

G60/157

No Restrictions

MONASH UNIVERSITY
THESIS ACCEPTED IN SATISFACTION OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ON..... 5 July 2005.....
.....

Sec. Research Graduate School Committee

Under the Copyright Act 1968, this thesis must be used only under the normal conditions of scholarly fair dealing for the purposes of research, criticism or review. In particular no results or conclusions should be extracted from it, nor should it be copied or closely paraphrased in whole or in part without the written consent of the author. Proper written acknowledgement should be made for any assistance obtained from this thesis.

ERRATA

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| p.20, para 2, line 11: | '... a process that staff at all levels have contributed to'. |
| p.32, fn 22: | '...between the techniques of writing and recording used in social work...' |
| p.33, para 1, line 4: | 'In this way, the imperative of privacy and confidentiality can be maintained by professional workers, while at the same time managers are able to garner new forms of knowledge about (and potential control over) the substance of professional work and working relationships'. |
| p.69, para 2, line 12: | 'to abolish' for 'to either abolish' |
| p.70, para 1, line 8: | 'principal' for 'principle' |
| p.70, quotation: | 'guard' for 'guards' |
| p.129, para 1 line 4: | '... is at the centre of attempts to not only make or transform institutional structures and relations but also to 'responsibilise' actors in new ways'. |
| p.134, para 2, line 3: | 'is more' for 'are more' |
| p.144, para 2, line 1: | 'Clarke and Newman' for 'Clarke & Newman' |
| p.148, fn 77: | 'Department of Family and Community Services' for 'Department for Community Services' |
| p.156, para 3, line 2: | 'principal' for 'principle' |
| p.159, para 1, line 5: | 'develop' for 'development' |
| p.163, quotation: | 'powerless' for 'power' |
| p.178, fn 92: | 'be explained' for 'explained' |
| p.198, para 2, line 2: | '... social service administration, is a complex phenomenon.' |
| p.200, para 2, line 9: | 'costs' (Pinkus, 1987: 1164)' for 'costs (Pinkus, 1987: 1164)' |
| p.224, para 1, line 4: | 'levels' for 'level' |
| p.247, para 2, line 6: | 'Sole Parent Pension' for 'Single Parent Pension' |
| p.252, para 1, line 5: | '1989' for '1972' |
| p.278, para 3, line 6: | 'as' for 'any' |
| p.285, para 2, line 7: | 'frontline social workers' for 'frontline line social workers' |
| p.308, para 2, line 3: | 'Humphries and Camilleri' for 'Humphries & Camilleri' |
| p.310, para1, line 3: | 'The enunciation of the individual statement changes, such that the drive to count aspects of performance is now of paramount importance.' |

**COMPUTERISED INFORMATION SYSTEMS
AND PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY:
THE RECORD OF SOCIAL WORK**

Submitted by

Philip Ross Dearman (B.A. Hons)

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Humanities, Communications & Social Sciences
Faculty of Arts

Monash University
AUSTRALIA

March 2005

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.
Yet not for power (power of herself
Would come uncall'd for) but to live by law,
Acting the law we live by without fear;
And, because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, (1833) *Ænone*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
ABBREVIATIONS.....	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 1: Objectives and hypothesis.....	16
1.1 Introduction	16
1.2 The central thesis	21
1.3 Why social work?	24
1.4 Information in professional work	27
1.5 Key assumptions	30
1.5.1 Autonomy.....	30
1.5.2 Power	31
1.5.3 Representation	32
1.5.4 Technology	33
1.6 Thesis structure.....	34
1.7 Thesis Chapters, in summary	36
1.8 Conclusion	42
Chapter 2: Paradigm assumptions in the study of professionalism.....	46
2.1 Introduction	46
2.2 Defining the term 'profession'	50
2.3 The paradigm approaches	56
2.3.1 The functionalist paradigm.....	57
2.3.2 The revisionist paradigm	63
2.4 Discussion	71
2.5 Conclusion	74

Chapter 3: A governmental approach to the study of professional autonomy	77
3.1 Introduction	77
3.2 Elements of a 'governmental approach' to communication and culture	82
3.2.1 Discourse, power and the subject.....	84
3.2.2 'Technology' and 'society'	100
3.3 Framework number one: 'modes of accounting'	110
3.4 Framework number two: 'investment in forms'	120
3.5 Discussion	125
3.6 Conclusion	135
Chapter 4: Responding to new managerialism	140
4.1 Introduction	140
4.2 What is 'new managerialism'?	142
4.3 Social work's response: the Weberian dialectic	149
4.4 Social work as an extension of juridical power.....	159
4.5 Conclusion	167
Chapter 5: Competing modes of accounting: a genealogy of social casework recording	172
5.1 Introduction	172
5.2 Recording techniques in social casework: a brief history	176
5.2.1 1900s—1940s: from ledgers to narratives.....	178
5.2.2 1950s—1990s: 'accountability crises', standardisation, risk management and computerisation.....	189
5.3 Discussion	205
5.4 Conclusion	213

Chapter 6: Case study—Centrelink social work, and the Social Work Information System	221
6.1 Introduction	221
6.2 Methodology	226
6.3 Public service reform in the 1980s: a new 'attitude of mind'	232
6.4 Social work in DSS/Centrelink	245
6.5 Development and implementation	255
6.5.1 Overview: what does SWIS do?	255
6.5.2 The process of developing SWIS	258
6.5.3 Views from the front-line	277
6.6 Discussion	286
6.7 Conclusion	296
CONCLUSION.....	303
Questions	303
Arguments and Assumptions	304
Findings	311
APPENDIX 1: Interview Questions.....	322
APPENDIX 2: Chronology of SWIS Development	323
REFERENCES.....	324

ABSTRACT

The advance of new information and communications technologies (ICTs) in the human services workplace has generated a series of objections, including the proposition that the use of computers jeopardises professional autonomy. Computerised information systems, in the service of the master 'new managerialism', are said to enable an unhelpful intrusion of management into professional worker/client relationships, 'dehumanising' the tasks of advocacy, therapy and general assistance. The question shaping this dissertation is thus: "How are we to understand the impact of computers on professional autonomy, when the latter is something generally understood either as a generic characteristic, or as expressive of ideology?"

The position argued here is that autonomy, and the capacity for discretionary judgement, is an historical artefact of disciplinary training and forms of workplace organisation. While the introduction of computerised information systems into the human services has indeed altered relationships between managers and professionals, this is not 'dehumanisation' but rather a recasting of a set of ethical dispositions and relationships already historically constituted through the operation of a range of communications technologies. Autonomy, in this sense, can be seen as an artefact constituted through regular performance.

That recasting is explored here in three stages. First, a review of literature on professionalism provides an opportunity for naming an alternative (governmental) perspective on knowledge and practice in social work, which is framed by post-structuralist analyses of power, knowledge, communication and technology. Second, a review of the history of social work recording

illustrates relationships between techniques of representation, disciplinary knowledge and professional aspirations—relationships that constitute a particular 'mode of accounting' (Law, 1996). Third, a case study of the development of a computerised information system in the Social Work Service (SWS) of Centrelink provides an opportunity to analyse the complex and incremental nature of socio-technical change. Managers of the SWS have used the computerisation of information systems as an opportunity to reframe the particular ensemble of discursive practices that shape and limit the exercise of discretionary judgement and accountability in that particular case. The requirement to key, rather than write, has been used to restructure relations of trust and control that characterise manager/professional workplace relations (of accountability). But this is change of a piecemeal nature, characterised by resistance and discontinuity, rather than straightforward implementation of original intentions.

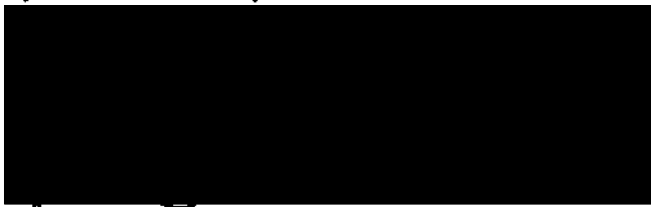
The thesis concludes that professional autonomy in social work is not simply a matter of principled freedom *from* managerial power, but rather a disposition to act that is an outcome of forms of engagement with techniques of representation. Those techniques of representation have changed significantly during the course of the twentieth century, with a profound reliance now on technologies of audit rather than the earlier techniques of narrative recording. As that change has occurred, so too has the nature of the real relations between professional labour and management, and the makeup of the 'ethical disposition' (or alternatively 'the capacity for self-mastery') of professional workers.

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis presented by me for another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

A large black rectangular box redacting the signature of the author.

Philip Dearman, March 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It's taken me a very long time to produce this thesis, far too long in the eyes of some. During the research and writing my life has changed substantially. I've shifted myself out of the public service into the relative vitality of modern academia, moved a family across state borders, and watched two infant children become teenagers.

During that time I have had assistance from a number of people, including supervision from the following: Peter Travers, Lesley Cooper, Cathy Greenfield, Daryl Nation, Beth Edmondson and Simon Cooper. Beth has shouldered much of the responsibility for pushing me forward in recent years, and for that I am extremely grateful. I should also thank Peter Williams, whose insight and interest over the last fifteen years has been of enormous benefit to me, both personally and professionally.

Readers of this work will naturally ask the question: why choose social work as case study of the impact of computerised information systems on professional autonomy? While reasons for this are summarised in Chapter One, it's important to also acknowledge a portion of my own personal work history—as an administrative officer in the Department of Social Security, from 1991 through to 1996—as part of the inspiration for the research. I worked along side a number of different social workers, and witnessed first hand their problematic relationships with administrative and managerial staff. I also witnessed the difficult conditions under which all staff in that organisation worked, and saw—although only briefly—the beginnings of its transformation into the 'customer service' oriented Centrelink.

That work history provided me with a useful link to senior managers of the Social Work Service of Centrelink (and previously the Department of Social Security), who facilitated my access to departmental files and Regional Office social work staff. On that count I am particularly grateful to Margaret Healy, Lindsay Kranz, Peta Fitzgibbon and Desley Hargreaves.

I am also extremely grateful to my current employer—the School of Humanities, Communications & Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Monash University—and its head Dr Harry Ballis, who provided me with teaching relief and other resources that allowed me to finish the onerous task of writing up.

Andrew Dearman provided an excellent sounding board during the middle stages, and did an excellent job of transcribing several hours of semi-structured interviews with Centrelink social workers.

Jenny Hurley read the penultimate draft, and provided invaluable feedback at the final stages, just when things seemed to fray beyond my control.

I shouldn't forget Jean, my mother, who taught me how to write, or Ross, my father, who taught me the basics of humility. Thank you, both of you.

Finally, the outcome would not have been possible without the wonderful love, support, appreciation and tolerance of my family, Deborah, Blake and Elliot.

ABBREVIATIONS

AASW	Australian Association of Social Workers
AAT	Administrative Appeals Tribunal
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AIG	Australian Industry Group
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AIRC	Australian Industrial Relations Commission
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ANT	Actor-network theory
APS	Australian Public Service
AR	Annual Report
ASW	Area Social Worker
AT&AEA	Australian Theatrical & Amusement Employees' Association
AWIRS	Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey
BHP	Broken Hill Proprietary Limited
CAS	Customer Appointment System
CCTV	Closed circuit television
CoA	Commonwealth of Australia
COS	Charity Organisation Society
CPSU	Commonwealth Public Sector Union
CRS	Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service
CSC	Customer Service Centre
CSO	Customer Service Officer
DoF	Department of Finance
DSS	Department of Social Security
FMIP	Financial Management Improvement Plan

FOI	Freedom of Information
GMH	General Motors Holden
ICT	Information and communications technology
IT	Information technology
LAN	Local area network
NPM	New Public Managerialism
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PC	Personal computer
PMB	Program management budgeting
POA	Professional Officers' Association
POR	Problem oriented recording
QANTA	Queensland & Northern Territory Area
QWIS	QANTA Social Work Information System
RCA	Review of Commonwealth Administration
RCAGA	Royal Commission into Australian Government Administration
RO	Regional Office
SMR	Sender-receiver model of communication
SSAT	Social Security Appeals Tribunal
SWIS	Social Work Information System
SWS	Social Work Service
VDHS	Victorian Department of Human Services
VRF	Victorian Risk Framework

INTRODUCTION

The central purpose of this thesis is to respond to claims that neo liberal forms of public sector management are working to 'dehumanise' professional social work. Mark Lymbery, in a paper titled "Social Work at the Crossroads", exemplifies the kind of 'big picture' claims often made about external threats to the professional status of social work, which are said to compromise the freedom to exercise autonomous judgement:

Recent years have seen a constant attack on its values and principles, which has taken place at political, organisational and professional levels. Social work practice has been subjected to increased managerial control and social workers' levels of autonomy has [sic] been reduced. ... its survival as a recognisable professional activity is dependent on the extent to which it can redefine its role within society, and re-establish clarity about its overall purpose and function (2001: 369).

Lymbery names the ideology of the New Right as the main culprit, as responsible for both the spread of cultural conservatism and the introduction of a business orientation into public service organisations.¹ The New Right is said to demonise anyone perceived as a threat to the sanctity of marriage and the family. "Since much social work takes place at the intersection between the family and society, these developments have affected the climate within which practice is carried out" (2001: 373). The new business ethos of public service is responsible not only for increasing the power of a managerial elite *over*

¹ Rees and Rodley argue even more broadly than this, asserting that the 'human costs' of managerialism are a recent corollary of the ideology of capitalism. The authors note in their introduction that managerialism "facilitates the destructiveness of market-based economic policies and controls", and describe their search for a 'modus operandi' for empowering individuals which will "appeal to principles of humanity" (1995: 3).

professional staff, but for disturbing the balance between the technical aspects of social work (including rules and procedures) and the 'indeterminate areas' of practice that require the exercise of professional judgement. A 'reductive preoccupation' with the notion of competence has shifted that balance towards 'technicality', and as a result "there is a danger that social workers will lose the ability to innovate in practice or think strategically about the development of the profession" (2001: 377). The prescription Lymbery provides for turning the tables is equally 'big picture': social work must develop a 'new professionalism', he argues, which must embrace social diversity and fight social division, in order to ensure oppression and poverty remain central to the social work agenda.

The argument that will be made here, in response, is that professional autonomy is not an essential quality previously 'beyond the reach' of government, which now requires protection to ensure its preservation. Autonomy is not *outside of*, or *beyond*, government. It is in fact an outcome (or artefact) of government, where the latter is more than the regulatory apparatus of state institutions or political parties but rather a particular set of techniques and activities aimed at shaping, guiding or otherwise affecting the conduct of others (Gordon, 1991: 2).

This line of argument—which draws on a Foucauldian approach to the study of power, knowledge and government—is not meant to deny the concerns that social work writers have expressed about the effects of market oriented business practices in the public sector. The object is to provide an alternative analytical framework that goes beyond the 'principled positions' (Hunter 1994b) put forward in arguments about the ideology of new managerialism, in

order to provide tools that can focus discussion on changes in the practical routines—principal among them the act of casework recording—that have worked to reshape, and to re-regulate, the conditions of professional autonomy.

This draws on Dorothy Smith's (1990) notion of a politics of writing, in which the uses made of 'documentary' technologies in the organisation of everyday life are seen as crucial. Smith argues that while technologies of inscription permeate all aspects of social relations they remain largely taken for granted by sociology. She calls for an exploration of textual practices (such as those under consideration here, namely the recording and communication of social case work) as constitutive of social relations and not just as expressive of culture formed elsewhere. The effects of information systems need to be considered not simply in terms of what flows from a centralisation of surveillance—where more information supposedly gives the centre more power—but also in terms of how capacities (considered as outcomes of social organisation, rather than as expressive of personal attributes or traits) change.

To be more precise, this thesis assumes that autonomy is premised upon ethical capacity—which will be called here a capacity for self-mastery²—derived from training in the performance of a set of discursive routines for giving account of one's practice, in relation to relevant authorities. In orthodox definitions of ethics the term stands for the rules, principles or ways of thinking about how one ought to act (Singer, 1994: 4). Ethical

² The reader will notice that the phrase 'ethical skills and capacities', or a combination of these terms, is used in preference to 'subjectivity'. 'Subjectivity' is a term that can denote broad categories of thinking and being which in some uses—particularly in a humanist approach to the study of communication and culture—can suggest an essential relationship between thinking and the physical substance of the brain. 'Skills and capacities' implies more precisely the competencies acquired through (formal or informal) training, of actors in social relations.

principles are seen as foundation materials of social behaviour, as the rocks upon which the possibility of autonomy is built. In this thesis, however, regimes of practical ethical training—rather than principles—are considered to be the prerequisite for establishing the possibility of autonomy. The capacity for ethical self-mastery is understood here as being constituted through an engagement with particular procedures for giving account of one's practice, procedures which it will be argued here are part of the historically developed 'modes of accounting' (Law, 1996; §3.2) used for monitoring and managing the conduct of social work.

On the basis of these assumptions it is then reasonable to ask what mechanisms, for giving and taking accounts of practice, have been brought to bear in the regulation of professional social workers, and with what results. What is the significance of 'trust' in the relations of power operating in the social work workplace? How is this changing, in relation to (or as a consequence of) the computerisation of information systems?

It will be argued here that recording, which is generally marginalised as a relatively insignificant and mundane activity, is in fact an activity at the centre of attempts by the profession, and by managers and administrators, to 'make up' the ethical capacities of social work staff. Autonomy is an artefact—at least in part—of the discursive practices surrounding and making up casework recording, or in other words of the things social workers do when they document and communicate information about the substance of their work with clients. Rather than trace the emergence of an 'ideology' of 'new managerialism'—which one might do by tracing the content of published utterances made by or on behalf of 'management'—this thesis explores the

shifts that have occurred in the uses of recording in social work practice, in order to establish at a more practical level what is at stake in debates about accountability, autonomy and control in the social work workplace.

A number of researchers have written previously on social work records, also using theoretical frameworks derived from Foucault's work—including Prince (1996), Tice (1998) and Floersch (2000). However this thesis is different in at least two respects. First, it does not look to the record as either symbolic or symptomatic of social repression, and does not therefore identify the clients of the various institutions that come under the heading 'social work' as its ultimate objects of inquiry. Second, it does not deal with the records of social work as an archive, as a body of objective knowledge about 'real people' waiting to be tapped for what it says about the 'true' nature of welfare institutions. It looks instead at what social workers have been asked to do *to themselves* during the recording process, and more particularly at how the various forms of inscription, assessment and evaluation have been shaped around the task of self-reflection. It does this because of the importance of such a task in the building of a contemporary 'ethical infrastructure' in the name of a more effective management of expertise.³

The focus on the 'work of the self' done in relation to techniques of institutional writing draws on a post-structuralist theoretical 'toolkit', which is

³ This term borrows from work on public service ethics by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD has attempted to develop what it calls an 'ethics infrastructure' for public service that, significantly, does not look to overriding principles but rather to procedures. Its recommendations are grounded in a "deliberately analytical approach" (Mills, 1999: 63), which does not offer normative principles to guide action, but instead emphasises process and methodology. There is no mention of public service as an 'ethic of vocation', or of the kind of moral culture that Pusey, in the Australian context, argued was "a constituent of just those universalistic norms upon which principled public action depends" (1991: 168).

interested in how actors are 'made up' as autonomous through the course of an engagement with the material practices of social institutions. In this respect it draws substantially on Foucault's work on government of the self, which according to Rose privileges "a domain of practical texts that [has] offered rules, opinions and advice as to how to conduct oneself as one should" (1996: 297). This thesis considers a particular process—the things social workers do in collecting, writing up and communicating information about their work—which requires the caseworker to reflect on and to question the conduct of their expertise. It looks at recording as part of a knowledge system geared towards the production of 'truth' (Foucault, 1980b: 133), where truth is not seen simply as principled fact, but rather as the alignment of action with the objectives of authorities.

But how has this domain of 'practical texts' changed in recent years, and with what effect? It is reasonable to argue that, in a period as short as twenty years, the various spatial and temporal dimensions of most sectors of contemporary social and cultural life have been irrevocably changed by computerised information systems that appear to separate information from lived experience. Detailed information about employees, clients and physical assets is registered within integrated systems that provide authorities with opportunities to trace the movement of bodies and other objects through space and time. Financial databases, appointment systems, CCTV, telephone and email systems all provide authorities with opportunities for auditing and controlling the various dimensions of labour, service and production.

Support for the idea that centralised power and control stems from the deployment of new information systems is widely available. One of the major

concerns in the sociology of work and technology is precisely the trend to deskilling and/or the loss of employment opportunities. Consider, for example, debates about the way in which public transport ticketing systems—simultaneously systems for facilitating easy payment and speedy transit, but also for more precisely knowing about and managing the ebb and flow of customers and rolling stock—are implicated in the transformation of ticket collectors into 'transit police' and 'customer service officers', and ultimately in the loss of a substantial number of jobs. Consider also the changed patterns of employment brought about by the centralising architecture of multiplex cinemas, where one large long room with a view into a number of adjacent viewing rooms makes possible a single point of control over the flow of sound and image, and the reduction of projectionists from several down to just one. Significant battles were fought, but inevitably lost, by trade union activists over that particular innovation.⁴

Concern about the centralisation of information has also been focused on the cultural effect of changes in the flow and control of data within the firm. The 'electronic architecture' of the relationship between call centre workers and their supervisors exemplifies this form of change, where the latter control sensitive information about the former in call waiting times and lengths of toilet breaks, where taped calls enable detailed scrutiny of an individual's strategies for dealing with problem customers. The continuous reminders about the knowledge supervisors have of them challenge and change workers' understanding of the limits of their action.

⁴ The researcher worked, during the 1980s, for the New South Wales branch of the Australian Theatrical & Amusement Employees' Association (AT&AEA), and experienced first-hand the industrial disputes that occurred when Hoyts Cinemas' management introduced new projection equipment. Surprisingly, nothing appears to have been written about the protracted—and ultimately unsuccessful—industrial campaign that occurred at the time.

In the white-collar professional workplace, autonomy has traditionally been seen as a reward for providing a function that meets the objectives of authorities (for maintaining healthy and educated labour, for example) in a way that does not challenge the principle of freedom from political interference accorded to citizens in liberal democracies. A range of institutionalised accountability mechanisms has been developed to match, including codes of ethics, credentialing systems, mechanisms for peer supervision and appeal rights. But in the context of social, economic and cultural changes—often simply referred to as a ‘crisis of the welfare state’—the political response has been to harness technologies of managerial accounting to the task of challenging the discretionary freedoms of expertise. Information systems, according to some authors, challenge and ‘puncture’ discretionary spaces of professional work in situations where individual workers are charged with the responsibility to engage in a service relationship—for example doctors, social workers, academics—which is not routinely observable by a managerial gaze (Orlikowski, 1988). Information systems contribute to the ongoing development of managerial options for making the exercise of professional judgement visible and controllable, precisely in order to shape and influence the *process* as well as the *progress* of client interactions.

There is another interesting and important dimension to the developing relationship between information systems and professionalism. There has been, in fact, a kind of convergence between previously distinct employment relationships, in what is generally known as the modern ‘knowledge economy’. There are two aspects to this convergence. First, the exercise of professional judgement is continually subject to challenge, with various arguments about trust and accountability used to transform the working

conditions of academics, teachers, allied health workers, and a number of other professional groups. A variety of information and reporting mechanisms, usually tied to more strictly controlled funding arrangements, have made the conditions of the exercise of judgement more visible and more open to managerial control. Second, many of the new jobs created at the lower end of the labour market are being 'professionalised'—in the sense that they require higher qualifications, are often conducted without direct supervision and have a clear focus on 'customer care'—such as new kinds of education work (for example, in sport and recreation), care workers, call centre workers and IT workers.⁵ Surely one of the most telling signs of the spread of the ethic of 'professionalism' in modern society has been the link between sport, physical education and training, and cultural expectations.⁶ It is as if this new economy is not simply a 'knowledge economy', as many would claim, but more precisely a 'self-knowledge economy', where various forms of labour are (re)invented to operate without direct supervision, continually investing in new modes of self-empowerment and self-control.

How does one make sense of the effects of information systems on professional work? What theoretical tools are available? The traditional thesis of Marxist labour process studies is that technologies of office automation (and therefore information systems) provide opportunities for capital to maximise its control over labour. Paul Thompson asserts that this is based on a fundamental view of capital-labour relations:

⁵ Indeed Don Watson defines 'professionalisation' as a process, which is making language and ordinary life 'more business-like' (2004: 261).

⁶ Watson makes an interesting claim about how the language of modern authority has seeped into other domains, including the use of the term 'accountable football' to describe a player who keeps to a team plan, or ethos (2004: 16).

A labour process perspective locates the basic activity of transforming raw materials into products through human labour within a given technology, within the specific dynamics of a mode of production and antagonistic class relations (1983: 4).

Lorimer's account of the relationship between communication technologies and the location of knowledge and power precisely summarises what this perspective believes to be at stake in the development of new information systems:

The increased separation between a phenomenon and information descriptive of it allows a reorganisation of its spatial relations. Most significantly, it allows a shift in control from a multiplicity of scattered points, each proximate to a phenomenon, to a central location that controls activities in a far-flung hinterland. As the information gathered increases—and it has increased enormously with digitalisation, computers, information-gathering satellites, transmission capability and information-processing capacity—the degree to which effective control can be exercised also increases (1994: 138).

Despite the challenge of a 'reorganisation of spatial relations' this view is premised upon a particular theoretical perspective, known as the 'process model' of communication. That model tends to equate information with knowledge without interrogating how audiences work to transform one into the other (Hall, 1974; Carey, 1988; Moores, 1993). It assumes that information translates directly into knowledge, without considering the processes of translation and transformation that take place between 'point of capture' and the point at which 'knowledge' is ultimately put to some use. The model is easy to problematise, in respect of the particular research context of this thesis. What guarantee do managers have that the information they receive is credible, or reliable? What guarantee do they have that their workers, or other constituents, understand the meanings they seek to 'inject' into their messages? How must they then work to use information, in order to secure

compliance? Clearly, the capacity of the process model—which assumes a linear and relatively unproblematic transmission of information from sender to receiver—to respond to the questions raised above is limited. More information cannot always be understood as a guarantee of more effective knowledge and substantive control.

In the research undertaken for this thesis there is, in short, evidence of complex rather than straightforward outcomes. The 'interests' of capital, or of labour, or of any of the morphed identities somewhere in between, cannot be understood simply in terms of their purchase on information flow, or the hold they have 'over' the various forms of information with currency in their particular location. In order to understand how working relationships are potentially or actually reconfigured by information systems, it becomes important and necessary to include some reference to the ways in which the actual uses of those systems help frame the perspective of different organisational actors. This line of argument owes a considerable debt to Carolyn Marvin's work on the development of electronic media at the end of the nineteenth century. Marvin argues against an 'artifactual approach' to the study of new media, which she says assumes social processes begin with the development and application of new instruments. New media, she says, provide new platforms for already existing confrontations. Old habits, skills and capacities frame the possible outcomes of new phases in those confrontations.

New media may change the perceived effectiveness of one group's surveillance of another, the permissible familiarity of exchange, the frequency and intensity of contact, and the efficacy of customary tests for truth and deception. Old practices are then painfully revised, and group habits are reformed. New practices do not so much flow directly from technologies that inspire them as they are improvised out of old

practices that no longer work in new settings. Efforts are launched to restore social equilibrium, and these efforts have significant social risks. In the end, it is less in new media practices, which come later and point toward a resolution of these conflicts (or, more likely, a temporary truce), than in the uncertainty of emerging and contested practices of communication that the struggle of groups to define and locate themselves is most easily observed (1988: 5).

The effects of new technologies need to be considered in relation to the capacity of users to negotiate ongoing uses, and instances of innovation and change therefore need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. In other words, what is it that information systems make available to those actors, in terms of capacities, dispositions or strategic alliances? What investment do actors in these systems make, in a cultural sense? How can such an investment be maximised, realised, or indeed subverted?

Social work presents an excellent opportunity to answer these questions. It has been described as an 'invisible trade' (Pithouse, 1987), which in its individualised form is conducted in physically closed interviews, in agency offices or during home visits.⁷ It occurs away from the view of managers, supervisors, and often of other colleagues. It is a discipline that has historically been accorded certain discretionary freedoms over the domain of its work practices. The processes and outcomes of casework have been described as uncertain and difficult to describe, as the products of a variety of knowledges based on intuition and personal experience as much as technical competence, and therefore as difficult to account for. On the other hand, social work has for

⁷ While the generic term 'casework' is used throughout this thesis, it is important to note that social work takes a variety of different forms. These range from an individualised 'case management' approach to various forms of collective group and 'community' work. The objective of this thesis is not to investigate the various nuances of each approach, but—as noted above—to consider more broadly changes in relations of trust and control between managers and workers, that have occurred as a consequence of the use of computerised information systems.

a long time been in conflict with agency managers and policy makers, over the sometimes-problematic conduct of trained practitioners. The recent history of social casework is potted with media scandals and public inquiries concerning the failure of state institutions to manage populations on the margins of society.

As already noted above, managerial attempts to intervene in the terms and conditions of social work (to specify new work arrangements, to manage risk, to set benchmarks for efficiency and productivity, and to prescribe performance outcomes) have incited angry protests from various quarters of the social work profession. The objective of this research, situated as it is in the field of communication studies, is not so much to agree or disagree with that protest, but to attempt to understand the complex relationship between managerial aims and objectives, information and accounting technologies, and professional conduct. The thesis assumes that the ethical comportment of front line social workers is constituted through the performance of particular communication practices, which are framed by historically specific organisational and political structures. Ethics is based in a set of practical competencies, rather than 'big picture principles', and developed through an engagement with the discursive routines of casework. Ethical capacities are therefore constituted through what will be called here a 'mode of accounting', a display of respect for and compliance with professional as well as organisational norms in return for an allocation of trust (or, in other words, a constant process of 'reporting back'). Ethical practice is not simply a display of the values, principles or knowledge base of the discipline. Ethical practice—and the capacity to exercise autonomous professional judgement—is

an enactment (or performance) of not only credentialed objective knowledge, but also self-knowledge and self-mastery.

The fact that communication practices have changed substantially in recent years has implications for what is meant by 'mode of accounting'. The use of narrative recording systems, in both educational and organisational contexts, has contributed—at least in part—to the development of the capacity for self-mastery.⁶ These recording systems have formed part of a 'professional' mode of accounting, an ensemble of techniques used by the profession to regulate practice, to ensure a degree of accountability to professional and social norms. Recording, along with interviewing and supervision, has been the subject of a substantial body of research and writing in the social work discipline, concerning the best way to train social workers for practice in the field.

Computerisation, as a key component of an organisational mode of accounting, has resulted in a substantial re-skilling of social casework. Specifically, the requirement to enumerate aspects of their work, to measure and record them in a management database, and to constantly refer to that database in procedures of self assessment, produces new techniques for identifying, calculating and accounting for performance in relation to others. The framework by which caseworkers understand and make sense of their own professional accountability (or, in other words, the limits of their own discretionary judgement) appears substantially re-engineered.

However this is not a matter of ideological re-programming, by which the socially progressive values and ideals routinely claimed by social work

⁶ Narrative recording required social caseworkers to document their work in extensive detail. This is defined and discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

educators and commentators are somehow dehumanised, dissolved and reformatted. It is instead a practical change brought about by the requirement to develop different kinds of competencies. The question is, what impact has this had on the capacity for self-regulation, or self-mastery, which has previously been built around mastery of a longhand narrativisation of casework. Is it substantially altered by the engagement with tasks of enumeration and statistical analysis?

In other words, the objects of analysis in this thesis are recording as a material process, and the capacities for making sense developed out of that process. The conclusion to this thesis looks for some understanding of the extent to which professional independence is left intact by the computerisation of recording processes, or in other words the extent to which computerisation brings with it a substantial change in the cultural capacities of professional social workers.

CHAPTER ONE

Objectives and hypothesis

- 1.1 Introduction
 - 1.2 The central thesis
 - 1.3 Why social work?
 - 1.4 Information in professional work
 - 1.5 Key assumptions
 - 1.6 Structure
 - 1.7 Chapter summary
 - 1.8 Conclusion
-

1.1 Introduction

The advent of computerised information systems in the human services, and in many other work contexts, has generated a series of objections including the proposition that the use of computers jeopardises professional autonomy. Computers, so the argument goes, enable an unhelpful intrusion by management into professional worker/client relationships, 'dehumanising' the tasks of advocacy, therapy and general assistance.

This dissertation tests out these objections, engaging with debates about technology, trust and control in professional work, and focusing on the particular discipline of social work.

In order to address this topic, the research has sought to answer the following questions. What do information systems make possible in the modern professional workplace? (As opposed to 'what do they *do*, or *not* do, to *us*?') How has their use, in social work recording, led to changes in relationships of

trust and control between social workers and their supervisors/managers? Keeping in mind Foucault's work on governmentality, what adjustments have been made to the 'field of possible action' available to professional social workers?⁹ Using the notion of subject as actor (Hindess, 1986), what kinds of capacities and opportunities have developed out of the use of information systems in social casework recording? What are the points of accommodation and the opportunities for resistance, in the particular case of Centrelink's Social Work Service?¹⁰

It is important to be clear on the scope of the argument put forward in these chapters. First, 'technology' is defined in terms of the social uses arguments proposed in recent years by various writers, all of whom agree on the need to transcend distinctions between the social, economic, political and technical domains of life.¹¹

Second, 'autonomy' is defined as both *the capacity to influence decisions about the conduct of work* and *the capacity and opportunity to exercise independent judgement*. This emphasises the notion of 'agency', instead of the traditional focus on autonomy as a privilege associated with monopoly control of a particular market, or 'territory'. The argument works against a notion of autonomy as discretionary space, located somewhere beyond managerial control. It works against the notion of freedom as something that is essentially human, as

⁹ This phrase borrows from one of Foucault's later, and best-known, definitions of government: "To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others" (1982: 221).

¹⁰ Note that these questions are asked against a background of substantial research and writing on the use of computers in the human services, on the status of professionalism in social work (and in related occupations like teaching and nursing), and on the phenomena of 'new managerialism' and what has been called the 'audit society' (Power, 1997). That research raises important questions about the value of expertise in democratic societies, and in particular its role in public services.

¹¹ I refer here to writers as various as Jacques Ellul, Raymond Williams, Langdon Winner, Bruno Latour and Michael Callon.

existing prior to social relations. It seeks instead to understand autonomy as a capacity for action that depends on skills acquired through training.

Third, these definitions are developed as tools for analysing the complex reorganisation of professional work that has occurred in tandem with the development of computerised information and accounting systems now routinely used to monitor and regulate work performance in the 'personal social services' like teaching, nursing and social work.

The status of theory in this thesis, in other words, is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The objectives of the research, and of the overall argument, are firstly to clarify the terms of debates about the status of professional autonomy, and secondly (and perhaps more importantly) to identify elements of the complex patterns of change that have occurred in the particular discipline of social work in response to the managerial appropriation of computers as accountability tools.

One of the triggers for the perspective adopted in this research has been Fiona Wilson's article "Computer Numerical Control and Constraint" (1988). Wilson engages with Braverman's thesis, in *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (1974), that new technologies of numerical control (and therefore of automation) have caused a progressive deskilling of jobs. In studies of professional work this is often referred to as the 'proletarianisation thesis'.¹² Work, according to Braverman, is being progressively degraded, with all elements of knowledge, responsibility and judgement removed from workers as their tasks come to be more and more programmed. Wilson notes Braverman's highly abstract theory

¹² For a more recent review of the 'proletarianisation thesis', see Murphy (1990).

of class, which focuses on objective markers of class but not at all on 'the subjective' (1988: 67). The result, says Wilson, is that Braverman "drastically underestimates the knowledgability and the capability of workers faced with a range of management imperatives" (*ibid*). Wilson argues that Braverman treats the implementation of Taylorism as unproblematic, both historically and theoretically, and that he sees management as omniscient, and employees as 'infinitely malleable' (1988: 68). She concludes her discussion by noting that Taylorism does not in fact dominate the workplace but rather coexists with a variety of 'non-Taylorist' practices, including the granting of discretion to generate commitment and trust (*ibid*). What Braverman's discussions therefore lack, says Wilson, "is a parallel discussion of the reactions of workers, as themselves knowledgeable and capable agents to the technical division of labour and Taylorism" (1988: 67).¹³

This immediately begs the question as to whether the abovementioned claim about dehumanisation can, in reality, be so straightforward. Computerised information systems have certainly become an indispensable component of the post-industrial workplace where information is one of *the* key currencies used in shaping and managing not only the 'products' of work but also the attributes of labour, and of markets for service. But have the relationships of accountability and trust in the professional workplace not been complex and strong enough to withstand something that at this stage does not appear to be a substitute for labour? Are they simply 'washed away'? Rather than accept the tone and the substance of claims about dehumanisation—which would presume these systems are simply suppressing 'true' autonomy and displacing

¹³ Note here, again, the influence of Marvin's (1988) work on the development of communications technologies, also noted above in the Introduction.

some form of 'naturally free' labour—this dissertation foregrounds the productive (in the Foucauldian sense of that word) effects of communication practices associated with managerial accounting techniques that are made possible by networked computer systems. It looks to the complexity of each and every individual case. It assumes resistance will occur, but not solely in the form of human pre-meditated self-conscious antagonism. It enquires, instead, into the historical development of the mix of human and non-human artefacts that make up 'technology'.

It does so by presenting a case study, in the second part of the thesis, of the historical development of communications technologies used to record information in the particular case of social work. The case study draws on the Foucauldian concept of genealogy—a technique for describing histories of the various forms of contingency upon which the formation of ethical selves is based (Foucault, 1984)¹⁴—commencing with an attempt to describe the historical importance of recording techniques and technologies in shaping professional skills and supporting the 'professional project' of the social work discipline. It then documents the development and use of a management information system used by the Social Work Service (SWS) of Australia's income support agency, Centrelink.¹⁵ This considers the historical, cultural and political background to a process which staff at all levels have contributed. It describes the particular patterns of development that occurred in the relationship between a group of professionals—social caseworkers in

¹⁴ See also Kendall & Wickham (1999: 29-31), for a useful discussion and interpretation of Foucault's genealogical approach.

¹⁵ The SWS now makes use of a Social Work Information System (SWIS) to measure and manage work routines and resource allocations in a work unit with a staff of over 550 social workers, that currently services a national network of approximately 320 customer service centres and 19 call centres. (Figures sourced from the Centrelink 2002-2003 Annual Report, available via www.centrelink.gov.au).

Centrelink—and their managers. It establishes the political and cultural outcomes of computerised recording in this case, describing and analysing the use of information systems in effectively reframing the 'meaning systems' that guide social workers in their daily routines. It asks to what extent this has enabled, or disabled, the capacities of staff to exercise independent judgement, and to influence the outcome of decisions about the conduct of their work.

In summary, the various Chapters seek to determine whether and how the use of computerised information systems has been productive not only of new structural arrangements and working relationships that now constitute social casework but also of new cultural frameworks (or 'meaning systems') that guide casework practice. They do so in order to understand autonomy as a continuing problematic of power in the modern workplace.

1.2 The central thesis

As noted in the Introduction, computerised information systems have substantially rearranged relations of time and space in the modern era. This is now a taken for granted assumption, but what does it actually mean in practical terms for white-collar workers? It seems from the outset that the development, implementation and use of computerised information systems have put pressure on two things: on the work time of professional labour, and on the professional 'space' of expertise. How is it possible to make sense of the pressures, and the policy responses, that are associated with this outcome?

Information systems enable managers to deploy resources on the basis of what appears to be incontrovertibly objective evidence. 'Perfect numbers' are drawn

from, and synthesised by, information systems that feed off—but are generally seen as essentially independent of—actual relations between managers and workers. In the view of social workers employed in Centrelink both prior to and following the development of the Social Work Information System (SWIS)—which is the object of the case study presented in Chapter Six of this dissertation—the system has enabled managers to make new kinds of judgements about staffing. Social workers' labour has become a new kind of resource, about which different kinds of predictions and calculations can be made. As Chapter Six notes, two consequences of the introduction of SWIS appear to be substantial work intensification and a standardisation of the range of tasks they performed. In this sense it is possible to say that the 'substance' of expertise is not simply 'controlled'—but the conditions under which it can be 'performed' are substantially modified.

In respect of the professional 'space' of expertise, the forms of calculation required and promoted by computerised information systems put further pressure on the capacity of professional workers to make judgements framed according to disciplinary knowledge and logic.¹⁶ As already indicated this thesis uses a different conception of space than that associated with the concept of autonomy as 'leeway', as a zone of freedom beyond government.¹⁷ It is, instead, a notion of space that fits with what Foucault calls the 'limits of possible action', which therefore must include some reference to the capacity

¹⁶ In the case of Centrelink social workers, this is 'further' pressure in the sense that social work in that Agency has always been constrained and limited by the norms and imperatives of the bureaucracy in which it is lodged. But until the recent past those constraints have been moderated by a number of factors, including the nature of its role and function as essentially an advice and support unit. This will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

¹⁷ In relation to the 'closure strategies' of some professions one writer puts it this way: "The greater the power of action, or leeway for autonomous assessment, the greater the liberty and power of deciding and acting without other control than one's own judgement" (Hellberg, 1990: 182-183).

to make decisions and to influence their outcomes. SWIS, which was developed at a time when Centrelink was being corporatised, now trains social workers to follow forms of knowledge and logic that are somewhat different from those prescribed in the traditional social work curriculum. It requires end-users to engage in the logic of a kind of 'double guessing', in effect to measure their performance against managerial objectives now embodied in the form of lists and tables, and at the same time to continue in their endeavour to measure their work according to the standards of their discipline, and their peers. The conduct and the object of work can no longer be conceived mainly as an act of balancing client needs against administrative or managerial objectives. It is no longer a matter of managing a 'collision' between the needs of the discipline—those of the social worker, and those of the client—and the ambitions of administrators and policy makers. It can instead be framed as a complicated engagement with a series of apparently objective mediations, which quantify various aspects of work performance—in lists, tables and graphs—in ways that make possible a misrecognition (in the sense of a confusion of priorities, rather than identities)¹⁶ of the substantive objects of work. The 'reality' of work, in this context, can now be one's own work performance rather than a focused engagement with client circumstances and needs.

Having found sufficient evidence in the research material to support these two propositions, this dissertation argues against the notion that managerial uses of computerised information systems work to 'dehumanise' the heart of professional social work, at least in the case of the Centrelink social work

¹⁶ This qualification on the term 'misrecognition' is intended as a corrective to the possible (and incorrect) interpretation that this is an Althusserian argument about the reproduction of ideology. It is certainly not the latter.

service. They have, in fact, enabled a kind of *re-humanisation* (or 're-constitution', understood as an outcome of new forms of training) of the 'organisational soul' of Centrelink. The form of knowledge garnered from SWIS—in tandem with a number of other factors discussed further in the Chapters below—has provided Centrelink managers with opportunities to appropriate and map the skills of customer service across the administrative side of the Agency. SWIS has provided managers with evidence that supports the retention of the SWS, at a time when most other social work services in other federal government agencies have been removed altogether. This appears, however, to have been at the expense of the 'autonomy' of SWS staff, where this is understood as the dual capacity to both influence decisions about the conduct of work, and to exercise independent judgement.

1.3 Why social work?

The research understands the application of computerised information systems in the administration of human service organisations to have occurred in situations where public managers have for some time sought to readjust the limits of independent judgement exercised by professional workers. Given the fact that many forms of expertise have been targeted by the accountability drives of new managerialism, why focus on social work? There are a number of reasons that deserve mention.

First, social work forms a key plank in programs of liberal welfare. The discipline works across key institutions: in court systems, hospitals, community welfare agencies, schools, and in government departments such as Centrelink. It draws on—and helps to construct—governmental knowledge of

social problems, of life 'at the margins' of social and economic disadvantage. Social casework provides a mechanism for engaging with the conditions of that disadvantage in a manner that is theoretically supposed to guarantee a substantial measure of privacy. Privacy and confidentiality of client information are key issues in social work practice. In other words, it seeks to intervene as much as possible through education and counselling rather than direct force, acting in an exemplary manner on what Foucault has called 'the conduct of conduct' by governing at a distance.¹⁹

Second, social work is an occupation about which both the Left and Right of conventional politics are often suspicious. The former has attacked it as a 'lackey' of the establishment, often all too willing to carry out programs considered 'not in the interests' of the various populations targeted by state authorities, including Aborigines, single mothers, people with disabilities, homeless people and young people. The latter has criticised its inefficiencies, and its apparent failure to come to grips with its objects of practice—homelessness, child poverty, domestic violence, etc. This is a discipline apparently wedged between the proverbial rock and a hard place, but one which nevertheless continues to play a key role in conceiving of, and attending to, the government of marginal (and marginalised) populations.

Social work therefore occupies a strategic position, both practically and philosophically, between governmental programs (aimed at the control of budgets but also the fostering of productive self-regulating populations) and anti-statist critique. While it has provided a necessary means for intervening

¹⁹ These terms draw very directly on the work of Michel Foucault, and in particular on his concept of governmentality. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

on behalf of the state, it has also acted as a site for the development of arguments critical of the role of state authorities in curtailing individual liberties. In this sense, social work is always caught between the rhetorics of accountability, and of democracy. It provides an excellent case for studying the relationship between forms of trust, and modes of control.

The third reason for the focus on social work is that while it has a primary role in mediating relationships between state authorities and populations considered 'at risk', the effectiveness of welfare services more generally has for a long time been of strategic significance for authorities interested in managing not only the effects of poverty but also treasury finances.²⁰ Demands for effectiveness have always been balanced against arguments about efficiency and productivity, and this has certainly been the case since the 1970s in most Western liberal democracies. The case of social work, as a key discipline within large state-sponsored social programs, offers some useful insights into the way in which information, as a commodity, has come to play a central role in the calculations that governments and administrators have been making in recent years, in respect of the administration of social welfare budgets.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the development of computerised information systems has added significance in social work because of the importance attached to recording practices in the development of the 'citizen social worker'. In other words, the figure of the social worker is an exemplary case of the integration of self and work. The case of social work offers an opportunity to consider what is at stake in what one writer has called the

²⁰ See Grewall & Davenport (1997) for an interesting review and discussion of the progressive rise in federal and state government outlays on social security and welfare services during the period between 1972 and 1995.

'informatisation and virtualisation' of the workplace (Bogard, 1996: 98), to ask what role and effect information systems play in respect of the moderation of relationships of power and control between institutions and populations, between managers and workers, and between individual workers and their own ethical selves.

In summary, the choice of social work is based on the understanding that it offers fertile opportunities to investigate broader questions of governmental power and control in modern liberal societies, in which the constitutive relationship between knowledge practices and agency (or, 'practices of self') are absolutely central.

1.4 Information in professional work

Why should one bother with what people do with information in the professional workplace? Are not information systems, after all, simply tools for improving the collection of data and the production of socially useful knowledge? As Chapter Three explains, the relationship between information and knowledge, and the processes of representation involved in producing and using knowledge, are much more complex. Forms of knowledge include more than simply non-controversial 'data'. The Foucauldian notion of discourse allows us to move beyond the idealist notion of knowledge as objective facts and ideas waiting to be discovered (or, alternatively, of false knowledge). On the one hand, discourse can be defined simply as organised sets of assumptions and practices for doing things and making sense in social institutions. On the other hand, discourses (or what can otherwise be called 'knowledge practices') are always contestable, and always part of the political

processes of opinion formation, persuasion and policy making. Discourse, in this sense, is an essentially political phenomenon.

One of the interesting outcomes of debates about the relationship between government and expertise has been the development of new systems of appeal and review—a relatively new discourse of citizens' rights—that challenge and reform the structure and practice not simply of 'government' but more particularly the 'exercise of judgement'. There has, historically, been an inherent difficulty associated with regulating forms of judgement exercised by labour undertaken without direct supervision, because it involves the application of certain forms of knowledge that are not externally controllable or verifiable. Information systems, as part of the armoury of modern managerial accounting systems, appear to offer policy makers and service managers strategic opportunities for regulating the scope for exercising judgement based on that knowledge. They offer the possibility of re-mapping, of re-presenting in new ways, aspects of the content of work previously conducted well beyond the gaze of management.²¹

The 'proletarianisation' thesis, already noted above, assumes a degree of unity across professional disciplines, speaking to an essential separation between managerial and professional roles, knowledge and objectives. This is certainly the case in debates about the forms of surveillance that computerised information systems make possible through the centralised collection of information about work practices. A nice example of this assumption can be

²¹ Consider, for example, the recent furore in Japan concerning malpractice suits against hospitals. The reported response of authorities in that country was videotaping of surgery, in order to ensure a more permanent record of medical practice that could be used in the event of negative outcomes for patients. Reported on the AM program, ABC Radio News & Current Affairs, 6th January 2004.

seen in a relatively recent paper on activism and professionalism in the public sphere, where Bacon *et al* (2000) speak of a 'legitimation crisis' created by the "burgeoning of bureaucratic and corporate controls and constraints which are being applied to professional practice, whether in education, journalism or the health professions". They note further that while professions experience controls and constraints in ways specific to their own social and economic circumstances, each one shares much in common with other professions "experiencing the trade winds of change" (*ibid*). These 'winds of change', they argue, can only be defeated through unity, and through a resort to mechanisms developed beyond the glare of external political or managerial scrutiny:

Ultimately, professionals are accountable to their publics for their performance in the execution of their duties. These duties are defined and constrained by their fields and methodologies of practice, themselves the object of continual contest internally and externally. It is the massive increase in the influence of external factors—organisational and market imperatives—that has provoked the current crisis. It is not possible for individual professionals to avoid these imperatives, but it is possible to consider and organise a collective response within and among professional organisations in order to safeguard the core accountabilities of each profession to their publics (*ibid*).

From this perspective it seems that professionals cannot avoid external review, but they must work to preserve the private relationship they have with their clients. The encroachments made by management—the 'bureaucratic and corporate controls and constraints'—are to be resisted because they are seen as disabling existing/traditional accountability mechanisms. There is a sense here of a set of opposing imperatives: the managerial imperative of 'managing to make accountable', on the one hand, versus the professional imperative 'resist in order to survive'. This notion of an essential opposition—which Hunter

(1994a) calls 'exemplary oppositions'—between managerial and professional knowledge and practice is a recurring theme throughout this thesis.

1.5 Key assumptions

To summarise so far, this dissertation focuses on relations between information systems, professional autonomy and the accounting strategies of new managerialism. It focuses on managerial attempts to 'readjust' the limits of independent judgement. It engages with the practical politics of information and knowledge, and with the development of technologies for representing—and therefore for mapping, shaping and controlling—professional labour. The following brief definitions of key terms will be taken up in more detail in Chapter Three.

1.5.1 Autonomy

The argument presented here focuses on professionalism in terms of the negotiation of practical capacities and trainings. Chapter Two explains that there is a substantial thread in traditional sociological arguments about professional work that sees autonomy as either negated or corrupted by technological change. There is also a contrary view within the functionalist tradition that sees professions as historical outcomes of technological innovation, which led to (or at least enabled) specialisation on the basis of socially valued knowledge. Chapter Three further discusses the weaknesses of these determinist approaches to technology, but suffice to say at this stage that the approach taken in this thesis understands material work arrangements—including routines, procedures, relationships and patterns of communication—as constitutive of the ethical disposition of the 'autonomous'

professional. Autonomy is not treated simply as a precondition of professional arrangements and practices, as a category of being and a bounded space of freedom, somehow invented prior to the application of independent judgement. Understanding it in that way ignores the practical material significance of autonomy—and indeed of human agency—as an acquired attribute, as something with a complex cultural history. It is treated here, instead, as both a personal and a structural disposition, which is in turn an outcome of particular forms of training undertaken within and beyond the various arrangements that constitute the workplace. On this basis, a key objective of this thesis is to assess the extent to which that disposition is changed through the negotiated development and practical application of forms of training associated with new technologies for collecting and using information.

1.5.2 Power

Politics is understood in this thesis as a dispersed activity, involving struggles around relations of power. Peter Williams (1987) argues that there is 'no general theory of politics', and contrasts this with an idealist notion of power as a right, as an individual possession rather than a property of social relations. His discussion of the Foucauldian conception of power, in comparison with classical Marxist notions of repression imposed by the state or by ideology, is particularly useful. For Foucault, he notes, power is always articulated with knowledge, and in politics there is always room for both contradiction and resistance:

power, politics and policy formation are not simply negative and juridical, not simply reducible to ascribed interests and intentions, not monolithic (although omnipresent and historically formed) ... [and therefore] discontinuities and non-homogeneity between particular

strategies and effects produce contradictions and resistances to subject positionings and the mechanisms of government of institutional populations (Williams, 1987: 41).

According to Williams, an analytics of power relations needs to attend to "the institutional hegemonies, strategic connections and networks around which power relations are formed and political struggles conducted and fought out" (*ibid*). It needs to do so in order to provide an effective guide to the strategic qualities of power, and to provide opportunities for the formulation of specific forms of resistance. This dissertation takes this view of power and politics seriously. One of its key objectives is to explore the dimensions of struggle, including the forms of resistance and accommodation available to the different actors, in the particular case of the development of new systems for recording and for regulating social casework.

1.5.3 Representation

Representation, likewise, is assumed in this thesis to be productive rather than simply a neutral relay of 'the real'. Following Foucault, and others, technologies of workplace writing provide scripts for exploring and constituting particular subject positions. Various systems of recording, collating and using information—or *technologies*, in Raymond Williams' (1981) sense of the term—have helped social work managers and educators constitute the ethical disposition of professional social workers since the early years of the twentieth century.²² Information in this sense is not simply a reality 'captured' by recording systems. The latter are tools for shaping reality, for shaping the material/physical world as well as our capacity to engage with the

²² Chapter Five specifically explores the historical relationship between the writing and recording used in social work education and practice, and the development of a 'professional project'—including the attendant notion of professionalism—in social casework.

universe of our perceptions. Networked information systems enable new kinds of mapping, which from a manager's point of view can proceed *at a distance*.²³ Managers can now work more successfully from the perimeter, shaping the conditions of professional work without directly intervening. In this way it allows the imperative of privacy and confidentiality to be maintained by professional workers, but at the same time allows managers to garner new forms of knowledge about (and potential control over) the substance of professional work and working relationships. It works, in short, to promote a form of professionalism that managers can exploit in new and different ways.

1.5.4 Technology

This thesis engages with questions regarding managerial uses of computerised information systems, and how it is that professional workers are responding to the pressure of increased surveillance. It argues that patterns of resistance and accommodation are shaped by a messy negotiation of technological development—which Bruno Latour (1991) describes as an ongoing 'play-off' between 'program' and 'anti-program'—in which a range of unexpected practical issues, beyond considering the principle of whether or how professionals should or should not be 'called to account', become important. This helps us avoid generalising assumptions about essential differences—which, as noted above, Hunter (1994a) calls 'exemplary oppositions'—between professional knowledge as opposed to managerial prerogative, or between state domination and democratic imperatives. Instead

²³ For an early use of this term in the governmentality literature, see Miller & Rose (1990), who in turn borrow it from Latour (1987).

one needs to look at what new technologies make possible—what they enable, for both managers and workers alike. Hopwood puts it thus:

attention needs to be directed to the assumptions, choices and practices that enter into the process of making practical what was previously rhetorical. Proposals for accounting change should always be interrogated in the name of the technical; for if this is not done, the consequences that such accountings have may bear only a loose relationship to those which explicitly entered into their justification and development (1984: 177).

The point here is that complexity and contingency need to be studied in observable patterns of technological change. It is vitally important to be strategic about how to act, rather than accepting of utopian rhetoric, or completely rejecting of that rhetoric as driven by 'vested interests'.

1.6 Thesis structure

The thesis is constructed in several layers. It takes as its theoretical premise the perspective on political power and knowledge in modern liberal democracies that Foucault (1991a) developed in his discussions of governmentality.²⁴ This assumes, among other things, that the self-knowing individual subject—a figure which permeates so much of Western cultural thinking about the limits of power and the exercise of freedom—is not a 'natural given', but is in fact constituted through the performance of discursive practices within a range of institutional contexts. The argument therefore considers professional autonomy—the capacity to exercise independent discretionary judgement within the limits of accepted professional norms—to be, at least in part, a

²⁴ See Mitchell Dean (1999) for a comprehensive discussion of the subsequent elaboration and uses of this concept.

product of writing/recording practices undertaken in the course of engaging with and representing clients.

The thesis explores how this set of assumptions can be applied to the case of social work at this point in history, by summarising a rough history of the conduct and the context of casework recording, by reviewing the recent development of programs for monitoring and evaluating performance in the Australian Public Service (APS), and by examining the development of a management information system in one particular public sector social work service.²⁵

The focus on interrelations between domains of communication, technology, policy and labour relations is necessarily an interdisciplinary undertaking. This thesis simultaneously attempts to take account of sociological studies of professionalism, of recent discussions on 'new public management' within what is loosely called policy studies, of the branch of the sociology of technology studies called 'actor-network theory' (ANT), and of the study of communications technologies as constitutive of capacities and social relations as developed in fields of media, communication and cultural studies. Questions about autonomy and regulation, and about the relationship between subjective and material phenomena, are routinely asked across these disciplines, and in a variety of ways. Scholars in the humanities, organisation studies, economics and accounting are all interested in the phenomenon of how regulation occurs inside organisations, and in particular with how the notion of 'accountability' is used to govern behaviour without the need for

²⁵ It is important to emphasise here that this thesis is not solely about social work in Centrelink, or about SWIS in particular. That particular case provides opportunities to further explore ideas and arguments about the constitutive relationship between recording systems and techniques and the regulation of professional work.

time consuming managerial intervention. All have taken interest in the invention, adoption and use of computerised information systems as managerial tools. They follow the patterns of development, implementation, translation, innovation and diffusion, and the politics of control and resistance.

1.7 Thesis Chapters, in summary

The thesis proceeds from a consideration of autonomy as a particular component of professionalism to a case study of whether, and how, the specific uses of SWIS challenge the capacity of Centrelink social workers to exercise discretionary judgement. It works in discrete stages: it reviews theoretical paradigms used in the sociology of professionalism, before presenting a summary statement of the theoretical framework that can be used to make sense of the historical development of social work recording generally, and of the Centrelink case study in particular; it then proceeds to consider the rhetoric of social work's opposition to new managerialism, and the importance of recording practices in the 'professional project' of social work, before turning to consider the case of SWIS in more detail.

Chapters Two and Three elaborate the contextual background and theoretical assumptions that shape subsequent sections. This is developed out of a reading of Foucauldian studies of power/knowledge relations, which draws on the extensive literature framed around Foucault's work. It includes specific reference to notions of technology, representation, agency and power. This framework provides conceptual tools for analysing information systems as sites for constituting workplace relations of power, rather than as simply neutral relays of 'facts', or as technologies infused with managerial 'ideology'.

Chapter Two summarises dominant paradigms used to frame functionalist and Marxist arguments about professionalism. These paradigms appear to understand autonomy primarily as a bounded space of independence. The Chapter concludes that these perspectives are founded on idealist assumptions about the formation of the person, and about personhood as expressive of something formed and located elsewhere—in an essential humanity, or in the economic base. As such, they are limited in terms of their capacity to analyse practical working relationships in organisational contexts. As Hunter has shown in his work on schooling, personhood is assumed by liberal political philosophy to be essentially free and autonomous from external regulation. The attributes of the autonomous self-made individual—*homo oeconomicus*—are seen as an outcome of an unconstrained ‘complete’ development of the person’s faculties, which enables them to “know and govern their own conduct” (Hunter, 1994b: xv).

In social work, the development of a capacity for self-mastery has been a primary focus of both practical training and social casework, since the days of the Charity Organisation Society (COS).²⁶ However sociological studies of professionalism, focused as they are on theoretical knowledge and relative status, fail to acknowledge self-mastery as a core element of professionalism. They therefore fail to recognise the central problematic of the complex relationships that exist between management and professional labour. For reasons already mentioned, concerning the management of risks and resources, public sector management has sought to contain and reshape the

²⁶ For a discussion of the historical development of the COS in the United Kingdom, see Pinker (1989). On the COS in Australia see Lawrence (1965), and also Kennedy (1985).

space for autonomous judgement.²⁷ Yet contemporary management practice is strategic, in the sense that it has also recognised and sought to capitalise on the entrepreneurial capacities of the liberal self, in the context of substantially changed labour market conditions.²⁸ The practical make up, or constitution, of the ethical capacities of the self-governing person (or collective) and its deployment in workplace contexts is not examined within those traditional sociological approaches to the study of the professions.

Chapter Three argues that in order to overcome this impasse it is necessary to apply an alternative theoretical framework on power and resistance, especially when it comes to making sense of accounting and accountability practices in the workplace, in order to examine the phenomenon of professionalism from a fresh perspective. Foucault's notion of 'power/knowledge' provides the required starting point, by making it possible to analyse professional disciplines as discursive formations. The Chapter focuses, in particular, on how notions of discourse and agency provide the means for going beyond idealist notions of alienation, legitimation and ideology.

Chapter Three concludes with a set of questions about the basis of professionalism, which are very different to those posed in the traditional sociologies of professionalism. It is no longer satisfactory to ask merely whether or not a profession meets a significant social need, or whether it

²⁷ Foster & Wilding, drawing on Nigel Parton (1998), comment that—in relation to child protection work—strategies emerged during the 1980s and 1990s “which did not have as their central focus either meeting the needs of children or responding directly to child abuse, but rather were focused on the assessment and the management of risk” (2000: 152). The focus of ‘policy’ and ‘practice’ is no longer about the particular face-to-face relationship between professional and client, but the management and monitoring of a range of abstract risk factors.

²⁸ Consider, for example, the development of team-based work in the public service (which breaks with the traditional hierarchical relationship between a succession of decision-making—or ‘determining’—officers), and also various opportunities for the examination of conscience through evaluation. For a summary of the relationship between labour market conditions and the production of entrepreneurial workers, see Rose (1999: 156-158).

occupies the position it does because it has managed to beat off its competitors in staking out a particular territory, an exclusive market for service. It is important to ask, instead, questions about the meaning and the force (or effect) of disciplinary specific statements, and about the social relations of truth and power circulating around and through such statements. Within the 'governmental' approach to media, communication and social relations, and therefore in this thesis, those questions are framed around the practical and constitutive effects of information practices on ethical dispositions, on the application of expertise, and on structural workplace arrangements where expertise is brought to bear.

Chapter Four introduces some of the historical, political and theoretical concerns that have shaped debates about trust and control in the human services, including the response of social work commentators to what are perceived as the 'dehumanising tendencies' of new managerialism.

Subsequent Chapters take the form of a genealogical study. They flesh out the role of recording practices in the formation of professional autonomy in social work generally, and then more specifically in the case of the Centrelink social work service. They examine how information is now used in that particular workplace to challenge the limits of that autonomy.

Chapter Five summarises the history of recording practices in social casework. It describes the forms taken by recording systems in social work practice, from early narrative summaries through to 'problem oriented recording', from extended recording of the fine detail of casework processes through to the standardised and computerised form-filling and box-ticking of today. It attempts to draw some preliminary conclusions about the particular nature of

autonomy as it is understood in the social work literature, and to distinguish the historical development of managerial attempts to limit the scope for exercising discretionary judgement by changing routines for recording and communicating information. It outlines the history of social work's attempt to use recording systems to construct itself as scientific, and thereby to achieve the status of a profession. In turn it indicates the role of key discursive practices in supporting and justifying that status and in constituting individuals as bearers of a particular ethical disposition that warrant the title 'professional'.

Chapter Six summarises the detail of a case study of the use of information in the Social Work Service (SWS) of Centrelink. It begins by providing background on the structural and cultural changes that occurred within the APS during the 1980s and 1990s, focussing in particular on the use of program information in reconstituting public administration as 'efficient and effective'. Computerised recording—particularly in the form of management information systems—is now used by agencies in the APS to monitor, measure and survey key aspects of professional practice. Social work, along with a number of other professions (for example, medical officers, counsellors and psychologists), has been forced to restructure and to adapt to a raft of new arrangements: the privatisation of public agencies, the introduction of contractual 'purchaser-provider' arrangements for delivering services, and a range of corresponding audit mechanisms for ensuring 'adequate performance outcomes'. The first part of the Chapter notes the changing status of information in this organisational and policy context, in relation to not only the computerisation of work but also the corporatisation of program planning and service delivery in public sector agencies.

The balance of Chapter Six focuses on the uses of information in the particular case of the Centrelink Social Work Service. It summarises and discusses the process by which the Social Work Information System (SWIS) was developed and subsequently introduced into the daily routines of frontline Centrelink social workers. It describes SWIS as an elaborate mapping tool for describing, knowing and intervening in social work practice, from a distance. It does this by drawing on documentary evidence gleaned from agency files, and on interviews with social workers who experienced the shift from paper-based recording to the computerised routines of SWIS. It identifies the practical ethical capacities that social work staff brought to the business of resisting, and ultimately of shaping and accommodating, the new information system they now use. It looks at the particular kinds of investments made by the different actors in the new system. It asks, ultimately, whether the small bubble of autonomy that professionalism has provided these workers is indeed punctured by SWIS, or whether that bubble can somehow remain intact. How, in particular, should one view resistance by social workers to casework recording systems, and other performance management tools, in the case of Centrelink social work? What has been the nature of their recording practices in the past, and how has the development of SWIS challenged and changed them since it was first introduced in the late 1980s?

The case study sets out to clarify the messiness of the process by which social work staff have been drawn into an engagement with the logical imperatives of computing discourse, and with the managerial gamble of technological redevelopment, where ways of managing work routines are suddenly reconstituted according to imperatives of managerial accounting and the logic of screen flows, as well as professional social work knowledge. The focus of

this concluding Chapter is on summarising the pros and cons as to whether discretion remains a workable concept for these staff, in their new working arrangements.

1.8 Conclusion

A key premise of the research has been that computers, and the various techniques of accounting which make use of them, have indeed enabled authorities to reframe the management of various tasks previously delegated to the independent judgement of expertise. Computerised information systems enable opportunities for greater control, from a distance, effectively challenging the autonomy of professional work. However this is not straightforward, and requires substantial qualification. A failure to critically analyse front line workers' engagement with new artefacts, systems and technologies runs the risk of assuming a linear style transaction, where workers are either brainwashed by the (essentially immoral) imperatives of the new systems, or constrained by their (assumed) repressive powers, or—more positively—provided with further means to improve their scope for accurate judgement.

Failure to analyse the complex assemblage of human and non-human agency that is called 'technology'²⁹ runs the risk of falling back on an orthodox approach to communication, which this dissertation is critical of, and which assumes computerisation simply 'adds more information'. The proposal in this thesis is, instead, to treat the computerisation of recording systems (in the

²⁹ The term 'technology' is complex, and requires substantial discussion. This is addressed in Chapter Three. For the moment it will suffice to refer here to Wise's useful definition. "Technology and discourse, mediation and agency, are not somehow external to some essentialized human identity, but rather constitute it. The question we should ask shouldn't be of the human *and* technology, but of the human *as* technology" (1998: 423-424, emphasis in the original).

particular discipline of social work) as a complex and dynamic process of translation.³⁰ It is in that process that capacities for knowledge and action are formed, and transformed, through the particular forms of training brought to bear. In this view computerised casework recording requires, or enables, new capacities to be developed (and in this sense is productive, as per Foucault's use of that term), which challenge existing ways of thinking about objects and processes of work, and which also change relationships between key actors.

The case study indicates how, in Centrelink social work, computerised recording of casework information has gradually displaced a system of typed reports and submissions, of handwritten notes and *ad hoc* personal records.³¹ The formulation of new techniques for identifying, measuring and organising particular aspects of work (through what is known as program planning) has caused a reorganisation of the meaning systems (or, 'interpretation repertoires', or 'frameworks for making sense')³² that guide frontline social workers in their daily routines. This concept of a cultural shift is an important key to understanding how information systems—and the rationality of managerialism that frames their particular uses—have challenged and

³⁰ This is a term used in actor-network theory (ANT) to refer to the idea that the identity of actors, both human and non-human, and their relations to one another, is always 'in process'. Barry and Slater (2002: 178) refer to it as a political process in which politics can be conceived as a strategic process, rather than as a competition between opposing ideologies and interests. By extension, social and technical change need not be seen as an express outcome of intention (which in turn might be seen as a simple extension of interests) but as a kind of politics that both reveals and translates the identity of social and economic actors. Again, this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

³¹ Some initial qualification deserves to be added here. This has been a progressive change, and it is also incomplete. Some social workers still use typed reports, albeit word processed, which are stored either on a customer's paper file or on a LAN to which clerical staff and social workers in other offices do not have access. Some still keep handwritten notes from interviews, although mostly they are shredded after a case is deemed closed. However all social work staff are required to use SWIS, which stores statistical information and some case work notes. All are required to use the information extracted from SWIS in local evaluations of the efficiency and effectiveness of their own work, and all are drawn into new ways of calculating the scope of their role as professional social workers.

³² For an extremely useful discussion of these terms and their application in cultural studies, see Alasuutari (1995: 35-37).

changed the limits of autonomy in social work practice over the last two decades.

In summary, this thesis explores the effects of managerial uses of information systems on the 'ethical social worker', on the status and substance of professional autonomy. It argues that autonomy is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is not simply freedom from managerial control or state power, but rather a product of forms of engagement with institutionalised routines of communication and calculation. Autonomy is not something that can easily be measured in terms of a 'volume amount', but rather a mix of qualities that are identifiable with organisational relationships and individual competencies. The focus on professional autonomy as practically or materially constituted opens up the possibility of considering resistance as a complex 'socio-technical' process rather than a 'resort to principle'. If new computerised information systems are understood to be, at least in part, an investment by managers in new modes of mapping and problematising those difficult spaces of expertise previously beyond their gaze,³³ and for reconstituting working relations and personal capacities, then what forms of resistance have been possible, on the part of the various actors involved? What chance do managers have, in a conquest of professional autonomy that requires them also to develop new forms of technical knowledge? How has expertise been surveyed, scrutinised, transformed and rearranged? On what basis, and to what end? What resources do professional social workers now bring to their engagement with the information systems used in public administration? How are managers and social workers alike, in the process, transformed by the uses

³³ For a useful summary of the forms of critique which, broadly speaking, called expertise into question from the 1960s, see Dean (1999: 153-154). See also Rose (1999: 147-156), on advanced liberal strategies for governing the conduct of expertise.

they make of the knowledge gleaned from computerised management information systems?

The tentative conclusion, which the following Chapters proceed to explore, is that computerisation has effectively reframed social work discourse through crucial changes to the structural limits and cultural practices that front line workers use in 'representing' (in both senses of the term, as advocacy and as communication) the objects of their work. Their capacity to exercise independent discretionary judgement is substantially amended, however this is no straightforward reduction. It is in the nature of advanced liberalism to appear, as Rose puts it, to individualise and entrepreneurialise policy actors. In a parallel process the accounting technologies of the modern virtualised and informatised workplace require them to make visible various factors affecting, and resulting from, their work. In a clever double play it opens them up to the possibility of closer scrutiny and more immediate control.

CHAPTER TWO

Paradigm assumptions in the study of professionalism

- 2.1 Introduction
 - 2.2 Defining the term 'profession'
 - 2.3 The paradigm approaches
 - 2.4 Discussion
 - 2.5 Conclusion
-

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter reviews the sociological literature on professionalism in order to consider the various paradigmatic assumptions that dominant approaches have used in making sense of the relationship between knowledge and autonomy. Remember that the questions the research seeks to answer are about what effect the use of information systems have had on professional autonomy. This is an inquiry into how new systems of information collection and knowledge management have affected relationships of trust and control between professionals, their clients and the larger community within which they work.³⁴

The conclusion of this review is, in summary, that those approaches are not capable, for reasons to be outlined below, of theorising autonomy in terms of the particular subjective or practical capacities developed out of material administrative practices (including routines of information collection and

³⁴ Which is taken here to be both policy makers and managers, who have routine relationships of control with professionals in contemporary human service organisations.

knowledge management) undertaken by professional workers in the 'new managerial' workplace. Autonomy is conceived—in the approaches outlined in this Chapter—as 'leeway', as a space of freedom to exercise independent judgement based on the acceptance of appropriately validated scholarly knowledge (§1.2; Hellberg, 1990: 182-183). The available approaches do not provide sufficient scope for theorising autonomy in relation to administrative routines—like those involved in computerised systems for 'writing the record of work'—now undertaken by professional workers in the human services workplace. While there have indeed been some attempts to explore the relationship between computerised information systems and expertise in terms of the building and management of trusting relationships,³⁵ this Chapter concludes that in order to extend the study of power/knowledge relations in professional work towards considering the impact of information systems on professional work, it is imperative to find a rather different framework of analysis than that offered by the sociology of the professions.

But it is important, in the first instance, to remember what is at stake here. The research has asked a number of questions about accountability and control in the human services workplace. 'What have ICTs made possible in the relations of power and control between managers and professional social workers? How should one understand the notion of autonomy, always so important in dominant understandings of professionalism?' Furthermore, the project seeks to describe and analyse the effect of communications technologies (and in

³⁵ See, for example, Powell, Klein & Connell, whose research is interested in how to match 'expert systems' with the needs and opportunities that arise in complex organisations. They argue that while much has been written about expertise, and about what 'makes' an expert, that literature "misses the key point that expertise is not limited to the expert. ... This paper attempts to understand the system of which the expert is a component. This system is in part organisational, in part social, and in part personal" (1993: 362).

particular systems for collecting information and managing knowledge) on the autonomy of social work. It asks whether social workers are able to play a meaningfully autonomous role beyond the provision of basic advice and assistance, following the introduction of a computerised casework recording system.

Of course this runs the risk of being seen as an evaluation of the respective merits of maintaining the autonomy of expertise against new mechanisms for extending democratic accountability, given that these systems are often heralded as a means by which problems of managing professional labour can— 'in the public interest'—be overcome. However this thesis attempts to move beyond a simple dichotomy, and to understand the practical effects of material changes. Arguments 'for' or 'against' greater autonomy run the risk of being swallowed up by hollow political positions, all of which proclaim themselves to be advocating on behalf of the best interests of 'the client' (or more recently, of 'the customer'). How is one to know, for example, where the 'real' markers of client interest lie? Are they to be found in the publication of social statistics gleaned from information systems, in 'league tables' charting the rise and fall of child abuse, domestic violence, prostitution, drug use and gambling, but which are assumed to be ruthlessly manipulated to political advantage? Or are they to be found in arguments for increasing levels of trust between professional workers and their managers and clients respectively, which are also known to be fraught with danger given the substantial attention given to many cases where poor judgement has had disastrous consequences for children, in particular, and for the various other vulnerable populations to which welfare services are dedicated?

So, rather than simply weigh arguments for greater professional autonomy against managerial strategies for asserting more effective control, this thesis asks precisely how autonomy 'works' in a practical sense. How has it been developed in social casework? What has it been 'used for' in the past? What bearing does that history have on the particular effect of computerised information systems in the contemporary white-collar workplace?

The rest of this Chapter is in two parts. First, a brief summary of definitions of 'professional' and 'professionalism' is presented, together with a broad picture of the historical development of professional work. Second, the key differences between *functionalist* and *revisionist* approaches to the study of professional work are then highlighted, in terms of their perspectives on knowledge and autonomy.³⁶ The objective is to consider what these approaches have to say about power, about the relationship between managerial prerogative and professional autonomy, and about the consequences of technological change for professional work. What kinds of assumptions are made in the literature about the relationship between knowledge, forms of regulation and the concept of autonomy? What do they tell us about the impact of the development and use of ICTs on the status of professional autonomy?

³⁶ These terms are taken from Randall Collins (1990). Elsewhere the functionalist approach has been termed 'taxonomic', 'trait' or 'hallmark', because of the empirical work of many writers in classifying characteristics of the 'ideal type' of professional work. The revisionist approach is often labelled as 'Marxist', or 'Marxist revisionist', or sometimes as a 'conflict' approach. Leicht and Fennell distinguish between 'liberal/technocratic theories', which they acknowledge broadly as functionalist, and 'power theories' (2001: 90-95).

2.2 Defining the term 'profession'

Studies of professional work constitute an extremely broad field, crossing sociology, labour studies and organisation studies. A larger study would make room to consider the inevitable interdisciplinary mutations and variations upon basic themes, as they occur across disciplinary boundaries. This Chapter presents only a relatively concise summary of the core assumptions and major variations, in order to discern how practical questions of knowledge and autonomy are understood. As already noted above, it draws out the basic distinctions between functionalist and revisionist approaches to professionalism. The assumption made here is that it is possible to sift out the broad range of supporting assumptions that have currency in this field of research and debate, in order to more effectively assess arguments about the impact of computerised information systems (or, in other words, of systems that are being used to automate the collection of information and the production of knowledge) on relations of power and control within the professional workplace.

However, before engaging with the detail of the dominant paradigms it will be useful to consider how the term 'professional' has been used, to establish some sense of its historical development and contemporary significance.

Prior to the nineteenth century, 'experts' or 'professionals' were organised in guilds, which worked on their members' behalf to protect systems of training and service. Most writers acknowledge theology (or divinity), law and medicine as the 'original' professions.³⁷ During the nineteenth century more

³⁷ See, for example, Carr-Saunders (1966). For a more recent summary of the history of the term see Slaughter and Leslie (1997: 4).

and more occupations moved to claim professional status. Haskell notes that until this time being an expert at something did not automatically attract the label 'expertise'. That status came to depend on a particular relationship between the conditions of a population, the development of policies to respond to those conditions, the nature of available knowledge, and modes of service delivery:

It was only then that ascending levels of population density and per capita income made it possible for substantial numbers of people to make a living by selling advice and specialised services, rather than producing food or other tangible goods (Haskell, 1984a: xii).

During that period new industries were established in urban centres across Western Europe, with new systems of manufacturing work involving an increased specialisation of labour. The rise of large population centres, without appropriate services and infrastructure, brought with it various forms of poverty and squalor. The new occupations of engineering, surveying, architecture, teaching and nursing offered new solutions to the various problems that governing authorities sought to address. How was the growing volume of sewage to be disposed of? How could effective systems of public transport be mapped across new urban areas? How could the leisure time of a new urban-based workforce be regulated, and contained? How could the domestic sphere of the family be joined to the growing public sphere of politics, communications and mass culture? In other words, professionals provided solutions to major social problems in the fields of public health, justice, social welfare and public works.³⁸

³⁸ A number of writers have conjectured about how the alignment between need and function worked in the professions during this period. Haskell and Larson, for example, have both

Belinda Probert notes that the term 'profession' comes from the verb 'to profess', which in the Christian church meant the taking of vows upon entering a religious order. It later came to be used to refer to "a vocation which relied on a 'professed' or 'declared' knowledge of some particular kind of learning or science" (1989: 53). Most of the specialist literature draws on more elaborate and exhaustive definitions. These include: a claim to specialist expertise acquired through formal training; monopoly control of a market for service protected by forms of association, registration and licensing; self regulatory arrangements (including accreditation of courses, control of admission to practice, codes of ethics and regular performance evaluation); a degree of social and financial status; and discretion over the exercise of judgement.

Some writers have defined the characteristics of professionalism in a way that suggests something much broader than simply the application of specialised knowledge. Mary Parker Follett, for example, defines a professional person simply as one who maintains loyalty to a code of ethics transcending his or her loyalty to the rest of the organisation (cited in Martin & Shell, 1988: 2).

Everett Hughes, paraphrasing T. H. Marshall, defines professions more expansively to include reference to client relations and income security thus:

[Professions are] those occupations in which *caveat emptor* cannot be allowed to prevail and which, while they are not pursued for gain, must bring their practitioners income of such a level that they will be respected and such a manner of living that they may pursue the life of the mind (1966: 64).

commented on the question of whether or not professionalism constituted part of what Polyani described as a 'countermovement' to the expansion of market liberalism. See Haskell (1984b: 225, n. 70), and also Larson (1977: 9).

William Goode describes professions in terms of identity, tenure, values, role, knowledge and forms of self-regulation: training and membership confers a binding sense of membership and identity; members have a clear sense of inclusion and exclusion; they share common values, and a common language which is only partially understood by outsiders; professions are like communities, which have substantial power over members; the limits of that power are not physical or geographical, but social; professions reproduce themselves, through control over recruitment and training processes (1957: 194).

More recently, Becher has articulated seven basic criteria. Practitioners, he says, apply a specialist skill that is seen precisely as a specialised service. They are, in other words, non-generic. That skill, or set of skills, has been acquired by training, both intellectual and practical, in a clearly defined area of study. Professional service requires a higher degree of detachment and integrity on the part of the practitioner, in the exercise of independent judgement. The service involves direct relations with the client. Practitioners have a collective sense of responsibility for maintaining competence and integrity in their occupation. They are generally required to avoid commercial methods of attracting business. Practitioners are organised in bodies that provide mechanisms for regulating standards of competence and conduct (Becher, 1999: 7).

Harold Wilensky's (1964) comments on the professions are well known, and important to note here. They were published at a time of substantial change in labour relations, with the onset of substantial automation of manufacturing and office work, and at a time of questioning as to the role and function of

public services. More particularly, they came at a point where writers and social activists were coming more and more to question the status and prestige of expertise.³⁹ Wilensky raised significant doubts about the application of the term 'professional' to what he saw as a disproportionately large number of occupations. More specifically, he argued that occupations wanting to exercise 'professional authority' needed to find a technical basis for it, to assert an exclusive jurisdiction, link their skills to that jurisdiction, and convince their public of their trustworthiness:

While this traditional model of professionalism, based mainly on the 'free' professions of medicine and law, misses some aspects of the mixed forms of control now emerging among salaried professionals, it still captures a distinction important for the organisation of work and for public policy. In the minds of both the lay public and professional groups themselves the criteria of distinction seem to be two: (1) The job of the professional is *technical* – based on systematic knowledge or doctrine acquired only through long prescribed training ... [and] (2) The professional man [sic] adheres to a set of *professional norms* (1964: 137, emphasis in the original).

Martin and Shell, writing from a managerial perspective, define professionals as primarily 'knowledge workers' whose work is defined not only by a specific code of ethics or formalised licensing procedures but also by the organisational contexts in which it is practiced. Professionals, for them:

³⁹ Wilensky's argument prefigured what has been called the 'accountability crisis' in professional/client relations from the 1970s. On the question of 'crisis' see, for example, Leicht & Fennell (2001: 104-105). Foster & Wilding (2000) provide a substantial review of relevant cases in the UK context, in education, health and social work. The American social work literature of the 1970s contains repeated reference to concerns about accountability, noting growing tensions in the relationship between the profession and the various bureaucracies that had become its vehicle. Weinbach argues, for example, that the emphasis on accountability "has just destroyed the last rationale for social work to continue its interminable drive for recognition as a profession ... the questions of efficiency and effectiveness ... are questions which threaten the very existence of social work and have pushed social workers to new heights of defensiveness" (1977: 1011). An even greater sense of cynicism is evident in an article by Henderson & Shore: "It is difficult to define where realistic evaluation of practice ends and scapegoating for problems inherent in the society begins. Someone has to be blamed for the ills in the system. Why not social workers? Their activities in the arena of human concern are highly visible. They become easy targets for the criticism" (1974: 387).

tend to have a strong sense of self worth and often possess high mobility. Thus they put pressure on management to manage effectively ... [and] they expect considerable freedom and autonomy in performing their work (1988: 3).

Professional work, they argue, is defined by its 'enriched' quality, which gives workers a greater sense of 'meaningfulness and responsibility'. They characterise this work as containing a high degree of skill variety, as having 'whole' pieces of work with clearly identifiable outcomes, as being 'significant' in its purpose and effect, and as providing significant autonomy and frequent feedback (1988: 190).

Until the early twentieth century the traditional mode of professional practice, at least in the United Kingdom and the United States, was sole practice.⁴⁰ This had changed dramatically by the middle of the twentieth century, when C. Wright Mills was able to argue that "most professionals are now salaried employees ... successful professional men [sic] become more and more the managerial type" (cited in Becher, 1999: 76). This shift has had clear consequences for the manner in which professional work can be studied: as a complex outcome of different threads of historical development, in which forms of workplace organisation (involving relations of managerial power and control) have slowly but surely come to play an important role.

⁴⁰ In his discussion of Tawney and Durkheim, Haskell notes how the latter wrote from his experience of French society, which, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, 'lacked the Anglo-American heritage of free and independent professions' (1984b: 196).

2.3 The paradigm approaches

So far this Chapter has outlined definitions of key terms, and some sense of their application. The next step is to determine how the field of study is organised, around a series of key assumptions. In fact the literature betrays a clear distinction between two broad paradigms, the 'functionalist' and the 'revisionist'.⁴¹ The functionalist paradigm has been preoccupied with describing and analysing occupational traits and professionalisation processes, while the latter is more concerned with how professions have come to occupy privileged positions, and/or manage conflicts over territory and control between themselves, other professional groups and/or managers and policy makers. It uses empirical research to identify the various traits and functions of professional occupations, and then proceeds to use that evidence in arguments about how professions meet particular social needs (altruism). The revisionist paradigm, as a critique of functionalist approaches, assumes professions exploit an already advantaged position by taking monopoly control of markets for service for even greater social gain (self-interest, egoism).

Without this broad distinction it is easy to find oneself confused on surveying the relevant literature. Within the space of sixty years, from the early 1920s to the late 1970s, it seems there was a complete inversion in the paradigm approach used to study professions, professionalism and professionalisation. Haskell, in an extremely useful discussion of the notion of professional 'disinterestedness', notes the distance between the writing of R. H. Tawney and Randall Collins, published in 1920 and 1979 respectively:

⁴¹ Drawn from Collins' (1990) use of the terms. See §2.1, above.

Tawney thought he saw in the professions a way of life that lifted men out of their baser selves and enabled them unselfishly to serve their fellow man. Collins regards the professional credentialing process as only another form of self-aggrandisement and proposes to abolish it (1984b: 181).⁴²

Collins, in a later work, argues that the break between these perspectives, as phases in the history of professionalism studies, is not as sharp as some would suggest (1990: 11-15). Nevertheless, he divides the field into two distinct approaches, and defines them historically:

- 1930s—1950s: liberal/idealising, functionalist view of professionalism as *altruism*, characterised by studies of specific attributes of particular disciplines or occupations;
- 1950s—1970s: Marxist/revisionist view, characterised by studies of exercises in credentialing and conflicts over markets for service (*ibid*).

2.3.1 *The functionalist paradigm*

At a practical level, some functionalist writers see technological change as the very impetus for the development of professions. New technology made possible specialisation in fields such as engineering, chemistry and medicine. For Carr-Saunders and Wilson technological change constitutes the driving force for further professionalisation:

In the long run technical advance implies an increase in the number of those doing more or less specialised intellectual work relative to the number of those who are engaged in manual labour or in unspecialised intellectual routine (cited in Vollmer & Mills, 1966: 22).

On the other hand, writers like R. H. Tawney and Emile Durkheim expressed strong fears about the potential disintegration of traditional social and political institutions, triggered by industrialisation, urbanisation, and new forms of

⁴² Note that Haskell refers to a much earlier publication by Collins, *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification* (1979).

culture and communication. This is the reverse side of the optimistic position noted above, a fear of technological change on the basis that it will have consequences beyond their control.⁴³

Indeed among early functionalist writers there was a more general sense that professionalism needed to be nurtured in opposition to the social, political and moral consequences of *laissez faire* liberalism. Their concern was with larger debates about what Matthew Arnold (1869) had called 'culture and anarchy', or in other words not so much with autonomy within the workplace—that came later—but with community and collegiality as bulwarks against an onslaught of the selfishness and greed they saw associated with market economics. The development of professionalism was, in this sense, a remedy for the patterns of self interest established by industrial capitalism. It provided the possibility of a form of freedom—through fellowship and association—that had been compromised by forms of mass production and mass consumption:

Desire to associate and ability to do so are the pre-requisites of professionalism, and not only of professionalism but also of any society which is vital and free. When men cannot associate, they are not free; when they do not wish to associate for common ends, they have no living purposes. Free fellowship is evidence of vitality and freedom (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1964 [1933]: 495).

The functionalist paradigm sees professional occupations as promoting social harmony and stability, providing something that Herbert Spencer is said to have called 'the augmentation of life' (cited in Hughes, 1966: 64). This presumes that professions perform an essentially positive and democratic role, acting out of a sense of altruism and providing a productive conduit between

⁴³ See Blau (1963: 9-14) for a succinct summary of the functionalist approach to social change more generally.

state institutions, business interests, communities and citizens. The approach is 'functionalist' in the sense that it glosses over the messiness of historical development, and presumes the role performs a function that meets a specific purpose. This might be, for example, the formation of social work for the alleviation of poverty, or the development of new forms of engineering for the specific purpose of improving safe roads and efficient transport systems.

A functionalist approach offers a politically benign definition of professional knowledge. Professions are defined as having a systematic body of abstract and specialised knowledge, which acts as the groundwork for developing practical and technical skills to respond to the relevant demand or need. Carr-Saunders and Wilson, in their exhaustive historical analysis of the development of modern professions in the United Kingdom, describe the chief characteristic of professions as "the application of an intellectual technique to the ordinary business of life, acquired as the result of prolonged and specialised training" (1964 [1933]: 491). Leicht and Fennell, in a more recent review, note how "the impression one gets from early work in this tradition is that persistent problems of post-industrial development produce unconscious role demands and that professionals are the natural and inevitable solution" (2001: 91).

Knowledge is seen in this approach to provide the basis for the authority of a discipline, which in turn guarantees status in the eyes of the community. Clients then effectively surrender a degree of prerogative to credentialed professionals, on the basis of the claim and the corresponding acceptance of expert knowledge. This in turn invests in them a monopoly on judgement, and

a degree of immunity from community and legal judgement on technical issues with respect to their domain of expertise.

The degree of autonomy exercised by individual professionals is seen as being qualified, or regulated, by both formal and informal means. Professional associations, which accredit training institutions and regulate licensing processes, can wave the threat of expulsion at members in order to ensure conformity with standards. Codified ethical standards provide a framework for disinterested service, and for collegial cooperation.

It can be argued that the force of a functionalist framework derives from a historically specific perspective on the democratic possibilities of professionalism. While proponents of the revisionist approach have argued that the functionalist approach is unprepared to explain and interpret the fallout of professional excess, it needs to be acknowledged as having particular historical significance. Functionalist studies of professionalism have focused on occupations ¹⁴ that have offered forms of socially valuable knowledge and technical know-how, because that is precisely what those occupations did—and still do. That they can also be seen as occupations requiring complex forms of licensing and self-regulation through accreditation and codes of ethics adds another dimension to their study, but it does not discount the material usefulness of their contribution to social development at certain points in history. Haskell (1984b) argues that the common thread running between the writings of R. H. Tawney, C. S. Pierce and Emile Durkheim was a deep revulsion against the libertarian excesses they associated with the triumph of capitalism. These writers looked on professionals as unselfish largely because of the background against which they were operating: a lurid scene that

depicted the capitalist marketplace as a moral desert in which unscrupulous businessmen scrambled for 'filthy lucre' in an 'orgy of self-aggrandizement'. To combat this unbridled acquisitiveness, Tawney proposed that all occupations be transformed into professions, thus making the experts' distinctive virtue available to everyone.⁴⁴ Durkheim argued along the same lines, that professionalism provided a form of individual and collective discipline otherwise lost amidst an expanding social horizon:

There is no form of social activity which can do without the appropriate moral discipline ... It is this discipline that curbs him [sic], that marks the boundaries, that tells him what his relations with his associates should be, where illicit encroachments begin, and what he must pay in current dues towards the maintenance of the community. Since the precise function of this discipline is to confront the individual with aims that are not his own, that are beyond his grasp and exterior to him, the discipline seems to him—and in some ways is so in reality—as something exterior to himself and also dominating him ... The individual can take in no more than a small stretch of the social horizon; thus, if the rules do not prescribe what he should do to make his actions conform to collective aims, it is inevitable that these aims will become anti-social (1957/1992: 14-15).

The functionalist paradigm has been criticised for being elitist, and for not being able to explain precisely what is understood as 'socially productive discipline'. Haskell, in his reading of Tawney and Durkheim, argues that their positions were, ultimately, difficult to sustain:

What they especially took for granted was the very heart of the matter—the disciplinary mechanism or process by which the collegial community induces good behaviour in its members. Neither Tawney nor Durkheim supplied more than the most rudimentary explanation of how this takes place. ... Durkheim's assertion that 'once the group is formed, nothing can prevent an appropriate moral life from evolving,' is typical of the cursory treatment they gave this critical question. ... They know professional communities made better men of their members because they felt that their own recruitment, training, and mature participation in the invisible community of scholars and scientists had

⁴⁴ For a useful review of Tawney's *The Acquisitive Society*, see Haskell (1984b).

brought forth their own better selves. Like riders astride bicycles, they felt no need to explain how the community keeps its members upright (1984b: 202).

It is important to note the scope for variation in this approach, both in terms of emphasis and application across disciplinary boundaries. Dietrich and Roberts acknowledge, for example, the difference between 'taxonomic' and functionalist approaches: the taxonomic is purely an exercise in identifying occupational traits and formulating lists of attributes, while the functionalist identifies the particular functions that professions play in the maintenance of social harmony (1997: 22-23). A functionalist approach is characteristic of earlier writers like Tawney and Durkheim, while it appears from the literature that the empirical taxonomic studies of particular professions developed a greater momentum after the publication of Talcott Parsons' (1939) classic article on self-interest, in which he claimed there was no essential difference between the self-interest of business managers and that of professionals.

It is also important to note that the trend to taxonomy occurred subsequent to the growth of new professions, and the shift from private practice into complex organisations, after the Second World War. The previously clear distinction between professional and non-professional, and between private practice and state sponsored employment, was no longer so clear. Indeed the shift to 'bureau-professionalism' provided grounds for the development of revisionist arguments, which can be seen as responding to the inadequacies and the complexities of post-war conditions, to the difficulties involved in professional work inside large service organisations.

2.3.2 *The revisionist paradigm*

Revisionist approaches acknowledge the same set of broad characteristics developed by functionalist sociology, however instead of suggesting a functional link between social harmony and professionalism—where professions are assumed to be motivated by 'public interest' principles—professions are seen as having played a role in the maintenance of an unjust and hierarchical society. Collins notes the shift in perspective thus:

Professions were seen as part of the stratification of society; but instead of being extolled as altruistic and liberalising, they were critically scrutinised as part of the structure of privilege (1990: 13).

The revisionist approach, broadly speaking, focuses critical attention on the nature of the status attributed to professions by other social groups. Proponents have criticised functionalist writers for failing to provide an account of the unequal distribution of power between professional groups and the consumers of their services. Their concern is mainly with issues of market monopolisation and de-skilling, and in this respect it includes broad variations in research positions, some attacking the reach of professionalism into everyday life, and others concerned with the capacity of professional labour—now ensconced within salaried employment—to resist managerial prerogative, and to exert control over the means and processes of production.

Writers within this approach disagree with the notion that professional groups exercise a primarily democratic function in society. They attempt instead to understand the social, political and economic status of professional groups as an outcome of the social relations of inequality—in terms of social class, financial capital and educational background. The basic assumption of this approach is that professions are formed within and across unequal class

relations, and that they work expressly to maintain status quo in those relations. For example, Collins argues that professions are 'occupational communities':

they are thus a type of class-based status group except that the community is organised explicitly within the realm of work itself rather than in the sphere of consumption. Its basis is the practice of certain esoteric and easily monopolised skills and the use of procedures that by their very nature work most effectively through secrecy and idealisation (Collins, 1979: 134).

Probert argues that professional groups lay claim to an exclusive form of scientific or technical knowledge, and regulate the distribution of that knowledge through appropriate systems of formal training. Training functions as a strategy of exclusion, as well as mystification. Forms of association are vehicles for gaining exclusive monopoly coverage over the field. The success of particular professional groups is based on their "ability to define a specific occupational territory, and to set up some kind of mechanisms to ensure that members of the 'profession' have a monopoly on the work within it" (Probert, 1989: 61). Strategies of exclusion rely on the 'ideology of professionalism', which in the case of medical doctors, for example, emphasises "the inadequate, inferior or unscientific training of other health workers" (Probert, 1989: 63).⁴⁵ New professions cannot expect to achieve the status or influence of the older more entrenched groups, because they lack the capacity to resist state interests and imperatives:

⁴⁵ Probert notes that the 'semi-professions', especially those employed by state bureaucracies, and increasingly those working in large corporations, are unable to appropriate the degree of autonomy accorded doctors and/or lawyers. She comments on the example of conflicts confronting newer welfare professions (social workers, probation officers, etc): "[F]ew are able to practice independently, and most are employed within large bureaucratic structures which prevent them from pursuing purely professional interests. ... Can a probation officer genuinely put the interests of her client first when her overall responsibility is to assist the state in eliminating or at least controlling behaviour that is officially defined as deviant?" (1989: 68).

New professions will experience relatively little control over their work, for they will depend overwhelmingly on the state or the major corporations for employment, and will have to serve their interests to a greater or lesser degree (Probert, 1989: 68).

As an ideology, professional independence is said to signify social status, to justify the ongoing reproduction of credentialed knowledge, and to define an expert speaking position that maintains exclusive control over markets for service (Larson, 1977: 56). However in a more practical sense, professionalism—the disciplinary regulation of knowledge and conduct—is also seen to make the use of discretion predictable, in the sense that it relieves managers of the responsibility of devising in-house mechanisms for controlling discretionary aspects of work (Larson, 1977: 198).

The view of technological change in this approach is generally pessimistic. The smaller professions in particular are seen as open to fragmentation and deskilling in the face of technological change, especially when they depend on corporate employment where cost and productivity pressures are keenly felt. "If elements of the work can be separated out and standardised, they can be downgraded and handed over to workers without professional qualifications, usually at a lower cost" (Probert, 1989: 69).⁴⁶

The claims that ethical principles provide sufficient regulatory force and that altruism prevails over self-interest are seen by revisionist writers as a strategy

⁴⁶ There is indeed a substantial thread within the literature on professions that deals with the ways in which different occupational groups have been affected by the introduction of new systems for recording and communicating aspects of work. Effects appear to vary, depending on the uses that have been called for and made possible in the particular circumstances of each case. Becher (1999: 83-86) notes that the impact of graphic design technologies on architects has been more substantial than that of records management on hospital medical staff, for reasons to do with the particular software and hardware packages used as well as the organisational cultures in which they have been applied. Bremner and Kelly (2000) argue that medical scientists have been substantially affected by the development of machines for the testing of blood and tissue samples, with substantial numbers of jobs downgraded to technician status.

for maintaining resistance to governmental intervention, and therefore for maintaining conditions and privileges of work. Probert, again, notes that professionals "have developed the ideology of altruistic professionalism to distract attention from their pecuniary motives" (1989: 59). Professionalism is seen, therefore, as being tied directly to the social relations of wealth. It entails the notion of an individual career, rather than simply the selfless disinterested expenditure of one's labour. It draws on and supports the class system: education plus wealth, rather than 'intelligence', enables entry into the system. Entry restrictions limit service capacities and therefore work to preserve or guarantee high demand. Status depends on the possession of cultural capital as well as, or instead of, financial capital.

These are key points that cannot be understated: professions are seen by this approach as an expression of the class system. Like financial capital, professional training and expertise can be used to attract high financial returns, and like wealth it can even be kept in the family. The children of professionals stand a very much better chance of receiving professional training than the children of the working class (Probert, 1989: 69).

There are also observable variations within the revisionist paradigm. Dietrich and Roberts argue that most work can be classified as either Marxist or neo-Weberian in approach. The former centres on the social relations of production, and in particular on class relations; the latter focuses on market conditions, and on society as an arena in which various groups compete with each other for power and status (1997: 24). Leicht and Fennell define the latter as a variation of the revisionist paradigm, a distinct sub stream of 'power theories'. Rather than questioning the origins of professional prerogative, or

the conditions of the application of abstract knowledge, this line of argument "asks whether the control and prerogative of professional work have shifted away from professional groups toward superordinate organisations that do not represent the interests of professionals themselves" (2001: 94).

So on the one hand, Marxist writers regarded professional autonomy as a block to social reform, symbolising the preservation of elite social status. But on the other hand, professional autonomy has come to symbolise the need of labour more generally to resist the ever-expanding ambit of governmental power in general, and managerial prerogative in particular.

Broadbent, Dietrich and Roberts, for example, argue that in many areas of work "institutionalised control is being degraded by the introduction of systems of individual accountability based on customer reaction" (1997: 1). They assert that the current professional workplace is dominated by change—technological, organisational, socio-economic and political—and that new technologies have:

a unique set of characteristics that are forcing socio-economic restructuring ... are both pulling and pushing change ... are disrupting existing professions ... [and work to] facilitate decentralisation accompanied by tighter accountability (1997: 7).

This line of argument draws on a long history of labour process debates about managerial control, about deskilling and proletarianisation (Kitay, 1997; see also §1.1, above). Braverman's discussion of scientific management has been influential in this respect. The concern here is with the manner in which automation, information systems and other surveillance technologies have eroded the cultural capital underpinning professional autonomy and authority. The conclusion is that professional knowledge is a "quickly eroding

resource ... [the loss of which] ... renders less and less effective professional strategies to acquire and/or maintain power, autonomy, rewards and status" (*ibid*).

The broader proletarianisation thesis is less interested in professional ethics than it is in struggles for control over autonomy and discretionary judgement in bureau-professional contexts. Control, Braverman argues, had been a distinctive feature of management thought and practice since Taylor, when management involved:

the gathering together of the workers in a workshop and the dictation of the length of the working day; the supervision of workers to ensure diligent, intense, or uninterrupted application; the enforcement of rules against distractions (talking, smoking, leaving the workplace, etc.) that were thought to interfere with application; the setting of production minimums; etc (1974: 90).

According to Braverman it was Taylor's contribution that enabled management to achieve far greater control over the conduct of work, over the actual mode of performance of every labour activity, from the very simple to the most complex:

Taylor raised the concept of control to an entirely new plane when he asserted as an absolute necessity for adequate management the dictation to the worker of the precise manner in which work is to be performed. ... Management, he insisted, could only be a limited and frustrated undertaking so long as it left to the worker any decision about the work (*ibid*).

In more recent times the concern about standardisation has been used in defence of professions against managerial demands for greater accountability, against arguments that professional expertise should be opened up to greater scrutiny. Marilyn Lake, for example, is critical of the Howard Liberal-National

Coalition government's attempts to subject university academics to closer regulation and control:

Original ideas have, by definition, yet to be imagined, and they need the right conditions in which to flourish. Creativity needs to be nurtured with trust and respect, not crushed by the weight of bureaucracy, by disrespect of the endless demand for accountability and conformity to rules and regulations (2002).⁴⁷

Another variation on the same theme—the concern about the power of superordinate organisations—is the ‘radical conservative’ approach, which focuses on the notion of citizen disenfranchisement through illusion. As noted above the broad thrust of the revisionist approach is that an unjust society is an outcome of flaws in capitalism, in the division of labour and the class system. Professions are seen as defined by the cultural as well as the financial capital their agents carry, and are therefore perceived by some as a ‘new governing class’ with power based on control not over the means of production but over “the means of knowing in a post-industrial system increasingly founded on science and technology” (Murphy, 1990: 71). Friedson (1984) names Illich as representative of the ‘abolitionist’ position, which seeks to either abolish professions altogether by depriving them of the resort to credentials and occupational autonomy. Expert knowledge, in this line of argument, has disabled the capacity of citizens to take part in the processes of government, or even to run their own affairs. Through exclusive relationships with state institutions, various professions have been able to effectively disable the capacity of ordinary citizens to exercise control. Illich’s work relies on a notion of community that equates to a kind of freedom *from* government, or at least a return to the ‘proper character and independence’ of earlier forms of

⁴⁷ For a recent example of this approach in a medical context see Cruess & Cruess (1997).

liberal democracy, to a space in which freedom to exercise personal choice is a realistic option. In a democracy, the power to make laws, execute them and achieve public justice must derive from the citizens themselves. But this approach argues that because professionals have appropriated such power citizen control over key institutions is now restricted and weakened, and sometimes abolished by the rise of what Illich calls 'church-like' professions. Government by a congress that bases its decisions on professional expertise might be government for, but never by the people. As Illich puts it:

The principle source of injustice in our epoch is political approval for the existence of tools that by their very nature restrict to a very few the liberty to use them in an autonomous way (1973: 635).⁴⁸

A revisionist approach, in summary, takes the form of a critique of social relations of power. In other words, it attempts to analyse and understand the social control function of professions and professional work. It inquires into the conditions by which elite status is conferred upon any given occupational group, and comments on the ways in which that group then works to maintain and guards its status.⁴⁹ It critiques the strategies by which professions work to control and marginalise weaker social groups in the service of their own elite interests, and by which they seek to exclude rival occupational groups. It distinguishes between the various professions in terms of different degrees of status achieved, and their respective capacities to resist external regulation and control. It notes how systems of professional registration are closely associated

⁴⁸ More recently, Chafetz has argued that expertise threatens citizen liberties and presents a dangerous secondary flow-on in relation to other moral crises: "The pronouncements of experts fill the moral and ethical vacuum left by the demise of the extended family and the waning of religious and political leadership" (1996: xiv). And further, "I want us to regain our right to think for ourselves by withdrawing our consent to their ascendancy" (1996: xvi).

⁴⁹ It distinguishes, for example, the strategic role most professions play in licensing and regulating the conditions and standards of their own work, or of educational institutions, resisting any form of external regulation by governments.

with academic training, and that the conditions of that training are regulated both formally and informally.⁵⁰ Overall, a revisionist approach assumes that the set of relations within any given profession, or indeed across the 'professional classes' as a whole, are an express outcome of the interests, intentions and aspirations of dominant class interests.

2.4 Discussion

The objective of this Chapter so far has been to review the literature from the sociology of the professions, focusing on what the dominant approaches assume about knowledge and autonomy. It is possible to say now that they appear to conceive of autonomy as a space beyond government, of power as a possession won and guarded by professional groups, and of knowledge (and of technology) as either the progenitor of major social change or as a harbinger of threats to status and autonomy.

From the perspective of both functionalist and revisionist perspectives the social functions and roles of professional workers are seen as expressive of either democratic, or alternatively non-democratic, institutions. The independence and status of medical practitioners, for example, is seen through a functionalist lens as a reward for their crucial role in studying and maximising the health and welfare of populations. The principles of care and confidence are integral components of a professional ethic, which frames and

⁵⁰ For example professional associations approve university courses if they meet certain conditions, such as the professional registration of appointed teaching staff. Conditions of entry into university courses are related to an assessment of the distribution of work and income across certain professions. Entry into courses is also seen as related to the educational capital and class status of applicants.

regulates the conduct of medical work. Alternatively, through the revisionist lens the status of medical practitioners can be seen as one outcome of the wider social relations of control, where certain groups have successfully cornered and controlled markets for high demand specialised health services, at the expense of various forms of preventive medicine, or of traditional or alternative healing practices. Medical ethics, particularly from within a Marxist analysis, is a kind of window dressing that obscures the strategies of state and capital used to ensure the efficient reproduction of labour and the pursuit of profit rather than disinterested service. In this sense, status and privilege are seen as outcomes of complicity between the state and the bearers of necessary, and very specialised, forms of knowledge.

Both paradigms can be seen as outcomes of particular political and cultural contexts, and this is their particular strength. The functionalist approach grew out of a concern to resist *laissez faire* capitalism towards the end of the nineteenth century. Early functionalist writers assumed professional knowledge (and by extension, 'new technologies') would be used responsibly, in the name of social progress. Durkheim, for example, argued that professional ethics provided a much-needed solution to the 'amoral character' of economic life at the end of the nineteenth century:

If a sense of duty is to take strong root in us, the very circumstances of our life must serve to keep it always active. There must be a group about us to call it to mind all the time and, as often happens, when we are tempted to turn a deaf ear. A way of behaviour, no matter what it be, is set on a steady course only through habit and exercise. If we live amorally for a good part of the day, how can we keep the springs of morality from going slack in us? We are not naturally inclined to put ourselves out or to use self-restraint; if we are not encouraged at every step to exercise the restraint upon which all morals depend, how should we get the habit of it? If we follow no rule except that of a clear self-interest, in the occupations that take up nearly the whole of our time,

how should we acquire a taste for any disinterestedness, or selflessness or sacrifice? (1992 [1957]: 12).

The revisionist approach grew out of real concerns about how best to manage the invention of regulatory frameworks for constituting and maintaining 'the social'⁵¹. As the integration of professional work into state-funded or state-sponsored agencies occurred with the gradual development of welfare state institutions a variety of studies focused on power relations within and between professions, where now the autonomy of professional workers came to be seen as a bone of contention. Power in this context was no longer seen in relation to arguments about social morals, but read and discussed in relation to the structure and regulation of organisational relations. Everett Hughes, for example, acknowledged the rise of new forms of organisation that threatened traditional professional autonomy:

we are at a paradox of modern professional freedom. The effective freedom to choose one's special line of work, to have access to the appropriate clients and equipment, to engage in that converse with eager and competent colleagues which will sharpen one's knowledge and skill, to organise one's time and effort so as to gain that end, and even freedom from pressure to conform to the clients' individual or collective customs and opinions seems, in many lines of work, to be much greater for those professionals who have employers and work inside complicated and even bureaucratic organisations than for those who, according to the traditional concept, are in independent practice (1966: 69-70).

In this sense it is perhaps reasonable to see the revisionist paradigm as an extension of the functionalist/idealist paradigm, both historically and intellectually. The former developed precisely as a sustained critique of the latter, during the 'accountability crises' of the 1970s, a period in which the

⁵¹ In a very practical sense it applied itself to the messiness of the various bureaucratic institutions that came to constitute the fabric of social democratic market economies after the Second World War.

culture of bureaucratic decision making surrounding the Western welfare state (of which professionals had come to occupy crucial roles) was seriously challenged. It is no coincidence that by this time the major growth in professional work was in bureau-professional contexts. It is therefore possible to understand why the revisionist approaches were prompted to develop a more sophisticated view of professions in organisations, and of how particular professional groups have been able to negotiate their way through attacks mounted on them by policy makers—whether in the name of cost, or automation, or 'proceduralism'.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary, the basic premise of both dominant approaches remains that autonomy is either an essential sphere of human freedom that lies beyond the sphere of management and policy making, or that it is an effect of fundamental structural relations. The argument from within the professions remains that relationships of trust with clients are characterised by the exercise of tacit knowledge, which is then impossible to articulate except in the context of its application.⁵² While the Left has been substantially critical of professional elitism and autonomy, there is a distinct and very strong sub stream of argument within the revisionist paradigm in defence of that autonomy, against what many see as the ideological encroachment of a managerial elite. That encroachment is seen to occur precisely as a result of new technologies, either

⁵² An indicative illustration of this argument is in Orlikowski's discussion of the codification of knowledge in so-called 'expert systems'. She notes: "Also significant is the array of tacit, intuitive and judgemental knowledge acquired through case experience and informal interaction with clients and colleagues. Not only is most of this knowledge difficult to codify, it is usually impossible for professionals to articulate" (1988: 36).

via forms of deskilling (and the attendant competency based training) or through limits on the leeway for autonomous judgement (brought about by related pushes to proceduralise all forms of work). Neither approach addresses the practical and strategic link between routine administrative practice and the constitution of the ethical capacities of frontline professional workers.

It is, perhaps, no surprise that these approaches do not register the significance of administrative procedure, given the practical distance between technical procedures for the collection of information and the subsequent generation of knowledge that was the case in the contexts to which their analyses were applied. The installation of computer systems on the desks of professional workers is one of the key innovations of the 'knowledge economy', and one, which has narrowed that distance. Case records are no longer dictated and sent to typing pools. The management of card files is no longer the sole responsibility of receptionist assistants. These objects and tasks have been integrated to such an extent that professional workers are now required to engage with tasks of annotation and calculation that previously were not within their workspace. They are now required to engage with the mundane routine of what is often derogated as 'administrivia', or in other words, to enact tasks situated precisely at the convergence of client assessment and administrative control functions in ways not previously contemplated.

In order to acknowledge and respond to this shift, it will be necessary to consider an alternative approach—which in the following Chapter will be termed 'governmental'—to the specific material practices undertaken in the information (or knowledge) economy, where all forms of white-collar work are

required to engage with computerised information systems in one way or another. That alternative will need to focus on professionalism in a way that deals more specifically with the skills and relationships that grow out of the negotiation of new information systems. It will need to fit more precisely with what many writers understand professional workers to be doing in the so-called 'new' or 'knowledge' economy. It needs to fit more precisely with not only the client assessment tasks of professional work (or what might be called the application of a theoretical knowledge base) but with the employment and service relationships that characterise 'information processing' work in contemporary professional contexts. But how might this work? That is the question that the following Chapter will pursue.

CHAPTER THREE

A governmental approach to the study of professional autonomy

- 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.2 Elements of a governmental approach to communication and culture
 - 3.3 Framework number one: 'modes of accounting'
 - 3.4 Framework number two: 'investment in forms'
 - 3.5 Discussion
 - 3.6 Conclusion
-

3.1 Introduction

As already explained above, this thesis sets out to assess the relationship of trust and control between social work and its managers. It attempts to clarify exactly how that relationship is being renegotiated as a consequence of a new mode of communication enabled by the computerisation of information systems, which has occurred in the context of an ongoing process of reform in Australian public sector management. It does so in the light of repeated claims in social work commentary that new managerialism has 'dehumanised' the heart of social work. These claims give cause to ask, on the one hand, what this assumes about truth and knowledge, about 'humanness', about accountability, and about policy and government.

Just as importantly, it is also relevant to ask what new relations of knowledge and power accrue from the use of management information systems in controlling, channelling and managing the flow of social work's clients. Is

there a loss of control, or a loss of trust in the various relationships between manager, worker and client? If so, how does this happen? If not, what factors are involved in making and managing resistance to the imperatives (of surveillance and control) that seem to be implied in the development of computerised information systems in this particular discipline?

It is important to emphasise that these questions are not asked on behalf of a body of aggrieved social workers, concerned about further restrictions placed upon their work by a centralised bureaucracy. This is not an exercise in rallying troops to a cause taken at face value, about 'greater independence for social workers, vis-a-vis state institutions or the legal system'. The social work literature is replete with examples of just that kind of battle cry. Instead, the research has sought to clarify the status of 'information' as a regulatory tool, in a way that can then be of benefit in studies of the management of expert labour more generally.

In order to do this it will be necessary to ask additional questions about the 'mechanics' of information. In what way has the writing and recording of information been used previously, in regulating relations of trust between social workers and their managers through generating a particular kind of ethical 'substance'? Does more 'management information' (notice how the very term implies the information accrued *belongs* to managers, rather than to caseworkers or their clients) provide a mechanism for managers and policy makers to, as Rose puts it, 'puncture the limits of expertise' (1999: 153)? Or does expert labour have something more up its sleeve, as a defence against repeated attempts by managers to extend their gaze beyond the usual limits of

confidentiality and privacy, in the name of either the client or the taxpayer, or both?

Chapter One outlined a series of key assumptions, in basic detail, concerning autonomy, power, representation and technology. This Chapter fleshes out these assumptions in further detail, in two broad steps. First, it outlines a set of assumptions derived from a post-structuralist approach to knowledge, power, technology and agency. These assumptions are clearly encapsulated in what has come to be called 'the governmental approach'—a mix of arguments drawn from Foucault's account of knowledge/power and governmentality, together with associated arguments about technology and agency/subjectivity. This makes clear the main theoretical assumptions framing the research. The summary of Foucault's work on knowledge and power, which leads us through an intersection between forms of domination and the various 'technologies' of power by which social actors come to see themselves as autonomous individuals, provides a framework for analysing casework recording routines as a component part of professional regulatory practices—which is called here a 'professional mode of accounting'—such that recording can be seen as a site for developing and maintaining ethical practices of self-reflection, for constituting the skills and capacities of self-mastery, and therefore as a key tool in regulating practice.

In fact the argument developed here is that social work recording provides a very practical example of what Foucault (1991a) calls 'governmentality', or in other words the yoking up of practices of self-regulation with the rationalities, objectives and aspirations of political authorities, via available meaning systems.

The first section also draws on actor-network theory (ANT), which provides a much-needed corrective to the Foucauldian approach to power and control. While in much of his writing Foucault implicitly acknowledges the messiness and contingency of modern power (for example, in "The Subject and Power" (1982) he argues that resistance is always a property of power, always an open possibility) there is a quality of closure that characterises much of the broader Foucauldian project. For some, Foucault's conceptualisation of the technologies of panoptic power frame modern forms of government as comprehensively successful in realising the aims and objectives of authorities, subverting any and all forms of possible resistance.⁵³ Resistance appears futile, even impossible, in the view of some critics who read autonomy as a lynchpin of 'counter politics', but fail to see it also as a strategic premise of liberal rationalities of power. The key concepts of ANT—including Latour's (1991) argument that objectives, or 'programs', are always necessarily open to being transformed by the 'anti-programs' of opposing actors, and by the qualities of non-human artefacts—are helpful in resolving this dilemma.

The second section (in §3.3 and §3.4) tables two analytical frameworks that draw on the groundwork of the governmental approach. These are Law's (1996) concept of 'modes of accounting', which draws attention to the syntax, or ordering, of key elements within a network, and Thévenot's (1984) notion of 'investment in forms', which provides tools for analysing the less visible discursive shaping of practices, habits and trainings required in organisations

⁵³ James Marshall notes that Foucault coined the term 'governmentality' partly in response to critiques of his work on the 'microphysics' of power in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Some were critical of the book because, they said, it ignored the issue of state power; others argued that the book represented society as a network of omnipresent power relations which left little room for meaningful individual freedom within a philosophy of despair or nihilism. "It was suggested that he presents us with a grim political scenario in which the grounds for resistance to oppression, even the very possibility of resistance, seem precluded" (Marshall, 1997: 595).

where close personal relationships are essential. These frameworks will be used in later Chapters, to make sense of the historical development of social work recording, and to consider what role computerised information systems can play in regulating social work expertise.

In summary, the Chapter provides a set of conceptual tools for describing and analysing the constitutive relationships between writing practices (forms of recording, of collecting information and producing knowledge) and the capacities that 'make up' professional autonomy in the discipline of social casework. The Chapter interrogates the categories of 'power', 'discourse' and 'technology' precisely in order to suggest that ethical capacities are an outcome of one's engagement with practical technologies for recording and regulating routines of work, and that these capacities are in turn the foundation of what is known as 'autonomy'. In doing so it shapes a usable theoretical lens that can do two things. First, it opens a path for describing and analysing factors concerning the relationship between social work recording practices, ethical agency and the 'professional project' of that particular occupation (discussed in §5). Second, it enables a description and analysis of the particular local example of managerial and technological innovation that is SWIS in terms of what it makes possible (rather than what may have caused this state of affairs) for Centrelink managers and for social work staff alike (discussed in §6).

3.2 Elements of a 'governmental approach' to communication and culture

A governmental approach to culture and communication⁵⁴ recognises social relations as materially produced and historically developed. In other words, it argues that communication practices have material effects other than simply the transfer of information.⁵⁵ As those practices change, so too are the observable effects going to be different.

The approach refuses the idea of a single material foundation to social relations, or what is often called 'social totality' (in Marxism, this is generally the 'economic base', or 'the relations of production'), and argues instead for a materialist definition of culture as a 'patchwork' of institutions, organisational forms, practices and agents "which do not answer to any single causal principle or logic of consistency, which can and do differ in form and which are not all essential one to another" (Hirst & Woolley, 1982: 134).

The approach replaces the concept of ideology (as either 'true' or 'false' knowledge), with that of discourse (as knowledge practices and assumptions, organised within and between specific social institutions, for doing things and making sense). It shifts the focus away from individual 'subjects' of dominant power, whose interests are supposedly defined by their structural relationship to the source of power, to 'actors'. Actors are not defined by identity or

⁵⁴ As already noted, the use of the term 'governmental' derives from Foucault's studies of 'governmentality'. Cathy Greenfield and Peter Williams have provided particularly useful resources for drawing out the detail of Foucault's work, in both their teaching and writing, in a way that also recognises the contribution of a range of other writers (including Ian Hunter on representation, Barry Hindess on agency). See Greenfield & Williams (1998).

⁵⁵ Indeed much of contemporary communications theory can be read as a critique of the 'process model' of communication—otherwise known as the 'transmission model', or the 'sender-message-receiver (SMR) model'. See Hall (1974), Carey (1988) and Moores (1993) for further detail.

consciousness, but rather by their socially acquired capacities for making decisions and acting upon them (Hindess: 1986, 1989).

Finally, it presumes an altogether different notion of governmental power, as constitutive of social relations and actors' capacities, rather than simply arbitrary force or control over a 'true' human nature.

It is immediately clear that useful connections can be made with the guiding question of this research, namely 'how do we make sense of the impact of new information collection and management practices on the relations of trust and control between managers and professional workers?' The governmental approach, from this brief summary, would seem to offer conceptual tools for analysing the historical development of expertise, its broader social role and effects in shaping knowledge and managing populations, and managerial attempts to regulate its exercise. However it will be useful, firstly, to look in more detail at Foucault's basic arguments about the historical development of modern forms of power, in order to appreciate the broader context within which one of the objects of this study—social work—has developed. The purpose of the following sections is therefore to briefly review the relationship between the various categories and concepts generated by Foucault's work on governmental power, with particular reference to the kinds of discursive technologies for rendering human life "susceptible to evaluation, calculation and intervention" (Miller & Rose, 1990: 7.) This will then enable further discussion of expertise as discourse practices constituted by techniques of power—rather than simply bodies of 'expert' knowledge—and of the 'investment' in new regulatory arrangements for containing and controlling expert labour.

3.2.1 *Discourse, power and the subject*

Foucault's arguments about the relationship between power and knowledge form part of an overall concern with how government proceeds. His aim was to engage with the practical realities of power, to construct complex analyses of the historical development of regimes of truth and knowledge. This was a concern that he developed across the entire body of his writing, but while his earlier works (1970, 1972) focused more on theorising discourse his work on power was further developed in his 'middle works', *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *The History of Sexuality* (1978). Foucault came out of the European critical tradition, with an express interest in the historical development of political and economic inequality, but he was in turn critical of humanist and structuralist perspectives on power within that tradition. They are, he argues, premised on idealist accounts of not only knowledge as 'essential truth' but also of power as 'substance' and 'force'. They are based on 'juridico-discursive' models of power, which he says are stuck with pre-modern notions of sovereign and state power, and therefore unable to comprehend the ways in which society is constituted by decentralised and essentially discontinuous systems of power relations:

Sovereign, law and prohibition formed a system of representation of power which was extended during the subsequent era by the theories of right: political theory has never ceased to be obsessed with the person of the sovereign. ... We still need to cut off the King's head: in political theory that has still to be done (Foucault, 1980b: 121).

The concept of discourse within an early structuralist approach was focused largely on the nature of meaning, particularly within narratives and other forms of literary and cinematic texts. Roland Barthes, and others, borrowed the term initially from linguistics in an attempt to generate new ways of thinking about meaning as socially produced, rather than as a naturally occurring object

'out there' in the world. Barthes, and other structuralist writers, insisted on seeing meaning as an effect of systems of signification. The vehicle for these systems was language, which thus became the object of study for 'semiotics', and indeed for much of the early cultural studies project.

For Foucault, however, structuralism became too preoccupied with a notion of the world (or at least our consciousness of it) as an effect of available forms of representation. His work provided grounds for a critique of the conceptions of discourse used in formal and empirical studies—which have focussed either on language as propositions, or speech acts—or else in the 'sociology' of human conversation (McHoul & Grace, 1993: 27-31). In these traditions of discourse analysis 'knowledge' refers to something like technical knowledge, or 'know-how', rather than relations of power and control. Foucault argued that these traditions worked at the level of enunciation, looking at the kinds of techniques and structures by which subjects come to be able to produce and recognise utterances. "Such a narrow focus can include only the surface of language use, the *ways and means by which* concepts and meanings are spoken or written" (McHoul & Grace, 1993: 35).

Foucault's concept of discourse can also be distinguished from empirical discourse analysis in terms of his use of the term 'archive'. This denotes not simply a 'corpus', or a collection, of texts (such as historical documents, or transcribed conversations) but "the form of organisation of the parts of a discourse (its statements)" (McHoul & Grace, 1993: 30). For Foucault, the analysis of discourse means an 'archaeology': not so much an exegesis in search of hidden or encoded meanings, but rather an analysis of the limits and the forms of discursive formations, or what he called "the law of *existence* of

statements" operating in particular societies, and at particular moments of their history (Foucault, 1991b: 59).

In other words, his interest lies in the limits and forms according to which statements become sayable; according to which some statements come to be seen as valid and valuable, and therefore worthy of preservation; and according to which particular kinds of discourses come to be attached to particular kinds of speakers (Foucault, 1991b: 60).

The concept of discourse in this approach therefore refers not to language, or to social interaction, but to bodies of institutional knowledge. Discourse theory, within this frame of reference, looks for techniques for what can, and cannot, be said. Discourse refers to institutional conditions that constrain, but also enable, writing, speaking and thinking within available limits.

His argument is that "discourse is not just a form of representation; it is a *material condition* (or set of conditions) which enables and constrains the socially productive 'imagination'. These conditions can therefore be referred to as 'discourses' or 'discursive conditions of possibility'" (McHoul & Grace, 1993: 34). Discourse provides an alternative to ideology as either false knowledge, or as an 'informing spirit'. Instead, Foucault treats discourse as bodies of institutionally specific knowledge. Discourse is a 'subjectless process', in which the "rules of the production of statements are not centred on human intervention or action" (Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 43). There is no natural cognitive 'interior', which adapts language to its original thinking patterns (and which can therefore be 'read off' the text), and no universal laws or structures that govern behaviour in all social and political contexts. "Foucault is seeking to fragment what we usually understand as 'thinking',

not to universalise it as 'thought'" (Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 35). He proposed instead to look at specific bodies of knowledge, or discourses, in terms of the kinds of statements they contain, and in terms of the rules governing their inclusion or exclusion.

This represented a substantial move away from discourse conceived as 'text', and closer to what Foucault called 'discipline'. He used this latter term in two ways: discipline as scholarly knowledge, and as the practices of institutions of social control such as asylums, prisons, hospitals, the armed forces, and the workplace. Foucault sees a crucial role for disciplinary knowledge, and knowledge practices, in constituting social relations. Knowledge does not simply flow from primary or sovereign subjects, and nor is it an effect of the economic base of social relations. As noted above, one of Foucault's primary objectives was:

to challenge the idea of a sovereign subject which arrives from elsewhere to enliven the inertia of linguistic codes, and sets down in discourse the indelible trace of its freedom; (and) to challenge the idea of a subjectivity which constitutes meanings and then transcribes them into discourse (Foucault, 1991b: 61-62).

Studying knowledge in the governmental approach is a project of describing and analysing the histories of the social and political conditions affecting the process by which statements come to be seen as either true or false. For Foucault, knowledge—and what he calls 'regimes of truth'—is an outcome of the deployment of specific material practices—observing, interviewing, writing, archiving, and networking—within institutions that have sought to manage the 'vicissitudes' of populations. Truth is something to be understood as an outcome of systems of inscription, of communication, or:

as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements ... [which is] ... linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A régime of truth (Foucault, 1980a: 133).

The essential political problem for the intellectual (in studying and making sense of disciplinary knowledge), says Foucault, is not to criticise the ideological contents supposedly linked to science (which he calls 'that great arbiter of truth in modern society'), or to ensure his/her own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, but to ascertain the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people's consciousnesses—or what's in their heads—but the political, economic, institutional regimes for the production of truth.

Foucault's work on discourse is historical. He looks, particularly in *The Order of Things* (1970) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), at how, between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, new discourses developed around human life, labour and speech (or, in other words, 'signification'). These include biology, psychology, psychoanalysis, economics, sociology and literary studies. This development was not simply a gradual revelation or discovery of 'true' knowledge, but a process whereby sets of truth claims were made possible by (or were contingent upon) developments elsewhere: for example, the spread of literacy, post the development of print and of various forms of mass transport, or the mapping of the taxonomic methods of the natural sciences onto studies of human affairs.

Foucault's project, then, is aimed at "exposing the historical specificity—the sheer fact that things could have been otherwise—of what we seem to know today with such certainty" (McHoul & Grace, 1993: 33). In this sense, it grew

out of the structuralist enterprise of calling into question that which had been presumed to be universal.

Foucault's writing has been extremely influential in reframing the concept of discourse around institutional practices. Post-structuralist writers have retained language as centrally important in the production of meaning, but ask readers to remember that the resources of language "are and always have been subjected to the historical developments and conflicts of social relations in general" (O'Sullivan *et al*, 1994: 93). Alasuutari describes discourse, succinctly, as an interrelationship between forms of knowledge and reality. For him, discourse refers to an 'ever-renewing' relationship between language and 'reality': "speech and language convey meaning, produce states of affairs, and construct subjects and identities all at once, and a change in any of these aspects has a bearing on the other ones" (1995: 115). In different social and political institutions there exist different mechanisms for compiling knowledge, and speaking that knowledge, which both represent and help to shape—or 'encode'—the meanings and values particular to those institutions. These ways of speaking and thinking—or 'discourses'—set limits for the possibilities of thought and action; they normalise what is taken to be true, and thus they constantly work to encode relations of power within those institutions.

This concept has been useful for clarifying an important distinction between structuralist notions of text and meaning, and a post-structuralist view of the relationship between language, meaning and social action. While the former assumes texts give expression to something that already exists, the latter sees texts, and the practices that go into their production, circulation and reading

(or 'use'), as productive of things beyond the text—including forms of interaction, forms of organisation and forms of identity. Schirato and Yell (1996), for example, refer to an ongoing tension between a formalist (coming out of linguistics) approach—sometimes called 'social semiotics', with a focus on what the form and content of a text says about underlying social forces—and a Foucauldian approach, where the concept of discourse denotes something about the relations between knowledge and power, about disciplinary knowledges and organisational routines.

On similar lines Bourdieu argues that the symbolic power of language is located not in words themselves, but in the institutional arrangements that support the authority of speakers, and their statements. He argues that the focus of semiotics on the formal content of language is misguided. It searches for meaning, and power, within words themselves. But the power of language is only indicated, or represented, in words. It is only rare that "the informative content of the message exhausts the content of the communication" (Bourdieu, 1991: 107). The power of words, says Bourdieu, is only the 'delegated power' of the speaker, which is granted from elsewhere. "Language at most *represents* this authority, manifests and symbolises it" (1991: 109). Attempts to decipher power in language, according to Bourdieu, is reduced to a theory of particular classes of symbolic expression "whose specific efficacy stems from the fact that they seem to possess *in themselves* the source of a power which in reality ... resides in the institutional conditions of their production and reception" (1991: 111). The use and the manner of speech, for example, depend on the context of speech, and on the social position of a speaker who is the 'bearer' or 'carrier' of the legitimacy accorded that speaker. In other words, the success of utterances, of speech, depends on the delegated authority of relevant institutions. Efforts

to locate power, force or meaning in words will not work, unless an attempt is also made to establish "the relationship between the properties of discourses, the properties of the person who pronounces them and the properties of the institution which authorises him [sic] to pronounce them" (*ibid*).

Hunter's work on representation (1984, 1991), substantially influenced by Foucault, sees systems, or 'media', of representation as productive rather than simply neutral relays of 'the real'. Technologies of writing provide scripts for exploring and constituting particular subject positions, for performing and developing ethical capacities. 'Information' is therefore not simply a reality 'captured' by knowledge systems, but rather a heading that signifies a set of tools for *shaping* reality, for shaping the material/physical world as well as the capacity for social actors to engage with the universe of their perceptions. Texts are not simply reflections, or 're-presentations', of a reality located elsewhere, but rather sites where social actors work to produce meanings through material practices of reading and composition.

Foucault, and the many writers who now routinely adapt his work to their own research and writing, are not interested in 'great ideas' or 'social institutions' as representative or expressive of some kind of essential power. His interest, and theirs, is more in the techniques by which institutions attempt to define and reinforce territory, administer populations, know and attend to the vagaries of the individuals that constitute those populations. Foucault defined his work on what he calls 'bio-power' as an alternative to traditional sociological studies of institutions (the military, the bureaucracy, the workplace, etc) and the individuals who govern them:

What I am looking for, on the contrary, are the techniques, the practices, which give a concrete form to this new political rationality and to this new kind of relationship between the social entity and the individual ... techniques by which the individual could be integrated into the social entity (1988b: 153).

In the traditional 'juridico-discursive' model of government, sovereign power is seen as proceeding either by a continuous reinvestment in itself—in the manifest trappings of prestige, property and territory—or by the reproduction of false knowledge (or 'ideology'). Foucault sees power as relational, not as sovereign, or located in a specific origin that exists elsewhere (for example the economic base, or patriarchy). He rejects structuralist and humanist conceptions of essences, or origins. Society is seen as constituted by discontinuous systems of power relations, rather than directed by one single and general concept or type of power (for example economic, patriarchal, military). Techniques of power are simultaneously totalising (working at the level of populations as a whole) and individualising (working at the level of the individual) (1982: 213).⁵⁶

This approach is grounded in an understanding of liberalism as a practical governmental rationality, rather than simply as a political philosophy that might otherwise be seen as distanced from the 'real action' of politics. Power is understood as productive of, for example, relationships, knowledge (of populations, and crucially also of one self), and of forms of available action. The object of the two poles of bio-power (which he calls 'disciplinary' and

⁵⁶ Consider the example of the 'examination', which Foucault discusses as an example of the productive effects of forms of disciplinary power developed during the eighteenth century: a set of apparently simply techniques for notating, registering and constituting files, which transform each and every individual into a 'case'; the constitution of the individual as a 'describable, analysable' object; the constitution of the archive of 'bodies and days', which "places individuals in a field of surveillance [which] also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them" (1977: 189).

'species' power (in Rabinow, 1984: 262-265)) is not simply bodies, or territory: its object is the properties and the conduct of populations. Power no longer exists to kill, but 'to invest in life through and through'. Power is to be analysed as technical, and as procedural. Social relations, culture, identity and behaviour are mediated outcomes of technical and administrative inventions as mundane as handwriting, interviewing and the national census. Institutions develop various techniques for using these inventions: the systems of knowledge and practical techniques form 'technologies' for doing things. Power is intelligible only through description and analysis of the administration of these techniques and technologies.

Foucault called disciplinary power one of the greatest inventions of bourgeois society. Disciplinary practices and institutions—hospitals, armies, schools, and the workplace—are not just an expression of the power of capital (as if they were an invention of an already constituted 'capitalism'), but a regime of techniques invented for producing 'practised' bodies, and for inserting them into newly developing production processes.⁵⁷ Discipline does not simply produce 'docility' in the sense of 'conformity', but rather it produces individuals with specific capacities. Disciplinary power is also about the collection of information, and its translation into various forms of knowledge.

In this sense, Foucault's notion of power is directly linked to, and cannot be read separately from, a concept of knowledge as truth. "Power never ceases its

⁵⁷ Foucault explains that disciplinary power, and the parallel development of the human and social sciences (or, in other words, the knowledge of populations) that developed from the 17th and 18th centuries, was indispensable to the development of capitalism: "the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. ...it had to have methods of power capable of optimising forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern" (Rabinow, 1984: 263).

interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit" (Foucault, 1980a: 93).

Power requires knowledge, and knowledge is never neutral. Indeed, Foucault was clear in his argument that power and knowledge exist in reciprocal relationship with one another. In *Discipline and Punish* he argues against the humanist notion that knowledge is separable from power, and indeed is only able to flourish after the 'renunciation' of power:

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (1977: 27).

Foucault's concept of 'governmentality', which draws together his overall interests in discourse, power and ethics, provides an alternative framework for analysing how liberal political power proceeds, via various political rationalities and intellectual technologies for shaping and guiding conduct *at a distance*. 'Governmentality' is shorthand for 'mentalities' (or 'rationalities') of government, or in other words the systems of thinking about the practice of government that inform and shape (or, make thinkable, and sayable) the limits of action. If liberal power is to be comprehended as more than sovereign domination, then it has to be describable in terms of the mechanisms that draw individuals and populations into techniques of self government. Foucault argued that these 'techniques of self' are complementary to, and intersect with, structures of domination. The contact point where individuals are 'driven' by others (through forms of domination) is tied up with how they conduct themselves, and this is what Foucault calls 'government':

Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word ... is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself (1993: 203-204).⁵⁸

In order to govern, in a liberal sense, where autonomy remains an important principle (both in a rhetorical sense, and in a practical political sense), government aims to regulate action indirectly. Government requires knowledge, of both the human and non-human resources that constitute the state; in order to maximise those resources, government needs to 'know' them in as many senses as are possible. The dilemma, in a liberal state, is that those who govern must have knowledge of certain things that may not be immediately accessible to those who want to know.

The concept of governmentality has provided a substantial trigger for a wide variety of inquiries into relationships between systems of notation and inscription and the regularity of human social conduct, and is particularly useful for understanding how conduct is governed—made thinkable, made calculable, and made regular—without the use of force. Governmentality provides a means for connecting questions of autonomy, knowledge and technology together in a manner that helps make sense of the material dimension of a territory that is not immediately 'knowable' in the eyes of policy makers and managers—or, in other words, of professional independence. It works with a notion of power as *relational*, focusing on what power makes possible rather than how or what it constrains. It works with a

⁵⁸ Elsewhere, Foucault also writes: "I have attempted a history of the organisation of knowledge with respect to both domination and the self. For example, I studied madness not in terms of the criteria of formal sciences but to show how a type of management of individuals inside and outside of asylums was made possible by this strange discourse. This contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self I call governmentality" (1988a: 18-19).

notion of *discourse* rather than *knowledge*, which acknowledges and includes material organisational and technical factors in a consideration of how authority, and autonomy, 'work' in practice. It also includes a notion of technology as a series of *cultural artefacts*, which are constantly evolving in significance through social use rather than as essentially separate from human bodies and their supposedly self-generated ideas:

It seems to me that we must distinguish the relationships of power as strategic games between liberties—strategic games that result in the fact that some people try to determine the conduct of others—and the states of domination, which are what we ordinarily call power. And, between the two, between the games of power and the states of domination, you have governmental technologies—giving this term a very wide meaning for it is also the way in which you govern your wife, your children, as well as the way you govern an institution. The analysis of these techniques is necessary, because it is often through this kind of technique that states of domination are established and maintain themselves (Foucault, 1988c: 19).

The notion of *government at a distance* has been used to review accounting as an array of techniques for 'making up people' (Hacking, 1986), in ways that seek to influence their actions, and as a body of expertise concerned with "the exacting of responsibility from individuals rendered calculable and comparable" (Miller, 1994a: 240). Peter Miller, writing on accounting as 'social and institutional practice', notes how views of accounting have changed since the 1970s:

Attention has been directed to the ways in which accounting exerts an influence on, and in turn is influenced by, a multiplicity of agents, agencies, institutions and processes ... The manner in which accounting has become embedded in so many areas of social and economic life has been a continuing concern. And the focus throughout has been on accounting as a *practice*, a view that accounting is, above all, an attempt to intervene, to act upon individuals, entities and processes to transform them and to achieve specific ends (Miller, 1994b: 1).

How might this be used to tackle the substantive question of this research? How can it help us understand the historical development of social work as 'expertise', and the position it finds itself in now—apparently subject to changing forms of managerial control? Fournier draws on Foucault's argument that in liberal societies government proceeds by constructing subjects as rational autonomous individuals, capable of regulating their actions without the need for direct interference of authorities:

Truth governs not by controlling directly the acts (or even the knowledge) of the professional practitioner but by making sure that the practitioner is the sort of person who can be trusted with truth (1999: 287).

Expert knowledge is not simply 'pure knowledge', or indeed 'ideology'. Expertise constitutes instead the set of 'truth claims' required for 'winning arguments' about what 'really counts' in politics, or in the workplace, or in any other social institution. As such, expertise is a 'regime of truth', which regulates—through various material practices—what is 'sayable' and 'thinkable' in any given context. Expertise, as competence, is a combination of knowledge (or skill) and bearing (or disposition). 'Experts' are relays for the application of expert knowledge, and as such are crucial as both objects and subjects of government. They are 'objects' in the sense that they perform the work towards implementing authorities' objectives: doctors and dentists attend to the health of populations, within the budgetary constraints of governments; teachers attempt to train the hearts and minds of students; social workers to guide the limits of good parenting. They are also 'subjects' in the sense that the competence of the 'reflective practitioner' is a practical achievement of a series of social 'technologies' and historically formed discursive practices.

So within a governmental perspective, professional expertise—particularly those forms of power/knowledge associated with the human sciences—can be seen as linking the political rationalities of authorities with what Foucault calls 'technologies of the self'. Expert knowledge is not a body of knowledge that is somehow separable from institutional arrangements, invented and then carried forward in its application to identified 'problems', as if it had been discovered or invented in isolation from human affairs. At the same time it is important not to assume professional autonomy (or independence) is simply an illusion created by the modern state, part of the ceaseless 'imaginary' of power as domination, to give the appearance of distance between force and effect. It is, indeed, part of the armoury of modern liberalism, providing a key mechanism for attempting to govern from a distance, and without coercion.

This refers to the view that autonomy is grounded in ethical capacity, which in turn is developed out of the assumption that the identity (or 'subjectivity', or 'skills and capacities for thinking and acting') of actors is always 'in process'. In line with the assumptions of a post-structuralist paradigm on agency and action, identity is not seen here as grounded either in some kind of pre-social essence, or in particular social, economic or linguistic structures. Identity is instead assumed to be an outcome of social and cultural practices. Like Mark Poster, this assumes that identity is:

constituted in discourse practices ... so that the individual is not a natural being, is not a being centred in consciousness, but is actually given shape in the interactions that occur in language and in action (2001: 148).

A focus on autonomy as capacity (and in the case of this research on the specific capacities developed in response to the deployment of computers as

information and accountability tools) has certain implications for how to understand the agency of resistance, and how to think about managerial-professional power relations generally. A reading of autonomy as a corollary of a space of freedom that is 'essentially human' and therefore rooted in pre-social consciousness, and of resistance and accommodation as necessary opposites, presumes that actors remain static in what can only be seen as a competitive power relationship with other human and non-human actors. This dissertation assumes instead that actors' identities—including their skills, capacities and dispositions—undergo processes of translation as they adopt new devices.

These concepts are particularly useful for analysing expertise as a series of disciplinary fields—constituted through forms of work organisation and educational arrangements—and as 'regimes' of discourse, or rather 'discursive formations'. The object of interest in this research is therefore not just the texts of communication—which in this case include casework records of interviews, theoretical treatises on social case work, policy reports or Hansard—but also the techniques of communication, including the rules for organising interactive relationships (for example between caseworkers, clients, managers and policy makers), the artefacts used to communicate (pen and paper, telephone, computer), and the contexts of that communication (the changing funding and organisational structures and routines).

In the computerisation of recording there are therefore a number of pertinent questions that need to be taken up. What imperatives of knowledge collection and 'truth making' are carried forward through computerised recording? What has computerisation enabled, and what new objectives have authorities

and expert labour been able to formulate? What happens to the statements of practice, contained in computer records, and how has this affected what comes to be counted as 'true'? How have relationships between managers and frontline social workers changed, as a result of computerisation?

Techniques of accounting used in professional work incorporate particular techniques of self-reflection. These are apparent in the modes of interaction, recording, supervising and reporting that professional workers are routinely required to undertake. None are productive of domination by themselves; it is important to give due regard to the political and institutional contexts of their particular use. For example, the development in recent years of self-governing teams in administrative units of the Australian Public Service (APS), and in many other administrative working environments, has involved new modes of competency based training, systems of performance management and computerised reporting arrangements, which grant greater freedom to local operatives in return for compliance with a range of centrally determined and controlled reporting regimes. Ultimately it is this relationship between knowledge and freedom, which involves various alignments of subjects with the objectives of authorities that Foucault calls 'governmentality'.

3.2.2 *'Technology' and 'society'*

An important movement has developed in sociology (and in the humanities more generally) since the 1970s, around studies of society and technology. In fact this has largely been an attempt, by many writers, to problematise what have been seen as arbitrary boundaries between 'society' and 'technology'. This section briefly considers the main elements of these alternative

approaches, in order to add further conceptual tools that supplement the governmental framework described above.

Raymond Williams' comments on technological determinism are particularly useful. He is critical of the confusion created by the inadequate terms on which debate about the 'effects' of modern (communications) technologies is based:

what the terms and their assumptions often prevent us from seeing is that technical inventions are always made *within* societies and that societies are always more than the sum of relations and institutions from which, by a falsely specialising definition, technical inventions have been excluded (1981: 226).

Williams argues that the failure to see this connection, between the social and the technical, flows from the power of both social and technological determinisms—or, from the idea that technology (as an autonomous sphere) is either shaped and determined entirely by human intention, or else that it has effects which 'it' generates and which then impact upon human affairs.

Wise argues that the constant to and fro between different modes of determinism (social and technical) is perpetuated by an age-old dilemma about 'autonomous technology', which is embodied in conceptions of the master-slave relationship:

This dilemma lies at the heart of the modern. The question is one of control, control of the other, and the differentiation between self and other (Cartesian dualism, the Kantian noumena-phenomena split). Thus we have seemingly constant debates over whether we control our technologies/slaves (social determinism) or whether they control us because we have become radically dependent on them (techno-logical determinism) (1998: 418).

Barry and Slater, in a review of Callon's contribution to sociology, argue that the starting point for his early work (which was located then in a sociology of

technology) was a desire to challenge the determinism that characterised earlier sociological and economic accounts of technology. "Rather than view technical change as an external force that had an impact on society and the economy, sociologists of technology sought to demonstrate the ways in which technology was socially shaped or socially constructed" (2002: 176-177). Socio-technical change, in this view, is neither linear nor completely predictable. Programs of change give rise to outcomes that cannot be calculated simply according to the stated intentions of managers or other policy actors. Change is always socially organised and culturally communicated, and never purely technical or 'non-human'. Innovation involves a mix of human and non-human actors, whose characteristics and capacities inevitably complicate processes of development and diffusion.

For Callon himself, the 'sociology of technology' amounted to an alternative sociology, which he says needs to break away from the 'purity' of tried and tested methodologies and instead "follow innovators in their investigations and projects" (1987: 98) in order to more fully understand how socio-technical change actually occurs.

It is useful, before going further, to note where the term 'technology' comes from. Miller notes its derivation from the Greek 'techne', which he interprets as 'a practical rationality governed by a strategic ambition' rather than a coherent body of knowledge (1994a: 242). Williams notes the same derivation, but goes further in distinguishing between a set of related terms. A 'technique' is a particular skill, or application of a skill. A 'technical invention' is the development of a skill, or a device. 'Technology', finally, has two connected meanings, referring to different stages of development: "the body of

knowledge, both theoretical and practical, from which the skills and devices (technical inventions) come, and the body of knowledge and conditions from which they are developed, combined, and prepared for use" (1981: 227). The terms refer to different things, but are substantially connected. On the one hand there is the knowledge from which inventions arise, while on the other there are practical applications. For Williams, the upshot of the distinction is that 'technology' should always be seen as 'fully social': "It is necessarily in complex and variable connection with other social relations and institutions, although a particular isolated technical invention can be seen, and temporarily interpreted, as if it were autonomous" (*ibid*).

The term 'technologies' in this instance does not mean simply the artefacts or the machinery of the modern office, the service delivery agency, or the modern manufacturing plant. It refers instead to the complex of social arrangements and technical apparatus: the forms of organisation which produce technical inventions, which are the site within which their use is negotiated and developed, which gather knowledge from that use, and which shape the objectives and the capacities of relevant social actors.

Wise's definition draws on an analogy of strata in rock. In a discussion of what he calls 'intelligent agency', he distinguishes between 'corporeal agency' (an ability to achieve effects through physical means, body on body, through a direct manipulation of reality) and 'discursive agency' (an ability to achieve effects incorporeally, through language or other abstract means). The latter has definite effects, but the initial action is incorporeal. For Wise, the articulation of the two strata is what constitutes human social space. "Human agency, the ability of humans to achieve effects in a society, is always both technological

and linguistic. What changes from society to society, and across time, is the relative consistency and arrangement of each strata (technologies change, languages change) and the relation between the two strata" (1998: 421). Nevertheless, in any given situation there will always be a combination of 'language-bearing' human actors as well as non-language-bearing non-human actors.

Wise argues, further, that Western industrialised societies place great faith in linguistic agency, where the public sphere and democracy (in which one can bring about change in government and society through language, by 'voting and declaring') is seen as constitutive of that agency. It is precisely that linguistic agency that one is supposed to use in commanding and directing machines. He argues that determinist accounts tend to ignore technological mediation, and that this is encouraged by the transparency of the human/non-human interface itself, which encourages us to ignore all the actors that make up elaborate networks of humans and non-humans, such as 'cyberspace'.

Both forms of agency are real, says Wise, and that in fact "both realms are inseparable. We cannot abandon one in favour of the other. Therefore discourses which attempt to do so are necessarily ignoring or masking other effects" (1998: 422). The technical and the linguistic are not somehow separable from, or external to, an 'essentialised human identity', but rather they constitute it. "The question we should ask shouldn't be of the human *and* technology, but of the human *as* technology" (1998: 424).

Wise's claim that "the bodies that constitute the stuff of social space are technological as well as human" (*ibid*) echoes one of the core concepts of actor-network theory (ANT). ANT joins the human and non-human via a definition

of 'actor' in semiotic terms. Drawing on the work of Greimas, Callon and Latour defined an actor—or 'actant'—as "whatever unit of discourse is invested of a role" (cited in Barry & Slater, 2002: 177). The term refers to "anything that acts ... [and] is made the source of an action" (Latour, cited in Henman, 1996: 14). So all elements in a 'socio-technical complex', therefore, are actors. For example, modern cricket is comprised of more than players, umpires, scorers/statisticians and spectators. There are also elaborate TV and radio commentary systems, cameras lodged in stumps, 'third umpires', action replays, laser guns to measure the speed and trajectory of balls, and vast stadium complexes. The 'assemblage' of pre-existing actors was changed, as a consequence of the kinds of new actors (non-human artefacts, as well as commercial media interests and sponsors) who were enrolled in the sport during and after the revolutionary World Series of the late 1970s.

ANT argues that the ability to act—or what is often called 'agency'—does not lie in any single entity, but in the interaction and interconnection between the various actors that make up a network. Agency is shaped by relationships, which in turn are shaped by the material qualities of individual actors: materials, texts, bodies, skills, interests, etc. But the actors, and their relations, that constitute a network do not just 'happen': ANT proposes a four-stage process of 'translation', by which networks are formed, or configured, through the enrolment of 'allies' by negotiation. The stages are, in summary: *problematization* (where key actors are persuaded that solutions to the individual problems are located with the 'enroller'), *intéressement* (the gradual dissolution of old/existing networks, and their replacement by new ones), *enrolment* (new networks achieve a firm identity, through various forms of negotiation) and *mobilisation* (the alliances that constitute new network are

mobilised to represent—or speak on behalf of—an even larger network of absent actors). Barry and Slater describe 'translation' as "all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak on behalf of another actor or force" (2002: 178).

Latour (1991) proposes that sociology turn away from the 'symbolic superstructure' of a materialist Marxist framework, and consider instead the means by which non-human actors are mobilised within the projects of human actors. He proposes two further concepts—association and substitution—which he uses to examine the ways in which the original intentions of human actors are changed through the properties of responding actions. He suggests that intentions rely heavily on their ability to use non-human actors, which routinely do not perform as expected, thereby opening up avenues of resistance not initially foreseen. Instead of analysing socio-technical change in terms of a relation between 'power/powerless', Latour proposes to consider the unfolding interaction between 'program' and 'anti-program'. In his example—a study of European hotel managers' attempts to prevail upon customers to return keys, by attaching a heavy weight rather than a written sign—Latour notes the difficulties involved in ensuring the object of action (in this case, the behaviour of customers) meets with the intentions of the initiator. A fundamental principle of all studies of science and technology, he says, is this: "the *force* with which a speaker makes a statement is never enough, *in the beginning*, to predict the path that the statement will follow. This path depends on what successive listeners do with the statement" (1991: 104). The outcome for the hotel owner anxious to keep an expensive store of keys intact depends partly on communication (on what is written on

the key) but also on what the customer does with that writing. The number of 'loads' that one needs to attach to a statement, to an intention, depends on the capacities, or the 'mood', of the recipient. "The *programs* of the speaker get more complicated as they respond to the *anti-programs* of the listener" (1991: 105). If a customer removes the heavy weight, the manager may have to consider soldering the ring that connects it to the key. On the other hand, they could simply resort to guards at each door, and a regime of searches—but as Latour notes this would just as likely lead to a loss of customers overall. What matters, in any case, is that statements (the programmatic intentions of human actors) only become 'predictable' when the corresponding anti-programs are countered. In the process, actors and their intentions are transformed:

[T]he order that is obeyed is *no longer the same* as the initial order. It has been *translated*, not *transmitted*. In following it, we are not following a sentence through the context of its application, nor are we moving from language to the praxis. ... The statement is no longer the same, the key is no longer the same—even the hotel is no longer quite exactly the same. ... the fate of a statement is in the hands of others (Latour, 1991: 105-106).

Innovations, says Latour, always involve a succession of transformations, both on the part of the speaker as well as the statement (or object, or apparatus, or technique). In following any process of innovation—if one accepts the message of ANT—one does not follow any given statement through a context. Instead, what is followed is "the simultaneous production of a 'text' and a 'context' ... [and] both the *chain* of speakers and their statements and the *transformation* of speakers and their statements" (1991: 106). All this demonstrates—and here the link to a Foucauldian concept of subject as actor is very clear—that innovation is never an outcome of the express intentions of a singular entity:

we never work in a world filled with actors to which fixed contours may be granted. It is not merely that their degree of attachment to a statement varies; their competence, and even their definition, can be transformed. These transformations ... reveal that the unified actor ... is itself an association made up of elements which can be redistributed (1991: 109).

Returning for a moment to the previous example of modern cricket as a network of human and non-human actors, this notion of transformation becomes clear. Cricket was once a game played entirely by amateur sportsmen. The game is now commercialised, with various technical, social and economic factors contributing to changes in all grades from international 'tests' to local club functions. Television coverage of national and international games—which has contributed substantially to that commercialisation—now includes slow motion replays from a multitude of angles, from outside the ground as well as within the boundary (especially the well-known 'stump-cam'). The circulation of images and statements about the progress of a game, via television, has changed the way players, commentators and spectators/fans speak about and understand the game. The precise role of the umpire, as ultimate adjudicator of the rules of the game, has been subtly transformed by the installation of cameras and the development of a process by which judgements can be interrupted and tested with the aid of slow-motion replays. The network of actors that make up cricket—or any other modern sport, for that matter—is transformed by the introduction of new/different actors.

ANT also stresses the contingent nature of network building. There is a constant need to establish, maintain and reproduce identities and alliances. Actors are always 'in process', as are networks as a whole. For ANT theorists, patterns of technological development inevitably involve patterns of resistance

and accommodation, shaped by the messy process of 'translation'. They argue that it is necessary to look at what new 'socio-technical assemblies' of both human and non-human elements make possible, not simply at the intrinsic interests of (human) actors, or the broad social/political contexts which they occupy. Studies need to look to complexity and contingency in patterns of technological change, rather than simply accept the utopian or dystopian rhetoric of social or technological determinism.

It is important to acknowledge some of the criticisms levelled at ANT. For example, Feenberg (2000) argues the empiricism and localism of ANT excludes reference to traditional categories of class, culture and state power, categories which he says are still important in making assessments of the relations of power between different social actors. Grint and Woolgar (1997: 30-31) note the view that ANT's empiricism actually amounts to a residual technicism, which, rhetorically at least, it rejects. Descriptions of socio-technical networks that draw attention to the central role of non-human actors in cementing or dissolving a network—for example Callon's (1986) account of the development of an electric vehicle, which discusses the role of faulty engine parts in the ultimate demise of the project—fail to provide an account of how and why human actors are able to achieve their objectives. Latour himself catalogues a series of important concerns about the detail of ANT—including the concern that many readers see it as a dissolution of humanity "into a field of forces where morality, humanity, psychology was absent" (1999: 16)—and yet ultimately provides a defence against claims that the framework provides no solution to 'social problems'. ANT, he says, provides a solution to the dissatisfaction of social scientists, who alternately move between macro and micro sociology in search of explanatory frameworks. ANT does not designate

a Society, 'the Big Animal' that somehow allows us to make sense of local interactions. "Neither does it designate an anonymous field of forces. Instead it refers to something entirely different which is the *summing up* of interactions through various kinds of devices, inscriptions, forms and formulae, into a very local, very practical, very tiny locus" (1999: 17). It is this summing up—this analytical framework that tackles the constitutive relationship between the properties of a network and the capacities of actors—that provides ANT with a substantial use-value.

The following two sections outline basic elements of broad frameworks that will then be useful in making sense of the material discussed in the second half of the thesis. Both draw, both explicitly and implicitly, on the concepts discussed above, on post-structuralist notions of discourse, power, subjectivity and technology.

3.3 Framework number one: 'modes of accounting'

The various writers who coined the term ANT have carried it forward into a diverse array of projects.⁵⁹ John Law's work is no exception. His article "Organised accountabilities: ontology and the mode of accounting" (1996) appropriates the concept of technology as a socio-technical ordering of elements (or 'actors', both human and non-human) within a system (or 'network'), to argue that organisational modes of information gathering and

⁵⁹ See, for example, Barry & Slater's (2002) review of Michael Callon's contribution to economic sociology and anthropology.

accounting can be seen as constitutive of a particular subjectivity.⁶⁰ By 'modes of accounting', or 'syntaxes of representation', he means the 'ordering logics' that are embodied in socio-technical relations: "Ordering logics that are embodied and performed in many different places: in ordered texts; in the practices or people; in devices of all sorts; in interactions and habits; and in architectures" (1996: 294). Here, forms of representation, and the things people do with them in complex organisations, have incredibly important effects. They are not mundane artefacts, which simply reflect what is already there. They create—through the work they require actors to do 'on themselves', and through the relations they create between 'subject' and 'object'—dispositions, or subject positions, from which it is then possible to speak and act.

Law reviews different theories of representation—empiricist, instrumental and post-structuralist.⁶¹ In the empiricist view, representations are supposed to correspond to 'reality'. The question it asks is 'is it (the object of vision) real?' In a neo-liberal managerial framework, the questions would be 'are these the *real* costs?' and/or 'is this an *accurate* statement of outcomes?' The instrumental view sees representations as having effects, but only as enabling instruments that perform tasks set by their authors. In other words, they are seen as expressive of the intentions of their authors. This view asks whether particular representations 'work', as instruments or tools shaped by a particular worldview, or set of interests. The question it asks is more likely to be 'does

⁶⁰ The particular context of Law's study was a large scientific laboratory, circa 1990. The managers of the laboratory were attempting to develop a computerised information system, which they believed would enable them to more effectively monitor 'man hours' spent on individual projects, in order to more effectively manage problems in cash flow derived from those projects.

⁶¹ The first of these (the empirical) corresponds to the 'process model' of communication, noted in the Introduction.

this mode of reporting bring about the necessary degree of accountability that I/we desire?’

In the post-structural view, which Law adopts and carries forward in his discussion, the notion of effect is taken further: representations and their referents are generated together, in what he calls a process of doubling. Modes of accounting ‘perform’ subjects—seeing subjects—which Law says are places from which there is a view; but at the same time they also perform (and thereby construct) a ‘disciplined series of objects that are available to the seer’. “Seer and seen: they are constituted together in a ‘semio-technical’ hierarchy” (1996: 294). The question to ask from this perspective is ‘what kinds of subject positions, capacities and relationships are made possible by a new ordering of technical objects, routines and habits?’

In his review of the different theories of representation Law weaves together a comparison of the two forms of subjectivity (two kinds of capacities for thinking and acting) generated out of an engagement with a management information system as opposed to a classical meeting agenda. In each, the character of the subjectivity generated is linked with an appropriate performance of subject-as-object. The latter is an example of a mode of accounting in which management continually subjects itself to due process and proper administration, to the legalities of rule-following, where subjects and objects are interchangeable such that one’s behaviour (in relation to, for example, standing orders) is judged according to conventional rules of behaviour. The mode of accounting constituted by the meeting agenda is continuous, reflexive, unfolding and tactical, says Law, “distributed across

time in ways that cannot be predicted or told in any detail at a single time or place" (1996: 300).

In the mode of accounting associated with sophisticated computerised information systems, the object created is an array of normalised elements "that stand in specific and calculable relationship with one another" (1996: 294), and these objects then generate options that call for a (managerial) subjectivity capable of the 'bold' and 'responsible' exercise of (again, managerial) discretion. The use of information systems constitutes a re-ordering of all the elements within a network, which in turn generates a panoptic subjectivity and, at the same time, "that most celebrated form of organisation—the flexible and 'pro-active' enterprise which is capable of efficiently deploying its resources in order to respond to the opportunities presented by the environment" (1996: 294). In what he calls 'discretionary panopticism', the constant flow of information brings the objects of vision together at a single point, providing a "calculus for comparing and contrasting" things which otherwise would be incommensurably distributed (1996: 296). In doing so it generates the subjectivity of "an informed, control-relevant and luxurious discretion" (*ibid*) that works to constitute an array of objects (all those actors that make up the network of organisation) within a normalised space.⁶²

This brief review makes it possible to develop a preliminary hypothesis about the shift from 'traditional' forms of social casework recording (from narrative and process recording: see §5.2) to standardised and computerised information systems, and in particular about the effect of that shift on the capacity to

⁶² The use of the term 'panoptic' here derives from Foucault's work on power—see §3.2.1.

exercise independent/autonomous judgement. It is reasonable to argue, firstly, that the elements of traditional technologies of trust used to regulate expert labour—the social work curriculum, forms of scholarly and workplace writing (including the various recording techniques available), interviewing techniques, peer supervision, office architecture, etc—incorporate self-regulatory checks that require professional workers to continuously monitor their conduct against governing standards. Writing the record of practice, in particular, is a crucial focus of power relations in the social work workplace. The requirement to record, and the set of available recording techniques, are not simply expressive of a managerial power in principle, *in potentia*, but are instead crucial elements in the techniques of power in practice, *in actua*. They are, in fact, the 'stuff' of workplace culture, the 'ground' on which the 'content' of work is firmly placed.⁶³ They shape practices of self-reflection, and indeed the wider professional mode of accounting.

Professional autonomy, as a result, can be seen not just as a phenomenon with functional or structural significance—as a tool for improving the lot of humanity, or for squaring off markets for service—but as a material basis for a relationship of trust. Autonomy can then be read as an artefact, with practical limits, and a technical history relating to its development through the various 'techniques of self' brought to bear in professional education and workplace contexts. Autonomy is not simply a precondition of professional arrangements and practices, or a category of being and a bounded space of freedom that was somehow invented prior to the application of independent judgement. It is, instead, both a personal and a structural disposition, which in turn is an

⁶³ This notion of 'ground/content' is a reference to McLuhan's (1964) notion that 'the medium is the message'.

outcome of a mode of accounting constituted by particular forms of cultural training undertaken within the structural arrangements that constitute the university curriculum and the workplace. Material communication practices—including routines for conducting interviews, procedures for documenting the detail of a casework relationship, patterns of communication with colleagues and supervisors—can be seen as constitutive of the ethical disposition of the 'autonomous' professional.

It is then logical to argue, secondly, that managerialism aspires, through information systems, not just to maximise particular objects of work—for example, the structural 'service' relations between workers, clients and institutions, or the outcomes/circumstances of clients—but also to minimise the autonomy of expertise by paring back opportunities for the development of the capacity for self-mastery. But what do computerised information systems require social workers to do, and how is this different from what it is replacing? In longhand record writing the caseworker is required to draw together—to actively codify, on the basis of disciplinary and agency knowledge—a summary of a client's circumstances against the various reference points that have some bearing on a case (for example their professional training, agency instructions or legal statutes). The product—paper copy file notes, reports, plus other relevant documents—are then attached to the client's file, or distributed to appropriate parties as required. Computerised information systems, on the other hand, require caseworkers to enter basic details of individual cases, against a set list of codes that capture basic information about a client's circumstances—for example demographic, or geographic—and about the process by which the client is responded to. These systems have provided managers with tools to scrutinise

aspects of work not previously included in written reports. They have made it possible to draw things together in new ways, which do not necessarily 'wipe away' previously dominant systems for 'encoding' the circumstances of cases (because writing up case records, longhand, has remained an important part of the caseworker's role), but which provide new categories and codes on the basis of which those cases can then be 'catalogued'. In fact the coding is already half completed: it remains a simpler task for the caseworker to 'fit' the case to the category, or the code.

Information systems do not simply force the case worker to reveal the detail of their decisions—these are already the subject of the longhand report—but what they do is to plug them into a 'growing cybernetic assemblage' that constitutes the virtual workplace of the twenty-first century (Bogard, 1996: 99). Managers at a central point now have the capacity to know, at any given time, the precise numbers of cases on hand: the numbers and types of contacts made with each and every client (or other relevant 'witnesses'), office waiting times, the social and economic details of each and every case, the numbers of particular types of cases, the distribution of cases across available staff, the length of time taken to resolve each and every case.

Crucially, managers have new opportunities to trace workers' compliance with defined recording requirements—by tracing the completion of statistical information against finalised cases—so that from their central point managers can know more precisely about the reliability of the evidence they accrue on the process and the outcomes of work. In this sense, the means has truly become an end in itself.

This new form of 'informed surveillance' (Bogard, 1996) provides managers and policy makers with opportunities to redefine the conditions and outcomes of work previously entrusted by licence. That licence is not simply 'expired', but its terms appear substantially changed. Codification does not remove the onus of responsibility for cases from the shoulders of each and every caseworker. They remain accountable for the outcomes of their work performance, assessed against specific agency and 'professional' standards. However codification would appear to have the potential to standardise work tasks, as it has done in other areas of the workforce, and thus the expectation of this research is that as systems for codifying the labour and the outcomes of casework change—or, as the mode of accounting shifts—then not only will the frameworks of interpretation available to professional workers be expected to change in some significant way, but the organisational relations between workers, managers and clients will also, in some sense, be standardised.

Where does this leave the argument? As already stated, a central object of analysis in this thesis is the constitution and control of autonomous judgement. The word 'constitution' refers precisely to what professional autonomy is taken to be here: a set of culturally constructed competencies (or capacities), which from the perspective of managers and political authorities enable the regulation of work *at a distance* (see above, in §3.2.1). Autonomy is a fundamental component of what can be called a 'technology of trust'. The capacity to work independently, to observe ethical standards and to use one's own initiative in contexts where direct supervision is not available (or not considered appropriate), requires the development of specific skills. The various forms of communication professional workers engage in (including

client interviews, peer supervision, assessment routines, record keeping) are important sites for the development of those skills.

However there appears to be a tension between the technology of trust peculiar to 'professionalism'—which has included ethical codes, forms of peer supervision and regulated licensing—and the ambitions and techniques of managers and policy makers who desire to know about and more effectively control the outcomes of practice.

Using Law's notion of 'modes of accounting'—which suggests one look to the forms of representation that order elements within the system/network—it is possible to say that this tension is in fact between a 'professional' mode, and an 'organisational' mode of accounting. Each mode comprises different systems of notation and communication, and each gives rise to rather different rules and relationships. The professional mode is productive of a subject who 'sees', and who is seen as an object (by herself, and her supervisor, for example), but in ways that are qualitatively different from the subject/object relationship in the latter mode. In the professional mode, the subject/object relationship is mediated by an array of ethical questions (for example: 'have I followed the provisions of the Act?'; 'have I followed the appropriate ethical provisions in the Code?'; 'how will my supervisor respond to my report on this matter?').

This would therefore seem to be productive of a mode of accounting that is, as Law suggests, distributed across time in ways that are not easily predicted or explained from a single point. In the organisational mode the precise opposite applies: centralised databases can be seen as 'panoptic' systems, to the extent that they create a single point of vision from which dispersed and variable

phenomena can be drawn together, compared, and then 'managed' on the basis of that singular vision. The subject who records information is therefore an object of regularity ('is this person complying with established categories and with timeliness standards?', 'am I categorising this according to established standards?'). In the professional mode, there is the possibility of a kaleidoscopic vision, a chameleon-like collage of irregularity, whereas in the organisational mode there is a line of convergence, focus and regularity.

What is at stake in testing this hypothesis is the development of a framework for analysing the effect of computerised information systems on the skills and capacities of social work staff, and on the relations of power more generally between this group of professional workers and their managers. In this way it is possible to assess the effect of computerised information systems on professional autonomy in a practical way, instead of resorting to arguments about ideology and 'dehumanisation'. Law's concept of a 'mode of accounting' offers a starting point, which helps us consider the extent to which the standardisation of the 'codification' of case material works to also standardise the exercise of judgement.

The following section now moves to consider the notion of various forms of competence—including the skills of self-mastery—as an outcome of particular forms of investment.

3.4 Framework number two: 'investment in forms'

In "Rules and implements: investment in forms" (1984), Thévenot develops a concept of investment that joins the cultural with the economic and the organisational, describing the productive relationships between systems of signification—which he calls 'code forms'—and patterns of economic investment. He argues that traditional notions of investment neglect the less visible discursive shaping of the practices, habits and trainings required in organisational contexts where close personal relationships are essential. His objective is to provide a means of accounting for the investment in those forms (in codified systems and routines relying on standardisation and categorisation) that "are usually abandoned to other disciplines because they are thought of as 'symbolic'" (1984: 3). It would therefore seem to be particularly useful for clarifying the differences between the elements of the two modes of accounting proposed in the last section—the professional and the organisational—in terms of their 'investment value' and their effectiveness in achieving a balance of trust and control in working relations between social workers and their managers—and indeed for conceiving of autonomy as a material artefact.

Thévenot argues that traditional studies of economics focus far more on fixed assets, on immobilised capital, on 'sacrificed consumption', at the expense of things less visible. His concern is that failure to account for non-financial investments may cause 'grave inadequacies' in firms where "investment in forms is more decisive than investment in plant determining performance" (1984: 3). As a solution Thévenot proposes to use the term 'form' to denote the shape given something by the establishment of a recognised coding system. In an organisational context, the status of a position or an activity is

'encoded'—and therefore made recognisable—by particular instruments such as written instructions, systems of measurement and job descriptions. The material or formal work practices of organisations are indeed 'form-giving' investments that can be characterised in terms of the temporal and spatial validity they achieve: investment in relations over time, as an "operation to establish a stable relation with a certain lifespan" (1984: 11); and in relations across geographical space, where "the larger the area of validity, the more likely it is that established forms will be interconnected and the greater the savings that may be expected from the investment" (1984: 13).

The term 'form' can be used to specify things (including practices, arrangements, objects and routines) that prescribe or shape conduct, which both have and bring about formal integrity and validity both through time and across space. These can be material objects, such as time clocks or machine tools—designed for very specific uses—or instructions, or rules of conduct. Forms, in this sense, are like laws: they are rigid and inflexible, with "the ability to resist efforts to distort, adjust or negotiate them" (1984: 10). But forms vary in their effect. A 'good' form is one that endures over time, and can be used to manage geographically dispersed activities. A 'good' form has force, reproduces states of relations between objects with a minimum of human intervention (*ibid*).

Economic theory also, in general, makes a clear distinction between investments and natural resources, between 'the water and the pail'. Investment is normally conceived of in terms of capital whose growth is, or can be, statistically measured. Capital is distinguished from consumer goods, whose value declines almost immediately after their purchase. In summary,

the conventional definition of investment excludes working capital, and only takes into account fixed assets and fixed capital. Thévenot's point is that the less material forms—including habits or rules of conduct—are also investments, and should be treated, and measured, as such. Investment cannot be conceived as having only a material form, like a machine. Economic analysis needs to account for labour as well as capital:

Because there is a need for articulation between the exploitation of the tools and the form-giving operations which make them function, there is every reason to put forward a definition of investment which can take account of all of these operations, whatever the material nature of the forms produced. From this point of view, it would appear that the most relevant way to conceive of an investment, which takes account both of the classical use of the term and the extension of its meaning, is a costly operation to establish a *stable relation with a certain lifespan* (1984: 11).

But lifespan is not sufficient to describe the effects of investment. Thévenot argues that one also needs to look at the *area of validity*:

a further characteristic which must be taken into account is the area over which a form is valid as well as the length of time for which it is valid. The larger the area of validity, the more likely it is that established forms will be interconnected and the greater the savings that may be expected from the investment (1984: 13).

The third dimension of the framework is concerned with the extent to which investment exists in the form of anonymous implements, and whether those implements are of a conventional technological kind, or of a legal, scientific or other nature. Where less formal equipment is available, then it will be more difficult for a form to be anonymous, "so that the form remains highly individualised and is sometimes even invested in a particular individual, which implies high maintenance costs in terms of personal time spent" (1984: 15). Organisations that depend on interpersonal relations, such as hospitals, schools and universities, only function well if individuals see each other

frequently. Individual investments require more time to establish, for example the time spent in training, in developing habits and relationships. In those contexts, 'breakdowns' in the form of poor communication, poor performance or staff turnover are not easily turned around without mechanisms for codifying performance. "Because no comparable equipment is available, such relations cannot easily cease to be individual ... [and] ... personal relations can only be handed on if a general institutional objectification takes place" (1984: 15-16).

In his discussion Thévenot focuses in particular on the writing of Frederick Taylor, arguing that Taylor's principles for empirically measuring the minutiae of work practices established a radical model of the company, which presupposed that the company controls every investment—every instrument available to the company, including labour—that is relevant to the use of the workforce. Taylor's *Scientific Management* is a handbook for managers who were anxious to appropriate even the means of judgement previously held by labour, "a work intended to produce a set of systematic and unified rules out of a collection of disparate habits" (1984: 8). In Thévenot's terms, scientific management is a repertoire of 'form-giving instruments'—including plans, formulae, ways of giving instructions, methods of payment, sets of principles and forms of advice—which accomplishes that objective.

Thévenot notes that in Taylor's 'scientific management' the elaboration of the task is the key that makes possible the elementary coding of each individual employee's actions. "It is a stable form that is equipped by means of written instructions valid throughout the company which have nothing to do with the qualities which make up the individual employee's identity" (1984: 16). In

other words, the task is divorced from the individual, in order to objectify and carry forward management's interest in the productivity of labour.

What is the upshot of Thévenot's framework for studies of expert labour? His argument speaks to the need for a cultural perspective in economic analyses of management. He recognises the forms of investment made in personal behaviours, suggesting the management of work practices ought to be seen as an investment in discursive practices for ensuring compliance, not simply through interdiction but also through the shaping of conduct. His argument provides an opportunity to consider the development of computerised information systems as a *recodification* of procedures for rendering the conduct of professional work visible, and communicable. Indeed from the discussion in this and the previous section, it is reasonable to argue that 'modes of accounting' are indeed an 'investment' in particular 'form-giving' apparatus, which has certain effects (on relationships, on competence, on communication, on knowledge, etc) that are not immediately apparent.

If one accepts the theoretical premise that management constantly seeks new means for dispensing with labour, or at least for transforming discretionary judgement into an objective and more easily observable code form, then Thévenot's framework helps us see information systems as just such a means. This is a framework for analysing the development of information systems as a codification that acts as a machine does in respect of raw or manufactured materials, that helps "reproduce, with the minimum of human intervention, a state of relations between standard objects" (1984: 10). Longhand notation forms part of a series of techniques centred on the knowledge and competence

of the writer. Standardised forms, on the other hand, de-centre that knowledge and competence, or at least translate it into an altogether different form.

3.5 Discussion

So far this Chapter has tabled a framework of key terms and concepts. It offers a brief review of the following: Foucault's work on power/knowledge relations and governmentality (§3.2.1); the basic assumptions of actor-network theory (ANT) (§3.2.2); Law's notion of the 'mode of accounting' (§3.3); and Thévenot's concept of 'investment in forms' (§3.4). Together, this provides a conceptual framework that generates two particular insights: first, information collection is more than a routine capture of the already known, but rather a *crucial part of the ordering of elements within a network*; and second, autonomy can be seen as *discursively constructed and regulated*, rather than simply an ideal mode of being.

These insights are helpful in engaging with what can be seen as a coupling of political authority with techniques of self-construction and self-regulation—which Foucault calls 'governmentality'. This in turn enables an appreciation of the role and function of computerised information systems in programs of managerial accounting, and helps us see the key role that accounting techniques play in 'constructing the governable person'.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ This term is taken from Miller & O'Leary, whose purpose—apart from teasing out the histories of theories of standard costing and budgeting in the early years of the twentieth century—is "to suggest some elements of a theoretical understanding of accounting which would locate it in its interrelation with other projects for the social and organisational management of individual lives" (1987: 235).

The previous Chapter noted that functionalist and revisionist paradigms on professionalism view autonomy as associated with an original, or pre-social, human essence. Both functionalist and revisionist approaches assume 'autonomy' is a space for exercising discretionary judgement. One views that space as a necessary adjunct to professional work, providing the kind of creative independence that scientific or technical enquiry needs to function effectively. The other sees it as a key plank in a professional ideology that legitimates social status, and controls access to markets for service. The focus on concepts of function and structure assumes a kind of essential professionalism, devoid of historical development. These paradigms appear to turn on two sides of the one coin: either the humanist notion of an essential social good, or the structuralist notions of market ideology and capitalist exploitation.

Both functionalist and revisionist paradigms conceive of autonomy as a space outside of market relations, to be held onto because it provides opportunities to realise opposition. Consider, for example, how Henry Giroux writes about changes in higher education:

higher education represents the possibility of retaining one important democratic public sphere that offers the conditions for resisting the increasing depoliticisation of the citizenry, provides a language to challenge the politics of accommodation that connects education to the logic of privatisation, refuses to define students as simply consuming subjects, and actively opposes the view of teaching as market-driven practice and learning as a form of training (2002).

Giroux writes in opposition to the 'encroachment of corporate power' and its attendant new educational technologies, without considering how his privileged position—as an educated and independent scholar—was constituted through a particular relationship between available markets and

previously dominant educational technologies. His position echoes the call of Durkheim and Tawney for the enhancement of professionalism as a space for resisting laissez faire liberalism, and echoes also the concerns of those revisionists and labour process theorists writing about proletarianisation. What is needed now, to deal with this problem of the apparent convergence of these positions is to try to understand professional knowledge and discretionary autonomy not simply as properties of a structured system of closure—where utilitarian knowledge provides the resources for monopolising markets and maintaining relative status—but as an outcome of a particular form of governmental rationality.

The governmental approach, summarised above, makes available alternative tools for conceiving of writing/recording techniques as productive of certain capacities. It opens up the possibility of understanding the minutiae of professional communication as a site where practical work undertaken 'on the self' assists in regulating the conditions and outcomes of professional autonomy. The concepts tabled here shift the focus of analysis away from structure and function towards material capacities, which are seen as outcomes of a cultural training that occurs at the level of what Foucault calls the 'microphysics of power', through an array of techniques for documenting, verifying and assessing client circumstances that are then used to classify, arrange, interpret and order those circumstances in the form of individual 'cases'.

In other words, autonomy is understood as socially and culturally produced, and regulated through the deployment of what Foucault and others have called 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988a). The reciprocal relationship

between political rationalities and the various 'technologies' of government—including those we apply to our selves—is nicely captured in Miller and Rose's (1990) notion of discourse as a 'technology of thought'. Language both articulates government—its objectives, rationales and strategies—but is then also continuously reshaped by various programs of government. Miller and Rose use the term 'language' to include much more than vocabulary, or published texts. For them, and for others working with the legacy of Foucault, the analysis of the relationship between language and government requires "attention to the particular technical devices of writing, listing, numbering and computing that render a realm into discourse as a knowable, calculable and administrable object" (1990: 5). Language here is much more than 'meaning', but rather the mechanisms for rendering reality amenable to decision making and action (Fairclough, 1992: 65-66).

The 'language' of recording is obviously important in any organisational context because it is a crucial site for reconciling competing frameworks and objectives. Recording, in whatever form it takes, is a locus of organisational actors' attempts to 'tell the truth' of their workplace, and to use that truth in the formation of what they see as appropriate policies and procedures. In a specifically cultural sense (in relation to the production and circulation of frameworks for making sense) recording, and the individual records and reports produced by any given system, is a practical achievement of knowledge and procedure—or what Smith (1990) calls 'an accomplishment of an extended organisational process'. Recording takes the form of codified steps for making completed work visible, for objectifying and standardising aspects of work in ways that render it at least partially independent of individuals.

Recording is never merely an index or representation of the reality of completed work, and this has perhaps never been so clear as it is now, where the computerisation of information systems (which attempt to capture various elements of the process and outcome of labour) are at the centre of attempts to make or to transform not only institutional structures and relations but also 'responsibilise' actors in new ways (Miller, 1994a). Recording constitutes a critical site for the development of networks through which aspects of labour can now also be objectified, standardised and accounted for, and also—crucially—made visible and amenable to managerial calculation and intervention.

Autonomy is not simply an empty space into which knowledge and action can be poured, as liquid fills and takes on the shape of a container. Professional autonomy is, instead, shaped and constituted by discourse, by institutional languages, and political practices and objectives. As Fournier notes, professional knowledge (which might now be read as the 'texts and technologies of expert work'), articulate the subject positions of professionals:

Professionals are the target of professional rationality, they are both the governor and the governed. As Gordon argues, the activity of government is 'interdependent with the government of self, on the part of the *ruler* and the ruled alike' (1999: 285).⁶⁵

Indeed, ethical professional character can be seen as a vehicle for the deployment of technologies for governing what Foucault calls the 'conduct of conduct' (1982: 220-221). To so govern is to regulate the limits of possible action *at a distance*, where the exercise of power is always "a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being

⁶⁵ Fournier quotes Gordon (1991: 12). The emphasis is Fournier's.

capable of action" (1982: 220).⁶⁶ Such an 'analytics of power' presumes human agency to be a practical accomplishment of social relations—of the things people do in concert with others—rather than simply an already existing primary consciousness or a secondary effect determined by underlying social or economic structures. It looks for the means by which social actors acquire the capacity to make decisions and to act upon them (Hindess, 1986). It does not assume those actions to be expressive of an essential human character, or ultimately constrained by economic structures, but looks for evidence of technical complexity and local variation. Hirst and Woolley note the difference between this approach, and Althusser's version of structuralist Marxism:

He [Althusser] conceives social relations as totalities, as a whole governed by a single determinative principle. This whole must be consistent with itself and must subject all agents and relationships within its purview to its effects. We on the other hand consider social relations as aggregates of institutions, forms of organisation, practices, and agents which do not answer to any single causal principle or logic of consistency, which can and do differ in form and which are not all essential one to another (1982: 134).

Dean argues a similar point, in relation to the question of 'shifting' ends and outcomes, acknowledging the possibility of contingency and resistance:

Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for

⁶⁶ Note also that this term has been popularised by Bruno Latour's concept of 'action at a distance', which was then appropriated and extended by Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose in relation to the 'technologies' of advanced liberalism. Miller and Rose argued that analysis of the mentalities of modern government needed to free itself from an exclusive focus on 'the state', which provided only a restricted conception of the technical/political possibilities available to authorities more generally. They proposed instead a focus on 'intellectual technologies'—the coupling of various forms of expertise with techniques of inscription, notation and calculation—which "increasingly seek to act upon and instrumentalise the self-regulating propensities of individuals in order to ally them with socio-political objectives" (1990: 28).

definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes (1999: 11).⁶⁷

Foucault was not interested in the workings of complete subjugation—as in the mode of power that produces slavery—but in the regulation of individual and collective agency through ‘modes of action’ which “act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others” (Foucault, 1982: 221). This notion of power implies freedom, but not simply freedom *from* coercion. It implies the possibility of freedom where the shape of conduct and the basis of capacity building are always ‘at stake’, always contested and contestable—in short, always political. It implies the possibility of rationality and reason, conflict and resistance on the basis of a ‘counter politics’. It invites practical description and critical theoretical analyses of the mechanisms (or technologies) that have been developed for collecting information, generating knowledge and making calculations in ways that draw on, but also constitute, the capacities of self-regulating subjects. The ‘right to strike’, for example, refers to an array of technical, legal and political rules and conventions, as much as it does to the cultural appreciation and performance of the notion of an essential conflict between labour and capital. There is no singular right, written in a straightforward fashion, which sanctions or guarantees the action of withdrawing one’s labour. The opportunity and the capacity to do so are

⁶⁷ Note how the final phrase—“relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes”—suggests the importance of considering how techniques are developed, how innovation and change proceeds, and how this is negotiated by different parties.

always subject to negotiation, always under threat, as can be seen in recent debates about industrial relations in Australia.⁶⁸

The notional spaces of professional autonomy, as conceived in the academic rhetoric of professional disciplines, have traditionally been seen as regulated and made accountable through collegial mechanisms invented by those disciplines, and maintained at a safe distance *beyond government*: technical and critical education, collegial supervision, peer review, linked recording formats, ethical codes and related enforcement mechanisms. However if these are considered in the light of Dean's (1999) definition, 'spaces' of autonomy are clearly vehicles *for* government, and should not be read simply as spaces of *freedom from* governmental control.

Foucault's particular notions of discourse, power and the subject are not posed here as a complete substitute for other theoretical reflections on the relationship between expert labour, managerial power and technologies of information and control. This work does not assume that the kinds of studies referred to in Chapter Two have nothing useful to say, and no capacity for responding to the political challenges of the modern (professional) workplace. Those studies, indeed, have meaningful application in relation to the particular

⁶⁸ Consider, for example, debates about the Workplace Relations Amendment (Better Bargaining) Bill, introduced by the Howard government in 2003. That Bill, which was subsequently defeated in the Senate, was aimed at further limiting the situations under which industrial action could be considered 'protected action'. It seems likely that that Bill—and many others like it—will be reintroduced, after the Liberal National Coalition government gains control of both houses of Parliament in July 2005, (AIG, 2004). Indeed, Kevin Andrews (the current Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations), used the rhetoric of 'national interest' when he signalled the government's intentions in a speech to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia. Andrews likened the current government's industrial relations agenda to that of the 'founding fathers' of the conciliation and arbitration system in the early twentieth century. They aspired, he said, to: "...usher in a new province for law and order ... [so that] conciliation, with arbitration in the background, is substituted for the rude and barbarous processes of strike and lockout ... all in the interests of the public" (Andrews, 2005).

political and economic events and processes that led to the disposition of professional labour as it is now practised, in a range of institutions: in the formation of state policies, the development of various forms of professional association, the growth of modern bureaucracies and the professionalisation of labour into/within their ranks, and the historical development of markets for service. What Foucault offers, instead, is a notion of autonomy as a product of power, and therefore a particular perspective on how professionalism intersects, or overlaps, with a form of government that is not possible to speak of in terms of "ideal necessities, one-way determinations or the free-play of individual initiatives" (Foucault, 1991b: 70). A 'cultural approach' to studies of professional work can provide insights into communication and representation as productive of power relations, of knowledge and identity, rather than simply as means towards the transmission of information and/or the generation of knowledge.

In summary, the notion of self-mastery (or, the capacity to effectively align one self with professional norms, sometimes in conflict with organisational or managerial objectives) appears to be inadequately theorised in recent debates about the nature of professionalism. Those debates, still drawing on the legacy of Braverman's (1974) thesis of deskilling, tend to focus on the extent to which managers and policy makers have been able, either through automation or through quality control measures, to 'dilute' or to challenge the 'leeway' of professional autonomy. Autonomy in this sense is treated as a protected space for the exercise of human judgement, rather than as an ensemble of practices that work to constitute subjects as responsible agents. While it is conceived purely as either freedom from administrative control or oversight, or as an ideological effect, it leaves aside the significance of the means by which

personal and collective agency—that is, capacities for self-regulation and independent action—are practically, *materially*, constituted. It leaves aside the ways in which professional work, through the deployment of what Foucault calls ‘technologies of the self’, routinely articulates a mode of thought and action with the aims and objectives of authorities. As Fournier notes:

being a professional is not merely about absorbing a body of scientific knowledge but is also about conducting and constituting oneself in an appropriate manner ... Through the notion of competence, truth and knowledge are translated into a code of appropriate conduct which serves to construct the subjectivity of the professional practitioner. Truth governs not by controlling directly the acts (or even the knowledge) of the professional practitioner but by making sure that the practitioner is the sort of person who can be trusted with the truth (1999: 287).

The rest of this thesis, therefore, responds to the core question—‘what is the effect of computerisation on worker autonomy?’—assuming that an historical and empirical description of techniques and skills of inscription are more helpful in studying the effects of any given technology than are broad explanations based on structural or cultural factors located elsewhere. As Latour notes, the most powerful explanations are those that are “both material and mundane, since they are so practical, so modest, so pervasive, so close to the hands and the eyes that they escape attention” (1990: 21). He argues for a strategy of ‘deflation’, rejecting grand schemes and broad conceptual dichotomies, in favour of a focus on “simple modifications in the way in which groups of people argue with one another using paper, signs, prints and diagrams” (1990: 21). As a consequence of their essential humanism (the assumption of a fundamental space of human freedom that exists *prior to* the historical materiality of social relations) traditional sociological approaches to professionalism focus first and foremost on autonomy as a territory of freedom, which has an essential governing principle lurking behind it that

relates to either social function or ideology. The alternative, developed in this Chapter, is to consider autonomy as a practical capacity for action, an outcome of techniques of power. In this sense one should therefore expect 'autonomy' to change as a consequence of any shift in the network of relations between human actors, recording techniques and apparatus, and forms of organisation.

3.6 Conclusion

The previous Chapter reviewed available paradigms for understanding professionalism, and in particular their capacity to deal with the impact of computerisation on the discretionary exercise of autonomous judgement. The conclusion of that Chapter was that functionalist and revisionist paradigms provide limited tools for describing and analysing how and whether skills of self-mastery have any meaning within the framework of managers/authorities, because it relies substantially on a humanist view of power. In that view, knowledge provides either a platform for expertise to pursue socially valued ends, or else it provides the means by which elite groups secure monopoly control over markets for service. Power, within these approaches, is seen as a matter of substance—and generally is viewed as negative, imposing itself on and constraining the limits of autonomy—rather than as productive of subjective attributes.

Simplistic appeals to autonomy and disinterestedness generally take one of two forms: autonomy is either an essential ideal (or 'standard'), or an essentially unattainable and imaginary falsehood. In either case, autonomy is presented as though it pre-exists the mundane reality of social relations. This is a position that can only serve—although often with the best intentions—to

manufacture further ignorance of the practical material base of governmental programs, and to "divorce ourselves from the sphere of political rationality shaping our future" (Hunter, 1989: 19).⁶⁹

In order to understand more fully the alleged 'effects' of new managerialism on professional autonomy, this Chapter has considered Foucault's arguments about the relationship between knowledge and power, and discussed some of the principles of ANT used to describe and analyse the material integration of human and non-human agency. Together with Law's concept of 'mode of accounting' and Thévenot's 'investment in forms', these concepts provide an analytical framework for making sense of the changing communication practices that make up accounting systems in professional contexts. Through this framework it is possible to see 'new managerialism' as not simply false ideology (as already-developed knowledge) conceived at an executive level and then generalised across and down through an existing hierarchy, but rather a banner term for technologies of accounting that have supplanted (or are, at least, in the process of doing so) previous technologies, which is called here a professional mode of accounting. To understand the process of 'translation' and its effects it will be necessary to look at several things: at the dilemmas that drove developers to consider the automation of information systems; at what computers have enabled and required their users to do; at what responses users have made to the imperatives of inventors, managers and computer systems alike; and at what capacities have been lost and/or acquired in the process.

⁶⁹ This thesis works in parallel with Hunter's concern to see a productive engagement with governmental rationalities, rather than a wilful—although well-intentioned—ignorance of their practical material base.

The conclusion of the Chapter, in summary, is that autonomy is best seen as a capacity for action, for engaging *in* politics (in any context, including – for the purposes of this thesis – the workplace) rather than simply as an expression of an original space of freedom *beyond* politics. Rather than speak of freedom in terms of principled or moral values, it is necessary to be able to 'value' it as a material capacity grounded in forms of training.⁷⁰ The notion of autonomy as grounded in ethical capacity provides an alternative to a notion of autonomy as a bounded space of ideal freedom.

In order to understand more precisely the nature of conflicts over control of professional labour (of the content and/or the conduct of work), and to develop appropriate tools for engaging in those conflicts, it is important to include some consideration of the relationship between worker/reader and text/technology, in a way that acknowledges self knowledge and autonomy as technical accomplishments. Such consideration should examine how it is that the automated 'writing' of work provides opportunities for reconstituting the subjective self of the professional worker, and how this is tied directly to re-regulating the conduct of working relationships that make up the modern workplace.⁷¹

⁷⁰ In forms of training which, for the purposes of this thesis, the ensemble of social work's communication practices form a substantial locus.

⁷¹ A useful link can be made here, between this study of work in organisations and larger political and economic debates in the 1980s and 1990s, about the extent and role of state regulation. The debates about 'deregulation' of economic structures, entities and practices were in fact about forms of 'self regulation', about the development of reporting lines and accountability systems which enabled state institutions to maintain a kind of 'hands off' approach, but at the same time be able to manage *from a distance*. The fact that this failed in some particularly notorious cases does not, one must suspect, undermine the general argument that the dismantling of state institutions was in fact an extension of their influence, by other means than direct control. For a further discussion of the relationship between state and 'non-state' political and economic institutions see Rose & Miller (1992).

The purpose of this Chapter has been to indicate that power, knowledge and technology are inseparable in the final analysis: technology, in this sense, is always 'fully social', always drawing on but also productive of knowledge (Williams, 1981). Far greater attention needs to be given to the *technical* nature of power: the means by which some alignment between the aims and objectives of authorities, and the capacities and actions of social actors, is sought and achieved; and the means by which strategies of resistance are formulated, and enacted. The Chapter has therefore sought to map out a framework for analysing professional autonomy as a site for the deployment of certain 'technologies of the self'—*a la* Foucault, *et al.* It indicates how this concept has been used in other contexts, and how it might be used to understand professional work.

The concept of 'modes of accounting' provides a particularly useful route into analysing the introduction of computerised information systems as a vehicle for developing new techniques for regulating relations of trust and control, in the context of forms of expert labour that do not automatically submit to the principle of managerial prerogative. Likewise, it can be seen as an investment in a new 'code form', in a new system of signification that makes possible the standardisation (and therefore greater regulation) of an ethical/professional disposition to act autonomously.

This responds to what is lacking in humanist and structuralist studies of professionalism: the capacity to theorise autonomy as constituted, at least in part, through technologies (knowledge and practice) working at the personal level, as well as the structural level. What now remains to be seen is how, and

to what extent, new technological apparatuses are negotiated. How do they displace, or add to, or otherwise amend, existing arrangements?

The analytical frameworks tabled here offer a concrete opportunity to examine what happens to that subject as the nature of the cultural apparatus of work shifts, as technologies of organisation and communication, management and information, are changed and redeveloped. Chapter Five uses the various concepts raised within this Chapter—power as relational, knowledge as discourse, and subjectivity as materially constituted—to trace the history of communication and representation in social work practice, in order to determine what has counted as 'social work discourse', or more particularly a 'professional mode of accounting'. The conclusion is that discursive practices in social work can be seen as supporting the production of a professional mode of accounting whose main locus is the practical skills of self-mastery. The objective of Chapter Six will then be to consider how the development of centrally controlled information systems constitute an alternative (organisational) mode of accounting, and how this impacts on the formation/construction of a capacity for discretionary judgement.

But in the first instance, Chapter Four now moves to define, briefly, the impact of new managerialism on work in the Australian Public Service, and then to consider the response of social work commentators to its particular effects on social work.

CHAPTER FOUR

Responding to new managerialism

- 4.1 Introduction
 - 4.2 What is 'new managerialism'?
 - 4.3 Social work's response: the Weberian dialectic
 - 4.4 Social work as an extension of juridical power
 - 4.5 Conclusion
-

4.1 Introduction

As already outlined in previous Chapters, this dissertation describes and analyses the impact of new computerised information systems on professional autonomy, in the particular discipline of social work. It asks what is made possible by the computerisation of information systems, and it asks this in preference to the kinds of questions (what do automated information systems do *to* us, or what do authorities do *with* them?) routinely inspired by a determinist view of social relations and technological change. It focuses on the extent to which computerised recording has made possible new strategies of management, which change existing routines and relationships of accountability (or 'modes of accounting'—see §3.2), which (re)structure the possible field of action of (and thereby challenge the scope for discretionary judgement exercised by) social workers. It uses a governmental approach (outlined in §3) to make sense of changing relations of power in contemporary social work, focusing on the particular question of autonomy. What kind of autonomy have social workers actually enjoyed in practice? How does autonomy fit with the objectives of public sector managers, as a result of the

reforms of the 1980s and 1990s? What impact has the computerisation of information systems had on that notional freedom of expertise called 'autonomy'? What kinds of the imperatives have been created by the apparently irresistible logic of computerised screen flows?

This Chapter begins the task of spelling out some of the background debates about managerialism in the human/social services, in order to open the door in the following two Chapters to further discussion of the 'tide of managerialism' so often noted in the literature. It briefly summarises key aspects of the development of new managerialism, as it occurred in the Australian Public Service (APS) during the 1980s and 1990s. Further detail of that development, as it affected Centrelink specifically, is taken up in Chapter Six. The purpose here is to provide some sense of the commentary published in response to new managerialism in the APS during the last twenty years.

From this summary it proposes that the dominant mode of commentary on new managerialism, within social work and social policy literature in particular, has been framed principally by philosophical notions of value and principle that effectively disable further consideration of the complex and protracted processes of development, of the material—and often unpredictable—consequences of computerisation, and of the formation of strategies to deal with those consequences.

The balance of this Chapter is in three sections. First, it summarises the particular objectives of new managerialism in terms of its focus on autonomy and responsibility at the local/program level. Second, it briefly notes examples of the commentary on new managerialism, published in the critical literature on social work and social administration, and then discusses the assumptions

on which it rests—assumptions that constitute what can best be described as a kind of 'disabling dialectic' in which the possibility of resistance, of maintaining some kind of practical and meaningful autonomy, amounts to a matter of 'all or nothing'. Third, it then offers an outline of an alternative analytical strategy, suggesting the ethics of self-mastery as a primary focus for further analysing the renegotiation of power/knowledge relations in the social work workplace, in which change is no longer a radical 'all or nothing', but rather a negotiated translation.

4.2 What is 'new managerialism'?

'New managerialism' is a term generally used to refer to the application of a variety of business management practices to the administration of public services: formal processes of planning and review, budgeting, purchaser-provider contracting, and the development of sophisticated audit and communications functions. The tasks of setting priorities, delivering services and assessing outcomes in the Australian public service are now shaped by a series of taken-for-granted imperatives: increased productivity, greater efficiency and transparent accountability. These are the key 'maxims' of new managerialism, which have been generated by the practical and technical knowledges of accounting and management that have become thoroughly accepted at all levels of public service agencies.

The stock phrases used to introduce the topic in the policy literature that have chronicled its development—'let the managers manage', and 'managing for results'—indicate that this has been a process by which public sector bureaucracies have been challenged to revise traditional hierarchies and

procedures around principles of delegation, devolution, competition and accountability. In general terms 'new managerialism' points to an extended revision of a range of administrative practices and principles, which radically altered relationships between the executive, government departments, service agencies and citizens.⁷²

There is sometimes a degree of confusion between the terms 'new managerialism' and 'economic rationalism'. While the latter refers more to the economic belt-tightening signalled by the term 'doing more with less', which occurred in response to the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s⁷³, new managerialism can be seen as a process of political and procedural reform which occurred in response to calls for more 'accountable government'.⁷⁴

In the introduction to their edited collection of critical essays on this topic, Considine and Painter summarise new managerialism as a 'standard package' of reforms, which most levels of government (federal, state and local) adopted. These reforms included:

comprehensive corporate planning based on centrally determined goals;
comprehensive program budgets in which resources were allocated
according to policy and management goals; management improvement

⁷² For a review of the various dimensions of change in public sector policy making and service delivery, see O'Faircheallaigh, Wanna & Weller (1999). See especially the reproduction of Mike Codd's comparative table 'Changing demands facing a senior public sector manager' (pp.5-7).

⁷³ This short-changes the term somewhat, but only for the sake of brevity. The connection between the terms is intricate, and a fuller discussion would include reference to successive programs of corporatisation and privatisation. The latter, in particular, was (and still is) part of an attempt to reduce the practical administration of government, to reduce public debt and to satisfy the ideological claims of the conservative right, in successive ALP and Liberal National Coalition governments.

⁷⁴ These calls were repeated in a range of policy contexts: in major government reviews (such as the Royal Commission into Australian Government Administration (RCAGA) in 1976), and in the development of administrative appeal mechanisms (including the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT) and the Freedom of Information (FOI) mechanisms established in the 1980s) and consumer protection legislation. For a useful summary and chronology of key changes in the APS, see <http://www.apf.gov.au/library/pubs/chron/2002-03/03chr01.htm>.

programs in which private sector management theories and private sector managers were identified as the model for public service improvement; creation of a defined rank of senior managers subject to forms of contract employment which limited their tenure while increasing management authority over programs; and increased accountability for financial management of programs through new forms of central audit, review, and performance monitoring of individuals and organisations (Considine & Painter, 1997: 3).

In summary, the mechanisms adopted during this period provided for greater central control over planning and review, but they also provided mechanisms to enable middle level managers to take more responsibility for 'achieving results' at a local level. In this sense the reforms can be seen as a curious mix of centralising and decentralising policies and technologies: centralising in the sense of mechanisms for developing greater central knowledge of and capacity to influence program outcomes; but decentralising in the sense of new techniques for enabling greater delegation of responsibility for the conduct and outcomes of publicly funded programs.⁷⁵

Why and how did this happen? Clarke & Newman argue that the New Right attacks on welfare state bureau-professionalism, which occurred from the 1970s onwards, were essentially anti-statist (1997: 15-16). The institutions of the welfare state had been labelled a cause of national decline. In tandem with 1960s and 1970s laissez-faire liberalism it was seen by some as "undermining personal responsibility and family authority and as prone to trendy excesses such as egalitarianism, anti-discrimination policies, moral relativism or child-centredness" (1997: 15). The New Right called into question the neutrality and

⁷⁵ Michael Keating goes so far as to make a link between devolution and staff morale, when he argues that through the former, departments "sought to achieve a much better integration of policy development with policy implementation and a much closer relationship between authority and responsibility. Once individual public servants have established a clearer understanding of what is expected from them, and are accordingly made accountable for the results they achieve, their work is made more meaningful and more satisfying" (1990: 387).

disinterestedness of the forms of expertise previously accepted as offering solutions to the forms of social dislocation caused by two world wars and a major economic depression, all in the space of thirty years.

Pusey (1991) argues that a process of ideologically driven personnel selection adopted in the APS was the central force that enabled the attack on Australian state institutions. His now classic argument is that the bearers of the discipline of economics, drawn principally from the private schools of Sydney and Melbourne, entrenched a conservative view at the most senior levels of the public service. O'Faircheallaigh, Wanna and Weller echo this view when they comment on the forms of knowledge which gained currency in Australian government decision making during the 1980s: it was during this period, they argue, that economists effectively displaced other forms of expertise:

In the 1980s almost all economists argued that market forces were more likely to achieve efficiency in the provision of services than government choice or intervention. As that principle became widely accepted within the economics profession, so some policy instruments were developed as a natural consequence: user-pay provisions, privatisation, contracting services out, the concept that citizens were purchasers of services, lower tariffs and less government assistance (1999: 77).

Returning to the immediate topic—the effect of computerised information systems on autonomy in professional work—it is important to ask two questions. First, what have been the implications of new managerialism for professional staff in the APS? Second, what role has 'information'—as a commodity, and as a series of collection, storage and distribution practices—played in the development of these arrangements?

With regard to the first question, Wilson (1999) describes the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s as a series of structural changes that transferred resources to

the private sector, downsized public sector workforces, and imposed market disciplines (including flexible work contracts) on public sector employees across the board. On the basis of data from the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS) of 1995, Wilson argues that the duration and intensity of reorganisation led to work intensification, and caused public sector workers to report declining work satisfaction and a strong sense of insecurity about the future of their work (1999: 130-132).

Minson (1998), in a discussion of the changing 'ethic of service' in Australian public service, summarises a series of changes with particular implications for professionalism: outsourcing and job rotation, and other measures to ensure 'flexibility' in the management of both human and financial resources; a corresponding 'explosion' of audit functions; a continuous recodification of standards (of 'service', for example); the introduction of change management, risk management and performance management routines; competency-based training; and all against the background of a general shift of emphasis away from process, to results.

On this last point, O'Faircheallaigh, Wanna & Weller discuss the dichotomy between previous normative notions of vocational professionalism and the 'can-do' nature of new managerialism that now applies in the public sector. They argue that the latter has a greater commitment to competency-based training, team building and teamwork, performance assessment, contracting and outsourcing, and has substantially displaced the former:

In place of 'independent' values, staff are required to be responsive, malleable and driven by immediate political priorities. ... [They are also required to] lose some of their anonymity as they become much more personally identifiable and accountable for their outputs and

performance, especially when competing as internal business units (1999: 147).

With regard to the second question (what role has 'information'—as a commodity, and as a series of collection, storage and distribution practices—played in the development of these arrangements?) it is reasonable to argue that the automation of information systems was a key driver of the reforms that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s. During the course of the 1980s successive federal and state governments embarked on a series of key procedural and technical reforms, which involved the collection and communication of financial and other program information. One of the key platforms of reform at a federal level was the Financial Management Improvement Plan (FMIP), implemented in 1984.⁷⁶ The FMIP introduced the concept of program management into general practice, requiring departments to introduce reforms in budget formulation and decision-making. These reforms enabled devolution of responsibility for policy outcomes. Stewart notes that the FMIP gave agency managers and departmental managers greater freedom to adjust savings and losses at two different levels: at the level of expenditure control, through the revision of budget processes, and at the level of the individual program via program management budgeting (1999: 253). Expenditure control measures required the development of sophisticated budgetary forecast systems, which had three key consequences: information about trends and priorities could be fed into formulae for arriving at three year budget estimates; the collection of information about staff and capital costs became a much higher managerial priority; and ultimately the objective

⁷⁶ While the Department of Finance implemented elements of the FMIP in 1984, implementation of core elements was not completed until after the 1988/89 budget. See Stewart (1999: 252).

became an accumulation of savings over time, in the form of the 'efficiency dividend'.

Program management budgeting (or PMB) formed the operational side of the FMIP reforms. The aim of PMB was to provide local operational managers with greater control over financial and human resources, and therefore with more flexibility in their pursuit of specific policy objectives and priorities. PMB was described by the Department of Finance as providing a means by which budget allocations could be matched with strategic goals and objectives:

Programs can then form the basis for, on the one hand, allocations to operational units responsible for implementing strategy and, on the other, for parliamentary and public scrutiny of achievements against strategic objectives. Departmental program structures should, therefore, reflect the hierarchy of corporate goals and objectives and programs should provide the basic framework for strategic management and performance reporting by departments. In a very real sense, staff should feel they 'own' their programs and therefore be responsible for program performance (results) (FMIP Report, p.42, cited in Stewart, 1999: 254).

The FMIP and PMB effectively enabled an extraordinary restructuring of relationships between citizens, programs and governments. Programs became more 'responsive' to community needs, providing a 'human face' for government, and yet at the same time they could establish a greater sense of distance between themselves, government ministers and their departments.⁷⁷

These developments could not have occurred without the development of sophisticated computerised information systems. Information systems, and

⁷⁷ Centrelink is an excellent example of this development. The Department of Social Security (DSS) eventually became Centrelink in 1997, with an objective of providing "a more human face for government and a more efficient service for the citizens of Australia" (Vardon, 2002: 3). The planning and policy development functions of DSS were eventually taken up by the Department for Community Services. Service provision became the responsibility of a 'statutory authority' rather than a 'government department', which has a board of management that includes a majority of members drawn from the private sector.

ICTs more generally, have enabled more rapid accumulation of information at points of central administration, and likewise more rapid forms of communication with (and control over actions of) local actors commissioned to deliver public services. However it is important to note that in the literature on public policy developments during this period there is a relative lack of attention paid to the way in which the development of ICTs was a necessary pre-requisite for even being able to formulate, and certainly to implement, the series of reforms that constituted the FMIP and PMB.⁷⁸ One is left with the distinct impression that these reforms, and the various outcomes that have occurred, have been 'ideas-driven'. The alternative, discussed above in Chapter Three, is to look at change as a dynamic and continuous transformation of objectives, strategies and technologies, and that is precisely what the balance of this thesis proceeds to do. In order to proceed in that direction it is important to briefly consider how commentators in the field of social work and social administration have responded to the rhetoric and practice of public sector reform.

4.3 Social work's response: the Weberian dialectic

The application of private sector management techniques and administrative practices provoked a wide-ranging and extended debate in the literature on social work and social administration, from the mid 1980s through to the late 1990s. After more than two decades of major reform in social welfare policy making and service delivery (the rationalisation of public sector employment

⁷⁸ One notable exception is Bellamy & Taylor's *Governing in the Information Age* (1998), which explores whether new managerialism is a new form of management driven by or enabled by new ICTs, or whether it can be seen as independent of developments in new technology.

and contracting out of services, the introduction of competitive tendering for public funding, and the development of performance management schemes) social work feels threatened and marginalised.⁷⁹

The position adopted in this thesis, as already outlined, is that the impact of new managerialism on social work and social welfare programs needs to be assessed against the various historically developed relationships that have operated between particular forms of social work practice, the range of state instrumentalities funding or running social welfare programs, the political objectives of governments and the negotiated development of new information and communication technologies. However the critical response of commentators and educators in the domains of social and welfare work to 'new managerialism', and to the related deployment of computerised information technologies, has been framed largely within the language of humanist ideology critique (see §1.1). This draws substantially on a Weberian-style distinction between critical and instrumental values. While there are indeed significant texts dealing with managerialism as a set of techniques and practices,⁸⁰ the general thrust of much of the literature is premised on an

⁷⁹ See the following as an indication: Lymbery (2001), Hugman (1996), Dominelli (1996), Thompson (1992), and Benn (1991). Note that by the same token, the number of social and welfare workers has grown substantially in recent years. Statistics published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), drawn from the national census, indicate that in 1996 there were 7193 (or 40.5 per 100,000 population) social workers employed in the community services sector. By 2001 the number of social workers in that sector had grown to 9130 (48.0 per 100,000 population). In 1996 there were 6220 (or 35.0 per 100,000 population) welfare workers employed in the same sector, and by 2001 that number had grown to 8989 (47.0 per 100,000 population). Source: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/>, accessed 15.7.04.

⁸⁰ See for example Jones & May's *Working in Human Service Organisation* (1992). Chapter Eleven, "Beyond the managerialist agenda", includes a section on strategies and tactics for social and welfare workers, where the authors argue that a critical understanding of the concepts of efficiency and effectiveness needs to be supplemented by a knowledge of "how to participate in the ongoing organisational contest around the defining and assessing of efficiency and effectiveness" (397). This includes a selective use of the language and practice of planning and evaluation in circumstances which "might include negotiations with funding and regulatory bodies, defending the organisation, development of the public image of the organisation, and the initiation of organisational change and resistance processes" (398).

assumed dialectical opposition between the progressive ideals and values of the social work profession and the ideological preoccupation of public sector managers with small government, market freedom and personal choice. The relationship between professional workers and bureaucracies is therefore seen as necessarily conflicting.

This is a well-worn critical path, not peculiar to the social and welfare work disciplines. An example of how the argument runs in practice can be seen in an exchange that took place during the middle of the 1990s, when the late John Paterson—then secretary of the Victorian Department of Health and Community Services—publicly criticised the ignorance he saw betrayed in media reports about welfare funding cuts. He noted that:

production gains that would have been great news in an article about BHP or GMH were evidently not thought germane to government. This implies government is viewed primarily as the property of special interests, to be valued as their plaything. Any role as a source of services to the public is, at best, incidental (1994: 17).

The main thrust of Paterson's argument was concerned with Brian Burdekin's condemnation of Victoria's mental health system, delivered through what Paterson called a 'promotional barrage' in the media over the weeks preceding the release in late 1993 of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report on human rights and mental illness. Outraged by what he had seen in a tour of public mental health services in Victoria, Burdekin, the then Federal Human Rights Commissioner, expressed concern that health and community service departments were headed by accountants, remarking that when "the bean counters say 'we can't afford this', my answer to that is 'garbage'". But Paterson's response was that "at no stage did Burdekin

actually deal with costs and outlays, except to denounce efficiency measures and to endlessly repeat that more money was needed" (*ibid*).

In early 1994 comments by Paterson about Burdekin's 'towering moral fervour tottering on a scrappy anecdotal foundation in fact' provoked outrage from the Commissioner. He responded:

We seem to be getting to the point where human rights are taking a back seat—not that they ever had a front seat—in deference to a bunch of bureaucratic bean-counters. I am sick and tired of listening to people who believe the most important thing ... is getting the bottom line right and if we just adjust the economic levers accurately everything is going to be okay (*ibid*).

Paterson responded by arguing that the 'bean counters' were already working away trying to account for the 'systemic factors' that were selling short the mentally ill in Victoria. For him, Burdekin's criticisms were "nothing more than a convenient illustration of a belief system that virtually eliminated the possibility of coherent public discussion in the health and welfare fields" (*ibid*). The critics of structural financial reform within the Victorian health and welfare sector, who Paterson labelled 'the chattering classes', were ignorant of the fact that:

contemporary doctrine in Victoria unabashedly says the interest of patients and clients should be paramount. The privilege of being a provider should be contestable, and earned on the basis of the cost and quality of the offer. Those who link rights with open-ended budgets, total disregard of ordinary cost standards and the appeasement of union officials evidently have a tenuous commitment to democratic processes (*ibid*).

In a further example Webster draws on Pusey's study of the social and economic backgrounds of senior executive staff in the Canberra bureaucracy, which concluded that there was a direct relationship between their privileged

backgrounds, conservative political ideologies, and the perpetuation of economic inequality. Webster summarises thus:

Pusey maintained that the new economic rationalist bureaucrats lack the ethics and social insight possessed by the earlier generation of 'social democratic intellectuals' who staffed the public service in the 1970s. He established that these new bureaucrats grew up in privileged middle to upper class suburbs, attended the best schools in the country, were right wing, and preoccupied with economic utilitarian concerns at the expense of broader social principles. Their dispositions, if carried over into the policy area, suggested that they were likely to be individualistic, tough, anti-social and deficient in generosity (1995: 45).

She contrasts this managerial disposition with social work's professional commitment to, and advocacy for, 'social values'. The Australian economy, she says, is like a 'battleground of conflicting ideas, values and objectives', but it is the ideas that seem to really matter:

an understanding of the historical path and the ideas that sustain policy-making in Australia is necessary in order to challenge policies which clearly run counter to social work's professional commitment to the least advantaged members of our society (1995: 46).

Webster, and Burdekin in the previous example, both draw on the classic dehumanisation thesis, based in a Weberian-style distinction between critical and instrumental values, which assumes that techniques and practices of new managerialism are expressive of the 'vested interests' of a new managerial class. Debates about objectives and effects are then carried on at the level of ideas, rather than practice.

How is it possible to understand and move beyond this impasse? A first step is to consider how it has developed in the particular case of social work. A brief comparison of liberal and radical perspectives on the social work profession offers some indication of its history. The liberal view sees the profession as

providing a means for liberating groups and individuals from the worst consequences of capitalist social relations. Friedlander, for example, in describing the 'generic principles' of social work, argues optimistically that the profession bases itself in values and beliefs central to democracy, and:

in ethical and spiritual equality, freedom of individual development, free choice of opportunities, fair competition, a certain degree of personal independence, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression and communication. Our system of social sanctions is based upon mutual respect and concern for the rights of all. Social work is directed toward the realisation and implementation of the ideals of democracy in our civilisation (1976: 1).

The radical view is more complex. Outsiders see social work as part of an ideological state apparatus that merely ameliorates those consequences, providing a kind of 'wolf in sheep's clothing' conduit between the circumstances of families and individuals on the one hand, and state authorities on the other (Skenridge & Lenny, 1978). Many of those who work within the profession are also bleak about prospects for social change. Bill Jordan, for example, writes that social work is:

predominantly concerned—at best—with helping people eke out some kind of existence within a tightly state-constrained life-space, under conditions of multiple surveillance and regulation by state officials who limit choices in many important spheres (1984b: 6).

However the radical view from the perspective of insiders is sometimes qualified. Some writers offer a positive critique of social work's purpose, seeking within capitalist structures to address, or at least alleviate, the effects of personal crisis. Simpkin, for example, comments that although the state acts as an agent of the ruling class, and that social workers play a role in maintaining control, some aspects of that control are both beneficial and

necessary. The dilemma, says Simpkin, is that social work is a necessary corollary to the excesses of capitalism:

Help is requested, changes are demanded. The social worker is expected and needed to act as mediator between individual and individual or between individuals or groups and the state; even to be an advocate for reform. Pain deserves to be relieved as efficiently as possible; it is no use expecting clients to wait and work for the revolution (1979: 39).

In summary, the liberal view sees social work as empowering individuals to achieve their promise within the framework of a democracy, whereas the radical view sees it as affirming (although sometimes challenging) the economic and political foundations of dominant institutions. So again, what appears to be operating here is a dialectical opposition between the state and social work, between two extremes of value: one is 'caring', the other 'uncaring'; one seeks, at best, to adjust the conditions of freedom and at worst to intentionally restrict them, while the other seeks unconditionally to advocate on behalf of freedom and social justice.

Another 'way out' of this impasse is to interrogate the notion of visibility in social work. The individualised form of practice—generally called 'casework'—is, after all, conducted largely outside the purview of managers, supervisors and other colleagues. One writer, for example, has labelled social work an 'invisible trade' (Pithouse, 1987). For this reason, the processes and outcomes of casework have traditionally been described as uncertain and difficult to identify, as the products of objective knowledge and technical competence but also as based on intuition and 'self-awareness'⁸¹. Hugh

⁸¹ The notion of personal commitment is also relevant here, as an indication of the investment social work educators make in what we might broadly call development of 'the self', as opposed to 'the technical' dimension of everyday practice. Coates writes that social workers

England, for example, refers to the double-edged ambiguity surrounding the intuitive 'use of self' in social casework: it is on the one hand hard to define, but on the other the job is seen by aspiring practitioners as more 'real' than others, as one in which they can 'be themselves' (1986: 40-41).

This distinction between self and institution is carried even further. The notion of intuition and self-awareness as bases for 'good practice' are often contrasted with the technical dimensions of bureaucracy. In a discussion of the limits of bureaucratic control over social work practice in child welfare, Linda Davies argues that the application of the 'proletarianisation thesis' (the notion that bureaucracy undermines professional status and independence) to state social work is ill considered. Braverman's notion that work is brought under more direct control through routinisation and standardisation, and through a separation of conception from execution of tasks is, says Davies, not directly useful in understanding social work:

within social work the basis for technical control is limited because of the unpredictable and unique nature of the input (clients), and the basis of social work production in specific skills largely employed in face-to-face contact with clients beyond management scrutiny. Social workers are thus not subject to direct monitoring; management must rely on indirect means through administrative procedures and its control of resources to shape practitioners' options (1990: 85-86).

The notions of 'invisibility' and 'uncertainty' are used, then, as defences against managerial oversight. One of the principle complaints expressed by social work commentators has been that new managerialism embodies the kind of 'technical rationality' that dehumanises and deprofessionalises the

will not contribute to any movement to social transformation unless they have a personal commitment to it, and that commitment "is part of personal transformation. It grows out of the sense of personal empowerment and personal connection to the need for social change" (1994: 14).

essence of social work, which inside the sector is celebrated as variously 'unpredictable' and 'unique'.⁸² Formalised decision-making is understood as something that can only be successful in domains where relationships between inputs, processes and outputs are well structured, precisely related and clearly visible. This is not seen as possible in social casework, and indeed not in a range of related health and education contexts. Ravetz, for example, argues that the logic of bureaucracy, or Taylorism, or any other information-based managerial intrusion, cannot be applied to the domains of health and social welfare more generally:

Much of organisational activity in health and social services is dependent on informal dialogue, negotiation, and networks that cannot be adequately described by formal paper based or technology based information systems. Health and social services are marked by the essential imprecision of defining inputs (diagnosis, assessment), by the inferential character of the processes (quality not easily defined), and by the imprecision of the relationship between processes and outcomes (outcomes not easily defined) (Ravetz, 1996).⁸³

It seems that within the dialectical opposition it becomes impossible to move beyond an apparently insoluble set of exemplary oppositions: between the principles of social justice and the administrative imperatives of balancing budgets and accounting for limited public sector funds, and between the critical discourse of social policy and the procedural discourse of policy making and administration. On the one hand there is the social worker, ethical agent of change. On the other there are the conservative forces of the state.

⁸² On the notion of 'technical rationality', Donald Schon's book, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (1983) is often quoted in the social work literature. On the question of deprofessionalisation, Dominelli, writing from a UK perspective in the mid 1990s, predicted that the marketization of social welfare service delivery, and in particular the trend towards competency-based training, would lead to "the demise of the autonomous, reflective practitioner, creating instead, a fragmented, deprofessionalised service that is poorly placed to meet the requirements of anti-oppressive practice" (1996: 153).

⁸³ Note that this is precisely the argument that the Australian Nursing Federation mounted, successfully, in its 2004 battle with the Victorian Government over nurse-patient ratios in public hospitals.

This is a truly normative hierarchy of values, where the 'critical' equals 'ethical', equals 'outside or apart from the state', where bureaucracy equals 'unethical', equals 'within or part of the state', and where one presides most certainly over the other. As Ian Hunter remarks in his discussion of the perspective of the critical intellectual, from the outside:

the penetration of public life by the profit motive and the 'managerial' ethos of capitalism is held responsible for a splintering of the public sphere's collective moral personality and the emergence of an amoral technicist bureaucracy (1994a: 80).

The questions that remain, as a consequence of this apparent difficulty of classification and definition, revolve around the notions of value and accountability. How can the profession value (or justify) itself, and regulate the objectives, processes and outcomes of casework, when casework is a process that is apparently difficult to define in any specifically technical sense? How has it done so for itself, as a profession, let alone for state authorities and other funding bodies, in the past? Given that the answer, at this point in history, requires some kind of engagement with managerial discourse, and therefore some kind of 'definition' in order that it is 'managed' in a practical sense, what has the 'principled evasion' allowed under its guard? How has practice actually changed, 'in practice'?

Answers to these questions are central to constructing the thesis argument as a whole. The answers proposed are complex, and require an exploration of the detail of particular communication practices. While Chapter Five reviews the historically developed relationship between recording practices and what is called the 'ethic of self-mastery', the next section summarises and discusses Jacques Donzelot's perspective on the historical development of social work

practice as a whole. It provides grounds for an alternative view of social work, which suggests that the practical autonomy of caseworkers is an outcome of a connection between the historical development of the welfare state, the development of forms of social work recording, and the requirement to develop some kind of self-regulatory regime. The form that practical autonomy has taken, it will be argued here, is the capacity for self-mastery.

4.4 Social work as an extension of juridical power

In *The Policing of Families* (1979), Donzelot acknowledges the expansion of social work in a way that problematises notions of middle class judgement and progressive enlightenment, and instead emphasises the technical dimension of what he calls 'psy-knowledges' and casework practice.⁸⁴ Donzelot acknowledges the ongoing debates within social work commentary about the correct interpretation of the history and development of the profession, over whether the substitution of the educative for the judicial has indeed abolished stigmatising punishment in favour of a careful consideration of each individual case, or whether it can be interpreted as "an extension of the judicial, a refinement of its methods, an endless ramification of its powers" (1979: 98, emphasis added). He argues however that these are ultimately sterile

⁸⁴ See especially "The Tutelary Complex" (96-158). Donzelot offers a broad study of the historical development of institutional arrangements surrounding poor families. His commentary touches on various changes in law, changes in related institutions (including asylums, children's homes) and the 'invention' of psychiatry. It ranges across the period between the 1850s and the 1970s. His focus is on France, rather than on Anglophone countries like Australia. Nevertheless the broad social, cultural and political framework he describes has parallels with developments in Australia, and elsewhere (for example, see Stephen Garton's brief summary of developments in Australia's 'helping professions' across the same period (1990: 141-146)). Donzelot's discussion of the substitution of the 'tutelary' for the judicial also has clear resonance when we read about contemporary Australian cases like that of Daniel Valerio, as described by Helen Garner (1993). See also two articles by J. Davies ("Crisis in state child protection network", and "In search of home") published in *The Age*, 20th October, 2000.

and abstract debates. How can one possibly argue that social work remain aloof from the judicial machinery of state control, without also legitimating the arbitrary and dangerous power of the family, "which, behind the shelter of its walls, can mistreat its children and seriously handicap their future?" (*ibid*). The solution he proposes, for transcending the 'academic' debates, is to question social work in terms of what it actually does, rather than in terms of what it 'is', or what it 'stands for'.

In the history of the welfare state, social work is the profession most centrally tasked with policing marginal populations, within and through a combination of institutions that Donzelot calls the 'tutelary complex'. His focus on institutional practice goes some way to developing an alternative to the disabling nature of the dialectic summarised above. That focus provides the lever for asking further questions that need to be answered in order to resolve this dilemma of how to 'value', and how to defend, actual practical autonomy for social workers in organisational settings. What was the historical development of the conditions under which any form of autonomy was granted social work, as a distinct discipline? What problems did social work offer a solution to, and what have been the outcomes? Before proposing a way forward in relation to autonomy, it is important to look briefly at Donzelot's commentary on the techniques of social work.

The development of modern social work has, says Donzelot, involved the erection of an 'infrastructure of prevention' and an 'educative machinery' focussed on the problems of families, and in particular on the 'contours of the less-favoured classes'. It has included an:

increased attention to the problems of children, a consistent revision of the old attitudes of repression or charity, the promotion of a boundless educative solicitude, more concerned with understanding than with the application of judicial punishment, replacing charity's good conscience with the search for effective techniques (1979: 96-97).

The techniques of military or monastic forms of organisation, linked previously to forms of familial, religious, police and judicial authority, were replaced by techniques drawn from a combination of psychiatric, sociological and psychoanalytical knowledges, which offered the possibility of forestalling police action, and thereby "abolishing stigmatising punishment in favour of a careful consideration given to each individual's case" (1979: 97). From late in the nineteenth century, the details of individual cases became the subject of new modes of investigation and new forms of interpretation. Information came to be held in individual dossiers, rather than the simple inventories previously held by schools, asylums, boarding houses and the like. The 'social inquiry' model, which collected information for those dossiers, focused the attention of social workers on the knowledge held by other agencies, by schoolteachers, employers, landlords, neighbours and shopkeepers, in order to prevent the investigator from being "tricked by popular methods of staging" (1979: 121). That knowledge could then be brought to bear in home visits, but in ways that should work to "test the mother's sincerity, to inspire confidence and obtain a maximum of confidential disclosures" (1979: 123).

Here, in summary, are a series of basic communication practices: techniques for interviewing and examining, for constructing character assessments and family histories, for reporting and liaising, for regular monitoring and for education. Donzelot argues that the arrangements and techniques developed early in the twentieth century were outcomes of a search for solutions to the

apparent incapacity of some parents to cope with their children, which could counteract the authority of families who were neither economic (because they cost the justice system substantial amounts of time and money) nor operating within the economic domain (not, in other words, behaving like 'tireless little workers').

The loosening of juridical powers, and the development of a new 'politics of the family' had certain consequences, and these are crucial in relation to a consideration of what can be called a 'politics of autonomy'. Police and magistrates handed over some measure of their capacity (including enforcement and confinement) to psychiatry and social work, to new forms of medical and educative intervention. As juridical power was loosened, with a corresponding liberalisation of family relations (for example, the developing notion of children's rights, or measures for balancing male-female relations within the family), the space for social work and related disciplines was widened: "the more these rights are proclaimed, the more the strangle hold of a tutelary authority tightens around the poor family" (1979: 103). In relation to the juvenile justice system, Donzelot speaks about a 'dematerialisation' of the offence, which subjects young offenders to further investigation, to further judgement. Justice, in a sense, is delayed, or rather transposed into an inquiry into the 'facts' of a minor's personality, of his or her milieu, conducted by the various 'social assistants' that make up the tutelary complex (1979: 111).

In this view, social work has occupied a crucial position in the government and management of marginal populations. It has for a long time been a conduit or bridge between state bureaucracies and families in crisis. Bill Jordan, for example, argues that social work services are:

sandwiched between those in political control of the state, and their most power and disadvantaged subjects. ... Part of the skill of social work in any society would consist in negotiating with such groups, and in trying to organise at least a truce in their conflicts with appointed authority, and some room for manoeuvre on both sides (1984a: 120-121).

The task of social workers, particularly in statutory agencies, is at once to study the personal circumstances of the individual, and also to examine the individual's social relationships. Contemporary texts on social work practice define the instruments and outcomes of social work in terms of 'caring' relationships established with clients. Social workers are trained to insert themselves into a range of personal relationships, in which questions about how to negotiate individual and collective rights, obligations and vicissitudes routinely arise. In other words, social work is an example *par excellence* of the forms of expertise brought to bear in the development of liberal modes of government whose objective is the management of populations without resort to direct or coercive intervention.

Where does this leave the overall questions about the impact of information systems on professional autonomy in social work? In the Weberian dialectic, social work is either an integral component of the apparatus of democracy, or else a handmaiden to capital. Information about client circumstances, and the systems designed to collect, store and circulate that information, are seen respectively as merely enabling better decision-making, or as an expression of the ambition that drives the development of more exacting forms of supervision, surveillance and suppression.

The concern of this research is that any analysis that ignores the practical engagement of front line social workers with the new technologies of information runs the risk of assuming a linear style transaction, where workers

are either brainwashed by new systems, or simply constrained by their repressive powers. It is necessary to explore the uptake of these technologies in more detail, looking at the historical development of relations between organisational arrangements, skills and values.

In the case of the latter, an idealist approach sees these as ideas without material origin, which define the terrain and constrain the limits of possible action.⁸⁵ In the alternative approach put forward in this dissertation, values are instead seen as component parts of meaning systems. The texts and technologies of social work—card files, instructional texts, personal conversations, database records, interview techniques and supervision arrangements—constitute the sites within which these meaning systems (or what might otherwise be called 'frameworks', 'interpretation repertoires' or 'ways of seeing') are developed, negotiated and articulated.

The compromise position proposed here therefore asks how and why the spaces of autonomy came to exist in the first place. It acknowledges social work as a series of techniques that have offered a solution to authorities with a particular dilemma: how does one intervene in the conditions of marginal populations, in a way that at least attempts to safeguard the privacy of

⁸⁵ Barry Barnes, on the question of the material effect (or implication) of 'values', writes thus: "Consider a norm or a value existing entirely separately of all of the particular actions which, allegedly, it implies. What does such a 'separated' norm or value look like? How is it internalised? Presumably it can only exist, and only be introjected into the mind, as a verbal formulation, a maxim, or a principle, or an aphorism. But how can particular implications be drawn out of such a formulation? The answer is that they cannot be. There is no 'inside' out of which to draw implications. Nor does such a formulation come like an electrical appliance, with an instruction book attached indicating how it is properly to be used. In isolation, the verbal formulation of a norm or a value is a mere jumble of meaningless symbols, an uninterrupted formalism awaiting interpretation. It is devoid of implications of any kind. To have content a norm must be learned in conjunction with actual examples of its application. It must be learned as a stream of such examples. Then conformity to the norm is a matter of acting in proper analogy with previous actions which are accepted examples of conformity to the norm" (1988: 28-29).

individual citizens? Early social work had already provided some solutions to this dilemma, in the form of voluntarism and charitable philanthropy. The more scientific forms of individualised social casework that were developed twenty years into the twentieth century, informed by and coupled with the expertise of psychoanalysis, offered something new. They offered more precise forms of investigation, developed out of new forms of medical and psychological knowledge.

The opportunity to engage with practices of investigation, classification and interpretation provided social work opportunities to establish further spaces of discretion—in the form of the individualised casework relationship—that offered a means for ensuring privacy but also for legitimating governmental scrutiny. The upshot was, effectively, that this space could not be easily dissolved. The practical coincidence of most early social work with medical and legal working contexts (where they were employed as hospital almoners, or as court social workers) opened up the possibility of pursuing greater degrees of institutional status and autonomy. In order to legitimate those spaces of discretion, the discipline sought to establish mechanisms for ensuring a more professional, and likewise a more accountable, approach.

Social worker writers such as Mary Richmond set about constructing theoretical and practical arguments to support the regimes that were already coming to use the information gleaned from casework. They asked how it could be used to support the claim to higher status, and how it could be used in the formation of ethical attributes of 'trained social workers'. In *Social Diagnosis*, for example, Richmond provides guidance on using various forms of evidence—interviews, home visits, documentary evidence, letters,

telephone and telegraphic exchanges—in constructing strong case summaries. She asks social workers to abandon claims to respect based solely on good intentions:

we should meet halfway their earnest endeavours to subject the processes of their task to critical analysis, and should encourage them to measure their work by the best standards supplied by experience—standards which, imperfect now, are being advanced to a point where they can be called professional (1917: 25).

Ada Sheffield, a contemporary of Richmond, commented that accuracy in the routines of recording in extensive narrative form provided a means of 'self-betterment', and grounded caseworkers in 'habits of critical thinking' (1924: 18). Calls for more critical and accountable personal practice were then coupled to arguments for greater recognition of professional status. Bertha Reynolds, writing in 1937, discussed the need for elaborate techniques of supervision, arguing that:

the professional person is accountable, but not to others. He [sic] is accountable to his own mature and trained intelligence. He is answerable to his professional colleagues for applying the standards they collectively maintain, but he can apply them in no other way than by the use of a discretion which is his own (1937: 62).

As a key capacity in social work practice, the enactment of self-mastery requires the capacity to engage constructively with a client without submitting to personal whim or impulse. It 'requires' this in the sense that self-control, independence and objectivity become key capacities for the competent caseworker. What came to be required, or requisite, was the capacity to keep a safe distance between the emotion of the clients' circumstances and one's own feelings or intellectual judgements. Bill Jordan, for example, writes that:

social work is a very practical activity, in which the personal qualities of the worker may be as important as the knowledge he or she possesses; in which how the worker acts and communicates may be as significant as what he or she decides to do; and the success or failure of which can be evaluated from several different perspectives (1984a: 1).

Likewise, Harold Plotnick speaks of the 'attitudinal orientation' of the social worker in terms of their capacity to be a kind of participant observer, to be involved, but also sufficiently detached to be in control of their own faculties:

The worker is expected to be sensitive to what the client feels or might feel in order to relate to him with sympathy and understanding. The social work student is expected to become willing to see himself [sic] in operation and to observe how his acts affect others. He must come to understand a wide range of emotions, attitudes, and behaviour in others with concern and compassion. In short, he is expected to demonstrate a dynamic understanding of personality and motivation; a warm, natural liking for people; tolerance for human behaviour in all its manifestations; and a quality of self awareness to the extent that his feelings do not adversely affect his response to the client's emotions. Hamilton states that 'the caseworker will be of little use to clients unless he has a real interest in them—cares about them—but he can never be helpful if he exploits this interest in the form of curiosity or a desire to manage' (1965: 23).

4.5 Conclusion

The social work curriculum and research literature has for a long time defined and celebrated the concept of autonomy through the operation of formal codes of ethics, and through the activities of professional associations.⁸⁶ Indeed autonomy is a central issue in social work, a key object of the tensions between so-called intuitive and reflective forms of knowledge that many of its scholars put forward as the 'essence' of practice, and the technical and procedural

⁸⁶ Since the early years of the twentieth century social work has been regulated through forms of professional association that credential access to educational programs and employment, and formulate appropriate codes of ethics. Education is conducted in university-based schools of social work that are accredited through those associations.

forms of knowledge that frame the bureaucratic contexts within which social work is generally required to operate. The rise of new managerialism—of increased productivity, greater efficiency and more transparent accountability—has exacerbated a set of tensions that have existed for some time.

Social work's response to managerialism appears, however, to be premised on a sense of moral superiority, which in turn is grounded in certain social and political knowledges (of higher ideals and values) and in a strong sense of ethical behaviour. These values and ethics—including a commitment to principles of fairness, equality and justice—are said to be undermined by the ideology of managerialism, which itself is grounded in a purely instrumental, or technical, knowledge of administration. The ideological obsession that managers allegedly have with constantly updated information, planning and evaluation is said to undermine the scope for autonomous discretionary judgement, which in turn works against the social mission of the discipline. So, despite the development of a 'scientific' approach to program planning and evaluation, and to case work practice in general, the notion that social work practice is more an 'art' than a science, and is not therefore (numerically) specifiable, persists.

As noted above, a traditional liberal approach to professional autonomy views independence positively, as a prerequisite for productive social change. On the other hand, a Marxist approach views autonomy negatively, as an outcome of market control, and in fact one of the central objectives of those occupations that have sought the status of 'profession'. In both approaches it is possible to see a common thread: individual practitioners enjoy spaces of independence,

or freedom, from state or managerial supervision, albeit for different reasons. Independence is either granted, or won. It comes in the form of credentialed access to protected markets for service, and in the form of various ethical conditions—codes, and forms of association—which are supposed to protect the interests of both client populations and state interests alike. In both cases, spaces of autonomy are effectively seen as outcomes of a political process.

The alternative, which this dissertation argues for, is that autonomy is multi-dimensional, not simply positive or negative. It is not simply a state investment, and nor is it simply a badge of courage and freedom to be worn in battles against managerial interference. It is instead a set of capacities to act that are outcomes of both formal and informal trainings, undertaken in the education system as well as the workplace. It is both a capacity to act, and a quality of working relationships within established structures and routines. Discretionary judgement, in this sense, can be seen as part of a professional 'persona', or what might be called a 'disposition'. It is part and parcel of the skills and competences of institutional actors who have been "inducted into special disciplines and practices of ethical self-problematisation through which they can learn to call their conduct into question and begin the 'work of the self on the self' that we call conscience" (Hunter, 1994b: 161).

This is a very different way of looking at the concept of agency. In social work, and in related 'bureau-professional' occupations⁸⁷, autonomy is generally

⁸⁷ Harris, quoting Parry and Parry, uses this term to refer to the emergence, during the 1970s, of work regimes that combined the rational administration of bureaucratic systems [with] professional expertise. "They represented ... a blending of elements of professionalism and bureaucratic organisation. Neither autonomous professionalism nor purely bureaucratic hierarchies emerged from the reorganisation. ... The mode of organisation is a hybrid ... It involved a negotiated partnership between social work, attempting to organise as a profession

understood as a space of freedom, as a kind of barricaded independence from managerial prerogative. That space is seen as bounded, or delimited, by a series of negotiated provisions: a credentialing system to control entry into the profession; ethical control over individual behaviour in the form of associational codes of conduct; disciplinary control over knowledge frameworks that frames the conduct of customer/client interactions.

The focus of this dissertation is not on the individual subjectivity of the professional worker, but on the capacities for making decisions and acting upon them. The premise here is that professional autonomy is best seen as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, comprising the following elements. Professionalism is *rhetorical*, in that what is known about particular professions, from the outside, is based on statements of knowledge and 'value' in public discourse. Professionalism is also *structural*, in the sense that the status and relative autonomy of any given occupation are shaped by relations between authorities, employers and professional workers—for example, through the credentialing process, through forms of direct and indirect state regulation, and through the self-managing activities of associations. The third dimension, and the one most often elided in debates about autonomy, is concerned with *technical processes of actual work*, including the skills and capacities brought to bear in successfully managing relations with employers and/or clients. A medical practitioner's bedside manner, for example, is shorthand for the often taken for granted dispositions that people working in the 'caring professions' are required to acquire, and to regularly 'perform'.

The capacity for autonomy is therefore not simply a matter of positive or negative space. It is neither a state investment (granted in order to secure compliance or assistance in respect of a particular matter) nor simply a guarantee of freedom from managerial interference. It is not simply a quantum of control, which one either has, or does not have. Discretionary judgement is, in this sense, part and parcel of the personal armoury of institutional actors who have been, as noted above, inducted into particular disciplines and practices of ethical self-problematisation through which they learn to question their own question in the manner that we call 'conscience'.

In summary, this Chapter has reviewed the basic premises of new managerialism, and tabled a set of indicative responses from social work critics. That commentary can be characterised as operating on the basis of a 'disabling dialectic', which leaves open few options for valuing or defending the professional status of social work in the face of political and managerial arguments for greater accountability. It has reiterated the alternative—put forward in earlier Chapters—that instead of resorting to arguments based in principled ideology critique it is possible to view autonomy as not only a 'space' of freedom within which independent judgement can be exercised, but also—and just as crucially—a capacity for action developed through particular forms of cultural training.

The following Chapter moves to consider the history of social work recording in more detail, in order to lay the ground for the description and analysis in Chapter Six of the particular use of computerised information in the Social Work Service of Centrelink.

CHAPTER FIVE

Competing modes of accounting: a genealogy of social casework recording

- 5.1 Introduction
 - 5.2 Recording techniques in social casework: a brief history
 - 5.3 Discussion: recording and the limits of ethical capacity
 - 5.4 Conclusion
-

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter reviews the historical development of social casework recording systems, from the early 1900s through to the 1990s.⁸⁸ It considers the different 'modes of accounting'—which, following the lead of Chapter Three, can broadly be defined as 'professional' and 'organisational'—that have existed during that period, in terms of the relations of trust and control that have existed between social workers and their managers. It then asks whether the professional mode of accounting can co-exist with the organisational, or

⁸⁸ The summary in this Chapter is relatively brief. A much more detailed examination of the cultural and political history of casework recording could, for example, track the connections between techniques and technologies on the one hand, and key social policy developments and demographic changes on the other. It would also consider key institutional and/or cultural differences that clearly have existed between social work taught and practiced in Australia as opposed to Great Britain, the United States or anywhere else. Most of the journal literature quoted here was published in the United States, and there may therefore be some bias built into the discussion. This is partly because there was only limited material published on social work, in Australia and by Australian writers, until at least the early 1970s. (See, for example, the bibliography at the end of Lawrence's (1965) historical study of Australian social work. Reference to Australian social work texts is almost non-existent). However in its defence we can argue that the journals used in researching and writing the Chapter were drawn from the shelves of Australian university libraries, which have long serviced students in local social work courses, and the same journals will doubtless be found in numerous other Western contexts. The object here is to compile a relatively basic chronology and typology of factors shaping recording, in order to demonstrate an ongoing tension/competition between two particular modes of accounting: professional and organisational.

whether it is fundamentally challenged by the standardisation of format and procedure that has occurred in recent decades. Have changes in recording—with the shift away from extended narrative (or process) recording to standardised and computerised recording systems—undermined the traditional focus of social work on the development of the skills of 'self-mastery'?

This Chapter proceeds in this direction on the assumption that relationships between social workers and their managers—relations, as noted above, of trust and control—have been discursively constructed. In other words, recording is discussed here as a 'cultural technology', which has particular effects, and which change over time. The question to ask is therefore 'what is the syntax of the organisational relationships, created by—and in turn perhaps also productive of—different systems of recording?' And further, 'what kinds of ethical capacities and skills are shaped up (or made possible) by 'process recording', as opposed to the various types of standardised, proceduralised—and now computerised—recording practised in today's version of social work?'

While the following Chapter takes up the detail of a particular case study (the Social Work Service in Australia's national income support agency, Centrelink), this Chapter remains for the moment at the level of the discipline. It considers the extent to which older versions of casework recording—the act of discursively representing and 'making a case' on behalf of one's client, in the form of an extended narrative of process—have acted as a site for ordering the relations of trust and control between caseworker and supervisor, or in other words for performing and constituting the skills of self-mastery that

have been seen as central to 'professional' social casework practice. Evidence from the literature indicates that early writers, such as Mary Richmond and Ada Eliot Sheffield, saw the development of a professional self as an achievement arising out of the performance of detailed narrative recording systems. Sheffield, for example, saw in the process of sifting through and writing up the numberless facts of a case a "constant means of self-betterment" (1924: 18). More recent scholarly work discusses the possibility of a productive connection of this kind, still, between particular techniques for writing up casework and the development of a critical awareness, or what Paulo Friere calls 'conscientisation'.⁸⁹

The question remains, however, as to what kinds of ethical skills and capacities are made possible by contemporary systems of information management. Does computerised recording—and this is ultimately where the larger argument of this thesis heads in the final Chapter—still allow the bearer of social work training to acquire and exercise the skills and capacities of 'self-mastery', or what might otherwise be called 'independent judgement'? If so, what form does this take? If not, what does this say about the status of social work as a profession?

In summary, this Chapter now reviews the relevant literature, much of it historical, to assess the history of relationships between writing/recording techniques, managerial aspirations and professional independence. It investigates, in other words, the changing relationship between trust and control that can be described as 'accountability', or more specifically as a

⁸⁹ For a brief discussion of Friere's approach see Fook (1993: 96-97). As examples of this kind of work, see Swenson (1988) and Pare & Allen (1995).

'mode of accounting'. It takes the form of what Foucault calls a 'genealogy', or, in other words, a study of the historical development of present arrangements. A genealogy of the impact of computerised information systems on the autonomy of professional work should describe how current structural arrangements and ethical capacities have been shaped by available technologies of representation, or in other words by the 'discursive technologies' used *prior to* computerisation (for example paper and pen, the typewriter, the Dictaphone, the secretary, the typing pool, etc). A genealogy of computerised recording should also review the history of such arrangements and capacities in tandem with evidence of the changing detail of workplace routines, practices, and policies, including those designed to secure professional accountability. Crucially, a genealogy of computerised recording must attend to the historical development of the regimes of power and knowledge that social work practice has contributed to, in order to understand how recording has (and does) produce the forms of knowledge and practice skills used routinely in regulating the ambit and limits (and outcomes) of actual social casework.

It is necessary then to do more than simply describe and review the actual process of development and implementation of computers, in order to analyse the interplay between new communications technologies, actors' objectives, their capacities and their actions. The object of this Chapter, in summary, is to review evidence of what came before the development of computerised systems for recording and communicating information—and of accounting to a single point within an organisation—in order to understand the base that existed to support the development of new techniques for using and exploiting computerised systems. Likewise, it is important to understand how that base

of relationships, skills and capacities provided grounds for active resistance to changes in the rationale for modes of accounting in this particular field. This discussion in turn lays the groundwork for Chapter Six, for a more detailed analysis of the relationship between computerised management information systems, recording techniques and socio-political forces in the particular case of the Social Work Service of Centrelink.

5.2 Recording techniques in social casework: a brief history

In simple terms, social work recording is the systematic documentation of the transactions between caseworker and client, and between the caseworker and other relevant sources of 'evidence' or assistance used in pursuing and finalising a case. It proceeds after interviews, home visits, telephone calls and case conferences. It is constituted by a combination of 'ex-post' accounting, commenting on events and actions that have already occurred, and 'ex-ante' accounting that puts forward plans for outcomes that the caseworker will work to achieve. Events, conversations, decisions and actions (including the grounds for these) are supposed to be documented and 'sifted' consistently throughout a case—although again, the urgency given to the recording task has depended on historical and agency contexts—from the initial intake point through to finalisation. Recording is an integral part of the assessment process (in which judgements and decisions are made about action in respect of the client) and provides opportunities for self-reflection and for supervision, or in

other words for demonstrating progress in one's work and in one's development as a competent caseworker.⁹⁰

Before summarising the history of recording techniques it will be useful to explain, in fairly general terms, the purpose of social casework records. It is possible to distinguish between at least three different genres of written work that a social caseworker might be required to produce. Casework records take the form of a summary of the detail of individuals and their circumstances, and actions taken by caseworkers. There have been a variety of different formats used—both historically, and in different agency contexts—which have been more or less complex. Social workers also produce written reports on individual clients or client populations, drafted for official purposes such as legal cases or inter-agency submissions, which draw on the material lodged in client records and in other agency information systems. Agencies will also, very often, produce casework summaries: these take the form of statistical summaries, generally compiled for managers and funding bodies, and extracted out of information lifted from a corpus of casework summaries.

Over and above this basic summary one can see, from a review of the scholarly literature, evidence of a range of theoretical and practical discussions about how recording should proceed, and why. While social work writers have been interested in the philosophy and practicalities of recording at least since Mary Richmond wrote *Social Diagnosis* (1917), an extensive treatise on the importance of using appropriate evidence in the 'diagnosis and treatment of social ills', it is important to identify points of difference, and moments of

⁹⁰ O'Connor, Wilson & Setterlund describe assessment as both a process and an outcome. Factors include "listening to the other, listening to yourself, sorting and sifting through information, seeking out information and analysing self in process" (1998: 87).

change.⁹¹ The following section summarises the basic details of recording during two broad periods: 1900s to 1940s, and 1950s to 1990s.⁹² Both are discussed in terms of available technologies and techniques, intellectual background knowledge and assumptions, and broad social policy contexts.

5.2.1 1900s–1940s: from ledgers to narratives

Before the end of the nineteenth century the records of charitable institutions in Western countries like Australia, Great Britain and the United States took the form of simple ledgers. In these were recorded the names of individuals and a brief description of assistance provided. Sheffield notes that ledgers reflected the immediate purpose of service without differentiating the forms of action or assistance provided to one individual from another (1924: 6). Ledgers captured the most basic information about recipients (including name, address and a summary of assistance received), without any commentary on judgements made by agency staff.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century ledgers were gradually transformed into individualised client records.⁹³ Individual ledger entries were

⁹¹ It is perhaps reasonable to complain that this suggests a revisionist version of social work history, which neglects the contribution of earlier writers, for example those involved in the Charity Organisation Society or the Settlement Movement during the latter half of the nineteenth century (including Bernard Bosanquet or Sidney Webb). However it seems reasonable to nominate Richmond's work as a commencement point for modern social work as a professional project. Robert Pinker, in a very useful summary of the intellectual history of social work and social administration, nominates Richmond's book as describing "not only the first steps towards integrating the knowledge and skills pertaining to social work but even more ambitious attempts to incorporate sociological knowledge and research methodology in the therapeutic enterprise" (1989: 89).

⁹² The case could easily be made that there are clear crossovers between these time periods, and likewise that there were phases during the periods that deserve further distinction. The objective, however, is to make a broad distinction between recording practices during these periods, in terms of the manner in which different modes of representation have been developed, and different modes of accounting conceived and enacted (or performed). This will be explained further in the Chapter.

⁹³ This was largely a function of the growth of organisations like the Charity Organisation Society (circa the 1870s), in response to social, demographic and political changes. See Garton (1990) and Kennedy (1985) for further detail on the history of the COS in Australia.

disaggregated, by client, and collected together using the client's name as the header. A brief chronological commentary on action was joined together into a single document that demonstrated, in very basic terms, a broad alignment with agency objectives and social standards. Sheffield calls this stage 'stewardship', because it displayed a closer examination of each and every individual, not just in terms of financial circumstances but also personality and character:

The history as a whole is apparently designed to justify the aid given or refused, as was the ledger record, the difference being that the fuller chronological statement leaves less to memory and evinces a conscious attempt at sizing up character in a rough way (1924: 10-11).

As agencies grew larger and cases became more involved, single documents were joined together into files: manila folders with a basic summary of identifying information on the cover; a combination of summary notes, correspondence and other material pinned together inside.

The development of new casework recording formats, together with the growing use of the commercially produced typewriters in office work (Kittler, 1999) was coupled with the rise of accounting systems that worked not only to track the development of a case, but also to make visible at least the conditions under which the exercise of judgement could occur. A number of factors were important here. Larger agencies meant there were more staff changes, and it began to make good organisational sense that mechanisms were developed to trace each case for the benefit of new workers. The development of the discrete

case file signalled the birth of the 'case load', which could be moved from worker to worker.⁹⁴

By the nineteen twenties Mary Richmond was arguing strongly against the use of simple forms, on the basis that agencies' functions had become much more diverse. Their needs, and the needs of their clients, were seen as more complex, and authors like Richmond argued for the development of techniques to track changes as they occurred. Social workers were no longer responsible only for 'relief', she said, but also for "working with a series of social relationships and social complications that have to be individualised case by case, if the families and individuals under our care are to be made really better off" (1925: 214). Richmond emphasised the importance of having not only principles but also 'data', or 'evidence', to back up 'diagnosis'. Indeed her book *Social Diagnosis* (1917) reads like a legal textbook for the layperson, on the collection, classification and admissibility of appropriate evidence.

During the inter-war years, roughly speaking, the dominant approach discussed in the literature was the construction of extensive narrative records. This was a period in which social work was conducted increasingly 'above the poverty line'—in veterans' hospitals and psychiatric clinics—as well as the traditional 'below the line' public assistance offices and law courts. Mary Richmond and Ada Sheffield were both important figures in proposing new techniques, which they called 'narrative recording', that could be used in these

⁹⁴ These developments coincided with the development of complex accounting systems in Western organisations, during and after the First World War, which according to Hopwood brought about a mutual relationship between available modes of organisation and social – as well as economic – forms of management. "A particular regime of internal visibility started to become influential. Accounting developments, in turn, not only reflected the continuing paths of organising developments but also started to play a much more active role in facilitating and enabling these to take place. The modern interrelationship of accounting and the management of the enterprise was in the process of being forged" (Hopwood, 1986: 14).

new contexts. Sheffield summarises her sense of the casework narrative thus: "This is the detailed story of the client's situation, the evidence that his [sic] need lies in this or that direction, and the account of the course taken to meet his need" (1924: 75). She describes a basic practical framework for writing up casework narratives:

The narrative comprises (1) reported interviews with the client and with those acquainted with him [sic], (2) an interpretation of his case, and (3) a chronological record of what the agency does with and for him (1924: 124).

This seems all very straightforward, and in some ways it was. The point to make is that Sheffield, like Richmond, was primarily interested in using the casework record to amass *objective facts*, in order to contribute to the development of what she saw as a sound base of research material that could be used in 'soundproofing' social work's claim to professional status.⁹⁵ The contradiction to this claim was in the fact that much of the evidence seen as valuable fell into the category of the subjective, including the various markers of a client's dispositions and relationships—expressed in terms of a person's 'love for their family', 'pride in their children', 'sense of self-love', 'involvement in religion'. In this sense the casework record was used as an elaborate index of character judgement.

⁹⁵ The question of social work's status as a profession was, during this period, of great contention, and had been since Abraham Flexner's contribution to the debate in 1915. Indeed, Austin (1983) argues that Flexner cast a shadow over the discipline that was to last for many decades. Flexner had argued, at a US conference on work in charities and corrections, that social work could not be considered a profession because it had no clear ends: "It appears not so much a definite field as an aspect of work in many fields. An aspect of medicine belongs to social work, as do certain aspects of law, education, architecture, etc" (2001 [1915]: 156). Flexner also argued that social work fell short in terms of mechanisms for remuneration: "the rewards of the social worker are in his [sic] own conscience and in heaven. His life is marked by devotion to impersonal ends and his own satisfaction is largely through the satisfactions procured by his efforts for others" (*ibid*).

Sheffield makes the interesting claim—and this foregrounds the importance of tracing the effect of technological change—that the social casework record would not have developed as a summary of detailed evidence on each and every individual case had it not been for the invention of the typewriter. The transition from ledgers to detailed narrative records—the former terse and succinct, the latter able to penetrate ‘into a man’s character’—was paralleled, according to Sheffield, by two things: the rise of the social sciences, and the development of typewriters:

The concern with personality, which marks the case work of today, is of course due to the advance of social science, but let anyone ask how far busy visitors could get in responding to this concern, were they still confined to handwriting, and he [sic] will realise that the typewriter is releasing time and energy in ways that count for the enrichment of our thinking upon our clients’ problems (1924: 80).⁹⁶

‘Process records’ were an extended version of narrative records, which required social caseworkers to record the detail of all exchanges between worker and client.⁹⁷ This format was developed in response, according to Kagle, to a call from some advocates within the discipline who wanted social workers to make their work more available to sociological interpretation.

⁹⁶ Note that the development of the typewriter, and its application in contexts like this, should not be considered in isolation from the assembly of large numbers of employees in ‘typing pools’. Typists often doubled as stenographers, and Sheffield warned her readers to watch out for the additional, and unnecessary, detail that they were prone to generate in their work: “It is because dictation to a stenographer lapses into the prolix and redundant style of ordinary talk that it is more necessary than in the early years of case work for us to emphasise the selection of those facts that have the highest relevance, and the casting aside of those which do not bear upon the major process of treatment” (1924: 81).

⁹⁷ Leonard Kogan claims that verbatim process recording was developed initially by psychotherapists, circa 1934, and was used extensively by the US military in group psychotherapy sessions during the Second World War (1950: 372). See Wilson (1980), for a detailed summary of the generic techniques of process recording. By the 1980s process recording was seen as an education tool more than a practice tool, however her description is useful for understanding the complexity and the ‘completeness’ of this form of recording. She argues that the ‘information content’ of a process record should include the following elements: client identifying information; a word-for-word description of what happened during interview; a description of any action or nonverbal activity that occurred; the worker’s observations, feelings and reactions to what occurred; a diagnostic summary; and a casework plan (1980: 18-20).

Process recording was thus designed to "reveal the person as he really is to himself ... in his own language" (1987: 464). Process recording enabled extended reflection by the caseworker, not only on the conduct of the client but also on their own personal feelings and experiences of the process of casework. As social workers gradually adopted the language of psychoanalysis, describing character traits and personality defects, they began writing and reflecting on lengthy summaries of personal feelings about the conduct of interviews, phone calls, home visits and collegial conversations.

With the adoption of the Dictaphone, interviews were recorded verbatim in many larger agencies, subsequently transcribed, and then studied for the deeper meanings of practitioner behaviours, and for the nuances of clients' attitudes, responses and—of course—their personal circumstances. According to the literature, process recording was used extensively in social casework until at least the 1950s, and in the social work curriculum well into the 1980s (Kagle, 1987: 464).

All writers during this early period emphasised the importance of acquiring good record keeping skills during training, albeit in slightly different ways. Copies of case records were included in the curriculum of early training courses (Tice, 1998: 6). Richmond herself noted the importance of accurate and comprehensive evidence not only for organisational communication but also for the supervision and training of new workers. Recording not only provided opportunities for development of skill, but also moments of insight for the supervisor:

A record well written up from day to day reveals the strengths and the weaknesses of your case worker—neither can be successfully covered up in a chronological account (1925: 215).

Ada Sheffield went further, arguing that narrative recording assisted with the 'development of judgement', which she saw as a product of the processes of constant selection from 'numberless facts' about clients, from which emerged greater accuracy in thinking:

The recurring necessity for deciding what facts to include in the history, for ordering these facts in relation to one another, for reviewing and appraising her conclusions, render her increasingly skilled in contriving appropriate treatment. Her [sic] ulterior motive of making her histories convey the social typicalness of her cases thus furthers not only their immediate helpfulness to the client but *their incidental efficacy in grounding the worker herself in habits of critical thinking* (1924: 18, emphasis added).

Breckinridge saw the reading of case records as an opportunity to acquire a better understanding of social reform, of "the consciously directed effort to secure more favourable conditions of life ...[and] to develop resources of a preventive and constructive character" (1924: 4). But she also emphasised the use of records as teaching tools, and recording as an activity that provided opportunities for shaping the 'habits of thought'. These habits then carried over into the conduct of work, enabling students "to develop *responsibility*, to cooperate *sympathetically and honestly* with agencies even of differing standards, and to move *persistently* toward the improvement of community resources" (*ibid*, emphasis added).

For Gordon Hamilton, who developed an approach called 'diagnostic summary recording', recording was also productive of particular 'habits'. It was not a skill that could be prescribed by specific guidelines. It was instead characterised by a sensitivity to detail that grew with overall experience and understanding. Hamilton argued that such sensitivity could only be learned through extensive practice, as a 'habit':

Does not the actual recording of a diagnostic statement perhaps inhibit thinking? May not the worker say, "Well, now I have done my thinking", when after all he [sic] has merely indulged in a few descriptive generalisations and stereotypes? Yes, this is entirely possible, but it is less likely if the worker has achieved the kind of diagnostic habit which underpins interpretation with the specific detail. The remedy for loose thinking is not less thinking, but more thinking, and the remedy for hasty and inaccurate generalisation lies in the habit of repeated diagnostic attempts and of case analysis through staff discussion. Workers who have formed the habit of putting their thinking together about the meaning of the case are likely to develop professional skill faster than those who have not (1946: 67).

In other words, Hamilton saw professionalism as growing out of persistence and experience rather than clear and regimented guidelines. A professional approach for her was neither moralistic nor coercive, but rather based in a sense of detachment derived from a combination of scientific knowledge and self-control. "[T]he worker must first be able to understand himself [sic], his own emotional drives and impulses, before he can truly accept the bad feelings, aggression, and hostility in others" (1937: 149). This sense of detachment, for Hamilton, requires in the first instance that caseworkers understand their own feelings, before they can recognise and understand those of others. In turn, the capacity to manage oneself in a casework relationship involves a changed attitude towards authority:

We see more clearly now that controls should not come out of personal authority... We must remind ourselves again that the kind and degree of authority, if used...must not only be related to the capacities of the client, to the realities of the given external situation, but also to *the development within the worker of his own inner controls*, so that he is less naively identified, less involved through his likes, dislikes, and pity, or social philosophy (1937: 149-150, emphasis added).

In her discussion of how to style a case record Hamilton invoked a sense of recording as a dynamic 'work in progress', running parallel with the developing relationship between caseworker and client. She discussed

recording in terms of 'style', arguing that a professional style was 'elusive', as in a sonnet or a novel: for her, the word 'style' was shorthand for the capacity to capture the complex relationships between behaviour, emotion and thought.

Each case is a sort of abstraction, a professionally conceived body of elements relevant to our purposes, which does make for some unity. The meaning of a case professionally emerges as the case progresses, so that our grasp of significance is dynamic rather than ultimate, practical rather than theoretical (1946: 18).

Hamilton even quotes Gertrude Stein (who is alleged to have said, in a lecture on narration, that the beginning-middle-end formula is not entirely necessary or desirable in writing), to suggest that logic's time-bound chronologies were not supportable in good casework writing:

The ordinary rules for paragraphing are not entirely relevant to the professional record because material derived from clients is discontinuous and illogical ... within this framework the themes cannot be too nicely set apart without violence to the truth of the experience itself (1946: 11-12).

Hamilton is significant in the literature on casework recording as a writer who adopted the language of psychoanalysis. She spoke of further individualising the 'client-in-situation', and elaborated on the 'treatment' process. Whereas the works of Richmond and Sheffield can be read as a celebration of the ideals of the Progressive Era (in their championing of objectivity, and of a scientific method for the collection of discrete 'social facts'), Hamilton asked caseworkers to, in effect, read between the lines of the stories they encountered. She asked her students to give up the idea that social behaviour was entirely a matter of individual responsibility, and to look to the psychology of the client, as well as their social relationships, for solutions to individual social problems:

A person comes to us because he is suffering... The trouble may largely originate in external factors, or the trouble may be, and indeed often is, a combination of internal strains and external pressures (1946: 68).

Beyond the boundaries of their own discipline early writers like Richmond, Sheffield and Hamilton saw the systematic collection of evidence as necessary if social work was to stay in touch with, and provide services to, other related disciplines that were also experimenting with new forms of social inquiry. Social work, according to Richmond, was not recognised and understood as useful by the wider community because people were not "alive to the difference between going through the motions of doing things and actually getting them done" (1917: 25). The discipline needed to submit itself to greater analysis, she believed, because respect would never be based upon principled intentions but on reliable standards and measurements. Indeed her primary purpose in shaping the techniques she put forward in *Social Diagnosis*, in bringing attention to the discipline through rigorous analysis, was "to make some advance toward a professional standard" (1917: 26), both in terms of how social workers saw themselves, as well as how other disciplines saw and understood social work from a distance:

But another audience has been kept in view in its preparation. Much of the process herein described is undoubtedly applicable, with modification, to human situations which do not come within the purview of social work as now organised. The special field of social diagnosis lies in social case work. It is destined in addition to become an adjunct in the fields of medicine, education, jurisprudence, and industry. While knowledge from these fields is being applied to social case work, the latter has developed methods that will be useful in return (1917: 26-27).

What does this tell us about the mode of accounting that applied during this early period? It seems there was initially a focus on accumulating detailed evidence for each and every case, which could then be used in the pursuit of

'greater social goals', and in support of claims for a higher professional status for social work. This was combined with strategies for using the recording process as a basis for the professional and personal development of the caseworker. There was no apparent contradiction between the two, and in fact they went hand in hand: on the one hand, there was an interest in sociological objectivity, and on the other an interest in developing techniques for including and involving one self in the encounter with the client. There was both a focus on the needs of the discipline as a whole (in terms of its developing status), and on the needs of individual caseworkers.

Social work writers like Richmond and Sheffield saw case recording, in the first instance, as a technique for amassing relevant evidence that could differentiate social work from the disciplines adjacent to it. The rituals of self-examination involved in the various forms of narrative recording provided an additional dimension to their claim. Detailed recording was seen as an opportunity for the development of self-awareness, which was not only 'incidental' but ultimately held out as a guarantee of accountability in two respects: first, for new social workers who aspired to be 'professionally accountable' workers, and second, for authorities concerned to account for the productive benefits of social work agencies. There is no evidence of a contradiction between the different techniques for accumulating objective as opposed to subjective knowledge (unlike later—as will become clear in the next section—where record keeping was toned down, and workers channelled towards keeping and compiling statistical records in the name of 'the good of the service'). In any case, the effect by the time of the Second World War was a self-consciously professional discipline, determined to assert itself as a player

in providing social welfare services. As Bertha Reynolds remarked, in a discussion of techniques of supervision:

the professional person is accountable, but not to others. He [sic] is accountable to his own mature and trained intelligence. He is answerable to his professional colleagues for applying the standards they collectively maintain, but he can apply them in no other way than by the use of a discretion which is his own. Is it possible for a professional person to be trained to be more aware of what he is doing and feeling than a person in ordinary social relations would need to be? It seems that he must if he is to be accountable for his own part in helping to bring about better adjustments of other people – that is, if his profession is social case work (1937: 62-63).

5.2.2 1950s–1990s: ‘accountability crises’, standardisation, risk management and computerisation

There is clear evidence in the literature published after the Second World War of major concerns about economy, efficiency and accountability in casework recording. The Dictaphone prolonged the life of verbatim process recording for some years, but with an increasing client base made up substantially of armed forces veterans repeated calls were made to limit the detail included in case records.⁹⁸ Process recording was by then seen as ‘cumbersome and wasteful’ by many commentators, and particularly by agency directors.

During the 1950s and 1960s writers discussed alternative approaches that could ‘sift out’ the ‘meaning’ of a case, but still be able to describe the essential process. Gertrude Sackheim, a supervisor in a US army veterans’ ‘mental hygiene clinic’, claimed that what actually transpired in an interview—the process—“can be obscured by the verbiage of cluttering details” included in

⁹⁸ John Tipping’s history of the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service (CRS), which was set up during the Second World War as part of a concerted policy of returning the growing number of Invalid Pensioners to the workforce, provides useful indications of this trend. He notes, for example, that between 1948 and 1977 almost 50,000 people with disabilities were accepted for rehabilitation by the CRS (1992: 172). Social work played a central role in the CRS’s processes for rehabilitation and work placement.

process records (1949: 25). To illustrate the benefit of condensing the process Sackheim published an extract from a case record, demonstrating how she applied a straightforward technique for lifting out (1) pertinent information about the client, (2) movement in 'therapy', (3) activities of the worker and client, and (4) some sense of the emotional interaction between the two. That extract, and the condensed version, are quoted here in full in order to provide for the reader a clearer sense of the scale of detail previously included (in process recording), and the scope of change suggested by Sackheim:

The following is an extract from a case recorded in detail for presentation at a seminar. It is the case of an obsessive neurotic who at this point in treatment was concerned primarily with his feelings about masturbation and his continued use of unnecessary eye medication:

"Patient was 20 minutes late because he was a little late getting out from work. He told me that he had had no drops in his eyes since Saturday. He put them in once Saturday morning and then could tolerate it no longer; he was using the last of the bottle of drops and felt that if he bought another bottle he would be tied down for three months more. He called his doctor and told him he was disgusted, and the doctor told him to stop for two months and then have his eyes examined again. However, all weekend he was greatly disturbed, since he used the drops only once on Saturday. Perhaps he should have put them in the four times Saturday and then stopped on Sunday. He was uncomfortable all weekend. This morning he felt so uncomfortable that he had to call his mother and tell her that he was under such tension that he didn't know what to do with himself. He finally lived through the time when he could call his doctor and get reassurance from him and then felt very foolish, but better. All weekend he had a feeling of foreboding about having stopped the drops, and yet a feeling of relief at not having to put the drops in and worry about them all the time, but he was unable to explain the feeling of foreboding. I suggested that it might have some relation to the thing we had talked about last week—that putting in the drops had been a kind of shield for himself from activity that was difficult. I pointed out that we do not get rid of feelings as quickly as we can accept them intellectually. Patient accepted this idea quite readily, but did not pursue it.

"Another thing that disturbed him this morning was that two people made disparaging remarks about him and he took them too seriously. He knows one was jesting; he still is not certain about the other. One of his fellow employees said something to him about being unshaven and

when patient showed that he was sensitive about it, this fellow immediately said he was joking, that many people were unable to take a close shave. Patient shaves only every other day because his skin is so sensitive. Then, later, when he was getting on the elevator, the operator said something to him about being a dope fiend, a narcotic addict. Patient felt then that he was worrying so much about his drops that he was beginning to look old and haggard. In addition to that, one of the sales clerks had asked him during the morning whether he was feeling ill, because he looked as if he had something on his mind. Patient constantly worries about growing old. I wondered if these remarks could be related to his feeling that he was growing old. Patient knows that other people think he looks much younger than he is and this pleases him a great deal. If anyone ever remarked that he looked older he would worry. I said we all had a resistance to growing up and facing additional responsibilities, and patient felt that this had a lot to do with his fear. He has never had to be on his own. He could always, in an emergency, turn to his parents for help. He does not know whether he could manage on his own, but also, in this, is his fear of not looking well. If he is young looking and fresh looking, he believes that people will like him better. Patient related this to his old guilt about masturbation. He always felt that when he masturbated he looked haggard and worn and then people would not like him. In response to my question, he never felt people would think badly of him because he masturbated, because he always had known that everybody masturbated. All his guilt was illogical and unaccountable. He never had a feeling that other people would accuse him of it, but did feel that people did not like him because he did something that made him look bad. He used to walk down the street and when other people would look at him, he would feel that they were looking at him with distaste. Now, when he walks down the street and people look at him, he feels that they are looking at him admiringly. He feels that some of this is due to the fact that he has more friends now. He is well liked at the store; the other boys accept him as one of them. They fool around with him, slapping him on the back, giving him playful punches, and so on. Also, the boy downstairs whom he had always wanted as a friend, but who never showed too much interest in him, is now inviting him to come in and suggesting things they do together. Also, he is going to the recreation centre more often and is beginning to make friends there".

Condensed for the record, it reads as follows:

"Patient was delayed at work and was 20 minutes late. He has stopped using the eye drops but felt great anxiety about whether he should have stopped. This morning his anxiety was so intense he had to telephone mother from the job just to tell her about it until he could get the proper reassurance from the doctor. This was related to previous interpretation of symptoms as a defence against individual responsibility and patient agreed. Two casual, unflattering comments about patient's appearance made him worry again about growing old. Patient related this to dependence on parents and fear of accepting adult responsibility, as well as to guilt about masturbation, which he regards as self-damaging.

This used to make him feel that people looked upon him with disfavor but his present social relations have reversed this" (1949: 21-22).

A number of commentators wrote about the state of exhaustion created by the attention to detail required by process recording. Helen Harris Perlman, for example, argued that one of the most common causes of occupational neurosis among social workers was recording. Its impact, she wrote, was a variety of symptoms, "from mutism to verbigeration, from headache to laryngitis, from hyperactivity on all fronts to frozen depression in the face of the enemy Ediphone" (1954: 83). Perlman saw detailed casework recording and supervision as essential tools for the education and development of 'self-reliant' social workers, but argued that changes in work practices were inevitable:

in the interest of monetary and psychic economy, the use and usages of records and supervision, in their relatedness warrant our most searching inquiry and our readying ourselves for such changes as such inquiry may suggest" (1954: 85).

However worries about exhaustion were overshadowed by concern about the increasing cost of labour, arising from the extended organisational structures and procedures that developed around the caseworker and their use of the Dictaphone. John Frings (1957) reported on a study of recording that compared a number of different model approaches, in terms of time taken, purpose and attitudes of caseworkers and supervisors. His study found—among other things—that the cost of recording approached thirty percent of agency budgets.

A series of techniques were proposed at this time to address issues of time and cost. Alice Taylor (1953), reporting on interagency seminars in the US aimed

precisely at developing more useable recording practices, summarised four principles: relevance, currency, economy and adequacy. She proposed the adoption of the then new technology of microfiche, to deal with the ever-expanding archive of casework agencies, and the further adoption of standardised forms.⁹⁹ Dwyer and Urbanowski (1965) proposed, like Taylor, to impose greater structure over process recording, particularly for its use in social work education. Garfield and Irizarry (1971) described an alternative 'record of service', which consolidated an extended log of client interviews into a brief summary. They argued that records should show quality as well as quantity, and should reflect a theoretical approach:

All of this adds up to a concept of accountability that calls upon the agency to show the *what*, the *how*, and the *why* of what it does. It must know what needs doing, it must do it well, and it must record what it has done so that others will understand (244).

Concerns about cost, efficiency and accountability came to the fore during the 1950s, in a line of debate that signalled the rise of a more complex managerial perspective on the administration of casework services. In some respects this was (and still is) a self-conscious debate, where administrators who had themselves been social workers were now justifying arguments for organisational efficiencies. Bertram Black, for example, argued that administration was an important process he believed would contribute to better outcomes from professional casework. "There is recognition that, beyond supplying the setting in which casework can be carried on, administration is itself a process involving the application of skilled methods

⁹⁹ The standardisation of casework reporting forms is discussed in more detail below. Kagle (1987) comments on them in her brief history, but gives no indication of when agencies commenced using them. We can only assume from Taylor that in 1953 they were already in use, and causing some controversy.

and professional discipline" (1950a: 223). On the one hand, Black emphasised close similarities between the professional concerns of 'social administration' and those of social casework. In managing a service, he said, one should be concerned about 'the principle of growth' in order to "release the capacities of individuals and groups so they find satisfaction in working for the purposes of the agency as a whole" (1950a: 225). This, he goes on, is similar "to the principle of growth as it applies to the individual or the family group" (*ibid*). He suggests a direct relation between the administrator's interest in 'democratic participation' of all staff in planning and development, and the caseworker's commitment to "the principle of the integrity of the individual and his right to make a choice as to whether and how far he is willing to participate in utilising the service provided" (*ibid*). But Black is then at pains to point out some key differences. For example, the administrator needs to be cognisant of and able to respond to possible overlaps with other similar agencies, able to exercise some prerogative in short-term and long-term planning, and capable of showing leadership and taking responsibility for decisions made on behalf of the agency. Furthermore, he advocates a range of quantitative measures, or 'quality control indices', that he says will provide the administrator with 'clues' about the quality of service over time. His comments on 'the statistical individual' are particularly enlightening, as to the development of an organisational mode of accounting—and the implications for individual caseworkers—at this point in time:

While individualization is important, the administrator faces the necessity of considering the relation of each individual to the group which he represents. In other words, how representative of his peers, his professional group, or his population category is the staff member or client carrying or receiving the service? This has a statistical connotation involving the understanding of the norms, ranges, averages, and the deviations from them (Black, 1950a: 225).

In a subsequent article Black went on to outline further differences between casework and administration. He acknowledges the importance of allowing caseworkers, as professionals, scope for completing their work without immediate scrutiny. The caseworker, he says, gives close personal service, sharing with other established professions the task of working in intensive relationships with other people. This changes their employer-employee relationship, making it more flexible in terms of working hours and other arrangements such that productivity can only be measured in terms of the number of services completed, rather than 'units per man [sic] hour of service'. But for Black this has implications that cannot be ignored:

The organisation of the casework agency into a hierarchy of supervisors and workers with its requirement for maintaining a constant volume of services has in it elements of the industrial structure. To put it bluntly, need for individuality of service becomes linked with requirements of the production line. The economics of the service come to the fore. This is not intended as derogation of the structure in which casework is carried on; it is simply to make clear that the administrator has to thread his way between a relationship to professional colleagues entitled to requisites and privileges which are treated individualistically in other professional groups and a responsibility for employees who must adhere to the rules and regulations that keep the organisation functioning like clockwork (1950b: 329).

The 'Problem-Oriented Record' (POR), which came out of a debate about the need for reforming medical record systems, responded to the hardening of attitudes about brevity and accountability. The format, which has been widely used in human services agencies (including social work services) since the 1970s¹⁰⁰, includes a face sheet (on which essential data about the client are recorded at intake), a numbered problem list (which lists all matters of concern in the case), a summary plan for dealing with the client's concerns, and an

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of its origins and the application of the POR in social work see Kane (1974).

action list. The routine of summarising detail in short lists was aimed at streamlining the processes for collecting, collating and applying information. It required point-form summary writing rather than long detailed exposition. "In social casework such a format could be an antidote to the rambling, chronological style of recording in which original problems can be lost or forgotten" (Kane, 1974: 415). The POR was promoted as a tool for encouraging a problem solving approach to casework.

The search for alternatives was also promoted at this time in constant debates about accountability in public agencies. In a brief summary and discussion of the POR Kane appeals to the need to reconcile flexibility with useability, and to develop recording techniques "that can be used on all fronts in the struggle for accountability" (1974: 413). The reader should not, comments Kane, have to make heroic efforts to decide which facts are significant, because all entries in a 'database system'—to which the POR could be linked—encourage notation against a list of defined problems. The clear aim here was not simply to economise but also to standardise, to respond to changing social conditions that saw an enormous growth in the size and scale of social welfare programs. A variety of demands for better client service, for example, pushed for these programs to be administered more efficiently.¹⁰¹

A very significant point in Kane's discussion is her comments on the POR's emphasis on making the collection of casework data more routine, which she says would then make peer review possible. The idea of peer-review, she notes, was then attractive to many social workers concerned about the

¹⁰¹ Including, for example, debates about public accountability and the excessive use of discretion in large human service bureaucracies. See, as one example, Trattner (1983), which includes discussion and reflection on Piven & Cloward's *Regulating the Poor* (1972).

emphasis on personality that occurred in supervision, and interested in inventing different ways of ensuring accountable practice:

At present some workers are striving for 'autonomous practice' that would be contingent on professional sanctions, legal licensure, and professional surveillance by peers ... the Problem-Oriented Record could lead supervision away from issues of personality to focus on the substance of practice itself. One reason why social work supervision, especially in casework, has tended to concentrate on the adjustment of the worker is because the interaction between the worker and client has been unobserved and unobservable. POR could give content and substance to the supervisory process (1974: 418).

It appears, then, that the debate about accountability fed into bubbling concerns, which had not been expressed clearly before this time, about difficulties in managing the supervisory relationship. Standardisation of the recording process provided an opportunity not only to reduce the collection of detail on process, but also to defuse conflicts between worker and supervisor about the management of that process.

From the early 1970s agencies developed numerous standardised forms, of which the POR was a more elaborate cousin. These forms could be completed with a combination of short statements and tick boxes. Kagle notes that by the 1980s the extent of the use of forms depended on the nature of services provided. Smaller private agencies (especially in the US context) were more likely to be staffed by trained social workers, and to continue to use narrative recording, while larger publicly run agencies were more likely to be staffed by unqualified welfare workers and more likely also to use forms:

However, in the future, as more agencies move to automate their records, these differences are likely to disappear. In adapting their records to make them compatible with data processing systems, social work agencies and departments generally move to standardise as much of their record keeping as possible (1987: 466).

Indeed it is possible to see forms and computerised information systems as part and parcel of the one phenomenon: the attempt by services to streamline the flow of information from the casework process through to the position of manager. But it is important to be clear about what is meant by 'computerisation', in this particular context. Clearly it means a variety of new techniques for managing and using information, in both administrative and clinical contexts. In terms of the former one can think immediately of the promise of the 'paperless office', of the prospect of a seamless process of electronic communication from initial inquiry through to case closure. In terms of the latter, there have been numerous discussions over recent years about the promise of 'artificial intelligence' for social work, where expert systems and decision support systems provide statements of diagnostic options on the basis of information about 'symptoms'.¹⁰² For the purpose of this discussion, however, the focus is firmly on the former, on the development of computer-based information systems for collecting, storing, processing and providing access to information used in the management of an organisation.¹⁰³

Computerisation, and its coincidence with the substantial practical changes in social welfare service administration are incredibly complex. Computerisation coincided with the development of industrial awards and with a redefinition of social and welfare work as an 'industry' rather than as state or private benevolence (Patry, 1978). It began during a period (the 1980s) which saw major state financial crises, policies urging labour reform and pushes for

¹⁰² Steyaert, Colombi & Rafferty's (1996) summary provides more of an international perspective, while Smith (1996) focuses on developments in Australia.

¹⁰³ Textbooks on management information systems define them as existing primarily for planning, control decision-making and problem solving, and as much more than the technical artefacts themselves. Oz, for example, argues that an information system consists of "data, hardware, software, telecommunications, people, and procedures. In a computer-based information system, computers collect, store and process data into information, according to instructions people provide via computer programs" (2002: 21).

greater productivity, an increased interest in developing evaluation tools, and techniques generally for gathering and testing scientifically verifiable knowledge.¹⁰⁴ On this last point, it is interesting to note how one author glosses over the relationship between computerisation and the managerial/professional drives to monitor and control 'quality' that it appears to have enabled, or at least assisted, by invoking the idea of measurement as an 'age-old' tradition:

quality control is founded on measurement, which is an idea that can be traced back to primitive man, and early civilisations such as Babylon, Greece and Rome developed rapidly because they were able to standardise and specify according to measurable and measured criteria. ... Standards for the defence industries were first introduced in Britain in the reign of Charles I, and the mass production manufacturing processes that were developed as part of the Industrial Revolution during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were based on the idea of standardised interchangeable parts made to a controlled, standardised specification (Dickens, 1994: 10).

The temptation to make sweeping generalisations like this is enormous, because it is difficult indeed to completely unpick factors of cause and effect. But an interesting point that bears consideration is the fact that the development of computerised information systems coincided with the rise of IT as a major service industry. Social welfare programs, like all other sectors of the economy, came to see computers as an enormously beneficial enabling tool. They provided opportunities to follow up longer-term ambitions (the accumulation of objective and scientifically verifiable service data), but also threw up options—and obstacles—that had not previously been contemplated (including the need for new forms of training, the need to re-evaluate costs and resources, and the need to respond to changing service patterns.)

¹⁰⁴ On this last point, for a trajectory of the literature on evaluation see the following examples: Lush (1978), Eldridge (1982), Bloom & Fischer (1982), Rosen (1992), Rose-Miller (1994), Dickens (1994), Mullen & Magnabosco (1997), and Gabor, Unrau & Grinnell (1998).

Both automation and computerisation have been discussed in the literature from clearly opposing critical perspectives. A mixture of positive views have been put forward, for example in journals like *Computers in the Human Services*, about the potential for research and new modes of client service apparently made possible by new expert systems and database softwares. Computers have been viewed as providing options for improving accountability, efficiency, and research, as a tool for measuring effectiveness, and as bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and the technology of practice (Pinkus, 1987: 1164). On the other hand, fears have been expressed about the future of the 'human side' of social work, which is said to be in danger from a creeping managerial ideology of control lodged within the new technologies. Computers have been seen as a weapon for rationalising and shifting the location of decision-making upwards in the organisational hierarchy (Smith, 1985: 72).

In terms of process, computers have essentially assisted in shifting the emphasis away from narrative recording towards summary forms of notation and data collection. There is evidence in the literature, from the 1980s, of an alternative rationality that does not see detailed records of practice as among the particular advantages that social casework has to offer. Pinkus, for example, argues that case studies and case histories do not appear to constitute evidence "since they do not show controlled conditions, the influence of the intervention, the relative overall numbers of successes and failures, and the long term effects and costs (Pinkus, 1987: 1164).

Computerisation requires—and in a sense 'compels'—workers to complete particular fields of client information before moving to subsequent screens,

forcing them to engage in what is essentially a standardised recording procedure. However a focus on computerisation alone is somewhat misplaced. Electronic automation, after all, is only one aspect of the progressive standardisation of accounting practices. Standardisation of recording has, to some extent, been achieved through the compilation of extensive agency manuals, which in some sites have numbered several volumes. Such manuals include definitions, purposes and standards for case records, and therefore prescriptions for practice. Agency manuals have set standards for content and for use: all records are to be dated on file; all opening entries must contain identifying information; language should be non-sexist and non-judgemental; the legal bases for assessment must be included. Checklists and reminders are usually included, together with principles of privacy and confidentiality of records.

This may read as somewhat banal and 'ordinary': this is precisely what is taken as straightforward administrative practice, what the community expects state welfare agencies to require of themselves—the normal bureaucratic rules and regulations that ensure all citizens are treated 'equally', and that minimise the risks of poor service. Manuals are notorious, however, for being overlooked. In the eyes of some, agency manuals are only as good as the professional judgement exercised in following the policies and procedures laid down in them. Cooper, for example, in a report on South Australian child protection work with children of 'under-age parents', argues that policies and procedures structure social work practice, but that they require another component to make them work:

This other component is the worker's capacity to form a relationship with the client, to make adequate and thorough assessments, to set clear goals and to make logical and workable case plans in a child protection context where sound professional judgement must be exercised. The aim for consistently high practice then is to have quality policies and procedures linked to sound professional judgement which is focussed on the clients' needs (1988: 1).

Cooper is critical of the assumption, pushed by some critics, that procedure weakens decision-making and discretion. She argues instead that while procedures may be prescriptive about process, workers can still exercise significant judgement at each stage of the decision-making cycle. However for this to work, the management of that cycle needs to be supported by good supervision, which in turn is still largely dependent on what people do, in an organisational context, with casework documentation. Outcomes, it seems, are shaped by pressures on time:

To undertake supervision of any quality the senior needs time: time to read the casepapers; time to think through the implications of what is read; then time to prepare for the session. Most supervision sessions will last about an hour-and-a-half. Then time is needed to put notes on the case file and to make notes about the supervision session itself. If the senior has, say, eight staff, this hardly leaves time for any of the other duties expected of a senior, including such things as chairing case conferences (1988: 106).

Managers have taken another step in recent years, in attempting to demarcate the limits of professional judgement, by providing a clear flow of routines for the documentation and resolution of each individual case. In some cases, these routines have been computerised, such that the logic of the screen flow pushes caseworkers to exhaust different stages of documentation before others. The Victorian Department of Human Services (VDHS), for example, developed a new approach to the management of child protection work at the end of the 1990s, using a system that combined professional and actuarial models of

judgement. Based on recent research relating to risk assessment in child protection, the Practice Leadership Unit of the Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Branch of the VDHS produced the Victorian Risk Framework (VRF), a set of standardised procedures for guiding child protection workers through set stages of information gathering, analysis and assessment. Caseworkers are now required, at every stage of a case, to make calculations about actual and potential risks to children, by following a 'risk analysis matrix'. That matrix guides caseworkers through a model of risk analysis, asking questions such as 'What is the actual or believed harm to the child?', 'What factors increase or decrease the probability of harm?', and 'Is there significant risk of harm to the child during the assessment phase, or is safety demonstrated?' The assessment process is standardised—or proceduralised—to the extent that the case worker must demonstrate in their case notes evidence of having exhausted each stage in a calculation of risk being 'highly likely, likely or unlikely'.

In the VRF the risk assessment process is broken down into three steps: information gathering, analysis and judgement of risk. Risk is defined as "the relationship between the degree of harm and the probability of the believed harm occurring (or of protection being provided)" (VDHS, 1999: 3). Categories of essential information are very specifically prescribed: information about the child, the parents, the source(s) of harm, the opportunity for harm, and the formal and informal networks in which the child lives. The VRF requires workers to gather and think about these kinds of information at all stages of a case. For the purposes of analysis, information relating to these categories is then reorganised in tabular form so that workers can focus on the degree and probability of harm. Again, key dimensions are indicated: the severity of believed harm, the child's vulnerability to harm, the likelihood of harm

occurring, and the degree of safety for the child. Finally, judgement in the VRF is a process that requires workers to answer a set of key questions about the information they have collected and analysed. "What is the actual or believed harm to the child or young person? What are the factors that increase or decrease the probability of this harm occurring or recurring? Is there any risk of significant harm to the child or young person over the immediate assessment period?" (VDHS, 1999: 17). Another checklist for recording visits (titled the 'Risk Analysis Matrix') is to be followed, together with a list of generic indicators to be used in the assessment of the probability and consequences of harm.

The initial version of the VRF came in paper copy form, but by 2002 the procedures set out in the Framework had been computerised.¹⁰⁵ Caseworkers are now required to follow the risk analysis matrix process through a series of screens, which do not allow cases to be finalised until the requisite number of screens have been exhausted.

The VRF is one example of an attempt to standardise procedures not only of recording, but also of the various stages of casework. It takes the manual of practice another step, laying out a clear procedure that integrates agency guidelines with the actual steps of casework practice. The procedures appear to enable the application of professional judgement, but within strict parameters defined by organisational needs and policy frameworks. Flow charts diagrammatically represent the various stages of a case, from notification to closure, summarising the required steps each caseworker must

¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately no scholarly work has been published on the VRF. Information about its computerisation is based on a brief interview conducted by this researcher with a departmental official in the Child Protection Unit, Warragul Office of the Victorian DHS, 16th November, 2004.

take. The lists of assessment indicators remind them of the factors that trained staff should be expected to know already. In this sense, the management of risk focuses not just on the risk factors operating in and around vulnerable children and their families, but on staff employed as child protection workers.

The attempt to couple judgement with policy objectives is not, of course, a new phenomenon. What is new is the technology used in this particular case. The VRF is the latest version of the various accounting technologies developed not simply to delimit the spaces of discretion within which the autonomous social worker is able to move, but to systematically integrate information with action.

5.3 Discussion

So far this Chapter has explored changes in discursive practices and their relation to particular modes of accounting: the 'professional' and the 'organisational'. These modes of accounting are constituted by two broadly different recording technologies (extended process recording as opposed to standardised forms and other data collection instruments), by which individualised forms of social casework have been made 'accountable', or in other words made subject to both internal and external forms of regulation.

In the earlier phases of social work history recording was described as a practice that involved writing up long-winded accounts of not only actions and decisions but also an exhaustive summary of the detail of one's dialogue with clients, and the ideas and feelings that were generated. This was seen as performing at least two main functions: first, the accumulation of a mass of data on which to base research into the efficacy of social work, and therefore

also as support for its claim to a professional status; and second, it contributed to developing skills of self-reflection that the discipline also saw as necessary for building the status of social casework. The literature indicates that recording practices were seen as constitutive of a particular approach to practice: through their performance social workers could rehearse a particular subject position, one that engages in a dialogue with 'self', in order to essentially transcend that 'self'.

Early social work scholars (from Mary Richmond to Gordon Hamilton, from the 1920s to the 1940s) saw the capacity for independent discretionary judgement as an outcome of a particular kind of discursive routine. They saw recording processes as key activities in developing professional knowledge and (what more recent authors would call) 'critical awareness'. In terms used by Foucault (§3.2) traditional social work recording can be seen as a key 'technology of the self', which has provided scripted activities by which generations of social workers have come to develop their capacities and skills as independent subjects within the domain of the human services.

However it appears that endless recording of casework information was, eventually, not a luxury that social caseworkers could indulge in without reference to organisational pressures. Recording practices across the discipline appear to have been substantially standardised since the 1970s. Recording appears now to function, in the main, as an organisational management tool that works to limit risk and to monitor and shape the efficient use of resources. Indeed it can be seen as a recursive technology for predicting and controlling patterns of service, much in the same way as they are managed in industrial organisations. While a number of authors continue to argue that writing is a

useful tool for developing skills of critical awareness and independent judgement, most appear to have accepted that recording should be brief and succinct in style and format, and that its primary function is to demonstrate agency (as well as individual professional) accountability.

There has been, since the 1950s, a shift away from extended process recording—and the associated interest in linking writing with professional self-development in an organisational context—to a set of technologies that standardise not only the techniques of representation but also appear to reshape the limits of social work practice. The automation and computerisation of recording appear to have placed pressure on the exercise of independent judgement, working as they do to standardise not only recording formats but also the mode by which practice decisions are made. The objective of the organisational mode of accounting, as developed in computerised recording, seems to be minimisation of the risks associated with practice, in order to avoid litigation arising from poorly managed casework.

One can reasonably conjecture about why new forms of representation, which made up an alternative 'mode of accounting' practice, were adopted. In part, it seems they were driven by cost pressures at the local level (labour time as a proportion of expenditure, storage costs, staff turnover), and by pressures at the political level.¹⁰⁶ The latter took the form of impositions on real growth in funding, but also explicit privacy and confidentiality rules, which have been

¹⁰⁶ For an example, see Carter (1983), who argued that political pressure at the time amounted to a fundamental questioning of the 'ethic of intrinsic goodness'.

codified in policy manuals, and driven, at least partly, by government inquiries into problems in performance.¹⁰⁷

How have these pressures been played out at the 'street level' of social casework? The professional mode of accounting in social casework traditionally assumed a close relationship between caseworker and supervisor. In this relationship relevant information on cases would be routed through supervisors, in a way that provided certainty for agency management, but also developmental opportunities for casework staff. There have been subtle shifts in power relations between caseworker and manager flowing from the rise of administrative expertise in social work agencies, from the development of industrial awards, and the consequent view of the sector as an 'industry' rather than discrete 'charities'.¹⁰⁸ It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, to note the desire on the part of some to use the POR—and other standardised devices—to circumvent conflicts in supervision, around personality differences (Kane, 1974: 418, cited in §5.2.2).

Forms of narrative and process recording were seen as expensive and time consuming. The dictation and transcription of casework records was depicted in the literature as exhausting for social workers, as much as it was expensive for service managers. Likewise, the use of records as the basis for supervision has been problematised by a number of writers, who saw records increasingly

¹⁰⁷ This refers to the various reviews and inquiries, conducted after the death—for example—of children in care. See Cooper (1988), Garner (1993) and Davies (2000a, 2000b). See also Wilczynski, who claims that confidentiality provisions first arose in the US during the McCarthy trials of the 1950s, when "governmental investigatory bodies sought clinical records to establish clients' political leanings" (1981: 314).

¹⁰⁸ For a relatively recent discussion of the history, size and scope of social welfare services in Australia see the Industry Commission's report *Charitable Organisations in Australia* (CoA, 1995). Chapter Five of that report covers the main features of the human resource issues (including skills, training and industrial relations) across the sector as a whole.

as a focus for a negative performance management process rather than discussions about the circumstances of client populations.

The critique has not been a one-way street, however, with writers like Wilczynski arguing that the growth of the various regulations imposed on recording gradually made it 'stultifying' and 'mechanical', highlighting progress rather than process. "Recording now reflects a greater concentration on *what* was achieved in contrast to *how* it was achieved" (1981: 313).

In summary, this Chapter's brief review of changes in social casework recording indicates an apparent narrowing of the role of writing in actual practice, and specifically in terms of any contribution it makes to shaping the skills of independent judgement. The act of writing, in other words, appears to have been substantially circumscribed by accountability and risk management guidelines.

It is important, however, to qualify what conclusions can be drawn from this. It seems unreasonable to assume standardisation is straightforwardly expressive of a managerial objective to contain and control casework. In addition to the interest in using standardised recording to resolve problems in the supervision process, noted above, arguments for resource efficiency had been building for many years, in periods prior to the supposed heyday of new managerialism. Peter Rossi, in a discussion of outcomes measurement in the human services, notes:

the emphasis on outcomes is no more than an extrapolation of the trend of the past three decades consisting of a growing emphasis on accountability and evaluation in the assessment of human service policies and programs. Social historians have yet to produce a credible account of why policymakers in the 1960s began to write evaluation requirements into legislation authorising human service programs (1997: 20).

On the other hand, one can also note that while extended process recording has not been used in social casework for many years, it remains, still, a focus for training social work students in university-based degree programs today. Writers such as Swenson (1988) have continued the tradition established by earlier writers, arguing that casework recording still provides opportunities for self-reflection and self-development. The emphasis on developing a capacity for critical self-awareness (or what some writers refer to as 'conscientisation' (Fook, 1993: 96-97, drawing on Friere)) remains an important ingredient in the social work literature, with much of it framed around the ideal of the social worker as a social change agent. Paulo Freire, for example, in discussing the 'virtues' of a progressive social worker, comments "social workers uncover and make explicit a certain dream about social relations, which is a political dream" (1990: 5). The skills of progressive practice are held to include the capacity to ensure a minimal distance between what is said and what is done, "between what I say, what I affirm, and what I do" (1990: 7). The bearer of these skills should also have the capacity for a 'permanent critical curiosity', and be able to "permanently search for one's own competence" (1990: 8). Margaret Rhodes, a well-known writer on social work ethics, describes a similar process: "My point of view, then, is that *dialogue* is central to ethics ... [and these] dialogues often end without a conclusion, the conclusion being that we must constantly re-examine our answers" (1986: 19-20).

In casework recording there is a kind of double connection to the skills of ethical professionalism. On the one hand, recording is a critical technology used in collecting and framing arguments about social work's knowledge base that have been used, since the first half of the twentieth century, to persuade external authorities that social work is a credible and professional discipline. In the earlier period discussed above, knowledge was derived from extensive casework recording processes. In more recent times, arguments about 'efficiency and effectiveness'—particular in tender and 'business partnership' documents—are being used to persuade prospective partners to enter into contractual arrangements with social work agencies. In the shift from one mode of accounting to another it is possible to see a very different set of organisational and disciplinary relations. On the other hand, recording as an actual discursive practice continues to enjoy a status which is not just about the 'facts' of a case: it is still seen as a site for rehearsing or performing a particular mode of 'reflection in action', which in a very real sense helps govern the limits of autonomy.

The difference here is that instead of it being seen as important in 'growing' or professionalising the discipline it appears often to be hooked up with arguments about social justice and social change. In other words, it is more outward looking, less concerned with the immediate relationship between supervisor and caseworker, less concerned with professional status and more concerned with 'making a difference'.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Garfield & Irizarry, who argue that "writing records is not a formalistic problem alone but a pragmatic one closely tied to our basic understanding of what we were doing in the community—the *raison d'être* of the work itself" (1971: 242).

The differences between the professional and organisational modes of accounting—where one assumes and depends on a less formal subject-centred knowledge base, while the other is committed to a very formal mode of objective (and centrally controlled) knowledge production—came to the surface in the 1970s, in various claims and counter claims about the role and function of social welfare services provided by large state bureaucracies (Scott, 1969; Hanlan, 1971; Lawrence, 1976). The relationship between trust and control, in other words, has been contentious in social work for some time, and remains so. In the modern 'knowledge economy' that relationship is 'tensioned' in new ways—and social work is not immune to this—by managers who have now invented and implemented a range of computerised information systems that appear to have resolved many of their previous dilemmas about information and control. These systems act in two ways. First, they are part of the means by which the ends of work are achieved: they take the form of, for example, cash registers, mobile phone systems, and satellite tracking systems. Second, they are simultaneously the means by which information *about* the conduct of work is registered, accumulated and stored. They provide organisations with new ways of 'getting the work done' but *at the same time* with the means for regulating and accounting for action through a new kind of dispersed authority which is apparently 'always there'. In other words, the computerisation of work tasks has made it possible to align the ends with the means, to match 'doing' tasks more precisely with information and accounting tasks, making it possible for the act of counting to be configured 'into the job'. Counting, and 'ac-counting', are no longer conscious secondary add-ons, but part of the primary process of work.

One conclusion that can be drawn, then, is that computerisation has resulted in a certain re-skilling of social work staff, by which their perception of their own professional accountability (the limits of their own discretionary judgement) is substantially re-engineered. This is not a matter of ideological re-programming, by which the socially progressive values and ideals routinely claimed by social work educators and commentators are somehow dissolved. It is instead a change in the skill set of social workers, brought about by the requirement to develop particular competencies: the requirement to enumerate aspects of their work, to measure and record them in a management database, produces new techniques for identifying, calculating and accounting for performance *which are qualitatively different to those that preceded them*. Their capacity for self-regulation, or self-mastery, is substantially altered by the tasks of enumeration and analysis (and this includes the recording *as well as* the making sense of information produced by the system), and by the context of the performance of that task. A degree of professional independence is left intact by the continuation of a range of structural arrangements attendant to professional status—including pay scales, hours of work and educational requirements. But in essence, computerisation brings with it a substantial change in the cultural landscape of professional work.

5.4 Conclusion

This Chapter argues that professionalism is premised upon the development of particular communication practices that have shaped certain identifiable modes of accounting. It has described and discussed aspects of one of the key

discursive mechanisms developed to regulate the conduct of practitioners, namely casework recording.

How can these findings help to resolve the initial thesis question, namely 'what effect of the computerisation of recording systems on the autonomy of professional social work?' Before going further it is important to remember the central argument of this thesis. The advance of new information and communication systems in the human services workplace has been identified as a major concern, with many commentators arguing that the use of computers jeopardises professional autonomy. The technologies of computerised information systems, so the humanist argument goes, represent an 'inhuman' (or, 'ideological') intrusion into professional worker-client relationships, thereby dehumanising the tasks of advocacy, therapy and general assistance. This dissertation accepts that computerised information systems have indeed altered relationships between managers and professionals in the human services. However this is not viewed as a matter of 'dehumanisation' but rather a recasting of a set of ethical dispositions and organisational relationships (including modes of accounting) that were *already previously constituted* through the operation of certain techniques of representation, or 'cultural technologies'. The capacity to exercise independent judgement—or what are called here the acquired 'skills of self-mastery'—is constituted *in practice*, and not simply ordained elsewhere.

This builds on the assumption that forms of representation and communication are not neutral, but political. They are political precisely because they enable things to happen, because they constitute capacities and perspectives. Records are 'productive' documents: they are used to particular

ends in court proceedings, in dealing with the consequences of domestic violence, in submissions for removing children from families, and for keeping families together. The use of records within and beyond agencies, and specifically in decisions about 'real' people, means the accuracy and credibility of the information they contain is always under scrutiny, as is the writer's faculty of ethical judgement that worked to produce them. But recording is also productive in another sense: it is productive of a set of skills for self-mastery (or 'detachment') that play a key role in regulating casework.

Chapter Four noted that social work is a profession whose members are trusted to act independently, but nevertheless are required to account for the outcomes of their actions. The individualised version of social work called 'casework' is conducted largely outside the purview of managers, supervisors and other colleagues. Coupled with this, one of the key debates in the social work literature over the last three decades has been about the apparent indeterminacy of casework practice, or in other words the difficulties involved in making the outcomes of practice visible, and in defining and explaining the precise 'techniques' and 'processes' of casework practice.¹¹⁰ A survey of the relevant literature reveals repeated reference to questions about fundamental issues concerning the status of both objective and subjective knowledge. Is social work art (England 1986), science, or religion (Barber 1995)? Can it have a strong and credible theoretical base? Is that base sufficient to guarantee the status of 'professional'? Or is the basis of the profession founded instead on the personal character and conduct of the individual social worker?

¹¹⁰ The editorial of a 1974 issue of the US journal *Social Work* (vol. 19, no. 4) called for social workers to send in broad descriptions of what they did at the level of actual practice. This was in the face of pressure from governments, who wanted to more clearly define various aspects of a set of public programs that were growing but lacked clear definition—in terms of training requirements, staff numbers, costs of services, and so on.

Many writers have argued that, because of the problem of visibility, and because of the close personal nature of casework, the processes and outcomes of social work are by definition uncertain and difficult to identify. The conduct of casework is, in this approach, based largely on a mastery of honed intuition and 'self-awareness', or what is sometimes referred to in the literature as 'the use of self'.¹¹¹ Successful social work practice is said to depend on maximising the capacity of frontline social workers to deal with their clients, likewise, as significant and self-determining subjects, rather than merely objects of the discipline's (institutionally organised and controlled) practice. Recording techniques, and the associated routines of assessment and supervision, provide a credible means by which accountability can be assured. Writers from this perspective resent the intrusion of what are seen as Taylorist industrial techniques for measuring and accounting for 'inputs' and 'outcomes', which serve only to rationalise the scope for meaningful change via social welfare services.

For many other writers, however, the individualised character of casework is precisely why the act of recording must provide accurate and objective information that can then be used as evidence of the effectiveness of casework. As this Chapter has shown, one of the preoccupations of social work writers in the last thirty years has been with the development of sophisticated measurement and evaluation tools, or in other words with techniques for gathering and testing scientifically verifiable knowledge.

William Schwartz's discussion of the challenges often mounted within social work to the 'scientific paradigm' of objective knowledge exemplifies the

¹¹¹ See, as examples, Carew (1987) and Anderson & Mandell (1989).

ongoing tension, within social work, about the role and status of knowledge. Schwartz refers to a range of 'received beliefs', drawn from the positivist paradigm of study-diagnosis-treatment inherited from early medical social work. However he says the discipline also faces an array of complex 'games and puzzles' that defy a positivist approach, and are extremely difficult to resolve:

We have our stubborn contradictions, the anomalies that face us at every turn: the need to hedge on the sequential character of study, diagnosis, and treatment, maintaining that each step occurs simultaneously, since the imagined process is so obviously at odds with what actually happens between worker and client; the vexing inability to reconcile the demands for both prescriptiveness and self-determination; the call for both professional detachment and deep empathy in the same relationship; the problem of integrating concepts of changing people with those of helping them; and many others. And the crisis is unmistakable as professionals try to live with the traditional subject-object view of the helping relationship (Schwartz, 1994: 327).

Remember that Chapter Two noted that resolution to these debates might be found through interrogating the significance of the ethical character of social work practice, by looking at the figure of 'citizen social worker'. That figure can be seen as both an outcome of forms of engagement with the discursive routines of practical and educational social work, and also a key (albeit informal) guarantor in the discipline's regulatory arrangements. It has, in other words, been a locus of the professional mode of accounting. The development of a 'professional project' in social work runs parallel with the development of both formal and informal systems for regulating ethical practice, for performing and producing subjects capable of acting with professional 'detachment'. That project has been driven not only by the elaboration of codes of ethics, and of arguments about 'principled practice', but also by knowledge systems (or 'discourses', as per §3.2)—in the form of clear guidelines and

techniques for interviewing, assessment, recording and supervision—that work to draw the credentialed social worker into ways of thinking and acting not just about their clients and/or managers, and also, crucially, about themselves.

'Ethics' means, therefore, a set of practical competencies developed through an engagement with discursive routines. Ethics in this sense constitutes both a mode of reflection as well as a relationship of accountability, a display of respect for and compliance with professional norms. Ethics is not simply a set of base line values established separately from practice contexts. Ethics, as a relationship of accountability, is not simply a display of the values or the knowledge base of the discipline. It is instead an enactment of self-knowledge, of self-awareness, of self-mastery. As a key capacity in social work practice, the performance of the skills of self-mastery—through the discursive means noted above—opens up the possibility of engaging constructively with a client without submitting to personal whim or impulse. Skills of interviewing and recording can be seen as productive of the capacity to keep a clear distance between the emotion of the clients' circumstances and one's own feelings or intellectual judgements.

This line of argument assumes, in summary, that the use of various forms of recording systems, in both educational and organisational contexts, contributes to the development of a capacity of self-mastery. Recording systems have clearly formed part of the ensemble of techniques used by the social work profession to regulate practice, to ensure a degree of accountability to professional and social norms. Recording, along with interviewing and supervision, is a key component of a certain professional 'mode of accounting'

that has been the subject of a substantial body of research and writing in the social work discipline, concerning the best way to train social workers for practice in the field.

To return to the overall thesis question—'what is the effect of the computerisation of recording systems on the autonomy of professional social work?'—it is therefore imperative to ask what distinctions can be made, in respect of ethical capacities, between the different modes of accounting distinguished so far. How have these capacities changed? Is it reasonable to argue that standardised forms of reporting and writing constitute ethical substance, but perhaps that that substance changes? Is ethics, indeed, essentially an outcome of a set of procedures for aligning one self with the aims and objectives of authorities? Is the professional mode of accounting dependent on procedures that are privatised, or personalised, following codified principles determined beyond agency doors? Is it possible to distinguish the organisational mode of accounting as one that operates in the more public realm of case manuals and software programs? Is the ethical 'subject position' of the social worker in an organisational mode of accounting one that considers itself more in relation to the central managerial concerns of the agency, simply because it is that centre that the subject is routinely asked to communicate with? Is there something about the format and presentation of numbers (figures, tables, graphs) that reformats the ethical substance of the citizen social worker?

If autonomy (as a subject position, an ensemble of ethical capacities) is an artefact of a rehearsal of a mode of self-reflection, and if that rehearsal has changed in substance, then perhaps it is the case that social workers have two

forms of 'ethical' rehearsal available to them, and in a sense each competes with the other, and has done so for some time. Perhaps the outcome is not simply a displacement, but rather a constant play between two modes. The end point might appear to be the same, in the sense that the outcome is a subject 'made regular', and therefore capable of being governed 'at a distance'. The difference, however, might be that the organisational mode opens the bearers of expertise up to the influence of policy actors beyond the realm of routine practice, actors whose objectives may be significantly different to those held by the bearers of professional expertise.

In order to further explore these questions—about professional autonomy and accountability in social work, and about the effects of computerised recording—the following Chapter moves to consider the results of a case study, which considers the development and implementation of a computerised management information system in the social work service of Centrelink.

CHAPTER SIX

Case study—Centrelink social work, and the Social Work Information System

- 6.1 Introduction
 - 6.2 Methodology
 - 6.3 Public service reform in the 1980s: a new 'attitude of mind'
 - 6.4 Social work in DSS/Centrelink
 - 6.5 Development and implementation
 - 6.6 Discussion
 - 6.7 Conclusion
-

6.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter established some important historical links between the routines of casework recording and the development of social work as a profession. Early social work writers saw the discursive routines of narrative and process recording as providing a dual guarantee of professional accountability. They emphasised detailed investigation and the gathering of evidence, as well as critical examination and reflective interpretation.

On the one hand, detailed investigation generated volumes of research material that could be used in persuasive arguments about the value of the discipline, in debates concerning its professional status. The pioneers of 'professional' social work—writers such as Mary Richmond and Ada Sheffield—emphasised the role that objective data could play in not only supporting a more scientific 'diagnosis' at the local level, but also in compiling

an objective and scientific knowledge base that could be used to advance the status claims of the profession.

On the other hand, narrative recording—and the practices that have been performed around the casework record, such as training, intake and assessment, interviewing and supervision—were seen as constitutive of certain skills of critical self-examination, and these in turn provided a basis for the kind of 'detachment' seen as a necessary quality for professional practice. In this view, self-examination has been seen as a requisite training for self-regulation, which in turn provides a further guarantee of the accountability of the profession for the trust placed in it by state authorities and the broader community.

While some recent writers have maintained an interest in writing as a site for the constitution of ethical capacities, and while process recording has had some continuing currency in the social work curriculum, the major focus in debates about professional accountability since the 1950s has been on the accumulation of quantitative data, on the development of techniques for enumerating aspects of practice. If scholarly writing and publishing can be taken as a reasonable indication of what happens in the field, then there would appear to have been a shift in the dominant mode of accounting, from the professional to the organisational. This is, in other words, a shift in regulatory focus, from regulation at the level of the individual caseworker to regulation at the level of the whole agency.

If the drive for development of what is called here an 'organisational mode of accounting' in social work services dates back to the 1950s and 1960s, this puts pay to the claim that the supposed 'proletarianisation' of social work is an

outcome of new managerialism, the rise of which is generally dated to the late 1970s and early 1980s. This indicates that the relationship between technical, demographic and political forms of change on the one hand, and social work's workplace culture on the other, is more complex and more long-term than has been suggested in the literature reviewed in Chapter Four. The claim that the new liberal drive for efficiency and effectiveness has 'dehumanised' the 'heart' of social work is perhaps understandable, but not entirely supportable.

The task of this Chapter is to extend the overall argument about recording as a 'cultural technology' of government, and to draw some conclusions about the longer-term effects of the current preoccupation with audit that characterises an organisational mode of accounting. Remember that the larger research question is concerned with the effect of computerised information systems on professional autonomy, or more substantively with the impact of computerised recording systems on the relations of trust and control between social workers and their managers. In this Chapter the focus is narrowed further, to a consideration of the effect of computerised case recording on the capacity of Centrelink social workers to exercise a measure of independent judgement.¹¹²

The work here proceeds in three stages. First, it reviews the background context against which information and communication practices in the

¹¹² Centrelink is a statutory authority, established in 1997 under the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency Act. It brings together a range of payment and support services previously provided by a variety of federal government departments. According to its website (www.centrelink.gov.au) it delivers more than 140 different products and services to Australian citizens, on behalf of 25 government agencies. The Department of Social Security (DSS) previously controlled Centrelink's Social Work Service. In order to avoid any confusion for the reader, 'DSS' is used to refer to any matter concerning the SWS prior to 1997. Where necessary, 'DSS/Centrelink' is used to refer to any matter concerning the SWS that crosses the different time periods.

Australian Public Service (APS) were substantially reformed during the 1980s and 1990s. The reforms noted here worked to create a new corporate culture in the APS, including DSS (and later Centrelink). They have required staff at all level to become more entrepreneurial and less process oriented, and have assisted in the progressive devolution of responsibility for program outcomes from the 'centre' of government to the 'periphery'.

Second, it summarises and discusses the development and implementation of the Social Work Information System (SWIS). It demonstrates how SWIS has worked as a key component of a mode of accounting that produces new forms of knowledge about Centrelink's clients/customers and staff, that works to centralise policy control over the process work that happens at the periphery. It also enables a more precise understanding of the complex process of 'translation' (a concept discussed in §3) by which a computerised information system has effectively displaced paper-based longhand recording.

Finally, the Chapter uses interview material to further illustrate and discuss the effects flowing from SWIS as they have impacted on social work staff at the 'front line' of the organisation. This allows some further appreciation of the impact of computerisation on both daily routines of practice as well as on the 'cultural frameworks' by which front line Centrelink social workers can now make sense of their relationship to management.

In summary, the Chapter sets out to assess changes in rules governing the production of statements about Centrelink social work staff and their work, for what they can tell us about working relationships of trust and control between this group of professional social workers and their managers, and about the capacity of Centrelink social work staff to exercise independent judgement.

The Chapter concludes that in the 'story' of SWIS there is a significant tension between two particular 'narrative threads', which parallels the tension that can be observed between a professional and an organisational mode of accounting, and which can be fruitfully discussed in terms of a 'politics of visibility'. Centrelink social workers continue to aspire to engage with a diversity of work tasks, because they see diversity as a necessary component of a professional status. At the same time, many want to have elements of these tasks noted and recognised by management, as tasks that fit legitimately within the framework of Centrelink's role and function. There is a tension here between the need to engage in complex work tasks, and the need also to display competence, created by the desire of most social workers to remain aloof from direct control, to engage in work tasks that are not standardised from above.

This is a tension played out in a complex and changing context, where utopian optimism has competed with a dystopian realism, where numerous technical difficulties have frustrated an initial aspiration (for a recognition of complexity), and in a sense fractured and 'translated' that aspiration into something else. Rather than accommodate and communicate complexity, SWIS can be seen as working to limit and standardise subjective evaluation at the point of client contact, precisely in order to produce sets of reports that fit easily with a set of communication and accounting practices operating at another level of the organisation. SWIS produces, in other words, persuasive reports that can be 'read at a glance' by policy actors unfamiliar with the nuances of social casework. These are reports that summarise a complex state of affairs inside a series of simple summary statements, in ways that provide rhetorical tools for pursuing strategic ambitions concerned with resources and

other related matters. In doing so, this has particular implications for how social work can be appreciated, and regulated, within the organisation.

6.2 Methodology

But on what basis can interpretations be made about the historical development of an information system, about the contextual organisational relations of power in which it was produced, and about the reception and use of that system by its end users? Chapter Three outlined key theoretical tools for this very purpose. However it will be useful, in the first instance, to also comment on the practical 'nuts and bolts' of the research conducted towards this section of the thesis.

In summary, the Chapter makes use of a variety of sources, including DSS and Centrelink annual reports, agency report writing principles and instructions, agency interview and assessment notes and instructions, historical interviews drawn from the National Library of Australia, interviews with current staff, SWIS training notes, SWIS reports (including pilot evaluations, casework reports, systems guides), agency file notes and memos, and a decision of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) on Centrelink social work job descriptions and pay scales. These various sources can all be used to tell a particular 'story' about how knowledge/truth and technology/power relations are shaped in this particular institution. Ultimately, stories are framed not only by theoretical perspectives, but also by the conditions under which evidence is acquired, and put to work.

SWIS is a peculiar phenomenon, not least because its development occurred in a way that has ensured available evidence about its history. The traces of technical development of this sort are not often clearly documented. In this case there are abundant traces of the work carried out by SWS managers and their staff, over many years (from the early 1970s, to the current day). The SWS, as a sub-section of a large federal government department (namely DSS/Centrelink), was required to keep detailed records of all the deliberations of individuals and committees that worked on SWIS. Records of meetings, reports, letters, memos, files notes, jottings, media reports and other documents, all accumulated over a period of more than twenty years, show the traces of a shift from 'old' technologies of handwriting to 'new' media for computerised capture of information. Access to those records provided detailed evidence of not only larger policy frameworks (of those governing the delivery of social work in this particular context) but also of the effects of significant local decisions about how to devise, distribute and use the new apparatus.

The SWS made its extensive collection of file notes on the development of SWIS available, and these were used to develop a summary of structures, events and processes that shaped SWIS. The files include a series of documents referring to both the broad policy framework that shapes social work practice within the context of delivering income support payments, as well as the practical processes involved in turning card filing into a system for self-keyed data capture. They include statements about the role and function of social work staff (including reports, audits and conference papers), annual reports, instructional manuals, official communication between senior managers, actual case work records (obtained through the National Archives of

Australia), data entry forms, training material and transcribed interviews with agency social workers.

In relation to the question of *evidence*, a primary issue shaping research into any form of socio-technical change is always 'reliability'. Historical evidence, particularly that which is retrieved and accumulated well past the time of initial change, is sometimes not considered entirely useful when there is a substantial 'personal' dimension to the expression of individual views. Official documentary evidence (including memos, reports and personal correspondence) can be seen as shaped by individual and collective actors with a capacity to 'write the history' of change, in their 'interests'. Likewise, the views of low-level 'functionaries' (such as those interviewed for this research—see §6.5.3 below) are not seen as significant. Acquisition of particular client/customer records was not possible in this research, given the effect of privacy regulations that surround the uses to which those kinds of records can be put.

In summary, and in response to these kinds of concerns, this Chapter draws on both oral and documentary sources, conscious of their individual shortcomings but also mindful of a collective 'weight of evidence' they make possible. It seeks to 'magpie' the available evidence, in a way that seeks to foreground very specifically the techniques of inscription developed with SWIS. The focus here is on a variety of sources for what they say about 'the technical', or 'the discursive', rather than on the personal opinions of just a few social actors.

In the early stages of the research for this thesis it was thought that a comparison of earlier and more recent recording formats would help in

foregrounding the detail of the work routines involved in social work, in this context. Old case records were obtained from the Social Work Branch of the old Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service (CRS).¹¹³ Names of clients had been 'expunged'. The documents did indeed provide useful insights into dominant cultural views about income support for disadvantaged citizens at the time, as indexed by the language of the worker/author in the following extract:

26/5/55: Rehab file referred to SW. Seen by SMO [presumably senior medical officer] 23/5/55 and later he telephoned her mother. SMO feels that Rehab not likely to help [*name expunged*] as she is sub-normal [and] not likely to be improved by 'any means at our present disposal'. Recommend rejection. (Department of Social Welfare, File D1853/1 (Australian Archives), Item 1).

And further:

12/6/55: telephoned Mr. Harris. Says Education Department docket is long & involved. Could SW call and look at it? Later: Education Department docket sighted. Referred to psychologist by school teacher in 1946. Said to be nervy, imaginative child. Three children in the family—father a clerk. By Stanford-Binet test IQ about 77. Had fobia [sic] about cats—had fantasy 'cataland' where people eat and do as they like. Mother one of large family—had nervous breakdown at 18 and then married the boy next door. An aunt and grand parent said to be 'crackers'. Referred to Dr. Winter—schizo—wants to keep touch with her 6 monthly by interview. 1950 Rorschach test: IQ 89. Makes up stories—gets very excited and can't sleep. Mentally retarded, or looks this way because she is withdrawn... (*ibid*).

The records are also particularly interesting in terms of the manner in which their production and processing would have been undertaken. They would have almost certainly been handwritten or taped, and then typed/transcribed by dedicated typists. Detailed notes on individual phone calls and home visits are included.

¹¹³ See Tipping (1992) for a detailed history of the CRS, and its connections with the DSS.

However more recent records, for the purpose of comparison, were simply not available to this researcher. Special access requests for personal file records are available to 'researchers preparing works of national significance' for publication, but certainly not to a researcher investigating the material cultural relationship between mundane recording technologies and the scope for autonomy accorded professional social workers.¹¹⁴

This researcher therefore sought permission to interview Centrelink front-line social workers, to gauge their experience and understanding of SWIS. The comments presented below (in §6.5.3) have been drawn from interviews with staff, which were recorded and transcribed verbatim.¹¹⁵ The interviews were semi-structured. Respondents were asked a series of questions about their experience and perception of changes in the mode of collecting and using client information, but allowed to extrapolate if they saw reason to make connections elsewhere. Their transcribed responses were then collated and reviewed for what they indicated about the process, and the progress, of change in the discursive practices particular to social work in DSS/Centrelink.

Caseworkers were recruited if their employment with DSS/Centrelink spanned most or all of the period of transition from paper copy to electronic recording (1985-1995, roughly speaking), so that they would therefore be able to discuss the minutiae of technical, administrative and cultural changes that occurred during those years. This was an extremely difficult task, given the long-term high turnover of DSS/Centrelink social workers and the practicalities of interviewing staff scattered around a country the size of

¹¹⁴ For further detail on the nature of policies governing access to the Australian Archives see <http://www.naa.gov.au/fsheets/fs219.html>.

¹¹⁵ See Appendix 1, for a list of the questions used in interviews with Centrelink social work staff.

Australia. As a consequence, only a small sample was recruited. However the size of the sample (n=12) is offset by the qualification set for eligible interviewees, whose accumulated years of experience was approximately one hundred and forty. The shortest employment period for any of the interviewees was ten years, the longest eighteen. The interview comments included in this Chapter can therefore be read as informed by substantial experience and appreciation of social work in DSS/Centrelink.

It is important to note, additionally, that the purpose of the interviews was not to determine the 'absolute truth' of the reality of social casework in DSS/Centrelink, but to clarify and crystallise information already obtained through documentary research.

This research could have been framed as a longitudinal project, perhaps using elements of an ethnographic approach to follow a larger sample of individuals through different dimensions of practical, political and cultural change inside the organisation. It could have been conducted as a study of the attitudes of a sample of social workers to the role of computers in their practice contexts.¹¹⁶ However the perceptions of individuals, as sovereign producers of their own particular worldview, have not been the object of this research. Instead, it has consciously looked to the discursive formation that is 'Centrelink social work', for evidence of the ways in which institutional knowledge is collected, framed, circulated and used in that context. It looks, as others have looked, for:

¹¹⁶ See, as one example of this form of research, Humphries & Camilleri (2002). Humphries is a 'business manager' in the National Support Office of the SWS, Centrelink. The paper reports on results of a questionnaire survey of Centrelink social workers, conducted during 2000, which asked participants to rate themselves with respect to their working knowledge of computer systems used in Centrelink.

histories of knowledge which are not histories of what men and women have thought ... [which are] not histories of ideas, opinions or influences nor are they histories of the way in which the economic, political and social contexts have shaped ideas or opinions. Rather they are reconstructions of the *material* conditions of thought or 'knowledges' (Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 35).

6.3 Public service reform in the 1980s: a new 'attitude of mind'

This section describes the basic form taken by the new mode of management introduced into the APS during the 1980s, in order to provide some sense of the historical and political 'location' of Centrelink's SWS. It briefly summarises the 'cause for reform', and the basic components of the version of corporate management that were developed at that time, in order to raise the question of what role information has played in reconstructing the focus of management (from *process* to *progress*) in this context.

The question here is therefore: 'how did corporate management change the tasks and operating frameworks of public service managers, and in particular, what did they see as the role for "information" in the new managerial framework?'

During the second half of the 1980s a variety of corporate management strategies were adopted from the private sector and introduced into the APS by ministers and officials concerned about managing the growing complexity of government.¹¹⁷ Those ministers and officials had, for some years, been

¹¹⁷ It is important to note here that reform of the APS did not occur in isolation from other social and political changes. The introduction of corporate management into the APS occurred at a time when many Australian economic and social institutions were opened up to significant international pressures: financial markets were deregulated, world commodity prices collapsed, and new networked media and telecommunications technologies and

canvassing solutions to a series of major problems in the relationship between policy making and service delivery. The size, complexity and cost of government services had been growing substantially. There were major difficulties in ensuring departments were capable of implementing policies as governments and ministers had intended. In short, there were serious misgivings expressed about the system of responsible government, about relationships of authority and control between ministers and their departmental officials, which one author referred to as "a definite responsibility void" (Thynne, 1983: 78).

The accountability of the public service—to governments and to the citizenry—had been seriously questioned in a series of government commissions and inquiries.¹¹⁸ Deficiencies in aspects of administrative performance, in particular, were the subject of numerous reviews and royal commissions held prior to the commencement of the first Hawke government in 1983, at the Commonwealth as well the State level. The Report of the Royal Commission into Australian Government Administration (RCAGA), tabled in

commercial arrangements were being developed. Corporate management came into the APS at the same time as the push for increased national productivity, through strategies of workplace reform riding on the back of the Wages & Prices Accord between the Commonwealth Government and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (Dabscheck (1989); Singleton (1990)). The Government was also attempting to build a national education and training system, with closer links between institutions of technical and further education, and those of higher education, between the achievement of competency and the conferral of university degrees (Meredyth, 1998). The rhetoric of productivity and workplace reform, and the increasing vocational accent on educational credentials also coincided with the introduction of the computer keyboard into Australian offices. In the APS this changed the nature of work systems dramatically, such that eventually various categories of worker—clerk, clerical assistant and typist—and the support work they did were gradually collapsed into a single category of administrative (now 'customer') service officer. Finally, at this time government agencies developed new systems of computerised surveillance, which saw monitoring and review of clients through coordinated links between taxation, social security, immigration and company and security databases. In summary, it is important to remember that the reform of management practices in the APS took place in the context of a range of sweeping changes, affecting most Australian social and political institutional arrangements.

¹¹⁸ See Thynne (1983) for a brief summary of enquiries into administrative review and discretion and open government. See also Verspaandonk (2003) for a very useful research bibliography, together with a summary of reviews and changes in the APS during this period.

1976, concluded that the APS, as it stood then, was not capable of responding to the service demands created by extensive change in the Australian community, that it was inefficient in its use of resources, that lines of authority and accountability between ministers and departments were seriously clouded, and that its recruitment and promotion procedures were cumbersome and outmoded (Commonwealth of Australia (CoA), 1976: 17-22).¹¹⁹ The authors of the RCAGA wrote that the fundamental task of reform in the public service was "to integrate the authority which comes from popular election with that which derives from professional knowledge and experience, while upholding the principle of ultimate political control" (CoA, 1976: 43). For this to occur, they argued, the roles of policy makers and officials would need to be seen as complementary, and the managerial responsibilities of officials clearly recognised and defined:

Final authority must be in political hands, but without making management ineffective. This will be fully achieved only if officials accept an obligation towards the spirit as well as the letter of government objectives. Their acceptance of that obligation cannot be ensured either by legislation or convention. We can only note ... that such acceptance is more likely if officials have participated effectively in the process of converting the generalities of the political program into a blue-print for action (*ibid*).

Officials, in other words, were to be made more responsible—or at least 'responsive'—and asked to take a greater role in policy, in the practical sense of 'program planning'. The development of a stronger sense of obligation—or,

¹¹⁹ Central to the thrust of the RCAGA was the argument that the Westminster model of ministerial responsibility was not representative of the operation of the Australian system of government. In that model, the government is chosen from elected representatives, and is responsible and accountable to those representatives through parliament. The bureaucracy is conceived of as simply an extension of ministers' capacities, informing and advising them, and managing the programs for which they are responsible on their behalf. Unless specified in legislation, a department's power to act is supposedly derived entirely from the minister by his or her delegation, and he or she remains responsible to Cabinet and to parliament for the operations of its personnel.

in other words, an acceptance of political authority—could not occur through legal means, but through participation in the 'micro-mechanics' of policy and planning.

The RCAGA noted two different options for reform. The first, and perhaps the more familiar at the time, was the use of ministers' reserve powers, which would enable them to intervene in the operations of departments when and where they felt obliged. Its authors argued however that this "provides no significant stimulus to better managerial performance" (*ibid*). Instead, their preferred option was not only to acknowledge the managerial responsibility of officials, but also:

to prescribe the means by which their performance will be assessed and reported upon in ways which will influence ministerial judgement about their professional standing and future. At present no such assessment occurs at departmental head levels, and the assessment processes at lower levels do not relate in any direct way to the conduct of programs as they might be judged by ministers (*ibid*).

There was, in other words, a perceived disconnection between the performance of process and the apprehension of material 'facts' about that performance. Furthermore, the RCAGA's authors argued that accountable management would not work without "the development of appropriate guidelines in financial and personnel matters, and the precise formulation at the centre of principles on which day-to-day decisions are to be based, [which] will allow effective action at lower and geographically distant points of decision" (CoA, 1976: 53). Accountable management would not work, they argued, without adequate flows of information between the 'centre' and the 'periphery', in the form of guidelines and principles for those exercising delegated authority. It would not work without a further flow of information

that was seen as necessary to the ongoing monitoring of performance, and necessary also for "the progressive modification of the principles and guidelines on which it [i.e. delegated authority] has been based, and indeed to the review of the programs and policies being administered" (*ibid*). The Review prescribed, in short, a more effective two-way flow of performance and policy information.

Advocates of change in the APS during the 1980s appealed constantly to the need for greater efficiency and effectiveness, for greater value for money and accountability for the results of program initiatives. Their prescription was a devolution of authority to lower level managers, who—they argued—needed to be redefined as more flexible and more responsible, with more discretionary power, as more accountable for their action and for the actions of their subordinates. Mike Codd, Secretary to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet during the Hawke years, states in a summary of the management reforms of this period that it had become increasingly apparent public sector management was too centralised and too focussed on controlling inputs and due process, such that:

substantial gains in effectiveness and outcomes could not be achieved without reforming the overly centralised structures and processes, the associated centralised management philosophy, and the overwhelming concentration on inputs for control and accountability purposes (1991: 3-4).

The Hawke Labor government came to office in March 1983 with the clear intention of shaping what it called a 'more purposeful and efficient administration', removing what were seen as arbitrary and ad hoc methods of controlling staff, and ensuring a greater ministerial involvement in the development, management and evaluation of government programs (CoA,

1983a: 31). The government's 1983 White Paper set the scene for subsequent reforms, which sought to improve long term planning (through, for example, the development of ongoing review processes and management improvement plans), streamline human and financial resource management, and enable greater ministerial involvement in the activities of their departments (CoA, 1983a: 27).¹²⁰

A series of subsequent reviews and reports pursued the 'cause for reform', providing ministers and department heads with the impetus to develop new arrangements within their own areas. A 1984 White Paper on management of budgetary processes discussed the objectives of the proposed financial management improvement program, which had initially been recommended by the 1982 Review of Commonwealth Administration (RCA), and noted in the 1983 White Paper. In particular, it canvassed improvements to the processes by which budgets were formulated, and by which information about budgets was prepared and circulated.¹²¹ In 1987 a series of changes to the 'machinery of government' were made by the re-elected Hawke Labor government, which included a reduction in the number of government departments (from 28 to 18) with a two-tiered system of ministerial control.¹²²

¹²⁰ Many of the proposals put forward in the first White Paper were formally enacted in the Public Service Reform Act, 1984, including the following: creation of the Senior Executive Service; dissolution of the four-tier divisional structure to enable staff mobility and career progression; equal employment opportunity provisions; recruitment and promotion of the basis of merit rather than seniority; and the devolution of authority over staffing decisions to agencies, from the Public Service Board to individual agencies (CoA, 1992: 169).

¹²¹ The 1984 White Paper proposed greater public and parliamentary scrutiny over budgets and implementation processes, and recommended clearer strategies for financial management of programs in all agencies. It described the broad aims of reform to the management of budgetary processes as being the development of: new means for identifying and setting budget priorities, clear links between program goals, objectives and resources, specific techniques for identifying efficiencies in resource outlays (CoA, 1984: 1-2).

¹²² The intention of the 1987 changes was to enable greater ministerial flexibility, with a number of junior ministers responsible for some part of their senior's department. At the same

By the mid 1990s the National Commission of Audit's *Report to the Commonwealth Government* were able to state, with some apparent certainty, that:

There is now a much greater emphasis on providing managers with the flexibility and discretion to manage resources and to hold them accountable for the efficiency and effectiveness with which they achieve program objectives and outcomes determined by the Government. Consequences have been, amongst other things, a greater questioning of the need for government programs to be delivered by government agencies, thus introducing competition and contestability into the public sector environment; increased emphasis on cost recovery; and a need to better identify, account for and manage all resources needed to deliver a program, not just the cash transactions involved (National Commission of Audit, 1996: 214-215).

In short, public service agencies were remodelled as business organisations. Michael Power, in a discussion of the rise of audit functions in modern government, argues that new managerialism of the form adopted by the APS (and by public services in many other Western countries at this time) emphasised a mix of cost control strategies, decentralised managerial authority (in order to make local managers more autonomous, more entrepreneurial), the creation of market mechanisms that separated purchasing and providing functions (linked through various forms of contract), and the creation of performance indicators aimed at improving the quality of service. "One might put the NPM ideal very simply as a desire to replace the presumed inefficiency of hierarchical bureaucracy with the presumed efficiency of markets" (1997: 43).

time, the Public Service Board was abolished, with some of its functions further devolved to agencies, but also some reallocated to the strengthened central agencies of the Departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Treasury and Finance.

The reforms worked to shift the culture of the APS away from an administration of decision-making processes, towards the flexible management of productive links between inputs and outcomes. A variety of strategies were used to effectively devolve responsibility for various levels of decision-making and action to lower levels of management, and to attempt to ensure that officers at those lower levels were entrepreneurialised and held accountable for their performance. They were designed, ultimately, to ensure the aspirations and goals of managers at those levels were drawn into line with larger political and organisational objectives. Those strategies focused on ways of managing the interrelation between human and financial resources, on mechanisms for formulating strategic plans and budgets, and most importantly on procedures for gathering information in order to measure, monitor and evaluate expenditures and program outcomes. A key element in these strategies would be the development of sophisticated information collection and distribution systems.

The upshot here is that the desire to reshape the public service as a supremely efficient mixed market economy—entrepreneurialised, decentralised, but also more precisely ‘plugged into’ the knowledge requirements of policy makers—has meant that public service managers and their staff have in fact been required to enter into a new kind of contract with their employer. Various elements of corporate management have combined to shift the ‘ethos’ of public service away from procedural anonymity to a contractual obligation to perform in line with publicly scrutinised standards and expectations. The flow of information would not only be internal, but also external.

The nature of this shift was neatly captured in a submission by the Department of Finance (DoF) to the RCA, which prefigured the reforms. The DoF referred to the need to:

develop an *attitude of mind* in departmental managers at all levels so that they appreciate and accept a responsibility for pursuing cost-effective performance which constantly relates the development and operation of the services for which they are responsible ... to the resources available and accordingly determine priorities and strategies for achieving those objectives (cited in Zifcak, 1994: 111, emphasis added).

How to make sense of the long-term shifts that have occurred, in the relationship between broad policies on 'accountability' and the institution of local techniques for accounting, is not a straightforward matter. John Uhr, in a brief essay on problems of accountability in government administration, neatly signals the orthodox route into asking how and why government is to be made accountable:

There can be few more basic democratic responsibilities than protecting the public's right to accountable government (1993: 14).

Accountability and responsibility, for Uhr and for many other writers in this complex field, are complementary terms. The test of a responsible administration is in the measure of its capacity to respond, he says, in two related senses: to both *sponsor* policy initiatives as well as to *answer* for the results of those initiatives. The term 'democratic responsibility' invokes accountability as one of the key elements of responsible government, conceived of as a contract between political institutions and the citizenry: the various arms of government are required 'to give account' of their actions, as the elected "*agents* of the real sovereign, the people" (Uhr, 1993: 2). The citizenry, in turn, is conceived as a unified actor, the collective constituency of

the parliament, with a clear right to government of a particular kind, one that is both open to scrutiny, and responsive to the needs of the community.

This orthodox line of commentary on accountability in government is limited, however, in that it fails to deal with the ways in which techniques of accounting 'structure the possible field of action' (Foucault, 1982: 221) available to managers, and to other policy actors.¹²³ Accountability in government administration is a complex phenomenon, and any analysis requires attention to relations *internal* to institutions of government as well as those *external* between institutions and the citizenry. While one clearly affects the other—with political demands impacting upon internal arrangements of publicly funded agencies, and vice versa—it is important to acknowledge the clear differences between the external forms of appeal and scrutiny that are understood as essential to 'open government', and the various techniques developed for overseeing the management of 'human resources', the control of finances and the provision of services, both in terms of their formal mechanisms and their respective historical trajectories. Beyond this, the assumption that governments owe a responsibility for policy making and service delivery directly to the sovereign body of 'the public'—presumably through the ballot box as well as various forms of external review—obscures the diversity of different 'publics', or political communities, that constitute governmental institutions.

The orthodox definition of accountability fails, then, to acknowledge the multiplicity of systems of decision-making and action, and the mix of power

¹²³ See §3.2, for a summary of how Foucault's definition of government—'to structure the possible field of action of others'—can be applied to making sense of the development of a new mode of accounting, such as that under discussion in this present Chapter.

relations that characterise modern government conceived as "multiple spaces within and among both state and non-state institutions" (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997: 91). As Ericson and Haggerty note, the test of effective accountability is far more difficult. Effectiveness implies the existence of what they refer to as 'a common currency of justification' between both principal and agent, about 'what constitutes an acceptable performance'. The concept of accountability is made problematic by fragmented public philosophies and competing sub-professionalisms within public service and parliamentary organisations:

Almost all the research thus far has focused on the abilities to give account, and the implications for open access to information and analytical 'accounting' prowess which accountability agents need. Little research has examined the abilities of account-taking which make responsible use of the mass of information demanded in the name of accountability (1997: 14).

Accountability, according to this definition, can be investigated not just in terms of sovereign power and responsibility, but also in terms of the various capacities for giving and taking account of actions. What is needed here is not simply some assessment of the structure of the 'flow of power', but some sense of the constitutive links between information systems and 'responsibility'. Indeed, accounting can be seen as an attempt precisely to set the terms for 'a common currency of justification', which in turn defines 'what constitutes an acceptable performance'.

On this front it can be reasonably argued that the introduction of the various elements of corporate management—such as program planning, program budgeting, management information and performance evaluation—were integral to the longer term attempt to produce the 'responsible manager' with a 'new attitude of mind', an autonomous but continuously answerable actor in

an extended network of planning, monitoring and evaluation. As Peter Miller has consistently argued, it is accounting—considered as a variety of technologies and forms of rationality, as a discipline in both an intellectual/professional and practical/material sense—that has been specifically geared to the task of producing such an actor:

It is such an entity that accounting has long sought to fabricate, through its concerns with individual performance, through its attempts to induce individuals located in abstract spaces to become calculating selves, and through its endeavours to enrol individuals in the pursuit of prescribed financial targets or objectives. Accounting has become a body of expertise pre-eminently concerned with the exacting of responsibility from individuals rendered calculable and comparable (1994a: 240).

The techniques of the new style of management attempted, in an overall sense, to develop more efficient and effective public programs. These techniques worked on the public service as a whole, attempting to turn it into a more accountable instrument of policy makers—of ministers, Cabinet and the parliament—through strategies for formulating corporate/portfolio objectives, for distinguishing the aims and objectives of specific programs within portfolios, for allocating and managing budgets within those programs, for developing flexible arrangements for managing and sharing human and financial resources within and between programs, and for monitoring and evaluating outcomes. In other words, studying the reforms of the APS during the 1980s—from this now relatively comfortable distance—shows a clear attempt to establish a neo-liberal framework in which corporate actors could be made responsible through various kinds of governmental programs that seek to implicate them in the regulation of their own conduct. Corporate management challenged established professional modes of accounting by requiring staff at all levels to undertake these new practical tasks of planning

and recording. These can be seen as programmatic attempts to position social actors as self-managing and self-calculating, as responsible and entrepreneurial.

It would be unreasonable to designate a simple singular rationality as the driving force behind all the changes that occurred in the APS. However information (and therefore, more particularly, 'information systems') can be seen as a key element (but not simply 'the' driver) in the mode of accounting developed around what was simultaneously a decentralising and centralising form of administration. Information systems enabled the dual movements of corporate planning and delegation. Setting objectives, formulating categories of measurement by which to monitor and evaluate performance, and delegating responsibility for results to lower level program managers, all work to enrol individuals in a larger set of objectives that stand apart from those held by any singular higher manager, or group of managers. 'Management by objectives', 'strategic planning' and 'performance management' are some of the terms routinely used to identify components of modern management techniques that work to elide control derived from hierarchies of position, and instead seek to draw managers into a shared knowledge of the 'law of the situation'.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ This term was coined by Mary Parker Follett, to describe the kind of 'human relations' approach that created the feeling of working *with* someone, rather than working *for* them. For a brief discussion of her work see Wren (1994: 255-264), who notes that Parker Follett drew in turn on the principles of scientific management, which attempted to divorce the person from the situation, or in other words divorce the worker from the conditions of production. Consider also comments by Peter Drucker, a leading American writer on management practices since the 1950s, who notes: "A manager's job should be based on a task to be performed in order to attain the company's objectives...the managers should be directed and controlled by the objectives of performance rather than by his boss. ... The only principle that can do this is management by objectives and self-control... It substitutes for control from outside the stricter, more exacting and more effective control from the inside. It motivates the

The investment in new information and accounting systems made by policy makers and APS administrators during this period can be seen as an investment in a series of what Thévenot calls 'code forms' (§3.4). This was an investment in more than a new set of structural arrangements required for ensuring the flow of information and the enhancement of managerial and political power recommended by the series of administrative enquiries noted above. It was also an investment in new systems of signification ('syntaxes of representation', modes of training, regimes of truth, subject positions), which could ensure the development of the new 'attitude of mind' that many believed would, in turn, guarantee an appreciation and acceptance of the responsibility for an alignment between broader public policy aims and the actions of staff at the local level.

The next section briefly reviews the history of social work services in Centrelink, in order to provide some further background to the conditions of work in this particular context. Subsequent sections move to consider the implementation and reception of SWIS.

6.4 Social work in DSS/Centrelink

Social workers occupy positions in Centrelink's network of Customer Service Centres (CSCs)¹²⁵, in urban and rural locations. Centrelink, and the Department of Social Security (DSS) before it, has a small number of senior

manager to action not because somebody tells him to do something ... but because the objective needs of his task demand it" (cited in Wren, 1994: 365-366).

¹²⁵ In some sections of this Chapter the alternative term—'regional offices'—is also used. The latter term refers to the network of DSS suburban and regional offices which serviced clients at the local level, and which eventually became CSCs.

social workers that constitute the management of the SWS, based in Canberra. Area Social Workers (ASWs) are located in Area Offices in major cities, and it is these ASWs who most directly supervise CSC social work staff, on behalf of the SWS's Canberra managers. CSC social workers have dual lines of accountability: they are responsible to the local managers of individual CSCs on matters of routine day-to-day administration, but also to the managers of the SWS who regulate professional and ethical standards (Holt, 1994: 116).

Centrelink social work is not easy work. The SWS assists up to 250,000 newly referred clients each year.¹²⁶ Social workers deal with a range of challenging cases, generally on a short-term basis.¹²⁷ Cases are characterised by short-term crisis intervention followed by prompt referral to outside agencies. This is dictated largely by the fact that the organisation's core function is to act as the distribution point for the Federal Government's income support program. Centrelink's 550 caseworkers are spread across a network of almost 300 CSCs, which means they usually work individually or in pairs. Anecdotally, many find it difficult to establish supervisory relationships with their ASWs. They juggle dual lines of accountability: on the one hand they see themselves as accountable to their profession, through their training and their code of ethics; on the other hand they are Centrelink employees who are expected to understand and comply with the organisation's rules and regulations. Social work positions have traditionally churned through staff quickly because of the

¹²⁶ The figure of 250,000 referrals is quoted from press releases published on Centrelink's website (www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/news_room/index.htm), including the following: "Centrelink celebrates its social workers" (2nd May 2003), and "60 years of helping Australians in hardship" (26th November 2004).

¹²⁷ According the Agency's 2002/03 Annual Report, social workers' tasks include support for individuals and families with difficult personal and family issues, processing claims for exemption under the Child Support Act, assessing claims for Youth Allowance made by young people in situations of extreme family breakdown, assessing claims for Crisis Payment for people leaving situations of domestic violence, and assisting people facing multiple barriers to participation.

confronting nature of the work, and the challenging context in which it is carried out.

The SWS has been a part of Australia's income support system since the end of the Second World War. For most of that time the SWS has functioned as a research and advisory service, providing policy input at a senior level, and producing reports on individual cases where eligibility requirements allowed for discretionary judgement—in respect of payments such as Carer's Allowance, Single Parent Pension, Disability Support Pension and Special Benefit—that could sometimes not be straightforwardly satisfied or determined. This is where Centrelink social workers' sense of professionalism has been most clearly nurtured, and satisfied. The SWS has consciously sought to provide an independent casework service to clients in crisis, in a way that would not be compromised by the organisation's commitment to bureaucratic proceduralism. It sought to retain a third party advocacy role, assisting claimants in their dealings with departmental decision-makers, and contributing to the development of income support policies. Only in recent years have social workers been 'delegated decision makers'—made responsible, in other words, for making decisions about eligibility under the *Social Security Act*—for specific payment types.¹²⁸

The role of the SWS has been substantially shaped by government policy of the day. The Department of Social Services became fully operational in 1941, an outcome of the Menzies government's Joint Parliamentary Committee on Social Security (DSS, 1986: Appendix A; Tipping, 1992: 4). In the same year,

¹²⁸ Social workers have been required, since the late 1990s, to make decisions about exemptions from the paternity provisions of the Child Support Scheme (for Sole Parent Pension applicants) and payments under the Young Homeless Allowance scheme (Fitzgibbon & Hargreave, 2001: 132).

that Committee also recommended that the Department be extended to include:

facilities for research into social problems and the investigation and study of the effects of existing social legislation, ...[and] ... the employment of trained social workers in connection with the administration of invalid and old age pensions, maternity allowance and child endowment (DSS, 1986: Appendix A).

In 1945 Lyra Taylor, a qualified lawyer and social worker, was appointed as a chief research officer in the Department. Her tasks were "to introduce a social work service into the Department, to establish and develop a social work services library and to lay the foundations of a social research program" (DSS, 1986: Appendix A). Social workers employed by the Department were seen as a specialist group, whose role was to assist with advice and recommendations but not to exercise delegations under the relevant income support legislation. Taylor is reported to have said, in 1947, that the role of social workers in the Department then was:

to provide a skilled casework service for the Department's beneficiaries, to make the Department's administration as humane as possible, and to form a useful instrument for social progress by assembling evidence on social questions (cited in DSS, 1986: Appendix A).

In an interview many years later, Taylor commented on the difficulties involved in establishing a skilled and coordinated group of social workers in a federal Department:

LT: The whole picture was completely different from what it now is. It took quite a considerable time to get even one social worker into the various State offices and it has to be remembered, too, that air travel was not available to all States then, one had to take a social worker by train and plant her in a State office and help her to orient herself, and they were mostly, the first social workers, pretty new out of their training here, and I remember one of them telephoning me from Queensland

early in the piece and she said "Miss Taylor, shall I do what it says in the book or shall I do just the best I can?"

Interviewer: And what was your answer?

LT: Well, I think I probably said "My child, do the very best you can" (in Glasson, 1972).

In 1947, just three years into her post, Taylor commented that it was too early to attempt any evaluation of the success of the profession in a Department that had always, she argued, operated on a basis of making definite, legally defined payments in legally defined circumstances. It was going to be difficult to turn this around, to advocate for the treatment of 'unequal things unequally', but:

This must be regarded as a continuing task, to be carried on steadily, tranquilly and durably, day after day and week after week. The proof of our usefulness will be slow, but it is likely in the end, to be sure. ... These men may not know exactly what is meant by the term casework. Indeed, as Dr Henry B. Richardson points out in his book 'Patients Have Families', the term 'caseworker' is hard to define all in one sentence like 'baker, one who uses an oven to bake bread'. But people often recognise a reality which they cannot define (Taylor, 1947: 29).

Taylor's comments are enlightening in relation to three matters relevant to this study. She refers to the difficulties of communication across a geographically dispersed federal government department, at a time when information was conveyed principally in paper copy form. It was not conceivable that management could rely on a steady stream of up-to-date information about performance, or even about the caseloads of staff. She also implicitly acknowledges the difficulty of circumscribing all aspects of practice, at a time when it was not possible for her, as a senior manager, to know everything that was happening at the local level. Indeed the form of investment made by the Department, at that time, in regulatory arrangements governing the SWS was in a 'professional mode of accounting' (as defined in §3.3). "My child, do the

very best you can". There was no immediate flow of 'management information', upon which judgements could be based.

Finally, and flowing from the above, Taylor implicitly accepts the uncertainty of predicting, and the difficulty of specifying, outcomes in professional work. Her distinction between 'baker' and 'caseworker' is premised on the same sense of professionalism argued by Reynolds (in §5.2.1, above): a professional person is engaged in a complex set of tasks, which require a substantial measure of discretionary judgement, leaving them accountable only to their 'own mature and trained intelligence' (1937: 62).

Staff numbers in the SWS remained relatively small throughout the period of Liberal-Country Party coalition government, from 1949 through to the end of 1972. With the reorganisation of welfare services under the Whitlam Labor government the newly named Department of Social Security acquired a number of additional responsibilities, administered by the newly created Social Welfare Division (DSS, 1986: Appendix A).¹²⁹ The Directors of this Division met during 1973, and resolved that "departmental social workers will now become more active in helping community organisations and in assisting the coordination of welfare services at local and regional levels" (DSS Annual Report (AR), 1972/73: 45). This led directly to an expansion of social work staff numbers. In the new Department's first Annual Report (1972/73) social work staff numbers were quoted at 99 (DSS AR, 1972/73: 45); this number had grown to 279 just four years later (including 102 welfare officers employed

¹²⁹ The Social Welfare Division—later to be dissolved by the Fraser Government—was responsible for the Homeless Persons Assistance Scheme, Community Information Centres, Welfare Rights Services, the administration of Commonwealth grants to national welfare bodies, welfare services for newly arrived migrants, and administration of the Australian Assistance Plan.

under an expansion program piloted during the period of the Whitlam Labor government (DSS AR, 1976/77: 31)). Staff numbers continued to grow despite the conservative Fraser Liberal Country Party coalition government's change of policy direction—which saw the Commonwealth reallocate significant welfare functions back to State governments—presumably as a result of the growth of a decentralised network of regional offices. During the late 1970s and early 1980s the role of the SWS was trimmed back to encompass primarily advocacy and assistance for income security claimants, with a much-limited role in community development. According to the then Director of the SWS, by 1994 social work staff had grown to 520 (Holt, 1994: 116). That number has remained relatively constant since then.

The managers of the SWS have fought to improve its status within the larger organisation during most of its existence. It appears that the SWS had always been on the margins of DSS/Centrelink, always low on the list of more senior managers' priorities. Support for this claim cannot be found in any government reviews or other published literature. This is a claim relayed by senior staff during informal discussions concerning the development of SWIS. Indirect support can be found in the lack of any comprehensive discussion of social work services in the various reviews and enquiries of social security in Australia.¹³⁰ More direct support is in comments by well-known Australian social work writer R. J. Lawrence, published in the 1985/86 DSS Review of Social Work Services, on the attitude of departmental officials to the SWS, circa the late 1940s:

¹³⁰ See, for example, Kewley (1980), or the Joint Committee for Public Accounts' enquiry into income maintenance programs (CoA, 1983b).

The acceptance of social work within the Department was found to range from enthusiastic cooperation to active hostility and obstruction. Difficulties cited were the failure to refer suitable cases, the denial of the existence of social problems, interferences with a social worker's handling of a case, the intrusion of others into social case-work, and certain mechanical impediments, such as lack of privacy for interviewing (DSS, 1986: Appendix A).¹³¹

SWS managers interviewed for this research gave the impression that they had been stuck at the end of an organisational *cul-de-sac* for many years. This *cul-de-sac* had moved location from time to time, marooned at the end of various flowchart lines, tacked on to a succession of different departments as a result of successive reviews and restructures (Minchin, 1972).

At the local level, Centrelink social workers have always had to work hard to establish credibility in the eyes of Customer Service Officers (CSOs), who traditionally held a more conservative range of views on the role of social welfare, and on 'client-centred service' in particular.¹³² This lends a sharper edge to the tension implied in Lawrence's comments, a tension between Centrelink's core objective—to determine applicants' eligibility for payment, on the basis of the appropriate legislation—and social workers' professional objective of providing support to people in situations of crisis and distress. In interviews conducted with Centrelink social workers one commented on the

¹³¹ Minchin notes, in a study of the role of social work in DSS during the post-war years, that senior bureaucrats within the Department had not universally welcomed the establishment of a social work service. "Social work was relatively new to Commonwealth Departments; only nine social workers were employed in such government agencies in 1941. The new Bureau was viewed as critical to the administration of the Department [and] hence social workers posed a threat because qualified women of a new profession were in positions senior to the unqualified, largely male staff, some of whom had worked in the administration of benefits even prior to the establishment of the Department" (1989: 5).

¹³² CSOs do most of the claim processing work in Centrelink. They also respond to telephone and counter inquiries and conduct various forms of ongoing reviews. The ratio between CSOs and social workers in CSCs is approximately forty-to-one. CSOs are, in general, less credentialed than social workers, and most are paid much less. It is reasonable to argue, therefore, that relations between CSOs and social workers are characterised by clear differences in cultural as well as financial capital. It is important to note here, also, that Centrelink management has, in recent years, grudgingly acknowledged the organisation's failings in some of its service standards, and committed itself to improving those standards.

difference between the dominant 'breach culture' of administrative staff—who tend more often to automatically impose penalties on clients who break (or 'breach') rules of eligibility for ongoing payment—and the 'touchy-feely' culture of social workers. "Those people in the compliance culture, if you like, have always seen us as being expendable. ... [T]hey don't like the sort of stuff we represent. They think we're unnecessary. I think that's always been there".

After the creation of Centrelink in 1997 (which coupled the service delivery functions of the old Department of Social Security with a range of other federal government services), the SWS found itself substantially disconnected from the policy formation processes. The purchaser-provider framework on which the new Agency is now premised limited its capacity to feed information back into the policy cycle, leading to the possibility of an even greater sense of marginalisation. Senior staff have, however, put on a positive face in public statements. According to Fitzgibbon and Hargreaves—both senior managers of the SWS during the last fifteen years—the SWS used this transition period to develop a broad framework for delivering social work services in the new Agency, which would be "built around concepts of customer-service partnerships, emerging technologies, and enterprise practice and review, which would see social workers initiate opportunities for service delivery and policy development" (2001: 125). A further statement by Fitzgibbon and two senior SWS colleagues highlights the new 'discursive conditions of possibility' (§3.2.1; McHoul & Grace, 1993: 34) brought about by the computerisation of performance information systems. In a conference paper delivered at an AASW national conference they noted that:

social workers had not previously regarded the collection of data as a high priority in their work and as a result a lot of important information about the needs of disadvantaged people has been untapped and underdeveloped for program evaluation and policy purposes...the increasing emphasis on 'management by results' and establishing performance indicators within a fiscal environment of reducing costs and contracting out of services puts pressure on all parts of an organisation, including social work, to review its operations and the ways in which it 'adds value' to the organisation ... the need for social work performance [has] to be made more transparent in terms of greater professional accountability and relevance to the work of DSS (Abalo, Fitzgibbon & Ham, 1995: 5).

The prior neglect of performance information is turned on its head, thanks to the pressure of 'management by results'. However according to Fitzgibbon and Hargreaves this is not a straightforward 'cave in' to pressure from above. They argue that there has, indeed, been a convergence between the administrative and social work cultures in the new Centrelink. While their new role as delegates for a limited number of payments threatened some staff members,¹³³ the newly established enterprise culture of Centrelink speaks back to social workers in their own language:

Social workers have traditionally worked at the interface between individuals or the community and the bureaucracy. With the creation of Centrelink, social workers were faced with the challenge of accepting that the traditional social work role of advocacy, in theory, was overtaken by an organisation that, in its approach to customers, articulated values consistent with those of social work. Centrelink is a customer-focused organisation and its staff is expected to provide a personalised service to customers. The interpersonal communication skills of staff are being enhanced through training [much of it provided by social workers] to enable them to provide a more holistic service to customers. Shared behaviours of staff include respecting, listening, exploring, problem-solving, and behaving in an ethical manner. An enormous cultural shift has been required, which takes time. Social workers have had to accept the goal of offering a holistic service, while being aware of the reality. They have been challenged to share their

¹³³ As Fitzgibbon & Hargreave note, in a review of the history and prospects of Centrelink's Social Work Service, "some social workers have struggled with this and are not comfortable with the reality of being an administrative decision-maker rather than an advocate for the customer" (2001: 132).

skills, to extend the boundaries and contribute to the skills development of staff in a broader way than previously done (2001: 133).

Centrelink social workers, in this view, have acquired a rather different role than they previously held. From this statement it appears that the context in which they work has substantially changed: advocacy in the face of bureaucratic antagonism has been overtaken by a 'cultural shift' towards 'shared behaviours'; and this has occurred in circumstances where social work staff are now required to assist in training CSOs in a particular set of 'ethical' behaviours. This is borne out by many of the comments captured in interviews with Centrelink social workers about their experience of computerised recording (summarised below, in §6.5.3), which—together with historical evidence concerning the development and implementation of SWIS—are included in the following section.

6.5 Development and implementation

6.5.1 Overview: what does SWIS do?

The version of SWIS that social workers now use is primarily a screen-based management information system, developed by staff within the SWS in collaboration with DSS IT officers. It 'captures' elements of work detail and process, and is used to inform decisions about resources and the pattern and flow of work. It has replaced personal card-file systems, and previous versions of standardised recording and reporting, across the service. SWIS now requires social workers to input a range of client details into a series of screen flows, connected to a client's payment record on a national mainframe. It also

interfaces with a computerised Client Appointment System (CAS), which makes possible a much more precise tracking of the timing and flow of work.

SWIS codifies and condenses customers' circumstances, and the decisions and actions of the social worker. It enables statistics to be extracted on patterns of service, including demographics, presenting problems, geographical distributions, seasonal fluctuations, waiting times, and grant and rejection rates. The software provides short fields for brief statements of assessment and action details. While staff can choose to write longer reports—which for confidentiality reasons are then lodged on a secure server, or on the client's paper copy file—work-time pressures limit the use of this facility. Management discourages its use as wasteful and inefficient.

Prior to the invention of SWIS, the managers of the SWS—as the coordinators of social work staff across all State and Territory offices—had only limited statistical knowledge of the activities of staff in those locations. They worked off basic summaries provided by senior and Area social workers, matching these against DSS statistical summaries of their various client populations across the regional areas. They were unable to 'know', in any 'business-like' sense, the extent to which the resources it had allocated were matching up with the needs of those client populations. They were unable to predict, except on the basis of reports which were largely qualified and anecdotal, where to distribute and how to equip staffing and other resources. SWIS now provides managers with the capacity to extract summary information about casework, community and administrative activities of social work staff, which is updated daily. Reports produced out of SWIS have been used in a number of ways: by CSC managers, for managing and focusing local resources; and by managers in

Area and National offices, to develop systems and procedures for meeting program objectives, within defined budgets. At these different levels information has been used to report against the stated objectives of the SWS, and to monitor trends in customer populations. The SWS has claimed that SWIS information contributes to the development and evaluation of policies and programs, to monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of customer service, and therefore also contributes to the organisation's corporate strategic aims and objectives, namely client service, staff support, quality, innovation and accountability (DSS, 1994: 10).

In short, SWIS has enabled the SWS to demonstrate its achievement against specific targets, to manage workloads and work flows more efficiently, and to demonstrate its usefulness in an institution that has, as is noted above, been somewhat ambivalent about its ongoing role and status.

But how does SWIS actually work, in a practical sense? How is the detail of work 'codified'? In the language of SWIS, a 'referral' represents a 'customer' who receives assistance from a social worker. Referral information keyed into the system includes personal and demographic details, and other information relevant to the payment, if any, that the customer receives. The information collected refers to key aspects of social casework, including source of referral, reasons for referral, client details, contact type, action taken, and referral to other services.

'Contact' information refers to any single 'action' taken on behalf of that customer (which could be a phone call, a conversation, or a written report). Social workers record personal details about each customer, and details of contacts with other officers, outside agencies and relatives. This is an

extremely important component of the SWIS record: it is the point where multiple forms of action are linked to a variety of possible performance outcomes (such as 'report completed', 'pay recommendation', 'counselling', or 'referral out').

Contact information is supposed to be recorded by social workers as, or after, they complete their interviews, telephone calls and written reports. In practice, this requirement is difficult to meet, largely because of work time pressure. The electronic record is available to social work staff across the network of CSCs and Centrelink call centres, enabling a more seamless provision of service where customers can access social work assistance beyond their immediate local area.¹³⁴

The following section describes, in some detail, the various factors affecting the development of SWIS during the period between 1983 and 1994.

6.5.2 The process of developing SWIS

The development and implementation of SWIS occurred over several years. While it is tempting to assume this occurred only during the 1980s and 1990s—during the period of major reform of policy and process in the APS (as noted in §6.3)—evidence suggests that the managers of the SWS in DSS were interested in streamlined recording and reporting functions from at least the early 1970s. References in DSS Annual Reports from that period point to the need for more formal monitoring of social work practice. For example, while

¹³⁴ Note that for reasons of confidentiality this has been a contentious issue for the life of the networked version of SWIS (or, in other words, since 1994). Basic contact details are recorded on the system but many social workers refuse to include casework notes, preferring instead to lodge detailed notes in electronic word-processed documents on a local network drive, or on the paper-copy file.

the 1973/74 Annual Report speaks (in the language of the times) of social work as one of the fundamental social utilities in a supportive community—and of access to expert and responsive social work assistance as an essential corollary of the expansion of income security and social justice programs—it also speaks of preparations:

for a series of inter-related studies to examine social work process from a number of aspects, leading to improved in-built monitoring and evaluation procedures and to more rigorous programs of staff training and development. ... The Division is examining improved procedures to record and analyse case data so that they reflect more accurately the characteristics of populations assisted by social workers and the types of assistance offered. This will help in identifying patterns of service so that social policy planning issues are highlighted (DSS AR, 1973/74: 10).

The 1974/75 Annual Report notes a review of social work functions, and comments on a pilot project in South Australia which would trial a new casework record, the purpose of which was:

to collect data which, after analysis, will provide information on how effective personal helping services are. [Training sessions prior to the trial will be] aimed to standardise social workers' and welfare officers' approaches to the recording system and help them to consolidate their knowledge of personal services (DSS AR, 1974/75: 40).

The aspiration to use 'program information' towards standardisation of DSS social work was, it seems, already well and truly formed by the early 1970s. This was, as noted above, a period of rapid growth and change in the welfare sector generally, and particularly in DSS. It was a period of growth, and of increasing complexity, in public service programs more generally. It was a time during which questions were being raised about the accountability, and the scope, of government (§6.3). Beyond this, educational institutions had been pushed to provide diplomas for welfare workers, in order to cater for the growth in demand for trained staff required by large and growing welfare

bureaucracies (Martin, 1990). It seems reasonable to conclude that the rapid growth in expenditure, and the concomitant expansion of staff numbers, suggested to managers the need for closer scrutiny of performance.¹³⁵ The technical means to achieve this end had not, however, been invented.

In any case, for the purpose of this case study it is convenient to divide the development of SWIS into three main periods (see Appendix 2). During the years between 1983 and 1988 (Stage 1) SWS senior managers and staff worked in-house to develop a set of system objectives, and then proceeded to invent a system for counting and monitoring aspects of social work practice. The version of SWIS introduced across all DSS offices at the beginning of 1989 was the product of those several years of experimentation, most of it achieved without additional funding from DSS Central Administration. Further development took place between 1989 and 1994 (Stage 2), when a much more sophisticated 'instant capture' windows-based version was implemented. This second stage was enabled by new funding provided by senior DSS executives, who apparently saw the sense in developing a work-monitoring tool for a growing number of 'specialist' staff. Developments since that time (Stage 3) can be characterised as a series of refinements on the 1994 version.

The following description and discussion focuses on Stages 1 and 2, which are precisely the stages during which the tensions between complexity and standardisation—or, between the professional and organisational modes of accounting (see §6.1, above)—are most apparent.

¹³⁵ See the report of the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare (*Through a Glass Darkly*), published in 1979; see also Davis (1987) on the split in the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)—the peak professional body for social workers in Australia—over how to service the growing number of 'non-professional' members, leading to the formation of the Australian Social Welfare Union.

Stage 1: 1983-1988

In 1983 a review of the 1981 'Guidelines for Welfare Staff in Regional Offices' was undertaken, leading to the development of "national priorities...the highest being income maintenance client services" (DSS AR, 1983/84: 69). At the same time, a social work manual was compiled "to help social workers carry out their tasks efficiently and effectively within the Department's legislative framework" (*ibid*). The period of change during the 1970s, during which the number and role of social workers had significantly expanded, was over. The Fraser Coalition government disbanded the Social Welfare Commission, set up by Bettina Cass during the period of the Whitlam Labor government. Fraser's 'New Federalism' sought to hand the responsibility of service provision back to State governments. Social work staff in DSS were given the message that their role was limited to assisting with the determination of income support payments, and *only* income support payments.

In the same year an external contractor was asked to examine and report on an internal proposal for a national welfare 'staff monitoring system'. The report¹³⁶ discussed the possibility of a computerised recording system that could capture information that had been recorded by staff on paper copy forms, and then translate that electronically into a series of 'helpful' reports. Julian Meyer, the author of the report, pointed to the difficulties of implementing the proposal as it then stood. These included a lack of any reference to the

¹³⁶ The document was authored by J. Meyer, and is titled *Requirement Definition for the Development of a National Welfare Staff Monitoring System*, and attached to DSS SWS File 1990/N1060 (Part 4). Subsequent references to the document in this section cite it as 'Requirement Definition'.

STRATPLAN system just then being developed.¹³⁷ There was no clear understanding, in other words, about how to integrate the proposed system with the massive computerisation of all administrative tasks that was about to proceed.

In response to the internal proposal Meyer outlined a set of 'system requirement definitions' that could be used to frame any subsequent development and application of a computerised information system. It is important to briefly summarise Meyer's statement of objectives and system definitions here, because these definitions established a benchmark (or, in Latour's language, an initial 'program' (§3.2.2)) that subsequent projects could follow. They have also provided a yardstick against which eventual outcomes (including the series of 'anti-programs' thrown up against the initial objectives) can be assessed, and opened up the possibility of scrutinising the historical development of SWIS, prior to its subsequent black-boxing by the late 1990s.¹³⁸

Meyer noted that the statistical material collected should be able to assist various levels of management with the following: resource planning and allocation of staff, work reporting, training of staff, reviewing the

¹³⁷ STRATPLAN was a major project that re-equipped DSS with a national computing network through which a client service officer at any location could access information from a set of integrated on-line databases. It commenced in 1983 after several years of planning, was completed by 1986, and cost approximately \$200 million. According to Rogers (1994), it was the largest computing re-equipment plan that had, at that time, been commissioned in Australia. Henman outlines the progressive cultural and policy changes brought about by STRATPLAN, and by subsequent additional developments in computer technologies in DSS. Computerisation enabled not only instant access to information about clients, but created a system for monitoring staff movements across the network. "An 'integrated audit facility' which gave the 'Department's auditors the capacity to trace individual transactions at any stage of the computer process was introduced (DSS A/R, 1983/84, 14). Every access to a client's record by a DSS staff person was recorded" (1996: 119).

¹³⁸ 'Black-boxing' is a term used in ANT (§3.2.2) to refer to the concept of a completed 'actor-network', a network of associations between human and non-human actors, the mechanics of which are taken for granted by its users. See, for example, Callon, Law & Rip (1986).

appropriateness of work, reviewing priorities for work and measuring results, and regional office management decision making (Requirement Definition: 4). Note that these are the various aspects of management taken for granted today, but entirely unfamiliar to Lyra Taylor in the late 1940s. The objectives of such a system, according to Meyer, should be:

- to provide an overview of workloads and patterns of work undertaken by welfare staff;
- to provide information about the kinds of problems faced by departmental clients;
- to provide information on the source of social and welfare work referrals;
- to set parameters for determining the average times taken by staff to complete tasks;
- to provide the information needed to plan and review those tasks;
- to determine areas of staff competence, and to identify the need for training;
- to determine whether staff are being appropriately and effectively utilised with Regional Offices;
- to provide information for responding to parliamentary questions and government requests (Requirement Definition, 1983: 6).

These points can be categorised, broadly speaking, as serving one of two main purposes: workload management, or policy and planning. Meyer's list is predominantly about the former. Only the second and last dot points, about the nature of client circumstances and policy debates, refer to issues beyond the routine management of service demand.

Meyer also specified a long list of informational requirements that a new system should meet, and again these are mostly unremarkable from a contemporary managerial perspective. The document specifies, for example, the kinds of demographic details seen as necessary, the forms and modes of reporting seen as most helpful, the need for a comments field and reasons for referral. A number of these requirements would eventually prove difficult, or at least controversial, for the SWS managers who worked on SWIS. For the

moment it is important to note, again, that Meyer's list is predominantly interested in the minutiae of workload management:

- The monitoring system should allow for multiple problems to be monitored and then to be reported on.
- Instead of welfare staff keeping track of the time spent for interviewing the monitoring system should develop standard/average time to be used.
- The time taken to interview a client could be determined by a computerised system. In this way the interviewing office would not have to manually note the interviewing time.
- The time a client has to wait to see welfare staff should be monitored.
- The complexity of cases should be monitored. A table of complexity would have to be set up for welfare staff referral (Requirement Definition: 10).

Finally, Meyer provides a short list of benefits that a computerised staff monitoring system might result in. These include standardisation of recording formats and recording outcomes across all states and territories, easily available and supportive documentation for determining staff workloads, more sophisticated knowledge of trends within DSS client populations, information for justifying welfare staff positions, timely provision of information, and the expectation that individual staff "would not have to complete a great deal of information in order to get monitoring information [because] a major part of the monitoring information would be completed at the time of completing the initial benefit details" (Requirement Definition: 15).

Meyer's lists can be read, then, as part of an initial investment in the standardisation of discursive practices (of reporting routines, report formats, etc) in this particular workplace. They provide early evidence of the development of a 'syntax of representation' that could be used to account for not only efficiency (in the monitoring of waiting times and interview duration) but also complexity. The vision here is for a system capable of instant capture,

and capable of a kind of instant recognition, such that each and every individual client would 'fragment' into a series of notated problems and circumstances that could then be 'accounted for' in terms of working hours and service outcomes.

Indeed Meyer's list, as early as 1983, gestures towards the possibility of constructing a computerised managerial information and surveillance medium that would cease calling attention to its existence: in Foucault's terms, this would be the perfect panopticon. As will become clear shortly, this is what the SWS has attempted to contrive: a computerised information system that calls upon its users to input most, if not all, required information at the point—as it were—of 'sale'. Keying has, to a large extent, become integrated into the routines of work, rather than simply bundled separately after the completion of already existing tasks. While this has failed to rule out the possibility of user resistance—with some staff continuing to 'batch-key' information on a periodic basis—the collection imperative has eventually become substantially integrated into the work routines of front line social workers.

In summary, these preliminary aims and objectives set up a framework by which subsequent managers pursued SWIS, as a tool for automating information collection and for governing work routines and directing resource allocation. Managers attempted to use computerised recording to confine work within a particular box, one that was easily and accurately measurable, and therefore—in a sense—required less effort or thought on the part of the worker. However while many social workers at the 'front line' have continued to argue that their work should always be variable, others have looked to SWIS as a solution to the 'knowledge problem' they see at the root of their lack

of credibility in the organisation. "How do we show our workloads are too high? How do we justify extra resources, at the different levels of the organisation? How do we convince agency managers beyond the SWS of the value of the service as a whole?"

Frustrated with a lack of progress in moving towards a national system, social work staff in the Queensland and Northern Territory Area Office (QANTA) devised and introduced a pilot system in April 1985. This required social work staff in that Area to 'count' aspects of their work by ticking several boxes on a proforma, which then allowed for the aggregation of data on the service as a whole. A report on the system¹³⁹, which ran for twelve months, commented on major issues for service delivery highlighted by QWIS, and on strengths and weaknesses of the recording process developed by QANTA social work staff. QWIS enabled an Area manager to map aspects of their work not previously available in statistical form. The report asserted that the range of tasks undertaken by staff was increasing, but that there was no corresponding recognition of this in terms of staffing levels or skills training. It noted particular problems for staff working alone in small regional offices, and the difficulties incurred by high staff turnover and poor induction routines for new staff. It enabled a statistical overview of the client populations referred to social work staff, reasons for referrals, and modes of referral. Acknowledging the national review of social work functions that had just occurred in 1985—which had commented on the history of tensions between professional and managerial imperatives in respect of the 'mix' of income support and other functions (DSS, 1986)—it asserted the QWIS statistics revealed that the

¹³⁹ The report is titled 'Report on the Queensland Trial of the Interim Queensland Welfare Information System (Q.W.I.S.)', and attached to SWS File 1990/N1060 (Part 4). Subsequent references to the document in this section cite it as 'QWIS Report'.

activities classified under the three functions of social work staff (namely income support, management/administration and community work) were 'highly integrated and balanced'. In this sense, QWIS provided useful evidence for an argument about complexity, and about the need for more resources to cope with that complexity.

The report also reflected on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of QWIS, as a first attempt at a detailed recording process. It claimed that QWIS enabled a more thorough breakdown of service patterns, dispelled 'mythologies' about the lack of integration between income support and community work, enabled social workers themselves to control the data collection process and its analysis, and provided "comprehensive information for the RO social workers' planning and evaluation of their own activities if they chose to use it in that way" (QWIS Report: 11).

However the report also noted the complex and time-consuming nature of the manual recording process, arguing that "greater attention must be paid to the uses of the statistics if the collection of those statistics involves the diversion of scarce resources from other activities" (QWIS Report: 6). It suggested that 'counting time' compounded problems of recording and collation: it required a new kind of dedication, and it was resource expensive over a long period of time. Despite the clear benefits of standardised recording—in accumulating information towards a new mapping of the service as a whole—the report noted that QWIS also encouraged social workers to abandon other systems that had previously fulfilled local/personal needs.

Further, the report noted the difficulty of achieving accuracy in recording, due to the complex and overlapping nature of social work tasks: many

management tasks in regional offices overlapped, meaning that the separate identification in terms of 'time taken' was inevitably arbitrary; community work tasks often spanned a number of issues and were therefore probably under-recorded; if future systems were to allow 'fast recording' it would most likely involve a trade off between accuracy and detail, between time and complexity. Finally, it noted that the recording of time involved "issues of acceptance, accuracy and design for potential use", which needed substantial consideration and debate before it proceeded (QWIS Report: 13).

The QWIS trial report provides useful insights into the way in which the development process threw up a series of quandaries for social work staff and their managers. It displays a refreshing naivety about managerial prerogative, and the potential use of statistical information for standardising and further regulating the conditions of professional labour. At this stage—the mid 1980s—there was still a lively debate about the potential tradeoffs between complexity and simplification. The report's writers realised that systematic recording for the purpose of compiling a national statistical overview would be time consuming, resource hungry, and involve a potentially substantial shift away from individual control.

However the promise of a more complete knowledge—at the centre—of the activities, outcomes and resource requirements of the periphery, was enough to spur on further development, this time in Central Administration.

Stage 2: 1989-1994

The version of SWIS introduced across the national network of DSS regional offices at the beginning of 1989 drew data from frontline social workers, which had been recorded on paper copy forms, filled out at intervals dependent on

local practice, sent to Area Offices and 'batch keyed' into a PC loaded with the appropriate software. The data from that point was then downloaded onto a floppy disk and physically 'snail' mailed to the SWS in National Administration where it was uploaded into another computer, and merged with data from other Areas. The system only counted data from casework—which was a significant step back from the ambitious complexity of QWIS—while some information about administrative work and community liaison was collected and recorded manually. SWS management claimed, at this time, that the value of SWIS would be measured in terms of its capacity to enable more adequate supervision of staff, to improve the management of the service overall by matching plans against achievements, and to provide a tool for regional office workload monitoring.

An undated memo (written during 1989), titled 'SWIS Data Analysis: Some Possible Interpretations of Statistics', provides insight into the way in which management attempted at this stage to enrol social work staff into the benefits of SWIS. The memo puzzles over how to interpret, and how to act on, SWIS statistics. It addresses the issue of inappropriate referral—a constant thorn in the side of DSS social workers, who were often angered by the failure of administrative counter staff to deal with issues which were primarily about eligibility, and for which social work staff did not have delegation. Statistics, this document argues, make clear the basis for decisions about recurring problems of this nature. Statistics enable a basic picture, then formulation of strategy in consultation with relevant allies, and eventually verification of outcomes:

In short, this would enable me to demonstrate actual achievement in changing the way in which cases were being referred and would have the effect of maximising client access to appropriate Departmental services. It would also have the effect of lessening the actual workload for me and would enable me to control some of the work which is coming to the social work section (DSS SWS File 90/0104, undated).

However a series of concerns were raised, from inside as well as outside the SWS, almost as soon as the system had been implemented. One of the Assistant Directors of the SWS noted that failure to include any facility to record time spent on particular tasks—for example on policy review and comment, and on training of administrative staff—meant there was no acknowledgement of the validity of those tasks. Some staff became increasingly frustrated with what they perceived as an “inability or unwillingness in some areas” of senior management to ensure computer training was provided to social work staff, data was keyed and reports produced in a timely manner (DSS SWS File 89/6716, memo dated 18.9.89).¹⁴⁰ Numerous technical difficulties plagued the system. Files were easily corrupted, and sometimes lost in transit. Data was often not backed up, and later lost. One senior SWS manager complained of a lack of uniformity in form-filling and batch-keying procedures, which resulted in skewed and useless reports (DSS SWS File 89/6716, memo dated 9.8.90). There was generally a lengthy time lapse (often as much as three months) between the form-filling exercise at the local level, the keying of data in Area Offices, and the collation of data at National Office. The reports produced by National Office were, as a result, out of date and unreliable. In the middle of 1990 the SWS even considered a proposal to collect data for only two weeks out of each month, in order to check whether the increased time for completing the

¹⁴⁰ As noted above, data was batch keyed from completed forms by clerical staff, a resource not controlled by social work staff or their managers.

collection work would increase accuracy of data produced (DSS SWS File 90/N1060 (Part 4)).

Nevertheless, memos and file notes written at the time are clearly framed by a sense of optimism that what could be gained from the new flow of data would be persuasive arguments constructed in terms of statistical information that could be read 'at a glance'. The point here is not that statistical argument was new, but that the anticipated flow of data enabled a new way of arguing, one which acquired a new 'temporal' element. Management is seen in this framework as being able to proceed, ultimately, into a kind of 'hyper-drive'. It would no longer suffer from the constraints of time and space experienced by staff back in the 1940s, or even the 1970s. It became possible to mount a range of arguments for and against management decisions about staffing, such as in the following:

What seems clear from the figures is that the majority of social workers' client work is and remains in the categories of clientele where the Department is experiencing a drop in the overall recipient populations. It is interesting to note that in 1984 when benefit numbers soared through the roof the Department stated that this did not have any effect on the social work service, but now that benefit numbers are dropping there is an attempt to align the social work service to such numbers and extend to the social work service the cuts that are appropriately being applied to the general clerical service (DSS SWS File No. 89/6716, memo dated 7.11.89).

However the delays in having data entry completed at Area Offices caused further problems in applying the new information. Senior SWS managers complained that only one third to one half of social work activity was reflected in the reports that were eventually produced. These reports, as noted above, were often out of date by the time they could be used. As a result, techniques for securing compliance became an urgent topic for frustrated senior SWS

managers. Front line staff expressed disquiet about the additional workload involved in completing the required forms. They asked for the recording process to be suspended for six months, to deal with the backlog of data entry. From their perspective, they increasingly saw only the inconvenience of additional workload pressure, and became apathetic about the longer-term (administrative/managerial) concern with resource negotiations and policy formation.

One manager in the SWS concluded that some staff were selective in their recording, and that data would therefore not reflect the 'reality' of daily routines and practices. "The problem with this approach is that it does not give an effective overview to anyone seeking information about what is really happening in the regional offices about these activities" (DSS SWS File No. 89/6716, memo dated 6.3.90). But while arguing for comprehensive and accurate reports, the same official argued for data which could be consolidated into 'a format which could be seen at a glance', so that the conclusions that could be drawn were easily and immediately available. What they wanted, it seemed, was a 'tick box' system that would enable social workers:

to take from the mass of total activities those which they wish to comment upon in their reports while at the same time recording a more comprehensive range of the total activity range which they have undertaken in the regions ...[and] it enables users of the system at each level to consolidate data quickly without having to read through reports to find numerical totals of data, submerged in many pages of written text (*ibid*).

In September 1990 a senior DSS executive—to whom the SWS had appealed for assistance in securing more resources for SWIS development—wrote to the SWS Director asking for better performance in gathering data, and for some kind of accompanying analysis of data when presented. "Our statistics people

do this with surveys etc... Not only would some narrative be helpful to me. I think we have to have this if we are going to 'sell' the picture [of the SWS] up, down and across the organisation" (DSS SWS File No. 89/6716, memo dated 26.9.90).

This triggered further discussion about the need for a new system, which would require social workers to key at their desks. A 1991 submission by the SWS to senior DSS managers was ultimately successful, and SWIS entered a new stage of development that would involve collaboration between SWS senior project staff and a range of in-house and contract IT workers. Planning for the new system took over three years, with the new SWIS implemented nationally in 1994.

In the meantime, new database software was applied to the existing version of SWIS, which enabled new calculations about accuracy and use of data. In March 1991, as the SWS put together a Working Party and Terms of Reference for the new system, one senior SWS manager asked his colleagues for support in designing an experiment to look at the vagaries of keying, and the use of data, at the local office level. The questions he wanted answered were precisely about compliance: "when is data recorded, in relation to client contact?, how long does each entry take?, how long does it take to get data back to regional offices, after it is keyed, from Area Offices?, how is the data used in reports, and in supervision?" (DSS SWS File 91/3745, memo dated 12.3.91). At this point, elements of the act of recording information—including timing, accuracy and usability—had become an integral part of the SWIS project, something to be measured, calculated and managed. SWIS was now an object of enquiry, in and of itself.

The shift to self-keying brought with it further dilemmas about the means by which complexity could be measured and translated into numerical data. One member of the new Working Party noted major concerns about how effectiveness could be measured. She advocated a separation between the field noting 'reason for referral', and that noting 'presenting problem'. This would enable social workers to be seen to explore an individual case on its merits, and not simply in terms of a client's particular payment type (as a recipient of unemployment benefits, or sole parent pension, for example). Combining the fields would, she argued, "blur the DSS reasons for client contact and the social issues that were impacting on their lives" (DSS SWS File 91/3745, memo undated).

Discussions took place, at the same time, concerning the best mechanism to record 'level of intensity'. Some members of the Working Party considered a simple numerical scale of one to five as too subjective, meaningful only to social workers but not for a wider (managerial) audience. Time, or 'length of time spent with client', was seen as a more accurate measure by some, although others argued that "this measurement could be misused by management at an individual and SWS level. Some people [in discussions with CSC social work staff] did not believe that time reflects in any way how we work with clients" (*ibid*).

An ASW stationed in one of the States produced an extensive report, on the recording practices of CSC social workers and the potential problems involved in self-keying (DSS SWS File 93/1427, dated 2.6.93). The report argued that there was "considerable lack of uniformity and consistency in the recording of client contact" on the recording sheets used in the first version of SWIS. It

summarised the results of a survey, which asked questions about how they had conducted their recording practices in the past. In answer to the question 'how did you record the client's gender', it appeared there was a marked diversity of views and practices. "Only two used the same criteria, that of the couple considered as two clients. The other recording methods were as follows: gender not recorded, not seen as a useful category; usually the beneficiary, unless the emphasis is on the other partner; the male, as he is usually the beneficiary; the beneficiary always; whoever appears to be the client; the person who has the problem; whoever made the first contact; the partner with whom the most interaction occurs" (*ibid*). Whichever category was used would, of course, have implications for the data that could be drawn from the proposed new system. It was clear to the author of the report that if the new system were to be successful—if, in other words, it was to reflect social work practice accurately and comprehensively—coding practices would have to be standardised, and 'individual differences' ironed out.

The allocation of funding from DSS Central Administration also brought with it a series of external imperatives that the SWS needed to reconcile. Not the least of these was the difficulty that some SWS project staff had in explaining their requirements to IT systems analysts not acquainted with the messiness of frontline social work. They were also, from this point forward, confronted with further dilemmas about keeping the goodwill of senior DSS managers, some of whom expressed an interest in having SWIS integrated with the larger national client database. The SWS, however, preferred to restrict access to social work staff only, for reasons of confidentiality. One senior SWS project officer noted the possibility of "contamination of the social work intervention process by other Departmental processes", noting in particular the managerial interest in

performance outcomes, in determining whether action led to any benefit (DSS SWS File 91/3745, memo dated 21.6.91). The example of an action taken on behalf of a Disability Support Pensioner was put forward, as a case in point:

The change brought about by rehab may not occur for many months, and could we legitimately claim it as an outcome of the referral agency? Most of the texts that I have come across look at the measurement of change in social work practice where social work intervention is the service—i.e. the social worker takes a referral, assesses the presenting problems, plans the intervention, provides or co-ordinates the service delivery, evaluates change and eventually ends the intervention. I would suggest it is somewhat different for us (*ibid*).

During this period, also, there was ongoing discussion about the integration of data recording and the more detailed case note recording that social workers had always performed for each case. While one project officer argued that such integration would enable the end of paper-based recording, and that this was precisely one of the objectives of moving to self-keying, this was not the eventual outcome. The first self-keying version of SWIS, and the subsequent versions produced since 1994, provided only limited space for case notes. In interviews with social work staff (reported below, in §6.5.3) it became clear that many social workers have preferred to use a local computer drive to store written reports, while others prefer to use the case notes facility on SWIS.

After many months of deliberation—of extensive consultation with CSC social workers, of discussions with other DSS program representatives, of reprogramming after reprogramming—the new self-keying version of SWIS was piloted in late 1993, and then released to the national office network in July 1994. Findings from the pilot indicated a range of problems that would continue to plague the system for some time. Many social workers had not had computers on their desks previously, were angry about being given sub-

standard equipment by their local office managers, were not trained in basic computer skills, and were uninformed about the usual (but important) OH&S issues that flowed from the integration of computers into other work routines.

This was indeed a messy trajectory of development. However this is not surprising given the obstacles involved: the complex relationships that constitute close work with clients in crisis; the translation of those relationships, and their outcomes, into a standard code form; the negotiation of a variety of disciplinary knowledges and practices; the enrolment of geographically dispersed social actors into a series of new technical devices and arrangements.

The following section now moves to discuss frontline social workers' experiences of SWIS, through a summary of interview material.

6.5.3 Views from the front-line

Centrelink social workers interviewed for this research were asked about the changes that had occurred in their jobs during the period when recording was computerised.¹⁴¹ Note that the interviewees were encouraged to discuss a range of issues only indirectly related to the development of SWIS, including office culture and broader policy frameworks, in order to fill out the contextual background.

Most interviewees described the changes in their work, during the 1980s and 1990s, as dramatic. Some described social work in the 'early days' as 'generic', without specific classification: 'it was really what we had time to do'. One said

¹⁴¹ See Appendix 1, for a list of the questions used in interviews with Centrelink social work staff.

her work then had been much more varied, and she felt they previously were 'a law unto themselves'. A social worker located in a regional CSC said his work had been without clear definition, that it involved simply a kind of 'fix it' role in the local office:

I had a fair amount of scope, at that time, because there wasn't a lot of accountability... I just had to mop up after [administrative] staff, yeah that was the nature of the work.

Another described her work now in terms that clearly mix the professional with the organisational, as "more professional, more accountable, more business like".

Most interviewees commented on the requirement to make decisions about payments for young people and sole parents. For some, delegation as a decision maker under the Act narrowed the focus of their work too far, limiting their capacity to act as an independent advocate. However one worker felt her job was more flexible and 'less process-oriented' because she didn't have to write any many reports as she had done previously. Computerised recording had absolved her of the drudgery of paperwork:

It was very much process work before. You'd spend hours helping people fill in forms and things like that. Now, we have a lot more freedom, as long as we do those compulsory assessments.

Some commented on the new 'customer service' orientation of the organisation, which saw social workers allocated a kind of 'coaching' role for helping CSOs deal with 'problem customers'. One interviewee thought that the decision to ask social workers to coach CSOs had brought about a greater alignment between the 'client-centred point of view' of social work and the

'bureaucratic processing point of view' of CSOs. Another agreed, but remembered how in the 'old days', the 'value' of a C in the eyes of the organisation's hierarchy—was based on how quickly they could get through an interview, or an assessment process:

[Now,] it's *how* we deliver that payment to the customer. [But then,] the quicker that person could get through an assessment, or an interview, and get the person on payment [the better,] regardless of how that interaction went, be it very bad or very good. That wasn't the issue. It was about assessing payments correctly, so that the person could get on payment.

Other factors nominated included the requirement to meet new timeliness standards—driven by an automated link between SWIS and the Customer Appointment System (CAS)—in the face of what some perceived as a contraction of available resources, and a growth in 'telephone social work' whereby almost all interviews were conducted in-office, and very often by telephone rather than in person. One interviewee drew attention to an interesting relationship between SWIS, the CAS and the development of open-plan office architecture in Centrelink CSCs. The CAS not only streamlined booking schedules, but made it possible to draw additional statistics on key performance indicators, such as claim processing and client waiting times. Open-plan architecture removed the wall that previously divided the 'back office' staff from the front counter. That wall had provided a measure of security and safety, in an organisation that was occasionally under siege from angry clients. A receptionist, who sits midway between waiting clients and staff, now greets clients who are then interviewed at desks located in the space between the waiting area and 'back-office' staff. Neither would have been possible without newly developed local area network technologies. The caseworker noted that, while this had brought about significant changes in the

visible demeanour and attitude of office staff in their relations with clients, it was now more difficult to undertake client interviews by telephone:

I've had to adjust my manner, because of the open plan arrangement. You have to use, you know, a quieter voice, and you have to be able to concentrate better, to block out what's going on around you. Yes, and it's *really* hard, because everybody can probably hear the conversation you and I are having right now. So, ah, I'm a lot more cautious. You can't be yourself.

In this sense it is possible to argue that SWIS is just one of a series of innovations that have changed the manner in which staff conduct themselves, and give account of themselves.

Another worker commented, firstly, that he simply couldn't afford the time involved in home visits. But he also nominated other reasons for the trend to more in-office work:

There have been important shifts in the way we view people entering the home. It's not safe for me to do it any more. I'm much more vulnerable, now, to fabrication, of, you know, misconduct on my behalf, than I would have been in the past. But most significantly, it's the computer system [and] that means all the tools I need aren't available in the field. I need to be near a terminal to record my SWIS, to check details, to keep in touch with my answer-phone. Like a lot of people in [private] enterprises, I'm much more committed to my workspace now.

PD: And perhaps it was seen as more efficient, time wise?

I think the culture shifted as well. I think it happened with doctors a long time ago... our expectations became 'they come to us'.¹⁴²

¹⁴² The same interviewee volunteered that he'd recently come across a document prepared by a colleague, comparing grant and rejection rates for clients interviewed face-to-face with those for clients interviewed by telephone. It showed, he said, that more were granted face-to-face. His conclusion was that "they were more accountable [to the person], because they had a human relationship with this person, that was three dimensional. It's easier to be tougher over the phone. You don't know the person, you don't see them. They're not likely to see who you are, and see you in the street, or whatever".

Indeed all interviewees nominated computerisation as central to the changes they had seen. Furthermore, the requirement to enter the network, to make transactions on a system from which they had previously been excluded, had a number of immediate consequences. First, social workers had to persuade their local office manager to agree to place a computer on their desk, and to provide them with training to use the system. One interviewee commented:

There was this idea, you know, that 'you people are social workers, you're professionals, why do you want this technology?' And of course the technology was there, it was available for us, but it just depended on what your manager would give you in the office.

Social workers felt that not only was their 'technical status' reassessed in the eyes of their CSO colleagues, but also they were subjected to new forms of compliance monitoring. Interviewees reported being challenged by managers, all of a sudden: 'why haven't you entered/updated your SWIS files?'; 'why does it take so long to process claims for payment?'; 'how can you justify your current staffing quotas?'. This presented serious challenges for their relationships with managers at different levels. Second, they were actively discouraged from keeping personal notes, which many had done as a matter of course.¹⁴³ The message they received was clear: 'we know what you're doing, and by the way, cease all this unnecessary duplication'.

One interviewee admitted that she had been positive about the electronic version of SWIS, immediately seeing potential in being able to access up-to-date and comprehensive service data, to check her hunches about

¹⁴³ Many social workers had kept notes on paper cards, in personal diaries and manila folders. Some interviewees said they did so precisely in order to avoid having to continually ask CSOs for access to information from the organisation's mainframe computer system. See footnote 130, above, on the character of relations between CSOs and social workers in CSCs.

demographic or seasonal trends without having to keep her own 'messy paper files' or haggle with CSOs for help. But another said she missed the old proforma system because it was so straightforward, without creating extra layers of work. The burden of additional work created by the new computer technology seemed, in her eyes, an inevitable consequence of its complexity:

It was so simple—a folder on your desk. You'd just walk back and do it in about two seconds, and that was it. You didn't have to get into another system, go through a range of different screens, or have the person's record number... If we're inaccurate about how we record it, yes, it's a burden. But with all the different screens, the electronic documents we have to create, and all the other things you do that are quite outside just seeing the customer, making the phone calls and doing the work... Yes, it's a burden.

Most interviewees expressed concern about the time pressures associated with keying interview data. One reported having RSI in the initial stages of keying, describing SWIS as 'frustrating, a huge imposition'. Her sense of exasperation was caused not only by work intensification but also by technical problems with early versions of the system:

I think management have got a perfect right to ask you to record, I don't have a problem with that. But then [they should] make it so that you don't have to record the same information three times. Make sure there's enough space to do it in. Make sure the computer system you've got works. For example we use scripts, which means you're just supposed to press some buttons and certain things happen, to save time. The scripts crash, or they get stuck. You're nearly in tears when you've got all these other demands, the phones are ringing, somebody needs to see you urgently, you've got someone screaming out the front, and then you're trying to get somebody's payments through ... and the script crashes. It's just like *sometimes* you're *constantly* reinventing the wheel, you're doing a lot of 're-work'... Apparently we do about thirty percent re-work, and sometimes I wonder if it isn't more.

A number of interviewees said their response to SWIS was clouded by memories of a promise from SWS managers that SWIS would not be used as a workload distribution tool. They felt their earlier collective and personal

investment in 'making the system work' had been justified by the prospect of a more accurate picture of the work and the value of the SWS as a whole. One interviewee said that she had supported the system initially, but could now see why others had protested: "They thought it was going to be used inappropriately, used for reasons it was said not be used for... I can understand how they thought that, because now I can see how it turned out to be true".

Most interviewees raised questions about the reliability of information. One said she normally tried to complete all screens just after seeing a client, but this became more difficult as the flow of work increased. This then had implications for the reliability of any reports extracted from the system at a later date:

As we get busier, we fill in less.

PD: So in a sense, as your workloads in real time go up, the perception of your workloads, according to SWIS?

Yes, they can drop.

Others commented on the difficulty involved in condensing the complexity of client contact down into standardised data. One explained that his disenchantment with SWIS was based partly on continued technical problems, but these were compounded by the fact that what was indeed 'captured' by the system depended on local interpretation. He found it difficult to see SWIS data as objective, precisely because of the local variations in recording that the system made possible:

People fill it in differently. [For example] how do you decide what's a contact? For us [in this office] a contact would be an office interview, or a phone call. Now for some people [in other offices], a case consultation

with a CSO, that lasts ten minutes, is a contact. So that gives you different pictures about what the workload is like.

The initial desire for an 'instant capture' system, it seems, has still not been realised. There is continuing disconnection between task and record, between client engagement and subsequent computer work. One interviewee said that when SWIS was first introduced she found the requirement to key initially very difficult, and so put off her recording until 'some time later'. This meant she would have to set aside a period of 'frantic time' for recording, "which was just ridiculous because the reality is it's not then realistic, you just get sick of keying and you don't put it all in". She said she had not been against the introduction of the system like some others—who she described as 'paranoid' ("they were the paranoid ones... who felt that what we were doing was far more important than the recording of it, so 'why should we record?'")—but just simply concerned about the new time burdens imposed on work routines.

The electronic version of SWIS now allows data to be processed and updated daily, whereas previously it had been updated monthly, and sometimes only quarterly. This allows SWS managers to use comparative tables to 'entrepreneurialise' social work staff at an individual level, or in other words to encourage them to work 'harder' and 'smarter' by constantly comparing themselves with colleagues across other offices. Information from the CSC network—in office-by-office format—is available to be viewed on an intranet site. Social workers are encouraged to make comparisons between their office's statistical profile, and those of other like-offices. The opportunity to compare themselves with like offices effectively works to construct a quasi-competitive market. One interviewee saw this as a dramatic change. SWIS, he said, had been an in-house tool, 'made for social workers, by social workers':

But now, it's all there. So anyone can go in and look at these figures, and do anything they want with them. Draw any conclusion they want from them. And often they will draw conclusions that don't take into account things like inconsistency in recording practices.

On the upside, SWIS did indeed assist SWS managers in selling their service in a new way. A major policy change in 1997 saw Centrelink become more entrepreneurial in its attitude to bidding for contracts with external agencies. Information from SWIS has since been used by the SWS in the preparation of tenders for what are called 'Business Partnership Agreements'. While social work services in other government departments were progressively closed down during the 1990s, the Centrelink SWS now provides a range of advisory, counselling and training services to many of those departments, and to some community organisations, on a purchaser-provider basis.

Information from SWIS was also used to justify changes in pay rates for social work staff. In 1997 the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) was successful in having the classifications for Centrelink social workers upgraded, and in their case they used statistical evidence from SWIS to support their argument that the work of social work staff was sufficiently 'novel' and 'complex' to warrant a higher classification level. This was a major coup for frontline line social workers, leading to higher salaries for some staff and defined a more expansive career path for social workers in the organisation.

Some interviewees thought that the codification and standardisation that SWIS embodied provided clear protocols for recording, and argued that these were well overdue. SWIS, they said, conveniently defined and limited the nature and scope of information that managers want them to record. Some accepted the opportunity to be able to justify the need for their work. One said, "I like

being able to justify what I do. And I like people to be able to get bigger pictures".

Another thought computerised recording was useful in 'speeding up' the report writing process. "You just fill in the details about what you want to write. There can be more or less detail, depending on the style of the person who writes it, or the issues of the report, but that's the format".

When one interviewee was asked where she thought the idea of having to justify the outcomes of their work came from, she offered a very practical response that refers back to the initial desire of many staff for a system that would make their work more visible to decision makers:

Local office managers used to control all the money for that office. If they'd lost money out of the budget, and they didn't have a commitment to social work services, then social workers would lose staff. That doesn't happen now, because the SWS have their own budget. But before, you had to have very good relations with your manager, or they had to really understand what a social worker does, because there was always that threat that you may lose staff.

6.6 Discussion

SWS managers originally floated the idea of a 'work monitoring' system as early as the mid 1970s, touting it as a tool for demonstrating the value of the Service to the Department's senior hierarchy. The first version of SWIS, eventually produced in the late 1980s, consisted of a tick-box proforma. Caseworkers were asked to tick against basic demographic, case and action details on a paper form, bundle them at the end of the month and send them to their Area manager. A clerical assistant then 'batch-keyed' the information,

and eventually produced a report disc that was sent to National Office to be loaded into a primitive collation program. The spreadsheets generated by this process were nearly always out of date, and therefore unreliable. Timely production was compromised either by failings in the technology or by poor relations between the SWS and some senior bureaucrats, who varied in their commitment to the supply of administrative support labour needed for keying and processing data.

SWS managers and staff produced the original SWIS, and its subsequent versions until the early 1990s, in-house. During the early stages of its development, the Centrelink hierarchy was reluctant to commit resources to SWIS, or indeed to a Service that had—they argued—not been able to justify itself within the framework of the organisation's traditional culture and objectives. Social workers did not have computers on their desks, and for many years this remained an important cultural marker in an organisation that trumpeted itself as one of the most technologically sophisticated in the federal public service, and indeed in the larger Australian economy (Henman, 1996). So SWS staff puzzled over computer magazines, read the journals on the use of computers in social work, ignored the (sometimes dire) warnings of the latter and then struggled to adopt various early spreadsheet softwares to the task of producing their programs. Those programs were clunky, subject to sudden unexplainable—and occasionally unfixable—breakdowns. They caused immense frustration, both for the SWS managers and for staff out in the CSCs, many of whom had nevertheless supported the development because they accepted the view that a sophisticated information tool could persuade senior bureaucrats their service was worth maintaining.

Things changed in the early 1990s when technicians from the IT department were brought in to assist with a major redevelopment of SWIS. Centrelink's senior and middle managers by this time were well versed in the rhetorical practices of 'new managerialism', after a decade of reforms promoting greater efficiency, productivity and accountability. Quantitative information for them had become a key commodity of decision-making, providing greater certainty in their day-to-day management. But they were also acutely aware of the growth of new professional positions within the agency.¹⁴⁴ They decided to support the development of an information system that could measure the labour and outcomes of a growing number of professional staff, whose work tasks had always remained difficult to quantify and control. SWIS was eventually reinvented with new software, just as a new agency-wide computer network was rolled out during the mid 1990s. Since then it has required social workers to key client information as they work. SWIS, and the use of computers more generally, became integrated more thoroughly into the client contact routines of social workers.

Before proceeding further it will be useful to briefly review the original question framing the research, and summarise relevant key concepts put forward in Chapter Three. This will be helpful in drawing out final conclusions.

¹⁴⁴ By this stage social work was no longer the only non-administrative or non-technical position within the organisation. And senior managers faced the prospect of having to absorb responsibility for a large number of psychologists and project staff from other government departments, in a restructure that occurred in 1997. Challenged with the responsibility for managing larger numbers of professional staff, managers saw the possibility of using SWIS as the basis for generating a more complete system for monitoring the conduct of non-administrative labour.

The overall question framing the research is about whether, and how, changes in recording and other communication practices impact on the ethical agency—or, the capacity to reflect on professional knowledge and respond with some measure of discretionary judgement—that is understood as central to 'professionalism'. Is professional autonomy still a workable concept, considering the degree of control managers now seem to have over the definition of white-collar work tasks and work time in the post-industrial workplace? Or is it transformed into something else? How can the notion of 'discretion' be used as a conceptual tool for understanding labour relations in a context where, according to Rose (1999), the bubble of mystery surrounding professional expertise has been well and truly punctured by a range of monitoring and surveillance tools and techniques, like those embodied in SWIS? What implications does this have for understanding how the actual politics of information (and of trust and control) is shaping the future of professional work?

Chapter Three tabled a review of the 'governmental approach' to the study of communication and culture, and then used that to argue that the discursive routines of professional work are tied up with the development of certain skills of self-reflection.¹⁴⁵ Following Hunter (1984, 1991), it is reasonable to argue that systems of writing and recording provide 'scripts' for exploring and constituting particular subject positions, for performing and developing ethical capacities. It is therefore important to pay attention to the routines that constitute what has come to be called 'knowledge work', and the ways in which those routines are tied up with attempts to 'responsibilise'—or in other

¹⁴⁵ Note that this point was further explored, in a more detailed historical sense, in Chapter Five.

words make regular, make governable, and make 'autonomous'— professional work. 'Knowledge' in this framework is not simply information about an external reality 'captured' by whatever means possible, but a heading for the various practical arrangements and conceptual tools that shape the capacity of social actors to engage with certainty in their world.

The interest of this current Chapter, in studying the planning, manufacture and use of SWIS, is therefore not simply in whether and how it managed to capture an 'accurate' and 'realistic' picture of social work practice in Centrelink, but rather in the kinds of cultural meanings and practical outcomes shaped by the 'reading' and 'writing' practices associated with SWIS. More specifically, how has the computerisation of recording changed the culture of trust and relationships of control that operate between Centrelink social workers and their managers?

Chapter Three also drew attention to recent critiques of technological determinism, arguing against an arbitrary distinction between the 'human' and the 'technological'. Socio-technical change is not derived from one or the other, but rather it is a property of the interaction and interconnection between the various actors (both human and non-human) that make up a 'network'. Networks do not just 'happen'; they are constituted through a four-stage process that actor-network theory (ANT) calls 'translation' (§3.2.2). Actors' intentions are shaped and reshaped through a messy process of association and substitution, in which the statements (or, 'programs') of actors can only be realised when the various 'anti-programs' thrown up against them are exhausted. Innovation, according to Latour, always involves a succession of transformations, and in turn transformations can never be entirely predicted,

or traced purely to the express intentions of a single actor. Chance and risk play a significant role in socio-technical innovation.

In summary, that brief review of the recent 'sociology of technology' provided a set of tools for doing two things in this case study: for following the messy trajectory of organisational and technical development that has been the 'invention' of SWIS; and for making sense of the competing views expressed by social workers, on a process by which the complexity of practice could be translated into summary accounts that can then be 'read at a glance'.

Chapter Three summarised Law's (1996) notion of a 'mode of accounting', which draws on the post-structuralist notion that representations and their referents are generated together. Modes of accounting (or, in other words, the 'syntaxes of representation' used in organisations to give and receive accounts of action) 'perform' subjects, in the sense that they construct a position from which to view, and interact with, the particular context in which they are employed. They create—through the work they require organisational actors to do 'on themselves, and through the relations they create between 'subject' and 'object'—dispositions, or subject positions, from which it is then possible to speak and act. Whereas longhand information systems leave open the possibility of a form of judgement based on knowledge not within the immediate control of management, computerised information systems provide opportunities for the standardisation of tasks, and of judgement. In fact the latter enable the generation of what Law calls a 'panoptic subjectivity'. The question here, in this review of the development of SWIS, is what this means for the autonomy of social work practice in Centrelink. Does this form of subjectivity necessarily imply greater managerial control, and less autonomy?

Finally, Chapter Three reviewed Thévenot's (1984) concept of 'investment in forms', which provides grounds for considering the development of computerised information systems as a 'recodification' of procedures for rendering the conduct of professional work visible, communicable, and amenable to standardisation. This does not deny the existence of alternative 'code forms', prior to the development of computerised information systems—as if they have simply filled an empty void, as if previous forms had no 'spatial' or 'temporal' validity—but rather suggests the possibility of evaluating different forms in terms of their relative cost and effectiveness. Is SWIS, indeed, an investment by Centrelink managers in what Thévenot calls a 'general institutional objectification', aimed at reducing the costs that flow from poor communication, variable performance and high staff turnover? In what sense does SWIS divorce the various tasks of frontline social work from the individuals who undertake them? In what way does the system work to transform discretionary judgement into a more objective—and therefore more easily observable, and more 'manageable'—code form?

From the perspective of these frameworks it is reasonable to argue that the development of computerised information systems is tied up with a series of dilemmas—ongoing questions, problematisations, disputes, debates—which can perhaps best be captured under the two headings of 'visibility' and 'the constitution of responsibility and autonomy'. Indeed these headings, or topics, have been key issues for social work throughout its history. As noted in Chapter Five, professionalism in social work has long been tied to particular routines for recording and communicating information. Social work's claim to professional status, says Tice (1998), was dependent on the development of 'scientific' mechanisms for gathering and recording casework information,

which at the end of the nineteenth century were consciously distinguished from the soup kettles and almsgiving of earlier philanthropic activists. Early writers seeking to establish social work's credentials as a profession saw the rituals of self-reflection involved in process recording¹⁴⁶ not just as a tool for the development of self-awareness, but also ultimately as proof that social workers were developing a capacity for professional accountability. Recording has always been seen by the discipline as a key link in a chain that holds up a regime of accountability that draws together the various tasks of interviewing, assessment and supervision.

The descriptions above, including the summary of interviews conducted with Centrelink social workers, indicate that Centrelink social workers have—for most of the organisation's history—struggled to come to grips with the bureaucratic culture that frames the organisation's core functions, and shapes their relationship with administrative staff and clients. The initial incentive to produce a work monitoring system was the promise that the information produced would persuade managers that the SWS did in fact have something to offer beyond an immediate salve in cases where legislation had created space for discretionary judgement on the part of delegated decision makers. More information would make for a more clear-eyed mode of management. This was a promise of 'accountability' of a particular form, one based on information that was qualitative as well as quantitative.

¹⁴⁶ As noted in Chapter Five, process (or narrative) recording is an elaborate system that was used in social work agencies during the 1920s and 1930s. Wilson describes it as "a specialized and highly detailed form of recording. Everything that takes place in an interview is recorded using an 'I said then he said' style. In effect, the social worker writes down everything that would have been heard or observed had a tape recorder and camera been monitoring the interview" (1980: 18). Process recording was used less and less after the Second World War, as questions were raised about resource efficiency. It is still used, nevertheless, in schools of social work education, as a tool in the development of critical awareness.

However the system that now exists, that many thought would help make their work more visible and thereby improve its status, has brought mixed blessings. On the one hand, information from SWIS has been used in an industrial case that led to changed classifications and increased salary for a number of staff. But on the other hand social workers are now locked into an arrangement that some see as a 'surveillance system', which—although it does not exactly tell them how to interview or how to assess their clients' needs and interests—appears to have reframed their sense of what can be achieved at the street level, principally because of what they perceive to be a substantial increase in their overall workload. The question can reasonably be asked: is the incentive for increased remuneration merely a vestige of an older style of professionalism, at least in this context?

PD: Do you feel any less of a professional now than you did ten years ago?

In some ways yes, I think I do. I think the reason for that is when you've got a high volume clientele, often [in] the work you do with people you just can't spend as much time with them, and you're just doing the barest minimum for people, and I think that's a bit of a problem.

Admittedly, some social workers interviewed for this study appeared happy with the new regime of accountability that SWIS enabled. They had previous experience of systems that had much more clear-cut reporting requirements, and they felt uncomfortable not being able to show managers that they were 'making a difference'. But many saw it as impinging on their autonomy, as placing them in a position of visibility that they see as incomplete, and therefore flawed. Some saw it as simply a waste of time, because the transition period was so long and tedious. The system has always been time consuming, always dropping out, always locking up. It has never seemed to produce statistical information that is complete, or convincing, or—for one worker in

particular—relevant. For this interviewee, at least, the shift to a new mode of accounting has been without meaning, except perhaps to satisfy the needs of managers who simply wish to survey, for surveillance's sake:

And then you had to compile stuff, like turn the data into reports. And it was just an exercise, it didn't mean anything, it didn't tell me anything, it was to satisfy somebody else's need to think they knew what I was doing. It was National Office wanting to be accountable, and they need to have numbers to crunch, so we needed to produce them, but it had no meaning for me as a worker.

Some interviewees remarked on the consequences of SWIS, in terms of how it made them respond to the information gathering process. Some said they now felt much more self-conscious about keeping records brief for reasons they said did not appear logical, but which under closer analysis might be seen as a consequence of the efficiency principles ('keep it brief, and accurate') built into SWIS. One experienced social worker explained how SWIS had led him to look at events and exchanges during his working day as opportunities for counting, rather than in terms of their intrinsic importance to the substance of his work with clients:

I think I see some instances as 'stat-able'. "Oh, that's a statistic". You know, I will collect them. Because I think I have to, I think it's a fundamental tool that I've got, and one of my jobs as a worker is to produce numbers. If you can't make a statistic out of it, it doesn't exist. It's a large part of the culture, so I'm prepared to play that game. So I stat things. And I say to anyone I'm supervising, one of the first things you've got to do is keep your statistics up, [because] otherwise you become very vulnerable, politically vulnerable.

Those who remain unconvinced by the capacity of SWIS to capture a meaningful snapshot of the complex nature of their work rail against the overwhelming tide of work involved in the constant keying required by the system. They resent the pressure to move their focus away from their clients,

and on to computer screens and telephones. It seems however that this particular interviewee is, in a sense, accepting of the need to engage in processes of 'making things visible', no matter how flawed they may be, because it is a strategic (or, 'politic') activity. What is at stake in the reporting process is not accuracy, not verisimilitude, but an understanding that there is another level (or, 'culture') of work involved, the object of which is 'manageable data'.

6.7 Conclusion

In summary, this Chapter has described SWIS as a mechanism for shaping the 'limits of the sayable', in a way that renders social work practice more amenable to managerial assessment intervention. It appears from the research evidence that the changes in writing and recording practices that constitute SWIS have made a substantial difference to day-to-day working relationships between managers and their staff. SWIS has had a discernible effect on Centrelink social workers' 'professional' understanding of, and engagement with, the various objects of their work. They have, in effect, been recommissioned to see and engage in their work in ways that can be seen as contrary to their professional ideals.

In the events that make up the 'story' of SWIS, a series of developments overtook—or 'translated'—earlier objectives. A succession of 'anti-programs', put forward by SWS managers, staff and the various non-human actors that have made up SWIS, have transformed SWIS into something that not all actors thought it was 'meant' to be. These 'anti-programs' can be summarised as different perspectives, or statements, on what SWIS has become.

On the one hand, management's interest in statistical information—in 'perfect number' solutions—appears to have transformed SWIS into a compliance system, where SWS managers are always looking for new ways to close the loop on caseworkers who neglect, or refuse, to record 'correctly'. From this perspective, the means—statistical mapping—has become an end in itself, divorced from the messy 'reality' of frontline client contact. In reviewing the mass of documentary evidence on the development of SWIS it is clear that compliance has become an inescapable element of data collection. In professional work there is no pure form of surveillance, and certainly no immediate way of linking up actions performed (which in the 'personal services' are often complex and multi-faceted) with a numerical codification of outcomes. There is only ever an approximation, and that approximation in this case has depended on a measure of precision.

On the other hand, many staff are acutely concerned about the rising workload associated with keying, and the use of the system to shape patterns of staff allocation. SWS managers promised, at various stages of the development of SWIS, that the system would not be used as a workload management or resource distribution tool. Likewise, SWS project officers spent innumerable hours in planning a mechanism that could be both simple, yet sophisticated enough to capture complexity, in order to avoid increasing workloads. "We should be very careful not to make an industry of the system. The balance between the time involved in keeping the records (keying) and the product usefulness must be kept in mind at all times" (DSS SWS File 91/3745, memo dated 31.5.91). They played up the role of SWIS as a tool for gathering information that could be fed into the policy cycle, as an instrument that could both demonstrate the complexity of work tasks and objects, and assist with the

formation of improved approaches to income support. SWS managers and project officers went to great lengths to persuade social workers in the CSCs that staffing arrangements would not be based on SWIS data, which all agreed was not capable of capturing and allowing for local and seasonal variations. They told the union not to worry: 'we have no intention of using this to shape and control staffing and resource allocation!' However that is precisely what they did.¹⁴⁷ SWIS now provides SWS managers with information about the content of its workers' caseloads that is undeniably important and useful as a support in their understanding of client circumstances. However one of its most significant functions is as a human resource management tool, which managers argue provides them with flexibility and efficiency in the distribution of 'scarce' resources.

In summary, the case study indicates that the displacement of a system of typed reports and submissions, of handwritten notes and *ad hoc* personal records, has not been a straightforward innovation. The 'instability' of the outcome points to the variety of perspectives, needs, opportunities, strategies and inventions that make up the 'story' of SWIS. Not only has development

¹⁴⁷ SWS files indicate an infrequent flow of correspondence between SWS managers and the Professional Officers' Association (POA), and later the Community & Public Sector Union (CPSU). In July 1990 the POA wrote to the Manager of the SWS, asking her to instruct all Area Social Workers (ASWs) not to use SWIS casework statistics as a basis for resource allocation. Attached to the letter is a handwritten notation, presumably circulated to ASWs, instructing them not to use SWIS as a workload measurement tool (DSS SWS File 1990 N1060 (Part 4)). Just over twelve months later, the position adopted by the SWS Manager was entirely different. In October 1991 she wrote to the DSS National Manager of Operations, asking for money to redevelop SWIS on the grounds that Area Offices did not have sufficient money to enter data accurately and in a timely manner, and that SWIS had by that stage reached a point where it could not be a reliable and meaningful product without further resources (DSS SWS File 89/6716). In her letter she referred to the requirement of the Department of Finance that additional social work resources provided in the 1991/92 federal budget be reviewed through the Regional Staffing Model (a model adopted by management and the CPSU in respect of administrative staffing levels for CSCs), and suggested that SWIS would be the ideal tool for workload measurement without resorting to a new system. So, through an apparent sleight of hand, SWIS became something that it had always been intended for, and the interim 'anti-program' of the POA was defeated.

been a slow process, but also in some ways it is incomplete. Some social workers still use typed reports, albeit word-processed, which are stored either on a customer's paper file or on a Local Area Network (LAN) to which clerical staff and social workers in other offices do not have access. Some still keep handwritten notes from interviews, although mostly they are shredded after each case is finalised. However all social work staff are required to use SWIS, which stores statistical information and some case work notes; all are required to use the information extracted from SWIS in local evaluations of the efficiency and effectiveness of their own work; and all are drawn into various numerical calculations about the scope and effectiveness of their role as professional social workers.

Indeed one of the more significant conclusions to be drawn in this Chapter concerns the episodic reframing of objectives. The authors of the 1973/74 DSS Annual Report emphasised the importance of data capture in "identifying patterns of service so that social policy planning issues are highlighted" (10). Meyer's list of system requirements (discussed above, in §6.5.2, Stage 1) was preoccupied with a managerial perspective on tight administration of human and other resources. The trial of QWIS (also discussed in §6.5.2, Stage 1) attempted to gather evidence for an argument about the complexity of social work tasks, and about the need for more resources to cope with that complexity. But by the mid 1990s the imperatives of administrative process again framed discussions about the development of SWIS, with a much greater focus on compliance. What occurred in between was a prolonged process of reframing previous intentions, from sophisticated work monitoring and policy development to mainly resource management. Ultimately, the emphasis on

accuracy or verisimilitude of recording outcomes has come to outweigh previous objectives of 'social utility' and 'supportive communities'.

Centrelink social workers appear, then, to have been caught in a complex and uneasy bind throughout the entire period of the development of SWIS. They have worked in an institutional context in which there has been considerable tension between bureaucratic objectives and procedures, and their professed aim of remedying the worst excesses of those procedures. Their scope for community development and liaison work was rapidly extended during the early 1970s, and then just as rapidly limited during the Fraser administration. Their historically developed role as contributors to larger debates about the direction of income support policy has been curtailed by the more recent restructuring of income support policy and payment systems (by the creation of Centrelink, and the subsequent disconnection between departmental policy makers in Canberra and the apparatus of local service delivery). At the same time, their ethos of ethical professionalism appears to have been appropriated by the new customer service culture of Centrelink.

What can be observed through this case study is an ongoing slippage between the objects of work (referring not just to 'client circumstances' but to the whole set of objectives that form the universe of a social workers' daily routines, including interviewing, liaison, filing and supervising), new technologies of communication and the disposition of 'end-users'. As one element changes so the others seem to adapt, or, in other words, are 'transformed'. The object of work is not an absolute unchanging referent, and neither are communications technologies simply transparent mediators of objective information. The focus of interest in this kind of study, therefore, should not be on the forms of

inscription themselves—as if there is something technically peculiar or remarkable about *how* they communicate information—but rather on the *potential transformation of perspective*.

The question about the effect of new information systems on professional autonomy can, perhaps, best be answered in terms of how the managerial and professional 'cultures' at work in this case *see* the world, and make it visible. As Latour notes, a new culture "redefines both what it is to see, and what there is to see" (1990: 30). Hence the main object of discussion here is not just the criteria of objectivity introduced by the 'culture of audit'. Neither is it something specific about computerised communications technologies themselves, as if there is truly an objective reality to be captured, documented and articulated. Instead what is at stake here is what Latour calls the quality of 'optical consistency' (1990: 31). The main object, in other words, is the set of useful/usable techniques by which complex phenomena are made visible, described, articulated, made 'immutable', and made mobile. In this particular instance, the development of SWIS has enabled senior managers to acquire a particular form of information that can then be used in ways not directly related to the circumstances of its initial collection. The use value of the information available, in some cases, bears only indirect relation to the original intentions of the project staff who first sat down and contemplated a work monitoring system for DSS/Centrelink social work. The early concern, as noted above, was with visibility, with correcting perceived misunderstandings about role, function and status. Since the formation of Centrelink, and the subsequent splitting of service delivery and policy making functions of the old DSS, information from SWIS has been particularly useful in calculations about the various business partnerships that the SWS has entered into. A new

framework of partnership, flexibility and customer service has apparently, overtaken the former concern with bureaucratic inflexibility.

It therefore seems reasonable to argue that, within the limits of this research, the outcomes of SWIS are mixed. There is no conclusive measure here of any reduction in the limits of autonomy. There are, instead, a series of indicators that tell of a number of threats and opportunities flowing from a considerable investment—by frontline social work staff as much as SWS or higher DSS/Centrelink management—in the invention of an alternative 'code form' for rendering the conduct of this form of professional work visible, more easily communicable, and more manageable.

CONCLUSION

Questions

This thesis has investigated the constitutive relationship between information and communication practices in social work, and the capacity for self-mastery exercised at the level of actual casework. It describes this as a relationship in which an alignment between self-mastery and the political objectives of authorities is being fundamentally renegotiated through the computerisation of information systems. In particular, the focus of interest has been on the use of computers in developing new regimes of reporting and accounting for practice, and on what this has enabled: the seemingly contradictory attempt to exert greater control over public programs through new regimes of self-regulation, to achieve new heights in productivity and risk minimisation through more effective control *at a distance* (§3.1, 3.4).

The argument is structured around a set of primary questions, about the extent to which the use of computerised information systems in the professional workplace has reshaped the ways that professional workers have of conceiving of their autonomy, and of acting independently of managerial objectives. What is the status of established systems of accountability in social work, and how should one understand their significance in relation to the history of the 'professional project' in that particular discipline? What happens when communication systems change? Does the 'way of thinking'—or in other words, the frameworks used by these workers for making sense of their position within an organisation—change as a consequence of the requirement

to key casework information into a database, rather than write it down longhand and store it in a personalised card system or on client files?

In studying a particular case of the recent development and implementation of computerised information systems (§6), and the larger social and political background to that process (§4, §5), the overall aim in this project has been to identify precisely what was at stake at the moment of uncertainty where professionalism, as a kind of collegial regulation at a distance, is supplanted by new techniques of entrepreneurial self-management coupled with virtual surveillance. What was given up, and what was taken on? What was risked, and what was gained? How has professionalism, in this local instance, been redefined?

Arguments and Assumptions

The study draws on some of the key assumptions of critical studies of media, communication and culture. Specifically, it draws on the notion that the 'effects' of any new communications technology depend largely on the capacities (both practical and intellectual) that audiences/users bring to their engagement with that new technology, as much as it does on the content of the information produced or on the mode of its delivery. Effects are not registered simply as a consequence of the transmission of information, but as a consequence of audience engagements with the complexity of new arrangements. When social actors make sense of their world they pick up and apply available 'meaning systems', 'cultural distinctions' or 'interpretation repertoires'. These systems or distinctions are not just one-way lenses, which

subjects adopt and use to make sense of reality at will. They are specific to particular institutional locations, and they effectively work to constitute (or in other words, produce and reproduce) social realities, including the skills and capacities of subjects themselves. They are not separate to reality. They are an integral part of any given reality.

The focus of discussion has been micro rather than macro, in that it deals with what might be called a 'politics of writing' rather than a politics of social policy formation. It is the labour relations of the human service organisation, and in particular the relations between those that manage and those that consider themselves professional—and therefore responsible and autonomous—that are at stake here. This notion of a 'politics of writing' draws on the call made by Dorothy Smith (1990) to consider the uses of 'documentary' technologies in the organisation of everyday life. Smith argues that while technologies of inscription permeate all aspects of social relations they remain largely taken for granted by sociology. She calls for an exploration of textual practices as constitutive of social relations and not just as expressive of culture formed elsewhere. The effects of information systems, in this particular research context, therefore need to be considered not just in terms of a centralisation of surveillance—whereby more information supposedly gives the centre more power—but also in terms of how capacities (considered as outcomes of social organisation, rather than as expressive of personal attributes or traits) change.

The use of analogue recording systems, in both educational and organisational contexts, has contributed—at least in part—to the development of a capacity for self-mastery. Narrative and process recording have formed part of the ensemble of techniques used by the profession to regulate practice, to ensure a

degree of accountability to professional and social norms. Recording, along with interviewing and supervision, has been the subject of a substantial body of research and writing in the social work discipline, concerning the best way to train social workers for practice in the field. Computerisation, and the push towards standardisation more generally, has resulted in a kind of 're-skilling' of social work staff, by which their capacity to demonstrate accountability, and the limits of their own discretionary judgement, is substantially re-engineered. This is not a matter of ideological re-programming, by which the socially progressive values and ideals routinely claimed by social work educators and commentators are somehow dissolved or displaced by alternative ideas. It is instead a change brought about by the requirement to develop different competencies: the requirement to enumerate aspects of their professional work, to measure and record them in a management database, produces new techniques for identifying, calculating and accounting for performance. Their capacity for self-regulation, or self-mastery, is substantially altered by the tasks of enumeration and analysis (and this includes the recording as well as the making sense of information produced by the system), and by the context of the performance of that task. A degree of professional independence is left intact by the continuation of a range of structural arrangements attendant to professional status—including pay scales, hours of work and educational requirements. But in essence, computerisation brings with it a substantial change in the cultural landscape of professional work.

Chapter Three put forward a framework of concepts about discourse, power and technology, which in tandem provide an alternative to the disabling characteristics of liberal and Marxist approaches discussed in Chapter Two. On the basis of that framework, professionalism can be analysed as a 'subject

position' formulated and regulated within, and through, discursive practices. Professionalism, in that framework, is both a disposition to act (ethically, competently, independently) and a position within a field of discursive relations.¹⁴⁸

The concept of discourse—as an alternative to 'ideology' as 'false knowledge'—assumes there is no essential separation between a 'perspective' on work, such as 'professionalism' or 'managerialism', and the practices by which that work is carried out. Ideas and practices do not belong to separate (ideal as opposed to material) domains. The practice of recording, when newly tied to administrative techniques and mechanisms of managerial accounting, is not automatically or only representative of ideas—which are supposedly located elsewhere—about how work should proceed. The practice of recording is, alternatively, a 'site' at which professional or managerial dispositions are 'worked out', or 'negotiated'. It is a site at which there is not just room to manoeuvre around, or simply resist, conflicting or controversial imperatives; instead, it can be seen as a site at which there occurs a process of negotiation and translation. This does not mean simply that the bearers of newly arrived imperatives 'get their way', eventually, albeit by the long road. It means that the perspectives, and the skills and capacities of the users of recording systems are not simply transmitted, but produced by their negotiation and use of those systems. Responses to the recording and calculation of waiting times, the configuration of office furniture as it affects worker/client interactions, the use

¹⁴⁸ As noted in Chapter Three, 'discursive' refers to the sense of the relations Foucault saw "between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterisation", which are understood as productive of practices of representation, reflection and action (1972: 45-46). Discourses, in this framework, are the sets of rules that "define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. ...[they are] practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972: 49).

of appointment systems in structuring access to service, or a sense of responsibility about privacy are just a few examples of the elements of 'mode of accounting' that need to be considered in order to understand what it means to maintain 'professionalism' in the face of a mode of administration understood as the manifestation of 'managerialism'.

This approach incorporates a substantially different set of assumptions from those which, for example, support the determinist argument about technology and social work put forward by Humphries & Camilleri (2002). Their argument, based on a survey of Centrelink social workers' attitudes to ICTs, is that an over-reliance on information and communication technologies, without critical understanding, leads to an excessively 'procedural approach' to social work that ignores the 'uniqueness' of individuals.¹⁴⁹ The outcome of their survey was that Centrelink social workers feel they have insufficient training to deal with the array of systems available to them. The danger of this, they argue, is that lack of formal skilling can lead practice in particular directions:

At its extreme, it can be argued that an over reliance on a central but not fully understood client management system can lead to a reliance on a procedural approach to social work practice that meets the needs of the organisation but is unable to take the unique situation of the individual client into account. ... It is important to remember that any client information system (or any other sort of information system for that matter) is not just a neutral tool but must inevitably influence (potentially both positively and negatively) how social work practice is constructed within that organisation (2002: 258).

¹⁴⁹ Note the similarity between this assertion, and that attributed to Lymbery in the Introduction to this thesis. According to the latter, a 'reductive preoccupation' with the notion of competence has shifted that balance towards 'technicality', and as a result "there is a danger that social workers will lose the ability to innovate in practice or think strategically about the development of the profession" (2001: 377).

Ultimately, Humphries and Camilleri warn there is a danger in social workers seeing the use of technology as an end in itself, rather than as a means to more efficiently process information. Their argument betrays a tension between applause for new information systems and a fear of their inappropriate use. That tension, indeed, refers back to the enduring sense of conflict one sees in the literature on professionalism and bureaucracy, between Weber's notions of critical and instrumental rationalities, between social work's interest in the uniqueness of the individual and the bureaucratic preoccupation with standardisation. Humphries and Camilleri assume a kind of sleeping moral danger is immanent in new technology, a danger which humanism must stand up to, and find a way to resist.

This thesis argues that the humanist focus on the 'moral danger' presented by computerised information systems is not simply 'not warranted', but not practical. Critique needs to descend into the messy detail of what people actually do with computers, rather than stay at a higher level of abstraction.

The alternative is premised on a 'post-representational' view of communication, which contradicts the positivist/idealist notion that a representation is either true/adequate or false/inadequate on the basis of its correspondence to an essential 'reality out there'. Instead, representations can be, and should be, seen as productive of audience capacities. The capacities of professional actors—both individual and collective (such as professional associations)—are formulated or acquired within particular discursive fields, where they come to appropriate the historically developed rules for producing statements that 're-present' some aspect of their field of action/intervention.

In terms of a Foucauldian framework for analysing discourse, computerisation of casework recording changes the conditions under which a statement can be held to be true. The enunciation of the individual statement changes, with a drive to count aspects of performance, is now of paramount importance. The conditions of authorship change significantly, as computerised reports displace card files, personalised notes and diary entries. Different kinds of statements make visible new kinds of 'truths' about the component parts of casework interviews, of follow-up action and of decision-making practices.

Chapter Five considers the historical development of a professional mode of accounting in social work, arguing that the ethical comportment of graduates and front line workers must be read in terms of a constitutive relationship between communication practices and organisational and larger political structures and practices. Ethics is considered here as a set of practical competencies which are developed through an engagement with systems of interviewing, recording and supervision. Ethics in this sense constitutes a relationship of accountability, a display of respect for and compliance with professional norms. Ethics is not simply a set of base line values established separately from practice contexts. Ethics, as a relationship of accountability, is not a matter of content. Ethical practice is not simply a display of the values or the knowledge base of the discipline. It is an enactment of self-knowledge, of self-awareness, of self-mastery.

Findings

New managerialism has effectively reframed the limits of expertise, both through crucial changes to the structural limits of work practices (including regimes of contracting and the subsequent casualisation of labour), and through changes in the cultural frameworks which professional workers bring to bear in making sense of their relationship to administrative authority. Advanced liberalism works, as Rose puts it, to autonomise and to entrepreneurialise policy actors. In a parallel process it also requires them to make visible various factors affecting, and resulting from, their work. Visibility, which is a condition of autonomy in the neo-liberal workplace, appears to open actors up to closer scrutiny and to more immediate control (Rose, 1999).

Computerised information systems (and a variety of other technologies) are crucial tools of management, used to make visible aspects of work previously unavailable to those external to the professions. They require professional workers to reveal various details of some aspects of their decisions. They plug them into the 'growing cybernetic assemblage' (Bogard, 1996: 99) that constitutes the virtual workplace of the twenty-first century. Professional work is not simply de-skilled by this scrutiny, 'deprofessionalised', 'proletarianised', or assimilated as working class. Instead, the management of many forms of professional work—work, that is, based on specialised knowledge, regulated by forms of credentialing, licensing and ethical codes, and conducted without direct supervision—is being *virtualised*. New forms of 'informed surveillance'—part of what Latour describes as "imbroglios of computer chips, organisations, subjectivity, software, legal requirements, routines, and markets" (1996: 305)—provide managers and policy makers with

opportunities to redefine the conditions and outcomes of work previously entrusted by licence, without renegotiating the terms of that licence.

Traditional sociological paradigms of professionalism are not sophisticated enough to handle the notion of the cyborg worker, or the networked organisation. They do not provide explanatory mechanisms capable of explaining the 'fit' between professionalism and the social, organisational and technical arrangements for 'governing at a distance', for drawing human and non-human actors into new forms of association. A traditional liberal approach to professional autonomy views independence positively, as a prerequisite for productive social change. On the other hand, a Marxist approach views autonomy negatively, as an outcome of market control, and in fact one of the central objectives of those occupations that have sought the status of 'profession'. In both approaches it is possible to see a common thread: individual practitioners enjoy spaces of independence, or freedom from state or managerial supervision, albeit for different reasons. Independence is either granted, or won. It comes in the form of credentialed access to protected markets for service, and in the form of various ethical conditions—codes, and forms of association—which are supposed to protect the interests of both client populations and state interests alike. In both cases, spaces of autonomy are effectively seen as outcomes of a political process.

The governmental approach to communication and culture, on the other hand, sees the capacity to exercise judgement as not just based on 'space' (or territory, or leeway) but also on the routines of conscience, on self-knowledge, or in other words on the capacity for self-mastery. The freedom to exercise discretionary judgement depends on a capacity for self-mastery. Furthermore,

this capacity is precisely what managerialism seeks to capitalise on: managerialism, in a very real sense, is not a denial of autonomy but rather a redevelopment and redeployment of the skills of self-mastery. In fact managerialism draws on the developed capacities for independent self-assessment that are already centrally important in social work training, and which are acquired through training in the traditional regimes of accountability (including interviewing, supervision and recording). It seeks to capitalise upon 'skills of the self' in order to refashion the structural relations of trust and control in organisational contexts. It seeks to adapt skills of self-mastery from domains like social work, and broadcast them across others.¹⁵⁰ It concedes the domain of professionalism as 'autonomous', at least in a rhetorical sense, but then seeks to intervene by recommissioning professional subjects as entrepreneurs in their own right. It capitalises on the networks of virtual information—provided by performance information systems, like the system described here in Chapter Six—in order to render visible certain forms of knowledge not previously obtainable. The continued autonomy with respect to the 'content' of practice (for example, control over interview and assessment routines, supervisory relations, etc, which are continually spoken about in the literature in terms of various 'techniques of self') acts as a concession to professional expertise. The corollary is an increased capacity for intervention by the centre.

However this is by no means a process of simple exchange, whereby one mode of supervision replaces another, but rather an uneasy standoff fraught with conflict. This is precisely because the information is never 'perfect', but always

¹⁵⁰ In the case of DSS/Centrelink, reported in Chapter Six, this has taken the form of the adoption of social work as a primary vehicle for training administrative staff in skills of 'customer service'.

open to contest. The technical and the political dimensions of visibility are not straightforward. On the one hand, information systems tend to elide the complexity of work that draws on personal skills and tacit knowledges, and thereby enables a reading of that work that may not be cognisant of, or sympathetic to, the complex objectives that inform it. On the other hand, they may also lead to unanticipated benefits, through the ability to self-justify at levels of decision-making previously antagonistic to their objectives, and even their very existence. The important point here is that the performance data obtained through networked information systems should not be read as an intrinsically 'clearer' version of the outcomes of professional work. Information systems are not simply indexical of a reality that already exists elsewhere: they are productive of ways of thinking about the objects and processes of work. The computerisation of information systems can, indeed, provide new perspectives on what has previously seemed remote from a managerial perspective. However this is also a process through which almost everything about work changes: not only the routine skills required for documenting work tasks, but also the very perception of the shape and context of the objects of work (be they inanimate objects, processes, or people). In this sense, the invention of information systems can be seen as productive of standardised perception, and also—ultimately—of relations, practices and capacities.

In social work, and in related 'bureau-professional' occupations¹⁵¹, autonomy is generally understood as a space of freedom, as a kind of barricaded

¹⁵¹ Harris uses this term to refer to the emergence, during the 1970s, of work regimes that combined the rational administration of bureaucratic systems with professional expertise. "They represented ... a blending of elements of professionalism and bureaucratic organisation. Neither autonomous professionalism nor purely bureaucratic hierarchies emerged from the

independence from managerial prerogative. That space is understood as bounded, or delimited, by a series of negotiated provisions: a credentialing system to control entry into the profession, ethical control over individual behaviour in the form of associational codes of conduct, and control over knowledge frameworks that frames the conduct of customer/client interactions.

The premise of this dissertation, on the other hand, is that professional autonomy is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Professionalism is *rhetorical*, in that what is known about particular professions, from the outside, is based on statements of knowledge and 'value' in public discourse. Professionalism is also *structural*, in the sense that the status and relative autonomy of any given occupation are shaped by relations between authorities, employers and professional workers—through, for example, the credentialing process, or through forms of direct and indirect state regulation, or the self-managing activities of associations. The third dimension, and the one most often elided in debates about autonomy, is concerned with *technical* processes of actual work, including the skills and capacities brought to bear in successfully managing relations with employers and/or clients. A 'bedside manner', for example, is shorthand for the often taken-for-granted dispositions that people working in the 'caring professions' are required to acquire, and to regularly 'perform'.

This distinction—between rhetorical, structural and technical—draws on a notion of discourse as a 'field', or 'terrain'. What matters is not just the literature, the ideas, the statements, but also the power relations that constitute

reorganisation. ... The mode of organisation is a hybrid ... It involved a negotiated partnership between social work, attempting to organise as a profession on the one hand, and the managerial and organisational approach of the state and local authorities on the other" (1998: 843).

the field, as well as the formation of subjects who 'staff' it. In this sense social work (or any other profession, for that matter) can be described as a 'discursive formation', comprising utterances or statements which are made possible (and made true) by structural and technical factors: by theoretical knowledges and practical techniques for attending to the adjustment of client/target populations; by regulations and conventions for ordering relationships between labour and the market for service; by systems of education and training which credential that labour; by funding policies and accountability guidelines; by forms of commentary on the legitimacy of past, present and future political and administrative regimes.

The practical capacity for autonomy is therefore not simply a matter of positive or negative space. It is neither a state investment (granted in order to secure compliance or assistance in respect of a particular matter) nor simply a guarantee of freedom from managerial interference. It has more to do with the sets of capacities to act that are outcomes of both formal and informal trainings, capacities acquired through the education system and in the workplace. Autonomy is indeed both a capacity to act, and a quality of working relationships within established structures and routines. It is not simply a quantum of control, which one either has, or does not have. Discretionary judgement is, in this sense, part of a professional persona. It is part and parcel of the personal armoury of institutional actors who have been "inducted into special disciplines and practices of ethical self-problematisation through which they can learn to call their conduct into question and begin the 'work of the self on the self' that we call conscience" (Hunter, 1994: 161).

Professional autonomy, in summary, is not simply principled freedom *from* managerial power, but rather a disposition that can be seen as a *product of* forms of engagement with managerial authority. Autonomy is as much a consequence of the skills of self-mastery as it is a 'measure' of 'spaces' of freedom. The former can be seen as an outcome of the cultural communication of practice, in education and workplace settings alike, and therefore needs to be described and understood in the context of debates about the impact of new managerialism on professional work.

While it is tempting to draw blanket conclusions about the effects of SWIS on the autonomy of Centrelink social workers—on the basis, for example, of assumed managerial or professional 'interests'—they have to be qualified by acknowledging the distinctly messy process of development, in which the following factors play a role. First, the process involved a range of different actors, all of them bringing quite different interests, knowledge and styles, and drawing on a range of different discourses. The resulting complexity caused extended periods of compromise and uncertainty. Second, the objectives of the different actors were never clear-cut. For example managers of the SWS often expressed contradictory aspirations, arguing out of frustration for greater compliance with keying requirements, but then expressing concern that the bureaucratic mentality of information collection was overtaking and 'contaminating' their service's objectives. This clearly highlights the broader tension referred to here between professional aspirations and bureaucratic objectives, between the aspirations of social workers as professionals interested in community welfare more broadly, and the attempt by managers to standardise work routines—and thereby limit casework to specifically income support matters—and to maximise the productive, efficient and

effective use of social work 'resources'. Third, participants at all levels of this process endured extended periods of frustration, in the face of a range of technical problems and resource constraints. Finally, attempts were made to develop a system capable of measuring complexity, but were compromised by an incessant drive for 'easy to read'—or 'read at a glance'—information.

In summary, Chapter Six questions the empiricism that is implicit in the managerial imperative of (numerical) information collection and control. It seeks to contribute to a more complete understanding of what Clarke and Newman call 'the politics of information', which they say involves a series of overlapping struggles: about what words are used to define the 'user' of a service, about whose information best represents their needs; and about what those needs 'really' are (1997: 117). In their view, the managerial claim to know the best interests of 'customers'—embodied in techniques of market research, customer surveys and computerised information systems—challenges the traditional claim of professionals to 'know what the user needs'. The claim to 'speak for the customer' in new and different ways has underpinned management's transformation of organisational routines, through audit and performance reviews, decentralised service delivery and quality service initiatives:

Knowledge of the customer has come to be more highly valued than bureau-professional knowledge of the client, not least because the technologies of customer research generate what appear to be reliable and extensive quantitative data about preferences, expectations and levels of satisfaction. Such data form a sharp contrast with the informal and qualitative knowledges of the client which is typically the basis of professional claims ...[which are]... part of professional 'common sense' and acquired through experience and professional socialisation (Clarke & Newman, 1997: 117).

The managerial claim to 'know' about the best interests of customers clearly depends on techniques of knowing about the conditions and outcomes of expertise, or put more simply, of skilled labor. One form of knowledge has clearly displaced another, with consequences that warrant serious attention.

The focus on SWIS, in Chapter Six, has, in a real sense, limited the certainty of conclusions drawn. Centrelink social workers were already 'constrained', in various ways, by the limitations of a bureaucratic culture. The main function of Centrelink—and before it the Department of Social Security—has been to fulfil the federal government's obligation to deliver income security payments. Centrelink is not, as was noted in Chapter Six, a service specifically designed around a particular social welfare priority. This has clearly placed ongoing restrictions on the possibilities for the kinds of social casework that can be undertaken by Centrelink social workers. A more clear cut sense of the challenges to professional autonomy may have been evident if the study had focused a service where the casework function is at the centre of the organisation's role. Likewise, further research on this topic might also seek to compare a range of different discursive practices across a number of different professional occupations (such as nursing, teaching, accounting) in order to flesh out the particular relationship between the limits of autonomy and the modes of accounting operating in those occupations.

In summary, the case study of SWIS can be read as a story of a messy and discontinuous process of invention and implementation that has involved a series of anticipated and unanticipated opportunities, threats and consequences. There are benefits to be derived, and concerns to be raised. In order to understand the new relationships that now apply in this

case—relationships between information and control, between power and knowledge—the temptation is always to theorise them in terms of ‘threats’ posed to territory. Orthodox sociologies of professionalism (as discussed in §2.3) have traditionally assumed conflicts over change are played out according to a dichotomy between accommodation and resistance, where autonomy is seen as a space of ‘principled freedom’, a territory that can be defended by a rhetorical defence on the basis of ethical ‘first principles’. This research has assumed, instead, that professional autonomy is grounded in practical competences that are outcomes of working relationships and working routines, like those involved in recording the conduct and outcomes of social casework. Autonomy can therefore be seen as a capacity to act independently and to influence change, not simply a principled moral status. Defence of any given profession on the basis of an assertion of moral legitimacy—as is often the case in the social work literature—does not work in policy or management debates, when the very grounds on which that autonomy is built (namely the independence of expert knowledge) are sliding out from under one’s feet. In order to defend and enhance the practical autonomy of labor—not just for social workers but also for other forms of labor in the ‘new economy’—it is necessary to understand how challenges to professionalism work in practice, rather than simply defending one’s territory ‘on principle’.

The task of identifying the traits of a particular profession, and of understanding professionalism, therefore goes well beyond the simple listing of traditional sociological traits—for example autonomy, credentials, monopoly control of markets—as was observed in the review of orthodox sociological analyses of professionalism, in Chapter Two. It must extend to some analysis of “the entire field of *signifying or meaningful practices*: those

social interactions—material, institutional and linguistic—through which reality is interpreted and constructed for us and with which human knowledge is produced and reproduced” (Edwards, cited in Kaasgaard, 1998).

In other words, professionalism must be seen as part of a circular relationship between object (work), representation (text) and subject (worker/manager), a relationship always fluid and open to change. Human purposes change as new techniques of representation, and therefore new/different objects, enter the field of vision and of knowledge. New possibilities open up. New inventions, likewise, are generally developed with a purpose in mind, although complex processes of adaptation complicate and blur that process. As change occurs in the various domains of professional work, and in particular in techniques for representing (for capturing and recording) the circumstances of ‘clients as objects’ then it is reasonable to assume something must also happen to the user (to the professional worker and/or association/organisation). Rather than seeing that user as an expression of a particular (liberal) world view, or as an outcome of political and economic constraints, it is possible to see it as a bearer of ‘professionalism’, conceived as a way of thinking and acting, as something that has been developed on the “surface of an organisation of techniques and statements” (Hunter, cited in Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 36).

APPENDIX 1: Interview Questions

1. How long have you been employed by the Department of Social Security and Centrelink?
2. How has the work you do as a Centrelink social worker changed during the period of your employment?
3. Tell me about the nature of the interventions you do at Centrelink.
 - What is the relationship between social casework and the assessment of entitlement to income support? (Priority, ratio, perceived importance, etc)
 - How are casework and income support assessment work regulated within the Agency? (What degree of discretion do you have in your job?)
4. Tell me about the procedures for collecting and recording information about your work with Centrelink customers.
 - What systems do you use to record information?
 - What are the stages of the recording process? (Do you keep handwritten notes? Do you go through drafts in any form of documentation?)
 - How do you take notes during interviews? (What happens to these notes afterwards?)
 - How do you decide whether to store records in paper copy or electronically?
5. How is the writing and recording of casework and benefits related work regulated?
 - Are there clear protocols for 'proper recording'? (Or a set of unwritten conventions?)
 - Do you have any discretion over the process of recording information about clients? (If yes, in what ways?)
 - How did you learn how to record information 'correctly'?
6. What was your experience of the introduction of SWIS? How did the automation of recording affect you? How did it affect your colleagues?
7. How has SWIS changed the way you collect and think about information?
8. What use do you make of the information produced through SWIS?
9. How do you understand SWIS information to be used at Area and National Offices?
10. How has computerisation changed the physical space in which you work? How has your workstation changed? How have interview spaces changed? Do you conduct conversations/interviews differently now that you use a computer?
11. How do you think FOI provisions and privacy legislation have affected recording practices?
12. Is there anything else that you've been thinking about, during this interview, that you think might help me understand how electronic recording has changed your relationship to your work, to your clients, or to your employer?

APPENDIX 2: Chronology of SWIS Development

1983 to 1988	Stage 1: Development of preliminary objectives for standardised recording, and of the 'informational requirements' needed by a computer system able to do that job. Trial of an early version of standardised recording, in the Queensland and Northern Territory Area of DSS.
1989 to 1993	Stage 2: Release of first national version of SWIS. Data 'captured' via batch-keying of information recorded on paper copy forms. Statistics included in Department's Annual Report (1989/90) for the first time. SWS submits to the National Operations Manager for funds to redevelop SWIS, arguing for workload measurement tools as an explicit rationale for making the system accurate and efficient. Working Party begins to consider the possibility of direct keying, and also at the particular 'data needs' of social workers at all levels "to make SWIS a useful practice and management tool" (DSS SWS File 91/3745, SWIS Working Party minutes (8.5.91)). Liaison established, for the first time, between SWS and Department's IT support group. Discussion at various levels of the SWS of the notion of a 'trade-off' between accounting for complexity and managing issues of keying, including resources and compliance. Pilot (in 1993) of new PC version of SWIS, using direct keying for the first time, across several Areas.
1994 onwards	Stage 3: Direct keying version implemented across all Areas. Staff advised the new version included a case management recording facility, enabling the retention of brief case notes for individual clients. Asked to cease using personalised card file systems. The first National Audit of Social Work Services conducted by the Departments' Audit & Evaluation Branch, identifying a number of concerns: problems with training, efficiency of work control and recording mechanisms used by social workers, coordination between SWS planning and other business planning at Area/Regional Office levels, and "problems with the completeness, quality and validity of data recorded on the PC-based Social Work Information System and lack of integration with other Departmental records of the relevant clients" (DSS SWS File 95/3587, DSS National Audit of Social Work Services (6/95)). Formation of Centrelink (in 1997). The Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) handed down a decision in response to a claim made by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) (lodged initially by the Professional Officers' Association (POA) in 1992), concerning the "appropriateness and correctness of the application of position classification standards to the professional Social Work positions within the DSS" (AIRC decision 742/947: 2).

REFERENCES

- Abalo, J., Fitzgibbon, P. & Ham, S. (1995), "2001 An Odyssey Into New Frontiers of Information Technology and its Role in Social Work Practice", paper presented at the Annual National Conference of the Australian Association of Social Workers, Launceston, July.
- Alasuutari, P. (1995), *Researching Culture: Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies*, London, Sage.
- Anderson, S. & Mandell, D. (1989), "The use of self-disclosure by professional social workers", in *Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work*, vol. 70, no. 5, pp. 259-267.
- Andrews, K. (2005), "Where do we want workplace relations to be in five years time?", speech given to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia, Melbourne, February, published at <http://www.dewrsb.gov.au>, viewed 7 March 2005.
- Arnold, M. (1964 [1869]), *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Austin, D. M. (1983), "The Flexner Myth and the History of Social Work", in *Social Service Review*, vol. 57, no. 3, pp. 357-377.
- Australian Industry Group (2004), "Workplace relations implications of the federal election outcome", published at <http://www.aigroup.asn.au>, viewed 12 February 2005.
- Bacon, W., Groundwater-Smith, S., Nash, C. & Sachs, J. (2000), "Legitimizing Professionalism?", paper presented to the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Cardiff, published at <http://journalism.uts.edu.au/acij/pp/bera.html>, viewed 13 November 2003.

- Barber, J. (1995), "Social Work: Science or Religion?", keynote address to the National Conference of the Australian Association of Social Workers, Launceston, Tasmania, July.
- Barnes, B. (1988), *The Nature of Power*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Barry, A. & Slater, D. (2002), "Introduction: the technological economy", in *Economy & Society*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 175-193.
- Becher, T. (1999), *Professional Practices: Commitment & Competence in a Changing Environment*, New Brunswick & London, Transaction Publishers.
- Bellamy, C. & Taylor, J. A. (1998), *Governing in the Information Age*, Buckingham, Open University Press.
- Benn, C. (1991), "Social Justice, Social Policy and Social Work", in *Australian Social Work*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 33-39.
- Black, B. J. (1950a), "Tools and Techniques of Administration", in *Social Casework*, vol. 31, no. 6, pp. 223-229.
- Black, B. J. (1950b), "Some Aspects of Professional Administration", in *Social Casework*, vol. 31, no. 8, pp. 326-332.
- Blau, P. (1963), *The Dynamics of Bureaucracy: A Study of Interpersonal Relations in Two Government Agencies*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Bloom, M. & Fischer, J. (1982), *Evaluating Practice: Guidelines for the Accountable Professional*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.
- Bogard, W. (1996), *The Simulation of Surveillance: Hypercontrol in Telematic Societies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991), *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Braverman, H. (1974), *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, New York, Monthly Review Press.
- Breckinridge, S. (1924), *Family Welfare Work in a Metropolitan Community: Selected Case Records*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Bremner, J. & Kelly, R. (2000), "The Medical Scientists Association of Victoria: A Case Study of Professional Trade Unionism in the 1990s", in G. Griffin (ed), *Trade Unions 2000: Retrospect and Prospect*, Melbourne,

National Key Centre in Industrial Relations (Monash University), pp. 66-80.

Broadbent, J., Dietrich, M. & Roberts, J. (1997), "The End of the Professions?", in J. Broadbent, M. Dietrich & J. Roberts (eds), *The End of the Professions: The Restructuring of Professional Work*, London, Routledge, pp. 1-13.

Callon, M. (1987), "Society in the Making: The Study of Technology as a Tool for Sociological Analysis", in W. E. Bijker, T. P. Hughes & T. J. Pinch (eds), *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, pp. 83-103.

Callon, M., Law J. & Rip A. (eds) (1986), *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology: Sociology of Science in the Real World*, London, Macmillan.

Carew, R. (1987), "The place of intuition in social work activity", in *Australian Social Work*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 5-10.

Carey, J. (1988), *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, London/New York, Routledge.

Carr-Saunders, A. M. & Wilson, P. A. (1964 [1933]), *The Professions*, London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd.

Carr-Saunders, A. M. (1966), "Professionalisation in Historical Perspective", in H. M. Vollmer & D. L. Mills (eds), *Professionalisation*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, pp. 2-9.

Carter, R. K. (1983), *The Accountable Agency*, Beverley Hills, Sage Publications.

Centrelink (2003), *Annual Report, 2002-2003*, published at www.centrelink.gov.au, viewed 7 July 2004.

Chafetz, M. (1996), *The Tyranny of Experts: Blowing the Whistle on the Cult of Expertise*, Lanham, Madison Books.

Clarke, J. & Newman, J. (1997), *The Managerial State: Power, Politics and Ideology in the Remaking of Social Welfare*, London, Sage.

Coates, J. (1994), "Education for social transformation", in *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, vol. 10, nos. 1-2, pp. 1-17.

Codd, M. (1991), *Federal Public Sector Management Reform: Recent History and Current Priorities*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.

- Collins, R. (1979), *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*, New York, Academic Press.
- Collins, R. (1990), "Changing Conceptions of the Sociology of the Professions", in R. Torstendahl & M. Burrage (eds), *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State and Strategy*, London, Sage, pp. 11-23.
- Commonwealth of Australia (1976), *Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration: Report*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Commonwealth of Australia (1979), *Through a Glass Darkly: Evaluation in Australian Health and Welfare Services*, Report from the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Commonwealth of Australia (1983a), *Reforming the Australian Public Service: A statement of the Government's intentions*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Commonwealth of Australia (1983b), *Income Maintenance Programs: A Review by the Joint Committee of Public Accounts*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Commonwealth of Australia (1984), *Budget Reform*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Commonwealth of Australia (1992), *The Australian Public Service Reformed: An evaluation of a decade of Management Reform*, Canberra, MAB-MIAC.
- Commonwealth of Australia (1995), *Charitable Organisations in Australia*, Industry Commission Report No. 45, Melbourne, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Considine, M. & Painter, M. (eds) (1997), *Managerialism: The Great Debate*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.
- Cooper, L. (1988), *Report into Department for Community Welfare Policies and Procedures With Respect to Children of Under-Age Parents*, Adelaide, Department for Community Welfare.
- Cruess, S. R. & Cruess, R. L. (1997), "Professionalism must be taught", in *British Medical Journal*, vol. 315, no. 71, pp. 1674-1677.

- Dabscheck, B. (1989), *Australian Industrial Relations in the 1980s*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press.
- Davies, J. (2000a), "Crisis in state child protection network", in *The Age*, 20 October, p. 1.
- Davies, J. (2000b), "In search of home", in *The Age*, 20 October, p. 14.
- Davies, L. (1990), "Limits of Bureaucratic Control: Social Workers in Child Welfare", in L. Davies and E. Shragge (eds), *Bureaucracy and Community: Essays on the Politics of Social Work Practice*, Montreal, Black Rose Books, pp. 81-101.
- Davis, E. (1987), *Democracy in Australian Unions: A Comparative Study of Six Unions*, North Sydney, Allen & Unwin.
- Dean, M. (1999), *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, London, Sage.
- Department of Finance and Australian Public Service Board (1987), *Evaluating Government Programs: Financial Management Improvement Plan*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Department of Social Security (n.d.), Social Work Service Files (89/6716, 90/0104, 90/N1060, 91/3745, 93/1427, 95/3587), Canberra, DSS National Administration.
- Department of Social Security (1973), *Annual Report, 1972/73*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Department of Social Security (1974), *Annual Report, 1973/74*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Department of Social Security (1975), *Annual Report, 1974/75*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Department of Social Security (1977), *Annual Report, 1976/77*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- Department of Social Security (1986), *A Review of the Role and Structure of the Department's Social Work Service*, Canberra, Department of Social Security.
- Department of Social Security (1994), *SWIS Pilot Evaluation Report*, Canberra, DSS Social Work Service internal report.

- Department of Social Welfare, File D1853/1 (Australian Archives), Item 1.
- Dickens, P. (1994), *Quality and Excellence in Human Services*, Chichester, John Wiley & Sons.
- Dietrich, M. & Roberts, J. (1997), "Beyond the Economics of Professionalism", in J. Broadbent, M. Dietrich & J. Roberts (eds), *The End of the Professions? The Restructuring of Professional Work*, London & New York, Routledge, pp. 14-33.
- Dominelli, L. (1996), "Deprofessionalising Social Work: Anti-Oppressive Practice, Competencies and Postmodernism", in *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 153-175.
- Donzelot, J. (1979), *The Policing of Families*, New York, Pantheon.
- Durkheim, E. (1992 [1957]), *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, London & New York, Routledge.
- Dwyer, M. & Urbanowski, M. (1965), "Student Process Recording: A Plea for Structure", in *Social Casework*, vol.46, no.5, pp. 283-286.
- Eldridge, W. D. (1982), "Coping with Accountability: Guidelines for Supervisors", in *Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work*, vol. 63, no. 8, pp. 489-496.
- England, H. (1986), *Social Work as Art: Making Sense for Good Practice*, London, Allen & Unwin.
- Ericson, R. & Haggerty, K. (1997), *Policing the Risk Society*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1992), *Discourse and Social Change*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Feenberg, A. (2000), "Modernity Theory and Technology Studies: Reflections on Bridging the Gap", paper presented at a conference on Technology and Modernity, University of Twente, November 1999, published at <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/feenberg/twente.html>, viewed 28 October 2003.
- Fitzgibbon, P. & Hargreave, D. (2001), "Social Work in the Field of Income Maintenance", in Alston, M. & McKinnon, J. (eds) *Social Work: Fields of Practice*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, pp. 122-135.

- Flexner, A. (2001 [1915]), "Is Social Work a Profession?", published originally in *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections*, reprinted in *Research on Social Work Practice*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 152-165.
- Floersch, J. (2000), "Reading the Case Record: The Oral and Written Narratives of Social Workers", in *Social Service Review*, vol. 74, no. 2, pp. 169-192.
- Fook, J. (1993), *Radical Casework: A Theory of Casework*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin.
- Foster, P. & Wilding, P. (2000), "Whither Welfare Professionalism?" in *Social Policy & Administration*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 143-159.
- Foucault, M. (1970), *The Order of Things*, London, Tavistock Publications.
- Foucault, M. (1972), *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London, Tavistock Publications.
- Foucault, M. (1977), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Middlesex, Peregrine.
- Foucault, M. (1978), *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction*, London, Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1980a), "Two Lectures", in C. Gordon (ed), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, New York, Pantheon Books, pp. 78-108.
- Foucault, M. (1980b), "Truth and Power", in C. Gordon (ed), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, New York, Pantheon Books, pp. 109-133.
- Foucault, M. (1982), "The Subject and Power", in H. L. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (eds), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Brighton, Harvester, pp. 208-226.
- Foucault, M. (1984), "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", in P. Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, London, Penguin, pp. 340-372.
- Foucault, M. (1988a), "Technologies of the Self", in L. H. Martin, H. Gutman & P. H. Hutton (eds), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, pp. 16-49.

- Foucault, M. (1988b), "The Political Technology of Individuals", in L. H. Martin, H. Gutman & P. H. Hutton (eds), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, pp. 145-162.
- Foucault, M. (1988c), "The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom", in J. Bernauer and D. Rasmussen (eds), *The Final Foucault*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, pp. 1-20.
- Foucault, M. (1991a), "Governmentality", in G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 87-104.
- Foucault, M. (1991b), "Politics and the Study of Discourse", in G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 53-72.
- Foucault, M. (1993), "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self", in *Political Theory*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 198-227.
- Fournier, V. (1999), "The Appeal to 'Professionalism' as a Disciplinary Mechanism", in *The Sociological Review*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 280-307.
- Freire, P. (1990), "A Critical Understanding of Social Work", in *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 3-9.
- Friedlander, W. (1976), "Introduction: Generic Principles of Social Work", in W. Friedlander (ed), *Concepts and Methods of Social Work*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, pp. 1-12.
- Friedson, E. (1984), "Are professions necessary?" in T. L. Haskell (ed), *The Authority of Experts*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, pp. 3-27.
- Frings, J. (1957), "Experimental Systems of Recording" in *Social Casework*, vol. 38, no. 21, pp. 55-63.
- Gabor, P. A., Unrau, Y. A. & Grinnell, R. M. (1998), *Evaluation for Social Workers: A Quality Improvement Approach for the Social Services*, 2nd edn, Boston, Allyn & Bacon.
- Garfield, G. & Irizarry, C. (1971), "The 'Record of Service': Describing Social Work Practice", in W. Schwartz & S. Zalba (eds), *The Practice of Group Work*, New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 241-265.

- Garner, H. (1993), "How we lost Daniel's life", in *Time Australia*, vol. 8, no. 10, pp. 23-27.
- Garton, S. (1990), *Out of Luck: Poor Australians and Social Welfare, 1788-1988*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin.
- Giroux, H. (2002), "The Corporate War Against Higher Education", in *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, vol. 5, no. 1, published at <http://www.louisville.edu/journal/workplace/issue5p1/bartlett.html>, viewed 17 September 2003.
- Glasson, M. (1972), *Interview with Lyra Taylor, Social Worker and Social Service Administrator*, sound recording produced by the Australian Association of Social Workers, held by the National Library of Australia.
- Goode, W. J. (1957), "Community Within a Community: The Professions", in *American Sociological Review*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 194-200.
- Gordon, C. (1991), "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction", in G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 1-51.
- Greenfield, C. & Williams, P. (1998), *The Gambits of Commentary: Part of a Governmental Perspective on Mass Communications Media*, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Monash University (Gippsland Campus), Working Paper No. 1.
- Grewal, B. & Davenport, P. (1997), *The Australian Economy and Society: Shifting Boundaries of Social Welfare in the Australian Federation*, Working Paper No. 10, Centre for Strategic Economic Studies, Victoria University, Melbourne.
- Grint, K. & Woolgar, S. (1997), *The Machine at Work: Technology, Work and Organisation*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Hacking, I. (1986), "Making Up People", in T. Heller, M. Sosna & D. Wellbery (eds), *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality and the Self in Western Thought*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, pp. 222-236.
- Hall, S. (1974), *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Stencilled Occasional Paper No.7, Birmingham, University of Birmingham.

- Hamilton, G. (1937), "Basic Concepts in Social Case Work", in *The Family*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 147-156.
- Hamilton, G. (1946), *Principles of Social Case Recording*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- Hanlan, A. (1971), "Casework beyond bureaucracy", in *Social Casework*, vol. 52, no. 4, pp. 195-199.
- Harris, J. (1998), "Scientific Management, Bureau-Professionalism and New Managerialism: The Labour Process of State Social Work", in *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 28, no.6, pp. 839-862.
- Haskell, T. L. (ed) (1984a), *The Authority of Experts*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Haskell, T. L. (1984b), "Professionalism versus Capitalism: R. H. Tawney, Emile Durkheim, and C. S. Peirce on the Disinterestedness of Professional Communities", in T. L. Haskell (ed), *The Authority of Experts*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, pp. 180-225.
- Hellberg, I. (1990), "The Swedish veterinary profession and the Swedish state", in R. Torstendahl & M. Burrage (eds), *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State and Strategy*, London, Sage, pp. 174-185.
- Henderson, R. & Shore, B. K. (1974), "Accountability for What and to Whom?" in *Social Work*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 387-388.
- Henman, P. (1996), *Constructing Families and Disciplining Bodies: A Socio-Technical Study of Computers, Policy and Governance in Australia's Department of Social Security*, PhD thesis, University of Queensland.
- Hindess, B. (1986), "Actors and social relations", in M. Wardell & S. Turner (eds), *The Dissolution of Sociological Theory*, London, George Allen & Unwin, pp. 113-126.
- Hindess, B. (1989), *Political Choice and Social Structure*, Aldershot, Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Hirst, P. & Woolley, P. (1982), *Social Relations and Human Attributes*, London, Tavistock Publications.
- Holt, R. (1994), "The Social Work Service", in *Social Security Journal*, December 1994, pp. 116-119.

- Hopwood, A. (1984), "Accounting and the Pursuit of Efficiency", in A. Hopwood & C. Tomkins (eds), *Issues in Public Sector Accounting*, Oxford, Philip Allan, pp. 167-187.
- Hopwood, A. (1986), "Management accounting and organisational action: an introduction", in M. Bromwich & A. Hopwood (eds), *Research and Current Issues in Management Accounting*, London, Pitman, pp. 9-30.
- Hughes, E. C. (1966), "The Professions in Society", in H. M. Vollmer & D. L. Mills (eds), *Professionalisation*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall Inc, pp. 64-70.
- Hugman, R. (1996), "Professionalisation in social work: the challenge of diversity", in *International Social Work*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 131-147.
- Humphries, P. & Camilleri, P. (2002), "Social Work and Technology: Challenges for Social Workers in Practice, a Case Study", in *Australian Social Work*, vol. 55, no. 4, pp. 251-259.
- Hunter, I. (1984), "After Representation: Recent Discussions of the Relation Between Language and Literature", in *Economy and Society*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 397-430.
- Hunter, I. (1989), "Performance Measures: Problems and Opportunities", in *Culture & Policy*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 19-23.
- Hunter, I. (1991), "From Discourse to *Dispositif*: Foucault and the Study of Literature", in *Meridian*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 36-53.
- Hunter, I. (1994a), "Bureaucrat, Critic, Citizen: On Some Styles of Ethical Life", in *Arena journal*, no.2, pp. 77-101.
- Hunter, I. (1994b), *Rethinking the School: Subjectivity, Bureaucracy, Criticism*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin.
- Illich, I. (1973), "The Professions as a Form of Imperialism", in *New Society*, no. 13, p.635.
- Jones, A. & May, J. (1992), *Working in Human Service Organisations*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire.
- Jordan, B. (1984a), *Invitation to Social Work*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Jordan, B. (1984b), *The State and Social Work*, Department of Social Work, University of Queensland, Occasional Paper No. 84.2.

- Kaasgaard, K. (1998), "The Value of Discourse Analysis in Understanding Cycles of Re-design of IT in Organisations", paper presented at the Third International Conference on Organisational Discourse, 'Pretexts, Subtexts and Contexts', London, July 29-31, published at <http://www.uerforum.dk/content/artikler/vda.html>, viewed 24 November 2003.
- Kagle, J. (1987), "Recording in Direct Practice", in *Encyclopaedia of Social Work*, 18th edn, Washington DC, NASW Press, pp. 463-467.
- Kane, R. (1974), "Look to the record", *Social Work*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 412-419.
- Keating, M. (1990), "Managing For Results in the Public Interest", in *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 387-397.
- Kendall G. & Wickham, G. (1999), *Using Foucault's Methods*, London, Sage.
- Kennedy, R. (1985), *Charity Warfare: The Charity Organisation Society in Colonial Melbourne*, Melbourne, Hyland House.
- Kewley, T. H. (1980), *Australian Social Security Today: Major Developments from 1900 to 1978*, Sydney, Sydney University Press.
- Kitay, J. (1997), "The Labour Process: Still Stuck? Still a Perspective? Still Useful?", in *Electronic Journal of Radical Organisation Theory*, vol. 3, no. 1, published at <http://www.mngt.waikato.ac.nz/depts/sml/journal/ejrot.htm>, viewed 10 March, 2004.
- Kittler, F. (1999), *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press.
- Kogan, L. S. (1950), "The Electrical Recording of Social Casework Interviews", in *Social Casework*, vol. 31, no. 9, pp. 371-378.
- Lake, M. (2002), "Unchain the creative class, and profit", in *The Age*, 25 June, p. 15.
- Larson, M. (1977), *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Latour, B. (1987), *Science in Action*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
- Latour, B. (1990), "Drawing things together", in M. Lynch and S. Woolgar (eds), *Representation in Scientific Practice*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, pp. 19-68.

- Latour, B. (1991), "Technology is Society Made Durable", in J. Law (ed), *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, London, Routledge, pp. 103-131.
- Latour, B. (1996), "Social Theory and the Study of Computerised Work Sites", in W. J. Orlikowski, M. R. Jones & J. I. DeGross (eds.), *Information Technology and Changes in Organisational Work*, London, Chapman & Hall, pp. 295-307.
- Latour, B. (1999), "On recalling ANT", in J. Law & J. Hassard (eds), *Actor Network Theory and After*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 15-25.
- Law, J. (1996), "Organised accountabilities: ontology and the mode of accounting", in R. Munro & J. Mouritsen (eds), *Accountability: Power, Ethos and the Technologies of Managing*, London, International Thomson Business Press, pp. 283-306.
- Lawrence, R. J. (1965), *Professional Social Work in Australia*, Canberra, Australian National University Press.
- Lawrence, R. J. (1976), "Accountability", in *Australian Social Work*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 15-21.
- Leicht, K. T. & Fennell, M. L. (2001), *Professional Work: A Sociological Approach*, Malden, Mass., Blackwell.
- Lorimer, R. (1994), *Mass Communications: A Comparative Introduction*, Manchester & New York, Manchester University Press.
- Lush, F. (1978), "Evaluation and the social worker's role", in *Social Security Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 18-22.
- Lymbery, M. (2001), "Social Work at the Crossroads", in *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 369-384.
- Marshall, J. (1997). "Personal Autonomy as an Aim of Education: A Foucauldian Critique", in C. O'Farrell (ed.), *Foucault: The Legacy*, Kelvin Grove, Queensland University of Technology.
- Martin, D. D. & Shell, R. L. (1988), *Management of Professionals: Insights for Maximising Cooperation*, New York, Marcel Dekker Inc.
- Martin, E. (1990), *Gender, Demand and Domain: The Social Work Profession in South Australia*, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne.

- Marvin, C. (1988), *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- McHoul, A. & Grace, W. (1993), *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject*, Carlton, Melbourne University Press.
- McLuhan, M (1964), *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York, McGraw Hill.
- Meredyth, D. (1998), "Corporatising Education", in M. Dean & B. Hindess (eds), *Governing Australia: Studies in Contemporary Rationalities of Government*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 20-46.
- Miller, P. (1994a), "Accounting and Objectivity: The Invention of Calculating Selves and Calculable Spaces", in A. Megill (ed), *Rethinking Objectivity: Post-Contemporary Interventions*, Durham, Duke University Press, pp. 239-264.
- Miller, P. (1994b), "Accounting as Social and Institutional Practice: An Introduction", in A. G. Hopwood & P. Miller (eds), *Accounting as Social and Institutional Practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-39.
- Miller P. & O'Leary, T. (1987), "Accounting and the Construction of the Governable Person", in *Accounting, Organisations and Society*, vol. 12. no. 3, pp. 235-265.
- Miller, P. & Rose, N. (1990), "Governing economic life", in *Economy & Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 1-31.
- Mills, A. (1999), "Ethics Goes Global: The OECD Council Recommendation on Improving Ethical Conduct in the Public Sector", in *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 58, no. 2, pp. 61-69.
- Minchin, L. (1989), *The Influence of the Social Workers of the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, 1944-1972*, MSW thesis.
- Minson, J. (1998), "Ethics in the Service of the State", in M. Dean & B. Hindess (eds), *Governing Australia: Studies in Contemporary Rationalities of Government*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 47-69.

- Moore, S. (1993), *Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption*, London, Sage.
- Mullen, E. J. & Magnabosco, J. L. (eds) (1997), *Outcomes Measurement in the Human Services: Cross-Cutting Issues and Methods*, Washington DC, NASW Press.
- Murphy, R. (1990), "Proletarianisation or bureaucratisation: the fall of the professional?", in R. Torstendahl & M. Burrage (eds), *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State and Strategy*, London, Sage, pp. 71-96.
- National Commission of Audit (1996), *Report to the Commonwealth Government*, Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service.
- O'Connor, I., Wilson, J. & Setterlund, D. (1998), *Social Work and Welfare Practice*, 3rd edn, South Melbourne, Longman.
- O'Faircheallaigh, C., Wanna, J. & Weller, P. (1999), *Public Sector Management in Australia: New Challenges, New Directions*, 2nd edn, South Yarra, Macmillan.
- O'Sullivan, T. et al (eds) (1994), *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, 2nd edn, London & New York, Routledge.
- Orlikowski, W. J. (1988), "Computer Technology in Organisations: Some Critical Notes", in D. Knights & H. Willmott (eds), *New Technology and the Labour Process*, London, Macmillan, pp. 20-49.
- Oz, E. (2002), *Management Information Systems*, 3rd edn, Boston, Thompson Learning.
- Pare, A. & Allen, H. S. (1995), "Social Work Writing: Learning by Doing", in A. Rogers (ed), *Social Work Field Education: Views and Visions*, Dubuque, Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., pp. 164-173.
- Parsons, T. (1939), "The Professions and Social Structure", in *Social Forces*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 457-467.
- Parton, N. (1998), "Risk, Advanced Liberalism and Child Welfare: The Need to Rediscover Uncertainty and Ambiguity", in *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 5-27.
- Paterson, J. (1994), "Mental health ill-served by crying poor", in *The Australian*, 16 November, p.17.

- Patry, B. (1978), "Taylorism Comes to the Social Services", in *Monthly Review*, vol. 30, no. 5, pp. 30-37.
- Perlman, H. H. (1954), "Of Records and Supervision", in *The Social Service Review*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 83-85.
- Pinker, R. (1989), "Social Work and Social Policy in the Twentieth Century: Retrospect and Prospect", in M. Bulmer, J. Lewis & D. Piachaud (eds), *The Goals of Social Policy*, London, Unwin Hyman, pp. 84-107.
- Pinkus, H. (1987), "Recording in Social Work", in *Encyclopaedia of Social Work*, Washington DC, NASW Press, 1987, pp. 1161-1168.
- Pithouse, A. (1987), *Social Work: The Social Organisation of an Invisible Trade*, Avebury, Aldershot.
- Piven, F. F. & Cloward, R. A. (1972), *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, New York, Vintage Books.
- Plotnick, H. L. (1965), "The Attitudinal Orientation of the Worker and Accuracy in Predicting Client Behaviour", in *The Social Service Review*, v. 39, no. 1, pp. 23-30.
- Poster, M. (2001), *The Information Subject*, Amsterdam, G. & B. Arts International.
- Powell, P. L., Klein, J. H. & Connell, N. A. D. (1993), "Experts and Expertise: The Social Context of Expertise", published in conference proceedings, of the Special Interest Group on Computer Personnel Research Annual Conference, St Louis, Miss., pp. 362-368.
- Power, M. (1997), *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Prince, K. (1996), *Boring Records: Communication, Speech and Writing in Social Work*, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd.
- Probert, B. (1989), *Working Life: Arguments About Working Life in Australia*, Melbourne, McPhee Gribble Publishers.
- Pusey, M. (1991), *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-Building State Changes Its Mind*, Sydney, Cambridge University Press.
- Rabinow, P. (ed) (1984), *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, London, Penguin.

- Ravetz, J. (1996), "Technology and Power in Social Welfare: Models, Ideology and Information Technology", published at <http://enith.asfh-berlin.de/ravetz.htm>, viewed 25 February, 1997.
- Rees, S. & Rodley, G. (eds) (1995), *The Human Costs of Managerialism: Advocating the Recovery of Humanity*, Sydney, Pluto Press Australia.
- Reynolds, B. (1937), "The Development of a Professional Self", in *The Family*, vol. 18 no. 2, pp. 61-66.
- Rhodes, M. (1986), *Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work Practice*, Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Richmond, M. (1917), *Social Diagnosis*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation.
- Richmond, M. (1925), "Why Case Records?", in *The Family*, vol. 6 (November), pp. 214-216.
- Rogers, V. (1994), "Converting Information Technology to Performance Improvement, Part 2", in *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 394-399.
- Rose, N. (1996), "Authority and the Genealogy of Subjectivity", in P. Heelas, S. Lash & P. Morris (eds), *Detraditionalisation: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*, Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell.
- Rose, N. (1999), *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Rose N. & Miller, P. (1992), "Political power beyond the State: problematics of government", in *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 2, pp. 173-205.
- Rose-Miller, M. (1994), "Evaluation, social justice and social work", in *Australian Social Work*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 21-26.
- Rosen, A. (1992), "Facilitating Clinical Decision Making and Evaluation", in *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, vol. 73, no. 9, pp. 522-530.
- Rossi, P. (1997), "Program Outcomes: Conceptual and Measurement Issues", in E. J. Mullen & J. L. Magnabosco (eds), *Outcomes Measurement in the Human Services: Cross-Cutting Issues and Methods*, Washington DC, NASW Press, pp. 20-34.

- Sackheim, G. (1949), "Suggestions on Recording Techniques", *Journal of Social Casework*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 20-25.
- Schirato, T. & Yell, S. (1996), *Communication and Cultural Literacy: An Introduction*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- Schon, D. (1983), *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, New York, Basic Books.
- Schwartz, W. (1994), "Between Client and System: The Mediating Function", in T. Berman-Rossi (ed.), *Social Work: The Collected Writings of William Schwartz*, Itasca, F. E. Peacock Publishers, pp. 324-346.
- Scott, W. R. (1969), "Professional Employees in a Bureaucratic Structure: Social Work", in A. Etzioni (ed.), *The Semi-Professions and their Organisation: Teachers, Nurses, Social Workers*, New York, The Free Press.
- Sheffield, A. (1924), *The Social Case History: Its Construction and Content*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation.
- Simpkin, M. (1979), *Trapped Within Welfare: Surviving Social Work*, London, Macmillan.
- Singer, P. (ed) (1994), *Ethics*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Singleton, G. (1990), *The Accord and the Australian Labour Movement*, Mulgrave, Melbourne University Press.
- Skenridge, P. & Lennie, I. (1978), "Social Work: The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing", in *Arena*, no. 51, pp. 47-92.
- Slaughter, S. & Leslie, L. L. (1997), *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Smith, D. (1990), "Textually Mediated Social Organisation", in *Texts, Facts and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling*, London & New York, Routledge, pp. 209-224.
- Smith, N. (1985), *Social Welfare and Computers*, Melbourne, Longman.
- Smith, N. (1996), "Australia", in J. Steyaert, D. Colombi, & J. Rafferty (eds), *Human Services and Information Technology: An International Perspective*, Aldershot, Arena, pp. 49-54.

- Stewart, R. G. (1999), *Public Policy: Strategy and Accountability*, Melbourne, Macmillan.
- Steyaert, J., Colombi, D. & Rafferty, J. (1996), "Rhythms of the Future", in J. Steyaert, D. Colombi, & J. Rafferty (eds), *Human Services and Information Technology: An International Perspective*, Aldershot, Arena, pp. 235-256.
- Swenson, C. R. (1988), "The Professional Log: Techniques for Self-Directed Learning", in *Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work*, vol. 69, no. 5, pp. 307-311.
- Taylor, A. (1953), "Case Recording: An Administrative Responsibility", in *Social Casework*, vol. 34, no. 6, pp. 240-246.
- Taylor, L. (1947), "Social Work in the Statutory Agencies", in *Proceedings of the First Australian Conference of Social Work*, Sydney, Australian Association of Social Workers, pp. 27-32.
- Thévenot, L. (1984), "Rules and implements: investment in forms", in *Social Science Information*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 1-45.
- Thompson, I. (1992), "Social Justice: People, Policies and Economics in the Human Services", conference paper presented at the Australian Association of Social Workers (WA Branch) Annual State Conference, November.
- Thompson, P. (1983), *The Nature of Work: An Introduction to Debates on the Labour Process*, London, Macmillan.
- Thynne, I. (1983), "Accountability, responsiveness and public service officials", in A. Kouzmin (ed), *Public Sector Administration: New Perspectives*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, pp.78-100.
- Tice, K. (1998), *Tales of Wayward Girls and Immoral Women: Case Records and the Professionalisation of Social Work*, Urbana & Chicago, University of Illinois Press.
- Tipping, J. (1992), *Back on Their Feet: A History of the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service, 1941-1991*, Adelaide, Australian Government Printing Service.

- Trattner, W. I. (ed) (1983), *Social Welfare or Social Control: Some Historical Reflections on 'Regulating the Poor'*, Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press.
- Uhr, J. (1993), "Redesigning accountability: from muddles to maps", in *Australian Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 2, pp. 1-16.
- Vardon, S. (2002), *Creating Centrelink and the New Journey*, Canberra, Centrelink.
- Verspaandonk, R. (2003), *Changes in the Australian Public Service, 1975-2003*, published at <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/chron/2002-03/03chr01.htm#references>, viewed 7th July 2003.
- Victorian Department of Human Services (1999), *Victorian Risk Framework: A Guided Professional Judgement Approach to Risk Assessment in Child Protection*, Melbourne, Department of Human Services.
- Vollmer, H. M. & Mills, D. L. (1966), *Professionalisation*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall.
- Watson, D. (2004), *Watson's Dictionary of Weasel Words: Contemporary Clichés, Cant & Management Jargon*, Sydney, Random House.
- Webster, T. (1995), "Economic rationalism: The nature, influence and impact of the doctrine over the last decade in Australia", in *Australian Social Work*, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 41-47.
- Weinbach, R. W. (1977), "Accountability Crises: Consequences of Professionalisation", in *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, vol. 4, no. 7, pp. 1011-1024.
- Wilczynski, B. L. (1981), "New Life for Recording: Involving the Client", in *Social Work*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 313-317.
- Wilensky, H. L. (1964), "The Professionalisation of Everyone?" in *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 70, no. 2, pp. 137-158.
- Williams, P. (1987), *Writing, Reading, Politics: An Analysis of Some Debates Within and Around the Institution of Literature in Australia With Particular Reference to the Work of Frank Hardy*, PhD Thesis, Griffith University.
- Williams, R. (1981), "Communications Technologies and Social Institutions", in R. Williams (ed), *Contact: Human Communication and Its History*, London, Thames & Hudson, pp. 226-238.

- Wilson, F. (1988), "Computer Numerical Control and Constraint", in D. Knights & H. Willmott (eds), *New Technology and the Labour Process*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, pp. 66-90.
- Wilson, L. (1999), "The New Public Sector: Reform, Public Choice Theory and Government Employee Attitudes to Job Insecurity", in J. Lee, B. Probert & R. Watts (eds), *Work in the New Economy: Policies, Programs, Populations*, Melbourne, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT University, pp. 124-134.
- Wilson, S. (1980), *Recording: Guidelines for Social Workers*, New York, The Free Press.
- Wise, J. M. (1998), "Intelligent Agency", in *Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1998, pp. 410-428.
- Wren, D. (1994), *The Evolution of Management Thought*, New York, John Wiley & Sons.
- Zifcak, S. (1994), *New Managerialism: Administrative Reform in Whitehall and Canberra*, Buckingham, Open University Press.