The Production of Subjects and Everyday Life in Neoliberal Capitalism

Ciaran Summerton
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and English
Honours in Philosophy

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Ciaran David Summerton
Abstract

Among scholars of neoliberal capitalism, it is commonly noted that neoliberalism shapes human subjectivity. In this thesis, I address this relationship between neoliberal capitalism and subjectivity. I argue that the neoliberalisation of subjectivity and everyday life is central to neoliberalism’s embeddedness. I offer a critical account of what Wendy Brown describes as the neoliberal production of subjects. As I will claim, the production of neoliberal subjects is in part the consequence of applying economic categories and market-like principles and practices to all aspects of human life. To clarify the relationship between neoliberalism and subjectivity, I examine the notion of human capital, which has been pivotal to articulations of neoliberal selfhood. I also critically assess a range of management literature and practices that promote the optimisation of the neoliberal subject’s human capital. Additionally, I contend that neoliberal discourse and practices shape our working lives, both in and outside of formal work settings. My aim is to elucidate the economic and social conditions and the ideological field that have brought about the imperfect yet extensive neoliberalisation of selfhood.
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Introduction

Among scholars of neoliberal capitalism, it is commonly noted that neoliberalism shapes human subjectivity. In accord with this insight, I will argue that neoliberalism is characterised by a particular mode of ‘the production of subjects’.¹ In particular, I argue that the neoliberalisation of subjectivity is central to neoliberalism's embeddedness. I suggest that if we are to make sense of our current political and cultural landscape, then it is essential that we clarify the constitutive features of the neoliberal self.² I will also argue that in various ways neoliberal ideas and practices have come to organise our everyday lives. It is precisely insofar as neoliberalism has penetrated the fabric of daily life, that it can be understood as producing certain kinds of subjects. Numerous factors, such as the increasing commodification of daily life, particular trends in economic thought and policy, management discourse and practice, government policies on work, unemployment and social security, and other institutional arrangements, have all contributed to producing particular kinds of subjects, that is, typical modes of relating to others and to our “selves.”³

By focusing on the production of neoliberal subjects, I am not offering an account of neoliberalism per se. Accordingly, I do not provide a detailed history of: the transition from Fordist-Keynesianism to flexible accumulation and monetarism; changing policy regimes in various governments; neoliberal think tanks and mainstream economics; the extensive reworking of the relationship between state, capital and labour; changes in regulation and widespread privatisations.⁴ When I do touch upon these topics, it is only to elucidate what I

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¹ Wendy Brown, Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 21. Throughout this thesis, all emphases in quotations are in the original text unless stated otherwise.
² I use various neologisms to denote the neoliberal conception of selfhood, such as the neoliberal self, the neoliberal subject, the entrepreneurial self, the self as enterprise, and the self-enterprise.
³ For my thinking on this subject, I am particularly indebted to Wendy Brown, Peter Kelly, David Chandler, Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval. Of course, I am solely responsible for the manner in which I have interpreted and selectively used their works.
am referring to as neoliberal selfhood. Specifically, I seek to clarify the economic and social conditions and the ideological field in which we find ourselves and which encourages us to relate to ourselves in particular ways. In place of a focused ethnographic study, which would undermine the more general claims I wish to make, I will restrict myself to exploring key texts, trends of thinking, varieties of workplace organisation, forms of education, and the material conditions typical of the neoliberal period. In this respect, my project can be understood in terms similar to those Ulrich Bröckling uses to describe his recent book:

Put metaphorically, the book investigates not how far people let themselves drift or how they use the current to move forward more quickly, or whether they attempt to evade it or swim against it, but rather the current itself and how it draws people in particular directions. It is by focusing on a select collection of texts, varieties of workplace organisation, material conditions, etc., that I hope to paint a picture of the neoliberal “current” and its framing and shaping of subjects. The success or failure of this neoliberal current is a somewhat different issue. But I maintain that one cannot address the latter without getting a clear picture of the current itself. That is what I attempt to provide in this thesis. Clarifying his use of key terms, Bröckling explains that the term ‘entrepreneurial self’ does not denote a particular person or group of people, but instead refers to ‘a way of addressing individuals as people, of alerting them and causing them to alter themselves in a particular way.’

Similarly, in this thesis I use the “neoliberal self” to refer to ways of addressing people and framing selfhood, invoking certain kinds of actions, fears and desires. I hope to denaturalise some of the seeming inevitabilities of contemporary capitalism, specifically in relation to conceptions of selfhood, by showing the historically specific ways in which neoliberalism frames and addresses us as subjects. Bringing this aspect of contemporary neoliberalization: geographies, modalities, pathways,” Global Networks 10, no. 2 (2010); Philip Mirowski, Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste (London and New York: Verso, 2013); Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (eds.), The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).


capitalism to the foreground is a necessary part of being able to successfully challenge it.

To this end, I critically examine the knowledge, the material conditions and the practices of neoliberalisation in everyday life, specifically as they relate to subjectivity. Hence, as noted above, this is not a thesis about neoliberalism as such. What I seek to uncover are the ways in which certain tropes and trends connected to what I refer to as neoliberalism are aimed at – or have the effect of – shaping human subjectivity in various ways. There are many other aspects of neoliberalism I do not cover. The term “neoliberalism” is simply a helpful shorthand that connects the issues pertaining to subjectivity that I explore. However, given that I make use of the term for much of the thesis, it is appropriate that I give some brief outline of what I mean by “neoliberalism.” I should first point out that the practices pertaining to the neoliberalisation of subjectivity considered below are found primarily in developed capitalist economies. I focus especially on the USA, UK and Australia. Hence, although some of the issues and practices I outline are found in a variety of places, my thesis does not account for the existence of neoliberalism in all parts of the globe. Although it is arguable that neoliberalism can be found just about anywhere these days, ‘in its differential instantiations and encounters with extant cultures and political traditions, it takes diverse shapes and spawns diverse content and normative details, even different idioms.’

Thus, whether taking neoliberalism to be a novel policy regime, or a strategy of capital accumulation, or a restructuring of socio-economic institutions and relations, it is important not to interpret it as a singular monolith or as some sort of ideal model toward which the different local processes of neoliberalisation are inevitably moving. Neoliberalism is a complicated and diverse system of economic, political and social rule. It takes different forms in different parts of the globe, and exists alongside other systems of political-economic organisation:

The neoliberal ascendancy was never a sure thing. It was a remarkable ascendancy, not an inevitable one – remarkable in the sense that its journey from the margins to the mainstream was not guided by some

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secret formula or determinant blueprint; its zigzagging course was improvised, and more often than not enabled by crisis. Perplexingly, its success as an ideological project reflects its deeply contradictory nature, as a combination of dogmatism and adaptability, strategic intent and opportunistic exploitation, programmatic vision and tactical smarts, principle and hypocrisy.\(^8\)

The important point that Jamie Peck makes here is that there is no singular or pure neoliberalism. Hence, we need to be able to recognise neoliberalism in its different instantiations, mixed in with other forms of rule and social (dis)order. Neoliberalism is an ongoing and diverse project of reconstructing the social order rather than an end-state that has been completely realised. For this reason, rather than simply picturing an already-realised neoliberalism, Peck prefers to describe an ongoing process of ‘neoliberalization’, which can be considered ‘as an open-ended and contradictory process of regulatory restructuring.\(^9\) This way of thinking about neoliberalism is also helpful for making sense of its relation to subjectivity. As I will stress, the claim I make in this thesis is not that we are all perfect and complete neoliberal subjects, but that we are subject to various processes of neoliberalisation that are changing, contradictory, and challengeable, but that have nonetheless been a core part of neoliberal capitalism and its infiltration of everyday life.

Regarding periodisation, depending on what one takes to be the essential features of neoliberalism, one will locate its historical origins differently. I think it is problematic to locate its origins in a single event, school of thought, or particular point in time.\(^10\) I see neoliberalism as something that has its roots in numerous sources and that has evolved as historical circumstances have changed. Broadly speaking, my thesis covers a number of neoliberal trends in the second half of the twentieth century, culminating in the latter part of that century and then continuing into the twenty-first.

Despite the diversity of the literature on neoliberalism, there are a number of key features that are frequently described. I will outline five of these features so as to clarify what I mean by the term and how I intend to use it.

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\(^8\) Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, 4.
\(^9\) Ibid., 7.
These five features of neoliberalism are: the reconfiguration of class relations and the increased power of the capital class; the neoliberal intellectual heritage; neoliberalism as a policy regime; the transformation of the state (rather than its downsizing or withdrawal); and, neoliberalism as a 'scheme of evaluation.'

In the most general sense, neoliberalism, or neoliberalisation, ‘denotes a politically guided intensification of market rule and commodification.’ Yet, the details of the political guidance, the form of market rule and the process of commodification can be interpreted in a number of ways. One prominent interpretation, particularly among Marxists, Neo-Marxists and political economists, stresses the transfer of wealth and power from the lower and middle classes to the upper echelons of capital. Neoliberalism thus entailed a reconfiguration of class relations to the benefit of the capital class. In conjunction with this, scholars of neoliberalism often also stress the increasing power and prominence of finance in neoliberal capitalism. It is usually suggested that increasing the power of finance capital was one way in which the upper class was able to expand capital accumulation when confronted by the challenges facing the world economy in the 1970s. However, there are diverging views as to what exactly is entailed by this “financialisation” and what makes it specific to the neoliberal period.

The notion that neoliberalism demarcates a stage of capitalism is often found in conjunction with an analysis of neoliberalism as a power grab by the capital class. From this perspective, the beginning of the period of neoliberal capitalism marks the demise of the Fordist-Keynesian regime of accumulation that had characterised the advanced capitalist economies in the middle of the

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13 Saad-Filho and Johnston connect this financialisation to the cooptation of the state and the transfer of wealth not only to the capital class but also to the US: ‘Neoliberalism also rationalised the transfer of state capacity to allocate resources inter-temporally (the balance between investment and consumption) and inter-sectorally (the distribution of investment, employment and output) towards an increasingly internationally integrated (and US-led) financial sector. In doing so, neoliberalism facilitated a gigantic transfer of resources to the local rich and the United States’. (Saad-Filho and Johnston, “Introduction,” 4).
twentieth century.\(^{15}\) As an example of this interpretation of neoliberalism, Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy claim that neoliberalism emerged as a result of the structural crisis of the 70s. They contend that neoliberalism must be understood as a joint strategy of the capitalist classes and upper (specifically financial) management, with the intention of ‘strengthen[ing] their hegemony and... expand[ing] it globally.’\(^{16}\) Neoliberalism, therefore, is primarily the consequence of changing class relations and the new objectives of the capital owning class as a response to changes in the capitalist economy. I make use of this interpretation of neoliberalism as a shift in class power in order to explain some of the reasons for implementing neoliberal workplace policies and managerial practices that target subjectivity (see chapters three and four). It also allows me to connect precariousness and indebtedness with the neoliberalisation of selfhood (as explored in chapter five).

From a different perspective, neoliberalism can be interpreted as a particular intellectual movement that increasingly influenced government policy in the second half of the twentieth century. Such a perspective focuses on intellectual groups like the Mont Pèlerin Society.\(^{17}\) Philip Mirowski has recently promoted such a reading of neoliberalism. He is not alone in this respect. In fact, it is very common to note the importance of neoliberalism’s intellectual heritage, even though who gets included on the list of important thinkers and where they sit in order of importance is somewhat varied. Regular figures in this account of neoliberalism include Austrians Friedrich von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, a collection of German Ordoliberals, and numerous members of the

\(^{15}\) On Fordism (or Fordism-Keynesianism), see: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 125-140. Brett Heino also gives a brief overview of the demise of Fordism-Keynesianism: “Due to a combination of inter-related features, including the exhaustion of productivity growth in lead sectors, the resistance of workers to intensified exploitation, the internationalisation of production and the erosion of US hegemony…, Fordism began to lose coherence from the early-1970s onwards, and this was reflected in high inflation, growing unemployment and stumbling productivity growth. This period extended into the 1980s, and was characterised by ‘institutional searching’ to escape the growing crisis and restore stable accumulation’ (Brett Heino, “Capitalism, regulation theory and Australian labour law: Towards a new theoretical model,” *Capital and Class* 39, no. 3 (2015): 458).


\(^{17}\) On the Mont Pèlerin Society and the history of key neoliberal thinkers (among other topics) see: Mirowski and Plehwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*. 
Chicago School of Economics. I borrow from this approach to neoliberalism insofar as I stress the importance of the idea of human capital and hence the work of the human capital theorists Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz (chapter one).

Another related interpretation of neoliberalism focuses on the changing dynamics of the political system – often as a response to the kind of changes in capital accumulation mentioned above – and to the corresponding shift in economic and social policy. Specifically, during the neoliberal period government policies in key capitalist countries started to make use of market-based solutions through privatisation, deregulation (or rather, “reregulation”), the construction of pseudo-markets and the application of market and business rationales to government, education, health and other social institutions. Daniel Stedman Jones is an example of someone who stresses the policy changes that neoliberalism ushered in:

In the mid-1970s, neoliberal insights into macroeconomic management and regulation first took hold in the administrations of Democratic president Jimmy Carter and Labour prime ministers Harold Wilson and James Callaghan. Carter began to deregulate the transportation and banking sectors, and appointed Paul Volcker chairman of the Federal Reserve. After 1975, Wilson, his successor Callaghan, and Chancellor Denis Healey oversaw deep spending cuts and the abandonment of the long-cherished postwar goal of full employment in favor of targeting inflation. These neoliberal-influenced policies broke through on the left because liberalism, social democracy, and Keynesianism seemed toothless in the face of stagflation. But even in the 1960s there was evidence of a change in approach among British and American policymakers across a range of fields, especially with regard to trade unions, welfare, housing, and urban development. There was a greater willingness to look at market-based solutions in areas of perceived policy failure, such as affordable housing and urban renewal.18

The focus on neoliberalism as a particular approach to government policies leads me to another important point about neoliberalism and its relation to political authority. As a constant project of market-oriented reform, neoliberalism – like the entire history of capitalism – relies heavily on the state. The neoliberal project aims to reshape the state and not to minimise or destroy it. Specifically, neoliberalism encourages ‘techno-managerial governance’ that

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will support the market. Damien Cahill claims that it is here that many progressive responses to neoliberalism have gone awry by taking for granted that the state has in fact shrunk under neoliberalism. It is a common misconception that there is a “states versus markets” dynamic at play in capitalism and that under neoliberalism markets are winning at the expense of the state. Cahill wishes to correct this misunderstanding:

[D]uring the neoliberal era, the economic size of states was not diminished when measured in terms of relative expenditure. Furthermore, the extensive programmes of deregulation, privatisation and marketisation carried out by most capitalist states during the last 30 years resulted not in a diminution of the regulatory reach of states, but in the concurrent implementation of a host of new regulations and agencies to govern the markets transformed and created through neoliberalism. The coercion used by states against those opposed to neoliberal measures is further evidence against the argument that the neoliberal era entailed a retreat of the state, as is the persistence of universalist institutions, such as socialised education and healthcare, in the neoliberal era.

As an adaptive process of regulatory reform, neoliberalisation relies on the state and other key actors to constantly implement and rework its various instruments. The path of neoliberalisation, Peck indicates, ‘is one of repeated, prosaic, and often botched efforts to fix markets, to build quasi-markets, and to repair market failures. Neoliberalization, in this sense, is not the antithesis of regulation, it is a self-contradictory form of regulation-in-denial.’ Regulation-in-denial is regulation nonetheless, and so requires strong actors – like states – for its design, implementation and policing. The very process of neoliberal privatisation and deregulation require the presence of states and other regulatory bodies.

Accordingly, privatisation and deregulation have not been accompanied by an actual reduction of the state. The size of state expenditure as a proportion of GDP remained relatively stable between 1980 and 2000. Moreover, Cahill observes that the establishment of regulatory bodies actually increased during

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19 Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*, 56.
22 Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, xiii.
the neoliberal era. Cahill cites David Levi-Faur and colleagues’ investigation of the establishment of new regulatory bodies in 48 Latin American and OECD countries between 1966 and 2007. This work found that the annual rate of regulatory agency set-up increased during the neoliberal era. Prior to the 1980s, new agencies were established at a rate of less than five per year. Thereafter the rate increased to over 15 per year, with a peak of over 20 per year from 1995 to 2001.

Hence, neoliberalism cannot simply be equated with deregulation but must more specifically be thought of as a particular kind of regulatory restructuring that involves some deregulation, but that also includes new regulation that ‘enables and constrains particular economic agents and interests.’

For example, in the US since the 70s, changes in the financial sector were accomplished by the creation of new regulations and regulatory agencies whose purpose was to ‘facilitate and respond to new freedoms for finance capital, the use of new financial instruments and new practices for governing national currencies and their trade.’ Cahill makes reference to the establishment in 1974 of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, tasked with the facilitation (which requires regulation) of derivatives. The spread of derivatives was also of course facilitated by deregulation but not deregulation alone (if we take it to mean the complete withdrawal of government rules and government agencies). Cahill also references the Clinton government’s instructions to Fannie Mae and Freddy Mac to ‘extend their securitisation of mortgages for low-income households.’ This demonstrates the active role government takes in encouraging and facilitating certain trends in the financial sector. These examples are particularly telling given that the finance sector is often thought to have been unleashed through a process of deregulation and the withdrawal of the state. While this is partly true, Cahill reminds us that the US state did much more than simply take regulation away and so “unchain” the finance sector:

[L]ong before the onset of the global financial crisis in 2007, the state effectively underwrote the viability of the financial sector through, for

26 Ibid., 20.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 21.
example, deposit guarantees and the direct provision or facilitation of bailout packages for failing financial institutions. In contrast to the idea of the neoliberal era being one during which the provision of state welfare became denuded, the volatility facilitated through financial deregulation created the conditions whereby directing corporate welfare to the financial sector became a normal part of the activities of the US state... State support for the finance sector of the US economy would later come in the form of more direct provision of assistance by bailing out institutions during the Savings and Loan crisis of the mid-1980s, and later facilitating a bailout package for the Long Term Capital Management Fund in 1998.  

These examples show that the state did not retreat from involvement in the economy, not even in the burgeoning financial sector. Deregulation (of a certain kind) and increased state involvement are therefore not mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, in addition to state financial assistance and regulatory restructuring, neoliberalism entails a strengthening of the coercive powers of the state. The classic example is the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile that started with the 1973 coup. In Chile, privatisation and deregulation were accompanied by the repression of opposition to the regime. IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs serve as another example of state coercion being used to implement neoliberal policy changes. In another hotly contested political space, labour market deregulation (or reregulation of industrial relations) has made it very difficult for workers to organise and engage in collective action. Cahill notes that in addition to labour market reform, state coercion targeting unions also employs more direct tactics such as strike breaking, gaoling unionists and deregistering unions. All this is to say that the increased power of capital in the neoliberal period, often concentrated in the firm or the corporation, is intimately bound up with the continuing activity of states, international governing institutions and other regulatory agencies. Thus, neoliberalism is implemented and sustained by numerous agents and institutions, such as states, businesses, business and industry groups, management and consultancy firms, and national and international regulatory

29 Ibid.
30 As Cahill notes, '[c]ross-country analyses by Abouharb and Cingranelli (2007) of 431 IMF and 442 World Bank neoliberal structural adjustment programmes throughout the 1980s and 1990s found that human rights abuses – including torture, extra-judicial killing, political imprisonment and disappearances – became more likely the longer a country spent under a structural adjustment programme. They argue this is attributable to state regimes repressing dissent arising from the implementation of the neoliberal programmes and the social and economic dislocation such programmes cause' (Ibid., 22).
31 Ibid., 23.
institutions. By keeping this aspect in mind we will better understand the neoliberalisation of subjectivity and the everyday world, both of which are subject to various forms of intervention and micro-management (as discussed in chapter two).

Finally, I understand the term neoliberalism to refer to a particular mode of reason or ‘scheme of evaluation.’ In other words, the changing class dynamics, new forms of capital accumulation, new policy regimes and the reorientation of the state I have mentioned so far, are accompanied by a neoliberal rationale that takes the market and market metrics as its model. This is the subtle yet powerful way in which market rule and commodification are instantiated even in areas where there is no actual market in place and no formal economic exchange. By privileging the model of the market and related technocratic-economic forms of evaluation, neoliberalism targets not just the economy or economic relations, but forces all parts of society to operate according to market-like and economic principles. Nikolas Rose says that already in the 1970s

[all kinds of practices – health, security, welfare and more – were to be restructured according to a particular image of the economic – the market... Hence these styles of governing sought to create simulacra of markets governed by economic or para-economic criteria of judgement in arenas previously governed by bureaucratic and social logics: the new techniques were those of budgets, contracts, performance-related pay, competition, quasi-markets and end-user empowerment.]

This revaluation of an extended array of human activity in terms of a market-oriented economic rationale is key to neoliberalism and especially to the neoliberalisation of selfhood and the everyday. In this sense, neoliberalism can be understood ‘as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life.’ These values, practices and metrics are used to produce and manage neoliberal subjects. Patricia Ventura observes that ‘[n]eoliberal government represents the population’s wellbeing as intimately tied to individuals’ abilities to make market principles the guiding values of their lives,

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32 Brown, Undoing the Demos, 21.
33 Nikolas Rose, Powers of Freedom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 146.
34 Brown, Undoing the Demos, 30.
to see themselves as products to create, sell, and optimize. When I refer to neoliberalism in this thesis, I am invoking this demand made upon people and the reformulation of the notion of subjectivity it entails.

Having provided an outline of the manner in which I use the terms “neoliberalism” and “neoliberalisation,” it should be clearer how I approach the topic of the neoliberalisation of subjectivity and the everyday in this thesis. To further clarify my understanding of the neoliberalisation of selfhood, I now explain the theoretical framing I employ and the theoretical assumptions I make, particularly regarding my use of Michel Foucault’s ideas. In a paper entitled “The Subject and Power”, Foucault sketches a way of thinking about the relationship between power and the subject that I draw upon to examine the neoliberalisation of subjectivity. In this paper, Foucault says that subjects must be free in order for power to act upon their subjectivity. Power here means the collection of forces, inducements, constraints and structures that orient the conduct of a subject. According to Foucault, if people were not free, then one could not incite and encourage them to act in certain ways; one could not, in other words, influence and direct their conduct.

The idea of “conduct” assumes a limited kind of autonomy, the capacity to comport oneself in one way rather than another; in other words, it points to the relative freedom of the subject. From this perspective, power

is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions.

36 In Foucault’s own words: ‘Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized. Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains. (In this case it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint). Consequently, there is no face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom, which are mutually exclusive (freedom disappears everywhere power is exercised), but a more complicated interplay. In this game freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination)’ (Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” Critical Inquiry 8, no. 4 (1982): 790).
37 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 789.
It is my position that the neoliberalisation of subjectivity can be fruitfully analysed by considering it as the conduct of a limited freedom, a set of actions upon the possible actions a subject could perform. Put differently, in order for neoliberalism to shape the manner in which people self-relate, to make some actions more likely than others, it has to work with subjects who are free. It is because the free subject has the possibility of acting differently that neoliberalism can be understood in part as a project that seeks to set conditions conducive to bringing about certain kinds of actions.

Directly influenced by Foucault’s work, governmentality studies have placed the conduct of a qualified freedom at the centre of analyses of neoliberalism (or “advanced liberalism”). Echoing Foucault, Nikolas Rose avers that

to govern is to recognize [the] capacity for action and to adjust oneself to it. To govern is to act upon action. This entails trying to understand what mobilizes the domains or entities to be governed: to govern one must act upon these forces, instrumentalize them in order to shape actions, processes and outcomes in desired directions. Hence, when it comes to governing human beings, to govern is to presuppose the freedom of the governed. To govern humans is not to crush their capacity to act, but to acknowledge it and to utilize it for one’s own objectives.\[38\]

Using this Foucauldian framework, I argue that neoliberal government seeks to imbue in its subjects a certain way of understanding themselves and promotes practices of self-entrepreneurialisation. It establishes conditions, parameters and incentives aimed at facilitating a certain self-relation and that are meant to elicit desired modes of conduct. The details of this kind of neoliberal government of subjects are outlined in the chapters that follow.

Despite the usefulness of this framework for an analysis of the neoliberalisation of subjectivity, Foucault does not pay sufficient attention to the constraints placed on our freedom, as he is not interested in the specifics of the conditions in which people live. This is certainly true of his lectures on neoliberalism.\[39\] Therefore, stressing aspects of neoliberalism that move beyond

\[38\] Rose, Powers of Freedom, 4.

\[39\] Generally, Foucault overlooks the authoritarian aspects of “liberal” regimes, as he tends to take liberal and neoliberal self-descriptions at face value. It is not just the discipline of the market and private property that I have in mind. Even in the “liberal West,” market discipline is supplemented by other forms of discipline and control, much of it of a coercive nature. See: Loïc Wacquant, Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity (Durham and
Foucault’s concerns, I will demonstrate in this thesis that neoliberal government effects subjective conduct not only by encouraging and incentivising, but also by taking options away, exploiting material inequalities and needs, using threats, making ultimatums, giving the appearance of choice while making some choices difficult and costly. In some instances, neoliberal governance also relies upon outright force and violence.

This is not to say that Foucault’s general outline of the relationship between freedom and power has no purchase for an analysis of neoliberal subjectivity, only that it needs some qualification. It is also important to remember what Foucault was trying to achieve in his history of liberal (and neoliberal) government. In the first lecture of *The Birth of Biopolitics* series, Foucault clarifies the framework he adopts in his historical analyses:

> I have not studied and do not want to study the development of real governmental practice by determining the particular situations it deals with, the problems raised, the tactics chosen, the instruments employed, forged, or remodelled, and so forth. I wanted to study the art of governing, that is to say, the reasoned way of governing best and, at the same time, reflection on the best possible way of governing. That is to say, I have tried to grasp the level of reflection in the practice of government and on the practice of government. In a sense, I wanted to study government’s consciousness of itself.\(^{40}\)

Although I am similarly interested in exploring ‘government’s consciousness of itself’, I also consider some of the more concrete and everyday conditions and practices of the neoliberal government of subjects. In doing so, I depart from Foucault’s approach, while still making use of his understanding of the relationship between power and subjectivity, as well as some of his observations regarding neoliberalism’s “self-understanding.” Interpreting him more liberally, and taking his ideas as a point of departure rather than as a set of rules that must be strictly followed, I contend that Foucault’s insights can serve as a useful inspiration for investigating the relationship between

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neoliberalism and its governance of subjects.\(^{41}\) ‘To govern... is to structure the possible field of action of others.’\(^{42}\) In the broader sense, structuring a possible field of actions could include inducing and precluding, enabling and constraining, rewarding and punishing. In this thesis, I use the expression “neoliberalisation of subjectivity” to refer to the strategies, techniques and knowledge used to constrain and enable different kinds of activities in the neoliberal period.

Hence, while analysing the neoliberalisation of subjectivity in a loosely Foucauldian manner, I also stress the constraints through which neoliberal government functions. The relationship between neoliberalism and subjectivity is as much about limiting freedom as it is about directing freedom to act in certain ways. Put differently, getting subjects to act in certain ways is often accomplished precisely by limiting freedom; eliciting certain forms of conduct can be achieved by limiting or removing the possibility of other forms of conduct.

Consider the spread of markets into new areas. More and more parts of our lives have become commodified and we increasingly rely on markets and quasi-markets for the provision of our needs. From a neoliberal perspective, the increasing ability to engage in market exchange is evidence of our increased freedom. We are at least formally free to engage in market exchanges in domains previously curtailed from market calculus (individual employment contracts, private health, private energy provision).\(^{43}\) In this sense, our economic “freedom” has been expanded. Often unmentioned are the power relations and forms of compulsion that characterise contemporary economic life. Instead, neoliberal theory emphasises the voluntary nature of market exchange. Taking this perspective at face value for the moment, we could say

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\(^{41}\) In this sense, my use of Foucault is similar to the one Nikolas Rose describes between his own thinking and that of Foucault: ‘I do not think that there is some general theory or history of government, politics or power latent in Foucault’s writings, which should be extracted and then applied to other issues... I advocate a relation to his work that is looser, more inventive and more empirical. It is less concerned with being faithful to a source of authority than with working within a certain ethos of enquiry, with fabricating some conceptual tools that can be set to work in relation to the particular questions that trouble contemporary thought and politics’ (Rose, Powers of Freedom, 4-5).

\(^{42}\) Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 790.

\(^{43}\) Cahill, The End of Laissez-Faire, 122.
that there has been an increased formal freedom in the neoliberal era. We can purchase more things, engage in more market exchanges, exercise our economic freedom in more domains. But we can only do this if we have the means available, and contemporary capitalism does not allow a great many people such resources. If we do not have the required financial resources, then we cannot access much of the market-provided goods and services. (Or we can do so only under the burden of increasing amounts of debt – and even then not all goods and services, and not without serious consequences).

In another sense, we are also made to be “free” insofar as we are forced to engage in market and market-like exchanges. If no labour protections exist, then workers have to negotiate individual employment contracts, often to the detriment of the individual worker. How is this a genuine exercise of freedom? If what was previously provided publically is now either partially or wholly provided by private players in a market, then people have no choice but to engage in market exchanges. Again, it is only by a sleight of hand that this can be described as promoting freedom and autonomy. As Cahill notes, ‘while market exchanges are formally voluntary, the extension of such exchanges to more and more areas of social life generally arises from people losing access to non-market forms of provisioning thereby leading to market relations becoming essentially compulsory.’

As should be obvious, such market exchanges ‘are... underpinned by asymmetrical power relations.’ Hence, the notion of “freedom” that allows us to consider the way neoliberalism acts upon subjectivity should be considered alongside a clear recognition of these constraints and power disparities.

Wendy Brown offers a Foucauldian inspired analysis that manages to capture the way that neoliberalism produces subjects (governs our relative

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44 Ibid., 122-23.
45 Ibid., 122. Besides, the neoliberal period has been characterised by non-market coercion as much as any other period of capitalism. McNally nicely summarises this point: ‘while much can be left to market discipline, not everything can. That is why law, police, prisons, and direct force remain omnipresent. Indeed, the intensified disciplinary regimes of the neoliberal period – punitive laws against pandhandling or sleeping in parks, widespread incarceration of those found with small bits of drugs, harsher street-level policing and jail terms, and ever more people stuffed into prisons – are sharp reminders that the coercive powers of the state will be regularly mobilized every time the “work ethic” and social discipline seem to be waning.’ (McNally, Global Slump, 117).
freedom) within a highly constrained space. As we are always thought to be and expected to act as self-enterprises operating with our personal human capital, we are ‘constrain[ed]... to act in a capital-enhancing fashion everywhere.’

Failing to do so is not without consequences. Neoliberalism eliminates easy and unconditional access to a range of public goods and social protections and enhances the power of employers and the capital class. By doing so, it subjects people to a range of penalties should they fail to conduct themselves as the enterprising subjects they are expected to be:

Neoliberalism emancipates individuals from one kind of state regulation and social solidarity to make them available for interpellation and integration by a different set of political-economic imperatives and arrangements, ironically repeating the “double freedom” Marx described as integral to proletarianization in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Formally freed from legal interference in their choices and decisions, subjects are at every level identified with and integrated into capital’s imperatives and predicaments. Thus, as neoliberal citizenship sets loose the individual to take care of itself, it also discursively binds the individual to the well-being of the whole — demanding its fealty and potential sacrifice to national health or economic growth.

This is the framework for thinking about the production of neoliberal subjects I use throughout the thesis. In each unique situation, the balance between freedom and constraint – or the measure in which freedom and constraint are fruitfully unified – is different. As the examples in my thesis show, the government of neoliberal subjectivity operates through a variety of strategies and discourses. Although his analyses do not seem to follow the insight, Foucault himself acknowledged that the interconnection of power and subjectivity ‘cannot be studied outside their relations to the mechanisms of exploitation and domination.’ Going beyond Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism in the late 70s, I attempt to highlight the relationship between domination, exploitation and subjection (actions targeting our subjectivity and conduct) in neoliberal capitalism. I argue that forms of domination and exploitation are more effective because of the neoliberal government of our subjectivity. Conversely, I highlight the way that forms of everyday compulsion (which includes domination and exploitation) further the neoliberalisation of

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48 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 782.
subjectivity. In this respect, as I have noted, my project both follows a liberally interpreted Foucauldian framework, while moving beyond and shifting the focus of Foucault’s own analysis of neoliberalism.

Methodologically, in order to make clear the essential components of the neoliberal subject, I conduct a critical analysis of the neoliberal understanding of selfhood. This analysis will include a comparative study of publications from human capital theory, management literature, self-help literature and other pertinent texts. In each section of the thesis, I consider the neoliberal subject and the neoliberalisation of our daily lives from a different perspective. By considering the relationship between neoliberalism and subjectivity from these different perspectives, I present a clearer overall picture of what it means to be a neoliberal subject.

Through this critical analysis, I argue that one of the main features of neoliberalism is the extension of a market-like interpretative framework. William Davies holds that neoliberalism ‘is typically less concerned with expanding markets per se, than in expanding the reach of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation.’ 49 Complementary to the reinterpretation of the world and human life in market-like terms, neoliberalism also entails the interpretation of the world from a broadly economic perspective. As Wendy Brown suggests, neoliberalism ‘transmogrifies every human domain and endeavour, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic. All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized.’ 50 I suggest that the production of neoliberal subjects is part of this economisation of (traditionally) non-economic domains; that is, producing neoliberal subjects entails the application of economic categories and market-like principles and practices to all aspects of human life. 51

50 Brown, Undoing the Demos, 9-10.
51 As Brown notes, ‘we may (and neoliberalism interpellates us as subjects who do) think and act like contemporary market subjects where monetary wealth generation is not the immediate issue, for example, in approaching one’s education, health, fitness, family life, or neighborhood. To speak of the relentless and ubiquitous economization of all features of life by neoliberalism is
Put differently, neoliberalism encourages people to make sense of and evaluate their actions and surrounding situation ‘as if’ they were acting in a market.’\textsuperscript{52} All activity is conceived as a kind of competitive, value-enhancing activity. Thus, what is central to neoliberalism is not just the market as such. In practice, markets are often inhibited, regulated or orchestrated in ways that do not strictly adhere to the recommendations of neo-classical economics or laissez-faire liberalism. Instead, what is central to neoliberalism are ‘particular market-based (or market-derived) forms of economization, calculation, measurement and valuation.’ \textsuperscript{53} Neoliberalism entails policy orientations, government practices, systems of workplace organisation, and forms of evaluation and description that encourage people to orient themselves as if they are in a market situation. As a consequence, even where there is no market, there are market-like actors. As Brown emphasises, from the neoliberal perspective we are always and everywhere \textit{homo economicus}. I contend that the proliferation of the model of the market has consequences for the relations we have with colleagues, work, family, community, authority, and ourselves. It also reconstructs how these relations are organised, rationalised, monitored, evaluated and experienced.

In order to make sense of this proliferation of the model of the market, I will consider neoliberal subjectivity from a number of perspectives. For example, the neoliberal self can be thought of as an “ideal self.” By this I mean that the neoliberal self is a collection of characteristics and attributes that are presented – through government policies, advertising, reality television, popular cinema, social media, educational institutions, unemployment programs, etc. – as both necessary and desirable. As an ideal, the neoliberal self is something we should aspire to, a collection of characteristics and practices that are associated with desirable ends. This ideal of selfhood demands a certain kind of conduct on the part of individuals. The idea of personhood

\textsuperscript{52} Davies, \textit{The Limits of Neoliberalism}, 21.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textit{\textsuperscript{54} thus not to claim that neoliberalism literally \textit{marketizes} all spheres, even as such marketization is certainly one important effect of neoliberalism. Rather, the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminates the \textit{model of the market} to all domains and activities – even where money is not at issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as \textit{homo economicus}’ (Brown, \textit{Undoing the Demos}, 31).}
found, for example, in human capital theory and contemporary management studies induces people to act in ways that complement neoliberal understandings of the self and human life. Hence, the neoliberal self is also a set of practices, strategies and techniques for how we ought to manage ourselves. Furthermore, the neoliberal self is a mode of self-understanding; neoliberal narratives about what the world is like include suggestions for how one should make sense of and relate to oneself. The neoliberal self also functions as an explanatory device, a unit of analysis that frames descriptions and endorsements of a particular version of political and economic organisation. In this guise, the idea of the neoliberal self serves as a tool for explaining and justifying particular historical trends, decisions of governments, suggestions for future policy, distributions of wealth, and so on. I argue that the different practices associated with these aspects of neoliberal selfhood support the neoliberalisation of the everyday and the embeddedness of neoliberalism. I outline these different aspects of the contemporary neoliberal self in order to clarify the more general neoliberal imaginary that constitutes our contemporary world.

As noted above, neoliberalism entails practices aimed at the production of neoliberal subjects. For example, government policies attempt to encourage entrepreneurial activity and “innovation”; they are not mere descriptions of already entrepreneurial and innovative subjects. People are directed toward understanding themselves as self-enterprises. We do not spontaneously and throughout history consider ourselves in such terms. In this sense, ideas like human capital should be understood as both descriptive and normative. The theory of human capital is meant to capture what we are in fact like at the same time as it offers a series of recommendations for who we ought to aspire to be. In other words, neoliberalism, like any dominant social order, is in part characterised by various strategies to produce subjects that sustain and support the neoliberal order. If all domains are market-like, then the characteristics to succeed in these domains will be those appropriate to the market. It is because the construction of neoliberal subjects is never complete, and sometimes meets serious resistance, that this process of subject construction is an ongoing one.
As a particular mode of self-understanding, the production of neoliberal subjects can be thought of as a process of internalisation. In other words, people come to adopt attitudes, dispositions, habits and values typical of neoliberal entrepreneurialism. However, it is important to note that there is not one kind of internalisation process that all people go through in neoliberal capitalism. Internalisation takes place in different ways and to different degrees depending on contextual and individual specificities. Additionally, this internalisation, to the extent it occurs, does not take place in a subject who resembles a blank slate. Neoliberal attitudes, dispositions, habits and values must accommodate and do battle with other sets of attitudes, dispositions, habits and values. There is no single figure of the self-enterprise to which we all conform. People internalise neoliberal interpretive frameworks to varying degrees and these frameworks exist alongside other interpretative frames. For example, one can develop certain habits and dispositions typical of the entrepreneurial self, like practicing forms of self-promotion or engaging in regular retraining in order to be a model employee, while simultaneously holding ideas about poverty and wealth-distribution that do not accord with an explicitly neoliberal outlook. Thus, the process of internalisation is not a neat and complete one. In reality, it is rife with contradictions and tensions. If we were all perfect neoliberal subjects, then many of the texts and workplace practices I analyse in this thesis would have been superfluous. As Mathieu Hilgers puts it, ‘[d]omestication is never total’.\footnote{Mathieu Hilgers, “Embodying neoliberalism: thoughts and responses to critics”, Social Anthropology 21, no. 1 (2013), 83.} People resist aspects of neoliberal subjectification and its accompanying practices and power relations.\footnote{Often, those resisting neoliberalism are met with authoritarian and coercive responses. Moreover, marginalised groups most frequently encounter this disciplinary side of the neoliberal state. On this point, see: Cemal Burak Tansel (ed.), States of Discipline: Authoritarian Neoliberalism and the Contested Reproduction of Capitalist Order (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Wacquant, Punishing the Poor, (2009).} The perfect market-like society of self-enterprises is necessarily a utopian and unfinished project.

Although incomplete and contextually varied, I maintain that forms of neoliberal subjectivity are widespread. If honest and self-aware, even people who explicitly oppose neoliberalism will likely find themselves relying on interpretative frameworks and acting in ways that are peculiar to the neoliberal
world they inhabit.\textsuperscript{56} In part, this is because many of our daily activities and relations with others are mediated by markets and commodities.\textsuperscript{57} Moreover, in order to get by in contemporary capitalism, neoliberalism makes certain forms of behaviour necessary, such as self-promotion and engaging in instrumental forms of education that allow us to find employment. It is these everyday practices and experiences that generate neoliberal modes of subjectivity. Damien Cahill, who I quote at length, has also observed this feature of neoliberalism:

[U]nder such neoliberal arrangements, people are constituted materially as consumers of public services, even if they reject the discursive assignation. When people buy a private education for their children, or when they purchase private health insurance, or pay a private provider for their electricity, they expect ‘value for money’. Their right to the service comes not through citizenship but through their ability and willingness to pay. Thus, under neoliberalism, people are increasingly forced to become the individual consumers of social services prized by neoliberal doctrine, even if such consumers simultaneously reject the policy prescriptions of that doctrine.

It also seems plausible to suggest that the marketisation of everyday life so central to neoliberalism also contributes to individuation. Such a phenomenon facilitates the process of ‘commodity fetishism’ described by Marx... whereby social relations appear as relations between things. Under neoliberalism, people’s relationships with others are increasingly mediated through markets and commodities. This masks the social relations that underpin such markets in a double sense: on the one hand people engage in such markets as individuals, while on the other hand the commodities and the prices attached to them in effect become the market, obscuring the web of institutions and class relations that bring such commodities and prices into being.\textsuperscript{58}

Thus, the kind of subjectification (or production of subjects) I am referring to need not – and usually does not – entail people explicitly endorsing neoliberal

\textsuperscript{56} After all, ‘[w]e are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man’ (Antonio Gramsci, \textit{Selections from the Prison Notebooks}, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 324).

\textsuperscript{57} According to David Harvey, ‘[i]t is invidious to view daily life and the lifeworld as something “outside of” the circulation of capital, then we have to concede that everything that now occurs in the workplace and in the production-consumption process is somehow caught up within capital circulation and accumulation. Almost everything we now eat and drink, wear and use, listen to and hear, watch and learn comes to us in commodity form and is shaped by divisions of labor, the pursuit of product niches and the general evolution of discourses and ideologies that embody precepts of capitalism. It is only when daily life has been rendered totally open to the circulation of capital and when political subjects have their vision almost entirely circumscribed by embeddedness in that circulation that capitalism can function with affective meanings and legitimacy as its support’ (David Harvey, \textit{Spaces of Global Development} (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 82).

\textsuperscript{58} Cahill, \textit{The End of Laissez-Faire?}, 135.
values in the sense that they agree with a set of propositions from the neoliberal playbook. Rather, the real structural changes in our everyday world have led to a subtler reworking of human subjectivity. As Cahill suggests, ‘material changes’ in ‘people’s everyday lives have, at least to a certain extent, facilitated complementary subjectivities.’\footnote{Ibid.} Or, as Eric Schutz describes, ‘the simple habits of living according to the dictates of a particular social context generate particular habits of thinking along with them, and these become, in effect, “values and preferences”.’\footnote{Eric Schutz, \textit{Inequality and Power: The Economics of Class} (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 132.} At different points in this thesis, I will unpack some of the daily practices, experiences and encounters that contribute to the production of neoliberal subjects. I argue that neoliberal, pro-market and entrepreneurial discourse is reinforced by this everyday experience, and the seeming naturalness and inevitability of our experiences is in turn reinforced by the way our daily lives are saturated with neoliberal discourse. In the five chapters of this thesis, I attempt to elucidate the manner in which neoliberal discourse and practices shape subjectivity.

In order to clarify the way that neoliberalism renders people market actors \textit{tout court}, in chapter one I examine the notion of human capital as outlined in the work of Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz. I contend that human capital theory contains a radical interpretation of human life, one that is based on the assumption that we are always and only economic agents. We find in Becker and Schultz a clear and original explanation of \textit{homo oeconomicus} that has filtered down, in complex and myriad ways, to everyday language and to the organising principles and practices of our contemporary economic and political world. As I will argue later in the thesis, such an interpretation of human beings is an essential part of the neoliberal production of subjects.

In chapter two, I claim that management theory and practices are central to the production of neoliberal subjects. I consider a number of key texts from management studies and the self-help genre to unpack the way human capital is currently understood and put to work. These texts combine certain economic ideas – such as entrepreneurialism and human capital – and apply them to work
and other domains of our lives. Authors such as Jim Loehr, Tony Schwartz and Shawn Achor outline many of the ideal attributes and techniques of self-enhancement that encapsulate the neoliberal self and its government. As we will see, neoliberalism calls upon all aspects of a person's life to contribute to the productive capacity of the individual. Accordingly, I argue that such texts and the associated practices are vital elements of the production of neoliberal subjects and the neoliberalisation of everyday life.

After considering some of the main features of human capital theory and contemporary management studies, I dedicate two chapters to examining the neoliberal self in contemporary working life in order to show that practices associated with the construction of neoliberal subjects can be found in the workplace. Generally, I contend that neoliberal thinking, policies and practices have shaped the contemporary understanding of work. In chapter three, I first suggest that neoliberal management discourse reframes the relationship between employees (understood as organisational capital) and the organisation. I outline the attempt to institute a workplace culture that reflects this new discourse. Given that neoliberal management considers workers as essential components of organisational capital, neoliberal management also takes a keen interest in employees’ general character and abilities. I will suggest that this more general interest in the capabilities (human capital) of employees is in part due to the spread of new kinds of work and new ways of extracting value from workers. The various abilities that the neoliberal self is expected to develop are referred to as “soft” skills. I argue that these soft skills are promoted not simply because they provide employers with the kind of workers they need, but also because they equip people with the capacity to adapt to various industries and different kinds of work. In other words, the promotion of soft skills supports the production of neoliberal subjects required for the efficient functioning of a “flexible” labour market. The “gig economy” is an example of an industry that promotes the benefits of flexible work and flexible careers. In the final section of this chapter, I argue that the gig economy exemplifies neoliberalism both in spirit and in the power dynamics that underlie it. The gig economy's employment arrangements and business model encourages people to act as self-enterprises with different kinds of capital that
can be profitably invested. For this reason, I contend that the gig economy furthers the neoliberalisation of subjectivity and the everyday.

In chapter four I continue my analysis of working life in neoliberal capitalism. As already indicated in chapter three, I will argue that much of working life in neoliberal capitalism is characterised by techniques of control, both in the workplace and more generally in our “entrepreneurial” lives. So as to be able to critically evaluate the neoliberal management discourse considered in previous chapters, I elaborate some of the control techniques of monitoring and organising people’s activities in the workplace. After reflecting upon the techniques used to control activities in the workplace, I consider a different set of techniques that are aimed at controlling working time both in and outside of the workplace. I argue that neoliberalism colonises the times and spaces beyond the boundaries of formal employment. It is my contention that this feature of neoliberalism substantiates my claim that the production of neoliberal subjects also entails the neoliberalisation of much of our daily lives.

Finally, in chapter five, I unpack some of the general characteristics of neoliberal selfhood so as to draw together the threads of the previous four chapters. I argue that as a consequence of the neoliberal understanding of the world and its reshaping of our common life, people are encouraged – or forced – to “self-entrepreneurialise,” that is, to operate as managers of their own enterprise and capital. In other words, I examine the way that the neoliberalisation of our circumstances seems to make necessary the self-enterprising activities of the neoliberal self. In the first section of this chapter, I will claim that the spread of neoliberal competition fosters the production of self-enterprising subjects. As self-enterprises, we are in constant competition with other self-enterprises with whom we compete for positional advantage. This competition necessitates the kind of entrepreneurial activity seen from the neoliberal perspective as both desirable and unavoidable. I then elucidate the manner in which the competition that neoliberalism forces workers into seems to necessitate resiliency and malleability in the face of ongoing change. Put differently, in a world understood to be characterised by constant risk, change and competition, individuals can only survive (and maybe succeed) if they are flexible, adaptable and resilient. Finally, to complete my analysis of the
production of neoliberal subjects, I will argue that people’s precarious living and work conditions facilitate the production of neoliberal subjects by inciting entrepreneurial practices. Generally, I outline the way that indebtedness and the financialisation of our everyday lives integrate people more fundamentally with the global capitalist economy.

By considering the different themes just outlined, I will illustrate the different ways in which neoliberalism shapes human subjectivity. In brief, I argue that neoliberalism entails a particular mode of the production of subjects, and that such a production of subjects is bound up with attempts to instrumentalise, rationalise, economise and commodify – in a word, neoliberalise – everyday life. The neoliberalisation of subjectivity and everyday life supports the embeddedness of neoliberalism that has made it so difficult to challenge.
Human Capital Theory

As I argue throughout the thesis, the idea of human capital is an important conceptual pillar of neoliberal selfhood. In this chapter, I consider the work of economists Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz in order to highlight those aspects of the concept of human capital that shed light on the contemporary articulation of neoliberal selfhood. I will argue that human capital theory contains a radical interpretation of human life, one that is based on the assumption that we are always and only economic agents. I suggest that by considering human life in these terms, human capital theory opens up new domains to economic evaluation and analysis. Such an interpretation of human beings is an essential part of the neoliberal production of subjects.

Today, the notion of human capital is used in many different contexts and often in a fashion not entirely in accord with the formulations given by its early economic theorists. Nonetheless, it is important to consider the seminal economic accounts of this idea in order to clarify its contribution to neoliberal conceptions of selfhood. Although there are important figures apart from Becker and Schultz that could be included in a chapter on human capital, I focus on these two economists because they concisely capture the idea of human capital that has continued to shape, at least in part, our current neoliberal political imaginary. Moreover, they both spent time at the Chicago school of economics, infamously linked to the development of neoliberalism. Schultz was the chair of economics at Chicago between 1946 and 1961. He was also president of the American Economic Association for some time and remained active at Chicago until late in his life. Becker had postings at both Chicago and at Colombia.

Although not part of popular discourse in the same fashion as today, the idea of human capital was already receiving attention many decades ago within certain economic departments. Pedro Nuno Teixeira notes that economists

61 As Becker himself observes in the preface to the third edition of Human Capital: ‘a bibliography of the economics of education prepared in 1957 would have contained less than 50 entries, whereas one issued in 1964 listed almost 450 entries and its second edition in 1970 listed over 1300 entries. Moreover, this bibliography excludes the economic literature on health, migration, and other nonschooling investments in human capital, which has expanded
increased their use of the phrase "human capital" in the 1940s. Later, through the work of the likes of Becker, Schultz and Jacob Mincer, it became a commonplace term among economic circles. By the time of the third edition of Human Capital, published in 1993, Becker could boast of the term’s use in the presidential campaigns of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. Nowadays, the term is so ubiquitous in political and economic commentary, think-tank publications, economic policy discussions, and even in everyday life, that it is easy to forget that the concept has not always been central to economics, let alone routine political discourse.

The current ubiquity of the idea will become apparent in later chapters. So as to make clear the economisation that is essential to the neoliberal conception of selfhood, in this chapter I briefly explore the formative intellectual articulation of the concept of human capital. First, I argue that Becker and Schultz arrive at the notion of human capital by equivocating different kinds of economic activities. In particular, we will see how human capital theory renders labour a form of capital and reconceptualises certain forms of consumption as investments. In this way, human capital theory takes previously differentiated components of economic analysis and places them on the same plane.

Secondly, I will argue that human capital theory offers a radical interpretation of human activities, so that we are always and only conceived as economic agents, that is, as homo oeconomicus. This conceptualisation of human life is based on the assumption that people are constant cost-benefit analysers and welfare-maximisers. If we are always and everywhere homo oeconomicus, we are also constantly subject to both economic description and to interventions that will facilitate better economic outcomes. Human capital can grow, increase in value, generate more returns, and generally be put to work or worked upon in some fashion. This optimisation of personal human capital is one of the central aspects of neoliberal selfhood.

Finally, I will stress that human capital theory opens up new domains to economic evaluation and analysis. As already noted, this kind of economisation
is an essential component of neoliberalism and the neoliberalisation of selfhood. Fundamentally, human capital theory encourages a perspective that takes markets and market-like behaviour as an invariable component of human life. Human capital theorists interpret domains of human life (prominent examples being health and education) in such a way that they can be understood in accordance with the parameters and principles of economic reasoning.

While Becker and Schultz may have believed that their assumptions were justified by the results of their research, the concept of human capital is now taken so much for granted that it is used to explain all sorts of phenomena in the absence of either conceptual or empirical defence. As I will show throughout this thesis, human capital theory has helped to establish a broadly held view that equates people with self-enterprises. Our shared life, in the neoliberal outlook, is made up of numerous enterprises, whether they are individuals, firms, cities, nations, or some other entrepreneurial formation. I contend that human capital theory provides a central intellectual articulation of this reconfiguration at the level of selfhood.

**Economic Categories in Human Capital Theory**

To clarify how human capital theory has contributed to the neoliberal reconceptualisation of selfhood, it is important to explore the way in which human capital theory equivocates different economic categories, primarily through broadening the concept of capital in order to apply it to persons. In particular, I highlight the way that the category of labour is reinterpreted as another form of capital. If people are capital, then some activities previously understood as consumption are now understood as investments. These two seemingly insignificant changes alter the way that a great many aspects of human life are understood.

In human capital theory, labour is not an unchanging input of production. Rather, labour is reconfigured as a kind of capital that can qualitatively change. Labour can improve, stagnate, or decline. As such, it is understood as another source of capital that can be optimised. Hence, in human capital theory, labour
is not interpreted quantitatively (as it is, for example, in David Ricardo's work, in which an increase in labour is a quantitative increase in hours worked). Rather, it is now considered in its "qualitative" aspect. It is precisely this qualitative aspect that allows labour to be improved; not just more labour (for example, more hours worked) but better labour, more productive labour, labour that generates more returns. Labour is something that can be invested in or neglected, can be qualitatively developed or left to stagnate or decline.

As noted above, as a consequence of the changed understanding of labour (now a kind of capital), various kinds of consumption are also reimagined as types of investment. For example, while many economists had previously referred to education, health and internal migration as forms of consumption, Schultz states that from the perspective of human capital theory they now need to be considered as investments in human capital. If education and internal migration result in a better job, then they are investments in human capital and not simply forms of consumption. Even taking up leisure activities in one's own time becomes a form of investment. Learning German so that one might read Goethe or Rilke in the original is a form of investment, even if one is solely motivated by a passion for German literature. The investment includes whatever "resources" one expends in learning German (time, money for a tutor, acquisition of pertinent books) and the developing ability to speak German forms part of one's human capital. For Schultz, education can be thought of as both a consumer good and a producer good, or investment in a capital:

Although education is in some measure a consumption activity rendering satisfactions to the person at the time he obtains an education, it is predominantly an investment activity undertaken for the purpose of acquiring capabilities that render future satisfactions or that enhance future earnings of the person as a productive agent. Thus a part of it is a consumer good akin to conventional durables, and another part of it is a producer good. I propose, therefore, to treat education as an investment and to treat its consequences as a form of capital... Since it becomes an integral part of a person, it cannot be bought or sold or treated as property under our institutions. Nevertheless, it is a form of capital if it renders a service of value. The principle hypothesis underlying this treatment of education is that some important increases in national income are a consequence of additions to this form of capital.

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63 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 220.
Human capital theorists commonly make such a link between investments (here education) in human capital and increases in national income. Labour becomes a target for investment because it is hoped that more “value” can be extracted from it. In order to maximise the returns of labour, it is necessary to rethink traditional economic categories along the lines outlined in human capital theory. Like Schultz, Becker reconfigures the distinction between traditional economic categories such as labour, investment and capital. He encourages us to rethink the conception of capital so as to recognise its human variety:

Schooling, a computer training course, expenditures on medical care, and lectures on the virtues of punctuality and honesty are capital too in the sense that they improve health, raise earnings, or add to a person’s appreciation of literature over much of his or her lifetime. Consequently, it is fully in keeping with the capital concept as traditionally defined to say that expenditures on education, training, medical care, etc., are investments in capital. However, these produce human, not physical or financial, capital because you cannot separate a person from his or her knowledge, skills, health, or values the way it is possible to move financial and physical assets while the owner stays put.66

These elements of an individual’s personality, abilities, and knowledge are capital because they generate various kinds of short- and long-term returns. Principally, they are capital because of their contribution to future sources of income. Health care and education become means to other, usually economic, ends. Human capital theorists in economic departments are hardly alone in considering things like healthcare and education as economic investments in capital. To note one prominent example, the World Bank is only one key institution that took up and based its education policies on human capital theory.67

By reconceptualising key economic categories and expanding the concept of capital, human capital theorists conceive of people as sites of various kinds of intervention. As capital, individuals are resources of a malleable quality and therefore ought to be managed (and ought to manage themselves) in a way that maximises the returns that these human resources generate. As Becker claims, human capital investments can be ‘activities that influence future monetary and

psychic income by increasing the resources in people." The individual is portrayed as an object of investment, of inputs and outputs. In order to secure the desired returns, investments must first be made. These investments ‘include schooling, on-the-job training, medical care, migration, and searching for information about prices and incomes’. Such investments ‘improve skills, knowledge, or health, and thereby raise money or psychic incomes.’

This notion of ‘psychic income’ demonstrates how wide Becker wants to cast his conceptual net by including various kinds of human activity as investments in human capital. Human capital investments, according to Becker, need not only generate returns of a monetary nature. The idea of psychic income allows Becker to explain why people act in ways that do not seem to be immediately directed at monetary gain. Rather than concede that there are aspects of human existence that cannot be understood in terms of economic principles and categories, Becker extends the notion of “income” to include non-monetary (psychic) rewards. When someone acts in a way that does not seem to be for monetary or psychic reward, Becker assumes that this is because of some “hidden cost.” For example, Becker claims that when a person, household or business forgoes a ‘profitable opportunity,’ we must assume the existence of some ‘monetary or psychic’ cost that is not immediately observable. In this way, Becker reimagines non-economic phenomena so as to make them amenable to economic evaluation and description:

When an apparently profitable opportunity to a firm, worker, or household is not exploited, the economic approach does not take refuge in assertions about irrationality, contentment with wealth already acquired, or convenient ad hoc shifts in values (i.e., preferences). Rather it postulates the existence of costs, monetary or psychic, of taking advantage of these opportunities that eliminate their profitability – costs that may not be easily “seen” by outside observers. Of course, postulating the existence of costs closes or “completes” the economic approach in the same, almost tautological, way that postulating the existence of (sometimes unobserved) uses of energy completes the energy system, and preserves the law of the conservation of energy.

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68 Becker, Human Capital, 11.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
The idea that forgoing an opportunity for profit is the result of some unseen psychic cost might save the consistency of Becker’s economic analysis but is not itself rigorously defended. Rather, this assumption serves as a foundation for Becker’s theoretical and empirical investigations, and the results of these investigations, he believes, justify the assumption about hidden costs (and profits). If you view everything through the lens of a set of internally coherent concepts and methods, then your results are likely to reflect the assumptions that constitute your starting point. Becker’s human capital theory, I suggest, is indicative of such an approach.73

However, human capital theorists are not content with speculating about hidden costs and the returns individuals enjoy by investing in their capital. There are larger implications of their studies. As improvable and expandable capital, the “humans” in human capital theory are rendered sites of intervention for the sake of a “healthier” and “growing” economy. In other words, the returns on investment are supposed to benefit both the individual and the broader economy.74 Like many accounts of a neoliberal variety, Becker attempts to explain macroeconomic phenomena by starting on the microeconomic plane. For both the economy to improve and for individuals to enjoy better (monetary or psychic) returns, it is individuals that need to be transformed. Among other things, such an account assumes that skills and education alone are able to create jobs at the macro scale. For example, the most important kinds of investment in human capital, as far as Becker is concerned, are education and training. He claims to have shown that in the US attending high school and college significantly increase personal income. This seems to assume that education alone is somehow causing these higher incomes. And, as a corollary, lack of education – and not other macroeconomic, social and political factors – is

73 As Ben Fine and Dimitris Milonakis note, despite wanting to apply his economic theory to all manner of phenomena, Becker leaves out basic components of actual economic activity, such as money and finance: ‘The application and extension of the principles of marginalism take precedence over even the simplest intrusion of reality in general, and in the specific nature of the object of study. Thus, despite the wide application of his economic approach by subject matter, Becker has never incorporated the simple fact that economic exchange takes place through the intervention of money, let alone that there is a financial system that governs economic and non-economic relations’ (Fine and Milonakis, From Economics Imperialism to Freakonomics: The Shifting Boundaries between Economics and Other Social Sciences (New York: Routledge, 2009), 33-4).
74 Becker, Human Capital, 324.
the cause of low incomes and poverty. Hence, by making labour a form of capital, and education and similar activities forms of investment, human capital theory shifts our attention to managing the return-generating capacity of individual “capitals,” while also opening new domains of selfhood to economic explanation and intervention.

Like education, health is also incorporated into the domain of economic calculation. Health is of interest to individuals themselves, to the organisations that employ them (or might employ them), and to the “nation” insofar as health shapes the individual’s capacity to generate returns. A person’s health, like all aspects of their life, has implications for their capital value. Becker notes that the emotional and physical health of the worker is an important area for increasing returns. Like knowledge, health is subject to improvement and therefore is a target of investment:

One way to invest in human capital is to improve emotional and physical health... Health, like knowledge, can be improved in many ways. A decline in the death rate at working ages may improve earning prospects by extending the period during which earnings are received; a better diet adds strength and stamina, and thus earning capacity; or an improvement in working conditions – higher wages, coffee breaks, and so on – may affect morale and productivity.75

In this passage, Becker nicely captures the way that human capital theory links health and economic domains. These days, a great many government policies (not exclusively in health portfolios), management studies and self-help guides focus on people’s mental and physical health. Already in human capital theory, and very clearly in Becker’s work, we see this concern for the body, intelligence, and emotional state of the individual. Becker notes that firms can invest in the health of their workers via ‘medical examinations, lunches, or avoidance of activities with high accident rates’.76 Furthermore, individual health is the target of investment outside of the workplace, ‘in households, hospitals, and medical offices’.77 Hence the dietary habits of the household and the provision of medical care in hospitals also impact human capital. In this way, practices such as medical provision are transformed into investments. Health is treated as an investment rather than something that should concern us because

75 Ibid., 54-5.
76 Ibid., 55.
77 Ibid.
we have a moral obligation to look after the sick or meet people's basic rights. Health “investments” are of interest only because they offer some sort of return. Health, like education, becomes a means to ensuring more productive and valuable human capital. Individuals are understood (and encouraged to understand themselves) as capital that has an improvable capacity for generating returns.

**Human Capital and *Homo Oeconomicus***

Having considered the way that human capital theory reconceptualises economic categories, I will now outline the implications this has for how we think of human activity more generally. I argue that human capital theory conceives of human beings as no more than economic agents. Hence, individuals are conceived of as both capital to be made use of and as economic agents in charge of their personal capital. As I suggest throughout this thesis, such a conception of human life is essential to the neoliberal conceptualisation of selfhood.

One of the distinguishing features of human capital theory is the assumption that people are constantly making decisions of an economic variety. The economic agent of human capital theory is constantly engaged in cost-benefit analyses. While human capital theorists analyse and evaluate, for example, education and health as investments in capital, they assume that the rest of us are also already making similar (albeit cruder) analyses. We might not have the resources, training or acumen of a trained economist, or the resources and collective experience of a firm, but our reasoning and motivations are fundamentally economic. The decisions I make regarding my education, where I choose to live, who I choose to marry, how many children I have and how I raise them – all these are based on sophisticated or crude cost-benefit analyses. As Becker observes, ‘[h]uman capital analysis starts with the assumption that individuals decide on their education, training, medical care, and other

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78 Davies points out that 'Becker’s influence has been felt in an approach that reduces all moral and legal questions to problems of cost-benefit analysis’ (William Davies, *The Happiness Industry* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 151).
additions to knowledge and health by weighing the benefits and costs.'

Markets in goods and services are no longer the only domains in which individuals perform these cost-benefit analyses. There are now markets for all sorts of things, like marriage, not associated with traditional conceptions of goods and services. In light of this market-like interpretation of personal decision-making, the individual begins to closely resemble the corporate firm. As Davies puts it, with Becker’s ‘metaphor of ‘human capital’, the distinction between corporate strategy and individual behaviour dissolved altogether: each person and each firm was playing a long-term game for supremacy, whether or not there was a market present.’

Yet, Becker attempts to evade accusations of reductionism regarding his characterisation of human decision-making. For example, he claims his analyses do not assume that individuals are simply self-interested. He contends that human behaviour is ‘driven by a much richer set of values and preferences.’ Accordingly, what counts as “welfare” in welfare maximisation will not always be, say, securing the material advantage of the individual. Nonetheless, Becker continues to interpret people as primarily welfare-maximising creatures. Individuals might be ‘selfish, altruistic, loyal, spiteful, or masochistic,’ but each still maximises their (personally conceived) welfare, albeit from a different set of motives and preferences. Irrespective of these differences in motivation, Becker believes that human behaviour is forward-looking, consistent over time, and attempts to – successfully or otherwise – anticipate the future consequences of present actions. From this perspective, human behaviour consists of ‘individual choices characterised by utility maximisation, a forward-looking stance, consistent rationality, and stable and persistent preferences.’

As Becker acknowledges, he is committed to rational choice theory – slightly reworked – and its application to social issues. Even the ‘altruistic’ head of the family in the below example is a calculating, welfare-maximising individual –

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81 Becker, Accounting for Tastes, 139.
82 Ibid.
84 Becker, Accounting for Tastes, 156.
only, because they are ‘altruistic’, the welfare that concerns them is not simply their own:

Altruistic family heads who do not plan to leave bequests try to create a “warm” atmosphere in their families, so that members are willing to come to the assistance of those experiencing financial and other difficulties... Parents help determine the values of children – including their feelings of obligation, duty, and love.85

A “warm atmosphere” is created after a calculation on the part of the family head about the possible future returns of such an atmosphere. Parents try to create feelings of obligation in children if they judge that they will require their material support later in life. Supposedly, they are less inclined to encourage these feelings in their children if such material support is unnecessary. This characterisation rests on the idea of the calculating, welfare-maximising individual.86 Individuals use economic reasoning for all their decisions. Accordingly, people resemble firms both in the way that they are composed of capital of various qualities and in the strategic outlook they adopt in all domains of their lives. On the basis of the notion of human capital, Becker conceives *homo oeconomicus* as the fundamental characterisation of human existence and as a consequence undermines the distinction between economic and non-economic activity.

**Extending the Economic Framework**

So far, I have argued that human capital theory reconceptualises economic categories so as to portray people as another kind of capital and consequently targets of investment and improvement. Following this, I argued that Becker’s

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85 Ibid., 154. When I make reference to “the family” in this chapter and the next, it is only to clarify the understanding of the family promoted by the particular author whose work I am discussing. Of course, the actual story of neoliberalism and the family is much more complex. On neoliberalism and the family, see Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017) and Ventura, *Neoliberal Culture*, 2012.

86 Consider the calculating, welfare-maximisers in the following example of the ‘market in marriages’: ‘According to the economic approach, a person decides to marry when the utility expected from marriage exceeds that expected from remaining single or from additional search for a more suitable mate... Similarly, a married person terminates his (or her) marriage when the utility anticipated from becoming single or marrying someone else exceeds the loss in utility from separation, including losses due to physical separation from one’s children, division of joint assets, legal fees, and so forth. Since many persons are looking for mates, a market in marriages can be said to exist: each person tries to do the best he can, given that everyone else in the market is trying to do the best they can. A sorting of persons into different marriages is said to be an equilibrium sorting if persons not married to each other in this sorting could not marry and make each better off’ (Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*, 10).
conception of *homo oeconomicus* assumes that we always behave as economic agents, endlessly making cost-benefit analyses in order to maximise our welfare (however conceived). In this section I extend what is already apparent from the above discussion. Namely, I stress the extension of the economic framework accomplished by human capital theory. As mentioned in the introduction, the production of neoliberal subjects is in part the consequence of interpreting all domains of human life in terms of economic principles and evaluative methods. In accord with this neoliberal move, Becker and Schultz extend economics to include phenomena outside of traditional economic sites like firms and markets. Becker himself says his ‘research uses the economic approach to analyse social issues that range beyond those usually considered by economists.’ These issues include discrimination against minorities, addiction, crime, and the family. In order to incorporate these topics into economics, Becker transforms the phenomenon in question so that it can be understood in the terms of his own economic framework. His extension of economics also rests on the assumption, as noted above, that people are themselves perpetually engaged in better or worse cost-benefit analyses, are welfare-maximisers, are forward-looking, have stable preferences, and so on. In other words, it rests on the assumption that we are always and only *homo oeconomicus*. Consequently, everything we do can be understood within an economic framework. As Brown explains, this was not the case in ‘classical economic liberalism’:

Adam Smith, Nassau Senior, Jean-Baptiste Say, David Ricardo and James Steuart devoted a great deal of attention to the relationship of economic and political life without ever reducing the latter to the former or imagining that economics could remake other fields of existence in and through its own terms and metrics.

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87 Fine and Milonakis have traced what they see as the economic colonisation of other intellectual disciplines and perspectives. Although they do not discuss the extension of ideas like human capital into politics and the public domain, the kind of “economics imperialism” they explore is a useful reminder of the power of certain economic ideas in recent intellectual history. They outline two main kinds of economics imperialism. Of the first strand, the definitive (and, to their mind, extreme) version can be found in the work of Gary Becker. (The other strand includes the likes of George Akerlof, Joseph Stiglitz and Kenneth Arrow). See Fine and Milonakis, *From Economics Imperialism to Freakonomics*.

88 Foucault stresses this aspect of “American neo-liberalism” and human capital theory (*Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics*, 219, 243).

89 Becker, *Accounting for Tastes*, 139.

90 Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 33.
Becker's discussion of the family is a clear example of the extension of economic analysis to new domains. For Becker, the family is an integral setting for the formation of human capital. Children acquire many of their skills, habits, knowledge and values in their home life. A parent who beats their child, Becker tells us, will 'cause lasting damage.' This is not good for the child's human capital. By contrast, 'sympathetic and firm parents help motivate their children.' And this must be good for the child's human capital and thus their long-term value-generating capacity. Accordingly, Becker is interested in the family insofar as it shapes the child's human capital and therefore its ability to function later in life, particularly – but not exclusively – as a productive agent.

In addition to the family being a site of capital formation, Becker also conceives of family members as economic agents. He states that the kind of economic approach to the family that he advocates 'interprets marriage, divorce, fertility, and relations among family members through the lens of utility-maximising forward-looking behavior.' Likewise, Schultz notes that his economic perspective on children

[p]ostulate[s] that parents respond to economic considerations in the children they bear and rear and that parents equate the marginal sacrifices and satisfactions, including the productive services they expect from children, in arriving at the value of children to them. Thus, in thinking about the economics of fertility, social cost and benefits aside, the analytical key in determining the value of children to their parents is in the interactions between the supply and demand factors that influence these family decisions.

For example, in countries with different resources, parents value their children differently, but these differences are themselves the consequence of the economic reasoning all parents practice. It is the circumstances between rich and poor countries that are different, not the kind of economic agents (and the accompanying economic reasoning). In richer countries, parents receive mostly 'future personal satisfactions' from their children. By contrast, in poor countries, children often add to the future income of their parents through

91 Becker, Human Capital, 21.
92 Ibid.
93 Becker, Accounting for Tastes, 140.
95 Schultz, The Economics of Being Poor, 280.
working in the household or farm. They also provide food and shelter for parents in their older age. As Schultz puts it,

[c]hildren are in a very important sense the *poor man’s capital*. It is becoming clear that the investment in children is in many ways akin to the investment in home-grown trees for their beauty and fruit. A very young child is highly labor-intensive in terms of cost, and the rewards are wholly psychic in terms of utility. As a child becomes a teenager the additional cost born by the parents involves less labor intensiveness, and the rewards, especially in poor countries, consist in an increasing part of useful work that the teenager performs.\(^{96}\)

Thus, for Becker and Schultz, the family is its own little enterprise in the same way that each individual is a small enterprise with their accompanying capital. Schultz claims that it marks a significant advance in economics to take the firm as a model for the family, that is, to interpret the family as an economic unit whose decisions about “consumption” and “production” can be defined in economic terms. The family as a firm is interpreted

as a decision making unit not only in maximizing its utility in consumption but also in determining the allocation of human time and of goods in the production activities of the household... In this view of the family, the assumption is made that the welfare of each member of the family is normally integrated into a unified family welfare function.\(^{97}\)

In order to flesh out this extension of the economic sphere, I will return to the study of education in human capital theory. As with their account of the family, human capital theorists fundamentally change the way we understand education.\(^ {98}\) Broadly speaking, Becker and Schultz understand education as an investment in human capital. According to their analyses, schools specialise in the ‘production of training.’\(^ {99}\) Becker conceives of schooling as essentially a process of equipping people with skills. Likewise, universities equip people with skills of a ‘large and diverse set.’\(^ {100}\) Firms and schools are different sites of training for the skills that different professions require. Skills are the additional capital individuals attain as a result of educational investment. According to human capital theory, education is one factor in the calculation of the efficient

\(^{96}\) Ibid., 280-1.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 282.

\(^{98}\) In addition to the family, education and health, Becker’s research on fertility is another revealing example of the analysis of a phenomenon reduced to the confines of Becker’s economic assumptions. See: Becker, *Human Capital*, 347-8.

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 51.

\(^{100}\) Ibid.
allocation of resources. As such, education loses any noneconomic value and becomes a means to some other end. This also means that education is an investment in capital that might or might not garner returns. From both the macro perspective of the economy and from the perspective of the individual, there might be instances in which “investing” in education is not worth the “costs.” Education will not always necessarily deliver returns, or certain kinds of education might be deemed better investments than others. Accordingly, education is one possible investment that competes with other possible investments:

The formation of capital by education is obviously relevant in planning for economic development when the objective is that of achieving an efficient allocation of investment resources in accordance with the priorities set by the relative rates of return to alternative investment opportunities. Assessments of education in terms of costs and benefits are all the more likely once you have accepted the language and logic of human capital theory, an outlook according to which education is capital-forming, is an investment whose rate of return can be roughly measured, and can be comparatively assessed against other investment opportunities. For Becker and Schultz, education is an investment in human capital because it is a source of future “satisfactions” or earnings. But both Becker and Schultz spend much more time talking about future earnings than satisfactions. Moreover, such a theory tells us nothing about (and has no concern for) what education actually entails. It calculates costs and benefits (to individuals, families, national economies) and leaves it at that. Ben Fine and Pauline Rose claim that this cost-benefit assessment of education means that human capital theory essentially begins without any understanding of the educational process. On the one hand, the ‘black box’ of how education is provided remains firmly shut other than in the labelling of financial costs and benefits. On the other hand, the theory has no historical or social specificity. The rise of human capital theory within the World Bank, for example, grew out of the more specific application of cost-benefit analysis to calculation of rates of return (Jones 1992). As such, it has nothing to do with education. Exactly the same methodology could be applied to any factor with an economic effect.

Indeed, this is precisely what the work of human capital theory has achieved in its analyses of education and other activities.

Becker's account of the family, health and education demonstrates how human capital theory opens new domains to economic analysis. Everything falls within the purview of Becker's economic investigations, irrespective of scale and significance. The kind of economic approach Becker advocates makes no ‘distinctions between major and minor decisions.’ The same principles are at work when people choose a brand of coffee and decisions they make ‘involving life and death.’ No distinctions are drawn between decisions that have different levels of emotional involvement. Thus, again, the same logic can be applied when ‘choosing a mate or the number of children [one has]’ and ‘buying paint.’ Importantly, as Becker does not distinguish between different kinds of decisions, he also thinks it is unwise to proffer alternative explanations for the decisions of people in different social, cultural and economic positions. Hence no conceptual distinctions are drawn ‘between decisions by persons with different incomes, education, or family backgrounds.’ Becker's uniformly applicable economic theory renders significant differences, such as class, completely invisible.

Becker himself observes that he considers the economic approach ‘comprehensive’:

I have come to the position that the economic approach is a comprehensive one that is applicable to all human behavior, be it behavior involving money prices or imputed shadow prices, repeated or infrequent decisions, large or minor decisions, emotional or mechanical ends, rich or poor persons, men or women, adults or children, brilliant or stupid persons, patients or therapists, businessmen or politicians, teachers or students.

In order to start from such a perspective, Becker must ignore the historically divergent and socially embedded nature of the phenomena under consideration. None of us, from Becker's perspective, are anything other than

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid., 7-8.
107 Ibid., 8.
108 According to Fine, '[Becker] takes the implications of mainstream, neo-classical economics to their logical extremes even though the results prove embarrassing to his less persistent colleagues, who prefer to overlook the inevitable reductio ad absurdum. In short, Becker represents in the sharpest form the way in which mainstream economics abstracts its analysis
homo oeconomicus. We cannot “behave” or make decisions in any way other than as calculating, welfare-maximising bundles of human capital. And this is an essential point. Part of what makes migration, the family, education, and fertility rates amenable to the same kind of analysis is the assumption that in each of these domains people always operate according to a particular economic outlook. We are always forward-looking, welfare-maximising, cost-benefit-analysing economic agents. This assumption allows Becker to extend his economic analyses to all kinds of phenomena. The ubiquity of homo oeconomicus leads to, even necessitates, the spread of (a specific kind of) economic analysis and understanding.

Conclusion
In the above, I have shown that the concept of human capital collapses distinctions between different kinds of economic categories, primarily in order to add a “human” variety to the idea of capital. Secondly, and central to my overall claim regarding neoliberalism, I held that human capital theory contains a radical interpretation of human life, one that is based on the assumption that we are always and only economic agents. It assumes people are constant cost-benefit analysers and welfare-maximisers. Additionally, by seeing people as capital, it also renders us sites for particular kinds of intervention (as I explore further in later chapters). Given I contend that the neoliberalisation of everyday life is supported by the spread of a particular economic framework, I finished the chapter by suggesting that human capital theory opens up new domains to economic evaluation and analysis. Fundamentally, it encourages an outlook that takes markets and market-like behaviour as an invariable component of human life.

A brief analysis of the economic notion of human capital was important because of the role the idea has played in recent decades, which I explore further in the following chapters. Fine and Rose claim that the idea of human

capital 'has... been increasingly and widely accepted uncritically.' The widespread nature of its acceptance means that its use is often confused, inconsistent and varied. Nonetheless, there are important clues in the human capital theory of Becker and Schultz that help us to make sense of more recent articulations of neoliberal selfhood.

Becker and Schultz take the kind of activity and calculations of firms to be indicative of the activity and decision-making of people generally. In human capital theory, traditional economic categories are reworked so that we are each considered as our own bundle of capital. Every person is, irrespective of their position in the division of labour, their age, class, or any other social, political or economic category, a manager of their human capital. As I will argue, an essential component of neoliberal selfhood is the practice of self-entrepreneurialisation, that is, practices of self-enhancement and optimisation of one’s capital. Human capital theory has contributed to this understanding of individuals as sites of possible “qualitative” improvement, with a strong emphasis on the economic implications of such enhancement. As Philip Brown, Hugh Lauder and David Ashton have noted, human capital theory led to a new focus on the ‘quality’ of workers and the workforce generally: ‘If quality of the workforce was the key to economic growth, companies and policy advisors needed to focus attention on the supply side of economic activities rather than such things as consumer demand or the cost of raw materials.’ It also changed the way many people made sense of the relationship between capital and labour. As I noted, according to Schultz and Becker, investment in human capital generates monetary returns to individuals as well as to companies and the broader economy. From this perspective, “[w]hat people were paid did not depend on owning one’s own business or result from collective bargaining that set employers against labor unions in a fight for a bigger slice of the cake. Rather, wages were based on a worker’s contribution to productivity, as earnings were assumed to reflect value added to the organization.’

Thus, in a number of important ways, the theory of human capital has been a significant component of political-economic practices, ideas and explanations in recent decades. Accordingly, we must keep this important notion in mind if we are to understand what it means to be a neoliberal self in our contemporary world. At various points in the following chapters, I will make reference to the appropriation of the idea of human capital to highlight its pervasiveness in everyday life and its contribution to the production of neoliberal subjects. During the neoliberal era, industry leaders and management circles have adopted an outlook akin to that found in human capital theory, as they focus on the “qualitative” improvement of their targeted subjects. I consider a number of instances of this kind of management discourse in the following chapter.
Optimising the Neoliberal Subject

Having shown that human capital theory seeks to analyse ways of improving the “value-generating” capacity of the individual, I will now consider another body of literature aimed at improving this capacity of individual subjects. I claim that management theory and practices are central to the production of neoliberal subjects. Neoliberalism entails directing and encouraging people to understand themselves as self-enterprises. The management literature and practices analysed below are exemplary in this respect. In addition to the inducement to understand oneself in particular ways, neoliberalism also facilitates certain modes of self-conduct. The representations of personhood found, for example, in human capital theory and contemporary management literature – the subject of this chapter – prompt people to conduct themselves in ways that complement neoliberal understandings of the self and the world.

In order to provide some specific examples of what constitutes the human capital of the neoliberal self-enterprise, I consider a number of recent texts from management literature. Specifically, I analyse texts by management consultants, advocates of positive psychology and self-help gurus. These authors outline many of the ideal attributes and techniques of self-enhancement that encapsulate the neoliberal self and its government. In fact, certain aspects of these works so concisely and clearly capture the key tenants of the self from the neoliberal perspective that no critical scholar of neoliberalism could come up with better formulations. I do not suggest that these works exactly describe, for example, people’s working lives or their self-understandings. Instead, I claim that they serve as a neoliberal guide for who we ought to be, how we should relate to ourselves and in what ways we should act. Besides, given the very real success of neoliberalism and its encroachment into our everyday lives, neoliberal accounts of the self are not merely the unrealised fantasies of an isolated elite.

My position on what can be learnt from such texts resembles that of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello:

[M]anagement literature can be read on two different levels. We certainly find in it a source of new methods of profit-making and novel
recommendations to managers for creating firms that are more efficient and more competitive. But management literature is not purely technical. It is not composed only of practical recipes for improving the productivity of organisations as one improves the performance of a machine. It simultaneously has a high moral tone, if only because it is a normative literature stating what should be the case, not what is the case. Consequently, we may legitimately pose the question of the realism of this literature, and hence how believable it is when it comes to what ‘really’ happens in firms... Their orientation is not constative, but prescriptive. In the manner of edifying books or manuals of moral instruction, they practise the exemplum, select the cases employed according to their demonstrative power... and take from reality only such of its aspects as confirm the orientation to which they wish to give some impetus. But it is precisely insofar as they constitute one of the main models in the world of enterprise that they are of interest to us here.112

It is this moral tone and prescriptive orientation that I want to make explicit in the texts analysed below. To paraphrase Boltanski and Chiapello, I suggest that they constitute one of the main models of the self as enterprise and are for that reason of interest to an analysis of neoliberal selfhood. The material they contain is situated at the intersection of certain economic ideas – such as entrepreneurialism and human capital – and their application to our working and everyday lives. Specifically, as Peter Kelly stresses, these texts indicate what the subject must know about itself and how it must manage itself in order to succeed as an enterprising project.113 As I explore further below, the authors of these texts encourage people to optimise their physical bodies, social connections, emotional life and general psychology in the service of enhancing the value of capital – their own, the organisation’s or the (post)national economy’s. It should be stressed that I am not simply analysing the managerial expression of neoliberal ideology (although clearly I also undertake such an analysis). Many of the recommendations made in management literature have been implemented in one form or another in workplaces and other institutions.

In order to outline some of the main ideas about the ideal productive agent in the neoliberal era, I first look at the work of Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz. I suggest that Loehr and Schwartz’s work highlights a number of features of neoliberal selfhood and the production of neoliberal subjects. First, Loehr and Schwartz call upon all aspects of a person’s life to contribute to the

productive capacity of the individual. We also find in their work a competitive (and sporting) framework for understanding how individuals should approach their entrepreneurial self-formation. This self-fashioning involves new forms of self-understanding and self-management, but also includes a prominent role for expert knowledge, advice and services. The goal of this assisted self-fashioning is to optimise the functioning of the individual so as to be able to meet the wedded interests of individual, family and firm. Finally, Loehr and Schwartz take a keen interest in the happiness and wellbeing of their clients. People's happiness and wellbeing are themselves put to work in the service of some value-generating activity, whether the beneficiary is the individual, the firm, or the broader economy.

Similar themes and a comparable framework can be found in the work of Shawn Achor and the psychological capital theorists I consider in the second section of this chapter. I contend that these authors provide a different perspective on the techniques used to mobilise various aspects of a person’s life for the sake of “success” or generating value. Broadly, Achor and the psychological capital theorists are concerned with the relationship between psychological constitution and value-generating capacity. In Achor’s work, as in other texts in this field, happiness is understood as a direct cause of success and as a distinct competitive advantage. In the psychological capital literature, an explicitly psychological space of intervention is carved out. With the notion of psychological capital comes a new way of making sense of the possibilities of working with and optimising the psychological subject. Psychological capital, like happiness in Achor’s work, is seen as a significant contributor to performance outcomes. It is my contention that the attempt to optimise our psychological and emotional lives should be seen as part of the more general project of producing neoliberal subjects. All aspects of a person, including their psychological and emotional characteristics, are reframed as human capital to be optimised.

To conclude my analysis of management literature and practices, I argue that practices of self-branding are another way in which neoliberalism infiltrates our everyday lives, employing our whole person in the goal of building a successful self-enterprise. Just as the modern firm is increasingly
concerned with its reputational capital, with its networks and business relationships, so the individual must also be concerned with how they are publicly received, that is, with their brand. To highlight this aspect of neoliberal selfhood, I look at two texts on the branded self. First, I briefly analyse Doug Dvorak’s *Build Your Own Brand*.114 I then draw out some of the key themes in David McNally and Karl D. Speak’s *Be Your Own Brand*.115 The authors of these texts interpret the self as something like a firm or enterprise whose “success” in life requires constant self-promotion and building business-like relationships. In accord with the way that neoliberalism exploits all aspects of our subjectivity, the construction of a strong brand requires coordinating the different features of an individual’s life: their past experiences, abilities, personality, education, habits, travel experience, appearance, and whatever else affects the impression a person makes on others. By encouraging people to consider how these parts of their lives shape their personal brands, the growth of self-branding techniques also facilitate the construction of neoliberal subjects.

**Training and Managing the Self-Enterprise**

In the previous chapter I gave a general characterisation of the idea of human capital. I now argue that in management theory and practices we clearly see the kind of “capital” individuals are meant to embody and develop in the neoliberal period. By exploring these components, I make clear the way that the neoliberal self is expected to integrate the different dimensions of their life into one and the same enterprising project. To illustrate this feature of neoliberal selfhood, I first consider the work of management consultants Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz.

For Loehr and Schwartz, as with other professionals in their field, psychological, physical and mental health must be integrated if the individual is to succeed in becoming an optimal enterprising project. Additionally, new possibilities of assessment and intervention become possible when a connection is thought to exist between the performance of employees and the

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state of their body, mind and soul. It is the task of organisational management and performance coaches to assist the individual in developing and integrating their “capital” or “assets.” Management monitors and encourages the healthy functioning of the person. This healthy functioning is a means of guaranteeing strong individual performance, which in turn improves organisational performance. The neoliberal self is encouraged to care for itself as an interconnected whole of psychological, bodily and spiritual parts.

**The Corporate Athlete**

This particular version of the neoliberal self can be found in the work of Loehr and Schwartz. To make clear this idea of neoliberal selfhood, I start by considering a 2001 article they published in the *Harvard Business Review* in which they outline what is required to be a healthy “corporate athlete.” Following Kelly, I acknowledge that the corporate athlete is only ‘one form the self as enterprise can take’. Nonetheless, this form of the self as enterprise is an instructive one. By formulating the idea of the corporate athlete, Loehr and Schwartz capture much of what is expected of the neoliberal self. In particular, the account of the corporate athlete highlights what the neoliberal self is expected to know about itself, that is, the particular ways in which neoliberalism induces one to relate to oneself.

Loehr and Schwartz would have us understand and relate to ourselves as a kind of athlete, specifically, as “corporate athletes.” The idea of the athlete, like that of the manager-coach or management-consultant-coach, shows the prevalence of a competitive sporting paradigm in the neoliberal imaginary. Throughout their work, Loehr and Schwartz frequently use sporting metaphors and examples. Like a coach training an athlete, they offer a series of recommendations and evaluative frameworks that position the performance of workers as something that can be shaped and improved. The training

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undergone by the corporate athlete entails techniques for improving all aspects of the person’s capacities.

Loehr and Schwartz start by noting that the reason executives perform differently under pressure is not simply because of differences in intellect. If they want to be high achievers, a ‘sharp intellect’ must also be accompanied by ‘physical and emotional strength.’ The mind, the body and the soul all need to perform at the top of their game, must be brought to ‘peak condition.’ The world of the executive is one of constant change and pressure. High performance in these conditions can be difficult. Loehr and Schwartz claim that until now management theorists’ formulas for maximising performance under pressure have too often focused exclusively on the executives ‘cognitive capacities,’ that is, their assets ‘from the neck up.’ Loehr and Schwartz assert that this can only be remedied by paying due attention to all aspects of the person. Therefore, performance management must take into consideration ‘the body, the emotions, the mind, and the spirit,’ as well as the way these different domains influence one another. It is for this reason that they introduce the ‘performance pyramid,’ which entails, from bottom to top: physical capacity, emotional capacity, mental capacity, and spiritual capacity. By properly connecting these different levels, one can reach and maintain an ’Ideal Performance State’

Given their focus on these four components of the performance pyramid, Loehr and Schwartz note that their approach to executive training does not involve working on typical business skills, like public speaking or balance sheet analysis. Rather, they prefer to concentrate on what they call ‘supportive or secondary competencies, among them endurance, strength, flexibility, self-control, and focus’, all of which help maintain performance levels over time. These competencies are required not only for specific tasks but are needed in all parts of working life. For example, focus and endurance are necessary in all

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118 Loehr and Schwartz, “The Making of a Corporate Athlete,” 120.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid., 123.
124 Ibid., 122.
working contexts. Accordingly, Loehr and Schwartz’s program encourages a kind of general vigilance on the part of executives. The whole person is retrained so that such vigilance can be practiced in the demanding setting of the modern workplace.

The newly fashioned corporate athlete ought to be able to do more than succeed in the workplace. They ought also to be able to perform at their “peak.” An executive might perform successfully while drinking too much, smoking, lacking emotional awareness, and so on. But this success is not the same as working at their full potential. While executives can achieve success without peak performance, Loehr and Schwartz are promoting success of a different kind. One should strive for peak performance and not merely success.\footnote{The very ambiguity of “success,” “performance,” and “full potential” helps to reinforce a sense of never having done quite enough or at least always possibly drifting from the constant attention required to temporarily achieve them. Moreover, the idea of “peak performance” suggests some sort of comparison: performance “a” is the peak performance in comparison to performances “b”, “c”, “d”, and so on. Again, I suggest that this is because with the idea of peak performance, (like the ambiguity found in “success,” “performance” and “full potential”), Loehr and Schwartz give the impression that there is always a little more that could be done, more than what one is currently doing. Specifying a point of achievement – a singular goal, a measured “peak” performance – would distract us from the constant effort required to extract the maximum value from our ongoing performance.\footnote{Loehr and Schwartz, “The Making of a Corporate Athlete,” 122.} When smoking, drinking, neglecting one’s emotional skills, the executive ‘cannot perform to their full potential or without a cost over time – to themselves, to their families, and to the corporations for which they work.’\footnote{Ibid.} As in all of Loehr and Schwartz’s work, they make an explicit connection between personal performance and happiness, the family’s happiness, and organisational success. If the executive does not develop the skills Loehr and Schwartz recommend, it will negatively impact themselves, their families and the firm.

In order to avoid these negative impacts, many of the recommended skills and competencies are aimed at facilitating the proper use of energy. Borrowing from findings in sport science research, a number of recommendations are made for ways that executives can balance energy expenditure and recovery. Loehr and Schwartz claim that stress is not the real problem in the workplace. On the contrary, stress is a ‘stimulus for growth.’\footnote{Loehr and Schwartz, “The Making of a Corporate Athlete,” 122.} The problem the modern executive faces is inadequate recovery from high levels of stress and stress
inducing situations. In other words, it is great to expend energy. Problems arise when energy is not properly recovered. Consequently, Loehr and Schwartz focus on developing rituals that balance energy expenditure and recovery. Peak performance is maintained by using rituals to both integrate the four levels of the 'high-performance pyramid' and to manage energy use and recovery. This pyramid is organised in the following way:

- Physical well-being is its foundation. Above that rests emotional health, then mental acuity, and at the top, a sense of purpose. The Ideal Performance State – peak performance under pressure – is achieved when all levels are working together.

- Rituals that promote oscillation – the rhythmic expenditure and recovery of energy – link the levels of the pyramid. For instance, vigorous exercise can produce a sense of emotional well-being, clearing the way for peak mental performance.

Notice that there are very few boundaries that separate what does and what does not affect these four areas. Physical health is something that needs to be looked after all the time and, in fact, cannot really be attended to in its entirety while one is at work. Emotional health is clearly something that includes areas of one’s life outside of work and outside of the time in which one is working. It includes all of one’s relationships in and out of the workplace. Traumatic incidents from a person’s past could be said to impact their emotional capacity and therefore their work performance in the present. In this way, more and more areas of a person’s life and of their character are being organised and optimised in the pursuit of establishing a robust enterprising subject.

In order to unpack the work that this enterprising subject must do, Loehr and Schwartz start with the example of Marilyn Clark, then managing director of Salomon Smith Barney (now part of Citigroup). She lived, they tell us, what appeared to be ‘an enviable life’:

Yet her hectic lifestyle was exacting a cost... In the mornings, temporarily fueled by coffee and a muffin, she was alert and energetic. By the afternoon, though, her energy sagged, and she got through the rest of the day on sheer willpower. At lunchtime, when she could have taken a few quiet moments

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128 Loehr and Schwartz use the analogy of weight training. When lifting weights, the muscle is, so to speak, highly stressed, ‘to the point where its fibres literally start to break down’ (Ibid.). When the muscle is given enough time, it will heal and grow stronger. However, if the muscle is overused – over-stressed – without proper recovery, it will be damaged. If the muscle is not stressed at all, it will become weak and atrophied. Hence, the point is not to avoid stress but to properly balance ‘energy expenditure and recovery’ (Ibid., 123).

129 Ibid.
to recover, she found that she couldn’t say no to employees who lined up at her office seeking counsel and support. Between the demands of her job, her colleagues, and her family, she had almost no time to herself. Her frustration quietly grew.\textsuperscript{130} Clark’s family is presented as a group that demands something from her in the same way work does. Hence, it is not simply that poor self-management impacts one’s family. It is also the case that the family is something that can contribute to poor performance if the energy you expend “dealing” with it is not properly recovered.\textsuperscript{131} So as to have Clark performing at her peak, Loehr and Schwartz started by assessing her physical fitness.\textsuperscript{132} I suggest that, through this very process of assessment and education, managers and management consultants make the person aware that there is an area of themselves that requires maintenance, attention, work. As Loehr and Schwartz report, ‘[a]s she learned more about the relationship between energy and high performance, Clark agreed that her first priority was to get back in shape.’\textsuperscript{133} Generally, processes of evaluation, goal-setting, auditing, and related practices, can have this effect of creating an awareness in the subject of some aspect of themselves and their performance that they must monitor and improve. In this way, these practices foster forms of neoliberal subjectivity. Clark was encouraged to start doing gym sessions by her corporate coaches and by colleagues. Apparently, quite a few of the staff members started attending the gym together. Clark reported that they could now discuss and share ‘something healthy’ and not just talk about work.\textsuperscript{134} Whether or not they had managed to fit in a workout and how well they were recovering became part of their daily exchanges.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} On the idea that families and other intimate connections are possible obstacles to strong work performance, Peter Fleming notes the practice of potential employees of the financial sector’ writing “no dependents” on their CVs to illustrate that they are fully available to their employers, free of cumbersome social or familial impediments (Peter Fleming, \textit{The Mythology of Work: How Capitalism Persists Despite Itself} (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 27).
\textsuperscript{132} The changes targeting the physical level include not just physical exercise but also changes to sleep and diet. On employer attempts to manage employee diet and health more generally, see Carl Cederström and André Spicer, \textit{The Wellness Syndrome} (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2015).
\textsuperscript{133} Loehr and Schwartz, “The Making of a Corporate Athlete,” 123.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 124.
In addition to the physical competency of the executive, Loehr and Schwartz also evaluate and target emotional competency. They justify this by again making reference to their earlier work with athletes, and the connections established therein between emotional capacity and performance. Negative emotions, they claim, negatively affect performance in both athletes and business people. They cite the example of Alan, an executive of an investment company, known for his angry outbursts, often because he felt that others were not meeting his high standards. Loehr and Schwartz offer the following diagnosis: ‘His anger, we explained, was a reactive emotion, a fight-or-flight response to situations he perceived as threatening. To manage more effectively, he needed to transform his inner experience of threat under stress into one of challenge.’\(^{135}\)

Though it is easy to mock the simplicity of this kind of analysis, simplicity is required when you are treating an emotional problem like an impediment to a properly functioning entrepreneurial machine. Whether or not overall individual capacity is improved will be analysed in accord with how changes to emotional interactions, experiences, and capacities affect executive performance.

Again, Loehr and Schwartz first recommended a regular workout regime for Alan. This was supposed to lengthen his emotional endurance and allow him to release some of his emotional tension. However, his busy travelling schedule sometimes interrupted this regime. Therefore, ‘a precise five-step ritual to contain his negative emotions whenever they threatened to erupt’ was also developed.\(^{136}\) After the implementation of this ritual,\(^{137}\) apparently several of his staff found him easier to work with and Alan himself thought he was now a ‘more effective manager.’\(^{138}\) This is, after all, the real goal.

Improving emotional capacity can also be achieved with the right use of music, body language and close relationships. Loehr and Schwartz encourage ‘close relationships’ because they help to sustain and improve work performance:

\(^{135}\) Ibid., 125
\(^{136}\) Ibid.
\(^{137}\) Noticing signals in his body indicative of emotional tension, closing his eyes and taking several breaths, relaxing his face muscles, softening his voice and speaking slowly, putting himself in the place of the other person, framing his response in positive language.
Anyone who has enjoyed a happy family reunion or an evening with good friends knows the profound sense of safety and security that these relationships can induce. Such feelings are closely associated with the Ideal Performance State. Unfortunately, many of the corporate athletes we train believe that in order to perform up to expectations at work, they have no choice but to stint on their time with loved ones. We try to reframe the issue. By devoting more time to their most important relationships and setting clearer boundaries between work and home, we tell our clients, they will not only derive more satisfaction but will also get the recovery that they need to perform better at work.\(^\text{139}\)

So, time with loved ones is part of the “recovery time” necessary to prepare for the next bout of work. All time and activities are organised around the needs and demands of high performance in the workplace, even when clear ‘boundaries between work and home’ are apparently being established.\(^\text{140}\)

At the level of cognitive capacities in the performance pyramid, Loehr and Schwartz target their clients’ ‘focus, time management, and positive- and critical-thinking skills.’\(^\text{141}\) For example, they inform the reader that people lose energy when their focus is interrupted or interfered with. Therefore, maintaining focus is a crucial cognitive capacity. To this end, Loehr and Schwartz recommend meditation, as it both trains attention and promotes recovery.\(^\text{142}\) Time management and allowing time for rest and energy renewal are also essential to cognitive capacity. They tell the story of their success with (then) managing director for institutional sales at Gruntal & Company, Jeffrey Sklar:

> With our help, he built a set of rituals that ensured regular recovery and also enabled him to perform at a higher level while spending fewer hours at work. Once in the morning and again in the afternoon, Sklar retreats from the frenetic trading floor to a quiet office, where he spends 15 minutes doing deep-breathing exercises. At lunch, he leaves the office... and walks outdoors for at least 15 minutes. He also works out five or six times a week after work. At home, he and his wife, Sherry, a busy executive herself, made a pact never to talk business after 8 PM. They also swore off work on the weekends, and they have stuck to their vow for nearly two years. During each of those years, Sklar’s earnings have increased by more than 65%.\(^\text{143}\)

\(^{139}\) Ibid., 125-6.
\(^{140}\) Ibid., 126. Of course, many actual workplaces pay lip service to the idea of work-life balance while still expecting that work be the employee’s first priority, even if it means spending less time with one’s family.
\(^{141}\) Ibid.
\(^{142}\) Ibid.
\(^{143}\) Ibid.
The last point is what really sells the corporate athlete regimen – Sklar’s earnings were up considerably as a result (supposedly) of applying Loehr and Schwartz’s program. The implication is that if everyone applied such rituals they would be equally successful, would “perform” just as well as other top performers.

Such an idea is belied by Loehr and Schwartz’s own description of Sklar, who was worn out because of his approach to work, which involved ‘topping his competitors by brute force – pushing harder and more relentlessly than anyone else.’\textsuperscript{144} If his competitors were “topped” before, how are they faring now that Sklar’s earnings have increased by 65%? Given this improvement in his performance, what advice would Loehr and Schwartz have for his competitors? Deep breathing, breaks from the desk, regular exercise, leaving work “in the office”? Will that give them the edge over Sklar? If so, what then would be their follow up advice for Sklar? By honing in on the individual in this way, even at the rather lofty level of the executive world, Loehr and Schwartz propagate the myth that individual performance is the main determinant of success and failure, narrowly defined. Unsurprisingly, being more successful, or productive, or generally performing better, is reported by all of the clients Loehr and Schwartz use as examples. At least the way it is presented here, Loehr and Schwartz make business success the opposite of a zero-sum game. There is success enough to go around for anyone who is willing to work – and this means work on themselves – in the right way.

As part of their performance-optimisation arsenal, Loehr and Schwartz locate spiritual capacity at the top of their high-performance pyramid. Like the other levels of the person, the spiritual level is a source of energy to be “tapped.” They use the term spiritual capacity to refer to ‘the energy that is unleashed by tapping into one’s deepest values and defining a strong sense of purpose. This capacity... serves as sustenance in the face of adversity and as a powerful source of motivation, focus, determination, and resilience.’\textsuperscript{145} Here too, rituals such as journal writing, meditating, praying, or service to others can help to strengthen this spiritual “muscle.”

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 127.
In fact, all these aspects of the person – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual – are presented as so many muscles working together to achieve high performance. ‘When people feel strong and resilient – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually – they perform better, with more passion, for longer. They win, their families win, and the corporations that employ them win.’ The recommended self-development techniques are meant to improve the capacities of the individual, making them more robust and productive self-enterprises. Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval emphasise that the neoliberal self is strongly encouraged to identify their own goals and what is good for them with the “needs” of the organisation, or, more abstractly, of the market or economy. This is evident in the regime promoted by Loehr and Schwartz, in which the personal wellbeing of the individual is put to work for the mutual benefits of executive, family and firm. The individual, their family and the corporation they work for are closely intertwined – what is good for one is good for all. Or, more specifically, the high demands of performing in a competitive and changing corporate world under massive amounts of stress can, with the right rituals, be made compatible with happy families and happy individuals. Additionally, it is not just that the individual, family and firm can be made to function and achieve their goals in unison, but the kind of habits and practices typical of one domain will affect the other domains, for better or for worse. What is worth noticing is that the individual as self-enterprise is at the same time part of the organisation’s capital. As noted above, according to the neoliberal understanding, you are capital for yourself, for your employer and for the broader economy. It is because you are part of the organisation’s capital that your personal and family life, your diet, and your social and emotional “skills” are of interest to organisational management.

146 Ibid., 128.
148 The following comment is from a Human Resources Director of Daimler-Chrysler: ‘The employees of an enterprise are part of its capital… The motivation and know-how of the employees, their flexibility, capacity for innovation and concern to satisfy the clients’ wishes… constitute the raw material for innovative service products… Their behaviour and their social and emotional skills play an increasing role in the evaluation of their work… This will no longer be assessed by the number of hours they put in, but on the basis of objectives achieved and the quality of outcomes. They are entrepreneurs’ (cited in André Gorz, The Immaterial: Knowledge, Value and Capital, trans. Chris Turner (London: Seagull Books, 2010), 6).
Wellbeing and Resilience

Loehr and Schwartz have both extended and updated their optimal performance models. Like their account of the corporate athlete, their recent work features neoliberal ideas concerning how people ought to relate to and work on themselves as self-enterprises. These recent publications are also interesting insofar as they are not merely presented as contributions to management studies or as advice for top executives. Instead, they are aimed at a more general audience. The target audience for these more recent publications includes anyone who wants to work better, perform better, and be happy. I will briefly explore Schwartz’s *The Way We’re Working Isn’t Working* before noting a few key elements of Loehr’s *The Only Way to Win* in order to highlight the manner in which they present neoliberal practices of self-management as applicable to all people and to all domains of our lives. In anticipation of the following section of this chapter, I draw particular attention to the presentation of personal psychology (or emotional “health”) as key to one’s human capital. As I will stress, personal psychological stability is an important component of the successful entrepreneurial self.

Importantly, this concern for people’s psychology and for their general emotional resilience is always connected to other economic goals. In particular, Schwartz is concerned about the impact unsatisfied workers can have on company success. In *The Way We’re Working Isn’t Working*, we only have to wait until the second page for Schwartz to note the effect of worker disengagement on the company “bottom line.” He makes reference to a 2007-8 study conducted by the consulting firm Towers Perrin. The study

looked at some 90,000 employees in eighteen countries. Only 20 percent of them felt fully engaged, meaning that they go above and beyond what’s required of them because they have a sense of purpose and passion about what they’re doing. Forty percent were “enrolled,” meaning capable but not fully committed, and 38 percent were disenchanted or disengaged.

All of that translated directly to the bottom line. The companies with the most engaged employees reported a 19 percent increase in operating income and a 28 percent growth in earnings per share. Those with the lowest levels of engagement had a 32 percent decline in operating income, and their earnings dropped more than 11 percent. In the companies with the most engaged employees, 90 percent of the employees had no plans to leave. In those with the least engaged, 50 percent were considering leaving.
More than a hundred studies have demonstrated some correlation between employee engagement and business performance.\footnote{Tony Schwartz, \textit{The Way We're Working Isn’t Working} (London: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 4. Fleming contends that such reports show that ‘the neoliberal revolution [has] not actually created a supine and obedient workforce after all’ (Fleming, \textit{The Mythology of Work}, 43). Fleming expands on this theme throughout his book, \textit{The Mythology of Work}.} Not satisfied with merely noting this “correlation,” Schwartz seems to imply that disengaged employees \textit{cause} worse organisational performance. What is significant for our account of neoliberal selfhood is the connection Schwartz makes between an employee’s sense of purpose in their work and the success of the organisation. Engaged workers will go ‘over and above what’s required of them’ – this is what really interests Schwartz.\footnote{Schwartz, \textit{The Way We’re Working Isn’t Working}, 4.} He does not address why they ought to be engaged, why they are in fact disengaged or why better organisational performance is so important. A competitive world where profits are both necessary and desirable is taken as given. And engaged employees are essential to company profits. The connection between employee motivation and the performance of the company makes the attitude and feelings of the employee a central target for managerial intervention.

As already noted, I hold that much of the testing, auditing and evaluating that the neoliberal self is encouraged to practice has the effect of making some aspect of oneself appear as an area that one can control and improve. The very title of chapter two, ‘We Can’t Change What We Don’t Notice,’ suggests that we need to pay attention precisely where we might lack awareness. The subject is invited to relate to and \textit{know} itself in particular ways and for particular ends. One of the areas that Schwartz encourages each of us to focus on is our emotional life. Predictably, soon after expressing his concern for people’s emotions, Schwartz explicitly links emotions to performance capacity. Feeling “positive,” in the sense Schwartz intends the term, is connected with performing well or being in what he calls the ‘Performance Zone.’\footnote{Ibid., 124.} Feeling bad and not being in the ‘Performance Zone’ means that your performance is ‘suboptimal.’\footnote{Ibid.} In this condition, you are not performing at your best, not reaping the full possible returns of your work and investments. The person who does not feel ‘optimistic, engaged, upbeat, focused, enthusiastic, and committed’
is the person performing at a suboptimal level.\textsuperscript{153} Schwartz is not interested in merely suggesting there is a (rather obvious) correlation between doing well and feeling good. He wants to show that certain emotional states are conducive to, or even central \textit{causal} contributors to, high performance. People are encouraged to treat their emotions as a means to the end of performance enhancement.

In accord with the neoliberal ascription of responsibility, it is the individual who is in control of their emotional life and who is thus to blame should they neglect to do something about their emotional “health.” It is individuals who allow themselves ‘to be pulled into the Survival Zone,’ a domain of negative emotions such as fear.\textsuperscript{154} The implication is that one need not allow oneself to be “pulled” in this way. Rather, it is something one has the power to resist. Indeed, each of us ought to resist this pull into the “survival zone” because it is in our interest to do so:

It’s in our self-interest to cultivate positive emotions, not just because they make us feel good but also because they fuel more productivity and effectiveness across all dimensions of our lives. We allow ourselves to be pulled into the Survival Zone [impatient, irritable, frustrated, angry, defensive, fearful, anxious, worried] by the people around us and by the events that occur over the course of the day. But even in the face of the most stressful demands, we have the power to profoundly influence how we feel. What that requires is learning how to pulse rhythmically between the Performance Zone [calm, optimistic, challenged, engaged, invigorated] and the Renewal Zone [carefree, peaceful, relieved, mellow, receptive], so we’re capable of responding resiliently to any challenge that arises.\textsuperscript{155}

By providing techniques for properly managing our movement between these emotional “zones,” Schwartz is offering us the tools to build ourselves up as “emotional athletes” who can cope with any situation. After all, from the neoliberal perspective, it is individuals who must alter and strengthen themselves, and not circumstances that are subject to change. Schwartz encourages the reader to practice something like an ongoing emotional competency evaluation, allowing them to identify and eradicate weaknesses. Emotions are described as if they were a set of muscles that can be exercised at will. If I need to swing rhythmically between the performance zone and the

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
renewal zone, this assumes that feeling challenged and invigorated is something I can – at least in part – make happen myself.

This is of the same variety of thinking as the cliché “no one can make me (you) (un)happy but myself (yourself).” Such a sentiment is often expressed when people feel overwhelmed by their circumstances or the conditions of the world around them. It assumes the goal of life is some sort of personal contentment irrespective of circumstances, and it implores us to stop focusing on what is happening around us and instead do what we can to make ourselves content, happy, or at least emotionally lulled and therefore functional. It takes social and political problems and turns them into therapeutic-psychological ones. As Jennifer Silva observes of the informants of her study, this psychological-therapeutic narrative makes the powerless feel they have control over and are consequently responsible for their happiness.156 A therapeutic focus on emotions gives powerless people a sense that there is at least something they can manage, something they can do for themselves. Many of the young working-class Americans of Silva’s study relate to themselves as this kind of therapeutic project. According to Silva, this therapeutic project gives them a sense of hope and meaning but also makes their emotional and psychological lives the biggest obstacle to their happiness:

In a neoliberal world of unpredictable markets, fragile families, hollow institutions, and anaemic safety nets, the self – alone and uncertain – is endowed “with the power to make or unmake itself” (Illouz 2008: 131). Indeed, the vast majority... of informants reported that they viewed themselves as their greatest risk. As Kelly, a twenty-eight-year-old line cook, declared, “When I start feeling helpless, I just have to make a conscious decision to not feel that way. It sounds easy and it’s really not. There’s just no other choice. No one else is going to fix me but me.”157 Kelly accepts that because she feels helpless, she requires “fixing,” that her justified concern about her circumstances is something that she alone must tackle via therapeutic-psychological self-management.

Of course, if we think that one of the primary causes of Kelly’s distress is the state of American society (and the conditions of young working-class people) in contemporary neoliberal capitalism, then this is not such an easy

157 Silva, Coming Up Short, 138.
beast to tackle. I concede that young people like Kelly need all the resilience they can muster. That is, I am not implying that emotional fortitude is not something to be fostered. Nor am I celebrating an excessive emotional sensitivity to external conditions. Rather, I wish to point out how difficult it has become to discuss feelings of unease or dissatisfaction without immediately turning to the inner life of the individual for solutions. By always focusing on the (supposed) capacities and responsibilities of individuals, neoliberalism traps us in a psychological perspective from which it is difficult to move beyond those feelings of unease and dissatisfaction to the situation that prompts them. Neoliberal discourse and practices ingrain this focus on the inner life of subjects as something they are responsible for and as the primary target of improvements.

In accord with this focus on individual psychology, Schwartz emphasises the importance of having a sense of purpose. Similar to his position on positive and negative emotions, he suggests that purpose is something we must find via internal work and that we can decide to be happy irrespective of circumstances. Consequently, those who are not happy and do not feel their lives and work are purposeful are suffering as the result of their own attitude: ‘No career automatically provides a purpose, but no job precludes a purpose in it, either. It isn’t the role we fill that prompts a sense of purpose but how we choose to approach whatever work we do.'\footnote{158} So no matter the kind of work – no matter how exploitative, exploiting, degrading, alienating, pointless, boring, repetitive, physically debilitating, criminal, unethical – it can have purpose depending on one’s attitude toward it.\footnote{159}

\footnote{158} Schwartz, The Way We’re Working Isn’t Working, 295.
\footnote{159} Many jobs now carry entrepreneurial sounding titles to give the false impression of individual control of one’s circumstances and of the possibility of occupational and economic mobility: ‘The US occupational body, characteristically giving itself the inflated title of the International Association of Administrative Professionals (having been the more modest National Secretaries Association), reported that it had over 500 job titles in its network, including ‘front-office coordinator’, ‘electronic document specialist’, ‘media distribution officer’ (paper boy/girl), ‘recycling officer’ (bin emptier) and ‘sanitation consultant’ (lavatory cleaner)... The French now tend to call cleaning ladies the more prestigious techniciennes de surface’ (Guy Standing, The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 17). Jobs are hidden by titles that suggest people are owner-operators of self-enterprises no matter what their actual employment or life circumstances. Given the control this implies we have over our working lives, as we are all running our own businesses, much of how we feel about work is up to us.\footnote{159}
Management theorist Thomas Peters expresses a similar view. Like Schwartz, Peters holds that what really matters is not your circumstances but your attitude. Consequently, part of the constant work each of us must do on ourselves involves establishing the right sort of attitude. In fact, your attitude can change your circumstances. Thus, as you are responsible for your attitude, you are also responsible for your circumstances. As Carl Cederström and André Spicer nicely summarise this kind of ‘positive thinking’: ‘it combines magical thinking (you can achieve anything with a positive attitude) with a harsh insistence on personal responsibility (if you fail, it’s your fault).’ For Peters, you are never in any significant sense powerless, though you may feel so because of your (bad) attitude:

Are there things that can be labeled “circumstances”? Of course.
Do bad things happen to good people?
Of course.
Is there such a thing as "powerlessness”? Perceived powerlessness?
Yes.
Real powerlessness?
No!
No!
No!

Viktor Frankl, psychologist and Holocaust survivor, on concentration camps:

“The last of the human freedoms—the ability to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”

If you can figure out how to go to work with a smile today, I (despite my engineer’s training, and the resulting baggage of an MBA from a "quant school") will... **guarantee**... you that you will not only “have a better day,” but will (eventually) infect others!

And performance will improve—maybe even take a Great Leap Upward.

... Take charge now!
Task one: Work on yourself.
Relentlessly!

Peters gives expression to the neoliberal injunction to work on oneself and adopt an uncompromisingly optimistic attitude. Even enterprise is an ‘attitude to be promoted among children and students, a potential energy to be tapped in wage-earners, a way of being at once produced by institutional changes and
productive of improvements in all areas.'\textsuperscript{162} Hence, people’s emotional life and their general attitude can be enlisted in the attempt to promote self-enterprising activity and used as a way to moralise individual “failings” by framing them as the consequence of problems in one’s “inner life” or in one’s attitude.

Loehr’s \textit{The Only Way to Win} is a similarly revealing text regarding the contemporary neoliberal imaginary of the self. The very title suggests we are in some competitive contest for which there is a set of procedures and techniques that will give us the best advantage. The subtitle, ‘How Building Character Drives Higher Achievement and Greater Fulfillment in Business and Life’ is also revealing. It makes one and the same what is required for “success” in business \textit{and} in life. In this work, Loehr claims to be as much interested in happiness as he is in success. Indeed, much of the book reads like an instruction kit for achieving happiness, including scorecards that can be used for grading (B, B+, D-, etc.) such character strengths as integrity, compassion, courageousness and love. Scorecards are also used to record the training one has done on specific character strengths and a journal is used for reflecting upon these strengths. Because character strengths require training, the reader is instructed to ‘[d]etermine how you will make energy investments in the targeted character “muscle”.’\textsuperscript{163}

Examples of this kind of training are given for the character “muscles” gratefulness and kindness: ‘to build gratefulness, spend three minutes every morning for fourteen days writing a list of all the things you are grateful for. For kindness, do eight acts of kindness over the next fourteen days.’\textsuperscript{164} The training regimen will change as your character “muscles” strengthen and as you adapt to changing conditions. You continue to grade yourself throughout this process.

Like a company, you also write an ‘Ultimate Mission’ statement.\textsuperscript{165} This states your ultimate goals, who you want to be, how you want to be remembered. The scorecard, the mission statement and the journal are personalised: you must decide upon the strengths to be developed, the content

\textsuperscript{162} Dardot and Laval, \textit{The New Way of the World}, 264.
\textsuperscript{164} Loehr, \textit{The Only Way to Win}, 94.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 95.
of the mission statement, the smaller goals to be met, the grading of each trait, and so on. Loehr maintains that these tools help us to bring about both happiness and 'external achievements':

I contend that once you get the new scorecard going and really live it, you not only become a stronger, happier human being, but you are very likely to experience more victories and more external achievements, too. Why? Because you will be getting far more out of yourself than ever before. Happier, more fulfilled people constantly outperform those who are unhappy and dissatisfied. You will be happier than you were, and happiness... breeds success. We've seen how the reverse statement – success breeds happiness – is simply not true.166

So, improved performance, external achievements and success are associated outcomes of the happier self Loehr’s training is supposed to bring about. Generally, Loehr’s focus on happiness is not a break from the neoliberal injunction to practice self-fashioning of an entrepreneurial variety. For example, in the following passage, Loehr describes each person’s energy as something that they must thoughtfully choose where to invest if they are to get the best returns. The “returns” here are ‘fulfillment and meaning’:

Every day each of us is confronted with a near endless array of things in which we can invest our energy. The critical question is which of those possible investments will provide the richest return in personal fulfillment and meaning.167

Like the owner of a firm, you have to choose to invest your capital (here your energy) in one way or another. There is always an opportunity cost involved in such an investment; dedicating your resources (say, time and energy) to one thing means forgoing applying them to another. The scorecard you create is supposed to help you with this investment choice.

The attention Loehr gives – like other members of the burgeoning “happiness science” industry – to emotional self-management puts another aspect of our lives to work in the service of “value-generation,” framing emotional contentment as a source of capital that can generate returns. Happiness has become something that is not only measurable and analysable, but also creatable and investable. Referring to the discussions and presentations about happiness at the World Economic Forum in recent years, Davies describes the way that the elite class have come to feel that ‘the future of

166 Ibid., 96.
167 Ibid., 99.
successful capitalism depends on our ability to combat stress, misery and illness, and put relaxation, happiness and wellness in their place. Techniques, measures and technologies are now available to achieve this, and they are permeating the workplace, the high street, the home and the human body.\textsuperscript{168} In the corporate world and the management consultancy arena, there is a keen interest in the impacts of employee wellbeing on business. Un/happiness is of concern to many people in government and business because of its links to lost productivity, lost revenue and other associated costs. Indeed, a general emotional malaise, a lack of ‘enthusiasm’ for work of any kind, could be seen as a contemporary threat to capitalism itself.\textsuperscript{169} To some extent, this explains the recent outpouring of concern about the deficit in “wellbeing,” and all the advice floating around about how we can – indeed, as if it were a moral demand, must – better care for ourselves.

A number of papers and reports in recent years are evidence of this anxiety. A report by Target the Impact of Depression in the Workplace (a ‘Business Leadership Forum made up of senior business and medical executives from major European employers’)\textsuperscript{170} notes that depression is a ‘brain-based disorder’ that undermines the ability to concentrate and work productively, which is particularly worrying in a ‘brain-based economy.’\textsuperscript{171} As the authors further explain, ‘[d]epression has a direct impact on the operational costs of businesses and economic losses driven by work years lost on the job… [M]ental disorders wipe out 4% of the European economy year in and year out.’\textsuperscript{172} Fortunately, they tell the reader, the costs of treating these disorders are

\textsuperscript{168} Davies, The Happiness Industry, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{169} 'Without a certain level of commitment on the part of employees, businesses run into some very tangible problems, which soon show up in their profits. This fear has gripped the imaginations of managers and policy-makers in recent years, and not without reason. Various studies of ‘employee engagement’ have highlighted the economic costs of allowing workers to become mentally withdrawn from their jobs… Disengagement is believed to manifest itself in absenteeism, sickness and – sometimes more problematic – presenteeism, in which employees come into the office purely to be physically present… Few private sector managers are required to negotiate with unions any longer, but nearly all of them confront a much trickier challenge, of dealing with employees who are regularly absent, unmotivated or suffering from persistent, low-level mental health problems’ (Davies 2015, 105-6).
\textsuperscript{171} Wilkerson, Depression in the Workplace in Europe, 4.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
outweighed by productivity gains. For another example, we can cite The World Economic Forum’s 2010 report *The Wellness Imperative. Creating More Effective Organizations*. The report encourages employers to take an interest in the wellness of their employees. The authors claim that ‘wellness is an extremely powerful element that can play a significant role in employee engagement, organizational productivity, talent retention, and creativity and innovation... To realize real business gains, wellness must be approached strategically and incorporated into a broader organizational effectiveness framework.’  

Likewise, a discussion paper published by the Centre for Economic Performance in 2007 claims that should the UK’s NHS include psychological therapy, government would recoup the costs through ‘savings in incapacity benefits and extra taxes that result from more people being able to work.’ The authors add that there are also marked benefits to the whole economy. Another example can be found in an article published in *The Lancet*, titled ‘Scaling-up treatment of depression and anxiety: a global return on investment analysis.’ The authors estimate that US$147 billion is needed between 2016-30 for depression and anxiety treatment. This investment, they predict, will generate ‘intrinsic’ returns of ‘43 million extra years of healthy life over the scale-up period,’ upon which they place an economic value of $310 billion, as well as economic productivity gains of $230 billion from treating depression and $169 billion for treating anxiety. These investments are necessary for tackling reduced ‘productivity at work, reduced rates of labour participation, forgone tax receipts, and increased health and other welfare expenditures.’ The authors claim that in 2010 ‘US$2.5-8.5 trillion in lost output was attributed to mental, neurological and substance use disorders’. They urge governments to

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177 Ibid.

178 Ibid.
address this issue that they believe will otherwise significantly worsen. If these publications are anything to go by, it seems that part of the future self-enterprise’s lifelong training could include a fair bit of medication and psychological therapy. These studies tell us that one’s human capital requires investment not just to improve its returns but also to prevent it becoming damaged and unproductive capital.

By focusing on the population’s emotional state without acknowledging any political, social or historical context, complex aspects of human life are reinterpreted as technical problems that require technical solutions, such as the right kind of training.\textsuperscript{179} In order to properly implement this training and to tackle the problem of people’s discontent, expertise is employed and made part of the operational plans of many corporations and other institutions.\textsuperscript{180} What we are witnessing then is not just an interest in happiness but a more general concern – as is evident in Loehr and Schwartz – for the emotional resilience of organisational, national and global human capital. People are not simply encouraged to be happy at work, but also trained how not to be unhappy if, for example, work is bad, you do not have work or you are removed from your home.\textsuperscript{181} Targeting people’s emotional life is supposed to protect business and capital from an unhappy workforce while also making emotional states in and out of the workplace a problem that individuals can alter by training and focusing those emotions. In this way, people can learn to adapt to any situation, can normalise and optimise their emotional responses to the most adverse conditions. Cederström and Spicer give the example of mindfulness training being used by the US Marine Corps in an attempt to tackle post-traumatic stress and suicide rates among army personnel, while also allowing them to embody a certain calm during armed combat.\textsuperscript{182} As an example from a different context,

\textsuperscript{179} The component of Loehr and Schwartz’s regimen that targeted the “emotional level” is a clear example.

\textsuperscript{180} ‘A growing number of corporations employ ‘chief happiness officers’, while Google has an in-house ‘jolly good fellow’ to spread mindfulness and empathy. Specialist happiness consultants advise employers on how to cheer up their employees, the unemployed on how to restore their enthusiasm to work, and – in one case in London – those being forcibly displaced from their homes on how to move on emotionally’ (Davies, \textit{The Happiness Industry}, 4).

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{182} ‘With a technique called ‘mind fitness training’, [the US Marine Corps] hopes to reduce the amount of post-traumatic stress and high suicide rates among soldiers returning from combat. At Camp Pendelton in California, 160 Marines are ‘taught to focus their attention by
Guy Standing cites the UK government’s promotion of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for the unemployed after the 2008 financial crash:

The government launched the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme, by which anybody could be referred by their doctor to the National Health Service for CBT. This was buttressed by a ‘talking treatment’ programme, in which mental health coordinators were stationed in Jobcentres. The claim was that CBT would raise employment, as a result of Jobcentres sending the unemployed to therapy centres around the country...

The government put aside funds to pay for initial treatments of eight sessions, planning that within five years anyone would be allowed to ‘refer themselves in’ for treatment. How eight CBT sessions would ‘get Britain working’, as was claimed, was unclear. Instead of recognising the causes of difficulties, the intention was to treat the victims of economic mismanagement and encourage them to think they needed therapy.

Anxiety about one’s future, a sense of helplessness regarding the likelihood of things improving, fear about one’s ongoing ability to meet financial obligations, keep a steady job and support one’s family – all this, apparently, requires psychological therapy.

Some studies would suggest that the attempt to have people focus on their personal psychology has had at least some success. As noted above, Silva contends that many young working-class Americans have adopted a psychological-therapeutic understanding of their situations. From a collection of interviews, she found, somewhat unsurprisingly, that many of these young people had low expectations regarding their working prospects, were wary about romantic and other social commitments for fear of making themselves vulnerable, distrusted social institutions and were isolated from other people. Silva contends that, as a way of coping with this distrust, isolation and low expectations, these young people tend to ‘focus on their emotions and psychic health.’ Consequently, many of them were not inclined to make sense concentrating on their body’s sensations, including breathing, in a period of silence’, after which they are sent into ‘a mock Afghan village with screaming actors and controlled blasts’ to practise their new-found mindfulness techniques’ (Cederström and Spicer, The Wellness Syndrome, 23-4).

183 Standing, The Precariat, 142.
184 Silva, Coming Up Short, 10.
185 Ibid. Silva, following Eva Illouz (Cold Intimacies (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007)) and others, sees this trend as a reflection of the therapeutic model of selfhood. Therapeutic selfhood entails an ‘inner-directed self preoccupied with its own emotional and psychic development’ (Silva, Coming Up Short, 19). ‘Inwardly directed and preoccupied with its own psychic and emotional growth, the therapeutic self has become a crucial resource for ascribing meaning and order to
of their situation in terms of political, social and economic injustices and
distributions of power. Instead, they interpreted their struggle to forge a secure
adult life as a quest to forge a secure adult identity that relied heavily on the
trope of self-overcoming. Silva claims that ‘the majority of men and women
[she] interviewed crafted deeply personal coming of age stories, grounding their
adult identities in recovering from their painful pasts – whether addictions,
childhood abuse, family trauma, or abandonment – and forging an emancipated,
transformed, and adult self’.186 ‘Psychic transformation’ and ‘emotional self-
management’ are areas that many of the young adults felt they had some
control over, as opposed to the political, educational, community, legal and
administrative institutions upon which they had learnt they could not rely.

These young adults are encouraged to understand themselves as a
therapeutic project through institutional interactions, educational material and
popular media, such as ‘school psychologists, family services, the service
economy, self-help literature, online support groups, addiction recovery groups,
medical trials, or even talk shows such as *Oprah.*’187 Through these encounters
young people learn to think of happiness (or, at least, emotional functionality)
as something that can be achieved through psychological self-transformation,
for example, by controlling negative feelings and behaviours. As a result of
learning the hard way that you can trust ‘no one but yourself,’ they turn instead
to ‘willful self-change at the level of the psyche.’188 By making their struggle a
personal one, these young adults forgo the possibility of understanding their
situations as the result of broader phenomena and structures that affect them
collectively rather than individually. Many of them make a virtue of their
unwillingness to accept help and think others should act similarly. Sadly, their
lack of trust in others is all too understandable given their experiences. As Silva
notes, the flexibility they are forced into in the labour market – which leaves
them perpetually insecure and vulnerable, sometimes destitute – has hardened

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187 Ibid., 21.
188 Ibid., 12.
many of these young adults in other domains of their lives. This sense of distrust and rugged individualism permeates intimate relationships and perpetuates gender and racial division. Feelings of distrust toward government, educational institutions, family members and employers, and uncertainty about their future, are the consequence of their experiences in the neoliberal economy. However, the pervasiveness, for example, of such neoliberal tropes as self-responsibility and therapeutic understandings of personhood inclines them to make sense of their situations in ways that foreclose collective action and reinforce neoliberal hegemony. We can only hope that the movements that came out of Bernie Sanders presidential campaign, the Black Lives Matter movement and similar movements for social and economic justice, might shift the situation Silva describes in the US:

This hardening against oneself and others has profound personal and political consequences for the future of the American working class, as the youngest of its members like Wanda, Brandon, Kelly, Eileen, and Julian embrace self-sufficiency over solidarity and blame those who are unsuccessful in the labor market. As potential communities of solidarity across race, class, and gender remain hostile and divided, levels of community engagement and social trust, at their highest in the postwar decades, are plummeting among the working class... They are left with a worldview that conceives of rights in terms of "I's" rather than "we's," with economic justice dropped out of their collective vocabulary. Rooted in everyday instances of disappointment and betrayal within the family and institutions, the cultural logic of neoliberalism resonates at the deepest level of the self.

The reports on the costs of psychological “disorders” cited above reinforce this focus on the individual, specifically on individual psychology. This focus on individual psychology frames people's dissatisfaction with work – due to experiences of overwork, fruitless job searches, being underappreciated, exploited, doing pointless work, etc. – precisely as an issue of the emotional life of the individual and not as a judgment based on legitimate reasons for being dissatisfied with an unjust and problematic situation. In other words, the individual is approached as someone who ought to and can be made to feel one way rather than another, and not as an intelligent being with legitimate grievances or political and social demands. The real neoliberal victory is the

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189 Ibid., 17.
190 Ibid.
191 Ibid., 110.
192 Ibid., 18.
extent to which many people conform to such a narrative and make sense of themselves (and others) and their situation predominantly in terms of emotional-psychological categories and attributions of personal responsibility. Not only does addressing contemporary working life in terms of satisfaction, resilience and stability frame the issue in a particular way, it also precludes other ways of interrogating and explaining the political-economic and historical conditions of our neoliberal era.

The Psychological Life of the Neoliberal Subject

To make sense of this promotion of individual resilience and stability, I will now elaborate upon the specifically psychological parts of human capital. We need to understand the psychological framing of neoliberal accounts of selfhood if we are to make sense of the social-political imaginary of recent times and the manner in which neoliberal subjects are produced. I suggest that Shawn Achor and the psychological capital theorists attempt to establish a relationship between psychological constitution and value-generating capacity. I claim that by promoting practices that assume the existence of such a connection, the works of these authors help to reinforce the production of neoliberal subjects. They do this either by encouraging people to reflect upon their own psychological and emotional capital or by addressing managers hoping to optimise the human part of their organisational capital. In Achor’s work, as in other texts in this field, happiness is understood as a direct cause of success and as a distinct competitive advantage. In this respect, Achor’s claims resemble those made by Loehr and Schwartz. In the psychological capital literature, an explicitly psychological space of intervention is carved out. Hence, the theorists

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193 Davies links these kinds of personal narratives with the prevalence of ‘happiness science’: ‘The greatest successes of behavioural and happiness science occur when individuals come to interpret and narrate their own lives according to this body of expertise. As laypeople, we come to attribute our failures and sadness to our brains or our troublesome minds. Operating with constantly split personalities, we train our selves to be more suspicious of our thoughts, or more tolerant of our feelings, with the encouragement of cognitive behavioural therapy. It ways that will baffle cultural historians a century from now, we even engage in quantified self-monitoring of our own accord, volunteering information on our behaviours, nutrition and moods to databases, maybe out of sheer desperation to be part of something larger than ourselves. Once we are split down the middle in this way, a relationship – perhaps a friendship? – with oneself becomes possible, which when taken too literally breeds loneliness and/or narcissism’ (Davies, The Happiness Industry, 258).
of psychological capital understand their work as a necessary extension of human and social capital theory. The notion of psychological capital introduces new ways of working with and optimising the psychological subject. Specifically, the important distinction is not between the mentally functional and the mentally ill or abnormal, but between the psychologically optimal and productive and the psychologically suboptimal and not-as-productive-as-theyotherwise-could-be. Consequently, people deemed psychologically “healthy/normal” are still possible targets of psychological development from the perspective of psychological capital theory. Psychological capital, like happiness in Achor’s work, is seen as a significant contributor to performance outcomes.

**Shawn Achor and the Benefits of Happiness**

Achor is a textbook example of someone whose interest in psychology has a strong neoliberal bent. Achor is a positive psychology advocate who attempts to link happiness to a general state of advantage. In his work, happiness is depicted as a ‘precursor to success, not merely the result.’ Hence, Achor believes that happier people, and thus those of us willing to work on our happiness, do better. Being happy and optimistic, Achor claims, ‘actually fuel performance and achievement – giving us the competitive edge that I call the Happiness Advantage.’ Happiness is a tool for one’s continuous competitive battle. And it is a powerful tool indeed, seemingly able to overcome all sorts of material and economic obstacles.

Achor’s work, like that of Loehr and Schwartz, contains a set of practices to assist each of us with the work we are encouraged to do on ourselves. As Achor himself puts it, the happiness advantage is ‘a work ethic.’ In the now familiar physiological simile, happiness is like a muscle that needs to be exercised. Similar to Loehr’s recommendations, Achor encourages us to pursue happiness by practicing and drilling our emotional attributes. Individuals have a potential for success that will go unrealised in the absence of the requisite

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196 Ibid., 24.
exercise. There are a number of activities that Achor encourages his reader to undertake for working on their happiness. To take a short list, Achor recommends meditation, looking forward to something, consciously performing kind acts, infusing positivity into your surroundings, exercising, spending money to do things (as opposed to buying stuff), and exercising a signature strength. He claims that there is scientific research that confirms the success of these techniques.

Apart from individuals, businesses can also learn important lessons from Achor’s “findings.” And many of them have already implemented strategies that show an awareness of the possible significance of their employees’ emotional states. As Achor approvingly observes,

[t]he Happiness Advantage is why cutting-edge software companies have football tables in the employee lounge, why Yahoo! has an in-house massage parlor, and why Google engineers are encouraged to bring their dogs to work... Smart companies cultivate these kinds of working environments because every time employees experience a small burst of happiness, they get primed for creativity and innovation... Famed CEO Richard Branson has said that, “more than any other element, fun is the secret of Virgin’s success.” This isn’t just because fun is, well, fun. It’s because fun also leads to bottom-line results.

In the pursuit of bottom-line results, social relationships are an important ingredient of managerial and self-management strategies. Hence, Achor is only interested in the instrumental value of our connections with others. Providing an environment in which social relationships can flourish is a means to personal happiness, which is in turn a means to “achievement” and “success.” Put differently, social relationships are important because social capital is part of personal capital insofar as social capital makes individuals better able to generate returns. For Achor, social capital allows people to be “resilient” in the face of adversity and stress in the ‘volatile world of work.’ Hence, social life is not something in conflict with the demands of work but is instead another source of capital and thus vital to workplace performance. It is worth quoting Achor at length to show how he formulates this idea:

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197 Ibid., 4.
198 Ibid., 51-6. This is only a short list. There are many recommended techniques, attitudes and evaluative frameworks discussed throughout the book.
199 Ibid., 45.
200 Ibid., 178.
The same strategy – hold onto others – is just as crucial for our survival as we navigate the daily stresses of the working world. Studies show that each positive interaction employees have during the course of the work day actually helps return the cardiovascular system back to resting levels (a benefit often termed “work recovery”), and that over the long haul, employees with more of these interactions become protected from the negative effects of job strain. Each connection also lowers levels of cortisol, a hormone related to stress, which helps employees recover faster from work-related stress and makes them better prepared to handle it in the future. Furthermore, studies have found that people with strong relationships are less likely to perceive situations as stressful in the first place. So in essence, investing in social connections means that you'll find it easier to interpret adversity as a path to growth and opportunity; and when you do have to experience the stress, you'll bounce back from it faster and better protected against its long-term negative effects.

In the volatile world of work, this ability to manage stress, both physically and psychologically, is a significant competitive advantage. For one, it has been found to greatly reduce a company’s health care costs and rate of absenteeism. But perhaps more important, it directly impacts individual performance. Researchers have found that the “psychological resourcefulness” that employees gain from positive social interactions provides a foundation for workplace engagement – employees can work for longer hours, with increased focus, and under more difficult conditions.201

Achor’s rendering of our social connections as social capital frames his evaluation of those social relationships. Consider Achor’s examples:

Each one of these social connections pays dividends. At IBM, for example, when MIT researchers spent an entire year following 2,600 employees, observing their social ties, even using mathematical formulas to analyze the size and scope of their address books and buddy lists, they found that the more socially connected IBM employees were, the better they performed. They could even quantify the difference: On average, every e-mail contact was worth an added $948 in revenue... IBM wisely decided to capitalize on it by starting a program at its Cambridge, Massachusetts, office to facilitate the introductions of employees who didn’t yet know one another.

Google is perhaps the most famous example of a company that truly understands the importance of social connections... Not only do company cafeterias stay open well past the hours of the traditional workday, making it easy for employees to dine together as much as possible, Google employees have access to onsite day care and are even encouraged to make time to visit their kids throughout the day.202

At Google, work and home-life collapse into one and the same unbroken stream: you can eat (and do a little collaborating) with colleagues at any time, while also being able to bring your child to the workplace and visit them intermittently

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201 Ibid., 179.
202 Ibid., 185-6.
throughout the day. In both the Google and IBM examples, the focus is on the “dividends” received from the investment in social capital. A Bloomberg article on the studies at IBM and MIT informs the reader that leading tech companies are hiring experts “to map new types of friendships – and put a value on them.”\textsuperscript{203} Specifically, they are interested in the “friendships” – both current and potential – within the organisation. These friendships are another untapped source of collaboration, productivity and profit. Achor’s description of social life, and the IBM and MIT studies, present social relationships as a source of capital, and as an investment in individual human capital. Our shared lives are reconfigured as value-generating relations that are not only compatible with but in fact bolster individual value-generating capacities.

From this perspective, social relations are something to be encouraged and exploited. For example, Achor favourably cites the implementation of “employee support programs” that involve employees at individual workplaces making actual monetary contributions. The money in these social programs is drawn upon when colleagues are confronted with ‘medical and financial emergencies.’\textsuperscript{204} Achor favours these programs because of the sense of community and solidarity they build between fellow employees and the organisation that sets up the support program. He claims that the positive feelings associated with these programs ‘translate into real dividends, including lower absenteeism and turnover rates, and increased employee motivation and engagement.’\textsuperscript{205} What Achor does not mention is the way these programs absolve employers and government of the responsibility to meet the basic provisions of workers. If they actually work, they are a brilliant neoliberal tool; promoting feelings of solidarity between workers that in turn unite them with the ethos of the company, while increasing the financial burden of workers and the profitability of the organisation.


\textsuperscript{204} Achor, The Happiness Advantage, 186. He notes the presence of these programs at Southwest Airlines, Domino’s Pizza, and The Limited. See Adam Grant, Jane Dutton and Brent Rosso, “Giving Commitment: Employee Support Programs and the Prosocial Sensemaking Process,” The Academy of Management Journal 51, no. 5 (2008), for more examples.

\textsuperscript{205} Achor, The Happiness Advantage, 187.
Similar to Achor, in a 2008 article in *The Academy of Management Journal*, Adam Grant, Jane Dutton and Brent Rosso claim that employee support programs improve employee commitment because such programs are an avenue for giving as well as receiving support. The impression that they participate in a caring company culture makes employees more committed to the workplace. Grant et al. observe that such programs are especially helpful in light of recent changes in the workplace and the ‘employment landscape’ that have undermined employee commitment. Without saying exactly what those changes are, they note that these changes to the ‘employment landscape have weakened employees’ physical, administrative, and temporal attachments to organizations.’ Therefore, the challenge is to find ways to ‘strengthen employees’ psychological attachments by cultivating affective commitment – an attitude of emotional dedication – to organizations.’ Unsurprisingly, actual work conditions, and broader legal, political and economic factors are not mentioned as areas requiring attention. Instead, they focus on the psychology of workers. They report that employee commitment, when firmly established, has resulted not only in employees remaining with an organisation for longer periods but also in reduced absenteeism and improved workplace performance.

As mentioned, rather than focusing exclusively on the psychology of receiving (that is, the notion that there is improved worker commitment because employees are the beneficiaries of employee support programs), Grant et al. suggest that the experience of giving is also important for forging bonds between the individual and the workplace. The act of giving to employee support programs fosters organisational commitment ‘by strengthening employees’ perception of both personal and company prosocial identities – images of the self and the organization as helpful, caring, and benevolent.’ Grant et al. claim that employees are grateful to the organisation for the

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207 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid., 900.
211 Ibid., 903.
opportunity to ‘reinforce their prosocial identities.’ Consequently, their commitment to the organisation is strengthened because of these programs.

As we have seen, neoliberal management theorists and self-help promoters have not been blind to the potential of drawing on people’s social and even moral inclinations. The connection Achor makes between social capital and robust individual capital is a case in point. The family, for example, is seen as a possible ally in the quest to improve individual performance. We have also seen how people’s emotional lives are put into the service of garnering personal and organisational returns. Furthermore, we have seen how these authors merge happiness and a general emotional resilience that allows individuals to cope with modern working conditions. True to neoliberalism, these conditions themselves are not called into question. It is individuals who must adapt to given circumstances. The ability to adapt can be considered part of one's “psychological capital.”

_Psychological Capital_

The study of psychological capital combines a number of approaches from positive psychology and organisational studies. Fred Luthans, Carolyn M. Youssef and Bruce J. Avolio outline the components of psychological capital – or ‘PsyCap’ – in their book, _Psychological Capital: Developing the Human Competitive Edge_. Therein, they add to the notions of human and social capital in order to highlight a number of features they believe are strictly psychological. Luthans et al. claim that focusing on human capital is inadequate because more is required than simply developing our skills, knowledge and technical abilities. In addition, there are specifically psychological attributes that need attention and management. Hence, by focusing on psychological capital, they consider not just what and who you know (your human and social capital respectively) but also who you are and who you might become. By orienting their discussion of psychological capital around “who you might become,” Luthans et al. quite explicitly present their project as one aimed at transforming subjects: ‘PsyCap recognizes moving (developing) from the actual

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212 Ibid., 904.
self (human, social, and psychological capital) to the possible self.\textsuperscript{214} Accordingly, like other forms of capital, psychological capital ‘can be invested and developed for sustainable competitive advantage through people,’\textsuperscript{215} The four main features of psychological capital are self-efficacy (or confidence), optimism, hope and resiliency:

\textbf{PsyCap} is an individual’s positive psychological state of development and is characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success.\textsuperscript{216}

The important aspect of these (‘state-like’) capacities is that they can be trained and honed:

In our proposed POB [positive organisational behaviour], we only include positive psychological capacities that are state-like and malleable. Being state-like (rather than trait-like), these positive capacities are open to development and improvement using relatively brief training programs, on-the-job activities, and short, highly focused “microinterventions”.\textsuperscript{217}

They explore the four main parts of psychological capital and techniques for improving them in more detail in the book. One of the distinguishing features of their approach is that they are not concerned with healing those deemed mentally unwell. That is, developing self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency is a task that anyone can and should engage in. Hence, it is not a matter of “fixing” some sort of mental damage, bringing people back to a state of normality through psychological treatment. Rather, they contend that developing psychological capital is important irrespective of one’s psychological health. They approvingly observe that positive psychology ‘has broadened the perspective beyond what is wrong with people toward optimal functioning, flourishing, and reaching human potential.’\textsuperscript{218} Accordingly, workplace management should not focus on “unwell” employees but should attempt to optimise the cognitive capacities of all employees, regardless of their “mental health.” In this sense, we all "need" or could at least benefit from the

\textsuperscript{214} Luthans et al., \textit{Psychological Capital}, 20-1.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., vii.
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., vii.
psychological training techniques on offer. Put differently, we are all capital capable of improvement and optimisation.

While Luthans et al. are not interested in fixing the mentally “unwell,” this does not mean that they shy away from the practice of diagnosing the strength (or weakness) of employees' psychological capital. On the contrary, the conception of psychological capital allows for the labelling of a whole new array of mental dispositions as somehow suboptimal. When the goal is to optimise psychological capital, almost anyone could be deemed to require some sort of intervention and development. For example, diagnosing levels of employee hope is an important part of measuring psychological capital. Those lacking hope are not optimal employees and must be managed back to hopefulness:

Although hope is a malleable state and thus variable, managers who are capable of identifying hopeful tendencies (or signs of hopelessness) can be better equipped to diagnose the state of hope among their employees. Effective managers are proactively prepared to nurture and reinforce hope in their associates.219

It is important that managers are able to diagnose and manage hope and hopelessness because hope is part of employee – and therefore organisational – psychological capital. It is another resource to be managed, developed and invested.

Luthans et al. include a number of interesting features under the rubric of the “hopeful employee.” For instance, a hopeful employee is an ‘adaptable employee,’ one willing to take on ‘additional responsibilities.’220 By contrast, the employee lacking in hope is not so adaptable, less willing to assume additional responsibilities and solve challenging problems. Hence, hope starts to sound a lot like a set of features deemed desirable in the neoliberal worker: adaptability, willingness to go beyond the requirements of their position, strong motivation. The employee who lacks hope is not this go-getting achiever but more of an obedient conformist. For Luthans et al., the employee who lacks hope

may come off as conforming to organizational rules and being obedient to their managers. Low-hopers may be perceived by managers and coworkers as cooperative, “good soldiers.” Unfortunately, most organizational reward

219 Ibid., 73.
220 Ibid., 74.
systems are informally, if not formally, geared toward such benign attitudes and behaviors.\textsuperscript{221}

The employee lacking hope sounds like one who does the job required of them, the job they were employed to do. Yet, this is no longer enough in the neoliberal workplace. The neoliberal worker, the worker displaying appropriate levels of hope, is more motivated, goes beyond the call of duty, and distinguishes themselves from the crowd of unambitious rule-followers. More importantly, they are committed to their work and to the organisation that employs them. Luthans et al. warn that employees without hope might become disengaged and do little more that attempt to give an impression of busyness. Even more worryingly, they might ‘spend their time thinking of pathways to obstruct what the management and leadership are trying to accomplish,’\textsuperscript{222} To avoid such circumstances, managers must monitor and diagnose levels of hope, and make interventions into hope-related psychological capital.

Ultimately, the importance of improving the four main capacities of psychological capital – self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency – lies in the causal connection between these capacities and ‘desired performance outcomes.’\textsuperscript{223} Developing psychological capital through appropriate techniques and ‘microinterventions’ brings about returns in the workplace.\textsuperscript{224} In other words, Luthans et al. believe they can demonstrate that these psychological capacities are significant causal contributors to desired performance levels. In fact, Luthans et al. claim that they ‘have been able to demonstrate that PsyCap development can yield a very high (over 200\%) return on investment.’\textsuperscript{225}

This analysis of psychological capital is another example of the way that human life is instrumentalised and optimised for the sake of generating value, here in the pursuit of improving workplace performance. This is also another example of the way that the managerial interest in people’s lives is delving into more intimate and psychological spheres. As with the work of Loehr, Schwartz and Achor, I suggest that the psychological capital paradigm is an attempt to train and mould a specific type of subject that has many of the hallmarks of

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid.
neoliberal selfhood. We can also see the interest that management theorists have in promoting the development of emotional hopefulness and resiliency in workers. In another paper on psychological capital co-authored by James B. Avey, Fred Luthans and Susan M. Jensen, the development of psychological capital is directly linked to dealing with employee stress and reducing employee turnover. Building psychological capital is about shaping employees so that they can manage in stressful workplaces – it in no way seeks to change or even clarify the conditions of the workplace itself, let alone those of the broader economy. That the workplace is stressful is taken as a given, and is not seen as problematic. It is workers who need to be moulded – by management and by workers themselves – so that they can cope with the inevitably stressful and high-pressure modern workplace. As I have stressed throughout this chapter, this is a hallmark of neoliberalism and of the production of neoliberal subjects.

The literature on psychological capital is aimed at those who are, or who ought to be, managing the psychological capital of other subordinates. Hence, in addition to the common themes outlined above, there are three important perspectives in the literature we have looked at so far: (1) advice to managers/employers on how to craft the desired entrepreneurial and productive agents; (2) advice for self-enhancement aimed at individuals and workers; and (3), a little hidden away here but present nonetheless, techniques for achieving (2), that is, managerial techniques for getting individuals and employees to practice the requisite self-fashioning by understanding and working upon themselves in particular ways. This managerial function could be extended to include the array of experts who now assist people in the task of entrepreneurialising themselves and increasing their market value, whether that be in the job market, the friendship market, the marriage market, the social market, or whatever other domain in which we can be thought of as having a

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227 As Avey et al. explain, ‘meta-analyses indicate that cognitive-behavioural approaches, which seek to change employee cognitions and reinforce active coping skills, may be the most effective in reducing anxiety symptoms, enhancing coping strategies, and improving the perceived quality of work life… This related research suggests that HR managers who recognize positive PsyCap as an important individual difference that can be developed (through the cognitive-behavioral approaches used in PsyCap training interventions discussed next) may use this development for stress management’ (Avey et al., "Psychological Capital," 687).
value and something to sell. The way that Loehr and Schwartz combine managerial practices with the coach and the self-help guru, apparently assisted by the pertinent scientific evidence, is noteworthy in this respect. It demonstrates how the notion that people (as human capital) need fixing, improving and updating so that they can flourish in the neoliberal world has opened up a whole new space for instruction and novel forms of pedagogy. As Cederström and Spicer observe, ‘[a]lthough relatively unknown a few decades ago, life coaching has now become a common occupation. There are about 45,000 coaches world-wide, and the industry as a whole generates $2 billion a year.’

The marketisation of personhood has in a quite real sense created new kinds of markets for “specialists” in the construction of enterprising subjects. These new coaches and specialists and the discourse and practices they promote have themselves helped to promote and ingrain the practices of neoliberal selfhood that I am outlining.

**The Self as Brand**

Broadly speaking, the literature and techniques I have considered so far in this chapter deal mostly with the way the subject (understood as a self-enterprise) can improve itself; that is, how the neoliberal subject can optimise its human, social and psychological capital. In this section of the chapter, I look at a related but somewhat different task for neoliberal subjects; namely, ways that people are encouraged to brand, promote and “sell” themselves. I argue that, in addition to the self-optimising practices described above, an important part of being an entrepreneurial self is to have a brand. Just as the modern firm is increasingly concerned with its reputational capital, with its networks and business relationships, individuals must also be concerned with their reputation and brand. As with the human capital that makes up the self-enterprise, all aspects of an individual’s life can be used to improve the personal brand. By considering the way that the life of the neoliberal self is interpreted as a constant exercise in branding, I further demonstrate the way that

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management discourse and practices encourage the entrepreneurialisation of the self that is characteristic of neoliberalism.

The current ubiquity of personal branding culture is somewhat alarming. In addition to new conceptions of working life and the need to manage oneself like a business, personal branding is also facilitated by a culture of celebrity, and one in which many people spend a great deal of time crafting their online selves for social media. As we have seen in several other areas, the development of personal branding comes with its own set of experts, from the careers councillor at your university to the proliferation of publications and online forums about branding:

College graduates are counselled on the necessity of building a self-brand when entering the job market. Self-branding experts and professional Facebook photographers provide support services for the job of building a self-brand. Trade books with titles such as *Be Your Own Brand: A Breakthrough Formula for Standing Out from the Crowd; Managing Brand You: 7 Steps to Creating Your Most Successful Self; Make a Name for Yourself: 8 Steps Every Woman Needs to Create a Personal Brand Strategy for Success; and Me 2.0: Build a Powerful Brand to Achieve Career Success* now occupy a weighty bookshelf on a topic that barely existed fifty years ago. These physical books coexist with countless "how-to" forums online, where amateurs and experts alike debate the dos and don'ts of self-branding. Academics and intellectuals (and even those who study branding and consumer culture) are increasingly advised to further professionalize by developing personal brands as a way to strategically market both career and personal identities.

Alison Hearn points out that the ‘personal branding movement’ came to prominence in the 1990s in the midst of the neoliberalisation of the economy and during the ‘rise of a culture of promotionalism.’ Indeed, branding is at the heart of the “lean firm” that outsources much of its production process and focuses instead on its reputational capital and the value of its brand.

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229 Alison Hearn offers this excellent example of celebrity branding and the commodification of selfhood: ‘Perhaps the best-known example of a celebrity brand functioning directly as a profit-producing, symbolic cultural resource on the open market is David Bowie’s 1997 offer of 'Bowie Bonds'. Here Bowie trades on his reputation directly, asking investors to bank on his brand equity, based on the past and future royalties of his music’ (Alison Hearn, “Meat, Mask, Burden’: Probing the contours of the branded ‘self’,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8, no. 2 (2008), 208).


232 As Hearn elaborates, “the value of a company is not only determined by the objective value of what it produces but also on its reputational capital, or what is commonly referred to as "branding." As Samsung, a leading global electronics firm, has observed, “In the digital era, a product will be distinguished by its brand more than by its functions or by its quality.” Today,
Likewise, branding is thought to be essential to the individual self-enterprise who must attract business and make its capital a desirable investment. Personal branding is a way of ensuring “success” in an increasingly competitive environment. Hence, branding is another way of dealing with the uncertainty of self-entrepreneurial life. As Hearn puts it, ‘gurus of personal branding, such as Stedman Graham, Tom Peters and Peter Montoya, offer ways to compete and gain power in the volatile world of flexible capital.’

Specific (“hard”) skills, qualifications and perhaps even actual ability matter less than ‘the glossy packaging of the self and the unrelenting pursuit of attention.’ It is the task of the individual self-enterprise to present themselves in ways appealing to real, possible and imagined markets of employers and other investors, collaborators and business partners. In this section, I look at two texts on the branded self in order to explore the practice of self-branding as another task for individuals in neoliberal times.

In Doug Dvorak’s *Build Your Own Brand*, branding is not presented as something that concerns only companies and organisations. For it is not only these larger groups that have brands; ‘[p]ersonalities do too’. Dvorak is not simply saying that individuals ought to be interested in branding. He is saying that individuals already have brands, irrespective of their interest in the techniques of branding. One is, according to this perspective, already like a firm with a brand. In fact, Dvorak says that even children have brands. They are contributing to their brands in some way every time they go on the Internet, when they use blogs and other websites on which they are ‘expressing who they are.’ No matter your occupation, you have a brand, even if you are just a single employee in a large organisation. The brand of an employee or a potential employee is an essential determinant of their competitive position within an

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many companies and their employees create nothing tangible such as trains, planes, or automobiles; they sell information, ideas, or solutions that are difficult to price. Value depends on market judgements that are shaped through image management, marketing, and public relations. Value added in knowledge-intensive industries, such as management consultancy or financial services, stems from branding the company to maximise the price of its professional knowledge’ (Ibid.).

233 Ibid.
234 Ibid.
236 Ibid., 21.
organisation or in the larger employment market. Amongst employees who in many respects are of equivalent intelligence and capacities, branding is the only way to stand out. 237 Since having a brand is basically the same as the inevitability of making impressions on people, the job seeker is presenting their brand ‘from the moment [they] step into the interview room.’ 238

Like children, all people have brands outside of their working roles. Hence, one has a brand and is “branding” whether or not one is in paid employment. The impressions we make on one another with our brands determine our future interactions. This is true even of familial relationships. So even a ‘homemaker’ has a brand. 239 In a bizarre but unintentional acknowledgement of the mostly ignored work that women do within the home, Dvorak describes the homemaker as a ‘CEO of Home, Inc.’ 240 Your personal brand, which means your reputation, determines both your ability to manage as this CEO and ‘how well your friends and acquaintances treat you.’ 241 The brand image of the homemaker, like any other ‘everyday person’, is called their ‘social brand image’: ‘In the same way a professional or an entrepreneur benefits in the market from having a good personal brand, an individual benefits in the “social” market from having a positive brand. A healthy social brand will earn you respect.’ 242

This personal brand that each person is encouraged to promote gets to the heart of an important neoliberal contradiction. Dvorak stresses two aspects of the personal brand that seem to be inconsistent with one another. He holds that each person is unique, special and different in some way, and that it is precisely this uniqueness that should be the focal point of the personal brand. 243 Your “uniqueness” should be marketed as your key quality: ‘Personal branding is all about taking your unique strengths, skill sets, and personality traits and

237 Ibid., 124.
238 Ibid.
239 Ibid., 122.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid., 123.
243 ‘Let’s not be too sentimental here, but everybody is special. The Creator gifts everybody with some unique personality traits. You must have something that sets your apart from the rest; it cannot be otherwise. You need a brand to highlight that specialty’ (Ibid., 21).
packaging them into a solid brand.\textsuperscript{244} Hence, one’s uniqueness should only be presented to others when packaged as a brand. Our uniqueness is a packaged brand competing with all the other packaged personal brands in the self-brand market. Can our unique brand consist of anything at all and still be beneficial to us in our entrepreneurial endeavours? Surely not. The different qualities that Dvorak says make each of us unique are more or less from the usual list of neoliberal self-enterprising skills and competencies. Accordingly, one’s supposed uniqueness either is not very unique to begin with, or some genuinely unique quality needs to be repackaged in a way that makes one’s brand attractive to potential investors and collaborators. Otherwise, it is useless to one’s brand. Dvorak endorses Kirk Scott’s advice to prospective employees when he tells them they need to ‘advertise his/her product and tailor it to the needs of the prospective employer. The key is making one’s brand relevant to the employer.’ \textsuperscript{245} Thus, the boundaries of our “uniqueness” are clearly established: be unique, as long as your uniqueness comes packaged as a product that will interest your employer or a prospective employer.

By uniqueness, Dvorak actually seems to mean something like being recognisable, making an impression, standing out from the crowd, having a mark of distinction. Thus, the branded self is pulled in two directions: it needs to stand out while simultaneously making sure it conforms to a world of neoliberal entrepreneurialism. Similarly, David Freemantle advises job applicants to accentuate those features that make them stand out from other applicants.\textsuperscript{246} Yet this “standing out” must be consistent with the image of the attractive and acceptable job applicant. I could stand out in all sorts of ways in an interview that would have me either quickly and quietly crossed off the list, or asked to leave the room, or even escorted out of the building by security. But this is not the kind of “standing out” or “uniqueness” the branded self is meant to communicate. Consider some of the ways in which Freemantle suggests we can show how we are different, how we can make clear our ‘USP (unique selling

\textsuperscript{244} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{245} Kirk Scott, ‘director of Consumer Marketing for CareerBuilder.com’, quoted in Dvorak, \textit{Build Your Own Brand}, 124.
\textsuperscript{246} David Freemantle, \textit{Wanted: how to become the most wanted employee around} (Edinburgh Gate, Harlow: Pearson, 2009), 22.
point).’ We could, for example, make note of our ‘unique professional expertise,’ ‘unique relationship skills,’ ‘unique personality,’ ‘unique experience in a specific industry,’ ‘unique ability to motivate team members,’ or our ‘unique track record for getting results.’ Motivating team members and getting results are hardly markers of genuine uniqueness. Hence, standing out is perhaps not so much about being unique. Instead, standing out means having more of some desirable feature or ability than others. The neoliberal branded self could experience some real difficulties when trying to balance the call for uniqueness with the need to demonstrate one has all the relevant self-enterprising traits: “Sell your uniqueness! But in accord with those traits deemed desirable in neoliberal, flexible capitalism.”

If you are to stand out in the sea of self-enterprises, your brand needs to be attention-grabbing in some way. For this purpose, you need to make sure you promote yourself. You need to overcome any lingering shyness you might suffer from and instead start to ‘toot your own horn.’ No one else, Dvorak warns, will do it for you. If you do not self-promote, if you do not look after your brand, you will ‘suffer the agony of anonymity.’ For the self-enterprise whose value is closely linked to its reputation, there is little worse than being unremarkable. Being unremarkable – or worse, simply unknown – is the consequence of having a poor brand.

Like other features of neoliberal selfhood, all aspects of one’s life can contribute to or detract from the value of one’s brand. Conscious self-branding is supposed to make one aware of the ways in which one can draw on one’s experiences, skills, and education in order to improve one’s brand. For example, having travelled – even as a reckless and rebellious twenty-something-year-old – can contribute to your brand if it can be shown to have developed your “worldliness.” Conversely, Dvorak cautions that if you have not travelled then you might be passed over for an overseas work assignment. Therefore, one

247 Freemantle, Wanted, 22.
248 Ibid.
249 Dvorak, Build Your Own Brand, 22.
250 Ibid., 46.
251 Dvorak cautions that ‘[i]f you have not stepped out of the country, your boss may hesitate to entrust you with that deal to be negotiated in Paris. It may go to your colleague who has some travel experience in Europe’ (Ibid., 126). It also matters where you travel. If you want to be able
should perhaps do a little travelling in order to improve one's brand as a mobile and worldly employee. Note again how the neoliberal outlook takes all sorts of aspects of human life and experience and reinterprets them as opportunities for “adding value.” Consequently, what is encouraged is not just the taking up of entrepreneurial activities but also the reinterpretation of one's selfhood and history as somehow relevant to one's “value-generating” activities and the favourable presentation of one's human capital.

In Dvorak, this connection is clear; everything you do, and everything you are, is somehow pertinent to your brand. Brands include the usual “core competencies”: qualifications, experience, specialisations, and skills. Additionally, personality and habits are also essential contributors to the personal brand. So too is your general appearance, from the way you dress to the vehicle you drive, the restaurants you dine in, the area you reside in, the newspaper you read, the sports you play and watch, your political affiliations, the type of movies, music, and TV programs that you enjoy, and the friends you keep – all go into shaping and determining your brand image.252

The smallest details of how you present yourself can impact your brand. Hanging a family photo in a work cubicle affects your brand insofar as it encourages others to view you as a ‘responsible family man’.253 Your vacation choice, the car you choose to drive, or the fact that you ride a bike or catch public transport, will also reflect on your brand. As will the clothes you wear, the films you see, the music you listen to. All these parts of who you are and what you do could be detrimental or beneficial to your brand image. Perhaps there are aspects of who you are that could have a positive effect on your brand if "packaged" in the right way. Perhaps you need to present your brand in different ways for different audiences. Even the political domain is implicated as something that can positively or negatively impact your brand. Remember, as we saw above, your brand needs to be tailored to the needs of your employer, a potential employer, or what you imagine potential employers might desire. Without doubt, there are a number of political positions and affiliations not to land deals in booming Asia, then a trip to Thailand might just give you the edge: 'If you have spent vacations on the sandy beaches of Thailand, then you have more chances of being assigned projects in the Asian markets’ (Ibid., 127).

252 Ibid.
253 Ibid.
good for one’s brand image and employability. Accordingly, you need to think carefully about all these choices and how they affect your brand. You need to constantly ask yourself, even when employed, if you are doing enough to maintain a positive brand:

> Check your core competencies and see how you are doing. Are your qualifications still suitable for the position you hold? Or is there a need to gain knowledge in additional areas through degrees or workshops? Are your skill levels high and appreciated by the senior executives? Are your personal traits and hobbies in line with the position you are holding or aiming to hold?254

The touted uniqueness of the personal brand is very much undermined here. It is apparent that the neoliberal self, should it follow this advice, will conform to a list of desirable traits and features. Such a self is also likely to suffer from extreme anxiety about the impression their “brand” is making and what they can do to improve this impression. This vigilance is necessary in the endeavor to put to work all aspects of the person for the sake of crafting the perfect personal brand.

Like Dvorak’s recommendations on self-branding, David McNally and Karl D. Speak’s *Be Your Own Brand* is another interesting example of self-branding advice. As with Dvorak, McNally and Speak claim that everyone already has a brand. Brands build up over time and through multiple interactions with other people.255 Essentially, a brand is simply another person’s perception of you. That perception and the emotions associated with it frame your relationship with that person. What matters is what other people make of your brand because it ‘exists on the basis of a set of perceptions and emotions stored in someone else’s head’.256

There is something almost paranoid about the social world McNally and Speak describe, one in which we are always making impressions in one way or another, to the benefit or detriment of our brands. They warn the reader that ‘people are constantly observing who you are, what you do, and how you do it.’257 Accordingly, McNally and Speak do not want us to rest content with the insight that we each have a brand. Like Dvorak, they want us to strengthen our

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254 Ibid., 128.
256 Ibid., 11.
257 Ibid., 7.
personal brands. They claim that the strength of each person’s brand ‘grows or weakens depending upon the consistent impact (positive or negative) you are making on other individuals. Want to be a stronger brand? Make a difference!’

There are three key components of a strong brand. McNally and Speak hold that strong brands are ‘perceived to be’ distinctive, relevant and consistent. Distinctive brands ‘stand for something’; relevant brands connect ‘what they stand for’ with ‘what someone else considers important’; and consistent brands encourage people to ‘believe in a relationship based on the consistency of behaviors they experience or observe.’ These components make a brand strong by creating ‘value and trust in a relationship.’ Brands are ways of solidifying trust and creating positive expectations in others. A brand is something like a guarantee of the benefit other people will derive from future interactions with you: ‘when someone believes that you make your distinctive qualities relevant to them, the value you bring to the relationship is clearly established (i.e., you made a difference); when you are consistent in creating value, people know they can trust you to add value time and time again.’

As noted, the branded self needs to be vigilant about its brand and the impressions it makes on others. You are always being evaluated, which is always somehow positively or negatively affecting your brand strength. This is especially true in the workplace, where your performance is closely monitored. McNally and Speak give the following description of one of McNally’s colleagues:

One of David’s colleagues, Sue Stanek, describes how she is consciously evaluating individual personal brands by noticing how she thinks when she passes fellow workers in the office. Looking at one, she might say to herself, “You really make my life easy!” Looking at another, she thinks, “You really make my life difficult.” Sue’s bottom-line judgments are a reminder

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258 Ibid.
259 Ibid., 17.
260 Ibid.
261 Ibid. In banking terms, ‘[w]hen something you do strengthens the relationship, you’re effectively making a deposit. When your actions consistently strengthen the relationship, the balance grows—and accrues interest. Brands are like that. Successful interactions build the expectation that things will go right the next time, too. If they do, brand equity continues to grow. When something goes wrong, however, the equity in the brand account is tapped and reduced. With an account that is well into the black, even major problems can be encountered and survived without destroying the relationship. But if the balance goes into the red, the relationship can be irrevocably broken’ (Ibid., 85-6).
262 Ibid., 17-8.
of the importance of making a positive difference if you want to be perceived as a strong brand.\textsuperscript{263}

So making a positive difference means making Sue Stanek’s life easier? What is involved in making her life easier? And how does it give me a strong and authentic brand? In this example, “making a positive difference” sounds a lot like being a model, productive, submissive team player and employee.

I suggest that this concern with the personal brand, which means with other people’s impressions and assessments of oneself, reinforces the self-entrepreneurial outlook. The dedicated self-brander is constantly vying for recognition and credit, making sure not only that they are using their best “qualities” but also that they are seen to be doing so. McNally and Speak state that the personal brand management they describe will ‘enable you to shift others’ perceptions so that you can be acknowledged and receive credit for who you are and the difference you make for others.’\textsuperscript{264} Things you do that do not receive credit will not strengthen your brand. In other words, the neoliberal self is under constant pressure to perform and to be concerned about appearing a certain way to others. This stress on performing, on managing the impressions of others, introduces a fundamental dishonesty into our interactions. It is as if we engage with others from behind a screen, able to watch and assess the impressions we make, so that we can later analyse the impressions we made and devise a strategy for improving future impressions and the strength of our brands.

By paying attention to your personal brand in the ways McNally and Speak recommend, it will become more and more a part of who you are. Your concern for your personal brand must be constant. The personal brand ‘must be renewed every day.’\textsuperscript{265} In fact, your personal brand ‘must become a part of everything you do.’\textsuperscript{266} And so the line separating the person and the brand starts to blur. Perhaps this is how the branded performance becomes truly “authentic,” where there is nothing else but that performance, and the brand and person merge.

\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., 123.
\textsuperscript{266} Ibid.
As stressed by Dvorak, as well as McNally and Speak, branding requires ongoing work. Something as ephemeral and vulnerable as a reputation is susceptible to sharp fluctuations. When we factor in the constant competition (explored below) that neoliberalism promotes, simply maintaining your reputation requires constant activity. In the competitive world of self-enterprises, and with the proliferation of content on the web, social media and the entertainment industry vying for attention, we are pushed to do what we can to stand out. Neoliberalism is characterised by various kinds of insecurity and precariousness, particularly in our working lives. From the perspective of neoliberal ideology, one remedy for this is the ongoing self-promotion I have explored in this section. This concern for one's brand and the associated practices of self-branding can have disciplinary affects insofar as people are encouraged to constantly worry about their “business reputation,” the perception of how worthwhile they are as a possible “investment,” or how “employable” they are. People moving between jobs and those unsure about the security of their current position are likely to have a heightened sense of the impression they make and the impressions they need to make, and might be more inclined to worry about impressing potential employers and other people who may be a source of work. As is common of neoliberal discourse, this problematic situation is reinterpreted by the self-branding theorists as an opportunity for self-optimisation and is equated with the normal state of any firm in a competitive market, in which it must ensure the strength of its brand. Although not everyone practices self-branding quite as conscientiously as the theorists discussed here recommend, to the extent that people must be increasingly concerned with their reputations and the impressions they make in highly performance-oriented employment settings, then the promotion of self-branding practices can be seen as another source of the neoliberalisation of selfhood.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that management theory and the associated practices contribute to the production of neoliberal subjects. To substantiate this claim, I provided specific examples of what constitutes the capital of the
neoliberal self-enterprise by analysing the works of Jim Loehr, Tony Schwartz, Shawn Achor and the psychological capital theorists. As I suggested, these works indicate what the neoliberal subject must know about itself and how it must manage itself in order to succeed as an enterprising project. There are a number of common themes in the literature analysed above, including: an interest in all aspects of a person’s life, specifically insofar as these aspects affect workplace performance; an interest in people’s psychological makeup and the identification of our psychological lives as another opportunity for intervention and optimisation; and a focus on the need to develop people's abilities to adapt to and cope with stressful situations in the modern socio-economic landscape.

To highlight the neoliberal optimisation of all parts of the subject's life, I began by analysing Loehr and Schwartz’s corporate athlete program. In their work, everything in a person’s life is called upon to contribute to the productive capacity of the individual. This formation of the fully functioning self-enterprise involves new forms of self-understanding and self-creation, as well as a prominent role for expert knowledge, advice and services. The goal of this assisted self-fashioning is to optimise the activities of the individual so that they can meet the now wedded interests of individual, family and firm. In their later work, Loehr and Schwartz take a keen interest in the happiness and wellbeing of their clients. As I argued, people's happiness and wellbeing are put to work in the service of some form of value-generating activity.

Having explored the implications of Loehr and Schwartz’s outlook, I turned to Achor and the psychological capital theorists so as to examine the specifically psychological capital of the neoliberal subject. By reflecting upon Achor and the psychological capital theorists, I showed the manner in which neoliberal management techniques draw upon all aspects of our subjectivity, including the minutiae of our emotional and psychological lives. These authors provide us with a more specifically psychological perspective of the techniques used to fashion an optimally functioning self-enterprise. Achor and the psychological capital theorists are concerned with the relationship between psychological constitution and value-generating capacity. In Achor's work, as in other texts in this field, happiness is understood as a direct cause of success and
as a distinct competitive advantage. In the psychological capital literature, an explicitly psychological space of intervention is carved out. As I showed, psychological capital, like happiness in Achor’s work, is seen as a significant contributor to performance outcomes.

To conclude my analysis of management literature and neoliberalism, I argued that self-branding constitutes another instance of the neoliberalisation of selfhood. I highlighted that the construction of a strong brand requires organising all aspects of a person: their past experiences, abilities, personality, education, habits, travel experience, appearance, and whatever else affects the impression a person makes on others. This is very much in accord with the perspective taken by the likes of Loehr and Schwartz. By inducing people to treat themselves not only as capital to be optimised, but also as an enterprise to be marketed, self-branding practices further instantiate the production of neoliberal subjects.

By considering this collection of literature, crude and simple though it may be at times, we can see how the self is understood and summoned to work on itself in neoliberal discourse. It is through such processes of entrepreneurial self-fashioning that neoliberal subjects are produced. In the following two chapters, I turn my attention to the neoliberalisation of working life to consider the production of neoliberal subjects from a different perspective. Many of the themes explored in this chapter and the previous one will help me to describe some of the central aspects of work in the contemporary world. We will see that the more celebratory features of neoliberal discourse often clash with actual neoliberal practices in the workplace and in our working lives. Nonetheless, I maintain that work and working life are key sites for the production of neoliberal subjects.
The Neoliberal Subject and Modern Working Life

Having first considered some of the main features of human capital theory and recent management studies, I extend my analysis of neoliberal selfhood in this chapter and the next by turning my attention to the neoliberal self in contemporary working life. I argue that practices that support the construction of neoliberal subjects are abundant in modern working life. Considering this dimension of neoliberalism brings to the fore important features of the power relations of neoliberal capitalism, as well as many of its contradictions and inconsistencies. Moreover, given that we spend so much of our lives either working or engaging in work-related activities, reflecting upon the neoliberalisation of work is an important part of clarifying the production of neoliberal subjects and the neoliberalisation of everyday life. In recent decades, developments in technology and industrial relations, the rise of finance and the spread of global markets have changed the world of work. Rather than focus on these broad scale trends, important though they are, I will instead explore the way that neoliberal thinking, policies and practices frame contemporary working life. I suggest that these neoliberal ideas and practices are essential components of the organisation, understanding and experience of work in many parts of the world today.

267 Although work has changed in significant ways, we need to be careful not to take at face value the description of these changes coming from politicians, industry leaders, and management literature. It is especially important to challenge the notion that we are all now autonomous knowledge workers in an immaterial economy. For a start, while sectors like services have grown in advanced capitalist countries, the working conditions of people in these sectors hardly resembles the positive presentation given in much of the literature on the topic. Moreover, contemporary capitalism still involves... the production of material commodities, only much of this production... has moved to developing nations (see Ursula Huws, Labor in the Global Digital Economy: The Cybertariat Comes of Age (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014), 157-8). Even the so-called immaterial and knowledge-based economy still relies on a great deal of material production. On the exploitation of labour in ICT production in Silicon Valley (USA), Ciudad Juárez (Mexico), Hyderabad (India) and Hsinchu (Taiwan), see Nick Dyer-Witheford, Cyber-Proletariat: Global Labour in the Digital Vortex (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 60-80. See also Christian Fuchs, Digital Labour and Karl Marx (London: Routledge, 2014), in particular for Fuchs’ discussion of the production process and the labour involved in ICT, including: the extraction of minerals from African mines that become electronic appliances; ICT manufacturing and assembly in China; software engineering in India; hardware assembly and software engineering at Google in Silicon Valley; and other related topics.
Specifically, I focus on the way neoliberal discourse and practices shape expectations regarding the kind of person a worker should be, the kind of activities it is reasonable to expect workers to engage in, and the role work plays in our larger lives. Clarifying working life in neoliberal capitalism is not only a matter of describing work relations and broader shifts in the capitalist economy. We must also highlight neoliberal ways of understanding, directing and evaluating our working lives.

As noted above, I consider work to be an essential site of the production of neoliberal subjects.268 Again, I am not claiming that passive subjects enter workplaces and absorb the messages of the “bosses” in a unidirectional and frictionless fashion. The way that work shapes identities differs depending on numerous factors. People’s experiences of working life vary depending on their occupation, the industry in which they work, the region or country in which they live, plus a host of other personal, social and political factors. Nonetheless, I suggest that there are significant neoliberal trends in the way work is understood and organised and that we need to clarify these trends in order to properly understand contemporary working life and neoliberal selfhood. Kathi Weeks maintains that the production of certain kinds of subjects is a feature of work in general:

> Work produces not just economic goods and services but also social and political subjects. In other words, the wage relation generates not just income and capital, but disciplined individuals, governable subjects, worthy citizens, and responsible family members. Indeed, given its centrality both to individuals’ lives and to the social imaginary, work constitutes a particularly important site of interpellation into a range of subjectivities.269

In this chapter and the next, I will explore some of the ways that work “interpellates” subjects under neoliberal capitalism. By considering neoliberal discourse and practices related to working life, we will have a better overall

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268 While neoliberal capitalism entails the attempt to construct a new type of subject, such a relationship between a particular socio-economic system and subjectivity is not itself novel. Consider, for example, Gramsci’s analysis of “Americanism and Fordism” in the *Prison Notebooks*, in which he says that ‘the new methods of work [in America] are inseparable from a specific mode of living and of thinking and feeling life’ (Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 302). Gramsci details the way that management and the state took a serious interest in the lives, conduct and morality of the workers, trying to match the worker with what was required for the Fordist productive process.

picture of the coherence, contradictions, strengths and weaknesses of neoliberalism. As I will examine throughout these two chapters, work has educational, socialising, and disciplinary functions. Thus, any account of what it means to be a person in neoliberal times must pay some attention to our working lives. The ubiquity and apparent necessity of work makes it an essential feature of this analysis. In fact, we take it so much for granted that we have to work, we tend to lose sight of what this necessity entails.

As an extension of my analysis of Loehr and Schwartz, I begin by arguing that neoliberal management discourse reframes the relationship between employee and organisation. I will also consider some of the changes made in the workplace that are part of the attempt to institute this reimagined relationship between employee and organisation. From the perspective of this neoliberal management approach, work is seen as a place of self-realisation. It is hoped that as work is a place of self-realisation, the worker will identify with the goals, values and brand of the organisation. As suggested in the previous chapter, neoliberal organisational management presents work as a place of self-realisation in the hope that this will engage and motivate workers. This attempt to engage and motivate workers is part of the broader pursuit of extracting more value from organisational “human assets.” As an example of the neoliberal restructuring of the workplace, I will unpack some of the insights that can be drawn from Catherine Casey’s research at the (pseudonymously named) “Hephaestus Corporation.” This will allow me to critically examine the implementation of some of the management approaches I am discussing throughout this thesis. As I will argue, there are many inconsistencies between the purported benefits of such a workplace and the real organisation and experience of the workplace in the modern world.

As part of the reorganisation of the workplace, neoliberalism also gives rise to a renewed interest in workers’ general character and abilities. We saw some of the implications of this interest in every aspect of a worker’s subjectivity in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will suggest that the interest in the capabilities (human capital) of workers is due to the

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development of new kinds of work and new ways of extracting value from workers. Looking at paradigmatic examples such as call centre work, I will examine the attempt to put to work the whole person by tapping into their ability to communicate, emotionally engage with others, adapt to different circumstances, and so on. The various capacities that the neoliberal self is expected to develop are referred to as “soft” skills. They differ from traditional “hard” skills: technical mastery or specialisation in a specific role. I argue that these soft skills are promoted not simply because they provide employers with the kind of “flexible” workers they require, but also because they equip people with the capacity to adapt to different industries and kinds of work. They foster the “employability” that workers must maintain precisely because they are not guaranteed secure and ongoing work. Hence, it is not enough for people to be “flexible” workers within any one workplace; they must become accustomed to the flexibility that will characterise their entire working lives.

The “gig economy” is an example of an industry that promotes the benefits of flexible work and flexible careers. It is an interesting example to consider, as it is a form of work that takes place outside of the bounded workplace. In the final section of this chapter, I argue that by shifting risks and costs to unprotected workers and by presenting this shift as an opportunity for people to exploit untapped capital, the gig economy exemplifies neoliberalism both in spirit and in the power dynamics that underlie it. The business practices and marketing discourse of the gig economy frame individual workers as entrepreneurs surrounded with opportunities for value-enhancement. Thus, the practices and principles embodied in the gig economy reflect the neoliberalisation of subjectivity and the everyday.

Neoliberal Trends in the Workplace

The New Workplace

In order to show the impact of neoliberalism on the workplace, and, in turn, how changes in the workplace have supported the production of neoliberal subjects, I first outline the reconceptualisation of the relationship between employees and the organisation. According to Dardot and Laval,
entrepreneurial neoliberalism valorises work as a key site of the individual’s ‘self-realization.’ That is, work is presented as a place in which the individual has an abundance of opportunities and incentives to increase self-worth. In order to achieve this self-realisation, the subject is encouraged to identify with the purposes of the firm or organisation for which they work. More specifically, workers have been encouraged to identify with the brand and the brand values of the firm, as much as or even more than with the firm itself. From the neoliberal perspective, each employee ought to both compete and collaborate with other employees, united by the goals and requirements of the company and the company brand.

Several decades ago, management consultants Thomas Peters (cited above) and Robert Waterman pioneered a new approach to workplace management based on an understanding of worker-firm relations similar to that described by Dardot and Laval. In 1982, Peters and Waterman published the first edition of their international best seller *In Search of Excellence.* The book is partly a response to the contention that Japanese companies employ better managerial practices than American companies. Peters and Waterman challenge this claim, arguing that there are several American companies that have excellent and innovative management methods. Among these innovative methods, they are particularly enthused by the attempt to integrate employees into company life. They discuss at length the importance of valuing employee input, encouraging collegiality and having a sense of shared values and purpose. As they claim, the success of the top companies is due to ‘people’s being motivated by compelling, simple – even beautiful – values.’

“Motivation” is a key word in this discursive repertoire. It signals the desire to engage the person in a more fundamental way, that is, a desire to create in workers a strong commitment to work itself. Global management consulting firm McKinsey and Company have also stressed the importance of motivating employees. In the McKinsey publication *Knowledge Unplugged: The McKinsey and Company Global Survey on Knowledge Management,* the authors

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272 It sold three million copies in the first four years after publication.
argue that management too often pushes knowledge at employees as part of a top-down strategy. They believe that successful companies also allow knowledge to flow in the other direction; that is, from employee to firm. These successful companies ‘create environments that encourage [employees] to seek knowledge for themselves and pull it out from sources both within and beyond the confines of the corporation.” In particular, employees are motivated to gather and develop “knowledge” that is useful to the performance of the company. The best management approach is one that combines methods of top-down “push” and down-up “pull” to disseminate and extract knowledge. Only by motivating and incentivising employees in the right way – using “pull” as well as “push” approaches – will companies be able to utilise the full capabilities of their staff (human capital):

Exclusively managing by push is quick and relatively easy, but fails to capture the full capabilities of everybody in an organization. We are convinced that the maximum potential of individuals can only be unleashed through an approach that gets to the heart of what motivates them.

Due to the perceived significance of motivation, shared values and common purposes, the “culture” of the workplace and the employee’s placement firmly within this culture takes on a new importance. It is interesting that in both Peters and Waterman’s work, and in the McKinsey publication, it is not really clear what these shared values and the shared sense of purpose entail. They simply stress the need for shared values, shared purpose and deep motivation, and not the particulars or the merits of what is shared or why workers should be motivated.

As part of the attempt to integrate the goals of employees with that of the organisation, the new managerial style focuses extra attention on employees. Peters and Waterman encourage companies to consider their employees as assets. This means that companies must treat their staff as ‘adults’ and

275 Kluge et al., Knowledge Unplugged, 26.
276 This was also a feature of the Japanese Toyotist production system that has in various ways influenced business practices around the world (Ricardo Antunes, The Meanings of Work: Essay on the Affirmation and Negation of Work, trans. Elizabeth Molinari (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 39).
277 Kluge et al., Knowledge Unplugged, 27.
278 Ibid., 31.
'partners,' with the 'dignity' and 'respect' they are due. Immediately following the instruction to value employees in this manner, as if it was the logical consequence, Peters and Waterman also invite companies to treat their staff and 'not capital spending and automation – as the primary source of productivity gains.' Peters and Waterman stress that if companies are to fully employ their human assets, then they must properly engage employees. Thus, treating employees as adults, engaging and motivating them, is one and the same as understanding employees as the key organisational asset. In other words, it is because employees are important assets that they must be managed in such a way that maximises the returns they generate for the organisation. At the time of their research, Peters and Waterman believed that the top American companies were doing this successfully:

> There is good news from America. Good management practice today is not resident only in Japan. But, more important, the good news comes from treating people decently and asking them to shine, and from producing things that work. Scale efficiencies give way to small units with turned-on people. Precisely planned R&D efforts aimed at big bang products are replaced by armies of dedicated champions. A numbing focus on cost gives way to an enhancing focus on quality. Hierarchy and three-piece suits give way to first names, shirtsleeves, hoopla, and project-based flexibility. Working according to fat rule books is replaced by everyone’s contributing.

It is highly unlikely that this exactly depicts the workplaces of the top companies that interest Peters and Waterman. Yet, as Nikolas Rose points out, the importance of Peters and Waterman’s work lies not in whether or not they accurately describe the management practices of these companies. It is more significant that in Peters and Waterman’s work, and in many management studies that follow, we find an image of work in which worker and organisation are integrated and complimentary elements of the same whole. For the integration of worker and organisation to be accomplished, workers’ sense of purpose, their goals and their attempts at self-realisation must be targets of managerial techniques.

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281 Peters and Waterman, *In Search of Excellence*, xxv.
For workers in various kinds of occupations and employment arrangements, work is far from a place of self-realisation. Still, despite the dissatisfaction with work that countless people feel, we ought not overlook the extent to which for many people work provides, if not quite self-fulfilment, then at least a sense of security, identity and collegiality. In The Time Bind, first published in 1997, Arlie Hochschild claims that for the subjects of her study, work was a place of stimulation and belonging, neither of which they were experiencing in their home lives. As much as it is a source of exploitation and alienation, work can also be a source of purpose, an avenue for meaningful social contribution and a way of connecting with others. Management consultants like Peters and Waterman make sense of these aspects of work as something for management to exploit.

In practice, contemporary “flexible” workplaces are often far from liberating. In fact, the “liberation management” promoted by the likes of Peters and Waterman is often combined with rather strict forms of authority and control. Additionally, the attempt to make the workplace more equal and inclusive by encouraging employee contribution and flattening hierarchies is not necessarily a shift to genuine equality and inclusiveness. Promoting equality and inclusiveness is often little more than a way to raise expectations about employee contributions. If employee contributions do not improve overall performance (which means, for most organisations, profitability and efficiency), then they are unlikely to be welcome. If there is equality in such cases, it is in the sense that we are equally expected to contribute more. Moreover, workers are expected to contribute in ways that show they are doing so freely and that their contributions are expressions of their authentic selves. Carl Cederström and Peter Fleming contend that this new kind of workplace culture is perfectly compatible with older forms of control. They hold that many workplaces combine “liberation management” with bureaucratic structures and the micromanagement of workers. As they put it, “[w]orkers are bossed around by old fashion bureaucrats and Hitler-like micromanagers more now than ever... whilst

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284 Tip number ten in Freemantle’s book, Wanted: how to become the most wanted employee around, is ‘BE YOURSELF’ (Freemantle, Wanted, 41).
perversely being ordered to speak their mind, exude authenticity and have fun.\textsuperscript{285}

As with the “uniqueness” of the personal brand, the freedom we enjoy in the new workplace and the authenticity we are meant to display cannot be just any expression of freedom and authenticity. We are free to express ourselves as long as this expression remains within certain boundaries. For example, authenticity in the workplace often means little more than being able to dress a particular way, to wear the token accessories of whatever subculture we are thought to belong to. Such an approach to workplace organisation can be seen in the much-celebrated tech-companies in California. According to David Frayne, the ‘administered’ freedom of these companies ‘takes place within strict boundaries’: ‘it is a freedom to have a unique hair colour, wear a short skirt, or display a surfboard in your cubicle, but not to have a real influence over the labour process.’\textsuperscript{286} In some workplaces, employees might be allowed to air a little criticism, as long as this either contributes to the overall picture of an authentic workspace or can somehow be transformed into improved firm performance. Workers might have permission to be a little laidback with their work attire and do not need to so strictly recognise traditional and formal hierarchies (even if they still exist). Yet such practices are favoured only as long as they contribute to company goals, and if they allow employers to present their companies as friendly and flexible places to work. Similarly, in some workplaces staff can work untypical, flexible hours, as long as they meet the targets of whatever project they have been assigned, often requiring them to work more intensely than if they had a job organised around normal working hours.

Another notable feature of neoliberal workplace discourse is that, while often celebrating the workplace for the flexibility and authenticity it allows, the actual specifics of the work do not seem to matter. In other words, management’s concern with workplace culture does not include a consideration of what the organisation actually does. This seems to tell us much about the

neoliberal-entrepreneurial framing of work. The assumption is that work is inevitable, and organisations and jobs exist because “the market” demands them, so there is not much point asking questions about the necessity of the work being done. Workplace culture, on the other hand, is somewhat malleable and can therefore be altered to improve the experience of employees and the performance of the organisation. In a sense, the modern flexible workplace is meant to secure a kind of thoughtless contentment and industriousness, a habitual inattention to anything but the details of the specific task at hand. Work satisfaction is disconnected from any critical question about the job and its connection to the social-economic world in which it is situated. In this way, work of an ethically questionable nature (and work that is socially useless) can be packaged as another form of flexible, fun and rewarding work. Frayne nicely summarises this point:

As [André] Gorz suggested, it is possible to have a congenial and enjoyable work environment regardless of what is produced, whether it is ‘chemical weapons or medicines, Action Men or educational games, pornography or art books’ (Gorz, 1985: 52). In the ‘humanised’ offices of a company known to exploit sweatshop labourers, get children hooked on sugary cereal, or open up new markets for pharmaceuticals, the middle manager might forget any moral qualms by wearing a T-shirt to work, decorating his office, and enjoying the perks of a corporate lunch date.287

In other words, the flexible and fun workplace easily coexists with a variety of actual kinds of work. Additionally, you might work in a flexible and fun workplace where you are encouraged to “be yourself,” but in which you and your authenticity are required only as long as the firm needs. If employee freedom and authenticity always need to accord with the goals of the firm, so too is the actual employment of that authenticity conditional upon the firm’s business plans and conditions in the market/s in which it operates. “Empowered” and “authentic” workers are as disposable as any other worker. The management team that is encouraging self-expression and authenticity one month might be part of a senior meeting celebrating a rise in share price after a period of “downsizing” the following month (if members of lower and middle management have not themselves been victims of this downsizing).

287 Frayne, The Refusal of Work, 60-1.
The Hephaestus Corporation

To consider how some of these new management approaches have played out in the workplace, I will consider some of the central themes of Catherine Casey’s research in the early 1990s at the “Hephaestus Corporation.” Casey’s work allows us to explore some of the management approaches described above in more detail and provides me with the opportunity to show how individuals are targeted by neoliberal management techniques. As Casey explains, Hephaestus reorganised their workplace culture following the recommendations of a report by management consultant firm McKinsey and Company. The reforms were aimed at improving productivity and customer satisfaction.\(^{288}\) In order to achieve these goals, Hephaestus implemented a number of strategies to develop their ‘benchmarking’ and ‘employee involvement.’\(^ {289}\) In accord with the kind of management literature discussed above, Hephaestus also attempted to introduce a new workplace culture ‘in which employees would believe that their self-development, their source of self-fulfilment and identity are found in working for the corporation, and in the pursuit of company-defined “excellence.”’\(^ {290}\) To achieve these ends, management sought to ‘flatten hierarchies’ (or make hierarchies less formal and explicit) and facilitate employee contributions to decision-making.\(^ {291}\) Management also organised employees into teams while simultaneously promoting the idea that the company was a “family.” Generally, a new set of values was introduced. Or, rather, the discussion, promotion and constant reference to various values became part of daily life at the company. These values included ‘the pursuit of excellence, leadership, customer satisfaction and a team-family atmosphere of caring involvement and commitment.’\(^ {292}\) Casey argues that these strategies were supposed to restructure the relationships between each employee and the company, between employees themselves, and between employees and

\(^{288}\) As Casey also notes, in addition to improving productivity, such programs often had the goal of reducing the number of workers: ‘The corporate aim was to develop a workforce that was not only more productive but reduced in size from its 1970s figures’ (Casey, Work, Self and Society, 98).

\(^{289}\) Ibid., 97.

\(^{290}\) Ibid.

\(^{291}\) Ibid.

\(^{292}\) Ibid., 98.
customers. Management put employees through an extensive training program to familiarise them with the new cultural values and the kind of practices expected of them under the new regime.

The company met some of the newly introduced benchmarking goals by pushing the “teamwork” and “family” agenda. The representation of the company as a “family” is a time-honoured tactic of large corporations such as McDonald’s and Walmart. In the case of Hephaestus, the company was described to employees as one large team or family. However, management also divided this larger group into a number of smaller teams whose accomplishments could be compared and who were encouraged to compete with one another. Consequently, staff members were in competition not only with other organisations but also with their fellow colleagues. Competition was not only encouraged; winning competitors were rewarded. Winning teams earned rewards like ‘bonus payments or special weekend vacations in New York City.’ The bonuses are particularly interesting. They further monetise the collaborative relationships within the company, making staff work together and support one another (or reprimand, cajole and push one another) because of the incentive of the monetary reward. By having to compete and collaborate with different staff members for different tasks and at different points of the day, collegiality is restructured so as to resemble a number of shifting alliances that move between cooperation and competition.

Competition (and collaboration against other competitors) is one way in which the intra-organisational relations were reorganised in a market-like way. Another example of this market-like reorganisation of workplace relations can be found in the use of the terms “supplier” and “customer” to refer to staff members within the company. Just as colleagues are potential competitors, so were they suppliers (and you the customer) if they were providing you with a service, or customers (and you the supplier) if you were providing them with a service. Hence, if one has obligations to others, they are of the kind prompted by being in a market: meeting customer needs and acquiring reputational capital

293 Ibid.
294 Ventura, Neoliberal Culture, 13.
295 Casey, Work, Self and Society, 99.
296 Ibid.
through quality service provision are good for business. Casey says that both ‘between and within teams,’ staff interactions were ‘based on the view that they are buyers or suppliers and that they have certain needs – “customer requirements” – that they and others must meet.’ 297 Interactions with customers of the company and customers of “services” within the company are referred to as “interfacings” and the customer as an “interface.” 298 This market-like language and the restructuring of the company into teams providing internal and external services changes the relations between workers into another kind of market transaction. It is also interesting to note that the ‘marketplace language of customer is promoted alongside the filial language of team and family.’ 299 After all, these are potentially conflicting frameworks for making sense of professional relationships.

The Hephaestus “family” and “team/s” seem to work on different levels. Assigning work to groups, measuring the work of that group and then comparing those measurements to other groups’ achievements makes working in smaller team units an everyday experience. That is to say, the division and measurement of work tasks supports the sense of belonging to one of the smaller team units. By contrast, the idea that Hephaestus as a whole is a team or a family is continuously vulnerable to the realities of daily experience. For a start, the larger family-team seems to be undermined by the competition between the smaller teams. Moreover, ongoing talk about teams and families might not convince staff who are overworked, underappreciated, and powerless with respect to the specifics of their work. As Casey observes, the Hephaestus team-family did not seem to exist outside the confines of the workplace and the official hours of work. 300 This is because the team-family was a management project, not something ‘spontaneously created by groups of workers wishing to create community with each other’. 301 In fact, Casey claims that a number of the staff reported a decline in outside social activities since the introduction of the

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297 Ibid., 100.
298 Ibid.
299 Ibid.
300 Ibid., 111.
301 Ibid.
new company culture. It would appear that the attempt to replace the more spontaneous and organic community that often exists between workers with the constructed social activities promoted by management was not entirely successful. I suggest it is also possible that the separation of staff into teams and the newly created competition and supplier-customer relations that developed between staff could also have inhibited interest in socialising outside of work.

However, it is unlikely to matter a great deal to the senior members of the company whether or not employees socialise outside of work. What really matters is whether or not the construction of competing teams and the reformulation of collegial cooperation as an exchange between customer and supplier have the desired effect on workplace performance and company profit. Additionally, from management’s perspective, the team-family nexus is an effective organisational structure to the extent that it introduces new forms of workplace control. Consider the idea of the workplace “family.” A dispute within a family might occur when someone has not done a job properly, like a chore, doing the dishes or buying milk on the way home from work. Not doing this chore lets other members of the family down. By using the team-family discourse, everyday work activities are reframed as opportunities to meet – or to fail to meet – one’s obligations to the team-family. The emphasis on competition further increases the risk of “letting down” other team members. It is not simply that “Pete” has to perform “x” task in order to meet his obligations to the company. He now has to do “x” task better and faster than “Susan” and “Mike” from the other teams, or risk letting down his own team. So, Pete could be letting his team down even while he is performing the same role in the same fashion he has done for several years.

Hence, the sort of closeness of the team-family also includes family forms of dispute and discipline. As one worker told Casey, ‘[i]t’s like a family here. We

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302 This is how Maggie, a Hephaestus employee, makes sense of the change: ‘We used to socialize with each other back then... I think that it started to fall away when the company decided that they would do all of these things, and they would give us picnics and stuff, and sports teams... and when they started arranging these company things, I don’t know, but I think that it was the structures, where you knew that you were going to party on Wednesday the 19th, whereas before you would have all worked together, maybe ten-hour days, and accomplished a whole lot, and you felt on a Thursday night like having a few beers, then you would do it together, and there was no structure to it, and say, hey, that was a really bad idea, let’s go have a beer, and that stopped’ (Ibid., 111-2).
all get on well, and we’re looked after. Sure, we argue sometimes, if someone hasn’t done their job right, or something, but you never really get mad… We’re a family, you know… and we stick together.’ Notice the collective “we” in ‘we argue sometimes, if someone hasn’t done their job right’. When disputes occur in this fashion, management does not always need to admonish employees. In the new horizontal workplace, workers (as members of the team-family) often perform the role of disciplining each other once assigned to the boss. Such direct disciplining is perhaps not even necessary. If employees do not want to deal with the guilt of having “let down the team,” they will manage themselves. Fears of social isolation that come with the team-family nexus can contribute to employee self-discipline. In these various ways, discipline does not only come from a centralised authority but now infiltrates the everyday interactions and expectations of the workplace. In Casey’s words, ‘[a] culture of discipline is established and the employees police themselves.’ In her research at a number of workplaces in Brisbane (Australia), Melissa Gregg observed that the bonds between co-workers were an important factor in employees working longer hours, as such bonds make this work seem ‘courteous and common sense’. Gregg argues that “[t]he “team” is an accommodating signifier. It helps to express engagement and commitment when loyalties lie not with the organization or even necessarily the job, but with the close colleagues who are the main point of daily interaction.” We might not feel particularly committed to the organisation for which we work or to the job as such but might feel obliged to our immediate team. This helps to make sense of the managerial focus on team bonding and establishing dependence and obligation between team members.

303 Ibid., 113.
304 Although Casey assures the reader that Hephaestus still used disciplinary techniques for keeping employees on task and for reprimanding them when they fell short of expected work performance (Ibid., 121-4).
305 Ibid., 122-3.
307 Gregg, Work’s Intimacy, 85.
308 Fleming gives the example of a bizarre attempt to forge workplace bonds at United Health Programs, a Long Island customer service firm. Among other things, the firm forced (and failed, in some instances, leading to employee complaints and the company being sued by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) employees to say “I love you” to each other. ‘Employees
While these different ways – team-family, customer-supplier, competitors – of framing intra-company relations might overlap and complement each other in some respects, they also conflict with one another. Typically, a family does not just drop certain members because their “services” are no longer required and they do not provide quality services because of a concern for reputational capital. Casey reports that some employees believed the team-family relationship protected them from being disposed, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Ultimately, the tensions between these ways of making sense of the company culture are inherent to the neoliberal management practices I have been discussing: they ask for a commitment from staff (to the brand, values or team) that is not reciprocated by the organisation.

Casey found that different employees made sense of their commitment to the company, or to the team-family, in different ways. Interestingly, she observed that employees under thirty-five seemed less emotionally committed to the company, although they made use of the team-speak in order to successfully operate within the organisation. Rather than talk about the importance of the work, their commitment to the company, or the pleasure of working with colleagues, these younger members tended to cite high pay, convenient location, tenure, health insurance, and similar reasons for working with Hephaestus. Nonetheless, Casey found that the younger employees go along with the team concept as a structure, and some actively believe in it for its ability to shape and encourage relationships that are collegial and open. For many, there is a willingness to believe, but belief seems to be harder for them than it was for the older group. Their bond to the company is tenuous and fragile.

Hence, it would seem that employee commitment to the organisation, to colleagues and to the work itself is somewhat fragile and uncertain in the new workplace. Perhaps this is in part because of the conflicting ways in which workplace relationships are framed and the experiences people have in the “flexible” employment market.

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309 Casey, Work, Self and Society, 114.
310 Ibid., 116.
311 Ibid.
In addition to the team-family method, Casey also found that despecialisation was an important part of the structural changes at Hephaestus. She observed this amongst both the white-collar workers and the manufacturing workers on the factory floor. The new workplace organisation was based on ‘generalization and flexibility’. In other words, specialisation and occupational boundaries were replaced by a diffusion of knowledge and roles so that workers could complete many different and smaller tasks. Management presented these changes as an attempt to create a more accountable workplace. They improved “accountability” by making everyone capable of and therefore responsible for numerous tasks. Management also presented this “generalization and flexibility” as a way to empower employees, allowing them to engage with aspects of the work process beyond traditional specialised functions. Sharing responsibilities in this way was seen as a challenge to traditional hierarchies. Again, we see how advocates of neoliberal workplace arrangements use ideas of empowerment, flexibility, and equality to positively present workplace restructuring.

Casey contends that specialisation and occupational groups were previously significant markers of class solidarity and identification. The organisation of workers into teams and the dispersal of knowledge displaced this older form of identification. The company sought to dissolve ‘occupational and professional boundaries’ because it ‘enables the dispersion of certain (not all) knowledge and expertise among many people, and the capacity to tap the resources of its employees more deeply.’ I would add that this dispersion of knowledge and expertise also means that the company is less reliant on any one person or group to perform a particular task. If people can perform a broader array of tasks, then it is possible that the overall work process can be done with less workers. Furthermore, these workers are easily replaceable, as they are no longer the exclusive practitioners of certain skills or

312 Ibid., 108.
313 Ibid.
314 Casey notes that at Hephaestus, ‘there are limits to this apparent democratization of knowledge. A pattern of polarization is emerging within the Hephaestus workplace in which the dispersion of knowledge is controlled by a new demarcation between an upper level of technologists and managers and a lower level of manufacturing workers’ (Ibid.).
315 Ibid.
316 Ibid.
in control of specific occupational knowledge. Hence, the dispersal of knowledge and tasks allows companies to get more out of a smaller workforce while simultaneously weakening the bargaining position of the workers. The new company culture, if effective, simultaneously dismantles traditional forms of solidarity, lessens the power of workers, and – albeit in limited and contradictory ways – establishes new links between employees and the organisation:

Hephaestus wants a corporate culture that has the solidarity and cohesion of industrial culture but eliminates the visibility and knowledge of structural conflicts inherent in traditional industrial culture. It seeks also to eliminate the allegiances of employees to external solidarity forms in the remnants of class and union formations. A corporate culture in which employees “feel good about themselves” enables their locus of identity to shift toward the source of that good feeling. The effect of participation and “empowerment” disguises their absence.317

The extent to which employees actually do “feel good about themselves” in the workplace, and in turn associate this good feeling with the organisation for which they work, is not entirely clear. What is certain is that management discourse has employed this kind of rhetoric in order to establish a sense that we can realise our goals and achieve self-affirmation in a workplace structured in a market-like fashion, one in which we are meant to be committed to others and to the company in a customer-supplier type relationship without any guarantee that the organisation is strongly committed to us. In order to make sense of such a relationship, we need to clarify not just the restructuring of the workplace that neoliberalism instantiates, but also the kind of worker and the kind of work the new workplace entails. It is to this task that I now turn.

**Shaping the Subject for Neoliberal Work**

**The New Working Subject**

As we have seen, neoliberal management attempts to more deeply exploit the assets that make up organisational human capital. The management practices outlined in this chapter and the previous one help us to understand some of the work expected of individuals when they are understood as an organisational asset. Here, I extend the insights of the above discussion by considering the

317 Ibid., 113.
desirable skills, personality and general capacities of the contemporary neoliberal working subject. I argue that neoliberalism encourages subjects to adopt a set of characteristics and practices that complement neoliberal working life.

What matters a great deal in the neoliberal workplace and for the work being asked of the neoliberal self is not only – and often, not primarily – actual technical skills, but instead personality type. Madeleine Bunting describes a conversation she had with the manager at the North Shields (England) call centre for French telecommunications corporation Orange, in which the manager said that they hire call centre workers not based on their ‘technical skills’ but rather on their personality.\footnote{Madeleine Bunting, Willing Slaves: How the Overwork Culture is Ruling our Lives (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 68.} The personality-type the manager was interested in was ‘cheerful, outgoing, flexible, good-natured, adaptable’.\footnote{Bunting, Willing Slaves, 68.} Unlike technical skills, “adaptability” or “good-naturedness” cannot be so easily trained. This is because they include the emotional, communicative and social skills and dispositions that we acquire throughout our lives. Bunting reports that B&Q (a DIY and home improvement retailer) sought personalities like those that interested Orange. In order to make sure they employed people with the desired characteristics, B&Q used an ‘automated telephone personality test’ to assess the personalities of potential employees.\footnote{Ibid.} This interest in personality is evidence of a more intrusive approach to the shaping of the workplace. Companies like Orange and B&Q recruit personalities that will help entrench the desired company culture. As the Human Resources Director at B&Q told Bunting, ‘[w]e wanted a psychological underpinning to the entire culture – the same description of cultural fit across the entire population [of the company] – including management.’\footnote{Ibid.} The foundation for the workplace culture is the personalities of the workers themselves. Despite frequent appeals to authenticity and diversity, it sounds like what these companies desire is to have all their employees – even management – fit a particular personality mould: cheerful, outgoing, flexible and good-natured.

\footnote{Madeleine Bunting, Willing Slaves: How the Overwork Culture is Ruling our Lives (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 68.}
\footnote{Bunting, Willing Slaves, 68.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
Insofar as personality is a fundamental criterion for assessing someone's employability, the worker must make use of all their capacities and ensure they loosely fit the expected personality type. Hence, you are hired and valued not just for what you can do but also for who you are, or at least who you are capable of becoming. As outlined in the previous chapter, neoliberal subjects are encouraged to put to work all aspects of their selfhood in the pursuit of optimal performance and “value-generation.” This is especially the case in the service sector, which makes up a large portion of developed capitalist economies. Cristina Morini and Andrea Fumagalli call this kind of capitalism “biocapitalism.” Value in biocapitalism is found in ‘the intellectual and emotional resources of subjects, and in their ability to activate social links that can be translated into exchange value, governed by the grammar of money.’

In other words, our everyday lives, histories and personalities are useful insofar as they can be made to generate some sort of further value. Our very subjectivity, ‘in its experiential, relational, creative dimensions,’ is rendered an asset to be fully exploited.

We saw that at Orange certain personalities are sought after for call centre work. In fact, call centre work is an excellent example of the activation and exploitation of the person’s emotional, social and communicative capacities. Morini and Fumagalli describe how call centre workers are valued in terms of their ability to secure and add to customer lifetime value (CLV). CLV measures the value of a customer to a company over a certain period of time. Accordingly, it factors in not only present and past purchases, but also the likely purchases the customer will make in the future. The use of this measure pressures call centre operators to establish some sort of relationship with the customer, so that the customer is encouraged to feel an emotional connection to the organisation. In attempting to establish this relationship with the customer and respond appropriately to their queries, the operator activates in her working performance not only what she learnt during her professional education, but also her relational intelligence – developed since her childhood – her innate relational attitudes, her faculty for

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323 Morini and Fumagalli, “Life put to work,” 236.
324 Ibid., 243.
language, her interests and social contacts. To this we must add ‘physical’ components, such as a persuasive tone of the voice and a positive attitude during the phone call. This amount of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘affectivity’ is clearly present in the relation with the customer, but is not represented in the operator’s wage.\textsuperscript{325} Due to the nature of the work, call centre operators provide a clear example of the kind of emotional labour that requires a deeper activation of the “assets” of the worker. Beyond the call centre, the demand that we connect and engage, that we make use of the full capacities of our person is becoming common in many industries and workplaces. As with the flexible and liberating workplace described above, the stress on emotional engagement and commitment seems to be more important than the content of the work itself. For instance, in \textit{Wanted: how to become the most wanted employee around}, Freemantle asserts that it is essential people love what they do.\textsuperscript{326} He emphasises that loving what you do entails being both emotionally \textit{engaging} and \textit{engaged} in the workplace. Hence, in accord with neoliberal management regimes, the worker is expected to be emotionally committed but also to inspire emotional commitment in others (colleagues, employers, customers). Performing work tasks now entails “connecting with people.” The emotional engagement is not an end in itself but is encouraged because it is considered an important component of good business. All the same, Freemantle seems to be asking for a genuine emotional engagement, not a feigned friendliness or warmth: ‘When you touch a person’s heart and soul you resonate. To commit to a genuine agreement you need to reach into your heart and seek to resonate with the other person.’\textsuperscript{327} It is this ability to “resonate” that the modern employee must master:

To become wanted in any organisation requires such resonance. It requires developing the skill, when walking into a room of strangers, to tune in quickly to their wavelength and reflect back clearly that you are also on the same wavelength. This will endear you to them and spark a reaction, ‘This person is like one of us’. They will sense the harmony that can be achieved in working with you for the simple reason that what you say, and the way you say it, touches emotional chords with them (and vice versa).\textsuperscript{328}

\textsuperscript{325} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{326} Freemantle, \textit{Wanted}, 38.
\textsuperscript{327} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{328} Ibid., 39.
Touch and be touched; this is what is required of the modern worker as they are encouraged to establish business-like relations of temporary trust and mutual benefit like any good dealmaker. This emotional engagement can be added to the list of work we must do to be optimal entrepreneurial selves.

Similar to the above-discussed tension between “uniqueness” and embodying desirable neoliberal attributes, there seems to be a contradiction between genuine authenticity and always showing that you are ‘on the same wavelength,’ that other people will instantly recognise that you are ‘like one of us,’ and that others always ‘sense the harmony that can be achieved in working with you’.

Yet, authenticity does play a role to the extent that the emotional engagement must be genuine. Referring to the “buzz sessions” at the beginning of the day in his call centre work, Jamie Woodcock has also picked up on the demand for genuine emotional engagement. These buzz sessions often contain singing, chanting and “motivational” speeches from management, in an attempt to excite and mentally prepare workers for the day. Woodcock believes that workers were expected to genuinely engage with this process. Those deemed not to be participating sincerely risked being labelled ‘party-pooper[s].’ As Woodcock puts it, with these kinds of ‘affective demands’ being made of workers, it is no longer ‘enough to sell your labour-power – nor even to work hard during that time – you must also enjoy the process.

**Soft Skills and Lifelong Learning**

The attempt to find the right personality type, to employ a person’s social and communicative capacities, and to foster genuine emotional engagement, are all evidence of the more general goal of optimising human assets and moulding workers to the requirements of modern work. This adaptation of workers to the needs of work and flexible labour markets can be further clarified by examining the “soft” skills required of the modern, flexible and mobile worker. Soft skills are an important link between the neoliberal workplace and the larger labour market. In particular, neoliberal workers need soft skills in order to both adapt

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329 Ibid.
331 Woodcock, *Working the Phones*, 76.
to changes within organisations and to shift between jobs. Mastering these skills might improve one’s “employability” but they also confirm one’s disposability. Put differently, because the neoliberal worker is disposable, they need to make sure they make themselves employable (useful) to other potential employers.

As part of the promotion of soft skills, neoliberalism privileges an image of the flexible and adaptable person who can pick up new skills and replace old ones when “the market” and employers require it. Consequently, the meaning of “skills” has changed. As Philip Mirowski notes, “skills” no longer indicates the mastery of a craft but now implies ‘a vague set of “life skills,” “communication skills,” and a range of related euphemisms’.332 The most important “skills” for entrepreneurial lives are not technical (or “hard”) skills. Instead, entrepreneurial selves are encouraged to develop a range of “soft” skills: various aspects of our personality, emotional “style,” facility with language, optimism, likeability, even the very ability to pick up new skills. Bonnie Urciuoli cites a University of Waterloo Career Services document that informs readers that ‘[e]ach person has approximately 700 different skills in their repertoire.’333 For a person to have so many skills, much of who we are and what we do must already be interpreted as tools for ‘productive labor.’334 As noted above, many of these soft skills are developed outside of formal training and the workplace. They are often the “skills” we develop in our everyday interactions with others, our social and familial relations, our use of different kinds of technology, and our ability to navigate the milieu of our immediate surroundings. Hence, the demand for soft skills is connected to the instrumentalisation of our whole personhood that is essential to the production of neoliberal subjects.

Similarly, André Gorz has argued that ‘post-Fordism’ relies on a great many attributes and capacities learnt outside of the workplace.335 He contends that it is precisely the cultural baggage of everyday life that the post-Fordist

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332 Mirowski, Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste, 10.
334 Urciuoli, “Skills and selves in the new workplace,” 212.
335 Gorz, The Immaterial, 9.
(what I am referring to as “neoliberal”) workplace exploits. According to this view, post-Fordist workers enter the workplace

with all the cultural baggage they have acquired through games, team sports, campaigns, arguments, musical and theatrical activities, etc. It is in these activities outside work that their liveliness and capacity for improvisation and cooperation have been developed. It is their vernacular knowledge that the post-Fordist enterprise sets to work and exploits.\footnote{Ibid., 9-11.}

It is because post-Fordism, or neoliberalism, already frames all aspects of human life in terms of value-generation that it makes sense to think of people having approximately 700 skills. We are henceforth constituted by myriad capacities (capital) for value-enhancing activity. These capacities are the soft skills that can be moulded to suit a variety of tasks and careers.

However, what is missed in Gorz’s analysis is the way in which everyday life has been, at least to some extent, reconfigured by neoliberal practices and modes of reason. So while Gorz is right to note the pertinence of our everyday “skills” to post-Fordist, neoliberal work, such a perspective risks presuming that there exists an everyday world untouched by neoliberalism, but from which neoliberalism (or for Gorz, post-Fordism) borrows in order to put the skills and capacities developed there to work. In one sense, neoliberal – or post-Fordist – workers must convert and adapt their “skills” into working methods useful to neoliberal/post-Fordist working life. However, given the extent to which we are encouraged to understand our everyday lives as part of a continuous management of our self-enterprising portfolios, it is also the case that the “soft skills” of everyday life already come in the form needed for neoliberal work. In other words, neoliberalism produces subjects inclined to engage in entrepreneurial value-enhancement. When our everyday cultural baggage is seen as capital to be put to work, it is also transformed. It is telling that Gorz gives sporting and performance-based examples of cultural baggage, precisely because these activities involve capacities and skills that can be adapted to neoliberal working life (such as competitiveness, performativity (self-promotion), audience (customer) engagement, self-discipline and self-exertion).

Today, young people in particular are seen as targets for the development of soft skills. Accordingly, we need to qualify Gorz’s position on post-Fordism
and its exploitation of the capacities of everyday life. It is not simply a case of exploiting people’s “natural” social and educational development. Even describing our past as an accumulative process of “social and educational development” in which we have formed certain “skills” is already to see it from an instrumental and neoliberal perspective. As I have already suggested in regards to the promotion of authenticity, neoliberalism cannot work with any and every kind of “social development.” Hence, while it is true that the neoliberal workplace makes use of our cultural baggage, it is also the case that a more general, institutionally embedded neoliberal culture has meant that this cultural baggage already comes with certain neoliberal characteristics. To take one prominent example, the development of soft skills has not been left up to a random process of enculturation; these skills are actively taught to young people in a range of institutional, cultural and educational settings. To the extent that these soft skills are felt to be lacking, many people are demanding they be directly taught in schools, colleges and universities.

A recent report by the non-profit Foundation for Young Australians makes this point clear. The report is titled *THE NEW BASICS: Big data reveals the skills young people need for the New Work Order*. It is framed as a response to the ‘growing demand from employers for young workers to have... enterprise skills.’[^337] “Enterprise skills” is more or less a euphemism for “soft skills.” The reader is informed that these enterprise skills are needed for many contemporary forms of work. For this reason, it is necessary that they are actively taught and promoted. Like soft skills, enterprise skills are not specific to a set of tasks, an occupation or even a single industry (these would be the traditional “hard” skills). On the contrary, they are ‘transferable skills that allow young people to be enterprising so they can navigate complex careers across a range of industries and professions.’[^338] In other words, during your entrepreneurial life, you will need to adapt yourself to the kind of work available at different times and places. The skills you will need to make yourself as useful as possible to the largest possible number of organisations include

[^338]: *THE NEW BASICS*, 3.
'problem solving, financial literacy, digital literacy, teamwork, and communication'.

The obvious place to teach these skills to young people is at school and other educational institutions. It is the responsibility of schools and teachers to give students the enterprise skills required in the future job market. Hence, like the human capital theorists before them, the authors take education to be no more than training for future employment. Our schooling and education system should follow the lead of those training institutions already implementing programs to encourage enterprise skills. For example, the report favourably cites a year 9/10 program at Frankston High School (Australia) in which students are given ‘4 hours per week to build their own startup.’

The fact that schools are implementing such programs shows that an entrepreneurial approach to education can be found beyond the confines of neoliberal think tanks and industry representatives.

As education is no more than a place to mould the next generation of workers, educational content must be adapted to the needs of business. Likewise, young people must be moulded so that they can adapt to the requirements of business. The authors inform the reader that these requirements can now be known in ‘real time’ thanks to developments in digital technology:

[T]he digital age allows labour market data to be at the fingertips of young people who are deciding what training to undertake or what types of jobs applications to focus on. Rather than relying on anecdotal advice about which career path to pursue, live labour market data offers young people, parents and careers advisers an additional and valuable source of information. Using online job advertisements, we could build national tools for students to identify, in real time, what employers want, the biggest employers, the highest growth industries and the best paying work.

Young people are quite explicitly instructed to take cues from the employment market. The question for young people is no longer “what do you want to be when you grow up?” but “what does the market have available and what skills and capacities do the availabilities require?” Apparently, what the market is asking for at the moment are the soft skills listed above. These soft skills are not

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339 Ibid.
340 Ibid., 21.
341 Ibid., 22.
only what employers in major industries currently require, but they are the very skills that ensure the flexibility and adaptability workers must exercise as they shift positions and industries according to the winds blowing in tumultuous global markets. Education is no more than an extended apprenticeship for a life of flexible work. As Frayne words it, ‘[i]n the work-centred society, the most readily accepted purpose of education is the socialisation of young people for the successful adoption of a pre-defined work role.’342 Yet, young people are not being equipped with the skills for any specific role. Instead, they are equipped with the general skills and “career resiliency” (explored below) that prepare them for a life of uncertain work and adaptation to market changes.

Soft or enterprise skills have been promoted in areas other than primary and secondary education. Ursula Huws’ analysis of skills training in the “knowledge economy” provides us with several examples. Huws claims that we are in a phase of capitalism that needs a new set of ‘generic attitudes and abilities’ and that various state agencies and supranational bodies are assisting in their provision.343 Harmonisation of educational standards and content is useful to corporations that want to rapidly shift work and workers between geographical locations. As third-way intellectual Anthony Giddens clearly states, ‘[g]reater harmonization of educational practices and standards… is desirable for a cosmopolitan labour force. Some global corporations have already set up standardized entrance requirements, but governments need to take the lead.’344

Huws points out that, like the report discussed above, many job advertisements and training programs emphasise the need for “e-skills” and “digital literacy.”345 Similarly, World Bank aid is guided by its “knowledge for development” (K4D) principles, funding programs ‘that link educational reform with the extension of telecommunications networks, encouraging entrepreneurship, and “an efficient innovation system of firms, research

342 Frayne, The Refusal of Work, 15.
343 Huws, Labor in the Global Digital Economy, 41.
345 Huws, Labor in the Global Digital Economy, 42.
centers, universities (and) consultants.”  

Huws observes that these educational aid programs run by the likes of the World Bank and the European Union often require that host nations alter or dismantle their national qualification systems, supplementing or replacing them with ‘international course and curricula, including the franchising of courses run by universities and colleges in donor nations, the compulsory teaching of English in primary schools, and sometimes, a second European language in secondary schools.’  

These programs also highlight the need for the usual array of soft or enterprise skills like digital literacy, as well as promoting education that is linked to employability and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, large multinationals are promoting digital literacy by developing certification programs for the use of certain software and providing samples of hardware so that students at schools and colleges can learn to use their products. Huws says that this is part of an attempt to establish ‘global skills standards’ that are relevant to business needs. In other words, it is highly desirable, from the perspective of capital, to have an educated and trained global workforce (and consumer base) able to manage the machinery, technology and infrastructure of a “knowledge-based” capitalist economy. As Huws suggests, World Bank and European Union education policies and funding priorities create, intentionally or not, ‘a global reserve army of “knowledge workers.”’

The global army of workers is encouraged to engage in lifelong education, training, and learning. This is because soft skills are never perfected and always require updating. The very nature of such ephemeral “skills” as entrepreneurship and flexibility leaves them without a clear end state. One cannot master “flexibility,” or “entrepreneurialism” or “communication” in the same way one can master the use of a tool, machine or computer program.

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346 Ibid.
347 Ibid., 43.
348 Ibid.
349 Ibid.
350 Ibid., 41. 'With high-capacity telecommunications infrastructure in place, and workers who speak the global languages and can use the increasingly standard global software packages, it will be possible to switch work seamlessly from worker to worker and place to place in the process increasingly known as “global sourcing” – a complicated mixing and matching of tasks from a number of different locations in specific configurations to suit a particular business client' (Ibid, 43).
However, one can continually improve or maintain their “entrepreneurialism” and “flexibility” through the constant practice of these skills. Thus, developing soft skills is an ongoing project of training, retraining, and constant adaptation. Indeed, it is a kind of soft skill to be able to constantly acquire new skills and adapt old ones. The message is that you must ‘[n]ever rely on the knowledge you have.’

Under neoliberalism, lifelong learning has a particularly economic and instrumental flavour. People are not encouraged to engage in personal development for the sake of that development alone or because it makes them a more thoughtful and engaged citizen, but for the sake of furthering their ability to generate value, or, in cruder and concrete terms, in order to match themselves to a changing job market. As Freemantle puts it, the ‘more options you can offer (in terms of skills, knowledge and experience) the higher the probability you will be wanted.’

This lifelong learning can involve all sorts of things. As we have seen, neoliberalism entails the transformation of much of who we are into a project of self-entrepreneurialisation. Accordingly, lifelong learning includes everything from exercise and other bodily improvements, to anything that betters the mind, to acquiring new skill sets and practical abilities, to having the right kind of ‘experiences.’

As Giddens puts it in The Third Way, governments need to emphasize life-long education, developing education programmes that start from an individual's early years and continue on even late in life. Although training in specific skills may be necessary for many job transitions, more important is the development of cognitive and emotional competence. Instead of relying on unconditional benefits, policies should be oriented to encourage saving, the use of educational resources and other personal investment opportunities.

Lifelong learning means being adaptable and constantly remoulding oneself. Freemantle, for instance, states that to be a wanted worker you must be constantly learning. He claims that ‘95 per cent of learning occurs outside the classroom and cannot be found in textbooks or in lectures given by the most highly esteemed professors.’ If it takes place outside of the classroom, it is necessarily the responsibility of the individual. This is a task the neoliberal

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351 Freemantle, Wanted, 204.
352 Ibid.
353 Ventura, Neoliberal Culture, 32.
354 Giddens, The Third Way, 125.
355 Freemantle, Wanted, 70.
subject can take up every day. Freemantle advises that you make your ‘own study plan to improve your current on-job performance and to further your career’ and that you ‘[e]ducate yourself with daily study modules.’\textsuperscript{356} People who are able to meet the real challenges of learning realise that they need to ‘pursue extra-curricular activities at every stage of their life.’\textsuperscript{357} These people do not wait for their organisation to offer them training. If they work in IT, they will have studied data protection before their employer thinks such training is required.\textsuperscript{358} Hence, they anticipate the needs of business in the same way a firm anticipates client demands. And that is exactly how the relationship between employee and employer is being framed. The self as enterprise is like a firm that makes sure it invests in its capital (skills, knowledge, personality) so that it can provide services (work) to its client (here, a current or potential employer).

We can take another example from the European Union, which dubbed 1996 the “European Year of Lifelong Leaning.”\textsuperscript{359} Since this time, the EU has made explicit its commitment to this form of training and has developed numerous policies to support it. Lifelong learning was a prominent feature of the employment chapter of the Amsterdam Treaty (ratified in 1999).\textsuperscript{360} Therein, member states are ‘called on... to coordinate their employment policy with respect to four common pillars: employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability, and equal opportunities.’\textsuperscript{361} We can see that there is quite a lot of crossover between lifelong learning and the soft/entrepreneurial skills discussed above. These capacities were to be instilled in workers for the sake of developing more flexible employment relations. Katharyne Mitchell observes that European Commission policy at this time made frequent reference to personal updating and lifelong learning in the context of ‘a rapidly changing world.’\textsuperscript{362} The following is from a speech by then Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Anna Diamantopoulou:

\textsuperscript{356} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{357} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{358} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{360} Mitchell, “Neoliberal Governmentality in the European Union,” 396.
\textsuperscript{361} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{362} Ibid., 400.
Skill and competence enhancement in the new economy in Europe requires that the policy emphasis is shifted towards increasing investment in human capital and in raising participation in education and training throughout working life. To keep pace with developments in technology, globalisation, population ageing and new business practices, particular attention should be given to workplace training[,] an important dimension of our strategy for Lifelong Learning.\footnote{Anna Diamantopoulou cited in Mitchell, "Neoliberal Governmentality in the European Union, 400.}

Lifelong learning is a form of investment in human capital. Only by constant training and updating of their capital will people be able to keep pace with changes in technology, social demographics and global markets. Again, workers are to take their cues from external forces, seemingly beyond anyone's control. The neoliberal message is that workers cannot stall or alter the direction of these trends, but with enough entrepreneurialism, they might be able to adapt to them. The growth of insecure work is one of the trends to which workers are supposed to adapt, as seen in the development of the "gig economy." As I argue below, the gig economy exemplifies neoliberalism both in the employment and power relations that characterise it and in the self-entrepreneurialisation that it fosters.

**The “Gig Economy”**

I suggested above that neoliberal management seeks to find new ways to extract value from employees, putting to work intimate aspects of their subjectivity. I also noted the attempt to educate and so construct subjects that both fit the changing nature of work and who are prepared for an unprotected existence in a precarious labour market. Apart from practices of actual workplace management and changing models of education, certain employment arrangements and business models also encourage people to act as self-entreprises or as responsible owners of their own microbusiness. One much discussed example is the so-called “gig economy.”

The gig economy reflects the general neoliberal trends I have been documenting and will expand upon in the final two chapters. For instance, the employment practices found in the gig economy exist in many other industries.\footnote{As Jim Stanford explains, 'this general practice [of outsourcing, contracting and subcontracting labour] remains important in many non-digital industries, including resource}
not unique to “gig” work but are part of the widespread unwinding of the post-World War II “standard employment relation” (SER). Stanford holds that the undermining of the SER and its replacement with precarious work is visible in many parts of the economy – not just among digital platform businesses. Indeed, evidence suggests that as little as half of existing paid work in developed Anglo-Saxon economies (such as the US, Australia, and Canada) still occurs within the confines of the SER model...; precarious or contingent work in a multiplicity of forms (including part-time, temporary, casual, labour hire, independent contracting and marginal forms of self-employment) accounts for the rest.365 Employment practices in the gig economy reflect a political-economic situation in which ‘employers are less constrained in their ability to organise work to minimise their risks and responsibilities and optimise their profits.’366 The employment relations of the gig economy are another example of the neoliberal promotion of independent contractors, freelancers, casual and seasonal employment; in other words, of precarious and insecure employment conditions that benefit the capital class. Thus, the rise of the gig economy needs to be understood as part of a more general change in power and employment relations during the neoliberal period.

At this point in time, the gig economy constitutes a small percentage of overall employment and the future viability of its business model is questionable.367 What is interesting about the gig economy for the sake of this thesis is the neoliberal framework used to justify and celebrate its existence, the way it forces people to act like a small firm and the worker vulnerability that underlies its organisation. For these reasons, I contend that the gig economy serves as a useful example of the neoliberalisation of employment relations and of everyday life. In addition, the business practices and marketing discourse of

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366 Ibid., 392.
the gig economy frame individual workers as self-investing entrepreneurs. These features of the gig economy make it a quintessentially neoliberal phenomenon.

The gig economy includes such for-profit companies as Uber, Airbnb, TaskRabbit, Freelancer, Deliveroo, Foodora and Instacart. According to their self-descriptions, by providing a digital platform on which services can be advertised or sought out and through which payments can be transacted, these companies act as “intermediaries” who connect users and providers of a variety of services (transport, data-entry, market research, removals, home maintenance, gardening, food delivery, cleaning services). The provider (the worker) and the customer of the service ‘interact under a separate service contract (explicit or implicit) which is held to absolve the platform provider of direct responsibility or involvement in the work that takes place...’ The digital platform companies resist classifying the “independent contractors” as employees (although this is being legally challenged in a number of jurisdictions). The company who owns and operates the digital platform takes a cut from the fee paid by the customer of the service.

As the workers are not classified as employees, the contracts that cover work in the gig economy are individual rather than collective. Accordingly, the platform companies make it difficult for the “independent contractors” to bargain collectively for better conditions. Not being classed as employees also means that workers ‘are not entitled to minimum labour standards’ (such as ‘sick leave, minimum wages, annual leave and access to workers’ compensation’). Because the workers are not typically covered by minimum labour standards and are not collectivised, they are especially vulnerable to competitive pressures. For example, when an individual or business advertises a job they would like done on the Airtasker website, the workers can offer to do the job for a smaller fee in order to secure the work:

A worker interested in an advertised job may offer to do the job for the advertised price, or they can bid down the compensation initially offered in

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369 Minter, “Negotiating labour standards in the gig economy,” 438.
370 Ibid., 438-439, 441.
an attempt to be awarded the work. Bids are ‘blind’, meaning that only the job-poster can see what various workers are bidding. This clearly encourages an ultra-competitive bidding environment, in which workers attempt to undercut the advertised rate to gain a competitive advantage.\textsuperscript{371}

Individuals who desperately need the work are more likely to find themselves trapped in this competitive downward spiral. As I will outline in further detail in the following two chapters, neoliberal restructuring often has the effect of increasing competition among workers. The competition that the isolated gig workers are forced into further weakens their ability to demand better conditions and to maintain their standard of living. Furthermore, work in the gig economy ‘is performed on an on-demand or as-needed basis. Producers only work when their services are immediately required, and there is no guarantee of ongoing engagement.’\textsuperscript{372} The uncertainty of future work only increases the competitive pressures.

By contrast, the benefits of the gig economy for the companies involved are numerous. Generally, the business model allows the digital platform provider to outsource many of the costs and risks associated with the provision of the service. While the workers are paid poor wages and work under insecure conditions, the platform providers ‘simply siphon off a rent from every transaction they facilitate.’\textsuperscript{373} The companies have a ready supply of cheap labour, often paid less than award and minimum wages. In addition, ‘digital platforms [have] full control over each worker’s access to the platform and in many cases [determine] rates and payments unilaterally.’\textsuperscript{374} Gig workers are paid by the task and not for the (often irregular) hours they work. This shifts the risks and costs associated with the time it takes to perform a job to the worker, who will bear the cost if the job stretches out. The companies also save money by not providing the workers with benefits of any kind. There is less office space and little to no training involved. And the workers provide most of the capital equipment. Customer provided ratings evaluate the worker’s

\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., 443-444.
\textsuperscript{372} Stanford, “The resurgence of gig work,” 384.
\textsuperscript{373} Srnicek, “The challenges of platform capitalism,” 256.
\textsuperscript{374} Minter, “Negotiating labour standards in the gig economy,” 439.
performance, allowing the platform provider to outsource performance management to those paying for the service.375

This is not to suggest that no one has ever benefited from finding gig work. The problem is that the material conditions indicative of the neoliberal period, such as high levels of personal debt, insecure employment and unemployment, pressure people to turn to alternative forms of work such as that found in the gig economy. It is true that at least some workers in the gig economy are able to choose when and how much to work, which jobs to take and which to pass over. They find employment that might otherwise have been hard to come by. Finally, some people really do manage to work at times they prefer and use the flexible arrangement to fit work in with other commitments in their life.

All the same, this is not the case for a great many people in the gig economy. And even those who enjoy some of its benefits still face unfavourable conditions. To summarise some of the features of gig work mentioned above, rather than enjoying flexible work arrangements, many workers find they are “on demand,” under pressure to work when required or be penalised. They often have to work irregular hours, as they must respond to fluctuations in demand for their services. They are paid poor wages, often under minimum legal standards. They find themselves potentially stuck in low-skilled work with no opportunity for progression, nor with any guarantee of the future availability of work. There are no benefits and no security if they become ill or if there is a “lull in the market.” And they are lumped with providing and maintaining the capital equipment.

In addition to exacerbating these worrying trends in neoliberal employment relations, I argue that the practices and principles embodied in the gig economy reflect the neoliberalisation of subjectivity and the everyday. For example, the uncertainty of ongoing work in the gig economy nicely fits within the neoliberal discourse about changing and flexible careers. The platform provides the “opportunity” for people to maximise their resources (their time, labouring capability, and belongings), and to be the boss of their own little business and so exercise autonomy over their working lives. This attitude

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toward our time, labouring capability and belongings is similarly enmeshed in neoliberalism’s evaluative orientation. As I have repeatedly mentioned, the neoliberal rationale frames all of our personhood as human capital for some form of value-enhancement. This includes our “idle” time and our belongings, whether they are a pushbike, a car or a set of tools. The possible income streams these “idle resources” could generate is going unrealised unless they are incorporated into an entrepreneurial project. As Gary Hall describes this way of thinking, the digital platform companies are ‘corporatizing and selling cheap and easy-to-access assets that are underutilized. In the case of Uber and Airbnb... these assets take the forms of seats in vehicles and rooms in properties...’

Hence, under the neoliberal eye, the gig economy optimises the use of “assets” that are otherwise not being properly employed.

For the gig workers themselves, many of these people probably come to see their spare rooms and empty car seats as a possible income stream because of the pressures they face in the neoliberal economy. By entrepreneurialising one’s personhood and interpreting all time as possible labour time (or, better, “enterprising” time), all belongings and dwellings as part of one’s capital portfolio, the gig economy can be seen as part of the marketisation and commodification that is central to the neoliberalisation of the everyday. As Airbnb cofounder Brian Chesky puts it, his company has given people the opportunity to more readily ‘act like a brand’ representing their own mini-enterprise: ‘It means that people all over a city, in 60 seconds, can become microentrepreneurs.’ This is what the gig economy has gifted to its “independent contractors.” Within the neoliberal way of thinking, this is meant to free individuals from the tyranny of the standard employment relationship and provide them with the opportunity to reap the returns of the capital that sits within and around them. The subject is transformed into an enterprise chasing investment opportunities whose business is organised in a web of contracts. As Hall describes the gig economy: ‘In the interests of capital, the for-profit sharing economy can... be seen to be involved in the process whereby

377 Quoted in Hall, *The Uberfication of the University*, 12.
each of us is being transformed into a dispersed, atomized, precarious, freelance microentrepreneur.'

Hence, the gig economy is part of a more general process of neoliberal embedding, framing our subjectivity, belongings and daily life as capital waiting to be incorporated into some enterprising project.

**Conclusion**

I have argued that practices associated with the construction of neoliberal subjects are evident in modern working life in both the reorganisation of the workplace and the promotion of the capacities and learning required of modern working subjects. To bring to the fore the neoliberal dimensions of modern work and its implications for an analysis of subjectivity, I started by outlining the way that the relationship between employees and the organisation was reframed by neoliberal management discourse and the attempt to institute a workplace culture that reflected this new relationship. I suggested that neoliberal management encourages workers to seek self-realisation through a commitment to the goals, values and brand of the organisation. I argued that the focus on workplace culture and employee motivation is part of the broader endeavour to extract more value from organisational “human assets.” As an example of the attempt to restructure the workplace in accord with neoliberal management theory, I used a number of examples and insights from Casey’s research at the “Hephaestus Corporation.” As I emphasised throughout the chapter, there are many inconsistencies between the purported benefits of such a workplace and the real organisation and experience of the workplace in the modern world. Despite the language of empowerment, the neoliberal restructuring of the workplace often leads to a loss of control over work-related knowledge and the work process. Rather than finding a deeper connection to work, neoliberalism often brings about a sense of isolation and alienation from work. Instead of being a place of equality and autonomy, the neoliberal workplace is characterised by myriad forms of discipline and control.

Following my analysis of Casey’s work, I discussed the neoliberal interest in workers’ general personalities and abilities. I claimed that this focus on the

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378 Ibid., 14.
character and abilities of workers is a clear example of the attempt to produce subjects suitable to neoliberal capitalism. I suggested that this more general interest in the capabilities (human capital) of workers is also partly due to the spread of new kinds of work and new ways of extracting value from workers, such as those practices related to the growing services industry and the so-called knowledge economy. Looking at paradigmatic examples such as call centre work, I examined the specifics of the attempt to put to work the whole person by tapping into their ability to communicate, emotionally engage with others, adapt to different circumstances, and so on. The various capacities that the neoliberal self is expected to develop are referred to as “soft” skills. I argued that soft skills are promoted not simply because they provide employers with the kind of workers they need, but also because they equip people with the capacity to adapt to different kinds of work and industries. Hence, they are essential features of the flexible neoliberal subject that is necessary for the optimal functioning of the neoliberal economy.

In order to consider an example of flexible work and flexible careers outside of the bounded workplace and the accompanying managerial practices, I turned my attention to the “gig economy.” As I suggested, by shifting risks and costs to unprotected workers and by presenting this shift as an opportunity for people to exploit untapped capital, the gig economy exemplifies neoliberalism both in spirit and in the power dynamics that underlie it. I argued that the gig economy’s employment arrangements and business model encourages people to act as self-enterprises with the opportunity to invest their capital in various ways. Characterised by poor working conditions with little to no benefits, and located in a context of general precariousness, the gig economy both exemplifies and exploits the increasing precariousness of neoliberal existence. Accordingly, I argued that the gig economy furthers the neoliberalisation of subjectivity and the everyday.

So as to present a more rounded picture of contemporary working life, in the following chapter I outline the forms of control that operate within the
workplace, and the way that both the reorganisation of the work process and the proliferation of enterprising tropes are used to extend working time. Both of these elements of work can be considered as part of the neoliberalisation of our working lives, and consequently as contributors to the production of neoliberal subjects.
Forms of Control in Modern Working Life

While this chapter is a continuation of my examination of working life in neoliberal capitalism, I consider work from a somewhat different perspective. Contrary to the image of the self-directed neoliberal subject, I argue that much of working life in neoliberal capitalism is characterised by techniques of control, both in the workplace and more generally in everyday life. It should be noted that while much of working life does not resemble the rosy picture of entrepreneurial life we find in some of the above-discussed management literature, work is still a place in which particular kinds of neoliberal subjectivity are produced. By examining the control techniques used to monitor and organise people’s activities in the workplace, I will make clear some of the inconsistencies between neoliberal discourse and the reality of contemporary working life.

To this end, I first outline some of the control techniques that are used specifically within modern workplaces. Following a number of commentators, I suggest that these techniques constitute a kind of neo-Taylorist management approach. In contrast to the image of the autonomous and empowered employee, I suggest that workers are further disempowered as a consequence of the codification, standardisation and automation of the work process. As noted in the previous chapter, these changes have given employers more control of workplace knowledge and processes. I also explore the widespread promotion of intra-firm competition and comparison. Neoliberal management promotes competition among workers, and makes hitting “targets” and improving “performance” an ongoing task for workers. Through a system of rewards and sanctions, and often making workers’ ongoing employment dependent upon their ability to meet some desired performance, management techniques of control help to shape neoliberal subjects by forcing them to act as enterprising, competitive workers. Following this analysis of control within the workplace, I elaborate the ways in which the neoliberal self is monitored and measured outside of formal work settings. I argue that even outside of work,
certain techniques and technologies encourage us to treat aspects of our person (our knowledge, abilities, personality) as assets to be trained and perfected.

Extending my consideration of techniques of control deployed outside of the workplace, I then consider a different set of techniques that are aimed at controlling and extending working time, both in and outside of the workplace. It is my contention that neoliberalism colonises time and space beyond the boundaries of formal employment with work-related projects and concerns. Specifically, I reflect upon changes in our experience of working time and space under the neoliberal work regime in order to again highlight that neoliberalism involves the instrumentalisation and economisation of all aspects of our lives. First, to outline one way in which employers seek to extract more value from workers, I discuss the intensification of work in the modern workplace. Second, in support of my claim that neoliberalism reconfigures our everyday lives, I also suggest that neoliberalism transforms time beyond the confines of formal employment into opportunities for some form of work-related or enterprising activity. As I will argue, the promotion of unending competition to ensure strategic “advantage,” developments in technology, new kinds of employment, the expansion of “24/7” global markets, and the notion that people must manage their human capital, all contribute to the blurring of the distinction between working time and space and nonworking time and space.

**Monitoring and Measuring the Neoliberal Subject**

Having first addressed the kind of capacities, skills and even personality-type pertinent to neoliberal work and the neoliberal workplace in the previous chapter, I will now consider some of the management techniques used to control much of contemporary working life. However, these are not disconnected components of neoliberal working life. In part, the attempt to produce a particular kind of neoliberal worker is also a method of exercising control in the workplace, even if it entails “outsourcing” control through the promotion of self-management. Contrary to the notion that people currently enjoy more autonomy in their working lives, I maintain that techniques of control are essential to the governance of neoliberal subjects as they navigate their working-enterprising lives.
I suggested in the previous chapter that call centre work provides us with a clear example of the kind of emotional (or “affective”) labour expected of neoliberal subjects. We also find in call centre work forms of control and discipline that are indicative of the practices found in many contemporary workplaces. This shows that forms of control and the demand that we instrumentalise parts of our personhood are connected to the more general neoliberal project. In call centres, computerisation and new communication technology allow for strict tracking and organisation of employee time. Such a regimented workplace undermines the image of a workplace characterised by flattened hierarchies, empowerment and flexibility:

Auto-diallers connect both inbound and outbound calls straight to employees’ headsets, with no breaks permitted between calls. Monitoring software collects data on each worker’s productivity, automatically reporting tardy or under-performing workers to their managers, so they can be singled out for coaching, disciplinary action or embarrassment. One study describes the modern call centre as an ‘electronic panopticon’ (Fernie and Metcalf, 2000), whereas another refers to the ‘assembly line in the head’ of the call centre worker, who always knows the completion of one task will immediately be followed by the uptake of another (Taylor and Bain, 1999).379

Frayne argues that the management of call centre workers and the prevalence of similar techniques in other workplaces indicates the continuation of a version of Taylorism in workplace management.380 As the example of call centres illustrates, this modern Taylorism is no longer confined to the industrial sector. Workers in a number of industries are now subject to strict time control, management oversees or has some technological device monitor much of what they do, and workers carry out systematised ‘small, repetitive tasks.’381

Brown, Lauder and Ashton similarly see a modern version of Taylorist management in call centre work. Far from the autonomy to structure one’s activity in the workplace, they detail how the tasks of the call centre worker follow a number of common scripts. Workers use these scripts to respond to customer inquiries, comments and complaints. The use of strict timelines also makes work in the call centre resemble the office version of an industrial production line. Brown, Lauder and Ashton note that the pace of work in call

379 Frayne, The Refusal of Work, 50-1.
380 Ibid., 61.
381 Ibid.
centres is ‘determined by an autodialer that selects and dials numbers giving managers complete control over the pace of work. Some autodialers do not have a pause button, making it difficult to take a break, even to visit the restroom.’

The use of the autodialer sets the pace of work and keeps the workers on task, minimising (or completely removing) the opportunity for social engagement and other kinds of distractions from work tasks. Should this not be enough to keep workers engaged, close surveillance helps to complete the disciplinary apparatus of the call centre:

Television monitors... adorn the walls of contact centers that give supervisors minute-by-minute information about the number of calls answered or in a queue waiting to be answered. The performance of individual operators is monitored on displays with smiley faces for those meeting appropriate performance targets and sad faces for those who are not.

The use of the monitors and the autodialers is not merely a cold and indifferent way of regulating work. Although it may seem like a small detail, I suggest the inclusion of the happy and sad faces is significant in this respect. The sad face indicates disappointment, an emotion that suggests a set of relations more akin to families, friends and teams. Hence, it is not that the worker has failed to meet their obligations in a contractual sense. Instead, as I outlined above, they have let down the “team.” The sad face does not simply stand in for that of the boss/manager. It is the sad face of the company, of the customers whose calls are not being answered, of one’s team members, and even one’s own sad face. There is an emotional element to the sad and happy faces that sets up an almost infantile type reward system that would not be out of place in a classroom for children. It shows that these management techniques attempt to invoke a sense of obligation and commitment on a more personal level at the same time as they deploy a pervasive and sometimes faceless system of surveillance and control. Hence, there is the attempt to infuse a personal and emotional aspect to the disciplinary relationship between worker and organisation, situated within a workplace that in other ways removes anything personal or intimate in its array of scripted performances, strict guidelines and expectations, and lack of time for

382 Brown et al., The Global Auction, 74.
383 Ibid.
social engagement and spontaneous interactions with customers and fellow workers.

The management and control of call centre work are well illustrated in Jamie Woodcock’s Working the Phones: Control and Resistance in Call Centres. As part of his research, Woodcock found employment at a sales-based call centre in the UK. During his period of employment at the call centre, he had firsthand experience of some of the management techniques I have just described. For instance, whiteboards and television screens in the call centre displayed names, sales targets, current activities (including the ‘inbound calls outstanding and successfully answered’), and the number of sales made.384 One screen ‘displayed the top individual seller followed by each worker ranked by the number of sales’.

As I will explain below, these kinds of internal comparisons are used to both discipline and incentivise workers.

According to Woodcock, while the call centre workers follow scripts, this does not mean that they do no more than read lines from a sheet of paper. Workers must simultaneously follow the script and find moments to foster the kind of personal connection discussed above. Even when following key talking points on the script, workers are required to consider their ‘pace, tone, conversation style, listening skills.’386 Management insisted that ‘your own personality should come across during the call.’387 Again, I suggest this demonstrates that the neoliberal demand that we engage and instrumentalise our whole personhood to generate more “value” is not inconsistent with the strict control of workplace activities. Woodcock also notes that in the call centre setting it is difficult to adopt certain emotional states conducive to customer engagement. Sounding happy and upbeat can be rather challenging in a stressful environment in which workers are subject to close monitoring.388 Nonetheless, the worker must display – and even feel – the right emotions, which are also subject to management’s gaze.

384 Woodcock, Working the Phones, 39.
385 Ibid., 40.
386 Ibid.
387 Ibid.
388 Ibid., 52.
As noted by the commentators referred to above, monitoring and surveillance are particularly pronounced in the modern call centre. Woodcock’s experience as a call centre worker makes this evident. All the calls in Woodcock’s workplace were recorded and stored. Calls that resulted in sales and a random selection of unsuccessful calls were ‘listened to and graded by the quality-control team.’ Supervisors also regularly listened to calls in order to provide workers with advice about how to make more sales. Often this would take the form of ‘weekly ‘1-2-1’ (one-to-one) meetings’ in which ‘supervisors would grade performance and provide instructions on how workers could improve.’

In addition to tracking sales, listening to recorded calls and holding regular meetings, the computer system was another tool used to manage workers. In fact, Woodcock describes the labour process in the call centre ‘as a kind of computerised development of Taylorist management principles.’ The computer system functioned as a strict control mechanism, regulating many of the activities that made up the daily tasks of the call centre workers:

Workers have to sign onto the computer system in order to make phone calls. The computer system logs the exact time that the worker starts their shift. There is an unpaid hour break between the two half-shifts, and two fifteen-minute breaks half-way through each half-shift. The computer system logs the start and end time of the break; if the break exceeds the limit, the system notifies a manager. During phone calls, the computer surveillance system will display three states: ‘Previewing/Dialling’ for the time when the automatic dialling system is ringing through the list of numbers; ‘Connected’, when the worker is talking to someone on the phone; and ‘Wrapping’, which provides an opportunity to record the outcome of the phone call and take any relevant notes. This is described as ‘non-productive’ time, only to be used when needed, never exceeding five seconds.

As I will explore below, the attempt to extract more out of workers often takes the form of closely controlling the time of work activities. The monitoring and timing of working activities in the call centre is one version of this ongoing endeavour. It is assisted by the combination of the computer and the telephone,

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389 Ibid., 42. The three grades a call could receive were ‘green (passing quality standards), green D/N (passed but development needed) or red (failing to meet standards and therefore no commission)’ (Ibid., 43). 
390 Ibid. 
391 Ibid., 50. 
392 Ibid.
which Woodcock claims helped management in three distinct ways. First, it allowed for an increase in the pace of the work process. The use of the automatic call distributor takes ‘the process of connecting calls away from the control of the operator’ and allows for ‘the queuing of incoming calls and the automatic dialling of outgoing calls.’ In this way, the pace of making calls was set not by the worker but by an automated system, ‘maximising the amount of calls made in a shift.’ Second, the use of computers made possible the collection of data and hence the closer monitoring of individual performance. As Woodcock observes, the data – as ‘quantitative variables’ – are assessed without any context. These quantitative variables are used as ‘the evidence base for rewards and discipline.’ Third, and as noted above, developments in computer systems and related technology allow for the recording and relatively cheap storage of all phone calls. In Woodcock’s workplace, all sales calls were archived ‘as the call itself acts as a verbal contract for the sale between customer and company.’ Any phone call could be played back whenever deemed necessary by management.

The system of workplace control that Woodcock experienced is part of a more general set of practices that involve subjecting workers to a strict workplace regime. Standardisation and automation might ultimately do away with the need for call centre staff entirely, or at least significantly reduce their numbers. Our interactions with many companies now include completing forms online, or carrying out a transaction or making an inquiry following only automated prompts. It is only after the automated prompts fail to handle our inquiry that we are (usually after a lengthy waiting period) transferred to an actual employee. Brown, Lauder and Ashton use the term “digital Taylorism” to capture the use of new technology to standardise, monitor and automate work. Organisational tasks such as ‘receiving orders, marketing services, selling products, delivering services, distributing products, invoicing for services, and

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393 Ibid., 66.
394 Ibid.
395 Ibid.
396 Ibid.
397 Ibid.
398 Brown et al., The Global Auction, 73.
399 Ibid.
accounting for payments are increasingly subject to this standardisation and automation. Digital Taylorism enables innovation to be translated into routines that might require some degree of education but not the kind of creativity and independence of judgment often associated with the knowledge economy.

Digital Taylorism also allows companies to reduce costs and exercise greater control over the work process. Similar to the restructuring at Hephaestus, work is broken up into simple and repetitive processes that can be easily taught, therefore separating the workers from specialised skills and knowledge. This is why consultancy firms like McKinsey and Company encourage a “pull” as well as a “push” style of management: because the “pull” approach encourages the full activation of the worker’s skills and knowledge, it gives the company access to and eventually control of most of the knowledge pertinent to the work process. Put differently, companies are able to ‘capture the idiosyncratic knowledge of workers so that it can be codified and routinized, thereby making it generally available to the company rather than being the property of an individual worker.’ Brown, Lauder and Ashton note that digital Taylorism is increasingly prevalent in the so-called knowledge economy and related industries, such as information technology, financial services, legal services, and pharmaceuticals:

This involves translating the knowledge work of managers, professionals, and technicians into working knowledge by capturing, codifying, and digitalizing their work in software packages, templates, and prescripts that can be transferred and manipulated by others regardless of location. It is being applied to offices as well as factories and to services as well as manufacturing. Unlike mechanical Taylorism, which required the concentration of labor in factories, digital Taylorism enables work

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400 Ibid., 75.  
401 Ibid.  
402 Ibid. This kind of capture and transfer of worker knowledge and skills was a key technique of the Japanese “Toyotist” workplace restructuring: ‘Besides worker-knowledge, which Fordism expropriated and transferred to the sphere of scientific management and development, the new phase of capital, of which Toyotism is the best example, transfers know-how back to labour, but with a view to appropriating its intellectual dimension, its cognitive capacities and attempting to involve the workers’ subjectivity more intensely. Teamwork, quality-control circles, the suggestions from the shop-floor, are collected and appropriated by capital in this phase of productive restructuring. Workers’ ideas are absorbed by the company after they have been analysed and proved to be viable and to the benefit (profit) of capital. The process goes further, however, since a part of the intellectual knowledge is transferred to the computerised machinery, which becomes more intelligent, reproducing part of the activities transferred to it by the intellectual know-how of labour’ (Antunes, The Meanings of Work, 108).
activities to be dispersed and recombined from anywhere around the world in less than the time it takes to read this sentence.\textsuperscript{403} Codified and routinised work lends itself to automation. This has been a key tactic of companies like IBM in the pursuit of reduced costs and improved productivity.\textsuperscript{404} The repeatable processes are codified in software that can be used in different work situations and with different clients anywhere in the world. In order to codify work in this way, IBM needed to isolate 'base-level components that do not rely on the tacit knowledge of employees that may lead them to undertake the same assignments in different ways.'\textsuperscript{405} Once this is accomplished, one and the same codified process can be used for all instances of the particular work task. We can see how this process runs in a different direction to the emotional labour and the instrumentalisation of personality described above. While requiring access to worker knowledge, processes of codification, standardisation and automation only need this access for a brief period of time and will ultimately make the worker superfluous (or at least reduce their role to one of following software models and assisting automated processes).

The routinisation and codification of the work process entails workers following strict guidelines when performing basic tasks. This also means that direct oversight is not always required. It is the worker’s responsibility to follow guidelines and codified processes, assisted by the technology that records and times the specifics of their work. Similar to the commentators referred to above, Bunting argues that technology has enabled employers to measure and track employee performance, extending ‘Frederick Taylor’s dream into white-collar work, bringing unprecedented control and time efficiency.’\textsuperscript{406} The example Bunting gives below also shows how workers are recruited to manage themselves, removing the need for constant and direct managerial oversight. Bunting’s example concerns Liz, who works in the mortgage

\textsuperscript{403} Brown et al., \textit{The Global Auction}, 72.
\textsuperscript{404} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{405} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{406} Bunting, \textit{Willing Slaves}, 38.
department of a bank in Yorkshire. As Bunting puts it, Liz describes ‘how the computer has replaced the clerical supervisor.’ In Liz’s words,

[w]e had a laminated sheet of barcodes representing a series of tasks on our desk, and every time we did anything we had to swipe the appropriate barcode with a laser reader pen. We had seventeen minutes to get out a mortgage offer. If the phone went, we had to answer it within two rings and all the calls were recorded and monitored to check whether we were giving out accurate information and the manner with which we dealt with the call. Every time we made a call we had to swipe the pen, and every time we answered the phone we had to swipe. You had to swipe if you were going to the toilet or to get a coffee. If you wanted to talk to a colleague you had to swipe, so that all interactions with colleagues were being monitored. When we had finished for the day, we had to log in and out. The whole thing was then downloaded to the supervisor, who could look at the log to check productivity.

As Bunting explains, Liz’s log informs both management and Liz if there is any departure from her typical routine, ‘such as too many toilet breaks or too many ‘consultations with colleagues’.’ Thus, the computerised and digitalised monitoring of employee activities is a rather intense form of supervision. It certainly does not resemble anything like the relaxed and flexible workplace that management literature describes. Notice also that just because technology is used to monitor and record everything Liz does, it does not mean that any of the recorded data is actually seen by management. The supervisor ‘could look at the log to check productivity.’ But whether they in fact do so does not seem to matter for the disciplinary effectiveness of the technology. The fact that all activities are recorded means that workers know that everything they do could at any time be scrutinised by management, thus alleviating the need for the direct presence and activity of management. Together, the workers and the technology do much of the managing.

As the above examples show, the effectiveness of monitoring workers usually requires workers’ awareness of this monitoring. In addition to the call

407 Ibid.
408 Ibid., 38-9.
410 Ibid.
centre and the example of Liz at the Yorkshire bank, another example is the practice of publishing league tables. This type of performance tracking does not rely on directly monitoring work activities, but of monitoring and sharing some measure of those activities. Brown, Lauder and Ashton discuss the use of league tables at the branch of an international bank in India. These league tables, true to the neoliberal attempt to activate an extended array of worker capacities and attributes, measure both ‘hard performance’ and ‘soft performance.’\textsuperscript{411} Hard performance includes sales targets and visits to customers. Soft performance entails those things more difficult to measure, such as ‘relationship management’ and ‘customer satisfaction.’\textsuperscript{412} Hence, the kind of emotional labour discussed above is also subject to management techniques of monitoring, measuring and comparison.

I suggest that the practice of making comparisons is pivotal to this particular management technique. The use of league tables turns the performance of workers into something measurable and publicly visible. Brown, Lauder and Ashton report that in the case of the bank in India, ‘anyone within the organization across the country is able to compare the performance of individuals, teams, and branches.’\textsuperscript{413} Workers themselves can see how others are performing, the level of average performance, and what targets they need to meet to improve their ranking. Similar to the team structure implemented at Hephaestus, the league tables create the competition that otherwise would not exist. Two grocery stores in different suburbs owned by the same family could operate indefinitely if they make enough money to cover their costs and there is demand for their business, even if one of them consistently “outperforms” the other. If you start to record and compare the “performances” of the two stores, all of a sudden you have a competition. You could do this even if nothing is at stake, in the sense that they are not competing for anything because they cater to different populations in different suburbs. As in the example of the publication of league tables, management creates the competition by the use of the comparison, so that not meeting sales targets or selling much less than

\textsuperscript{411} Brown et al., \textit{The Global Auction}, 79.
\textsuperscript{412} Ibid., 79-80.
\textsuperscript{413} Ibid.
another branch of the business somehow makes one's existence within the business less viable. One is expected to do more than simply perform tasks at a pre-established satisfactory level because what constitutes a satisfactory level of performance is now comparative. The monitoring and measuring, and hence incentivising, can now be done by workers themselves with the assistance of league tables, goal setting, regular auditing, and so on. As Brown, Lauder and Ashton were told by a senior manager from the bank in India, '[i]f a particular person in the banking hall needs to know where he or she stands in the country in her particular function, she can just go and open the league tables, and she will get to see where her position is. In this way, evaluation techniques in the workplace function as both a form of discipline and incentivisation for workers.

Furthermore, these neoliberal evaluative techniques involve various forms of self-monitoring. Employers have encouraged workers to utilise self-tracking devices that monitor employee fitness, sleeping patterns and work habits. By combining these practices with the idea that workers are allowed a certain amount of autonomy, the employees are recruited to manage themselves. Of course, in some instances, self-tracking is imposed on workers rather than merely encouraged. Deborah Lupton observes that there are companies in 'the banking, technology, pharmaceutical and health care industries [that] require their employees to wear badges equipped with radio frequency identification (RFID) chips and other sensors that can record sound, geo-location and physical movement to monitor such aspects of the wearers as tone of voice, posture and who they speak to and for how long.' Workers may accept wearing such devices because colleagues do, or because they fear dismissal for noncompliance, or perhaps younger employees less familiar with a world without such invasive technologies do not find their use in the workplace as objectionable as older employees might. The use of all these kinds of

\[414\] Ibid.
\[417\] Lupton notes that some physical education teachers require students to wear self-tracking devices to collect data (for example, on their heart-rate) and compare this data to other students (Ibid.). The use of this technology by authority figures like teachers lends legitimacy to such practices. Besides, many children of recent years grow up with these devices in their pockets, bedrooms, classrooms, built into the back of car seats, and so on.
technologies, monitoring techniques and self-tracking devices shows that the flexible and self-directed workplace still relies upon a great deal of monitoring, directing and incentivising.

Because some of these monitoring techniques do not entail direct management supervision, they might not immediately appear to be in conflict with the autonomy and flexibility we are all now supposed to enjoy in the workplace. In fact, monitoring need not even involve explicit evaluative techniques and measurements. The mere fact that performance is evaluated in terms of “projects” and not set working hours means that there is constant pressure to be displaying one’s diligence and ensuring one’s value to the organisation. In the white-collar world, this can have the effect of transforming something like email response into a benchmark of professionalism. It is a way of keeping workers on task without actually instructing them or explicitly measuring their performance. This was a common theme in the Australian workplaces investigated by Gregg. Lisa, a thirty-two-year-old radio producer, told Gregg that she constantly checks emails both to keep up with the sheer volume of communication, and so as to make sure that others realise she is working. As part of the new workplace flexibility, Lisa often works from home. Her large workload, as well as team expectations and a concern that others will think she is using the flexible arrangement to relax, act as disciplinary forces that keep her constantly available and responsive to work demands. As Lisa says, she worries that if she does not very quickly respond to email, ‘then it may be perceived that I’m slacking off somehow.’

These procedures of evaluation and monitoring produce what Dardot and Laval call an ‘accountable subjectivation.’ They argue that the neoliberal subject is not the Benthamite calculating individual but instead the very subject of calculation and evaluation. I demonstrated the way the neoliberal self is subject to an array of evaluations in chapter two. Different forms of calculation and evaluation are considered further in the next chapter. Such an individual does not simply sell their labour but also has the value of that labour closely

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418 Gregg, Work’s Intimacy, 42.
419 Dardot and Laval, The New Way of the World, 279.
420 Ibid.
dissected and measured by a new array of techniques. Dardot and Laval claim that the new managerial goal is to evaluate as closely as possible each individual or group’s financial contribution and hence their contribution to profit and shareholder value. 421 Financial value now resides in people, groups, relationships, etc., and not just in products, physical capital and traditional financial products. The evaluation of an individual or group’s financial worth has the consequence of subordinating other goals of the specific kind of work: ‘The Post Office counter-clerk must increase sales of some ‘product’, exactly like the financial adviser of any bank. But the doctor too must sometimes prescribe profitable ‘acts’ and sometimes free up beds as quickly as possible.’422 As I claimed in chapter two, our relations with other people become opportunities for value-enhancement, what Dardot and Laval call the ‘instrumentalization of others.’423

If we are to appreciate the neoliberalisation of everyday life, it is important to acknowledge that practices of monitoring and evaluating the self are not confined to the workplace. For instance, Davies points out that in accord with the new fascination with “happiness” and the flourishing happiness science, we now have devices that supposedly measure our emotional state. Our surrounding environment is increasingly equipped with devices to monitor our mood, happy or otherwise.424 This is part of a general trend of self-monitoring and self-auditing facilitated by technological developments:

A range of consumer technologies are now on the market for measuring and analysing well-being, from wristwatches, to smartphones, to Vessyl, a ‘smart’ cup which monitors your liquid intake in terms of its health effects...

Once happiness monitoring tools flood our everyday lives, other ways of quantifying feelings in real time are emerging that can extend even further into our lives than markets.425

421 Ibid., 280.
422 Ibid.
423 Ibid.
424 Davies, The Happiness Industry, 10-1. Davies cites British Airways’ use of the “happiness blanket” as a telling example. Through neural monitoring and changing colour, the blanket ascertains and communicates the “happiness” or “contentment” of flight passengers. Apparently, this informs the flight staff that the customers are satisfied with the flight service (Ibid., 10).
425 Ibid., 10-1.
Perhaps this trend is most evident in the emergence of self-tracking practices, also referred to as ‘lifelogging, personal analytics and personal informatics.’

Self-trackers use digital devices and “smart” objects to collect data about their activities. The data is then interpreted with the hope that it will offer insights for the user’s life. True to the neoliberal spirit, many self-tracking devices allow for comparison with other people’s data sets. Comparison and competition with others is used as a way to motivate further practice of the monitored activity. Such competition and comparison is also a feature of programs like ‘fitness and weight-loss tracking’ and ‘digitized educational initiatives for children.’

The widespread use of these technologies among children is particularly suggestive for an analysis of neoliberal selfhood. Lupton offers the example of the Mathletics educational program in which children from around the world compete with one another ‘in the effort to make mathematics fun.’ Due to the widespread use of these kinds of technologies and games, many children will grow up thinking that the digital and quantitative representation of their personalities and capacities is an unremarkable practice. Moreover, they will find it normal to compare these personality traits and capacities with those of both strangers and friends. When considered from a neoliberal perspective, practices of self-tracking allow the individual to improve their human capital. Specifically, technological devices provide entrepreneurial selves with the means to evaluate, quantify, compare and track their assets. These technologies and programs usually come with a series of recommendations and practices for improving those assets. Moreover, self-tracking converges with the neoliberal injunction to be responsible for oneself and one’s human capital. The self-

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427 These “smart objects” include cars, mattresses, chairs, shoes, clothing, homes, cities and schools (Ibid., 5).
428 Ibid., 2.
429 Ibid., 9.
430 Ibid. In this program, '[c]hildren earn points, items of clothing for their avatars, win certificates for participation and competing challenges and can compare their progress with others in their class or across the entire user population, including the use of a world league table that lists and ranks the highest achievers’ (Ibid.).
knowledge facilitated by tracking devices, supposedly, ‘will allow self-trackers to exert greater control over their destinies.’

**Working Time and Space**

Practices of self-tracking outside of the workplace suggest that the optimisation of our “human capital” is an ongoing project without clear boundaries. To develop this analysis of the extension of self-enterprising and work-related activities to everyday life, I now consider the way that working time and space have changed in neoliberal capitalism. I claim that by colonising and economising more times and spaces with entrepreneurial activities, neoliberalism produces the always-active and enterprising subjects that are essential to its functioning.

I have already made reference to the speeding up of the work process that occurs in the modern call centre. Like working conditions generally, the length and intensity of the workday are not merely at the behest of capital and governments, but are in part the consequence of the demands and struggles (and weaknesses) of the labour movement. Many of the regulations of working time and limitations of the working week are the result of historical struggles waged by the labour movement. In order to further clarify what it means to work in neoliberal times, in this section I analyse the organisation of our working lives in different times and spaces. I claim that there are numerous ways in which working time has been either extended or intensified in the neoliberal era. Moreover, because neoliberalism entails a reconceptualisation of what it means to work, self-enterprising activities have further invaded the nonworking times and spaces of our lives.

The introduction of women to the workforce has been one key contributor to the overall increase in hours spent working. The “male breadwinner” family model is now much less widespread, and this has increased time pressure for many families. In particular, it has accentuated the shortage of time that burdens many women. Thus, the distribution of working time, and the time

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431 Ibid., 15.
spent doing remunerated and non-remunerated work, is clearly gendered: ‘time-use data suggest that time poverty is a particularly widespread experience among working mothers, who juggle work, family, and leisure.’

Having entered the workforce in large numbers, women’s working hours have obviously increased. However, there has not been a similar balancing of non-remunerated household and caring work. Even more of this care work becomes the responsibility of women when neoliberal governments discontinue or reduce social services. Hence, women have taken up much of the extra work being performed by society as a whole. Moreover, in most countries women are overrepresented in the category of part-time employment, which comes with its own set of disadvantages, such as poor unionisation, variation from week-to-week of working times, unsocial hours, ‘lower hourly wages, limited career prospects, and lower income-dependent benefits.’

Judy Wajcman identifies other changes that have increased time pressures and affected the organisation of daily life in recent years. For instance, under flexible work arrangements and with constant capitalist activity, people’s schedules tend to lack synchronisation. The irregularity of working life leads to a situation in which people’s timetables are far less predictable and less likely to coincide. Hence, the shared social activities that were either organised or spontaneously formed around the regular working week have also been impeded: ‘Flexible working hours, 24/7 working time, and contract work create coordination problems, as working time and locations are increasingly deregulated and scattered.’

Unpredictability and a loss of synchronisation have led to real time pressures associated with organising social engagements, caring duties, health appointments, education tasks, and other activities. Wajcman suggests there is a class dimension to who is favoured by these changes: ‘While higher socioeconomic groups may be able to utilize flexibilisation to gain greater control over their time, lower status groups suffer

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434 Much of this work has been monetised and is now performed by women from poorer countries (Silvia Federici, “The Reproduction of Labour Power in the Global Economy and the Unfinished Feminist Revolution,” in Workers and Labour in a Globalised Capitalism, ed. Maurizio Atzeni (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 100-1).

435 Hermann, Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time, 149.

436 Wajcman, Pressed for Time, 24.
from temporal fragmentation created by working irregular hours." All the same, 'socializing is made difficult for both groups because of the weakening of the shared sociotemporal order and a corresponding fragmenting of society.'

Generally speaking, as Christoph Hermann outlines, 'despite the partial move to the 35-hour week in France and Germany, work time reductions have slowed down markedly since the 1970s. In some countries (full-time) work hours started to increase in the 1980s and 1990s, but more often it was per capita hours that have grown during the last three decades – after decreasing during the postwar period.' Bunting, focusing on the UK, holds that long hours and overtime affect blue-collar workers in 'construction, manufacturing and transport'.

According to Bunting, 'between a quarter and a third of plumbers, electricians, lorry drivers and security guards are working over forty-eight hours a week.' People in unskilled occupations often need to work longer hours because they are so poorly paid and lack other forms of financial security. Bunting interviewed Joshua, a cleaner at a London hospital, who at the time of the interview was working about fifty hours a week for £4.79 an hour. His employer, the Danish company ISS, required him to sign a waiver on the European Working Time Regulations. Instead of working for the government as an NHS employee, Joshua must face the difficulties that come with being employed by a private service provider. Given the categorisation of his work as unskilled, he must also live on low wages in one of the most expensive cities in the world:

Walk into any organisation and there will be plenty of people like... Joshua. They work long hours doing the tedious, repetitive work of cleaning in a burgeoning service economy. Only people with severely limited choices and little negotiating power in the labour market would ever take such jobs, and in London and the south-east that effectively requires a ready supply of immigrant labour. Without immigrants, much of the public sector services in the south-east would be on the point of implosion. They clean, they cook, they do the washing up, and because their work is classed as

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437 Ibid., 76.
438 Ibid. See also Bunting, Willing Slaves, 24.
439 Hermann, Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time, 1.
440 Bunting, Willing Slaves, 7.
441 Ibid.
442 Ibid., 13.
low-productivity, they earn wages barely sufficient to support one person – let alone the multiple dependents whom... Joshua... support[s].

Recent decades have been characterised by a number of different trends in working hours. For people like Joshua, stagnating wages and the increased cost of living – as well as a welfare system pushing people into insecure and poorly paid jobs – forces them to work longer hours. There has also been a reorganisation of business practices that includes the attempt to increase output with a smaller workforce, meaning that many workers are required to work longer hours to compensate for a smaller amount of staff. Conversely, increased casual, temporary and part-time work means that particular individuals are working fewer hours than they would be if they had full-time employment. As Hermann summarises these changes, ‘because of the neoliberal promotion of markets and competition, work time [has] not increased for all workers; instead the result of the destandardization and flexibilization of work time [has] been a growing polarization of work hours, with some workers working very long days and others very short ones.’

Noting a corresponding phenomenon, Hermann contends that under neoliberalism employers are able to grow productivity and working hours (even if these working hours are concentrated among less people) while keeping wages flat. Hence, there is a ‘widening gap between necessary and actual work time, which in the postwar decades had been kept under relative control through work time reductions and (real) wage increases.’ In other words, businesses have been successful in their endeavour to attain more of the surplus generated by productivity gains in the workplace. Because those working less hours are often not doing so by choice, and are often either in and out of unemployment or in some form of insecure and poorly paid work, decreasing working hours is no longer necessarily an indication of a win for workers. In addition to the increase in “flexible” working arrangements, working times have also been affected by ‘the granting of concessions and exemptions from collectively agreed work hours; the erosion and

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443 Ibid., 14.
446 Ibid., 159.
decentralization of collective bargaining structures;... the promotion of individual employment contracts, possibilities of opting out of collective or statutory norms, as well as the granting of large amounts of overtime.\footnote{Ibid., 159-60.}

Although it is important to note these changes, I suggest that making sense of our working lives requires more than ascertaining correct means and averages of the hours we are in paid employment. Such an approach fails to capture the work that is done outside of official working hours. Moreover, it does not consider activities that cannot be understood either as work or as leisure in the strict sense of those terms (such as checking emails, participating in a short course, or going to a “social event” for networking purposes). Moreover, as already stressed, the neoliberal self – at least as an ideal – should always be on the lookout for opportunities to maximise its portfolio value, which often means treating nonworking life as an extension of work. I have discussed at length the way that management literature connects our achievements in working time with the management of our selves beyond the confines of the time we are officially working. Hence, there is a problem with interpreting official non-work time as necessarily being time \textit{free from work}. I will explore some of these themes below. Before doing so, I will first outline ways in which working time can change due to an intensification of the work process.\footnote{For the classic of analysis of the intensification of labour, see Karl Marx, \textit{Capital: A Critique of Political Economy}, Vol.1, trans. Ben Fowkes, (London: Penguin Books, 1976 [1867]).} I consider this aspect of neoliberal capitalism in order to make clear that neoliberalism entails more than the promulgation of an enterprising oriented ideology that blurs working and nonworking time. In addition, our neoliberal era is characterised by real changes in workplace organisation that have led to the intensification of work and the increased exploitation of workers.

\textbf{Intensification of the Work Process}

Using indicators such as the complexity of work tasks, the speed of work and working to tight deadlines, recent studies in the US and Europe corroborate the claim that work has intensified.\footnote{Hermann, \textit{Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time}, 177.} Thus, as Ricardo Antunes observes, ‘the
reduction of the working day does not necessarily imply the reduction of working time.\footnote{Antunes, \textit{The Meanings of Work}, 148.} In other words, a reduction in hours of paid employment can be undermined by the intensification of the hours spent working. Accordingly, for Antunes, the struggle against overwork implies not only opposition to extensive hours of employment but also to \textit{the oppressive time of work}.\footnote{Ibid.}

Bunting, Hermann and Huws all point out that project-based work is one way of getting people to work more.\footnote{Bunting, \textit{Willing Slaves}, 2005; Hermann, \textit{Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time}, 2015; Huws, \textit{Labor in the Global Digital Economy}, 2014.} Part of the reorganisation of work in recent years has focused on implementing a project-oriented approach to work not constrained by the typical “9-5.” Management literature often presents this as a win for the whole workplace, not least for workers themselves. This literature associates project-oriented work with the freedom to work at different hours, fitting work in with family time and other leisure activities, and generally celebrating a more casual and relaxed approach to workplace organisation. Supposedly, the authoritarian-Taylorist with his stopwatch and strict expectations about timelines is replaced by flexible and partly self-managed, project-based work. The new boss, according to this characterisation, is less interested in the hours we work and more concerned with the projects we complete.

However, project-based work does not necessarily conform to this positive characterisation. Huws points out that project-based work is one way of more directly linking work to the dictates of the market, or, perhaps we should say, to the dictates of clients. For example, in research and development (R&D), Huws contends that “there has been a sharp increase in orientation toward markets, with “pure” research increasingly being ousted by research that can be readily brought to market, exposing workers to direct pressures from the market, experienced as tight deadlines.”\footnote{Huws, \textit{Labor in the Global Digital Economy}, 115.} Huws suggests that the framing of R&D in terms of various projects that need to meet externally imposed deadlines facilitates the link between work-time and the market. What matters is not so much the time spent working but the tasks (projects) one
completes. And the number of projects that must be completed and the time in which this must be accomplished will depend on demand and competition. Hence, by subjecting work to client demands and competition, project-based work can involve longer hours and/or the intensification of the time spent working. If more importance is given to the work (projects) completed rather than the hours worked, then work can extend in hours and increase in intensity to meet the needs of the project. Rather than liberating workers from the 9-5 grind, in many cases 'this simply means exacting more work than can feasibly be done in the contracted hours.' According to Steffen Lehndorff and Dorothea Voss-Dahm, work intensification and longer work hours are most likely to occur under conditions where only specific targets are defined (e.g., project deadlines, financial targets, goals agreed among individuals or groups) and where practical implications for meeting those targets within the contractual work hours become a matter to be resolved by employees themselves. Hence, the neoliberal reorganisation of work in terms of projects might allow for flexibility in some cases, but this flexibility often entails significant amounts of extra work and the intensification of the hours spent working.

Project-based work is not the only way in which work can be intensified. In many workplaces, intensifying work (extracting more work out of staff) is a way of bringing down costs. Getting less people to do more work is a favoured approach to cost reduction. In concrete terms, this intensification of work means that ‘cleaners have more wards to clean, and catering assistants have more meals to prepare.’ In such cases, actual hours worked need not necessarily increase for more surplus to be extracted from workers.

Another way in which work has been intensified, and employers have minimised unproductive time, is through the implementation of functional flexibility. As we saw in the case of Hephaestus, this involves training staff to perform a number of tasks. As a consequence, if there is a breakdown in

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454 Bunting, Willing Slaves, 27.
455 Lehndorff and Voss-Dahm cited in Hermann, Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time, 90.
456 Bunting, Willing Slaves, 28.
457 However, increased hours and intensification are not mutually exclusive. 'The killer combination is when both the hours of the job and its intensity have increased, and that is usually the case: surveys show that the single biggest cause of long hours is having too big a workload' (Ibid.).
machinery or some other hold up in the production process, many workers are able to perform the task needed for work to continue.\textsuperscript{458} Bunting describes the similar development of multitasking, which allows the worker to efficiently coordinate several tasks in a given time period.\textsuperscript{459} The point of functional flexibility and multitasking is to ensure continual work and a minimal amount of wasted time.

To take a broader historical view, some of these changes can be understood as part of the transition to “flexible accumulation,” “lean production” or “post-Fordism.”\textsuperscript{460} For David Harvey, the transition from Fordism-Keynesianism to flexible accumulation entails a speed up of production. This was achieved through the coordination of new technology and new organisational forms.\textsuperscript{461} Similarly, Hermann states that in addition to the traditional attempt to expand ‘output per unit of work time,’ post-Fordism is also characterised by a reduction of ‘work time per unit of output.’\textsuperscript{462} As noted above, this can be accomplished by cutting staff and extracting more work from a smaller workforce. Hence, the “leanness” in lean production comes partly from having fewer workers burdened with a larger workload. Hermann points out that Taiichi Ohno, who introduced the infamous Toyota production system, or Toyotism, cut staff numbers as a technique of saving wasted (unproductive) time.\textsuperscript{463} The lean production of Toyotism, in other words, saves time by taking time away, or by establishing what has been described as “management by stress.”\textsuperscript{464} That is, it demands more of a smaller workforce and hence attempts to eliminate the possibility of idle time.\textsuperscript{465}

\textsuperscript{458} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{459} Ibid. Pioneering in this respect is the Toyotist organisation of production, as it is ‘structured within a flexible productive process which allows a worker to simultaneously operate various machines’ (Antunes, \textit{The Meanings of Work}, 38).
\textsuperscript{460} On lean production and industrial restructuring in the neoliberal period, see McNally, \textit{Global Slump}, 46-9. In addition to the time-saving mechanisms outlined in this section, “lean production” also entails focusing on “core competencies” and outsourcing other stages of the work process to cheaper providers, usually located in developing countries.
\textsuperscript{461} Harvey, \textit{The Condition of Postmodernity}, 284.
\textsuperscript{462} Hermann, \textit{Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time}, 65.
\textsuperscript{463} On Toyotism, see also Antunes, \textit{The Meanings of Work}, 2003.
\textsuperscript{464} Hermann, \textit{Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time}, 71.
\textsuperscript{465} As Hermann observes, what is described as an innovative organisational structure is really a process of increased exploitation: ‘The success of the Japanese production system... did not so much depend on its innovative character, than on its ability to press out more surplus labor from its workers’ (Ibid.).
As I have outlined, there have been a number of internal workplace changes that have intensified the work process. From a broader, economy-wide perspective, changes in the circulation and distribution of goods and services have also increased the pace of working life. Improved communication technology and ‘information flow’ combined with changed ‘techniques of distribution (packaging, inventory control, containerization, market feed-back, etc.), made it possible to circulate commodities through the market system with greater speed. Money flows were also sped up with the introduction of ‘[e]lectronic banking and plastic money,’ while computerised trading increased the pace and volume of financial services and markets. This general acceleration in the flow of capital has implications for the pace of work – and, importantly, for expectations about the pace of work – on the shop floor. A core aspect of Toyotism – whose methods have been replicated in many parts of the world – is the just-in-time model of production. Just-in-time production entails quickly responding to client orders and hence to movements in specific markets. For example, work is organised so that when a client places an order, the workers must quickly prepare the order rather than have a large stock sitting idle and awaiting distribution. In this way, companies are able to save money ‘on inventories that were previously used as buffers to make sure that production could continue until the arrival of new parts.’ Toyotism ‘is a form of production closely tied to demand that seeks to respond to the most individualised needs of the consumer-market, distinguishing it from Taylorist/Fordist series- and mass-production.’ The pressure to meet quotas at short notice now falls on workers:

“The absence of buffer stocks,” as Robert Boyer and Jean-Pierre Durand note, “puts enormous stress on workers and supervisors, given each breakdown or problem disrupts the totality of production by interrupting the material flow.” To quickly resume the flow of production, or make up for losses due to production breakdowns, workers are frequently required to work overtime. Thus, just-in-time production is not free of buffers – “long and flexible hours are the hidden buffer that are utilized if necessary.”

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466 Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 284.
467 Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 284-5.
Here, flexible working time equates to workers adapting to the demands of the market. Just-in-time or lean production is founded upon a closer alignment of work and the demands of the market, client and employer. I noted above that lean production entails a combination of increasing ‘output per unit of work time’ and ‘a reduction of work time per unit of output.’ To achieve this, the speed of production is increased and the size of the workforce is reduced. Less staff and smaller inventories is how employers achieve reduced input per unit of output. In the latter half of the twentieth century, as businesses renewed efforts to reduce input – which entails reducing time – per unit of output, ‘the standardization of work hours became an obstacle, and employers increased pressure to make work time more flexible – in Europe mainly through the introduction of averaging periods and work time accounts, in North America primarily through the use of overtime.’

471 Ibid., 74.
472 Ibid.

In summary, there are various ways in which work has been reorganised – such as lean production, project-based work, reduced number of staff, and functional flexibility – that have changed the nature and pace of work and not just the total amount of time spent working. During the neoliberal period, intensified work processes and the pressures that arise from the increased pace of the circulation of capital are borne by workers; along with the general increase in individual “responsibilities,” it is workers who must work harder, longer or smarter to meet market deadlines and complete project work when required. In order to provide a clearer idea of the working time expected of neoliberal subjects even outside of formally recognised working times and places, I will now situate these changes within the neoliberal ideological framing of work time and space. I argue that the entrepreneurialisation of our lives and subjectivities is reinforced by the combination of the intensification of working time and the invasion of nonworking time by work- and enterprise-related activities.

### 24/7 Enterprising

In the neoliberal imaginary, individuals are responsible for constantly bettering their competitive position in an unpredictable and changing world. From such a
perspective, it is hard to know when one has done enough. One could always do
more and work harder to better guard oneself against the unpredictability of
the future and the gains of other competitors. Therefore, it does not seem
unreasonable, given market fluctuations, client demands, competition from
other self-enterprises, and so on, to demand more from people. Workers must
practice the kind of vigilance, planning and adaptability that will allow them to
navigate “life in the market.” The above-discussed management consultant
Thomas Peters frequently depicts the self as a site of constant work, training
and development. From Peters’ perspective, people are endlessly jockeying for
“advantage.” At no point, if we follow Peter’s reasoning, is our advantage
secured. Hard work has no other goal than temporarily
protecting one’s own or
encroaching on your rivals “advantage”:

GET UP EARLIER THAN THE NEXT GUY.
Flying to Boston from London on Saturday morning. 7 hours. Professional
woman sitting in front of me. I duly swear, she did not look up for 7 hours.
She produced more on her laptop than I do in... a week... a month.
I’m not touting workaholism here.
I am stating the obvious.
She or he who works the hardest has one hell of an advantage.
She or he who is best prepared has one hell of an advantage.
She or he who is always ‘overprepared’ has one hell of an advantage.
He or she who does the most research has one hell of an advantage.
I don’t know about you, but I wouldn’t have wanted to challenge ‘the
woman in the row in front’ in whatever presentation venues she was
approaching.473

Working “the hardest,” being “best prepared,” doing the “most research” are
descriptions relative to other known or unknown, present or potential,
competitors. Thus, one cannot know if one is ever “overprepared” enough. What
happens when several or many people are “overprepared”? Or when many
people do a lot of research? Acknowledging this possibility should jolt the
neoliberal self-enterprise into further action; in turn, this further action is
without a clear endpoint. There is no limit to the work being asked of us here.
The ambiguity of the subtitle (“GET UP EARLIER THAN THE NEXT GUY”) is
telling in this respect. Who is it exactly that we are supposed to get up earlier
than? Who is the “next guy” and is he really singular? And what time does he get

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up? The lack of precision is essential. Peters’ characterisation of competitive life tells us that *we do not know* when we have done enough to secure our advantage and therefore we should always push ourselves to do more. Or, at least, if we are not pushing ourselves in this fashion, we need to keep in mind that “the woman in the row in front” who is more enterprising will be increasing her advantage relative to our own.

As Brown, Lauder and Ashton observe, when everyone is pushing for “advantage,” what actually constitutes a more competitive position continually moves further out of our reach and demands more of each of us.474 As in the case just presented, if we are all measuring ourselves against imaginary competitors working long hours (of an unspecified amount), we will increase our hours, and those competing with us will have to increase their hours to be competitive, and so on. Protecting the strength of one’s employability and impressing the boss become significant challenges if everyone is working in this fashion. Similarly, if everyone seeks higher educational achievements for the sake of their employability and competitiveness, then standard levels of educational attainment become much less impressive. A bachelor degree is now far too common; one also needs a Masters, or some other postgraduate degree, and extensive “on-the-job” experience got through volunteering and interning, which in turn have become the minimum requirements now that they are so common.

In the above quote from Peters, hidden behind his jovial and informal tone is a hard neoliberal message about the world and the conduct expected of the neoliberal self. If distinctions between self and organisation, work and non-work have eroded, so too have distinctions between work-time and non-work-time, work-space and non-work-space. In the pursuit of success and wealth, which Peters’ advice is supposed to facilitate, such traditional boundaries are impediments to the full implementation and maximisation of our personal resources. A plane is a workstation like any other. Your competitive position and capital value can be going up or down even when you are thousands of feet in the sky. The neoliberal self is trained to constantly calculate the opportunity

cost of everything it does or does not do. Consequently, where work starts and finishes becomes increasingly blurred because opportunities for value-enhancement and competitive positioning are so numerous.

This blurring of work and non-work is complemented by changes in the kind of work a great deal of people engage in. For example, many kinds of work are no longer fixed at a specific location, nor focused on a group of physical objects. These changes to working time are also assisted by the use of technologies such as the portable computer and the integration of the Internet and the mobile phone. Gregg observes that in the last decade many telecommunication and hardware providers used the “anytime-anywhere” workstation as a key part of their advertising. For example, in Australia, their adverts emphasised the possibility of using their devices in such “workspaces” as ‘a bus stop (Telstra), the bus itself (Vodafone), a cliff face (Sony), the beach (i-mate), a catamaran (Telstra), a building site (Telstra), a park (Bigpond), a café (Telstra), a hairdresser’s (Telstra) – even nude (Vodafone’s BlackBerry Mobile Email bundle). These adverts highlight the “convenience” and “flexibility” these devices make possible for modern working life. In their 2005 flexible working campaign, Toshiba ‘encouraged employees to check email at home to avoid peak hour and capitalize on the most productive part of the day.’ When work is uncoupled from specific locations, then it is easier for work to take place ‘not only... in various configurations of time and space (the desk at 10.15 am, or the kitchen table at 9.30 pm), but for... work to colonise and claim all time/space (24/7).’

Under these conditions, people perform work tasks outside traditional workplace settings without even considering them to be work. Training and skill updating serve as obvious examples. However, there are other activities that fit in this category. For example, many of the interviewees in Gregg’s study performed tasks like checking and responding to emails in the morning, in the evening or on the weekend, often because they did not consider checking emails to constitute work in the proper sense. Knowing that they have a great deal to

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476 Gregg, Work’s Intimacy, 32.
477 Ibid.
478 Kelly, The Self as Enterprise, 99.
get through in their hours at the office, many workers felt the need to work outside of traditional hours and places in order to keep on top of things. As Jenny, a library project officer, reported, ‘[s]orting through an inbox you can do at home sitting in front of the television. I probably wouldn’t allocate two hours at work to do that. It would seem wasteful.’ Hence, technological developments, the reorganisation of work and changes in attitudes to work practices have facilitated the expanding role of work in our lives.

In Australia, according to left-leaning think tank The Australia Institute, ‘around half of all workers (54 per cent) are expected, or not discouraged from, working at home outside of work hours.’ They estimate that Australians work approximately $128 billion worth of unpaid overtime each year. Furthermore, nearly half of workers (51 per cent) did not take their annual leave in 2014. Besides, as Kelly notes, even when workers are paid for overtime, this often leads to employers expecting staff to work overtime in the future. Organisations must be responsive to changes in the market, unfolding business relations, supply chain activity, and customer needs. The responsiveness of the organisation translates into the demand that employees work more intensely, at uncommon hours, and often ‘from a smaller core workforce.’ Flexible employees are central to the responsiveness of the organisation. In addition to the hours we spend in paid employment, we should add the time we spend preparing for work, (re)training for work, traveling to and from work, looking for work and – as Frayne maintains – worrying about work.

People working in investment banking and finance are most keenly attuned to the always running global economy. As Karen Ho observes, long

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481 Johnson, *Workin’ 9 to 5.30*, 3.
482 Ibid., 3, 10. Bunting notes a similar trend in the UK: ‘According to two surveys, only 44 per cent of workers take all the holiday leave to which they are entitled – 39 per cent of men and 49 per cent of women. The most frequently cited reason for not taking holidays was that there was too much work to do, followed by fear that taking a break might jeopardise the employee’s job’ (Bunting, *Willing Slaves*, 10).
484 Ibid.
hours are a normal component of investment banking culture on Wall Street. In the pursuit of generating and finalising as many deals as possible, employees must be available at all times of the day and night. It is quite normal to be asked by a senior banker to provide a report, analysis or some other piece of work the following morning, even if that means a serious encroachment on (or disappearance of) sleeping hours. In such circumstances, an employee’s hours could be ‘from 7 p.m. to the wee hours of the morning.’ Ho sums up some of the stories and perceptions about long hours in the investment-banking world:

In times of heavy deal flow, analysts and associates regularly stay at work until two or three in the morning, pull all-nighters, and work both Saturdays and Sundays. The disciplinary joke that analysts and associates often share among themselves is, “You’ll be lucky if you get a day off besides your wedding day.”... The pages of the Harvard Crimson and the Daily Princetonian are filled with recent alumni reflecting on their first two years in investment banking, recounting how for spans of months at a time, they never made it home before midnight... [A] Goldman Sachs analyst who requested anonymity, declared, “For a year you have no personal life. It’s hard enough to do my laundry.” His worst work week lasted 155 hours, leaving him with just 13 hours to sleep.

The newly recruited graduates, usually from the highest-ranked and best-connected universities, are quickly introduced to the time-demands of investment banking. From the start of their employment, these graduates learn to operate under high-pressure for long hours, or they burn out and leave. Ho describes a work atmosphere in which new analysts and associates learn to “live” there and in which they are soon ‘comparing notes about who is staying the latest and “getting slammed” the most, not to mention participating in the makeshift Nerf football game at 1 a.m.

Despite some reported frustration, Ho found that hard work and long hours often reinforced Wall Streeters’ sense of self-importance. Overwork in this sense is a normative practice; it is valued for the qualities it is associated with and functions as a sort of litmus test, according to which one is only doing important work if one is overworking. Ho reports that she

often heard bankers simultaneously complain and brag about how long they worked: ”I pulled three all-nighters this week”; “I’ve been working

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487 Ho, Liquidated, 88.
488 Ibid., 90.
110-hour weeks for the past two weeks”; I slept in my car at 3 a.m. because I had to be back at work at 6 a.m.” Through this hard work, however, comes, for those analysts who come back and associates who stay, the understanding that they have become a part of the business elite, influential advisors to the top brass of corporate America.\textsuperscript{489}

Hard work, along with the shared assumption that they are part of an incredibly intelligent and talented minority, leads Wall Streeters to assume that their work is important and of a high quality. Ho claims that the ‘internalization of overwork,’ that is, the identification with overwork and a sense of its necessity, reaffirmed the idea of their ‘cultural and technical superiority’.\textsuperscript{490} So, for example, because talented and intelligent Wall Street staff worked hard to execute a number of mergers and acquisitions, they must be good deals.\textsuperscript{491} The celebration of overwork also helped to align Wall Streeters with the non-time, or continuous time, of the market. In Ho’s words, their ‘work lives [provided] a kind of ideological discipline that keeps them focused on market position, profit making, and shareholder value.’\textsuperscript{492} If the markets are relentlessly at work, if they are subject to constant change and new directions, if they operate according to global time, then so will those people who understand their work to closely harmonise with the rhythms of the markets. In other words, ‘the culture of hard work legitimates Wall Street investment bankers’ roles as spokespeople for, and embodiments of, the financial markets.’\textsuperscript{493}

Casey found similar dynamics in her research at Hephaestus. Interestingly, Casey notes that many tasks did not require long hours. Instead, what made overtime important was ‘the display function that the long hours symbolize.’\textsuperscript{494} That is, long hours symbolise a certain kind of ethic, a keenness on the part of the individual, a willingness to do a little more than what is required in order to make sure things were always on schedule. Many of the employees at Hephaestus reported that it was common for staff to comment on the presence of other peoples’ cars in the parking lot on weekends. A car in the parking lot

\textsuperscript{489} Ibid., 99-100.  
\textsuperscript{490} Ibid., 106.  
\textsuperscript{491} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{492} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{493} Ibid., 106-7.  
\textsuperscript{494} Casey, Work, Self and Society, 127.
was a kind of public statement – I am here, again, even when other staff (and their cars) are not:

Some employees report that they want everyone to know if they have bought a new car so that it would be recognized in the parking lot on the weekends. Everyone seems to know when others arrive at work in the morning and when they leave. While among the exempt employees time-keeping is not strictly observed, there is a highly accurate informal perception among the managers and employees of each team member’s hours of work habits.⁴⁹⁵

That this perception of team-member working hours is ‘informal’ is all the more telling. This is the way a culture of overwork functions: there need not be formal rules and sanctions regarding working time in order for people to feel the pressure to work long hours. Extended working hours are normalised, part of the requirements one must meet to be a good team player.

Outside the confines of the workplaces studied by Ho and Casey, the neoliberal blurring of the distinction between work and non-work is accentuated by the notion that we are not merely working for some organisation but also for ourselves, as proprietors of our own enterprise. From this perspective, we ought to practice some sort of entrepreneurial awareness whether or not actual work is making more demands on our time. The idea that each of us has a brand upon which our “success” depends is one way of encouraging ongoing entrepreneurial self-management. In Peters’ account, just as everyday life and work become indistinct, so also do everyday life and the presentation of our individual brand. Consequently, everyday encounters and the presentation of our brand also start to resemble one another. All settings are opportunities for good or bad impressions – our brand capital is always vulnerable to increasing and decreasing value. Being “excellent” is a way of life for Peters because all of life is interpreted on the model of entrepreneurial, human capital management, and that means a constant presentation of one’s self-enterprise. Being excellent seems to come very close to performing well, making the right impression, and promoting one’s brand, all of the time:

"It’s always show time!"
"Showtime" for me =
Every speech!
Every PowerPoint presentation!

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.
Every individual slide!
Every CLIENT phone call!
EVERY INTERCHANGE WITH A “FOURTH-LEVEL” CLIENT “ADMIN ASSISTANT” (who may make a negative—or positive!—comment to her boss’s boss—who signs my check!—about an off-the-cuff comment I hastily made).
EVERY EMPLOYEE INTERACTION... especially when I’m stressed and/or grouchy.
Every post at tompeters.com!
Every tweet at Twitter!
Every SEVEN-SECOND EYE CONTACT with someone who asks me to sign a book!
And so on.
And on.
And on.
Am I hopelessly uptight-demanding-ridiculous-absurd about all this?
Absolutely.
But no, too; “it” (being “on”) has become a way of life, as natural as breathing. (My wife says it takes me two or three days, after I’ve been on the road, to quit “preaching to 4,000 people.”)
Is this “no way to live”?
Hell, no!
I am... Desperate to... Make a Difference!
I hope you are, too.496

Peters again provides us with an important neoliberal lesson. As proprietors of our own enterprise, we should always be “switched on,” aware that all of our (in)actions contribute to or detract from the value of our self-enterprise. The neoliberal self-enterprise’s ability to positively present itself, to be aware of myriad opportunities for enhancing value, is essential to the value of its capital.

All the same, even self-enterprises have a home life. However, while the home has long been a place of non-remunerated work for women, it is increasingly a place where people perform duties directly related to their paid employment. Parenting and working, for example, are not necessarily mutually exclusive activities. Gregg describes the way that Claire, a thirty-three-year-old marketing professional, works from home in order not to worry so much about work while at home. That is, because of her large workload, Claire has to work at home so she can enjoy home life that would otherwise be filled with worry about work. It is a bizarre situation. With full days of work, often packed with back-to-back meetings, Claire does not have the chance to complete all her work.

496 Peters, The Little Big Things, §41, ‘It’s Showtime! All the Time!’
tasks. So that she can sleep better, she prefers to spend an hour or an hour and a half working in the evening and catching up or preparing for the following day. She and her husband will often sit on the couch together working on their laptops after they have put their young son to bed. She describes this time spent together as ‘catch[ing] up on a bit of work,’ and simultaneously as an opportunity to ‘relax.’ Spending time together, relaxing and working can all be done in the same time and space. Her home life closely interconnects activities of work, care and leisure. Even on a day off, ‘wireless Internet allowed Claire to work anywhere in the house, so that: “if we are out the front playing cars with my two-year-old on the driveway I can still be doing a bit of work as well.” Claire sought strategies to limit time spent on the computer “when I should be giving my son attention,” but she figured: “if I can sort of juggle the two and still be rolling cars down the driveway or playing fire engines, then that’s OK.” When work invades the home in this fashion, the time of our home life is subjected to an efficiency evaluation like any other unit of work time.

The organisation and optimisation of time are key factors in modern workplaces and in people’s busy lives. As we have seen, the ideal entrepreneurial self is one who will thoughtfully manage their time in the most optimal way. In other words, time is a crucial resource that ought to be used productively and efficiently. Indeed, time management is necessary for many people simply because of the pressures they face and not because they are aspiring self-enterprises. Or we could say that this time pressure felt by ordinary people is part of the entrepreneurialisation of everyday life insofar as it forces them to treat time like another aspect of their lives they must manage properly and take responsibility for. It forces people to treat time like another unit in a business calculation and makes time-management another key skill that they must develop.

The need to treat time like a resource that we must properly manage complements a familiar neoliberal picture of how the world works. Life is busy

497 Gregg, Work’s Intimacy, 50.
498 Ibid.
499 Ibid.
and unpredictable. Some periods can be unexpectedly busier than others. If you are going to get the most out of life, you have got quite a bit to squeeze into each day. *That is just how things are.* Therefore, it is the individual’s responsibility to manage their time properly. Following Gregg, Frayne suggests that the discourse of “work-life balance” is a way of shifting the responsibility to manage the demands of work onto the individual: ‘The raft of training initiatives it has inspired – workshops on ‘coping with stress’, ‘dealing with change’ and ‘time management’ – have all ultimately pushed the same message: that it is you alone who is at fault if you struggle to cope.’ Being overburdened, not being able to pay adequate attention to something in one’s life or finding oneself overworked are all signs of poor individual time-management. According to Bunting, while employers can encourage and train employees in time-management, ultimately the ‘contemporary disciplines of time are not externally imposed by managerial/professional work, but internalised, and we are made into our own timekeepers.’ Bunting describes this ‘internalisation of efficiency’ as follows:

> There’s a reflex by which we calculate a cost-benefit analysis of whether an activity is worth the time we are investing in it. This can apply to doing the shopping, changing a nappy, compiling a report or attending a meeting. Are we doing something in as short a time as possible? It’s as if we have absorbed the ‘time-motion’ studies of the late-nineteenth-century American management theorist Frederick Taylor, and are applying them not just to manufacturing processes but to our entire lives… Closely allied to efficiency is productivity: instead of being asked if we’ve had a good day, we’re now asked if we’ve had a productive one. Nothing contributes more to frustration and impatience than attempting to live life efficiently. It allows no margin of error, no room for the ebb and flow. Listen to anyone talk about a day that has gone wrong and it’s a tale of how their aspirations to efficiency were frustrated by traffic jams, cancelled trains, crashed computers or flight delays.

Whether or not we have internalised the Taylorist timekeeper in quite the manner Bunting describes, I think she is right to contend that efficient and productive use of time is the framework many of us use to evaluate our daily lives. Consider the proliferation of cookbooks that advertise themselves as “meals in minutes.” For those desiring more precise estimates of cooking time,
apart from *Jamie Oliver's Meals in Minutes: A Revolutionary Approach to Cooking Good Food Fast*, Jamie Oliver has published *Jamie's 30-Minute Meals* and *Jamie's 15-Minute Meals.*\(^{503}\) I can offer a few personal examples from my everyday life of this evaluation of time in terms of efficiency and productivity. For example, very much in accord with Bunting's observation, my partner and I are guilty of wishing each other a “productive day” as we leave the house in the morning, and asking on afternoon telephone calls if the other person has been having a “productive day.” I am also guilty of trying to multitask in circumstances when it is perhaps unnecessary. Around genuinely busy schedules, we try to organise catch-ups that involve different groups of friends in order to “get the most” out of any one social outing. When I go for a walk to have a “break from the desk,” I often take my mobile phone with me in order to call friends and family members who I have not recently contacted. A simple walk often becomes a bit of exercise, an opportunity to use mobile and headphones to do a little French practice, and the chance to make a few obligatory phone calls. Similarly, catching the bus and train has become another opportunity to do a little more work, or even flick through some news in order to free up time later in the day in which I might have been reading news but which I could instead use for some other activity, work-related or otherwise, but always somehow “productive,” always “getting things done,” “ticking things off the list.” Overwhelmed by a feeling of constantly falling behind, one berates oneself for needing “so much” sleep. In all these ways, our time before and after official employment is often similarly constructed in units regarded as more or less “productive,” irrespective of the nature of the activity we are setting time aside for. Add this to the actual overwork many people experience in paid employment, and one gets tired just thinking about it.

**Conclusion**

Although my treatment of work in this chapter and the previous one is far from exhaustive, I have considered neoliberal working life from a number of

perspectives in order to clarify the way in which working life supports the entrepreneurialisation of the self. In this chapter, I started by arguing that there is a common set of control techniques often employed to organise the neoliberal workplace. I showed how the use of new technologies and other techniques constitute a kind of neo-Taylorist management approach. This entailed a consideration of the way that many aspects of the work process have been codified, standardised and automated. I argued that these changes have given employers more control of workplace knowledge. I also analysed intra-firm competition and comparison as techniques that management employs to control the work process. The use of competition within firms is particularly interesting given the way that it is employed to control the productive activities of workers, in part by eliciting practices of self-monitoring, self-auditing, competitive comparison with others, individual goal-setting, and so on. By promoting competition among workers, the pursuit of various targets, close self-monitoring and a stress on optimising individual performance, these practices encourage workers to relate to themselves, their colleagues and their work in ways that reinforce neoliberalism. Hence, control techniques in the workplace do not exclude the production of neoliberal subjects; on the contrary, control techniques often only have the desired effect by eliciting certain kinds of behaviour indicative of neoliberal selfhood. Put simply, methods of control and of subject production are not mutually exclusive; they often serve the same end of propping up neoliberal capitalism. As I showed, practices of self-monitoring are common outside of formal work settings. I suggested that these techniques and technologies encourage us to treat aspects of our person as assets to be trained and perfected for the purposes of navigating our entrepreneurial lives.

Finally, to consider another way in which neoliberalism shapes our everyday lives, I explored changes in our experience of working time and space under the neoliberal work regime. I described how the organisation of time has changed in neoliberal capitalism, both in and outside the workplace, so as to clarify the way that work has been extended and intensified as part of the general instrumentalisation of human life. My central thesis was that neoliberalism undermines the distinction between working time and space and nonworking time and space. I argued that the colonisation of much of our lives
by work is supported by the ideology and practices associated with neoliberal selfhood.

This analysis of work was important given the amount of time we spend training and preparing for, worrying about and discussing work, in addition to the actual time spent in paid employment. As Weeks puts it, the problem is 'not just that [work] monopolizes so much time and energy, but that it also dominates the social and political imaginaries.' By establishing a clearer picture of the particular neoliberal imaginary of work, we can more clearly recognise the manner in which it has reconfigured our nonworking lives. In the next chapter, I will elaborate some of the themes I have explored in this chapter and the previous ones but that have not as yet been treated at length, such as competition, adaptability, and the relationship between precarious living conditions and the construction of neoliberal subjects. By bringing together a number of themes that have run throughout this thesis, I will be able to complete my picture of neoliberal selfhood and the entrepreneurialisation of everyday life.

504 Weeks, The Problem with Work, 36.
A Competitive and Precarious World: Home of the Neoliberal Subject

I have so far looked at the neoliberal production of subjectivity from a number of perspectives. Given the centrality of the notion of human capital to the neoliberal imaginary, I started by considering the human capital theory of Becker and Schultz. I then turned to a selection of management literature and practices to unpack how our human capital is put to work and, importantly, how we are called upon to work on ourselves in specific ways. Following these analyses, I directed my attention to working life in neoliberal capitalism so as to draw out some of the tensions between neoliberal thinking and practice, but also to show the pervasiveness of neoliberal subjectification across our much-extended working lives.

Many of the features I explore in this chapter – competition, flexibility and adaptability, individual responsibility, precarious living conditions – have already been either explicitly or implicitly touched upon in previous chapters. Here, I want to flesh out some of these general features of neoliberal selfhood in order to consolidate the above analyses. I argue that as a consequence of the neoliberal understanding of the world and its reshaping of our common life, people are encouraged – or compelled – to “self-entrepreneurialise,” that is, to act as managers of their own enterprise and capital. It is this relationship between context and self-entrepreneurialisation that I bring to the fore in this final chapter.

I argued above that the production of neoliberal subjects entails the combination of the idea of human capital with the practice of constant entrepreneurialism. As neoliberal selves, we are each an enterprise of ourselves, that is, of our capital. As self-enterprises, we are in constant competition with other self-enterprises with whom we compete for positional advantage. In practice, neoliberalism has introduced new competitive pressures into our everyday lives, in the workplace and elsewhere. I suggest that this competition necessitates the kind of entrepreneurial activity seen from the neoliberal perspective as both desirable and unavoidable. To flesh out the
function of competition in neoliberalism, I will unpack this relationship between the construction of competition and its facilitation of self-enterprising practices. I maintain that the kind of neoliberal competition (and “competitiveness”) that is indicative of our times begins long before working life and adulthood. Experiences of competition and encouraging competitiveness are important parts of many strands of childhood education, parental-child relations and other aspects of our early years. I consider some of the ways in which children are already prepared for a world in which they are positioned as responsible self-enterprises who must face a future of tough competition.

One’s place in the competitive “market” of self-enterprises is governed by one’s willingness to be adequately flexible and adaptable. The neoliberal self must be responsive to changes in their surroundings and constantly practice some form of enterprising activity. In other words, in a world understood to be characterised by constant risk, change and competition, individuals can only survive (and maybe succeed) if they are flexible and adaptable. Herein we have another example of the way individuals are modelled on a particular conception of the firm: the flexible and adaptable firm is in a sense the model for the flexible and adaptable subject. Flexibility and adaptability are important capacities because they allow for the constant practice of self-fashioning. Put differently, we can think of flexibility and adaptability as naming the very capacity to surpass oneself, to shed one’s skin, to change when change is required. As part of my consideration of the adaptability and flexibility required of the neoliberal self, I will suggest that the production of neoliberal subjects involves fostering individual resilience. In order to flesh out the idea of resilience, I revisit the psychological capital theorists explored in chapter two. I show that the adaptable subject is also the risk-taking and resilient subject that complements the neoliberal reorganisation of the workplace.

In the first two sections, I address the features of the competitive and volatile neoliberal world that call forth a particular subject; namely, one able to actively develop their “competitiveness,” show resilience in the face of change, and adapt to circumstances when required. In the final section of this chapter, I further stress the way that contextual circumstances can be used to elicit
neoliberal subjectivities. In particular, I will argue that precarious living and working conditions facilitate entrepreneurial practices. Neoliberalism engrains everyday challenges and disadvantages, and then calls upon subjects to self-entrepreneurialise in order to optimise their situation in an “inevitably” precarious and changing world. In the sense I am using it, precariousness need not always imply destitution, but necessarily entails a lack of security and an element of vulnerability. One example of this kind of increased precariousness can be seen in the explosion of private debt. Indebtedness and financialisation of the everyday, as well as a general precariousness of living and working conditions, reinforce self-entrepreneurialisation by encouraging the practices of risk-taking, skill acquisition, financial participation, networking, and other activities indicative of neoliberal selfhood. Generally, I outline the way that debt and the financialisation of our everyday lives integrate people more fundamentally with the global capitalist economy. From the neoliberal perspective, precariousness is interpreted as the risk that all enterprises must manage. As such, indebtedness and the risk associated with financial embeddedness are conditions proper to the self-enterprise rather than a problem that requires a political and systematic solution.

The Subject as Competitive Enterprise

To begin this chapter, I suggest that the promotion of competition and “competitiveness” are key contributors to the production of neoliberal subjects. In capitalism – and certainly in its neoliberal variety – competition is a way of

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organising social and economic relations. One of the main points that should be highlighted is that competition in neoliberal is something that must be encouraged. As Michel Foucault shows in respect to German Ordoliberalism, it has long been understood that the state has an important role in creating the conditions for competition. Competition is not a natural fact of human existence; it needs to be organised and constructed.

Nevertheless, competition is often presented as an inevitable component of modern society. In fact, making it seem like an inescapable given of human life is part of its construction. The modern economy, we are often told, is increasingly and unavoidably competitive. According to this perspective, in order to flourish in an increasingly competitive world every kind of institution must focus on its competitiveness. This is one of the great watchwords of neoliberalism. Management consultant Peter Drucker informs us that in order for an institution to succeed, nay, survive, it must make competitiveness a

506 However, “competitive” could be a somewhat problematic descriptor, depending on the scale of the economic-social relations one is examining. Increased competition might exist at the level of workers and for certain industries and institutions but it is not the reality faced by all firms and industries. As Foster and McChesney note, there has been a trend toward monopoly and not increased competition in recent years: ‘the last few decades have seen the intensification of a growing trend today toward monopolization in the U.S. and global economies, reflected in: (1) concentration and centralization of capital on a world scale, (2) growth of monopoly power and profits, (3) the developing global supply chains of multinational corporations, and (4) the rise of monopolistic finance. The total revenue of the five hundred largest corporations in the world… was equal in 2004-2008 to around 40 percent of world income, with sharp increases since the 1990s’ (John Bellamy Foster and Robert McChesney, The Endless Crisis: How Monopoly-Finance Capital Produces Stagnation and Upheaval from the U.S.A. to China (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 21. From the same text: ‘Twentieth-century monopoly capitalism was not returning to its earlier nineteenth-century competitive stage, but evolving into a twenty-first century phase of globalized, financialized monopoly capital. The booming financial sector created turmoil and instability, but it also expedited all sorts of mergers and acquisitions. In the end, finance has been – as it invariably is – a force for monopoly. The worldwide merger and acquisition deals in 1999… rose to over $3.4 trillion. This was equivalent at the time to 34 percent of the value of all industrial capital (buildings, plants, machinery, and equipment) in the United States. In 2007, just prior to the Great Financial Crisis, worldwide mergers and acquisitions reached a record $4.38 trillion, up 21 percent from 2006. The long-term result of this process is a ratcheting up of the economic concentration and centralization of capital on a world scale… [T]here was a tenfold increase in the net value of annual global acquisitions by the top five hundred firms (operating in the United States and Canada) as a percentage of world income from the early 1970s through 2008’ (Foster and McChesney, The Endless Crisis, 74-5). On the evolution of the Chicago School’s view of monopoly and competition, see Foster and McChesney, The Endless Crisis, 91-6 and Davies, The Limits of Neoliberalism, 70-107.

507 Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics, 120.

508 There are much more recent examples than German Ordoliberalism. To take one at random, Cahill outlines the way that competition policy has been used in Australia (particularly with the passage in 1995 of the Competition Policy Reform Act) as a way to institutionally embed a neoliberal competitive framework (Cahill, The End of Laissez-Faire, 112).
strategic goal, whether the institution is a business, a university, a hospital, or something else besides.\textsuperscript{509} As Davies explores at length, neoliberalism makes competitiveness a central goal of cities, regions, states and larger groupings like the European Union.\textsuperscript{510} States and societies are taken to be entities that must either be strategically organised or risk losing out to more adaptable competitors. The individual, as we will see, is no exception.

According to the neoliberal picture of the self, each of us is a 'bundle of “investments,” skill sets, temporary alliances (family, sex, race), and fungible body parts.'\textsuperscript{511} As Michel Feher explains, everything that I am constitutes my human capital: genetic background, individual dispositions, my social milieu, physical abilities, psychological constitution, etc.\textsuperscript{512} Each of us is our own personal firm, adapting to our environment, trying to improve our credit-rating, responding to investment opportunities, and engaging in appropriate risk-taking. As I explained above, the neoliberal self’s value can always be increased. Conversely, the value of personal capital can also always decrease, even if only relative to the competition. As Feher puts it, 'the things that I inherit, the things that happen to me, and the things I do all contribute to the maintenance or the deterioration of my human capital.'\textsuperscript{513} There is a perpetual volatility in the value of the assets or capital that constitutes who I am. Accordingly, it is incumbent for the neoliberal self to engage in constant enterprising activity, to always be on the lookout for securing some sort of advantage. It is this understanding of the constant possibility of either furthering our value and advantage or losing value and advantage that acts as one of the key imperatives for relentless neoliberal self-management and competitive positioning. The individual is conceived as a lifelong entrepreneurial project in an unending competition with other entrepreneurial projects.

Brown highlights the way that the focus on competitive positioning entails a shift away from the economic agent of exchange: 'neoliberal \textit{homo oeconomicus} takes its shape as human capital seeking to strengthen its

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{510} Davies, \textit{The Limits of Neoliberalism}, 108-47.
\bibitem{511} Mirowski, \textit{Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste}, 59.
\end{thebibliography}
competitive positioning and appreciate its value, rather than as a figure of exchange or interest'. The economic agent of exchange is less important precisely because we are thought to be in market-like settings at all times, even in the absence of any exchange. The agent of exchange pursuing their own interest is no longer the privileged figure because this narrow notion of exchange is tied to monetary transactions that involve the selling of goods and services. Neoliberal selfhood has moved beyond domains that involve these traditional types of market exchanges. It is now embodied in the idea of ‘financialized human capital’ whose ‘project is to self-invest in ways that enhance its value or to attract investors through constant attention to its actual or figurative credit rating, and to do this across every sphere of its existence.’

This shift away from the economic agent of exchange is facilitated by the neoliberal commitment to the idea of pervasive competition. As agents of exchange, we occupy a particular place in some actual market; as buyers, sellers, owners, distributors, and so on. However, the centrality of competition, combined with the notion that we are each our own stock of human capital, shifts the focus away from our location in market exchange, and instead highlights the value of our capital relative to other personal capitals. In doing so, it homogenises the otherwise different places we occupy in the market, the division of labour, and other social and political institutions. By substituting competition for exchange neoliberalism renders us as no more than 'little capitals' in competition with other 'little capitals.' Each little capital has its own portfolio value to maintain in all settings of its life:

[Homo oeconomicus as human capital is concerned with enhancing its portfolio value in all domains of its life, an activity undertaken through practices of self-investment and attracting investors. Whether through social media “followers,” “likes,” and “retweets,” through rankings and

514 Brown, Undoing the Demos, 33.
515 Ibid.
516 Foucault already noted the centrality of competition to the neoliberal imaginary: ‘The society regulated by reference to the market that the neo-liberals are thinking about is a society in which the regulatory principle should not be so much the exchange of commodities as the mechanisms of competition. It is these mechanisms that should have the greatest possible volume in society. This means that what is sought is not a society subject to the commodity-effect, but a society subject to the dynamic of competition. Not a super-market society, but an enterprise society. The homo oeconomicus sought after is not the man of exchange or man the consumer; he is the man of enterprise and production’ (Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics, 147).
517 Brown, Undoing the Demos, 36.
ratings for every activity and domain, or through more directly monetized practices, the pursuit of education, training, leisure, reproduction, consumption, and more are increasingly configured as strategic decisions and practices related to enhancing the self's future value.\textsuperscript{518}

In this respect, the neoliberal self is like any competitive firm. The entrepreneurial self ‘mirrors the mandate for contemporary firms, countries, academic departments or journals, universities, media or websites: entrepreneurialize, enhance competitive positioning and value, maximise ratings or rankings.’\textsuperscript{519} When conceived as a small enterprise, while the individual might not be selling a service or exchanging goods in the strict sense, they are necessarily making investments, looking to increase portfolio value, and competing for advantage with other self-enterprises, even co-workers and employers.

As explained above, encouraging competition between workers is a key neoliberal strategy for bringing about entrepreneurial self-management. Several decades ago, Peters and Waterman were already commenting on the “benefits” of intra-firm competition and ‘peer pressure’:

A company is not supposed to compete with itself. But throughout the excellent companies research, we saw example after example of that phenomenon. Moreover, we saw peer pressure – rather than orders from the boss – as the main motivator. General Motors pioneered the idea of internal competition sixty years ago; 3M, P&G [Proctor & Gamble], IBM, HP, Bloomingdale’s, and Tupperware are its masters today.\textsuperscript{520}

Competition between workers is encouraged as it spurs harder work and generally acts as a motivating force on employees. As with other strategies noted above, it also relieves management of the need to closely direct all work tasks. This competition can be fostered in several ways: making work “outcomes” measurable, and therefore comparable; celebrating and rewarding working achievements; organising workers into “teams” whose work can be compared to that of other “teams”; monitoring workers through goal-setting and auditing, etc. As competing enterprises, people are subject to the same expectations as any enterprise. One must develop oneself, market one’s product, seek investors and customers, and adapt to changes, even within the organisation for which one works. Without strategising in this way, one risks

\textsuperscript{518} Ibid., 33-4.
\textsuperscript{519} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{520} Peters and Waterman, \textit{In Search of Excellence}, 51-2.
weakening one’s competitive position in relation to unknown others in the workforce, future competitors for other employment positions, and co-workers against whom one competes for recognition, promotion and simply to keep one’s job. Hence, as an enterprise of oneself and of one’s own labouring capability, neoliberal subjects are encouraged to compete both within the organisation that employs them and in the global market of self-enterprises. Flexible labour regulations, increased outsourcing, and framing work as a temporary arrangement between enterprises are different ways in which we are forced into a working life of constant competitive pressures.

Under these conditions, a new relationship emerges between employee and employer. When labour is seen solely as an entrepreneurial product in a market, ‘a contractual relationship between “personal enterprises”’ is substituted for ‘the wage contract.’\(^{521}\) That is, the self-enterprise is not employed as such. Rather, it engages in business alliances with other enterprises of various sizes. Neoliberalism obfuscates the wage-relation – the employer paying the worker for a given amount of time of their labouring capacity in exchange for a wage – and instead presents the employment relationship as two enterprises ‘enter[ing] into a business partnership’.\(^{522}\) Each self-enterprise simultaneously collaborates and competes with other self-enterprises in numerous business ventures. This stress on improving one’s competitive position in pursuit of securing business undermines worker solidarity and collective action. Instead of solidarity, ethical questions about the “business” being done, and a political understanding of work relations, the ideology of competition reframes our everyday encounters and commitments as part of a merely strategic battle. As Davies puts it,

\[\text{[t]he very act of circumscribing activities within a competitive arena, subject to specific rules of competition, is an invitation to abandon ethical questions of how one ‘ought’ to behave or how society ‘ought’ to be, in favour of strategic efforts to defeat opponents and maximise one’s score... The capacity of competition to keep ethics at bay... is another way of understanding the enthusiasm that neoliberals have always expressed for competitive forms of interaction.}^{523}\]

\(^{521}\) Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 266.


\(^{523}\) Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, 62.
However, people do not first encounter the competitive paradigm when they enter the workplace, or when they commence competing for a position in the workplace. Many children, even babies, are tested and trained for a life of competition from their earliest years. To make this point clear, I will briefly make reference to a number of examples from Brown, Lauder and Ashton's work.

In some of the examples they provide us, it seems that it is the activities and desires of the parents that competitively situate their children, even before the child is capable of embodying anything like a competitive spirit. Brown, Lauder and Ashton note that it is often parents who push their children to compete – or who compete for them, using money, connections, and other resources – for ‘the best prep schools, high schools, universities, and “branded” firms.’ Many parents probably feel that they would not be meeting their parental obligations should they fail to provide their children with every possible advantage. Hence, it is important to note that competitiveness need not come from a ruthless disregard for others or some insatiable appetite for conquest and life’s finer things. It can also be married with a genuine concern for those close to us. As Brown, Ashton and Lauder note, some parents will go to some length for the sake of giving their child a competitive advantage, ‘such as remortgaging their homes to pay for private schooling or suddenly discovering a new faith to get their child into the local religious school with a good reputation.’ They also note the increasing use of private forms of education; apart from actual private schools, parents also make extensive use of tutors, counsellors and career specialists. Some parents have even been accused of trying to have their children diagnosed with a learning disability in order to give them an advantage in school tests.

\[^{525}\] Ibid., 12.
\[^{526}\] Ibid., 144.
\[^{527}\] Brown, Lauder and Ashton borrow this example from David Callahan’s *The Cheating Culture*: ‘Along with many other examples, he [David Callahan] cites the case of Dr. Dana Luck, a psychiatrist in Westchester County, who had a sudden increase in the number of local teenagers she was asked to evaluate for even the slightest evidence of learning disability. The cause was a College Board ruling giving students with disabilities extra time on Standard Attainment Tests (SATs). This led to diagnosis shopping as wealthy parents attempted to gain official recognition of disability to allow their children a better chance of doing well in the SATs. Dr. Luck expressed...
As Brown, Lauder and Ashton warn us, we would be wrong to think that this kind of childhood training and preparation for a competitive life is an exclusively Western phenomenon. In support, they provide the example of the Chinese best-selling book *Harvard Girl* by Yiting Liu, which ‘sold more than 3 million copies within 2 years of publication’ and offers a series of childrearing techniques designed to secure your child a spot in an elite foreign university.\(^{528}\)

Brown, Lauder and Ashton describe the book as follows:

It tells of how Yiting Liu’s parents adopted a scientific method of child rearing based on the teachings of a little known eighteenth-century German priest named Carl Weter. The priest had applied his innovative approach to child rearing to his son who learned six languages by the age of 9 and obtained two doctorates by the age of 16. In a *Time Magazine* article “Eyes on the Prize,” Yiting’s parents explain that a lot of Chinese parents “just let their kids play until they’re six,” but Yiting’s education started at 15 days old when she started to receive massages to stimulate her senses. Relatives were drafted to talk non-stop during the infant’s every waking hour, a verbal barrage “crucial to developing IQ,” according to Yiting’s mother. “If we wanted Liu Yiting to grow up to be an exceptional person... she would have to be able to withstand great psychological pressures and physical trials,” including long-distance swimming and holding ice cubes until her hands turned purple.\(^{529}\)

Here, the family attempts to mould the child into an “exceptional person” so that the child can later gain admission to prominent educational institutions. In this approach to childrearing, notice how important it is to imagine the child’s future life as composed of countless competitors and competitive situations. In many of the above examples children are not merely being prepared for particular competitions but for competitive life as such.

There are similar insights in Amanda Keddie’s research on education and neoliberalism.\(^{530}\) Fieldwork like Keddie’s necessarily draws on only a small sample of student experiences and there are all sorts of young people who do not have schooling experiences with the neoliberal characteristics that Keddie

\(^{528}\) Ibid., 145.
\(^{529}\) Ibid., 145-6.
outlines. Related to the different classes to which young people belong and the demographics of where they live, there are differences also in the kind of school children attend and the extent to which that school uses neoliberal language and organises its curriculum and other programs along neoliberal lines. Still, these examples are common enough to warrant our attention.

Keddie conducted her research with year five and six students at a London primary school. One of the standout features of the school and the students’ experience of their education was the constant competition. In some instances, this was associated with a desire on the students’ part to win and be the best. Just as often it can be attributed to the idea that if the students did not position themselves well according to various rankings then their future life chances would be limited. Various tests and rankings encouraged students to interpret their achievements in terms of where they were situated on some sort of league table, leading some of them to make constant comparisons between their performance and ranking and that of other students. They often described their educational achievements in terms of having won (or not won) some prize or having achieved a certain level in a topic that could be compared to the level achieved by other students. Consequently, this competitive spirit led many students to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. One student, Rebecca, explains her feelings of disappointment at her performance in the Junior Maths Challenge. Rebecca’s description of her disappointment with herself shows that she believes she has failed to perform at an appropriately high standard, even when she “beats” many other students in some competition. This is Rebecca’s account of her annoyance with herself:

I got a Bronze medal and I was annoyed because I didn’t get the Silver, if I had got Silver I would have been annoyed because I didn’t get Gold. If I got Gold I would have been annoyed because I hadn’t got into the Europe Championship, if I got into the Europe Championship I’d be annoyed because I didn’t win. If I did win... I would be annoyed because my handwriting wasn’t neat enough. It’s like I appreciate it but then I think...

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531 For an interesting example of these class differences in educational experience, see Gabrielle O’Flynn and Eva Bendix Petersen’s analysis of two young women in very different class positions and at different schools in Australia: O’Flynn and Petersen, “The ‘good life’ and the ‘rich portfolio’: young women, schooling and neoliberal subjectification”, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 28, no. 4 (2007).
about all the stuff I could have done better and then I just end up annoyed.\textsuperscript{532}

Irrespective of what Rebecca accomplishes she always feels that she could have done a little more and a little better. Her performance is always measured against some possibly better, optimal performance that she can never achieve. As I discussed above, in an ongoing and somewhat opaque competition, one is only as good as one’s last performance, a performance that could always be bettered.

The propensity to understand their achievements in terms of various measures and rankings was common to all of the high achieving students that Keddie focuses on. Keddie states that the ‘individualism, competitiveness and anxiety within Rebecca’s remarks permeated the talk of the five high achieving students who are featured in this paper.’\textsuperscript{533} Individual competitiveness and anxiety about the need to constantly perform at their best was exacerbated by the schools use of certain forms of evaluation and comparison between students. Keddie claims that educational processes of evaluation, measurement and comparative assessments of performance are borrowed from the business world, turning students, teachers and the school into “auditable commodities,” so they may be efficiently held to account and assessed against quantifiable standards of “success”.\textsuperscript{534} Success though is not an endpoint that can be marked by attaining some specific goal, but is an ongoing performance constantly tracked by evaluative procedures that keep the student keenly aware of the need to exert themselves. The use of these evaluations prompts students to continuously keep in mind their competitive position and the need for ongoing work in the pursuit of a rather amorphous “success.”

However, for the top students, educational achievements were seen as more than a means to secure the necessities of a later adult existence. Some of these students revelled in the constant competition itself as much as in the promised rewards.\textsuperscript{535} Of course, these high achievers receive recognition from teachers, parents and other students that tends to reinforce their commitment

\textsuperscript{532} Keddie, “Children of the market,” 108.
\textsuperscript{533} Keddie, “Children of the market,” 108-9.
\textsuperscript{534} Ibid., 109.
\textsuperscript{535} Ibid., 116.
to competitive positioning and to maintaining high achievements. The competitive spirit was apparent in the constant references that top students made to student rankings and measurements of achievement:

For Christopher, his reading age of 22 sets him well above his peers, for Rebecca her superior cleverness is clear because she finds the SATs tests easier than most of her fellow students and for Lucien, evidence that he is better than most is apparent in his achievement in the Junior Maths Challenge. Lucien’s characterisation of this challenge as like a ‘kids’ World Cup’ and the detailed knowledge he offers in relation to the statistics involved in ranking student performance within the categories of Gold, Silver and Bronze (like Rebecca’s knowledge of the marks required to attain different levels of achievement in the SATs tests) illustrates a strong investment in competition and, more specifically, being ‘better’ than others. Indeed, Lucien admits that he is jealous of those who are recognised as better than him… This is a highly strategic, active and continuous endeavour of calculation, measurement and comparison towards building and developing a self that is productive, ‘successful’ and better than others.536

These examples demonstrate that in adolescent schooling the competitive spirit is assisted by a host of techniques and is not simply some natural propensity. The student’s education is instrumentalised both in the way it is understood to contribute to the school’s reputation (and hence its market competitiveness), and in the way students are encouraged to see educational success as key to future employability, happiness, or simply in order to avoid becoming destitute or failing in some other way. For them to meet the necessary educational achievements, they must be competitive, enterprising, and willing to work hard. Keddie notes that ‘[g]aining positional advantage through hard work is, of course, a central platform of neoliberal discourse obfuscating the reality that such advantage is generally only available to class and race privileged groups with distinctly gendered effects’.537 While the students may not have been aware of the gender, racial and class divides that give people unequal access to the rewards of entrepreneurial existence, they were familiar with the ideas and language that connected education and future success:

All of the children expressed a keen awareness of the significance of education to their future capacity to take up the material benefits of the social world. They were particularly aware of the relationship between education and employment credentialing… While some identified the sort of vocation they would like to take up, such as teacher, barrister and

536 Ibid.
537 Ibid., 109.
doctor, most of the children simply associated a good education with the capacity to get a good job and earn a good income.\textsuperscript{538}

As discussed in chapter three, the idea that education consists of equipping students with general “soft” or enterprise skills has helped to encourage this connection between schooling and later employability. Perhaps it is too anecdotal to invoke my own experience, but I can hardly recall being encouraged to make or myself making quite such a clear connection between my schooling and my future when I was in school in the nineties. No doubt, I had fantasies at various points about being “rich,” but a strictly instrumental understanding of my education and any real understanding about adult working life were all but absent. Certainly, the kind of claim made by Adam, a sixth-grader, would have been shocking to many of my peers and to me: ‘to be honest… [if you’re] not clever academically [you] won’t have a good job when [you’re] older which means [your] life is over basically.’\textsuperscript{539} Indeed, Keddie points out that some of the students hoped to get a good education and consequently a good job not just for the material benefits, the social standing it provides or because it fulfils some notion of good citizenship. Like Adam, many of the students seemed to think that simply ensuring their survival requires good education and good jobs.

Andrew Wilkins’ research at two co-educational secondary schools in London brings out similar themes.\textsuperscript{540} Wilkins’ study also shows that actual competitions (for example, maths competitions) and processes of evaluation (like ranking systems), are not the only ways that competitiveness is fostered in the classroom. Wilkins’ account brings out the way that everyday classroom interactions, often guided by teachers, can help to imbue students with a competitive spirit. In addition to good grades and high ranking, students also compete for ‘symbolic rewards’ like teacher approval and peer acceptance.\textsuperscript{541}

There were a number of scenarios Wilkins witnessed that were indicative of the general classroom environment. For example, during a geography lesson the teacher asked the class who had scored five in a test of five questions. The

\textsuperscript{538} Ibid., 112.

\textsuperscript{539} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{540} Andrew Wilkins, “Push and pull in the classroom: competition, gender and the neoliberal subject,” Gender and Education 24, no. 7 (2012), 765-81.

\textsuperscript{541} Wilkins, “Push and pull in the classroom,” 770.
teacher made her disappointment clear when mostly boys raised their hands, exclaiming 'come on girls'. During a French lesson, the teacher gave the class a task to complete in under 90 seconds, hence making it a race and a competition. In another example, students attempted to spell ten words before handing their work to the student next to them to be marked as the teacher reads out the correct spelling. After this, the students are asked to stand up and the 'teacher then asks pupils to sit down in order of the number of words they spelt correctly.'

Not all the students engaged with these tasks in a competitive and enthusiastic way. But enough did for it to be worthy of comment. Hence, at least in some respects, students have experiences of learning that are competitive and adversarial, 'based on attitudes of point-scoring, one-upmanship and entrepreneurialism.' We can imagine the anxiety and fear of inadequacy these classroom techniques cause in some students. Some of these competitive techniques are very visceral ways of comparing students, such as having them stand up and then sit down when their low score precludes them from further recognition. The student is encouraged to score high in geography or maths not because the subjects matter to them, to their development, and to the world around them in some way, but because their score in these subjects is another way in which their value relative to other students is made apparent. Through their participation in these educational practices, pupils in effect are incited to calibrate their behaviour on the basis of enterprising tendencies and formulate success in narrow utilitarian terms as the outcome of competitive behaviour. Competitive behaviour is rewarded and associated with good outcomes in the future. Students are separated into winners and losers, with the possibility of shifting their competitive position with hard work and improved performance when the next comparative lesson comes around.

Keddie believes that as a consequence of these kinds of experiences within the education system, students today make sense of their education and

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542 Ibid.
543 Ibid., 771.
544 Ibid.
545 Ibid.
employment prospects ‘within the context of neoliberal imperatives.’ 546

Significantly, this also shapes how they identify with themselves, friends, and the world around them. In the case of the UK, Keddie holds that neoliberal imperatives have been shaping social relations in numerous ways for 30 years and are therefore ‘seen by the current generation of students as natural or normal’. 547 While this might be overstating the case somewhat, it is an important reminder that at least some of those aspects of neoliberalism I have been discussing throughout this thesis are now old enough and common enough to have become unremarkable, even unnoticeable, to many younger people. Foremost among them is the stress on competition and the normalisation of competitive processes and comparisons. In this way, young people are prepared for a world of ongoing competition in which, as entrepreneurs of themselves, their responsibility begins and ends with their own competitive standing.

It is the fault of individuals should they not adequately engage in entrepreneurial activity, preparing for and adapting to changes, seeking out new opportunities, making themselves amenable to the requirements of entrepreneurial life, for which – as we have seen – they must start preparing at a young age. Hence, making people responsible for the success or failure of their self-enterprises essentially means preparing them for and abandoning them to the ebbs and flows of the “global economy.” Managing one’s human capital and taking advantage of opportunities for enhancing value are the techniques necessary for living in a competitive neoliberal world that cannot be controlled, a world where future forecasts are less and less reliable. From a neoliberal perspective, it is precisely because the world is beyond the individual’s control that the self is an obvious site of activity. And because the self is the domain of choice and control, it is the individual who bears responsibility for their own fortune, having managed their capital in better or worse ways. 548

547 Ibid.
The Flexible, Adaptable and Resilient Subject

The *summum bonum* of modern agency is to present oneself as eminently *flexible* in any and all respects.\(^{549}\) In addition to being subject to constant competition, and consequently needing to improve one’s competitiveness, entrepreneurial life is also one of relentless flexibility and adaptability. As explained, in the neoliberal worldview there is no escape from constant competition and hence from the possibility of one’s competitive standing either improving or worsening. This means that one is always subject to potentially drastic changes in one’s circumstances. Consequently, there is a constant need to manage one’s capital and reorient one’s entrepreneurial endeavours as circumstances demand.

In order to competitively ‘entrepreneurialize its endeavours, appreciate its value, and increase its rating or ranking,’\(^{550}\) the neoliberal self must be flexible and adaptable. This is another way in which the self mirrors the firm in the neoliberal imaginary. Flexibility and adaptability are capabilities that firms require to succeed in competitive and evolving markets. Boltanski and Chiapello highlight the way that French management literature of the 1990s stressed the need for firms to be flexible, adaptive and inventive as a response to increased global competition and ‘rapid technological change.’\(^{551}\) Due to the way that selfhood is modelled on the competitive firm, neoliberal selves also need to be flexible and adaptable in order to move within and across markets should new opportunities arise or older pursuits become less profitable or unfeasible. Like the firm, we must constantly make investments, manage risks, establish new business relationships, and so on. This particular idea of the firm has become one of the essential models of neoliberal flexible selfhood.

In our current era, individuals are encouraged (or forced) to be flexible as part of the general advocacy for labour market flexibility. Demands for labour market flexibility came to the fore in the 1980s and have been repeated *ad nauseam* ever since. It is often argued that labour market flexibility is needed so as to keep labour costs down and make local industry competitive.\(^{552}\) If labour is

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\(^{549}\) Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*, 108.
\(^{550}\) Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 36.
too “expensive,” it is feared that capital will move to wherever labour costs are cheaper. This is another example of the way that people are expected to accommodate the “demands” of the global market economy. But “flexibility” has been used in a number of other senses:

[W]age flexibility meant speeding up adjustments to changes in demand, particularly downwards; employment flexibility meant easy and costless ability of firms to change employment levels, particularly downwards, implying a reduction in employment security and protection; job flexibility meant being able to move employees around inside the firm and to change job structures with minimal opposition or cost; skill flexibility meant being able to adjust workers’ skills easily.  

According to neoliberals and a great many politicians across the political divide, these kinds of flexibility are the only way to maintain both investment and jobs. As has been evident in the recent economic crises in Europe, and pronounced in the case of Greece, it is now common to attribute economic downturns in part ‘to a lack of flexibility and to the lack of ’structural reform’ of labour markets.’

From a neoliberal perspective, the flexibility and adaptability of the neoliberal self is taken to be its greatest strength. Flexible and adaptable selves are better able to take advantage of various opportunities, enhance their value and promote their self-product. Due to the neoliberal subject’s flexibility and adaptability, any shortcomings of the self can be remedied. Consequently, unemployment can be fixed with the right attitude to one’s unemployed status and by adapting one’s “skill set” to better one’s competitive standing in the shifting labour market. Rather than selling a certain amount of labour time, what we offer as self-enterprises is this willingness to engage in an ongoing process of skill acquisition and synchronisation between our abilities and the requirements of potential employers. We sell, in part, the very willingness to be flexible and adaptable. Like most job advertisements these days, the selection criteria for available positions in the Australian public sector all stress the necessity of flexibility and adaptability. Even organisations like Oxfam want their volunteers (and not just employees!) to be flexible and adaptable. Given the vagueness of such criteria, one can only anxiously search one’s past for

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553 Ibid.
554 Ibid.
examples in which one proved oneself willingly flexible and adaptable, while being careful not to appear excessively committed to anything for fear of betraying one’s “rigidity” and therefore inflexibility.

Flexibility and adaptability are also essential traits of a self that is an *unending* project, in a world that it not static and predictable, but dynamic and unpredictable. The neoliberal self must be able and willing to engage in the self-fashioning that will support their journey through this competitive and changing world. As David Chandler points out, there is a difference between the notion of “progress” and the neoliberal idea of constant change. Neoliberal change is presented as an ordinary feature of human life, simply the result of complex market-like interactions. Accordingly, unlike the idea of progress, neoliberal change is not teleologically directed to some end point. As such, it is not something we can control, but only something we can adapt to:

Whereas the discourses of progress presupposed a knowable external world open to human exploration and understanding, and to control and direction by governments, the discourse of change involves no future-oriented goals on behalf of the human subject... Change is something that happens independently of human planning or direction, but is understood to be an emergent product of human interaction and agential choices and behaviour. In a neoliberal world, change is something that governments and communities can only adapt to.  

In such a world, it is not the state's role to provide goods and services but instead to foster resilient subjects capable of exercising individual choice and adapting to change. 

In other words, the neoliberal conception of a dynamic and constantly changing world summons the adaptive neoliberal subject. You either change with this world or get left behind. As Peter Drucker makes clear, firms must be prepared above all to ‘abandon yesterday.’ Otherwise they will wastefully commit resources to things that have ceased to contribute to performance and results. Thus, the primary ‘change policy’ of firms must be one of 'Organized Abandonment.' The need to adapt so as to keep pace with a changing world

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559 Ibid., 64.
also goes for individuals. As Freemantle tells us in a curious collection of metaphors,

[d]on't become a coastal mariner. Jump ship and sail over the horizon. Keep moving, that’s the name of the game. Once every four years take a good look at what is on the high sea of opportunity and start pitching for exciting new jobs elsewhere.560

Under flexible employment arrangements, being a “coastal mariner” might not even be an option. Hence, adaptability and flexibility are presented as necessary strategic practices of survival given the insecure working conditions of the neoliberal labour market. Adaptive self-management and perpetual self-fashioning are required if we are to navigate and adequately respond to changing market dynamics and other competing self-enterprises. A neoliberal world needs neoliberal subjects. In other words, we are required to mould ourselves to a neoliberal image of the world.

David Chandler and Julian Reid observe that the flexible and adaptable subject is also a resilient subject.561 Specifically, an individual is resilient if they

560 Freemantle, Wanted, 134.
have adequate adaptive capacity. Resiliency is an essential attribute of both individuals and communities.\textsuperscript{562} As mentioned in chapter two, for the psychological capital theorists, resilience is one of the four main components of psychological capital. Luthans et al. observe that clinical psychologists have defined resilience as ‘a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk’.\textsuperscript{563} However, Luthans et al. propose to broaden this definition. Resilience, they claim, must be understood not only as the capacity to deal with and recover from adverse circumstances, ‘but also very positive, challenging events (e.g., record sales performance) and the will to go beyond the normal, to go beyond equilibrium point’.\textsuperscript{564} From this perspective, the truly resilient subject is not merely a “survivor.” They are an over-achiever, resiliently – and relentlessly – extending themselves beyond what they have previously achieved.

The emphasis on “risk” helps us to locate the psychological capital account of resiliency squarely within the neoliberal paradigm. From the neoliberal perspective, risk is a necessary part of life in an uncertain world. Trying to totally avoid risk is ‘unrealistic’.\textsuperscript{565} Importantly, risk is also an opportunity for self-development and the optimisation of resources and opportunities. Thus, rather than trying to avoid risk, it is better to treat risk as a chance to develop oneself.\textsuperscript{566} This is why resiliency is so important. It allows one to embrace risk and the challenges this entails, turning adversity into opportunity:

If properly identified and managed, the process of using assets to overcome risks can help people overcome complacency, explore new domains, and further exploit their existing talents and strengths. In other words... risks can stimulate growth and development and help people to reach their full potential... [R]isk factors are important antecedents for bouncing back and beyond in the resiliency process. Resiliency allows one to take advantage of latent potential that would go undiscovered otherwise.\textsuperscript{567}

This resiliency in the face of risk is now more necessary than ever. Today’s workplace, as Luthans et al. state, is highly competitive and continuously

\textsuperscript{562} Chandler, “Debating Neoliberalism,” 15.
\textsuperscript{563} Luthans et al., Psychological Capital, 116.
\textsuperscript{564} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{565} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{566} ‘[T]he presence of challenges is actually a necessary and invaluable growth and self-actualization opportunity’ (Ibid.).
\textsuperscript{567} Ibid., 117-8.
changing. In this context, organisations are not looking for people who simply perform basic required tasks. Instead, they are searching for ‘top performers who can thrive on chaos, proactively learn and grow through hardships, and excel no matter how many or how intense the inevitable setbacks.’

Accordingly, the resilient and adaptive subject is not afraid of a little chaos. It sees stability and predictability as features of an uninteresting and unproductive past. This subject can grow and learn through adversity, and excel despite any setbacks. Not only does the resilient subject bounce back from such hardships and setbacks, they actually somehow manage to better themselves in the process. The neoliberal subject here is not only being lumped with the responsibility to suffer the consequences of difficult circumstances, but is also being charged with the task of turning these circumstances into an opportunity for self-enhancement and improved performance. It is not enough to simply bounce back from some difficulty – although this is still necessary, ‘it is no longer sufficient’:

Average performance can no longer meet today’s rapidly growing expectations... Today’s organizational participants need to not only survive, cope, and recover but also to thrive and flourish through the inevitable difficulties and uncertainties that they face and to do so faster than their competition.

We can see that the amalgamation of resiliency and adaptability is a way of making extreme demands of workers, portraying every circumstance as an opportunity to improve performance and enhance the individual self-enterprise. These psychological capital theorists seem to say, “in this topsy-turvy world you must be resilient come what may, adapt harder and faster than the competition, or suffer the consequences!”

Resiliency is essential not just in the face of specific hardships and in one’s current workplace; rather, resiliency is necessary across the whole span of working life. The psychological capital theorists call this broader kind of adaptive capacity “career resiliency.” Those with career resiliency are dedicated

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568 Resiliency is also needed because the workplace is ‘dominated by shades of gray when it comes to value systems and standards of ethical behavior’ (Ibid., 122). I can only assume when they say that the concept of resiliency is appealing in these circumstances that they mean it allows workers to better put up with ethically questionable treatment and behaviour.

569 Ibid., 123.

570 Ibid.
to ‘continuous learning’, are willing and able to ‘reinvent themselves to keep pace with change’, and will ‘take responsibility for their own career management’.

Significantly, the notion of career resiliency, this adaptive capacity that allows the self-enterprise to mould itself to external requirements, changes the relationship between employee and organisation. Specifically, Luthans et al. understand the ‘new strategy of career resiliency’ to have clear implications for how we think about loyalty and commitment. Career resiliency gives individuals a broader perspective from which they can see that the complete elimination of risk is neither possible nor desirable, that it is harmful to consider one’s career as structured around a particular specialisation at one organisation. For Luthans et al., career resiliency allows for a more ‘volatile, flexible relationship between members and the organization that is sustained as long as it is mutually beneficial’. The question is: what do they consider mutually beneficial? They make it clear what they expect of workers under this career resiliency approach. Put simply, it is the responsibility of workers to adapt to organisational needs. Workers are ‘charged with continuously monitoring, benchmarking, and anticipating changes in organizational needs and then upgrading their skills and abilities (assets) accordingly’. Obviously, this side of the bargain benefits the organisation. Workers will have the adaptable skills required at any time and the general attitude of commitment and flexibility that management desires.

However, Luthans et al. inform the reader that employees still need to perceive the relationship between themselves and the organisation as fair and based on trust. What does this perception entail? Does this trust involve some sort of employment protection, clear and enforceable workplace rights and benefits, genuine power in the workplace? No, it does not. People will still have to be “let go” in the flexible workplace, perhaps frequently. The challenge for the modern organisation is to do this in a way that maintains employee “dignity”:

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571 Ibid., 127-8.
572 Ibid.
573 Ibid.
574 Ibid.
575 Ibid., 128.
‘Having to let people go but helping to maintain their dignity is resiliency enhancing.’\textsuperscript{576} Presumably this is because it familiarises workers with their disposability, thus making their hiring and firing a normal process and encouraging them to consider their disposability as the ongoing opportunity to take up new ventures.

Thus, employers are not responsible for instituting the ‘traditional employment contract.’\textsuperscript{577} For Luthans et al., this traditional arrangement is no longer suitable. It is not clear, then, what employers must do to meet their responsibilities. After all, as we saw above, it is workers who must be ‘continuously monitoring, benchmarking, and anticipating changes in organizational needs and then upgrading their skills and abilities (assets) accordingly.’\textsuperscript{578} By contrast, employers’ obligations are described in the vaguest terms: they must enhance staff ‘employability’ through ‘equipping rather than prescriptive training’ and supporting ‘lifelong learning.’\textsuperscript{579} Although the way in which they meet these obligations is not made explicit, the intention is clear. Workers are not being equipped with only firm specific skills but with adaptive capacities that set them up for a life of myriad employment relationships, moving with the ebbs and flows of global markets, looking to where the finger of capital points at any given time. Clearly, the idea is to create a culture in which workplace and career expectations accord with the requirements of a flexible employment market. Career resiliency thus establishes a new ‘psychological contract’ between worker and organisation: ‘career resiliency is not a violation or betrayal of the psychological contract. Instead, it is a new type of psychological contract with somewhat different but still balanced expectations.’\textsuperscript{580} Those expectations neatly fit with the neoliberal organisation of employment and working life.

Generally speaking, the entire framework of career resiliency is designed to squeeze more out of workers. Career resiliency places workers (either literally or imaginatively) in a continuously competitive and changing job

\textsuperscript{576} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{577} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{578} Ibid., 127-8.
\textsuperscript{579} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{580} Ibid.
market that makes it necessary for them to adapt to employer needs and differentiate themselves from the competition. In the neoliberal era, precarious employment is really an opportunity; it gives workers the incentives they need to be successful self-entrepreneurs. This seems to be the position of the psychological capital theorists:

In the career-resiliency paradigm, risk factors that may be inherent in organizational strategic decisions, such as downsizing, reengineering, mergers and acquisitions, and outsourcing, may also trigger the development of new assets for resiliency. For example, career-resilient managers and employees are likely to invest time and energy in beefing up their resumes and in networking and building connections beyond their direct units or even their present organization. This newly developed human and social capital is a resource to draw on in times of adversity. When properly managed through well-designed organizational values, policies, and procedures... these relationships can be aligned and channelled to work for, rather than against, the interests of the organization. Moreover, adaptational mechanisms, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-development, are expected to mediate the processes through which managers and employees proactively and independently develop their assets, manage their risk factors, refine their values and beliefs, and subsequently build their resiliency. In other words, resiliency is required to survive the precarious conditions of modern work, and, in turn, the experience of these conditions will build further resiliency. Difficult conditions are essentially understood as opportunities to develop neoliberal-entrepreneurial capacities and assets. The extra work that individuals have to do also benefits the organisation that employs them, and equips workers with both the resiliency and the general skills needed for future employment relationships.

This heroic vision of the individual as self-enterprise, constantly adapting and remaking themselves to fit the circumstances, able to overcome any obstacle with the right attitude and self-fashioning, has played out in our everyday understanding not just of who we are and what we are responsible for but also what we might achieve. It has, in part, limited our grasp of the real restraints faced by different people. In our neoliberal era, we are frequently invited to identify with overnight success stories, successful start-up tech companies, the teenage singing talent whose hard work paid off when they showed up to the right audition. If all these different instances of “success” are

\footnote{Ibid., 129.}
different degrees of the one metric of achievement, if we are all malleable
capital presented with countless opportunities for enhancing value, then
anyone – assuming they apply themselves diligently – can achieve “success.” If
we are unsuccessful, it is because we have not aptly optimised our flexible
selves. But we are in no way materially constrained. We might not achieve
“success” but not because “success” is not a possibility. The neoliberal self can
‘incorporate any attribute, take up any challenge, transcend any limitation, and
embody any quality.’^582

Precarious Lives
So as to further detail the adaptive self-fashioning of neoliberal subjectivity, I
now look at a specific way in which neoliberal selves are mobilised to manage
themselves and their assets. In particular, I argue that the precarious working
and living conditions that affect many people in contemporary capitalism
contribute to the production of neoliberal subjects. In other words, precarious
and insecure conditions can be used to foster the kind of entrepreneurial
activity that is considered desirable from a neoliberal perspective. To take a
specific instance of what makes up this precarity, I contend that the
accumulation of private debt is an important part of contemporary capitalism as
both a means of control and a way of encouraging entrepreneurial activity.
Indebtedness and increasing financialisation of the everyday are part of this
precariousness that makes individuals responsible for managing themselves
and their affairs as if they were owners of a small enterprise. Indebtedness and
financialisation of the everyday, as well as a general precariousness of living
and working conditions, reinforce self-entrepreneurialisation by encouraging
risk-taking, skill acquisition, financial participation, networking and other
related activities. By entwining our subjectivities, households and future
prosperity to markets and financial products, indebtedness and financialisation
further embed neoliberalism in everyday life.

I am not suggesting that precariousness is somehow unique to neoliberal
capitalism. As other scholars have noted, to take working conditions in

^582 Mirowski, Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste, 117.
contemporary capitalism as peculiarly insecure is to ignore both the history of capitalism and the experience of working populations outside of the advanced capitalist countries.\(^{583}\) All the same, I contend that there are a number of important features of the precarity that prevails under contemporary capitalism that we must clarify if we are to make sense of neoliberal selfhood.

Although generally well known, I will first briefly outline a few of the key components of what I am referring to as “precariousness,” specifically as they relate to working conditions. Put simply, much work in the neoliberal period is characterised by: stagnating real wages; the weakening of worker representation due to attacks on unions and related institutions;\(^{584}\) long-term unemployment; increasing part-time and casual employment; self-employment;

\(^{583}\) For an alternative take on the precarity of contemporary workers, see Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, “Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 7-8 (2008). They contend that the previous Fordist-Keynesian arrangement was the exception to the typical precariouslyness of workers under capitalism. See also Francesco Di Bernardo: ‘Precarity, in reality, is not any sort of ‘new’ condition, and not the result of unprecedented post-Fordist transformations of labour and production, but rather a symptom of a return to the pre-Fordist and pre-welfare-state labour conditions’ (Bernardo, “The impossibility of precarity,” *Radical Philosophy* 198 (2016), 9).

\(^{584}\) For example: ‘If the defeat of the air traffic controllers’ union, PATCO, was a decisive turning point in the United States, it had its ugly parallels elsewhere. From the 1970s on, governments and employers around the world launched a coordinated offensive to roll back union power, labor rights, and employees’ wages, benefits, and conditions of work. Workers resisted these attacks, sometimes heroically. But the ruling class was bloody-minded and union leaderships were generally too passive and compromising to prevail. And where employers could not defeat workers on their own, governments turned to legislation, the courts, the police, and prison terms to do the trick. Mandatory wage restraints and trampled union rights became the orders of the day. The U.S. government’s firing [under the Reagan administration] of striking air traffic controllers was part of a widespread revival of tactics only rarely deployed during the Great Boom: mass firings, jailings, and large-scale use of police to break strikes. In Canada, the government imposed compulsory wage controls in 1976 and then two years later jailed the president of the postal workers when his union, for a decade the most militant in the country, struck in defiance. Similar methods would be employed on a much larger scale, supplemented by massive use of scabs and police, when Margaret Thatcher defeated Britain’s National Union of Mineworkers in 1985, or in Bolivia the following year when troops were used to crush the tin miners’ union, long the backbone of labor radicalism’ (McNally, *Global Slump*, 42-3). McNally goes on to give examples from Germany, Italy and elsewhere. For a different perspective on the role of unions and the labour movement in neoliberalism, see: Damien Cahill and Elizabeth Humphrys, “How Labour Made Neoliberalism,” *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 4-5 (2017). Humphrys and Cahill claim that in Australia, certain parts of organised labour are implicated in the ascension of neoliberalism. They argue that similar dynamics were at play in New Zealand, the USA and the UK. From a different perspective, Dorothy Sue Cobble challenges the idea that the global labour movement is in decline. She notes that while union membership has declined in OECD countries, it has been on the rise over the last few decades in other parts of the world. She also highlights the growing importance of “alt-labour” groups, that is, groups that are fighting for workers but that are not members of traditional unions (Cobble, “Worker mutualism in an age of entrepreneurial capitalism”, *Labour & Industry* 26, no. 3 (2016)). See also Beverly Silver, “Theorising the Working Class in twenty-first-century Global Capitalism,” in *Workers and Labour in a Globalised Capitalism*, ed. Maurizio Atzeni (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
contract work; the abandonment of government commitment to full employment; a lack of protection from arbitrary dismissal; the erosion of collective bargaining and other factors contributing to worker insecurity.

As I have suggested, advocates of neoliberal reforms often present changes to work as necessary adjustments to a changing and innovative economy. In other words, these conditions are presented as unavoidable adjustments to “market demands,” or even more grandiously, to historical trends. Moreover, these changes are described as benefiting the majority of people because they are better for the “economy” as a whole. Take the example of the increasing ease with which employers can dismiss workers, often framed as part of the push for a “flexible” industrial relations model. We are told that employers will more willingly hire workers if they know they can easily and cheaply dispose of them, with the supposed benefit being the willingness of employers to hire workers and thus an overall boost to investment and employment. As Standing notes, the IMF and the World Bank are amongst those influential institutions that have claimed “labour flexibility” (employment insecurity and suppressed wage growth) is ‘necessary to attract and retain foreign capital. Governments have accordingly competed with one another in weakening employment protection and have made it easier to employ workers with no such protection.’

Precarious living conditions affect people around the world, including those in the wealthiest countries. Of course, precarious conditions are not equivalent in all places. I merely wish to point out that in those countries that in various ways and for many years have followed a neoliberal pattern of economic development, precariousness for working people is a real and

585 As Matthew Eagleton-Pierce explains, ‘[m]any neoclassical economists, notably those tied to institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), tend to favour ‘labour-market flexibility’ and, by contrast, claim that too much regulation or ‘rigidities’ (such as employment protection schemes or union participation in wage setting) represent something negative… More flexible wages and employment laws, it is argued, help to enable a more rapid clearing of excess supply and demand, a policy environment that is useful when external shocks, like bouts of recession, hit the economy… Thus, a core meaning of flexibility here may indeed be the ease with which an employer can hire and fire. These arguments need not always be specific, but are often couched in the discourse of ‘enterprise’ and ‘competitiveness’ in a ‘global economy’’ (Eagleton-Pierce, Neoliberalism: The Key Concepts (New York: Routledge, 2016), 79).

586 Standing, The Precariat, 31-2.
widespread condition. In the U.S. there were almost one million homeless people ‘on any given day in 2007... and about 3.5 million people were homeless at some point during that year (National Coalition for the Homeless 2009).’

We also need to remember that people in poverty in the U.S., as elsewhere, are not all unemployed. Schutz notes that ‘[n]early half of the officially counted working-age poverty population is... employed – a quarter is employed in full-time jobs – and such low-wage work is not at all merely the province of young job-holders (U.S. Census Bureau 2008c).’ These precarious conditions increasingly affect traditional middle classes and people with professional occupations in a process Joel Kotkin calls the ‘proletarianization of the Yeoman class.’

Many of the white-collar professionals interviewed for Gregg’s Work’s Intimacy faced unemployment, redundancy, relocation, uncompensated overtime, understaffed teams with large workloads and other kinds of work insecurity typical of neoliberal working life. Furthermore, many employment agencies allocating people to temporary work are finding that professional positions constitute an increasing share of their portfolios. Thus, albeit in different ways, an increasing number of people are facing insecure and precarious conditions.

The Indebted Subject and the Financialisation of the Everyday

Private debt and the spread of financial instruments into our everyday lives are key elements of contemporary precariousness and its connection to entrepreneurialisation. When people’s living conditions are threatened, when they lack economic and social security and therefore face an increasingly uncertain future, they are more likely to turn to alternative forms of protection. In many instances, this is not so much a pragmatic choice but an absolute

587 Ibid., 7.
588 Schutz, Inequality and Power, 98.
589 Joel Kotkin, The New Class Conflict (Candor, New York: Telos, 2014), 67. For example, in the US, ‘[w]hile middle-class incomes have fallen relative to the upper-income groups, house prices and the costs of health insurance, utilities, and college tuition have all soared... For over a decade, job gains have been concentrated largely in the low-wage service sector, such as in retail or hospitality, which alone accounted for nearly sixty percent of job gains; in contrast middle-income positions have actually been declining. Meanwhile, taxes on corporate profits, which are at an all-time high, have fallen to near historic lows’ (Kotkin, The New Class Conflict, 67).
590 Gregg, Work’s Intimacy.
591 Standing, The Precariat, 33.
necessity, as some people are forced to use credit to meet basic subsistence needs. Nevertheless, the turn to credit is not merely the consequence of necessity. Neoliberal ideology, which encourages us to treat everything as an asset and to be constantly looking for opportunities to increase value, has also played a crucial role. Firms calculate optimal debt levels based on expectations about the performance of assets and market developments. The indebted neoliberal self – and the indebted neoliberal family – is supposed to make similar calculations and must concern themselves with comparable market dynamics.

Furthermore, the proliferation of household debt and increased financial participation have been actively facilitated by government policies (financial deregulation, the creation of private retirement savings, easy credit, tax deductions, financial education), the development of new financial and banking products, and campaigns that encouraged housing investment, participation in the financial markets and the use of credit cards. Governments of various political persuasions have enthusiastically promoted financial inclusion. For example, the UK Labour government that came to power in 1997 endorsed financial inclusion (financial market accessibility) as a way of remedying various social and economic problems. Susanne Soederberg contends that ‘the increasing reliance of the working poor on expensive forms of privately created money (what is conventionally termed ‘consumer credit’) is a social construction that has been facilitated and reproduced by states and capitalists in the neoliberal era.’ Paraphrasing Robert J. Shiller, Fiona Allon claims that the idea was precisely ‘to bring... the benefits of Wall Street to the customers of Walmart.’ Perhaps, we might add, even to the workers of Walmart.

As emphasised above, the use of credit has been one way in which people have compensated for slowing wage growth and a general loss of work and financial security. Yet, it is not simply that the impoverished and insecure classes use credit to finance their needs and protect their living standards. It is

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in the interest of the capitalist class to ensure that the larger working class can both meet its subsistence needs and continue to consume products and services. Capitalists seek to minimise wages without entirely robbing labour of its purchasing power, upon which capital is dependent. Hence, credit is a useful tool (in the short-term) for circumventing this problem. As Cahill observes, in the neoliberal era, ‘workers’ real wages across the advanced capitalist countries either stagnated or grew very slowly, but demand was maintained via the extension of credit to working class households – facilitated by neoliberal processes of financial deregulation.⁵⁹⁵

In recent decades, people have addressed insecure and precarious conditions by incurring further debt, sourcing credit to invest in housing and other assets. As Allon notes regarding the U.S. – and the same can be said of Australia, the UK and elsewhere – at the same time as it was becoming easier to access credit, there was an intense push of ideas celebrating the ownership society and housing investment opportunities, and these ideas were complemented by ‘schemes of equity withdrawal and refinancing.’⁵⁹⁶ Indeed, in the last couple of decades home loans have been an avenue for debt consolidation, as people have used their mortgages to acquire further credit, in some cases to pay off other outstanding debts.⁵⁹⁷ People have also used housing finance to attain credit to meet their basic needs, all the while hoping that their assets (in this case, also their homes) will appreciate enough for them to be able

⁵⁹⁵ Cahill, *The End of Laissez-Faire*, 66. Allon sums up the situation in the U.S.: ‘In this new age of post-growth volatility characterized by rising unemployment and deindustrialization, American consumers not only faced the possibility of sudden loss of employment and therefore income, but also stagnating wages, a trend that would actually amount to a steady decline in real wages over the next 30 or so years.... [C]onsumers began to rely on credit to compensate for lack of wage growth, enabling households to maintain their standard of living while also upholding the levels of consumption that capitalist expansion increasingly depended on. This came at the cost of ballooning household debt levels, however, and, unsurprisingly, between 1970 and 1979 outstanding debt tripled (Barba and Pivetti 2009). From the 1970s on, as they sought to insure against the uncertainties of employment, a declining social wage and increasingly privatized and downsized public services, flows of highly liquid capital enabled Americans to borrow cheaply and so invest in, and acquire, assets’ (Fiona Allon, “Everyday Leverage, or Leveraging the Everyday,” *Cultural Studies*, 29, no. 5-6 (2015a), 692-3).
⁵⁹⁶ Allon, “Everyday Leverage, or Leveraging the Everyday,” 698.
⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.
to cover their debt (or, in the best case scenario, improve their standard of living). 598

The general populace’s indebtedness and integration into credit markets extends beyond housing finance. There is also the increase in student debt, credit cards, payday loans and other kinds of bank loans. 599 For example, ‘[b]y the end of 2009... more than 576 million credit cards were in use in the U.S., representing an average of three and a half per cardholder. On these cards, the average American household held $15,788 in debt – loans that come with a variety of user fees and exorbitant interest rates.’ 600 Soederberg holds that these different forms of credit are being used to meet the subsistence needs of the ‘surplus population,’ that reserve army of labour so essential to the capital owning class:

[C]apital accumulation depends on a relative surplus population – not only because a ready supply of cheap workers is profitable for capitalists, but also because the reserve army places downward pressure on existing wage levels, threatens employed labourers with layoffs, discourages labour organisation and increases the intensity of labour for those employed. It is, therefore, in the capitalist classes’ interests to manage the relative surplus population, through disciplinary tactics and ideological means, in such a way as to perpetuate it... The relative surplus population must, therefore, be able to socially reproduce itself by meeting basic subsistence needs. 601

Increasing the use of credit has been an important tool for meeting these basic subsistence needs. Credit has been used not only to protect living standards but also simply to fill the gaps caused by stagnating wages and the loss of other forms of social protection. This is particularly the case for workers living from paycheque to paycheque who often have no extra resources to meet unexpected outlays like medical emergencies. The use of credit to meet basic needs often further entrenches indebtedness and locks people into a vicious cycle of needing to find the means to make repayments (with interest) on their debt, which might require the accruement of more debt, or taking whatever work is

598 ‘Several studies have now confirmed the extent to which American households have been borrowing money against property not just as leverage for home purchase, but rather simply to raise funds to make ends meet, a trend that has also become prominent in other countries such as the UK and Australia’ (ibid.).
599 Student loans in the US now exceed $1 trillion, ‘higher than all other types of consumer credit (save mortgage debt).’ (Soederberg, Debtfare States and the Poverty Industry, 1).
600 McNally, Global Slump, 121-2.
601 Soederberg, Debtfare States and the Poverty Industry, 40-1.
available, often insecure and poorly paid work that leads to the need for more credit, and so on.

In addition to allowing the surplus population to meet their subsistence needs and maintaining levels of consumption, debt has also given the owners of capital a means by which to extract more value from the popular classes. As Harvey explains, dispossession also occurs beyond the bounds of the workplace. Harvey draws our attention to what he calls the ‘secondary forms of exploitation,’ an example of which is the extraction that takes place as a consequence of indebtedness. 602 For instance, as David McNally observes, banks and other credit issuers make large sums of money from the ‘least “credit-worthy”’. 603 Money is extracted from this section of the population through high interest rates (for example, on credit cards) and fees ‘for late payments and bounced checks.’ 604

From this perspective, people who have not traditionally had access to credit constitute a new target market. An obvious example in recent history is the mortgage-brokers (and the other players in the financial world that supported such practices) who pushed “subprime” loans onto disadvantaged communities in the lead up to the Global Financial Crisis. As Soederberg documents, when people started to default on their mortgages, credit card companies swooped in to offer them another line of credit in order to secure fees and interest payments for the credit issuers. 605 In another example, Soederberg cites a 2008 study conducted by the Centre for Financial Services Innovation in which it is claimed that in the US ‘approximately 106 million individuals (40 million households) are unbanked and underbanked, representing billions of dollars of potential income.’ 606 Of the people interviewed for this study, 41 percent were unemployed, 11 percent were part-time workers, and 33 percent had subprime credit ratings (42 percent could not be scored because they had little or no credit history). 607 Such vulnerable

602 David Harvey, Rebel Cities (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 129.
603 McNally, Global Slump, 124.
604 Ibid.
605 Soederberg, Debtfare States and the Poverty Industry, 94.
606 Ibid., 93. The study was co-sponsored by Citibank, Fidelity National Information Services, H&R Block and MasterCard.
607 Ibid.
groups are easy targets for financial institutions in search of new investment opportunities.

The spread of debt among the population acts in part as a disciplinary mechanism. Those who are indebted need to work to meet not only their subsistence needs but also to meet debt repayments. Hence, heavily indebted people are more likely to take whatever work is available, under any conditions, in order to make repayments and to safeguard their access to credit. Debt also has a disciplinary effect on the better off, who enjoy a better standard of living but must remain committed to work and financial participation if they maintain this standard of living in part through excessive debt and other forms of financial exposure (for example, assets that fluctuate in value). Hence, debt helps to guarantee the productive activity of the indebted person into the future. Soederberg holds that indebted individuals and families learn to be ‘respectful/fearful of market discipline’ through their subjection to ‘the coercive tactics employed by collection agencies, such as the threat of court proceedings, prison and so forth; the less onerous imposition by creditors of expensive late fees and other pecuniary penalties; and the lowering of one’s credit scores – all of which result in either lack of access to credit or higher risk premiums on the next issuance of credit.’

Similarly, albeit from an intellectual perspective somewhat different from Soederberg’s, Maurizio Lazzarato contends that indebtedness is an essential feature of modern governmental practices. He claims that debt reduces ‘the uncertainty of the behavior of the governed.’ In practical terms, it encourages people to accept the necessity of work and to concern themselves with their credit rating. Hence, we could say that indebtedness mitigates future uncertainty by restricting people’s possibilities and tethering them to financial markets and work. For Lazzarato, debt can be thought of as a “promise” that puts certain limits on the debtor’s future actions. By extracting such a promise, ‘capitalism exercises “control over the future,” since debt obligations allow one

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608 Ibid., 62.
610 However, I would argue that wage and property relations in capitalism already perform a similar function. Unfortunately, I do not have space in this thesis to explore this topic.
to foresee, calculate, measure, and establish equivalences between current and future behavior.\textsuperscript{611}

More than simply a “promise,” Lazzarato also considers indebtedness as a form of education in the sense that it teaches people the techniques they need to employ and the framework in which they need to think in order to navigate a life in the markets, which also means a life in debt. Being indebted is a kind of ‘apprenticeship’ insofar as it supplies people with an opportunity to practice the techniques of the successful self-enterprise.\textsuperscript{612} These might include acquiring a basic familiarity with accounting, learning how to manage debt and other financial products, and placing one’s capital – including one’s debt (now also a possible asset) – in profitable kinds of investments. Most people undergo some version of this “education” through debt due to the normalcy of credit and the instruments that support it.

It is the responsibility of the entrepreneurial self to manage its debt and to use debt effectively. The savvy, responsible, and entrepreneurial adult must concern themselves with their debt, source more debt when a higher future return is possible, and maintain a good credit rating. Hence, under neoliberal capitalism indebtedness is another way of transferring costs and risks to individuals and families. What is distinct about indebtedness in the neoliberal period is that it becomes a \textit{permanent} responsibility. As Martijn Konings observes, the expansion of credit that occurred in the US in the middle decades of the twentieth century was founded on the principle that debt ought to be repaid in full and hence the debt ultimately annulled.\textsuperscript{613} By contrast, Konings says that the expansion of “revolving debt” in the early 1970s is indicative of a shift away from such a model of credit. Revolving debt ‘does not require paying down the principal as long as debtors are capable of servicing the interest payments on the debt, usually against interest rates that would have been considered usurious only several decades earlier.’\textsuperscript{614}

\textsuperscript{611} Lazzarato, \textit{The Making of the Indebted Man}, 46.
\textsuperscript{612} Maurizio Lazzarato, \textit{Governing by Debt}, trans. Joshua David Jordan, (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015), 70-1.
\textsuperscript{614} Konings, \textit{The Emotional Logic of Capitalism}, 109.
variety of credit encouraged ongoing indebtedness. The price for having ‘a piece of the American dream’ is ‘indefinite penance.’

Therefore, debt is what I would call a form of control, integrating people into a credit system that requires the organisation of their assets and working life in such a way that allows them to meet repayments and guarantees their ongoing participation in the neoliberal economy. Importantly, it also facilitates an outlook by which people start to calculate, as noted above, much like a firm. People’s houses, for example, become “property investments,” assets that (it is commonly believed) will continue to appreciate and act as a source of capital and security for the family. Accordingly, indebtedness and financial market participation facilitate a set of practices that more intimately connect individuals and families with the financial markets of neoliberal capitalism.

In addition to increased private indebtedness, I suggest that the integration of everyday life and financial markets is another phenomenon that encourages people to understand and orient themselves in a way that reinforces the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism. For instance, people’s savings in superannuation funds are heavily invested in the financial markets. Consequently, people have an interest in the strength and stability of those markets, even if financial markets undermine the living conditions of workers in other ways. Apart from superannuation, many people are now managing their own portfolio of investments, for example, in stocks and bonds.

As Gerald F. Davis documents, over the last half-century more and more people in the US became investors in the financial markets, often through diversified mutual funds. Davis reports that the ownership of stocks is particularly prevalent among younger people. While their parents may have “enjoyed” (and in recent years may have had cut short) a lifetime of employment at a single employer, ‘this generation was not about to entrust

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615 Ibid.
618 ‘[W]here one in eight households headed by someone under 35 was invested in the stock market in 1983, half were in 2001’ (Davis, Managed by the Markets, 3).
their future to a career at Pets.com or Wal-Mart. In other words, and as outlined above, it is precisely because people do not have secure employment and – particularly in some countries – an adequate social safety net that they feel the need to look for material security elsewhere.

This widespread participation in financial markets is supported by the kind of neoliberal ideology I have been describing. While people are working on their human capital, investing in their “soft” skills, and searching for new and possibly lucrative investment opportunities, they can diversify their portfolio by including some financial capital in the stricter sense of that term. If the individual is something like a small enterprise, then each of us ought also to be an investor in the global financial markets. Hence, we are investors in a number of senses. We invest in our human capital, in social capital (friendships, networks, neighbourhoods, social media), in our homes, in our superannuation, and in actual financial markets. Investing in the stock market, having your retirement savings invested in the financial markets, and buying into housing as a vehicle for wealth creation, are important ways in which the neoliberal subject learns to perceive itself precisely as this portfolio of investments. Just as Lazzarato describes indebtedness as a kind of apprenticeship, these different forms of “investment” also have an educational effect. As Davis describes this new kind of investor:

Through portable pension plans, complex home mortgages, and investments in human capital and social capital, investor-citizens managed a portfolio containing many species of assets. Indeed, one could recognize the sophisticated investor by the ribbons running along the bottom of her laptop: Fidelity to track her 401(k), Zillow.com to monitor home prices in her neighborhood, US News to update the value of her college degree, and Facebook to assess the worth of her social capital (formerly known as “friends”).

Allon makes a number of similar points when describing what she calls a system of “wealthfare.” Wealthfare refers to the promise of the “democratisation of credit,” that is, the idea that investment in financial markets and ownership of interest-bearing assets are a way of liberating oneself from

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619 Ibid.
620 Ibid., 193.
621 Allon uses the term “wealthfare” to complement Soederberg’s notion of “debtfare” (Fiona Allon, “Money, Debt, and the Business of “Free Stuff”,” The South Atlantic Quarterly 114, no. 2 (2015b), 286).
reliance on wages. These investments are supposed to ‘provide a solid and reliable foundation that can insulate against misadventures such as unemployment and sickness, while also liberating households from the ephemerality and the “tyranny” of earned income’. Allon stresses the ways in which our daily lives are connected to financial markets ‘through homeownership and investing in the housing market, through managing one’s superannuation or choosing a privatised pension plan, through to selecting a financial or insurance product to finance one’s retirement.’ The integration of financial markets and our pensions, superannuation, mortgage debt, student debt, and insurance, connects more areas of everyday life with the fluctuations and disciplinary forces of markets. By promoting the purchase of financial products and the financialisation of our everyday lives, “wealthfare” reframes the middle classes as “investors” whose economic interests are singularly focused on asset prices and shareholder value.

Housing is an excellent example of this financialisation of the everyday. On the one hand, housing is bound up with the financial markets because of the centrality of property finance and mortgage securitisation to recent forms of capital accumulation. Through securitisation, mortgage repayments become an income stream for someone in the financial markets. On the other hand, as I noted above, housing has also taken on a financial aspect for the owner-occupier. For a start, as an asset whose value people hope will continue to appreciate, many see housing as a safe investment for wealth creation. Additionally, as noted above, homes have become ‘objects of investment and speculation from which home equity could be leveraged to finance consumption, retirement and further investment opportunities.’ Using homes and housing finance in this way is a perfect example of a ‘debt-financed model of privatised welfare.’ It is dependent upon private households using their mortgages to finance consumption, make other investments, and acquire further debt. From a neoliberal perspective, this makes perfect sense, as

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626 Ibid., 20.
everything is considered a kind of capital for investment and value-enhancement.

Using housing as a vehicle for wealth creation and a source of further credit changes the way that people relate not only to their homes but also to the area in which they live. Harvey observes that many homeowners want to preserve and if possible increase the value of their houses in order to protect their investment.\footnote{David Harvey, \textit{Consciousness and the Urban Experience} (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 42.} The presentation of their suburban area, access to local services, levels of pollution – these issues matter because they have consequences for property prices. As Harvey points out, infrastructure projects (for example, a new road) can increase the value of some properties while decreasing the value of others. Increasing homeownership (including the purchase of second or third houses) ‘can also lead to petit landlordism, which has been a traditional and very important means for individual workers to engage in the appropriation of values at the expense of other workers.’\footnote{Harvey, \textit{Consciousness and the Urban Experience}, 42.}

The more people rely on homeownership as a form of protection, the more they have a stake in such issues, which tend to be focused on the interests and predicaments of individuals, rather than those problems that affect people collectively.

As with some of the consequences of precariousness mentioned above, insecure work and living conditions have incentivised the financialisation of the everyday and particularly of the home. Again, for savvy neoliberal subjects, worsening conditions are an opportunity for entrepreneurialism, here by using large amounts of credit to get involved in the property market and to acquire other promising assets. Taking risks and leveraging to invest is not simply one good idea among others; it is what is expected of mature, responsible and independent adults. Increased financial exposure ties the fate of households closely to financial and property markets, and trains people to closely monitor and operate within the world of stock and property prices, to anticipate future market changes, and look for opportunities for new investments or signs that it
is time to “bail out.” This has led to what Allon, extending the insights of Pierre Bourdieu, calls a new “speculative habitus”:

[With] the erosion of state provision and many of the traditional infrastructures for reproducing life, households have been called upon to demonstrate financial calculation in relation to almost every dimension of life management: student loans, mortgages, home equity release, health insurance, credit-card debt, and retirement and individualized pension funds. In this way, individuals have been exhorted to perform their own “calculative agencies” in order to function as competent financial subjects who can provide for themselves and their families by investing in the future. Consequently, investment and speculation have become emergent forms of “normal” social relations, their embrace by individuals taken as a sign, somewhat paradoxically, of prudent and responsible life management and planning. As a direct result, both individuals and households have developed what I call a “speculative habitus,” a mode of being that is defined by an anticipatory logic and a prospective temporality. For Pierre Bourdieu, the habitus is the structuring mechanism that operates from within agents, guided by histories, rules, and dispositions that become internalized, quite literally, as common sense. If the financialization of everyday life has integrated households into global financial markets in new ways, then, it has also become embodied by those same households as specific sensibilities and norms of social being, as habitus.629

“Financial habitus” is present in the world of high finance, but also in many households, and certainly in other institutions traditionally operating with a different logic, like hospitals, schools, universities and government departments. It is now quite common for households and other institutions to seek investment advice, ‘financial counseling’ and ‘specialized wealth management advice.’630 Such advice is to be sought when one is buying insurance, or a house, or investing in stocks, or planning one’s retirement. These practices and the acquisition of the relevant financial knowledge are ‘necessary elements of a responsible model of life management’ 631 in a neoliberal era in which the self and the household are modeled on the small enterprise.


Precarious Conditions and Enterprising Subjects

One of the key points I want to make here is that precariousness, indebtedness and integration into financial markets reinforce the structures and rationale of neoliberal selfhood. Under a flexible work regime, an awareness of precarious and insecure conditions can incentivise self-enterprising activities. Even in industries and workplaces where work is relatively secure, the ubiquity of neoliberal narratives about changing markets, unknown futures and flexible careers all help to prepare people for the self-entrepreneurialism that could be required of them at any time. In other words, fear about one’s future, and a sense of the possible precariousness of one’s situation, are useful incentivising tools.

Thomas Lemke has noted the importance of fear as an instrument for governing in neoliberal capitalism.632 Perpetual uncertainty about the future, and the more specific threats of unemployment and poverty, prompt people to constantly monitor their material situation. As this situation is their responsibility, evaluating it entails considering both immediate risks (health, employment, debt) and larger risks (industry level changes, market downturns, political turmoil, rent and property prices). In order to manage these risks, the neoliberal self must also evaluate and monitor the investments they have made, the (re)training they might need, and other protective measures they can take in the ongoing task of adapting to a changing world. Unprotected people are more likely to anxiously keep an eye on their own circumstances in this fashion. For example, easily disposable temporary and contract workers are likely to experience socially useful fear. In order to constitute neoliberal subjects through precarious working and living conditions, the possibility of finding oneself without work must be adequately unappealing. This might help to explain the harsh treatment unemployed people experience. As Eric A. Schutz states,

[e]ssentially poverty is the face of the threat required to sustain employers’ power over their lowest-paid employees: job termination cannot constitute a serious threat unless it implies a significant contraction in the employees’
livelhood, hence for employees in the lowest-paying jobs, the required contraction necessitates the existence of an economic status even lower yet in order to make credible the boss’s implicit or explicit threat of job termination in the event one fails to please him. Eliminating poverty, in the absence of other major changes in the social processes of work, would undermine the very foundation of this economic system. Despite an occasional flurry of political rhetoric and hand-wringing, real war on poverty is probably not possible in this system.\(^{633}\)

Both precariousness (here in the form of unreliable and insecure work) and the threat of destitution in the absence of work contribute to the anxiety that produces the “rational” entrepreneurial self of neoliberalism. Precariousness forces people to plan and act in the face of perpetual uncertainty about their future. Generally speaking, it is the combination of factors making up worker insecurity – weaker working rights, reduced provision of public services, wage stagnation, household indebtedness – that constitute the conditions that make entrepreneurial activity seem necessary. Put differently, from the neoliberal perspective, a precarious position is an opportunity to optimise our personal portfolio and to realise that we are our own brand, product and enterprise.

The relationship between precariousness and enterprising activity is particularly prevalent in those industries that have most fully embraced a neoliberal outlook and organisation of employment. Ho’s work details the manner in which employment insecurity is taken as a normal condition of working life for investment bank workers on Wall Street. Of course, investment bankers, even junior analysts, are much better compensated than workers in other industries. I am in no way suggesting that the precarity faced by a junior analyst at Goldman Sachs, who comes from a middle (or middle-upper, or upper) class family and went to an Ivy League college is comparable to the conditions of much of the working class. What is important about Ho’s research is the relationship it brings to light between precarious employment conditions and entrepreneurial activity. Insofar as many members of the business and political classes see the finance sector as a model to be emulated, paying attention to employment relations in finance can tell us something about the general neoliberal imaginary.

\(^{633}\) Schutz, *Inequality and Power*, 98.
According to Ho, employment insecurity is an unremarkable component of working life in investment banking. Employees in investment banks are often quite aware that their employment at a firm has a limited lifespan and that changes in the market or in firm performance could put them out of the job. Investment banks are notorious for their frequent “downsizings.” In these circumstances, investment bankers need to be constantly networking and reputation building so as to establish ties with other people and firms in the industry. This also helps to explain the sense of urgency to make as many deals as possible in the shortest possible time. The insecurity of work accentuates a sense that short-term rewards must be maximised and therefore greater risks must be taken:

Most of Wall Street’s daily values and practices – as constituted through Wall Street’s compensation structures, job insecurity, “the-strategy-of-no-strategy,” and the adherence to an identity marked by pride in market simultaneity – lead to a corporate culture where reckless expediency is the generalized norm. In this cultural environment, investment bankers, continually threatened with job loss and drastic departmental changes, are motivated to seek out the highest compensation and accept the social contract of high reward/high risk.

In other words, both Wall Street culture and its employment conditions encourage, and in some respect make necessary, entrepreneurial activity, here concentrated in the ruthless pursuit of landing deals and chasing bonuses. This is partly because people work on Wall Street for large compensation, partly also because it is well understood that investment-banking employment is often short-term:

In a context of rampant insecurity negotiated through compensation, Wall Street’s pay-for-performance bonus system “incentivizes” bankers to compete by doing more deals, bringing in more revenue, finding more profitable trades, convincing more people to invest in funds and the stock market, and so on. Not only are their bonuses directly tied into the amount of deals and revenues that they are able to generate for the bank, but bonuses are also seen as symbols of coming to terms with the riskiness of their jobs. It comes as no surprise, then, that investment bankers, faced with the ever-present specter of layoffs, are motivated to complete as many deals and transactions as possible for their corporate clients... Given that bonuses depend on the size, amount, and number of deals that bankers bring in and complete, and given that their jobs are decidedly

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634 Ho, *Liquidated*, 264.
635 For details of Wall Street’s employment strategy of hiring and firing, see: Ho, *Liquidated*, 224-43.
636 Ibid., 285.
short-term and could be eliminated at any time, bankers are structurally primed to generate as many deals as possible whether or not these deals are ultimately "good" for the company by any long-term, even neoliberal, measure.\(^{637}\)

This is a clear example of how neoliberal employment conditions can incentivise entrepreneurial behaviour, here in the form of making as many deals as possible, with the understanding that the opportunity to make these deals might be short-lived. High-risk and high-pressure are what must be suffered if workers want to enjoy the rewards of working with the top companies.

Of course, there are people whose conditions are much more precarious than those found in investment banking. Yet, that need not mean that their precarious conditions do not call forth similar kinds of entrepreneurial practices. From a neoliberal perceptive, the more precarious one's conditions, the more that entrepreneurialism is needed. I will again quote Peters at length because he captures so well this neoliberal understanding of flexible work. He concedes – without specifying in what way – that work has changed. Yet, these changes do not equate to a worsening of worker conditions but merely put the majority of people in the position of the local electrician, as if that was a compelling case for its generalisation. Precariousness also does no more, according to Peters, than give us an opportunity to practice the entrepreneurialism that is natural to us but that we have stopped exercising:

Though I introduced the idea of "Brand You" (translation: you've got to stand out to survive professionally) some 15 years ago, and although chaos in the workplace has accelerated madly since, huge numbers of people continue to have problems with the situation that, say, a local electrician faces every day: The newly precarious necessarily need to see (must see, per me) themselves as a “business,” as a “brand” unto themselves. And many are scared out of their wits at the idea of "going entrepreneurial.” Ubiquitous rejoinder: “It's not my thing.” “I didn't get the entrepreneurial gene.” Or some such.

I feel their pain, but as to the "missing genetic ingredient”—baloney! I stand foursquare with the father of microlending and 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus. He claims—and I wholeheartedly agree—that we've mostly lost the mojo we all once had. "All human beings are entrepreneurs," Mr. Yunus states. "When we were in the caves we were all self-employed... finding our food, feeding ourselves. That's where the human history began... As civilization came we suppressed it. We became labor

\(^{637}\) Ibid., 290.
because [they] stamped us ‘You are labor.’ We forgot that we are entrepreneurs.”

That statement doesn’t remove, or perhaps even diminish, our fears—especially if you are 53 years old, you have been laid off permanently, and your pension has evaporated as well. No, I’m not offering insufferable “tough love.” I am simply reminding us that we who made it this far along the evolutionary path are highly skilled and resilient survivors from the get-go. We do, like that very “normal” electrician down the road from me, have what it takes...

We’ve pretty much got to work full-time on buffing up our skill set, sharpening our sales proclivity* (*sorry—you’ve gotta learn to sell), and networking like a maniac. It won’t be easy for many, but it can be done by “normal” people; and though life will doubtless appear to be more precarious, the odds are actually pretty good, very good in fact, that the improving skill set and enhanced network will enhance our long-term “career” viability—and will also be a damn sight more fulfilling than the lot of the cubicle slaves so aptly documented by Scott Adams’s Dilbert comic strip.

Message: You... do... have the... Right Stuff! 638

Peters is not merely encouraging entrepreneurialism as one way of managing precarious circumstances. He wants to convey the stronger message that we are all, naturally, entrepreneurs. If only we had the courage and willingness to tap this natural propensity. And tap it we must, as Peters urges us, in the precarious modern world of work. For Peters, changes to working life provide people with the opportunity to adopt the kind of entrepreneurial practices of the neoliberal self: maximising their investments, relentless networking, selling themselves and their human capital, adapting to conditions in order to “survive” and “prosper.” Here, Peters combines a constructive and naturalising account of entrepreneurial selfhood. Flexible working lives provide individuals with the opportunity to practice (construct) the entrepreneurialism that is natural to them. Notice also the combination of external precarious conditions and the fashioning of a new kind of entrepreneurial subject. Dardot and Laval suggest that the ‘main innovation of neo-liberal technology precisely consists in directly connecting the way a man ‘is governed from without’ to the way that ‘he governs himself from within’. 639 I suggest that an example of this matching of “outer” and “inner” governing can be found in the connection between “outer” government policies, management practices and worker disempowerment that

have placed many people in a precarious existence, and the “inner” self-enterprising practices that are supposed to serve the individual in this situation.

Hence, it must be remembered that the entrepreneurialisation of the self is facilitated by very real constraints and threats that often compel workers to adopt some of the self-enterprising practices I have been discussing. The internalisation of the neoliberal outlook and the normalisation of everyday enterprising practices are facilitated by the precariousness of modern neoliberal existence. Individual resilience, flexibility and self-enterprising are supposed to make likely the success of the neoliberal subject. However, far from dreams of “success,” a little security would be a welcome relief for many working people. But security is precisely what cannot be guaranteed in a world where risk is constructed as a natural and constant factor. As outlined above, risk can be managed in better or worse ways but it cannot be overcome. Therefore, from a neoliberal perspective, the precarity that results from the marketisation of more areas of employment and our daily lives is not a state to be remedied but merely one to be managed and, hopefully, with the proper entrepreneurial activity, optimised. In fact, embracing risk is the quintessential neoliberal expression of our freedom and individuality.640 The representation of risk as ever-present and unavoidable rationalises and justifies after the fact whatever occurs in “life in the market.” You might fail in some respect (lose your job), or find yourself on the wrong side of market forces (if your pension fund invests in high-risk financial products that lose their value), but this is just a part of the risk fundamental to our lives and made apparent in the market. In an uncertain and precarious world of competing enterprises, any outcome is the result of the risks taken (or not taken – also a kind of risk) by the individual. Forcing individuals to assume responsibility for the success of their

640 ‘A denizen of modern neoliberal society has not demonstrated real flexibility of personal identity until they have prostrated themselves before the capricious god of risk. Freedom without uninhibited embrace of risk cannot be experienced as anything other than static mechanical “choice.” Any machine can accomplish that. Salvation through the market comes not from solidarity with any delusional social class or occupational category, but instead bold assertion of individuality through capitulation to a life of risk. The heady elixir of distilled risk is hawked as the drug of choice of the modern neoliberal self: just say yes. This, of course, has almost nothing to do with the actual economic history of capitalist business: it is entirely a cultural construct’ (Mirowski, Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste, 120).
entrepreneurial lives is one way of enlisting them in the task of producing themselves as neoliberal subjects.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I sought to extend and summarise some of the general characteristics of neoliberal selfhood explored in earlier chapters. It was my contention that as a consequence of the neoliberal understanding of the world and its reshaping of our common life, people are encouraged – or forced – to “self-entrepreneurialise,” that is, to act as managers of their own enterprise and capital. Hence, I brought to the forefront the relationship between the construction of particular kinds of circumstances and the production of neoliberal subjects. I claimed that the construction of competition has the effect of encouraging self-enterprising practices. As I outlined, under neoliberalism, we are in constant competition with other self-enterprises with whom we compete for positional advantage. This competition necessitates the kind of entrepreneurial activity seen from the neoliberal perspective as both desirable and unavoidable. I suggested that exposure to the neoliberal competition that is indicative of our times begins before working life and adulthood. As I showed, experiences of competition and encouraging competitiveness are important parts of many strands of childhood education, parental-child relations and other aspects of our early years. Hence, children are prepared for an insecure world in which they must be responsible self-enterprises in order to navigate a future of tough competition.

Our place in the competitive “market” of self-enterprises is governed by our willingness to be adequately flexible and adaptable. Accordingly, I argued that the neoliberal self must be responsive to changes in their surroundings and constantly practice some form of enterprising activity. Flexibility and adaptability are important capacities because they allow for the constant practice of self-fashioning that the neoliberal self must practice in order to keep pace with the neoliberal economy. To highlight how neoliberal circumstances are used to call forth adaptable neoliberal subjects, I analysed the relationship between adaptability and resilience in psychological capital theory. I suggested that the adaptable subject is also the risk-taking and resilient subject that
complements the neoliberal reorganisation of the workplace. The emphasis on the adaptability and resiliency of the subject clearly demonstrates that under neoliberalism it is subjects who are called upon to mould themselves to external conditions, while these conditions often escape critical scrutiny.

To complete my analysis of the neoliberal circumstances that foster neoliberal practices, I went on to consider the way that people’s precarious living and working conditions facilitate entrepreneurial practices. As I outlined, indebtedness and financialisation of the everyday, as well as a general precariousness of living and working conditions, reinforce self-entrepreneurialisation by encouraging the practices of risk-taking, skill acquisition, financial literacy, networking, and other activities indicative of neoliberal selfhood. From a neoliberal perspective, indebtedness and financialisation are signs of proper entrepreneurial activity that all people are encouraged to adopt. More broadly, precariousness is no more than the risk that all enterprises – and especially individual self-enterprises – must learn to live with. Hence, it is apparent that precarious living and working conditions can be used to justify the kind of self-entrepreneurialisation that reinforces the power structures of neoliberal capitalism.
Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have considered a number of themes pertinent to understanding neoliberal selfhood. As I claimed in the introduction, we must clarify the constitutive features of the neoliberal self if we are to make sense of our current historical situation. Accordingly, my aim in this thesis was to highlight the socio-historical context and the ideological field that have brought about the neoliberalisation of selfhood. Specifically, following Wendy Brown, I made the case that neoliberalism entails the production of particular kinds of subjects. As I have argued throughout, the neoliberal self is in part the result of applying economic categories and market-like principles and practices to all aspects of human life. Furthermore, I argued that the neoliberalisation of subjectivity and everyday life is central to neoliberalism’s embeddedness. Hence, the neoliberalisation of subjectivity and the everyday is partly what has made it difficult to challenge. So as to support my contention about the significance of subjectivity to neoliberalism, I explored the following themes.

First, I unpacked the concept of human capital in the work of Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz. I argued that human capital theory contains a radical interpretation of human life, one that is based on the assumption that we are always and only economic agents. I suggested that this economisation and marketisation of human life is characteristic of neoliberal selfhood. In the chapters that followed, we saw that aspects of the human capital paradigm have contributed to the production of neoliberal subjects in various ways.

To further my analysis of neoliberal selfhood, in chapter two I claimed that management theory and practices are central to the production of neoliberal subjects. I investigated the work of Jim Loehr, Tony Schwartz, Shawn Achor, the psychological capital theorists and the self-branding theorists in order to provide some specific examples of what constitutes the human capital of the neoliberal self-enterprise. I highlighted the manner in which neoliberalism calls upon all aspects of a person’s life to contribute to the productive capacity of the individual. In particular, to optimise the value-generating capacity of the
subject, neoliberal management sets guidelines for how one should conduct and relate to oneself as an enterprising project.

To further demonstrate the pervasiveness of neoliberalism, I then argued that practices associated with the construction of neoliberal subjects are present in modern working life. In chapter three, I considered the way that the relationship between employees and the organisation was reframed by neoliberal management discourse and the attempt to institute a workplace culture that reflected this new discourse. Given that neoliberal management considers workers as essential components of organisational capital, neoliberal management also shows a keen interest in employees’ general character and abilities. The most important of these abilities that the neoliberal self is expected to develop are referred to as “soft” skills. I argued that these soft skills are promoted not simply because they provide employers with the “flexible” workers they desire, but also because they equip people with the capacity to adapt to different kinds of work and industries. In other words, the promotion of soft skills encourages the production of flexible workers required for a flexible labour market. The “gig economy” is an example of an industry that promotes the benefits of flexible work and flexible careers. As I suggested, the gig economy’s employment arrangements and business model encourages people to act as self-enterprises with the opportunity to invest their capital in various ways. Characterised by poor working conditions with little to no benefits, and located in a context of general precariousness, the gig economy both exemplifies and exploits the increasing precariousness of neoliberal existence. Accordingly, I argued that the gig economy furthers the neoliberalisation of subjectivity and the everyday.

In chapter four, I argued that techniques of control are essential to neoliberal working life both in and outside of formal work settings. For the sake of testing some of the neoliberal claims about work against actual workplace practices, I undertook a brief analysis of some of these control techniques used to manage people’s activities in the workplace. I claimed that neoliberalism also includes a set of techniques aimed at controlling time both in and outside of the workplace. As I suggested, the organisation of working time and space under
the neoliberal work regime highlights the colonisation and economisation of our daily lives by work-related and “enterprising” activities.

In the final chapter, I drew together a number of themes from the previous chapters of the thesis in order to consolidate my analysis of neoliberal selfhood. I argued that as a consequence of the neoliberal understanding of the world and its reshaping of our common life, people are encouraged to “self-entrepreneurialise,” that is, to act as managers of their own enterprise and capital. First, I claimed that the spread of neoliberal competition fosters the production of self-entreprising subjects. I then argued that the “competitiveness” paradigm and increased competition among workers help to justify the promotion of flexibility, adaptability and resilience. These characteristics are seen as necessary for self-enterprises navigating a neoliberal life of competition and constant change. Finally, I looked at the way that people’s precarious living and working conditions facilitate entrepreneurial practices.

I have suggested that neoliberal subjectification affects the manner in which we orient ourselves in daily life, regardless of our assessment of neoliberal capitalism in conscious reflection. As Hilgers observes, ‘neoliberalism is never implanted or put into action as successfully as when it leads to the internalisation of categories of perception that shape how agents problematise their experience, reinterpret their past and project themselves into the future.’\footnote{Hilgers, “Embodying neoliberalism,” 82.} I maintain that many people, to varying degrees and in different ways, do understand themselves and their situation in terms of at least some of the key categories of neoliberal selfhood. Whether or not they do so in exactly the way outlined by the authors I considered above is not germane. In order to understand contemporary neoliberalism and the way it shapes people’s understanding of themselves and the world they inhabit, one must be open to the messy and inconsistent ways in which neoliberal ideas and practices seep into different aspects of modern life. Because our everyday actions and experiences are shaped by market-like settings, over time we are likely to internalise some of the associated values and general outlook of neoliberalism.
pointed to an example of this “internalisation” of neoliberalism in my discussion of childhood education. Moreover, as indicated above, people’s material conditions and the way that employment and monetary rewards are distributed in our society often leave people with little choice but to engage in what I described as entrepreneurial practices. Having to engage in these activities might not bring people to heatedly defend free markets in the local pub, but it certainly helps to form our interpretative horizon, what we think is possible, normal, inevitable. Neoliberalism shapes our experiences and possibilities, and hence engages us at a subjective level, not just at work, but also in other domains of our everyday lives.

Another key takeaway of an analysis of neoliberal selfhood that I suggested should be stressed is the way that, broadly speaking, people are addressed in two key ways. For instance, I hold that notions like human capital have a double function, that is, are used in two main registers. On the one hand, neoliberal selves are prompted to be the active and autonomous agents of their own self-fashioning and optimisation. From this perspective, subjects are described as active, entrepreneurial individuals, making their own history and helping to drive the general development of society, albeit within the confines of complex and interconnected global markets. This is perhaps captured best by the notion of the self as enterprise or the entrepreneurial self. On the other hand, neoliberal selves are treated as parts of a larger systematic whole, the human part of the capital that ties together the modern social and economic world. As human capital, we are the “stuff” – the machinery, assets, capital, data, inputs – of the larger economy. Brown makes several references to this twofold nature of the neoliberal self: ‘As human capital, the subject is at once in charge of itself, responsible for itself, yet an instrumentalizable and potentially dispensable element of the whole.’

The individual as enterprise must maximise their own value and personal ratings, as well as their ability to maintain employment and generate income. If we are obliged to others it is in the sense that we are obliged not to be a burden; our responsibility is to be self-responsible, to take charge of ourselves and

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642 Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 38.
optimise our opportunities so as to achieve self-sufficiency. Moreover, it is as units of capital, as part of a larger system of inputs, that the self as enterprise contributes to overall economic growth, credit ratings, competitiveness, and so on. Should we fail to benefit these larger metrics, we risk being cast aside and deemed superfluous to the capitalist system.643

This is a critical point. Much of the stress on the importance of “human assets” boils down to the following: individuals and small “unproductive” groups are expected to adapt themselves to the needs of capital or risk being left behind. It can be difficult to see this disposable aspect of neoliberal selves because neoliberal discourse often invokes ideas of inclusion, empowerment and opportunity. For instance, conceiving of previously excluded social groups as human capital is considered a way of guaranteeing their inclusion. According to this perspective, disadvantaged or marginalised groups need to be treated as “assets” in order to become full members of the frictionless, developed, free-market world. A clear example of this use of human capital can be found in Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull’s speech at the 2016 International Women’s Day Parliamentary Breakfast:

Critical to any economy and society is ensuring that we have access to the ingenuity, the enterprise, the intellect of the whole community – in our schools, in our workplaces, and in the innovative industries of the future. Ensuring that the power of women is brought to bear, is enabled, empowered, that rich human capital and increasing their participation in the workforce, must be a critical part of every government’s agenda to secure the economic future of the nation. Australia’s best assets, its best capital, is its human capital. Our greatest value, our greatest asset is not under the ground, it’s all of us, all of you – 24 million of us – and half of that population are women.644

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643 According to Brown, ‘rather than each individual pursuing his or her own interest and unwittingly generating collective benefit, today, it is the project of macroeconomic growth and credit enhancement to which neoliberal individuals are tethered and with which their existence as human capital must align if they are to thrive. When individuals, firms, or industries constitute a drag on this good, rather than a contribution to it, they may be legitimately cast off or reconfigured – through downsizing, furloughs, outsourcing, benefit cuts, mandatory job shares, or offshore production relocation. At this point, the throne of interest has vanished and at the extreme is replaced with the throne of sacrifice’ (Ibid., 84). See also Fleming, The Mythology of Work, 56.

It is fascinating to observe how rhetoric like this so easily combines praise and concern for the population – and here, the women in the Australian population – with the idea that we are all assets and capital for the national (or global) economy. Accordingly, we constitute the capital of our own self-enterprise and the capital of larger organisations and economies. We are promised that treating ourselves as *the capital we are* will allow us to prosper and thrive. However, as human capital we are also tethered to the perceived needs of markets, businesses and variously scaled economies. If we are to ‘maximise our own economic health and that of the nation (or postnational constellation) through spending, saving, borrowing, working, and not working, according to capital’s needs of the moment’,\(^\text{645}\) then we might find ourselves abandoned, short-changed, redeployed, overworked, impoverished, or whatever else depending on what that moment is thought to require. Human capital is one component of the resources to be countered, measured, optimised and deployed according to the needs of a larger economic system. Actual human beings are entirely effaced from such a picture of the world.

Whether or not neoliberal capitalism will continue in its current form is an open question. One could suggest that neoliberalism’s grip on our political imaginary and its feasibility as a system of capital accumulation is currently seriously threatened, if not already on the way out. It could be that neoliberalism has, as Antonio Gramsci says of the ruling class in a different historical context,

lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer “leading” but only “dominant”, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their ruling traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.\(^\text{646}\)

Certainly, many developments in our world at the moment are indicative of such a situation. Nonetheless, it seems to me that much of daily life and the rationale of our dominant institutions remain firmly placed within a neoliberal framework.


Whatever the current direction of neoliberalism, my aim in this thesis was to make clear the twofold manner of addressing and using people (as self-enterprises and as human capital) under neoliberal capitalism. I have also tried to trace the various ways that neoliberal subjects are produced, and to show how the neoliberal organisation of different components of daily life can foster particular kinds of worldly engagement that support neoliberal capitalism. Of course, they can also have the opposite effect, prompting dissent, disengagement, and other forms of conduct resistant to the dominant order. Nonetheless, neoliberalism has been successful enough to at least partially accommodate these tensions, divergences and crises. Although much has been written about neoliberalism, I believe that the extent to which neoliberalism shapes us at an experiential and subjective level is not always examined at length. I have emphasised this aspect of neoliberal capitalism so that it may be challenged. As Mirowski recommends, ‘Know Your Enemy before you start daydreaming of a better world.’

Whether or not neoliberal capitalism is in decline, or in crisis, or is taking on a new form (perhaps neoliberal, perhaps not) is a question I am unable to address. It would require a much broader and very different kind of discussion. Still, I maintain that among other things such a discussion would need to consider the relation of the capitalist order to subjectivity. To properly address the question of subjectivity in our contemporary world we must understand the relationship between neoliberal capitalism and subjectivity in the recent past. I have attempted to make a small contribution to clarifying this topic.

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Bibliography


