Adulthood and Other Horizons:
The Complexities of Temporalities and
Orientations to the Future

by

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Abstract

The problem that I have identified pertains to a dominant ontological view that one experiences time as a movement along a singular trajectory. In order to function within this temporal framework, individuals attempt to prioritize their expectations, decisions, and actions in an appropriately ordered and sequential fashion. Where material relations that privilege economic relations characterize the context in which this occurs, work (as an economic activity) constitutes the top priority. As a result, young women and men who are moving between education and employment strive to situate themselves on a work trajectory. The focus of their expectations, decisions, and actions is oriented to achieving work and thus successfully moving along this path.

I demonstrate the existence of this ontological view of time first by extrapolating a set of narrative motifs that constitute capitalist relations and relevant narratives within the relational setting. I look at post-secondary education policies and employment/unemployment policies from the 1960s through the 1990s to the present in Canada. Aspects of these sites and analyses of the changes that they brought about comprise the conditions and discursive terrain in which young adults have ‘transitioned’ into adulthood in the last forty years. I argue that public, conceptual and meta-narratives are constituent elements of these policies and processes, and that they have focused attention and resources on putting necessary pieces in place in order to create a successful (economic) future.

I then draw from individual experiences of interview respondents in order to highlight the expectations concerning chronological transitions, the accumulation of resources, and a perceived direct relationship between skill set and opportunities. The respondents further identified a distinction between a controlled and intentional future

orientation and one that is left to luck. Respondents thus asserted agency by *creating* opportunity in order to avoid leaving themselves vulnerable to chance. Their objectives included '*fix and stabilize*' strategies in an effort to achieve their goals.

Two central questions have driven this project. The first question asks how we can understand and assess individual biographies as processual or as things that are *in the making* within a material context. The second question asks how we can remain connected to the pragmatics of day-to-day struggles while cultivating an orientation to the future with anticipation and hope. By revealing the character of a dominant ontological view of time and the efforts to control and know the future that it produces, I argue that a creative re-thinking of the future as indeterminate re-constitutes subjectivities. The role of temporalities in the constitution of subjectivities addresses the significance of the future possibilities of the self. Through this lens, my analysis lays a foundation for a subjectivity based on openness. Therefore, by arguing that subjectivity is mobile, nomadic and fluid in its constitution and orientation, a notion of fluidity opens up the future to multiple possibilities. As such, one's subjectivity is continuously in the making, continuously becoming. In this respect, an interpretation of biographies *in the making* may remain connected to material conditions and contexts, but does not presume to know or control possible future horizons.

Acknowledgements

The experience of being a doctoral student and the process of writing a dissertation has had a strange effect on my relationship with time. Work schedules seem to take on an amorphous quality, so that I find myself at my desk on too many Friday evenings, staring blankly at my computer. For all of those days when I thought that this would never end, I have learned the significance of duration – while some trajectories are ongoing (the questions), some must be treated as finite (the document).

I would like to thank my committee – Janet Siltanen, Hugh Armstrong, and Rianne Mahon – for the doors that they have opened for me in terms of opportunities and for their unwavering support. Janet, Hugh, and Rianne have been guides and role models as I continue to learn how to be a scholar. Each, in their own way, is committed to the importance of everyday lives and in demonstrating the significance of individual experiences. Their greatest gift has been the time and the freedom that I needed in order to explore my interests and lay the groundwork for my future scholarship. In spite of the many challenges that I have encountered along the way, I feel more passionate about the future research possibilities than ever before.

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Introduction

This dissertation is both a study of and story about biographies in progress. A biography is an account of someone's life, whereas my project explores the challenge of giving an account of that which is in the making. I am interested in the making of, or constitution of, early experiences of 'adulthood'. Rather than working with a discreet and measurable variable, I treat adulthood as a conceptual and processual ontological interpretation of biographical social scripts and expectations. I contrast this approach with a set of preoccupations that characterize adulthood as a specific kind of horizon. By 'specific' I refer to expected and normative life events such as school completion and employment attainment expressed in terms of their certain placement and priority as life trajectories. I argue that by engaging critically with a normative set of expectations concerning future biographical destinations, we may cultivate an alternative orientation to the future: one based on openness and hope.

Dominant ontological narratives about the future stipulate that the future flows directly from the past and that knowledge of the future can be extrapolated from the circumstances and conditions of the present (Grosz, 1999). The implications of this approach are such that the parameters of possibility are determined by prior happenings and interpretations. The relevance of surprise and chance factors is diminished within this dynamic of chronological causes and outcomes in a continuous series of unfoldings. To illustrate the alternative, I use the example of the 1998 German film, *Run Lola Run*. The film re-plays the same twenty-minute span three times, each time differing in small details that in turn lead the plot to three completely different outcomes. *Run Lola Run* thus explores the unpredictability and unknowability of the future and the significance of

surprise factors in the plot. The film encourages the audience to consider the question: given the range of contingencies, what is possible?

Based on this interest in how we may view the future as a host for change, there are two central questions that drive this project. The first question asks how we can understand and assess individual biographies as processual or as things that are *in the making* within a material context. The second question asks how we can remain connected to the pragmatics of day-to-day struggles while cultivating an orientation to the future with anticipation and hope.

In response to the first question, I argue that an understanding of *that which is in the making* requires an ontology of becoming. As I will explain throughout this thesis, an ontology of becoming emphasizes the living process rather than a static and fixed experience. An ontology of becoming thus focuses on *movement* as a constituent element of how we experience time. In response to the second question, I argue that an analysis of movement, duration and difference highlights the significance of the multiple trajectories that characterize individual biographies. These trajectories constitute the manyness of the process of living, given that subjectivity is produced both within and across these trajectories (Braidotti, 2002). Furthermore, the different durations of trajectories are significant aspects in terms of how difference is created through movement and foci. As such, subjectivity is constituted through mobile or nomadic movement and becomings. The future horizons of nomadic or mobile subjectivities cannot be pre-determined and, therefore, by highlighting multiplicities we open the future to possibilities which may not be predictable in the present.

In order to respond to the two central questions of the thesis, I am interested in narratives both as a mode of explanation and as constellations of relationships. Using Somers' (1994) model of four dimensions of narrativity: ontological, public, conceptual and meta-narratives, I demonstrate that a specific notion of temporal linear order dominates narratives of adult identity and institutional discourse in the relational setting. The ontological, public, conceptual and meta-narratives that I explore in this dissertation articulate and reinforce the prioritization of a 'worker' identity. The logic of linear order, therefore, suggests that once an individual attains 'work', other interests and pursuits, such as family formation, may follow. This is frequently framed, for example, in terms of maternity or paternity *postponement*. By focusing on young adults in the transition stages between education and employment, I explore the temporal dynamics embedded within narratives of worker identity as a future destination. Wrapped up with notions of being an adult, the pursuit of a future of work is inlaid with conceptual narratives of temporal movement as a singular, serialized process.

Ontological notions of temporal movement as linear, ordered and singular create the conditions in which the demands of prioritization become possible. A singular and linear story of movement focuses the constitutive elements of subjectivity and tethers it to a particular horizon. Rather than exploring what is possible, the dominant storyline that I examine reduces subjectivity to a single and specific expression. Therefore, the public, conceptual and meta-narratives (and by this I refer to individuals, cultural and institutional formations, theories and concepts) that reflect and reinforce an ontological view of time as linear and serial come to operate as future-making machines. As future-making machines, narratives inscribe a set of beliefs, expectations, decisions, discussions,

research, policies, and institutions onto a straight trajectory into the future of work. One fails as a participant in these future-making machines if they are re-routed by disruptions or deviate from this course.

In effect, a linear, serial and singular view of time demands a convergence or consolidation effort so that activities and events are assembled and follow each other along single time line. Dominant and deterministic needs, such as being a worker, push other activities forward in time (postponement) or eliminate them altogether. Additionally, seemingly unrelated phenomena may be enfolded onto the consolidated line, such as education, women's equality, and a discourse of time autonomy. Since the early 1960s in Canada, the expansion of post-secondary education and a re-configuration of employment relations have occurred as separate trajectories and their benefits have been, to differing degrees, assembled onto a work trajectory. University degrees are now pre-requisites for a number of jobs and time 'flexibility' operates almost exclusively to the benefit of employers.

The first chapter is a theoretical discussion of temporalities as complex and multiple dynamics. This perspective encourages us to understand that time is not a logical flow or inherently meaningful sequence and that the future is not given in the present. By engaging with a central motivation for this project – the question: what is possible? – we need to be able to give an account of that which is in the making. I argue for a conceptualization of the future that is premised on a notion of *becoming*. The imaginative project of opening up the future to possibilities can thus host an interpretation of subjectivity as nomadic or mobile. Rather than focus on a logic or central motif in our concept of *what* we are becoming, this project asks by what *logic* do

we interrogate these events and experiences? Bringing forward a notion of difference as a means through which divergent becomings, movements and temporalities may be assembled, I argue that no point should be privileged over any other. Therefore, by framing our understanding of subjectivities as mobile or nomadic, we highlight the forms and modalities of differences in the perceptions, trajectories and durations of trajectories. Not only does this reveal the indeterminate character of the future, but also the movement across trajectories that comprise the constitution of individual biographies.

I connect this argument to a body of feminist political economy for two reasons: the narratives that infuse the experience of early adulthood are embedded within political, economic and cultural material relations in terms of orientations to the future. Also, I argue that the narratives that emerge from these relations produce and reinforce the ideas about movement towards the future that I take up in this project.

Chapter two describes my methodological approach to interpreting the secondary sources and interview data. The interview data is drawn from a larger SSHRC-funded project entitled, “Social Citizenship and the Transformation of Work,” for which Janet Siltanen is the principal investigator. Based on the position that we understand and give meaning to events and experience through the telling of stories, the methodology used for this project reveals the process of emplotting narratives of priority and desirable objectives. By engaging with and analyzing the narratives that tell these stories, I demonstrate how individuals are constituted as ‘workers’ first and foremost, particularly in terms of the focus of the future orientation of young adults. The methodological emphasis, therefore, is on highlighting the character of narratives and the significance of the way these narratives are plotted by individuals and social policy actors.

The individuals who participated in these interviews are young women and men between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-two years of age. At the time of the interviews, they lived in Ottawa, Ontario, came from a range of backgrounds, engaged in a range of activities, and had various living arrangements. Initially, I selected these individuals because of their responses concerning work flexibility. As I analyzed their transcripts, it occurred to me that they each characterized and oriented themselves to the future in interesting ways. In their efforts to integrate certainty into their future horizons, they situate ‘work’ as a force that makes other things possible. Once they have secured a job, they figure, they can shift their focus to relationships, family formation, etc.

In chapter three I examine the relational setting in which public, conceptual and meta-narratives narratives are produced. In the first part of the chapter I look at post-secondary education policies and employment/unemployment policies from the 1960s through the 1990s in Canada on the conditions in which young adults ‘transitioned’ into adulthood. I argue that public, conceptual and meta-narratives are constituent elements of these policies and processes, informing perceptions of growth, change, and a notion of movement through time as a linear and chronological phenomenon.

In the second part of chapter three, I critically assess notions of ‘temporary’ and ‘transitory’ to describe the terms and conditions of work. My critique focuses on an assumption that is inherent in the applicability of this terminology: it presumes that an objective can be brought to the future in terms of planning for a progression to improved circumstances. I argue that this runs contrary to the indeterminacy of the future.

The fourth chapter is a composite analysis of the public, conceptual and meta-narratives embedded in individual stories. By pulling together relevant portions from

each interview transcript, I demonstrate that the individuals who participated in this study orient themselves to the future through preparatory, flexibility and work narratives. Their understanding of movement through time as an expression of ‘difference’ is framed as an anticipation and expectation of conditions getting better.

In chapter five I draw out illustrative examples from the interview data in order to advance my argument about the constitution of the respondents’ subjectivity. I assert that these young adults self-identify with a fixed state of being: they *are* workers. When they describe their past they are preparing for work; in the present they are looking for or struggling with work; in the future their work situation will be better. I contrast this with a non-fixed, fluid subjectivity based on a notion of a plural, multi-directional interest and focus that constitutes any ‘self’. This ‘self’ does not transition into and arrive at some destination called ‘adulthood’. This ‘self’ is continuously in the making; continuously becoming.

Furthermore, *becoming* has a material reality. As such, an analysis of the material terms and conditions of experiences within the context of the relational setting demonstrates the extent to which we are ontologically and epistemologically disconnected from the indeterminate character of the future.

The data explored in this dissertation are derived from a larger project that examined circumstances related to changes in work. As the Interview Schedule (see Appendix C) reveals, the questions focus on work-related experiences. I became interested in the way that the respondents conceptualized their subjectivity in terms of being or becoming workers. Rather than a matter of finding and keeping a job, a pattern

emerged in this collection of stories that highlights the specific focus with which individuals orient themselves to their own futures.

By linking these stories to the literature on social theories of time, I locate these responses within a broader critique of ontological narratives that give meaning to temporal dynamics and thus focus our priorities. From this perspective, the indeterminacy of the future does not change or alter. Our stories about temporalities, however, are embedded in public, conceptual and meta-narratives about the relational setting, thus ‘determining’ what is possible.

Chapter One – Theory

One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought... One wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her where she sat knitting, talking, sitting silent in the window alone; which took to itself and treasured up like the air which held the smoke of the steamer, her thoughts, her imaginations, her desires.

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*.

Introduction

As the narrator in this portion of text from Virginia Woolf's novel tries to illustrate, individuals are multifaceted and complex beings. The narrator speaks to the challenge of knowing a whole person and all of the constituent elements that make them who they are. This requires many viewpoints and access to all aspects of any individual's thoughts and experiences. The subject of the narrator's interest is neither extraordinary nor peculiar – it is the everydayness of her knitting, talking and sitting silently that the narrator suspects will give us insight into knowing her. Unlike forms of writing that include fiction, however, sociological studies rarely attempt to draw a detailed portrait of a specific individual. Instead the objective is to understand something on a larger scale about the conditions and circumstances of experience, through a conceptual and/or a material lens. This project takes as its starting point the idea that individuals are complex and multifaceted, and I focus my interest on a set of ontological assumptions about time and temporalities in the constitution of individuals, or more specifically, their subjectivities and the future orientation of subject positions. The main theoretical task is thus to incorporate a critical approach to interpreting the ontological and epistemological components of temporal movement. Towards this end, I take up Alcoff's (1999)

approach which highlights an ontology of becoming, and through this approach, I examine the horizons upon which ‘truth claims’ are inscribed.

My objective in this discussion is to explore the idea that we experience time as movement. I argue that an understanding of how individuals move temporally is influenced by political, economic and cultural practices that are made significant and meaningful in narrative form. For example, young adults move towards future horizons by completing formal education and training and then securing full-time work. As a temporal phenomenon, this movement is intentional, ordered and sequential. Movement along alternative and parallel trajectories is understood in terms of the risk that they will be disruptive or counter-productive. As a ‘launch’ stage of life, therefore, early adulthood is about getting on the right track. More broadly, my objective is to interrogate ontological perspectives by disrupting the idea that we experience life as a singular and consolidated time line. By examining the ontological and public/conceptual narratives within the context of the relational setting (the institutional, policy, discursive and cultural context), I explore the conceptualization of a ‘worker’¹ identity as the object of a singular, linear trajectory through early adulthood and individual orientations towards the future.

I locate the emergence and reinforcement of narratives about the future within the relational setting. In this project the concept of relational setting refers to the context in which the respondents for this study live and interact. The relational setting is the product of and is constituted through temporal and spatial configurations of relationships

¹ Within the parameters of this project, I understand ‘work’ to include all activities involved in the production and reproduction of economic relations and structures (Glucksmann, 2000). As economic activities that are connected to market relations and exchanges, ‘work’ is the supply of effort to produce goods and services for remuneration (Glucksmann, 2000; Heinz, 2001).

and cultural practices, including institutions and discourses (Somers, 1994; Massey, 1999). It is not an identifiable entity, but rather a complex of contingent cultural and institutional relationships:

A relational setting is a pattern of relationships among institutions, public narratives, and social practices. As such it is a relational matrix, a social network. Identity-formation takes shape within these relational settings of contested but patterned relations among narratives, people, and institutions. (Somers, 1994: 626)

As Massey (1999) argues, because a spatial or setting context is relational, it is embedded in material practices - they are always being made; they are always becoming; they are never finished, never closed. Furthermore, as the relational setting is a conceptual space, in this study it is also a place (Ottawa, Ontario), it has time parameters (1995-2008), and it involves institutions (governments, schools, workplaces), as well as social norms and structures (jobs, adulthood, marriage, family). I argue that the policies, practices and discourse that are produced within the relational setting contribute to the constitution of a specific orientation to the future.

Additionally, this project is a critique of the imposition of a model of temporal order on interpretations of life stage analysis. The critique of the original model happens in three ways: first of all, a model of temporal order presumes an identifiable continuum between distinct domains of social life (child, youth, adult, senior) (Stephens, 1995). This model pre-supposes that the identification of successively *different* qualities and characteristics is an important component of understanding movement from one moment to the next. Secondly, the use of continuous and cumulative logic in order to explain the temporal movement from childhood to adulthood or from one day to the next correlates a notion of an immature and underdeveloped past with a progressive, more fully developed future (Stephens, 1995). This cumulative theory of change thus presumes an inherent

rationality to the movement or momentum of living. Finally, the model of temporal order is implicated in interpretations of life stage analysis in the everyday expectations of individuals. An expectation that change will be linear, chronological and cumulative reflects a naturalistic orthodoxy (Grosz, 1999). As a foundation for understanding temporal movement, a notion of linearity mobilizes individuals to contain disruptive and deviant episodes that distract from the forward motion of a desirable trajectory into the future. Therefore, I locate this inquiry within a broader question at the centre of my argument: how can we give an account of *things in the making*?

In this case, those *things in the making* are all of those things that individuals perceive, desire and carry forward into their futures. In much of the literature the focus is on sets of constraints, obligations and responsibilities, and the clusters of inequalities that emerge from analyses of presumed projections into the future. In the course of analyses and broader discourse, many of these interpretations serve to reify normative and naturalized constructions of fundamental aspects of living, including life transitions and life stage markers of success. Ambiguity and uncertainty, for example, are cast, and thus experienced, as deviations from a dominant view of singular and linear trajectories. This narrow, deterministic understanding of temporalities and futurity has produced a version of discursive logic based on work time regimes² and clock time advancement. This project thus aims to disrupt this deterministic view of clock time and introduce the characteristics of movement as multiplicities of trajectories and priorities.

² Borrowing the concept of 'regime' from mainstream welfare state literature (see for example Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999), *work time regimes* is a heuristic device that articulates an idea of an identifiable pattern of policy practices and discourse that reflect a set of normative work and time relations. See the next chapter for a more detailed description of my use of this concept.

I do this by incorporating a concept of the mobile or nomadic citizen-subject (Braidotti, 2002; Ferguson, 1993), which I then connect to an exploration of the capacity of feminist political economy to analyze material conditions and circumstances. The contribution of this project to feminist political economy is thus to highlight the necessity of examining the complexities of the self and the relevance of the temporal dynamics of the present. In the last section, therefore, I reflect on feminist political economy's contribution to an analysis of material experiences.

Social Theories of Time

I begin this discussion by examining the ontological, epistemic and theoretical underpinnings of time. Arguments about social phenomena, social relations and social change often presume implicitly that time is linear and chronological, operating within a singular time frame and that events converge along a single time line (Adam, 1995). The 'arrow of time', or the assumption that time has an irreducible directionality, explicitly informs the biological sciences, for example, where explanatory relevance is given to the present and future states of an organism (Grosz, 1999). More broadly, social understandings of temporal relations are informed by everyday and scientific concepts of directionality, progress, development, accumulation, and lineage (Grosz, 1999). In order to think critically about *things in the making*, I take up Grosz's (1999) suggestion that we problematize deterministic views of time. A deterministic concept of temporality is structured by the terms and conditions of the past and the present; it thus eliminates any possibility of a future that is uncontained by the past and the present. Within this framework, the imperative of predictability is one of determinism's defining concepts (Grosz, 1999). Determinism thus denies the open-endedness of the future.

Bergson's contribution to disrupting this interpretation has been pivotal. In his book, *The Creative Mind*, Bergson (1946) outlines his view of the dominant interpretation of our movement towards the future. According to Bergson, we believe that the future is given in the present. We believe in pre-formed choice, as though each of these moments reflects 'possibilities' that have been outlined beforehand and the objective of the will is to bring about those possibilities. We further believe that something could not have been possible, if the possibility of its accomplishment had not been pre-known. He argues,

All our ways of speaking, thinking, perceiving imply in effect that immobility and immutability are there by right, that movement and change are superadded, like accidents, to things which, by themselves, do not change. (Bergson, 1946: 80)

In other words, we want to know the technique of our actions and be able to extract from them a prescriptive mode of conduct, characterized by stability and regularity (Bergson, 1946). We want to know this mode and therefore govern the moments of deviation from this course in order to minimize their impact. Bergson thus challenges the thinker to conceptualize the experience of time in favour of a multiplicity of movements rather than progress along a line. This experience of time is understood as *duration* – temporal dynamics that highlight movement, action, constant change and creative evolution, trajectories in motion. Within this framework, there is room for indetermination and freedom (Bergson, 1946).

Indetermination is a central component of Bergson's argument, highlighting the conceptual project of theorizing future trajectories without anticipating or imposing a destination or specifying a point of arrival. The foregrounding of 'constitutive processes' in analyses of social phenomena should lay a foundation for understanding these

dynamics as inherently creative. In other words, theoretical analyses of social processes cannot be based on a pre-set, pre-formed notion of the futurity of the assembly of social life.

Therefore, I argue for a conceptualization of our experience of time in terms of multiplicities of possibilities and trajectories. This means that outcomes cannot be pre-known, and that change and chance are integral components to how we think of the future. The concept of *becoming* captures this idea of possibilities and asks us to think about the significance of *things in the making* and of processes that are continuously *materializing*. The challenge is thus to think of time as the indeterminate, the unfolding, and the continuous eruption of the new (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

Where interpretations of ‘change’ and ‘new’ are conflated and presented as coterminous phenomena, an analysis of the experiences of time must consider the enigmatic character of change:

The much-celebrated phenomenon of globalization and its technologies accomplishes a magician’s trick: it combines the euphoric celebration of *new* technologies, *new* economy, *new* lifestyles, *new* generations of both human and technological gadgets, *new* wars and *new* weapons with the complete social rejection of change and transformation. In a totally schizophrenic double pull the consumerist and socially enhanced faith in the *new* is supposed not only to fit in with, but also actively to induce, the rejection of in-depth change. (Braidotti, 2006: 2)

The rejection of in-depth change is thus a reflection of the gravitational pull of old and established values within a context of an abundance of novelties and innovations. The introduction of ‘new’ elements thus rarely, if ever, accompanies social change. More often, existing dominant social scripts continue to permeate characteristics in the relational setting. One cannot, therefore, presume that the introduction of techniques and

devices signal a ‘new’ set of lived experiences, or that more significant changes are not occurring on a more in-depth level.

The distinction between the eruption of the ‘new’ and a reconfiguration of social processes based on the ‘new’ is integral to temporal analysis. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that we need to think about temporality as a modality of difference. Should a modality of difference attempt to escape the measure of achievement (success or failure), it can focus on a competing and contradictory set of impulses (McHoul and Grace, 1997). This creates a framework for simultaneously engaging in a nomadic or rhizomatic³ logic that is based on an interpretation of social processes as continuously generating difference and a future that is as yet unknown (Braidotti, 2002). This demands an interpretation of the future that is without form or materiality; where it is deterritorialized and decolonised; marked by an openness to the new, a willingness to explore the potentialities, and revel in the surprise that time brings (Grosz, 1999). Therefore, temporality not only captures the generation of the new, it is rhizomatic in its character and in its capabilities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

By examining temporality through the lens of modalities of difference (for example, those differences that demonstrate the complexity of the self and the possibilities of future selves) we can de-homogenize time. Events and processes contain particular durations that cannot be subjected to a unified understanding of time. When we introduce this framework to orientations to the future, we can understand the significance of individuals *becoming* within a spatial, temporal and material context. This means that representations of the future that look like a singular line projecting

³ A rhizomatic logic is based on principles of connection and heterogeneity, so that any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. It is a multiplicity without subject or object (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

forward create a false narrative, particularly in terms of setting up a false tension between predictability and certainty on the one hand and precariousness and uncertainty on the other. The presumed coherence of stability and predictability in terms of social processes belies the constituent elements of surprise and chance in future temporalities.

Decolonization and deterritorialization of time thus involve de-linking functionalist notions of temporal convergence (Adam, 1995) and capitalist values of progress and accumulation (Grosz, 1999). A model of time characterized by multiple trajectories and shifting foci involves sometimes parallel, sometimes contradictory, sometimes accented priorities, sometimes diminished priorities, sometimes possible, sometimes paused, sometimes quit, etc. movements and durations (Bergson, 1946). Therefore,

It is significant that this future-oriented temporality brings with it the centrality of the concept of chance, of what is in principle unpredictable, ... and chance, the concept of the random or the unpredictable, is of the essence of a time that is not regulated by causality and determination but unfolds with its own rhythms and logic, its own enigmas and impetus. (Grosz, 1999: 4)

The objective is thus not to impose a speculative science on interpreting the future, but rather to think creatively about future possibilities. This means dis-associating analyses of life course trajectories from linear and chronological models and eliminating a narrative of serial or sequential life course events from individual and collective expectations. This has implications in terms of understanding the subjective location of the individual within broader discursive narratives, as well as understanding the subject in life moment transitions.

Ontological Difference and the Constitution of Subjectivity

For the purposes of this project, the site of interrogation - that which is *in the making* - is the experience of adulthood. In *Childhood and Society: Growing Up in an*

Age of Uncertainty, Lee (2001) draws a conceptual line between adult ‘human beings’ and child ‘human becomings.’ Specifically, Lee argues:

The human being is, or should be, stable, complete, self-possessed and self-controlling. The human being is, or should be, capable of independent thought and action, an independence that merits respect. The human becoming, on the other hand, is changeable and incomplete and lacks the self-possession and self-control that would allow it the independence of thought and action that merits respect. (2001: 5)

This expresses an idea of the child as an in-formation version of the adult they are to become, identifying the pre-adult stage as a formative phase – one in which the acquisition and assumption of identifiable characteristics of adulthood (a stable and complete character) come to define the dominant qualities of the individual. Implicit within this successive model of life stage categories, identified by ‘child’, ‘youth’ or ‘adult,’ are notions of ontological difference (Qvortrup, 1994). ‘Difference’ in this framework, therefore, is an expression of demarcations along a serial line of development from birth to death. Ages and life stages operate simultaneously as both markers along the way and ontological clues that indicate the progression of becoming and/or expressions of being.

My critique of this framework focuses on the idea of ontological differences between pre-adult and adult life stages, arguing that adulthood cannot be expressed as a journey completed or point of arrival. This project troubles the boundaries between *becoming* an adult and *being* an adult through two specific and related strategies. The first strategy is to critique a notion of ontological certainty and argue for a concept of mobile or nomadic subjectivity (in contrast with a fixed subjectivity). The second and related strategy is to open the ontological possibilities of ‘being’ through the comprehensive use of the concept of ‘becoming.’ By unhinging ‘becoming’ from a

notion of moving *to* something or somewhere, the process of becoming can be understood as a continuous engagement and endeavour.

A further unpacking of the process of becoming requires a tandem discussion of the constitution of subjectivity. 'Subjectivity' is a conceptualization of selfhood that includes ideological and material relations and modalities. Subjectivity tells who we are, locating us within frameworks of expected and understandable biographies and identities in our culture (Benhabib, 1995). Subjectivity is also understood as an individual horizon (Minh-ha, 1997), although some scholars locate the articulation of the 'self' within a relational dynamic. Tilly (2005), for example, argues the following:

Every social relation includes a boundary between the sites involved. At the individual level, the boundary falls somewhere between you and me. At the collective level, it falls between us and them. Boundary construction is a fundamental social process. That process is crucial to the production of identities. (11)

An interpretation of identity or subjectivity distinction involves a spatialization or mapping of difference. Borrowing from a set of cartographer's tools and language, the mapping of difference describes the constitution of subjectivity as an exercise in border drawing in order to concretize the experience of subjectivity. If this were the basis of constituting subjectivity, the significant moment is in the establishment, with certainty, of the distinctiveness of different selves. Along a similar vein, Connolly (1991) argues that the knowledge of the 'self' is always a 'self-other' process:

An identity is established in relation to a series of differences that are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity. Entrenched in these indispensable relations is a second set of tendencies... to congeal established identities into fixed forms, thought and lived as if their structure expressed the true order of things... Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty. (64)

Thus the experience of subjectivity is understood to be a relational process of identifying boundaries that enclose distinct selves. What is evident in these descriptions, however, is an essentialist pattern of interpreting subjectivity as a sequential dynamic: we come into being and then we interact (Massey, 1999). It is through the interaction that subjectivity becomes fixed and certain, and therefore our identity distinctness is secured. A non-fixed subject that is open to the complexities and possibilities of becoming must be disembedded from pre-formed, essentialist points of departure. As Bergson (1992) points out, “The subject, by the sole fact of being named, is defined as invariable; the variation will reside in the diversity of the states that one will affirm concerning it, one after another” (69). In other words, the subject is believed to have an essentially stable quality, and it is its attributes that may shift, change or reform. Rather than focus on the constitutive role of ‘difference’ in the creation of subjectivity and thus entrench the significance of locating and interpreting boundaries, I argue instead for an analysis of the role of temporalities in the constitution of difference in the future possibilities of the self – a subjectivity based on openness.

Although relationally known and articulated, subjectivities must be constituted as fluid possibilities, wherein continuously *becoming* involves a continuously emerging set of characteristics and boundaries that cannot be pre-known. Subjectivity, therefore, cannot speak to or be fixed to a historical set of sequences (Massey, 1999), but is instead mobile and nomadic. The indeterminacy of its constitutive potential thus articulates its capacity to live a hospitality for an unknowable future and celebrate the freedom of possibility (Doyle, 2003).

Furthermore, the conditions of hospitality run contrary to notions of the subject as having a single, unified, dominant identity (Maloutas, 2006). In order to imagine a non-essentialist interpretation of subjectivity, therefore, one must suspend all models of the lifeworld based on pre-formative sets of deterministic qualities or causal factors. As Maloutas (2006) demonstrates, a framework that highlights the multiplicity of possible futures includes a definition of subjectivity that has non-sequential and multi-directional explorations of the self:

[T]he analytic categories perceived as manifest, such as 'child', for example, or 'woman' and 'man', it is now accepted that they are not as manifest, in the sense of a causal biological-social determination sequence which is less simple and unidirectional than the common-sense view. This reinforces the hypothesis concerning the existence of multiple and changing identities that the subject assumes at different times in her/his life. (Maloutas, 2006: 69)

To Maloutas (2006), therefore, the subject is a plexus of multiplicities and particularities and the subject's attachment to social locations are temporally mobile. In order to analyze the significance of both the mobility and location within a framework based on temporalities and movement requires conceptualizing a subject as an articulation of mutations, changes, and transformations (Braidotti, 2002). Drawing on both Braidotti's (2002) term 'nomadic subjectivity' and Ferguson's (1993) use of 'mobile subjectivities', my central objective is to focus on the dynamism of the subject: "We live in permanent processes of transition, hybridization and nomadization" (Braidotti, 2002: 2). This non-static, unstable vision of the subject thus highlights the temporal complexities of *becoming*. As Ferguson further argues,

Mobile subjectivities are temporal, moving across and along axes of power (which are themselves in motion) without fully residing in them. They are relational, produced through shifting yet enduring encounters and connections, never fully captured by them. They are ambiguous: messy and multiple,

unstable but persevering. They are ironic, attentive to the manyness of things.
(1993: 154)

By theorizing the constitution of subjectivity as a mobile or nomadic process, efforts at boundary-making are thus challenged. When boundaries or closures serve as recognitions of constraints and limitations, they are clearly an integral component of the analysis. Rather, by theorizing the discursive and experiential temporal embodiment of subjects, a foundation becomes available to envision a subject moving towards a multiplicity of futures. As the subject encounters the manyness of trajectories moving into the future, its mobility or nomadic nature can move with the unevenness of these trajectories and continuously shift its focus. Thus by thinking critically about the forms and modalities of the relation of the self to the future, it becomes both politically and ethically significant to locate these processes within a critical analysis of the paradoxes of the present (Braidotti, 2002).

To suggest that the present is paradoxical is to highlight the multiplicity and contemporaneity of our social locations. As such, we have the capacity to simultaneously incorporate social categories, such as class, race, sex, nationality, culture, etc. (Braidotti, 2002) and preoccupations. As Ferguson (1993) suggests, mobile subjectivities heed claims to 'be' as well as possibilities of doing otherwise. These possibilities continuously emerge in the present, and thus 'nomadic' and 'mobile' subjectivity provides a conceptual language for assessing the politics of location in order to map a materialist interpretation of situated, or embedded and embodied positions within a multiplicity of trajectories (Braidotti, 2002).

Political Economy

The movement of multiple trajectories with differing durations and foci are located within a material context: “The notion of the individual is enlarged to enclose a structural sense of interconnection between the singular self and the environment or totality in which it is embodied and embedded” (Braidotti, 2006: 160). That environment, or the relational setting in which it is embedded, connects to both constraining and enabling factors. A social theory of time that focuses on movement and difference, therefore, must also contextualize these forces.

As such, a political economy framework explores the interconnections and material relations within and across structural and institutional sites of social relations. By examining some of these institutionalized and discursive activities, it is the version of political economy that interrogates the interconnections between the institutional and the experiential that is most relevant to my project. By understanding both the differences and intersections as significant in the analysis, this approach can highlight the complexities of the material context.

As a component of painting a complex portrait of the context, political economy further advances a material analysis of the relational dynamics between ideology, culture, economic, and political trajectories (Clement, 1997). It seeks to highlight the mutually constitutive and relational dynamics of the political and the economic (as they are most broadly defined). The language of motion is often introduced in political economy discussions to describe qualitative and quantitative differences in political and economic relations through time. As O’Brien and Penna (1998) argue, a political economy perspective interprets transformations of processes and structures. The study of globalization, for example, captures the collective

aspects of transforming social, cultural, political and economic relations within and between nation states. Furthermore, the character of these changes is presumed to be transformative, influenced by neo-liberal ideology and privileging the interests of multinational corporations (Held *et al.*, 1999). Within this framework, what is understood about the changes witnessed in economic and political bodies is a growth of powerful new trans-national and regional forms of economic and political bodies with the capacity to eclipse national sovereignty (Held *et al.*, 1999). Thus the growth of new forms of political and economic entities is understood to transform the nation state's role through the mechanisms of trade liberalization, capital and labour mobility (Held *et al.*, 1999). When these analyses of transformations are nuanced, the emphasis shifts to the extensity, intensity and velocity of global interactions, yet the thrust of their transformative effect remains a significant factor (O'Brien & Penna, 1998).

Therefore, the element of *effect* is presented as a direct result of *transformed* relations between states, markets and households. As this explanation illustrates, *newness* is presumed to be the result of a transformation of a previous set of relations (between states, markets and households) and a present set of circumstances. Analytical and critical interest, therefore, stems from both an ongoing set of social dynamics and possibilities for future social dynamics. The impact of these changes is further presented in terms of their reverberations through the everyday lives of individuals.

My contribution to these conversations, therefore, is to highlight the need for a critical understanding of time in order to explain social change. Concepts such as *growth*

and *transformation* are based on a consolidated notion of cause and effect. The idea of movement as outcome presumes that trajectories converge. In contrast, an analysis of social change that foregrounds modalities of difference creates opportunities to analyze trajectories as multiple, intersecting or non-intersecting, and with different durations. An examination of phenomena as multiple thus produces an orientation to the future based on multiple possibilities.

Feminist Political Economy

Feminist politics aspires to change, innovation, and to the future (Grosz, 2000).

The transformation of material, social, cultural and ideological experiences of a 'self' in a gendered context sets sights on future horizons in which conditions can be improved. In order to assess current and future possibilities, an analysis of the significance of modalities and forms of difference as constituent elements of the present, for example, lays the groundwork for opening up the field of potentialities. The future possibilities of a 'self' possessing a mobile or nomadic subjectivity focuses on the fluidity of difference as a descriptive element of an individual's social location. The emphasis and significance of difference thus speaks to identity and the on-going constitution of identity, as well as the movement of individual experiences of multiple trajectories.

In order to interrogate these dynamics, I draw from the field of feminist political economy as an approach to interrupting assumed modalities and forms of difference. By engaging with the politics of the everyday as well as revealing some of the complexities of social processes, this lens brings together analyses of biographical experiences with an understanding of the elements involved in the production and reproduction of everyday life (Maroney and Luxton, 1997; Smith, 1992).

The production of everyday life requires a critical engagement with the ‘cultural and ideological moments’ in order to de-stabilize the privileged position of dominant discursive and material preoccupation with consolidated trajectories, such as the logic of capitalism, productivity and a specific understanding of success (Smith, 1998; Creese and Stasiulis, 1996). Where production and consumption are given free reign to ideologically shape and transform all of the economic, political and cultural forms they encounter (Bergeron, 2001), the market is implicitly or explicitly portrayed as a triumphant force over all other trajectories. This consolidated view of the relationship between temporalities and social life draws in its wake an economistic view of cultures, communities, and individual objectives (Bergeron, 2001).

As such, this material analysis of temporalities further challenges the notion that changes emerge from a dialectic relationship between gendered experiences and political and economic structures. A dialectical perspective limits the focus to sites of power and agency, so that factors that shape and influence the effect and outcome are given undue paramount attention. In contrast, a combination of multiple trajectories lived as a symbiotic experience reflects a rhizomatic dynamic. The fluid and contextual dimensions and durations of difference thus come together and cross personal and contextual trajectories.

Feminist political economy reveals the social character of the structural and institutional trajectories that characterize the relational setting (Maroney and Luxton, 1997). By shifting attention away from a linear and chronological cause and effect set of questions to a focus on difference and duration of multiple trajectories, the complexities

of *becoming* can be incorporated into an analysis of difference in the present and between the present and the future.

Specifically, this involves troubling an emphasis on a particular horizon for the constitution of subjectivity. By critically engaging with the force of movement as a trajectory towards the successful completion of one objective (school) and launching to another (work), an imaginative conversation about an openness to an indeterminate future re-configures our expectations concerning what is possible.

Conclusion

The construction and perpetuation of dominant narratives formulate the horizons upon which truth claims are inscribed. The power of some 'truths' to dominate is a factor of social forces and conditions (Glucksmann, 2000). One of these dominant discursive forces concerns truth claims about time in which change and chance fall on a temporal continuum with stability and order. This suggests that individual and collective experiences can be understood as either static and ordered or fluctuating and dynamic elements along this continuum. A critical analysis of temporalities, however, removes this spatialized interpretation of time and demonstrates that trajectories are ongoing, recurring, sequential and simultaneous dynamic social processes characterized by their open-endedness and multiplicity. An orientation to the possibilities of the future, therefore, requires that the location of subjects reflect the movement of both context and subjectivity.

In terms of truth claims inscribed in descriptive social conditions, change narratives are typically framed as static moments of arrival. Beck, for example, identifies a transformative movement away from collective lifestyles and full employment to an attitude of heedless exploitation of nature, ecological crises, the

decline of paid employment, individualization and a gender revolution (Beck, 2000).

We are to understand that the conditions of life in advanced industrial economies have changed and are now something ‘new’ – that we are located in a neo-liberal place.

I argue instead for an animated interpretation of social conditions. In so far as a temporal analysis demonstrates the absence of ‘moments of arrival’ for the subject, so too is there an absence of points or moments of enclosure around political and economic subjectivities. For each of these sites, temporalities are contested, multiple and contradictory (Larner and Le Heron, 2005). As Larner and Le Heron (2005) further demonstrate, subjects are being positioned and are positioning themselves in spaces that include neo-liberalizing spaces. Although complex and complicated, an animated temporal analysis thus informs the development of an epistemology of *becoming* and provides the ability to give an account of *things in the making*. Furthermore, it provides the conditions to open up analysis in order to examine the complex realities of the present.

Chapter Two - Methodology

Introduction

Through the practices of everyday life, social processes are coded, organized, centred, unified, integrated, hierarchized and finalized both in the course of formal and informal interpretive exercises (Olkowski, 1999). With this in mind, I am interested in the ways in which the ‘future’ is anticipated and the ways in which this anticipation is coded, integrated, interpreted, etc. by the individuals who participated in this study. By examining both formal/public and informal/personal interpretations of the future, my methodological framework lays the foundation for a critical engagement with the stories that individuals tell about the future, the contexts in which these emerge, and their implications for a constitution of the ‘self’.

The application of a qualitative methodology enables me to explore the descriptions that individuals give of their experiences and their social world in depth. Specifically, in order to reveal the complexities that lie underneath the coded, organized, hierarchized and finalized version of experiences, I require a methodology that is “exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven and context-sensitive” (Mason, 2002: 24). Therefore, I use a qualitative approach in order to analyze interpretations, perceptions and expectations about the future that are embedded in social policies and articulated by individuals. As I argued in the previous chapter, subjectivity is a nomadic or mobile phenomenon, such that individual life stories are constituted across trajectories and shifting foci. By highlighting the constitutive character of the stories that individuals tell about their attempts to coalesce along a singular trajectory (the work trajectory), I can

contrast epistemological perspectives that presume linear life aspirations and experiences with an epistemology that supports a notion of mobile subjectivity.

Within this framework, my methodological approach is to reveal, interpret, explain and create. The revelation aspect involves interrogating the ways that normative scripts permeate ontological assumptions through an understanding of narrative emplotment. The interpretive dimension involves focusing on biographical aspirations and notions of success and failure in public and personal narratives. The explanatory aspect examines the significance of the relational context. Finally, by stripping away some of the constituted elements of a 'worker' identity, I create an alternative vision of epistemology based on possibility. To achieve this, I base my analytical focus on ontological, public, conceptual and meta-narratives as constitutive dimensions of identity.

I begin this discussion by framing the tension between ontological and epistemological interpretations of biographical temporalities and movement as either fixed and stable or as open-ended and fluid. As a method of interpretation, I examine and analyze the stories that social and political institutions, policies, cultures, discourses and individuals tell about this phenomenon. Drawing from a narrative analysis approach, I set up my analytical framework in order to demonstrate that ontologies and narratives are mutually constitutive. I further describe the significance of my own biographical puzzles on the formulation of the interrogation, and then outline the research process. Initially portioning off a sub-set of interviews from a larger research project, I detail how my approach is unique and original relative to this project. Specific to my interests, my point of departure, analysis and arguments are my own.

Ontological and Epistemological Queries

In order to interrogate and problematize knowledge claims about biographies and identity, I began in the previous chapter by exploring the possibilities of ontological and epistemological states of open-endedness. By asking critical questions about the constitution of the 'self,' replacing notions of linearity and temporal movement with an understanding of the fragmentation, polyphony and atemporality of the self, we reveal an ontological problematic: what does this all mean for our perception of possibilities? Furthermore, what are the epistemological consequences in terms of what this entails for how we understand what it means to describe our selves in this way?

I am arguing that accounts of social life assume a narrative form. By joining this form to an understanding of social life, we can see how the telling of stories locates the actor in temporally and spatially shifting configurations that develop the coordinates of the 'self' in context. By emphasizing the relationality of emplotment, this precludes categorical stability (Somers, 1994).

An integral component of interrogating stories or accounts involves using an ideographic interpretive methodology (Ferguson, 1993; Denzin, 2004), where the focus is on the unique elements of an individual phenomenon. An interpretive approach means that the methodology is subject-centred and explores understandings, reasonings, processes and social norms (Mason, 2002). An interpretive approach further involves the construction of a reading of an event and examines the ways in which reality is socially constructed (Denzin, 2004). Interpretive analyses are also well-suited to studies of subjectivity (Riessman, 1993) and intersubjectivity (Denzin, 2004). Thus by interpreting the narrative accounts of identity and the relational setting (or context), I can reveal the

constitutive significance of the emplotment of specific narratives that influence our understandings, reasonings, and norms.

Four Dimensions of Narrativity

Based on Somers' (1994) model of the four dimensions of narrativity, this project examines a narrative thread that crosses storylines of identity and relational setting. By narrativity, I refer to the stories that are told in order to communicate and create some degree of understanding of experience (Feldman *et al.*, 2004). Within each interview conducted, there are stories that give information about the subjectivity of the speaker as well as the setting in which they were located. As Somers (1994) points out, "... all of us come to *be* who we *are* (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives" (606, emphasis in original). Therefore, narratives are the means through which experiences are constituted and made sense of, assembled and integrated (Somers, 1994; Denzin, 2004). "Through telling their stories, people distil and reflect a particular understanding of social and political relations" (Feldman *et al.*, 2004: 148).

The narrative form illustrates events, experiences, or actions with a plot that ties them together as a temporally organized whole (Polkinghorne, 2005; Feldman *et al.*, 2004; Reissman, 1993). The repertoire of stories that comprise this plot further guide actions, projections, expectations, and memories from a multiplicity of available social, public and cultural narratives (Somers, 1994). Given that narratives articulate relationships emplotted in time and space, this process also configures the plot in order to lay out happenings as part of an unfolding movement:

The purpose of narrative analysis is not to produce a re-production of observations; rather, it is to provide a dynamic framework in which the range of

disconnected data elements are made to cohere in an interesting and explanatory way. (Polkinghorne, 2005: 93)

The analysis, therefore, gives an accounting of why a narrative has the story line that it does (Somers, 1994). Data are integrated and interpreted in narrative form in order to highlight the significance of the location of narratives and the relationship of each location to other temporal and spatial events. These temporal and spatial events include public narratives and metanarratives, or the intersubjective relational plots. This means that narratives can be shown to be multiple and complex on their own, as well as significant in the multiplicity of the sites to which they are related.

Somers (1994) argues that narratives are formative in the constitution of ontologies. Narrative and ontology are processual and each a condition of the other – neither are a priori. As such, “Ontological narratives are used to define who we *are*; this in turn can be a precondition for knowing what to *do*” (Somers, 1994: 618, emphasis in original). Additionally, ontological narratives are what one *becomes*. From this position, I am interested in the way that individuals frame their stories and how events and plans are plotted along a particular storyline. In chapters four and five, for example, I analyze how the respondents’ personal narratives constitute their orientation to the future. I then assess the ways in which individuals orient themselves their own futures. By interrogating the intersections between the narrative constitution of public and personal plot threads (particularly in terms of employment and education and training trajectories) I am interested in the role of narratives in the constitution of the transition or trajectory of youth-to-adulthood. Also, by interrogating the intersections between ontological narratives and contextual, public narratives, I relate the constitution of identity to cultural and institutional formations.

Contextual or public narratives are explanatory plots that point to the connection between the configurations of relationships at the level of institutional and policy formations (Somers, 1994). In chapter three of this dissertation, I focus on the public, conceptual and meta-narratives that constitute the relational setting. The relational setting locates actors in temporal and spatial configurations – a complex of contingent cultural and institutional relationships (Somers, 1994). Social change thus emerges in the relational setting by assessing the shifting relationships among the institutional arrangements and cultural practices (Somers, 1994). In order to elucidate the public narratives, I examine the policies, institutions and debates concerning young adults, work, and work trajectories in order to extrapolate a set of patterns within their narrative plots. One approach to identifying plot patterns is to frame them as ‘regimes’ in order to denote that the relations between state and economy, as well as legal and organizational features, are systematically interwoven (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Regime theory looks at whole configurations of social processes, emphasizing conjunctions and interactions between popular discourse, social policy and its reciprocal political and economic institutions (Mabbett and Bolderson, 1999). ‘Regime’ can also be thought of as a complex set of norms and rules that create and establish expectations between individuals, markets and states (Sainsbury, 1999). For the purposes of this project, ‘regime’ works as a heuristic device in order to suggest that a narrative pattern exists in policy and institutional discourse. Other projects may (correctly) point to the contradictions and unrelated policies and techniques within a jurisdiction, but this is not necessary for what I am arguing here, particularly in terms of making an argument about the constitution of meta-narratives concerning time.

In this case, ‘regime’ captures a set of policies and discourse that reflects an understanding of temporal relations. Although time and temporalities have measurable and material qualities (solar cycle, lunar cycle, etc.), in this project I am engaging with time as a conceptual phenomenon, embedded in conceptual narratives. According to Somers (1994), a conceptual narrative is an explanation that is produced to give phenomena meaning:

Because neither social action nor institution-building is solely produced through ontological and public narratives, our concepts and explanations must include the factors we call social forces – market patterns, institutional practices, organizational constraints. (Somers, 1994: 620)

Drawing forward the notion that a set of patterns *can be* extrapolated from structural, institutional and experiential activities, I therefore draw on the dimension of conceptual narrative to the exploration of the ways that interpretations of temporalities (and futurities) shape and transform our experience of economic, political and cultural forms. Conceptual narrativity is thus enfolded in the emplotment of temporal and spatial public and cultural narratives as they intersect with social forces, including market patterns, institutional practices, organizational constraints, and so on. The complexities and contingencies of cultural and institutional relationships further emphasize the significance of a conceptual narrative that foregrounds the relationality of their constituent elements.

By analyzing the conceptual narratives within these dynamics, I demonstrate, for example, that concerted efforts to make the future calculable and controllable operate both at an abstract and a material level. This conceptual narrative of time is evidenced in the form of cultural and institutional pressures to move quickly, specifically and directly (i.e. from point A to point B; from school to work). I argue that this both defines our relationship with future planning horizons and underpins a time regime that articulates a

neo-liberal, capitalist model of efficient readiness to work. Therefore, a conceptual understanding of a time regime suggests that social life, social organizations, social action and social identities are constructed through our concepts and explanations of temporal dynamics. Time regime specifics differ according to historical period and place,⁴ these differences are expressed through public narratives, in legislation, regulation and studies, as well as through generation or age cohort norms and structures. Through the lens of metanarrativity, theories and concepts are encoded with aspects of master narratives (Somers, 1994), such as thinking of time in terms of its rationalized and commodified dimensions. These narratives serve to develop an analytic vocabulary, wherein social actions and processes are framed as economic exploitation, flexible accumulation strategies (where volatility across economic relations provides the margin for profit) (Tronto, 2003) and the time spent looking, waiting, and negotiating work contracts is understood in terms of personal or ‘downtime’ being enfolded into commodified time relations. These dynamics are implicated in ontological narratives in the form of being ‘on’ and ready to spring into action. This affects an individual’s sense of the present and the near future.

Time Narrative Motifs

In order to highlight the character of the narratives that inform and constitute time regimes across discursive sites of social activities, I extrapolate a set of narrative motifs. By reading across ontological, public, conceptual and meta-narratives, the motifs or themes identify *who* and *what* political and economic narratives privilege as well as trouble the ideas that underpin and/or reify capitalist relations and related narratives within and between identity formation and the relational setting. The motifs reflect the

⁴ A conceptual and experiential understanding of ‘lifespan’ is very different if we compare Sub-Sahara Africa to North America, for example.

forms and elements of privilege, guarantees and access, as well as the mechanisms and institutions that reinforce the significance of all of these narratives in operation through all levels of political, economic, cultural and ideological currents. Themes or motifs further lay the groundwork for an analysis of the interrelations of these stories, their emplotment, and their implications.

In the course of locating motifs, the challenge lies in the identification of what policies claim to achieve and what they in fact achieve. Analysis of individual positionings within the context of policy narratives further raises the challenge of discerning subjectivities and identifying the boundaries and parameters around differences in terms of reactions, responses and outcomes. Another challenge lies in combining analyses of the relationship of processes, institutions and conditions of production with an assessment of the norms and structures that emerge and inform politically located subjectivities (Orloff, 1993). Finally, attention to the capacity of policies to constitute and regulate citizen-subjectivity within a multiplicity of locations leads to additional questions about assumptions in terms of the forms and modalities of being and becoming subject positions.

The Reflexive Research Process

Interpretation of subjectivities involves highlighting the significance of the experiential as both a subject of study and a reflexive tool in the research process. This connects to epistemological issues concerning the constitution of public narratives and their relationship to material realities, assessed through the lens of feminist research practices. Feminist contributions to the field of qualitative research address the inter-subjective dynamics between the act of conducting research and the data that are produced. Cook and Fonow (1991) argue that this has largely been the result of

challenging norms of objectivity that presume that the subject and object of research can be separated from one another. As a result of feminist challenges to this framework, researcher participation and reflections have become a consciously used part of the feminist research process (Driscoll and McFarland, 1990). Furthermore, the strict need to leave out the personal experiences of the researcher has been eliminated (Cook and Fonow, 1991).

Therefore it makes sense that a study of identity and experience would address reflexivity – a process of reflecting upon, examining critically, and exploring analytically the nature of the research process (Cook and Fonow, 1991). Reflexivity entails at one end a self-awareness about the relationship between a researcher and researched and an awareness of the construction of knowledge, of biases, reactions and feelings (Wasserfall, 1997). At the other end, reflexivity also involves a deconstruction of the authority of the researcher and related power differentials in the field (Wasserfall, 1997). The experiential therefore becomes an explicit part of the research project. During the process of both collecting and analyzing data, sensitivity to the basis of inquiry and comprehension are interwoven, and the temporal, spatial and relational location of all of the actors involved, including the researcher, inform the research.

In the case of this project, I draw specifically on a set of data collected within the context of a team research project. This raises questions concerning the dynamics between an individual practicing reflexivity and a team practicing reflexivity. When the constructive and creative process of doing research is a collaborative project, as it was in this case, there are multiple locations of knowledge production and multiple sites of dialogue and interpretation. As Siltanen *et al.* (forthcoming) argue, reflexivity is an

interpretive resource, encouraging a dialogue about social, locational and emotional responses to the respondents; academic and personal biographies, theoretical backgrounds and interests, as well as differing institutional and interpersonal contexts, inform the process. Group dynamics can be beneficial if they enable on-going discussions and interpretations, raise questions concerning the constitution of the data and reactions to the interviews and to the researchers' own life experiences. Working reflexively as a team therefore involves multiple sites of orientation: to oneself, between the researcher and the researched, between team members, and to a broader engaged audience (Siltanen *et al.*, forthcoming).

As the following short transcript⁵ illustrates, I have integrated some of my own preoccupations into the research process and objectives throughout the course of planning, interviewing, analysis and writing. In this excerpt, I share an observation with my research colleagues in terms of how interviewing and listening to individuals has had an impact on how I think of my own life and what I wanted to know from proceeding interviews:

While we were doing the interviews, absolutely everything in my life changed on a very personal level. And I think that while I was listening to people talk about their lives and the decisions they were making and the things they were struggling with, I was taking that home and thinking about it and then bringing back my own questions to the interviews - questions about how people negotiate big life decisions and life partners. So, I could see an exchange happening.
(Willow Scobie)

Whether intentional or not, what I articulate here is the relationship between the stories that I heard and the puzzles that arose for me in terms of my 'self' and my future. The questions that I posed in the interviews became entangled with my own questions about how to tackle big life decisions. "What did you do?" was a surrogate for, "What

⁵ This transcript portion is from a recorded conversation amongst four of the research team.

does one do?” A reflexive approach thus not only highlights the interconnection of subjectivity between researcher and researched, it also reveals the relevance of an on-going narrative concerning the self and the self in relation to others. The issues and focus that I was able to express to the rest of the research team helped me clarify how and what I was reacting to in the interviews and what of my own life I was bringing to the stories that respondents told. This demonstrates the integration of voice and representation, as well as the significance of the researcher’s own narrative preoccupations. Therefore, discussions with colleagues, respondents and the data that I produced clearly reflect an interconnection between interpretive choices, self-interest and personal curiosity (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003), as well as a focus on understanding and problematizing ontological narratives in relational contexts.

Gathering Data

The research process began with an examination of the political and economic contexts (the relational setting), including relevant policy and research documents, in order to construct a description of employment policies and recent changes, changes to education and training and the implications for young adults, as well as broader changing employment relations. I also addressed other relevant social changes, such as transformation of demographic patterns, including fertility rates, average age at first marriage, average age at birth of first child, levels of education, labour force participation rates, and household circumstances since the late 1960s.

Data on the ‘institutional’ dimensions of this project are derived from government, non-governmental and academic sources. The descriptive analysis of policies and regulation is based on a critical review of this material in order to illustrate policy narratives. Data were also collected from government websites, from government

publications, as well as publications from the OECD, ILO, and Statistics Canada.

Analysis focuses on employment regulation, particularly those aspects of the regulation that enable flexible arrangements, education and training regulation, and critical discussions of the transition from youth to adulthood. In order to advance an argument about transformation of the experience of young adults, the material is juxtaposed with a brief description of the experiences of young adults in Canada since the late 1960s.

The other portion of data is drawn from a selection of respondents that participated in semi-structured interviews for a study of work change in Ottawa, Ontario. The larger project examines the impact of public sector downsizing and the rapid growth and deflation of the high-tech sector. The study of structural changes in the profile of employment of Ottawa revealed an interesting range of strategies in terms of how people understand and describe transition and change, particularly in terms of describing a tension between change as a moment or catalyst and change as a longer-term experience. Just over a hundred people participated in the original project.⁶

The objectives of the broader project include engaging with an understanding of work change by troubling the concept to include unpaid domestic work, voluntary work and work-related training. The focus also includes locating the way that individuals experience work change within a broader context of life experiences.

The interview focused on the work and household profiles of the respondents and changes that they had experienced since approximately 1995 (see Interview Schedule Appendix C). Questions also drew out the ways in which respondents

⁶ See Siltanen, Janet, Willow Scobie and Alette Willis (2007). "Flexible, branché, mais dans un cul-de-sac : inégalité stratégiques et changement au travail." Pg. 193-205 in Juan-Luis Klein and Denis Harrison (eds.), *L'innovation sociale : émergence et effets sur la transformation des sociétés*. Montreal: Presses de L'Université du Québec.

planned for or adapted to change, and how they managed change. The interviewers further interrogated the respondents' perceptions of broader patterns of and social expectations with respect to changes, challenges and opportunities, and their effects on both their household and work relations. And finally, in terms of the significance of Ottawa as a social space, respondents were asked about their perceptions of changes in the city and whether they perceived any social cleavages in terms of the outcome of those changes. Towards the end of each interview, respondents were also asked about flexibility and whether or not individuals should be prepared to be flexible in when, how and where they work.

The location and time parameters were chosen to capture the shifts in public sector and private sector (particularly high-tech) employment between the mid-1990s and early 2000s in Ottawa. This provided a backdrop to learn how individuals negotiate work change circumstances within a set of structural and contextual conditions, as well as by their own actions. We recruited people who had experienced some form of work change since 1995 - when the federal government announced the largest downsizing of jobs in the history of the Canadian civil service (Hunt, 2001).

Among Canada's large urban areas, Ottawa has one of the youngest populations, with 47.1% of the population less than 35 years old. Immigration is largely responsible for Ottawa's younger population. Between 1987 and 2002, net migration to Ottawa added 131,816 people to the city's population, representing 75% of its population growth for that period. Over those 15 years, 94% of the migrants who settled in Ottawa were under the age of 44 and 30% were aged between 18 and 24 (Ottawa, 2003).

The promise of high tech work is responsible for drawing some of these young adults. Sometimes described as Silicon Valley of the North, Turner (2001) argues that Ottawa began to position itself as a high tech hub in the early 1970s. Bell Northern Research (BNR) and two arms of the Federal Government – the National Research Council and the Communications Research Centre – recruited research capital and high tech talent to Ottawa (Turner, 2001). By the mid-1980s, a small number of researchers began to start up companies, and then “steady growth turned downright rapid through the early 1990s, and by 1997, Ottawa's tech industry was more than 40,000 workers strong” (Turner, 2001: 1). Within the context of Ottawa positioning itself as a hub of IT companies and providing incentives to attract IT corporations (Hunt, 2001), the local job market favoured employment opportunities in this sector. Turner further describes a shift in priorities and hierarchy in Canada's capital:

The transformation has been incubating slowly for decades, but now it has blossomed into the open. Political power has been supplanted by technopower; the low-slung office complexes of suburban Kanata have superseded the Victorian towers of Parliament Hill, 30 km to the west, which lie at the heart of a \$17 billion local high-tech industry. Ottawa, font of legislation, regulation and lobbying, now leads the country in economic and per-capita spending on advanced research and development. Local tech firms attracted more than \$1 billion in investment capital in 2000 alone. (Turner, 2001: 1)

By 2001, however, Ottawa's two biggest high-tech employers (Nortel and JDS Uniphase) experienced dramatic decreases in their stock values (Turner, 2001). Large numbers of layoffs marked the beginning of the burst for the high tech bubble.

Given that the larger project explores the conditions and circumstances of work⁷ change and the capacity of individuals/ households to respond to change within the context that I have just described, my project takes up a very different set of questions.

⁷ In this project, work is broadly defined. It includes paid job, volunteer work, unpaid carework and work-related training and education.

Beginning with an interest in portioning off those interviews that were with young adults, I became interested in narrative threads that were apparent in all of the interviews that I examined. Although the respondents were not asked directly to reflect on their *relationship* to their own future, when they described on-going training- and work-related struggles and their aspirations for the next five years (see Appendix B), a theme concerning the strain and anxiety in their efforts to locate themselves on a work trajectory emerged. From there I developed a focus on their orientation to their own futures. Of the interviews with young adults, therefore, I selected the twenty that articulated some sort of orientation to the future. My dissertation project thus differs from the larger project both in terms of the population that I am studying (a sub-group of the larger data collection) and the ontological and epistemological preoccupations of the query. Rather than analyzing the backward glance of the respondents, I am interested in how they look forward.

My specific involvement in the broader research project involved conducting a review of literature on temporary employment agencies, employment legislation, temp agency promotional material, and a survey of temp agencies with offices in the Ottawa region. My participation with the project interviews included collaborating on the development of the questionnaire, contributing to the recruitment of interview participants, assisting with one of the pilot interviews as a notetaker, acting as notetaker for an additional nineteen interviews, and taking the lead in conducting twenty-four interviews. Additionally, I led two of the follow-up interviews and assisted as notetaker on the third follow-up interview. Altogether, I was directly involved in forty-seven

interviews. Of those interviews selected for my own analysis, I posed the questions in seven of the interviews and was the notetaker in two of the interviews.

In terms of the data analysis portion of the process, I collaborated on the development of a set of analytical tools used for this project. Furthermore, I participated in on-going conversations about the reflexive component of working as a team and collaborated in preparing and presenting conference materials and published articles⁸ in order to report on our findings.

Data Analysis

In chapter three, I examine and analyze the public, conceptual and meta-narratives in the relational setting. By focusing on ‘new’ elements in the relational setting – expansion of post-secondary education, a preoccupation with youth unemployment, and a reconfiguration of employment relations – I assess the connection between changing social relations and temporalities. Taking as my starting point that political and economic discourse and institutional manifestations are social creations, I identify salient, key elements across sites in the relational setting. To understand the character of *the times we are living in*, the time parameters capture the significant period of the end of the expansion of the welfare state through the 1960s and 1970s and the shift to neo-liberalism in the 1980s to present in Canada.

The key elements in policies and policy analyses that I have selected capture a logic of development. This logic consolidates what otherwise could be viewed as

⁸ Publications from this project include previously mentioned Siltanen, Scobie and Willis (forthcoming); also Siltanen, Janet, Willow Scobie and Alette Willis (under review). “Flows, Scrambles, Eddies and Whirlpools.” *Canadian Journal of Sociology*; and Siltanen, Janet, Alette Willis and Willow Scobie (forthcoming). “Separately Together: Working Reflexively as a Team.” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*.

independent trajectories. The meta-analyses, literature reviews and analysis of surveys that inform this discussion thus present a dominant character and interactive formulation of priorities and objectives (i.e. work).

Chapters four and five report on a sub-set of individuals who participated in the SSHRC-funded project entitled ‘Social Citizenship and the Transformation of Work’ in the city of Ottawa, Canada between 2001 and 2003. The research team consisted of Janet Siltanen as principal investigator, three other faculty members at Carleton University (Wallace Clement, Hugh Armstrong and Jay Drydyk) and nine graduate students. The principal investigator and four of the graduate students, including myself, formed the on-going core of the research team. Interviews were conducted in pairs in various combinations of the core research team, with one leading the interview and the other taking notes. Each interview was recorded with two cassette recorders on standard size tapes. During the interview, the second member of the research team took and wrote up notes, creating a preliminary profile of the respondents, summary comments of their responses to the questions, and some analytical comments. For the purposes of my thesis, all twenty of the interviews were transcribed verbatim.⁹

As a research team, the core group conducted rounds of analysis in order to identify preliminary and more complex portraits of the research respondents, how people were placed along a life course path of work and household characteristics, and the kinds of change they had experienced. The initial rounds were intended to identify gaps in the characteristics of the respondents so that we could recruit to fill those gaps. Subsequent rounds of analysis focused on identifying themes in the experience of change. The

⁹ I recruited and paid someone experienced with the demands of qualitative research material transcription (respecting the confidentiality of the respondents) to transcribe the interviews. I asked her to note all of the words and pauses in the transcripts.

research group worked together to create analytical categories in order to illustrate the emerging patterns of inequalities in people's abilities to absorb and create change, to engage critically with the linearity of life course analysis, and to animate the experiences we were examining.

My own analytical process drew upon the depth of my familiarity with the content of the interviews after these rounds of exploration with the research team. Due to the manageable number of interviews and my preference for hardcopy materials, my analytical strategy involved identifying and highlighting patterns in the respondent accounts by using colour pencils and a ruler. Although working with a larger collection of data would have made this impossible¹⁰, I benefited from the privacy of my work space and the ability to spread these materials over every flat surface available. The luxury of being able to leave these materials out in a secure place enabled me to examine and re-examine the colour coded patterns over an extended period of time.

Respondent Profiles¹¹

Of the total 101 interviews conducted in Ottawa, Ontario between 2001 and 2003, there were forty-six respondents between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five years. Of this group of forty-six, twenty respondents were selected for transcription and analysis because of their involvement in flexible work relationships and education and training schemes. As previously stated, this group of twenty specifically described an orientation to the future. This group of twenty range in age between 24 and 32 years and their education credentials include the following: one has an incomplete college diploma; two respondents have college diplomas; four have Bachelor degrees and one has an

¹⁰ Although in this case, the small number of interviews meant that it was possible to work with the hardcopies, social scientists have found it useful to incorporate data analysis software in their project.

¹¹ See Appendix A for a summary of this information.

incomplete Bachelor degree; five have graduate degrees and an additional respondent was in the process of completing a graduate degree at the time of the interview; five of the respondents have combined university degrees and college diplomas, and one respondent has a college diploma, a university Bachelor degree and a graduate degree.

The breakdown of their employment status includes six with full-time employment (one of whom has signed a contract but was completing her diploma at the time of the interview), one works part-time, eight on contract, three are self-employed or freelance, one is a student, and one is unemployed. Ten of the respondents work and/or study in the information technology sector (both full-time students are included in this group).

In terms of income, four respondents did not report their income; two do not have any income; one earns \$15,000 - \$24,000; four earn \$25,000 - \$34,000; four earn \$35,000 – 44,000; two earn \$45,000 - \$55,000; and three earn \$55,000 or more.

The group of twenty is evenly divided by gender with ten men and ten women. Their ethnic backgrounds are comprised of six who immigrated to Canada as children (3 from Asia, 1 from the Middle East, 1 from Eastern Europe, 1 from Western Europe), thirteen Canadian born Anglophones and one Canadian born Francophone. In terms of the types of households in this group at the time of the interview, one respondent lives with their family of origin, four live by themselves, five live with roommates, six with a partner and four live with a partner and children.

All identifying details have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of the respondents, including employer and institution names.

Conclusion

Our understanding of the relationship between interests, experiences and subject locations are socially constituted and expressed through narratives. Narrative interpretations of the ‘self’, the context or relational setting and conceptual meanings of temporalities favour a particular discourse of order and linearity. Analyses of narratives reveal, therefore, the dominant interpretations and discursive efforts to coordinate with this narrative. Specifically, experiences of uncertainty and insecurity are likely to cause stress and anxiety, for example, and one hopes that these are temporary and transitory and not continuous and long-term. The desirability of stability and uncertainty operate within emplotted stories of typical or normative life course trajectories in contrast with those that are clearly undesirable.

In the proceeding chapters I will demonstrate that a dominant narrative concerning the relational setting, including trends and policies pertaining to education/ training and employment and individual experiences privileges a particular notion of success – being a worker. The possibilities of focusing on other trajectories are minimized within the dynamics between ontology and the relational setting.

In order to link this discussion to broader issues of social justice and equality it is essential to examine the narratives that constitute our ideas of adulthood and appropriate future aspirations. Rather than contribute to a taxonomy of ‘good’ jobs and ‘bad’ jobs, this methodological approach emphasizes the interpretive stories that emerge from sites that are relevant to the construction of ontology and the relational setting. Therefore, the focus of this analysis is not about assessing the impact of neo-liberal flexible work conditions, but about the temporal complexity of life trajectories, particularly in terms of young adults’ expectations and experiences. This is integral to concerted efforts to

address injustices in order to avoid reinforcing narratives of worker-identity. By critically engaging with a normative discourse of linear life progress, the relationship between biography and structure can be understood as a mutually constitutive set of narratives informed by particular interpretations of temporalities and life landmarks. Within this framework, ‘movement’ is desirable when it involves the attainment or achievement of something, such as a degree, a job, or financial independence.

Within the context of a relational setting, a discernible pattern emerges concerning the narrative character of social policies and policy discourse. While avoiding a claim about a *singular* organizing principle across all policies, I argue that a pattern exposes a specific narrative about the convergence of political and economic interests. In this chapter, I demonstrate how this political and economic context forms the relational setting in which ontological, public, conceptual and meta-narratives contribute to the construction of particular subjectivities.

Chapter Three – Context: The Relational Setting

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to demonstrate that public, conceptual and meta-narratives privileging work trajectories characterize the context in which the respondents for this study live and interact. Chapters four and five explore the ontological narrative of worker identities, and this chapter sets up that conversation by examining some of the specifics of the relational setting (having temporal and spatial dimensions; patterns of relationships among institutions; political and economic practices) in which these ontologies emerge.

The emplotment of the constituent elements of the practices and planning mechanisms that form the relational setting highlight the significance of the terms and conditions of the economy and of work. The plotting of these elements tells a story of consolidation, such that observations interweave eruptions of new or altered terms and conditions within a singular narrative of temporal movement and change. The dominant aspects of the relational setting that I examine here thus consider consolidation or convergence to be a function of temporal movement. To pursue a trajectory towards a desirable future thus requires that agency focus on planning and forecasting in order to meet objectives.

The public and conceptual narratives that further constitute the relational setting reinforce meta-narratives concerning time and movement. This movement is understood to be linear and rational, wherein individuals relate to this movement and see their own position in relation to this dynamic (see chapters four and five). Dominant narratives dictate that individual positions fall on a continuum between stability/certainty and insecurity/uncertainty, and further presume that linear movement through time is

constituted as intentional, planned and pre-known. Within this framework, the relational setting is relevant as a site and vehicle for the expression of public and conceptual narratives that demonstrate how relationships at the level of institutional and policy formations, as well as public and cultural narratives, foreground the link between the capacity of an individual to move in a linear fashion with institutions and policies. Planning and projecting are attentive to the future of the successful attainment of objectives (work) and analytical conclusions frequently draw broad strokes based on previous patterns and recommend a ‘fix and (return to) stabilize’ approach. I contrast this with an interpretation of the future that is open to chance and multiple possibilities (I take up this discussion in more detail in chapter six).

By critically engaging with the character of the movement of social structures and practices, on one level this chapter is a critique of the idea of path determinism¹² and assumptions about the determinant role of historical characteristics in the broad relational setting. By this I refer to the perceived relationship between pre-formed notions of outcome and prescriptive deterministic courses of action. In reference to the relational setting, this means that the scope of its activities, such as state policies and legislation, are to be understood as having a trajectory or set of trajectories that move through time on a continuous course. On another level, this chapter examines the discourse surrounding ‘new’ or changing structural elements (such as an increase in ‘non-standard’ forms of work) and locates it within the framework of this study. In spite of the potential for flexible or ‘non-standard’ forms of work to open up the future to multiple trajectories and

¹² ‘Path dependency’ is the idea that once countries begin certain trajectories, there is a kind of ‘lock in’ created by constituencies with interests in defending the status quo, with ever increasing returns to established lines of development (Orloff, 2003).

foci, I will demonstrate that success narratives remain entrenched in the pursuit of specific normative modalities of work horizons.

My approach to analyzing the institutional practices in the relational setting focuses on the intersections between politics, economics and other broad social relations. An element that becomes apparent in these dynamics is the thrust of a particular set of ideologies. One way to articulate these ideologies is to look at work, or more specifically, explore the qualities and conditions of working for pay. ‘Work’, within this rubric, operates as both a concept and a descriptor capturing a range of activities performed in exchange for remuneration as well as identifying a normative orientation to one’s role and aspirations. As a descriptor, ‘work’ speaks to the significance of the material experience of this activity as an on-going commitment; as a concept, ‘work’ is also abstract. ‘Work’ is not only something that is performed, it also defines a way to be: I am a worker; I am becoming a worker. The relationship between this component of being/becoming and a presumed understanding of the future calls into question a set of concerns in terms of how conversations are framed across these elements as well as how the context that contains these dynamics is understood. Furthermore, the overlay of specific ideological interpretations of ‘change’ frame the engagement with the material experience of work as a site of ‘changing’ qualities and conditions, as well as underlying normative notions of activity that reflect a particular set of ideas concerning success and measures of success.

The movement of individuals towards a future horizon as a mode of objective achievement is, as I have been arguing, most frequently articulated as a work space. Along this line, education and training are mobilized as integral components of

guaranteeing the arrival of this horizon. As I will explore throughout this chapter, strategies emerge that both maintain and reinforce this assumption, including policy re-configurations (such as the expansion of the post-secondary education sector), normative modes of activity (emphasis on seeking and attaining work) and consumption (purchasing work opportunities from temp agencies). I argue that the contexts and currents that produce these strategies are not about change and transformation, but instead speak to the wholesale mobilization of individual and structural components in order to maintain a semblance of continuity of a specific orientation to social activity. Therefore, contrary to arguments that highlight evidence of the emergence of unpredictability and chance, this chapter points to the continuity of a discourse of containing uncertainty in the interest of a broader project of progress, development and the articulation and attainment of normative goals.

As such, this chapter identifies and describes elements of the context or relational setting in which social narratives about ‘success’ are produced. The configurations of institutional and discursive sites are linked to each other and to individuals, articulated through public narratives. Contained within and running through the public narratives are narratives about the relationship between the present and the past, the significance of a specific set of characteristics and circumstances in the present, and the relationship between the present and the future. The interconnection between individual and institutional temporalities can be understood in terms of trajectories, thus drawing a line through temporal dimensions (past, present, future) and identifying the stories that describe the movement forward through time of individual experiences and institutional agenda.

In Section One, I examine four decades (from the 1960s up to and including the 1990s) of policy focus and practice that were specifically attentive to getting people into jobs, particularly young adults. These time parameters are relevant because they mark a period of expansion of the post-secondary education sector, which coincided with rising unemployment rates. Interwoven throughout and informing these practices and discourse are public, conceptual and meta-narratives concerning ‘growth’, ‘change’, work as a normative activity, and an over-arching interpretation of movement through time as a linear and chronological process.

In Section Two, I highlight the paradoxical relationship between a reconfiguration of the present in preparation for a future that is unknown. Using the example of temporary employment to illustrate, I argue that the conditions and circumstances of work have been transformed in the interest of securing a predictable profit margin/ expenditure rate on the part of employers. In conjunction with a legislative environment that either explicitly favours employers and/or fails to protect workers, increasing numbers of workers, particularly young workers, experience contingent and precarious work relations. Although not explicitly focused on young adults, the section on flexibilization provides an important background context to the decision-making and circumstances of the interview respondents. I also use this discussion to demonstrate that a perceived tension between contingency and stability is a narrative device that articulates a particular understanding of time. Within this ‘continuum’ of temporal experiences, ‘temporary’ or ‘transitory’ strategies suggest that a present dominated by uncertainty can be exploited in order to make the future knowable and calculable. This runs contrary to my view that the future is, by its very nature, indeterminate.

Section One - The Experiences of Youth in Canada: Four Decades of Change and Continuity

I examine four decades in Canada for this chapter: the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. By looking specifically at a range of reports, responses and academic analyses, I highlight a set of policies and practices intent on getting young adults into jobs. I describe the material context and demonstrate that institutional practices and policies inter-relate around efforts to promote work activities. I argue that these practices and policies reflect and reinforce universal and particular contextual/public narratives concerning the constitution of a worker identity. Furthermore, my analysis demonstrates that conceptual and meta-narratives within policy documents and studies articulate the same dominant theme. Within these documents, ‘young adults’ or ‘youth’ are typically individuals between the ages of 14/15 and 24/25 years. These ages are relevant to this discussion because they either implicitly or explicitly inform a set of associated expectations with early adult stage markers such as school completion, job attainment, as well as relationship and family formation.

Mapping a connection between age, transition and historical period, Anisef and Axelrod (1993) point to the 1960s in Canada as having been characterized by a number of transformative elements. They argue that the 1960s marked a period of sustained economic growth, resulting in an expansion phase for universities that benefited both from government expenditures and the ability to capitalize on a widespread belief that investment in human resources, including education, would contribute to economic development and higher standards of living for all Canadians. At the same time, the expanding public sector was recruiting university degree holders into public service positions, including school teaching, health and welfare. Documenting some of the

changes that had occurred by the early 1970s, members of the Committee on Youth (1971) identify concerns that were expressed by respondents to their study in terms of keeping up with technological change, an increase in applied 'technics,' urbanization, the role of the mass media, stressful ways of life, and unequal distribution of life chances. Furthermore, the political context in Canada and responses to political currents in the United States affected faith in the value of higher education during the 1970s and into the 1980s, challenged by critical student responses and protests, as well as shifting concerns and discourse regarding the level of public expenditures and deficits (Anisef and Axelrod, 1993). In addition to the relational relevance of the economic and political context, household dynamics were also shifting with opportunity structures and conditions: "While people worried about the 'empty nest' syndrome in the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s are marked by an increasing number of young adults who remain or have returned home because they are unemployed or underemployed" (HRDC, 1994: 7).

Changes in social expectations in terms of women's involvement in paid employment are also implicated in changes in the relational setting. Women and men mobilized around a number of issues concerning justice for women, including equal recognition of women's qualities and contributions:

The groups which called themselves women's liberation brought into Canadian feminism for the first time a large infusion of younger women, students, or ex-students. These in turn brought with them, from the student movement, a significant commitment to a Marxist or at least an economic, class-oriented analysis of women's situation. (Black, 1993: 154)

As a result of this orientation, women's groups, for example, focused some of their energy on the rights of women as workers and were able to convince governments to implement employment equity measures, even if these were slow to come and mainly

voluntary (Black, 1993). As an illustration of the social context from which these changes occurred, Gaskell (1992) interviewed young men and women in the 1970s and found that all of the youth assumed that the young women in their cohort would spend a short time at paid work and would soon become involved in child-rearing as a full-time occupation. For the women in Gaskell's study, putting family above paid employment was not simply a matter of fitting themselves into the dominant culture, but a reflection of their secondary place in the labour force: their probable earnings would only net them 60 cents on their male colleagues' dollar. The limited availability of child care also placed constraints on their job planning. The young men in her study articulated a traditional view of the division of labour in the home: the men would go out and work for pay and their wives would stay home and look after the household. Gaskell adds that the broader social discourse in the 1970s and 1980s maintained the view that women's limited contributions were a reflection of their lack of skill. This narrative justified a clustering of women at the lowest level of the occupational hierarchy, both in terms of pay and perceived responsibility (Gaskell, 1992).

By 1981, however, government officials began to recognize that multi-earner families were increasing and the percentage of households relying on just one income were substantially on the decline (Employment and Immigration, 1981). Although publicly recognizing a need for structures that would create equitable employment opportunities, a 'skill acquisition' narrative pre-empted an explicitly interventionist and supportive framework:

To the extent that these groups acquire a greater diversity of skills and experience, equity will be increased, labour market adjustment processes will occur more smoothly and the economy will be able to adapt more easily to

changes in the industrial and geographic structure of economic activity.
(Employment and Immigration, 1981: 16)

A story of changing contexts for women and work narratives also included a rapid and prolonged rise in rates of marriage dissolution and a reduction and compression of child bearing years. This story emphasizes the enabling significance of changing household and fertility pressures on women in relation to employment commitments:

Low levels of fertility have gone hand in hand with major increases in both divorce and remarriage over the past two decades. The odds are stacked against a young woman's raising three or four children and staying at home to do it, with a husband providing the family's only income. (Jones *et al.*, 1990: 12)

These authors further argue that a woman's age at first birth is a critical predictor of subsequent life events. Examining changes in fertility rates for over a century, they point out that a decline in fertility began in North America and Europe in 1871 and has not reversed, with an exceptional decline during the 1930s and a baby boom after WWII (Jones *et al.*, 1990). They also highlight historical patterns of gender convergence during the late teens and early twenties, but that significant changes can be observed in terms of a divergence when women pass the age of thirty:

The contrast between generations is even stronger if we compare the marital, parental, and occupational *changes* that women make between the ages 30 and 35, or 35 and 40. The current generation of young women is not just varied, it is also enormously fluid. These young women are much likelier than their mothers to do different things at ages 30, 35, and 40, for example. (Jones *et al.*, 1990: 56, emphasis in original)

At the same time, men's labour force participation rates have also changed. In 1977, male labour force participation was very high at all ages and for all levels of educational attainment, "but by 1985, at every age and education level, men were less likely to be in the labour force than they had been in 1977" (Jones *et al.*, 1990: 60).

Training and Education

Providing security and opportunity for Canadians in the future means investing in their skills, in their knowledge and capacity to learn... good skills are an essential part of the social safety net of the future. (Finance Minister Paul Martin, cited in Riddell, 2003: 5)

A survey of policy analysis documents that consider both broad and specific concerns with respect to education and training policies identify the 1960s as the beginning of the phase of formal higher education expansion in Canada (Ostry, 1972; Davies, 1986; Gaskell and Rubenson, 2004). Growth in enrolment numbers and substantial increases in government funding reflected an idea supported by institutions such as the Economic Council of Canada that an abundant supply of highly educated ‘manpower’ was a pre-requisite to economic growth (Ostry, 1972).

Materialization of this objective is evident in increasing participation rates in post-secondary education. Between 1960 and 1980, for example, “labour force participants with university degrees increased from 4.5 to 10.5 percent and those with college certificates or diplomas increased from 4.0 to 12.5 percent” (Employment and Immigration, 1981: 153). Furthermore, “[a]ll evidence indicates that general annual participation rates in Canadian adult education have increased greatly from about 4 percent in 1960 to 20 per cent in 1983” (Livingstone, 1993: 91-92). In terms of university enrolment, in “1983, 143,700 university degrees were granted in Canada, an increase of 30 percent since 1975” (Anisef and Axelrod, 1993). More recently, research indicates that the national average of university degree holders in Canada is now up to 21 percent (Riddell, 2003).

In terms of allotment of financial responsibility for all types of post-secondary education, in July, 1964 the federal government passed the *Canada Student Loans Act*. Federal government support to individual students for post-secondary studies thus came

in the form of guaranteeing loans and coverage of the interest payable on those loans until six months after studies were completed or terminated. The Department of Finance made it clear that Student Loans are based on the principle that parents and/or the student are primarily responsible for bearing the cost of post-secondary education. During the initial period of the program, provincial governments agreed to supplement federal student loans with non-repayable grants (Committee on Youth, 1971).

Financial responsibility for post-secondary education raises two further aspects of this issue, namely the extension of dependence of post-secondary students on their families and whether post-secondary education is a privilege or a right. On the first point, up to this period it had been assumed that responsibility for funding education fell to the state for primary and secondary education and transferred to individuals and families for post-secondary education. Within this framework, the pursuit of post-secondary education and employment were equally viewed as choices to be made by adults and therefore education was to be viewed as a privilege (Committee on Youth, 1971). The third issue, linked to the first two, arose as a concern about funding for young women: do they have the same negotiating power within households in attaining support for post-secondary education? Across the board, however, the material reality for individuals pursuing post-secondary education involves an increasing strain as the costs rise and greater portions are shifted to students (Hemingway and McMullen, 2004). “Between 1986/87 and 2000/01, for example, government support for universities decreased by 4.5 percent, while revenue from private sources, primarily student fees, rose 167 percent” (Hemingway and McMullen, 2004: 5). Furthermore, post-secondary education cost

increases and movement from grants to loans that occurred in the mid-1990s are reflected in Canada's graduates' rising debt levels (Hemingway and McMullen, 2004).

Youth and Unemployment

Attempts to isolate a set of causal or intervening factors that lead to unemployment reflect both broad structural and targeted efforts to find fault in specific dynamics. From a broad, structural perspective, Fortin *et al.* (1995) argue that minimum wages, union density, unemployment insurance regulations, terms of trade, demographic pressures,¹³ or a combination of the above are thought to influence unemployment. Conversely, Trist (1979) supports the view that the advent of work-related technologies are responsible for pushing people out of jobs: "... the unemployment effects of the micro-processor revolution have convinced me that full market place employment as we have understood it under the old paradigm will no longer be possible" (169). For young adults, however, unemployment is not only a matter of job loss but also a factor of being able to gain job entry. According to a review of Statistics Canada data, youth groups had the highest level of unemployment by the early 1970s (Committee on Youth, 1971). Of those who were actively looking for work, 13.6% of Canadian youth 14 to 24 years were unemployed. Later that decade, the Canadian Council on Social Development (1977) argued that young people's employment opportunities were even further in decline. By 1979-1980, youth accounted for 46% of all of the unemployed (Battle, 1979). What is also significant in these figures for this time period is that it calls into question the impact of efforts leading up to this point: the expansion of the post-secondary education and training sector in the 1960s and 1970s did not translate into work opportunities for graduates (Denton *et al.*, 1980). Through consultation with young people, the Committee

¹³ By demographic pressures, Fortin *et al.* (1995) refer to the increase of individuals in the labour force as a percentage of the total population.

on Youth (1971) found that unemployment constituted their single greatest problem and concern.

On this point, the Committee on Youth (1971) report argues that high rates of youth unemployment reflect their relative inefficiency in performing job searches as well as their natural inclination to experiment before settling into permanent employment. Youth are also vulnerable in the pecking order, a reflection of the ‘last hired, first fired’ adage. Speaking to this pattern, the Ministry of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) (1994) notes that in any given year approximately five million people move in and out of jobs, and of those, 1.5 million are young adults.

The Dodge Report (1981), a document prepared for Employment and Immigration Canada, suggests that the early eighties was a key period of unemployment. Patterns of occupational demand were changing and several sectors were adversely affected. More general growth in the labour force had also levelled off and begun to decline, and the economy was showing signs of slowing down in terms of growth. Denton *et al.* (1980) confirm that above average unemployment rates for young people were much higher by the end of the 1970s and that this highlighted a conspicuous trend.

In a piece published in 1991, Ashton and Lowe focused on a different set of changes in the employment relationship: the increasingly insecure nature of employment, the relative rise in the numbers of casual or temporary jobs, part-time jobs and marginalized workers. They point out that it is not simply enough to examine youth unemployment, but also the types and quality of employment being attained (Ashton and Lowe, 1991).

In 1994, HRDC noted that people were entering the labour force later and taking up employment opportunities that were more precarious than in previous periods. There were also fewer young people working full-time. These trends raised a related set of demographic concerns, specifically considering that there were fewer young people in the mid-nineties than there were in the previous generation (HRDC, 1994). Although those between 15 and 24 years at this time were the most highly educated generation Canada had seen to date, nearly one sixth were unemployed and the proportion of youth unemployment outside of urban centres was even higher. “Many of Canada’s youth are facing a major income problem, with repercussions for their future family formation and development.” (HRDC, 1994: 22).

Public and Conceptual Narratives – Training and Education

Within these institutional approaches and policy discourse, ‘growth’ is mobilized as a two-pronged phenomenon with a reciprocal set of motivations and dynamics. ‘Growth’ in the formal education sector translates into an internal logic of increasing opportunities (more jobs for professionals who in turn prepare students to find jobs) and an external benefit by presumably improving the productivity and innovativeness of the working population. However, although the last few decades have witnessed an expansion and increased enrolment in post-secondary education, strong investment in Canada’s education system has not translated into a strong economy (Gaskell and Rubenson, 2004). As the world economy faltered in the 1970s and 1980s, a disappointment concerning an expected connection between increasing rates of formal education in the working population (human capital theory) and the anticipated impact on the productivity of a ‘skill-enhanced’ working population (Gaskell and Rubenson, 2004). Within this context, Morissette and Picot’s (2005) observation is an interesting one:

Since the workforce has become more experienced and better educated over the last two decades, one would have expected the incidence of low-paid work to fall over time. This decline was not observed because the proportion of low-paid workers rose *within* demographic groups. Specifically, the incidence of low-paid work rose significantly among the less educated, young workers (25-34 years) and among recent immigrants. (Morissette & Picot, 2005: 9)

Rates of low-paid work among recent immigrants thus demonstrate clearly that not only is pure human capital theory inapplicable, but that other factors intersect with formal education, skill acquisition and job readiness.

A more nuanced justification for investing in formal education and training in Canada identifies a correlation between formal training and bringing a set of skills to the labour market that foregrounds adaptability (Riddell, 1986). In a chapter entitled, “Adapting to Change: Labour Market Adjustment in Canada: An Overview,”¹⁴ Riddell argues that policy focus and planning should reflect the turnover of opportunities that result from economic change. He says, “Change is a pervasive feature of economic life. A large turnover of enterprises occurs as new firms start up, existing firms vacate some markets and enter new ones, and some enterprises die” (Riddell, 1986: 9). One of the key approaches to readying a population for change, therefore, is by emphasizing adaptability to changing requirements, and education and training thus play a key role in equipping individuals with a capacity to respond accordingly (Riddell, 1986).

From a critical perspective but along a similar vein, the assumed direct relationship between input and the rate of return on investment in education raises some important questions. If we carry on with this metaphor, the assurance of pecuniary returns to the individual and/or society may not necessarily be a direct correlate of education nor can they be guaranteed (Handa and Skolnik, 1972). Beyond this

¹⁴ This piece is from Riddell’s submission to the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada, 1986.

framework, this critique questions the direct association between education and occupation and, directly tying into the specifics of this project, manpower forecasting.¹⁵

The ‘training gospel’ or learning for a living discourse, overlays an active government approach to facilitating strong attachments between individuals and the workforce (Shields, 1996). Supporting the notion that if individuals attain the correct tools they will be able to compete in a high-skill, high-wage economy (Swift and Peerla, 1996), this ‘gospel’ reinforces the perception that training improves job choice (Shields, 1996). Conversely, when individuals struggle to find work opportunities and sufficient income, Betcherman *et al.* (1998) argue that a vicious circle of skills deficit, under-investment and their declining employability prevents them from improving their situation.

According to this logic, there is an assumption that training should be directly responsive to labour market demands (Handel, 2003). Within the general population, this translates into a particular orientation to the purpose of education and training and its relationship to the job market:

Of those surveyed, 37 percent believe that a trade or apprenticeship program, or even a high school diploma with technical experience, is the best preparation for the future labour market. Another 35 percent feel that a technical college diploma is the best form of preparation for the modern economy. In contrast, only 25 percent feel that a university degree is the best form of job preparation for the future (Angus Reid Poll, 1998 cited in Walters, 2004: 5).

The marriage of these components: education and work – collapse the range of possible learning outcomes and the attainment of a future work horizon is cast as the main motivation. The recent construction of ‘knowledge’ or ‘information’ skills is an

¹⁵ Manpower planning or forecasting recommends that students take future labour market opportunities into account (Handa and Skolnik, 1972).

expression of the ascendancy of both a set of workplace technologies and a particular skill set (Dunk, 1996). Alternatively,

Despite reporting possession of similar levels of skill, liberal education graduates are afforded significantly less opportunity to utilize these skills in the workplace. Moreover, liberal graduates are disadvantaged in terms of their initial salaries and wages: as a group they earn less than their vocational counterparts. This is almost certainly related to differences in the value employers accord the skills of vocational and liberal graduates. Despite the fact that liberal graduates improve their economic position in the labour force at a faster rate than do vocational graduates..., they are initially disadvantaged by the recruitment practices of employers” (Lin *et al*, 2000: 40).

A further component of the training gospel is a notion of self-responsibility in the procurement of appropriate skills (Betcherman *et al.*, 1998). This has enabled the emergence of a ‘training market’ as provinces witness the expansion of the private training industry¹⁶ (Betcherman *et al.*, 1998).

Private Vocational Training Schools (PVTs) are commercial enterprises that provide employment-related course packages. Profits are derived entirely from student tuition and government contracts. Most PVTs operations are small, although a number of them are franchises or large training schools owned by a U.S. firm. They offer flexibility in scheduling of training, both in terms of class hours and start dates throughout the year. PVTs also try to keep the duration of each course program to a minimum (Gallagher and Sweet, 1999). As the following PVTs promotional material demonstrates, the academic product delivers a guaranteed employment horizon:

The continued success of CDI College is mirrored in the success of our graduates. Our goal is to provide the necessary tools for students to acquire gainful employment in their chosen fields of study. We give students the vital skills that are needed to thrive in the classroom, in the job market and ultimately in the corporate world.

¹⁶ Regulation of private training schools is the domain of provinces. Governments may be further involved through individual expenditures in the form of social assistance, Employment Insurance, Workers’ Compensation, and student loan programs (Gallagher and Sweet, 1999).

Employers recruit at CDI College because they know they will find a talented pool of career-ready graduates. We don't just give our students the academic background they'll need to be successful; we also give them the hands-on experience to practice their skills and gain confidence in their abilities (CDI College, 2006: www.cdicollege.com).

The second citation further highlights the corporate aspect of this industry, both as a continuous and a growing element in the private training sector:

ITI Information Technology Institute is a leader in information technology (IT) education. ITI has been educating IT professionals for over 18 years and has thousands of alumni working around the world. Since 1984 we've been providing local, national and international companies with skilled IT professionals.

In November of 2001, ITI became the first Canadian acquisition for Education Management Corporation (EDMC). EDMC (www.edumgt.com) is among the largest providers of proprietary post-secondary education in the United States, based on student enrolment and revenue. EDMC's education institutions offer master's, bachelor's and associate's degree programs and non-degree programs in the areas of design, media arts, culinary arts and fashion. The Company has provided career-oriented education programs for over 35 years, and its Art Institutes (www.artinstitutes.edu) have graduated more than 125,000 students (Information Technology Institute (ITI), 2006: www.iti.com).

Public and Conceptual Narratives – Youth and Unemployment

As I have suggested, active government policy focuses on getting youth and young adults through education and training programs and onto a work trajectory. For example, in the early 1970s, the Federal Government also funded a network of Manpower Centres, setting up sites to provide employment support across the country (Committee on Youth, 1971). At the time of the Report, there were 365 Centres across Canada, offering everything from job retraining programs to summer employment links. Critics of this initiative found that the Manpower Centres operated as referral services for employers rather than as placement services for workers (Committee on Youth, 1971).

Whether from the perspective of the initiative or assumptions embedded in the response, unemployment signals an indication of poor government planning. Concepts

such as ‘manpower planning’ not only suggest that rational intentionality is always the solution, but also that there is a single, identifiable destination that requires locating the correct path: economic prosperity. Another example, the Occupational Training for Adults program, which began in 1967, involved academic upgrading and technical training with an ‘earn while you learn’ allowance, was designed with the intention of increasing work opportunities for the unemployed (Committee on Youth, 1971; Adams *et al.*, 1971). This program stream included Occupational Training Courses, the Apprenticeship Program and Training in Industry program. In order to participate in this program, however, individuals must have been out of school for at least twelve months, and in order to qualify for the training allowance they must have been in the labour force for at least three years or have at least one dependent (Committee on Youth, 1971; Adams *et al.*, 1971). “This rule was explicitly designed to exclude the young from the program, even though they make up an enormous percentage of the total unemployed” (Adams *et al.*, 1971: 95). Again, both the program creators and its critics assume that the *right* project will make a difference.

As a means of locating young adults both within normative work trajectory narratives and realizing personal future aspirations, paid employment is identified with contributing to society, meeting social obligations, attaining status, defining the self and providing a source of money (Committee on Youth, 1971). In early adulthood, Gaskell (1992) points out, earning an income means independence from parents, the emergence of adult status and the right to be taken seriously. One of the participants in her study of approximately eighty young men and women in Vancouver beginning in 1977 remarked,

This year I am my own person. I have my own life and I’ll run it myself. I have my own apartment. I feel like a totally new person. Last year I was dependent

on my parents. I figured that if they said no, that's no. And I had to listen to what they said. I feel really independent now, it's a crazy feeling. (Gaskell, 1992: 62)

Embedded within a narrative of work and an anti-unemployment discourse is a particular idea of success: independence that is derived from employment-generated income. Consistent with the narrative promises that were evident in the education and training materials, a notion of progress in order to achieve those objectives is clearly expressed as something that is definitely on the horizon. The question is just about how to get there.

Public and Conceptual Narratives – 'The Economy' as a Social Actor

One of the elemental factors within the attempt to identify and isolate components that enable or disable 'manpower' success and market growth has been to presume a logical and rational profile of the 'economy'. By imbuing the 'economy' with a fixed status as a deterministic constituent of the relational setting, within this framework it is calculable and knowable. The 'economy' is thus both an aggregate of market activities and a conceptual indicator that conveys patterns of productivity. As both an aggregate and an indicator, therefore, the 'economy' also assumes an amorphous quality that makes social patterns seem immediately explainable but proves that the profile of the 'economy' is social in nature. As the following citation demonstrates, the 'economy' is used as an explanatory device with only a vague reference to a clear definition:

Although there is little direct evidence, it is reasonable to infer that the rising relative unemployment rates of youth and adult women in the past fifteen years have been related to limits to the ability of the economy to absorb the extraordinary large numbers of new entrants and re-entrants to the labour market. (Employment and Immigration, 1981: 11)

In this illustration, the 'economy' is a place where people work. As a work setting, the 'economy's' ebb and flow either has the capacity to provide work opportunities or it does

not. And as a social actor, the 'economy' is to be understood as a neutral, reactive force. For example, the federally commissioned Committee on Youth (1971) asks: what is the point in investing in training schemes unless "the economy provides the sufficient over-all demand for labour" (16).

An examination of statistical data, however, may challenge assumptions about the apparent neutrality of the 'economy' to select and include or reject and exclude particular portions of the population. A direct correlative relationship between youth unemployment and a slow-down in the economy that occurred in the early 1980s, for example, challenges this position:

The recession of the early 1980s saw Canadian youth unemployment rates rise rapidly to 19.9 percent by 1983. Joblessness among the young might have climbed even further, but for the larger proportion of young people staying on in school. (Krahn *et al.*, 1993: 171)

These authors further note that youth unemployment increased in the 1990s, in spite of the fact that the youth cohort was smaller. Again, they argue, structural changes to the economy are significant causal factors.

Failures in the 'economy' are often described in the literature as economic recessions. Since this is a social analysis and not an economic analysis, my objective is not to interrogate the impact of U.S. political decisions, commodity prices, oil prices or inflation¹⁷ on the health of Canadian job structure. Instead, my goal is to highlight some of the ways in which 'growth' is mobilized as a desirable objective and thus frames the interpretation of the present setting. The solution to unemployment and inflation, Trist¹⁸ (1979) argues, is economic growth. This concept gains political potency when it reinforces strategies to make Canada a more favourable environment for private capital

¹⁷ Ostry (1984) argues that these factors lead to Canada's recession in the mid-1980s.

¹⁸ From the study, *Full Employment: Social Questions for Public Policy*.

formation (Novick,¹⁹ 1979) or to develop the market by reducing or eliminating minimum wage legislation, social benefits, and the power of trade unions (Drache and Cameron,²⁰ 1985). Concern for the well-being of the 'economy' thus translates into an the logic of capitalism:

In its simplest sense, improving productivity means producing more for less by using capital, labour and technology more efficiently. Business perceives 'productivity' as being synonymous with profits. (Drache and Cameron, 1985: xvi)

Similar to the framework used to interrogate unemployment, characteristics are examined to determine if current difficulties in the 'economy' will translate into dire future consequences (Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto,²¹ 1985). In the mid-1980s, for example, the Federal Government commissioned a series of studies on Canada's future prospects:

The studies are charged with the task of identifying the factors that are likely to have a critical influence on developments over the next several decades. They are to examine possible institutional changes and policy options that might offer prospects of improved economic performance. (Bernier *et al.*, 1984: 3)

In the report submitted by Bernier *et al.* (1984), the research suggests that the most appropriate policy stance to take in preparation for the future is to enable a flexible capacity to respond. Similarly, the Dodge Report²² (1981) concluded that in order to facilitate labour market adjustment in a changing industrial, geographic and occupational mix of economic activity, workers, and young workers in particular, must be directed towards areas that will be in high demand in the years to come. As such, the 'economy'

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ From *The Other MacDonald Report*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Commissioned by the Department of Employment and Immigration, set out to assess labour market developments for the proceeding decade and to create a formula in order to forecast labour market demand and supply.

assembles the interests of capital, government and workers. Furthermore, as the discussion in Section Two will demonstrate, a ‘flexibilized’ workforce is put forward as a solution to a cluster of seemingly inevitable developments.

Narrative Analysis

There are two central public narratives evident in the relations between policies and institutions. The first is a narrative that constitutes work as a normative mode of activity and the second public narrative addresses causal factors that determine work-related outcomes. By re-organizing government structures in order to create equitable employment opportunities, emphasizing skill acquisition through advanced education, instituting ‘manpower’ centres to provide job preparation support, and coordinating efforts to address unemployment, policies and institutions reinforce a normative model of work. This suggests, for example, that the creation of job choice through education and training is not equivalent to creating life choices. The range of choices is restricted to the parameters of employment.

Relatedly, a public narrative concerning causal factors that pertain to economic growth is based on a model of investment and pecuniary returns. In spite of the evidence that proves that human capital theory is incorrect (such as incidents of low-paid work amongst well-educated recent immigrants), policies and institutions draw a correlation between self-preparation/workforce preparation and an outcome measured in employment figures. Attempts to identify and isolate causes of unemployment, for example by examining the impact of technology, the relationship between training and employer demands, as well as the possession of job hunting and job retention skills, suggest that a strategic and logical life plan can be produced.

The conceptual narratives plot a particular story about growth, change and rationality. In the four decades examined here, a presumed correlative relationship emerges between highly educated ‘manpower’ and economic growth. This ‘growth’ narrative is based on an internal logic of increasing opportunities and enhanced levels of productivity and innovativeness. Riddell’s (1986) argument concerning ‘adaptability’ adds a nuanced view of economic growth, where a mutual evolutionary model (or the metaphor: a rising tide lifts all ships) is supplanted by an analysis of market shifts and employer turnover. Between the early 1960s and late 1990s, therefore, we see a ‘change’ narrative replace the ‘growth’ narrative, and preparedness becomes framed as a capacity to be equipped for new and emerging, as well as transforming, employer demands.

As I have demonstrated, a narrative of rationality is particularly evident in descriptions of the ‘economy’. Public and cultural narratives reveal a claim to truth about the economy that suggests that it is rational and formulaic. This claim to truth suggests that the future is calculable and knowable. The view that the ‘economy’ can be understood as a neutral and reactive force only serves to reinforce a notion of its coherence.

Overarching these changing and shifting narrative themes (particularly with respect to the conceptual narratives), there is a meta-narrative that is consistent and dominant. Our understanding of temporalities and movement is characterized by the relationship between linearity and rationality that reflects a narrative about the pursuit of success. This meta-narrative dictates that success is produced by the pursuit of a work trajectory. The public and conceptual narratives frame this pursuit in order to clarify that this requires planning, forecasting and intentionality. Public, conceptual and meta-

narratives thus converge in the relational setting in order to constitute an assemblage of future-making machines.

Section Two - The Contemporary Context: The Transformation of Work

An examination of the contemporary work setting in Canada is a story about change and context. As young adults contemplate and explore the work environment that awaits them, 'new' elements have re-defined normative employment relations. Critiques of current patterns focus on the themes of insufficient job/income security and the constitution of opportunity structures based on a 'traditional' terms of full-time, permanent work. Writing in 1968, Jamieson describes some of the hard won gains in the Canadian labour force, many of which have carried forward as a barometer of present experiences:

Canada has enjoyed an impressive rate of economic growth and a considerable rise in wages and living standards since World War II and earlier decades. Added to these were improved protective labour legislation, elimination of the more blatant types of exploitation, the formulation of more comprehensive social welfare and minimum income programs, and legislation that provided organized labour a higher and more secure degree of legal status and recognition. (3)

With many of these elements framing aspects of work expectations, 'work' operates simultaneously as a normative focus of activity and in itself possesses a set of normative characteristics of adult social life. Glucksmann (2000) argues that work is always a relational concept, disconnected from any essential, intrinsic or categorical definitions, and yet there is most definitely a 'norm' or 'standard' against which all experiences are assessed. The 'normal job' is characterized as a regular, full-time, full-year work schedule with one employer, decent rates of pay and working conditions (Veltmeyer and Sacouman, 1998; Vosko, 2006). 'Bad' jobs are 'flexible' forms of employment and

conditions of work such as part-time work schedules, short-term contracts, low rates of pay, few or no benefits and economic insecurity (Veltmeyer and Sacouman, 1998).

Within this framework, therefore, the constitution of a normative ideal distinguishes trajectories *through* and *to* good jobs in contrast with undesirable trajectories through bad jobs or into unemployment.

The 'bad' or 'nonstandard' work forms have increased their share of total employment: "Part-time work rose from 4 per cent of total employment in Canada in 1953 to 15 per cent by the mid-1980s" (Economic Council of Canada, 1990).

Furthermore:

Part-time and other forms of casualization and non-standard employment are seen as the result of consciously pursued corporate and state strategies designed to lower the direct and indirect costs of labour, both in terms of wages (which for part-timers are on average only 70 to 75 percent of full-time rates) and in terms of benefits (which generally do not accrue to those who work fewer than 30 hours a week). (Veltmeyer and Sacouman, 1998: 123)

In the 1980s, resource-dependent industries and communities worried about their futures (United Auto Workers, 1985). In the mid-1990s, the preoccupation in Canada's labour force shifted to the rise of 'nonstandard' work arrangements: temporary work, part-time work and self-employment accounted for one in three Canadian jobs (Schellenberg and Clark, 1996). By the late 1990s, Lefebvre (1998) observed that work conditions in Quebec for young adults included long periods of employment instability, hiring freezes, a reduction in the salaries of newcomers and less generous salary ladders. Focusing on the experiences of young adult women, McDaniel (2001) reports that in the early part of this decade younger women were finding jobs harder to get and that more were working for minimum wage.

The specific experiences of women within work relations have always at the very least challenged what is possible. In 1985, the arguments presented by the National Council of Welfare in their submission to the report, *Fighting Poverty: The Effect of Government Policy* are telling: “The increase in the labour force participation of wives – from 3.5 per cent in 1931 to 50.5 per cent in 1981 – is a major social and economic development” (1985: 65). As a result, “If her husband is out of work, her earnings help cushion the shock to family income” (National Council of Welfare, 1985: 65).

While this assumes a heterosexist normative model of adult women and men teaming up and sharing the pot, it also demonstrates that across constituent elements of social life, including normative ideas of work and gender roles, some of the important aspects of change involve the emergence of a breadth of social factors that result in changing statistical figures and social expectations.

More recently, Drew *et al.* (1998) suggest that there is an increasing trend for women’s working lives to resemble those of men. This is a reflection of both the harmonization downward of employment terms and conditions for men, as well as the upward movement of the numerical and temporal commitments of women (Drew *et al.*, 1998; Armstrong, 1996). For both women and men, however, the downward turn of employment terms and conditions is a result of the erosion of protective employment legislation and other related rights such as the right to organize (Elson, 1994). Broadly, all of these patterns affect a sense of security, the ability to make long-term personal choices, and a feeling of authority over our own time (Sainsbury, 2001). In response to the MacDonald Commission on Canada’s Future, the Canadian Mental Health Association (1985) points out that a sense of basic security is essential to well-being, “...

because insecurity about the requirements of a decent standard of living and a productive social role undermines people's enjoyment of life" (81).

The Casualization of Work: The Decline of the Standard Employment Relationship

Examining a global narrative of economic discourse and the phenomenon of globalization, Teeple (2000) argues that the transformation of the labour process within the context of the growing denationalization of capital and the expanding supranational regime of accumulation is the most vital aspect. In post-WWII Canada, protective employment legislation, premised on the standard employment relationship, flourished in a period when worker militancy was particularly high (Vosko, 2000). This model of the employment relationship, based on a male-dominated industrial workforce working nine to five, often in fixed workplaces, was a rallying point for wage policy, labour legislation and redistribution of wealth through welfare state programs (Vosko, 2000). Furthermore, this model was premised on a notion of the social wage - the breadwinner model of redistribution, such that a male was employed in a standard employment relationship and a female was in the home providing reproductive support.

Schellenberg and Clark (1996) elaborate on the theory of an international context of economic change as a result of the globalization of trade, the introduction of new technologies, the volatility of international markets and rapidly changing consumer demand. At the same time, all levels of government have undergone considerable restructuring (Schellenberg and Clark, 1996). This has resulted in a trimming down of the labour force and a redesign of the traditional employment relationships (Schellenberg and Clark, 1996). Jackson *et al.* (2000) further argue that high unemployment in the 1990s provided employers with an opportunity to restructure employment relationships:

“With many workers seeking the few available good jobs, employers have been able to ‘downsize’ their workforces and require those left behind to work harder and longer” (49).

Re-configured labour forces are increasingly premised on introducing and ensuring flexibility in their make-up. This means hiring fewer and fewer ‘permanent’ employees and incorporating a range of ‘non-standard’ work arrangements, including contract work, part-time work and self-employment (Schellenbger and Clark, 1996; Cranford and Vosko, 2006). Drache elaborates on the specifics of flexible work arrangements in the following description:

(1) Financial – mainly cost-cutting by slimming down the workforce, widely used in smokestack industries in decline; (2) functional – making more efficient use of permanent full-time employees through quality control, working smarter, continuous production; and (3) numerical flexibility –closer tailoring the size of the workforce to a firm’s use of part-time, contractual, and temporary personnel. (Drache, 1991: 258)

Furthermore:

Gender is embedded in the strategies that organizations use to achieve flexibility. ‘Enabling’ strategies of flexibility (those that upgrade skill and the employment relationship) are most often pursued in male-dominated workplaces, while ‘restrictive’ strategies (those that downgrade labour processes and the employment relationship) pervade female-dominated workplaces. (Rogers, 2000: 10)

On this point, Vosko (2000) argues that ‘restrictive’ strategies are increasingly a normative feature of work. These changes have had serious consequences for Canadian workers and their households (Schellenberg and Clark, 1996). In fact, research indicates that Canadians feel that they have lost control over their economic future (Schellenberg and Clark, 1996).

Flexible Work for a Price: Temporary Employment Arrangements

Within this context, Canadians have witnessed the institutionalization of the formalized temporary work relationship. A formalized temporary work relationship may involve a contractual relationship with an intermediary agent or temporary help company. In the context of individuals seeking an entrance to a work trajectory opportunity, the reality of the triangulated work purchaser-agent-seller dynamic is one in which the temp worker's capacity to negotiate work opportunities on their own terms is severely restricted. By negotiating power I refer to the ability to assess and pursue first-hand knowledge of work tenure possibilities. Thus given uncertain future horizons, temporary help companies, for example, strive to orchestrate and maintain their role as intermediaries both in order to ensure that their legal obligations toward their workers are ambiguous and to maintain the reigns on future possibilities. Within the promotional narrative, the temp worker is cast as an individual who has traded in a forty-hour work week in order to set their own pace and decide when and how often they want to work. Empirical research demonstrates, however, that temporary workers experience precariousness, characterized by uncertainty and insecurity (Vosko, 2000; Gindin, 1998; Anderson and Schenck, 1995). Trends suggest that the use of temporary workers is expanding, and that an increasing percentage of these are 'involuntarily' temporaries (Rogers, 2000).

The Temporary Work Relationship

As Parker (1994) highlights, there is a wide range of scenarios which qualify as 'temporary': day labourers, temporary farm workers, guest workers, labour pools, and seasonal or sessional workers (see also Cranford and Vosko, 2006). In this discussion I refer to temporary work in which an individual registers with a temporary help agency

and is primarily assigned clerical work in a firm or organization, in both the private and public sectors. Although over half of temporary workers are male, women account for approximately two-thirds of workers employed through temporary-help agencies (Schellenberg and Clark, 1996).

Negrey (1993) describes temporary help supply companies as labour brokers who charge employers a fee for using their products. “Temporary firms are fundamentally private-sector enterprises organized, justified, and driven by the profit-maximization goal they share with other private businesses” (Nollen and Axel, 1998: 24). Temporary work tends to be thus driven by employer, rather than employee, demand (Henson, 1996).

Within a broader context of casualized work, “data from the Labour Force Survey indicates that in 1998 a substantial proportion of jobs in Canada held by individuals aged 15-64 were non-standard: 19 percent were part-time, 10 percent were temporary, 5 percent were in multiple employment, and 12 percent were in own-account self-employment” (Gunderson and Riddell, 2000: 15). The authors further argue that when we remove the overlap, 34 percent of the workforce is in at least one of four types of non-standard work (Gunderson and Riddell, 2000). Additionally, temporary part-timers, according to Duffy and Pupo (1992), are frequently the most marginalized workers in the labour force and their employment is most precarious. Women, youth and individuals from marginalized groups are disproportionately represented in these precarious forms of work (Duffy and Pupo, 1992; Cranford and Vosko, 2006; Vosko, 2000; Henson, 1996). “[E]mployers have come to rely on the gender gap and job ghettos as entrenched institutions of the economy” (Drache, 1991: 263). Temporary workers can be hired on an hourly or piece-rate basis, and are simply let go when the work is complete or business

slows down (Henson, 1996). Monotonous and low-skill tasks tend to be shifted on to temporary workers, and workers who perform highly skilled work tend not to receive recognition (Rogers, 2000). As Rogers (2000) bluntly puts it, temporaries tend to get all of the “shitty” work. “Temporary agencies and their clients benefit from temporary workers’ education and work experience, but the temporary workers themselves do not” (Rogers, 2000: 28).

With respect to other vulnerable workers, agencies argue that temporary help work is a suitable means for immigrants to gain experience and exposure in the Canadian labour market (Vosko, 2000). In reality, racialized notions of skill and work ethic tend to reinforce a racialized division of labour: “[A]gencies (tend) to place immigrant workers and workers of colour in jobs at the bottom of the wage and occupational hierarchy” (Vosko, 2000: 191). Additionally,

Agencies use the ideology of upward mobility... through portraying temporary work as a good way for workers to get into a desirable organization or occupation. Temporary work is thus represented as a vehicle for workers to demonstrate their skills so that their talents can be discovered. (Rogers, 2000: 36)

It is also important to note that contract conditions amongst temporary workers are not universally precarious or disadvantageous for the worker. One of the interesting new developments in the temporary work industry is the wider range of sectors and occupations that are supplied by temporary help services:

For example, temporary help agencies place workers ranging from scientists, lawyers, and managers to computer programmers, clerical workers, sewers, and assemblers. Furthermore, the temporary help industry remains sex-segregated internally and is characterized by income polarization both between women and men and among women and men themselves, based largely on criteria related to race, immigration status, and age. (Vosko, 2000: 7)

In other words, an increasing proportion of temporary workers are highly skilled health care professionals, engineers, research and development scientists, and management and executive temps (Daly, 1997). The companies that sell their services seek to secure a niche in the marketplace by specializing in kinds of occupations²³ (Nollen and Axel, 1998).

Across these experiences, agencies try to sell flexibility as a benefit of temporary employment to prospective and current temporary workers (Henson, 1996). Adecco, a multinational 'staffing' agency, makes the following claims about temporary employment on their website:

In an age when society is gradually moving toward leisure and creative activities and away from the rigid confines of the traditional '9 to 5' work day, there are the 'career' temporaries who have traded the 40 hour work week for a life of freedom and control. They set their own pace and decide when and how often they want to work. (Adecco, 2000: www.adecco.com)

Spherion, another multinational temporary staffing agency, describes the casualization of the workforce as a reflection of a liberated workforce that seeks new experiences and opportunities (Spherion, 2000). On their website, Spherion includes the results of a study they commissioned on workforce trends. In the report, the authors conclude the following:

In 1998 Spherion benchmarked an emerging workforce dynamic – the existence of a new breed of employee whose workplace values and expectations are very different from what we've traditionally known. This new breed – the Emergent Workforce – crosses all age groups, gender and geography and, according to Spherion, one of the world's largest employers, is a revolutionary trend that is quickly changing the way companies attract, retain and motivate talent. (Spherion, 2000: www.spherion.com).

²³ Multinational companies such as Spherion have been aggressively buying smaller temporary help suppliers and retaining the company name and services in order to sell this specialized product as one of their 'brands.'

This new breed - the adventurer - the agencies contend, prefers the flexibility of the temporary employment relationship.

Contrary to this image, workers who join temporary work agencies define their involvement as an in-between, stop-gap or transitional measure and they are actively seeking permanent positions (Henson, 1996). When Henson (1996) probed his research participants for instances of exercising or benefiting from scheduling flexibility he found that such incidents were few and far between. Instead, his analysis shows that temporary workers are “seeking entry or re-entry positions into the full-time labour force, these individuals pursue clerical temporary employment as a last-resort income source as well as a job-seeking strategy” (Henson, 1996). Negrey’s (1993) research participants similarly reported that they had chosen temporary work as a last resort and most of them harboured hope that their temporary job might be offered to them permanently. Similarly, Parker’s research participants lamented the precariousness of their predicament:

Nearly all the temporary workers identified insecurity as the underlying problem of being employed on a temporary basis. Temporary workers routinely face uncertainty regarding when they will work, the length of their assignments, and the quality of co-worker and supervisory interaction, not to mention the numerous daily nuances in organizational procedures. (Parker, 1994: 112)

Unfortunately, “temporary help companies actually inhibit workers from making the transition from the temporary to the permanent workforce by charging ‘liquidating damages’ to employers that hire these workers” (Nollen and Axel, 1998: 24). Parker’s (1994) research confirms that the practice of temporary workers moving from contingent to permanent status is formally and informally discouraged. He found that virtually all temporary companies charge their clients a fee if the employer hires one of the

company's temporary workers within ninety days of the initial assignment (Parker, 1994).

In terms of workers' experiences as temporaries, Nollen and Axel (1998) argue that workers in this industry are transformed from full-time job seekers into mass-commodified products. Most of the temporary workers that Parker interviewed "had imagined that the temporary firms would recognize their existing skills and talents and utilize them fully. Many expressed resentment at finding that they were just 'warm bodies'... and mere commodities" (1994: 53). With respect to their views of the temporary help companies, temp workers referred to them as 'flesh peddlers' (Parker, 1994).

When they register with a temporary help agency, workers forfeit their right to choose their worksite, their direct employer, and their right to select their place within the division of labour (Vosko, 2000). "[I]n signing an employment agreement with the temporary help agency, temporary help workers forfeit their ability to choose their preferred type of work" (Vosko, 2000: 19). Furthermore, issues such as harassment and worker safety are complicated due to the co-employer relationship (Barker and Christensen, 1998). "Temporaries often find themselves stigmatized or isolated, uncertain of the duration of their assignment, and with little recourse when problems such as sexual harassment occur in the workplace" (Rogers, 2000: 4). Temporary workers do not receive paid time off for bereavement, sick days, statutory holidays, vacation, etc.; they are not granted notice of termination (or wages in lieu of notice), maternity leave, or severance pay (Schellenberg and Clark, 1996). Temporary workers do not have access to workplace collective agreements

and provisions, such as employer-sponsored pension plans, dental coverage and medical insurance (Schellenberg and Clark, 1996). Furthermore, employers are much less likely to invest in the training and development of temporary workers (Schellenberg and Clark, 1996).

Even once they have registered with an agency, there are no guarantees that work assignments will be consistent. One of the workers that Henson (1996) interviewed explained: “The availability of temporary assignments was irregular and insufficient, leaving her with a less than adequate income. In order to make ends meet, she occasionally skipped meals and went without health care and other basic services” (38-39). Henson observes that the myth of the temporaries’ scheduling flexibility often masks the deficient or sporadic supply of temp work: “Fearing down-time and uncertain about actual scheduling practices, temporaries often find themselves in dependent, vulnerable, and sometimes manipulative relationships with their temporary agencies and client supervisors” (Henson, 1996: 49). In fact, many temporaries reported to Henson (1996) that they had registered with more than one agency as a strategy for ensuring an adequate supply of assignments. Daly (1997) suggests that job insecurity is an inherent characteristic of temporary work: temporary workers inevitably experience total job loss at the end of each assignment and can go without work for days or weeks.

Furthermore, Vosko (2000) observes that ‘temporary’ can be misleading:

In 1995 approximately 18.4 per cent of all temporary help workers reported that they had worked for an agency for between one and five years, and, even more striking, 12.4 per cent reported that they had worked for an agency for over six years” (134).

And it is not simply a matter of working as a temporary for extended periods:

“Compared with the industry’s early years, the use of annual and sometimes exclusive contracts between temporary firms and employers is now an increasing practice” (Parker, 1994: 48-49). This is due in large part to the number of high-technology companies that have long incorporated the use of temporary help firms into their human resource policies (Parker, 1994).

Employment Agencies and Labour Legislation

According to the Contingent Workers Project in Toronto (2000), both public and private sector industries encouraged the development of a flexible labour market in the 1990s. In the context of global business competition and the consequences of trade liberalization, flexibility and deregulation operate as coterminous elements that affect the relational setting (Beck, 1999; Esping-Andersen, 1999). In other words, as the institutions of the nation-state are re-configured they create an absence of protective legislation (Beck, 1999). Similarly, Esping-Andersen (1999) suggests that national governments have been at a loss to respond with legislation that strikes a necessary balance between flexibility and regulation in the face of exogenous change. A vacuum with respect to legislation that assigns responsibility in the case of the temporary work relationship is clearly the case in Ontario, for example (Vosko, 2000; Ontario, 2000).

Historically, the normative model of the employment relationship - the standard employment relationship (SER) - involved a set of standards that applied to male workers and included a minimum wage and a maximum work week.²⁴ The intention underlying the application of these standards was to set up a dynamic of consistent input and output of productive and consumptive power. They further accorded the worker a degree of

²⁴ Historically, benefits did not extend to workers in female-dominated sectors (Vosko, 2000).

regularity and durability in employment relationships, protected workers from unacceptable practices and working conditions, established rights and obligations and provided a core of social stability that created a foundation for economic growth. The increase of non-standard forms of employment began to outpace the growth of the SER in many advanced welfare states beginning in the late 1970s (Vosko, 2000). Concurrently, shifts in government policy have reflected a new set of standards:

Lean production is a set of management strategies to intensify work by eliminating ‘waste’ and creating a more flexible workplace... Employers and business organizations now see the spread of lean production as a crucial factor in restoring profitability. (Sears, 1999: 91-92)

In contrast with this strategy, employment protection laws, such as mandatory-notice laws, force firms to keep unprofitable workers on the payroll for two to four months longer than they otherwise would (Kuhn, 2000). The use of temporary workers enables the employer to shed the costs of adjusting their workforce during periods of downturns (Kuhn, 2000). The public sector budget constraints and uncertainty over future funding levels have increased the appeal of temporary workers (Pinch, 1994):

With cutbacks to the public sector and restructuring in the health care system, [the temporary help services industry] now caters to a larger proportion of health institutions, federal, provincial and local governments, and other publicly funded services, such as public utilities and public transportation. (Vosko, 2000: 136)

Hamdani (1997) points out that in 1993, governments and institutions were by far the major purchasers of services from the temporary help service industry, accounting for 25 per cent of the industry. The ‘lean production’ discourse thus permeates both government policy and practice, and in effect re-constructs the expectations and obligations underlying individual employment relationships (Lowe *et al.*, 1999).

With diminished relational ties, the employment agency enables employers to enlarge and decrease the size of their workforce according to their needs, with few legal and financial repercussions. “The legal apparatus that the THI (temporary help industry) crafted to surround the TER (temporary employment relationship) and the firm-based practices that it perpetuates curtail temporary help workers’ ability to resist their sub-standard conditions of employment” (Vosko, 2000: 158). Vosko (2000) further describes the employment contract as a one-way agreement between the temporary help worker and the agency, where the worker waives a minimal level of social protection in exchange for the prospect of obtaining temporary help work.

Finally, with respect to unionization, Vosko argues that there are fundamental obstacles to organizing temporary help workers due to the industrial model of work and the worksite-based regime of collective bargaining:

Temporary workers are unquestionably a difficult group of workers to unionize within conventional structures since they work in multiple locations, have shorter job tenure than the standard worker, and belong to a wide array of occupational groupings. (2000: 261)

The ILO

At the trans-governmental level, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is a participant in the transformation and re-negotiation of labour legislation. The ILO is charged with policing the area of workers’ rights (Held *et al.*, 1999). Since its inception in the early twentieth century, it has sought to establish basic rules regarding the treatment of labour (Held *et al.*, 1999). Teeple suggests that, despite their mandate, the ILO has little to no relevance: “There is no overall international agreement or jurisdiction, no authoritative international institutional machinery, and no agreed-upon sanctions or means of enforcement” (Teeple, 2000: 119). Subsequently, the ILO’s efforts

have little effect on actual corporate activities (Teeple, 2000). Nonetheless, it is a forum in which states, employers and labour come together to discuss labour-related issues and concerns in an international context.

Historically, the ILO has opposed labour market intermediaries in the context of buying and selling of labour, and has demonstrated unwavering support for the standard employment relationship.²⁵ In fact, one of the fundamental organizing principles of their mandate was that labour could not be commodified and that workers should never pay to work. The ascension of the temporary employment relationship, however, reveals the fragility of an aversion to commodification and the fracturing of a commitment to security in countries like Canada (Vosko, 2000).

In 1997, nation-states, labour organizations, and employers debated the revision of the Fee-Charging Employment Agencies Convention (No. 96) (Vosko, 2000; ILO, 1997). Within this context, the delegates agreed that the operation of employment agencies should be allowed, but that job seekers using their services must be protected (ILO, 1997). Out of these negotiations, the ILO produced Convention No. 181: “Adopted in June 1997, and based on an agreement between Workers’ and Employers’ Groups, this Convention recognizes temporary help agencies as employers and sets out a limited framework for regulating the TER (Temporary Employment Relationship)” (Vosko, 2000). This is a significant and important declaration, referring to the terms of the employment agreement and ensuring that there be grounds for mutual responsibilities. Convention No. 181 clearly states that private employment agencies shall not charge directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, any fees or costs to workers (Vosko, 2000).

²⁵ Standard employment relations refer to an experience of permanency, predictability, and normativity reflected in year-round, forty-hour tenured work contracts.

Unfortunately, ILO Convention No. 181 also provides for the acknowledgement of exceptions to this rule (Vosko, 2000). Convention No.181 “gives national authorities the flexibility needed to deal with private agencies in the context of their own realities and concerns” (ILO, 1997: 2).

Despite this caveat, the Association of Canadian Search and Employment Staffing Services (ACSESS), which represents employment and recruiting agencies across Canada, points out that Canada has not ratified Convention No. 181. Furthermore, they suggest that they will continue to lobby the federal government in order to persuade officials that Convention No. 181 does not apply to Canada (Turner, 2000:4). In fact, ACSESS has maintained pressure on the Federal Ministry of Labour with respect to Canada’s ties to the ILO in order to persuade this Ministry that tendencies at the ILO toward more regulation and tripartite consultation on all labour market policy and labour legislation run counter to Canada’s economic interests (Turner, 2000:4). It is the expressed opinion of ACSESS and their members that recruiting agencies should be free to self-regulate. They state:

The basic message is that the ILO is gaining much more power and recognition, and we must be vigilant in ensuring that as Canadian employers and ACSESS members we continue to operate ethically and responsibly in a free enterprise environment. (Turner, 2000:5)

The use of the term ‘employer’ here is interesting, and I note that in the same issue of the ACSESS newsletter, there is an article entitled: “A Comfortable Distance: Maintaining the Independent Relationship” by labour lawyer Peter Straszynski. This piece outlines strategies that agencies can employ in order to prepare contracts that will ensure that individuals placed by the agency remain legally independent from the temp company (Straszynski, 2000). On these grounds, a mark of their success is in ensuring that the role

of 'employer' in this triangulated employment relationship is ambiguous (Lowe *et al.*, 1999).

It is evident that the temporary help industry is politically well organized (Henson, 1996). Companies and their representatives monitor legislation that threatens to curtail the industry's growth and they continue to lobby for self-regulation (Henson, 1996). In fact, the Canadian temporary help industry has effectively been in a position to self-regulate over the last several decades due to an absence of state intervention and limited direct resistance to the temporary employment relationship on the part of labour (Vosko, 2000). In Ontario, the on-going review of the Private Employment Act includes representatives from the temporary help industry, but organized labour is conspicuously absent (Vosko, 2000). Primarily, industry representatives want to maintain their legal status as intermediaries in order to avoid assuming all of the responsibilities typically accorded to employers (Vosko, 2000).

Organizing Workers

In a number of forums, including the policy recommendations of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), rigid labour markets, with considerable government and/ or union involvement in wage-setting, and considerable restrictions on firms' abilities to adjust the size of their workforces, are commonly seen as more prone to unemployment and less conducive to employment growth than more flexible ones. (Kuhn, 2000: 177)

The significance of workplace unionization is evident in higher wages, more job security, formalized processes around promotion and restrictions on working time compared to non-unionized workplaces (Anderson *et al.*, 2006). Although unionization has been stronger in Canada in the last few decades than it has been in the United States, Canadian employers pressure governments to restrict protective legislation with respect to organizing workers (Gunderson and Riddell, 2000). This is framed as a matter of

strategic competition with producers to the South, as well as the retrenchment of overarching protective structures operating as a result of trade liberalization.

Although Canadian workers are more likely to be organized, Canada's record on protective labour legislation does not support the interests of workers (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 1999):

While freedom of association is generally respected in Canada, both the federal and provincial governments of Canada have interfered in the collective bargaining process in violation of trade union rights of public employees over much of the 1980s and 1990s, despite strong criticism of Canada by the ILO. (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 1999: 1)

In terms of the temp work relationship, barriers to work place union participation are endemic and reflect an absence of clarity concerning the identification of the employer in worker-agency contracts (Vosko, 2000). The federal and provincial governments, by virtue of their impotence on this issue, are complicit in the efforts of corporate management to implement lean production strategies with a non-unionized workforce (Glenday, 1997). This has also concentrated labour and economic processes of decision-making power in the hands of these business owners (Drache, 1991).

At the political level, Canada's unions have had little influence in affecting the re-design of work (Drache, 1991). The net effect is that workers in the temporary help industry are rarely unionized or covered by collective agreements (Vosko, 2000). In fact, according to research conducted by the Contingent Workers' Project in Toronto:

Almost half of the respondents were not covered by federal Employment Insurance, and two thirds did not think that they were covered by the provincial Workers Insurance and Safety Board. Even those who think they are covered find that eligibility criteria tend to exclude contract and temporary workers from training and other benefits. This may be a defining feature of contingent work: that workers do not have access to either government or employer assistance with lost earnings due to major employment transitions, illness or injury. It is almost impossible for these workers to acquire the resources to create their own

individual safety net which can see them through the insecurities of contingent work. (Contingent Workers' Project, 2000: 3)

Even in the face of these circumstances, Ted Turner, National President of Hunt Personnel, Temporarily Yours and Intérim Aide, appointed as Chair of the Canadian Employers Council and Chair of the ILO Resolution Committee, warns that the temporary help industry must keep watch: "There is a very strong drive by the unions to try to find ways to organize contract workers and by governments to regulate them. We must be on guard as there is no doubt that this activity can affect our industry in Canada negatively" (Turner, 2000: 4).

The effect of these efforts has fostered a neo-liberal narrative of the worker-citizen subject: an atomized, entrepreneurial worker, handmaid to a globally competitive market. The policy vacuum that enables employment agencies to self-regulate entrenches the onus placed on workers to assemble or negotiate his or her own safety net (i.e. through insurance) and assume risks privately. For young workers trying to get a toe-hold in the job market, a 'new' normative set of employment relations compounds the pressure to secure work by adding the need to keep an eye out for the *next* opportunity as well.

Public and Conceptual Narratives – Transformation of Work

In this chapter, I use the example of the 'transformation of work' and increasing rates of temporary and contingent work relations in order to illustrate a paradox: as individuals and institutions/employers each configure their present in order to orient themselves towards a promising future, they find that they are at cross-purposes. As each segment plans and programs present circumstances in order to ensure that desirable horizons are attained, the power and privilege of employers to promote their trajectory

serves to sabotage the attainability of workers' horizons. As the following quote demonstrates, Woods and Ostry observed the force of this dynamic over forty years ago:

Industrialism, because of its interdependence, requires a high level of predictability, even though industrial growth requires the encouragement of uncertainty. This dilemma of predictability and uncertainty is a central issue of industrial relations. (1962: 8)

The paradox is evident in the tension between predictability and uncertainty – the most effective means to ensure a profitable future horizon involves creating a contingent environment for workers. Furthermore, financial success appears to ebb and flow, the strain of which is borne by the (interchangeable and dispensable) working population. To some extent, therefore, a discourse or narratives that reinforces the immutability of the high profit/low expenditure imperative serves to reinforce uncertain work conditions.

The absorption of fluctuations in market activities is concentrated in the terms of employment for individuals, a relationship that is regulated by government policies. In spite of the evidence to the contrary, however, a tenacious narrative concerning planning, readiness and adaptability retains the notion that the future can be made calculable and knowable. Although workers and employers pursue it differently, a narratively constituted pre-known future is still the desired destination.

From this perspective, insecurity and uncertainty are framed as phases or transitional steps. Not only does this raise important questions concerning the impact of economic preoccupations, it also leverages a narrative of hopefulness: something new and better *is* out there. Until an individual arrives at this destination, they must keep moving towards improvement and success.

The term 'temporary' builds a narrative of hopefulness into precarious work and mobilizes the set of temporal dynamics that I have been describing. Temporary work,

Barker and Christensen (1998) point out, is the human equivalent to a just-in-time inventory system (see also Nollen and Axel, 1998; Hamdani, 1997).

Advocates for contingent staffing argue that it offers multiple benefits for the firm – it increases staffing flexibility, cuts direct labour costs, and it can, in addition to benefiting the firm, enhance workers' leverage in the marketplace, particularly for those workers whose skills are in demand (Barker and Christensen, 1998: 1)

The concepts of 'contemporary context' and 'transformation' thus suggest that differences can be discerned between present circumstances and past conditions. As the first section of this chapter demonstrates, analyses of the current context are linked to changes in the constituent elements of the work trajectory. Discussions tend to highlight what is no longer the same, however, and presume an expectation of a successive and evolutionary movement through time. As Bergson (1992) points out, an evolutionary interpretation stems from the expectation that the present was pre-formed prior to its arrival. A narrative that emphasizes 'contemporary context' and 'transformation' is preoccupied by 'altered sameness' and the eruption of a myriad of social changes between the late 1960s and now are reduced to an examination of successive movements along a trajectory from security to insecurity and from predictability to unpredictability. Work relations and opportunities are thus understood within the parameters of this model. As such, work trajectory readiness requires that resources, activities and expectations be recruited in preparation for the arrival of the future. The material conditions and relations that are mobilized in response to the particular pressures to lay claim to opportunities and to orient oneself to the future underlie the narrative of transformation.

Narrative Analysis

The public narratives that I have highlighted in this section reiterate an idea of work as a normative activity. The emphasis on 'non-standard' work in the contemporary

context serves here as a narrative device, so that a difference of experience is explained relative to a 'standard' or real ideal (permanent, full-time). Expansion of a worker identity to include women on a broader scale, for example, serves to reinforce the centrality of work as a dominant and organizing activity. Additionally, public narratives that describe transformation and flexibilization in policies and institutions only have meaning relative to this real or imagined ideal.

Building on the concept of change that I described in Section One, the conceptual narrative that characterizes the contemporary context plots the ascension of flexibility as a significant and important theme. Given that work readiness requires that resources, activities and expectations are recruited in preparation for the arrival of the future, readiness is cast as a matter of flexibility.

A conceptual narrative of flexibility emphasizes that individuals and sites in the relational setting be configured and oriented towards the future. Restriction or elimination of protective legislation, commodification of work relations, and other lean production techniques are secondary to this conceptual narrative focus on self, institutional and structural responsibility for an adaptive readiness in order to attain a pre-determined outcome.

This dynamic assumes that appropriate trajectories emerge from the relationship between individuals and the relational setting. Meta-narratives that frame temporalities as linear and knowable affect our orientation in this way, thus revealing an ontological problematic. In order to foster public, conceptual and meta-narratives that recognize and acknowledge possibilities and 'chance' factors requires an ontological and epistemological re-configuration of time and futurities.

Conclusion

Elements of narratives that constitute and give meaning to the relational setting are based on a particular story about setting objectives on future horizons. The relational setting is therefore not only the material context in which objectives are narratively produced, but also a site where social relations are recruited towards these ends. Social relations are thus not factors of interaction, but also conduits of normative agendas.

Drawing a traditional link between education and work, numerous scholars and policy groups have touted the potential of training as a solution to unemployment and underemployment (Krahn and Lowe, 1990). However, a more interesting set of questions concerning structural strategies interrogates a broader set of transitional mechanisms. What is known and expected from the experiences of young adults can be problematized and this rite of passage can be understood within a context of prescriptive and constituted future horizons. Empirical evidence has been mobilized to this end, where a set of experiences that privilege a singular trajectory from education to work are normalized.

Discursively, one of the thrusts that informs both this orientation and the way that it is understood reflects a set of ideas concerning the purpose of a 'youth' phase (learning and launching) and an 'adult' phase (working and settling down). Studies of this movement are theoretically and empirically bound to a model that measures the experience and/or success of this transition. Normative narratives that cluster around work trajectories raise significant issues with respect to the material conditions and circumstances of entering and retaining work. What is missing, however, is analysis of the complexities and interdependencies of multiple trajectories that characterize individual ways of being and becoming. By emphasizing education/training and work,

we can map both normative narratives that describe the dominant preoccupations in the relational setting. By critiquing the ideologically privileged position of work trajectories in studies of biographies I can interrogate both the logic of progress that underlies this framework as well as lay the groundwork for problematizing the universality yet particularity with which young adults construe their future selves.

The idea of future possibilities demands an engagement with the manyness of potential eruptions. An economistic market imperative that fosters and encourages the constitution of the self-sufficient 'Me Inc.', particularly amongst young adults, directs focus and expectations towards a specific horizon. Responses that operate from a reactionary basis – concerned with the terms and conditions experienced along this trajectory - raises important but limited considerations.

Although narratives appear to shift and alter their focus, themes that cross public, conceptual and meta-narratives retain a specific orientation to a dominant time regime: linearity and rationality. Within this regime, flexibilization is mobilized in order to ensure that specific objectives can be achieved. As such, insecurity and uncertainty are discursively constituted as necessary but undesirable strategies or passages in order to retain appropriate time regime trajectories. Within this time regime framework, the future is never understood as something indeterminate.

The relational setting has undergone a number of changes that have altered trajectories and relational dynamics. A number of other social changes could be examined in detail - the women's movement, the ecology movement, the civil rights movement, the gay rights movement, activists who work to advance the rights of recent immigrants, etc. have all served to nuance and transform social scripts and their roles as

having multiple and simultaneous durations may be investigated in future studies. Possibilities that were previously unimagined have emerged from these changes, experienced as both positive outcomes and negative reactionary politics. The topography of these complex social narratives suggests that one's subjectivity is a mobile and nomadic phenomenon, rather than a fixed line to a certain destination. As the next chapters will demonstrate, the tension between narratively produced expectations and the future as an indeterminate space.

Chapter Four – Interpreting Narratives

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that a particular ontological take on temporalities is expressed through public, conceptual and meta-narratives. Within this framework our movement through time is characterized as a linear and rational process constituted through discursive, cultural, institutional and policy stories. As I did in chapter three, here I continue to highlight a set of dominant themes concerning work as a normative objective, the emphasis on causal relations, an orientation to flexibility, and how all of these are wrapped up into narratives of future-making machines. The focus in this chapter specifically explores individual expressions of these narratives, conveyed in the telling of their own stories.

My point of entry in this analysis is to examine the expectations and orientation that individuals bring to their relationship with their present and to their future. Within this context, my analysis addresses the relationship between their orientation and a notion of temporal linearity and simplicity. This refers to the expectation that planning, preparation and realization of aspirations is predictable, calculable and chronological. My analysis thus highlights the tension that emerges between narratively constituted movement toward the future and the temporal complexities of experiences. What becomes evident is a perceived lack of success or failure on the part of the respondents as they describe their efforts and their encounters with disruptive or distracting challenges. The individuals who participated in this study thus assess their own position in relation to a linear movement towards a successful future horizon. Articulations of fear and anxiety,

for example, are associated with trajectories that seem circuitous or erroneous to the narrator.

Methodology: Inter-weaving Biographies

Consistent with my central argument concerning the mutually constitutive dynamic between experiences and narrative, I have decided to create a composite analysis of inter-woven stories and experiences. This chapter reports on and links portions of interviews with young adults between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-two years and explores the coherence of a public narrative articulated by individuals concerning their movement towards the future. In order to explore the experiential side of a conceptual time regime, I momentarily collapse boundaries between individuals in order to advance my argument concerning the heuristic advantage of assessing the coherence of our understanding of time. Within the narrative illustrations presented in this chapter, there is a clear plot that reflects a normative discourse of temporal movement, both as a series of ‘moments of arrival’ (birth→school→job→marriage→children→retirement→death) and a deterministic notion of its movement as ordered and cumulative. What emerges in this time regime framework is the emplotment of expectations concerning chronological transitions, an accumulation of resources and a direct relationship between skill set and opportunities.

The benefit of using a composite of personal stories in order to interrogate the public, conceptual and meta-narratives is to identify a narrative arc across individual stories. More than just linking portions of interviews, therefore, a composite profile enables me to plot these narratives beyond a singular experience in order to see if they merge and resonate in personal biographical processes.

Transition Strategies

The concept of ‘transition’ is relevant to both the analysis of narratives produced by the respondents as well as signaling their connection to the public, conceptual and meta-narratives previously described. To ‘transition’, therefore, is to move through a place or phase to a new or altered destination. In the interview transcript portions cited below, the reader will see how the respondents locate themselves in relation to uncertain present circumstances and how they perceive these circumstances will carry forward into the future.

This tension between a perception of an uncertain present and the implications for the future are particularly interesting with respect to the transition to adulthood. As I argued in chapter one, there is a set of ontological assumptions that constitute what we associate with adulthood, namely characteristics that differentiate an ‘adult’ state of being from a ‘youth’ or ‘child’ state of becoming. In contrast, we understand adulthood to indicate a growth completed and an experience of arrival. Rather than linking this to material circumstances (such as financial independence), I highlight the ontological and epistemological framework within which we culturally and discursively articulate this difference. The transition, therefore, is a hopeful concept that points to the expectation that with the completion of education and training, at the end of a temporary period of “paying one’s dues” in precarious work, an individual can expect to move towards a future horizon that is: a) different and; b) better.

Work Trajectory Narratives

Embedded within a notion of chronological and linear temporal dynamics is a normative structure of the life course. Associated with this structure is a serialized set of life stage markers (birth, school, job, etc.) that also include significant material

acquisitions (car, house, furnishings, vacations). Amongst young adults, the relatively arbitrary significance of the age of thirty marks a point when a certain set of life stage signifiers and major acquisitions should be in sight or already points of accomplishment:

So when it was my twenty-ninth birthday I went ‘holy shit’ you know. So I had taken five years off. And it flew by and in my twenty-ninth year I wrote my GMET, sent off my applications, got accepted and when I turned thirty I was in my third month of my MBA program. So I was right on schedule. (#43)²⁶

Being *on schedule*, within these narratives, is indicative of a sense of being on the right path. Within this framework, life stage markers and major acquisitions come together most productively when a stable source of income can guarantee regular payment schedules. As the next transcript portion illustrates, this respondent summarizes what young adults expect will be the outcome of their efforts. Conceptually, adulthood is associated with achievement and attainment, and as this response further illustrates, this is all wrapped up in a sense of security:

It’s like the American dream or the Canadian dream. We expect to be a certain place in our life at age thirty in terms of our financial situation. And you know, you want to have that security, that nest egg, you want to have that beautiful home. And I’m not saying that I’m materialistic, but you know these are just basic fundamental Canadian ideals of, like, a good home and a family and what not.

(...)

But to try to get into something where I can have a nine-to-five job, have kind of a typical Canadian life, and in the end have a nice... well, have enough money to vacation and what not. I think that that’s what every Canadian wants. You know, to be able not to live pay cheque to pay cheque, but to have that kind of feeling of security to prepare for your retirement and that kind of thing. (#43)

By framing this story as a “typical Canadian life”, this respondent expresses an assumption that correlates a work trajectory with adequate finances and the realization of life aspirations. The perception of causal relations, therefore, reinforces the salience of the narrative of work as a normative strategy in order to attain success. Furthermore, the

²⁶ This refers to an interview number. See Appendix A for details.

expectation of the linearity of the journey: from an exploratory launch to a settled and focused mature phase - correlates age with progress and the idea of growing up:

Well, you know I have had different types of changes. I mean there was from leaving my little protected nest at home to, you know, going off to live on my own as a student. And then another big change was going to live alone and actually working for real. And then, I mean, getting married. These are all different changes. I guess I'm growing up. But I think that these are all... it's... I see it as a progression. It's a natural progression in life. You know, you move from home and you start your own family. You know, I see that's what I'm doing and I see each step as a step forward and a possibility of something new and better. (#59)

The expectation that movement through time will involve an experience of progress and improvement creates tension and anxiety for some. As the next interview section demonstrates, individuals also realize that movement towards, into, and along a work trajectory does not come with guarantees. The weight of responsibility to successfully arrive at the promises of a work horizon, therefore, causes some to express desire for a shared effort to attain a successful future. In this case, the promises of a work narrative are problematized and a direct correlation between individual efforts and a successful outcome are challenged:

And I think there is a strong onus too to make sure that you can support yourself so you have the skills and you have the financial stability no matter how you do it. Whether you're saving or what not, I think definitely... I'm not putting this aside from my shoulders at all in any fashion, but aside from my responsibility, I think there should be an onus as well as the various industries to some extent. Give an environment where I can acquire those tools that will give me that flexibility. I can't do it just by myself.

(...)

I can be highly skilled but I have zero guarantees. (#85)

According to Interview #43, a steady and stable source of income will lead to the realization of one's aspirations of a house, vacations, and a retirement fund. Where work is the source of a steady income, a work trajectory promises these results. As the last

citation demonstrates, however, individuals feel pressure to independently secure the means and opportunities to locate and remain on a 'good' work trajectory. Being well trained and well equipped for work doesn't come with any guarantees. Instead, in spite of their best efforts to plan and prepare, flexibilized work experiences result in a sense of uncertainty and insecurity.

Planning, Preparation and Forecasting Narratives

Desire for movement towards the future so that it primarily gives a sense of progression and improvement is an inherent aspect of a narrative concerning linear and chronological temporalities. The relationship between time, movement and transition, therefore, is expressed in the emplotment of planning and forecasting. This plot reveals the thrust of planning and forecasting as a link between the future and the present in terms of the intentionality of the respondent's approach. Amongst the young adults in this group, for example, it was fairly common for them to be in training or to have recently completed training. In these transcripts, education and training are framed as preparatory moves along a work trajectory. The pre-work expectation, therefore, is articulated as a planning, readiness and forecasting narrative, reflected in the emplotment of training decisions.

The emphasis on Information Technology (IT) skills in these accounts is not a factor of respondent selection but rather a combination of coincidence, patterns in the relational setting, and dominant characteristics of the time regime. The respondents consistently expressed the perception that the local labour market was particularly favourable to IT skills and work. If one possessed IT training, they surmised, one would quickly find well-paying employment. To achieve this end at a quicker pace – a focused, direct and fast strategy promoted in this time regime – suggests that the condensed

private IT training programs taken up by some of these individuals were the correct choice.

The first set of responses focuses on this combination of elements: training, IT skills, and private vocational training schools. What is evident in these accounts is a sense of certainty about their future prospects as a result of their planning strategies. The planning, readiness and forecasting narrative in this case is expressed in the assumption that they correctly understood market demands, acquired those skills, and are thus located on a desirable trajectory towards success:

[Respondent] I'm not worried at all. I'm just very eager to get going. Open up a whole bunch of new doors and see what's behind them. Go down some different paths.

[Interviewer] It sounds like that really encapsulates your whole sense of where your life is right now. Obviously there are a lot of open doors, and where do you think that comes from? What do think is opening all those doors?

[Respondent] Oh, definitely my degree in information technology. Absolutely. It's sort of... and I sort of say I jumped on the bandwagon, and sort of developed the skills that are necessary in order to compete in today's market, I guess.

(...)

We were all eager when we started. We thought, "Oh when we graduate it's going to be absolutely perfect. We'll graduate at the perfect time and we'll all have jobs before we even come close to graduating."

(...)

So your doors, the doors that are open for you just start flying, you know. Um, yeah. And everything is going to become computerized at some point, you know. So if you can understand it then it gives you a competitive edge. (#64)

This was a consistent perception amongst these respondents: the idea that bringing IT skills to the labour force will determine their opportunity outcomes. Their attentiveness and responsiveness to market trends such as growth in the IT sector is perceived to foster growth and progress for all of those employed in this industry:

[Interviewer] You were in training for nine months?

[Respondent] Yeah, in training for nine months to prepare myself for the IT industry. And I went to Private IT College for nine months, um... and one of the

reasons I'll have to tell you is... I probably wouldn't have gone into Private IT College if I... or IT... the IT industry... if it weren't for Ottawa. Because Ottawa is a booming... booming industry... for the IT industry and it's very noticeable here. (#5)

Thus the perception that IT work was pre-destined to be a successful trajectory attracted individuals to specialize their training for the IT industry. In this context, private training colleges have capitalized on the (fast-paced) planning, readiness and forecasting narratives produced in the relational setting.

[Respondent] So I went ahead and took a year off and went to Private College. It was in networking administrating, pretty much, and it was the best thing I could ever do.

[Interviewer] Is Private College a private...?

[Respondent] It is a private school, a private college, but they have like eighty-nine percent placement rate. Which... I graduated on a Thursday and on the next day, the Friday, I had my first interview. And I got a call back that night pretty much confirming that I had the job, so...

(...)

[Respondent] One year. It was a one-year program.

(...)

[Interviewer] How much was your program at Private College?

[Respondent] Cost-wise? Fifteen thousand dollars. (#93)

As Interview #93 indicates, the accelerated pace of private IT college programs comes at a very steep price. The desirability of a condensed education experience, however, evidently justifies this financial investment:

[Interviewer] What made you decide to go into IT?

[Respondent] What made me decide? Okay, because basically... presently, I'm... right now I'm twenty-nine years old. I was twenty-eight I guess when I decided. I decided that I didn't want to take a three-year course at Community College. This IT course pretty much equals up to a three years at Community College. So I said I'll take the loss, pretty much. I'll probably end up spending five thousand dollars every year at Community College. I'll spend, whatever, four thousand dollars more, four or five thousand more and I'll be done in a year. In twelve months I'll graduate. (#93)

A planning, readiness and forecasting narrative is thus associated with a notion of time and investment, whereas we feel assured that actions taken in the present will pay off in the future:

The [Bachelor] degree really was in International Commerce, so basically I had the ability to communicate with different cultures and understand their religion and stuff like that, but I didn't have a specific product to work with. And that's the reason I went into IT - so that I could basically bring a product to the international market.

(...)

I went to Private IT College, which is an IT school. I would have to say it's the biggest step that I had taken towards going into the IT field. It's given me the opportunity to learn the actual programming languages and it's given me the exposure to the IT market that I need in order to become a professional.

(...)

And basically it has prepared me to go into a company and to be productive at a junior level. (#65)

The pay off for the individual is a hopeful comment about a possible future event.

In the meantime, private vocational training schools are receiving immediate returns on their investments:

[Respondent] Ah it's funny that you mention that because Private IT College is different in the sense that it's a private corporate institution. You pay more money and it just works more like a business. You're a client and basically you're treated like a client. As opposed when you're at university, you're a student.

(...)

[Interviewer] So you think that corporate environment is because Private IT College is a corporation and they are interested in getting your money, or is it because they're trying to teach you how to operate in a corporate world?

[Respondent] I think Private IT College is solely after our money. (#65)

The combination of the logic of causal relations and a perceived intensity of temporal pressures to prepare and get into the labour force reinforces an apparently appealing characteristic of the IT sector in this time regime: fast learning, fast success and quick bucks. Therefore, in spite of the considerable cost and, for some, assuming considerable debt, the pay-off of IT training-to-work trajectory is considered to be self-evident:

[Notetaker/Interviewer #2] Uh, just generally, why... why high tech? Why'd you choose to pursue that?

[Respondent] Mainly because of the market in Ottawa. At that time it was a huge booming market and, uh, I was making twelve bucks an hour. I wanted to make a good salary and I wanted to be sure that if I generated a debt from going to school I'd be able to pay it back.

(...)

I thought there's one thing that I should learn it's... it's that. That's gonna help me, uh, with... that I could probably have a good, successful career in. Ah, and the financial thing was a real... was a real big thing, uh, that uh that led me into that. (#19)

The impression that a guaranteed pay off in the "booming" high tech market is indicative of a belief in promise of the preparation, readiness and forecasting narrative. The idea that "I could probably have a good successful career" was an entirely untested hypothesis for this individual. This individual assumed that their perceptions of the stories about the IT industry were both correct and that the momentum of this market would have a direct effect on the circumstances of everyone who worked in this industry.

Viewed through this lens, the 'training gospel' can be understood and promoted by institutions within the relational setting that capitalize on the pressures produced by the preparation, readiness and forecasting narratives. It assumes that the future is pre-known in the present and that individuals must equip and re-equip themselves in order to successfully reach that destination. One of the respondents describes that pressure in this way:

Well, for a while it was like, oh maybe I need to go back to school because that's, like, what I've been doing all the time. And it's, like, been this kind of escape from bad jobs in a way - just go back to school. But I know that I don't need to go back to school. I have enough skills. I have enough skills. I have enough of the pieces of paper. (#78)

Training thus fits into a planning, readiness and forecasting narrative as a component of attaining a 'good' job.

Flexibility Narratives

In the previous chapter, flexibility is discussed within the context of the terms and conditions of work. The flexibilization of work, therefore, refers to contingent, term or temporary contracts that create a sense of uncertainty and insecurity amongst the workers. Within this broader narrative of flexibility, flexible work contracts are produced in accordance with fluctuations in the economy, specifically the ebb and flow of employer needs and demands:

The fact that we've had a couple of recessions meant that people laid... laid their staff off so they needed contractors to... to jump in. So they needed to have someone to do the work. And then when there was a high tech boom, suddenly there was money. So all the industries were optimistic and then they needed contract people 'cause there was extra work... So it's actually, um... it's been easy to be a parasite that way. (#10)

The parasitic image described in this respondent's answer illustrates an interesting tension between need, time, and change. The parasite is a tenacious creature, an unwelcome feeder whose survival depends on their ability to hang on. Over the course of time, the institutional sites that have demanded her work have changed, however a consistent element of her experience has revolved around picking up the "extra work" at the edges of the main business of government, high tech, etc.

In this section, I explore first-hand accounts of these conditions, with a particular focus in mind. As I will demonstrate, these young adults justify the experience of flexibility on the basis that they will either make a transition to improved conditions once they have accumulated skills, experience, and strengthen their negotiating capacity, or it is simply a factor of independent consulting. The vulnerability that they feel as a result of uncertain work and payment schedules is narratively off-set by the perceived benefits

of setting their own work time schedules. Within these stories, flexibility is a constituent element of this economy and it is the responsibility of individuals to respond accordingly.

Flexibility and Vulnerability

As the following response illustrates, young adults may describe the experience of flexibilized or precarious work as something that is emblematic of their lack of skills and experience, rather than symptomatic of particular institutional strategies. They may perceive that their negotiating capacity is constrained and therefore it is appropriate that they be “willing” to be “at the mercy” of employers. There appears to be little question that an individual in his or her twenties would be “extraordinarily” flexible in order to be employed:

[Respondent] Um... I'm sure that I have, uh, been willing and even eager partly... because of the nature of my personality and partly the economy, to be really flexible. I will put work in where it fits. I've been willing to... um, do contract work... Especially when you're in your twenties, you're definitely at the mercy of whoever happens to know that they have work available. And you're a fire fighter. And I've been willing to do that work. And you need an extraordinary amount of flexibility... in your time, um, to do that. And...you have to be willing to... I guess sacrifice structure really. (#10)

The narrative of flexibility can thus take on a particular salience amongst young adults. The idea that structure (presumably around a regular work time and payment schedule) can be sacrificed in one's twenties reinforces both the idea of this life stage as a preparatory phase and flexibility as a component of a transitory work trajectory manoeuvre. As the next respondent explains, however, the experience of flexibility involves short-term planning horizons and requires long-term money management. The challenges of these circumstances, therefore, lie in the unpredictability of the next work contract:

[Interviewer] Give us a bit of a sense of how many hours you work per week, how regular that is, whether you have... is it fairly steady work the same hours every week?

[Respondent] Not steady at all. Like this week I have nothing. And then I'm going away this summer, so I'm not going to have anything for quite a while. So that makes you nervous.

(...)

[Respondent] ...Probably about ten to twenty, maybe twenty hours or something. Yeah, that would be a good week. If I get a lot of those weeks then I'm having a nice steady flow. But then there's a lot of weeks when there's nothing.

[Interviewer] And has it been basically that pattern since you went freelance?

[Respondent] I guess more or less. There's a lot of blank spots.

(...)

[Interviewer] What do you do when you've had three months and no money coming in?

[Respondent] Well I usually plan about four months in advance how my cash is going to go and so I make sure that if I... if I'm covered for the four months I don't worry because I... within about a month I'll probably get a job.

(...)

[Interviewer] So you find that four months is a good sort of planning horizon for you?

[Respondent] Yeah, I find that's good because usually my jobs aren't that long term. Like, they're usually in a couple of weeks that I'm done once I get them. Then I'm done so... and then when you send in the invoice it's one to three months before you get paid. (#69)

This scenario illustrates the experience of flexibility as one in which work is “not steady at all”, that includes “blank spots”, as well as long waiting periods between work completion and payment. This respondent describes this situation as “stressful” and that it requires a great deal of financial forecasting. Under these circumstances, respondents must negotiate bill payment and financial commitments so that they may, for example, retain housing:

[Respondent] And, um, that's kind of a lot actually. Um.... but when it comes...I live... where I live now the landlord, um, likes me so I'm going month to month. I haven't actually done a lease. But she says she feels completely confident with me going month to month because I've lived there a while always saying, “Three more months!”

[Interviewer] (Laugh)

[Respondent] Okay, I've got a job for three more months. And she said, “You're not going anywhere.” And she's been right (laugh) up until now. So

overall I... I feel secure. But in the short term it is very hard to do. And medium term planning... all I can do is short term planning. (#10)

These stories highlight the vulnerability associated with flexible work terms. In addition to the short-term planning horizons and the necessity of taking a scrupulous approach to their own financial affairs, respondents also expressed their vulnerability in relation to the hiring and termination protocols that ensured that their status as a contingent worker would be preserved:

I was... when I was working... I was working in the temporary pool.
(...)

So the Public Sector Employer... the last hiring they had was in the late seventies, early eighties with the last economic boom. And they haven't hired anyone new except temporary staff.

(...)

Yeah, there were protocols. And I believe with the Public Sector Employer... it was three months and they had to lay me off for a week and then start me again and go back for another three months. So things were... a lot of three months here and one day off and then another three months. So it always... on my resume it looked like I had a tonne of jobs, but really... I couldn't explain that this was the policy at the time. (#18)

In this example, the respondent was independently contracted to this employer as a temporary worker. Other examples of flexible, temporary work involve formal contracts with temporary employment agencies. These respondents framed this decision in terms of not wanting to be in a position of continuously, independently soliciting themselves. Under contract through a temporary employment agency, therefore, they exchanged a percentage of their salary for the provision of work:

[Interviewer] And how would you access that work? How do you find these jobs?

[Respondent] Usually I went through employment agencies. There's a wonderful agency here that I had a great relationship with and they placed me in great places they were very supportive.

(...)

[Interviewer] So you looked through the yellow pages? So what made you think that an employment agency was the right strategy for you?

[Respondent] Well at the time I had read in the paper that employment agencies were doing very well. They were getting lots of contracts for the government initially and the government was something that I was also interested in. So I was hoping that by joining this one agency they would send me on a government contract and hopefully I would be hired by the time that I graduated from university. (#65)

As this respondent points out, the decision to register with an employment agency is frequently framed as a strategic approach to getting a foot into the labour market. Temps pay for this service, however. As this respondent demonstrates below, the notion of ‘temporary’ is articulated as an experience that is synonymous with one that is transitory. Therefore, negotiating power is accrued to the party who stands to benefit most from the perceived transitional strength of the temp worker:

[Respondent] It’s Staff for Hire. One of the smaller ones in Ottawa.

[Notetaker/Interviewer2] What was the... what were the details of your agreement?

[Respondent] I was a full time employee of the agency. I got basically ten days of vacation a year. And that was it, no benefits so I was pretty much a consultant to them.

(...)

[Notetaker/Interviewer2] How did you negotiate your pay with them?

[Respondent] Well basically they offered me a salary and after a few months of working for them I would usually ask for a raise. It all depends on the contract. I think they basically took... no, to the best of my knowledge they took a certain percentage of my salary and I would try to renegotiate that percentage.

(...)

[Notetaker/Interviewer2] And what was... your work with that... how much were they charging the company for...?

[Respondent] It was actually about fifteen percent. It was a very small amount and that was at the beginning of the contract and by the end it was usually about five percent, which is very small.

(...)

[Respondent] I had that bargaining power because usually the companies were interested in hiring me directly. So I would say I don’t mind staying with you for a little bit longer and I can guarantee that I will bring some money in for you, but I’d like a better salary. I’m not afraid to ask for money. (#65)

As such, there is a perception that individuals may personally benefit within a narrative of flexibility. As the following discussion will demonstrate, this is associated most often with a perception of possessing a skill set that is in demand.

Flexibility and Sovereignty

Some of the respondents argued that the flexibility accorded to them through contracting reflected positively on their skills and provided them some degree of sovereignty over their own time. As the following quote demonstrates, the security is derived from the perception of their viability as a self-employed *IT worker*. The certainty of the work trajectory, in spite of flexibilized work conditions, enables these individuals to interpret their experience as one that is characterized by self-determination. When Interview #30's employer would not guarantee that she could work part-time hours after returning from maternity leave, she decided to quit and work as an independent freelance programmer:

[Respondent] I'm a consultant. I have my own... I started my own company because my previous one wasn't going to... well most likely it wasn't going to allow me to work part-time. So I branched off on my own.

(...)

So, yeah, and being self-employed I end up... I'm making more than I was making working five days a week.

(...)

[Respondent] Like, I don't think you really have to worry if you've got that set of skills you can... it seems to be pretty easy to get a job. And there seems to be a lot of flexibility in what I'm doing.

(...)

[Interviewer] Specifically, people who are programmers and work in the IT sector?

[Respondent] I think probably first that'll be... because they have more... I think they have more clout because they need you and there's so many... there's a lot of jobs to fill, so you say I can only be there on my terms and get more of a chance. (#30)

Another respondent began independent consulting as a provider of IT services after his employer laid him off. His response reinforces the view that the demand for and high remuneration of IT work is the source of his sense of autonomy and security:

[Interviewer] Was it your choice to leave or was it...?

[Respondent] Sort of, but not really. Like, they were... they expanded too fast so then he had to downsize and he laid us all... a lot of us off. But that was not my choice to be laid off. But then a few months later I did have an option to go back but I decided to stay freelance.

[Interviewer] Why did you decide to stay freelance?

[Respondent] More control over my work schedule and plus, well, you get paid more per job than if you're on staff. So you work fewer hours and still get the same amount of money. (#69)

It is evident, however, that both of these individuals frame their 'decisions' to become self-employed as responses to limited or non-existent alternative options. The 'change events', including becoming a parent or employer downsizing, are framed as transitory moments to which they responded with a self-employment strategy. The work trajectory is continuous, therefore, and these respondents are fortunate that their timing coincides with a high demand period for IT skills.

A sense of autonomy and self-determination, however, hold narrative appeal but in practice may create a number of challenges. The following interview transcript reflects a celebratory response to the concepts of 'flexibility' and freedom, but acknowledges that the everyday experience is more than she bargained for:

[Respondent] I value having flexibility for myself and I value having a lot of freedom. I wouldn't want to work a nine-to-five job. But if that had been a high priority maybe I could have gotten a much more stable nine to five job. Then again, a lot of my friends who did get those jobs just turn out to be totally stable.

[Interviewer] Did you know how flexible you would be required to be when you initially started consulting?

[Respondent] No. (#69)

As this respondent illustrates, personal sovereignty is understood in terms of the ability to set one's own work-time schedule. At the other end of the spectrum is a nine-to-five job, characterized by limited self-determination, but a much higher degree of stability. For these consultants, the flexible work experience brings them freedom and autonomy, and they are well paid. This freedom and autonomy, however, only operate within the parameters of work time. For the first two individuals, their present experience of a shorter work week and adequate pay is contingent on the willingness of clients to accommodate this expectation. There are no indications that the benefits of flexibility in the short-term will translate into certainty on their future horizons.

Flexible Firms

To prove this point, some of the respondent experiences with downsizing and layoffs reinforce the uncertain viability of some industries and firms. As these accounts demonstrate, places of employment may also have a short-term lifespan:

I had been working in Toronto for an Internet Protocol solutions company and they haemorrhaged when the dot com crunch came. They weren't a dot com per se - they were a consulting company. But a lot of their clients had been these dot com companies who received their financing from venture capitalists who pulled all that financing kind of at once. So the company pretty much collapsed and I think now... There were three hundred people in the company when I was brought on and by the time I left they cut the work force. I was part of the wave of cuts that was basically thirty-five percent. (#86)

Similarly, another respondent commented on his experience in a precarious firm:

I left the last job I had was working for a software development company and I was a technical writer and tester of the software. And that company... I worked there for a while and then they stopped paying everybody slowly and so I eventually I had to leave. My wife was... we were expecting a baby and it was just not a good time to not be paid. (#33)

For this respondent, uncertain employment requires a readiness on the part of individuals to adapt to change:

I think probably I've shortened my horizon, you know. I'm stable for this [holds hands apart] amount of time. When I thought about High Tech Firm, well, based on the last missive from the CEO, we had lots of money in the bank. So I thought: I'm probably good here until the end of the year. A month later I was, you know, looking for work. (#8)

These respondents interpret the flexibility narrative to mean that individuals demonstrate their planning, readiness and forecasting in preparation for the work trajectory by further establishing their adaptability to change. Eruptions of change in the relational setting are thus to be anticipated and the prepared worker responds by being flexible:

It takes a different kind of person to be able to pick things up and adapt to the environment they're in. And also it comes with the times, where it's drummed into your head that there's no lifetime employment. Um, so I'm hoping that everything that I do will add to my skill matrix. So that will just make me a better person for the next job I go to. (#18)

Family Contributions

Often hidden behind the scenes, young adults may continue to rely on contributions and support from their family of origin. For example, having recently experienced a period of unemployment, the following respondent describes the challenge of achieving financial independence. As she suggests, embedded in a narrative of work as a normative activity is an idea of independent adulthood. It is acceptable for adolescents to rely on their parents for support, but adults must sort things out on their own. In the absence of being able to turn to her parents for help, this respondent describes her situation as desperate and that she was operating in survival mode:

[Interviewer] What do you feel has really helped you get through a lot of that?
[Respondent] I think it's more sometimes a sense of desperation. If you don't do it then there isn't really much of an alternative. Maybe it would be different if I was a little bit younger and had more of a buffer. And by buffer I mean, you know, you have parents to fall back on or what not. (#85)

Similarly, Interview #86 struggled financially in the wake of a lay off. Reiterating a sense of self-responsibility he sought help from family and friends in the form of a loan:

There were a couple points where my parents kind of, you know, sent me some bridge financing for the... and I actually paid them back at another point when I was in better shape. And then there was a point when a friend of mine loaned me some money when I was working, but it took me about three months to get paid on contract with my current employer so it was the same kind of situation. (#86)

As bridging strategies or an approach to financing training, loans are an interesting constituent element in the time regime. Loans are a way for banks to make money, but they operate discursively and are reinforced by a temporal narrative of chronology and linearity by reinforcing the idea that an investment in the present will equal returns in the future. The involvement of family members in this effort supports the perception that dedicating extraordinary resources will be rewarded by the outcome of this trajectory.

[Interviewer] You mentioned that your sisters were helping you out when you went to school. Did they help you pay the tuition as well?

[Respondent] Uh, my sister did help me pay the tuition while I was in school. Um, I got my loans through the bank and my parents co-signed the loan. (...)

[Respondent] Um... uh, I got another loan through the, uh, Ontario Government. OSAP loan. Six thousand dollars.

[Interviewer] Oh, okay.

[Respondent] For living expenses.

[Interviewer] Okay.

[Respondent] So that's what I used for rent. (...)

Um, if it weren't for my sisters I wouldn't have been able to go to school, financially. They supported me throughout the whole program. Like, I only had to pay for rent, but everything else was paid for by them. (#5)

Finally, as the last two interview transcript portions demonstrate, luck and chance factor in as significant elements of creating possibilities. The lucky eruption of inheritance and its impact on the ability of these respondents to pursue post-secondary

education is further indicative of the difficulty of creating independent means to prepare for future horizons:

[Interviewer] Um hm. So how did you survive financially during the time you were at school?

[Respondent] Well, I was very lucky. Um...I uh, well student loans at first. My Dad gave me a little bit of money for tuition, but it really didn't help... Well, I mean he... he gave us one of their old... an old car of theirs...

[Interviewer] Um hm

[Respondent] Which you know, that's worth a few thousand right there.

[Interviewer] Mmm

[Respondent] The expense of a car. Um, yeah but he like...um...but the monthly bills and the daily kind of expenses I mainly relied on my student loan.

[Interviewer] Um hm.

[Respondent] And then I, um, I inherited a whole whack of cash (laugh). And that was quite lucky in fact. (#19)

Also:

[Interviewer] And how did you guys finance your MBA program?

[Respondent] High Tech.

[Interviewer] High Tech? (laugh)

[Respondent] Yup.

[Interviewer] And how did High Tech finance it?

[Respondent] Well I mean we... I inherited some shares from my grandparents a number of years ago and as it was going up I was gladly selling. So that was, you know... High Tech...crashed, but luckily as we were going through it I just kept selling the stuff.

(...)

[Respondent] And, uh, I had zero money before that. Like zero. Absolutely none. Um, and had they not done that I would never have considered leaving my previous job.

(...)

[Interviewer] So...really your... enabled... your inheritance enabled you to just concentrate on school full time. Also to support your family?

[Respondent] I would... I would never have considered doing what I did without that money. (#52)

These stories interrupt a narrative expectation that movement towards and along a work trajectory, particularly if it is pursued with intentionality through planning and forecasting, will lead to a future horizon marked by success. This interruption occurs at two junctures: the first interruption challenges the material promise of the attainment of

work as a moment of ‘arrival’, so that for some the sense of ‘transition’ may be revisited during periods of unemployment; the second interruption occurs at the conceptual level in terms of the attainment of or state of being ‘adult’. The return to or continuation of familial financial dependence does not, as some argue, *postpone* adulthood, but rather opens up the possibilities of understanding between time and familial inter-dependent links. In other words, the association between age and financial independence should be replaced with a more nuanced understanding of relationships and their material implications as continuously *becoming*. What they are becoming is not pre-set or pre-known.

Conclusion

The decision to analyze the responses of a set of project participants up to the age of thirty-two years is not particularly significant in terms of understanding the experience of transitioning to adulthood. Statistical data usually clusters age groups from 15 years to 24 years and then 25 years to 44 years. This division reflects a narrative of linear and cumulative progress, and thus presumes that there are quantitative and qualitative differences between a ‘youth’ stage (15 to 24 years) and an adult stage (25 to 44 years). This demarcation both signals difference and silences the continuity and complexity of *becoming*. In this case, one may argue that individuals will continue to report on experiences of uncertainty and precariousness through their working lives and into retirement. My argument is therefore not about the significance of age in terms of transitioning into economic independence, but rather the tension between the narrative of linear growth and cumulative progress and the expectation that security and certainty will

commence at some point and continue. This is the story we associate with the arrival of adulthood.

The perception of the relationship between time and movement for these individuals revolves around a notion of change and improvement. Investment in training, for example, is framed as a preparatory strategy for a specific future horizon. The prepared individual is skilled, ready and adaptable to the demands of the labour market. These individuals believe that temporal movement is an ordered trajectory towards pre-set objectives and try to locate themselves accordingly. Several of the respondents, particularly those with short-term contracts, disrupt the narrative of anticipated success, but most of them do not appear to consider eruptions of chance and change to be continuous possibilities.

In this chapter I have shown that a notion of movement as ordered and thus intentionally created is narratively produced. Individuals who participated in these interviews demonstrate a belief that movement through time follows a singular trajectory, and so it can be characterized as an experience of cumulative growth and progress. The narratives that produce these beliefs concern stories about the centrality of work as future horizons, emplotted through public, conceptual and meta-narratives.

The respondents' accounts of planning, preparation and forecasting reflect their strategies to address their perceptions of uncertainty in the present and efforts to transition out of this uncertainty. Within these stories, movement can be compared to a cumulative building exercise – once a respondent has acquired skills, experience, and has strengthened their negotiating capacity, they will be in a better place in life. Respondents rationalize the experience of flexibility on the basis that it is temporary and that they will

transition out of these circumstances. As a temporal phenomenon, respondents presume that decisions and actions in the present will directly and inevitably affect future outcomes.

Connecting these dynamics to a broader social context, one can see that neo-liberal flexibilization policies exploit existing and constituted contingencies. Existing contingencies are present in factors and qualities that are unknown now and about the future. Constituted contingencies are cases where uncertainty is introduced in terms of short-term commitments. This is not my vision of orienting oneself to a future characterized by possibilities and chance. Individuals experience multiple trajectories, some of which require durations that enable us to sustain necessary material needs, such as through income. Living the experience of the indeterminacy of the future and being an active host to the unanticipated possibilities requires that some trajectories have momentum and are supported. It is not simply the responsibility of individuals to transcend dire circumstances in order to remain open to a future based on an ontology of becoming. Material relations in the relational setting and individuals require mutually beneficial and supportive environments in order to celebrate indeterminacy. Ideally, subject positions can be de-colonized and de-territorialized as work spaces and be free to be mobile, nomadic and exploratory.

Chapter Five – The Constitution of Subjectivities

Introduction

In chapters three and four, my analysis highlights the dominant ontological narratives in both the relational setting and expressed by individuals. The public, conceptual and meta-narratives that are assembled and form ontological narratives reflect a particular set of ideas concerning the character of movement through time. In this chapter I further analyze the interview responses in order to interrogate the constitution of subjectivity. As I explained in chapter one, subjectivity involves the conceptualization of selfhood, and it includes the ideological and material relations and modalities of being. Subjectivity locates us in frameworks of expected and understandable biographies and identities, and includes both an individual and a relational horizon. Expected and understandable biographies are thus politically located, informed and influenced by constituent elements of the relational setting as well as personal interpretations.

The ontological narratives that I identified in the previous chapter suggest that subjectivity or subject positions are fixed. The individual moves through time, but it is assumed that the destination of their selfhood is a pre-known, pre-assembled entity. The young adults in this study did not question their orientation to a future in which work was a dominant factor, wherein they organized their efforts, resources, and training in preparation for this horizon. Because we are located in public, conceptual and meta-narratives concerning temporal dynamics, therefore, we *expect* biographies to fit within this predictable and calculable framework.

The personal horizons of subject positions are thus colonized and territorialized by a logic of order and accumulation. According to this logic, the horizons to which

individuals orient themselves will flow directly from previous actions and decisions. Future horizons are thus entirely determined by what has preceded these moments, so that specific objectives are the colonizing and territorializing force. Where success and work are interwoven and dominate future horizon objectives, efforts to *be* a worker prioritize actions and decisions that will ensure the achievement of this objective.

In this chapter, I demonstrate three central themes that I identified in the respondents' stories. By acquiring education credentials, on-the-job learning, and practical skills, respondents perceive that they are advancing towards their objectives. They list factors that enable opportunity creation, such as financial support, networks, and financial independence. Finally, the creation of opportunities is something that can be bought and sold. Respondents also described the other side of opportunity creation. The rationalization and attempts to control future horizons in an effort to maintain an *opportunity creation* dynamic involves offsetting chance factors, controlling student debt, and going out to meet opportunities. Respondents describe this last strategy in terms of being flexible, ready, and mobile, as well as trying to become more stable.

The second theme examines the respondents' efforts to control and contain disruptions. The disruptive factors that I explore here include endemic job instability, the non-negotiability of student debt re-payment, their encounters with the fallacies and realities of stability and certainty (such as the sustainability of IT firms), and strategic postponement of family formation, etc.

The third theme concerns the perceived appropriateness of the respondents' orientation to the future. In order to achieve their objectives, respondents articulate a 'fix and stabilize' approach to their experience of moving through time.

In all of these themes, the respondents describe a range of responses and strategies that reflect the intentionality of preparation, readiness and forecasting narratives. The constitution of the ‘self’ is thus one that is purposeful, intentional and has agency over temporal dynamics. From this subject position, the future is calculable. By successfully lining up all of the pre-requisites, their subjectivity completes a symbiotic relationship with the time regime, wherein the institutional and policy efforts to effectively and efficiently locate individuals on a work trajectory are harmonized with individual aspirations.

As the following transcript portion illustrates,²⁷ the combination of school completed, skills attained, and a job contract awarded means that she *is* successful and has arrived. Her subjectivity as a worker is realized in this story as a direct circumstance of her agency and intentionality:

Interview #64 (F, 26 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, long-term contract, lives with roommate, \$55,000+)²⁸

[Respondent] I’m not worried at all. I’m just very eager to get going. Open up a whole bunch of new doors and see what’s behind them. Go down some different paths.

[Interviewer] It sounds like that really encapsulates your whole sense of where your life is right now. Obviously there’s a lot of open doors, and where do you think that comes from? What do think is opening all those doors?

[Respondent] Oh, definitely my degree in information technology. Absolutely. It’s sort of... and I sort of say I jumped on the bandwagon, and sort of developed the skills that are necessary in order to compete in today’s market, I guess.

(...)

[Interviewer] What is giving you the sense that all these doors are opening for you?

[Respondent] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Definitely, definitely, definitely from the Private IT College.

²⁷ Although I used this transcript portion in the previous chapter, I re-visit this quotation here and re-frame it. It is a perfect example of an articulation of a sense of agency and expectation.

²⁸ I use the following format to describe the respondent’s profile: sex, age, educational credentials, terms of their employment, living arrangements, annual income range.

She perceives that she is presented with a range of doors opening onto opportunity, and beyond them are pre-existing work destinations. For this individual, her subjectivity is fulfilled by making the correct choice – her orientation to the future must fix her position in relation to an assured success.

This understanding of agency, intentionality and an assured outcome contrasts with an open-ended interpretation of temporalities. A subjectivity that reflects a mobile or nomadic quality is de-territorialized, available to a multiplicity of future possibilities. Temporal difference is not equated with progress, but rather shifting foci that moves across the trajectories of work ambition, family commitment, and personal goals. In the next citation, the indeterminacy of the future is acknowledged and is a launch point for an ontology of becoming:

Interview #52 (M, 32 years, Graduate degree, permanent, lives with partner and child, \$35,000 – 44,000)

We've just accepted that... that, you know, that...um...uh...nothing's stable, that we can, we can always...I can quit my job tomorrow if I... if I get to a point where...I'm...I'm...see no hope in what I'm doing, and if it ends going against what I want to do. I should be able to quit my job within a day...and uh...I... I think we enjoy the times where, like if we're in Ottawa for three years, we'll enjoy those three years and we'll try to have good relationships with people while we can. But if at the end of three years it's not right, then...then we'll just pack up. So there's uh, uh...a sense of rootlessness a bit and... and we're pretty comfortable with that now. So we sort of feel like we're always in a transition phase to some degree.

(...)

Well, anything that doesn't fit into that's really frustrating right? And you get really pissed off and you blame whatever... It's like we could stay in Ottawa for the rest of our lives and that would be great. We could move to any other part of Canada - that would be fine. We could move to different countries - that would be okay, too. We could... I could quit my job, that's fine too. We can go back to school. I may even go back to school in, uh, five or six years. That's fine, too. My wife could do a PhD. That's fine.

(...)

If I was to speak in metaphors, uh...to take one from Pierre... from Pierre Trudeau, sort of, like, life is this river and it's going, you know, you're going down rapids and you're speeding along and the most you can do is, like, steer

away from a few rocks, but that's... that's the way it is, right? You can't control much more than that. But, you know, it's important to do that. But you're just steering right? Um... Trudeau said that and I thought it was pretty good.

The list of possibilities and the repetitive refrain of “that’s fine” is not a resignation to a lack of control or an absence of accumulating strengths and agency, but an attempt to speak to the reality of a future that is ‘as yet unknown.’ Interview #52 expresses an openness to chance, recognizing that a multiplicity of things *could* happen for a multiplicity of reasons. Therefore, a subjectivity that is mobile and nomadic recognizes that *that which is in the making* is an adulthood continuously encountering surprise and chance factors.

The narratives expressed by the respondents locate their subjectivities in a specific set of dynamics – the purposeful agent creating opportunity and containing disruptive factors. The movement and multiplicity of temporal and relational trajectories and foci connect experiences and interpretations to the process of becoming. An emphasis on things in the making thus runs counter to normative and naturalized constructions of life transitions and life stage markers of success by opening up analyses to the manyness and messiness of moments as process.

Modes of self-governance involve actions with purpose, the technique of which must follow from a prescriptive plan of conduct. As Bergson (1946) points out, we want to know this mode and therefore govern the moments of deviation from this course in order to minimize their impact. Therefore, the mode of governing one’s orientation to the future involves a strategic engagement with emerging issues and events.

I. Subject Positions: Creating Opportunity

Embedded within respondents' answers to a set of questions concerning work change²⁹ were descriptions of a strategic forward motion towards a specific destination: work. Based on a prescriptive mode of action, this destination was expressed in discourses of opportunity creation, access and reinforcement. Emerging issues and events were thus framed as imminently available to the dedicated pursuant.

In accordance with this response, this framing of 'opportunity' suggests that an abundance of work chances are waiting to be discovered. Where the perception that the relationship between temporal movement and personal responsibility involves progression and improvement, opportunity creation highlights a subjectivity based on a fixed objective. Opportunity creation is thus a self-directed mode of realizing one's subjectivity by colonizing one's own possibilities.

Therefore, the discussion highlights efforts to move through time purposefully. This is articulated in the pursuit of a specific future horizon, including education credentials, IT skills and the minimization of negative consequences on their future horizons, such as student debt. The stories that they tell plot a desire for agency over their futures and an ability to orchestrate their chances of getting where they want to go. The respondents also express a sense of readiness and adaptability to the demands that they encounter: possessing not only the right training credentials and skills, but also the right personality, attitude and sense of personal responsibility.

Opportunity is *created* through credentials:

As the following respondent points out, individuals believe that education and training credentials will create or enable a movement into work. In this case, the

²⁹ See Pertinent Interview Questions in Appendix B.

shopping list of job possibilities that one can pursue as a result of completing an MBA narrowly construes the purpose or intent of being a graduate student:

Interview #43 (F, 30 years, Graduate degree in progress, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)

I'm back in university and, you know, the courses I'm taking - marketing, accounting, finance, you know, they're telling me I could be a consultant, I can be a banker, I could be high tech management, I could be a human resource manager... You know, I mean it's... once again the world is at my feet and I really don't quite know what I am going to do with it.

For this respondent, an MBA degree is a component of creating opportunity in order to *become* a consultant, banker, etc. She perceives it as a central factor in putting an end to her current trajectory (in the service industry) and beginning a more desirable trajectory. She goes on to say,

Okay, you have to have credentials - that's all there is to it. And at this point I will. Five years ago things weren't... I was nervous about whether things would change in my environment at work. You know, whether the place would be sold or closed down or I'd be laid off. At this point in the game I'm not in the least worried because I've already, like, just testing the job market a couple of times. (#43)

As the second half of this quotation demonstrates, Interview #43 expects that an MBA will perform as a fulcrum between fear and uncertainty (for example, as a result of the high turnover rate in the service industry) and confidence and opportunity (associated with a white collar job). An opportunity *creator*, according to this story, locates him or herself on the correct trajectory. In this case, location on the right trajectory is assured with a high currency credential like an MBA:

Interview #5 (F, 28 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, short-term contract, lives with adult siblings, \$35,000 - 44,000)

Like, that's what they say to companies when they come and recruit us. It's like, "We have post-graduate students and our program is half of a MBA." Like, with our credits... that's why I went there as well. 'Cause I want to eventually get my MBA in information systems. And um, and that's why, like, it lured me in. I was, like, yeah, I'm gonna do it.

Within this technique of strategic self-alignment is the narrative of preparedness.

As I explored in the previous chapter, preparedness is ensured by the acquisition of correct and appropriate labour force information, training and education, and skill sets.

Together, these components set individuals on the right course:

Interview #5 (F, 28 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, short-term contract, lives with adult siblings, \$35,000 - 44,000)

[*Interviewer*] Do you think that you would have been able to find, um, an IT job without having gone to Private IT College or...?

[*Respondent*] I'm sure I could have...um, but.... I don't think it's as easy. You know, like they are looking for that piece of paper unless you're a genius.

The logic of progression, therefore, is perceived to be a straight and uninterrupted movement from one event (training) to the next logical event (job). A self-improvement momentum thus builds and is expected to produce guaranteed results.

Opportunity is also *created* through informal, on-the-job learning:

In some cases, the acquisition of correct and appropriate skills may be less about formal education and more about skill type. The efficient and opportunistic individual envelops preparedness into every available moment, in this way covering deficiencies in formal training with on-the-job learning. This was particularly evident amongst some of those working in IT. The following citations demonstrate a different set of expectations: that one can pick up IT skills while fulfilling the responsibilities of a particular job. In response to a question about where this man received website design training, he answered:

Interview #8 (M, 29 years, Graduate degree, short-term contract, lives alone, \$35,000 - 44,000)

[*Interviewer*] So you didn't learn that doing a B.A. in French?

[*Respondent*] No. No. No. So where did I learn it all?

[*Interviewer*] You didn't learn it in your M.A. in journalism either?

[Respondent] No, no. I... a lot of the stuff I learned at my current place of employment. Learning how a web, you know, how web sites work and what they can do and how you measure those... I learned at my previous job. All the jobs that I've had I've learned a lot. I never really thought much of the web when I went to university but here I am now. So I just learned through osmosis really.

[Interviewer] Sort of on the job picking things up and...?

[Respondent] Yeah, yeah.

Another respondent gave a similar account of his experience acquiring work-related skills:

Interview #7 (M, 29 years, Bachelor degree, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)

[Respondent] Yeah. Everything I learned was from my first job, is what I feel, not from... Education-wise, I mean university was good in that it helped me learn to study and I learned a lot of theoretical problems and how to apply them and stuff. But in the real work place, you know, it's what you learn from other people; that is how I got my education.

(...)

[Respondent] Yeah, that's what I'm trying to work towards. I'm trying to take on projects that I don't know much about, just so that I can learn a new language or a new way of programming, or learn algorithms, or just new... something new.

[Interviewer] Right.

[Respondent] ... that I can use in the future, and say, "Yeah, I've done something like this." And it'll help me get a better job.

... particularly if the employer or client *does not see the learning*:

Interestingly, when Interview #85 worked on projects that demanded a similar need to learn the applicable skills while in the process of completing the work, she expressed a sense of anxiety and stress that was not evident in the previous accounts:

Interview #85 (F, late 20s or early 30s, Bachelor degree, long-term contract, lives with partner, income unknown)

No, basically it was if I wanted to stay on I had to learn fast enough to make sure that the client didn't feel that I had some type of learning curve. I had to learn fast enough that the team didn't have to carry me continuously. And of course I did a lot of reading, a lot of literature, online resources of course and then the other team members. But there was never a formal methodology to account for my lack of background or knowledge. It was just whatever each project afforded me with: exposure to different technologies, different client

related issues, whatever the project afforded me that's what I had and whatever, it didn't afford me, I had to look for my own.

What is interesting about how this response differs from Interview #7's response (his preparation phase focused on getting a Bachelor degree in science and computer-related technologies) shows that individuals can be self-critical and take self-responsibility to further 'catch up' if their training is unrelated to their work. The self-improvement strategy reinforces the subject position as opportunistic and amenable to self-learning possibilities.

Opportunity is *created* when you possess practical, hands-on skills:

Respondents make an interesting set of claims about adding a college diploma to a university degree education. To some extent, it is a nuanced discussion of the previous arguments, qualifying the concept of 'skill' to make a specific point that skills be 'practical.' This factor, they claim, adds a competitive advantage to their preparatory efforts:

Interview #14 (F, 28 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, short-term contract, lives with partner, \$35,000 – 44,000)

By the time I had done it I just wanted to get out of university. I didn't want to pursue a Masters. I did not want to do anything beyond that. I wanted something that was practical, hands-on, that would get me a job.

(...)

So yeah, I took public relations, great program. It was a two-year program, you know. Learned all the skills, learned tons of computer skills that I really didn't have going to university. You know, university is theory. There's a lot of theory and research but in terms of practical hands on and getting down in the dirt doing it there's not much of that in terms of the program I went through. So I had a really hard time finding a job after I graduated. I sent out 147 resumes.

In this interview segment, the respondent configures her creative and preparatory decisions to assess the adequacy of a university education. She concludes that this approach was inadequate and did not enable her to be sufficiently responsive to the

demands of the labour market. In order to create opportunity, the self-improvement move required that she pursue ‘practical’ skills in a college program.

Interestingly, the concept of ‘practicality’ appears to be equally applied to an advanced degree. As the following citation demonstrates, an MBA has a practical applicability in preparatory efforts. ‘Practicality,’ therefore, is synonymous with a mechanism that is perceived to open doors to opportunity. As such, these practical skills not only promise that the difference between the present and the future will be identifiable by its improvement, but that the difference between two potential futures – one with and one without these practical skills – can also be pre-known. Without these skills, an individual cannot be assured that success is attainable.

Interview #52 (M, 32 years, Graduate degree, permanent, lives with partner and child, \$35,000 – 44,000)

I decided to jump out of journalism and, uh, a friend said that an MBA would be very practical for getting into any NGO or any international organization.

(...)

Got a job as editor of a...not a very good magazine. Just a tiny... And then, uh...I applied for an international job for the Federal Government. I was turned down. And, uh, then I did the MBA and then I got it.

Opportunity is *enabled* by financial support from family in order to pursue education and training:

In the process of creating opportunities, respondents describe mobilizing a number of resources. In some situations, for example, it was only a financial contribution from their families that made post-secondary education (for the first, second or third time) possible:

Interview #64 (F, 26 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, long-term contract, lives with roommate, \$55,000+)

[Interviewer] So how could you financially afford to make the decision to go to a private IT college?

[Respondent] I have the love and support of my wonderful parents. If I didn't have that I don't think I could have done it without actually having to work and pay for it.

Similarly, another response shows that opportunity creation is often not an individual endeavour:

Interview #5 (F, 28 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, short-term contract, lives with adult siblings, \$35,000 - 44,000)
Um, if it weren't for my sisters I wouldn't have been able to go to school, financially. They supported me throughout the whole program. Like, I only had to pay for rent, but everything else was paid for by them which was amazing. I mean, I owe them a lot.

Furthermore, the following interview portions demonstrate that the timing of family interventions can be essential to a subject's ability to 'locate themselves' on a preparation to work trajectory:³⁰

Interview #52 (M, 32 years, Graduate degree, permanent, lives with partner and child, \$35,000 – 44,000)

[Interviewer] And how did you guys finance your MBA program?

[Respondent] High Tech.

[Interviewer] High Tech? (laugh)

[Respondent] Yup.

[Interviewer] And how did high tech finance it?

[Respondent] Well, I mean we... I inherited some shares from my grandparents a number of years ago and as it was going up and as it was up I was gladly selling. So that was, you know High Tech.

(...)

And that was... that was it. Otherwise, if it weren't for that it would have been very difficult...yeah.

(...)

And, uh, I had zero money before that. Like zero. Absolutely none. Um, and had they not done that I would never have considered leaving journalism.

Interview #19 (M, 31 years, college diploma, permanent, lives with partner and child, \$45,000 - 54,000)

[Interviewer] Um, hmm. So how did you survive financially during the time you were at school?

³⁰ I re-visit some of the interview transcript portions presented in the previous chapter in order to illustrate a different set of argument concerning subjectivity.

[Respondent] Well I was very lucky. Um...I, uh, well student loans at first. My dad gave me a little bit of money for tuition, but it really didn't help... Well, I mean, he... he gave us one of their old... an old car of theirs.

(...)

Um, yeah but he like...um...but the monthly bills and the daily kind of expenses I mainly relied on my student loan.

[Interviewer] Um hmm.

[Respondent] And then I, um, I inherited a whole whack of cash (laugh). And that was quite lucky in fact.

And in the following case, the provision of \$25,000 for tuition fees plus living expenses for nine months was based on a combination of parental workplace policies and government policies:

Interview #65 (M, 24 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, student, lives alone, no income)

[Interviewer] How were you able to afford that?

[Respondent] I took out a rather large loan to be able to do that and I was also fortunate enough to have a... my parents work for an organization that provides funding for my education as well.

[Interviewer] Okay, so the combination of the two?

[Respondent] Probably sixty percent from loans and about forty percent from the... those covered by the grant.

[Interviewer] Both of your parents?

[Respondent] Yes.

The story of a self-constituted subjectivity is thus challenged by the necessity of drawing on family resources. In these scenarios, the self-propelled individual requires a collective and supportive effort.

Respondents look for strategies that allow them to access opportunities through contact with networks:

In addition to creating opportunity by assessing the labour market, accumulating skills through formal training and being supported by family resources, an active subjectivity demands forming and establishing work-related networks.

Networking, or the process of meeting and talking to potential employers and/or those who are connected to employment openings, speaks to the concerted effort of the

individual to locate opportunities. Whether they utilize existing relationships or attempt to make new connections, networking is an intentional social act deemed to create access to jobs. Cultivating the right sort of conversations and relationships focuses both the social interests and colonizes more social spaces into a work project trajectory. Furthermore, it trains the individual to remain on the look-out for imminent opportunities that are bound to be fruitful.

Interview #43 (F, 30 years, Graduate degree in progress, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)

...and you know what this university, to be honest with you, what it offered me was a networking opportunity. Because I worked in the Ottawa business community and I've actually been involved in politics as well on a municipal level and so I felt that I had the real good breeding ground for a career. Like, I really could network. So to start over in a new city when I had spent ten years meeting people just seemed to be ridiculous. I really need to build on that.

Interview #85 (F, late 20s or early 30s, Bachelor degree, long-term contract, lives with partner, income unknown)

[Interviewer] And how have you been trying to get into this current job? Did you go through a formal recruitment test or did you...?

[Respondent] I tried basically every avenue. One of these avenues includes the Public Service Commission web site that has a listing of jobs open to the public and everyone is allowed to apply. And I've been doing this for the past year I guess with zero response. It's not very successful where I'm concerned. The other is the via networking and trying to meet people through people who are already in the service and setting up very informal chat sessions just to talk to them, put a face to the name as my resume is being circulated. And that's a little bit more effective than going through the Public Service Commission web site.

Interview #19 (M, 31 years, college diploma, permanent, lives with partner and child, \$45,000 - 54,000)

Uh...well when I was... before...about a couple of weeks before I, uh, had my exams a school... um... a... a friend of mine in school got hired....and I just... that's how I heard about the company. I would never have known about the company...and um...had no idea what they did and so I applied there and uh...within a week they called me up and interviewed me and hired me. So I... I was told that I had a job.... at... by the time I had finished my exams, like, just within a couple of days.

Networking is framed as an information sharing strategy in order to find an opening an avenue to a pre-existing job opportunity. Present insecure work relations, including an imminent lay-off or an inevitable contract completion are depicted as less pressing if the individual is prepared to initiate a desirable movement. The desirable movement in this case involves the continuous location and re-location on the work trajectory.

Interview #14 (F, 28 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, short-term contract, lives with partner, \$35,000 – 44,000)

I think I'm starting to learn to have more faith in myself as well because before when I was laid off I was like, 'Oh my God it's the end of the world!' You know, I don't want to have to be looking for another job again. As I move through life and as I'm gaining more experience and meeting more people and adding to my resume it seems to be getting easier to find a job. So I know that I have a lot of networking opportunities with this new job. Networking is the most important thing that I've... the most important skill that I've learned. So when I knew I was getting laid off, for instance, this job... I started networking immediately. Like, just telling everyone that I was getting laid off, you know. Throw my resume around.

Interview #59 (M, 30 years, Graduate degree, self-employed, lives with partner, \$55,000+)

[Respondent] Okay, I guess it starts the day I lost my job the first thing I did was...

(...)

[Respondent] It doesn't really trouble me now. So one of the first things I did was putting out my resume and getting it out there to some contacts that I have... that I knew. I had several good contacts in the industry in government and elsewhere. So I got my resume out to them and let them know... let them know what my situation was. Got my resume on to a couple job search sites. Basically my idea was to explore all my options so I didn't want to... I wanted to investigate all avenues.

(...)

I mean, initially, after the initial shock wore off, I just saw it as a good opportunity because I knew that I made such good contacts in the government and the industry that I didn't think for a second that I would have trouble getting work. So I thought... I saw it as a great opportunity.

Interview #8 (M, 29 years, Graduate degree, short-term contract, lives alone, \$35,000 - 44,000)

[Interviewer] Now what gives you that sense of security that, you know, to just sort of launch yourself away from employee status like that?

[Respondent] You mean like the confidence that I had or...?

[Interviewer] Uh huh.

[Respondent] Well, it was primarily that I had contacts in Ottawa that I knew... I mean, I didn't go to that IT company... It wasn't a cold call - I know the CEO quite well.

Although a personal connection to the CEO of a firm is probably an example of having the *right* contact, a number of assumptions converge in these responses. The notion that pre-existing opportunities can be located by speaking to the correct person reinforces the idea that an appropriately focused individual takes responsibility for locating opportunity trajectories. The assurance expressed in the second interview: "I made such good contacts in the government and the industry that I didn't think for a second that I would have trouble getting work," (#59), speaks to the set of assumptions that are associated with a perceived direct correlation between initiating a connection and the outcome of that relationship. "I know the CEO" may prove to be a fruitful relationship, but to presume that a direct causal relation can be set in motion is to ignore the complexities of temporalities and possibilities.

Opportunity is enabled through *financial independence*:

The desire for a guaranteed outcome is articulated as a central motivator for pursuing an IT skills trajectory. Guarantees, or the arrival of success, were framed in specific terms: a high salary and the economic independence that it affords. According to some of the respondents, the convergence of IT jobs, high salaries and certain employment are signifiers of the experience of success:

Interview #64 (F, 26 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, long-term contract, lives with roommate, \$55,000+)

Um, huh, I was... see, I always wanted to be a teacher, but when I was growing up, my father always said, 'No, there's no money in teaching. There's no

money in teaching.’ So I lost that at a very, very young age. But it was always something that I sort of... I really sort of kept in the back of my head, you know. I’m sure one day I’ll do it. Um, but right now I need to be able to... I’m single and I’m twenty-six and I want to be able to totally support myself. And I want to be able to support a lifestyle that, you know, allows me to travel and do all kinds of wonderful things... Well, yeah and it’s not so much that you need thousands upon thousands upon millions of dollars. You just need to be able to have something to fall back on, you know. So I’d like to be able to develop some kind of nest egg so that I can... I can support myself.

Interview #8 (M, 29 years, Graduate degree, short-term contract, lives alone, \$35,000 - 44,000)

Yeah. I was at a research firm full-time staff with benefits and all of that and I left after a year and a half because I thought that I had got as far as I could with that job. And I sort of looked at what would be expected of me, or what I would be working on in the year ahead and I thought, ‘well I don’t want to do this anymore.’ Plus you don’t work nearly in the NGO business to get rich. And I was struggling with student loans and things. So getting a job in high tech was an opportunity that was presented to me. So I took it.

Interview #65 (M, 24 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, student, lives alone, no income)

[Respondent] I went to Private IT College, which is an IT school. I would have to say it’s the biggest step that I had taken towards going into the IT field. It’s given me the opportunity to learn the actual programming languages and it’s given me the exposure to the IT market that I need in order to become a professional.

(...)

[Respondent] Like, for example Japan is very strong in the hardware but they are weak in software and just slowly now they’re really starting to recruit lots of people with actually just one or two years of experience. And they are paying very high salaries. It’s the same in the Middle East and Latin America. Countries that still haven’t brought all their technology up to speed.

(...)

[Interviewer] And IT is your ticket to travel?

[Respondent] I believe IT is my ticket to travel, yes. It’s an industry... it’s one of the highest paying industries and just in... usually people that have about... four or five years experience.

In other words, the relationship between IT employment and a sense of moving directly towards success involves bringing an end to struggles (with debt), an ability to be financially independent, and an opportunity to live the life they had envisioned for

themselves (“IT is my ticket to travel”). The perception of employment guarantee and high income thus fosters a sense of self-constituting subjectivity.

Opportunities are enabled through financial independence accumulated through savings:

When respondents recognized that a future horizon characterized by security and guarantees was unknowable, some of them incorporated buffer zones into their preparatory strategies. Describing their personal savings techniques, the following interview excerpts express a perceived need for self-generating a base of savings. In this formula, there is an interesting impression that the individual can self-create insurance in order to maintain a forward-moving momentum.

Interview #18 (F, 27 years, incomplete Bachelor degree, permanent, lives with adult siblings, \$25,000 - 34,000)

[Respondent] I’m putting \$350 every month from payroll deduction to say I have that money set aside. I’m not really worried. That’s what I’ve always done. Especially when you work in contracts, I think my mind has been geared towards that way more because there’s nothing that’s guaranteed. I always have money set aside... To say, really, if something happens with this job, I’m not desperate enough to pick up another job that I don’t want to go to in the first place. And, um...

[Interviewer] Is that something you worked out on your own? Or is that something...

[Respondent] I think it’s personality. It takes a different kind of person to being to pick things up and adapt to the environment they’re in. And also it comes with the times also, where it’s drummed into your head that there’s no lifetime employment.

Interview #7 (M, 29 years, Bachelor degree, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)

[Interviewer] Would you say that security is an important part?

[Respondent] Definitely. I didn’t really know about investments and RRSPs until a couple of years ago when...I should get on this, I’m behind in my contributions, so, that sort of thing I try to put in a little more every year to get caught up.

Interview #93 (M, 29 years, college diploma, short-term contract + self-employed, lives with parents, income unknown)

[Interviewer] So your living expenses are fairly minimal. So what is your goal for your... what do you do with your money? Is... I don't know how to say this.

[Respondent] So say it, say it straight out.

[Interviewer] So you must have like a whack of savings. What are you saving for?

[Respondent] For a rainy day. I'm just saving because I don't... I saw what my parents went through and...

[Interviewer] Because things were tougher when you were kids?

[Respondent] Things were tougher, things were a lot tougher.

(...)

[Respondent] Savings is my huge security, that's my huge security. I always had a quota every year, how much I have to put away and as I... in some years I doubled that or whatever and I'm happy, you know.

(...)

I have that flexibility and that's what makes it flexible, you know, having some savings saved away for a rainy day or a rainy year or whatever and that's it, you know. For me I have to say, which may be a good thing or a bad thing, flexibility... it really depends. It depends on your bankbook... it depends a little bit on your bankbook.

This pre-emptive move is supposed to assist efforts to preserve the respondents' readiness for opportunity and avoid any struggles. The avoidance of struggle is, as these individuals suggest, a security measure that contributes to an active arsenal of strategic moves.

... and through an abundance of jobs:

The concept of 'abundance,' in this case, focuses on creating a range of options. Just as the previous respondents expressed a desire to avoid desperate conditions, these individuals pursue a different version of the same strategy: a preparation that will guarantee that many job options are available.

Interview #5 (F, 28 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, short-term contract, lives with adult siblings, \$35,000 - 44,000)

Uh, moving here... when I first moved here I thought I was going to be a teacher and, um, just everywhere you go, everywhere you look... looking for a job, it's like everything has to be with... is IT related. It was... it was crazy. Like, it was really difficult trying to find a job...and I thought why don't I couple my love for teaching with IT and eventually I could teach IT. And that's why I geared myself towards the IT industry, because it was so abundant.

Interview #19 (M, 31 years, college diploma, permanent, lives with partner and child, \$45,000 - 54,000)

[Interviewer] Uh, just generally, why... why high tech? Why'd you choose to, uh, pursue that?

[Respondent] Um...well, I wanted something that, uh, could use my mind and, uh, I was sick of the service industry work. And mainly 'cause of the market in Ottawa. At that time it was a huge booming market and, uh, I was thinking making twelve bucks an hour. I wanted to make a good salary and I wanted to be sure that if I generated a debt from going to school I'd be able to pay it back.

Opportunity is enabled through *multiple job holding*:

In other examples, 'many job options' are pursued simultaneously. The long work hours that result from holding multiple jobs at the same time reflects an effort to attain self-insurance and assemble their own components:

Interview #43 (F, 30 years, Graduate degree in progress, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)

[Interviewer] Are any of your co-workers juggling... is this their second job?

[Respondent] Yes. At the pub - absolutely, absolutely. Simply because nothing's guaranteed because of the turnover and because of the way they treat employees. People, like, people are told have a back up plan. Yeah, it's awful, it's really awful. You feel you have no job security so a lot of the staff do have part-time jobs.

Interview #8 (M, 29 years, Graduate degree, short-term contract, lives alone, \$35,000 - 44,000)

It's only now that I've sort of had a little bit of a cushion at the end of the month. Certainly at the IT firm and social research organization that wasn't... that wasn't the case. And so one of the reasons that I have taken the contracts now is because it just gives me that little extra cushion because I still... I still have student loans to pay off and I still have credit cards so... You know, I'm not... I'm glad that I can afford not to have roommates, you know, and have my own place.

Interview #93 (M, 29 years, college diploma, short-term contract + self-employed, lives with parents, income unknown)

I work seven days a week now but I wouldn't work seven days a week if I wasn't making the money I do. This way here I don't really... during the week my job for the public service agency... well no, on the weekends with driving the taxi, it allows me not to spend a dime that I make at the public service agency so it works out fine for me.

A “back up plan” or a “little extra cushion” reiterates a sense of self-determination and self-responsibility. The prepared move is to anticipate the need for self-protection in order to maintain the momentum forward.

Opportunity can be *purchased* and *sold*:

The commercialization of the process of locating the work subject on an employment trajectory adds another dimension to the preparation of the self and the desire to be located on a work trajectory can be exploited by private firms. The hope of being (quickly) located on the right trajectory (towards secure, full-time employment) is an opportunity for which some are willing to pay an intermediary agent:

Interview #65 (M, 24 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, student, lives alone, no income)

[*Interviewer*] So, you looked through the yellow pages. So what made you think that an employment agency was the right strategy for you?

[*Respondent*] Well, at the time I had read in the paper that employment agencies were doing very well. They were getting lots of contracts for the government initially and the government was something that I was also interested in. So I was hoping that by joining this one agency they would send me on a government contract and hopefully I would be hired by the time that I graduated from university.

Private staffing companies (or temp agencies) sell a promise of movement *into* a job and *onto* a path of the promise of imminent opportunities.

In the next sections, I demonstrate that respondents also attempt to rationalize and control future horizons in order to maintain their focus on creating opportunities. Respondents surmise that by staying in control, they preserve their momentum towards their objectives.

We create opportunities in order to *offset the ‘chance’ factor*:

These individuals’ efforts to locate themselves on desirable trajectories demonstrate intentionality and planning in their orientation to the future. Articulated as a

singular focus, the intent with which they move towards the future concentrates their subjectivity around self-disciplined achievement in order to be a worker. The success of this trajectory thus lies in the attainment of this destination.

This notion of intentionality presumes that reliance on chance can be contained or eliminated. As I argue in the following section, respondents have implicitly or explicitly understood that there is a tension between a rationalized and controlled future orientation and one that is left to luck. Individuals assert agency by creating opportunity in order to avoid leaving themselves vulnerable to chance. This man, for example, felt that his graduate degree had offset any need to rely on luck:

Interview #8 (M, 29 years, Graduate degree, short-term contract, lives alone, \$35,000 - 44,000)

I can understand that someone who's in a similar situation might not be fortunate enough to have those connections, but I don't... I don't attribute it all just to luck. You know I wouldn't have gotten the job at this organization had I not had letters after my name which I worked for.

Controlling (*student*) debt also reduces vulnerability to chance:

Another factor that the young adults in this sample identified as an element to be contained and controlled is student debt. Within the group of individuals interviewed for this project, the self-insurance strategy most often employed drew on family resources, but also included combining paid employment with school. In the following case, remaining in the community where this respondent had already established paid employment was an important factor to being able to go to school without taking on debt.

Interview #43 (F, 30 years, Graduate degree in progress, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)

[Interviewer] In terms of... are you doing your MBA at a university here in town or...?

[Respondent] Yeah. There's different programs you can do, like at other universities. But I'll be honest with you: I'm putting myself through school and, you know, I'm trying to do it without getting into debt.

For another respondent, avoiding debt involved a combination of working while in school and living with his parents:

Interview #93 (M, 29 years, college diploma, short-term contract + self-employed, lives with parents, income unknown)
 Cost-wise? Fifteen thousand dollars and I'm debt free right now. I worked the whole year, so before I went to the private college I went to another college for three weeks and I took the taxi course, because there's a taxi course you can go through. That's right.

Although he doesn't mention that living with his parents contributed to his ability to maintain low living expenses and avoid debt, he makes it clear throughout the interview that he does not contribute financially to the household expenses.

Opportunity is something that *pre-exists* and we must go out to *meet it*:

A notion that opportunities pre-exist, waiting to be discovered, informs a further aspect of self-preparation. Individuals identified a 'suitable' set of characteristics in accordance with a work-ready subjectivity. These personal traits demonstrate a readiness and willingness to be successful³¹:

Interview #64 (F, 26 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, long-term contract, lives with roommate, \$55,000+)
 Everything is an opportunity... And then, I think I'm just really anticipating all the things that I don't know that are going to happen. The idea of change is just so incredible that it's... you know, you just never know what's coming and if you can, you know, if you can handle it, then... I look forward to it, you know. I want it, and I don't know if I'm doing... maybe I am... a certain feeling that I'm expecting it so much that it's not going to happen for me, but, you know. You take it as it comes and go for it.

Interview #8 (M, 29 years, Graduate degree, short-term contract, lives alone, \$35,000 - 44,000)
 I think it's a bit of both. I mean, in high tech if you can't be everywhere and anywhere at a moment's notice then you shouldn't really be in the industry. The whole high tech industry is about mobility and freedom and, you know, ability

³¹ It will appear as though this is particularly evident amongst those working in the IT sector, but this is a factor of the sample and not an argument about IT work.

to go anywhere or send things anywhere or work anywhere at any time. And, you know, it's lucky that I can...

This combination of anticipation and inclination brings to mind an image of the racer poised at the starting gate. For the racer, the finish line exists. They know how far away it is, how much energy they need to exert in order to make it all the way... The only unknown factor for the racer is how much they need to push themselves in order to beat everyone else. For these young adults, the self must be ever-ready and receptive to imminent possibilities. In these responses, they emphasize being in a state of preparedness – hovering in the starting gate. Their capacity to launch is therefore framed as a constituent element of being located on a trajectory toward success.

Individuals go out to meet opportunities as *flexible, ready and mobile* individuals:

Interview #7 (M, 29 years, Bachelor degree, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)

[Interviewer] Is there anything that constrains your choices, or are you pretty much free to...

[Respondent] The only thing that constrains is if I just don't want to do it or I don't like it. Other than that, I can pretty well do what I want. Whatever I want, I'll do it.

This section and the previous section (*going out to meet opportunity* and *being ready and flexible*) reinforce a notion of intentional agency. In the telling of these stories, respondents highlight the absence of any factors that would hold them back. When an encounter with some sort of constraint occurs it is framed as a temporary misstep. As long as the subject is prepared to seize opportunities as they emerge and is prepared to adjust and move accordingly, the trajectory towards a successful future can be

maintained. As the following respondents express, there is also a sense that young workers are compelled toward self-improvement through readiness and flexibility.

Interview#10 (F, 32 years, Graduate degree, multiple short-term contracts, lives with roommates, \$25,000 - 34,000)

I'm sure that I have, uh, been willing and even eager partly because of the nature of my personality and partly the economy to be really flexible. I will put work in where it fits. I've been willing to...um, do contract work, especially when you're in your twenties, you're definitely at the mercy of whoever happens to know that they have work available. And you're a firefighter. And I've been willing to do that work. And you need an extraordinary amount of flexibility...in your time, um, to do that. And...you have to be willing to...I guess sacrifice structure really. Um, and that kind of appeals to me, economy or not.

Interview #33 (M, 28 years, Bachelor degree, part-time permanent, lives with partner and child, \$25,000 – 34,000)

Yeah, yeah. I definitely... it's... that's how I've got by in the last... since I left home, I guess. It's just being flexible, being able to adapt to different situations. And an example would be the job that I did for a computer company knowing nothing about that. But I was willing to try it out and knew that it would be worth giving it a shot. And adapting myself to that situation and that environment.

Respondents yearn to control and contain the uncertainties of future horizons and place themselves on *stable trajectories*:

For those individuals who clearly articulated a desire for their future horizon to be characterized by stability, they assumed that they should enfold those qualities into their present circumstances. “I’m a stable person” or “I don’t want to be part of that fear anymore” is indicative of the seamless connection between the sense of self and the work relationship. The prospect of proceeding into the future as an unstable individual, therefore, is a path to be avoided:

Interview #43 (F, 30 years, Graduate degree in progress, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)

Well I’m a firm believer that your resume shouldn’t look like you job jump too much because I think that... that’s the thing going back to stability. I like my resume to show that I’m a stable person and that I don’t just get up and quit. So,

I mean, when I commit to a business I really... I tell them, like, I want to stay here.

(...)

So I went into my MBA thinking, 'hmm high tech...' You know, let's get... And I've already forgotten that. I've already, like, forget it because I just see it as unstable.

Interview #85 (F, late 20s or early 30s, Bachelor degree, long-term contract, lives with partner, income unknown)

[Interviewer] What are the things that are appealing to you about working for the government?

[Respondent] First and foremost, the stability of it and it's more institutionalized of course and there's a lot of exploitation in the private sector. The most blatant of that example is the overtime hours where they are not compensated at all and this is something that simply doesn't happen in the public sector.

(...)

And so five years from now I would not want to be sitting and worrying about some kind of market turnover or some type of fallout or controversy that would trickle down to the investors holding out there... all those sorts of things. I don't want to be part of that fear anymore and I think that the government is an excellent buffer.

Interview #86 (M, 29 years, Bachelor degree, short-term contract, lives with partner, \$55,000+)

[Respondent] Uh, at the time that I decided to move to Ottawa I wasn't specifically targeting a job with the federal government. Although I thought that that was probably the best option. It wasn't really until I had come here and begun to look for a couple of months here that I really started to realize that I should have taken that job I was offered three years ago as a student. Because... no, in all seriousness I started to realize though that there were a lot of opportunities in the government that I had overlooked in the past.

[Interviewer] So when you looked at the high tech sector here, when you scanned it, it wasn't offering the kind of quality employment you wanted or...?

[Respondent] Stability.

[Interviewer] Stability.

[Respondent] Security. I mean, I think I had had enough personally of the roller coaster, the revolving door of high tech and, you know, I'll pass up stock options for a, you know, a real... a secure contract. Or at least an employer with a certain sort of values. So....

For this group, a future of stability involves predictability and certainty both in terms of their income and their employer. Government jobs are identified as examples of predictable and reasonable work time commitments, good benefit packages, and a refuge

from the culture of fear that some experience in private sector industries. The intentional agent moving towards this horizon must therefore set a self-improvement course along a stable trajectory.

Subject Positions: Creating Opportunity – *Analysis*

The belief that opportunities pre-exist our arrival and that we must coordinate our efforts in order to correctly locate ourselves in relation to them is based on a notion of a universal and specific experience of movement through time. This would involve a subject in linear motion seeking a stable, fixed destination. As I demonstrated in chapter three, however, institutions and policies in the relational setting are also in flux. Being located and in relationship with a myriad of cultural, discursive, institutional and policy influences produces a multiplicity of trajectories. The significance of any point on any of these trajectories changes and alters the momentum, emphasis and focus of the individual, and constitutes a nomadic or mobile subjectivity.

The significance of luck and chance in the co-ordination of multiple trajectories in these citations is downplayed or silenced as individuals identify efforts to self-constitute their subjectivity. The many possibilities that have continuously had the potential to erupt and affect their trajectories are not included in these stories as they focus on *being* prepared, active agents, self-protected and self-motivated to build momentum.

Respondents perceive that any possible momentum has two possible trajectories into the future: success or failure. The constitution of success objectives is enabled by making the right contacts, attaining high paying employment, saving money, having an abundance of options and juggling multiple jobs when necessary. Experiencing periods of struggle, requiring financial assistance, feeling as though one has limited and insufficient options are not consistent with the desirable subject location. Where the

prepared, competitive and independent subject is guaranteed a position on a trajectory towards success, the untrained, dependent adult will continue to struggle down the wrong path. Within this framework, the multiplicity of possibilities are colonized and territorialized in order to focus the intent on the subject *becoming* worker. Once this has been achieved, they will have arrived.

II. The Containment and Avoidance of Disruption

In spite of a narrative orientation to the future that constructs it as an anticipated series of unfolding events along a linear trajectory, there are also indications that respondents recognized the complexities of temporalities. Although emergent issues and events are described as either anticipated, pre-formed constituent elements that determine a desirable outcome, or errant deviations, attention to erupting elements nuances the respondents' understanding of temporalities. An acknowledgement of eruptions is framed in terms of large-scale fluctuations (markets) or small-scale non-negotiables (debt re-payment and the perceived inevitability of marriage and parenthood). The externality or inevitability of these factors is interpreted as issues to be *enfolded* into their strategies. Elements that are perceived as disruptive, therefore, are located in the periphery of the subject's efforts to maintain movement in the right direction.

Respondents *encounter* limitations in the relational setting characterized by *endemic instability*:

The influence of external factors, such as market fluctuations, are understood to have a momentum all their own. Movement within the market economy affects the landscape within which opportunities are produced. Although there is an expectation that the market economy contains an array of pre-formed jobs waiting to be found, respondents understand that *specific* jobs may not be fixed and stable. The availability of

opportunities is about the stability of plurality, in this case, rather the stability of any particular contract.

Respondents who work in the service industry, in the arts, as well as in the public and IT sectors experience this difference by adjusting their expectations. ‘Difference’, in these descriptions, highlights the discrepancy between employers’ trajectories and individual trajectories. In the first scenario, the anticipated disruption is on the horizon and it involves a lay off. That it should be understood as an imminent possibility disciplines the service sector worker to be prepared and ready to locate other possibilities:

Interview #43 (F, 30 years, Graduate degree in progress, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)

You know, I’ll give a recent example. You know, a new owner came in and he basically said, ‘I have no attachment to any of these people. I will...’ You know, he basically wanted to downsize a bit and wasn’t concerned about who’s, you know, there was no, you know... Downsizing is a normal thing in business. (...)

And now, I will be honest with you though, they get up to two hundred resumes a week. So, they have this feeling that the labour market... it’s just, you know, it goes on forever.

Similar to the constant presence of the possibility of an imminent lay off is the threat of not locating the next contract. The threat of missing an offer of an opportunity from an employer may be constant, so that the independent contractor must make her or himself continuously present and available. Being “like a farmer... tied to the land” indicates that Interview #10’s momentum requires that she contain the possibility of being without work by always being easy to locate.

Interview#10 (F, 32 years, Graduate degree, multiple short-term contracts, roommates, \$25,000 - 34,000)

[Respondent] Um...I find that because, again, I’m not making as much money as I could if I actually had gone and taken a high tech... I have picked and chosen so that I can afford a car if it’s not a really expensive car. I live in an apartment and I’m not buying a house. So, I’ve sort of... I have lower financial

expectations to do the kind of work that I'm more interested in. And I've been able to do that.

(...)

[Respondent] Um, the disadvantage is that it is an illusion in that you really can't take... you can't go away, you don't have regular vacations and stuff. I actually feel like I've, uh, I've been like a farmer the way I've been tied to the land in Ottawa.

[Interviewer] Um hmm.

[Respondent] Um, I've just been realizing that one of the reasons that I've stayed here is that I really have been chugging away on all these different contracts that are sort of go on and on and get extended and extended but I have sort of overlook, um, sort of having a... the fact that (laugh) things like that any time now would become an issue (laugh).

[Interviewer] Yeah that's interesting. So... so part of the requirement of... of having the irons in the fire and keeping those contacts going is that it's a bit hard to take time for yourself?

[Respondent] It's actually almost impossible.

The endemic instability that these respondents encounter is interpreted as a product of the relational setting. In order to maintain their own movement, therefore, these individuals take on responsibility for preparing themselves and responding to whatever occurs.

Respondents encounter further limitations in the relational setting characterized by *non-negotiable* demands of (student) debt re-payment:

One of the non-negotiable occurrences that press upon them is student debt. The attempts to locate and secure a steady source of income for those leaving school with student debt is situated as a key determinant in the opportunity seeking process. As the following segment demonstrates, respondents identified the need to secure sufficient earnings in order to service their student loans. Although she hasn't given up on pursuing something in the arts later on, Interview #85 frames her choice to postpone a career in this industry in order to contain the effect of carrying a debt load.

Interview #85 (F, late 20s or early 30s, Bachelor degree, long-term contract, lives with partner, income unknown)

When I graduated in 1996 in Art History, again as I mentioned, the field that I was entering did not afford me with too many opportunities, only by way of volunteer. But graduating and paying off those student loans, you know, that wasn't much of an option to do that. And the proximity - the mere proximity of me being on campus and me hearing about this company that was started by graduate students, albeit in different departments, made me think that I'll just do this for the summer and hopefully it will be something to carry me over as I continue to look for something in the arts.

In order to respond to the student debt factor, this woman changed the focus of her preparatory strategy. By borrowing student funds in order to finance her education, she needed to locate herself on a trajectory towards a lucrative financial future. Since debt repayment is non-negotiable, Interview #85 re-configured her pursuit of a future in the art industry in order to fulfill her financial obligations.

In this scenario, student debt determines the intensity of the need to attain lucrative employment. Owing large sums of money creates a fear of unemployment or low earnings. As these stories demonstrate, therefore, the students loan system reinforces a narrative of temporal linearity in three ways: it creates an impression of structural support in order to enable efforts to attain preparatory training; it tethers young adults and other student loan holders to a work trajectory by imposing the obligation of a future repayment schedule; and thus entrenches a particular understanding of linear movement towards the future. The non-negotiable aspect of student loan repayment thus has a disciplinary effect on the way that individuals conceptualize possibilities for future horizons.

Interview #14 (F, 28 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, short-term contract, lives with partner, \$35,000 - 44,000)

[Interviewer] I'm going to ask a bold question: how much is your student loan?

[Respondent] Fifty grand.

[Interviewer] That's just you?

[Respondent] Uh huh.

[Interviewer] Because your husband doesn't...

[Respondent] He doesn't, no. So it's not... like I said, that's why we've made the decision to struggle through the next three years. And we did struggle. Obviously, you know because I was paying six hundred dollars a month for my student loan payment.

(...)

Like, right now it's just survival kind of thing and once he's done we'll be doing the whole RRSP, saving for a house, all that stuff. Yeah. God. So maybe I should have gone for that other high tech job.

For those in this position, the need to focus on repaying loans becomes a paramount priority:

Interview #8 (M, 29 years, Graduate degree, short-term contract, lives alone, \$35,000 - 44,000)

[Respondent] The biggest goal I have right now is paying off my student loan.

(...)

[Interviewer] How long is it going to take you to pay off your student loans?

[Respondent] At the current rate, probably another eight years.

Whether the loans are from banks, from family members, or a combination of the two, the burden of debt weighs heavily on them:

Interview #24 (M, 27 years, college diploma, lives with partner, \$25,000 - 34,000)

[Respondent] And at first, like, with university my mother was a single parent and she had to support me for... That it was a lot of money and we only had one income and she had a house and mortgage payments and all that, so she basically had to take on loans so I could go to school.

(...)

[Respondent] And then I went to school the next year, but I had to borrow quite a bit of money from my mother because student loans only provided me with four thousand dollars.

(...)

[Respondent] I was going further and further into debt and by that time I just wanted to get into a position or even if it were an entry level position where they would provide training and at least I could start making money and paying off my huge debt that I owed.

[Interviewer] So how much debt is hanging over your head?

[Respondent] Oh about twenty-seven thousand dollars.

[Interviewer] And that's from your whole... you went to school for five years?

[Respondent] That's including student loans for... for university. Which is actually quite a bit less than... because most of it was in rent.

(...)

[Interviewer] Will you be debt free by that point do you think? Two years?

[Respondent] I doubt that.

[Interviewer] What's the time frame for that, do you think?

[Respondent] My loan is fourteen years. It's very depressing. But I'm hoping that once I start making more money I'll be contributing more to that so it won't be fourteen years.

Although respondents situate student debt-repayment in terms of a specific, transitory moment (it has a beginning, a middle and an end), this presumes that individual trajectories, such as student loan re-payment, can be isolated from other trajectories, including consumer debt, mortgage loans, etc. Just in terms of the range of financial obligations, fulfillment of any obligation can rarely be divorced from the multiplicity of other simultaneous demands.

Borrowing in the present to re-pay in the future operates within a temporal framework that is based on a controllable and calculable movement. Postponement of payment, therefore, reflects the promise that we advance chronologically, going through all of the necessary phases as though these are the natural qualities of temporalities.

The fallacies and realities in expectations of “stability” and “certainty” (wrapped up with notions of the ‘moment of arrival’)

While opportunity is often framed in terms of entering work, there is no certainty in terms of where things will go from there. Once an individual has attained a work destination, individuals realize that maintaining this location is the new challenge:

Interview #85 (F, late 20s or early 30s, Bachelor degree, long-term contract, lives with partner, income unknown)

[Respondent] It is a term position and I will be entering as a casual employee. A casual employee has a maximum of six months with the government. During that time a casual employee cannot compete for other public jobs.

[Interviewer] Oh, okay.

[Respondent] So it's a rather risky move because after six months I am not guaranteed any type of employment and it becomes very, very difficult to keep me on. So after six months it's going to be some kind of human resources acrobatics performed on the part of my employers and I believe that this is the

common practice because really their HR policies are not ones that facilitate hiring.

Similarly, this man is self-employed and relies on a series of short-term contracts for the government. As he points out, one of the shortcomings of serial contracts is the pressure to be continuously on the look-out for the next one:

Interview #59 (M, 30 years, Graduate degree, self-employed, lives with partner, \$55,000+)

[Respondent] But the way the government works, they can give out... let's take a fifty thousand dollar contract. They can tend... they don't have to submit it to tender so they don't have to do bids.

[Interviewer] Right.

[Respondent] Right. So they can just hand it directly to a person. So that's why they keep these contracts small. And then they just renew them like whenever they run out. So... so there's that aspect. You know, there's no guarantee of the contract being renewed.

Additionally, firm responses to market fluctuations might mean employee downsizing and interrupt their tenure in a company. In spite of the sense of certainty that a specialization in marketing and communications produced for this respondent, for example, the volatility of the market and instability of the firm left her unemployed:

Interview #14 (F, 28 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, short-term contract, lives with partner, \$35,000 – 44,000)

The old adage goes that when trouble hits in high tech the very first department to go is marketing and communications. Always. They just feel that... and that really should be the last place that they should... because that's when they need it the most.

Further on in the interview, #14 commented on the broader context of insecurity in IT:

[Respondent] And I never wanted to have a contract. I felt I was so lucky and so much further ahead than my classmates that had all got contracts. I was one of the few that had a full-time... I lasted nine months. Nothing is permanent in this economy. And it was funny because when people said to me, you know, you could have gone to... potentially you could have gone to the other company and you threw that away. I called them back and said I changed my mind, I've accepted a job elsewhere. That was a full-time permanent position. I have chosen a contract position that is temporary, and no benefits because I know I

am going to be happier on a day-to-day basis. Job security is nice. I would love to have it. I don't believe in it at this point.

[Interviewer] You just don't believe that any employer can really offer that and deliver?

[Respondent] No, not right now. No, especially in high tech. Hell no. Good god, no. I mean, look what's going on. Like, every single day so-and-so has laid off, you know, a third of their workforce and... Please, no - there's no such thing.

When she first completed her college diploma, Interview #14 thought that a number of factors converged in her favour: the correct choice of training, the acquisition of a set of marketable skills, and a boom in the IT sector. However, what this demonstrates is an assumption of duration in any particular trajectory. Job loss comes as a complete surprise: not because young adults are convinced that they will have their jobs forever, but they have an immediate sense that the conditions that define the present are indicative and directly correlated with what they can expect in the future. An expectation that possessing the correct skills and being employed in a lucrative job will consolidate these factors reflects the salience of the dominant ontological narratives. The pursuit of a 'success' horizon further serves to harmonize subjectivities with a future orientation reinforced by the desire for a 'good' job.

Interview #59 (M, 30 years, Graduate degree, self-employed, lives with partner, \$55,000+)

[Interviewer] Had you made any preparations? Did you have any contingency plan? You and your spouse? Or you personally, in the event that you got... were you thinking at all?

[Respondent] About being laid off or something?

[Interviewer] Yeah?

[Respondent] No, in fact it really struck me as a shock. I wasn't that... everyone knew that lay offs could be coming, but I personally didn't see it affecting myself, you know. Or anyone I work with. As it turned out I was affected and a couple of other people, so it was a big shock. So really, in terms of preparation, I really hadn't had done any.

(...)

Yeah, yeah. So I didn't have a plan in place because I didn't think I would be the one.

The manic excitement and optimism that accompanied the IT sector boom was not, in effect, about a certain trajectory for information technologies, but rather a projected future explosive outcome. The bursting of the IT bubble, therefore, disrupted the discursive and material investment in the 'promise' of its horizon. The stability and security that were built into the anticipated results were thus expected to be the engine of this and other sectors. Once harmonized with this industry, IT workers expected to be carried along with its success.

Interview #86 (M, 29 years, Bachelor degree, short-term contract, lives with partner, \$55,000+)

Previous to this I was unemployed for a while. I was unemployed for almost a year. I've been working... so there's a big gap there. I had been working in Toronto for an IP solutions company there and they hemorrhaged when the dot com crunch came. They weren't a dot com per se, they were a consulting company. But a lot of their clients had been... a lot of these dot com companies who received their financing from venture capitalists who pulled all that financing kind of at once so the company pretty much collapsed. And I think now, there were three hundred people in the company when I was brought on and by the time I left they cut the work force... I was part of the wave of cuts that was basically thirty-five percent.

Interview #33 (M, 28 years, Bachelor degree, part-time permanent, lives with partner and child, \$25,000 – 34,000)

The last job I had was working for a software development company and I was a technical writer and tester of the software. And that company... I worked there for a while and then they stopped paying everybody slowly and so I eventually I had to leave. My wife was... we were expecting a baby and it was just not a good time to not be paid.

(...)

The head office was in the U.S. and they stopped paying us and told us it was a computer glitch. Which, coming from a computer software company, seemed sort of outrageous. But, you know, what can you do? I just sort of said, 'Okay, I'll wait.' And so I got paid a couple days later and then the following pay cheque was also late and then they just stopped coming.

There is a tension between a sense of the *inevitability* of some things on future horizons and a series of *postponements* in order to realize these objectives: (such as the inevitability of parenthood)

The addition of some trajectories as young adults move through time is perceived to add to their responsibilities. Time devoted to education and training, finding employment, adjusting to precarious contracts, debt repayment, and planning for the future are either perceived as components of a consolidated trajectory toward work or as pressure pulling them in a different direction. Within this dynamic, strategic ‘postponement’ of some of these responsibilities demonstrates an effort to manage linear movement. A notion of pushing back relationships and family formation reinforces the thrust of ‘work’ as a colonizing discourse and locates the respondents’ subjectivity in relation to a specific objective. The chronological or serial temporal movement (finish school, then find a job, then comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in a baby carriage...) unifies the process to a set of pre-requisites and obligations:

Interview #43 (F, 30 years, Graduate degree in progress, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)

[Respondent] Yeah, pretty much non-existent. I’m not saying I don’t value relationships. I you know whether it be my own doing or whether society has given me this perception, I feel like I have to go, go, go right now. I have to get things done.

(...)

However, I do anticipate in my mid-thirties... I’m thirty years old right now. I’ll be thirty-one this year. I do anticipate that maybe that biological clock may start ticking and I’m worried about that. How old are you?

[Interviewer] Twenty-nine.

[Respondent] Yeah. I’m a little worried about that. They say it’s going to happen and I don’t know. I could just see that there may be a time in my life where I’ll go wait a minute, I’ve got it all. I got the car that I wanted, I got the house, I got the career, I’m successful. But there’s something missing and I do foresee that happening. But it’s not right now. It’s just not an issue for me, you know.

As such, the persistent sense of a singular and universal trajectory suggests that life events unfold chronologically. As the previous response and the following response demonstrate, however, pressure also comes from the idea that postponement of family

formation has limited feasibility. According to the parameters of maternal possibility, the time period in which women can biologically reproduce is fixed to a physiological timeline:

Interview #85 (F, late 20s or early 30s, Bachelor degree, long-term contract, lives with partner, income unknown)

[Interviewer] And in terms of expanding the numbers in your household, is that something that's way down the road?

[Respondent] I don't know if you can hear my biological clock in the background, but it's ticking and it's something on the horizon definitely. It's not an indefinite, so planning right now is very crucial to accommodate for whatever... whatever steps would be taken prior to expanding the family unit. But it's something that will be happening. For it to happen I would like to feel a little bit more stable than currently.

The relationship with time is thus conceived in terms of pressure, timelines, responsibilities and postponement. As the following interviewee expresses, the only way that she can conceive of making things work in the present is to push away anything that is not currently perceived to be a non-negotiable obligation. Time pressure in the present is enfolded into a strategic intent to catch-up down the line:

Interview #14 (F, 28 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, short-term contract, lives with partner, \$35,000 - 44,000)

We live in a two-bedroom apartment with four bloody monsters (cats), so there's no way in hell that I want to have kids right now. And just starting out my career, it would be career-suicide to take now a year off to raise a kid, you know. So it's just not in the cards for the next five years.

This interpretation of temporal dynamics suggests that life horizons are sequential rather than simultaneous and that linear frameworks and relational settings emphasize the need to transition through each stage in an ordered fashion. Elements in the relational setting, such as the mandatory employment insurance contribution requirements that qualify one for maternity/paternity leave reinforce this notion.

The Containment and Avoidance of Disruption – *Analysis*

The individuals who participated in this study reported their efforts to avoid or contain disruptive eruptions that threatened to de-rail their efforts. Their stories described their responses to external and non-negotiable elements, and they emphasized that they would not be a source of their own disruption. By being ready for market fluctuations, the potential for a lay off, and the demands of debt re-payment, they can adapt themselves and remain on course.

Conceptual interpretation of trajectories suggests that they are linear, chronological, and that some events are imminent. Individuals also expect trajectories to have discreet beginnings, middles, and ends. The appropriately constituted ‘self’, therefore, must do things in the right order.

By recognizing the complexities of temporalities as falling along a single continuum between anticipated, pre-formed elements and errant deviations, the respondents express a notion of time as a singular trajectory. The enfolding of external factors into the pursuit of their objectives can therefore be viewed as a ‘dodge and weave’ process in order to preserve the directionality of the work trajectory. Ideally, potential disruptions are pre-viewed and preparatory efforts ensure that the individual is ready. Responsibilities such as debt re-payment are placed along the work trajectory and reinforce the necessity of achieving this goal. The dominant ontological narrative of time as an ordered and linear phenomenon thus affects how individuals integrate these events as sequential and correlated, where addressing one factor is presumed to clear the future for new factors.

III. An Orientation to the Future

As they anticipated the future, I identified a pattern in the respondents' stories that I refer to as the 'fix and stabilize' project. Framed within their perception of expectations and temporal movement, for example a particular set of social and financial accomplishments associated with turning thirty, these individuals emphasized the significance of creating opportunity and containing disruptive elements. Their 'fix and stabilize' efforts express their concern regarding the attainability of a 'successful' horizon. The movement into early adulthood – passing through the twenties and into the thirties – is associated with a transitory set of steps in which one phase differs from and improves upon the previous phase. Attempts to 'fix and stabilize' thus speak to overcoming struggle and uncertainty.

Additionally, this story demonstrates the tenacity of a specific 'success' narrative as a colonizing element in the conceptualization of future horizons. The territorialization factor positions the 'success' destination just out of reach, but always in front of us:

Interview #43 (F, 30 years, Graduate degree in progress, permanent, lives with roommates, income unknown)
 What if I fail? What if I'm not good at anything but the restaurant business?
 That's a scary aspect. But to try to get into something where I can have a nine-to-five job, have kind of a typical Canadian life, and in the end have a nice... well, have enough money to vacation and what not I think that that's what every Canadian wants, you know: to be able not to live pay cheque to pay cheque but to have that kind of feeling of security, to prepare for your retirement and that kind of thing.

This transitioning movement towards success requires a continuous preparation:

Interview #86 (M, 29 years, Bachelor degree, short-term contract, lives with partner, \$55,000+)
 Around five years, give or take. I think realistically it will take us that long to get back on our feet and stabilize and feel really secure enough to make a plan and control our own... and not kind of forced upon us. And we've been kind of

jumping from sinking ship to sinking ship. I think... a little while and it's hard so... I think... that's, I mean, that's where I'd like to see... I'd like to see things work out in government for both of us. And hopefully those opportunities will come up and then maybe there'll be some chances for promotions. Where I'm at now, lord knows, there's a lot of opportunities.

For some, the anticipation of success is expressed in terms of a specific salary:

Interview #93 (M, 29 years, college diploma, short-term contract + self-employed, lives with parents, income unknown)

My goal... I said by the time I'm thirty I've got to make six digits a year. And that's my goal and that's what it looks like it's going to be. So I'm happy. Sort of happy. I'm happy... I'm happy that I reached my goal, but hopefully I can be happy with someone, if you know what I mean. So that's my other goal.
(...)

I want to live comfortable, I want my wife to be comfortable, I want to treat her like a queen, have kids, you know, the whole thing. That's why it's a sacrifice, a sacrifice I started when I was twelve and that it's, you know... And I plan on retiring when I'm thirty-five. So we'll see. Yeah, yeah. So we'll see.

Efforts to achieve success may create a tension between aspirations and work time demands. The time devoted to creating opportunity may push perceived disruptive elements such as a relationship so far away it appears to fall off the map. The 'sacrifices' involved in maintaining a focus and momentum towards a successful outcome may affect the self-improving agent's desire to form a twosome. Therefore, when relationships are assembled into the mix a re-configuration of work time is enfolded into the 'fix and stabilize' project:

Interview #85 (F, late 20s, early 30s, Bachelor degree, long-term contract, lives with partner, income unknown)

[Interviewer] So if you... if time scheduling were not an issue and you had all the power to have the perfect life, what would it look like?

[Respondent] It would be a three, at the most four, day workweek. And I would be very open to taking the appropriate salary cut and that would afford me the extra time to pursue my other interests, some things that I actually need to do to feel like I'm a person. And also a tremendous value... to people close to me and my... and that's... here. Like family, friends, and down the road, children... So, having a bit more time and a little bit more of myself to actually have a well balanced life. And I don't feel like right now that a five-day week is a good balance. It's not really.

Interview #19 (M, 31 years, college diploma, permanent, lives with partner and child, \$45,000 - 54,000)

[*Respondent*] Um...as far as job, I'm not like.... like, it would be really nice if... to find a... a... to get job, a good paying job, where you know that you're not expected to... to uh...work... overtime, just uh, at a drop of a hat...

[*Interviewer*] Um hmm.

[*Respondent*] Or anything. You know it's not going to be stressful... And I don't know if there's too many positions like that in this industry (laugh).

[*Interviewer*] Um hmm.

[*Respondent*] At least at the level I'm at. Perhaps as I get more experience, maybe.

A reduction in the time spent working is just one component, however. The comment, "... some things that I actually need to do to feel like a person" is a link to the manyness of the constituent aspects of success. Differences within concurrent experiences reflect the complexities of being human, rather than the complications involved in trying to be a good worker. Multiple locations and relations pull individuals in many directions at the same time, drawing their focus, attention and resources. The 'fix and stabilize' project, however, concentrates the focus, attention and resources on a singular trajectory in order to keep things on track:

Interview #59 (M, 30 years, Graduate degree, self-employed, lives with partner, \$55,000+)

[*Interviewer*] You seem very confident that there's going to be a continuum out there.

[*Respondent*] Based on the previous work that I did for the Government of Canada, like the time that lasted and this is a similar project, and given my work relationship with the project director, I figure... I really don't... I probably don't have any worries. And based on the... like I mentioned, that... as an example, that other gentleman that worked has been working there for years for the same type of contract, so I think for the foreseeable future if I wanted to stay working, maintaining this contract, I could.

(...)

Yeah. We kind of have the opportunity now to get our financial house in order and, you know, we're going to have kids, you know. You know, basically I see this, you know, as a time for us to stabilize everything and, you know, build a foundation for our family.

As the following interview transcript section shows, the ‘fix and stabilize’ project requires a willingness and readiness to adapt. The self-criticism inherent in this approach enables the individual to identify what they are doing wrong or what they are unable to control. As such, an orientation to the future requires an ability to predict the outcome of one trajectory and alter one’s course if necessary. This move presumes, therefore, an ability to predict and forecast should an individual need to transition to a different trajectory.

Interview #93 (M, 29 years, college diploma, short-term contract + self-employed, lives with parents, income unknown)

Yeah, it was... it was... I took a year off, pretty much... I went back to school after eleven years and I went to a private IT college, which I saw a commercial on TV. And for some reason, I guess, thinking of things that I wanted to change in my life and having the commercial there right in front of me just, I guess, gave me some sort of sign, I guess. I wanted to pretty much get out of the restaurant business. I had been in the restaurant business for sixteen years. Yeah. So, you know, one day I’d like to get married, to have the family, but it would be pretty hard being in the restaurant trade to have that.

Within the ‘fix and stabilize’ project, there are areas of work and trades that are perceived to be more or less likely to produce a ‘success’ horizon. For example, respondents described a sense of having a ‘career’ or being on the right track to achieving their goals as an indication of being correctly positioned:

Interview #5 (F, 28 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, short-term contract, lives with adult siblings, \$35,000 - 44,000)

I mean, it’s only been two months that I’ve been in this field. I know where I want to go. Like, I know that eventually I want to teach... and that’s where I’d like to work towards... and I’m going to stay small steps right now in the company to see if I can hone in those skills in the company that will lead me to the five year goal.

Interview #65 (M, 24 years, Bachelor degree + college diploma, student, lives alone, no income)

[Interviewer] Okay, so in the long term, say looking five years down the road, do you have an idea of yourself? Where you are what you’re doing?

[Respondent] Well, professionally I intend on being in a management position, and so that's a bit more difficult to say... What else? I'm fairly open, in terms of my personal life. Hopefully I will be somewhere in Asia or Latin America. I'm really not difficult that way.

[Interviewer] And do you have a sense of what you'll be making?

[Respondent] I'm hoping at the very minimum, five years from now, I'll be making \$80,000 a year. Hopefully more. And that's because I'll have... by then I should have my MBA and five years of work experience. That's a common amount for that amount of ...

[Interviewer] Are you worried at all about a continuing slow down in IT?

[Respondent] Not really. Basically, it's like everything else. It goes up and down, up and down.

The momentum produced by a stabilized trajectory is believed to be inherent to the character of movement. By honing or upgrading skills, individuals facilitate this momentum, thus interweaving the 'improvement' strategy with a sense of an assured successful outcome.

Some of the respondents, however, were uncertain about how to proceed. They describe short-term planning horizons and insecurity in terms of being unattached to a partner or job:

Interview #10 (F, 32 years, Graduate degree, multiple short-term contracts, roommates, \$25,000 - 34,000)

[Interviewer] Are you optimistic about like the next five years and where you might be going?

[Respondent] Um...cautiously.

[Interviewer] Um hmm.

[Respondent] Yeah.

[Interviewer] (laugh)

[Respondent] I'm not actually um, uh, I can't say I'm excited about it because I'm not quite sure how to get to that next step. And, um, yeah I'm sort of at an early planning stage but in general I'm optimistic.... anxious... anxiously optimistic.

Interview #8 (M, 29 years, Graduate degree, short-term contract, lives alone, \$35,000 - 44,000)

[Interviewer] One of the things that has been very interesting for us is to... is to get a sense of what people's planning horizons are. I mean, when you sort of think about down the road... is down the road next year when your contract is done or...?

[Respondent] Yeah. This ties... it... I guess to the rootless element. Is that, you know, I don't know, I can't... I don't think about planning my social future or future relationships or life goals.

(...)

I think probably I've shortened my horizon, you know. I'm stable for this amount of time, when I thought about my last job, well... Based on the last missive from the CEO, we had lots of money in the bank. So I'm probably good here until the end of the year. A month later I was, you know, looking for work.

For this man, coping with the fluidity and often elusive character of 'success' means reconciling himself to be open to anything. Similarly, Interview #33 expressed an openness to the manyness of possibilities. Although he assumes that everyone else's life is progressing towards a 'success' destination and that he is unique in being receptive to chance and luck, he recognizes the indeterminacy of future horizons.

Interview #33 (M, 28 years, Bachelor degree, part-time permanent, lives with partner and child, \$25,000 – 34,000)

One way or the other, in five years... so I don't see a lot of changes. I mean, I definitely hope for some changes. I would hope that I could start making more money doing what I love to do but so it's so hard to say. I remember reading a long time ago about this novelist John Gardner, an American writer who died maybe in the eighties. I think he was talking about choosing writing as a profession and he wrote that if you're willing to watch all your contemporaries pass you in terms of getting... getting into some career and making a lot of money and buy houses and cars and so on and moving forward while you sort of do basically do what I'm doing now, just slog away at what you love to do but is not going to necessarily make you much money. He said, if you're willing to live that life to watch everyone else around you move ahead, while you just do it, if you can see that and still want to keep doing it then that's a good sign.

(...)

So in some ways it doesn't matter what happens in five years as long as I can keep doing what I'm doing now. It's so hard to say. So many things could change and so many things come into play. So who knows.

An Orientation to the Future - Analysis

Who knows, indeed. By framing any choice, action or plan exclusively within a framework of individual efforts and responsibility, notions of linear trajectories and normative narratives concerning temporalities and life stage transitions distort interpretations of the present and the present becoming. Where aspirations are lined up

with a future horizon, the language focuses on ‘when.’ Individuals frequently disregard the multiplicity of their experiences of and hold on to focused expectations of improvement. Where pervasive interpretations of how opportunity is created and constituted are based on an understanding of causal relations, for example, interpretations of experience that depend on conditionality and chance are missed. For the most part, respondents were in agreement that one must be flexible and adaptable to *the* future. What this analysis reveals is that they realize that they are expected to be flexible and adaptable to *their own* futures.

The Constitution of Subjectivity – Four Types of Movement

A future that has been colonized and territorialized as a work space demands an orientation that is intentional and strategic. This orientation further requires a belief in the pre-existence of opportunities that become available as a result of the pursuit and attainment of pre-requisites, such as training and appropriate skills.

This perspective on time fixes subjectivities to a work objective and emphasizes a directive form of movement. The narrative expressions of ideological and material relations constitute the modalities of these subjectivities, such that they locate young adults in relation to their own futures. It is evident that within this dynamic there are four variations on the types of movement that constitute a worker subjectivity. These types of movement define the dominant thrust of cumulative positions along a trajectory in the hope that the desired subjectivity will be achieved. En route to this destination, these four types of movement are: self-tooling, strategic use of available resources, flexibility, and a ‘fix and stabilize’ approach.

Self-tooling involves the acquisition and accumulation of training/education credentials. A ‘self’ that is moving towards a worker identity equips themselves with a

diploma and/or a degree, engages in on-the-job learning and remains focused on the useability and practicality of these pursuits. Education and training thus become enfolded as constituent elements of a temporal emphasis on the attainment of an end goal, namely a fixed subjectivity. In relation to the benefits and outcomes of formal education, this temporal dimension highlights assumptions about preparation, self-alignment, being on the right track and opening doors to employment opportunity. Any other benefits are superfluous to this dominant movement. The temporal expectations, therefore, stipulate that intentional self-tooling will result in the direct fulfillment of a worker identity.

Another type of movement involves *strategic use of the resources available* in order to achieve the end goal. This includes drawing on financial support from family, networking, saving money, multiple job holding, temping, and controlling student debt. By capitalizing on resources that are available to the individual, they waste little time working and saving before pursuing post-secondary education, combing through job advertisements, and maintaining a continuous involvement in work. Consolidation of resources is therefore a temporal strategy to reign in potential time wasters and move succinctly and efficiently. By mobilizing personal and professional relationships, for example, their capacity to perform as provisional elements along a work trajectory are integrated into this dominant pursuit.

Movement that primarily emphasizes *flexibility* involves an adaptive and responsive effort to keep going forward. Within a temporal scheme, readiness is relative to whatever erupts and the intent is to maintain the direction and momentum of the movement. As an attempt to consolidate enabling and disruptive elements, therefore, flexibility means that mobility characterizes the position of the individual in relation to a

fixed worker subjectivity. For example, registering with a temporary employment agency enhances the speed with which an individual may respond to the prospect of unemployment. The temp agency is thus a component of consolidating a work search with a desire to be fast, so that the adaptive and responsive individual will take up any job contract being presented. Successful responsive and adaptive behaviour is evident when vulnerability to the disruptive potential of ‘chance’ factors is minimized.

The minimization of disruption is an inherent objective in the desire for an expectation of improvement. In order to improve conditions, a *‘fix and stabilize’* strategy is an attempt to attain the goal of a fixed subjectivity. For young adults, this involves trying to contain, reduce or eliminate the movement and momentum of trajectories that counter or sabotage these efforts. If, for example, the combination of trajectories includes a mix of durations of an individual’s contract, a project, a firm, and the tenure of colleagues, and the firm’s trajectory comes to an end first then anything else contingent on the continuation of the life of the firm will be affected. The ‘fix and stabilize’ plan seeks to protect an individual, for example, from the impact of many contingent trajectories. As an illustration, the idea that securing a permanent position in the Federal Government speaks to a notion that a singular, dominant trajectory will perform as a consolidating force. The perception is that permanence and stability reflects a transition *from* the seemingly disparate becomings of the young *to* the focused and fixed subjectivity of adulthood. As such, by seeking work as a fixed destination we must understand time as a linear, singular chronological phenomenon. To think of time as multiplicity and difference, therefore, indicates that movement in time is not cumulative –

just different. There can be no temporal destinations either – only many movements through which we are constituted as nomadic becomings.

Conclusion

There are a number of cultural and discursive expectations associated with the experience of early adulthood. In this dissertation, I argue that ‘adulthood’ is continuously in the making. That with which we associate this experience, however, is framed within a set of temporal dynamics that emphasizes singular, linear and chronological movement rather than a flow characterized by open-endedness. By examining the responses to questions about their future horizons, I argue that the respondents express an orientation to the future characterized by this sense of singularity, chronology and linearity. Efforts to set up and follow a sequential set of steps suggests that these individuals expect that intentional actions will result in a direct consequence: Information Technology (IT) training, for example, ensures that a good job and success are imminently located on their horizons.

Fluctuations in the relational setting and the continuous emergence of multiple trajectories trigger responses such as ‘fix and stabilize’ strategies. Often, these strategies mobilize efforts to contain or coordinate eruptions in order to maintain a sense of consolidation and an orientation to the objective. The presence and emergence of trajectories each have their own character, momentum, and set of possibilities. Movement across the trajectories and allowing the focus of objective to shift multiplies the potential futures. Openness to an indeterminate horizon thus also multiplies the potential of subjectivities.

Within the framework that I have described, the constitution of subjectivity is a concerted effort to *be* a successful worker. From a feminist political economy

perspective, the material circumstances of this ontological and epistemological project indicate how narratives produce fear and anxiety, manifested in experiences such as student loan debt, relationship and leisure postponement, as well as independent investments in protective devices such as insurance. The material relations that surround and reinforce an ontological notion of fixed subjectivities manipulate the desire for certainty and businesses such as temporary employment agencies find fertile ground. 'Flexibility' is thus enfolded into a business model designed to move workers around and fit them into available slots. The perception of time as movement along a single line creates the possibility of exploitation of the desire to maintain and speed up the process. Being out of work, therefore, constitutes a failure. This narratively produced interpretation of temporalities colonizes and territorializes success so that a narrowly construed experience that is always just ahead on the horizon keeps individuals tethered to the work trajectory. In this story, progress and improvement are the conceptual driving force of a momentum that guarantees the preservation of a capitalist framework.

In order to disrupt this relationship between ideological and material relations, I have critically interrogated the experiential outcome of an ontology based on a notion of fixed subjectivity. An emphasis on a future horizon dominated by work configures individual time relations by focusing their orientation on a particular destination. Additionally, by interpreting temporality as a singular movement, aspects of individual lives are consolidated in order to make that destination attainable and success achievable. Trajectories that do not directly facilitate a work trajectory, such as studying Art History or cultivating personal and intimate relationships, must not interfere. Along a singular time line they either get left behind or postponed until time opens up. As these

respondents understand it, successfully making it through necessary steps and arriving at a work destination produces an effect of opening up of time. Through this lens, we allow our relationship with time to be transformed *by* our material circumstances.

Chapter Six - Conclusion

Although social scientists recognize time as an important factor, there is still no theoretical approach *based on* its intricacies (Weik, 2004). Weik (2004) explains that the reason for this is in the dual nature of time at the basis of both social and natural sciences. Instead of bridging the gap, the investigation of time is torn between a social science focus on 'social time' and the knowledge accumulated in the natural sciences (Weik, 2004). I locate my project within a body of literature in the humanities and social sciences that attempts to break with a Newtonian conception of time. In the late seventeenth century, Newton argued that "time, together with space, is conceived as the 'place' where the movement or change of things occurs. In itself, it is unchangeable, permanent, a background before which everything happens" (Weik, 2004: 302). As Wallerstein and Prigogine recommend, a scientific analysis based on,

[T]he dynamics of non-equilibria, with its emphasis on multiple futures, bifurcation and choice, historical dependence, and... intrinsic and inherent uncertainty should be the model for the social sciences. (Cited in Law and Urry, 2004: 400)

The question that I have explored in this dissertation asks: how can one give an account of that which is in the making? As an ontological and epistemological puzzle, it raises further questions concerning the dominance of the view that one experiences time as a movement along a singular trajectory. From a sociological perspective, one must differentiate the character of socially-produced expectations concerning movement through time and the metaphysical character of temporalities. Within this dominant temporal framework that I have described in this thesis, individuals attempt to prioritize their expectations, decisions, and actions in an appropriately ordered and sequential fashion. Where material relations that privilege economic relations characterize the

context in which this occurs, work (as an economic activity) constitutes the top priority. As a result, young women and men who are moving between education and employment strive to situate themselves on a work trajectory. The focus of their expectations, decisions, and actions is oriented to achieving work and thus successfully moving along this trajectory.

This produces a particular orientation to the future, and for sociologists, creates an epistemological agenda concerning a social science approach to the future. From this perspective, investigation and analysis focus on making the future knowable and manageable. This epistemological agenda pegs the orientation to knowing what can be known and to troubling what cannot be known.

In contrast, I argue that temporal movement is multiple and that it reflects a complexity of experiences. The manyness of trajectories in the present creates a multiplicity of possible futures. As individuals experience these trajectories simultaneously and as priorities and focus change, so do subjectivities shift and change. The role of temporalities in the constitution of subjectivities concerns the production of difference in the future possibilities of the self. Through this lens, the analysis lays a foundation for a subjectivity based on openness. Therefore, I further argue that subjectivity is mobile and nomadic – fluid in its constitution and orientation. This fluidity opens up the future to multiple possibilities and this is a condition of freedom. As such, one's subjectivity is continuously in the making, continuously becoming.

In order to understand the material context in which a dominant view of time is perpetuated, I look at post-secondary education policies and employment/unemployment policies from the 1960s through the 1990s in Canada. Aspects of these sites and analyses

of the changes that they brought about comprise the conditions and discursive terrain in which young adults have ‘transitioned’ into adulthood in the last forty years. I argue that public, conceptual and meta-narratives are constituent elements of these policies and processes, and have contributed to a notion of temporal convergence. By focusing attention and resources on putting necessary pieces in place in order to create a future in which work is foregrounded, trajectories become focused on a single destination. Additionally, the flexibilization of work reflects an enfolding of a notion of time autonomy into a capitalist agenda, so that vulnerable workers, including young workers, assume the contingencies of uncertainty as individuals. Within these dynamics, uncertainty plays a paradoxical role: as individuals and institutions/employers each configure their present in order to orient themselves towards a promising future, they find that they are at cross-purposes in terms of managing the unpredictability of the future. The understanding of movement that makes this possible is produced through political, economic and cultural practices, made significant and meaningful in narrative form. The narratives that produce and reinforce this interpretation of movement construe temporalities as singular and ordered steps towards a specific future horizon.

In order to support the argument that a particular ontological view of time is a constituent element of policies and discourse, I extrapolate a set of narrative motifs. By reading across public, conceptual and meta-narratives, the motifs or themes identify *what* political and economic narratives privilege, as well as trouble the ideas that underpin and/or reify capitalist relations and related narratives within and between identity formation and the relational setting. The emplotment of the constituent elements of the practices and planning mechanisms that form the relational setting highlight the

significance of the terms and conditions of the economy and of work. The plotting of these elements tells a story of convergence, such that observations interweave eruptions of new or altered terms and conditions within a singular narrative of temporal movement and change. The dominant aspects of the relational setting that I examine thus consider consolidation or convergence to be a function of temporal movement. To pursue a trajectory towards a desirable future thus requires that agency focus on planning and forecasting in order to meet specific and normative objectives.

Drawing from the individual experiences of the interview respondents, my analysis highlights the tension that emerges between narratively constituted movement towards the future and the temporal complexities of experiences. An evident clear plot line reflects a normative discourse of temporal movement, both as a series of ‘moments of arrival’ (birth→school→job→marriage→ children→retirement→death) and a deterministic notion of this movement as ordered and cumulative. What emerges in this time regime framework is the emplotment of expectations concerning chronological transitions, an accumulation of resources and a direct relationship between skill set and opportunities. Where they encounter contingencies, young adults justify the experience of flexibility on the basis that they will either make a transition to better conditions once they have accumulated skills, experience, and have strengthened their negotiating capacity, or they rationalize it as a factor of independent consulting and thus their high pay.

The respondents in this study believe that there is a significant difference between a controlled and intentional future orientation and one that is left to luck. Individuals assert agency by *creating* opportunity in order to avoid leaving themselves vulnerable to

chance. By stabilizing a trajectory, for example, respondents believe that this will secure for them a successful outcome. The *'fix and stabilize'* strategy is an attempt to attain a fixed subjectivity. For young adults, this involves trying to contain, reduce or eliminate the movement and momentum of trajectories that counter or sabotage their efforts to achieve their goals.

Therefore, by examining the responses to questions about their future horizons, I argue that the respondents express an orientation to the future characterized by this sense of singularity, chronology and linearity. Efforts to set up and follow a sequential set of steps suggest that these individuals expect that intentional actions will fix their subject positions in relation to objective achievement and success through work. An emphasis on a future horizon dominated by specific objectives thus focuses and prioritizes what they will become.

The interview transcripts cited in this project were produced within the context of a study on work change. It stands to reason that the respondents would speak at length about their experiences searching for and in employment. By analyzing their stories, I became interested in the focused efforts that they brought to the pursuit of a work trajectory. By initially assessing the intersections between their relationships, family resources, education and training accomplishments or plans, and attempts to create opportunities and minimize disruptions, I observed a pattern in the way that the young adult respondents focused and organized their orientation to the future. In order to problematize this framework, I have explored and challenged the ontological and epistemological views of time that inform this dynamic. This problematic has produced for me two central questions. The first question asks how we can understand and assess

individual biographies as processual or as things that are *in the making* within a material context. The second question asks how we can remain connected to the pragmatics of day-to-day struggles while cultivating an orientation to the future with anticipation and hope.

As one considers future possibilities, I propose that a multiplicity of trajectories be foregrounded and that the manyness of seemingly minor, diverging lines be considered. As Stengers (2005) argues in reference to science, many new minority lines enter the dynamic and as they become enfolded they also modify it. This, Bergson (1946) says, is the paradox of time: it is simultaneously a unity and a multiplicity. As such, Stengers' (2005) description of links and knots offers a more nuanced understanding of temporal movement. "Knots" are a response to the temporal experience of "links", and refer to the capacity of an individual to link functions with material facts. This produces a kind of "agonistic cooperation on which this achievement depends" (Stengers, 2005: 156). Therefore, a nomadic or mobile subjectivity characterizes the movement across and along multiple trajectories, all the while creating links and tying knots.

One may look at the expansion of post-secondary education, the normalization of women's involvement in paid employment, efforts to reduce unemployment rates, and macroeconomic calculations, for example, as separate factors so that each are understood as individual trajectories further constituted by multiple trajectories with different character and durations. The multiplicities of possibilities from any of these points becomes more apparent. If I take this further and demonstrate how each of these trajectories produces differences that are rhizomatic and that links and knots are mobile

or nomadic (rather than constituting a dominant work horizon), I could explore the manyness of possibilities.

Enrolling in post-secondary education, for example, involves a movement across the trajectories of a political jurisdiction, a school, a community, and the individual's household and self. It involves moving along the trajectories of funding, academic performance, relationships, leisure, paid employment, personal well-being, and so on. Movement across the institutional trajectories and along personal trajectories highlights the multiplicities of possibilities as the complexities of each trajectory demands more or less attention and focus, as needs and interests change, and as the differences and durations within each trajectory play themselves out. A singular and linear narrative concerning post-secondary enrollment stipulates that, upon completion of the requirements for a diploma or degree, a credential will be awarded and the individual may pursue work in their chosen field. Analysis that highlights the multiplicities and durations across and along trajectories emphasizes the multiplicities of simultaneous differences experienced by an individual. The links and knots create potential coordinated or symbiotic moments that further multiply the possibilities. This creates a mobile or nomadic subjectivity as the self is re-constituted in these rhizomatic experiences.

From this perspective, my project seeks to lay the groundwork for an ontological conception of adulthood that highlights the constitutive significance of a multiplicity of potentialities. This view displaces a focus on the living process as becoming *something*, and instead focuses on the force of change and movement itself (Tarulli and Skott-Myhre, forthcoming). As a force of change, the individual is both in motion and experiencing a

point in time; always both *being* and *becoming*. This is illustrative of a temporality that is multiple and parallel, where movement is both forward and lateral, and focus shifts and changes accordingly.

The mobile or nomadic character of this movement disassembles normative frameworks of the life course. By challenging a notion of consolidation or convergence of possible trajectories into and through early adulthood, one may critique the narratives that situate young adults in relation to particular subjectivity positions. For example, positions constituted through a celebration of the independent, entrepreneurial, free-choice individual creates neo-liberalized subjectivities. The pressure to negotiate risk on an individual level means that individuals are required to make choices and create life trajectories for themselves. Towards this end, they develop individual strategies, and take personal responsibility for their success and livelihood by making the right choices (Harris, 2004). This is the *managed* biographical project, making it possible to transform and discipline divergent life processes into convergent values the neo-liberalized context needs for its own production (Stengers, 2005). A nomadic subjectivity, however, recognizes that movement is characterized by division, bifurcation, dissociation, combination, and collection which in the process creates change and difference (Grosz, 1999). Rather than narrowly construing possible future horizons, a nomadic subjectivity opens up to the indeterminacy of futurities. Thus by confronting the recursive relationships between public, conceptual, and meta-narratives and an ontological perspective that depicts adulthood as a certain kind of horizon, we can assess our capacity for transcendence of these notions.

One of the initial questions for this project – how can we remain connected to the pragmatics of day-to-day struggles while cultivating an orientation to a future that is approached with anticipation and hope – is integral to a progressive project. Feminist politics, for example, aspire to change, innovation and the future (Grosz, 2000). An ontology of *becoming* foregrounds a creative approach to imagining what is possible. “Becomings are no more submitted to the logic of destinations than they are to the logic of origins” (Tarulli and Skott-Myhre, forthcoming: 9). They are rhizomatic, connected at multiple points to multiple trajectories that produce difference and complexity. An approach to engaging with this process as a phenomenon thus requires that it reflect on philosophical foundations of being and knowledge production. As Colebrook (2002) argues,

Life is difference, the power to think differently, to become different and to create differences. The philosophical ability to think this concept will help us to live our lives in a more joyful and affirmative manner. (13)

An ontology of becoming is a liberating force that de-colonizes and de-territorializes the future from a static, specific, universal horizon. Becomings constitute lines of flight that enable desire to break from the territory of normative objectives (Potts, 2004). This creates the conditions of possibility and thus the freedom to live the openness and indeterminacy of the future.

Future research questions arise both in terms of resolving some of the unattended issues in this project and in consideration of other possibilities. Preparing and completing a doctoral dissertation, for example, is a process that involves exploring questions and hypotheses which in turn generate further questions. The production of scholarly work is an open-ended process that is continuously *in the making*. New ideas cannot pre-exist

and, therefore, as a temporal experience, becoming a scholar involves elements of indeterminacy. As a self-reflexive exercise and in order to think through an illustrative example of nomadic subjectivity, becoming a scholar requires that an individual be receptive to surprise and chance factors. The research and writing process demands a relationship with the unknown that does not fit in tidy fashion with timelines and deadlines. I suggest that it also requires that one live and work in the unknown – to revel and delight in the indeterminacy of learning and experimentation of ideas.

When I initially proposed my dissertation project, the steps outlined in that document bear little resemblance to what I have written here. Chance encounters and conversations, the link between some of the questions in my head and material in books and articles, the knots I tied between my own ontological perspective and concepts from other disciplines have contributed to the production of this project. I feel certain that different encounters would have produced a different project.

The ontological and epistemological dimensions of becoming a scholar require that we live in the domain of the unknown. Within the context of institutional pressures to consider doctoral candidates in terms of “time to completion” criteria, it is timely to ask: how can the processual requirements of the experience of *becoming a scholar* be affirmed and supported?

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Appendix A – Respondent Profiles

The respondent profiles are based on information provided to interviewers for the SSHRC-funded project, Social Citizenship and the Transformation of Work.

Of the total 101 interviews conducted in Ottawa, Ontario between 2001 and 2003, there were forty-six respondents between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five years. Of this group of forty-six, twenty respondents were selected for transcription and analysis because of their involvement in flexible work relationships and education and training schemes. This group of twenty range in age between 24 and 32 years and their education credentials include the following: one has an incomplete college diploma, two respondents have college diplomas; four have Bachelor degrees and one has an incomplete Bachelor degree; five have graduate degrees and an additional respondent was in the process of completing a graduate degree at the time of the interview; five of the respondents have combined university degrees and college diplomas, and one respondent has a college diploma, a university Bachelor degree and a graduate degree.

The breakdown of their employment status includes six with full-time employment (one of which has signed a contract but was completing her diploma at the time of the interview), one works part-time, eight on contract, three are self-employed or freelance, one is a student, and one is unemployed. Ten of the respondents work and/or study in the information technology sector (both full-time students are included in this group).

In terms of income, four respondents did not report their income; two do not have any income; one earns \$15,000 - \$24,000; four earn \$25,000 - \$34,000; four earn \$35,000 - \$44,000; two earn \$45,000 - \$55,000; and three earn \$55,000 or more.

The group of twenty is evenly divided by gender with ten men and ten women. Their ethnic backgrounds are comprised of six who immigrated to Canada as children (3 from Asia, 1 from the Middle East, 1 from Eastern Europe, 1 from Western Europe), thirteen Anglophones of European descent and one Francophone of European descent. In terms of the types of households in this group at the time of the interview, one respondent lives with their family of origin, four live by themselves, five live with roommates, six with a partner and 4 live with a partner and children.

	F	M	>\$34,000	\$35,000<	SN/A	Casual/ Contract	Self- empl.	P- T	F- T	N/A
≥ BA	18 85	7 19 24 33 86 93	18 24 33	7 19 86	85 93	24 85 86 93		33	7 18 19	
BA <	5 10 14 30 43 64 69 78	8 52 65 59	10 69 78	5 8 14 30 52 59 64	43 65	5 8 10 14	30 69 59		43 52 64	65 78

Education

Women

Less than Bachelor degree	one
Bachelor degree	one
Bachelor + college diploma	four (two of which are from private colleges)
Graduate degree	four (one of which is in process)

Men

Less than college	one
College diploma	two
Bachelor degree	three
Bachelor + college diploma	one (private college)
Graduate degree	three (one of which has a college diploma, B.A., MBA)

Income

	Women	Men
Did not report income	2	2
No employment income	1	1
\$15,000 - \$24,000	1	0
\$25,000 - \$34,000	2	2
\$35,000 - \$44,000	2	2
\$45,000 - \$54,000	1	1
\$55,000 +	1	2

Appendix B – Pertinent Interview Questions

These questions are a sub-set of the interview schedule prepared for the SSHRC-funded project, Social Citizenship and the Transformation of Work.

1.1 To start off, we'd like to ask you about your current work situation. We're interested in all the kinds of work that you might do now – paid, unpaid, in the house and outside of it. You might find the diagram at the bottom of the "Interview Topics" sheet helpful in answering these question – it shows the different things we are interested in.

So, could you think about all the different types of work you are doing (paid jobs, volunteer work, unpaid carework/homework for others, work-related training and education), and tell us which type of work has the most importance for you right now?

Paid jobs

What job are you doing now? What do you do in your job during a typical day? What type of business is your employer in? Employment status – employee, self-employed on contract, with agency on contract? Do you supervise or manage others? Is this full or part-time? Would you say this job fits with your educational qualifications?

Volunteer work (unpaid service done through/for a group or organization)

Do you do any volunteer work? What kind of activities does your volunteer work involve? Who do you volunteer for? Is this a regular weekly commitment? How many hours a week?

Unpaid carework (child care or elder care) and housework done for someone else

Do you do any of this sort of work? Who is it done for? Is this done in your home or elsewhere? Is this a regular commitment? How many hours a week does this involve?

Work-related training and education (on or off the job)

Do you do any work-related training or education? Where is the training done (on-the-job, or off site)? Is anyone helping to pay for this training? How many hours a week are involved? When will your course be finished?

2.8 What kind of paid job do you think you'll be doing 5 years from now? Why do you think you will be doing (the same) (a different) job?

3.2 Do you and the members of your household have a plan for the future in terms of who is going to be doing what kind of work and when? How likely is it that this plan will reach your desired goals?

3.5 In more general terms, do you feel able to plan for the future? What helps you to feel able to plan/why not?

3.6 Is security an important aspect of life for you? What contributes to your sense of security? How could this be improved for you?

4.4 Some people say that to survive in the current economy we must all be prepared to be flexible in when, how and where we work – is this an idea you agree with?

Appendix C – Interview Schedule

This is the interview schedule used in the SSHRC-funded project, Social Citizenship and the Transformation of Work.

TOPIC 1: WORK AND FAMILY HOUSEHOLD SITUATION

1.1 To start off, we'd like to ask you about your current work situation. We're interested in all the kinds of work that you might do now – paid, unpaid, in the house and outside of it. You might find the diagram at the bottom of the "Interview Topics" sheet helpful in answering these questions – it shows the different things we are interested in.

So, could you think about all the different types of work you are doing (paid jobs, volunteer work, unpaid carework/homework for others, work-related training and education), and tell us which type of work has the most importance for you right now?

Okay, we'd like to talk more about your *most important work right now*. (*Note to interviewers – ask about all types of work, starting with the type designated most important*).

Paid jobs

What job are you doing now? What do you do in your job during a typical day? What type of business is your employer in? Employment status – employee, self-employed on contract, with agency on contract? Do you supervise or manage others? Is this full or part-time? Would you say this job fits with your educational qualifications?

Volunteer work (unpaid service done through/for a group or organization)

Do you do any volunteer work? What kind of activities does your volunteer work involve? Who do you volunteer for? Is this a regular weekly commitment? How many hours a week?

Unpaid carework (child care or elder care) and housework done for someone else

Do you do any of this sort of work? Who is it done for? Is this done in your home or elsewhere? Is this a regular commitment? How many hours a week does this involve?

Work-related training and education (on or off the job)

Do you do any work-related training or education? Where is the training done (on-the-job, or off site)? Is anyone helping to pay for this training? How many hours a week are involved? When will your course be finished?

1.2 Okay that gives us a good picture of what your work profile looks like at the moment. We'd like to get an idea now of how things have changed for you since the mid-1990s. We'd like you think as far back as 1995 and identify for us the most significant changes that you've experienced in the four areas of work that we've talked about.

1.2.1 To start, we'd like to ask you to think of the most significant change you've experienced in any of the types of work you do – what stands out in your mind as the most significant change in your work since 1995?

(Note to interviewers – start with what they identify as the most significant area of change – follow up with questions about change in other areas of work where this is relevant.)

1.2.2 So you've experienced significant change in your *type of work* - could you tell us about this change?

1.3 Has there also been change in the other types of work you do over this same period of time?

If so, what would you identify as the most important change in the other types of work you do?

1.4.1 We're very interested in how you planned for or adapted to these important changes in your work – did they pose any particular challenges for you?

1.4.2 How did you manage these challenges? What or who was most helpful to you in managing these challenges?

1.4.3 Is there anything that would have helped to make these challenges easier to manage?

1.5 We're also interested in how circumstances in your family household might have changed during this same time period (since 1995). We're interested in changes in the needs of your family household as well as any changes in the contributions made to the running of the household. It would help to start with the basic profile of your household as it is now.

1.5.1 We're interested in the group of people who are part of your regular living arrangements - could you tell us how many people this includes at the moment?

1.5.2 What is their relationship to you?

1.5.3 How old are they all?

1.5.4 Do you all share the same house/apartment – or are you spread out a bit?

1.6 Has there been any change in the basic profile of your household since 1995?

1.7 How about change in the needs of your household, what would you describe as the most significant change in the needs of your household over this period of time?

1.8 What about change in contributions to the running of your household over this period - have you experienced any change over this period of time? For example, has there been change in the levels of financial contributions or in other sorts of non-financial contributions?

1.9.1 Has there been a change for your household in terms of the balance between needs and contributions made? If so, did these changes pose any particular challenges for you?

1.9.2 How did you manage these challenges? What or who was most helpful to you in managing these challenges?

1.9.3 Is there anything that would have made these challenges easier to manage?

TOPIC 2: WORK CHANGE AND STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH IT

2.1 Some people say that change will now be a permanent part of our working lives – would you agree with this? How would this affect you personally? How might it affect other members of your household?

2.2 Have the changes you've experienced since 1995 in how others members of your household are working had any effect on the work you have done over this period of time (on your paid work, volunteer work, care work, work-related training/education)?

2.3 Do you have discussions in your household about who will do what kinds of work and how much? How do you make decisions in your household about who will do what kind of work?

2.4 What kinds of things do you take into account when someone in your household wants to make a change in their paid job?

2.5 (*NB ask for all the types relevant for the respondent*) Thinking a bit more about your own work again, do you hope that any of the (volunteer work) (unpaid carework/housework for others) (training and education) you are doing will lead to some kind of paid job? If so, what sort of paid job do you hope it will lead to? Do you have any experience in the past of (volunteer work) (unpaid carework/housework for others) (training and education) leading to a paid job?

2.6 Do you think of your current work activity as forming a career? What would you say makes it (does not make it) a career?

2.7 What would be the one thing about the work you do now that you would most like to change? How might you go about making that change? Is it likely that this situation might change?

2.8 What kind of paid job do you think you'll be doing 5 years from now? Why do you think you will be doing (the same) (a different) job?

2.9 What level of employment income would you hope to be earning by that time?

2.10 Is your current employment income roughly the same every month, or does it differ every month?

2.11 What would be an average monthly income for you (before taxes are taken off)?

2.12 Do you have a benefits package? Is it provided by an employer or yourself?

2.13 Is your employment income the main income in your family/household? What percentage of the total income coming into your household would it be – 25%, 50%, 75%, 100%?

2.14 How has your financial contribution to your family/household changed since 1995?

TOPIC 3: PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL/HOUSEHOLD OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 Would you say there are a lot of opportunities for you (and your family) right now? (*elaborate/probe with the notion of options and choices*) What opportunities are most important for you?

3.2 Do you and the members of your household have a plan for the future in terms of who is going to be doing what kind of work and when? How likely is it that this plan will reach your desired goals?

3.3 Do you have a sense of well-being about your life right now? Is life going well for you? What contributes to this? What would help to increase this feeling for you? (*NB: use fulfillment or satisfaction to elaborate on well-being*)

3.4 Would you say that your standard of living has improved over the past 5 years? What things do you think about when you assess changes in your standard of living?

3.5 In more general terms, do you feel able to plan for the future? What helps you to feel able to plan/why not?

3.6 Is security an important aspect of life for you? What contributes to your sense of security? How could this be improved for you?

3.7 On the whole, do you see change as something that happens to you, or is change something that you yourself bring about?

3.8 Is change a good thing as far as you are concerned? Why/why not?

TOPIC 4: PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY CHANGE

4.1 Work in the city of Ottawa has undergone some major changes in the last few years – what would you identify as the most important change? How has this affected you personally? How has this affected other members of your household?

4.2 Would you say that these recent changes to work within Ottawa have benefited some people more than others? (if so, who and how?)

4.3 Do you think that the increased role of the high tech industry in Ottawa has brought changes for the better or worse? How has this shift affected members of your household?

NB: ASK THE FOLLOWING TO ALL AS THE LAST QUESTION

4.4 Some people say that to survive in the current economy we must all be prepared to be flexible in when, how and where we work – is this an idea you agree with?

TO CONCLUDE:

Before we bring the interview to a close, I'd like to ask you if you can think of any questions or topics that we didn't ask you about – any important aspects of change in your working life that we missed?

Well that's the end of the interview. Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts and experiences – all of the information you have provided is an important contribution to the research project. Please get in touch with us if you have questions, or would like further information – and visit our website to see how the project progresses.