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Genealogies of reflexivity: register formations and the making of affective workers

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Abstract: How has the ability to express reflexivity, including regulating affect, come to be part of the bundled self that workers are required to be? This paper offers a rigorous genealogical analysis of the multiple histories of knowledge and power that have informed the emergence and shaping of ‘reflexive registers,’ or socially typified ways of speaking and reflecting about oneself that stand for morally marked models of selfhood. It takes as a starting-point programs documented in my ethnography of employability programs in London, UK where workers of all sorts are asked to learn to examine their personalities and to express their feelings. It then draws on original historiographical and ethnographic data that allows documentation of the logics and circumstances informing the emergence and development of reflexivity as a resource for employability. It argues for an interdisciplinary understanding of reflexivity and its communicability that theorises the workers as products of history, capital, and affect.

Keywords: affect; capitalism; reflexivity; registers; work

1 Introduction

In 2017 I examined an employability program in East London as part of an ethnographic investigation of activation schemes for unemployed people in the UK conducted with Vivian Sze Wong. This program, provided by a local charity called Connections, targeted young people with what the UK government terms BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) backgrounds. All participants were men from economically disadvantaged families, but had different needs, histories, and ways of seeing themselves, including their futures and possibilities of job market integration. All were born and raised in London, but most of them had parents or grandparents who had moved to the UK from the Caribbean, Bangladesh, Poland,

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or Russia. Many were on social benefits, and were required by the UK's Jobcentre Plus (the government's employment services) to attend a training program in order to continue receiving state support. Training activities included job search skills such as development of CVs, networking and interview skills, but also leadership and emotional management skills like the ability to dream, to define personal goals, and to face barriers. Connections' curriculum had been predefined in collaboration with a US investment bank that funds employability training in high-need areas in the UK.

The training was conducted in a community centre in the heart of the borough, where Connections also provided housing, sexual education, health, legal, and community services. Activities were led by Natasha, an employability coach in her early thirties from a BAME background. Connections relied on BAME staff, stating explicitly that this was so the targeted groups would have success stories to imitate. Towards the end of the training program, Natasha invited conflict managers to offer a two-day workshop on anger management; the managers, Marc and Tania, were employed by a national partner charity focusing on personal development for young men in areas with high rates of poverty and incarceration. Natasha explained to Vivian and I that this type of emotional management workshop was part of every employability program and helped participants manage their emotions – to be more aware of, reflect on, express, and cope with their feelings, especially anger. Young, male, BAME unemployed subjects, in particular, were seen as needing to learn to cope with their feelings and frustrations.

The two-day program involved individual and collective reflection and discussion activities, as well as body exercises and meditation. Each activity began with a short exercise where participants were invited to sit in a circle, close our eyes and to direct our attention to our bodies, our breathing, our heartbeat, our thoughts, our anger. Tania would show us how to direct our consciousness to these physical and affective parts of ourselves. Then, one by one, we were asked to briefly state how we and our bodies were feeling. "How are you, James?" Marc addressed a young man standing next to Natasha. "How do you feel?" "I don't know." "You don't know?" "I think, I feel nervous," James answered. "I can't think." Tania advised James to put his hand on his belly and take a deep breath when he felt nervous and to be attentive to his body and the ways his feelings were expressed through his body. "Don't tremble with your feet, breathe." "You want to give an impression of yourself as someone self-secure and determined, but also calm." Tania added then, "This is something that we all are working on, but you need to learn to express your emotions, James." "Jamal don't laugh," Marc admonished one of the young men who was standing next to Vivian. I had observed how Jamal kept trying to get Goran's attention through eye-rolling, grimaces and body expressions commenting on the trainers' instructions. "Aren't you interested in what we are doing here?" "Does this

challenge the way you see yourself as a man?” Marc insisted. “And you, Alfonso, how are you?” I did not expect Marc to address me directly, but I decided to be honest. We had agreed with Natasha and the two conflict managers that we were allowed to document the workshop only under the conditions that we would participate in the training, and not just observe. “I feel anxious about the exercises,” I said, “about what they may reveal about me and my insecurities.” “It is normal to express insecurity, even for men in more senior positions,” Marc noted. “The question is how we can put them into words, to allow us to control them and be a nice partner to interact with.” Directing his gaze to the entire group, he explained: “Be aware of your insecurities and be honest about them.” And “relax your face muscles.” That was directed at me.

After this initial circle, Tania invited us to work on meditation and breath control. As she explained, our breath interacts with our inner life and is how “emotions interact with your body.” We were asked to learn to control our feelings and anxieties by giving them reason to exist but also by putting them aside when they hindered our individual development. She then went on about how learning to express our feelings allows us to remain in contact with ourselves and the people around us. “Think before you speak,” she clarified. “When you think you’re in a balance with your inner self, and can better cope with your emotions and with others.” “When you are getting mad,” she explained, “and you feel you want to explode, imagine a relaxing scene, take a deep breath, and repeat a calming phrase, such as *take it easy*.” Tania went on with her instructions: “Instead of focusing on what made you angry, on what makes you boil, remind yourself that anger won’t fix your problems and might only make them worse.” “Rather,” she explained, “reflect and identify possible solutions.” “To avoid criticising or placing blame, use ‘I’ statements to describe the problem. Try not to increase tension. Remain respectful and be specific.” She concluded on a more relaxed note, “You are all funny. So, make people smile, use humour to help you face what’s making you angry and, possibly, any unrealistic expectations you have.”

The introductory vignette shows multiple aspects of employability. First, it provides insights into the complex network of social, political, and economic actors, including the flow of financial resources, emblematic of the apparatus of power and control that currently manages unemployment in the UK. The emotion management workshop was subcontracted by an East London charity to another charity based in central England. The funding came from a US private bank with a branch in central London that was interested in polishing its reputation and justifying the social and economic disparities that London’s finance industry helps shape. And all this was run in collaboration with and under the control of Jobcentre Plus, part of the UK’s Department of Work and Pensions.

Second, it shows the role of affect in the everyday doing of employability. It documents the communicative instructions which vehiculate behavioural templates, or regulated models of reflecting, affecting and being affected. These templates represent standardised models to be imitated and internalised by participants to help them act upon themselves. They help participants not just to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate ways of feeling, reflecting, speaking, and behaving, but also between desirable and undesirable workers' personae. Appropriate and desirable affects are associated in this workshop with practices and qualities such as bodily and affective control, but also with eloquence, reflexivity and rational reasoning.

Third, it gives us insights into the links between appropriate affect and the modes of understanding and theorising the self which inform employability programs in the UK. The training activities documented here were informed by an underlying assumption that managing unemployed people's sense of insecurity, frustration, or anger, requires them to learn to reflect, experience, and express affect in rational ways. Rationality and emotionality were understood as intertwined social constructs that participants could analyse, and therefore control, in order to become the type of persons they wanted, or were asked, to be. Appropriate names behavioural features and personal traits that have been historically linked with the figure of the civilised, educated, often middle- or upper-class male, and opposed to a working-class, non-educated, male subjectivity, which is understood as aggressive, uncontrolled, instinctive, and linguistically deficient.

Fourth, it exemplifies how language becomes a powerful tool for the regulation of people's affect and body. It is not simply a medium for people to express themselves, to get heard and seen by their interlocutors – even if language is used to express alignment or misalignment with the training's behavioural templates. Language is constructed as an intentional practice of reflexivity and affect. It is seen as a communicative practice that allows people to interact with, gain control over, and transform their thoughts, body and affective impulses.

In this article, I genealogically analyse (Foucault 1991; Urla 2019) how these elements shape what I call 'reflexive registers', historically constituted, enactable modes of reflecting about oneself and of doing affective work (Carr 2010; Flubacher 2020; Gal 2018; Hochschild 1983; Lorente 2017; Tebaldi forthcoming a, forthcoming b). Reflexive registers are standardised models of feeling, of communicative self-discovery and self-revelation. They are "typified" and regulated, part of a series, a strategic reiteration of preexisting modes of doing and expressing introspection and affect. Reflexive registers are templates for communication which link speech repertoires to figures of personhood, to relationships, and to the conduct of social practices. These not just serve the production of a typified social persona, but also the classification of people into morally distinct raced, gendered, and classed types.

This paper claims that, since the onset of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century, being a worker has meant being able to feel, reflect on, and communicate those feelings in a highly regulated way. It then contributes to a sociolinguistic understanding of reflexivity and its communicability (Kelly-Holmes 2010; Perez-Milans 2017), but also to work on affect and capitalism (Karppi et al. 2016) which theorises ongoing investments in, and valorisation of, affect and reflexivity not as a distinct feature of neoliberal capitalism (e.g. Ahmed 2014; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hardt 1999; Hochschild 1983; Illouz 2007; Muehlebach and Shoshan 2012) but as a social practice that, from the outset, capitalism has acted upon and benefited from.

I claim that analysing reflexive registers within employability programs means analysing how individuals must feel and reflect to be seen as employable subjects, how these registers are circulated and taken up by trainers and trained individuals, how individuals are trained to recognise these registers' coherence, and how they practice them to become a specific type of socially valued person. Reflexive registers, I explain, serve as a form of management of poverty and control of people, and their daily enactment and naturalisation is a form of reproductive labour (Federici 2021), the unpaid forms of care, self-care, and affective management which create the conditions for the reproduction of capital.

To document the emergence and development of reflexivity as affective management, I draw on ethnographic and historiographical material to explore both the multiple histories of knowledge and power that have informed these ways of speaking and reflecting about oneself and their entanglement with specific infrastructures of employability. I first present an analysis of the historical formation of the register that young people at Connections are asked to adopt. I argue that this register can be understood as emerging within three intersecting transformations: of work, of the employability apparatus, and of vocational psychology's theorisation of affect and the self. I end by returning to the employability training illustrated in this introduction. This will allow me to explore individuals' uptake of this register – how people react to the forms of speaking, feeling and reflecting that these employability programs ask them to socialise themselves into.

2 Genealogies of selfhood

Reflexive registers must not be seen as a sudden discovery. Foucault (1988, 1993) shows that discursive self-making processes, as highly ritualised and regulated practices, can be traced back to Hellenistic Greece and early Rome. Since its invention at the beginning of the twentieth century, vocational psychology placed reflexive consciousness “at the heart of the self” (Athanasou and Van Esbroeck 2008). Inspired by Rose's (1990) analysis of the history of the private self and

Inoue's (2006) genealogy of vicarious language in Japan, I analyse how, in the UK, the invention of the worker is entangled with the refinement and development of specific techniques of self-making that construct the subject as both feeling and reflexive. These reflexive registers as standardised models of communicative feeling, self-discovery and self-revelation also socialise people into gendered and classed worker-subjects. In this section, I trace the emergence of three models of selfhood that have been particularly influential in the management of unemployment in the UK and which, as rationalities, have become guiding models for the management of people and their feelings in employability workshops such as the one introduced above.

The first model was developed in 1909 by US social reformer Frank Parsons, the founder of vocational psychology (O'Brien and Karen 2001), in a time when industrialism in the UK moved people from agricultural communities to cities. While in agricultural communities, individuals' positions in the structure of labour were inherited (Thompson 1966), in the city each young person had to determine what kind of life was worth living (Whiteside 2015), where their labour was needed within the social, affective, and economic engine of industry. One of the several cultural assumptions creating consent for the transformation of capitalism, including its social costs, was that this social and capitalist configuration brought the freedom for individuals to go where their intelligence, instinct, and interests took them (Van Leeuwen et al. 2004). This promoted an idea of freedom and total mobility for some, with women and migrant, often racially othered, workers being the most exposed to the social, cultural and economic consequences of these changing economic configurations (Dias-Abey 2021; Frederici 1975). Mobility, however, also came with the imperative for the individual to know their talents and traits and that, in turn, required them to look inward.

It is within the framework of this changing configuration of labour that in 1909 Frank Parsons launched the vocational guidance movement which was influential both in the US and Western Europe, including the UK. Initially, Parson's vision for a more just society led to the establishment of the Vocation Bureau in Boston, Massachusetts (Jones 1994). This bureau aimed "to aid young people in choosing an occupation, preparing themselves for it, finding an opening in it, and building up a career of efficiency and success" (Parsons 1909: 3). Parsons helped to outline a system of public guidance that paved the way for career counselling as we know it today.

While Parsons' reforms principally impacted the way career counselling was practiced in the US, in the first decades of the twentieth century his ideas, methods and principles were rapidly vehiculated into the UK. This was facilitated through widely read pamphlets, newspaper articles, magazine essays, speeches, regular travel to the UK and the mediating role of UK-based work and political rights activists and prominent members of the vocational guidance movement such as

Ogilvie Gordon (Savickas 2009). In the first decade of the twentieth century, Gordon managed through her publications, handbooks, manuals and other vocational guidance instructions to introduce Parsons' ideas and methods into UK governmental spaces, where young people's transition into the labour market was debated (Gordon 1908) and vocational guidance policies (e.g. the Labour Exchanges Act 1909 and the Choice of Employment Act 1910) were defined (Watts and Kidd 2000). While in the US, Parsons' theories and methods were implemented into institutions practicing vocational guidance, such as the Vocation Bureau, in the UK his ideas mainly served the creation of services in public schools that offered advice and guidance to young people 14 and 17 years of age. Young people, this was the idea, had to be supported in their transition from school to work to ensure a successful integration into the labour market (Gordon 1908).

In *Choosing a Vocation* (1909), Parsons laid out the steps for counselling and guiding people in their selection of a vocation. These steps consisted of:

'(1) a clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and their causes; (2) a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work; (3) true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts (Parsons 1909: 5).

For Parsons, the first and most important step towards finding a vocation is what he calls 'self-study'. People need to investigate themselves to determine their capacities and their feelings to be able to compare these with conditions of success in different industries. Successful self-investigation leads to happiness as well as high economic value. To support counsellors in guiding people in this process of self-investigation and affective management, Parsons developed a series of what he called "scientific methods". Counsellors should start with an initial short interview asking about a person's age, height, weight, health, temperament, family professions, education, aptitudes, and interests. During this interview, Parsons advised counsellors to carefully observe "the shape of [the worker's] head, the relative development above, before, and behind the ears, his features, expressions, colours, vivacity and voice, manner, pose, general air of vitality, enthusiasm, etc." This corporal observation and the initial answers provided by future workers were, for Parsons, indicative of the man's mental development, feeling, reason, imagination, experience, and employer's attitudes towards his work. Based on this initial interview, individuals should be invited to engage in a proper self-study.

Parsons prepared a list of more than 250 questions that young people were required to respond to in writing, to allow access to true reasoning and real introspection. For example: 1) appearance (are you slim, medium, thick-set?); 2) dress (do you give much attention to your dress?); 3) neatness (are your colors and cuffs Caucasian?); 7) handshake (do you have a handshake like a steam engine, a

stick, or an icicle?); 9) voice (is your voice soft or loud, clear, or smooth? Are you modest? Aggressive?); 11) personal atmosphere (cheery, vivacious, good-natured, solemn, indifferent); 12) mind (attention, memory, reason, imagination); 13) sight (normal, near or far, colour blind); 16) knowledge (of self, of business and industry, of language); 17) skill (skills of the hand, public speaking, singing); 18) character (honest, candid, prompt, reliable?); 19) taste (do you know a fine picture when you see it?); 20) temper (do you anger easily?); 21) tact (can you manage people well?); 22) friends (how many intimate friends do you have?); 27) temperament (phlegmatic, buoyant, or spiteful) (Parsons 1909: 32–44).

Many of Parsons' questions focus on affect: called temperament, temper, or "personal atmosphere". Parsons provided instructions to exemplify how people should be introduced to the task of self-analysis and address the questions he developed:

Some of these questions can be answered very definitely. In respect to others, you can only make estimates more or less imperfect and subject to revision. Some questions you may not be able to answer at all without assistance and careful testing. A thorough study of yourself is the foundation of a true plan of life. Deal with the matter as though correct conclusions would mean ten thousand dollars to you... Test every element of your character, knowledge, mental power, appearance, manners, etc. as well as you can. And then bring the study to the counsellor. He will help you revise it make further tests, suggest the means of judging questions not yet satisfactorily answered, and consider with you the relations between your aptitude, abilities, etc. and the requirements, conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and prospects in the various callings you might engage in, and also consider the best means of preparation and advancement to secure the fullest efficiency and success in the field of work you may decide upon. (Parsons 1909: 6–7)

The similarity between Parson's questions and instructions and the opening vignette is striking, especially his understanding of employability (study and know yourself!) and his obsession with microscopic, comprehensive self-analysis. Like Marc and Tania, the type of self-scrutiny that Parsons postulates is a highly standardised one and is mediated by instructions guiding the subject towards a meticulous exploration of their own persona and "personal atmosphere". Instructions regulate the way people need to think themselves and regulate morally idealised, gendered, and classed modes of being and feeling.

Parsons' methods were underpinned by a theorisation of the self as characterised by stable individual traits which can be "adapted" to stable workplace characteristics. For Parsons, this match between an individual's characteristics and the characteristics of work ensured a successful integration into an occupation, avoiding "inefficiency, unenthusiastic and perhaps distasteful labour, and low pay" (Parsons 1909: 3). This method is informed by an early form of logical positivism, assuming that only statements verifiable through direct observation

are meaningful. Instructions were crucial to prevent unclear language resulting in unverifiable claims and to impose a standardised form of scrutiny producing objectified knowledge about the self. Standardisation purified the instructions reproduced by counsellors and the language used by people in accounting for the knowledge of their own persona.

This process was complemented by psychometric tests which linguistically coded the knowledge generated through self-analysis into different authoritative texts that then allowed an objectification and classification into different types of persons (McIlveen and Patton 2006). These texts exerted power on people by normalising this classification and consequently directing them towards specific understandings of themselves, including specific feelings and occupational choices (Taylor 1986). In other words, we see here the emergence of a reflexive register. Not just in terms of a standardised, and communicatively or textually enacted, morally valued mode of thinking and exploring the self, but also in terms of the capacity of this self-scrutiny to have transformative effects on the self. This was not a transformation of a person's traits, an objective which underpinned Marc and Tania's training program, but their happiness and productivity. According to Parsons, a wise selection of a "man's" occupation should be in harmony with their nature and love for work. In his manifesto, Parson explains that this wise selection builds the foundation not only for happiness, but also of high economic value. Societal and personal happiness and industrial productivity were both triggers and goals of his theorisation of vocational guidance.

The model of vocational guidance developed by Parsons, and its underpinning assumptions about the self, self-study and the moral regulation of people's affect is linked to how work planners redefine occupational practice in a moment of accelerated industrial change (Savickas 2008). Critiques of Fordism and affect (Berlant 2007) have argued that the model of Fordist production – a model of economic expansion and technological progress designed to produce standardised, low-cost goods and afford its workers decent enough wages to buy them – was not just a scientific template for the regulation and segmentation of mass production, but also a moral formation governing people's affective capacities (Muehlebach and Shoshan 2012). Gramsci (1997) argues that Fordism was a "psycho-physical nexus" generated out of "the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and a new type of man." For Ford, the transformation of industrial labour had to encompass moral living, that is, to love, eat, and clean in particular ways. Ford attempted to secure this moral order by sending his Sociological Department into workers' homes to document their free time and make recommendations about their domestic and sexual lives.

The second model is Super's (1953) vocational self. Like Parsons, Super was a prominent member of the vocational guidance movement and contributed to its expansion to encompass career counselling. As the founder of the American Personnel and Guidance Association – an organisation serving professional counsellors in the US and 50 other countries in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, extending America's sphere of influence on the management of work, workers and access to work – Super managed to globally spread his ideas and scholarship (Savickas 1994).

While heavily invested in the global propagation of knowledge about vocational guidance, Super was also interested in a robust developmental understanding of what he called “the dynamics of vocational adjustment”, which would make vocational psychology fit for the challenges posed by the second half of the twentieth century (Super 1942). Although discussed already in the 1930s, Super managed to establish himself as an influential figure only after World War II. This was the moment when the accelerated transformation of industrial economies into corporations – especially the normalisation of organisational forms of governance and funding that, differently from earlier business entities owned by sole proprietorships or joint partnerships (often families), are owned by a number of shareholders, with effects on the ways organisations are managed and power is distributed – started to intersect with a new way of organising workplaces and work into organisational pyramids: a large number of labourers at the base, a number of managers and white-collar workers in the middle, and a small number of executives at the top (Van Leeuwen et al. 2004).

Historians of vocational guidance agree that this hierarchical structure that became widespread in the second half of the twentieth century normalised the idea and practice of career as a natural path of professional growth and individual development (McIlveen and Patton 2006). New organisational structures and the possibility for workers to move from job to job within the same corporation challenged a vocational guidance practice that theorised the worker's self as characterised by a set of inner, stable character traits that could be matched with a job for life. It is within this social and economic context that Super (1951) suggested a shift in focus towards an affective guidance practice that supports people in adjusting their self-concepts (the ideas that they have about themselves) to the types of occupations they are interested in at different stages of their occupational lives.

Super was inspired by Rogers' person-centric counselling techniques (Rogers and Wallen 1946). Affect is guided through practices of introspection, reflection, and interaction that help reduce the level of incongruence between the ideal and the actual self. Super argued that counsellors should focus on the underlying feeling of uncertainty faced by workers throughout their careers and personal development. The job of counsellors is to guide people in the exploration of their psychological selves and to recognise the emotional factors that operate in

vocational choice. Counsellors should invite people to ask and address three types of questions:

- 1) What sort of person do I think I am? How do I think about myself as I think I am?
What are my values and needs? What are my aptitudes and interests?
- 2) What sort of person do I want to be?
- 3) What can I do to reconcile my ideal self with my real self?

Super clarified that, while the first question invites the person to explore his or her objective self, the second one guides them towards an analysis of the subject they intend to be. The third question then allows them to reorganise their picture of themselves in a way that makes it easier to select goals and move systematically towards their attainment. In other words, as in Marc and Tania's anger management workshop, counsellors had to get people to reflect and talk freely about themselves, their emotions, and their situations, and to help them adjust their self-concepts through guided self-analysis. Also, similar to Parsons, as well as to Marc and Tania's model, the questions asked were communicative instructions guiding the individual in their reflections and affective management. However, differently from Parsons' ideas and more in line with the theories unpinning Marc and Tania's anger management workshop, for Super the individual's reflection was not seen as stable, an objective fact matched through psychometric tests with the characteristics of an ideal future job. Instead, making a vocational choice meant expressing a self-concept, or understanding of the self, which according to him naturally evolves over time. People seek career satisfaction through work in which they can express themselves and further implement and develop their self-concept. Like in Parsons' model, occupational success is affective. In a counselling activity, the individuals' reflections and speaking about their own self-concept helped them to overcome the social or psychological blockages that hinder the "natural development" of their person, including their progression into forms of employment aligned with their sense of self. Reflexivity as communicative practice then, more than mediating a match-making process between the self and the job market, was understood here as liberating the person from outdated sense of self which hinders its full affective realisation and natural development, as shown in the case of Tom Turner:

Tom Turner is a mining engineer. Several years ago, before World War II, Tom was a talented young high school student in a manufacturing town. His special talents were academic, artistic, musical, but Tom was versatile and willing to try almost anything to get ahead. His father was a mill worker, there was no money for higher education. So, Tom looked around to see what kind of free education he might obtain. He tried for a scholarship at his state university, applied for another at a nearby school of mines, and took exams for West Point and Annapolis. He didn't miss a beat. He won a scholarship at the school of mines. He was

graduated with honors. He now wishes he had never won that scholarship. Why? Some years ago, Tom came to an awareness of the fact that he is not really adapted to a field engineer's life. Oh, he made good grades in engineering school, he has a good employment record, his company thinks well of him, and he has had several promotions. But he is unhappy because his dominant interests and some of his talents are not like those of the other mining engineers and mining company employees with whom he lives and works. When he goes home on vacation he visits with his brother and his brother's crowd, talks their shop talk with them and dreads the prospect of returning to his job. His brother and his crowd are musicians. His few congenial acquaintances are among the eccentrics of the mining community: they include the company physician, a photographer, a hermit-artist who lives alone in the hills, and an amateur musician cast in the role of preacher. And Tom, too, is an intellectual and an aesthete at heart: he spends hours in serious reading, he does some water-colour painting, he has a collection of classical records; but his work is that of an engineer and administrator, he lives in a mining camp, he is a transient, and his colleagues are men of action, athletes, hunters, practical jokers. Tom just doesn't belong. The work he does, and the situation in which he does it, do not permit him to be the kind of person he really is and now knows he wants to be. (Super 1988: 357)

If Parsons was interested in supporting young men's transition to industrial labour, Super seems to focus more on established, educated middle-class male workers. Women, working-class, and racialised workers remain marginal in his thinking, mirroring the naturalised assumption of the 1950s that career progress, and job satisfaction more generally, was something that concerned white, educated males only. The social problem that vocational counselling addresses is therefore not or not necessarily a problem of occupational exclusion, but struggles to align an occupational position with the sense of (male) self. Tom's story represented for Super an emblematic case of the feelings and challenges of implementing a self-concept in choosing an occupation encountered by this specific persona type. To exemplify the affective consequences of this disalignment, Super opposes two self-concepts, which point to two modes of masculinity: the men of action and the aesthete at heart, which are seen as opposed to each other and lead to pain, distress and unhappiness.

We know that the relation between the two self-concepts described by Super is not only emblematic of a person's transition through different stages of developmental maturity but also a highly affective distinction between two models of raced and classed manhood – one that is more anchored in notions of physicality, rural space and practice and one which is more linked to ideas of the mind, art and aesthetics (for a similar conclusion see Blustein et al. [2012]). These differences point to older moralised distinctions between rural and urban, primitive and civilised, non-white and white, men and women around which inequality and a white social order has been historically organised. What counts then as maturity in Super's model of vocational choice is not only a stage in a psychological

developmental process. The development of the self through different stages of maturity is also a highly classed, racialised, and gendered one, standing for the transition of an individual from a primitive stage to a more civilised. Maturity, in Super's framework, was available only for a certain category of person, the white man who is acting on his putatively innate potential to be socially mobile.

In his 1988 paper, Super argues that his vocational guidance model would have helped Tom to sooner become aware of the type of person he is and find appropriate outlets for his talents instead of being guided into an inappropriate occupation. Guiding Tom towards actualisation of his own self-concept meant creating the conditions for him to expand, become autonomous, develop, and be motivated, self-directed, mature, and responsible – that is, to express and activate all capacities and potentials of the working self. An improved vocational guidance model was not just a way of aligning the worker's preferred way of life with their occupational situation. As with Parsons, workers' happiness also benefits society as a whole.

This imperative to be happy for the good of the working self and society is not particular to the field of vocational psychology and guidance. Ahmed (2010), Illouz (2007), and Rose (1990) argue that developmental psychological models, such as the one promoted by Super, are based on and normalise a widespread societal assumption about the "good" individual as constantly growing and developing as well as being happy and self-fulfilled. Illouz (2007) explains that such views of human development and growth were able to penetrate cultural concepts of the self in the workplace and society at large because they resonated with the cultural values of advanced liberal democracies and the demands of industries in post-World War II times of accelerated economic growth and expansion. If channeled through regulated practices, humans' natural quest for satisfaction and happiness would produce efficiency, profitability, and adaptability. For Ahmed (2010), people who did not develop and have a self-realised life were pathologised, sick, and therefore unproductive; they were seen as hindrances to their own fulfillment and for the fulfillment of capital. Rose (1990) agrees that this developmental model that helped establish a new hierarchy of workers was invented by vocational psychologists and counseling practitioners to distinguish between self-realised, growing workers and those who struggled to find their place in the world of work and therefore needed care and therapy.

Historians of vocational guidance have noted that this model assumes and promotes a changing, growing, individual but stable workplace (Herr 2013). This understanding of the self does not fit well with ongoing transformations of labour, including the fluidity of work, workplaces, and work tasks (Duchêne and Heller 2012; Gee 1996; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). The flexibilisation and restructuring of work are seen to require new models of vocational guidance that adequately account for rapidly changing occupational structures (Darmon and Perez 2011).

The third model of vocational guidance responded to the fluidity of work with a shift in focus from career development to career management (Savickas 2008). This was accompanied by a shift in the vision of affect and the self. Rather than developing in a stable work environment where workers can build their careers on previous experience and knowledge, vocational psychologists have been advocating for a new model of supporting workers in actively planning and implementing self-management behaviours in a life-long quest for happiness and the best possible futures (Savickas 2015). Like in Marc and Tania's anger management training, self-construction and identity narratives must address emotions of uncertainty and anxiety. In this transformed framework, counsellors are requested to formulate models of conduct and meaning-making that support workers in addressing mobility and career uncertainty.

This shift is clearly shown in the work of Mark Savickas – called “the linguist” because of his insistence on the role of language in career counselling – a clinical counselor, psychologist, and academic considered one of the main figures in the field today. Through several highly influential best-sellers translated into more than 20 languages, international action research projects and training events with career counsellors in several countries around the world (including the UK), Savickas imposed his ideas within academic scholarship and the practice of vocational counselling.

For Savickas, the question of vocational guidance cannot be matching individuals and occupation or lifelong career development. Instead he asks how individuals may best design their own lives within liquid occupational structures. To engage with the affective demands of these transformed work regimes, Savickas advocates for a new paradigm that guides workers in developing specific knowledge and skills to analyse and cope with the ecological contexts, complex dynamics, and non-linear casualties faced by workers. Continual occupational happiness and the best possible future requires continual affective management.

This requires a counselling activity that 1) understands workers as living entities that adapt to their manifold, unpredictable, and constantly changing work contexts; 2) focuses on strategies of survival, affect and coping that support workers in managing complex constraints within their personal, social, familial, and especially professional ecosystems; 3) develops expertise in the co-construction of holistic life design, replacing traditional sequences of differential diagnosis, indications, and prescriptions inherited from medical practice; 4) engages in activities and meaning-making that enable to them to build new views of themselves, and facilitates empowerment, flexible adaption, or reconstruction of one ecosystem in order to open new perspectives for co-evolution.

Savickas clarifies that this new paradigm redefines counselling. While vocational guidance needs to remain the focus of counsellors, all the roles of the

working subject (i.e. family, play) should become the objects of intervention in the guidance activities. Finally guidance should no longer confine itself to intervening at transition times but rather be a lifelong affective process fostering adaptability (workers' capacity to anticipate changes in their own person and at work), narratability (to understand workers' own life themes, vocational personalities, and adaptability resources), activity (to produce significant changes), and intentionality (to impose meaning and purpose on vocational behaviour and choice).

This transformed vocational guidance implies a new way of engaging with workers and their feelings that focuses on life design, stories, and activities rather than on test scores and profile interpretations. In his life design manual for vocational counsellors, Savickas (2015) formulates the following steps: First, workers and counsellors jointly identify the problem and what the worker wants to achieve in the counselling sessions. Second, the counsellor supports the worker in the exploration of what is called their "current system subjective identity forms", including how the workers see themselves, their feelings and their behaviour at work. Third, the counsellor helps the worker reflect on and then shape their story by having them articulate experiences and emotions, actions and interactions. This is said to help open perspectives, turning what had been implicit into something explicit. In their engagement with workers, counsellors should focus both on their stories' content and form. Does a client position themselves with a sense of personal agency? How clearly and coherently does the story express the content? But also, how many "feeling words" does the client use? Does the client recognise these feelings? Fourth, counsellors should help workers put their problems into a new story and think about themselves from a new perspective. Counsellors are invited to co-construct resolution stories, support clients in identifying role models, help individuals conceptualise these models in terms of affect. Fifth, counsellors define activities that test and actualise these new stories and perspectives.

For example, for step four of the counselling process (a new story), Savickas advises counsellors to ask workers about the plot of their favourite book or movie. A favourite story, he explains, mirrors aspects of their own story. By inserting themselves into that story, they can transform their sense of self, especially when the story suggests a reasonable way in which they may proceed. As in the case of a 45-year-old man who wanted to discuss whether to leave a secure job for a dream job:

Das Boot is my favorite book and movie. It's about a World War II submarine. It's an against all odds sort of thing. Being at sea. I identified with the chief engineer. At one point in the movie they have been hit by a big shell. They are stuck in the bottom of the ocean. Have to get water out of boat. Limited oxygen so they cannot stay down long. They know they are going to die. Chief engineer says everything is ready. They have one chance to blow to the surface... it works and everyone survives.

Savickas explains that the underpinning script the man presents is, “If I adopt the script from my favourite story, then I will take what feels like my last chance to surface my true passion in a new occupation”. Counsellors should ask workers about how they feel about their story and whether it could provide them with a sense of direction. Savickas recounts, in discussing this story, the man stated, “My current career is pacifying some jerks. It’s deadening. It’s just so true! I am stuck at the bottom. I have one last chance to pursue my dream. If I stay where I am, I will continue to suffocate until I retire. I want the challenge.” According to Savickas, the counsellor should engage with the workers’ reflections and emotions about the links between their own situations and the script underpinning the story. When interacting with workers, counsellors should adopt and use the metaphors of feeling expressed in these accounts. This identification with the story and the emotions of the characters supports workers in managing their feelings. In a further step, counsellors are invited to help workers reflect about how this story can be translated into a story about the workers’ new occupational role. Counsellors should then support workers in internalising these new stories’ and reflecting on how these stories can help them with future challenges. Workers should also be supported in learning how to tell their stories and sense of self, contributing to the shaping and actualisation of a new identity.

This model of vocational guidance is emblematic of a constructionist model of the self as constituted by narrative. Vocational adjustments and the quest for employment and occupational happiness are therefore a matter of purposeful action and intentionality, a matter of choice, narrative, and storytelling. This is distinct from earlier vocational psychology, but also from the post-modern, liquid self, the fragmented self where agency lies in aligning given roles and contexts (Bauman 2005). This is a self that understands life as a game (Rose 1990). Unlike these, the reflexive self that workers are increasingly required to be is one that makes itself manageable – exists before relationships and contexts and actively decides how she or he will agentively and attentively connect with people, institutions, and professional practices. People learn a reflexive register, a mode of selecting, mapping, and interpreting certain affective impulses and modes of interchange (see Gershon [2011] for a critique of a similar agentive model). They learn to make themselves manageable through their identification with a narrative of emotions – such as the use of a favourite’s story plot as both a discursive and emotional model – that allows them to remake their own lives through calculated choices that will fulfill their subjective needs. They invest in and practice storytelling and narrative to accommodate an unpredictable and fluctuating labour market and moralised societal expectations of selfhood.

This model of vocational guidance that requires workers to invest in and practice storytelling and narrative to accommodate an unpredictable and

fluctuating labor market emerges out of a set of rationalities, i.e. theories of vocational guidance that, since the early twentieth century, have been refined and developed and that contribute to the shaping of happy, productive subjects. More than being in rupture with previous modes of understanding the vocational self and imagining the way transition into work needs to be guided, I argue that there are strong continuities between the ways vocational counseling has been theorised throughout the past 120 years. While Parsons, Super and Savickas imagine the self in distinct ways – as a set of inborn traits, as developing self-projects, or as the product of a story – they all identify reflexivity and self-analysis as a crucial technology for successful labor market integration and productivity, and they all define this in affective terms – occupational happiness as a match, as an endgoal, as a process. They also share the assumption that language, and more particularly standardised models of communicative feeling, self-discovery and self-revelation, or reflexive registers, do not just enable the externalisation of a happy working self. Self-analysis through introspection, writing and psychometric testing, development through dialogue, and calculated self-making through storytelling and narrativisation are also what Foucault calls technologies of the self that allow people to enact forms of self-care, including the management of affect and the building of resilience, motivation, and moral integrity.

What allows these models of the reflexive self to persist across history and capitalist periods with their changing regimes of work, is that they intersect well with a liberal rationality which connects phases of capitalist expansion as disparate as Fordism and Late Capitalism, including the cultural models of manhood, class, and race which are entangled with and legitimise capitalist formations (Heller and McElhinny 2017). What makes reflexivity inherently liberal and capitalist is that, as a practice of selfhood, it allows one to imagine and celebrate the individual as autonomous, responsible, and self-sufficient, a type of person that intersects with the idealised western masculine self (Kingfisher 2002; McElhinny 2010), and that, through its liberation from its inner affective and mental obstacles and barriers, is free to act up on nature and the social world for capitalist exploitation and value production.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that the reflexive registers documented in my introductory vignette at Connections are the logical culmination of a historical, linear, and rational progression of scientific thinking about the self at the service of capitalism. What Marc and Tania tried to teach us was informed by sediments, or pieces and bits of more or less articulated notions of the vocational self, which draw on all of these three models which have dominated vocational psychology in the twentieth century – the idea of knowing oneself through self-exploration, to overcome inner barriers through self-reflection and interaction, to learn expressing one's emotionality in different ways, and that, in that specific

anger management workshop, got enriched with principles of reflexivity and self-management from other domains of knowledge and practice such as yoga and mindfulness-based stress reduction. These principles allow one to reflect, manage, and express not just on the selves' characterological traits, emotions, barriers, and life aspirations, but target the body in its physicality, and this not just as an object of reflection, but also as object of intentional regulation and improvement. This process is an affective one, it is meant to lead to happiness.

In the next section, I analyse how this became possible, i.e. when, how, why and with what consequences these changing models of vocational guidance, including their more recent saturation with regimes of practice that come from other histories of knowledge, got entangled with a set of other transformations, namely the establishment and successive refinement of affective and administrative structures put in place to guide unemployed people towards work.

3 Shifting structures of vocational guidance

Government concern for unemployment is certainly not new. In England, total institutions, such as workhouses, governing individuals seen as unable to economically support themselves, had existed since the end of the seventeenth century. Workhouses, however, did not operate as spaces for solving the problems of unemployment, but as houses of correction and discipline allowing the management of vagrancy and social disorder (Morrison 1999). Since the nineteenth century, unemployment has been seen as a social problem that was the object of governmental intervention (Whiteside 2013).

It was only in 1909 that, following Parsons' vocational bureau, an extensive network of labour exchanges was put in place to respond to the question of unemployment in the UK. To promote total labour mobility within and between different professions and towns, new information technologies (i.e., the telephone) facilitated the immediate exchange of information about vacancies and applicants. This new apparatus intervening in the organisation of labour and the labour market was criticised by liberal employers and trade unions who claimed that labour management had to remain a private issue. However, for governmental authorities, the establishment of these new labour exchanges was not just a means to fill labour shortages, but was one ensuring the establishment of a moral order (Whiteside 2014). Like workhouses, labour exchanges were a disciplinary apparatus which helped to remove inefficient, idle, vagrant, and irregular persons, and to ensure that the unemployed regular men would not end up as casual labourers incapable of holding down permanent jobs.

Bruno Lasker, sociologist mandated by the US Department of Labor to study the British system of labour exchanges, published a 67-page, quasi-ethnographic account of labour exchanges and their effects on different types of unemployed subjects (Lasker 1916). Lasker does not tell us why the US Department of Labor was interested in understanding the British labour exchange system. Lasker had collected the information needed for his report during 1901 and 1914 when he resided in the UK. Together with B. Seeböhm Rowntree, a UK-based sociologist, he researched poverty and unemployment in England (Rowntree and Lasker 1909) and also worked for the social reform movement, closely collaborating with David Lloyd-George who, after Lasker's departure in 1914, became the UK's prime minister.

Lasker explains that networks of official surveillance allowed the identification of applicants of "good character, skill and sound working habits" in whose capable hands work should be concentrated, facilitating the elimination of the less efficient. Separate registration offices were provided for men, women, boys, and girls. Men's sections were further subdivided into separate rooms for artisan or casual labourers. This allowed a separation between the respectable skilled workers and the unskilled and less respected workers. Historian of the British welfare state Dias-Abey (2021) argues that the category of casual workers is racialised as well as moralised, consisting often of Black workers from the colonies, although this distinction does not appear in Lasker's report. While Black workers were not excluded from access to labour exchange services, this racialised distinction between deserving and non-deserving, able and non-able workers had effects not just for the types of jobs Black individuals were matched to (often precarious, seasonal, labour-intensive work places), but also on their prioritisations or non-prioritisations in waiting lists.

While Parsons' vocational guidance methods were circulating in the UK at the beginning of the twentieth century, Lasker's report does not mention counselling as pertaining to the work that labour exchanges were expected to do. Unlike the workhouses, where people were subjected to different techniques of discipline and regulation, labor exchanges did not have any educational function. This does not mean that vocational counselling did not exist in Britain – counselling was widely used in the state school system, which collaborated closely with the juvenile section of the labour exchanges and was meant to prepare young people's transition to work. This affected mainly White children from economically self-sufficient families, since children from poor and migrant backgrounds were sent to work despite education being compulsory for all children in the UK (Heginbotham 1951).

In the 1970s, labour exchanges began to be replaced by so-called job centres. Labour exchanges had been criticised by experts as inappropriate institutions for the management of poverty and labour. For some, they risked becoming a permanent club for the unemployed and fertile ground for vagrancy and immoral

behaviour. Bristow (2014) explains that the long waiting lines and waiting rooms established for those unskilled workers were seen as a space where bums and vagabonds conspire against the social order. The exchanges were also criticised by unemployed people themselves, who considered them to be spaces of stigma and social exclusion because of their physical location in urban centres and their societal connection to moral suspicion and laziness.

This moral panic emerging around labour exchanges was classed and raced. We know from Super's counselling work that, from the late 1950s on, labour exchanges were increasingly used not only by poor, casual workers, but also by members of a more educated, white middle class. This co-presence within the spaces of the labour exchanges of two classes and two races of workers, who were understood as two morally distinct groups of people, triggered the need to ensure that these institutions would be made secure for this new clientele. The rebranding of exchanges into job centres was accompanied by an architectural transformation whose implications were more than just aesthetic, described by those in charge of the rebranding as casual (Bristow 2014). As Bourdieu (1979) explains, class is also an aesthetic practice that requires constant reenactment and recognition. The aesthetic reframing of labour exchanges responded to these new unemployed workers' desires for the maintenance of their status as white, middle-class men in a time of professional transition and personal insecurity.

Catering to the classed demands of this new group of workers was not the only reason for the architectural transformation of these spaces. The Merseyside ESA Area Report (1977), commissioned by the UK government to propose changes to the functioning of job centres, explained that different special arrangements and the positioning of boards had to stimulate workers' curiosity and encourage searching beyond their routine job preferences. Through these spatial rearrangements, (some) workers were encouraged to be more flexible, autonomous, but also more mature in their choices. Echoing how Super's vision of occupational happiness intersected with the adoption of a moralised, classed and racialised sense of self, this moralised understanding of the self-seemed to coincide with the classed way the new jobs centres were conceptualised and rearranged by their planners.

Spatial rearrangement was accompanied by a change in function. The new job centres were explicitly conceptualised not only as facilitating the flow of labour market information, but in a new role, as institutions where benefits were distributed or withheld. While accessing benefits from the UK welfare state was seen as a universal right of all those born in the UK, in a British colony or an independent Commonwealth state, historians of welfare Paidipaty and Ramos Pinto (2021) argue that full access to the labour market and to the benefits of the welfare state was not in practice universally granted to women, racial minorities,

guest workers, or immigrants. Like labour exchanges, job centres' capacity to divide the deserving from the undeserving workers served and legitimised the exclusion of entire groups of unemployed workers from access to state benefit and support (Tilley and Shiliam 2018).

One effect of this classed, gendered, and racialised distinction between the deserving and non-deserving unemployed was the unequal offer of counselling services. The rebranding of labour exchanges into job centres did not lead to a large-scale implementation of counselling services from the 1970s on, so counselling became a service maintaining the distinction between two groups of workers. If racial minorities and migrant workers were automatically directed to low pay and low-skilled jobs, vocational guidance appeared as a practice to serve the professional transition of middle-class white men only. This unequal distribution of resources was legitimised by the very nature of the developmental models of vocational guidance which circulated in those decades. As a reminder, in Super's developmental model counsellors no longer decided "which job" would be right for a client, but rather assisted workers in making up their own minds (Roberts 1977). This freedom to decide one's own professional trajectory was a luxury which was unequally allocated, and this not only because the working class and ethnic minorities (and some women) were not seen as needing support, but because they were seen as intellectually inferior subjects, for whom occupational happiness did not depend on career progression or the counselling techniques serving these progressions (Dias-Abey 2021).

These transformations of the institutional apparatus put in place by the UK government to transform unemployed subjects into happy workers has accelerated in the last three decades. While services are moving online and becoming automated, a rebranded Jobcentre Plus has built partnerships with an industry of external service providers – like Connections – that work with state actors in managing unemployment and unemployed workers. Collaboration with external actors is linked to a logic of individualisation. Since the early 2000s, job centres provide person-centric, tailored support that adapts guiding measures implemented to the specific needs of each unemployed subject. The new Jobcentre Plus moves away from a standardised model of management which draws on match-making processes and a social benefits system, towards a set of flexible activities and services that are organised around the possibilities and challenges faced by each individual subject. This included the extension of counselling services to all categories of unemployed workers, not only white, middle-class men. This also meant the reliance on all sorts of other counselling practices that, like the anger management training at Connections, draw on bodies of expertise that are at least partially external to the field of vocational counselling and that are brought into the sphere of employability by external service providers collaborating with the state-funded

Jobcentres Plus. This does not imply that counselling today has become an emancipatory practice producing a happy future working self. Instead, counselling keeps playing a crucial role in maintaining the distinctions between groups of workers and managing unemployed workers' affect.

The job centre's recent personalised support is provided through a work coach delivery model introduced in the report *The Future of Jobcentre Plus* (Department of Work and Pensions 2016). This model requires workers to make a claim and initiate contact with work counsellors through a hybrid system involving face-to-face and digital contact. Coaching uses "outcome-focused interviewing techniques" and focuses on guidance, job search, and training, but also on personal circumstances, emotions, and barriers to employment. Once personal barriers are identified, the work coach can arrange in-house and external support depending on individual needs. The same report also clarifies, "Work Coaches are customer-focused, dedicated individuals and able to deliver exceptional service with empathy and compassion to people who need their support."

This insistence on the caring work of counsellors should not obscure that job centres are spaces of policing, a place where people were required to go regularly to be corrected, disciplined, and shaped into new subjects in part through the counselling techniques described in the previous section. While Parsons', Super's, and Savickas' models inform, at least partially, counsellors' daily activities, Wong (2017), Gao (2019) and Wightwick (2021) – who have all contributed to my ethnography of London's employability apparatus between 2017 and 2021 – argue that counselling differs according to whom this practice is targeting. For many middle-class workers, counselling, including the type of reflexive register or narrative of emotions that they are asked to produce, is meant to allow them to keep reimagining themselves and adapt to the changing opportunities in a fluctuating and unstable labour market. For others, counselling is an extension of the job centres' role as an institution of control. It is part of the discipline apparatus that traces their efforts and activities, from checkups to CCTV cameras. Occupational happiness is not a transition to more ambitious and prestigious occupations, but a technique helping them monitor their behaviour and feelings in undervalued labour. It is not meant to imagine and enact new forms of conduct, instead it is a technique of surveillance of their conduct. It is a means of managing and regulating their anger, frustrations, and hopelessness, a means of accepting their place in a precarious labour market.

The question that remains is the disciplinary effects that counselling has (or not) on workers, and their capacity and willingness to engage in reflection, analysis, and a narrative of emotions, that is, reflexive registers.

4 Conclusion

At the end of the anger management workshop, Vivian and I were left with questions – especially about Jamal and Goran, who quit the program after the first day. This was striking for us, since – while visibly uncomfortable with the input given by Marc and Tania – both of them had been engaged in the previous sessions offered by Natasha. We met them in an East London pub to get their perspective on the employability program, especially the anger management workshop. After getting beers, Vivian asked why they had left the program. Jamal and Goran looked at each other and burst into laughter. Vivian and I laughed as well, without really knowing why. We both felt it was the right thing to do. After a first moment of awkwardness, I asked again. Goran kept laughing, but then explained that he hadn't found the anger management workshop useful. "It was a waste of time," Jamal clarified. "Why all this emotional bla bla bla?" he asked. "Why do I need to learn how to control my breath? My feelings? My thoughts?" he insisted. And Goran added, "Why am I not allowed to say that I am angry? Why do I need to change the way I speak? To please whom?" I tried to keep nodding to signal my agreement with what they were saying, when Jamal added, "This feminised behaviour, this constant speaking about my feelings, won't give me a job." "What I need is someone helping me with my CV and letters of motivation, and I need someone giving me work." Goran nodded, "We just need to work, to pay our bills, we don't need a psychiatrist, nor a yoga class." Goran had just finished his sentence when Jamal exclaimed, "Do they send us to anger management class because they know that they have no jobs for us?" None of us was laughing anymore.

In this article, I have argued that throughout history reflexive registers are both the effect of a normalised assumption – informed and authorised by influential theories of vocational guidance – about what a good person is, as well as a communicative tool guiding and disciplining their selves, their language and affective interiority. What becomes clear in the short vignette offered in this conclusion is that this form of managing workers' affect does not always stick, it gets contested and sometimes even rejected. While many participants in the anger management workshop did find the training useful to manage their sense of insecurity and learn to express their feelings – at least this is what they told us when we interviewed them after the workshop – for Jamal and Goran the workshop was perceived as a form of affective alienation, an attempt to transform them, to socialise them in what they called a feminised behaviour (we would add a new form of middle-class masculinity), which they did not consider in alignment with how they saw themselves. Both Goran and Jamal clearly rejected the idea that their exclusion from the labour market was caused by their behaviour, and their ability

or non-ability to manage and express their feelings. They rejected the idea that managing their affect could be a way out of their situation of uncertainty – what they needed is a job. Of course, quitting the employability program had consequences both for Jamal and Goran, since their job seeker allowance was directly linked to their willingness to engage with the training activities their coach at the job centres plus had identified for them. We heard later from Natasha that both their allowances had been cut for a month, as a form of punishment for their refusal to continue the training program.

While their rejection of this register had monetary consequences, it also complexifies our understanding of the form of power and control that reflexive registers vehiculate. As technologies of power and the self – those which serve the exertion of power and the constitution of the self – the operations of governance that they exert remain dependent on the subject's willingness to internalise and enact them. This practice of uptake and reproduction of larger formations of governmental power can therefore not be taken for granted but is always contingent on the room for manoeuvre available to individuals like Jamal and Goran. Both of them were aware of the consequences that their interruption would have for them, they had been long enough on the job allowance system to know its punishing potential, what they were allowed to do and what not. What we can learn from Jamal and Goran is that, as technologies of governance, reflexive registers are a powerful, but also indeterminate, incomplete form of regulation and discipline. One that imposes control through affect, while at the same time leaving the space for people to challenge governmental power and allowing affect to guide them towards alternative forms of behaviour, which may or may not be more aligned with the ways these people see themselves and the social worlds surrounding them.

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