Third sector discourses and the future of (un)employment: Skilled labour, new technologies, and the meaning of work

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RUNNING HEAD: THIRD SECTOR DISCOURSES

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Abstract

In this paper we analyse a 600,000 word corpus comprised of policy statements produced within supranational, national, state and local legislatures about the nature and causes of (un)employment. We identify significant rhetorical and discursive features deployed by third sector (un)employment policy authors that function to extend their legislative grasp to encompass the most intimate aspects of human association.

Introduction

The purpose of our paper is to identify rhetorical and linguistic devices that provide functional force for third sector (un)employment policy discourses, or what we call more briefly here, *third sector discourses*. The terminology of the 'third sector' is mostly widely attributed to Jeremy Rifkin (1995: 239-43), although the volunteer, or not-for-profit sector, which is roughly equivalent to Rifkin's third sector, is clearly a far older phenomenon (1995: 243). The terminology of the 'third sector', as it applies to (un)employment policy and 'welfare reform' in general, found resonances with the 'Third Way' movement that proliferated during the mid-1990s, especially amongst traditionally progressive and leftist political parties throughout the west (see, e.g., Giddens 1998; Latham 1998; Marshall 2001). Regardless of how closely third sector discourses are associated with the Third Way's broader 'welfare reform' agenda, we leave the aside the contradictions of Third Way political movements here, except to note that they are adaptive responses by traditionally 'progressive' and 'leftist' forces in western politics to the imperatives of 'globalisation' and 'neoliberalism', and are thus infused with all the contradictions and paradoxes associated with any attempt to adapt to those forces in any traditionally progressive way (cf. Fairclough 2000; Giddens 1998).[1] Our focus here is on functional aspects of third sector discourses currently being deployed to redefine what it means to be a *skilled* worker; what it means to be *unemployed*; the meaning of *welfare*; and the meaning of *work* in general. More broadly, by identifying these elements of third sector discourses, we also identify their historical roots and social significance.

Our analysis is organised around Lemke's (1999 [1987]) notion of 'rhetorical formations' (RFs), which we explain more fully in the following section. The organising RF of the corpus takes

the form of a **problem^solution** construction. But it should be noted that this construction is closely linked to the social function of the policy genre more generally. Policy is the most overtly powerful contemporary genre of 'the language of action', and its rhetorical features are oriented towards 'moving us to act in the name of the good' (Lemke 1995: 178). To move people to action, today's policy makers are constrained by the conventions of our modernist political institutions, which are bound by the tenets of 'reason' and 'rationality' (1995: 179). Put differently, today's policy makers cannot merely command people to act in accordance with a free-standing moralistic value system, as could, for example, the 'divine right' monarchies of mediaeval Europe (Ranney 1976). Contemporary policy institutions are the product of a 400-year-long process which began with an adverse reaction to 'divine right and royal prerogative' (Ranney 1976). Throughout that process, the axiological (or evaluative) tenets of rationality and reason have supplanted those of divinity in the institutions of governance. Consequently, successful legislation now depends upon policy makers providing good reasons to make new policies. And, according to the tenets of rationality, there is no good reason to make laws without identifying a particular problem requiring a solution. Unemployment is such a problem.

Unemployed people are considered to be both political and economic problems—they are treated by policy makers as a burden on State funding, a wasted economic resource, a threat to social stability, and a threat to themselves (Rifkin 1995: ch. 12). Paradoxically, new technologies are presented as both a central cause of increasing unemployment and a generative source of new employment opportunities throughout the global policy field (Graham in press); they are both a problem and a solution. Third sector discourses attempt to reconcile these two directly opposed assumptions without refuting one or the other. The political implications of such efforts are most

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evident in the third sector discourses which turn upon definitions of what it means to be a 'high-skilled' worker in a high-tech, '*global* labour market' (OECD 1997: 18).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines 'administrative' and 'managerial' personnel as 'highly-skilled', while agricultural, manufacturing, and clerical workers are 'lower-skilled' (1998: 4). Trades people are defined as 'elementary workers' and are not considered to be skilled at all (1998: 4). A common assumption throughout the policy corpus we analyse here is that skill levels are directly related to people's use of new technologies. Consequently, most of the multilateral and national policy concerning trends in employment emphasises an increasing need for people to be in '*high-skill* occupations such as administrative, managerial, and professional workers' (OECD 1998: 3-4).

What we show in the following analysis is how, by basing unemployment policy on the contradictory assumptions that new technologies simultaneously destroy and create employment opportunities; by defining the third sector in the broadest possible terms; and by assuming that third sector activities can help to build national, local, and individual 'skill sets', the authors of third sector (un)employment policy are able to extend their legislative grasp to subsume and conflate disparate and ostensibly "distant" social domains (examples of social groups getting conflated in the corpus include family and state; mental health services and child care; coastguards and nursing mothers). Third sector solutions to the problem of unemployment draw their rhetorical force from historically inculcated assumptions about the nature and value of the (un)employed; presuppositions about the respective moral, intellectual, and social proclivities of people based on their employment status; an unmitigated enthusiasm for new technologies; the meaning of what it is to be a skilled worker; the imperatives in the current climate to render all human activity as some form of productive

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labour; and, as a corollary, an added impetus to the current tendency to formally subsume the most intimate human associations and experiences under the formal relations of commodification (Graham 2000).

Theory and method

A critical systems theoretical approach

Our perspective is informed by a 'critical systems' theoretical approach that assumes human communities are living systems situated in historically specific relations of production and power (Graham 1999). Such an approach also assumes that human meaning-making is material action with material effects, and that meaning is ultimately coordinated in language. People render their 'ecosocial systems' (Lemke 1995) socially meaningful through languaging processes, and with other sociocognitive processes, such as those associated with imagery, music, and dance. However, in our view, it is language that ultimately coordinates the entire network of interactions and processes through which humans produce, reproduce, and transform their dynamic systems of meanings (Graham 1999). We assume that the way in which people make meanings also defines and delineates the multiple social domains, or discourse communities, which they both inhabit and produce.

A note on method

Our analysis draws most directly on methods developed by Lemke (1995 1998 1987 [1999] in press) which are organised around the concepts of *presentational*, *orientational*, and *organisational* meaning (1995: 41-2). To briefly summarise the broader method: *Presentational* meaning is concerned with describing how a specific community typically describes and

relates elements of its world—that is, their 'explicit descriptions as participants, processes, relations and circumstances standing in particular semantic relations to one another' (Lemke 1995: 41). *Orientational* meaning is concerned with how members of a discourse community evaluate their world—how they orient themselves attitudinally to other discourse communities, and to the *presentational* elements of their own meaning-making systems (1995: 41). *Organisational* meaning is concerned with the 'relations between elements of the discourse itself', or that which provides a text with coherence (1995: 41). These different aspects of meaning – the presentational, orientational, and organisational – happen at once in any given instance of meaning-making, and are best seen as interdependent conveniences for analysis.

An *organisational* perspective will reveal that the coherence of texts derives from more and less enduring complexes of 'intertextual thematic formations' (ITFs)—'*thematic patterns*' that 'recur from text to text in slightly different wordings, but [are] recognisably the same, and can be mapped onto a generic semantic pattern that is the same for all' texts about a particular theme (Lemke 1995: 42 original emphasis). Organisational analysis aims at grasping how a discourse community's ITFs about a given aspect of the world are historically inculcated, reinforced, elaborated, and expressed, whilst comprehending that discourse communities typically draw upon an associated array of historically inculcated ITFs to provide coherence for the meanings they make. Put differently, what gives texts organisational coherence within a specific discourse community is the community's 'canons of intertextuality, its own principles and customs regarding which texts are most relevant to the interpretation of any one text' (1995: 41). For that reason, the organisational dimension is the least visible aspect of meaning, principally because a community's intertextual canons are rarely made explicit. In analysis, those canons only become evident when historical and

cultural context are taken into account, at which point 'larger, more complex patterns' appear (1995: 40). These organisational patterns are 'socially institutionalised in the sense that they come to be repeated, with variations, in recognisable ways from one text to another, one occasion of discourse to another. They come to be discourse formations, genres, text types' (1995: 40).

But difficulties arise in the analysis of third sector discourses because they are the same 'text types' and 'text formations' as globalisation policy discourses more generally (Lemke 1987 [1999]).[2] That is to say, they are produced within the same registers and deploy the same genres (policy production institutions; technocratic globalisation policy statements); they are presented in the same modes; deploy fairly much identical lexico-grammatical resources (cf. McKenna and Graham 2000; Weiss and Wodak 2000); and are thus fairly much indistinguishable in their presentational and orientational aspects from more general globalisation discourses (Graham 1999, in press; McKenna and Graham 2000). Thus, we argue, a method based in the organisational dimension is necessary to reveal the distinctive characteristics of the discourses we are analysing here. A focus on this least visible aspect of meaning provides us with the clearest picture of third sector discourses, which are about solving unemployment in the context of globalised nation-states.

Intra-organisational variations are, we argue, most readily explained in terms of rhetorical formations (RFs).

Rhetorical formations are semantic structures of the sort identified by Mann and Thompson, 1983, as 'relational propositions' … They include such structures as: Cause-Consequence, Instance-Generalization, Thesis-Evidence, Thesis-Example, Proposition-Evaluation, Proposition-Contradiction-Alternative, Action-Motivation, Problem-Response, Problem-Solution, Preview-Argument, Argument-Summation, and many others. (Note that rhetorical

formations commonly are, but need not be, binary, two-part structures.)

[…]

Rhetorical formations constitute an intermediate level of semantic structure in texts between generic structure and lexicogrammatical structure. The semantics of genre elements and their relations are specific to one separately defined genre or another. Lexicogrammatical resources enable us to make semantic distinctions which are potentially relevant in all text-types. The elements and relations of rhetorical formations are neither, though clearly which rhetorical formations are likely to occur as realizations of a particular element in a genre structure may be more predictable than are its grammatical structures. (Lemke 1987 [1999])

RFs are not genre-specific, and although certain forms are more likely to be found in certain genres, they can 'occur in texts of many, very different' types (Lemke 1987 [1999]). Such a feature is not without the suggestion of paradox: semantic devices which are far more stable than lexicogrammar, less reliant on genre for semantic salience and coherence-generating capabilities, and less predictable in terms of the genre in which any given RF might appear than are genre-specific ITFs. But it is precisely these paradoxical features that give RFs their analytical and practical force.

The difference in organisational analyses from the level of RFs, as opposed to ITFs, can be viewed in terms of temporality, or 'time-scales' (Lemke in press): the third sector discourses we analyse in the following section are quite impossible without the pre-established, longer-term inculcation of globalisation discourses, to which third sector discourses are a political response (Rifkin 1995). A further implication of Lemke's 'time-scales' perspective is that RFs can be seen to link organisational with orientational meaning, as well as with institutionally-specific genres (cf. Lemke 1987 [1999]). To explain: as we have noted in our *Introduction*, the functional force of

contemporary policy institutions is maintained in large part by a rationalistic approach to solving social problems which has developed social legitimacy over hundreds of years. Consequently, today's policy problems are organised according to the historically and institutionally inculcated tenets and rituals of reason, the purpose of which is, at least in theory, to produce meanings that meet the broad orientational criteria of *Truth*, or *Warrantability* (Lemke 1998: 37). In other words, contemporary policy institutions are truth-producing institutions whose social function is to get whole populations to act in certain ways. They do so through various genres and 'generic chains', for example, cabinet meeting - minutes – report - parliamentary debate - 'speech <press release> - (media reports) - document <press release> - (media reports) - speech <press release>', all of which take part in the organisational 'texturing' of *Truth* in the policy production process (Fairclough 2000: 177; cf. also Wodak 2000). In these generic chains, we also see that it is not merely different genres that are chained together in the political solution of social problems, but the different institutions in which these genres are produced.

RFs thus appear to do a lot of work in the 'hybridisation' (Fairclough 1992 2000) of smaller and larger units of meaning made within smaller and larger social units across shorter and longer 'time-scales' (cf. Lemke in press). In the context of third sector discourses, the time-scales, meaning units, and social contexts being discursively manipulated and hybridised are often quite massive—to solve problems such as unemployment in massified, globalised societies, policy institutions wield abstractions that ideally and actually break apart and force together often disparate social domains. The exemplar in this respect is the term *globalisation* itself, an abstraction that seeks to grasp the totality of human experience and describe it all at once. Policy authors routinely make use of such massive abstractions, which function as 'thematic condensations':

what is a proposition at one point in a text readily becomes "condensed" … as a participant at

another, and participants (especially abstract nominals) are often meant to be correspondingly

"expanded" by the reader into implied propositions through reference to some known intertext,

as well as through reference to the immediate co-text (Lemke 1998: 43).

The same goes for the phenomenon of 'evaluative condensation': that is, because of the coherence

provided by organisational meaning, when readers expand thematic condensations, they also expand

the evaluative, or orientational dimension (Graham in press). The routine deployment of thematic

condensation in contemporary policy discourses thus adds a subtle but powerful force to the infusion

of orientational meaning throughout the meaning system: thematic condensation links presentational

and orientational meaning, while RFs link orientational with organisational meaning and generic

hybridisation.

By analysing RFs in third sector discourses, we can see that they not only function as devices

to ideally link and de-link 'action genres'—for instance, those pertaining to the institutions of

education, "civil society", and business—they actually function, by legislative coercion, to link and

de-link the institutions within which particular genres are produced, reproduced, and transformed (cf.

Lemke 1995: 31-2; 1999 [1987]). Further, not only does a focus on RFs highlight dynamic,

'hybridising' links *between* genres and their social contexts of production, it also highlights how RFs

forge linkings and de-linkings of genre-specific organisational and orientational meaning systems

(Lemke 1987 [1999]).

Analysis

Inside the discourses of Globalisation: Contextualising the third sector

We begin our analysis by situating "third sector" and "skilled" discourses within 'globalisation' discourses (cf. McKenna and Graham 2000; Weiss and Wodak in press). The main organisational ITF which pervades the corpus (*new technologies, free trade, and a global knowledge economy create new forms of work and destroy old ones*) becomes – in all cases – the central explanatory theme for the (un)employment **problem**, as well as the source of its **^solution**. Once it has been established (or presupposed) that a lack of skills in relation to new technology is the main **problem**, the doors of society are thrown wide open to an imperative for the **^solution** of "upskilling". It also becomes evident that the very nature of policy-making institutions, i.e. as technocratic 'problem- solving, - identifying, and -brokering' institutions (Reich 1992: 183), provides a functional and generic imperative which, by definition, draws upon the **problem^solution** RF as a basic organising principle. As technocratic institutions embedded in globalised, democratic societies, solving problems like unemployment is a process which is heavily constrained by generically orientational imperatives (objectivity, value-free scientific explanations, etc). Thus **problem^solution** functions as a kind of macro-RF which is "reinforced" by the other RFs we identify in our analysis below.

Where we identify RFs, we show them in bold, with their structural constituents joined by a *caret* mark, as in the **problem^solution** example above. For the rest, our annotation system generally follows Lemke's (1995) broader analytical method: elements which foreground significant presentational aspects, particularly significant 'thematic condensations', (Lemke 1995: 61) are underlined; orientationally weighted elements are double underlined; and organisationally linked elements are marked in **bold**. Often, as might be expected, the intertextually weighted and linked elements overlap, and in such cases our annotations reflect this. In identifying evaluative (or

orientational) meanings in our analysis, we draw on the broad semantic evaluative features described by Lemke (1998) which recur across all kinds of texts. Here is an example:

> [1] There is <u>an urgent **need**</u> for **us to** draw on <u>our skills in developing online educational tools</u> and to **collaborate** across State borders **with business** to reflect <u>business needs</u>. [au_7: 4,199][3]

In [1] we see the typically panicked orientational tone (*urgency*, *Necessity*) that accompanies legislative exhortations, typical of globalisation discourses, to realign education systems to commercial *needs* (Graham in press). We also see a **problem^solution** RF linking orientational with organisational meaning: an *urgent need* compels *us to collaborate with business*, implicitly to cure unemployment, by catering to business needs.

Similar organisational elements can be seen in the following UK text which promotes a 'third sector' (or 'social economy') for London:

> [2] **Globalisation**, **technology**, **demographic changes**, **the rise of social, ethical and environmental considerations** and **changes to the nature of work are creating** <u>new patterns of wealth creation</u> where <u>successful **economies of the future**</u> <u>will be radically different</u> from those of the past. In particular, <u>the emergence of the 'weightless' economy</u> means that people are increasingly purchasing services which might best be described as <u>"relational services"</u>. **The trend towards the knowledge economy <u>will</u>**, as the DTI points out, **<u>require us to</u> focus on** 'future' thinking for <u>continued prosperity</u>. This <u>requires</u> **moving beyond** simply addressing **challenges of today** and taking action now **to deliver <u>future prosperity for all</u>**. **We** <u>already **know**</u> that <u>the skills needed for work</u> are changing, that <u>the shape of **work** is</u> changing, that <u>the composition of the workforce</u> is changing and that <u>the contours of careers</u> are **changing**. [uk_1: 736]

Text [2] clearly displays typical features of technocratic globalisation discourses (McKenna and Graham 2000). Presentationally, very broad and abstract 'thematic condensations' (Lemke 1995:

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61) are attributed with Agency in relation to other such condensations [*Globalisation*, *technology*, *demographic changes*, etc, **ARE CREATING** *new patterns of wealth creation*; *successful economies of the future*; etc]. *Orientationally* implicit and explicit evaluations for the *Inevitability*, *Significance*, *Necessity*, and *Desirability* of certain elements [*wealth creation*; *radically different*; *require us to*; *continued prosperity*; etc] are propagated at varying levels of abstraction, drawing heavily on the intertextual 'evaluative patterns' of neoliberal theory for orientational *and* organisational coherence (cf. Graham in press; Lemke 1998). Organisationally, we see an age-old, although unstated, ITF, a deeply embedded mythico-religious 'cultural narrative' (Lemke, 1999 [1987]). An authoritative *We* [legislators], urgently compelled by visionary premonitions [*we already know*] and immutable and exogenous forces, presented as technocratic "matters of fact", urge sacrifices *now* in order that humanity is delivered into the promised land at some indefinite point in the future [Conditions *require us to* go *beyond challenges of today to deliver future prosperity for all*].

Within the contemporary policy register, these are familiar, recurrent, well-documented, and, by now, somewhat unremarkable features (cf. Fairclough 2000; McKenna and Graham 2000; Weiss and Wodak 2000). We reiterate them here to acknowledge their continued and growing predominance, but also to situate third sector and skilled discourses within this overarching set of features. Our approach in the following is to define and foreground an organisationally, orientationally, and generically salient complex of RFs in third sector discourses. The RFs are deployed in such a way as to warp the social distance and relations between institutions and other social domains, conflating what were formerly disparate aspects of social space. The effect is to bring more and more dimensions of human experience under the auspices of bureaucratic control and

formal subsumption.

Defining the third sector

Policy definitions of the third sector are typically vague and often patronising. It is a sector

which first appears as an expression of passionate emotions, civic sentiment, or sheer idealism.

However, the very vagueness of the sector and its idealistic motivations provide more than sufficient

rationales for formalising what were previously informal relationships:

> [3] The third sector **is** large and **amorphous**, is driven by **passionate** social concerns, **does not** necessarily **speak with one voice**, and is mostly **dependent** for its existence **on government funding**. As many third sector **managers** have a limited understanding of government process, they **need to be trained** before they can establish and sustain an ongoing relationship. Also, because of the imbalance in power, agencies are more likely to shift their goals and objectives in order **to meet government funding criteria** rather than engage government in a debate **to achieve common policy goals**. Therefore, **governments need to "invite** the third sector to the table" when programs are developed, **provide support to agencies** to make government more transparent, and be proactive in developing collaborative relationships. [ca_2: 25,220]

This Canadian text [3] presents a complex of **problem^solution** RFs. The third sector (which is

part of the **^solution** side of the macro-RF in the corpus) is firstly *defined* as a complex of

problems: it is large and ill-defined (*amorphous*); emotional and impractically oriented (*driven by*

passionate social concerns, intertextually opposed in the policy register to more "practical"

economic issues); and incoherent (it has no singular or identifiable opinions and thus *does not*

necessarily speak with one voice). Worst of all, it runs on *government funding*, but its managers

are ignorant of *government process*. Here, the "skilled" **^solution** side of the RF is introduced:

third sector managers need to be *trained* to achieve *common policy goals* with government. This

is a matter of experience for the policy authors: if governments simply *"invite the third sector to the table"*, it becomes part of the government process, even whilst being formally and *actually* separated from the sphere of government responsibility.

For the most part, though, the third sector (otherwise called the 'civil', 'voluntary', or 'non-profit' sector, or, more vaguely, 'the social economy'), is little more than a euphemism for people who are not formally employed for whatever reason:

> [4] **We** do **provide an alternative** to unemployment, and we have called it Working Proudly. We are suggesting that we **ought to be** creating **a third sector** for the third millennium. We **have a pie graph** which **shows** that as **people move in and out of the traditional public and private sectors**, they will move **into a third sector**. In other words, **as restructuring and reform take place** in both the private and public sectors, **people will move into** some other— **something new**. And **that** is what **we need** to create. [au_carr1: 905]

As is often the case in discussions of neologisms and euphemisms concerned with the neoliberal restructuring of global human relations, the more precise the explanation, the less plausible the whole concept becomes. The speaker, a local government CEO, defines the third sector as that which people *move into* when they *move in and out of* the *traditional public and private sectors*. The best *alternative* to *unemployment* is *Working Proudly*: a euphemism instead of a job; doublespeak and cheap labour programs in place of a liveable social safety net or "real" employment. This is also a clear example of the formalising function of bureaucracy: *we need to create* something *a pie graph shows* as already existing.

History and heteroglossia: Today's third sector and some precedents

Today's orthodoxy claims that State-funded welfare programs (at least for non-corporate

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"persons") are not the answer. As in the wake of the Elizabethan Poor Law, welfare programs are construed in policy circles as actually being detrimental to the welfare of people, and to society as a whole (cf. Marx 1976: 882-883). Such programs provide no feasible **^solution** to the **problem** of unemployment. They only encourage indolence and deviance. Work is the only possible **^solution**:

> [5] **The participants** would **receive** <u>the allowance</u> under <u>a community award</u>. They would **get training**. They would get ~~**real life skills**~~. They would get ~~**social interaction and higher self esteem**~~. They would have ~~**career opportunities, mentoring**~~ and<u>, potentially,</u> ~~**graduation to either the public or the private sector**~~.

> I come to <u>the funding of such a scheme</u>. Currently, **there are** <u>direct **costs** **associated with unemployment, such as** <u>the dole</u></u>. There are also <u>indirect costs</u>**:** the ~~**extra pressure on our health and welfare and**~~ on **law and order**. […].

> Our conclusion is: <u>growth</u> alone will not solve <u>unemployment</u>. <u>The choice for Australia</u> is to continue with the same—that is, <u>unemployment</u>—or look for an alternative. I would like to quote from <u>Jeremy Rifkin</u>. In 1995, he said: As for <u>the increasing number for whom there will be no jobs at all</u> **in the market economy, governments** <u>will be faced with</u> **two choices**:

> ? finance <u>additional police protection</u> and build <u>more gaols</u> to incarcerate ~~**a growing criminal class**~~ **OR**

> ? finance ~~**alternative forms of work**~~ in the <u>third (civil) sector</u>. [au_carr1: 1,409]

Here, in the fully-foregrounded orientational dimension of third sector discourses, RFs clearly function to link organisational and orientational meanings, in this case by "chaining" **benefit^cost—problem^solution—cause^consequence** RFs.[4] *Working Proudly* provides the unemployed with potential **^benefits**: *money*, *training*, *real life skills*, *social interaction*, *higher self-esteem*, *career opportunities*, *mentoring*, and *graduation* to a "real" job. But there are already actual costs—*direct costs*, such as *the dole* (what welfare payments are called in Australia). But there are far more sinister *indirect costs*. Here, RF "chaining" is deployed to activate one side of a

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problem^solution RF. The authors splice the **cost^benefit** construction by recasting *indirect costs* as *social* **problems**. They do so by drawing on the orientational un-*Desirability* and un-*Acceptability* of the *indirect costs* (cf Lemke 1998: 36), and by activating a **cause^consequence** link: there are increased **costs** to *health* and *law and order* systems, implying that unemployment (**cause**) inevitably leads to increased levels of sickness and criminal behaviour (**^consequence**). Health is left aside, as the **cause^consequence** link between unemployment and crime is foregrounded. That supplies organisational coherence for the proposed **^solution** by an orientationally derived imperative: *Governments* are left with only two possible **^solutions** to unemployment. In fact, there is only one. One **^solution** is actually (orientationally) a **^consequence**—because it **causes** criminality, *unemployment* requires us either to pay for *additional police protection* and *more gaols* (**^consequence**). Thus the only real **^solution** is to pay for *alternative forms of work*: either we put the unemployed to work in the voluntary sector or lock them up. Organisational coherence derives from the fundamentalist Protestant axiom: "the Devil makes work for idle hands".

From this obdurate ethic, one could argue (as the author of texts [4] and [5] implicitly does) that economic growth actually *creates* unemployment, poverty, indolence, and crime. Third sector discourses – those which essentially euphemise a program of *forced*, low-wage labour in the guise of social welfare – draw most overtly on late-17th – early-18th century Protestant Orientations. To exemplify: in order to avoid the Elizabethan Poor Law, an early form of the social safety net, a group of wealthy English farmers

> devised a skilful mode by which all the troubles of executing this Act might be avoided. They
> have proposed that we shall erect a prison in the parish, and then give notice to the

neighbourhood, that if any persons are disposed to farm the poor of this parish, they do give in

sealed proposals … of the lowest price at which they will take them off our hands; and that

they will be authorised to refuse to anyone unless he be shut up in the aforesaid prison. […]

you are to learn that the rest of the freeholders of the county … will very readily join in

instructing their members to propose an Act to enable the parish to contract with a person to

lock up and work the poor; and to declare that if any person shall refuse to be so locked up and

worked, he shall be entitled to no relief. This, it is hoped, will prevent persons in distress from

wanting relief, and [thus] be the means of keeping down parishes. (Blakey 1855 cited in Marx

1976: 882) [5]

In other words, the "reformationist" authors are proposing that a third sector agent take the poor off

the hands of the Parish, put them to work them, *and* lock them up for the benefit of society. Third

sector discourses are mediaeval in content and origin. They are also utterly Puritanical in

organisational and orientational terms, whilst being definitively technocratic and up-to-date in their

presentational aspects. For example, a recent initiative of the Australian Federal Government calls for

'Community Work Coordinators' to act as third sector agents in the current *Work for the Dole*

scheme. The idea is that people 'are contracted to develop *Work for the Dole* projects/activities

and manage the placement of eligible job seekers into those projects/activities' and are 'contracted

through a competitive tendering process by the Commonwealth to manage work experience

opportunities' (DEWRSB 2001). Anyone who refuses such work (which is somehow not real

employment) loses their welfare payments. The archaic orientational logic finds its apotheosis in Third

Sector Recycling (TSR), a Canadian company that specialises in recycling human rubbish, both

metaphorically and literally. It promises 'to provide life skills training, job search training, academic

upgrading and work experience to individuals receiving Social Assistance', all this while processing

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and diverting 'approximately 27,700 tonnes of garbage from landfill' per year (TSR 2000).

Skilled labour discourses: Technology, education, and the third sector

In the following [6], the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) formally defines the meaning of "high skilled":

> [6] **"High skilled" workers** **are** defined here as those **in** the following **occupational groups**: Legislators, senior official [*sic*] and managers (ISCO-88 Group 1); professionals (ISCO-88 Group 2); technicians and associate professionals (ISCO-88 Group 3). **All remaining** occupational **groups are** classified as **"low-skilled"**. [oecd_9: 11,133]

This chain of mutually supporting, though quite distinct, RFs (**general^particular** and **generalisation^attribution**) defines *skilled* in such a way as to set up an impenetrably circular logic. There is no room for inept legislators and managers or gifted gardeners and carpenters. By default, the former are *high skilled* and the latter are *low-skilled*. The **general^particular** taxonomising RF deployed here is typically technocratic (McKenna and Graham 2000: 231-234). It shows how orientational and organisational meanings can reinforce each other through the chaining of RFs. The definition starts with a nominalised Attribute^Carrier construction (semantically dominated by the Attribute) as a **general** category, as if it were a Token (a Thing to be defined) rather than a pre-defined Thing. It then sets nominalised, ostensible **particulars** (*those in* particular *occupational groups*) in subordinate relation to the **general** category. The occupationally stratified definition of *high-skilled workers* deploys taxonomic strategies of social *hyponymy* (class superordination) and a socially exhaustive *meronymy* (class composition and constitution) at the same time.

With such a definition in place we can say that "Legislators are a kind of high-skilled worker" (hyponymy); or, we can say that "Legislators, senior officials, managers, professionals,

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technicians, and associate professionals compose the entire class of high-skilled workers"

(meronymy). This conflation is reinforced in the second sentence, which deploys the quite different

RF of **generalisation^attribution**. A **generalisation** derived from the particularisation of *high*

skilled workers (i.e. *all other occupational groups*) automatically carries the residual and opposite

^attribution: *All remaining occupational groups* <Carrier>/are/<Attribute> *low-skilled*. This

combination of **general^particular** and **generalisation^attribution** achieves a seemingly self-

evident, symmetrical definition which is circular from the start (McKenna and Graham, 2000).

The semantically circular, self-serving mode of classification evident in [6], so typical of

technocratic discourse (McKenna and Graham 2000: 240), provides organisational coherence for

the following:

> [7] When __new technologies__ are introduced into production processes, it is generally thought
> that, overall, they **reduce** the **demand for __low-skilled workers__** and **increase** the **demand for**
> **__high-skilled workers__**. This complementarity between technology and high-skilled workers at
> the level of the firm can be explained by reference to three intuitive arguments. The first is that
> high-skilled workers adapt more easily to technological change than low-skilled workers. The
> second is based on the observation that many new technologies perform repetitive tasks
> traditionally carried out by low-skilled labour, or workers without extensive training, such as
> routine assembly operations. The third is that computer **technologies** increase __the__
> __productivity of high-skilled workers__ more than low-skilled workers, **so** that **firms match**
> **__high-skilled workers__ with __new technology__**. [oecd_9: 5,302]

New technologies are cast as the active entity in this complex of **cause^consequence** and

cost^benefit RFs. New technologies appear (from nowhere) as the **cause** of reduced *demand for*

low-skilled and *increased demand for high-skilled workers*. Those increases and decreases in

demand are presented as a **^consequence** of *technology*. They are also a **cost** to low-skilled

workers and a **^benefit** to high-skilled workers. Later, we are told it is *firms* that *match high-*

skilled workers with new technology. But that is construed as a natural **^consequence** of new and advanced technologies because the authors take for granted that *computer technologies increase the productivity of high-skilled workers more than low-skilled workers* because the technologies act to replace the low-skilled. In other words, if a machine can replace a person who performs a given set of tasks, that person is definitively low-skilled. Not surprisingly, the productivity of the low-skilled is lowered by new technology because they are suddenly outside the production process. The **^consequence** and **cost** sides of the RF chain in [7] links orientationally with the central **problem^solution** RF of the corpus: namely, the un-*Desirable* **^consequences** and **costs** of (un)employment for the low-skilled, and, via welfare **costs**, for society as a whole.

Education, training, and lifelong learning: **^solutions** for skills shortage **problems**

The more complete the discursive conflation of technology, the global knowledge economy, the meaning of being skilled, education levels, unemployment levels, and society in general, the further policy authors can extend the logic of their **problem^solution** RFs to encompass larger aspects of society, most notably via the shibboleths of *education*, *training*, and *lifelong learning*:

> [8] In the longer-term, **meeting demand for high skilled workers will require** sustained investments in S&T [Science and Technology] **education**, not just in **compulsory education** but also **on-job training and life-long learning**. Improving the adaptability of the public research sector to changes in research and employment is also important. In all these areas, **governments must increasingly partner** with **industry, social partners and civil society** if they are **to provide workers with the right S&T skills for the knowledge-based economy**. [oecd_4: 611]

Here, the **problem** becomes part of the corpus's macro-**^solution**: *meeting demand for high skilled workers*. The **^solution** (to a **problem** presupposed in the "^technology creates new types

of employment" macro-**^solution**) is *compulsory education*, *training*, and *life-long learning*,

under which *government*, *industry, social partners and civil society* are conflated as *partners* (as

if these were ever discrete categories!). The **^solution** is far-reaching and pervades the corpus. As

the term and its usage suggests, *lifelong learning* encompasses most of human experience:

> [9] **Lifelong learning** is considered to be a very broad and comprehensive idea. It **includes all formal, nonformal and information learning** - whether intentional or unanticipated - **which occurs** at any time **across the lifespan**. [au_15 4,733]

In [9], the **^solution** to (un)employment is translated into an exhortation for all of human experience

(everything people do until they die) to be brought into a formally codified system of *lifelong*

learning so that the labour force can be rendered more flexible and mobile. This is both a **^solution**

and an intertextually derived **^outcome**.

We can see the **objective^outcome** RF deployed more directly in an extract from the

International Monetary Fund (IMF):

> [10] This study also analyzes how **workers with different skill levels respond to local labor demand shocks**. That question is addressed using a unique data set on working-age population, labor force, and employment for five educational groups (**ranging from the illiterate to the college-educated**) over 1964-92 for the 50 Spanish provinces. The **high-skilled** are found to **migrate** very **promptly** in response to a decline in local labor demand, whereas the **low-skilled drop out** of the labor force **or stay unemployed for a long time**. In other words, the results suggest that labor market adjustment is particularly sluggish among the low-skilled. **Therefore**, labor market and other structural **policies should devote particular attention to promoting the mobility of the low-skilled**. [imf_2: 784]

Problem^solution and **objective^outcome** are very closely linked semantically within the

contemporary policy genre because of its managerialist orientation (Graham in press). Proposed

^solutions become policy **objectives** with specified **^outcomes**. In [10], the definition of "skilled"

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is presupposed as being related directly to formal education levels. High-skilled, well-educated

persons are not a **problem**. But the *sluggish*, *low-skilled*, *illiterate*, and therefore *socially*

immobile need to be legislated for—they are the natural *objects* of employment policy **objectives**,

all of which are naturally formulated around skills re-education for whole classes, communities,

regions, States, and Nations. Being high-skilled is an **^outcome** of *lifelong learning*, or *life-*

experience in general.

Colonising and codifying human experience

The **problem^solution** links between depleted communities, low skills, education, and the

third sector are made explicit in the following passage from the leader of the aptly named Australian

Labor Party:

> [11] Today about **2.6 million people** - one in every five adults - **works** for <u>more than four hours</u> <u>a week</u> **in some form of voluntary activity**. The range of services they provide is absolutely huge. **They <u>help</u>** and <u>counsel</u> **people suffering from the whole gamut of physical and intellectual handicap** [*sic*]. They help **<u>rescue</u> ships at sea**, and **swimmers on our beaches**. They **protect kids from injury** and **<u>advise</u> nursing mothers**. They **<u>help</u> in <u>preserving</u> the environment**, **<u>mentoring</u> the young**, **<u>providing</u> food and shelter for the homeless**, **<u>visiting</u> the old and disabled**, and **<u>seeing</u> kids across the road**. … **Volunteers form** what has been called **<u>the third sector</u> of our economy**, **alongside <u>private</u> enterprise <u>and</u> the <u>public</u> sector**. Often voluntary organisations **<u>are able to</u> do their work more <u>cheaply</u> than** either the **public or private** sectors - they **use volunteers**, and often **have** the **<u>expertise</u> the <u>other sectors</u> <u>don't</u> have**. In addition, they **can often be <u>more effective</u>** - being <u>closer to the ground</u>, they **understand community needs better**. In <u>an age where all the discussion has been about the</u> <u>loss of a sense of community</u>, these are the people who **have** <u>simply, and quietly,</u> **gone about establishing their own meaning**, and **their own connection**, with **their own community**. [au_2: 1,441]

This is a massive **general^particular—generalisation^attribution** chain. The *third sector*

(**general**) comprises // a *huge* number of people across a range of specific activity areas

(**^particular**). The third sector (**generalisation**) has // unique *experience* and skill sets, and runs

more *cheaply* and thus "effectively" than the *other sectors* could (**^attribution**). Clearly, the third

sector *is* the social safety net. It is community based and locally oriented. It services disadvantaged,

disenfranchised, endangered, and helpless people. Best of all, because it *uses volunteers*, it services

them *cheaply*.

The paradox of such a sector becomes crystalline, as do legislative imperatives for

formalising what appears to be an already-existing and informal set of relationships: by defining the

third sector as distinct from government (the public sector), government distances itself from a whole

raft of responsibilities for the mentally and physically handicapped, public safety, medical care,

environmental protection, homelessness, aged care, and so on—practically everything that has no

immediate, obvious, or direct economic benefit; practically every area of human frailty for which the

widely-disparaged welfare state once provided support. At the same time, legislatures clearly feel the

need to regulate the third sector, perhaps because the authors of policy realise that when particular

areas of responsibility that correspond to this sector go into an "outcomes deficit", public and media

backlashes are invariably savage.

Third sector discourses empower legislatures to formalise very intimate areas of human

association. As the following shows, the basic social unit of human society falls squarely into the

focus of policy and programs when family members are classified as mentally ill, or unemployed, or

both:

> [12] At present **families are** virtually **'the third sector' in** the **mental health** system. As such
> they **are unpaid**, **unfunded and often unrecognised** but an **<u>incredibly significant</u>** and

instrumental `force' **in** the **achievement of policies**. **Research can bring families more centrally into the focus of policy and programs.** [au_4: 8,815]

While [12] may appear to metaphorically (i.e. *virtually*) index the family as an unfunded third sector institution (a **generalisation^attribution** RF) which might be helpful in achieving policy outcomes, the following passage [13], which is from the same text as [12], is some preamble to the proposition that *research can bring families ... into the focus of policy and programs*. It shows that the authors are proposing something far more intrusive *in the achievement of policies*. The authors are proposing the need for active *intervention* to detect *undiagnosed mental illness*:

> [13] In **70% of** the cases where a **severe psychiatric disorder** was diagnosed, the onset of the disorder **followed unemployment**. **But** as the <u>severe mental disorders</u> commonly disable because of the long prodrome, **it is not certain** whether the **unemployment is the result of** the early and **undiagnosed** phase of the **illness**. Significantly, **in more than half of those cases there was no evidence of any stress apart from that directly associated with unemployment.** Thus **the need is** less to demonstrate <u>the connections between mental disorder, psychiatric disability and unemployment</u> than it is **to construct <u>interventions</u> based on action research** to test <u>the connection between education, training, rehabilitation and employment</u> as techniques **whereby** the onset of **mental disorder might be delayed or averted**. [au_4: 7,247]

The complex RF chain in [13] is organised around a series of problematic **cause^consequence** RFs which link to the organising **problem^solution** of the corpus. The RF chain includes an **evidence^hypothesis—cause^consequence—further evidence^conclusion** formation, beginning with a similarly chained construction as that in [7] which problematises the causal relationship between the presence of technology within firms and the number of its high-skilled workers. The implied **evidence^hypothesis** construction (*in 70% of the cases a severe psychiatric disorder followed unemployment*) is derived from the problematic (because causally indistinct) **^consequence** is that *unemployment* may **cause** *a severe psychiatric*

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disorder. However, the reverse may also be the case. In any case, the two closely correlate. The **further evidence** [that *no evidence of any stress apart from that directly associated with unemployment* is involved] suggests, though, that most likely direction of **cause^consequence** is **unemployment^severe psychiatric disorder**. The RF chain's **^conclusion** is that *further action research* is needed to *test the connection between education, training, rehabilitation and employment*, thus including a further hypothesis [that *education, training, rehabilitation and employment* can *delay or stop the onset of mental disorder*]. In the third sector, (un)employment is just a state of mind.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Under scrutiny, the skilled labour discourses of third sector policy reveal that the object of the policies is to divest public and private institutions of particular burdens: namely, those specific to 'the elderly, the handicapped, the mentally ill, disadvantaged youth, the homeless and indigent' (Rifkin 1996: 240). The underpinning assumptions of third sector employment policy are similar to the 'paradoxical attitudes … that classify a golf ball as an asset, while education and health are categorised as liabilities' (Saul 1997: 157). Third sector and skilled discourses are about redefining social welfare programs; relationships between individuals, families, businesses, communities, and the State; the meaning of work; and, most of all, towards redefining the meaning of unemployment so that it would ideally no longer exist as a concept. If this last is achieved, the problem of unemployment is ideally cured, thus realising the technocratic function expected of policy makers—to solve extensive social problems, in this case by defining them out of existence.

Our analysis demonstrates clear linkages in contemporary policy between third sector

discourses and more or less overt elaborations of pre-capitalist orientations towards work and the unemployed. We also see an explicit tendency for policy authors to define the meaning of skills, employability, and moral and social worth in terms of their own social situatedness. Moreover, we show an overt tendency for contemporary policy to subsume disparate social domains under its managerialist auspices by linking the shibboleths of (un)employment, volunteerism, and skills attainment. The deployment of RFs in these discourses warp and hybridise sometimes quite distant social realms. The effect is to infuse societies with economic and political interventions to the point of saturation.

The organising assumption of third sector (un)employment policy is that, because of increasing technological advances, increased levels of unemployment are an inevitable outcome (Rifkin 1996: 236-48). The 'employed' will have 'free time at their disposal', while, 'the unemployed' will have 'idle time on their hands' (Rifkin 1996: 239). The intertextual links to 'idle hands' need no further elaboration. But what is elided from discussions of the "idle sector", and from its apparently degenerate social contexts, is the generative source of its social destruction. There is no mention of *why* there are the problems of excess labour and shortages of skills. There is no mention of *why* communities might have been destroyed in the first place. Employment, education, and welfare policies increasingly presuppose social degeneration as a starting point, and appear resigned to the technocratic "facts" of the globalising discourses in which they are embedded.

By focusing on the RFs of third sector discourses, we have shown that the rationalist imperatives imposed on policy authors by their institutional contexts—the essence of their organisational meaning systems—make their discourses seem presentationally factual, pragmatic, and even beneficial to the people at which the policies are aimed. At the same time, the

authors *exploit* their institutional constraints to present the unemployed in an orientationally

unfavourable light, as social problems, without ever mentioning the root causes of their plight, and

without obviously stepping outside the organisational constraints of 'value-free' objectivity—the

unemployed are presented as socially, morally, and intellectually deficient. *Their* inherent defects are

the problem. These defects give *carte blanche* to legislators to define the solution, simultaneously

reconfiguring the value and meaning of whole sectors of the population. The institutional constraints

of policy production limit the authors in *how* they say what they say: they are bound by historically

developed tenets of reason. But by deploying the macro-RF of **problem^solution**, the authors of

third sector discourses inculcate an unfavourable orientational stance towards the unemployed that

allows a wholesale intrusion of policy into the very foundation of human relatedness. They define their

problem according to pre-established solutions.

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Endnotes

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[1] We encourage interested readers to refer to Bewes (1997), Eatwell, (1995), and Fairclough (2000) for thoroughgoing critical reviews of various Third Way movements.

[2] Lemke defines identical text types as 'texts that belong to both the same dis course formation and the same text formation'. They 'belong to the same discourse formation when they are similar in three respects … they must share the same thematic formations…; they must take the same evaluative stance … toward these formations; and … they must construct the same heteroglossic relations among the formations

[…]

Two texts will be said to belong to the same text formation when they are similar in two respects: they have the same Generic Structure Potential (GSP) …; and … they realize the same elements of the GSP using the same rhetorical formations' (Lemke 1987 [1999]). In terms of these definitions, policy discourses that address the problems associated with 'globalisation', the 'knowledge economy', and (un)employment are the same text types and text formations.

[3] Corpus documents are cited by their file names and marked with concordance word numbers. A full list of documents cited is in Appendix 1.

[4] The terminology of "chaining" here should not be taken in any linear sense. The macro-RF formation allows RFs that sit "underneath" the macro-RF (rather like a mobile) to redound with the macro-category, as well as with organisational and orientational meaning. In some cases, the "chaining" effect we are describing could just as well be seen as a "shadowing" effect.

[5] Blakey quotes a document laid before a 17C jurist, Sargeant Snigge, later a judge under James 1.