

## STRENGTH IS IGNORANCE; SLAVERY IS FREEDOM: MANAGING CULTURE IN MODERN ORGANIZATIONS\*

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### ABSTRACT

The article subjects the assumptions and prescriptions of the 'Corporate Culture' literature to critical scrutiny. The body of the article is devoted to teasing out the distinctive basis of its appeal compared with earlier management theory. It is seen to build upon earlier efforts (*e.g.* 'theory Y') to constitute a self-disciplining form of employee subjectivity by asserting that 'practical autonomy' is conditional upon the development of a strong corporate culture. The paper illuminates the dark side of this project by drawing attention to the subjugating and totalitarian implications of its excellence/quality prescriptions. To this end, parallels are drawn with the philosophy of control favoured by the Party in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Specifically, the paper critiques the 'doublethink' contention that autonomy can be realized in monocultural conditions that systematically constrain opportunities to wrestle with competing values standpoints and their associated life projects.

### INTRODUCTION

During the 1980s, the 'culture' of corporations emerged as a central theme in the field management and organization studies. Amongst practitioners, the project of strengthening corporate culture was promoted by the gurus of excellence (*e.g.* Peters and Waterman, 1982) and enthusiastically endorsed by exponents of other popular flavours of the decade, such as human resource management (HRM) and total quality management (TQM).<sup>[1]</sup> This interest in culture as an instrument of competitive advantage has been paralleled and complemented by growing academic attention to the symbolic dimensions of organizational life (Gagliardi, 1990; Turner, 1989).

According to its leading authorities, the 'strengthening' of corporate culture enhances organizational performance by securing greater commitment and flexibility from employees (*e.g.* Davis, 1984; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Goldsmith and Clutterbuck, 1984; Kanter, 1984, 1990; Ouchi, 1981; Pascale, 1985; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Waterman, 1988).<sup>[2]</sup> Improvements in productivity and quality, it is argued, flow from corporate cultures that *systematically* recognize and reward individuals, symbolically and materially, for identifying

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their sense of purpose with the values that are designed into the organization.<sup>[3]</sup>

The guiding aim and abiding concern of corporate culturism, as I shall characterize it, is to win the 'hearts and minds' of employees: to define their purposes by managing what they think and feel, and not just how they behave. The strengthening of corporate cultures, it is claimed, provides the key to securing 'unusual effort on the part of apparently ordinary employees' (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. xvii):

The top performers create a broad, uplifting, shared culture, a coherent framework within which charged-up people search for appropriate adaptations. Their ability to extract extraordinary contributions from very large numbers of people turns on the ability to create a highly valued sense of purpose. Such purpose invariably emanates from love of product, providing top-quality services, and honoring innovation and contribution from all (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 51).

When a 'new' species of management theory first appears, it is initially difficult to discern its theoretical, practical and political significance. Is it simply a repackaging of old ideas? Will it have any material impact in changing management practices? With the passing of time, responses to such questions become less hesitant. Evidence is mounting that the theory and practice of corporate culturism is more than a passing fad or a simple repackaging of old ideas; and that it is having a material effect upon the politics of work. As Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) have recently remarked, the marketing of corporate culture has been a 'success story'. Following the lead given by Peters and Waterman (1982), 'a multi-million dollar industry has grown up as others attempt to prescribe the rules of excellence' (p. 23).

Of course, practical applications of corporate culturism may be patchy, partial and half-baked (Fitzgerald, 1988; Rowlinson *et al.*, 1991; Smith, 1990). Like other panaceas, it may slide into disrepute and disuse as raised expectations are unfulfilled or as the costs of implementation are unmatched by the promised return. Nonetheless, the core ideas of corporate culturism seem to have flowed remarkably quickly into the vessel of management thought. Ideas about 'strengthening the culture' now infuse diverse corporate change programmes, including those introduced primarily as a means of improving quality, flexibility and/or responsiveness to customer needs. In a variety of guises, corporate culturism has been endorsed by a sufficient number of leading management gurus, corporate executives and state mandarins to ensure a more than passing influence upon management theory and practice.

#### ‘TAKING CORPORATE CULTURISM SERIOUSLY

To study the claims of corporate culturism necessitates taking it seriously, with the associated risk of lending it undue credibility. Faced with this

dilemma, it is tempting for academics either to ignore its aspirations or to dismiss them as 'managerialist', 'consensualist', 'ideological', *etc.* (e.g. Alvesson, 1987; Silver, 1987). However, corporate culturism is now too well established and too influential to allow its gurus and corporate devotees to monopolize assessments of its theoretical and practical significance. As Wood (1989, p. 400) has suggested, the new wave of management theory merits serious, sustained consideration as a force that has moral as well as managerial significance. This is a view echoed by Taksa (1991, p. 23) when she urges that the new techniques of securing 'integration and socialization' merit 'a more extensive critique on ethical grounds than that which has been directed against the "corporate gurus" within the rarefied confines of academic publications'.

Considering the volume and influence of books and articles that celebrate corporate culturism in its various guises, there is a remarkable dearth of serious, critical analysis of this phenomenon.<sup>[4]</sup> A primary objective of this article is to contribute to the correction of this deficiency. There are at least two interrelated dimensions of this task. The first dimension, which will not be undertaken in any depth here, is concerned with situating the corporate culturism phenomenon historically in relation to its conditions of possibility – which include the move towards more flexible forms of accumulation, the Japanese challenge, a resurgence of economic neo-liberalism and the reassertion of managerial prerogative in the governance of employee values.

The second dimension of a critical analysis of corporate culturism is concerned more specifically with its content and practical implications. It comprises two intertwined elements: an illumination and assessment of theory; and, second, a critical analysis of its 'real world' applications. This article is directed principally at the first of these elements, though its arguments are illustrated by reference to a small number of critical empirical studies that shed light upon its application.<sup>[5]</sup> Since the two dimensions of the study of corporate culture are interrelated, some attention is also given to how 'corporate culturism' is supported and frustrated by the material and ideological contexts of its articulation.

We are not immediately concerned with assessing the technical effectiveness of corporate culturist prescriptions – a task that has been undertaken by others<sup>[6]</sup> Rather, attention is focused upon the moral significance and implications of corporate culturism. Its central argument is that, in the name of expanded practical autonomy, it aspires to extend management control by colonizing the affective domain. It does this by promoting employee commitment to a monolithic structure of feeling and thought, a development that is seen to be incipiently totalitarian.

The early sections of the article set the corporate culturism phenomenon in a wider practical and intellectual context: the transition from Fordism to a more flexible strategy of accumulation in which the governance of the employee's soul becomes a more central element in corporate strategies for gaining competitive advantage; and its relationship to the academic study of organizational culture and to other varieties of 'progressive' management theory. To sharpen and illuminate the central argument, parallels are drawn, with due qualifications, between the totalitarian demands of Oceania in

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the managerial project of strengthening corporate culture, as distilled most potently and influentially in Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*.<sup>[7]</sup> Elements of Oceanic 'doublethink', 'newspeak' and 'crimestop' within corporate culturism are identified and discussed'.<sup>[8]</sup> Criticism of these tendencies is illuminated and justified by reference to Weber's distinction between instrumental rationality and value rationality. Basically, it is argued that corporate culturism aspires to extend the terrain of instrumentally rational action by developing monocultures in which conditions for the development of value-rational action, where individuals struggle to assess the meaning and worth of a range of competing value-standpoints, is systematically eroded. Finally, the article draws upon research that has studied the practical effects of corporate culturist programmes. These findings suggest that their 'success' in securing employee commitment is at best partial; *and* that employees can become trapped in a vicious circle of cynicism and dependence. In conclusion, we return to the central theme of the article's opening sections by suggesting that the advocacy and development of corporate culturism be interpreted as a collective failure of moral nerve in the face of modernity's discontents. Instead of developing an awareness of the 'dysfunctions' of so-called rational organization so as to foster a radicalized modernity (Giddens, 1990), an instrumentally rational ambition to tighten control of thought and emotion contributes to the continuing downward spiral of the Enlightenment project (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972). A kind of hypermodernity (Willmott, 1992) is promoted in which a (self-defeating) correction of the deficiencies of rationalism is sought by inciting management to colonize the 'softer' features of organization.

#### CONTEXTUALIZING CORPORATE CULTURISM

It is important to situate the corporate culturism literature in the social and economic context of its preparation and adoption. Otherwise, it might seem that the seminal texts themselves produce the practices they describe, rather than appreciating how their prescriptions selectively (re)construct and rationalize particular kinds of management practice. There is a related danger of attributing the existence and impact of this literature to the inspired thinking and persuasive exhortation of leading management gurus and/or to the receptiveness of a vanguard of innovative corporate executives.

A critical history of the emergence of the new wave of management theory has yet to be written, although a number of suggestive analyses are beginning to appear (Alvesson, 1990a, 1990b; du Gay, 1991; Guest, 1990b; Miller and Rose, 1990; Rose, 1988, 1990; Silver, 1987). When situating the rise of corporate culturism in a wider political and economic context, it is relevant to recognize how challenges to the supremacy of Anglo-American business organization have coincided with the celebration of a consumer ethic of materialism and individualism. These developments have quickened a 'post-modern' decay of traditional virtues in which the display of dramaturgical skill in managing an impression of good performance has tended to displace the comparatively unsophisticated ethic of 'just exchange'. Coupled with

raised expectations about the 'quality' of working life, a sense of economic threat, especially from Japanese companies, has combined with a growing moral vacuum to create fertile ground for the emergence of a new brand of management theory: a brand that presents a recipe for economic and moral recovery by promising employees 'meaning as well as money' (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 323). Noting the affinity between corporate culture philosophy and the Reaganite/Thatcherite project of promoting the enterprise culture, du Gay has suggested that

Excellence in management theory is an attempt to redefine and reconstruct the economic and cultural terrain, and to win social subjects to a new conception of themselves – to 'turn them into winners', 'champions', and 'everyday heroes'. As much as anything, Culture Excellence is a struggle for identities, an attempt to enable all sorts of people, from highest executive to lowliest shop-floor employee, to see themselves reflected in the emerging conception of the enterprising organization and thus to come increasingly to identify with it (1991, pp. 53–4).

When set within a broader context, corporate culturism can be seen to form an important ideological element within a global restructuring of capital, labour and product markets that involves a movement away from the '5 dollars a day' logic of Fordism towards the contingent, fluid organizing philosophy of 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey, 1989). Fordism cultivated acquisitive consumers: the eager customers with regular wage packets that supported markets for standardized, mass produced goods. As a key component of moves towards more flexible structures of accumulation, corporate culturism expects and requires employees to *internalize* the new values of 'quality', 'flexibility' and 'value-added' – to adopt and cherish them as their own – so that, in principle, their uniquely human powers of judgement and discretion are directed unequivocally towards working methods that will deliver capital accumulation. As Harvey (1989, p. 171) has argued, the transition from Fordism to a more flexible regime of accumulation involves a growing emphasis upon, and increased efforts to manage, 'the fleeting, the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent in modern life'. He continues:

fragmentation and economic insecurity . . . lead to a *heightened emphasis upon the authority of basic institutions – the family, religion, the state. And there is an abundance of a revival of support for such institutions and the values they represent throughout the Western world since about 1970* (1989, p. 171, emphasis added).

Authoritarian remedies that prey upon existential problems have been developed within corporations, and not just outside them. In America and Britain we have seen the rise of a potent mixture of neo-liberalism and nationalism (*e.g.* Reaganism and Thatcherism) (du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Silver, 1987). Within organizations, programmes of corporate culturism, human resource management and total quality management have sought to promote or strengthen a corporate ethos that demands loyalty from employees as it excludes, silences or punishes those who question its creed.

## RESPONSES TO CORPORATE CULTURISM: PRAGMATISTS AND PURISTS

Amongst academics, responses to the appearance and prescriptions of corporate culturism have been polarized. On the one hand, there are devotees who enthusiastically embrace the teachings as the Holy Grail of organizational effectiveness (*e.g.* Kilmann *et al.*, 1985). Even when urging refinement and caution in interpreting and applying the prescriptions of corporate culture, these 'culture pragmatists' (Martin, 1985) are inclined to endorse their basic assumptions, blissfully ignoring research that casts doubt upon their logic and results (Barney, 1986; Carroll, 1983; Hitt and Ireland, 1987).<sup>[9]</sup> On the other hand, there are 'culture purists' who regard corporate culturism as a superficial, commercial and theoretically impoverished enterprise unworthy of serious examination.

Purists have widely endorsed Smircich's (1983) distinction between managerial and anthropological orientations to the study of organizational culture and symbolism. These 'honest grapplers' (Ott, 1984, cited in Turner, 1990) favour an anthropologically-informed approach in which culture is conceived as a 'root metaphor' for making sense of the constructed realities of organizational life (Smircich, 1983). In pursuing this approach, purists have taken conspicuously less notice of her argument that 'a cultural framework for analysis allows us to see that an important role for both those who study and manage organizations is not to celebrate organization as a value, *but to question the ends it serves*' (Smircich, 1983, p. 355, emphasis added). Indeed, for 'purists' who have not been tempted by the material rewards for becoming more 'pragmatic' (*cf.* Barley *et al.*, 1988; Calas and Smircich, 1987), the study of exotic organizational symbolism and diverse cultural artifacts appears to have become an end in itself (*cf.* SCOS Network, 1991, Editorial).<sup>[10]</sup> In effect, any sustained questioning of the ends of corporate culture has been displaced, seemingly by the effort to develop a market niche for innovative methods and esoteric objects of academic investigation (Alvesson, 1985, 1990b; Trice and Beyer, 1984).

When 'purists' express doubts or reservations about 'pragmatic' analysis, their criticisms tend to be directed at its methodological coherence rather than its political significance or moral defensibility. For example, in defence of a 'purist' position, Helmers (1991, p. 66) has recently argued that 'it is not possible to measure the performance of a culture as a whole or morally to judge it'. In general, the attitude of 'purists' seems to be that because the corporate culture literature is theoretically deficient, it is academically unrespectable, *and therefore* unworthy of serious examination. Even though the gurus and disciples of corporate culturism are directly engaged in the process of shaping organizational culture, the nature and significance of this engagement is unexamined. As a consequence, amongst the literature on corporate culture, 'it is obviously hard to find a position which rivals Peters and Waterman's view that excellent employing institutions have to provide money and meaning for their employees' (Sievers, 1990, p. 135).

A partial exception to this rule is Meek's (1992) discussion of the Kilmann *et al.* (1985) collection *Gaining Control of the Corporate Culture*. However, her analysis is largely confined to a rehearsal of the criticism that the corporate

culture literature in general, and contributions to the (aptly authored) Kilmann volume in particular, is founded upon a narrow, structural-functional conceptualization of culture (*cf.* Smircich, 1983). In passing, she gestures towards the understanding that 'norms and social meanings are structured by 'class cultures', and are a constant potential source of dispute' (Meek, 1992, p. 197). But her analysis then exemplifies the abstraction of organizational culture and symbolism from its wider historical and politico-economic contexts as culture is dissected into rituals, myths, sagas and the like. Absent from Meek's analysis is any consideration of the moral dimension or significance of corporate culturism. Even when she refers to nazi Germany, it is to make the point that Hitler did not create it by himself, rather than as a basis for exploring the parallels between propagandist methods, including symbol manipulation, developed to enrol citizens into national socialism and the totalitarian tendencies of corporate culturism.

For the 'purists', the myth of value-neutrality/transcendence appears to offer immunity from reflection upon the moral conditions and consequences of scientific investigation. The inadequacy of this fig-leaf becomes embarrassingly evident when it is realized that (scientific) knowledge does not simply reflect reality but inescapably reproduces or transforms it in particular ways that are rich in practical – that is, moral-political – consequences. Like management, the life of science is a matter of moral struggle and allegiance, not a zone of neutrality or objectivity (Shapin and Schaffer, 1985).

Even though definitive authoritative judgements about the morality of a discourse (*e.g.* the corporate culture literature) are unobtainable, their absence does not exclude the possibility of engaging forms of discourse that strive to enrich our appreciation of the moral dimensions and significance of lay and scientific practice. On the contrary, the lack of such judgements can accommodate it and even heighten it (Segerstrale, 1989). From a postempiricist perspective, the meaning of (social) science cannot be reduced to, or equated with, the mobilization of technical reason to identify and evaluate alternative means (Bernstein, 1976). Rather, the challenge is to revive and reconstruct the life of science in ways that incorporate the deployment of critical reason to re-member the normative, moral-political quality of all forms of human activity.

#### THE MORAL DIMENSION OF CORPORATE CULTURISM: THE VOICE OF CRITICS

There is undoubtedly a case for undertaking research, based upon the study of culture as a 'root metaphor', that develops an anthropologically-informed alternative to the managerialist representation of culture as a manipulable variable for gaining competitive advantage. But equally, as Smircich (1983) has emphasized, there is no good reason why a 'purist' interest in organizational symbolism should displace or exclude a more critical appraisal of the conditions and consequences of corporate culturism.

Critical analysis is distinguished by its concern to situate the development and popularity of ideas and practices – such as those of corporate culturalism – in the material and historical contexts of their emergence and application.

In doing so, critical analysis questions the authority and objective necessity of the normative framework that is taken for granted by the pragmatic gurus of corporate culturism. It also challenges the adequacy of 'purist' accounts of organizational culture in which the analysis of symbolic artifacts is abstracted from the politico-economic conditions of their emergence and reproduction (*cf.* Stablein and Nord, 1985). *More specifically, critical analysis explores how, as a medium of domination, the scope and penetration of management control is, in principle, considerably extended by corporate culturism* (Alvesson, 1990a; Anthony, 1977; Mitchell, 1985; Ray, 1986; Robbins, 1983;). No longer restricted to authorizing and enforcing rules and procedures, it ascribes to management the task and duty of determining how employees should *think* and *feel* about what they produce. Managers are exhorted to give employees 'a mission as well as a sense of feeling great' (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 323; *cf.* Hochschild, 1983; Van Maanen, 1992 and Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989). As Miller and Rose (1990, p. 26) have remarked,

The 'autonomous' subjectivity of the productive individual has become a central economic resource; such programmes promise to turn autonomy into an ally of economic success and not an obstacle to be controlled and disciplined.

When corporate cultures are 'strengthened', employees are encouraged to *devote* themselves to its values and products, and to assess their own worth in these terms. By promoting this form of devotion, employees are simultaneously required to recognize and *take responsibility for* the relationship between the security of their employment and their contribution to the competitiveness of the goods and services that they produce. As Wilkinson *et al.* (1991) tersely observe, corporate culture (and HRM/TQM) programmes seek to 'immerse employees in the "logic" of the market'. Or, as Thompson and McHugh (1990, p. 241) argue, through an absorption of core corporate values, employees 'are encouraged to perceive their performance and utility to the enterprise as their responsibility'. It is no coincidence that campaigns to strengthen corporate culture are frequently tied to presentations that stress the strategic importance of employees' taking their responsibilities seriously for the performance of the organization and, by implication, their own job security and career prospects (Knights and Willmott, 1987, 1991).<sup>[11]</sup>

What, in effect, advocates of corporate culture mean by the 'strength' of culture is its lack of contamination by rival 'ends' or values to which the discretion of employees might otherwise be 'mis'directed. Cultural strength is thus signified in terms of the closeness of the alignment of the content of employees' purposiveness with the normative framework laid down by the cultural engineers of the corporation. Through the careful design and dissemination of corporate values, employees are exhorted and enabled to acquire 'a love of product', or the equivalent, as their sense of purpose. In this way, employees are invited and induced to become 'tied to their identity by conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1982, p. 781; Knights and Willmott,

1989). Characterizing these developments as 'technocratic informalism', Heydebrand (1989, p. 344) observes how each employee is encouraged to become ensnared within a complex process of 'social engineering', a process 'that structures work situations by means of intensive training, planning, continuous learning, and the use of various human resource management techniques'. Insofar as they are drawn to the allure of technocratic informalism, employees come to *discipline themselves* with feelings of anxiety, shame and guilt that are aroused when they sense or judge themselves to impugn or fall short of the hallowed values of the corporation (Schwartz, 1987a, 1987b).

Of course, control of the affective and symbolic domain has long been a subterranean theme of management texts, especially those that have stressed the leadership responsibilities of managers, whether senior executives (Barnard, 1983) or middle managers and supervisors (Likert, 1961). What is new about the corporate culturism is the *systematizing and legitimizing* of a mode of control that purposefully seeks to shape and regulate the practical consciousness and, arguably, the unconscious strivings, of employees.<sup>[12]</sup> In the installation of corporate culture/HRM/TQM programmes, every conceivable opportunity is taken for imprinting the core values of the organization upon its (carefully selected) employees.<sup>[13]</sup> To the extent that succeeds in this mission, corporate culturism becomes a medium of nascent totalitarianism.

#### CORPORATE CULTURE AS MANAGEMENT THEORY: REPRISE AND INNOVATION

In emphasizing its capacity to raise the commitment and flexibility of individual employees, corporate culturism repeats and embellishes prescriptions advocated by earlier advocates of post-Taylorist management theory – such as human relations (*e.g.* Mayo, 1933), institutional theory (*e.g.* Selznick, 1957), socio-technical systems theory (*e.g.* Trist *et al.*, 1963), theory Y (*e.g.* McGregor, 1960) and various other forms of organizational development (Armstrong, 1986). Their common concern has been to increase co-operation and commitment by enabling employees to derive a sense of meaning and esteem, as well as payment, by directing their creative energies towards the realization of key corporate objectives.

Central to these 'humanizing' programmes has been a more or less explicit understanding that the openness and indeterminacy of human labour requires the development of a 'second nature', in the form of a normative framework, through which the bogey of indeterminacy is practically exorcized (Bauman, 1976). This orientation to management control is frequently contrasted with 'harder', 'Scientific' approaches to the design of jobs and systems in which a rational-economic orientation to work is assumed and engineered. Arguably, 'humanizing' programmes do not so much abandon or even transform the structures that are promoted and sustained by a 'scientific' approach to the design of work. Rather, these structures are overlaid with a mode of control directed at the productive potential of the normative quality and organization of human conduct. As Rose (1990, p. xi) has observed, within post-human relations varieties of management theory, knowledge of

the subjectivity of the worker is viewed as the key to achieving 'a judicious adjustment of the temporal, spacial and interpersonal relations of the work-place'.

Where corporate culturism differs in degree, if not in principle, from earlier, 'progressive' forms management theory is in its *systemic and totalizing approach to the design and strengthening of the normative framework of work*. Of course, the productive value of appealing to, and mobilizing norms of civility and reciprocity has been recognized and exploited by human relations and socio-technical approaches. In theory Y-type management theory, individuals are deemed to be more productive if they are allowed to 'exercise self-direction and self-control' (McGregor, 1960, p. 56). However, corporate culturism combines and extends these elements to produce a distinctive and potent new philosophy and practice of management control. Moreover, its novelty is in no way adequately characterized as a 'therapy of freedom' as Rose (1990, p. 257), for example, has recently claimed.<sup>[14]</sup>

'Theory Y' philosophy was built upon the assumption of a spontaneous consensus between individual needs and corporate objectives that had been denied and distorted by bad (theory X) theory. This assumption was naive because it took no account of deep-seated conflicts of interest within organizations that revolve around social divisions of ownership and control. As Child has remarked,

In business firms and other institutions where there is a cash nexus with their members (the) coercion of formalized authority will be reinforced by economic conflicts of interest. Organizational design and development can only help to resolve this conflict with the individual to a limited extent, by exploring more satisfactory means of reconciling the different interests involved (1984, p. 16).

Instead of assuming the existence of an underlying consensus in organizations that is distorted by incompetent forms of management control, as previous (progressive) varieties of management theory are inclined to do, corporate culturism seeks to *construct* this consensus by managing the culture through which employee values are acquired. From human relations and institutional theory is drawn the belief that social norms exert a powerful influence upon people, and that productivity is associated with respect for, and enhancement of, the normative framework of action. From theory Y is drawn the understanding that opportunities to exercise discretion improve performance. These ideas are fused in corporate culturism by advocating a *systematic* approach to creating and strengthening core organizational values in a way that *excludes* (through attention to recruitment) *and eliminates* (through training) *all other values*. 'Self-direction' is commended but, crucially, its scope and course is *dictated* and directed by the construction of employee commitment to core corporate values.<sup>[15]</sup> The central argument is lucidly articulated by Peters and Waterman (1982):

a set of shared values and rules about discipline, details and execution *can provide the framework in which practical autonomy takes place routine...* The

institution provides the guiding belief and creates a sense of excitement, a sense of being a part of the best, a sense of producing something of quality that is generally valued (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 323, emphasis added).

Here is the basic departure of corporate culturism from 'theory Y' management theory. As the champion of theory Y, McGregor (1960) assumed that the productivity of individual employees is dampened and frustrated by management's erroneous attachment to the rational-economic assumptions of theory X. A belief in an underlying consensus of values within organizations led him to contend that 'the individual can achieve his (*sic*) goals *best* by directing his efforts toward the success of the organization' (McGregor, 1960, p. 55). In contrast, corporate culturism is more responsive to the presence of value conflicts within modern (capitalist) organizations, conflicts which it interprets as a sign of cultural weakness that can be corrected. Though masquerading as a 'therapy of freedom' that expands the practical autonomy of employees, corporate culturism identifies cultural values as a powerful underutilized media of domination. Instead of assuming a consensus of values (as theory Y does), corporate culturism aspires to build or manufacture consensus by managing the content and valency of employee values.<sup>[16]</sup> Rejecting the view that the non-rational aspects of human organization must be eliminated (*e.g.* scientific management) or patronized (*e.g.* human relations), it is argued that these aspects can be legitimately and effectively *colonized*. As Peters and Waterman put it,

what our framework has done is to remind the world of professional managers that 'soft is hard'. . . . It has enabled us to say, in effect, 'All that stuff you have been dismissing for so long as the intractable, irrational, intuitive, informal organization *can* be managed' (1982, p. 11).

In principle, the management of 'the intractable, irrational, intuitive and informal' is accomplished by designing and developing corporate cultures. Conscious, systematic attention to these aspects is understood to produce committed, self-disciplining employees. A residual (theory Y) concern with designing organizations and jobs that fulfil 'higher order' needs is harnessed to the task of managing *the design of people* who willingly perform jobs because their sense of purpose and identity is tightly coupled to the core values of the corporation.

To sum up, corporate culturism shares with post-Taylorist management theory an implicit understanding that the distinctive quality of human action, and of labour power, resides in the capacity of self-determination. This insight informs the understanding that corporate performance can be maximized only if this capacity is simultaneously respected and exploited. However, in contrast to management theorists who take the identity and integration of individual and organizational needs as givens, and therefore see no reason to manage employee values, the prescriptions of corporate culturists commend and legitimize the development of a technology of cultural control that is

intended to yoke, in totalitarian fashion, the power of self-determination exclusively to the realization of corporate values.

#### AUTONOMY FOR SALE: CORPORATE CULTURE AS DOUBLETHINK

Corporate culturism endeavours to secure control by managing the impression of respecting the distinctiveness and individuality of each employee. As Orwell (1989, p. 37) anticipated, this enables an idea – such as autonomy – to be repudiated whilst simultaneously laying claim to its reality: ‘reality control’ is secured through ‘doublethink.’<sup>[17]</sup> In this doublethink world, the benefits of participating in a strong corporate culture (and thereby further strengthening its totalizing effects) are sold by stressing the benefits for the individual employee who, it is claimed, not only enjoys greater practical autonomy but is transformed into a ‘winner’:

There was hardly a more pervasive theme in the excellent companies than *respect for the individual*. . . . These companies give people control over their destinies; they make meaning for people. They turn the average Joe and the average Jane into winners. They let, even insist, that people stick out (Peters and Waterman, 1982, pp. 238–9, emphasis in original).

Peters and Waterman (1982) give numerous examples of the way excellent companies respect individual employees by enabling them to ‘control their destinies’ and ‘stick out’. For example, a Tupperware dealer is quoted as saying:

The company gives me great freedom to develop my own approach. There are certain elements that need to be in every party to make it successful, but if those elements are colored by you, a Tupperware dealer – purple, pink and polka dot, and I prefer it lavender and lace – that’s okay. That freedom allows you to be the best that you are capable of being (Peters and Waterman, 1982, pp. 105–6).

Like the market that allows sellers of labour to believe in their freedom, corporate culture invites employees to understand that identification with its values ensures their autonomy. That is the seductive doublethink of corporate culture: the simultaneous affirmation and negation of the conditions of autonomy.

In corporate culturism, respect for the individual is equated with complying with the values of the corporate culture. To challenge the values enshrined in this ‘respect’ is ‘a crime against the culture.’<sup>[18]</sup> Here there is a direct parallel between the discipline of strong corporate cultures and Party discipline in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, exemplified in ‘crimestop’, which Orwell characterizes as:

the faculty of stopping short as though by instinct at the threshold of any dangerous thought . . . of being bored or repelled by any train of thought

which is capable of leading in a heretical direction (Orwell, 1989, pp. 220–1).

Shared by the worlds of newspeak and corporate culture is *a totalitarian remedy for the resolution of indeterminacy and ambiguity: thought control through uniform definition of meaning*. In the name of corporate objectives (efficiency, effectiveness, profitability, value for money), the restrictiveness and inadequacy of formal rules, and the reduction of individual insecurity, employees are subjugated to the uniformity of corporate culture. In Orwell's Oceania, 'freedom is slavery' and 'Ignorance is strength'. In the world of corporate culture, 'slavery is freedom' and 'strength is ignorance'.

Big corporations possess the resources with which to construct and market an entirely heteronomous meaning of autonomy. The impression of respecting the individual is managed in two mutually reinforcing ways. First, the virtue of a strengthened corporate culture, where the distinctive skills and contribution of each individual is sought and recognized, is contrasted with the denial of discretion and stifling of individual initiative associated with rational, bureaucratic methods of organization. The promise of corporate culture is to relieve feelings of frustration and depersonalization engendered by bureaucracies where, if we accept Weber's classical analysis, the imperative is to remove all irrational and emotional elements. Second, by establishing a few core values, there is the prospect of minimizing the bewildering, anxiety-laden experience of having to cope with an excess of autonomy. A strong culture, like a strong leader, is deemed to provide each employee with the security of the 'sacred canopy' (Berger, 1973; Berger and Luckmann, 1966). This, it is argued, enables each employee to confirm a modern (humanist) sense of self, as a self-determining individual, without the burden of responsibility – the angst – that accompanies the making of (existential) choices between ultimate, conflicting values. Peters and Waterman (1982) explicitly refer to this appeal when they contend that, as human beings, '*we simultaneously seek self-determination and security*' (p. 80, emphasis added). They then continue:

the excellent companies seem to understand these important, if paradoxical human needs. . . . These companies provide the opportunity to stick out, yet combine it with a philosophy and system of beliefs that provide the transcending meaning – a wonderful combination (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 81).

In the newspeak of corporate culture, autonomy is represented as a gift that can be bestowed by culture upon employees rather than something that individuals *struggle* to realize by overcoming compulsions and dependencies (*cf.* Freire, 1972). By defining autonomy as obedience to the core values of corporate culture, the meaning and imagined possibility of freedom is tightly circumscribed – a situation that is directly paralleled by the objective of newspeak. By strengthening corporate cultures, employees' lack of control over the means of production (Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979) is compounded by (a further, systemized) lack of control over the means of value choice and identity formation (Willmott, 1990). As one of Orwell's charac-

ters, a specialist in newspeak, explains to Winston, the hero of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,

Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? . . . Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly *one* word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten (Orwell, 1989, p. 55).

Whether interpersonal (despotic) or institutional (totalitarian) in form, authoritarianism produces a sense of solidarity and freedom (from responsibility) through a systematic suppression of indeterminacy and ambivalence. In the ideal-typical bureaucratic, rule-governed organization, employees are at least permitted to *think* what they like so long as they *act* in a technically competent manner. Bureaucratic workers may be inclined to invest their sense of reality and identity in the authority of the organization, but they are not systematically induced and rewarded for doing so. In principle, communication between employees that challenges or ironizes bureaucratic authority is tolerated so long as the rules themselves are not overtly violated. In contrast, in organizations with a strong corporate culture, such 'disloyal' communication is at best strictly coded if it is not entirely tabooed (Kunda, 1991): 'you either buy into their norms or you get out' (Peters and Waterman (1982, p. 77).

In sum, those who advocate the strengthening of corporate culture extend the promise of developing a normative environment in which employees enjoy the security of a transcendent system of beliefs, a system that respects and indeed fosters each individual's powers of self-determination. The beguiling prospect is one of working in a culturally controlled environment in which ambivalence about what individuals should do and *be* is minimized if not wholly eliminated. Even when employees are exhorted to 'thrive on chaos' (Peters, 1988), they are simultaneously expected 'to move from lip service to the ideas of *In Search of Excellence* . . . to setting challenging goals for implementation' (Peters, 1988, p. 40). Central to these ideas is the doctrine that the discipline of culture ensures that the practical autonomy of employees is dedicated to the realization of core corporate values, as exemplified in the account of the Tupperware salesperson cited earlier.

#### BURSTING THE BUBBLE

Advocates of corporate culture would like to persuade and assure us that their prescriptions are morally benign. As noted in the previous section, they emphasize a respect for the individual. All employees are deemed to benefit from the discipline of culture. They also take it for granted that the objectives of the organization are, or can be engineered to become, consensual. Since every employee is assumed to share these objectives, and to benefit from their realization, there can be no moral objection to corporate cultural demands. In any event, employees are deemed to choose their employer and are always free to leave. Finally, the more evangelical of corporate culture gurus claim

that their prescriptions can revive or restore a sense of value and purpose that has been drained by the disenchanting stresses of modern, bureaucratic society.<sup>[19]</sup>

The advocates of corporate culturism either assume or enthusiastically proclaim the moral virtue of their prescriptions for reconstructing modern corporations. In contrast, the central thesis of this article is that its moral standing is, at best ambiguous, and upon further reflection, is de-moralizing insofar as its effect is to impede rather than facilitate a process of coming to terms with the indeterminacy of human existence. Instead of contributing to the development of a societal culture in which individuals learn to appreciate, and struggle with, the problematical experience and significance of indeterminacy, corporate culturism promotes what is, in effect, a totalitarian remedy for this existential problem. Corporate culturism directly exploits the feelings of insecurity and 'irrationalism' that are intensified by the capitalist process of commodification (Willmott, 1990). A system of beliefs and rewards is constructed that invites employees to suspend doubt in the good sense of subjugating themselves to the authority of the core corporate values. Far from enabling an active process of comprehending the possibility and necessity of choosing between competing values and their associated life-projects, identification with a single set of values is demanded. Or, as Peters and Waterman put it,

The institution provides a guiding belief and creates a sense of excitement, a sense of being part of the best, a sense of producing something of quality that is generally valued (1982, p. 323).

The scope for establishing such programmes does not arise from any basic consensus developed through an open debate about the merits of competing sets of values. Rather, the indeterminacy of human existence combined with the contradictory structuring of mutual dependencies within the capital-labour relationship (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980) are the principal conditions of possibility for the development of corporate culturalism. As Marx argued, capitalist relations of production draw much of their appeal from their bestowal of freedom upon individuals to sell their labour in the market place. Less obviously, this freedom carries with it the responsibility for their subsistence (and that of their dependants) as feudal ties of reciprocal obligation are broken. To underscore the significance of this new freedom, Marx (1976, p. 1031) contrasts the position of the slave, disciplined by the lash, with that of the industrial worker who

is impelled by his wants. The consciousness (or better: the *idea*) of free self-determination, of liberty, makes a much better worker of the one than the other, as does the related feeling (sense) of *responsibility* (emphasis in original).

By making each seller dependent upon, and responsible for, the quality of labour supplied, the 'whip' of the market fosters a purely instrumental relationship in which employment is regarded principally a means of satis-

fyng the wants that impel the worker to sell his/her labour. What is more, the development of a hierarchical and specialized division of labour, devised to harness and regulate the productive activity of labour for purposes of private accumulation, compounds the segmenting effects of the market. When positioned within the capitalist labour process, the individual seller of labour may well strive to make it as enjoyable or meaningful as possible – for example, by shirking work, joking about it or by taking pride in it. But this effort to make sense of work complements and sustains rather than negates, the instrumentality of wage-slavery.

From this perspective, the project of corporate culturism is interpreted as a strategy for managing the sense-making of employees in a way that moderates the ‘dysfunctional’, individualizing, segmenting effects of capitalist market relations. Peters (1988) makes the case with disarming directness when, referring to the use of values to govern employee behaviour, he asserts that

*These devices – vision, symbolic action, recognition – are a control system, in the truest sense of the term. The manager’s task is to conceive of them as such, and to consciously use them (Peters, 1988, p. 486, emphasis and bold in the original).*

Whereas Marx identified the market as the ‘whip’ that individualizes and controls the worker by necessitating the sale of his/her labour power, corporate culturists advocate the ‘strengthening’ of corporate values as a more potent way of shaping and disciplining the self-consciousness and identity of the corporate employee. This is clearly easier where the despotism of the market is softened by life-time employment, good job security or even the prospect of career advancement. Where these conditions are absent, corporate culturism can nonetheless contribute to the neutralizing of resistance. Although asymmetrically organized in a way that systematically favours the employer (Fox, 1974), capitalist relations of production present opportunities for ‘enroling’ (Callon, 1986) employees into a corporate culture by offering them a new, enhanced conception of self and an associated reformulation of their self-interest (Knights and Willmott, 1989). Yet, as will be argued in a later section, this exchange may be more problematical and conditional than is immediately evident. Connecting corporate culturism with the prescriptions of ‘soft’ HRM, Legge (1989) has noted both its political significance and the limits of its practical application:

*If it were possible to apply consistently the ‘soft’ version HRM model, it might well be argued that it mediates the contradictions of capitalism more effectively than traditional personnel management. . . . But if HRM, in theory, demands the integration of employment policies with business strategy, and hence, in some circumstances, to treat labour as a variable input, consistent adherence to the ‘soft’ version model will come under pressure as ‘employers require workers to be both dependable and disposable’ (Legge, 1989, pp. 38–9, quoting Hyman, 1987, p. 42).*

The gurus of corporate culture are inclined to interpret any resistance to their prescriptions as an indication of individual pathology or remediable imperfection in communications. However, there remains an underlying contradiction between the market status of labour as a disposable commodity and its corporate cultural status as a valued human resource – a contradiction that is less evident in Japan, the spiritual home of corporate culturalism, where the Enlightenment break with feudal values is less advanced (Locke, 1989).<sup>[20]</sup> The contradiction may be more or less successfully managed so long as the market relationship is secured and obscured (*cf.* Burawoy, 1979). But there is an inevitable return of the repressed either when competition/recession demands the disposal of labour and/or when the collectivist requirements of corporate culture are problematized by resilient residues of individualism and instrumentalism.

#### THE APOTHEOSIS OF INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY

Earlier it was argued that, lacking instinctual closure, the openness or indeterminacy of human existence is accompanied by an imperative to accomplish (normative) closure 'for all practical purposes' (Garfinkel, 1967). The sense of order bestowed by this 'second nature' provides a way of coming to terms with, a fundamental 'lack' in human nature (Bauman, 1976). Perversely, the very possibility of realizing the freedom of this 'lack' also depends upon the cultural world of 'second nature'. For it is 'second nature' that conditions and constrains how human freedom is interpreted and realized. And in this sense, autonomy is indeed 'a product of the discipline' provided by culture, as Peters and Waterman (1982, p. 322) contend.

However, it is one thing to recognize the connection between autonomy and the security provided by normative discipline; it is quite another to accept that corporate culture provides a favourable medium for the practical realization of autonomy. The basic flaw in its thesis resides in its assumption that autonomy can be realized within a *monoculture* that rigorously suppresses *critical reflection* upon the 'stable expectations about what really counts' (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 322). In the name of an expansion of practical autonomy, and improved organizational effectiveness, corporate culturalism systematically suppresses ideas and practices that might problematize the authority of core corporate values. At the same time, it is confidently asserted that because both individual autonomy and organizational performance are simultaneously enhanced, corporate culturism is morally neutral, if not morally beneficial. However, as Macintyre (1981, p. 71) has observed, when commenting upon theories of management in which a commitment to greater effectiveness is also equated with moral neutrality,

the whole concept of effectiveness is . . . inseparable from a mode of human existence in which the contrivance of means is in central part *the manipulation of human beings into compliant patterns of behaviour*' (emphasis added).

Earlier it was noted that the advocates of corporate culture differentiate it from established, rational, bureaucratic methods of organization, of which they are deeply critical (see Peters and Waterman, 1982, pp. 89 *et seq.*). Yet, paradoxically, barely covered by the velvet glove of corporate culture is the iron fist of instrumental rationality. Far from abandoning *Zweckrationalität* (instrumental rationality), corporate culturism extends it to the affective domain.<sup>[21]</sup> To support and further clarify this argument, it is relevant to recall Weber's (1968) discussion of different types of social action. This will also be helpful in clarifying the grounds of the earlier critique of corporate culturism's incipient totalitarianism.

Weber (1968) distinguishes four ideal-types of social action, of which *Zweckrationalität* and *Wertrationalität* (value-rational action) are deemed to be of most relevance for analysing modern society. Very briefly, a person whose actions are governed by *Zweckrationalität* derives his or her subjective wants from the prevailing system of values that s/he takes as given. These wants are then satisfied by calculating how they may be most effectively fulfilled. In contrast, action governed by *Wertrationalität* is directed by the person's 'self-conscious formulation' of the values that orient his or her conduct (Weber, 1968, p. 25). Elaborating the difference between these types of action, Weber continues,

instead of deciding between alternative and conflicting ends in terms of a rational orientation to a system of values [the actor takes them] as given subjective wants and arrange(s) them in a scale of consciously assessed relative urgency. He may then orient his action to this scale in such a way that they are satisfied as far as possible in order of urgency, as formulated in the principle of 'marginal utility' (Weber, 1968, p. 26).

This discussion of rationality can be applied to compare and contrast Weber's ideal-typical conception of bureaucracy – in which relationships are drained of all sentimental content – with corporate culturism's encouragement and reward of affective identification with core corporate values. Superficially, corporate culturism departs from *Zweckrationalität*: employees are apparently required to complement, if not replace, an instrumental orientation with one that is normative and affective. Through processes of recruitment and socialization, for example, they are selected and trained to develop a 'love of product'; and through the design of culture, there is an attempt to re-enchant working life through the use of stories, slogans, legends and lots of hoopla (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 75). However, this differentiation of corporate culturism from rational bureaucracy is deceptive.

On closer and more critical examination, culture strengthening devices, which bear more than a passing resemblance to methods favoured within totalitarian regimes, are designed to structure employees' immediate wants and provide the calculus for their realization. Through the strengthening of culture, the space within organizations for expressing and developing awareness of, and allegiance to, alternative norms or values is reduced and, ideally, eliminated. In principle, at least, employees' calculative powers are fully invested in, and

thus wholly committed to and exclusively motivated by, actions that are calculated to realize core corporate values.

#### STRUGGLING FOR AUTONOMY

What, then, is the alternative to the culturist extension of *Zweckrationalität*? For Weber, it is the deliberate choosing and refinement of the values that guide individual action. Instead of allowing contingency (e.g. the given values of corporate culture) to dictate the content of wants, *the transformative power of critical self-reflection* is engaged to appreciate the existence of diverse value standpoints. The autonomy of the individual is forged as s/he plays and struggles with the question of which standpoint s/he will consciously strive to enact – a struggle that exemplifies *Wertrationalität*. Only by imbuing action with values that are consciously chosen, Weber argues, can nihilistic indifference to the moral-political quality of human action be resisted, and its threat to human dignity and autonomy be effectively parried. It is this possibility of assessing the claims of competing value-standpoints, and then consciously striving consistently to enact a chosen value commitment, that underpins Weber's critique of *Zweckrationalität*.

For Weber, as for Nietzsche, the capacity to overcome the compulsion of immediate wants through commitment to a consciously chosen value-standpoint is associated with the outstanding individual or 'hero' who possesses an exceptionally strong and resolute character. Perversely, for a sociologist, precious little consideration is given by Weber to the social conditions of 'strong' character formation, or to the historically mediated process of critical self-reflection. Yet, recognition of the diverse (*i.e.* strong or weak) dispositions or potentials of individuals need not be denied in order to appreciate that conditions of *Wertrationalität* are socially organized, not naturally given. Moreover, *if* we are persuaded by the idea that the indeterminacy of human existence *demand*s that actions are shaped by meanings and not just by drives, the central *moral* issue then becomes: what kind of *social institutions* respect and foster the capacity of human beings to recognize and contemplate a variety of competing value-standpoints, and to appreciate the existential significance of the opportunity to make informed choices between these value-standpoints?

Without attempting to provide anything like an adequate response to this question, it can be suggested that the ability to develop a 'self-conscious formulation' of the values that orient our conduct is conditional upon (i) access to knowledge of alternative standpoints and (ii) a social milieu in which their competing claims can be critically explored.<sup>[22]</sup> Making a commitment to a value-standpoint is not simply a matter of assessing whether a particular set of values, such as the core values of a corporate culture, is effective in fulfilling our subjective wants. Rather, as Weber argues, it is a matter of questioning whether these values are worthy of our allegiance. In turn, this questioning directs attention to the social organization of the forms of communication in which choices and associated allegiances are (more or less consciously) made. In particular, the connection between freedom and

democracy is of critical importance because it again highlights *the relation of interdependence between the development of individual autonomy and the organization of social relations* (cf. Deetz, 1992). This affinity between the practical realization of autonomy and the development of *democratic* organization of social institutions, in which the virtues of competing values are freely debated, is lucidly articulated by Bauman (1991, p. 244, quoting Enzensberger, 1989, p. 29) when he observes that

freedom promises no certainty and no guarantee of anything. It causes therefore a lot of mental pain. In practice, it means constant exposure to ambivalence: that is, a situation with no decidable solution, with no foolproof choice, no unreflective knowledge of 'how to go on' . . . you can't have a nice democracy. . . . Democracy is something which can get very much on your nerves – you are constantly battered by the most obnoxious things. . . . All the dirt comes out in democracy.

Democratic practices, whether interpersonal or institutional, enable and encourage each person to formulate, communicate and debate their sense of value and priority. Democratic forms of organization are not 'nice' because they fail to protect the individual from 'the dirt' – the existential insecurity – associated with competing value-orientations and interests. But, in this process, the inherently moral quality of social reality is at once experienced and celebrated.

When attention is focused upon the human capacity to reflect upon, and choose between alternative value-standpoints for governing action, a basic deficiency of corporate culture philosophy is exposed – a deficiency that it shares with other varieties of 'progressive' management theory (*e.g.* theory Y). Namely, its understanding that any (corporate) practice/value is as good as any other so long as it secures the compliance of employees. As Dahler-Larsen (1991, p. 91) has incisively remarked, 'Hardly anything could be more foreign to Corporate Culture than the awareness of the problematic aspects of the values on which modern economic life is based'. For corporate culturism, the moral issue of whether employees are enabled to develop a (socially organized) capacity to reflect upon, and choose between, competing values is irrelevant so long as they believe, or feel, that their needs or purposes are being fulfilled. In effect, corporate culture programmes are designed to deny or frustrate the development of conditions in which critical reflection is fostered. They commend the homogenization of norms and values within organizations. Employees are selected and promoted on the basis of their (perceived) acceptance of, or receptivity to, the core values. More generally, employees are repeatedly urged and rewarded for suspending attachments to ideas and mores that do not confirm and reinforce the authority of the core values. Cultural diversity is dissolved in the acid bath of the core corporate values.<sup>[23]</sup> Those who kick against the monoculture are 'moved sideways' or they are expelled. There is, as Peters and Waterman (1982, p. 77) put it, 'no halfway house for most people in the excellent companies'.

Finally, and in anticipation of the objection that this critique of corporate culturism suffers from excessive idealism, it is necessary to acknowledge the

practical difficulty of reconciling a commitment to democratic principles of work organization with a concern to maintain a desired standard of living. The question of how nearly these concerns can be matched will of course remain unanswered until the desired standard is itself democratically defined. It is certainly possible, indeed likely, that some *conscious* compromise of these principles will be necessary. In the meantime (!), a relevant challenge for management academics and practitioners is to identify and utilize opportunities for 'microemancipation' within modern organizations (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). Even in situations where corporate culture programmes are planned or installed, their espoused concern for 'practical autonomy' presents an opportunity to explore, however tentatively, the question of what autonomy means and why it is of value. At the very least, it may be possible to act in ways that expose, undermine and/ or circumvent some of their more oppressive effects. More generally, the challenge, taken up in this article, is to address the espoused commitment of corporate culturism to the expansion of practical autonomy as a way of a stimulating debate about the moral character and defensibility of its aspirations and associated prescriptions.

#### DISCUSSION

The dominant tone of this article has been unashamedly polemical, a tone that carries with it the danger of exaggerating the totalitarian tendencies of corporate culturism and the parallels between the prescriptions of corporate culturism gurus and the Orwellian world of newspeak and 'thoughtstop'. For one thing, in Orwell's Oceania, control is achieved though direct control (*e.g.* continuous surveillance through the telescreens operated by the Thought Police) and, ultimately, through (the fear of) 'vaporization'. Corporate culturism, in contrast, relies upon the hegemonic programming of culture to secure self-discipline. Those whose devotion to corporate values is found wanting (or who fail to manage the appearance of being devotees) are excommunicated,<sup>[24]</sup> not liquidated. Unlike the fictional world of Oceania, corporate employees are exposed to, and constituted by, other relations and discourses, such as feminism and environmentalism. Beyond the immediate control of the corporate culture designers, these discourses serve to relativize the authority of corporate culture, a process that is also assisted by the dynamism and volatility of capitalist economies that continuously defies the capacity of corporations to fulfil their promises (*e.g.* about job security, career and 'respect for the individual', *etc.*). Key points of similarity and difference between the worlds of Oceania and corporate culture are now explored and illustrated through consideration of processes of seduction, resistance and entrapment. The purpose of this discussion is examine more closely the psychodynamics of corporate culturism in a way that is at once appreciative of its limits *and* of its residual, insidious effects.

#### *The Seduction of Security*

The sense of certainty associated with the cultural 'uniformity' required by Big Brother can be highly appealing. Especially in contexts where there is

much ambiguity and pressure for achievement, the 'irrational', yet also very real, attraction of culture-strengthening programmes resides in their promise of freedom from insecurity. Individuals become seduced by the idea that organizational membership could be (more) pleasurable, fulfilling and exciting if only (unwarranted) scepticism about the reality and/or value of the norms of the corporate culture were suspended.<sup>[25]</sup> Managers, no less than their subordinates, may welcome the absence or removal of ideas, people and situations that challenge or disrupt the immersion of self in corporate identity (Anthony, 1989; Schwartz, 1991).

Precisely because hegemonic forms of control have been far more effective in institutionalizing domination than Orwell ever anticipated, less draconian regimes have accommodated and indeed nurtured a measure of 'responsible autonomy' (Friedman, 1977). Instead of the extreme forms of 'direct control' portrayed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a liberal humanist ethos has been translated into the development of progressive, 'theory Y' techniques. A process of subjugation has occurred involving 'the transformation of work, mental and manual, into matters of personal fulfilment and psychical identity' (Rose, 1990, p. 244). As followers of Foucault have stressed, this kind of 'pastoral' power/knowledge has a positive appeal as it constitutes and reinforces employees' self-understanding as autonomous and responsible adults. Or, as Rose (1990, p. 116) puts it, the new doctrine of management has 'chimed with cultural images of self-motivated individuality ... they were attractive to the individuals concerned, for they promised them a better self'.

The effect of humanistic doctrines is inevitably double-edged. Their purpose is to enrol employee subjectivity into the productive process – not by forcing employees to relinquish control (as in theory X) but by conferring upon them 'self-motivated individuality'. An unintended consequence of this kind of management theory is to raise expectations about self-determination without necessarily aligning its fulfilment to the realization of corporate objectives. Instead of producing committed, enthusiastic, self-disciplining subjects, a possible effect of corporate culturist programmes is a reinforcement of instrumentality amongst employees who comply with their demands without internalizing their values.

### *Symptoms of Resistance*

Especially in cases where insecure, fashion-conscious management strives to 'modernize' its practices, aided and abetted by consultants who prey upon managers' vulnerability, a paradoxical consequence of culture-strengthening programmes is a further degradation and distortion of communication as employees instrumentally adapt their behaviour to conform with the relevant corporate code (Anthony, 1989; Knights and Willmott, 1987). Associated with this instrumentality is a scepticism, often expressed as cynicism, about the 'genuineness' of corporate culturist values and ideals. Instead of the promised gain in commitment, there can be an unwelcome loss in credibility. As one of the respondents told Hope (1991, p. 14) in her study of a cultural change programme at a large insurance company,

There are a lot of contradictions in this new culture thing and I haven't come to terms with this open style being great for everybody. . . . I think it can start to be patronising . . . there's normal suspicion.

Instead of a deep identification with corporate values, there can be selective, calculative compliance. In which case, employee behaviour is (minimally) congruent with 'realizing' the values of the corporation, but only insofar as it is calculated that material and/or symbolic advantage can be gained from managing the appearance of consent. Where calculative compliance is substituted for the desired commitment to corporate values, employee behaviour may be successfully modified by schedules of reinforcement that, for example, reduce the irksomeness and boredom of work, which formally permits no exercise of discretion (Wilkinson *et al.*, 1991).<sup>[26]</sup> However, corporate culture programmes strive to achieve more than the operant conditioning of behaviour.<sup>[27]</sup> Their aspiration is to secure 'commitment' by treating staff as dedicated enactors of the prescribed organizational reality. Mere compliance is insufficient since it signals a failure to mobilize the emotional energies of staff in ways that inspires them to embody and live out the corporate values.

Indeed, the gurus of corporate culture construe reluctance to suspend disbelief in the prescribed corporate values as self-defeating, both materially and symbolically, for employees. Materially, because lack of commitment is deemed to weaken the competitiveness of the company and thus the security of their jobs; but also symbolically because the reward of commitment is presented as an opportunity for each individual to gain more discretion and raise self-esteem. That is the theory. However, from the standpoint of the individual, the distancing of self from corporate values may be the preferred means of preserving and asserting self-identity.

This response to the demands of corporate culture can be further elucidated by reference to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) concept of 'cool alternation'. As a mode of (dis)engagement associated with the life-world of advanced industrial societies, Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 192) note how individuals contrive to distance themselves from the roles that they play (*cf.* Goffman, 1959). So, instead of experiencing the social world as reality, it is regarded as 'a reality to be used for specific purposes' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 192). A sense of subjective detachment *vis-à-vis* the roles is achieved as the individual "puts them on" deliberately and purposefully'. In this way, the modern individual contrives to enjoy the material and symbolic benefits of occupying the role without feeling that his/her identity is defined by it. Moreover, by playing the role at a psychological distance from what is deemed to be the 'real self' (Goffman, 1959), the individual feels little existential responsibility for its consequences. However, this dramaturgical 'game play' is not without its costs. For the individual is inescapably constituted in the process of playing the role, and often in ways that escape his or her conscious monitoring (Giddens, 1984). The 'real' self is a construction of the enacted self; it does not exist independently of the moment of its constitution.

*The Dynamics of Entrapment*

A dramaturgical orientation to life is seductive because it feeds the (humanist) idea that the player is in control as s/he calculates which role s/he will elect to play, whilst of course preserving a sense of subjective detachment from the reality of the role's demands. What is obscured, if not lost, from such consciousness is a capacity to reflect critically upon the sense and impact of 'being in control', and, in particular, the extent to which dramaturgical action systematically excludes the players from involvement in the (re)design of the institutions from which these roles are derived (*cf.* Habermas, 1987). This argument can be expanded by considering Kunda's (1991) study of 'Tech.', a company strongly committed to corporate culturism.

Kunda (1991) reports a widespread distancing of self amongst Tech. middle managers. Principally, this distancing was expressed in cynical comments about the purpose of the culture and a deft parodying of its demands. Amongst many Tech. staff, Kunda found that displays of 'controlled self-consciousness' were highly regarded as expressions of personal skill and elegance. This 'distanced' orientation to the Tech. culture enabled employees to retain a sense of independence and control. It allowed them to resist naive seduction by the corporate culture. However, a less obvious and perverse effect of playing the game of cool alternation was an undermining or numbing of a capacity directly to criticize or resist the cultural logic. Why so? Because *the very possibility of engaging in the playful ironicizing of the Culture was widely interpreted as evidence of Tech.'s commitment to openness, freedom of expression, etc.* (Kunda, 1991, p. 22). The most insidious effect of Tech. culture, Kunda reports, was its promotion of almost universal, indiscriminating cynicism. Employees were inclined to 'question the authenticity of all beliefs and emotions', and were thereby disarmed of a critical standpoint from which to evaluate the relative merits of competing value-standpoints. As a consequence, they lacked any basis for refusing to play out any scripts they are handed. Commenting upon this entrapment, Kunda concludes,

Under these circumstances, many employees may find that their work lives are enmeshed in an ever-accelerating vicious cycle (*sic*). The race to meet corporate standards of accomplishment, get corporate approval, and procure the pecuniary and personal rewards the culture promises becomes the only way to find stable meanings and compensate for a sense of confusion, lost authenticity, and inner emptiness; but it is a self-defeating exercise, one that creates and reinforces the very circumstances it seeks to correct. This then is the bottom line: Tech.'s managed culture allows management . . . to accomplish corporate goals not by enhancing the employees' experiential life but, if anything, by degrading it (Kunda, 1991, pp. 30-1).

So, even when corporate culture programmes fall well short of the ideal of creating 'charged up people (who) search for appropriate adaptations' (Peters and Waterman, 1982, p. 51), they are capable of exerting an insidious, self-disciplining power. In the absence of a well-organized, supportive counter-culture, the very process of devaluing corporate ideals tends to produce confusion and emptiness, thereby making employees enduringly vulnerable

to the (precarious) sense of stability and identity provided by a dramaturgical, cynical, instrumental compliance with corporate values.

*Existential Separation and the Limits of Humanism*

The experience of personal meaninglessness, Giddens (1991) observes, is intensified in the context of 'late modernity' where there is an institutionalized 'existential separation' from 'the moral resources necessary to live a full and satisfying existence' (p. 91). In the pluralized life-worlds of modernity, human beings are required to make their own identity, yet lack access to the 'moral resources' that are critical for fulfilling this requirement. Or, as Giddens puts it, with direct relevance for a critical appreciation of the corporate culture phenomenon,

The reflexive project of the self generates programmes of actualization and mastery. But as long as these possibilities are understood largely as a matter of the extension of the control systems of modernity to the self, they lack moral meaning (Giddens, 1991 p. 9).

In elaborating this argument, Giddens (1991) suggests that submission to authority 'normally takes the form of slavish adherence to an authority figure, taken to be all knowing' (p. 196). Absent from his analysis is the contemporary corporate equivalent of this phenomenon in which submission, facilitated by the identity-protecting device of cool alternation, is to an organizational ideal that is simultaneously an ego-ideal (Schwartz, 1987a, 1987b) – a syndrome that is no less crippling in its impact upon human existence than doggish devotion to a deified individual.

Expressive of the efforts to achieve the 'actualization and mastery' of human labour power, corporate culturism is at once a condition and a consequence of 'existential separation'. As argued earlier, its programmes are very much an extension and refinement of 'the control systems of modernity' that, as Weber recognized, are devoid of moral meaning. Even when these programmes fail to secure unequivocal commitment, they can be effective. For, as Kunda's (1991) study shows, corporate culturism can accommodate 'cool alternation' in which employees at once are distanced from, and compliant with, core corporate values. Corporate culturism thus reproduces the conditions of demoralization and degradation for which it is presented as a remedy.

As a footnote to this discussion, it is worth briefly amplifying the difference between the argument of this article and more familiar, well-rehearsed liberal humanist objections to authoritarianism. Liberal humanism assumes the presocial autonomy of human beings – an assumption that is most starkly articulated in the idea of individual choice that forms the ideological basis of neo-classical economics: to each individual is ascribed a 'natural right' and capability to realize his or her innate sovereignty through free participation in economic transactions, with the minimum of (regulative) interference from the state. In contrast, the critique developed in this article makes no assumption of presocial autonomy. Corporate culturism is not criticized because it denies or suppresses some essence of human nature. Instead, the indetermi-

nacy of human existence is stressed; and the development of autonomy is theorized as a contingent possibility that is imperfectly realized in modern society.

The theory and practice of corporate culturism has been criticized because it promotes practices and institutions that unnecessarily suppress and impede the nurturing of emancipatory contingencies. The position that underpins this criticism shares Deetz's (1992) view that

Anything that influences the continued formation or deformation of the human character has ethical implications. While no one is in a position to define the social good or what the human character ultimately should be like, the full representation of differing people and their interests would seem to be fundamental to ethical choices regarding development. . . . I do not agree with the postmodernist claim . . . that all moral democratic impulses are by necessity disguised dominations or nostalgia for the past. . . . The modern enlightenment project based upon reason and technology may well be dead, and with it the liberal ideals and utopian visions it spawned. But this need not be seen as simply dumping us into a reactive amoral postmodern reality. Perhaps it better lays the foundation for a new age of responsibility (Deetz, 1992, p. 3).

The objection to corporate culture philosophy has not been that 'strong' cultures alienate individuals from their 'real', essentially free, selves. Rather, the complaint – articulated most explicitly through a critical review of Weber's distinction between instrumental rationality and value-rationality – is that corporate culturism contrives to eliminate the conditions – pluralism and the associated conflict of values – for facilitating the social process of emotional and intellectual struggle for self-determination.

#### CONCLUSION

When reflecting upon the 'wonderful combination' of security and autonomy attributed to the cultural discipline of McDonald's and similar 'excellent' companies, it is difficult not to admire the audacity of the corporate culture gurus, and to marvel at the ease with which their wares have been enthusiastically consumed.

Much of the appeal of corporate culturism, it has been suggested, arises from the individualizing impact of modernizing forces that relativize meaning and demystify authority. In a situation where 'everything that is solid melts into air' (Marx and Engels, 1967, p. 83), self-identity is rendered unstable and insecure by the unrelenting, market-driven pressure to become 'somebody'. Employees' willingness to subjugate themselves to corporate culturism is procured by the sense of identity, security and self-determination that devotion to corporate values promises to deliver. Corporate culturism, it has been argued, preys upon the vulnerability of modern individuals who, as Giddens (1991) has argued, are burdened with the responsibility of choosing

between 'a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities' (p. 3), but lack access to the cultural and intellectual resources that are relevant for responding to this predicament in ways that are not self-defeating.

In the name of moral renewal, corporate culture programmes celebrate, exploit, distort and drain the dwindling cultural resource of caring, democratic values. In the doublethink, monological world of corporate culture, the values of community and autonomy are simultaneously celebrated and contradicted. Like the Party member in Orwell's Oceania, the well-socialized, self-disciplined corporate employee 'is expected to have no private emotions and no respites from enthusiasm . . . the speculations which might possibly induce a sceptical or rebellious attitude are killed in advance by his early-acquired inner discipline' (Orwell, 1989, p. 220). Under the guise of giving more autonomy to the individual than in organizations governed by bureaucratic rules, corporate culture threatens to promote a new, hypermodern neo-authoritarianism which, potentially, is more insidious and sinister than its bureaucratic predecessor (Ouimet, 1991; Willmott, 1992). Far from lifting or diluting management control, corporate culturism promotes its extension through the design of value systems and the management of the symbolic and emotional aspects of organizational membership.

Having said that, culture strengthening programmes can, and perhaps invariably do, fall well short of the ideal of securing unequivocal devotion to, and conformity with, corporate values. In the West, at least, an ethos of individualism sits uneasily with the collectivist aspirations of corporate culture. In the absence of institutional arrangements (*e.g.* life-time employment) and ideologies (*e.g.* of interdependence) that cushion conflicts of interest between buyers and sellers of labour, there is a tendency for the enactment of values to be based upon instrumental compliance rather than internalization or even identification. The skilful parodying of corporate culturism is one manifestation of this phenomenon (Kunda, 1991). However, despite evidence of the distancing of employees from corporate values, there is as yet little sign of sustained questioning of, or organized resistance to, the implicit political philosophy of corporate culturism.

The challenge is to contribute to the fostering of discourses and practices in which a commitment to a dialogical process of self-formation and determination supplants corporate culture doublethink. In seeking guidance for this project, we may do worse than turn to Weber's (1948) essay on 'Science as a Vocation' where he sketches the contribution of academics to challenging the received wisdom of 'party opinions'. The primary task of a useful teacher, Weber submits,

is to teach his students to recognize 'inconvenient' facts – I mean facts that are inconvenient for their party opinions. And for every party opinion there are facts that are extremely inconvenient, for my own opinion no less than others. I believe the teacher accomplishes more than a mere intellectual task if he compels his audience to accustom itself to the existence of such facts. I would be so immodest as even to apply the expression 'moral achievement', though perhaps this may sound too grandiose for something that should go without saying (Weber, 1948, p. 147).

In a post-empiricist era, Weber's appeal to 'facts' must of course be problematized: the modernist idea that opinions can be corrected by the compelling reality of facts is no longer plausible. In the contemporary era, where the truths of modernism are increasingly questioned, the role of the intellectual is not to correct opinion with fact but, rather, to participate in the development of what Foucault (1984, p. 74) has termed 'a new politics of truth' in which the normativity of knowledge is more fully appreciated.<sup>[28]</sup> A basic assumption of this article has been that grasping the normativity of 'party opinions' – such as those articulated by the gurus of corporate culture – can make a valuable contribution to a project that is post-modern *and* emancipatory.

## NOTES

\* An earlier version of this article was given at the 5th Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism, Copenhagen. I am most grateful to Peter Anthony, Paul du Gay, David Guest, Heather Hopfl, Veronica Hope, Karen Legge, Steven Linstead, Paul Jeffcutt, Rolland Munro, Adrian Wilkinson and three anonymous *JMS* referees for their assistance, comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this article.

[1] Legge (1989, p. 28) notes that 'most HRM models emphasize the management of the organization's culture as the central activity of senior management'. Crosby (1984), one of the leading figures in TQM, has also stressed the importance of changing corporate culture as a means of building quality into the consciousness of every employee (Crosby, 1984 p. 97, quoted in Tuckman, 1991). For detailed discussions of connections between the strengthening of corporate culture and HRM, see du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Guest, 1990a, 1991, 1991b. For a consideration of the linkages between corporate culture and TQM, see Hill, 1990, 1991a; Wilkinson *et al.*, 1991; Wilkinson, 1992. Differences between their respective linkages relate to the emphasis given to the strategic management of people in HRM and the integration of customer requirements and operations management in TQM. A growing convergence between corporate culture philosophy, HRM and TQM can be expected in the 1990s as the champions of each 'specialism' strive to appropriate and/or colonize the domain of the other (*e.g.* Atkinson, 1990; Oakland, 1989; Peters, 1988; Wilkinson, 1992).

[2] It may be objected that there is considerable diversity amongst such authors, with some being far more sophisticated in their treatment of culture and their prescriptions for action than others. Without denying this variation, I argue that the central message is very similar. If we take Kanter (1984) as a comparatively sophisticated exponent of the genre, she nonetheless shares an uncritical belief in imposing culture upon employees. Where she differs is in her appreciation of the degree of subtlety that is required if such programmes have any chance of being effective. As an example of her doublethink and newspeak (a theme to be taken up later in this article), we can cite her use of Fromm's (1941) arguments in *Escape from Freedom* to justify the design and imposition of a strong corporate culture in which people are constrained to fulfil their tasks rather than participate in defining their structure (Kanter, 1984, p. 248). Or, as she puts it, 'It is important to establish for people, from the beginning, the ground rules and boundary conditions under which they are working: what can they decide, what can't they decide. . . . The fewer constraints given a team, the more time will be spend defining its structure rather than carrying out its task'.

- [3] In case the systematic management of culture is (mis)understood to be a recent phenomenon, it is relevant to note that the task of securing control and commitment by 'strengthening' corporate values can be traced back at least as far as Barnard's seminal work on *The Functions of the Executive* (1938) and to the Selznick's (1957) comparatively neglected study of *Leadership in Administration*. What they share is a belief in the active construction of what Barnard (1938) terms 'communal sense', through which each individual willingly 'gives up personal control of what he does'.
- [4] Since the meaning of 'critical' is by no means self-evident or uncontested, it may be helpful to comment briefly upon what is intended here by 'critical' analysis of corporate culturism. The term is used somewhat loosely to identify a concern to draw out the wider social and political significance of the programme of strengthening corporate cultures. Despite their differences in orientation and focus, 'critical' analysis points towards what may be termed the darker side of the corporate culturist phenomenon: the side that is undisclosed or rationalized away by its advocates and apologists, and has remained largely unexamined by 'purist' students of organizational culture and symbolism. For a justification of this perspective on culture, see Stablein and Nord (1985).
- [5] Such as Filby and Willmott, (1988), Knights and Willmott, (1987), Kunda, 1991, Rosen (1985), Schwartz (1991).
- [6] Criticisms have included the argument that insufficient attention is paid to the influence of 'external' factors such as government policy and technology upon performance (Carroll, 1983); that over a five-year period, Peters and Waterman's excellent companies performed no better in terms of stock market valuations than a random sample of Fortune 1000 companies (Hitt and Ireland, 1987); and that organizations with strong cultures in core values become hardened into inflexible dogmas that impede responsiveness to changing circumstances (Soeters, 1986). Although unacknowledged, it is not unlikely that criticisms of this kind (as well as a keen recognition of the importance of product development) prompted Peters (1988) to stress that the pace of change makes all universal prescriptions, including corporate culture, inoperative: 'If the word "excellence" is to be applicable in the future, it requires wholesale redefinition. Perhaps: "Excellent firms don't believe in excellence - only in constant improvement and constant change". That is, excellent firms of tomorrow will cherish impermanence - and thrive on chaos' (Peters, 1988, p. 4). Nonetheless, in the same book, Peters reaffirms his faith in the value of strengthening culture, albeit that this culture must be designed to 'thrive on chaos'. For a defence of the effectiveness of strong corporate cultures, see Pascale, 1985. For an elaborate analysis of the relationship between corporate culture and organizational effectiveness, see Denison, 1990.
- [7] Other corporate culture texts are cited in passing. Greater attention is given to *In Search of Excellence* (1982) for two reasons. First because it is easily the biggest-selling book, and has provided something of a model for the series of 'cover versions' that have followed. By 1985 it had sold over 5 million copies (du Gay, 1991, n. 7). By contrast, by 1984 Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (first published in 1949) had sold 10 million copies. During 1984 it was selling at the rate of 50,000 copies per day (Kellner, 1990, n 1, citing Beauchamp, 1984). The second reason is that the citing of numerous corporate culture books would involve considerable repetition and/or leave the argument open to the charge that they had been raided selectively simply to support the article's argument.
- [8] Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is used because the article seeks to expose for

discussion the totalitarian implications of the corporate culture literature. This use of Orwell's novel is not without its difficulties since his principal target is the brutal, sadistic totalitarianism of Stalinist bureaucracy, and not the normalising, self-disciplining kind of oppression advocated by the gurus of corporate culture. For Orwell (1989, p. 280), totalitarianism is represented by the image of 'a boot stamping on a human face – forever' whereas, for Peters and Waterman (1982, p. 37), it is the apocryphal story of 'a Honda worker who, on his way home each evening, straightens up windshield blades on all the Hondas he passes. He just can't stand to see a flaw in a Honda!'. As Kellner (1990) has argued, Orwell's vision of the future is flawed by the assumption that operant conditioning applied by brute force, rather than cognitive, hegemonic forms of conditioning would prove to be the more potent type of control technology. Nonetheless, a number of key themes – articulated in notions of doublethink and newspeak – are highly pertinent for gaining a critical purchase on the corporate culture phenomenon. As an endearing example of Peters and Waterman doublethink and newspeak, the Honda worker's fetishistic love of his product is immediately equated with Pirsig's (1974) aesthetic conception of quality in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance!*

- [9] There is also evidence of disillusionment (and panic?) amongst the gurus of corporate culturalism. For example, Pascale (1991, p. 16) has recently compared the identification of the attributes of success amongst excellent companies to 'identifying attributes of people in excellent health during the age of bubonic plague'. Whilst claiming that there are 'no shortcuts' to eliminating the pestilence of economic decline, and also decrying quick fixes and management fads consumed by 'management gimmick junkies' (p. 21), he (predictably) proffers his own 'fix' – in the form of a new management mindset that makes a virtue of disequilibrium whilst also giving reassurances about the 'unbeatable' industrial infrastructure of the US (p. 23).
- [10] Jermier (1991) makes a parallel argument when he urges the use of a critical epistemology in the study of organizational culture. However, whereas his concern is to champion critical case studies and ethnographies (e.g. Knights and Willmott, 1987, Rosen 1985), the focus of here is upon the critical examination of corporate culturism in shaping and legitimizing contemporary changes in work organization.
- [11] In this way, each individual is prepared for the possibility that, at some future date, some 'hard love' will terminate his/her contract of employment (Legge, 1989).
- [12] The term 'practical consciousness' is derived from Giddens (1984) who defines it as, 'What actors know (believe) about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own action, but cannot express discursively' (p. 375). Giddens is also almost unique amongst leading social theorists in accepting the importance of repression and the unconscious in his theory of agency. In particular, Giddens makes an important connection between the reproduction of routines and the sense of security derived from 'the regrooving of established attitudes and cognitive outlooks' (Giddens, 1979, p. 128). The relevance of this insight for the critical analysis of corporate culture has been most clearly worked out by Schwartz (1987a, 1987b, 1991). For a summary and critique of Giddens' theory of the subject, see Craib, 1991; Willmott 1986.
- [13] It is relevant here to note the strong connection between the corporate culture literature and the advocates of TQM who are also busy designing self-disciplining methods of control (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1991a, 1991b).
- [14] Rose's arguments are rather more plausible in relation to the use of psychother-

apies and the emancipatory contribution of these discourses to what Giddens (1991) terms 'life-politics'.

- [15] In an otherwise provocative and illuminating analysis, du Gay (1991, p. 48) fails to distinguish this key difference between the prescriptions of what he terms the 'organizational psycho-technologists', such as McGregor, from the excellence gurus.
- [16] Although the discourse of 'goals' and 'needs' is retained by the advocates of corporate culture (to be discussed later), their analysis is informed by a more existential and phenomenological perspective in which the indeterminacy of human existence is recognized to render meaning and purpose deeply problematical, and thereby to provide management with a critical lever for manufacturing consent (Burawoy, 1979; Knights and Willmott, 1989).
- [17] The idea of 'doublethink' was coined by Orwell (1989, pp. 37–8) who describes it as a world in which it is possible 'to forget what it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and, above all, to apply the same process to the process itself. That was the subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed'. In his discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Rorty (1989, p. 187, n.20) likens doublethink to 'a kind of deliberately induced schizophrenia'. O'Brien, the mentor and torturer of Winston, the (anti-)hero of Orwell's novel, effortlessly switches between these contradictory roles as he induces Winston to know that two plus two equals five (Orwell, 1989, pp. 216 *et seq.*) and that 'freedom is slavery'.
- [18] Again, in case this sounds fanciful, consider Pascale's (1985, p. 31) endorsement of the way IBM maintains its core value of respecting individual identity: 'Included in IBM's mechanisms for respecting the individual is a device known as the 'penalty box'. Often a person sent to the 'penalty box' has committed a crime against the culture – for example, harsh handling of a subordinate, overzealousness against the competition, gaming the reporting system'. The penalty is a move sideways which to outsiders 'looks like normal assignments, but insiders know they are off the track'.
- [19] For example, Deal and Kennedy (1982, p. 16) first advise us that, compared with 20 years ago 'employees today are confused', blameful and cynical and allow special interests to take up their time – a malaise that they attribute to a lack of certainty about their life values. They then reassure us that 'corporations may be among the last institutions in America that can effectively take on the role of shaping values'.
- [20] As Locke (1989, pp. 50–1) has put this argument, 'Japan did not experience the Enlightenment. The Japanese society that underwent industrialization in the nineteenth and twentieth century did so with feudal values that expressed a Confucian ethic. . . . The Japanese worker does not think of himself as engaged in an economic function (being an electrical engineer, a production engineer, lathe operator, accountant, *etc.*) which is divorced from the firm, an occupational function that can be done anywhere. He is a Hitachi man, a Honda man, and so on, a member of a community. It is a profoundly different way of looking at work'. To this account should be added an appreciation of the politico-economic context of the feudal-like organization of financial institutions and the closeness of the industry–government relationship (Eccleston, 1989).
- [21] The following discussion is informed by Brubaker (1984) who presents an exceptionally lucid discussion of the interplay between Weber's sociological work and his moral outlook.

- [22] If this argument is accepted, then it follows that every philosophy and technique of management control – from Taylor’s ‘scientific’ principles to Peters and Waterman’s 7S framework – can legitimately be subjected to moral as well as technical evaluation.
- [23] Of course, organizations that approximate more closely to Weber’s ideal-typical model of bureaucracy also demand a suspension of ‘personal values’. The difference is that no systematic attempt is made to shape the value commitments of employees: employees are allowed to think and feel whatever they like so long as their behaviour complies with the rules. In this context, they may develop ‘bureaucratic personalities’ (Merton, 1940). But this pathology is an unintended consequence, not a strategic purpose, of bureaucratic organizations. Within bureaucracies, a hierarchical and specialized division of labour routinely spawns and accommodates the formation and elaboration of diverse occupational and departmental cultures.
- [24] The use of religious imagery here is not inappropriate. Consider for example, the following familiar extract, drawn from the second Collect at Morning Prayer, for Peace: ‘O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, *whose service is perfect freedom*; Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of our adversaries’ (Book of Common Prayer, OUP, p. 47, edition not dated, emphasis added). I am grateful to Karen Legge for making this link and supplying the quotation.
- [25] It is an appeal well documented in experimental studies of cognitive dissonance where internalization becomes the means of reducing the tension of compliance (Festinger, 1954; Festinger and Carlsmith, 1959). It is dramatically portrayed by Orwell in his description of the torturing of Winston. However, what often appears to be internalization has been contested in studies that have reinterpreted dissonance reduction in terms of the subject’s concern to project a contextually valued self-image (Alexander and Knight, 1971).
- [26] However, it is doubtful whether an enthusiastic response from employees to the removal of practices that are experienced as frustrating and disruptive, or even their expression of increased pride in work, discredits the suggestion that such programmes are ‘an attempt by management to control employees through internal discipline and self-control’ (Wilkinson *et al.*, p. 30). New working practices may be willingly reproduced and policed by employees precisely because they are congruent with their sense of self-identity and self-interest. In the absence of any significant shift in the structure of power-control relations (Robbins, 1983), employee enthusiasm for changes in working practice are plausibly interpreted as a response to forms of control which are deemed by them to be more compatible with self-identity and which, therefore, they are more willing to self-administer. This does *not* mean that employees necessarily identify with the new corporate values that accompany such change, only that their instrumental value is recognized.
- [27] It is no accident that Peters and Waterman (1982) stress the need to incorporate and go beyond behaviourism (pp. 67–73) as they draw upon the work of cognitive psychologists (*e.g.* March and Weick) to inform and legitimize their prescriptions (pp. 100–9).
- [28] For a discussion of the relevance of Foucault’s work for the study of management which takes the influential work of Porter (1985, 1990) on corporate strategy as its topic, see Knights, 1992.

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