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GET OFF THE BUS:

A Study of Redundancy Amongst Older Workers

in Palmerston North.

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the degree of Master of Arts.

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1995

ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to examine the experience of redundancy as it effected the lives of a small sample of older workers when they were laid off from their industrial site. The study begins by highlighting the extent to which previous research into the personal consequences of losing a job has to a large measure been limited because of a strong tradition of dualism within sociology. More specifically, the tensions and struggles of individuals as they endeavour to cope with the upheavals of suddenly finding themselves without a job have been divided into two schools of thought. *Either*, autonomous, voluntary (freely choosing), vulnerable older workers have been portrayed as struggling against, or determined by an oppressive 'system', *or* redundancy has been subjectively interpreted from the point of view of the actor where autonomy once more or having 'choices' is the defining characteristic of research. These theoretical constructions wherein social life has been polarized into one of two 'camps' of thought are challenged by this thesis. I argue that the result has been to marginalise, or neglect the very construction of *subjectivity* by previous researchers when investigating this subject.

This study is presented against the background of worsening economic conditions for a large number of citizens, escalating unemployment and the creation of a 'flexible' labour market in New Zealand after 1984. These conditions have led to far reaching and in many cases cruel changes in the working environment for those fortunate enough to be there. My argument draws upon the deconstructionism of Michel Foucault to put forward a more adequate sociological appreciation of the processes occurring during redundancy. By focusing on the relationship between *power* and *subjectivity* and utilising such an approach I hope to make visible and explain certain critical issues of control and dependency. This will show how subtle manipulations have a determining influence on the lives of the long serving employees at Zenith prior to, during and after they lost their jobs.

Do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to
remain the same : leave it to our bureaucrats
and our police to see that our papers are in order

(Foucault 1972, 1988: ix)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to Janine Jones (M.A. Hons) for her dedicated editing work. The many long discussions we have been involved in have also been of inestimable value in furthering my understanding of the work of Foucault. To my supervisors, Doctor Paul Perry and Doctor Mike O'Brien I would like to extend my deepest appreciation and thanks for your efforts on my behalf.. Your feedback and support was invaluable during the duration of the thesis.

To Professor Gregor McLennan who made comments on the completed chapters I extend my thanks. To Judy Lawrence, Senior librarian at the Massey library who searched previous studies of redundancy and to all Massey library staff who contributed with helpful advice, I extend my thanks.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores how changing power relations operate to influence and shape the conceptions older workers have of themselves before, during and after the experience of redundancy. As will be seen, power (defined in this thesis as a diffuse, dynamic and heterogeneous phenomenon), acts upon the actions of others (Knights and Willmott, 1989; Foucault, 1982). Power, argues Foucault, always flows from works by those 'who know' (the experts in a field) to effect every area of everyday life through subtle strategies of power and knowledge. This means that when mature workers (as is the case with others) experience redundancy, their identities are permanently effected by the power plays involved, impacting upon how they see themselves and others as human beings. Being laid off is not simply a matter of suddenly having less money.

New Zealand during the 1990s has witnessed a rush of radical change in the working environment which has transformed the fundamental character of labour relations in this country dating back over the last twenty years. Accompanied by worsening economic conditions for the majority of people and escalating unemployment since the early 1980s, crucial questions arise concerning the impact of unemployment on the individual and group psyche. This impact occurs through the continuous operations of power, since a great deal of what it means to be human comes from the workplace (Knights, 1989: 314). One example of this is the transformation of the working environment whereby workers are less ready to speak out and fight for their rights and those of others.

Previous research done in the area of redundancy suggests that the conditions of recession and the structural adjustment which goes with it significantly contributes to the difficulties older workers and their families experience when a job is lost (Kalisch and Williams, 1983: 13-14; Boglietti, 1974). Many of these problems can be traced to the small and subtle ways whereby power in modern societies operates as a determining influence to infiltrate minds and souls and shape an individual's perception of self (McNay, 1992: 3-81). Chapter One will reveal, that scant

rigorous, empirical research has been attempted specifically to show how power, when combined with knowledge, is used to subject managers and workers alike to their own identities for well-defined purposes (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 553; Foucault, 1982: 212-3), thus reproducing the conditions which oppress them. Technologies of power, which are always employed with deliberate intent to control others may cover a wide range of objectives, such as the urge to increase production or spur profitability to retain and enlarge corporate privilege. The lack of systematic scrutiny of power in redundancy studies and what might be revealed by tackling the issue of power plays and their consequences will be directly addressed in this thesis.

The 'germ' of an idea for the study occurred some time back when I was introduced to the work of Michel Foucault, a social historian (1926-1984) through his ground-breaking work, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* (Foucault, 1977a), where he shows us how a new concept of surveillance as punishment developed in Europe at the turn of the eighteenth century. It occurred to me that the novel ideas introduced by Foucault in relation to punishment, could also be applied when considering the labour market, and indeed any area of social life, with equal force and clarity.

Utilising Foucault in this way meant that the central task lay in attempting to create an account of how, through words and deeds, knowledge and power is used to turn individuals 'inwards'. By this Foucault means that the exercise of power causes persons to examine their behaviour, so that they become subjected to themselves, or what he terms 'subjects' (Rabinow, 1984: 7). This process was then to be translated into an analysis of redundancy in the labour market. Deeds or practices may be briefly defined as action, while words or discourse is the domain of language use that is unified by common assumptions or programmes (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 1988: 71). For example, Foucault describes how various discourses of sexuality have changed over time, thus providing the key to identity and social position in nineteenth century Europe (Foucault, 1978; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 168-183). Therefore statements help constitute what Foucault

terms the 'problem of the subject', or in other words the problem of the human condition as constructed in discourse.

With Foucauldian theory in mind, the Zenith Bus Company¹ was chosen as a site of historical change. The study is not intended as a definitive story, but is a localised investigation which aims to explore how one group of older workers were the target of subtle processes of power as they headed towards the fatal day of closure and redundancy.

In Chapter One, which reviews the studies which focus on the social consequences of being redundant it will be made clear that most research in this area falls into one or the other of two 'camps' of sociological enquiry. In one camp, the sociology of 'social systems' (e.g. Marxist), depicts voluntaristic (freely choosing) individuals as struggling against, or being oppressed by 'systems' such as the economic or political system. In the other, redundancy has been studied from the 'social action' perspective focusing on meaning and human autonomy from the point of view of the actor (e.g. symbolic interactionism), and aiming to show how the ability to take part in the life of the community has been eroded by redundancy. As a third approach this thesis argues that such dualistic theorising about the labour process has led to a marginalisation of subjectivity by placing an emphasis on grand systems or meaning.

Despite an absence of subjectivity in studies dominating the field of industrial sociology, two ethnographies stand. These represent a considerable improvement on other efforts to analyze the labour process as they capture the tensions, antagonisms and contradictions for those working on the shop floor.

Chapter Two locates and explains the key concepts adopted from Foucault. These concepts are used to shed light on the problem of power relations during

¹ Please note that in order to protect the identities of those who partook in the study all names of persons have been changed as has the name of the Company concerned.

redundancy and the impact upon the identities of older workers as they are targeted for 'the sack'. In this chapter I show how a person's sense of a clear identity is very much controlled by dividing practices. According to Foucault, these practices are the means or strategies which can be used to control individuals or populations for a definite purpose.

In Chapter Two Foucault's contention that power and knowledge complement one another is examined and explained as a category for the analysis of redundancy. Where knowledge and power is present, argues Foucault, individuals are constituted as 'subjects' through certain modes of objectification. This results in individuals becoming 'objects' by the different ways in which they are treated.

Together these concepts establish my theoretical framework. The framework helps demonstrate how those once employed at the Zenith Bus Company were not only agents in a class struggle over the means of production, but were on a deeper level the targets of disciplinary power processes that Foucault terms 'dividing practices'.

In Chapter Three I outline the methodology whereby the data was gathered and analyzed. This shows that workers laid off from the Zenith Bus Company were very much a product of their life long work.

For the purpose of analysis the case study method was felt to best show how power is embedded in dividing practices (outlined in Chapter Two), which in turn weakens the power of individuals (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 540-541) by turning them away from endeavour and in on themselves.

Chapter Three sets out four general rules of procedure outlined by Foucault (1982: 23-24), which will structure the interpretation of data. These will be followed by five steps that Foucault (1982: 223-224) suggests are necessary in order to have a rigorous analysis of power.

In Chapter Four I outline the historical background of the study of modern power

relations to show how disciplinary processes of normalisation, surveillance and assessments have extended their hold over processes and events in New Zealand, within the context of what Foucault terms the modern 'disciplinary society'. Such processes rather than class conflict underpin the structural changes which have occurred in the labour market here since 1984.

Following on from this broad overview I then narrow the focus of attention to the Zenith Bus Company as a microcosm of historical change.

In Chapter Five, as the stories of workers laid off from the Zenith Bus Company unfold, the dividing practices which shape their accounts reveal ways in which workers became subordinate to those who controlled the workplace and how these experiences influenced their later lives.

I conclude the study with an analysis of redundancy processes, focusing on Foucault's concept of dividing practices to examine how dealings on the shop floor and in the wider society are mediated by the problem of subjectivity and by relations of power (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 536-537). Power, it will be shown does indeed implant upon the hearts and minds of those sent 'down the road' by their long term employers, often without so much as a word of thanks after many years of loyal service. Dismissal is a sad state of affairs. The saddest aspect for those losing their jobs is clearly felt to be the ways in which workers are treated as 'objects' to serve corporate interests. Any notion that powerful business interests have the best interests of their workers at heart is quite plainly a myth.

CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

According to Foucault's reckoning (1982: 208), processes of control and dependency act upon workers in two ways. Firstly, they become controlled by and dependent upon those in charge of the workplace, such as foremen and managers. Secondly, they also become 'turned in upon themselves', or as Foucault puts it, *tied* to their own identity by a conscience or 'knowledge' of the self. By this he means that in today's industrial working environment, workers can by a combination of processes which act upon them, become 'consumed by the job' to such an extent that work often assumes strategic importance in how they see themselves as worthwhile human beings. It influences their values, thoughts and the way workers behave towards others. In modern society work can assume an exaggerated importance in a person's life so that when work is lost through redundancy, an integral part of the self is also lost. In such circumstances identity becomes increasingly problematic as workers struggle to re-establish 'who they are' and why they do indeed, exist at all. Several writers refer to this phenomenon as 'identity fetishism' (Willmott, 1989; Knights and Willmott, 1989; Knights, 1989). The idea of 'identity fetishism' is one example of how the operation of power upon individuals influences their identities or subjectivities. *Subjectivity*, for the purposes of this thesis, may be briefly defined as the result of power relays which act upon people to influence their actions, behaviour and innermost thoughts. This idea will be further explained in Chapter Two.

The aim of this thesis is firstly, to study how redundancy affects older workers by taking social or dividing practices as the focus of analysis and secondly, to explore how power applies these practices as tactics to influence the subjectivities or identities of a specific set of individuals; i.e., workers on the shop floor as they experience the labour processes of redundancy. This will be done in order to overcome the limitations of the main body of labour process research literature. This literature either focuses on 'society' as an undifferentiated mass or 'the

individual' as a psychological being at the expense of an adequate and in-depth analysis.

The theoretical problem of the *subjectivity* of the individual is not a new one within sociological inquiry. I believe it is possible to take this topic seriously without sliding into a purely subjectivist account of the social world. That is to say, an account of 'reality' that may be no more valid than any other account since it is merely an interpretation. Within sociology a considerable debate has ensued over the question of how to take account of the voluntarism (freedom to choose) of human beings as 'social agents' without underplaying the determinism of 'structures' in the 'social system' (see Dawe, 1970). Yet the current debate has been dominated *either* by 'social action' perspectives, such as symbolic interactionism, which stress interpretations of the subjective meaning of individual actors, *or* by 'social system' approaches such as functionalism, which place the emphasis on 'systems' or macro-processes. For example, the economic, cultural, political or social macro-processes which have dominated progressive social science.

In one 'camp' then, the sociology of 'social systems' emphasise the frailty of human nature in circumstances wherein workers are seen to be struggling against the monolithic 'oppression' of 'the system' (e.g. Westergaard, Noble and Walker, 1989; Harris, 1987). Here, the focus is on the need for social order if anomic chaos is to be avoided. This is a deterministic view of the social world, because within the parameters of studies from functionalism to structural Marxism, individuals are in the last instance controlled by 'systems', objective structures or institutionalised constraints. For instance, according to Marx's approach, workers are 'free' to exchange their labour for a wage, but within this process of the voluntary selling of labour power, workers are exploited by the systematic extraction of surplus value by the purchasers (capital) (Willmott, 1989: 354). Marx (1976: 280) vividly expresses it, saying the worker is 'free' to bring:

his own hide to market, and now has nothing else to expect but - a tanning.

Put simply, workers are exploited by the capitalist system for greater profit.

However, Marx's analysis fails to take account of the many ways power operates in modern societies (see Chapter Two) so that workers may come to regard a "tanning" as tolerable and even as desirable.

In the opposing camp, sociologies of 'social action', such as symbolic interactionism, stress meaning and human autonomy over 'structure' and aim to illustrate how 'freedom' to take part in social life is eroded by redundancy. Here the attention is directed towards subjective interpretations of the social world. It is claimed by 'social action' researchers (e.g. Ashworth, 1979; Weigert, 1986; Schultz, 1973), that reality can be explained simply from internal accounts of human behaviour alone. However, this contention fails to recognise that in modern political regimes individuals are not autonomous even though many people spend large amounts of time trying to reach that state. Rather, through the operation of the positive nature of power, as this thesis illustrates, individuals are induced and constrained to act and behave in specific ways (Foucault, 1982: 221). Reality therefore cannot simply be explained from meaning, because (as seen in Chapter Six), power acts upon the actions of others, (not necessarily directly), to change behaviour, thoughts, perceptions and values (Knights, 1989: 319). With this in mind, any interpretation of reality is only the *result* of the operation of power. An alternative is to take social practices as the focus of analysis, and to explore how these practices are simultaneously mediated by subjectivity and by relations of power. This is the approach taken in this thesis.

To illustrate the dominant body of labour process research, this chapter first reviews those studies which broadly fall into these two categories.

Then, the focus is on two specific empirical ethnographies within the industrial sociology literature. It is argued that these studies have the advantage of presenting a more adequate account of subjectivity than can be found in the current body of research. In contrast to most previous studies which neglect to recognise the importance of subjectivity, these researchers show a deeper appreciation of the human element within labour processes.

The chapter is concluded by stressing the problem of the '*missing subject*' within the body of studies on labour relations. I argue that in order to develop adequate accounts of this human relationship and the experience of redundancy, it is necessary to bring the '*missing subject*' into the centre of the analysis. This can be adequately done by drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of *the subject* (Foucault, 1978; 1986), which is explained in Chapter Two.

Now to elaborate on the dominant literature. The first broad systematic approach to the subject of the labour process is the:

Social System Approach

Marxist Studies

Marxist studies of the impact of redundancy relate the deprivation caused by being laid off to a worker's *economic* position within a particular class.

Westergaard, Noble and Walker (1989) use a structural Marxist approach to examine the long-term impact of redundancy on workers who lost their jobs from a Sheffield Steel Company in 1979. This event occurs within the context of British economic decline and deindustrialization at the start of the Thatcher years. The labour market experience is investigated from the viewpoint of workers themselves - their feelings of insecurity and fear within the 'class structure' and their resistance (non-resistance) to Company policy. Ex-workers are depicted as being buffeted by external macro-forces, such as social exclusion and economic marginalization, which shape their attitudes and behaviour after being thrown on the 'scrapheap'. What this study does in the end is to maintain that workers are exploited by an oppressive 'system', which takes advantage of their working class position. As a result, they struggle and find it difficult to come to terms with their disadvantaged position in a declining labour market.

In a similar vein, labour market outcomes and the behaviours of those made redundant are explored by Lee and Harris (1985) and Harris (1987). The identity of workers is defined in terms of their class position and the roles they play within

an economically driven labour market.

Harris claims:

The activity of workers in the market may be seen as a struggle to retain or reproduce, under unfavourable conditions, a traditional social identity.

Those who fail in market terms cling to the political and social models, which in the past have been associated with their class (Harris, 1987: 216).

This study is reductionist because it reduces subjectivity to economics since Harris focuses on the *economic* aspects of relations, actions, activities under study and then seeks to apply his insights to the labour market experience. Such an approach fails to appreciate the many complex ways in which the operation of power in modern society moulds the identities of workers and 'turns them in on themselves'. This is a factor examined in this thesis.

Walker (1986) also reduces power to economics by his contention that in the 1980s older workers in Western Europe were exploited to provide a 'reserve army of labour'. Walker describes this occurrence as "conscription on the cheap", but he fails to consider this as a deliberate power strategy to place some workers in subservient positions and eliminate others. Similarly, Showler and Sinfield (1981) from a macro perspective, show how older workers are exploited economically by a process of marginalisation wherein workers become 'responses to reduced demand' in order to maintain ruling class interests (Showler and Sinfield, 1981: 125). Again there is a failure to probe the intricate workings of the exercises of power. As Willmott (1989: 358) points out, capitalist labour processes are *not* just about producing goods and services for profit; they are also about workers, managers and directors organising their *own* subjectivities. These are subjectivities which are conditioned by the differing experiences of being treated both as subjects and objects of knowledge (see Chapter Two) and by contradictory or differing social positions.

The crucial influence of power within the labour process is also ignored by

Standing (1986) who views the growing marginalisation of older workers in Western Europe during the 1980s as a result of the creation of a 'flexible' labour force. Standing's analysis is inadequate since it merely considers this 'event' in terms of *cost*. As Chapter Four will illustrate, the constitution of a 'flexible' labour force has been a deliberate power strategy in New Zealand throughout the 1980s.

Functionalist Studies

Marxist studies, such as those reviewed above, are mainly concerned with analysing labour processes in terms of the *economic* class positions of individuals made redundant within the capitalist system. Functionalist studies, on the other hand, point to the disruptive impact of redundancy upon the smooth functioning of the 'social order'.

The first example of the latter, although not directly concerned with redundancy, is that of Komarovsky (1940). This study focuses on the upheavals in family life resulting from unemployment. Here, the experiences of families in coping with an unemployed husband are reduced, in the language of positivism, to reified accounts of authority types, roles and statuses. For example, as a wife perceives her husband's authority to be waning as a result of unemployment her response, according to Komarovsky, is personal despair as the price or pay-off for inflicted economic and social insecurity of the marriage itself (Komarovsky, 1940: 146). But this is a simple view of the human condition wherein it is assumed by the writer that a wife will respond in certain defined ways when an unemployed husband hangs around the house. But as this thesis shows, such gross reductionism fails to allow for the complexities of power in human relationships and the consequences for poor families.

Following on from Talcott Parson's conception of the 'sick role', Kasl, Gore and Cobb (1975) examine changes in health and illness as a result of an industrial plant closure. Power, as it exists in these studies, is typically viewed in negative or oppressive terms such as recession forcing people into redundancy while subjective processes resulting from these macro forces are omitted. Furthermore, creative,

innovative aspects of power are not considered.

Descriptive Studies

In contrast to the Marxist and functionalist studies reviewed above, descriptive studies merely describe redundancy processes, but fail to analyze underlying change. The critical issue of the intricate workings of power is omitted. It can be argued that they fail to probe the issue of redundancy at sufficient depth.

With this in mind, examples of such studies include the works of Morris (1984), Hutchens (1988), Davies and Esseveld (1989) Beckett (1988) and Kalisch and Williams (1983) wherein labour processes are merely described with no analysis of significant social practices or continuous operations of power. For example, Davies and Esseveld (1989) describe how a scheme provided a clothing factory with 'cheap', 'flexible' and thus easily disposable labour power (p. 241) while failing to draw out the strategies and objectives under such a scheme. Subjectivity, if it is included at all, is generally interpreted to mean oppression by the capitalist (or economic) 'system' which forces groups such as older workers out of the labour force or into secondary jobs.

Other Studies

Rones (1983) focuses on such indicators as discouragement by exploring the labour market problems of older workers in terms of *costs* and duration of unemployment, while Rones and Herz (1989) examine other institutional barriers to the employment of mature workers from an economic viewpoint. However, as precise as these studies may be, the *conditions* underlying these schemes or barriers are left untouched.

Finally, in this residual category, Beckett (1988), Elmore (1980) and Rosen (1978) examine aspects of redundancy among older workers from an administrative or legal perspective, but in each case the operations of power behind the making of managerial decisions are not considered. For example, Rosen (1978) investigates how age stereotypes influence the making of managerial decisions but fails to

realise that these stereotypes are continuously produced and reproduced both at home and at work through the exercise of power (Knights, 1989: 314).

To summarize then, most previous studies which focus on a monolithic and undifferentiated 'social system' view the operation of power within the labour process as both negative and oppressive. Accordingly, experience is *reduced* to a progressive tension between the workers aspirations and what workers can acquire from labour. For example, several researchers tend to overly reduce the effects of redundancy to a singular issue - *costs* - whereby ex-workers are seen as being deprived by being laid off. This is a simple view of how the self is influenced in the lead-up to, during, and after redundancy, since workers receive their identities and sense of self-worth to a very large extent from the work they do. I argue that these are historical processes which have been internalised and acted upon over time (Willmott, 1989: 346; also see Chapter Two).

Social Action Approaches to the Problem of Redundancy

Symbolic Interactionism

As distinct from the above studies, writers using this approach stress the autonomy of human action and the capacity to exert control. Redundancy is therefore depicted as resulting in deprivation and destroying meaningful activity from the viewpoint of those laid off.

One of the earliest studies of the personal and social effects of becoming unemployed is Marie Jahoda's sociography of an unemployed community, (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel, 1933). According to Jahoda, it is employment as a meaningful activity which becomes the benchmark in order to compare the negative experiences of becoming unemployed (see Fryer and Ullah, 1987: 244). However, as meaningful as it might be, this study like later studies on the subject are *essentialist* since they reduce the argument about redundancy to one of perception and in the process concentrate primarily on effects.

An *essentialist* view of the unemployed is reductionist because it reduces '*freedom*'

to a potential to express inner being. This removes what it is to be human to an 'openness' to the possibilities of our relationship with nature and social life. In short, it assumes that humans are naturally autonomous and 'free' in the choices and the decisions they take in how they will organise their lives. However, such a view denies the ways in which power acts upon individuals and their political wills which it constitutes (see Chapter Two for a fuller explanation). People therefore, can be induced to mould and alter their behavioural states in adverse and positive circumstances. Power does not deny freedom, it simply directs it along well-defined, ever finer channels (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 552).

Although Jahoda claims to have reconstructed the situation objectively by becoming immersed in the lives of her respondents, the critical element of power is left out of her analysis and subjectivity is therefore reduced to interpretation.

Case Studies

Of the studies which explore the impact of unemployment on older workers from a sociological perspective, Rife and First (1989) focus on some of the problems older workers face. For instance, constant discouragement and the burden of depression. The results though illuminating, are limited by too narrow a problem. The case study and survey methods employed also limit any proper understanding of the complex processes which emerge from the process of redundancy.

A more influential and extensive study of redundancy is that of Martin and Fryer (1973), who examine the attitudes and experiences of a workforce laid off from a large manufacturing plant in the North of England during the late 1960s. In true symbolic interactionist style, Martin and Fryer insist that the events associated with redundancy should be analyzed in terms of the 'actors' definition of the event and how such perceptions relate to the structure of the community and the plant (Martin and Fryer, 1973: 185). Accordingly, Martin and Fryer argue that attitudes, behaviours and individual perceptions of the world are rooted in a specific pattern of historical development and past experience, while power processes underpinning this development are overlooked.

Following Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt (1968), Martin and Fryer state the obvious by claiming that attitudes of workers are conditioned by 'ideal-typical' orientations to work within the framework of 'paternalist capitalism':

attitudes of workers bore the imprint of the social structure within which they had been socialised" (Martin and Fryer, 1973: 179).

As is the case with previous examples, Martin and Fryer thus also reduce subjectivity to 'orientations to work'.

In addition, they conceptualise managerial behaviour within the social structure according to criteria such as conflicting goals and the need to maintain equilibrium and control over men and materials. This thesis directly challenges these views by arguing that such approaches fail to grasp the complex labour processes that are experienced by those who work on the shop floor. As stated earlier, this can be done by focusing on social practices and investigating *how* these practices are applied as strategies of power which create *subjects* of workers.

In tackling the issue of the *subject*, this thesis places the older worker at the centre of the process of redundancy in a fresh approach wherein *subjectivity* becomes the central issue.

On further examination of the literature a plurality of forces become manifest in the process of being laid off. For example, new technology (Noble, 1979 and Child, 1986), international competition (Littler, 1982 and 1985), and state intervention (Hopper et al, 1985). These writers bring to the surface important components as catalysts of the redundancy process, but they rarely theorise or attempt to adequately analyze *subjectivity*, although there has been an attempt by Friedman to examine the dynamics of managerial strategy (Friedman, 1977; 1989).

Australian sociologists Knights and Willmott are among the few who attempt to utilize Foucault's ideas to the analysis of the labour process (Knights, 1989; Knights and Willmott, 1985 and 1986).

Clearly, an appreciation of the significance of the worker as a subject is ill considered by sociologists who focus merely on orientations to work (Goldthorpe et al, 1968; Martin and Fryer, 1973), or where the focus is narrowly on workers involvement in 'class' struggles and negotiations with the bosses (Westergaard et al, 1989; Harris, 1987; Lee and Harris, 1985). A review of the latter studies reveal the worker on the shop floor to be psychologically alienated by dominant capitalist forces and thus a passive 'victim' of bourgeoisie oppression. In such studies, experiences in which workers and management actively produce and reproduce the social relations which dominate them are absent from analysis.

To rectify this omission in social thought, the following section develops theoretical reflections on *subjectivity* by considering two labour process ethnographies from the literature of industrial sociology. I argue that these studies represent a considerable improvement on earlier attempts to analyze the labour process, because they capture the tensions and contradictions of working on the shop floor and something of the antagonisms inherent in capitalist/labour relations. However, both studies are subject to limitations because neither one answers satisfactorily the crucial question: How do workers (and others involved in the industrial environment) reproduce the conditions which oppress them?

Subjectivity in Ethnography: Burawoy and Cockburn

The appearance of Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capitalism* in 1974 ignited the spark of what was to become a continuing debate on the nature of the labour process in modern industrial societies (Thompson, 1983 and 1989; Knights and Willmott, 1989). According to Braverman, modern industrial production is increased through the deskilling of labour, greater managerial control over the means of production, and through a subtle separation of the formation of policy and its implementation at the 'grassroots' level.

This thesis of labour intensification posited by Braverman is contradicted by Burawoy (1979: 176) who sought to answer the question: "how does capitalism manage to continuously increase the amount of surplus value (profit), while at the

same time obscuring the precise ways in which workers within the labour process are exploited". Burawoy finds that production is maintained by management **not** by increasing control, but by relaxing it within the context of an elaborate shop floor game of 'making out' (i.e. maximising bonus pay-outs). This means activities on the shop floor become a series of games in which operators can earn a reward or bonus for boosting their own output, as bonuses are given on an individual basis over and above their normal earnings. The higher the target produced by a worker, the greater the bonus received.

The logic behind the game of 'making out' lies in the creation of workplace harmony and consent since conflicts are deflected horizontally within the company, away from the potential for industrial conflict. But the price of game playing is high and when workers become absorbed in the game by participating and adhering to its rules, they unwittingly are exploited in the process they initiate to make their work bearable. In short, workers are induced by an incentive scheme which is designed for the express purpose of creating workplace harmony to raise production. Interesting though this argument is, it fails to analyze how both workers and managers contribute to their own subjugation by participating in these games.

In his analysis Burawoy rightly points out that workers do discipline themselves by consenting to play these games. He notes that human interests and ideology are actively constituted and reconstituted on the shop floor and are not the passive consequences of class structures as Marxists would have it. Neither are they reflective of the way the employee has been socialised generally, as functionalists would believe. Such an insight represents a major advance on previous studies of industrial workers, where there is denial of the importance of subjectivity (Braverman, 1974), a reduction of subjectivity to mental constructs or attitudes (Rife and First, 1989), a reduction to 'class struggle' (Westergaard et al, 1989), or where the complex nature of subjectivity has been reduced to 'orientations to work' (Goldthorpe et al, 1969; Martin and Fryer, 1973). *In Manufacturing Consent*, Burawoy (1979), has made a major advance to the field of study but it is still incomplete.

This is because there is an assumption that workers will always feel deprived when there is an absence of positive work inducements which permit them to express their personal potential. Hence it is felt they will compensate (from resentment) by acting out 'work as a game'. Yet the game of 'making out' is a deliberate positive power strategy by the company designed to make workers feel good about themselves, as achievers, doing a 'man's job', so that even those who do not achieve will not necessarily feel deprived. They will simply be urged to try a little harder. Because Burawoy conceptualises power as unilaterally negative or oppressive, he fails to raise for analysis how both managers and workers contribute to their own oppression by participating in these games where nobody questions the rules or the social construction of identities on the shop floor. According to Knights (1989: 311), it is not that Burawoy completely neglects subjectivity, it is just that his account is incomplete in that he fails to show how "labour processes fragment, atomise and actually turn workers into individuals in the process, rather than being predetermined members of a particular economic class" (Knights, 1989: 311).

On a par with Burawoy who asserts that the restricted choices in game playing on the shop floor *compensate* for the degradation of work, Cockburn (1983: 135) argues that workers seek to preserve their masculine identity, in order to *compensate* for their powerlessness in the face of capital.

Being Marxist in orientation, both Burawoy and Cockburn analyze labour processes in an orthodox dialectical fashion. Burawoy views subjectivity as the empowerment of workers through game playing. He fails however, to see how these games are a source of meaning and identity for the workers who participate in them and as such are a power mechanism instituted by the company. This is because large companies encourage workers to secure their sense of importance by performing well while their macho identity is reinforced as they compete against one another.

In a similar fashion, drawing on gender, Cockburn (1983: 8) accounts for the lack of women in the printing industry by way of a 'dual systems' theory where class and patriarchy are seen to have independent yet mutually reinforcing effects on

gender relations. However, while incorporating gender inequalities is to be commended, by drawing on the work of Foucault, I argue that structural exploitations within the labour process derive *not* from class struggle or gender inequality *but* from a complex matrix of disciplinary mechanisms which are both a consequence and a condition of the exercise of power. Labour processes cannot be understood in terms of class consciousness alone but are a result of power strategies which are put into effect through knowledge (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 553). In this way, power is exercised by subjecting and thus tying individuals to their own identity and are not mechanisms directly derived from the forces of production, class struggle, gender divisions or mere ideology.

Because both Cockburn and Burawoy interpret labour relations in terms of class and gender inequality and only view the operation of power as a negative process, the creation of social identity through work is omitted when accounting for the reproduction of modern corporate-capitalist social relations.

In Burawoy's factory environment, management devises an elaborate shop floor game of 'making out', which is a strategy of power whereby participating workers contribute to their own oppression. Similarly, the absence of women from certain jobs within the printing industry is a further example of a power strategy since it illustrates the power of men to exclude women from jobs, thereby creating a system of job segregation. This serves to maintain their privileged position over women and *not*, as Cockburn suggests, merely as compensation for 'class underprivilege' (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 552).

Burawoy does not bring out how masculine (and feminine) identity is nurtured in and tied to the job. Cockburn downplays the importance of gender. The basic flaw in both studies is that they give too little empirical attention to how the social psychology of management control (that is, the strategies or tactics of power relations) is used to manipulate workers for specific purposes, such as increased production or maintaining certain privileged statuses (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 548-549). Neither study therefore, adequately accounts for the significance of class

or gender exploitation in the labour process.

It is evident from studies reviewed in this chapter that few previous studies of redundancy have dealt adequately with the issue of subjectivity that has been raised by Foucault. Social system theorists, such as Westergaard et al (1989) and Harris (1987), reduce the complexities and contingencies of social life to a simple definition of workers as 'free', voluntary and always struggling against economically oppressive, socially monolithic structures. They are therefore deterministic since they seek explanations in macro-structures or 'systems', be they economic, political, social or cultural. By contrast, grounded social action theorists such as Jahoda (1933) and Martin and Fryer (1973), interpret 'reality' according to subjective perception of workers and managers so that no room is left for the possibility that experience may be constructed as the formation and outcome of power processes. What these studies do is marginalise rather than incorporate subjectivity into their analyses. The challenge then, is to develop a different view of labour relations which adequately withstands critical sociological scrutiny.

As Thompson (1989) claims when referring to the marginalisation of subjectivity within research in this field: *the construction of a full theory of the 'missing subject' is probably the greatest task facing labour process theory.*

This thesis aims to address this problem by bringing the 'missing subject' to the forefront of an analysis of labour processes by examining the issue of redundancy in the Zenith Bus Company. The value of Foucault here lies in his relentless concern with the problem of how power acts upon the individual in western culture, turning people into 'subjects' of discipline and power/knowledge strategies (Foucault, 1982: 208). In line with Foucault's theory of modern power is the idea of 'identity fetishism' (briefly outlined at the start of this chapter) whereby through the operation of power in labour processes people's jobs can assume a symbolic significance. In their adoption of Foucauldian analysis, Knights and Willmott (1989: 555) maintain that labour process analysis must begin to expose the inconsistencies and contradictions of the 'security' sustained through identity fetishism.

With this in mind, this thesis gives particular attention to Foucault's conception of ubiquitous power relations as these impact upon workers in their job or elsewhere. The central problem is therefore:

How do power relations influence and determine the personal identities, experiences and emotions of older workers before, during and after they are fired from their jobs?

For the purposes of this study, 'older worker' is defined as those over the age of forty years at the time of redundancy. In view of the background of recession and high unemployment which is documented in Chapter Four, a lower age cut-off point¹ was considered more appropriate than a higher one of say fifty years. Previous research into discrimination and hiring practices firmly points to the conclusion that worsening economic conditions combined with high unemployment significantly contributes to the difficulties experienced by older workers of holding onto or obtaining a job (Kalisch and Williams, 1983: 13-14; Boglietti, 1974; Field, 1977).

Although Foucault does not specifically address the problems of older workers, his work suggests that employers and potential employers will take advantage of situations such as recession. They will do this through the social practices within which power is exercised (Foucault: 1977a, 1980a, 1980b, 1982).

It is the task of the next chapter to identify which key concepts of Foucault will shed adequate light on this problem.

NOTES

1. From the year ended March 1990 to the year ended March 1991 those in the prime working age had above average increases in unemployment. Of particular note were males aged 40-44 who had a rise in unemployment of 51.2% (Labour Market Statistics 1991: 21).