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Modernizing Moments: Work, Organizations and the Entrepreneurial Self

Women's work is positioned rather ambiguously in contemporary narratives of the transformations of economy, work and organizations. As I argued in the previous chapter, second-wave feminism opened up new ways of 'doing' politics and policy as well as bringing new issues into the policy domain. As such it forms a significant element of the narratives of modernity and the emergence of a new 'spirit' of capitalism that transformed organizations and their management:

Hailing from leftism, and especially the self-management movement, they ['neo-managerialists'] stress the continuity between the commitments of their youth and activities that they pursued in firms, following the political turning point of 1983, with a view to making working conditions appealing, improving productivity, developing quality and increasing profits. Thus, for example, the qualities that are guarantees of success in this new spirit – autonomy, spontaneity, rhizomorphous capacity, multitasking (in contrast to the narrow specialisation of the old division of labour), conviviality, openness to others and novelty, availability, creativity, visionary intuition, sensitivity to difference, listening to lived experience and receptiveness to a whole range of experiences, being attracted to informality and the search for interpersonal contacts, these are taken directly from the spirit of May 1968. (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 97)

This list of skills and capacities is remarkably similar to those valued by the women I interviewed. Furthermore, the 'spaces of power' I described in the previous chapter might be viewed as characteristic of the institutional transformations linked to the 'new spirit' that Boltanski and Chiapello depict. This is one version of a series of grand narratives that link feminism to the emergence of new political, economic and social orderings of power. Second-wave feminism has been implicated in the shift to 'reflexive modernity', by helping to challenge tradition and by constituting the flexible, reflexive subjects required by modern forms of capitalism. It enabled development agencies to turn to women as the bearers of responsibility for economic development in the global south, leading to a plethora of women's 'empowerment' and development programmes (Cruikshank 1999). Feminism, in short, was 'seduced' by capitalism into providing the resources for the further exploitation of women (Eisenstein 2009).

However, such narratives flatten complexity. ‘Past’ and ‘present’, ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ are depicted as singular entities that neatly succeed each other rather than being co-present. This leads to a number of difficulties. First, modernity is depicted as a period rather than, as Marcus argues, an ethos (Rainbow and Marcus 2008). Second, such narratives hide differences of class and race (the work of most women, even in the global north, is not particularly ‘reflexive’ and they have little chance to be creative). Third, they mask differences of place, assuming that the rationalities associated with a mythical cosmopolitan centre represent the new norm: differences are merely a question of evolutionary time lags or perhaps stubborn refusals of some places to become modern. But, more importantly in the context of this book, they blame women for their own exploitation, erasing the struggles for social justice in which they have engaged; or suggesting that their radical critiques of capitalism were ‘placed in the service of forces whose destruction they were intended to hasten’ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 97). This chapter sets out to offer a more nuanced account, highlighting the ambiguities that arose as women’s labour generated new organizational forms and new ways of organizing.

The chapter moves through a series of ‘modernizing moments’. The first section, ‘Challenging “tradition”’, focuses on the lives of two women who, in very different ways, became the markers of modernity-to-come in the early 1960s. ‘Challenging professions’ takes us to the 1970s and early 1980s and the ways in which some professions responded to social movement, class-based, community and ‘multicultural’ challenges. ‘In and against the (local) state’ depicts women entering local government in the 1980s, bringing their socialist feminist commitments into the difficult work of contracting-out services. ‘New managerial times’ shows women taking up new spaces of organizational and managerial power, and ‘Entrepreneurial selves’ traces the experience of women crafting their own – often fragmented and precarious – working lives.

This temporal sequence is designed to situate the account of each ‘modernizing moment’ in its political, economic and governmental context rather than to tell a linear history. This is not, then, a story of a shift from Fordist to post-Fordist or from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic organizational forms (see Lash and Urry 1987). Nor is it a complete story: the rise of the ‘managerial state’ in the twentieth century and of the transformations of public services in the twenty-first have been told elsewhere (Clarke and Newman 1997; Newman and Clarke 2009). Similarly I have not attempted to retell other gendered histories, whether of discrimination in the workplace (Coyle and Skinner 1988; Cockburn 1991), of women’s place in ‘culture change’ programmes (Itzin and Newman 1995), in management (Kerfoot and Knight 2004; Maddock 1999; Marshall 1984; Marshall 1995; Newman 1994), in the professions (Barry, Dent and O’Niell 2003) or of shifts in patterns of women’s economic activity (Molloy and Lerner 2010; McDowell 2009; Mac an Ghiall and Haywood 2007; Walby 2009; and

others). Rather, my aim is to offer a series of episodes or snapshots – moments that capture something of specific processes of change at particular times. And the story I tell is in part my own story. I have inserted myself into the account at various points, though like many other women my story has spanned transformations of work in ‘community’ and ‘policy’ as well as in organizations. The spaces in which we worked, responding to different cycles of reform and reorganization while also engaging in what we hoped were transformational projects of our own were, as I will show, not necessarily comfortable spaces. But they have nevertheless to be viewed as ambiguous spaces of power from which challenges to dominant orthodoxies could be voiced.

Challenging ‘tradition’

Here I recount the experiences of two very different women, both born in the 1930s, and thus the ‘oldest’ of the participants in this study (from generational cohort 1). Neither was born in Britain and both are somewhat famous. The organizations in which they found themselves early in their working lives in Britain – the Civil Service and the broadcast media – were exclusionary, hierarchical, male-dominated and predominantly white, untouched by the equalities legislation to come.

Dame Steve Shirley entered the UK from Germany in 1939 as an unaccompanied child refugee. She joined the Civil Service because she thought it would provide stability after her damaged childhood but also because in her family *‘that’s what you did, you worked for the benefit of the public’*. Her first boss was a *‘bully and a sexist’* and *‘things were very tough’*. She spoke of how women were on different pay scales to men, and of the barriers to women’s promotion and advancement: *‘It really was a different world, and some of it I think led me to really battle for the empowerment of women, but also the empowerment of any minority.’* She began developing software for the fast-growing computing industry, and *‘suddenly found that outside the Civil Service my salary doubled’*. In 1952 she set up her own company – F-International – employing a women only workforce:

A service company is nothing but its people, and I was recruiting from that 51 per cent of the potential workforce that nobody else was offering anything to, so I was getting the cream of that and the calibre of my colleagues was really incredibly high. It was a crusade rather than a money-making thing. At one point I had in fact investigated whether to run it as a charity. So we had a high quality, very high motivation and after a few years decent management. We had six women on the Board, when nobody else was having women at all, so we were breaking through.
(Steve Shirley)

The main issue I want to pull out of this account is the construction of ‘spaces of possibility’ for women trapped by the maternalist ethos of 1950s

Britain: women who, in Dame Shirley's terms, were 'wasted talent' and who needed new opportunities for themselves and whose 'flexible labour' could benefit the company. The setting up of F-International might be viewed as prefiguring the later shift from an industrial to a service economy in Britain, as well as the emergence of employee share ownership. But the company was also prefigurative in a different sense: while Dame Shirley did not claim the term 'feminist', there was an implicit valorization of women's management practice that predated the 1980s debates about 'women in management' and the corporate benefits to be gained from women's leadership styles. In the early years she fought against the image of F-International as a 'women's company' in case this became a competitive disadvantage, but then decided that her success in building it could serve as a role model for other women.

There are other features of this account to which I will return, but before doing so I want to introduce a second woman of this generation – Beverley Anderson. She was born in Jamaica, went to study in the United States and then joined the Jamaican Foreign Service (in 1963) because '*I wanted to understand how political decisions were made.*' She later served in the Jamaican Embassy in Washington where, as the only woman, her posting caused resentment among male colleagues. She arrived in England to train to be a teacher, and came to visibility as one of the first Black women local government councillors. She was invited to appear on a series of short TV programmes from which she went on to host the Channel 4 series, 'Black on Black':

'Black on Black' became a sort of success, and most of the children on my council estate then were white, and they got to stay up till 11.00 at night to watch it, and of course next morning back at school walking up the corridor the caretaker said, 'The toilets are flooded', and we deal with school again. For me this was a really healthy mix because most of my time I was doing something that I thought was worthwhile. I always had mixed feelings about broadcasting, and therefore it was very nice for me to get back to blocked up toilets. (Beverley Anderson)

There is ambivalence about 'holding' power here – Beverley decided not to continue as a diplomat or as a high profile face in the media. The emotional resonances that ran through the interview all concerned issues of access and empowerment through education:

I did a lot of interesting things, and many of them were about gender and race, but you know the thing that excites me most is education. As a Head Teacher I felt that I could use my authority to share it with people who didn't feel that they had a right to any power, were afraid of power, didn't understand how useful they could be as partners in power, and it's all true [she laughs]. (Beverley Anderson)

She then went on to work at both local and national levels on opening out access to higher education and served on a number of boards (the Arts Council,

The British Film Institute, the Oxford Stage Company) as well as becoming Chief Executive of the Book Trust:

I was seen as a grey-haired Black woman and I used to call myself a threefor... They get three for one, they get the grey hair, they get the woman and they get the brown skin, so there's absolutely no question that in some of the things I was asked to do, I knew they were asking me because of the colour of my skin. And I thought, 'Well lucky them, they actually get somebody intelligent as well, I will do it.' (Beverley Anderson)

Both women moved out of 'blocked' hierarchical organizations (the UK Civil Service, the Jamaican Foreign Service) and constructed their own life projects – projects that linked personal commitments and public action. Both created spaces of possibility for others – whether the women employees of F-International, the pupils of inner London schools, the young people supported by the charities that Steve Shirley went on to found or the cultural openings in the established artworld opened up by Beverley Anderson.

These accounts also demonstrate something of the exclusionary and oppressive qualities of traditional organizations characterized by hierarchy, patriarchy and whiteness. Both women rejected the institutions that they saw constraining them, choosing to move on to other forms of influence. Of course, both were privileged, well-educated women who were affluent enough to be able to make such choices. Less visible is the work of those stuck in organizations with entrenched gendered and racialized divisions and in highly exploitative forms of labour. But the accounts suggest some of the ways in which these began to be broken down, whether by creating alternatives such as F-International, by changing them through 'presence' (being a Black woman in a white media), through 'empowerment' (challenging the hierarchies entrenched in professional expertise) or through the development of other women as leaders, managers and members of governing bodies. The accounts, then, can be situated in a politics of access and inclusion that sought to overcome gender segregation and inequality in the workplace. Despite the efforts of women working on campaigns for gender equality traced in Chapter 4, we might argue, with Boltanski and Chiapello, that (male) hierarchy only began to be seriously challenged as organizations came to valorize new, more flexible and responsive ways of working and thus opened up spaces of possibility for women, or to value 'diversity' as an organizational asset. We can also see the symbolic capital that both female and Black leaders offered to organizations seeking to open up new markets and appeal to new audiences and customer groups. But these are rather functionalist readings that overlook the agency of women trying to open up new spaces of possibility for others. They also overlook the specificity of the ways in which 'pre-modern' orderings of hierarchy, patriarchy, whiteness and 'modern' rationalities are articulated in particular spaces at specific moments; and how the tensions and contradictions are lived and managed – or not.

Challenging professions

The story of the role of professions in the political and cultural transformations of the 1970s has focused extensively on radical social work (Lavalette 2011). This had its own forty-year celebration in 2010 and its political trajectories, divisions and contradictions closely paralleled those of the second-wave women's movement. Radical movements within medicine, schooling, planning and other professions also emerged, alongside a series of 'new' professions and professional identities. But I want to focus here on librarianship, arguably less radical, not only because it evokes my own history but also since it brings into view the difficulties faced by cultural institutions – public broadcasting, museums and galleries, including the television companies that employed Beverley Anderson – as they attempted to respond to social and cultural differentiation while struggling for survival in a shifting policy and spatial landscape (Barnett 2003; Morley and Robbins 1995). Librarianship, along with teaching, nursing, health visiting, social work and other occupations opened up significant 'spaces of opportunity' for women. These were, of course, subordinate professions – law and medicine remained predominantly male enclaves of power until much later. But these female-dominated professions also enabled many women to bring social movement and other political commitments into their working lives.

In 1962, at the age of seventeen, I began work as a library assistant in my local branch library. Apolitical and relatively uneducated I entered an organizational world of professional and bureaucratic hierarchy, much as in the Civil Service of Steve Shirley's day. Although a predominantly female profession, men were at the top, holding both professional posts in the branch and with a solidly male hierarchy of supervisors, inspectors and chiefs above them; women assistants were the bottom, with women cleaners somehow falling into a kind of underclass. I remained in this clerical role for some years before studying for a qualification and gaining a political education on the way. The service I re-entered in the early 1970s was ripe for change as the cultural, social and political transformations of the day began to bite, making me feel – rather arrogantly – that most of what we did 'at work', serving an old, exhausted culture, was pretty irrelevant.

In the 1970s and 1980s I became part of new groupings of children's librarians and community librarians then on the edge of the profession. As we began to engage in 'outreach' activities in order to reach non-traditional library users, we inevitably came into contact with very different publics and attempted to carry their voices back into the centre. I – and colleagues who I later went back to interview – remembered the personal impact of taking services into the local mosque, of reading stories to children on a glass-strewn playground in a rundown council estate, of giving talks about books to groups of teenage mothers in a family centre, of trying to develop a service to support community

action groups and a local immigration advice centre, of developing Black studies collections and projects at the time of the inner-city racial disturbances in Birmingham. Each served as a fast and sometimes brutal form of political education. And each produced more dynamic and contested conceptions of the public that challenged professional assumptions of universality, neutrality and openness of the public library's role (Newman 2006).

Commenting on the changes taking place in some parts of the service in the 1970s and early 1980s, one of my former colleagues reflected that much of what happened would now be considered patronizing, but it marked a key stage in our evolution as cultural critics of the mainstream service and our attempts to model different forms of professional practice that prefigured notions of the 'coproduction' of knowledge (see Chapter 6). We also engaged with the turn to 'partnership' and 'participative' styles of governing discussed in Chapter 4, working with family centres, Community Development Programmes, 'free' schools, youth organizations, education authorities, health clinics, play schemes, prisons and other agencies. But such projects were limited; we were also symbols of what came to be viewed as 'progressive' practices and left-wing political projects that became targets for the New Right politics to come.¹

In and against the (local) state

The spaces of power described in the previous section were spaces opened up by the profound cultural and social shifts of the period; shifts that fractured the post-war social, political and organizational settlements. A decade later, however, the British welfare state had become the target of New Right vilification and the focus of Thatcher's modernizing reforms (Clarke and Newman 1997). My focus now turns to the forging of connections between the class politics that intensified in the 1980s and the changing organizational logics of local government as it became subject to legislation requiring local authorities to submit much of their manual workforce, including school cleaners and caterers, to compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). Jane Foot, who appeared as a 'community entrepreneur' in Chapter 3, became a local government worker in the 1980s as she sought to bring her socialist feminist politics to the defence of low paid (predominantly female) workers. She drew on her experience of working in a trade union-funded resource centre in which:

We did lots of things about improving services in order to make them more defensible through CCT. So I did a big piece of work with Sheffield school cleaners and school caterers – sort of to work with them to improve the services before they had to be put out to tender. That was interesting, there were big campaigns about school meals, with linked stuff about nutritional issues – this was often the only hot meal kids would have. That was a perfect piece of socialist feminist work, really. And Jamie Oliver has proved us right! [She laughs.] (Jane Foot)

But the trade union resource centre wasn't sustainable financially and eventually she moved from campaigning from the outside to managing the CCT process within a local authority.

Loads of us went from those trade union resource centres, law centres, SCAT, into local government, either at the GLC or Labour-controlled councils. There was no local government profession for CCT, it was a completely feminist- and women-dominated area of local government. And I still have dinner with them all twenty years on. Some of them went on to become directors of DSOs [Direct Service Organizations, in-house contractors], and some became the first women local authority Chief Executives. (Jane Foot)

Ursula Murray was one of the other women mentioned by Jane and her account is very similar. Before joining local government she had worked on school meals projects that aimed to revalue women's skills in the context of 'early noises' about privatization:

The Tories had got rid of nutritional standards in school meals, and we wanted to do something. We worked from a socialist feminist perspective, working with working-class women on a women's employment project. But by 1986 there was a sense of dismay – there was a feeling that change had been possible in the era of political funding and sponsorship [for campaigning organizations], now it was all about income generation.

So I got a job as team leader of a public services team whose task was to 'roll back the frontiers of the private sector' in order to extend the public and voluntary sectors. But this only lasted two weeks: then Labour lost the [local] election and the task changed to preparing the council for CCT. Nothing had been done, apart from a working party opposed to privatization. There had been no attention to CCT by the Chief Executive, but thousands of women's jobs depended on it. That was my job for the next ten years. The brief was to keep us legal while defending the council and council jobs from privatization. (Ursula Murray)

I asked Jane and Ursula whether the move into local government was opportunistic, with jobs opening up as the organizations that had previously supported them had their funding cut, but both saw it as a collective intervention:

In my view – you were challenging the state, this was the time of 'in and against the state', but also you had to defend it. This was in the period after the miners' strike, the abolition of the GLC, so local authorities were then at the front line. It was not that you sought the job but you were drawn or pushed into it out of a sense of duty. (Ursula Murray)

I think we thought we would change the world. This was all the 'in and against the state' stuff. That group was very influential. (Jane Foot)

I also asked them to describe something of their work. Jane responded:

I think we thought we could go in, we could help councillors resist [CCT], and the lessons from SCAT and the work in Sheffield was that we could win. In my time in Camden we never lost a contract. We kept a lot of those services in house, and

we did improve them. There was a lot of ducking and diving going on. But there's a theme about relating, I think – between those who need the services and those who provide them. And both are very often women. Local government tends to forget that a lot of its staff are also its users. All that stuff about the client-contractor split and the provider focus – some of that is absolutely justified, some of what went on was completely scandalous. But we really threw out the baby with the bathwater in a big way. (Jane Foot)

I want to pull several things out of these accounts. The first is the ways in which changing political contexts – here Thatcherism and the 'contracting out' imperatives on local government – opened up new policy and management spaces for women. There were, as Jane notes, no existing staff with the skills and experience to undertake this work. But, second, it was the political commitment to working-class women, and prior experience of campaigns on women's work, that led both women to 'move in' to such roles. As such campaigning and activism became ambiguously aligned with state practice, with women engaged in extensive 'border work' roles as they linked inside-outside identities and forms of action (see Chapter 7). Third, the extracts point to contradictions in the process of public service reform. CCT was in part designed to challenge entrenched practices, especially in male manual work, and to disrupt the alliances between male-dominated trade unions and male councillors that at the time were, in Jane's words, '*completely scandalous*'. The role of the women who came into local government, bringing their socialist feminist commitments with them, was not, then, simply to defend the status quo. But the unravelling of entrenched and often corrupt practices through new competitive practices '*threw the baby out with the bathwater*', opening the way for successive rounds of market-making and the entry of multinational companies into public service provision.

The final point is the emphasis from both participants on the collective nature of their interventions and the power flowing from the solidarities this generated:

The old girls network was very powerful in local government. The CCT girls' network was very influential; we were given a lot of respect. We still meet, still have dinner sometimes. There was a similar network in regeneration and in personnel management. (Jane Foot)

Women played key roles in all of this – there were a lot of women involved in key positions at that time. When you came in you recruited people, you had to spot, grow, fast-track people. All of us had come out of the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector equipped us to be light on our feet, and we had learned how to pull people together. In the work around school meals it was all about working collaboratively. The women's employment project – we still keep in touch. And there's still a bond between the women in local government who shared the experience of CCT. It was very heavy stuff. How did we live the risk? Always being on the end of legality. In terms of survival, what really mattered was a sense of collectivity. It was deeply shared. (Ursula Murray)

The spaces of possibility occupied by Jane, Ursula and others were characteristic of the Labour-controlled local authorities who saw themselves as in opposition to the Conservative governments of the day. But the skills developed in this period by women working ‘in and against the state’ helped equip them to take on later roles as consultants, members of think-tanks and workers on development projects. Some, including Ursula, began taking on research roles and later moved into post-experience teaching. Others, like Jane, were well-placed to participate effectively in Blair’s ‘joined up government’ agenda. But both opened up spaces that younger women came to occupy – including the many women who took up management roles in local government and the wider public sector from the mid-1980s.

New managerial times

After 1992, and the local elections, there was a change of Chief Executive. New Labour had come in. It was like a tap that had been turned off but you hadn’t known it had been there. Previously there had been political people meeting all over the place. Suddenly it was all new public management. (Ursula Murray)

The processes of public sector reform in which Ursula and others found themselves were linked to what John Clarke and I termed the rise of the ‘Managerial State’ (Clarke and Newman 1997). Just as women were gaining a foothold on organizational power bases, it seemed, so power was being dispersed, managerialized and made subject to an array of competitive and performance pressures. Writing about the new managerial order, Höpfl noted the evangelical qualities of the discourse that was designed to challenge the ‘established church’ of traditional management (Höpfl 1992). New managerial and leadership orders in which women participated helped challenge the old church of tradition and hierarchy, moving from an emphasis on compliance to a search for commitment through the use of ‘soft power’.

There are no easy generalizations to be made about the experience of women taking on managerial work. Managerial images of the 1980s and 1990s centred on the heroic business leader able to cut through defensive practices to render organizations ‘lean and mean’, fit for the global marketplace of health and other ‘public’ commodities. Some commentators have argued that women brought something rather different. Sue Maddock, for example, describes the new generation of women managers who had been politicized in the 1970s and seasoned in management in the 1980s as bringing ‘post command, post market and post modern’ approach (Maddock 1999: 219). However, there were considerable differences of approach and style among the women I interviewed, and they occupied very different spaces of power. Those who had come through professional hierarchies were able to extend

the reach of their influence in ‘hybrid’ professional/managerial roles in which different forms of authority and expertise were – often uncomfortably – aligned. Some of those who had worked in ‘support’ professions such as personnel or accounting moved into more powerful roles as they were drawn into the corporate centre, though on the edge of what continued to be club-like decision-making networks. Women who had been stuck on the low rungs of ossified bureaucratic or professional career ladders could find themselves becoming ‘business managers’ of devolved service-delivery units, with all of the tensions this generated. Some, including many involved in CCT, moved from community-based or non-governmental activism into relatively powerful policy positions from which many stepped into chief executive posts. But others moved out of the public sector to take up roles as entrepreneurs providing services under contract as a result of the introduction of purchaser-provider splits and marketization. Some applied new managerial methods to voluntary organizations. Others became consultants, trainers and developers, offering services to organizations relentlessly searching for new skills and assets.

The new spaces of organizational and managerial power opened up to women were, then, paradoxical spaces that were inhabited by different women in different ways. Management was understood as both a paradigm that needed to be challenged (because of its instrumental, technocratic process) and also as a means of bringing about what was perceived to be needed reform. Sue Richards (G2) recalled how:

The Civil Service was viewed by Thatcher as an irresistible force, an immovable object. And I was right in the middle of it, in this club like, closed institution. From what I was observing I felt that we desperately needed change to the Civil Service, and she [Margaret Thatcher] was going to bring it. But I also felt that you could want that radical change but not for her purposes. Her sort of hatred of bureaucrats fuelled her commitment to policies to change them. I do think that had a huge impact – there are still echoes of that earlier past there, still very much in place. It's this that made me aware of the relevance of having someone who understands the machinery of the state, but is committed to different critical agendas, broadly socialist labour, whatever. And so it kind of began to feel like that was my contribution in life professionally, and it has shaped how I have put together the different routes, in different circumstances.
(Sue Richards)

This nicely captures the paradoxes of the period. The pre-managerial, bureaucratic, inflexible and often unresponsive public sector was a focus of change projects – in the spirit of ‘in and against the state’ – by many of the participants I interviewed. But when the changes introduced by Thatcher came along we were tempted to say, with Carole Harte in Chapter 3, ‘Ah, but we didn’t mean *that*.’

The managerial imperative rapidly spread from government to the voluntary sector. Naomi Eisenstadt describes her role in transforming one voluntary

organization – the Family Service Unit – into an organization that prefigured New Labour's style and approach, before her subsequent move to Sure Start:

Interestingly enough the organization was most powerful in Old Labour strongholds. It had had a very radical beginning – it was originally the Pacifist Service Unit set up by people who had been conscientious objectors during the war. But my impression was that the people doing the work needed the organization as much as the people who they were serving needed it. And that culture permeated the organization, and I wanted to stress the needs of the people who we were serving, not the needs of the people working there. People were fantastic, people did amazing work but there was no managerial structure. We paid someone to be our union rep, and we had 300 staff and didn't have an HR person, so it was classically old Labour. The fundamental fieldwork was amazing, the management structure was not. And really I came in as a Tony Blair to make it New Labour basically. (Naomi Eisenstadt)

Such reforms were those that closed some of the spaces of power for the women cited in the previous section; as Ursula Murray commented, the introduction of a New Labour culture into an 'old' Labour leaning local authority was 'like a [political] tap had been turned off'. And managerialism was key to the 'professionalization' of many voluntary bodies. Stella Semino had worked as a social worker for another left-leaning local authority – Lambeth – during the 1980s while also doing volunteer work for the Migrants Resource Centre in Victoria. After she left her social service job she was invited on to the Migrants Resource Centre's Management Committee. But:

The organizational circumstances were awful. The building – passed over from the GLC – was derelict; they had huge debts to the Inland Revenue. Then most of the staff left. So I invited a group of friends to work on restarting the centre. This was very successful, I'm so proud. (Stella Semino)

She became a part-time volunteer again, but later the organization started to professionalize:

We had to get funds to cope with the needs of the building and to meet our debts. But constraints came with funding – we had to do things we didn't necessarily want to do. Now the organization is a service provider not a community organization any more. We give advice and do a lot of public relations. The people on the management committee are now professionals, not people who are volunteers. And the organization doesn't really consult with volunteers anymore. (Stella Semino)

These two experiences – those of Naomi and Stella – can perhaps be understood as mirror images of the impact of managerialization on voluntary and civil society groups at different 'modernizing moments'.

Managerialism was not the invention of New Labour, of course – *The Managerial State* (Clarke and Newman 1997) addressed the reforms of the Reagan/Thatcher years. But managerialism certainly intensified under the 'modernizing' programmes of the Blair governments. Public management became a contested terrain as modernizing pressures collided with ideas

about how a reformed management could be used to deliver ‘progressive’ organizational and public goals. This was the ethos of the management development and MBA programmes I worked on during the 1990s from a base in a School of Public Policy at Birmingham University; such programmes were proliferating at the time as professionals sought managerial qualifications, but also as those squeezed by and critical of the impact of managerialism and privatization in the public sector searched for alternative paradigms. As Sue Richards, a colleague of that time, explained:

I have been driven by the idea that public management could be more than the tool of the New Right. I've always felt very ambivalent about the term 'new public management', because that was a stereotype, an impoverished version of what actually was happening. The strands of it, the elements that I thought were important, remained submerged. (Sue Richards)

I asked Sue what were her submerged strands:

Well, some of it is to do with the people who work in the organization being treated as human beings and finding fulfilment and self-actualization and so on, rather than being characterized as wasteful bureaucrats, so there's that side of it, but it's more a kind of innovative focus, I think. I go back to my own earliest roots and the story I told you about my dad, and how he felt and what he became. The sense of so much wasted talent, and so little self-actualization and so much pain and drudgery, and how it need not be like that ... it is about a degree of control I think. (Sue Richards)

I wondered whether she thought that public services could do that:

Yeah, I think so and I think that would be important for it to be able to generate that kind of wellbeing with people. Public servants should be driven by those ideas, along with stuff about serving the public. (Sue Richards)

Adi Cooper, at the time of the interview a strategic director in local government, described how she ‘*went in at the bottom*’ but quickly moved into management because, she recalled, she looked at what was going on around her, and above her, and thought ‘*I could do that differently*’:

The most difficult transition for me was from a front-line practitioner to front-line manager. I found it very difficult to take on that challenge of being able to tell people what to do, and being accountable for them, and performance managing them, and not being part of the front-line. That was really hard, really, really hard, but once I'd made that transition it was easier on some levels to go up. Some other stuff I took was from working in collectives – it was about real respect for whatever people do. I don't know, it's about the interpersonal stuff ... I try very hard not to abuse that power, the positional power of being a very senior manager. And that comes from my politics. (Adi Cooper)

There are important resonances between Adi's account and the image of public management offered by Sue: the importance of values, the focus on humanizing the workplace and of public service. In the 1990s such discourses became central to organizational programmes of ‘culture change’, while the

relational dimensions of their work took on new significance in the turn to ‘joined up government’, ‘partnership’ and ‘participation’ in the rhetoric of public policy (see Chapter 4 and Newman 2001). This turn in public policy drew many women with experience of voluntary sector and community-based activism into policy and management roles, and brought some of those with experience of CCT into senior management:

I was responsible for policy, quality, the internal market and other things – equality, community safety, the drugs action team – I worked to nine different committees. What’s notable is that all of these things were cross-cutting – I wasn’t responsible for any service departments. I had to do policy through partner agencies or by influencing service departments. And negotiation skills were really important. There were always allies – you find the people within the departmental hierarchies who agree and you support them. I really valued the services, I knew there were people out there who needed them and I had respect for what they were doing. Feminism helped – you find the feminist in the housing department who you could trust. But the job was undoable. (Jane Foot)

This extract suggests how the later focus on policy outcomes and ‘cross-cutting’ issues enabled new alignments between multiple agendas; these were less explicitly political, less explicitly feminist, but did generate spaces of power which women such as Jane could occupy, with all of the resulting tensions and stresses – ‘*the job was undoable*’.

In previous research (Newman 2005c) I showed how senior women managers occupied the new spaces of power constituted by the emergence of ‘leadership’ discourse, selectively amplifying government policies on social exclusion, public involvement, community capacity building, preventing ill-health, restorative justice and so on, and rearticulating them with counter discourses, including those of feminism, anti-racism and with redistributive concepts of social justice. An ‘expansive’ – or even colonizing – conception of public leadership was, then, rooted in the possibilities offered by New Labour’s own discourses and was readily taken up by women sympathetic to notions of participation, distributed power and a strong ethical and value base. As I emphasized in Chapter 3, I do not want to romanticize the agency of individual women; each worked in landscapes of antagonism in which reconciling personal and political commitments with modernizing imperatives was often problematic and painful, and fraught with contradictions. It is no surprise, then, that some decided to move into roles with rather more capacity to control their own labour through different forms of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial selves

This chapter began with the story of a woman business entrepreneur – Dame Steve Shirley – but has mainly focused on women’s labour in projects

of transforming the state and public services. However, the processes of 'modernization' at the core of the chapter raise significant questions about the state/business, public/market and bureaucratic/entrepreneurial binaries. The stories with which this chapter is concerned show a triple process. One is of entrepreneurial labour within the state ('intrapreneurship'). All of the participants on whose accounts I have drawn have been innovators and their capacity for innovation, I want to suggest, came from the ways in which their difference (of gender and race, of career route, of values, of experience, or of networks) disrupted taken for granted ways of working. They often worked on the 'edge' of existing structures (the partnership coordinator, the project worker, the in-house trainer, the policy officer, the equality worker, the director of a new programme or policy). This enabled them to mobilize new spaces of power and to deliver changes that often prefigured more widespread shifts in economy and polity.

Entrepreneurship of a different kind – 'moving out' – is evident in accounts of participants with a background in state work who left to form businesses or become consultants. This looks back to Steve Shirley but also to the (sometimes permanent, sometimes temporary) moves made by Marion Macalpine, Sue Richards, Tricia Zipfel and others. The turn to self-employment was often made by women who had come through the GLC, Inner London Education Authority and other radical spaces: see, for example, the accounts of Sonia Khan, Jan Etienne, Sue Beardsmore and Munira Thobani. Jan and Munira ran equality programmes for public sector bodies, while Marion worked with Sheila Marsh² as consultants running leadership and management programmes with a particular focus on partnership working and participative and 'distributive' notions of power:

In terms of being self-employed basically I'm an educator and an enabler. I think that's my core skill really, and I really enjoy that. It felt that I could influence quite a lot of people in a positive way – being a consultant but working with an academic body and a public sector client, and there was a political alignment there.

There are horror stories about being self-employed and the number of women who chose to be self-employed, and it had some disadvantages. One of the ones that I've really experienced is not being in a union. [But] what was wonderful was we could choose what we worked on. We could choose who we worked with. (Marion Macalpine)

Sue Beardsmore G2 came to consultancy work through a very different route:

By the end of the 1970s I had become disillusioned with the Communist Party and decided to have a rest from politics. I worked in community arts, had a job with the Musician's Union, organizing conferences and things, then got a teaching qualification and worked at Cockpit, a youth project that brought the arts into community development work, looking at how groups not in the mainstream could express their voice. But I was never entirely comfortable in

local government – for every thousand things you want to do, you only ever get five done, and that's by breaking the rules.

Then at the end of the 1980s I did a course in organizational development, and became a freelance consultant. Initially I worked with Voluntary Action in Leeds, offering consultancy to groups getting into the contract culture. But what I wanted to do changed over the years, I became more interested in group dynamics and conflict management, and that's what I did in lots of different places – for example, I was part of a delegation to Bulgaria from Northern Ireland trying to pass on the lessons from local conflict resolution programmes to other parts of the world. (Sue Beardsmore)

The spaces in which Marion, Sue and many other self-employed women worked emerged from the state transformations of the period: the contract culture and purchaser-provider splits, and other features of the New Public Management that required the development of new workforce attributes and skills. Sonia Khan showed the difficulty of clearly delineating the difference between 'inside' and 'outside' spaces in this new economy. She appeared in Chapter 3 as someone involved in community arts, and spoke of always wanting to work *'on the edges, in alternative spaces or places'*, rather than in organizations *'that were just the norm, where there was no vision'*. This took her to the Whitechapel Art Gallery where she was a project development worker, then to the Development Trust Association where she had a regional role trying to help arts organizations with self-financing:

I linked new and emergent projects up with those who had, for example, set up successful community-run organizations that were proven to be self-financing, or part of the mixed economy, enterprising. This was the time, 2000, when it was all thrown open by the election of New Labour, there was a bit of a naive sense that everyone should be running their own organizations. It was a free for all. There was no sense of framework in which the state would do this, the private sector should do that – it was a free for all. But within that there were some very interesting things happening. (Sonia Khan)

Here Sonia is referring to the emerging 'mixed economy' that the earlier programme of CCT and later development of purchaser-provider splits had prefigured. But what I find interesting in this extract is the ways in which the mixed economy and the new emphasis on social entrepreneurship produced a *'free for all'*, while at the same time the work of Sonia and other development workers was involved in processes of market-making. Later, Sonia moved to a further education college in a role managing what she termed *'creative sector development projects'*. While there she led a partnership of the tenants of an arts centre to develop a proposal to take it over when the company running it went into liquidation:

This was about bringing the management skills in that I'd started to develop and combining them with partnership skills, because this was a partnership project. So it brought together an understanding of communities and of partnership but

also brought in front-line delivery as well – managing the business support and so on. So it was very interesting. I worked on this for a couple of years, but left before I had intended to. Because the process of being involved in the arts centre closing and then taking it on was exhausting, and it felt like somebody else should do the next bit. (Sonia Khan)

This extract resonates with the experiences of other participants involved in trying to run organizations (women's centres, women's refuges, community businesses, projects floated off from mainstream organizations) where they had to combine management skills, business skills, funding skills, and an understanding of partnership working and community/stakeholder involvement. Here is Tricia Zipfel speaking about the end of the programme (Priority Estates Programme: see Chapter 3) that had been funded under the Conservative governments of the 1980s:

In 1990 government decided to bring the programme to an end. After eleven years they felt it ought to be able to sink or swim on its own merits. By then we had become a huge organization, employing around fifty people, and had to shift from being 100 per cent grant-funded to being 100 per cent self-financing within three years. We made the transition without losing any staff, and I was very proud of that achievement. But this brought me personally into a head-on collision with the whole thing of running a business and operating in a quasi-private sector way. We were not-for-profit but suddenly had to start monitoring everyone's time and expenditure, had to put all sorts of systems in place to manage the business in a completely different way. The challenge was how do you combine that sort of hard-headed business approach to being a consultancy within a market place that doesn't provide a huge amount of money with an organization where the motivation of everyone was a commitment to a vision of transformation and supporting very deprived communities to become more resourceful and vibrant. That's why people came to work for us. It was a struggle, but we managed to do it for a long time. I always describe it as trying to land a jumbo jet on a sixpence by the end of March every year. (Tricia Zipfel)

Many such spaces opened up as 'in-house' services were contracted out and as groups of professionals set up organizations to provide services to particular client groups that had traditionally not been served well by the public sector. These offered scope for new ways of working: for example, high-involvement support services to learning disabled people living 'in the community'. And the 'joined up government' agenda not only spawned new partnership bodies but also new forms of organizations that did the joining up: for example, trusts that brought together health, social care and housing workers. Those moving from 'inside' to 'outside' did not necessarily make huge shifts in the kind of work they pursued or the relationships that sustained them. But they did speak of having greater freedom to define the purpose of their work and of the attractions – as well as the risks – of working both independently and collaboratively in a period where the business ethos and managerial forms of control were intensifying within the public sector.

This takes me to the accounts of women working in entrepreneurial spaces, particularly those associated with what have been described as the ‘information society’ or the ‘creative industries’. However, these labels do not really reflect the range of ways in which women crafted their work. The consultancy work of Marion, Tricia, Sue Richards (who was a founder member of Office of Public Management), Sue Beardsmore and many others quoted in this chapter can all be described in terms of entrepreneurship. But I have selected extracts from the accounts of two women here, beginning with Jan Etienne. In Chapter 2 we saw Jan coming to politics through trade union and party, having worked in a factory in her early working life. She later found ways of combining her aspirations for a political career – both in the United Kingdom and in her country of birth, St Lucia – with part-time teaching and community-based ‘empowerment’ work (see Chapter 3). She spoke of deliberately working on multiple part-time teaching and consultancy projects through choice:

I'll tell you why. It's through choice. It's because for many years now my political life has been a priority for me, and this is why not having a permanent, full-time job is convenient for me right now. What I do at the moment – I'm teaching at a Sure Start Centre and teach sociology at Aldwych. But I also deal with the mainstream life of Birkbeck, working across four different programme areas, and teaching courses from six to nine in the evening. Sometimes I teach day courses so emotionally it is ... a lot of people would say that it's a doddle working in this kind of way, but it's hard keeping it all together. And I'm active in South Kilburn project, I'm active in the Labour Party Black Social Society, again attending meetings all over the place, and currently when I'm in a selection [to be chosen to represent a constituency in a parliamentary election] then I have to devote full-time to the constituency. (Jan Etienne)

I ask Jan if the community projects she works on pay her as well:

No, not at all. Everything that I do with the women is voluntary, except training and then I get a consultant's fee. I am also a consultant for ACER [Association of Colleges for the Eastern Region,] and once again I am there on their books delivering training because as a sessional lecturer you don't get that much money. (Jan Etienne)

I ask her what she will do if all the sessional lecturer work is cut out:

I know, I would say my consultancy work will probably take centre stage then. (Jan Etienne)

This extract from our conversation hints at issues confronted by many other participants who followed insecure and often poorly paid employment paths. Many speak of such paths as offering both greater freedom (less pressure from the performance regimes of public sector work) and more opportunity (to pursue ‘other agendas’). These other agendas may be parallel (parenting, care work and, in Jan’s case, the exigencies of party politics) or may be integral to

the work itself (finding spaces of power to pursue activist agendas; in Jan's case, empowerment work through her community-based consultancy work). Such pathways bring huge benefits: a feeling of choice, the accretion of skills and experiences that can be carried to new spaces, growing networks and the intrinsic rewards of the work itself. But they also carry huge costs. As well as concerns about earning enough money to live on in the present and securing adequate pension entitlements for the future, we can, in the extracts from Jan, see the emotional strain of, in her words, *'keeping it all together'*.

The next extract echoes some of these concerns but from a very different institutional space. Cecilia Wee, of the fourth generational cohort, and introduced in Chapter 2 as an independent arts curator, reflected on her life trajectory:

When I was younger then I wanted to do a PhD and go down that whole academic route and become a professor but when I started doing my PhD I realized that I didn't want to just do one thing, and I found out that academic work was too abstracted from a lot of the things that I was interested in. That's why I work with performance and live art, relishing all of those moments when the audience comes together with what you're doing, when audience and artists meet and confront each other. I like that live-ness and I like to see what the reaction is, and that process of reflection and questioning. I ran live projects for quite a few years with some friends and since then I've kind of been questioning what I really want to do, but luckily off and on having jobs that ensure that I can keep living. But now I feel I really know what I want to do and I don't want to waste anymore time working for other people when I could be working for myself and achieving what needs to be done. (Cecilia Wee)

Such freedoms come with a price. Cecilia spoke about her work for a major art gallery that employed her to curate events from time to time:

You know, as an independent person working with the largest institutions, there's a lot of challenges, as you can imagine, to try and get the right person to deal with the Health and Safety stuff, and all of that. We basically got everything that we wanted and the thing is that once that relationship had finished, and once the event had finished then that's it, there is no continuation. As an independent I don't have any chart or any kind of structure as such. So for every event that you do then you invest a lot of time and labour, most of which is unpaid – because the fee that they give you is OK for the event itself, but not for all the relationships, networks, equipment, other things. So the people who programme those events are basically subsidizing the gallery in a way. (Cecilia Wee)

This is a very different kind of entrepreneurship from that of Jan, but there are some resonances – for example, about holding things together and about finding ways of 'making a living' in order to pursue the things she really wants to do, and of patterns of exploitation. But the difference is in the choice of an entrepreneurial career path as one that enabled her to bring her passion into her work.

What is striking in these accounts is the way in which participants have actively crafted their own work and career path: they each have a sense of

possible futures and each is highly aware of the dilemmas they face. They are vulnerable to shifts in the economy and in changes in the market for training and consultancy, for creative products and for ‘empowerment’ and development work. Contemporary sociological theory has offered a number of different phrases or concepts to capture changing career paths and the growth of entrepreneurial work: portfolio careers (Handy 1989), social entrepreneurship (Leadbeater 1996), the information society (Castells 2000) and the ‘new precariat’ (Ross 2009; Standing 2011). The latter is a term that, in particular, has been used to depict what are viewed as new forms of cultural work:

Precariousness (in relation to work) refers to all forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work – from illegal, casualised and temporary employment, to homeworking, piecework and freelancing. In turn precarity signifies both the multiplication of precarious, insecure, unstable forms of living and, simultaneously, new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union. This *double meaning* is central to understanding the ideas and politics associated with precarity; the new moment of capitalism that engenders precariousness is seen not only as oppressive but also as offering the potential for new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics. (Gill and Pratt 2008: 3; original emphasis)

This seems to depict the position of many of the participants on whose accounts I have drawn here. Their work can be described through a number of the concepts offered by Gill and Pratt from their distillation of the literature: temporary, intermittent and precarious jobs; long hours and ‘bulimic’ patterns of working (periods of high intensity followed by periods of no work); the collapse of the boundaries between work and play; and passionate attachment to the work itself (Gill and Pratt 2008: 14). But one might question, given its resonances with accounts from multiple generations, the novelty of precarious labour; it seems that many women in my study from G2 and G3 have combined work and politics in this way. Women have always done immaterial and affective labour, but the focus on precarious working practices only came to attention as it began to impact on male workers in the post-industrial flexible job market (Fantone 2007). Many of the ideas on which notions of a new precariat are based – those of the knowledge economy, risk society, ‘immaterial labour’ and a post-Fordist economy that has displaced older forms of organizing – have been critiqued by feminist commentators (McDowell 2009). But such concepts nevertheless offer a vocabulary that can speak to some of the ways in which participants described their working lives.

Conclusion

The predominant focus on state work in much of this chapter is significant. In the period with which I am concerned the (local and central) state was the

primary target of political projects of modernization in which women stood both as a marker of modernity and as the barrier to modernizing projects. That is, the (partial and conditional) inclusion of women at senior levels of the professions, public service management, policy work and some areas of governance signalled that Britain was a modern state, committed to equality and justice and clearly distinguished from 'less civilized' nations in which women were less able to take on public roles (see also McRobbie 2009). But at the same time the welfare professions and public services that were the target of modernization programmes were largely staffed by women; and the care and welfare they provided were discursively linked to a pre-modernized 'nanny state' that induced dependence and over-mothering.

The chapter has shown how participants were positioned in this confluence of differently gendered modernizations. They were both models of change for the wider economy and polity, and the agents of change. That is, they brought something 'new' to the party, whether the flexible and resourceful labour needed for the changing economy, as in F-International; the symbolic presence of 'new' kinds of citizenship represented in the 'Threefor' of Beverley Anderson and multicultural libraries; or the relational and generative skills required to produce more fluid and responsive organizations. But they were also the agents of change, reordering the professions from within, working to 'empower' and 'develop' excluded or marginalized groups, introducing new person-centred management and participative leadership styles, and developing new spaces of possibility for others.

This would all seem to support the Boltanski and Chiapello propositions with which I began the chapter, i.e. that feminism and other movements of the 1960s and 1970s were complicit in the emergence of a new form of capitalism. It is possible to read these changes through the sociological narratives of the shifts from modernity to reflexive or liquid modernity (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994), through the political-economic accounts of the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist organizations and the significance of 'immaterial labour'. But a rather different narrative into which the changes traced in this chapter might be understood is the Foucauldian narrative of the shift from liberal to advanced liberal forms of rule (N. Rose 1993). Advanced liberal forms of rule are conducted through forms of 'soft power': consultation, negotiation, empowerment and activation, precisely the practices espoused by participants. Governmentality scholars would tend to view the proliferation of such programmes as evidence of the emergence of new orders of rule through which the 'conduct of conduct' was regulated. The process of 'empowerment' through which workers were freed from the old hierarchical order was accompanied by the explosion of audit, scrutiny and measurement processes (including, perhaps paradoxically, those developed to try to ensure the implementation of equality policies). New discourses of devolution, managerialism, leadership and partnership were associated with

the production of new kinds of 'self-regulating' subject; and the empowerment, development and pedagogical processes which many participants worked to install could be viewed as the instruments through which such subjects were produced. Women entering management could be viewed as doing important work in softening and humanizing organizations in ways that made them fit for service-based rather than industrial, Fordist production processes. The emotional, the relational, the personal were significant resources in the generation of new governmentalities that tied subjects more tightly to emerging orders of rule than had the instrumental and transactional forms of control of bureaucratic modernity. The empowerment and development programmes on which many women worked generated new logics that, it might be argued, helped constitute reflexive and flexible selves. Rather than the bureaucratization of feminism associated with state work we can see its continued *productive* power.

But such narratives, whether of the new spirit of capitalism or the shift from liberal to advanced neoliberal rule, flatten context. That is, they occlude the contested political rationalities associated with each of the different transformations described in this chapter; the logics associated with particular 'modernizing moments' are not displaced by succeeding reforms but continue within them. The contradictions between different temporal modernities created tensions for those trying to reconcile them in a particular place and time: trying to do new 'joined up' work from within a bureaucracy or trying to bring 'public' rationalities into a market-driven regime. We can see patterns in which some of these contestations produced new orderings of dominance, with 'old' rationalities perhaps becoming residual. In some examples we can see one side emerging as a 'winner': Thatcher defeated left Labourist local government and other alternative power bases through processes of vilification, abolition and reform. But others were more ambiguous. And even where some spaces were closed down, the actors who generated and peopled them often moved on to others. What most of this chapter has shown is the significance of the commitments that sustained individuals through different cycles of change. This is not a story of individual heroism but of collective endeavour, and of the living out of contradictions, uncertainties and personal dilemmas through different forms of collective practice. But it is also the story of the importance of the particular spaces of possibility associated with different political conjunctures. By focusing on the situated agency of participants in different places and moments, we can see ambiguities in new technologies and practices of rule.