled *The Managed Heart* (1983)), for example, introduced the concept of ‘emotional labour’, whereby the heavy subjective demands of the work role and behavioural rules of the workplace sometimes inhibited the employee’s attempt to limit the stress that the role places on the self (Hochschild, 1983: 188).

¹⁸ Cohen and Taylor do indeed recognise this tendency in their analysis, drawing a comparison with Berger and his colleagues. In Berger et al’s analysis, de-reification or conscious reflection are theorised as a pre-condition for change. In Cohen and Taylor’s account of everyday life, however, the de-mystification of the world allows people to maintain a stable state of contentedness which is incompatible with the desire for change (Cohen and Taylor, 1992: 56).

that in reality (as the case studies have shown) it was always some combination of the different motivations described that led participants to turn away from employment.

Trouble at Work

In chapter one I introduced the idea that capitalist societies are ‘work-centred’, owing to the subjective as well as objective centrality of work in everyday life. To recap, whilst the need to be employed is historically contingent, sociologists such as Jahoda et al (1972) and Sean Sayers (1998) have argued that human nature in capitalist societies has evolved to a point where the time structure and co-operative activities of the working day are crucial for the individual’s psychological welfare. Employment is valorised as an essential source of well-being for reasons more fundamental than its practical significance as a source of income. We find a more conservative manifestation of this view in public policy, where engagement in paid-work is declared a moral imperative and assigned an important socialising function, and everybody is encouraged to work if they are deemed capable. This optimistic view of employment is rendered problematic by the Marxist critique of actual forms of work, which has explored the degradation of work by the division, routinisation and alien goals of labour in capitalist societies. According to criteria developed by the sociologist Stanley Parker, the typical ‘bad job’ is characterised by repetitiveness, intangibility caused by an excessive division of labour, a sense of the job as socially useless or meaningless, job insecurity and a feeling of being too closely supervised (Parker, 1971: 49). In the experiences of the participants interviewed here, employment had indeed contained elements of Parker’s typical ‘bad job’. Their previous employment had not caused them to feel functionally integrated into society, but had led to detached forms of behaviour, as they withdrew their hearts and minds from the world of work.

Looking more closely at participants’ complaints about work, the data revealed a whole host of complaints about working. Some of these pertained to the fundamental nature of the job or work-tasks themselves, whilst others pertained to the irritations of the working environment, the structure of the working day, and the behaviour of

colleagues and bosses. Many participants, for example, said that they grew tired of their jobs because they had been over-supervised. Some used dynamic verbs and bleak imagery to paint an ugly picture of their previous workplaces as hostile and claustrophobic environments. At work one is ‘compressed’ (Mike), ‘controlled’ (Emma), ‘forced’ (Jack), ‘watched from behind’ (Adam), ‘pinned in... like a battery hen’ (Anne) or dominated by a ‘big beast’ (Ffion). The sense of subjugation that participants felt was greatest in workplaces that were intensively managed by surveillance technologies. Lucy, for example, reflected at length on the differences between working in a local shop and working in an out-of-town department store. She said that the rules had been tight in both jobs but described the authority she encountered at the department store as ‘more impersonal’. Her break times were automatically tracked by a clocking machine and the penalty for being over a minute late returning from a break was a half-an-hour pay dock. Lucy said ‘nobody had the right amount of lunch ‘cos they were just too scared’. Nikki reported a similar experience in her first full-time job at a call-centre. Nikki said that her workstation would not only time and record her toilet breaks, but would also log a report if she was as little as one second late arriving at her desk in the morning, or returning from her lunch-break. At the end of each afternoon, Nikki received a personal report assigning her a rating based on her productivity for the day. It was also customary for Nikki’s managers to randomly monitor customer phone-calls, causing her to feel under constant supervision. In the above cases, surveillance technologies had left participants feeling distrusted and vulnerable in their workplaces.

In other cases participants were frustrated not by management but by their peers. The office environment in particular was seen as a place characterised by ‘politics’, ‘bitchiness’ and ‘rubbish’ (Helen), or by rivalries, alliances and ‘all that shit’ (Sally). Anne described ex-colleagues as ‘back-stabbing bastards’ and, similarly, Matthew complained that at work ‘everybody just didn’t have a nice word to say about nobody’. Jack eloquently expressed a belief shared by a number of his *TIF* friends when he described the workplace as an ‘artificial community’. Whereas true communities ‘are based on shared values’ and ‘happen organically’, in work ‘people are there just because they wanna pay their rent or their mortgage and everything else’. Though Jack said he got along amicably with his workmates, he did not see

them as close friends because true friendships are more freely chosen. In the above cases, work had not helped the participants feel more socially integrated since the relationships encountered in workplace were seen as rivalrous or artificial.

These surface complaints about work were a common focal point in each interview, but perhaps had less influence on the participants' break-points than more fundamental objections to the nature and overall meaning of work tasks themselves. One of the most common issues raised in the interviews concerned the deficit of *meaning* in the jobs that participants had done. Each participant felt that their past labours lacked a valuable purpose and had not therefore been worthy of their time. As the case studies show, when participants complained about a lack of meaning in their work, they were sometimes commenting on the intangible or trifling nature of their own specific work tasks, with respect to the goals of their company as a whole, and at other times were making a broader value-judgement about the social importance of their general occupation. Recall Lucy's description, for example, of the crushing monotony and relative pointlessness of her last retail job, in which she would spend most of her day arranging cushions for display on the shop floor according to the meticulous standards set by her boss. Samantha – though she had experienced jobs with a higher status and skill level than many of the other participants– seemed to have felt comparably bored. Although her job as a patent attorney was skilled, Samantha compared it to 'a big game'. Like even the most challenging games, the outcome ultimately felt inconsequential: 'I felt like I was just doing hard Sudoku puzzles every day for a living... As with a Sudoku puzzle, it just felt like a mental exercise. The only end goal was money' (Samantha). Samantha's example illustrates that even if a job is technically demanding and requires skill, it will not necessarily be experienced as meaningful. Doing tasks that they felt to be meaningless on a daily basis made some participants feel less than human. Pointless work was described as 'like having your soul sucked out' (Anne) or 'experiencing soul death' (Helen).

Given the small sample size and clear bias of the sample, it would not be valid to extrapolate from participants' negative experiences of work to gain any kind of overview of work experiences in late capitalism. The participants' accounts do however corroborate the low estimation of work (as 'mostly awful', according to

Levitas (2001: 451)) held by critical sociologists. Furthermore, several of the accounts can be analysed as a consequence of a more general process of rationalisation in the sphere of work (summarised in chapter one). A number of participants who worked in semi-skilled white-collar jobs, for example, complained about the effects of deskilling on their work-satisfaction (e.g. Nikki, Helen, Rachel and Jack). Larry perhaps provided the richest description, reflecting at length on the changes he had witnessed in his many years as a social worker. He was nostalgic for a time where he was permitted the autonomy to work on a social-work case from start to finish, getting to know the client's needs and feeling like he was making a tangible contribution to their well-being. He explained how the organisation of the job had changed so that each social worker now did narrower, more routine tasks across a larger number of cases. Larry said his role increasingly revolved around administration and complained that his job was 'not satisfying at all now really'. His work was increasingly fragmented and he felt he had been dispossessed of the freedom to make discretionary choices about the best course of action for his clients. He complained that the wisdom gained from his years of experience on the job was redundant: 'your experience is less valued than... your typing speed'. It was also difficult for him to meaningfully relate to his clients when the division of labour had distanced him from their experiences. As a conscientious man, Larry had found this distressing because his daily experience of work had become one of wading through administrative tasks with impatience and resentment, even though he was deeply aware that the papers on his desk pertained to people who had 'quite pressing emotional needs or crises' (Larry). As a consequence of the changes he described, Larry had developed a purely instrumental relationship with his work and, since our interview, has signed off work due to stress. Whilst he provides an isolated example, it is easy to recognise in his account many of the basic sociological concerns surrounding the rationalisation and 'illegibility' of modern forms of work.

If several participants' negative work experiences were symptoms of the rationalisation of work, others' experiences can perhaps be interpreted as a consequence of a broader economic problem, namely, the mismanagement of individual talent (Brown, 2003; 2004). Several participants, for example, described a misalignment between their individual skills and the nature of the jobs that they were

able to find. Many expressed a strong belief in the principle that people should be able to engage in work that utilises their individual strengths and skills. Jack for example said: 'I think it's important that if you're gonna do something, you do something that maps on to your particular talents y'know... You can't put a square peg in a round hole'. These participants nevertheless told me that, despite trying, it had not always been possible to find appropriate jobs. Adam – a skilled computer programmer with aspirations to design his own systems – had eventually settled for a job in a large programming company, where he was disappointed by the scope of his work. Emma – a painter – had grudgingly settled for a job *selling* paint in a shop. She said, 'I could be utilised somewhere and I haven't been'. Anne – a keen photographer – found herself in a job where she 'spent most of the day collating share prices', and Samantha, who possessed a science PhD, was frustrated that she had not been able to find a role that truly utilised her specialised knowledge. Finally, Helen, who possessed a degree in Business Studies, worked in various administrative jobs, in which she had always felt 'too clever' for the work.

We must be cautious in interpreting these work experiences as proof of a structural economic problem, since I did not investigate how hard the participants tried to find jobs that mapped onto their skills. It nevertheless seems possible that the graduate participants who complained about their over-qualification for work (Helen, Rhys, Adam and Samantha) were experiencing a broader economic problem of labour market congestion. Phillip Brown has suggested that a symptom of this congestion is the 'opportunity trap', in which the high supply of skilled graduates is insufficiently mirrored by market demand for skilled roles (Brown, 2003). Widening access to, and increasing fees for, higher education are policies justified according to the belief that individuals with higher credentials are presented with greater opportunities in the labour market. But Brown has argued that this ideal unravels in the context of the 'opportunity trap', and that the shift to skilled knowledge-based work upon which the widening access agenda rests has been greatly exaggerated. Brown states the problem plainly:

The mass ranks of the middle classes and those from aspirational working-class families have high hopes of what the knowledge economy has to offer, fuelled by the expansion of higher education... The problem is that the labour

market cannot keep pace with social expectations of work, rewards and status. (Brown, 2003: 150)

The expansion of higher education exaggerates what Merton referred to as the cultural ‘frame of aspirational reference’ (Merton, 1938), producing a potentially anomic situation in which qualified individuals who aspire to challenging and meaningful work may find themselves disappointed with the available job opportunities. In the present study, those who possessed specialised skills or a higher education aspired to do meaningful and stimulating work but doubted they would ever find this in the form of a conventional paid job. Their break-points perhaps represented the moment at which they responded to this problem by refocusing their ambitions elsewhere.

In sum, negative experiences in employment represented one of the major motivating factors in the decision to disconnect from work. Participants complained about their workplaces and colleagues but, more fundamentally, about the lack of meaning in their previous jobs. Whilst some could not identify with the overall goals of their work, others felt their roles had been deskilled or struggled to find work that utilised their talents. The excited concentration, the lost sense of time passing, or the ‘glow of contributing’ (Gerald) one may experience when engaging in satisfying work were not things that they had experienced, or necessarily believed they *could* experience in paid-employment.

In the Shadow of Work

When discussing their break-points, as well as focussing on their negative experiences in employment, participants revealed the growing intolerability of a life in which even the content of non-working time seemed to be coloured by the emotional and practical demands of employment. Their concerns in this area reflect those of critical sociologists who, as I introduced in chapter one, have often mourned the shrinking scope for anti-utilitarian, purposeless, or contemplative activity, as life is instead increasingly governed by productivity (for example, Russell, 1967; Lafargue, 1975; McCracken, 2004). This set of concerns has sometimes been discussed in terms of

the speed of modern life. Recollecting the work of Paul Lafargue, for example, Darier referred to the modern tendency for ‘constant busyness’ and the typical ‘busy self’ of modernity (Darier, 1998: 193). Horkheimer also made the observation that ‘everyone is always busy’, and discussed the difficulty of maintaining a slower pace of life whilst remaining economically secure (Horkheimer, 1974: 26). The participants shared these concerns, and many expressed a desire to go about their lives ‘more slowly’ when discussing their break-point. In their quest for a more refined *ars vitae* or ‘work-life balance’ they were sensitive to the effects of employment on the quantity and quality of their free-time. Free-time was seen as precious and difficult to secure, and participants were discerning with regards to what sorts of time they were willing to classify as truly free. In the interests of clarity, I will refer to the ‘authentically free time’ that participants sought as ‘discretionary time’ (Goodin et al, 2008), though of course this begs the question: when is time truly our own, ‘authentically free’ or ‘discretionary’ in character?

A number of critical social theorists have attempted to pin down an adequate definition of discretionary time by making certain semantic distinctions. DeGrazia, for example, made a distinction between ordinary ‘free-time’ and real ‘leisure’, the latter representing an ideal and difficult-to-achieve ‘state of being’ (DeGrazia, 1962: 7-8). Adorno made the same distinction between the mundane phenomenon of ‘free-time’, whose quality is largely determined by the productive demands of capitalism, and true ‘leisure’, which can only be experienced by persons who are unencumbered by pressing economic and time constraints (Adorno, 2001: 187). Curiously, whilst Marcuse also questioned the space for discretionary time, his definitions were the reverse of those used by DeGrazia and Adorno. For Marcuse, ‘free-time’ is the rarity and it is ‘leisure’ that ‘thrives in industrial society, but... is unfree to the extent to which it is administered by business and politics’ (Marcuse, 2002: 52). With regards to the present research, though I did not directly prompt participants to answer the question of when their time is truly their own, most contemplated it at length, and their views require some unpacking.

Firstly, in evaluating their work-life balance, those participants who remained employed stressed that not all of their time outside the workplace was free from work.

Several described an uphill battle to ‘keep [work] out of the house’ (Terry) and lamented that much of their non-working time was taken up by work-related obligations such as doing paperwork at home, commuting, or preparing food and clothing for the next working day. As well as these work-related obligations, participants discussed their non-work obligations – those domestic activities which they took no pleasure in doing such as washing clothes or doing the shopping. Such activities occupied an undesirable grey area between ‘work’ and ‘life’. These apparently mundane accounts of daily activity are interesting since it is in each participant’s thoroughness as they talk about where work ends and life begins, that we can sense the strength of their desire for discretionary time. There is a hierarchy of activities that precede genuine freedom from necessity that includes not only the time the participant sells to an employer, but also a range of work-related and non-work-related obligations (Parker, 1972: 25-7; Goodin et al, 2008: 4-5).

Participants also regarded their time outside work as unfree in other ways. The critical sociologist, Lodziak, doubted the utility of the shards of free-time left behind by a full-time work schedule. Time outside employment generally comes in the form of brief periods of fragmented time, such as the evenings, the weekend or the holidays. Lodziak noted the limited utility of fragmented time for the development of new skills or for engagement in activities that demand concentration, application or dedication (Lodziak, 2002: 100). The fragmented free-time he described is certainly not conducive to the varied or multi-active lifestyles to which participants in the present study aspired. Many participants complained about the limited utility of the pockets of time that bracket the working day since, in their previous experiences, time outside the workplace had often been dominated by fatigue and stressful thoughts about work. Anne, for example, said that when she worked full-time she grew fed up of being ‘shattered’, and Jack too said he had reached a point in his old full-time job where he was completely ‘sapped’ and ‘burned-out’ and ‘always recovering from work’ (Jack). Even though he had shortened his hours, Terry also said he didn’t ‘really *do* anything with the extra time *really*, apart from recuperate’. Similarly, Lucy reflected on the low utility of her non-working time during her job in the department store:

Saturday I'd work four til eight which is horrible because it's at four o'clock and I just couldn't do *anything* cos I was just depressed that I had to go to work that night. (Lucy)

When Lucy would work a shift starting at eleven in the morning:

Loads of people would say like, 'aren't you happy 'cos you get a lay in'?, and I'm thinking 'well *no*, I don't get to do anything because I start at eleven, there's not much you c- you can't just go out and do whatever you like'. (Lucy)

The participants' recollections of full-time working underline the recuperative needs generated by employment, especially when the job in question is experienced as stressful or tiring. Just as time spent performing chores and work-related obligations cannot be considered discretionary, nor can time spent recuperating from work. As Adorno argues, the free-will that people are afforded in their free-time is not free at all if it is guided by the forces they are seeking to escape (Adorno, 2001: 188). A number of participants said that when in employment, they regretted their need to subordinate the activities to which they attached greater value to their need to rest. Terry, for example, said he liked to read, but was usually too tired:

I do like to do other things you know, but I think, often you're quite braindead... I do find it quite tiring at the end of the day... I don't do much reading because I've had enough of that screen. (Terry)

Jack on the other hand, who also remained in employment, expressed a desire to write and to go walking in his free-time. In reality, however:

I find that come the weekend I don't feel inclined to actually *do* very much... and also when I get home in the evening as well, it's not so much tiredness but just my response to being made to do things between certain hours... so I just stop, or I go to the pub and drink lots of real ale. (Jack)

In cases such as these, a qualitative distinction was made between free-time productively spent, and free-time lost to those activities that merely help the participant escape from the pressures of work. In making this distinction, participants disclosed their desire to be productive non-workers. Three participants applied this distinction in a broader evaluation of British culture, explaining the nation's partiality

for binge drinking as a result of people's dissatisfaction with work: 'that's just people escaping the nine-to-five' (Jack). This is an observation that participants share with Engels, who also observed the expenditure of leisure time on 'too much gin' and chasing the girls in his study of the English working class, suggesting that this was an inevitable response to the monotony of work. The increase of vice that was so reviled by the middle classes in the industrialising society was actually of their own producing, the mechanisation of work lauded by the bourgeoisie inevitably leading the labourer to seek refuge in carnal pleasures rather than what Engels, albeit rather superciliously, termed 'intellectual activities' (Engels, 1987: 133-4).

In sum, a number of participants' break-points were informed by the unhappy realisation that much of their non-work time was not truly their own but was in fact dead-time, spent recuperating from work or fulfilling the economic, social and biological obligations that belong to the realm of necessity, and thus preclude discretionary time. The most satisfying definition of discretionary time is perhaps offered by Hannah Arendt who, without the semantic fuss of distinctions between 'leisure' and 'free-time', lamented the shrinking space for time in which individuals transcend biological and economic necessities to become 'free for the world and its culture' (Arendt, 1977: 205). It is this sort of time many participants sought more of in their retreat from employment.

Life is Not Business

In chapter one I highlighted the concern that, as capitalist economies continue to expand, there is a shrinking space for those intrinsically valuable activities which do not have a biological or economic purpose. A number of critical social theorists have suggested that life is becoming synonymous with business, the impetus of 'employability' turning into economic assets those activities that are most meaningful when performed as ends in themselves (learning being a prime example). In *Reclaiming Work* (1999), Gorz summarised many of the concerns I discussed in chapter one, yet his theory of resistance posited that the commercialisation of everyday life can never be total. Citing 'Generation X' as an example, he argued that

commercialisation will always be met with a degree of subjective resistance, producing the desire to counter-balance employment with self-determined activities (Gorz, 1999: 63). This resistance is clear in the present dataset where, in some cases, the break-point was partly informed by the participant's growing intolerance of the commercialisation of everyday life. In a context where more daily activities can be said to have an external economic purpose, participants were notable for their emphasis on the intrinsic value of time for living, and for their defence of certain activities as meaningful ends in themselves. They embodied an exception to Russell's observation that 'modern man thinks everything ought to be done for the sake of something else, and never for its own sake' (Russell, 1967: 234). The activities in the foreground of their lives were the ones performed not for economic reasons, but for a sense of mastery, personal development or simple enjoyment. Many participants gave lengthy and enthusiastic accounts of their personal interests (which I will look at more closely in chapter six) and were comfortable defining themselves in terms of these self-determined activities – as nature enthusiasts, mountain climbers, computer buffs, writers, cooks or painters. Like Adorno, participants did not believe that such activities should be dismissed as mere 'diversions', 'hobbies' or 'pastimes' (Adorno, 2001; 189). These activities were self-defining, and a number of participants said they saw little sense in working hard in the present to enjoy them later in life:

Life is short and you never know when it's coming to an end, and I'm doing the things I wanna do and appreciating the things that are worth appreciating.
(Mike)

Don't work your ass off so that you can have a good time when you're old.
(Helen)

In keeping with their quiet rebellion against the commercialisation of everyday life, a number of participants also stressed the intrinsic value of learning. Matthew, for example, said that he had a 'sacred' view of learning and complained that it was being seen 'more as a means to getting a job'. He resented the fact that teaching hours on his course at university had been devoted to careers advice:

To have careers officers comin' in is basically just saying, 'this education's only for a job, do the three years, regurgitate all the stuff you've learnt, forget about it, get a job'. (Matthew)

Similarly, Jack said he didn't like the idea that one goes to school, 'always studying for a job'. Jack was a well-read and intelligent man, but said he had never bothered going to university for this reason. Emma also said she found it 'sad' that people would choose what to learn and what to occupy them based on its currency in the labour market:

People doin' a course just because of employment rather than their heart – do you know what I'm sayin'? People who say you should do this because it's the best thing for the economy or for your workin' life. (Emma)

Emma realised that her personal decision to pursue painting had made her life practically difficult, but she was motivated by her sincere belief in its value. She said 'I've been an artist all my life since I was a little kid, it's *in me*. I can't just go and pretend and get a job in an office 'cos that's what – the only thing that's gonna feed me'. Rachel was perhaps similar to Emma in that she used a lot of her extra time to gain knowledge and skills. She had vowed to take up a new activity every year and thus far had learned cookery, psychotherapy, yoga and samba drumming in her discretionary time. She said she was excited about the prospect of what she might learn next. There is a particular tacit understanding of what it means to be successful in these accounts. Success is not tied with material wealth or social status but with what Gorz calls the development of human capacities (Gorz, 2010: 23). Samantha described it as the difference between focussing your life on the 'externally recognisable stuff' and striving for 'personal enrichment'. For the above participants success is something internal and personal, tied to self-mastery and an appreciation of culture. In sum, a growing intolerance for the commercialisation of everyday life, or of the conversion of life into business, represents another way in which participants rationalised their break-point.

Self-Care

In discussing the frustrations that shaped the participants' break-points, I have suggested that participants made a *voluntary* decision to reduce their working hours or give up working. However, it would be problematic to think of their decisions as

entirely voluntary since those who suffered from health complaints were, to a certain extent, compelled to turn away from work in the interests of a tolerable daily existence. Terry, for example, had suffered with stress, Rachel with anxiety and panic attacks, and Paul with symptoms usually associated with depression. Adam said he suffered from fatigue and had struggled to get through an eight-hour day in his previous job. Matthew also described employment as having ‘messed up’ Lucy, and Lucy agreed that she had felt very ‘run down’ when she had been working. Emma suffered quite severely from Irritable Bowel Syndrome, which made working very difficult and, finally, Anne said she suffered from a form of anaemia, as well as numerous food allergies, meaning that she required more sleep than average, as well as a high level of control over her diet. In several of the above cases, work was cited as one of the causes of ill-health. Like the non-workers interviewed by Leff and Haft, a number of participants in the present study had come to the conclusion that ‘to be free from the demands and routines of working is, in fact, essential to their well-being’ (Leff and Haft, 1983: 393). The standard nine-to-five working week was described as ‘unnatural’ (Jack), ‘unhealthy’ (Cheryl) and ‘inhumane’ (Mike).

People put all of this importance into these jobs that make people feel like *crap* at the end of the day. (Matthew)

In the cases where participants experienced a health complaint, the decision to work less was formulated as a way of accessing the time and autonomy required to take care of themselves and to be more ‘hygienic’. In his critique of both the toxicity of capitalism and the medicalisation of the individual in *Ecology as Politics* (1980), Gorz developed the concept of hygiene. Under Gorz’s definition, hygiene represents more than the mundane habits of cleanliness referred to in a conventional meaning. Hygiene is instead likened to an ‘art of living’ and refers to the entire practice of self-care, or ‘the comprehensive set of rules that people observe *by themselves* to maintain or recover their health’ (Gorz, 1980: 151, emphasis in original). Gorz believed that ‘fragmented wage labour and market relationships destroy the individual’s autonomy and capability to take care of his or her own life, health [and] ills’ (Gorz, 1980: 151). Echoing Gorz’s argument, many participants in the present study believed that, by reducing working hours and gaining control over their time, they could foster a more nurturing relationship with their minds and bodies – to rest, eat, sleep, and to mentally

and physically exercise as required. In spite of the difficulties that arose in turning away from work (described in the following chapters), all participants (with the exception of Emma) reported a marked improvement in their well-being after reducing their hours:

You have a better – a healthier *mental* well-being, and *physical* well-being I feel and, y’know, even *sexual* well-being because there’s not those time restraints as well. (Cheryl)

I didn’t realise how much I was sufferin’ from stress ‘til it was all over really. I think I immediately felt physically better and it was a weight lifted if that makes sense. (Clive)

I enjoy my hobbies and I feel much *better* in myself, more *comfortable* in myself. (Rachel)

The definition of how ‘healthy’ a person is depends on what we understand by ‘ordinary functioning’ (Olin Wright, 2010: 14). The term ‘incapacity’, for example, includes an evaluation of health which tacitly assumes that individuals are ordinarily capable of engaging in employment; those who cannot are deemed unwell, sub-normal, or disabled. By contrast, participants disputed the idea that a full-time working schedule was a reasonable characteristic of ‘ordinary functioning’. Indeed, as accounts of their well-being suggest, their own health conditions, whilst not desirable, appeared to be manageable in a day-to-day context, and only really emerged as personal impediments in relation to the expectation that they engage in full-time paid-work. By excluding full-time work from their understanding of ‘ordinary functioning’, participants were able to take control of their daily rhythms and feel more healthy.

It is notable that participants chose to reject, rather than tolerate or attempt to adapt to, the work which they believed was toxic to their health. This demonstrates a strong ethic of self-care within the sample. What is also notable is that most of the participants with health complaints made no attempt to have their felt need to spend less time in employment socially approved and financially resourced in the form of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Participants like Lucy, Paul, Terry, and Rachel for example – as people with materially modest lifestyles – would have

certainly benefited from ESA, yet chose not to seek it. There are a number of possible explanations for this. One is that participants may have believed (quite realistically) that their chances of successfully claiming ESA were slim. The latest welfare policies are indeed increasingly expanding their definition of impairments and illnesses which must be 'tolerated as a part of normal everyday working life', as opposed to those which 'allow access to disability categories' (Williams, 2010: 181-2). Health complaints of an emotional nature, which may fluctuate in their severity and be difficult for their sufferers to articulate, are also less likely (than musculoskeletal complaints for example) to be recognised as illnesses in ESA interviews and medical assessments. A more compelling explanation for participants' decision to 'idle' rather than claim ESA, however, is that they were engaged in a moral struggle to resist the medicalisation of their experiences. Talking about the felt need for a break from employment, Gorz observed that:

To be socially acceptable, [a] cry for help must take the form of an organic disorder – exogenous and independent of the patient's will. You would have no chance at all of getting your boss or supervisor to listen to you if you said 'I can't go on; I'm losing sleep, my appetite, my interest in sex; I don't have energy for anything anymore. Give me a week off.' To be acceptable, your "I can't go on" must take the form of a somatic difficulty, of some impeachment beyond your control – in short, an illness justifying a medical exemption. (Gorz, 1980: 174)

As Gorz suggests, if employment is causing a person to break-down or burn-out, that person must deliberately 'medicalise' or 'somatise' their feeling of dis-ease in order to apply for an official exemption from duty. Those who opt to play this game, if they are unable to convince society that they really suffer from an organic disorder, run the risk of being labelled welfare cheats. A more generous interpretation of certain people who apply for ESA is that they are responding in a reasonable fashion to the degradation of work or poor labour market opportunities, and are involved in a form of resistance or an assertion of their autonomy. Interpreting the high rate of incapacity claimants in the ex-industrial communities of South Wales, for example, Gareth Williams suggested that 'incapacity can be partly understood as a way of preserving respect, a sense of belonging and attachment, and a basic income against the degradations of new forms of work' (Williams, 2010: 198). Furthermore, people

who experience an illness and claim ESA often carry on leading active leisure lives because, whilst they cannot tolerate pain at work, they are willing to tolerate it in order to do the things that they love. Many of the present participants, however, went a step further in their resistance because they were not prepared to play the game that Gorz describes in order to escape from work, i.e. they refused to surrender their self-understanding to a biomedical discourse.

For example, whilst several participants did not feel they could sustain a satisfying level of well-being whilst in full-time employment, they remained unprepared to admit that they were disabled, sub-normal or the victims of a 'health disorder'. Emma, for example, insisted 'I'm not *disabled* y'know, I've got a stomach problem!' Like Emma, other participants used a vernacular rather than a medical language to describe their health complaints. Lucy described many of the symptoms of what, in psychological terminology, might be labelled as agoraphobia, yet she resisted using this term to describe herself. Other participants such as Terry, Rachel, Clive or Paul described their 'tiredness', their 'stress', or their reluctance 'to do very much' after a day's work, but also resisted the use of reified biomedical labels such as 'depression', as well as their associated allopathic treatments. Participants seemed to regard their health complaints less as bona fide 'health conditions' in need of medical attention and more as personal idiosyncrasies that could and should be adequately managed with self-care. In sum, reducing hours on an individual basis (as opposed to simply putting up with work or applying for ESA) was a way of accessing the time and autonomy required for participants to live by the habits that allowed them to feel well, and to do so without surrendering their self-understanding to reifying medical categories. 'Idling' represented a morally chosen alternative to both full-time working and ESA; a lifestyle in which participants could feel normal rather than 'sick', and a lifestyle that they could feel proud of because it was characterised by autonomy rather than dependency.

Social Contribution

I wish to discuss one final rationale for the participants' break-points, namely, their desire to spend more time doing 'socially worthwhile' activities. Firstly, it is crucial

to once again stress the active nature of each participant's non-working life. Their rejection of the work ethic had caused many participants to be morally denigrated as feckless and lazy people with little to socially contribute (I will explore this denigration further in chapter seven). Against such stereotypes, however, it is important to note that each participant was by no means averse to work (in the broader or anthropological sense of the term, which includes activities other than paid-employment). This was demonstrated, for example, in the eagerness of a number of the self-defined idlers to distinguish themselves from Andrew – a member of *TIF* who was notorious for his daft and overly literal interpretation of 'idleness'. Andrew was described as a stubborn defender of the virtues of 'doing nothing', and many of his fellow members resented his affiliation with *TIF*, seeing his views as a radical misinterpretation of what they meant by 'idleness':

It's not necessarily about *not* working... I'm just opposed to doing mindless work which isn't rewarding in any way. (Jack)

I don't think that work is bad in itself if it's something you want to do. (Helen)

It's perfectly acceptable to work... but one of the things we're trying to promote is working in a way that you enjoy. (Anne)

Each participant had made their alternative lifestyle choices not only in order to escape from employment (as Andrew did), but also in order to nurture a set of alternative priorities that were deemed more worthy than the goals of employment.

One of the more prominent reasons participants gave for shortening their working hours, for example, was that they wanted to devote themselves more fully to their families. Lucy drew a contrast between her own marriage and the relationship between her parents:

They never *see* each other. My mum works in the day and my dad works in the night, I mean what kind of *relationship* is that? ... They never *talk* it's just, they get home, watch the telly – so *no* that, that – the *marriage* would be so much more important to me (Lucy)

By not working, Lucy felt she was able to have a richer relationship with her husband Matthew, and as a couple they went for walks, talked, and played games together on a daily basis. She also valued the time at her disposal to help him through the stress he was experiencing. Like Lucy, Gerald and Sally also believed overwork was a threat to their relationship, finding that they were not able to sustain their marriage with them both doing professional jobs on a full-time basis. They blamed job pressure for the stress they had experienced and their previous lack of patience with one another. When questioned separately, they both pinpointed the exact same moment when their views on employment began to change (Gerald even offered to look up the date in his diary). The couple recall a climactic argument, after which Gerald had said to Sally:

Look, we're gonna have to work out a plan for this because we're either gonna be dead or in the divorce court. It's not worth it, not worth it, we're making money and going around like important people but it's not worth it. (Gerald)

Both of these couples had concluded that they could not satisfy their marital aspirations with full-time jobs and had eventually decided to put their relationships first.

As well as dedication to their partners, a number of participants also discussed dedication to the care of their children. Dedication to one's children can of course be expressed by earning the money needed to support them, yet in their discussions of childcare, participants emphasised the importance of spending time rather than money. Ben for example, talked about the effect that the birth of his children had on his commitment to work. He recalls conversations he'd had whilst having lunch in the café with the lads from work:

I kept hearing stories y'know of these guys just spending so much time working, 'cos the money was good, so that in the future they could have this *happiness* y'know, um, but then I think 'they're not seein' their families', as they all had children y'know... and some were quite blatant and said 'don't make the same mistakes I did' y'know, 'spend time with your children.' (Ben)

Ben complained his children would often be asleep in bed, both when he left for and returned from work, and so had reduced his hours and got a job closer to home in order to remedy this. A number of participants had also ranked the care of their

elderly parents ahead of the need to work. Larry's mother had passed away several months before our interview, and his father was also unwell. He said he was glad of his reduced hours because his situation had allowed him to spend a bit more time with his dad. Rachel also said that her mum's health was 'failing', describing herself as 'a bit like her [mum's] co-ordinator really in terms of making sure she's gone to the doctors or the dentist or the opticians'. It was important to Rachel that her relationship with her mum went beyond a merely functional one, and that she spent time getting to *know* her mum in her final years. Similarly, Anne spent a lot of her time looking after her disabled father. She described caring for him as 'a constant round of doing all the cooking, all the cleaning, all the shopping'. She talked affectionately about her dad and it seemed important to her that she personally care for him rather than rely on care professionals. Samantha summarised the feeling of a number of participants:

If something happened to anyone in my family, I'd like to have the personal freedom in the future to be able to travel and be with them, for as long as I want to. (Samantha)

As the case studies have shown, as well as caring for their families, many participants also spent their time engaging in numerous forms of volunteer work, and several expressed a desire to take their volunteering further should it become practically feasible. Three participants, for example, said they did favours for their infirm neighbours. Two other participants also volunteered at local youth centres. Of all the participants, Cheryl perhaps had the most impressive credentials when it came to volunteering, helping out in a charity shop, hosting a hospital radio show, and working for NACOA¹⁹. Cheryl was also politically active, and regularly spoke at numerous Green events throughout the year. The time available for political activities was indeed also stressed by many at *TIF*. Many of those whom I met during my field visits said they valued the time available to go to political talks and rallies, and to keep themselves informed of current affairs, where others might be too tired from work to bother. Four participants (Cheryl, Ben, Ffion and Rhys) also stressed the value of the social contribution that they were making by consuming less and living in a more environmentally conscientious way.

¹⁹ National Association for Children of Alcoholics

The political emphasis on ‘workfare’ policies (discussed in chapter two), and on employment as a socialising, morally nourishing role to which all who are physically capable of working should aspire, places overwhelming value on paid-employment as the primary, socially recognised method of making a social contribution. By contrast, the value of contributions that do not produce goods or services for the market is downplayed. When asked, every participant in the present study agreed that it was important to make a social contribution but negotiated the definition of ‘contribution’ to include a range of activities outside paid-work. Many believed paid employment contained limited opportunities to make a meaningful impact on the world and instead stressed the importance of family care, voluntary work, political activities or, in a few cases, the social value of a more conscientious relationship with the environment. Their emphasis on the importance of social contributions other than paid-work contributed to their break-points by further sharpening the dissonance between the lives to which they aspired, and the lives which they had actually lived before reducing their hours.

Summary - A ‘Worthwhile Ethic’

In the present chapter I have been concerned with the participants’ ‘break-points’ – a term I have borrowed from Lefkowitz’s research into the voluntarily jobless in America in the 1970s (Lefkowitz, 1979). I began by describing the break-point as a rupture in the participant’s biography, whereby the participant gained a sense of the future as an open possibility, experiencing a strong need to escape the full-time working lifestyle. In keeping with Berger and Pullberg’s theory of dereification (Berger and Pullberg, 1965), it was observed that these pivotal moments, in which accustomed cultural beliefs and social roles were challenged, were always caused by ‘times of trouble’. Negative experiences of frustration or ill-health jolted participants off ‘autopilot’ and into a state of earnest reflection upon their hopes and aspirations, and upon the options that were available to them. I then moved on to explore the sense of malaise that led to participants’ break-points. The data demonstrates that a range of factors contributed to the growing intolerability of participants’ lives, prior to the reduction of working hours. Paid-jobs were often felt to be boring, meaningless,

or too easy, relative to participants' personal aspirations and skills. Each participant also expressed their dissatisfaction with the quality of the non-working time that had punctuated their full-time working lifestyles which, in their experience, had often been spent anticipating or recuperating from work, rather than performing the activities they deemed most worthwhile. Several participants also discussed the specific health complaints that had made it difficult for them to work on a full-time basis. In such cases, working less or giving up work provided them with the autonomy required to better take care of themselves.

What I hope to have revealed is a nuanced picture of the various rationalisations and experiences that inform the decision to turn away from work. Perhaps the most crucial insight that emerges from the analysis is the emphatically *moral* nature of the participants' resistance to work. The participants defied the usual derogative and conservative stereotypes of those who choose to work less – as feckless and amoral layabouts, simply too lazy to work. Such disrespect derives from a lack of understanding regarding the diversity of those who are rejecting work, and the aspirations and values that motivate them. Having reflected upon the reasons participants gave for turning away from work, it is clear that their motivations are often profoundly moral in character, and that participants are anything but lazy. They have rejected the work ethic and have replaced it with what David Cannon, in his study on 'Generation X', calls a 'worthwhile ethic' (here summarised by Bowring):

They have a personal agenda that is more important than that of the organisation they work for, and they may be motivated by a sense of ethical value or genuine social utility – a 'worthwhile ethic' rather than a work ethic (Bowring in Gorz, 1999: 61)

This worthwhile ethic is based not on the duty to perform paid-employment, but stresses the meaning and social value of work performed outside the confines of a job. It is based on the intrinsic value of activities other than work. It is based on care for oneself and for others. Such moral values sharpened the contrast between the lives that the participants wanted to live, and the lives that they really lived before reducing their hours. As they approached their break-points, many began to feel that what was demanded of them in their social roles was simply *wrong*.

The idea that those who are turning away from work may often lead very active and morally responsible lives is a significant departure from a conventional political understanding of the jobless as morally rudderless, or as a moral threat. The present findings indicate the need for a revision in the basic assumptions that inform work-related social policies. The findings presented here also call for a more nuanced understanding of joblessness in the sociological literature. As I argued in chapter two, whilst research in this area has been highly valuable in its sensitivity to the difficult experiences of the unemployed, it has often subscribed to the moralisation of paid-work, or over-generalised the negative experiences of unemployment (Cole, 2007; 2008). Such errors are complicit in the stagnation of work-related social policy and the lack of interest in genuine alternatives to the work society. I will address these wider implications of the present chapter's key findings in chapter eight. Firstly, however, in the following chapters, I will turn my attention to the material and the moral barriers that limited participants' attempts to work less, exploring the difficulties that participants experienced, as well as the strategies that they used in order to overcome them.

CHAPTER 6

CONSUMING LESS

In the previous chapter I explored the rationalities and experiences that had shaped the participants' break-points. What remains to be explored, however, are the practical problems entailed in resisting work. This will be the unifying theme of the present chapter, and the next, where I will move beyond the break-point to look at the barriers that were encountered by participants in their attempts to reduce working hours. As well as looking at the problems that the participants reported, I will also explore the strategies, values, and practises that helped them maintain their alternative lifestyles.

Questions surrounding the practicality of turning away from employment arose repeatedly during my fieldwork. When I conducted observation at *TIF's* promotional stall in Cambridge, for example, I found that a significant proportion of visitors to the stall were eager to deal with the question of whether *anyone* can disengage from work or whether, given the practical barriers involved, the option to work less is the preserve of the prosperous. A number of visitors were notably keen to put their points across to the idlers. One person presented the criticism that idling is only for the 'well-off people who've already made it in life'. Accusing the idlers of naivety, another person argued: 'well, in an ideal world I'm sure we'd all *love* to give up work, but we don't live in an ideal world!' Other visitors offered more detailed criticisms, arguing that the freedom to work less depended on the financial resources, as well as the cultural capital (or 'that certain kind of confidence' and 'sense of opportunity') that come with an advantaged upbringing. The most vitriolic critics seemed to view the idlers as the 'idle rich'; as spoiled young men and women whose time-affluent lifestyles were made possible by privilege. This was contrary to *TIF's* aim to present themselves as 'ordinary people' and promote the message that, like them, anyone could reduce their working hours with a degree of determination.

Whilst the *TIF* literature and public event sought to promote the accessibility of the idle lifestyle, when privately interviewed, the majority of participants (be they

affiliated with *TIF* or not) gave a more nuanced account. Virtually all participants raised the issue of barriers to working less, either directly or via recollections of their own difficulties. The only exception was Helen, who denied that there were any significant challenges involved in resisting employment. After conducting Helen's interview, I played back the tape and attempted to summarise our encounter in my field diary:

Helen insisted that 'anyone' can choose to work less. In particular, she attacked the idea that a person's options might be limited by their class position. She talked dismissively, for example, about people who say 'class issues still exist and y'know, it's still an issue, and blah blah blah'. She described such people as 'having a massive chip on their shoulder'. I think that Helen's views were perhaps a product of her anger towards the inaccurate stereotype of idlers as the 'idle rich'. But even though I recognised this at the time, interviewing Helen became demanding. She made it difficult for me to identify with her perspective when she continued to deny the existence of social inequality, arguing that 'everybody [in society] is kind of equal'. Helen understood working less as a choice available to everyone – 'everybody has the intelligence to realise what's important'. Additionally, she characterised those who feared or who were unhappy in their unemployment as 'sad individuals' with a 'weakness of character'.

Helen's dismissive attitude towards *TIF's* critics appeared to derive from her belief that there are no significant social barriers to working less. She found the criticism that only the prosperous can afford to resist work petty. In Helen's view, the challenge of resisting work ends with the dereification of the work-role, since anyone can live happily without work if they are 'intelligent' enough to challenge it, or able to 'think outside the box'. Challenging work was viewed as a simple problem of imagination. This belief underpinned Helen's condemning judgement of those who suffer in their unemployment as 'sad individuals', who lacked the strength-of-character to reap the benefits of their freedom from work. Though Helen did not identify herself as Green, it remains reasonable to apply Anders Hayden's criticism of the Green movement to her views. Hayden noted a tendency for members of the Green movement to blame the victim by forgetting that people are often bound into ways of living that are not of their own choosing (Hayden, 1999: 89).

Helen's comments are worth considering because they represent an extreme standpoint. Her image of a society in which freedom from work is simply 'there for

the taking', is both reductionist and individualistic (and some members of the public even found it offensive), downplaying the challenge of reducing working hours. By contrast, Hayden, in his argument for a politically endorsed and managed programme of work-time reduction, reflected on 'why it's so hard to work less' on an individual basis (Hayden, 1999: 79). Hayden challenges Helen's views by embracing the problem of working less in its full complexity, and demonstrates that even if resistance to work is by no means the preserve of the prosperous, the most socially disadvantaged groups in society are often in no position to challenge work. As well as the problem of people's consciousness of alternatives to the full-time working lifestyle (which I addressed in the last chapter), Hayden recognised a multitude of economic and cultural barriers to working less. Amongst other things, the idea of living better by working fewer hours faces barriers including an ongoing cultural obsession with growth and consumption, a pervasive work ethic, and the commodification of a range of needs (Hayden, 1999: 79).

Following Hayden, my aim, in both this chapter and the next, is to explore the challenge of working less with an appropriate degree of complexity. The challenge of resisting work does not end with the dereification of the work-role, and participants reported a range of practical obstacles in their day-to-day attempts to work less. The first set of challenges I will explore are those related to earning and spending less. Whilst a small minority of participants did not face significant financial challenges because they had past savings to draw on (Gerald and Sally) or still earned a comfortable wage relative to their financial obligations (Adam), for most participants, the reduction of working hours demanded a tangible reduction of consumption. This given, to what extent was it possible for participants to cope and remain happy in their resistance to work?

Consumption, Self-Identity and Social Inclusion

In chapter two I conducted a theoretical discussion of the need to consume, arguing that this would be crucial for interpreting the difficulties that participants were likely to face by opting to work and spend less. In the present chapter I will refer back to

these discussions in light of the research findings. One of the theoretical approaches I introduced in chapter two was the semiotic approach to consumption, generally favoured in cultural studies. To recap, the semiotic approach ‘focuses on the meaningful nature of consumption – its symbolic rather than its material use-value, and... emphasises the significance of consumption for the formation, maintenance and expression of self-identity and lifestyle’ (Lodziak, 2002: 1). In brief, this approach suggests that consumption is a contemporary ‘life-focus’, or plays a crucial role in social integration and selfhood. According to its logic, it would appear that it is not only economic survival that is in jeopardy in a low-income lifestyle, but also a kind of ‘cultural survival’, the individual’s self-esteem and social recognition thwarted by limited access to symbolic goods. The threat of a reduced income from working less, it seems, would be an impaired ability to participate in normatively approved lifestyles.

Bowring observed the connection that sociologists have often made between symbolic consumption and what it means to be a socially included member of society (Bowring, 2000). The work of Peter Townsend, for example, is notable for focussing not only on material inequalities, but also on the distinctively *social* character of exclusion – from living patterns, from customary behaviour, and from the activities that constitute a ‘normal life’ (Townsend, 1979: 31). Zygmunt Bauman also focussed on the cultural aspects of exclusion in his book, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (1998), where he introduced the idea of a ‘new’ form of poverty, defined by its twofold nature as a cultural, as well as material, form of exclusion. Like Townsend, Bauman suggested that ‘poverty means being excluded from whatever passes as a “normal life”’ (Bauman, 1998: 37). The link between consumption and social inclusion was stated plainly by Bauman, who suggested that the ‘normal life’ of late modernity, from which the poor are excluded, is one in which people ‘respond promptly and efficiently to the temptations of the consumer market’ (Bauman, 1998: 90).

The way present-day society shapes up its members is dictated first and foremost by the need to play the role of the consumer, and the norm our society holds up to its members is that of the ability and willingness to play it (Bauman, 1998: 24).

The ‘new poor’ in Bauman’s theory suffer partly because they are seen as ‘flawed consumers’ in the eyes of the majority (Bauman, 1998). In a society in which commodity relations play a key role in the activities, values and lifestyles of most people, ‘inferior purchasing power can lead to stigmatising forms of consumption, non-consumption, or indeed self-production’ (Bowring, 2000: 313). Whilst attempts to understand the hardships of low-income lifestyles are admirable in their sensitivity, I want to suggest that there is a risk in overestimating the significance of symbolic consumption to people’s lives. My own data provides evidence of an alternative sensibility in which the importance of consumption for individual well-being is downplayed.

Lodziak’s central thesis in *The Myth of Consumerism* (2002) indeed suggested that, ironically, the semiotic approach to consumption, whilst aiming to be a theory of the everyday, misrepresents the orientations of most consumers (Lodziak, 2002). He argued that, in emphasising the symbolic value of consumption, the cultural theorist departs from more plausible or common sense understandings of why individuals consume. Lodziak observed the neglect or relegation of the use-value and uncomplicated fun of commodities, where theorists have stressed the aesthetic or connotative relevance of material goods for the individual consumer (Lodziak, 2002: 34). Lodziak also posed the salient question of *who* in society consumes for primarily symbolic reasons. One can appreciate the symbolic utility of goods for identity-conscious youths (such as those studied by Paul Willis for example (1991)) who, in an intense period of self-discovery, seek to distinguish themselves and signal their autonomy to the adult world (Lodziak, 2002: 60). Studies of ‘symbolic communities’ by authors like Cohen (2003) or Hetherington (1992) have also shown how common patterns of symbolic consumption can help furnish a sense of solidarity within marginalised groups. However, according to Lodziak, the tendency in cultural studies to generalise findings from specific ethnographic studies of stylised subcultures, into a general theory of consumption, misrepresents the truly marginal role of symbolic consumption in the consumer practices of most everyday people (Lodziak, 2002: 37).

Whilst Lodziak did not support his thesis with any empirical evidence, the theoretical value of his work is that it refuses to except that symbolic consumption is an existentially fundamental activity. Bowring has also warned that sociologists should not enforce the ‘tyranny of normality’ by presuming that deviation from consumption-heavy lifestyles always entails an experience of deprivation and shame (Bowring, 2000). Bowring did not mean to romanticise austerity or trivialise the stresses endured by people on inadequate incomes. He did suggest, however, that the assumption that people feel ashamed and socially excluded due to a low income may say more about the social analyst’s own attachment to convention than about the outlook of poor people themselves (Bowring, 2000: 314). Participants in the present study – the majority of whom lived with markedly low incomes – were not ashamed about their limited ability to consume. By thinking of society’s outsiders only as the ‘excluded’, we risk obfuscating the potential radical and political significance of different ways of life.

Conceived as shame-inducing failure to meet the requirements of convention, [the] definition of deprivation [as normative exclusion] precludes from the outset the possibility of meeting needs in unconventional ways, and indeed of reformulating one’s needs in order to loosen the grip of social expectations (Bowring, 2000: 315).

Whilst the hardships of a low-income lifestyle have been documented, what is less commonly explored is whether it might be possible to reject consumerism and with it, the work-and-spend lifestyle. In the remainder of this chapter, I propose to move away from an approach to consumption that fixates on its significance for social integration and selfhood. The present data seems to highlight only the weaknesses of this approach. I will instead explore the alternative dispositions of the present participants, who privileged time and autonomy over the freedom to consume. I will also look at the strategies that participants used to meet needs without consumption. My key argument is that these dispositions and practises are best understood as an expression of what the theorist, Kate Soper, has called an ‘alternative hedonism’ (Soper, 2008).

Alternative Hedonism

Soper has suggested that consumerism is becoming subjectively problematic for a wide range of people, with disquiet spreading beyond the familiar groups of Green Party supporters, 'green socialists', and *No Logo* anti-globalisation protesters. This disquiet is partly shaped by alarm and anxiety surrounding the contribution of the Euro-American lifestyle to social and environmental exploitation. Crucially, however, Soper argued that disquiet is also being shaped with regards to the irritations and imbalances surrounding the subjective gratifications of affluent consumer culture. In Soper's terms, a 'new climate of disenchantment' is registering the unwanted daily by-products of consumerism, which include 'stress, pollution, ill-health, childhood obesity, car congestion, noise, excessive waste and loss of the "arts of living"' (Soper, 2009: 1).

Soper argued that this emerging disenchantment is best described from the perspective of an 'alternative hedonism' (Soper, 2008). The strength of alternative hedonism is that it represents an environmentally friendly disposition or art of living that does not depend on a puritanical renunciation of pleasure. Purely moralistic conceptions of the art of living suggest that individual and social well-being is attained by curbing human wants. Green moralists, for example, consistently emphasise frugality, moderation and the benefits of 'simplicity' (De Geus, 2009: 114-5). Consider Henry David Thoreau who, in his famously poetic account of 'life in the woods', expressed an ascetic pride in his ability to live a spartan lifestyle. In his account, Thoreau wondered whether even baseline needs such as the warmth of a fire, or clothing on one's back, were ultimately essential (Thoreau, 1995). On a less extreme level, thinkers such as Aristotle, Plato, and more recently, Amartya Sen and Amitai Etzioni, have also argued for the need to restrain material desires or practice 'voluntary simplicity'. Whilst the fostering of a less commodity-intensive existence is ecologically important, Kerridge has shrewdly suggested that many of the practices associated with Green moralism lack widespread appeal, partly because they are associated with an attitude of smug self-approval or piousness (Kerridge, 2009: 131).

Whilst Soper has recognised the ecological importance of reining in material needs, her work evades these kinds of criticisms by explicitly accounting for the fact that humans have pressing aesthetic and symbolic needs above the merely necessary – needs for diversity, novelty, and self-development (Soper, 2008: 575). For this reason, the environmental imperative for a reduced level of consumption cannot be met simply on the basis of a Green moralism or a joyless regression to more basic lifestyles. Nor could people feasibly want the reduction of consumption to be imposed from above, through enforced austerity, or what Gorz referred to as a nightmare scenario of ‘eco-fascism’ (Gorz, 2010a). Lifestyle choices made on the basis of Soper’s alternative hedonism are made autonomously. Alternative dispositions are not articulated in a language of prudence or self-restraint but according to a will to happiness. The alternative hedonist does not deny herself pleasure, but takes issue with the unmet needs and skewed priorities that characterise a life lived in the grasp of consumerism, which are seen as obstacles to that pleasure.

Another strength of Soper’s alternative hedonism thesis is that it avoids subscribing to any previous canon of consumer theory. In chapter two I discussed an article by Juliet Schor, in which she suggested that the theory of consumption had become stuck in a kind of cul-de-sac, theorists preoccupied with a reductive debate on whether the consumer should be approached as a ‘free agent’ or a ‘manipulated dupe’ (Schor, 2007). On the one hand, semiotic analyses of consumption have advanced a democratic theory of the sovereign consumer, but at the expense of any critical analysis of consumerism. On the other, authors from the Frankfurt School have offered an appropriately critical theory of consumerism, but adopted a fatalistic attitude towards the freedom of individuals to initiate change. Soper’s own approach is more judicious than either of these extremes, recognising the need for a theory that is both critical and democratic. Where other theorists of consumption have ostentatiously disposed of Critical Theory, Soper (1999) recognised that without critical engagement, scholars are left with no conceptual tools with which to approach issues of value and emancipation. Her own appraisal of Critical Theory, whilst recognising the inherent pessimism of totalising critiques, also celebrated their ‘will to happiness’, and enduring potential to infuse thinking with a sense of purpose and political inspiration (Soper, 1999). Soper’s work seems to avoid rigid adherence to

any past theoretical canons, constructing a revised theory of consumption that is both politically committed to social change, and in touch with the agency and subjectivities of consumers themselves.

Whilst Soper recognised the importance of social critique, she distinguished her own perspective from many other Marxist-influenced commentaries because it resists distinctions between ‘true’ and ‘false’ needs, or reference to ‘universal truths of human nature’, as bases upon which to evaluate modern consumerism (Soper, 2008: 574). Her anti-consumerist politics are instead interested in real subjectivities or structures of feeling, or what she believes to be an ‘actually emergent structure of consumer equivocation’ (Soper and Thomas, 2006: 26).

The concern is not to prove that consumers ‘really’ need something quite other than what they profess to need (or want)... but to reflect on the hedonist aspirations prompting changes in experienced or imagined need and their implications for the development of more sustainable modes of consumption (Soper, 2009: 6).

Soper’s theory translates into an empirical commitment to find out what consumers themselves are saying about the discontents of consumerism. It also hopes to challenge economic rationality by indicating an everyday enthusiasm for non-commodity goods such as free-time, well-being, conviviality, and a more relaxed pace of life. Soper explicitly offered her alternative hedonism thesis as a theoretical framework for interpreting the rationale and experiences of the growing number of people who are ‘downshifting’, demanding ‘time-affluence’, cutting down their working hours or consuming less (Soper, 2009: 6). Her thesis indeed maps strongly onto the data collected in the present study. As I have stated, for the majority of participants, working less also entailed a tangible reduction of consumption. Crucially, however, in all but one case, a reduced level of income and consumption was not simply viewed as an undesirable side-effect of working less. The participants did not see themselves as deprived or austere people, engaged in an uphill struggle to self-limit their needs. Rather, working less and consuming less formed a complementary package in the practice of a less acquisitive and therefore subjectively more gratifying way of life.

The Personal Cost of Material Luxury

In her study of downshiffters in America, Schor suggested that ‘downshiffters have experienced a change in which time and the quality of life become relatively more important than money’ (Schor, 1998: 138). Time and money are seen to exist in a trade-off relationship. Schor said that whilst, like most people, downshiffters would like to have more time *and* more money, their values lead them to make a lifestyle change that increases their time and reduces their income. Schor’s description of downshiffters is applicable to the dispositions of the present participants. Anne, for example, said that she sometimes regretted, ‘I want this and I can’t afford it’. She would like to have more money but said that when her ‘head is turned by pretty things’, she reminds herself that her lifestyle choices have enabled her to be more autonomous; ‘to live the way I want to live’. Within this context, ‘none of the material things are very important’. Whilst many participants said they often saw things they would like to buy, they reasoned that the autonomy they were afforded by remaining jobless or working less was much more desirable:

Sometimes I see things and I think ‘that’s nice’, but it’s not like I can’t live without it. It’s not that important that I would go and get I job I detest just in order to have it. (Mike)

There are things that you think will make your life better if you have them... but there’s no point if you’ve gotta spend all your time out there earning the money to pay for them. (Cheryl)

In these examples, the pleasures of material wealth are tarnished because earning money demands deeper enrolment into the undesirable world of work. The benefits of impulsive or luxurious shopping are outweighed by the inertia, ill-health, heteronomy, and skewed priorities that each participant associated with full-time working. The participants recognised that working less meant consuming less, but were keen to remind me that there is nothing austere about that:

There’s nothing puritanical about that at all, about choosing what your priority is. (Helen)

The people who are the real ascetics are the ones who are working and probably moaning that they hate their job, and hate their lives... there's no joy in that. (Mike)

In some cases, the choice between a time-rich and a financially-rich lifestyle was articulated by the participant in very explicit terms. A number of participants, for example, used binary oppositions along the lines of Erich Fromm's distinction between 'having' and 'being', as deeply fundamental personality types or modes of experiencing the world (Fromm, 1979). Fromm argued that Western liberal culture is too attached to 'having', or to what De Geus called an 'outward-looking' conception of human well-being, which is focussed on appearances and acquisition (De Geus, 2009: 121). By contrast, those who live their lives in a 'being' mode focus on aspects of well-being other than the acquisitive, directing their aspirations towards personal associations with others. Life is not biased towards acquisition but care, love, friendship, and environmental concern (DeGeus, 2009: 121). 'Having' and 'being' are best viewed as ideal types rather than bona fide empirical categories, since it is hard to imagine anyone structuring their lives purely in favour of one or the other. It remains true, however, that dualisms such as these were meaningful for participants in the present sample, who used similar terms to make sense of their own lifestyles.

Cheryl, for example, made her own distinction between people who have an 'outer life' or an 'outward way of being', focussed on acquiring commodities, and people who have an 'inward focus' and spend more time with their friends and family. 'Being' or 'inward' activities are distinctive because unlike material acquisition, which is resourced with money, they are resourced with time and energy. The archetypal consumer spends all of his or her valuable time and energy working in order to consume, and has no time left for living, caring, loving, learning, sport, culture, and other elementary forms of well-being (Kasser, 2002: 97-116). The activities privileged by participants (introduced in chapter five) were indeed those that require a large investment of time and energy. The time for these activities was valued more than the money to consume luxuries:

Material things are a part of life, but that isn't the point of life. You don't have to acquire, you live to live y'know, to *be*, to *relate*, to *grow*. (Jack)

For me, it's being with my friends and being in nice company and being out and about and therefore, as long as my house is safe and sound it really doesn't matter if I've got a brand new bath or new windows or whatever. (Rachel)

The most politically conscious participants (Cheryl, Helen, Anne and Jack in this case) made a value-judgement of those who privilege money and money-resourced activities over 'being'. In the eyes of these participants, choosing time over money shows that you're a person with your priorities in the *correct* order; that you've 'got a life'. Downshifting, idling, or 'choosing time' are associated with positive personality traits: with being an active, unique and interesting person. By contrast, the person who chooses money has undesirable traits such as 'acquisitiveness' (Jack) 'selfishness' (Anne) 'shallowness' (Cheryl) and 'insecurity' (Helen). In sum, participants happily tolerated a reduced level of consumption because they believed that the pleasures of the materially rich lifestyle were not worth the personal sacrifices involved in working and earning. In this sense, material luxuries represented what Soper has called 'troubled pleasures' (Soper, 1990) – pleasures that can only be enjoyed at the expense of more fundamental forms of dissatisfaction. In the above cases, material pleasures are 'troubled' by the fact that they must be paid for with work, though, in the experiences of the participants, the pleasures of consumerism had also become troublesome in other ways.

Further Troubled Pleasures

Whilst, in the above section, I described participants as 'trading-off' the pleasures of material abundance for more time, the dispositions of most participants were actually more complex than this, and also contained an element of what Schor referred to as the sensibility of 'simple living' (though I will personally avoid using this term due to its ascetic connotations). In Schor's terminology, 'simple livers' have a qualitatively different disposition from 'downshifTERS' because they *transcend* the trade-off between time and money. 'They find a low level of sufficiency income, beyond which spending is no longer positive' (Schor, 1998: 138). In terms of the present sample, a higher level of consumption was not only avoided because it had to be paid

for with undesirable work, but also because the pleasures of consumption had, in themselves, become questionable or troubled.

For example, in the experiences of several participants, the pleasures of consumption were tarnished by an awareness of the ethical issues that surround the production and disposal of commodities. Whilst the environmental costs of consumption did not appear to be particularly prominent in the participants' imaginations (Cheryl was the only explicitly 'green' person I interviewed), many discussed issues such as sweatshop labour or the exploitation of animals. A number of participants said they avoided certain stores, particularly low-cost clothing retailers such as *Primark*, because 'there's probably exploitation involved' (Cheryl). The ethical substance of this choice is reinforced by the fact that low-cost shops may be particularly appealing to people with low-incomes. Similarly, three participants said they had stopped going to *McDonald's*, and two said they had stopped buying certain brands of shoes, due to the poor animal rights reputations of the offending companies. The participants' discussions of ethical consumption provide a good example of alternative hedonism as a 'third way' of living, between self-denying moralism and a self-centred hedonism (De Geus, 2009: 119). Unlike purely acquisitive hedonists, alternative hedonists derive pleasure from knowing that their enjoyments are ethical, and do not come at the expense of human or environmental exploitation. An ethical consciousness sucks the enjoyment out of shopping:

At certain times I try not to go in [to the shopping centre] because it's just, I dunno, *sickening* sometimes. Like you see these people with like twenty carrier bags and it's like that 'look at me, I've just been shopping' y'know and it's, I dunno, I find it sort of...'. (Ffion)

In this account, Ffion describes an emotional or gut-level response to the busy shopping centre. Walking along, she had felt an indeterminate sense of unhappiness, which she struggles to describe. What Ffion may have experienced is what Soper describes as that 'vague and general malaise that descends in the shopping mall or supermarket: a sense of a world too cluttered and encumbered by material objects and sunk in waste' (Soper, 2006: online).

The ethical issues of consumption aside, a number of participants also experienced the pleasures of consumption as troubled pleasures because they believed that the satisfaction derived from buying luxury goods was generally short-lived. In Jack's words:

I'm actually happier not having lots of stuff, 'cos I just see it as a route to misery y'know and I don't understand people who just go on acquiring things, because have you ever bought a new thing? It sort of goes through a cycle doesn't it – there's the expectation of it which is the nice bit, and then there's the point where you actually get it and then often I think there's disappointment when it turns out to be not everything you wanted. (Jack)

Jack's account of the fleeting satisfactions of shopping resonates with the Marxist or production-focussed analysis of consumption introduced in chapter two. Gorz, for example, argued that the capitalist need for the realisation of surplus value depends on the market's ability to continually 'push back the frontier of the sufficient' (Gorz, 1988: 109), and to keep material desires constantly alive by preventing people from feeling satisfied with what they own. According to Gorz's theory, the elusiveness of gratification described by Jack can be interpreted as a structural fact of capitalism. Bauman made a similar point when he suggested that consumer society is kept in motion by the impossibility of ultimate satisfaction. Need was described by Bauman as a 'state of tension' that disperses when the need has been satisfied. The consumer society generates a profit by conspiring to keep this state of tension alive (Bauman, 2001: 13).

Like Bauman, several participants also understood need as a state of tension or anxiety. Matthew, for example, explained how 'pissed off and restless' he often felt when he went shopping for a treat, but returned home without having found anything he wanted. By relaxing their need for material goods, several participants claimed to have achieved a sort of 'inner peace' (Jack) in their low-consumption lifestyles. The tension generated by material desire was restricted through self-control, though 'self-control' here has a hedonistic rather than a puritanical meaning, because its ultimate end is the participant's desire to feel more alive. This was demonstrated clearly in Adam's interview since, unlike many of his fellow participants, Adam earned a comfortable amount of money relative to his financial obligations. Adam did not

experience a practical need to consume less, yet he still chose to do so. He had grown sceptical about the power of commodities to provide an enduring form of gratification:

The times when I have bought a treat – there's the boost afterwards of 'wooo yay, I'm happier!', but that soon disappears and then I'm thinking, 'now I've just got more *stuff* in my room'. (Adam)

The object that was supposed to make Adam feel happier simply joins the ranks of clutter in his bedroom. In Mike's words, the sought object, over time, becomes 'just another piece of crap to gather dust in the corner'. In these accounts, we again see that reducing consumption levels did not simply represent a practical necessity for the participants, but was also an expression of their alternative hedonism. Their accounts indicate the pleasure and the pride that they associated with the virtues of self-control and discernment, which were contrasted with the humiliation and regret of compulsion. Happiness comes from careful decision-making about what to buy, whereas unhappiness comes from the feeling of having been misled or having realised that a product is not all that was hoped for:

You're in town and you've got all this stuff to buy, and then you make a choice and I dunno, sometimes I've come home and thought 'uh, did I really need that?' and I've been upset. (Matthew)

In sum, many participants did not bemoan their lower levels of consumption, but enjoyed the feelings of self-mastery that derived from being prudent and sensible with their money. In all of the examples given, consuming less was not simply seen a practical requirement of working less, but was part of a more subjectively gratifying way of life.

Lost Pleasures

Whilst I have been dealing here with the 'troubled pleasures' of consumerism, Soper also pointed to certain pleasures and sources of gratification that may have been *lost* with the development of affluent consumerism (Soper, 2007: 211). Soper, as well as

critics of the post-industrial city such as Zukin (1995) and Minton (2009), suggested that among the things that society is losing are those tranquil or non-commercial spaces and landscapes in which people are free to idly talk and loiter (Soper, 2006: online). A number of participants also seemed to be experiencing this loss, and complained about the miseries of 'traipsing around town when it's busy' (Terry), or the 'horrible noise' and 'sensory overload' experienced in the shopping centre (Matthew). By contrast, many participants expressed their affections for 'independent' (Cheryl), 'quirky' (Helen) cafés, or spaces that 'haven't been gentrified too much' (Anne), and in which people aren't 'getting in your face trying to sell you something' (Matthew).

Scholars have also written of the loss of opportunities for conviviality and erotic contact in the context of consumerism, where life becomes more harried or sped-up (Soper, 2007: 212). Staffan Linder, for example, lamented the 'declining pleasures of the bed' (Linder, 1970: 83), and more contemporarily Carle Honoré, author of the self-help title, *In Praise of Slowness* (2004), devoted a whole chapter outlining his concern that work-dominated timetables were militating against time for erotic play. Honoré suggests that at a time when we ostensibly talk, read, think and watch about sex more than ever, ironically, 'at the end of a hard day, most people are too worn out for sex' (Honoré, 2004: 168). Two (unrelated) participants in the sample expressed sentiments in keeping with this analysis, reporting that their downshift had improved their sexual relationship with their partner by giving them longer periods of free-time and more relaxed moods.

It can be argued that the 'repressive' character of desublimation in Marcuse's theory (Marcuse, 2002) partly derives from the de-spiritualising effect of immediate gratification on the more aesthetic and sublime possibilities of human existence. What is lost as life becomes more harried are 'the aesthetic or ritualised aspects of consuming' (Soper, 2008: 577). According to Soper, the mealtime especially has personal and cultural worth as a 'shared, convivial event having its own intrinsic value... fostering human exchange, and providing food for thought as well as bodily renewal' (Soper, 2008: 577). The more relaxed pace of life favoured by my participants indeed included an attempt to rescue or re-sublimate these endangered,

convivial pleasures. Like those who support the ‘slow food’ trend – a now popular strand of the Green movement, which celebrates the creativity and conviviality of gastronomy – a number of the present participants stressed that they liked to make an effort at mealtimes; to cook with other members of the family (Cheryl), to ‘sit at the table and talk’ (Matthew), to ‘have a chat and a glass of wine with food’ (Anne), to ‘lay the table and make it a bit special’ (Samantha), or to buy some good quality ingredients and ‘have a nice evening in’ (Gerald). In the following extract, Ffion recalls one of her favourite memories. It is worth quoting at length because it provides a good example of the ‘slow’ pleasures that participants thought were missing when they had previously worked longer hours:

I just remember from before, and this is just a little thing but I remember it with a warm fuzzy feeling. It was Rhys’s family came over here for Christmas a couple of years ago and we did the cooking, all together, and it was partly because we had time off and time to plan what we were going to do, and we sort of made our own mince pies and made everything in stages y’know, and had Christmas music on and a few glasses of brandy. Y’know, there was something really nice about being all together and it not being really frantic. (Ffion)

To summarise, in the preceding sections I have interpreted various themes from the data in terms of Soper’s notion of an alternative hedonism. The examples provided show how the participants’ low-consumption lifestyles were not achieved through an ascetic renunciation of appetites, but via a strong will to happiness, in which the good-life was redefined in terms of time-dependent or relational activities rather than in terms of material acquisition. Whilst there are clearly economic barriers to working less, the participants here did not view the need to reduce consumption solely in terms of an uphill struggle. Participants were instead registering the ‘troubled’ or ‘lost’ pleasures of consumerism. The gratifications of shopping had become tarnished for a range of social, psychological and ethical reasons. Bowring helpfully summarised the prices of inclusion into a culture of consumerism, all of which were identified at least once in the sample, ‘whether this is the ‘family exclusion’ caused by long working hours, the degradation of nature by unbridled economic growth, the distractions and frustrations of congested commodity environments, the addictions and compulsions of

captive consumers, or the corrosion of social solidarity by the forces of consumer individualism' (Bowring, 2000: 316)

Limiting Needs

Whilst working and consuming less may have been motivated by a will to happiness, participants were still faced with the real financial difficulties of living a low-income lifestyle. They still had to keep the cupboard full and meet travel expenses; they still had to keep themselves amused, their children clothed, and their houses in a good state of repair. Each of these things was pinpointed by the participants as a source of worry. Even if a jobless lifestyle is tenable with a relatively low level of financial resources, there of course remain significant financial barriers to the reduction of working hours and, as I emphasised at the beginning of the chapter, resisting work is by no means a choice open to anybody. In chapter two I highlighted the cultural, but also the *structural* barriers to working and consuming less, given that consumer's needs are produced not merely through cultural engineering or strategies of 'hidden persuasion' (Packard, 1957), but also made objectively necessary by capitalism (Lodziak, 2002: 91). Gorz, for example, argued that the alienation of labour produces a need to consume by reducing the temporal autonomy required for self-production, and by creating a felt need for forms of consumption that compensate for the unhappiness experienced in heteronomous work (Gorz, 1967). The need to consume is also exaggerated through the commercialisation or privatisation of a range of good and services, and through the phenomenon of planned obsolescence. These themes were introduced as some of the primary avenues through which consumers' needs are produced and exaggerated, but they also represent the avenues through which participants resisted the need to consume, meeting their needs in novel and low-cost ways.

One of the central ways in which participants seemed to cope with less, against the structural pressures to consume, was by emphasising the *use-value* of their purchases. A number of participants, for example, said that since they had reduced their working hours, they made a bigger effort to evaluate the utility of their purchases:

I'll think 'I've got these and they're fine', so I won't get new trousers or a new coat or something... I wouldn't shop less for the things I need, but I would question 'do I need them'. (Rachel)

Several participants said that in order to avoid impulse-buying, they had formed a habit of pausing-for-thought when shopping. Ffion, for example, said that when she gave the giddy thrill of browsing time to fade, she would normally comfortably decide that she did not really want the desired object after all. (A number of participants also said that a good way to save money is simply to stay away from the shops altogether. Both Anne and Rachel, for example, said that they were much less tempted to buy clothes now that they no longer worked near the city centre, where the need to consume gets 'shoved down your throat' (Anne)). In the small number of examples in the data where participants were observed rationalising their purchases, the practical utility of commodities always took precedent over their aesthetic appeal. Anne, for example, in her interview, talked me through the various features of her mobile phone, explaining their utility for her work, in which she needed to keep in touch with clients and check emails 'on the go'. Emphasising the phone's use-value, Anne described it as 'reliable' and as the 'right tool for the job'. Rachel placed a similar emphasis on use-value when she explained how she had dismissed comments a friend had made on the 'old fashioned' colour of her bathroom suite. Rachel said: 'What does it matter? I've got a bathroom that works'. By emphasising use-value over the symbolic qualities of goods, these participants immunised themselves against the emotional and financial pressures of aesthetic obsolescence.

A number of participants also said they were able to *extend* the use-value of their more luxurious possessions by savouring their enjoyment. In *The Harried Leisure Class* (1970), Staffan Linder noted that as levels of consumption accelerate, the individual devotes increasingly little time to each consumption item (Linder, 1970: 79). This is either because the temptation to upgrade means that items with remaining utility are prematurely disposed of, or because the simultaneous consumption of multiple luxuries leaves the individual with less time to enjoy each commodity unit. In the following quotation, Linder demonstrates this second point with the humour for which he is known:

After dinner [the individual] may find himself drinking Brazilian coffee, smoking a Dutch cigar, sipping a French cognac, reading the *New York Times*, listening to a Brandenburg Concerto and entertaining his Swedish wife – all at the same time, with varying degrees of success (Linder, 1970: 79).

An example from one of Lucy and Matthew's interviews provides a contrast to Linder's harried consumer. The couple discussed their love of computer gaming, which represented one of the more expensive hobbies cited in the study, yet the couple stressed that even this activity was quite cheap, in fact, provided you played just one game at a time and got the maximum pleasure out of it. The important thing was to 'see everything in one game' before buying the next one (Lucy). We can reasonably assume that this did not entail a reduction of the couple's overall satisfaction, since according to the finite nature of time, 'one may possibly *buy* more of everything, but one cannot conceivably *do* more of everything' (Linder, 1970: 83). In other words, reducing consumption in the sphere of leisure does not necessarily lead to a reduction in overall satisfaction since the more luxury goods the individual consumes, the less satisfaction he or she is able to obtain from each object in the time available.

Linder's observations were also reflected in Emma's account of food shopping. Like Lucy and Matthew, Emma felt it important to treat herself, even though she was on a tight budget:

You can get these lovely smoothies, y'know, like supermarkets all have their finest or y'know, like their fine range. It's pricey but I'll get that. I'll have a couple of glasses one night, and then the last glass another night and that's a pleasure innit. (Emma)

What is conveyed in this account is the sense of appreciation that Emma attaches to the goods she can afford. Participants indeed seemed to highly value what they owned. Cheryl for example talked fondly about her new mp3 player ('It's lovely, it's *my* thing') and Jack enthused about his guitars ('they're brilliant'). When I asked participants to show me around their homes or to run through the main things that they owned, their inventories suggested a treasured and looked-after collection of

objects, treated with a sense of devotion. This observation complements Anne's suggestion that saving money is not necessarily accomplished by renouncing material luxuries, but by 'valuing what you buy' and 'getting the most out of it'. In sum, several participants saved money not through a total denial of luxuries but by eliciting the maximum yield from what they could afford to buy; they *savoured* the pleasures of the things that they owned.

A final means by which participants limited their spending was by meeting a range of needs without consumption. In chapter two, I suggested that one of the structural barriers to consuming less is a process of commercialisation. It follows that successfully working and consuming less rested partly on participants' ability to meet certain needs in non-commercial ways, without the consumption of commodities. The politically conscious participants, Ffion and Rhys, recognised the difficulty of this task in a culture in which meeting needs through consumption is the very definition of affluence:

Rhys – It's what culture tells us to do in a way. Affluence is driving places and getting lunch out. That's what the government seems to be telling us to do
Ffion – It's like an executive lifestyle or something

The couple's reference to the government brings to mind a quote commonly attributed to Margaret Thatcher who, in 1986, apparently said that 'any man who finds himself on a bus at the age of 26 can consider himself a failure'.²⁰ Here, status is associated with the ability to meet needs through private and more expensive forms of consumption. By contrast, self-furnishing needs or meeting them cheaply by using public services is a symbol of deprivation and low ambition. Many participants were observed inverting these values, celebrating their ability to meet needs cheaply or without consumption.

²⁰ This quote is commonly attributed to Thatcher (see, for example, the transcript of a Commons debate on the Parliamentary website: <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/vo030702/debtext/30702-10.htm>). Note, however, that the question of when Thatcher actually said this, and the exact wording, continues to be debated. The website, *Wikiquote*, continues to list the quote as unconfirmed (http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Margaret_Thatcher). I have chosen to include the quote anyway because it brilliantly captures the ethos of consumerism.

Cheryl's case study provides a definitive, if not a representative, example of low-cost living. As a self-professed Green and an expert on how to meet needs with minimal consumption, Cheryl was keen to show me just how far it was possible to push back the need to consume, given the time and dedication. Cheryl said she had been able to save money by cooking with basic ingredients and home-grown vegetables. When I visited her for her first interview, she served me homemade bread, and tea made with herbs picked from her garden. Self-production was a key element of Cheryl's identity. Her entire home was geared towards sustaining a low cost-lifestyle – a broom was positioned where a vacuum cleaner might have been, a huge kitchen table doubled as a workbench and cooking area, and rather than a tumble dryer, a system of hooks and lines had been installed for hanging wet clothes. Cheryl had also learned basic electrical and plumbing skills. Though Cheryl did not expect other people to embrace self-sufficiency to the extent that she had, she did hope to lead by example. Cheryl said you can live with less more easily if you are 'inventive' and 'clever' with money.

Like Cheryl, a number of other participants had developed the skills required to keep their possessions in a good state of repair, without buying replacements or paying for professional maintenance. Their maintenance skills appeared to be a great source of personal pride, with several participants having discussed maintenance with a fondness reminiscent of Robert M. Pirsig in the philosophical novel, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974). In the following extract, Pirsig talks about his riding gloves:

I *care* about these moldy old riding gloves. I smile at them... because they have been there for so many years and are so old and so tired and so rotten that there is something kind of humorous about them... They cost only three dollars and have been restitched so many times it is getting impossible to repair them, yet I take a lot of time and pains to do it anyway because I can't imagine any new pair taking their place (Pirsig, 1974: 52).

Like Pirsig, several participants expressed an attachment and a sense of loyalty towards the things that they owned, and therefore valued their ability to maintain them. During one of our interviews, for example, Matthew talked at length about his bicycle, and excitedly showed me his maintenance manuals and toolset. The act of

maintenance itself appeared to represent a source of pleasure, as a self-initiated and non-alienated form of work. Rhys similarly celebrated his knowledge of computers in allowing him to keep his PC up-to-date without having to spend out on a new model. He said: 'I like buying things that can be opened up and repaired, like I know computers, so I enjoy adding bits and taking out bits and maintaining them' (Rhys). Like Pirsig, a number of participants were interested in the inner workings of the things that they owned – in what technological components *meant* rather than what they simply *were* (Pirsig, 1976: 61). In these cases, the nature of the participant's interest in technology was one of the things that allowed them to spend less money.

Those participants with the most materially modest lifestyles said that they had to be particularly clever with their money in relation to what Schor has referred to as the 'commercialised rituals', such as Christmases, birthdays, or weddings. All of these represent occasions in which people are culturally obliged to consume commodities. A number of participants said that Christmas in particular, as a veritable consumption festival, was a difficult time of year to be trying to spend less:

I'm not one for this sort of – gotta spend hundreds of pounds at Christmas, but you've gotta buy Christmas presents and birthday presents, so that's a bit sore.
(Clive)

The 'commercialised rituals' were negotiated with creativity. Matthew and Lucy for example, had flavoured plain olive oil with chilli and garlic, decorated the bottles, and given the oil as Christmas presents to friends and family. This had allowed them to save money, and family members had appreciated the effort taken. Preparing the oil was better than 'just going into Boots and getting a 3 for 2 present' (Lucy). Similarly, Samantha, who had been unable to afford to attend her friend's birthday meal out, said she had instead offered to cook her friend a special meal. Samantha thought they had enjoyed a much better time than they would have at the restaurant. In these examples, there is a unique value attributed to the self-produced gift that contrasts with the colourless, impersonal nature of the commodity bought with money. Here, spending less is once again discussed by participants as pleasurable, rather than ascetic or simply necessary.

Lastly, participants also saved money by embracing low-cost forms of leisure. Many participants, for example, used the term ‘simple pleasures’ (or something similar), to describe the activities they liked doing. Mike, in the middle of a monologue about how nice it was that we were conducting the interview in the sunshine, said:

We’re sitting here now on the grass, and it’s a nice day and there are lots of people out and about, what more could we want eh? (Mike)

Many participants insisted that they did not have to spend a lot of money to keep themselves amused. Both Jack and Matthew said one of their favourite activities was simply talking to people or ‘shooting the breeze’ (Jack). Lucy and Matthew said that on many weekends they enjoyed relaxing at their local library. Lucy in particular, as a participant who was completely jobless, seemed especially adept at keeping herself fulfilled and entertained with little money, taking pleasure in inexpensive activities such as bird-watching, crafts, and reading. Most participants also said they enjoyed free outdoor activities such as walking in the countryside or by the coast. Cheryl’s passion for the ‘simple’ was made clear when she insisted we go for a walk at the seaside town near to where she lived. As we walked, she remarked on the details of our surroundings: the salty seaweed smell of the harbour, the clinking of ropes against masts, the glistening scales on the trout in the window of the fishmongers. Cheryl’s observations demonstrated the feelings of happiness that many participants said they felt when relaxing outdoors or observing nature. With tongue firmly in cheek, Matthew jokingly referred to these simple or inexpensive pleasures as ‘frugal fun’. We both cringed and laughed at this. This is a great example because it captures the participants’ ability to entertain themselves cheaply but, more importantly, also captures the humour, self-critique, and irony that characterised their accounts. In his laughter, Matthew was recognising the piousness of Green moralism (which we can easily imagine sternly entertaining the idea of ‘frugal fun’), and transcending it. He was showing me that he was a regular guy.

Temporal Autonomy and the Reduction of Consumption

In chapter two, where I deconstructed the need to consume, I explored Gorz's suggestion that the needs of consumers are prefigured at the structural level by the alienation of labour. Firstly, Gorz argued that employment reinforces consumer spending by arresting the temporal autonomy that is necessary if individuals are to self-furnish their needs. With a large block of the week spent performing social labour, the individual has less time and inclination to produce for themselves, or to develop the skills necessary for self-production, and is more likely to meet their needs via consumption. Secondly, Gorz also argued that alienated labour produces a need to consume by creating an identity deficit or feeling of unhappiness in the worker, which is compensated for by the consumption of commodities. On the basis of the individual's dissatisfaction, the market is able to sell all manner of distractions, escapes and indulgences – immediate gratifications that compensate for the more fundamental dissatisfaction of alienation (Gorz, 1967: 72). In my discussion of Gorz's approach, I hypothesised that the reduction of working hours may *permit*, as well as necessitate, a reduced level of consumption. The logic of Gorz's theory is indeed reflected strongly in the present findings, with reduced hours appearing to provide participants with, firstly, a level of temporal autonomy that allowed them to self-furnish needs and, secondly, a level of satisfaction that reduced their need for 'compensatory' forms of consumption.

The majority of participants told me that their need to spend was reduced by default, in simple light of the fact that they worked less. Several participants, for example, pointed to the ironic fact that working costs money: 'you can spend a stack of money going to work!' (Cheryl). These participants complained about the little hidden expenses of the working week. Ben was motivated to change his job partly by the irony that his commute into London cost a significant proportion of his wages. Gerald also complained about the transport costs he used to incur going to work, as well as the additional buying and washing of clothes he had to do because his job required him to dress formally. Rachel said that when she was working nine-to-five and was stuck for time, she would often end up spending a significant amount of money on packed sandwiches and coffee. She thought it contradictory that one could

spend an hour's wages simply on what one needed to get through the working day. Rhys gave an account of his expenditures on a typical working day:

When I think about it I can spend less money on a week on holidays than I do on a week at work. I do it less now, but certainly before I was getting sandwiches from the café and stuff, y'know, get a coffee in the morning with a pastry or whatever, and then after work it's down the pub to wind down – I'd be spending the best part of a hundred quid a week. (Rhys)

Whilst the daily costs of working may seem small, 'these things all add up' (Gerald), though the direct costs incurred in the act of going to work are perhaps trivial in comparison with the subsidiary costs incurred because of the time and energy that work consumes.

A number of participants complained that their previous full-time working schedules had left them with little time or inclination to do things for themselves. Many of the self-productive practices I have already described in this chapter, such as meal preparation, gift-making, or household maintenance, require large investments of time and energy – both in order to perform the labour involved, and to develop an interest and aptitude in the necessary skills. Meeting needs through the consumption of commodities or professional services is more appealing to people who have less discretionary time, but a number of participants saw the consumption of convenience as self-defeating. Ben articulated this using the example of food. In the following extract, Ben recognises that the need for pre-prepared food is exaggerated by the time-poverty of the working lifestyle:

You come home feeling rubbish and you buy a takeaway then don't you. You're too tired to cook, and that costs you fifteen quid and you've gotta earn the money to pay for that. It's a big *cycle*. (Ben)

In Ben's example, whilst pre-prepared food alleviates the labour of cooking, the ironic truth is that one has to work longer in order to pay for it. Furthermore, some participants questioned whether pre-prepared food was even as *appealing* as a meal made from scratch. Gerald, for example, said he had been eating much more luxurious food since retiring, even though he was spending much less money on it,

because he had the time to cook. These examples support the view that employment begets consumption by reducing the time available for self-production. Furthermore, as I already touched on above, the data also suggests that some participants enjoyed self-production as a self-initiated and non-alienated form of work.

The data also supports Gorz's suggestion that alienated labour produces a desire for compensatory forms of consumption. This was something that many participants chose to discuss, without prompting, with a number believing that the sense of well-being provided by disengagement from work had reduced their need to consume luxuries. Fromm argued that it is easy to recognise a tendency in ourselves to go and buy something when we are feeling anxious or depressed, or following a stressful or tiring stint of work (Fromm, 1995: 70).

When you're in a job you don't like you need some kind of positive stroke – a frock, or buy yourself some gadget, or you can say 'come on we deserve a night out'. (Gerald)

Ffion, for example, confessed to a previous weakness for shoe shopping as a way of making herself 'feel better'. Lodziak argued that whilst the majority of people will probably experience material rewards as inadequate compensation for the denial of a more meaningful and autonomous existence, they represent a form of compensation that is usually accepted in the absence of genuine alternatives (Lodziak, 2002: 158). By seeking a genuine alternative in the reduction of working hours, several participants believed they had exempted themselves from having to consume luxuries in order to 'make up for' (Rachel) the miseries of full-time employment. I asked Adam, for example, whether he had ever budgeted or taken any practical measures to save money. He said:

I suppose for me, I haven't had to be tactical saving money and things like that. It's not hit me that hard because I'm happy with my life, sooo – there's no need to spend more to sort of *boost* my happiness. (Adam)

The fact that I don't spend very much money probably comes from the fact that I – I know what I want to do, so I don't really need to spend to make my life more comfortable. I know where I'm going. (Adam)

Inherent in Adam's statements is a distinction between the immediate gratification to be found by consuming treats and the more steady or fundamental gratification entailed in the art of living – of 'being happy with your life', of 'knowing what you want to do' and 'where you are going'. By shortening their hours or becoming jobless, a number of participants felt they had distanced themselves from what had been a fundamental source of strain or dissatisfaction in their lives, and therefore no longer required the consolations or 'happiness boosts' provided by the consumption of treats. The treats or 'happiness boosts' and 'escapes' the participants said they had been able to do without are perhaps best summarised as 'negative pleasures': pleasures whose sense of gratification derives mostly from their contrast to the negativity for which they aim to compensate. In sum, the data supports Gorz's view that consumers' needs are preconfigured by the alienation of labour. Participants believed that by distancing themselves from work, they had gained the time, energy and level of contentment necessary to reduce their consumption levels.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this chapter, against the view that working less is easy (or a problem of the imagination, overcome with the de-reification of the work role) I proposed to explore the practical difficulties entailed in resisting work. The present chapter has begun this task by exploring some of the financial challenges of working less. In contrast with the view that affluent consumption represents a 'life-focus', crucial for social inclusion and selfhood, I discovered an alternative sensibility, which privileges time and autonomy over the need to consume. It is certainly the case that, given the financial barriers involved, the option to reduce working hours remains closed to the poorest members of society. Horkheimer's suggestion that 'the escape to a slower pace of life is closed off for the individual because he would not survive economically' (Horkheimer, 1974: 26) still carries much weight. However, the present data shows that by reformulating needs, and meeting needs in unconventional ways, it is to a certain extent possible to reduce working hours, and even to live without work altogether. By drawing on Soper's theory of alternative hedonism, I have been able to show that participants in no way understood their attempts to reduce

working hours and consumption as ascetic or self-denying. Their lifestyle choices were, in part, formulated as a response to the troubled pleasures of consumerism. A reduced level of consumption did not represent a dreaded side-effect of reduced working hours, but was a key component in a less acquisitive and therefore more subjectively gratifying way-of-life.

CHAPTER 7

DISRESPECT

In this chapter I will continue to explore the lived-through challenges of working less. Whilst in the previous chapter I examined the challenges of earning and spending less in a climate of consumerism, in the present chapter I will shift my attention to the confrontation between the participants' lifestyle choices and the work ethic. The present data suggests that the endurance of the work ethic designated many of the participants' values and actions as morally problematic. As was indicated in the case studies in chapter four, this sometimes led participants to feel stigmatised or denigrated as a result of their decision to work less or give up working. Whilst moral conflict appeared to focus and energise the efforts of those participants who were consciously political or socially networked in their efforts to work less, for other participants the experience of denigration was troubling, and represented a threat to their ability to maintain a self-respecting life outside work.

In order to make sense of the moral challenges of working less, it is useful to introduce Axel Honneth's concepts of 'social recognition' and 'disrespect' (Honneth, 1995). Honneth argued that 'in order to acquire a successful relation-to-self, one is dependent on the intersubjective recognition of one's abilities and accomplishments' (Honneth, 1995: 136). Humans have a basic need for love, equal rights and esteem, and these are pivotal to a person's sense of self-confidence and self-respect. It is only through these forms of social recognition that 'a person can come to see him or herself unconditionally, as both an autonomous and individuated being and to identify with his or her goals and desires' (Honneth, 1995: 169). Honneth understood disrespect as the *withholding* or *withdrawal* of social recognition from the individual, and distinguished between three types of disrespect. The first and perhaps most powerful form is the disrespect that occurs in an attempt to gain control of another person's body, against his or her will. Honneth argued that the violation or entrapment of the body is accompanied by a dramatic breakdown of the victim's trust in the social world and a collapse in his or her basic self-confidence (Honneth, 1995:

133). Honneth's second form of disrespect risks damaging a person's moral self-respect rather than his or her basic self-confidence. It is enacted by excluding a person from the possession of certain rights within a society. The person denied rights experiences a restriction on their autonomy as well as the feeling of not being a full-fledged member of the society, on equal footing with fellow members (Honneth, 1995: 133). It is Honneth's third form of disrespect, however, that is relevant to my present aim to explore the stigma of resisting work. Honneth referred to this final form of disrespect as 'evaluative' disrespect, since it is concerned with the denigration of certain lifestyles:

A person's 'honour', 'dignity', or, to use the modern term, 'status' refers to the degree of social esteem accorded to his or her manner of self-realisation within a society's inherited cultural horizon. If this hierarchy of values is so constituted as to downgrade individual forms of life and manners of belief as inferior or deficient, then it robs the subjects in question of every opportunity to attribute social value to their own abilities. (Honneth, 1995: 134)

Unlike the violation of the body, which Honneth argued is a historically non-specific form of disrespect, the denigration of particular ways of life is historically and socio-culturally embedded. As Durkheim suggested, no act (and it follows that no way of life) is inherently moral or immoral. Rather, morality and immorality are defined by the social rules that promote or forbid certain actions, praising moral behaviour and sanctioning immoral behaviour (Durkheim, 1953: 43). In the early chapters of the thesis, I attempted to provide an introductory sense of the social context in which those who resist work might be morally denigrated. In chapter one, for example, I presented the view that society is both objectively and subjectively 'work-centred'. This idea was developed in chapter two, in which I considered the moral discourse of work in government rhetoric and social policy, and its anchorage in the tightening conditions of welfare entitlement. It was concluded that, in advanced industrial societies, particular ideological significance is still attached to the performance of paid-work. Employment is generally seen as essential for a civil and emotionally prosperous existence, and it is through employment that individuals are supposed to assert their status as fully-fledged citizens. Goffman recognised the problematic status of unemployment – that 'blemish of character' – in his book *Stigma* (1963). He quoted the account of an unemployed man from a study by Zawadski and Lazarsfeld:

How hard and humiliating it is to bear the name of an unemployed man. When I go out, I cast down my eyes because I feel myself wholly inferior. When I go along the street, it seems to me that I can't be compared with an average citizen, that everybody is pointing at me with his finger. (Zawadski and Lazarsfeld, 1935: 239)

The participants in the present study were in a qualitatively different position from those individuals studied in Goffman's *Stigma* because, as chapter five demonstrated, they had made a moral choice to distance themselves from the world of work – their marginality was, in a manner of speaking, chosen. What is notable, however, is that whilst many participants were able to cultivate a healthy self-respect that did not depend on paid work, several continued to suffer emotional difficulties under the scrutiny of the work ethic. In the remainder of the chapter I will critically explore the nature of participants' moral transgressions, and look at the ways in which they coped with the experience of denigration.

The need to be socially recognised was discussed by most participants. This was an issue that was often raised, for example, in response to the question of whether there was anything the participant missed about having a full-time job. Consider Emma who, during her time on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), had become painfully aware of her need for social recognition. She said: 'I think working gives you a certain – it gives you a *purpose*', allowing you to feel as though you are 'playing a role for society'. Gerald made a similar insight. His previous high-status job as a university lecturer had given him a clear sense of purpose. Gerald gave a number of lengthy and enthusiastic accounts of his experiences as a jet-setting academic, going to conferences and receiving complements about his talks and publications. He said 'you get all these positive strokes [from work] and the money is just an added attraction'. Of particular value to Gerald was the 'warm glow of appreciation' he experienced when he went to his students' graduation ceremonies. After the ceremonies, the graduates would often come up and thank him for his teaching. However, whilst most participants discussed the value of work for providing social recognition in an abstract sense, with the exception of Gerald, few participants said they had actually *felt* valued and recognised in their previous work

roles. The participants Lucy, Clive and Larry, for example, all described their previous jobs as ‘thankless’ (which, whilst affirming their need for social recognition, suggests that they did not feel recognised). The former computer programmer, Adam, complained that neither his employers nor his clients had expressed any gratitude for the work he did. To his employers, Adam felt he was only a ‘resource’ or ‘number’, and to his clients, only of interest in when someone needed to be blamed for a software malfunction.

Whilst few participants had felt socially recognised in their previous work roles, in many cases the choice to disengage from employment confounded the need for recognition further. The participants of primary interest here are those who made the most drastic changes in their lives such as Emma (who was long-term unemployed and claiming ESA), Lucy (who at the time of interview had given up looking for a job) and Samantha (a thirty year old woman with a turbulent employment history). These participants are the most relevant because they had all experienced prolonged periods of joblessness. By looking more closely at their accounts of moral denigration, it is possible to bring into focus certain cultural beliefs about work and its performance, which may be confronted in attempts to live differently.

Disrespect

I will begin with Emma, the only participant in the sample to have a diagnosed disability and to be claiming ESA at the time of interview. Emma viewed unemployment as the result of impersonal forces, discussing the unemployed as victims of a ruthless economy and an insecure labour market. She had strong opinions, for example, about the recent closure of a *Burberry* clothing factory in Wales. She wondered, ‘how come no-one’s backin’ people up, backin’ people’s jobs up?’, and was angered by the disrespect that she believed the laid-off *Burberry* workers would face in their unemployment. She was confident that they would be denigrated, given the negativity of her own experiences:

The government will be on the case of those people who lost their job and are unemployed, havin' to sign on every week, they'll be on their *case* like they've done somethin *wrong*. And the way they talk to people down that job centre, that's part of why I got a job as soon as I had to sign on last time because they treat you like *dirt* y'know, and all you've done is become unemployed. They treat you like *dirt*. (Emma)

Emma said she had experienced disrespect not only from the staff at the job centre, during the time she was claiming a Jobseeker's Allowance, but also from acquaintances and family during her time as an ESA claimant. It appeared that her diagnosis with an acute form of Irritable Bowel Syndrome had not been enough to exempt her from work in the eyes of her family. She confidently believed that people held a negative image of her, owing to her joblessness:

They *definitely* do, and *society* does as well, and my family does, my family are really judgemental about me not working, even though I've been – when it's not my choice. They know that, but my mum completely doesn't get it, she's like 'when are you gonna get a job, when are you gonna get a job, why, I want you to get a job'. And I've said about the sickness and she said 'well you're alright now!', and I am, I am getting better again since last summer, but it's like 'give me a *break!*', the government's not – I'm not supposed to work by law. (Emma)

As an incapacity benefit claimant, Emma felt the victim of what she referred to as the 'mainstream view' of the unemployed as 'scroungers', who accept tax handouts whilst not undertaking paid-work themselves. The 'scrounger' label can be likened to what Kelvin and Jarrett have called the 'wealth ethic'. Whilst, unlike the work ethic, the wealth ethic does not stress the sanctity of work in itself, it does believe that individuals should work in order to generate sufficient wealth to prevent them from depending on others financially (Kelvin and Jarrett, 1985: 104). The wealth ethic contributes to a cultural climate of doubt and anxiety about the authenticity of the benefit claimant's health complaint (with the idea that people feign disability in order to exploit the welfare system having become a popular theme in the right-wing press). Emma had sometimes found it difficult to defend her right to incapacity benefits against those who challenged her for 'scrounging'. This was perhaps partly owing to the nature of her stomach illness which, like the psychological and behavioural complaints that afflict an increasing proportion of incapacity benefit claimants (44% in 2003 (Henderson et al, 2005)), may be intermittent, and may not have symptoms

that are visibly observable to members of the public. Emma's struggle to be validated as a person with an authentic need for support was made very clear in our interview, as a number of times she expressed an eagerness to convince me that she really *did* need support and was 'not pretending'.

Emma also believed that the denigration of incapacity claimants was exacerbated by a cultural attachment to stoicism (something Emma thought was a typically 'British' trait) as the appropriate response to illness:

That's the big façade people have over them y'know, everything is fine, Mr Nine-to-Five, a big façade innit. On the face of it all havin' all together, but underneath, *no*. (Emma)

Emma's concerns resonate with the findings from Walker and Fincham's qualitative research into the experiences of mental illness in the workplace. Interviews with sufferers pointed to the existence of a powerful stigma attached to the inability to cope with the 'normal' demands of the working day. Stories told by interviewees revealed the way in which the discussion of illness was constructed by managers as a taboo or inappropriate topic of conversation in the workplace (Walker and Fincham, 2011: 77). Unwell workers felt they had been construed as needy, selfish or substandard employees, and even sick-notes had failed to legitimate their need for concessionary treatment in the eyes of the employer (Walker and Fincham, 2011: 84-92). As a further example, the participants in the present research, Matthew and Lucy, told a story about the mistreatment of a pregnant colleague in their previous job at a shoe shop:

Matthew – Yeah, they would call her lazy cos she wouldn't lift something, because she was pregnant.

Lucy – They actually tried to get her fired, they tried to get her fired by saying she was being *extra* lazy.

The treatment of their pregnant colleague outraged the couple's own sensibilities of self-care (explored in chapter five). In these examples, it appears that to claim ESA or request concessionary treatment is, in some cases, to shamefully admit that one is not up to the challenge of working; that one is weak-willed, a softy or a bellyacher. A

pilot version of the present study had similar findings, with two aspiring ‘downshifters’ reporting that they had been bullied by bosses and colleagues as a result of feeling too unwell to work full-time (Frayne, 2008). The cases of Amelia (a heart-attack victim from that study) and Larry (a stress-sufferer in the present study) also suggest that even when sick workers are given permission to work part-time, they may not necessarily be permitted a proportionate reduction in their workload. Returning to the example of Emma, whilst Emma did not feel well enough to work, she said that the ‘shame’ she experienced as a benefit claimant often made her want to find a job. However, her experiences are not generalisable to the sample as a whole, since Emma was the only person in the research sample claiming ESA at the time of interview. Whilst several participants suffered from health complaints, most survived financially either by drawing on savings from a previous period of employment, by continuing to work a smaller amount of hours, or by receiving financial support from a partner. In light of this, the wealth ethic and the stigma of not feeling well enough to cope at work only go part of the way in explaining why some participants were denigrated for wanting to work less. A deeper explanation is necessary.

When Lucy was talking about the difficulties she faced in her decision to give up looking for work, she stressed her problems of social recognition more than the financial troubles that she and her husband Matthew were facing. This was significant, given that they had been getting by using only a small amount of saved money and Matthew’s student loan. In Lucy’s case study, I outlined her negative experiences of employment, her feelings of agoraphobia, and her ambition to have children and create a supportive family environment. It was clear that Lucy thought that, overall, she was better off without a job. During the interview, however, I asked Lucy to think about whether there was anything she missed about work and it was at this point that she raised the issue of social recognition. In the following exchange she became visibly upset:

Researcher – So if I were to push you, out of the things you said you miss about work, which was the most important, which would you say?

Lucy – Ummm [long pause] [sigh] I suppose the thing I miss most is, uh [long pause], not feelin like I’m letting people down, maybe that cos, I dunno, I just kind of feel like I’m letting Matthew’s parents down and *my* parents down. I s’pose, I wouldn’t say like – I dunno, does that make sense?

Researcher – Yes. So do you worry about it then?

Lucy – I worry every day [long pause] all the time [sigh], yeah [long pause], I just, I feel like I should get a job, so that, I don't feel like I'm letting everybody else down, but I just [sigh], I don't know if I can *do* that.

Lucy believed that her family thought she was a disappointment as a daughter because she didn't have any work-centred ambitions. She had carved a pleasant daily routine for herself based around reading, crafts and 'making things', playing computer games, taking care of her pets and going for walks. Lucy's only demand was that she not be pressured or forced to find work. Given the harmlessness of her chosen way of life, why did her choices lead her to feel denigrated?

Lucy's account suggests that there was a gender dimension to the disrespect she had encountered. Lucy was concerned that her ambitions as an individual, particularly in the eyes of other women, were not ambitious *enough*. She said that one of her main desires was to have a baby and be a stay-at-home mother, but was concerned that this would reflect badly on her. Lucy's worries were conveyed via a number of anecdotes relating to encounters with family members and ex-colleagues:

I remember um, somebody asking me what I wanted to do like, as a job, and I said 'I want to be a mother', and I remember her laughing at me and saying 'oh you don't *just* wanna do *that*'. (Lucy)

Lucy believed that other women were derogating her ambitions as dull, quaint or homely. Since work performed in the home is outside the sphere of the market economy, it does not have monetary exchange value and does not therefore carry the status of 'real work'. Women without significant ambitions in the public sphere may be regarded as anti-feminist or a moral threat due to their apparent failure to capitalise on the emancipation that women have won from their previous confinement to the private sphere. In another anecdote, Lucy recounted the embarrassment she felt when she met her mother's colleagues – female doctors and nurses – at a work's Christmas party. Lucy believed that her mother had tried to conceal Lucy's joblessness from workmates because it was a reason to feel ashamed.

The labelling of Lucy as an anti-feminist, or the assumption that she should feel ashamed of her domestic ambitions, conflicts with Nina Power's deft observation that there are multiple feminisms (Power, 2009). Power shows how the term 'feminism' has become so multifaceted that it can be hijacked to support a range of political agendas (from pro-war, to pro-life or anti-Islam), as well as to draw women into commercial activity and conspicuous consumption (Power, 2009). Power argues that those who invoke feminism must take due care in explicating exactly what they mean. In relation to work, one strand of feminism affirms the need of women to do work outside the home and struggles for the conditions that will allow this need to be satisfied. Nobody could legitimately argue against the ethical value of this project. However, Power, perhaps following Arlie Hochschild, has been wary of a feminism that seeks to 'capitalise women' by encouraging them to surrender more and more time to commercial activity. A crude form of feminism is structuring itself according to the morality of work, asking women to emulate the competitive, work-centred aspirations that compose the culturally defined masculinity of the traditional working man. In a seminal study on the gendered division of domestic labour in 1989, Hochschild indeed found that female respondents were judging women who did not do paid-work as unproductive (Hochschild, 1989). Reflecting on this study, Fevre observed that these women, among whom we might include Lucy, were seen to be 'failing the moral test of the world of work' (Fevre, 2003: 40-1).

A feminism synergised with the morality of employment makes great demands on women, but perhaps asks little of men. For example, whilst there has been a huge flow of women into paid work (the 'major social revolution of our time' (Hochschild, 1989: 206)) we have witnessed a much less significant change in the attitudes of men towards issues like the sharing of housework (Hochschild, 1989). Importantly, Hochschild's research questions why the struggle for gender equality must be fought solely in the arena of employment. The view that women like Lucy, who are consciously deserting paid-work, are anti-feminist is not instructive. Lucy was not surrendering to the wearying discourse that a 'woman's place is in the home' but, owing in part to her negative experiences of employment, was engaged in a struggle to validate her private, domestic and familial ambitions. Power argues that 'capitalism tries to perpetually pretend that the world of politics has nothing to do

with the home' (Power, 2009: 59). Lucy's political contribution, on the other hand, perhaps consists in her struggle to valorise the non-commercial priorities of life; the value of care and good-health, and those activities and forms of work that take place in the home and do not come under the heading of 'paid employment'. During our interviews it was clear, however, that the connection between work and modern womanhood continued to represent a threat to Lucy's self-respect as a non-worker.

Samantha's case study provides a similar example to Lucy's, since Samantha's desire to leave a high-pressured job also created the impression that she was lacking ambition and therefore letting herself down. In chapter four I recalled how Samantha, a PhD graduate and ex-attorney, had quit work, undergone a period of joblessness, and later taken a part-time job in a bar. During her period of joblessness, she had also uprooted herself and moved cities. Of these combined disruptions to her ontological security she said, 'god knows how I didn't have a nervous breakdown'. Whilst working at the bar, Samantha had also at times felt frustrated by her downgraded job status: 'sometimes I wanted to wear a badge that said "hey I might be making the coffee but I have a PhD y'know!"'. Despite these tensions, however, Samantha portrayed these periods in her life in a positive light. She presented her biography as a story in which she was gradually seizing control of her life, and as a story of her maturation, where 'maturity' was defined as the making of deliberate choices, as opposed to simply being 'swept along'. She said:

I wanted to get in touch with what I want. I was willing to listen to myself and see my reaction to things, to start structuring things in my way... It felt like growing up because I was doing things I had consciously chosen to do for the first time. (Samantha)

At the time of interview, Samantha's desire to make careful and autonomous choices had led to a decision to return to university and study psychotherapy. However, whilst she had a strong sense of conviction regarding her decisions, according to her account, friends and family were more doubtful. In contrast with Samantha's image of herself as having become increasingly mature and empowered, she thought that others, particularly her parents, perceived her decisions as reckless or as a signal of

‘regression to adolescence’. She was denigrated, for example, for ‘working in the same bar as teenagers’.

Like Lucy, Samantha felt that others saw her as under-ambitious. Unlike in the case of Lucy, however, where disengagement from work appeared to signal failure as a woman, Samantha’s lifestyle choices were read as a failure to properly develop into an adult. Samantha’s moral conflict perhaps demonstrates the extent to which paid-work, and particularly higher status jobs, act as a culturally recognised signal of maturity. One hears such sentiments expressed in the demand to ‘grow up’, to move into the ‘real world’, or to ‘knuckle down’. One is to express maturity by showing compliance and by having an income, and it is naïve and childish to remain inwardly-focussed or forever a student. Against these sentiments, Samantha constructed an internal narrative according to her own definition of maturity, which was based not on hard work and compliance, but on autonomy and moral fortitude. Her parents’ expectations were seen as infantilising by Samantha because they demanded passive acquiescence rather than wilful decision-making. This example again emphasises the importance of social recognition, particularly from those close to home. Yet it perhaps also demonstrates that misrecognition and disrespect, whilst frustrating, need not always be soul-destroying or derail attempts to work less.

It is, by this point, clear that the denigration experienced by many of the participants cannot be explained simply in terms of the ‘wealth ethic’ (Kelvin and Jarrett, 1985: 105). There also exist powerful and culturally engrained beliefs which suggest that having a job says something important about the individual’s ‘character’. By engaging in employment, it is supposed that individuals do not only fulfil their obligation to a social contract, but also affirm who they are and give their lives *meaning*. In the experiences of several participants, acquaintances had found it difficult to imagine that a meaningful life without employment was possible. People had constantly asked Lucy, for example, ‘if you don’t work then what is it that you *do* everyday?’ Not confrontational by nature, Lucy had a hard time dealing with people’s failure to imagine that her daily existence was worthwhile. The case studies show the extent to which, in a society where strong subjective importance is attached to paid-work, joblessness is perceived as a ‘non-identity’ (Cole, 2007). To not seek

employment is taken as a sign of laziness or stagnation. At the end of our interview, Matthew reflected on the stigmatisation of Lucy's lifestyle, summarising the moral climate well. He said:

I think that a lot of people think like, that you're kind of missing your shadow if you don't have a job, it's just like being *half* a person, and that's quite a strong thing to say but it's like, I dunno, this whole thing um, like when we were introducing ourselves to people last year, it was kind of like, 'what do you do', and if you were unemployed it was brrrrrr, y'know people would shudder a little bit and it's like 'oh so you don't *do anything* really', y'know? (Matthew)

Lucy regretted that people were often so eager to identify her in terms of her joblessness rather than her interests. Her distress reflects Goffman's observation that stigmatised individuals are often perceived solely in terms of their deviance, rather than as complete human beings (Goffman, 1963: 12). In the eyes of others, Lucy was not simply someone without a job, but she was a 'jobless person': flawed, incomplete or 'missing her shadow'. At the end of the interview, encouraged by Matthew's emotional support, Lucy ventured to note a general cultural tendency to view the jobless only in terms of their joblessness:

It's like, um, on all these talent shows when the people come on the stage and underneath it says their name and what they do, and like in big letters it says UNEMPLOYED... it came up when Susan Boyle²¹ came on, it uh, surely they – that's like, they don't *do* anything. They could put like, 'likes, making cards', I dunno, *anything*. (Lucy)

The stigma surrounding joblessness was made even clearer by Paul, a man in his mid-twenties who I met several times during my fieldwork. Though I have not provided a case study for Paul (since we never managed to sit down for a full recorded interview) I taped a number of revealing conversations with him over the course of the fieldwork. Paul had quit his job as a support worker in homes for the mentally ill because, in his words: 'I'm not all that well myself and so in the end I found it too psychologically demanding, really draining'. Paul was a recent graduate and viewed himself as a creative and politically-minded person, with an interest in literature and

²¹ Susan Boyle is the winner of a television talent show, notoriously mocked by journalists and talent show judges who have framed her as unattractive, lonely and socially disconnected, patronising her for her ability to sing.

philosophy. When he had initially left his job, Paul was not apprehensive about living through a phase of joblessness, since a period of reading books and writing seemed appealing and worthwhile. However, to quote Paul:

Even if you go into it feeling quite self-assured, happy that being out of work fits ok with your values, there is still just this massive sense of shame you're dealing with – like working is very deeply engrained in society I think. I'm finding it really hard... It's like every time you meet a new person the first thing is always 'so what do you do?' (Paul)

In Paul's example, the question of 'what do you do?' is, as all of working age are aware, synonymous with the question: 'in what capacity are you employed?' For those who do not have jobs, this basic conversational gambit acts as a daily reminder of their deviancy, and of the significance that society attaches to work. The participant, Clive, said he would often take this question as an opportunity to make others think, answering not by revealing his occupation, but by saying something like 'I do as little harm as possible'. For Paul, however, this question was not an opportunity for subversion but a source of dread. He confessed the shame that would arrest him when he would be forced to admit to others that he was unemployed. (This could only invite further questions: wasn't Paul *bored* being at home so much, and how come he couldn't mentally hack it in his job? Was he *unwell*?). Paul admitted that he had even experienced shame after arranging internet shopping to be delivered to his home. Whilst most people would be at their place of work, Paul would always be at home in the middle of the day, when the postman would knock to deliver his parcels. Paul said that when he answered the door, the thought would cross his mind: 'the postman must know that I'm unemployed now'. Paul's shame in front of a complete stranger seems idiosyncratic and perhaps even funny at first, but it is actually very revealing. On a cognitive level, Paul was reasonably at ease with his joblessness and attached value to the intellectual activities he had been doing in his time off. Yet this wasn't enough, it seems, to stave off his deeply engrained sense of shame about being out of work.

Drawing on the work of George Herbert Mead and the psychologist, John Dewey, Honneth argued that the experience of disrespect consists in the agent's sense of

disappointment ‘with regard to the normative expectations that he or she believed could be placed on another’s willingness to respect him or her’ (Honneth, 1995: 138). In other words, disrespect arises in an interactional situation in which the cultural expectations and prejudices of others are brought to bear. However, what Paul’s postman example shows is that the experience of shame does not merely arise in response to actual expressions of social disapproval. Paul’s postman had of course, in reality, made no assumptions or disrespectful remarks about Paul’s employment status – Paul had merely projected his insecurities about not working onto the attitude of a stranger. Drawing on Mead’s social behaviourist framework, we might say that participants are experiencing humiliation because they are breaching the expectations of the ‘generalised other’ (Mead, 1962). In abstract thought or what Mead calls an ‘internal conversation’, the individual ‘takes the attitude of the generalised other toward himself, without reference to its expression in any particular other individuals’ (Mead, 1962: 155-6). Whilst, as I have shown, some participants recalled actual incidences of social disapproval, the sources of disrespect identified in the data often took the more generalised form of ‘society’ (Emma), of unspecified ‘people’ (Samantha), or of what ‘everybody thinks of me’ (Lucy). Indeed, whilst almost all participants talked about what other people thought of them, far fewer were able to recall any specific incidences of social disapproval. This is perhaps a testament to the culturally and psychologically embedded nature of the ideology of the virtue of paid work. Even where the participant was essentially self-respecting and believed that what they did with their time was meaningful and worthwhile, it was still often difficult to confront the shame that society has long taught individuals to feel about joblessness.

The Struggle for Recognition

In the remainder of the chapter I want to move on to explore how participants coped with the moral conflict between their beliefs and prevailing attitudes about the importance of work. Throughout this section I will refer to participants’ degree of ‘success’ in disengaging from work. Success here is being defined in terms of the participants’ own goal to remain disengaged from the world of employment, in

accordance with their values. Since it is clear that some were more successful in their efforts to live differently than others, it is interesting to explore how the more successful participants managed to negotiate the moral challenges of working less.

In his essay, *The Determination of Moral Facts* (1953), Durkheim followed Kant in suggesting that a primary characteristic of moral behaviour is obligation. A sense of obligation has a stabilising effect on the individual, furnishing them with an identity and a code of living, according to which their daily actions will be guided. Aside from the quality of duty, Durkheim also argued that moral behaviour is characterised by its personal desirability: an act must interest the individual's sensibilities if he or she is going to follow it through without being coerced. The self-sacrifices of moral behaviour, then, are not always miserable or puritanical but entail a certain eudaemonism, since the individual is acting in ways that they perceive to be good (Durkheim, 1953: 36-45). It is through Durkheim's suggestion that moral behaviour has the characteristics of both obligation and desirability that we can appreciate the importance of moral commitments to the well-being of the present research participants. A crucial ingredient in each participant's ability to succeed outside work was his or her adoption of one or several of the alternative moralities explored in chapter five – the values of self-care, family-care, autonomy, living life to its fullest, civic participation and environmentalism. These were the moral codes which stabilised or gave shape to life outside work.

What marked certain participants out from others was their engagement in a conscious attempt to legitimise the values that they identified with. As Honneth argued, personal experiences of disrespect need not always conclude in an inescapable sense of shame, isolation and low self-esteem since, alternatively, they might also result in a political 'struggle for recognition' (Honneth, 1995). Goffman made a similar argument in relation to stigmatised individuals:

It seems possible for an individual to fail to live up to what we effectively demand of him, and yet be relatively untouched by this failure; insulated by his alienation, protected by identity beliefs of his own, he feels that he is a full-fledged normal human-being, and that we are the ones who are not quite human. (Goffman, 1963: 17)

Honneth theorised a form of dialectics that pays special attention to the individual's sense of having been denied recognition for who they are or what they perceive to be important, arguing that the negative feelings associated with disrespect are pregnant with political potential, and may lead to broader moral conflicts in the social lifeworld²². Negative emotional reactions such as feeling ashamed, hurt or indignant tell the individual who is experiencing them that certain forms of social recognition are being withheld, forming the basis of a struggle for recognition and a challenging of conventional values (Honneth, 1995: 135-6). In a number of examples in the present study, the participant's humiliation was transcended through the active defence of alternative moral priorities.

According to Honneth, there are a number of conditions that must be met in order for the individual to be able to turn their moral denigration into an active struggle for recognition. Firstly, individuals need the support and recognition of people with similar values. (Love, according to Honneth, is the most basic form of social recognition (Honneth, 1995: 162)). More than this, however, the disrespected individual must be able to cognitively register their feelings and read them as typical for an entire social group (Honneth, 1995: 162). Honneth's discussion here is reminiscent of Mills' introductory passages in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), in which Mills argued that the value of sociological thinking is that it allows individuals to conceive of their situation in terms of wider cultural and structural forces. The sociological imagination has both a therapeutic and political function in allowing a person to connect their private problems to broader public issues. Access to support and opportunities for conscious or 'sociological' reflection, and hence the opportunity to 'struggle for recognition', depends on 'how the affected subject's cultural-political environment is constructed' (Honneth, 1995: 139). In Goffman's

²² Honneth recognised that even political conflicts which appear to be material struggles over the distribution of resources have often been traced back to individual crises of recognition, citing, for example, Marx's concern with the 'dignity' of the proletariat, and Sorel's (a theoretical forerunner of French syndicalism) interest in the problem of the individual's 'honour' (Honneth, 1995: 161). Honneth regretted, however, that individual crises of social recognition and the negative feelings associated with disrespect had never been systematically developed into a theory of social conflict. The tendency of social sciences, he argues, has been to downplay the moral component of social struggles in favour of an ontological concern with conflicting 'interests', emerging from objective inequalities in the distribution of material resources rather than the 'everyday web of moral feelings' (Honneth, 1995: 161). By contrast, Honneth's primary concern is with the affective and moral dimensions of social movements.

terms, the stigmatised individual's social circumstances shape his or her 'moral career', or the opportunities presented to reflect upon his or her place in the social world (Goffman, 1963: 45).

In the case of those 'non-political' participants, who resisted work in isolation, the opportunity to develop a struggle was scarce. Participants such as Lucy or Emma, for example, found it more difficult to defend the value of their jobless lifestyles, because they did not have access to a common culture that legitimated their alternative values. Emma emphasised her denigration more than any other participant in the study. For Lucy, it appeared that things were made slightly easier by her husband Matthew. Matthew was interested in politics and philosophy, and during one of our interviews, he encouraged Lucy to challenge the people 'out there', who 'have this notion that work is so important'. Part of Matthew's supportive role was to encourage Lucy to improve her self-respect by thinking of the cultural values surrounding work as a topic eligible for debate:

Matthew – Why do the unemployed lose this respect? I dunno, but yeah it's weird like, obviously times have changed, women, back in the day, would have been at home and whatnot [sigh]. But I hope that it hasn't just completely spun, where women are looked down upon now because they want to stay at home lookin' after children, because *that* is a full-time job in itself, and it's somethin – and *that's* the problem, it's almost like that in itself is not something to be proud of. I'm not saying that, for one second that women shouldn't work, but it's a choice, neither one should be condemned.

Lucy – Mmmm yeah, a choice.

Several participants also appeared to appreciate the interview situation as an opportunity for moral reflection. The interview itself, and the academic significance thereby transmuted into the act of disconnecting from employment, made Lucy, for example, feel 'less weird'. She said she was glad I had not 'made up assumptions' or called her lazy and, over a year later, was still requesting that we hold further interviews.

Several participants had access to larger and more organised networks of support. *TIF*, for example, appears to have brought together previously isolated individuals and provided them with a social network, a shared vocabulary, and a heightened level of self-respect. On first inspection the label 'idling' seems counterproductive, given

that one of the aims of *TIF* is to dispel an image of the jobless as lazy and socially irresponsible. Yet the value of the label may be in its lack of political ties and in its sense of humour. For these reasons, ‘idling’ has worked as a catch-all term for a demographically diverse group of people with a wide range of values and experiences. All of the participants affiliated with *TIF* celebrated the foundation as a community that allowed them to feel understood and socially included. *TIF*’s co-founder Anne said:

I think for a lot of people – they don’t have any people in their day-to-day life who understands what their philosophy is, or the way they look at the world, and they become quite introverted because they don’t have anyone that they can talk to. I feel very sorry for them because then they might become quite isolated, because they almost stop giving people a chance because ‘they’re not going to be on the same wavelength’, y’know, and ‘no-one’s ever going to understand me’... and that’s why for a lot of people the Idle Foundation is like a refuge, it’s where they are understood. (Anne)

Many idlers I spoke to indeed had an obsessive interest in monitoring *TIF*’s highly active internet message-board, leaving it on continuously in the background whilst at home, perhaps because of the feeling of camaraderie that it brought them. Aware of the benefits of their community and of the success of previous meet-ups, the founders of *TIF* were also aiming to organise more public events. There were roughly fifty attendees to each of the meet-ups I visited, arriving from across the UK and Ireland. One of the main purposes of the meet-ups was perhaps to provide a forum for idlers to ‘esteem each other’ (Honneth, 1995: 164). The emphasis of these social events was not on the philosophical or political discussion of idling but on establishing friendships and having fun. Everybody was warmly welcomed and straight-faced conversations about ‘idle values’ quickly gave way to enjoyment of the food, drink and live music at each venue.

The *TIF* message-board and the meet-ups also appeared to have value as a forum for recommending and exchanging books. Favourite titles belonged to the growing genre of popular anti-capitalist literature and ‘alternative lifestyle’ bibles. Among the books I repeatedly heard idlers recommend one another were Tom Hodgkinson’s *How to be Idle* (2004), Thoreau’s *Walden* (1995), and Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* (2000).

Publications seemed to perform a similar function to *TIF*'s message-board, offering a source of social recognition, as well as fuel for the sociological imagination. Mike, for example, told me:

A few of my friends have kind of scattered off so I can't immediately call on them, but yeah, I've got my library books that can give me solace when need be. They're like a part of my support system. (Mike)

The idea of philosophical texts as offering 'support' is what partly influenced a group of the idlers to begin working on a book of their own. Goffman indeed noted that the production of a publication is a common and effective strategy, employed by marginalised groups as a method formulating their complaints, aspirations and politics (Goffman, 1963: 37). *TIF*'s planned publication comprised part of a bigger effort to begin promoting 'the idle way' to the public. Honneth argued that engagement in direct political action has a valuable function for marginalised groups, restoring some of the individual's esteem by tearing him or her out of 'the crippling situation of passively endured humiliation' (Honneth, 1995: 164). This perhaps helps us understand the proud self-confidence of the participant, Cheryl, a public figure who had bolstered her convictions by turning her life into a political project. Cheryl confidently defined herself as a 'downshifter', and a moral pioneer of an alternative way of living.

I think that with every piece of writing I write, or with every conversation I have, I hope I leave that person with a *grain* of sand of a different way of thinking, or a different possibility, or different option, and if I've done that, I've done a good day's work. (Cheryl)

Cheryl appeared to gain self-respect by pursuing downshifting as an active moral-political project, publishing, public speaking and appearing on television and radio. Where participants were consciously political, the negative reactions or withheld recognition of others seemed to provide anchorage and motivation, representing further proof that the participant needed to set an example for others to follow. Participants such as Mike, Anne and Helen, for example, enjoyed thinking of themselves as social outcasts, 'weirdoes' or people on the margins.

In sum, the role of the community or subculture is to provide a new ‘horizon of interpretation within which experiences of disrespect that, previously, had been fragmented and had been coped with privately can then become the moral motives for a collective “struggle for recognition”’ (Honneth, 1995: 164). Without the recognition and opportunity for moral reflection offered in interactions with those who hold similar values, the risk of ‘re-integration’ looms. Most participants seemed aware of this risk and therefore the importance of contact with people ‘on the same wavelength’ (Anne). After several years contemplating giving up work, for example, Samantha said she was only able to quit her job after moving to a housing co-operative and experiencing the fellowship of others with atypical employment situations. Conversely, Rhys believed that an increasing *lack* of contact with people sharing similar values to his own had widened the gap between his values and circumstances. He said: ‘out of my close friends and family, [alternative ways of living] are not really on their radar and I suppose that’s why it’s gone on the back burner really and I’ve gone off and got a job at the university’. It was fear of a similar fate that prompted Adam to set up a ‘Simplicity Circle’ (albeit unsuccessfully) in London. He said, ‘there must be people around who see the same as me’. With his characteristic eloquence, Jack summarised the situation:

For me community is completely key to everything and if you don’t have it, then everything that happens to you happens in isolation. Any group of people need to define themselves, and they need reinforcement from each other and without it, you just lose any sense of where you’re going and then you just revert to, guess what, working nine to five and all the kind of negative things in our society. (Jack)

In spite of the importance of a legitimating culture, however, it is clear that the desire to disengage from work has generally failed to articulate itself on a collective level. This might be partly explained in terms of the diverse interests involved. If we look at the sample in terms of what Honneth called ‘interest categories’, it appears varied, comprising green activists, anti-capitalists, parenthood campaigners, as well as people without any conscious political motivations. However, if we define participants not in terms of their interests, but in terms of their basic moral convictions, the sample appears much more uniform. The core moral conviction that participants share is an ethical demand for autonomy, and for freedom to spend time on, and be defined in

terms of, activities other than paid-work. Honneth argued that to unite movements in terms of their objective interests, rather than their core moral beliefs, is to risk obfuscating their commonality:

One can easily imagine cases in which movements intersubjectively misidentify, as it were, the moral core of their resistance by explicating it in the inappropriate terms of mere interest categories (Honneth, 1995: 163).

Honneth's concern was indeed reflected in the present research. At the end of each interview, I tried to give participants a sense of the views and experiences of their fellow sample members. Many participants not only failed to identify with fellow members of the sample, but also expressed an explicit ambivalence or hostility towards the other participants. Cheryl, for example, was disgruntled to discover that she was participating in the same study as a group calling themselves the 'idlers': 'I'm not advocating that people do nothing!' Similarly, participants such as Helen were unfamiliar with ideas such as 'downshifting', Helen questioning her place in a study which also looked at a form of green activism. Despite these differences, what all participants shared was a struggle to gain moral recognition for priorities and ways of life that were not focussed on employment. However, perhaps owing partly to the denigration of the non-worker, and to the diversity of those groups who *are* challenging work (in terms of cultural, political or demographic differences), the desire to disengage from employment has so far failed to engender a positive social movement.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

Thinkers such as André Gorz, Bertrand Russell, Herbert Marcuse, and even Marx, in his later writings, have argued for the expansion of a realm of freedom beyond the necessities of labour, in which individuals have more liberty to transcend biological and economic imperatives and be ‘free for the world and its culture’ (Arendt, 1977: 205). Gorz, for example, pointed to the irrationality of a society that strives for full-employment in spite of having developed the technological means to conquer scarcity. He argued that the Left should concentrate its energies on the reduction of working hours, and on expanding the time available for individuals to develop themselves culturally and socially (Gorz, 1982, 1985, 1999). In a similar spirit, Bertrand Russell candidly wrote:

Modern methods of production have given us the possibility of ease and security for all; we have chosen, instead, to have overwork for some and starvation for others. Hitherto we have continued to be as energetic as we were before there were machines; in this we have been foolish (Russell, 1967: 237).

It is thought that shorter working hours and a more equitable distribution of work and free-time would allow all individuals to enjoy and utilise the time liberated by capitalism’s capacity for productive growth. The shift to a non-productivist or leisure orientated society has not only been proposed in the interests of the autonomy, ease and self-development of humans, but also as a suitable response to the mounting ecological problems of overproduction and overconsumption. Anders Hayden, for example, discussed the ecological merit of a post-productivist society, in which the expansion of free-time, and not economic growth, would be a guiding principle (Hayden, 1999).

Critical social theory is valuable because its imaginative emphasis on the possible, as well as the actual, infuse thinking with a sense of political purpose, discouraging the

view that there are no alternatives to present modes of social organisation. Instead of extrapolating from the present, critical social theory ‘enjoins us to think first about where we want to be, and then about how we might get there’ (Levitas, 2001), ‘provid[ing] us with [a] distance from the existing state of affairs which allows us to judge what we *are* doing in the light of what we *could* or *should* do’ (Gorz, 1999: 113, emphasis in original). A number of critical theorists, however, have framed their theories as something more than experiments in emancipatory thought, and suggested that their anti-productivist perspective reflects an actually emerging culture of resistance to the requirements of economic rationality, or a growing demand for those non-material goods (free-time, autonomy, conviviality) that would be more readily available in a society where individuals were not obliged to spend so much of their lives working. Gorz, for example, in *Farewell to the Working Class* (1982), referred to the rise of the ‘non-class of the neo-proletarian’, who fight not for workers’ rights, but for a greater level of autonomy outside work. Updating his argument in a more contemporary context, he also described an ‘unheard revolution’ in cultural mentality, in which increasing numbers of people may be withholding their hearts and minds from the world of employment (Gorz, 1999). Gorz’s argument reflects the theory of Claus Offe who, in the 1980s, expected the rationalisation of work and a record rate of unemployment to lead to the diminishing ontological status of work in the eyes of the individual (Offe, 1985). Outside the world of critical theory, the New Economics Foundation also recently alluded to ‘shifting expectations or moralities regarding the use, value and distribution of work and time in society’ (New Economics Foundation, 2010: 4). However, in spite of such claims, there has been very little empirical research conducted to verify the extent to which critical social theory is culturally resonant, and theorists’ descriptions of where and in what form resistance to work may be occurring remain under-elaborated.

The shortage of case studies and insights into the meaning and experience of resisting work has left critical social theory open to the criticism that it is groundless or ‘merely utopian’ – its dreams of ease, human development and ecological harmony are dismissed as idealist, with no connection to the present. The findings of this research, however, represent preliminary evidence to support the idea that critical social theory is culturally resonant, revealing a culture of resistance to work that appears to be both

genuine and meaningful. It is clear from my analysis that this resistance cannot be accurately interpreted as a form of conscious activism, or as an ‘anti-capitalist’ attack on the social system. Since few of the participants in the present study were consciously political in their actions and choices (and a few even categorically stated that they were ‘not activists’), their resistance to work more accurately consists in what Honneth has called the ‘everyday web of moral feelings’ (Honneth, 1995: 161). The participants’ struggles against work were not waged from an intellectual position ‘outside’ society, but were rooted in everyday social reality and practice, where they negotiated their priorities, stood up for what felt self-evidently right, and confronted the malaise and daily frustrations generated by their former employment situations. The research shows the small acts of defiance that occur ‘when individuals are denied recognition for what they are, do, feel and want; in other words, when there is a conflict or contradiction between the reality of their experience and the patterns of social recognition and valuation’ (Gorz, 1999: 133).

Society continues to emphasise the work-based identity, playing down the value of identities which are not centred on employment, such as the family-based, friendship-based, artistic-based (or anything else-based) identities that constitute the complex multiple experiences of human subjects (Cole, 2007: 1145). In a society where work is central, a person may very well find that what they are expected to be is beyond them, the things for which society is prepared to grant them recognition clashing with what they feel is most valuable, or what they believe they deserve recognition for (Gorz, 1999: 133). In place of the virtues of work, the participants in this study stressed the importance of good health, care for family and friends, civic participation, or those aesthetic and educational activities performed outside employment, that have an intrinsic rather than an economic value. Such moral priorities were so integral to each participant’s sense of self-worth, that the demands of full-time employment were difficult to bear. Theirs was a moral rebellion – a defence of values rather than mere laziness or an expression of calculated self-interest – and whilst participants were not necessarily consciously political, the wider political significance of their actions and choices may be in lending substance and conviction to the more abstract arguments of critical social theory. Their lifestyles furnish examples in the ‘art of living’ and show society that another way of life is not merely an ideological fantasy.

A number of previous studies on the experiences of joblessness have dismissed the possibility of a felicitous life without paid employment. For example, research on the legacy of Jahoda and colleagues suggests that employment serves fundamental needs for shared experience and a sense of collective purpose, for a structured experience of time involving regular activity, and for a sense of status and self-identity (Jahoda, 1982). As such, joblessness has been approached as an experience characterised solely by deprivation, in which the individual is severed from the core psychological needs catered to by paid work. In chapter two I discussed a number of notable exceptions to this approach, pointing to previous studies that have demonstrated variations in the experience of joblessness (for example, Fryer, 1986; Fryer and McKenna, 1987; O'Brien, 1986). Whilst these studies have duly recognised the potentially devastating personal consequences of unemployment, the importance of their more nuanced understanding of joblessness is in underlining the complex array of variables that may influence a person's ability to cope with time away from work. Adding to this complexity, the participants in the present study inverted the values of the deprivation model. Employment was not valued according to its supposed psychological functions but, inversely, was described as a cause of alienation or stress. The jobs that participants had previously held were not valued as a medium through which to develop a sense of status and self-identity, but were seen as a threat to individuality and self-esteem. Those participants who suffered from specific health complaints had reached the conclusion that to be free from the routines and demands of working was, in fact, essential to their well-being, and by securing a greater level of temporal autonomy outside work, they sought to foster a more caring relationship with their minds and bodies. Whilst living without work was not always easy, most participants also appeared to lead active social lives.

Given the variable nature of both attitudes to work and personal responses to having more free-time, it must be concluded that the relationship between employment status and human well-being is more complex than we yet know. Among the significant variables that influence the individual's ability to cope outside work are a whole range of particularities that relate to the individual's personality, social location, financial resources and work experiences. Further research is needed in order to untangle the variables that shape the experience of time outside work, and such research must fully

embrace the complexity of the impact of different kinds of work and non-work on health (Williams, 2010: 200). One of the more compelling research questions that remains unanswered, for example, is the extent to which employment *itself* contributes to the negative experience of time away from work by institutionalising the worker, depriving him or her of the time and energy to cultivate other interests, aptitudes and social networks. Whilst this study has not attempted to explore the factors that shape the experience of joblessness in a systematic way, its findings do serve to underline the fact that the experience of time away from work is varied and not entirely predictable. Whilst unemployment is often personally devastating, work is not always valued for its supposed psychological functions, and joblessness is not always characterised by inactivity and purposelessness. The value of this insight is that it frees us from the ‘one-dimensional thinking’ (Marcuse, 2002) of the current mainstream political agenda, which continues to be formulated according to the view that employment is a primordial requirement for a civilised and healthy existence.

Away from the Work-Centred Society

The present study provides experiential evidence to suggest that work is faltering in its role as an instrument for social integration and psychological welfare. In spite of this, paid-work remains very much at the centre of mainstream political agendas in the UK. The view that employment is healthy and civilising has remained a continuous guiding principle of both Left and Right-leaning administrations. New Labour, for example, came to power promising to combat social exclusion by raising the rate of labour force participation (Levitas, 2001; DWP, 2006: 19). This theme is consistent with the ConDem Coalition’s latest wave of welfare-to-work reforms, which operate on the basis of the mantra that ‘those who can work, should work’.²³ The latest policies aim to create social inclusion through labour supply solutions, such as the development of job skills and the cultivation of a stronger work ethic among those who are deemed ‘unemployable’ (Orton, 2011). Whilst the sanctions for those who do not co-operate in the ‘welfare bargain’ have become notably more severe with the introduction of the Coalition’s *Work Programme*, it can be argued that the ideological

²³ David Cameron (2008) used this exact phrase in a speech on 8th January, 2008.

thrust of policy has remained constant in recent years. Policy continues to be formulated according to the tacit ideal of a full-employment society, and successive administrations continue to valorise employment as ‘the normatively positive state to which citizens should aspire’ (Granter, 2009: 148). Compliance is reinforced at the structural level by an ideology of the virtue of paid work, and the social construction of employment as an economic necessity (Levitas, 2001: 450).

The subjectivities and experiences of the participants in the present study sensitise us to a number of pressing reasons to be concerned about the moralisation of work, or what might be termed a ‘work-centred’ political agenda. Firstly, the emphasis on getting people into work ‘for their own good’ fails to evaluate the psycho-social quality of the work that is actually available to those for whom it is prescribed. Significantly, most of the participants in the present study generally found employment alienating, and discussed their semi-skilled jobs as a source of frustration, stress and anxiety. These negative experiences of employment had a significant role to play in shaping each participant’s break-point. Some objected to being under surveillance in their workplaces and complained about the disrespect of bosses and colleagues. Others talked about the lack of meaning in their previous jobs, either due to the numbing ease of the work itself or the perceived low social utility of their occupations in general. Negative experiences in employment are nothing new to sociology, and whilst some of the accounts here may be unique, I have argued that the bulk of participants’ work experiences can be interpreted in terms of broader economic problems or sociological trends, as symptoms of labour market congestion or Taylorist forms of work regulation.

The significance of research that exposes negative experiences of employment is in underlining the need for policy makers to be more sensitive to ‘what work means, and what forms of work do to people’ (Williams, 2010: 198). The quality of work as experienced by the majority is an issue which has remained absent from mainstream politics for some considerable time, even though there is a building body of evidence to suggest that poor quality jobs, characterised by low levels of autonomy and security, may be as bad for a person’s health as being out of work altogether (Broom et al, 2006, Benach and Muntaner, 2007, Butterworth, 2011). Many forms of semi-

skilled and unskilled work bear no resemblance to work in its anthropological sense, as an expression of human's capacity to interact creatively and meaningfully with the world. Before valorising paid-work as a condition for a civilised and meaningful existence, or as a panacea for social exclusion, those in power should remember that workplaces are, first and foremost, sites of production, and thus often characterised by domination and control (Walker and Fincham, 2011: 69). The productive growth achieved by labour-saving technologies also threatens to radically diminish the need for human labour altogether, making an increasing number of people economically superfluous (Rifkin, 2000). Regardless of how high the unemployment rate will get in the future²⁴, it can be concluded that mass unemployment has now become a structural feature of advanced industrial societies. Even if job creation could keep pace with jobless growth, the economy clearly cannot continue to grow in ignorance of its ecological limitations. There is a troubling paradox at the heart of the present situation: whilst employment continues to be necessary for access to a socially acceptable identity, meaningful work may be in increasingly short supply.

A second major criticism of a work-centred political agenda is that it fails to recognise the legitimacy of forms of social solidarity, work and social contribution, which sit outside the scope of exchange relations. The 'work' that remains central to a work-centred policy agenda is that which comes under the umbrella of 'employment', performed for a wage, in public, and 'for others as social, not private individuals' (Gorz, 1994: 54). Indeed, one of the classic concerns of critical social theory is that the social lifeworld is dissolving into market relationships: 'The importance of unpaid work to the maintenance of social life and human relationships is ignored [and] the possibility of integration into society through any institution other than the labour market has disappeared' (Levitas, 1996: 12). In keeping with the moral focus on employment, those who choose not to work are often viewed as leading empty and morally rudderless lives. A more malevolent version of this view has been witnessed in Right-leaning political agendas, which have a history of denigrating those who do the least paid-work as malingerers, or as a moral threat to society. The present study

²⁴ At my time of writing, the most recent report by The Office for National Statistics, in September 2011, lists the unemployment rate in the UK at 2.51 million people (7.9% of the workforce) (ONS, 2011: online).

provides initial evidence to subvert such assumptions by showing that the participants' resistance to work was not socially irresponsible but, as suggested above, notable for its *moral* character. In chapter five I suggested that the participants' alternative moral standpoints can be summarised as replacing the work ethic with what David Cannon has called a 'worthwhile ethic', which downplays the importance of paid-work and instead stresses the ethical merit and social utility of a range of activities that do not necessarily generate economic value (Bowling in Gorz, 1999: 61). The participants' emphasis on the value of autonomy, care and personal well-being underscores the fact that the work ethic is not the only moral code around which a day-to-day ethic of living may be structured.

Furthermore, whilst the participants in the present study wanted to do less paid-work, it was found that they all valued the idea of 'social contribution', and that many engaged in a range of socially valuable activities in their discretionary time, including childcare, voluntary work, education and political activism. By failing to recognise the value of the social contributions that can be made outside employment, it appears that society may be neglecting a key social resource. We might, for example, think of the most publicly active participants in the present sample as role models of the Conservative Government's ideal of a 'Big Society', characterised by localism and volunteerism. In a recent speech, David Cameron said the Big Society would draw on 'the spirit of activism, dynamism, people taking the initiative [and] working together to get things done' (Cameron, 2010: online). What this image of voluntary co-operation fails to take into account, however, is the time and energy required to make social contributions outside paid-work. Given the accounts of exhaustion and malaise given by many of the present participants, in relation to their previous experiences of the full-time working lifestyle, it is reasonable to assume that the social contributions they made in their non-working lives were only possible because of the time and energy afforded to them by shorter working hours. It is perhaps ironic that the Conservative government, whilst espousing a Big Society ideal, also aims to push everybody into paid employment. Those jobless individuals who may be best equipped with the time for independent social contributions are also those most vilified by a government that continues to put paid-work at the centre of its moral agenda.

Finally, the study also stimulates further discussion about the *personal* costs of society's moral investment in paid-work. The participants expressed one of the classic concerns of critical social theory, which is that the need to work (and to cultivate oneself for the world of work) leaves less time for joyful spontaneity or intrinsically valuable activities (Russell, 1967; Horkheimer, 1974; Lafargue, 1975). The strains reported by the participants here also add to an already significant literature on the stress and ill-health (for example, Shields, 1999), or family exclusion and 'time-binds' (for example, Hochschild, 1997; Fevre, 2003; Crouter et al, 2004) caused by commitment to work. The bulk of the latest research on the personal costs of work is generally concerned with the addictions and compulsions of 'overwork', or what is sometimes referred to as a 'long hours culture' (TUC, 2002; Bunting, 2007). However, it should be noted that the majority of the participants in the present study had never belonged to the high-pressure world of professional or executive employment, and none had worked a schedule any more intense than the standard nine-to-five. The everyday difficulties that they reported therefore underline a need not only for a critique of overwork, but for an enduring critique of *work*, in what Fevre calls the 'classical sociological tradition', which uses normative or 'non-economic meanings and values to critique economic behaviour' (Fevre, 2003).

Rather than approaching the participants as socially excluded, marginal, or even disabled because they were unable to keep up with the demands of full-time employment, it can be argued that each was responding in a reasonable fashion to fairly typical situations – to experiences of heteronomy at work, or to the fatigue and muddled priorities of the busy lifestyle. What must be remembered is the historical novelty of today's commitment to work, discussed in chapter one. As Fromm summarised, there is no other period in history in which free individuals have given their energies so completely to work (Fromm, 2001: 81). When we recognise the historical novelty and irrationalities of the present situation, the participants seem more pioneering than deviant. The marginality, alterity or 'madness' of the participants, when made the object of genuine interest, has a way of revealing the 'madness' we all experience to a certain extent. We might follow Fromm, for example, and argue that it is the society we live in which is sick (Fromm, 1963), or we might follow the logic of R.D. Laing, and argue that it is the ones who struggle to

cope with the strains of paramount reality who may actually be the most sane (Laing, 1965). As Erickson argued:

When we look in depth at what work actually involves for many, the meanings attached to work and the costs of work to the individual in terms of stress, workplace conflict, alienation and ill health, the real question we need to address isn't why people stop working, but why they work at all. (Erickson, 2010: 36-7)

Whilst (unlike the alternative lifestyle bibles sometimes like to think) those who work and spend less have by no means found a secret formula for happiness, it is worth noting the appeal of the low-work, low-consumption lifestyle, relative to how it may have been viewed previously. The present findings suggest that stereotypes of the anti-consumer as the 'Green moralist', living a self-restraining or Spartan lifestyle, may misrepresent the subjectivities of those who are actually choosing to work and spend less. Whilst living on a lower income of course presented certain challenges for the participants, none of them discussed the need to reduce their levels of consumption purely in terms of deprivation or self-denial. Chapter six argued that their actions and choices are best understood in terms of what Kate Soper has called an 'alternative hedonism' (Soper, 2008) that rejects commodities as a life-focus, and instead privileges time and autonomy as the paramount forms of wealth. The pleasures of material acquisition had become subjectively problematic for the participants for a range of reasons, be it the time-poverty or loss of conviviality caused by the need to earn, the 'state of tension' associated with material aspiration, or the known ethical problems surrounding the consumption and disposal of commodities. Given that the pleasures of consumerism had become 'troubled', a lower level of consumption did not simply represent a dreaded side-effect of reduced working hours, but a component in a less acquisitive and therefore more subjectively gratifying way-of-life.

The appeal of shorter working hours can also be grasped when one considers the trivial or self-defeating nature of more conventional attempts to resist the paramount reality of everyday life. For example, in chapter five I outlined Cohen and Taylor's suggestion that the holiday retreats and psychological manoeuvres that allow

individuals to flee the scene are always temporary at best, and may ultimately only serve to reinforce the individual's tolerance of that mundane or stressful situation from which they were originally trying to escape (Cohen and Taylor, 1992: 56). Similarly, critics of consumerism, such as Gorz and Bauman, have suggested that whilst shopping may provide a feeling of sovereignty and a sense of pleasure that compensates for the alienation of labour, commodities are enjoyed at the expense of deeper enrolment into the heteronomous relationships of employment (Gorz, 1967: 72; Bauman, 2001: 16). Elsewhere, semiotic theorists of consumption have noted the resistive or transcendent possibilities of consuming alternative styles and fashions (for example, Mort, 1990; Fiske, 2000), yet the 'symbolic rebellion' and identity politics celebrated by these authors are also rendered banal as rogue styles are reappropriated as mainstream fashions (Ewen, 1990; Heath and Potter, 2005). And finally, in what sense can symbolic counter-cultures really be considered a form of resistance anyway, if all they translate into is *more* consumption, or into 'consumerist notions of personal empowerment rather than any more extended concern with the liberation of oppressed groups' (Soper, 1999: 149)? Whereas many more conventional escape attempts may be self-defeating or only temporary, the participants in the present study attempted to find a more permanent, authentic and autonomous solution to their everyday troubles. By withdrawing from the market and reducing their working hours as far as they were able, the participants hoped to improve their sense of well-being by living in closer harmony with their moral priorities.

Towards a Time-Rich Society

Work remains society's chief mechanism for income distribution, as well as a moral obligation, and a key means of identifying individuals as social and political subjects. The present research findings, however, sensitise us to a number of problems with work-centred policy agendas. Taking stock of these issues, a number of critical sociologists have argued for a major break with the present policies:

It has to be recognised that neither the right to an income, nor full citizenship, nor everyone's sense of identity and self-fulfilment can any longer be centred on and depend on occupying a job. And society has to be changed to take account of this. (Gorz, 1999: 54)

Such proposals are radical in the sense that, whilst Marxist and feminist movements have admirably fought for better working conditions, equal pay, or the recognition of unpaid forms of work as socially valuable forms of labour, work *itself* has rarely been considered an eligible category for political debate. Similarly, it is clear that the thinking which characterises mainstream politics is as one-dimensional today as it was when Thatcher first proclaimed that 'there is no alternative' to neoliberalism in 1980.²⁵ The only significant evidence of an alternative political sensibility is perhaps found in the now commonplace discourse of work/life balance (hereafter WLB). According to the logic of WLB, work is not the only important thing in life; 'work' and 'life' are separate spheres and people can lead happier lives by investing optimal amounts of time and energy in both. There is now a significant sociological literature on WLB (Warhurst et al, 2008), though the issue is of predominant interest in the fields of management and human resources, where most publications are concerned with advising companies on their employees' rights to flexible working hours. The notion of WLB has also passed into everyday language, its uptake perhaps partly inspired by New Labour's interest in the issue of flexible working options (Directgov, 2007; Lewis and Campbell, 2007).

The scholars and promoters of WLB have often had humanistic intentions, bringing the personal costs of work into focus. However, there are a number of important reasons to doubt the efficacy of WLB as a programme for change. Firstly, it can be argued that the concept lacks definitional clarity, with 'work', 'life' and 'balance' all in need of elaboration (MacInnes, 2008). Specifically, the apparent dichotomy between work and non-work seems to preclude the possibility that work could be a rewarding *part* of life, and neglects those enjoyable or self-initiated work activities that do not necessarily take place 'at work'. These semantic problems aside, perhaps the most striking shortcoming of the WLB discourse is its individualistic approach to

²⁵ Thatcher used this phrase in a press conference for American correspondents in London, on 25th June 1980. The transcript is available at: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=104389&doctype=1> (Accessed 01.11.11)

the experiential problems of work. Walker and Fincham, for example, doubted the value of WLB because it primarily targets the sufferer, rather than the social system, suggesting that ‘responsibility for dissatisfaction, unhappiness and occasionally illness, rests squarely on the shoulders of the employee’ (Walker and Fincham, 2011: 136). Their interview-based research found that the discourse of WLB may even cause misery for people who have little control over their circumstances by holding them responsible for an impossible ideal, and by leading them to internalise the stresses placed on them in their employment (Walker and Fincham, 2011: 142).

The discourse of WLB is a paramount example of neoliberal political rationality, whose model subject is a resilient individual, who uses their agency to cope with the challenges of modern life. Whereas the discourse of WLB tends to cast the individual as an agent responsible for their own ‘stress reduction’, however, the present study has indicated the limitations of individual agency by underlining some of the real structural and cultural obstacles to working less. Even where employment is no longer personally valued by an individual, the fact that the need to work is structurally reinforced – both by the economic necessity of work, and by the ideology of work’s virtue – may make work difficult to resist. For example, whilst many participants in the present study lived on significantly low incomes, most were only able to survive by depending on savings, a partner’s income, or the money earned from the small amount of hours that they still worked. As we saw, in some cases, the decision to disconnect from the world of employment also forced the participant to confront culturally engrained moral beliefs about the relationship between having a job and being an interesting, acceptable and responsible person. Several found it difficult to compensate for the loss of recognition caused by their withdrawal from the world of work. The most socially isolated participants experienced doubts and denigration as a result of their alternative choices and, even though they did not really want to return to work, the cultural pressure to find work sat heavily on their shoulders.

One of the key questions raised by the analysis is to what extent structural and cultural pressures to work *close off* the option to pursue happiness by working less. The findings suggest that such obstacles by no means *completely* dictate the individual’s freedom to reduce their working hours. Chapter six, for example,

showed that by adopting a more practical attitude towards material possessions, or by utilising the time and energy gained by working less to meet needs in novel or economical ways, many participants were able to survive on lower incomes without any apparent diminution in their overall levels of happiness. Chapter seven also showed how the loss of recognition associated with joblessness was compensated for via the adoption of a subcultural or political identity, and through association with others who held similar values. These findings complement the conclusions of the journalists, Leff and Haft, in their study of the voluntarily jobless in 1980s America. Their research also stressed the agency of its participants, suggesting that personality and outlook are key determinants in the ways that people react to having more free-time:

The people we met who were at ease and at peace with their free time were of varied backgrounds, ages and occupational histories. What they shared in common was ripe curiosity, the willingness to test new ideas, and the belief that through their own acts they could influence their own lives. (Leff and Haft, 1983: 395)

However, whilst it may to a certain extent be possible to reduce working hours on an individual basis, it must be concluded that the challenge of working less is not simply a problem of imagination or outlook, and does not end with the dereification of the work role. Whilst the participants demonstrated some of the methods by which the structural and cultural barriers to working less might be overcome, these obstacles remain highly significant. The escape to a slower, time-rich lifestyle is limited by the dependency on work for an income, and the option to reduce working hours is clearly not open to the most disadvantaged groups in society. The commercialisation or privatisation of a growing number of needs is a process that can only make working and spending less more difficult. It will also remain difficult to disengage from the world of employment for as long as a job is considered necessary for access to a socially acceptable identity.

Whilst it has been shown that participants in the present study did achieve a level of success in rebalancing their priorities, the discourse of WLB underestimates the degree of financial security and moral fortitude that may be required for a person to

disconnect from work to any significant degree. In particular, WLB initiatives and policies seem to be targeted at those who work long hours due to an interest in their job or a commitment to their profession; they have little to offer those in less skilled jobs who work more out of economic compulsion. Jim Shorthose argued that WLB ultimately represents ‘evidence of an inability to step outside a particular universe and really compare alternatives in an open way’ (Shorthose, 2004: 2). Most of the official documentation on WLB is preoccupied with the economic value of employee morale, and frames WLB as a ‘win-win’ situation for both employees and businesses (DTI, 2007). Shorthose argued that this masks the conflict of interests between employers and employees, limiting a broader discussion of possibilities for alternative ways of living and different relationships between life and work (Shorthose, 2004).

The journalist, Melissa Benn, wrote that ‘Being against work-life balance would be a bit like being against summer or good sex’ (Benn in Shorthose, 2004: 2). A more harmonious lifestyle is indeed perhaps an ideal that is so *obviously* agreeable that its promotion is relatively anodyne. What is generally missing (outside critical social theory, at least) is a bolder discussion of what structural changes can be made to create more favourable economic and cultural conditions that, if implemented, could *help* people live the more fulfilling lives to which they aspire. The present findings, whilst demonstrating the agency of those determined individuals who have already broken from the norm of full-time working, ultimately suggest that genuine change can only be promoted by policies which radically readdress the maldistribution of work and free-time in society. A number of forward-thinking authors have already proposed an alternative in the form of a politically endorsed, collective programme of work-time reduction (Gorz, 1982, 1985, 1999; Hayden, 1996; Vandenberghe, 2002; Standing, 2005; New Economics Foundation, 2010).

Rather than furiously scrambling to make new work that is often meaningless and of low or no social utility, we should seek to share equitably the work that needs to be done, the leisure dividend from the work we choose to no longer do, and the wealth generated. (Hayden, 1999: 34)

Programmes of work-time reduction would privilege the expansion of free-time rather than economic production, encouraging a growth in non-monetary forms of exchange.

The efficacy of new policies would be judged according to the extent to which they allow people to live ‘multi-active’ lifestyles in which they are free to engage in a range of different activities and modes of social membership (Gorz, 1999). The new post-productivist society would be one based on culture and care rather than paid-work, and the central challenge that the makers of progressive policies would face is that of how to reduce working hours without also reducing people’s incomes. It is only by removing work as a precondition for social recognition and an acceptable income that society can make it truly tenable for people to work significantly shorter hours, and give people the basic level of security required to cultivate a more autonomous, caring and healthy art of living.

So long as society persists with a work-centred policy agenda, the free-time liberated by productive growth will be reinvested in the creation of jobs of questionable social utility that may diminish human well-being and contribute further to the destruction of the environment. Time that is not converted into new jobs will continue to manifest as job scarcity. By not responding radically to the problem of unemployment, society ensures that ‘unavoidable leisure shall cause misery all round instead of being a universal source of happiness’ (Russell, 1967). Rather than allowing individuals to be free for non-work priorities and the enjoyment of life, gains in productivity will continue to produce involuntary unemployment – a kind of ‘dead time’, characterised by poverty and social exclusion:

What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of labourers without labour, that is, the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse. (Arendt, 1998: 5)

Whilst it is beyond the scope of the present study to explore and evaluate the details of proposed programmes of work-time reduction, it is clear that such programmes would be most effective if formulated by drawing on the insights and experiences of those individuals who have already pioneered a break with paramount reality. I want to propose that everyday resistance to work is therefore a fruitful area for future sociological research. Subjects such as those studied here are of interest because the problems they are dealing with on an individual level are problems society will one day have to face on a collective level. If society is to earnestly respond to the social

problem of jobless growth, or to the ecological problems of overproduction and overconsumption, it is important for researchers to find out whether and how it is possible for individuals to live with less work, and to understand what a 'post-busyness' subjectivity might look like (Darier, 1998: 204-5).

One of the first tasks of further research in this area is perhaps to properly gauge the current level of disenchantment with work. Sociology's previous under-exploration of the area has left a number of stereotypes about those who resist work intact. On the one hand, conservative stereotypes approach non-workers as malingerers or excluded individuals who must be functionally re-integrated. On the other, it may be thought that resistance to work is a marginal phenomenon, confined to bourgeois idlers who can afford to buy themselves free-time, or to the usual artists and 'cultural commentators' who mount a politically conscious and intellectually informed attack on social norms (Granter, 2009: 182). By contrast, Gorz believed that paid-work was losing its ontological significance in the hearts and minds of the multitude (Gorz, 1999: 59). Whilst such claims lack robust empirical evidence to support them, the present research provides preliminary evidence to indicate that resistance to work may be more 'mainstream' than previously thought.²⁶

Whilst the sample size for this research was relatively small, it was also diverse in terms of age, gender, income and social background, suggesting that those who resist work defy categorisation in terms of a class, subculture, or interest group. Furthermore, as suggested above, struggle was not waged from a privileged intellectual position 'outside' society, but was rooted in everyday social reality and practice. Whilst some participants were politically conscious and did define themselves in terms of a subcultural label (as 'idlers' or as 'downshifters'), on the whole, it appears that participants' identities were not conspicuously marginal or avant-garde, but were actually far more ordinary. This is in line with Schor's

²⁶ It is indeed worth noting the relative ease with which eligible participants for the present study were found, and also the general interest of friends, family, colleagues and strangers in my topic area. Over the three years in which the study was conducted, I met an overwhelming amount of people who recommended friends to be interviewed, or who told me stories about their own negative experiences at work. Whilst I have not documented this interest, and such anecdotal evidence is no substitute for proper research, my personal belief is that it these are significant findings in themselves, and testify to the cultural resonance of the critique of work at my time of writing.

previous description of the downshifter as someone who could potentially be ‘the person next-door’ (Schor, 1998), or Soper’s reference to a ‘mainstreaming’ of concern surrounding the discontents of the affluent lifestyle (Soper, 2009). The participants in the present study provide initial evidence to show that it is not only marginal groups such as Green activists or the ‘idle rich’ who are choosing to work and spend less.

Given the apparent ‘ordinariness’ of people who are resisting work, the academic usage of subcultural terms like ‘downshifter’, ‘idler’ or ‘simple liver’ (whilst conceptually useful for describing changing attitudes) can be said to exaggerate the alterity of those who are disengaging from the world of employment, who may, in fact, have no sense of their attitudes or identities as ‘different’. Terms such as these perform an important function in the lifeworld as collective labels for people who choose to break from an accustomed way-of-life, but in the context of academic research, the present study advises that they can only serve to downplay the broader significance of changing attitudes. In summarising his study of the voluntarily unemployed in 1970’s America, the journalist, Lefkowitz, also downplayed the novelty of his interviewees’ attitudes. He suggested that whilst the choices they made were unconventional, the deeper concerns that motivated them were hauntingly familiar:

Their dramatic break with work has carried them some distance from the working community. But their conflicts and discontents with work, what they expected and what was denied them in their work lives, are not atypical or unusual... They have acted on those attitudes and concerns that trouble the majority (Lefkowitz, 1979: 15).

Whilst Lefkowitz’s belief in the relative normality of his participants’ attitudes seems plausible, further research is of course needed in order to quantify the cultural disaffection with employment. To this end, Gorz recommended the use of quantitative social surveys, suggesting that the design of these surveys might draw on the themes and interpretative frameworks generated by initial, more exploratory studies such as my own (Gorz, 1999: 61). One of the main methodological challenges of research in this area will be to figure out how to gauge the individual’s relationship with work in a society where most people are accustomed to working out of necessity,

and do not imagine that there could be any alternative (Granter, 2009: 139). If it can indeed be shown that resistance to work is a revolution that has already occurred in people's hearts and minds, as some theorists believe, this resistance will be in dire need of 'a collective expression capable of making itself publicly heard' (Gorz, 1999: 59). Further research might wish to explore the developing thirst for a social alternative, and continue to publicly translate the latent radicalism of those subjects for whom work has become problematic (Gorz, 1999: 60).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adorno, T. (2001) *The Culture Industry*. London: Routledge
- Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. (1979 [1944]) 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso
- Anthony, P. (1977) *The Ideology of Work*. London: Tavistock
- Arendt, H. (1977) 'The Crisis in Culture' in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Arendt, H. (1998 [1958]) *The Human Condition*. London: Chicago Press
- Barling, J. and Kelloway, E. (1996) 'Job Insecurity and Health: The Moderating Role of Workplace Control', *Stress Medicine*, vol.12, pp. 253-9
- Barry, J. (2010) "'Choose Life" Not Economic Growth: Critical Social Theory for People, Planet and Flourishing in the "Age of Nature"'. *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, Available at <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=1585830>> [Accessed 08.11.11]
- Bauman, Z. (1998) *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*. Maidenhead: Open University Press
- Bauman, Z. (2001) 'Consuming Life', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol.1:9, pp. 9-29
- Bauman, Z. (2008) *The Art of Life*. Cambridge: Polity
- Beder, S. (2000) *Selling the Work Ethic: From Puritan Pulpit to Corporate PR*. London and New York: Zed Books
- Bell, D. (1976) *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. New York: Basic Books
- Benach, J. and Muntaner, C. (2007) 'Precarious Employment and Health: Developing a Research Agenda', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, vol.61, pp.276-7
- Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Berger, P. and Pullberg, S. (1965) 'Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness', *History and Theory*, vol. 4:2, pp. 196-211
- Berki, R. N. (1979) 'On the Nature and Origins of Marx's Concept of Labour', *Political Theory*, vol. 7:1, pp. 35-56
- Black, C. (2008) *Working for a Healthier Tomorrow*. The Stationary Office

- Booth, W. (1989) 'Gone Fishing: Making Sense of Marx's Concept of Communism', *Political Theory*, vol. 19:1, pp. 7-27
- Bouffartigue, P. (2010) 'The Gender Division of Paid and Domestic Work: Some Remarks in Favour of a Temporal Perspective', *Time and Society*, vol.19, pp. 220-238
- Bowring, F. (1999) 'Job Scarcity: The Perverted Form of a Potential Blessing', *Sociology*, vol. 33:1, pp. 69-84
- Bowring, F. (2000) 'Social Exclusion: Limitations of the Debate', *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 20, pp. 307-330
- Bowring, F. (2011) 'Marx's Concept of Fettering: A Critical Review', *Critique*, vol. 39:1, pp.137-153
- Bowring, F. (forthcoming) 'Repressive Desublimation and Consumer Culture: Re-evaluating Herbert Marcuse', *New Formations*, Forthcoming journal article
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 3:2, pp. 77-101.
- Braverman, H. (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press
- Broom, D., D'Souza, R., Strazdins, L., Butterworth, P., Parslow, R. and Rodgers, B. (2006) 'The Lesser Evil: Bad Jobs or Unemployment?', *Social Science and Medicine*, vol.63, pp.575-586
- Brown, P. (2003) 'The Opportunity Trap: Education and Employment in a Global Economy', *European Educational Research Journal*, vol. 2:1, pp. 141-179
- Brown, P. (2004) *The Mismanagement of Talent: Employability and Jobs in the Knowledge Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Brown, P. (2011) *The Global Auction: The Broken Promises of Education, Jobs, and Incomes*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press
- Bunting, M. (2005) *Willing Slaves: How the Overwork Culture is Ruling Our Lives*. London: Harper Perennial
- Burchell, B. (1994) 'Who is affected by Unemployment? Job insecurity and Labour Market influences on Psychological Health' in D. Gallie, C. Marsh and C. Vogler (eds.) *Social Change and the Experience of Unemployment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Butterworth, P., Leach, L.S., Strazdins, L., Olesen, S.C., Rodgers, B., Broom, D.H. (2011) 'The Psychosocial Quality of Work Determines Whether Employment Has Benefits for Mental Health: Results From A Longitudinal National Household Panel Survey', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, DOI: 10.1136/oem.2010.059030

Cameron, D. (2008) 'A real plan for welfare reform', Speech, 8 January, Available at <www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2008/01/David_Cameron_A_real_plan_for_welfare_reform.aspx> [Accessed 30.09.11]

Cameron, D. (2010) 'Together in the National Interest', Speech, 6 October, Available at <http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2010/10/David_Cameron_Together_in_the_National_Interest.aspx> [Accessed 01.10.11]

Clark, T. (2010) 'On "Being Researched": Why Do People Engage With Qualitative Research?', *Qualitative Research*, vol.10:4, pp. 339-419

Cohen, A. (2003) *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London and New York: Routledge

Cohen, S. and Taylor, L. (1992) *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*. London: Routledge

Cole, M. (2007) 'Re-thinking Unemployment: A Challenge to the Legacy of Jahoda et al', *Sociology*, vol. 41, pp.1133-1149

Cole, M. (2008) 'Sociology Contra Government? The Contest for the Meaning of Unemployment in UK Policy Debates', *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol.22:1 pp.27-43

Conservatives (2010) 'Get Britain Working' [online] Available at <<http://www.conservatives.com/getbritainworking/>> [Accessed 09.11.11]

Conservatives (2010a) 'Ending the free ride for those who fail to take responsibility' [online] <http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/04/Ending_the_free_ride_for_those_who_fail_to_take_responsibility.aspx> [Accessed 20.04.10]

Crouter, A.C., Bumpus, M.F., Head, M.R. (2004) 'Implications of Overwork and Overload for the Quality of Men's Family Relationships', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol.63:2, pp.404-416

Darier, E. (1998) 'Time to be Lazy: Work, the Environment and Modern Subjectivities', *Time and Society*, vol. 7:2, pp. 193-208

DeBotton, A. (2004) *Status Anxiety*. London: Penguin

DeGeus, M. (2009) 'Sustainable Hedonism: The Pleasures of Living Within Environmental Limits' in K. Soper, M. Ryle and L. Thomas (eds.) *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan

DeGrazia, S. (1962) *Of Time, Work and Leisure*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund

Department for Social Security (1998) *New ambitions for our country: A new contract for welfare* (CM. 3805) London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Department for Work & Pensions (2006) *A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering People to Work* (CM. 6730) London: Department for Work and Pensions

Department for Work and Pensions (2010) 'Unemployment and Youth Unemployment Fall as Government Increase Help for Unemployed', Press Release. Available at <www.dwp.gov.uk/newsroom/press-release/2010/january> [Accessed 14.03.11]

Department of Health (2010) *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our Strategy for Public Health in England*. London: Department of Health

Department of Trade and Industry (2007) 'The Third Work-Life Balance Employee Survey'. Available at <<http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file38388.pdf>> [Accessed 03.10.11]

Directgov (2007) 'Flexible working and work/life balance: An introduction'. Available at <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/employment/employees/workinghoursandtimeoff/dg_10029491> [Accessed 03.10.11]

Dittmar, H. (2007) 'The Costs of Consumer Culture and the "Cage Within": The Impact of the Material "Good Life" and "Body Perfect" Ideals on Individuals' Identity and Well Being', *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 18:1, pp. 23-59

Doherty, M. (2009) 'When the Working Day is Through: The End of Work as Identity?', *Work, Employment and Society*, vol. 23, pp. 84-101

Dore, R. (1976) *The Diploma Disease: education, qualification and development*. London: George Allen and Unwin

Duncombe, J. and Jessop, J. (2002) "'Doing rapport" and the ethics of "faking friendship"' in M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop and T. Miller (eds.) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications

Dunn, A. (2010) 'Welfare Conditionality, Inequality and Unemployed People with Alternative Values', *Social Policy and Society*, vol. 9, pp. 461-473

Durkheim, E. (1953) *Sociology and Philosophy*. London: Cohen and West Ltd

Easterlin, R. (2007) 'The Escalation of Material Goods: Fingering the Wrong Culprit', *Psychological Inquiry*, vol. 18: 1, pp. 31-33

Edwards, T. (2000) *Contradictions of Consumption*. Buckingham: Open University Press

Engels, F. (1987 [1845]) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. California: Stanford University Press

Erickson, M. (2010) 'Efficiency and Effort Revisited' in M. Erickson and C. Turner (eds.) *The Sociology of Wilhelm Baldamus: Paradox and Inference*. Basingstoke: Ashgate

- Ewen, S. (1990) 'Marketing Dreams: The Political Elements of Style' in A. Tomlinson (ed.) *Consumption, Identity and Style*. London: Routledge
- Featherstone, M. (1991) *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage.
- Fevre, R. (2000) *The Demoralization of Western Culture*. London and New York: Continuum
- Fevre, R. (2003) *The New Sociology of Economic Behaviour*. London: SAGE
- Fine, M. (2002) *Disruptive Voices: The Possibilities for Feminist Research*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press
- Fiske, J. (1991) *Understanding Popular Culture*. London: Unwin Hyman
- Fiske, J. (2000) 'The Commodities of Culture' in M.J. Lee (ed.) *The Consumer Society Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Forrester, V. (1999) *The Economic Horror*. Cambridge: Polity
- Fraser, R. (ed.) (1968) *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Fraser, R. (ed.) (1969) *Work 2: Twenty Personal Accounts*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Frayne, D. (2008) 'Overcoming Work / Life Discrepancy', Masters Dissertation, Cardiff University
- Fromm, E. (1963) *The Sane Society*. Surrey: Routledge
- Fromm, E. (1979) *To Have or To Be?* London: Abacus
- Fromm, E. (1995) *Life Between Having and Being*. Suffolk: St Edmundsbury Press
- Fromm, E. (2001 [1942]) *The Fear of Freedom*. London: Routledge
- Fryer, D. (1986) 'Employment Deprivation and Personal Agency During Unemployment: Findings and Implications. A Critical Discussion of Jahoda's Explanation of the Psychological Effects of Unemployment', *Social Behaviour*, vol.1, pp.3-23
- Fryer, D. (1992) 'Psychological or Material Deprivation: Why Does Unemployment Have Mental Health Consequences?' in E. McLaughlin (ed.) *Understanding Unemployment: New Perspectives on Active Labour Market Policies*. London and New York: Routledge
- Fryer, D. and McKenna, S. (1987) 'The Laying Off of Hands: Unemployment and the Experience of Time' in S. Fineman (ed.) *Unemployment: Personal and Social Consequences*. London: Tavistock

- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity
- Goffman, E. (1963) *Stigma*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
- Goffman, E. (1972) *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction*. London: Allen Lane
- Goldthorpe, J.H., Lockwood, D., Bechhofer, F. and Platt, J. (1968) *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Goodin, R.E., Rice, J.M., Parpo, A. and Eriksson, L. (2008) *Discretionary Time: A New Measurement of Freedom*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Goodwin, A.M. and Kennedy, A. (2005) 'The Psychosocial Benefits of Work for People with Severe and Enduring Mental Health Problems', *Community, Work and Family*, vol.8:1, pp. 23-25
- Gorz, A. (1967) *Strategy for Labour*. USA: Beacon Press
- Gorz, A. (1980) *Ecology as Politics*. London: Pluto Press
- Gorz, A. (1982) *Farewell to the Working Class. An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*. London and Sydney: Pluto Press
- Gorz, A. (1985) *Paths to Paradise: On the Liberation from Work*. London: Pluto
- Gorz, A. (1986) with R.Maischein and M. Jander, 'Alienation, Freedom, and Utopia: Interview with André Gorz', *Telos*, vol. 67: pp. 199-206
- Gorz, A. (1988) *Critique of Economic Reason*. London and New York: Verso
- Gorz, A. (1992) 'On the Difference between Society and Community, and Why Basic Income Cannot by Itself Confer Full Membership of Either', in Philippe Van Parijs (ed.) *Arguing for Basic Income*. London: Verso
- Gorz, A. (1994) *Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology*. London: Verso
- Gorz, A. (1999) *Reclaiming Work. Beyond the Wage-Based Society*. Cambridge: Polity
- Gorz, A. (2010) *The Immaterial*. Calcutta: Seagull Books
- Gorz, A. (2010a) *Ecologica*. Calcutta: Seagull Books
- Granter, E. (2009) *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work*. Aldershot: Ashgate
- Grigsby, M. (2004) *Buying Time and Getting By*. New York: State University of New York Press

- Grover, C. and Piggott, L. (2007) 'Social security, employment and disabled people: Critical reflections on *A new deal for welfare*', *Disability and Society*, vol.22:7, pp.733-746
- Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (1994) *Labor of Dionysus*. London: University of Minnesota Press
- Hayden, A. (1999) *Sharing the Work, Sparing the Planet: Work Time, Consumption and Ecology*. Toronto: Pluto Press
- Hayes, J. and Nutman, P. (1981) *Understanding the Unemployed: The Psychological Effects of Unemployment*. London: Tavistock Publications
- Heath, J. and Potter, A. (2005) *The Rebel Sell: Why the Culture Can't be Jammed*. Capstone, Chichester
- Helm, T. and Asthana, A. (2010) 'Unemployed told: do four weeks of unpaid work or lose your benefits' [online] *The Guardian*. Available at <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/07/unemployed-unpaid-work-lose-benefits>> [Accessed 07.11.10]
- Henderson, M., Glozier, N. and Holland Elliott, K. (2005) 'Long Term Sickness Absence is Caused by Common Conditions and Needs Managing', *British Medical Journal*, vol. 330, pp.802-3
- Hetherington, K. (1992) 'Stonehenge and its Festival: Spaces of Consumption' in R. Shields (ed.) *Lifestyle Shopping: The Subject of Consumption*. London: Routledge
- Hochschild, A. (1983) *The Managed Heart: The Commercialisation of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Hochschild, A. (1989) *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Avon Books
- Hochschild, A. (1997) *The Time Bind*. New York: Metropolitan Books
- Hodgekinson, T. (2004) *How to be Idle*. London: Hamish Hamilton
- Honneth, A. (1995) *The Struggle for Recognition*. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell
- Honoré, C. (2004) *In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed*. New York: Harper Collins
- Horkheimer, M. (1974 [1957]) *Critique of Instrumental Reason*. New York: Continuum
- Jahoda, M., Lazarsfeld, P.F., and Ziesel, H. (1972) *Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community*. London: Tavistock
- Jahoda, M. (1982) *Employment and Unemployment: A Social-Psychological Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

- James, O. (2007) *Affluenza*. Vermillion: London
- James, O. (2008) *The Selfish Capitalist: Origins of Affluenza*. Vermillion: London
- Kasser, T. (2002) *The High Price of Materialism*. Cambridge and Massachusetts: Bradford Books
- Kelvin, P. and Jarrett, J. (1985) *Unemployment: Its Social Psychological Effects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kerridge, R. (2009) 'Green Pleasures' in K. Soper, M. Ryle and L. Thomas (eds.) *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Klein, N. (2000) *No Logo*. London: Harper Collins
- Kvale, S. (1996) *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London and California: SAGE
- Lafargue, P. (1975 [1883]) *The Right To Be Lazy*. USA: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company
- Lane, R. (2000) 'Diminishing Returns to Income, Companionship and Happiness', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 1, pp. 103-119
- Lane, R. (2000a) *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*. London and New Haven: Yale University Press
- Layard, R. (2005) *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*. New York: Penguin
- Leff, W. and Haft, M. (1983) *Time Without Work*. Boston: South End Press
- Lefkowitz, B. (1979) *Breaktime: Living Without Work in a Nine to Five World*. New York: Hawthorn
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1972) *The Savage Mind*. London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson
- Levitas, R. (2001) 'Against Work: A Utopian Incursion into Social Policy', *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 21, pp. 449-465
- Lewis, J. and Campbell, M. (2007) 'Work/Family Balance Policies in the UK Since 1997: A New Departure?', *Journal of Social Policy*, vol. 36:3, pp.365-381
- Linder, S. B. (1970) *The Harried Leisure Class*. Columbia: Columbia University Press
- Lodziak, C. (2002) *The Myth of Consumerism*. London: Pluto Press

- Lodziak, C. and Tatman, J. (1997) *André Gorz – A Critical Introduction*. Chicago: Pluto
- MacInnes, J. (2008) 'Work-life balance: three terms in search of a definition' in C. Warhurst, D. Eikhof and A. Haunschild (eds.) *Work Less, Live More? A Critical Analysis of the Work-Life Boundary*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Mackay, H. (1997) 'Introduction' in H. Mackay (ed.) *Consumption and Everyday Life*. London: SAGE
- Marcuse, H. (1968) 'Liberation from the Affluent Society' in D. Cooper (ed.) *The Dialectics of Liberation*. Penguin: Middlesex
- Marcuse, H. (1998 [1956]) *Eros and Civilisation*. London: Routledge
- Marcuse, H. (2002 [1964]) *One-Dimensional Man*. London: Sphere Books
- Marx, K. (1969 [1844]) 'Alienated Labour' in T. Burns (ed.) *Industrial Man*. Middlesex: Penguin Books
- Marx, K. (1972 [1857]) *Grundrisse*. London: Macmillan
- Marx, K. (1974 [1867]) *Capital*. London: Dent
- Marx, K. (1975 [1844]) 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' in L. Colletti (ed.) *Early Writings*. London: Penguin
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1970 [1844]) *The German Ideology: Part I*. Translated by C.J. Arthur. New York: International Publishers
- Mattiasson, I., Folke, L., Nilsson, J. and Theorell, T. (1990) 'Threat of Unemployment and Cardiovascular Risk Factors: Longitudinal Study of Quality of Sleep and Serum Cholesterol Concentrations in Men Threatened With Redundancy', *British Medical Journal*, vol. 301, pp. 461-6
- May, T. (2010) 'Tackling unemployment and worklessness', Speech, 15th March, Available at <http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2010/03/Theresa_May_Tackling_unemployment_and_worklessness.aspx> [Accessed 07.11.11]
- McCracken, S. (2004) 'Idleness for All' in *New Formations*, vol. 53, pp. 65-76
- McKibben, B. (2007) *Deep Economy: Economics as if the World Mattered*. UK: Oneworld
- Mead, G.H. (1962 [1934]) *Mind, Self and Society*. London: University of Chicago Press
- Merton, R. (1938) 'Social Structure and Anomie', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 3:5, pp. 672-82

- Mills, C.W. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Minton, A. (2009) *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First Century City*. London: Penguin
- Mort, F. (1990) 'The Politics of Consumption' in S. Hall and M. Jacques (eds.) *New Times*. London: Lawrence and Wishart
- Naish, J. (2008) *Enough*. London: Hodder and Stoughton
- Nava, M. (1991) 'Consumerism Reconsidered: Buying and Power', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 5:2, pp. 157-73
- New Economics Foundation (2010) '21 Hours' [online] *New Economics Foundation*. Available at <<http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/21-hours>> [Accessed 12/08/10]
- Nolan, J., Wichert, I. and Burchell, B. (2000) 'Job Insecurity, Psychological Well-Being and Family Life' in E. Heery and J. Salmon (eds.) *The Insecure Workforce*. London: Routledge
- O'Brien, G. (1986) *Psychology of Work and Unemployment*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons
- OECD (2002) *Babies and Bosses – Reconciling Work and Family Life (Volume 1)*. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/document/32/0,3746,en_2649_34819_30652384_1_1_1_1,00.html>
- Offe, C. (1985) *Disorganised Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity
- Office for National Statistics (2011) 'Summary of labour market statistics published on 14 September 2011' [online] Available at <<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/september-2011/statistical-bulletin.html#tab-Summary-of-labour-market-statistics-published-on-14-September-2011>> [Accessed 10.10.11]
- Olin Wright, E. (2010) *Envisioning Real Utopias*. London and Brooklyn: Verso
- Orton, M. (2011) 'Flourishing Lives: The Capabilities Approach as a Framework for New Thinking About Employment, Work and Welfare in the 21st Century', *Work, Employment and Society*, vol. 25:2, pp. 352-360
- Oswald (2010) *Emotional Prosperity and the Stiglitz Commission*. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 48:4, pp. 651-669
- Owens, E. (2006) 'Conversational Space and Participant Shame in Interviewing', *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 12:6, pp. 1160-80
- Packard, V. (1957) *The Hidden Persuaders*. London: Longmans, Green and Co

- Papadopoulos, D. Stephenson, N. and Tsianos, V. (2008). *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the 21st Century*. London: Pluto Press
- Parker, S. (1972) *The Future of Work and Leisure*. London: Paladin
- Peel, E., Parry, O., Douglas, M. and Lawton, J. (2006) “‘It’s No Skin off My Nose’”: Why People Take Part in Qualitative Research, *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 16, pp. 1335-1349
- Pirsig, R. M. (1974) *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. London: Vintage
- Power, N. (2009) *One-Dimensional Woman*. Winchester: O Books
- Rifkin, J. (2000) *The End of Work. The Decline of the Global Work-Force and the Dawn of a Post-Market Era*. London: Penguin
- Roberts, K. (2007) ‘Work-life balance – the sources of the contemporary problem and the probable outcomes: A review and interpretation of the evidence’, *Employee Relations*, vol. 29: 4, pp. 334-351
- Rubin, H. and Rubin, I. (2005) *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. London: Sage Publications
- Russell, B. (1956) *Portraits From Memory and Other Essays*. London: Allen and Unwin
- Russell, B. (1967 [1932]) ‘In Praise of Idleness’ in E. Fromm (ed.) *Socialist Humanism*. London: Allen Lane
- Sayers, S. (1998) *Marxism and Human Nature*. New York: Routledge
- Schor, J. (1998) *The Overspent American*. New York: Harper Perennial
- Schor, J. (2007) ‘In Defence of Consumer Critique: Revisiting the Consumption Debates of the Twentieth Century’, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 611:1, pp. 16-30
- Seidman, I. (1998) *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. New York: Teachers College Press
- Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character*. New York: Norton
- Shields, M. (1999) ‘Long Working Hours and Health’, *Health Reports (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 82-003-XIE)* vol.11:2, pp.33-48
- Shorthose, J. (2004) ‘Like Summer and Good Sex? The Limitations of the Work Life Balance Campaign’, *Capital and Class*, vol. 82, pp. 1-8
- Soper, K. (1990) *Troubled Pleasures*. London and New York: Verso

- Soper, K. (1996) 'Greening Prometheus: Marxism and Ecology' in T. Benton (ed.) *The Greening of Marxism*. New York: Guildford Press
- Soper, K. (1999) 'Despairing of Happiness: The Redeeming Dialectic of Critical Theory', *New Formations*, vol.38, pp. 141-153
- Soper, K. (2006) 'The Other Pleasures of Post-Consumerism' [online] *Soundings*. Available at <<http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/articles/soper.html>> [Accessed 02.11.10]
- Soper, K. (2007) 'Re-thinking the "Good Life": The Citizenship Dimension of Consumer Dissatisfaction with Consumerism', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol. 7:2, pp. 205-229
- Soper, K. (2008) 'Alternative Hedonism, Cultural Theory and the Role of Aesthetic Revisionsing', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 22:5, pp. 567-587
- Soper, K. (2009) 'Introduction: The Mainstreaming of Counter-Consumerist Concern' in K.Soper, M. Ryle and L. Thomas (eds.) *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Soper, K. and Thomas, L. (2006) 'Alternative Hedonism and the Critique of Consumerism', *Cultures of Consumption Working Paper*, No. 31
- Standing, G. (2005) 'Why Basic Income is Needed for a Right to Work', *Rutgers Journal of Law and Urban Policy*, vol.2:1, pp. 91-102
- Stiglitz, J.E. Sen, A. and Fitoussi, J. (2010) *Mis-Measuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up*. New York: The New Press
- Stratton, A. (2010) 'David Cameron Aims to Make Happiness the New GDP' [online], *The Guardian*, Available at <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/14/david-cameron-wellbeing-inquiry?INTCMP=SRCH>> [Accessed 28.04.11]
- Thompson, E.P. (1967) 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, vol.18:1, pp.56-97
- Thoreau, H. D. (1995 [1854]) *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. New York: Dover
- Townsend, P. (1979) *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living*. London: Allan Lane
- Trade Union Congress (2002) *About Time: A New Agenda for Shaping Working Hours*. London: TUC
- Vandenberghe, F. (2002) 'Working Out Marx: Marxism and the End of the Work Society', *Thesis Eleven*, vol.69, pp.21-46

Walker, C. and Fincham, B. (2011) *Work and the Mental Health Crisis in Britain*. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell

Warhurst, C., Eikhov, D.R. and Haunschild, A. (eds.) (2008) *Work Less, Live More? Critical Analysis of the Work-Life Boundary*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Warhurst, C. and Thompson, P. (1998) 'Hands Hearts and Minds: Changing Work and Workers at the End of the Century' in P. Thompson and C. Warhurst (eds.) *Workplaces of the Future*. Basingstoke: Palgrave

Waters, L.E. and Moore, K.A. (2002) 'Reducing Latent Deprivation During Unemployment: The Role of Meaningful Leisure Activity', *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology*, vol. 75, pp.15-32

Weber, M. (2002 [1930]) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. NY: Charles Scribner's Sons

Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2009) *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*. London: Penguin

Williams, G. (2010) 'Understanding Incapacity' in G. Scambler and S. Scambler (eds.) *New Directions in the Sociology of Chronic and Disabling Conditions: Assaults on the Lifeworld*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan

Willis, P. (1991) *The Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press

Wintour, P., Ramesh, R. and Mulholland, H. (2010) 'Iain Duncan Smith: It's a sin that people fail to take up work' [online] *The Guardian*. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/11/welfare-iain-duncan-smith>> [Accessed 11.11.10]

Zawadski, S. and Lazarsfeld, P. (1935) 'The Psychological Consequences of Unemployment', *Journal of Social Psychology*, vol.6, p.239

Zukin, S. (1995) *The Cultures of Cities*. Cambridge: Blackwell