

**PROFESSIONAL
IDENTITIES AND
COMMODIFICATION IN
HIGHER EDUCATION**

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Professional Identities and Commodification in Higher Education

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May *Plato and the Platypus*
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in my newly
authored,
figured
world.

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Foreword

As part of a professional doctorate with a commitment to developing practice, this thesis reports the development of my analytical apparatus that was put to work in my own practice to tackle issues faced on a daily basis. It presents an unfolding story where I developed new perspectives in my practice, which enables new professional moves to be made over time. These shifts in thinking and practice are reported in the Introductory chapter. One of the key shifts was an understanding of how particular ways of viewing the world are embedded in the narratives I tell, and hence structure how I engage in the world. During the early stages of the research, I was tending to write in *third person* narratives which ignored my position in the writings; I was stating the world as fact, rather than as how I was constructing it (and blind to the ideological forces shaping these ideas). As I developed my understandings of how ideology shapes me through narratives – and also how I can have a say in how I tell narratives – I began to use first person research to position me and my own subjectivity as a crucial part of the world I am telling stories about. So moving from the supposedly impersonal and objective to personal and subjective was an important shift to explore the research focus: around my own lived experience.

For most of the thesis, I use the first person to articulate my current version of how I see and understand the thesis and the arguments posited. This is an acknowledgement of how I am currently constructing my current thinking. However, I also use third person in the Cases chapter for two key reasons (and is the result of trying a variety of alternative ways to present the data). The first reason aims to aid the analytical distancing between the ‘me as subject’ who created the texts under interrogation (e.g. emails and reflections), and the ‘me as researcher’, coming to interpret and make comments about the texts. The second reason was presentational, to make this distancing clear in the presentation of the data (and subject in it), and the interpretation of it for the purposes of this thesis. Adopting a third person style was the most accessible way found to distinguish and report the two perspectives in this chapter. Third person was also chosen for the abstract (and ‘nutshell’) to assert the findings of the research in a fashion typically expected of a research thesis.

Abstract

Higher education in the UK has been moving towards an increasingly demand driven model, encouraged to better serve and grow the economy through becoming more attuned to what the marketplace needs and wants, and then supplying educational commodities that better meet these demands. New educational commodities have emerged to replace lost income, such as the university accreditation of learning associated with training courses delivered by commercial training organisations. This involves university academics reconceptualising training activity into academic content and then enabling professionals in the training organisation and the university to navigate the demands placed on them in this space. Yet this is widely reported to be a problematic sphere of professional activity, with ‘cultural’ and ‘communicative’ issues still without resolution. These issues and the tackling of them, as experienced by this study’s researcher, formed the initial motivation for this study. This study investigates the academic’s professional struggles and tensions in encountering and mediating the widely differing demands of the two sectors, with a view to offer fresh insight into this troubled space. Qualitative data from an academic’s daily practice are analysed from a professional interested perspective to elucidate and better understand these tensions.

This thesis demonstrates that, problematically, the academic variously identifies with and understands his practice from both perspectives, and in doing so, activates different and sometimes competing expectations of how he thinks he should act in a situation. In identifying in such ways, the academic practically becomes a custodian of the regulative apparatus that simultaneously polices his own practice. Through documenting how such diverse perspectives meet and materialise in academic practice, the thesis addresses the more fully theoretical concern with how such expectations, from particular ideological positions, operate through the engine of conceptualising and regulating professionalism in academic locations. In turn, this provides a critical platform from which to better understand the changing parameters of academic practice, that is, what university study becomes when its pursuit is increasingly a function of economically oriented demands. In this way, the thesis addresses how the professionalism of certain university academics involved in ‘business and community engagement’ is being understood and rethought to meet evolving funding parameters, and how the very notion of academic study is changing to meet these new expectations.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 A thesis in a nutshell

In the 1990s, the UK government renewed an interest in stimulating the ability of higher education institutions to respond to the needs of the economy, and pressed for an increasingly demand driven model. Here, the continued push was for higher education to become more attuned to what the marketplace needs and wants, and then supply educational commodities that better meet these demands. The recent removal of mainstream funding echoed this intention, sharpening the focus on the educational purchaser, and prompting the creation of new educational commodities to replace lost income. One example which has become increasingly popular within universities is the university accreditation of learning associated with training courses delivered by commercial training organisations. This involves university academics reconceptualising training activity into academic content and then enabling professionals in the training organisation and the university to navigate the demands placed on them in this space. Yet, the researcher's own specific daily challenges in delivering such activity were a key driver for this research. Here, he experienced difficult tussles in knowing how to act amid competing demands of the university and the commercial organisation. He was not alone, as this is widely reported to be a problematic sphere of professional activity, with deep 'cultural' and 'communicative' issues, but which are still without resolution. This situation prompted the researcher to focus on the academic's professional struggles and tensions in encountering and mediating the widely differing demands of the two sectors, from the academic's perspective, with a view to offer fresh insight into this troubled space.

The first stage of the research involved building analytical apparatus that would aid the tackling of the issues the researcher was experiencing. As the research was investigating how he was experiencing these tussles, it was important to select apparatus that focused on how an individual would experience and make sense of the world they were engaging in. Drawing on writers about the professional space of higher education, the researcher conceptualised the tussles as him connecting with competing ways of understanding a particular situation (or engaging with different ideological frameworks of sense making). This focus on understanding an individual's experience and the frameworks for making sense meant psychoanalytic apparatus was particularly

appropriate. Here, contemporary writers explain how such ideological frameworks hold particular perspectives or viewpoints which influence what we look at and how (a kind of distortion of what we can see), but are invoked every time we engage with language. Language necessarily draws on these frameworks to structure meaning, but these writers also alert us to the emotional fallout this can create, because each utterance never quite fits. Yet other contemporary writers remind us of the fragility of any word to represent its object, whether that be at one particular moment in time, or over time, where meaning changes depending on, and mediated by, the narratives we tell of it. But this was also a route to create new navigations through the influences that come to shape us. Collectively, this apparatus led to a methodological approach which collected the professional's texts over time (in the form of documents, reflections and emails), which were then examined to understand how the ideological influences were shaping how the professional understood the demands placed on him.

In examining cases at two different points in time, the thesis demonstrates that, problematically, the academic variously identifies with and understands his practice from both an academic quality assurance perspective and a commercial, client-oriented perspective. And by identifying in these ways of identifying, the academic activates different and sometimes competing expectations of how he thinks he should act in a situation. From the commercial, client-oriented perspective, the academic was implicated through the notion of 'client', where he understood his role to 'serve the client'. Yet from the academic quality assurance perspective, he was implicated by how higher education has become packaged into bureaucratic forms, such as levels, credits, modules, and so on. In identifying in such ways, the academic practically becomes a custodian of the regulative apparatus that simultaneously polices his own practice. At the same time, the identifications never quite fit, creating ongoing tensions with how he feels he should act. Yet through documenting how such diverse perspectives meet and materialise in academic practice, the thesis addresses the more fully theoretical concern with how such expectations, which are manifestations of an ideological perspective, operate through the engine of conceptualising and regulating professionalism in academic locations. In turn, this provides a critical platform from which to better understand the changing parameters of academic practice, that is, what does university study become when its pursuit is increasingly a function of economically oriented demands? In this way, the thesis addresses how the professionalism of certain university academics involved in 'business and community engagement' is being understood and

rethought to meet evolving funding parameters, and how the very notion of academic study is changing to meet these new expectations.

The thesis is organised as follows. This first chapter examines the key professional challenges the researcher was facing during the first stage of this research, and the theoretical apparatus that was developed and employed in attempting to tackle them. It locates the analytical apparatus that came to be useful in framing this research, and the methodological approaches taken within it, that is, psychoanalytical apparatus that helps interrogate personal experience with a view to build new strategies for action. This approach highlights the importance of collecting texts that we write in professional circumstances in informing us about the ideological framings and influences that are helping to shape how an individual sees themselves and their work. This approach not only highlights how these texts shape the individual's experience, it also highlights how through each writing, the individual is also shaped in different directions. Monitoring and expressing agency through these successive writings provide the platform for creating new ways of thinking about and engaging in the world.

These texts from the researcher's daily work are collated in the second chapter, in the form of cases. They consider two different time periods, reflecting two different perspectives; each offering a different angle on his practice. The first focuses on his interactions with the training organisation, and the second, a shifted perspective to how he was interacting with his colleagues within the university. The main focus in this chapter is to *present and interpret* the data which describes the experiences and tensions that the researcher, as the professional, was experiencing from his perspective.

In the third chapter, the focus moves to a more thoroughly theoretical *explanation* of how the tensions described in the previous chapter can be understood. Putting the theoretical apparatus (developed in the first stage of the research) to work on the texts discussed in the previous chapter, the texts are examined to explore and explain the tensions faced by the academic. The theoretical explanation is precisely the added value of this chapter. It demonstrates how the way the academic understood the demands he thought were expected of him set up the difficulties and irreconcilable tensions experienced in practice. Importantly, how he and education were constructed, or commodified in the process of delivering educational commodities, were central forces in shaping and perpetuating such expectations. The main focus in this chapter is about

developing a robust theoretical explanation of the tensions introduced and highlighted in the previous chapter.

And in the final chapter, the wider implications of such theoretical analyses are examined, and this highlights some of the challenges of how contemporary higher education can be understood and operates. The final chapter also highlights how this research has started to shift the researcher's own professional engagements with the world, which offer a way forward in establishing a sense of professional assertiveness and agency in an increasingly regulated sector. The shifts have important implications in terms of how the professional within it can be understood (and can understand themselves), and offers insights and ideas on alternative possibilities within these wider findings. The following section explains the initial context and stimulus for this research, and the thinking that came to frame it.

1.2 Professional context and theoretical framings

This research investigates how particular ways of thinking about a professional situation shape how professionals think about the demands placed on them, and in turn, how they think they should act. This section discusses some of the key professional demands experienced during the first stage of the research that led to this focus, and the analytical apparatus that enabled new ways of tackling these demands in practice. To do this, three themes are discussed here. The first theme is that higher education professionals, in a similar professional location to myself, sense tussles in knowing how to act in practice, and that this is partly because of the alternative ways of making sense of those actions and the values attached to them. This is explored in more depth in the second theme, which explains that these alternative frameworks for making sense, or ideological frames, embed perspectives which distort our experience towards certain aspects (and delete others). These distortions are necessarily evoked every time I speak, but shape me and my world as I do so. And finally, the third theme explores how a professional can navigate such distortions to create different effects in the world, to enable a sense of professional assertiveness and agency amongst such powerful, structuring perspectives. Together, these provide the theoretical framings of this study and its methodological perspectives and methods explained in the next section (1.3, Research methodology).

1.2.1 Tussles in knowing how to act

The initial stimulus for this research was the tussle and tension I felt in knowing how to act in my own daily work in a university. As will be discussed below, I was connecting with different ways of thinking about a situation and finding it difficult to come to a satisfactory resolution of this conflict. This is, however, a phenomenon in contemporary higher education broader than my experience, and the difficulties of operating in my professional location are widely reported. I drew on writers (explained below) who conceptualise this issue as a situation where professionals use alternative, and sometimes competing, ways of thinking about a situation to make sense of it, and to make judgements about how to act. These ways of thinking entrench a professional's location, and are ideological frames or perspectives which are powerful forces that shape the practical decisions and actions of professionals on a daily basis. This section outlines my professional location and how I conceptualised these tussles in relation to these wider forces at play, which in turn led to important developments in the analytical apparatus put to work in this research.

At the start of this research, my professional task was to expand flexible forms of higher education through introducing and then delivering two new developments in a university. The first of these was in relation to *negotiated, work based learning* degree programmes¹. These programmes are where individual learners, with support from a tutor (e.g. me), negotiate *what* and *how* they will learn, and how they will be assessed. For example, after a performance review a nurse might need to develop his leadership and clinical skills, so he selects modules in each area to devise a programme in clinical leadership. Rather than engaging in classroom tuition, he designs and implements work based projects; a form of learning that is akin to what might be termed ‘mode 2’ knowledge production² which is situated and responsive to the needs of the practical situation.

The second form was the *university accreditation of commercial training*, where a university formally recognises the learning that is achieved through an experience delivered by a business independent to it. An example³ is the case of an executive-coach training business which approaches a university with a course in coaching skills that it has already developed and operated profitably. Professionals at the university translate the course in to university modules, which when passed by a trainee, lead to a university-awarded, postgraduate certificate in coaching. In this way, the business determines and delivers the course, based on their desire to satisfy their customers and create additional profit. And profit seeking, according to studies by the professional body of higher education professionals and the funding body for higher education institutions, is an explicit objective of this type of activity⁴. Within this context, the higher education professional’s task is to facilitate it.

¹ As documented at the turn of the millennium by the first UK-based proponents of negotiated work-based learning, Boud and Solomon, 2001.

² Gibbons, Limoges, Notwotny, Schwartzman, Scott, and Trow, 1994.

³ Described by Wall and Grant, 2011.

⁴ Higher Education Academy, 2008 and HEFCE, 2010a, respectively.

This professional task was, and continues to be, a task shared by a growing community of higher education professionals emerging to address a wider government regime to stimulate an increasingly demand-led higher education⁵. This is a regime which crystallises messages in the government's Leitch Review⁶ whereby a “compelling and urgent” case was made for higher education to become closer to its market and serve it better was made. Here, it argued that attuning and servicing the demands of employers better would lead to “higher productivity, the creation of wealth and social justice” and that without it, “we would condemn ourselves to a lingering decline in competitiveness, diminishing economic growth and a bleaker future for all.”⁷. Since then, this message has become a modern reference point for governmental policy for higher education⁸, including the major review of higher education in 2009, where the report concluded that flexibility is crucial for “the nation's strength in the global knowledge based economy”⁹.

This regime, under the guise of ‘employer engagement’ and ‘employer responsive provision’ attracted millions of pounds to cultivate the capacity of professionals, like myself, to develop infrastructures and ways of working to become closer to its markets¹⁰. It was a political strengthening of the ‘third leg’ of the ‘three leg’ model of universities, where commercial income generation joins the pillars of teaching and research. However, for writers on contemporary higher education Barnett¹¹, Collini¹² and Brown and Carasso¹³, this ‘leg’ now does not just represent a discrete set of activity, but rather a wider ideological drive towards demand-led higher education which entrenches contemporary professional life in higher education. Indeed, Taylor¹⁴ highlights how over time, the responsibility of universities within the UK Government has shifted from a ‘Department of Education’ to, more recently, a ‘Department for Business, Innovation and Skills’; cutting out ‘education’ to emphasise commerce. England's 80% teaching budget cuts in 2011 exemplifies this drive further, but also emphasises and deepens this drive, in the sense that now, university income is largely

⁵ Dhillon, Edmonds, Felce, Minton, and Wall, (2011) have spotted this trend within the specific practices of negotiated work based learning and the university accreditation of commercial training. Others, such as see Whitchurch, 2008b, 2009, however, have spotted it in broader practices.

⁶ Leitch Review, 2006: 1.

⁷ Leitch Review, 2006: 1.

⁸ See also: Department for Innovation Universities and Skills, 2008a, b; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2009, 2010; HEFCE, 2010b, 2011.

⁹ Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2009: 15.

¹⁰ Such as the workforce development programme funded by the higher education funding body HEFCE, 2011.

¹¹ Barnett, 2011.

¹² Collini, 2012.

¹³ Brown and Carasso, 2013.

¹⁴ Taylor, 2010.

dependent on individual educational purchasers in the marketplace, and professionals have a direct role in serving the customer in satisfying that demand.

Extensive, cross-nation empirical work argues that such a drive is changing the roles of professionals in higher education¹⁵. Whitchurch informs us that tasks which were previously clearly demarked by professional spaces such as academic and non-academic (or administrative support) are merging and “blended professionals” engage in professional tasks that include, for example, curricula design (previously a typical academic task) with ‘client’ or ‘student experience’ management (previously a typical non-academic or administrative support task). And more recently, this has been corroborated in other research¹⁶, which describes a similar trend in the growth of ‘flexians’ in contemporary higher education; people who are experiencing a larger and more varied range of demands placed on them than previously.

However, even after such governmental direction and investment to deliver the demanded regime, there was (and still is) widely reported ‘cultural’ distance between higher education institutions and the commercial organisations it attempts to serve. For example, Wedgewood¹⁷ argued that the “dominant culture of HE is out of alignment with what the market wants”. Specifically, she is referring to a culture which “favour[s] delivery to a traditional market of full time 18-21 year olds on 30 week full-time courses, starting in October in an HEI”, which is at odds with a “culture of flexibility and responsiveness”¹⁸ required by the market. Similarly, in their research, Bolden, Hirsh, Connor, Petrov, and Duquemin¹⁹ concluded that higher education structures and practices have not been ‘well suited’ to the more flexible, responsive learning demanded by employers. Joined by others such as the CBI²⁰, these issues are described as ‘cultural differences’ which are a source of ‘friction’. Indeed, Cooper, Mackinnon, and Garside’s²¹ research sheds light on these ‘cultural’ challenges and highlights mismatched expectations related to the speed of response and the proactive management of relationships, and particular frustration with bureaucratic processes and use of jargon. Importantly, as McDonald²² highlights in his systematic review of studies in this area,

¹⁵ Whitchurch, 2008a, b, 2009, 2010.

¹⁶ Smith, 2012.

¹⁷ Wedgewood, 2008: 5.

¹⁸ Wedgewood, 2008: 5.

¹⁹ Bolden, *et al.*, 2010.

²⁰ CBI, 2008.

²¹ Cooper, *et al.*, 2008.

²² McDonald, 2009: 4.

language is a “key” barrier, arguing that the language used in higher education is not always “comprehensible” to others.

Yet these issues related to language and bureaucratic processes have not just been found to be challenges between professionals inside the university with those outside of it. In his research Poole²³ highlights other ‘cultural clashes’ where there are different assumptions and patterns of behaviour between ‘academics’ and ‘bureaucrats’. In particular, he refers to how certain notions of ‘quality’ have come to mean specific monitoring mechanisms with specialist terminology alien even to people within the higher education institution. This highlights an ongoing concern for Morley²⁴ who suggests that a growing culture of accountability and associated concern for the use of resources has led to the potential for professionals to be ‘policy ventriloquists’ – whether or not the professional is aware of it. In this way, the original intention of quality assurance to establish and maintain what is conceived as higher education study is mixed up with and made sense of wider movements of accountability and associated bureaucratic mechanisms to deliver this intention. Indeed, in the early stages of this research, in terms of how it was conceived and in my own reflective practices, such wider influences were absent. A possible sign of ‘policy ventriloquism’ which was shaping how I was acting in practice.

But even more relevant to the specific area of this study was Bolden, Connor, Duquemin, Hirsh, and Petrov’s earlier work²⁵ that argues for a cultural shift that means “academic staff [be] willing to consider different understandings of their role”. Indeed, other writers²⁶ have already pointed to shifts in how teachers understand their relationship with their students, particularly in further education, but did not offer a theoretical explanation as to why. And this was the location and nature of my own professional challenges. In delivering the two demand-led developments above (negotiated, work based learning and university accreditation of commercial training), I felt a stark difference in how I felt I should engage. Under these professional circumstances, I became aware of a relationship moving away from me having the autonomy to design and deliver the learning experience, to me providing an educational service which was being bought by an educational purchaser. This purchaser was the student negotiating a learning experience they needed or wanted, and the training

²³ Poole, 2010.

²⁴ Morley, 2003.

²⁵ Bolden, *et al.*, 2009: 36.

²⁶ Randle and Brady, 1997; Robson, 2006.

business wanting university accreditation of their commercial training course to boost their own profits. Tussle and tensions arose regularly about how to act even in very simple daily actions. For example, is it appropriate to continually request that a learner apply correct academic referencing conventions to pass a module? Referencing is important in academe, but can be irrelevant in the real working life of a senior leader in a large organisation. More so, is it appropriate to do this if that learner is not directly my responsibility, but a trainee of the commercial training business?²⁷

So what could be done about these issues? The above writers tend to focus on the notion of ‘bridging the cultural gap’, precisely through changing the ‘culture’ of higher education. For Wedgewood²⁸ this is about a ‘paradigm shift’ towards a “widespread culture of engagement - of business focus, of ‘close connect’ with professional employment and practice”. A culture “permeating all aspects of provision from the business model of a [higher education institution], through... new pedagogies for workforce education, to individual employment contracts for HE staff”²⁹. Others, such as Garnett³⁰, agree and argue that the fundamental issue, and ideas for its resolution, are located in an organisation’s deep rooted formal and informal structures, and precisely, that they are not set up to satisfy *customer* demands³¹. The idea here is that the university needs to orient its policies, processes, procedures, staff and wider organisation, around the educational purchaser³²; a long process requiring major cultural and structural change³³. But for others, such as Cooper, *et al.*, there are multiple, practical actions that can be undertaken, most of which relate to “good marketing and good project management techniques”³⁴. One example is the deployment of brokerage or translation staff³⁵ who can communicate in ‘both’ languages, and can understand and manage the different expectations of each world. Overall, these writers are certain that the solution to the ‘cultural challenges’ are firmly rooted within the higher education institution.

²⁷ This issue of contested ‘responsibility’ is taken up more thoroughly in Wall and Meakin (2013).

²⁸ Wedgewood, 2008: 20.

²⁹ Wedgewood, 2008: 20.

³⁰ Garnett, 2009.

³¹ Also see: Garnett, 2001; Garnett, Workman, Beadsmoore, and Bezencenet, 2008.

³² What Garnett and colleagues refer to as ‘structural capital’ of the organisation (Garnett, 2001; Garnett, *et al.*, 2008).

³³ Bolden, *et al.*, 2010.

³⁴ Cooper, *et al.*, 2008: 32.

³⁵ Also supported by: Bolden, *et al.*, 2009; Workman, 2010; Dhillon, *et al.*, 2011.

However, McDonald³⁶ argues that there is still no ‘coherent and proven strategy’ to overcome the difficulties above. And indeed others suggest that the issue is not *just* deeply rooted within the higher education institution itself. For example, Bourdieu³⁷ offers us theoretical ideas which explain how we relate to each other and how ways of understanding a sphere of activity are *reproduced* from wider social forces and structures. Here, through participation (or not), we come to know what it means to properly engage (or not) in a sphere of activity, but this process is wider than any particular organisation, and is also shaped (and held in place) by potentially multiple spheres of professional activity, such as wider concepts of education. Others, such as Holland, Lachiocotte, Skinner, and Cain,³⁸ also draw on these theoretical ideas to emphasise how these spheres of activity are like figured worlds, shaping how we make sense of our world and how we think. This helps inform us about some of the tensions experienced above related to different expectations and language. For example, in the UK, education is thought of in terms of levels and credits, and is captured in multiple educational frameworks³⁹, but these are not managed by one body, but rather governed and policed by multiple but powerful watchdogs⁴⁰, underpinned by a common understanding of what education is. This theoretical apparatus raises the question of how successful many of the recommendations would be at making such cultural changes. Indeed, Gibbs and Garnett⁴¹ draw on these same theoretical ideas to point out that many of the above recommendations could not create sustained cultural change, as they are kept in place (or *reproduced*) by stronger forces outside of the higher education organisation. The translator, for example, does not necessarily change the concepts of education, but *actively* uses them in their work of translation, and hence is part of the system that is reproducing the structures and understandings at play.

This was an important development in shaping of this thesis, as it raised wider structural forces that are at play as we engage in practice. It highlighted how spheres of activity could be conceptualised as specific worlds which have their own frameworks for making meaning and sets of language⁴². And, importantly, that these worlds encapsulate

³⁶ McDonald, 2009: 2.

³⁷ Bourdieu, 1988.

³⁸ Holland, *et al.*, 1998.

³⁹ Such as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Qualifications & Credit Framework (QCF) in the UK, and the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) across Europe.

⁴⁰ Such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the watchdog for higher education.

⁴¹ Gibbs and Garnett, 2007.

⁴² Holland, *et al.*, 1998.

a “composite of ideas, beliefs, concepts”⁴³, or ideological frames of reference. In other words, they embed particular ways of seeing the world, and include beliefs about the way things *should* be, and the value attached to those things. Indeed, Barnett⁴⁴ and Rowland⁴⁵, who write about ideology in higher education, specifically point to the multiplication of ideological frames which entrench contemporary higher education. They argue how the professional may connect more or less with multiple ideological perspectives which can clash or contradict in daily practice and create situations where the professional feels it is challenging to know how to act. Here, professional life is not just a matter of “handling overwhelming data and theories *within* a given frame of reference”⁴⁶, but rather a matter of “handling multiple frames of understanding... The fundamental frameworks by which we might understand the world are multiplying and are often in conflict”⁴⁷.

Such ‘frameworks’ refer to the ideological perspectives by which we make sense of ourselves in order to act. Examples of ideological forces which are reported to be permeating modern day universities with the agendas they carry include entrepreneurial perspectives, as a drive for new markets; quality assurance perspectives, as a drive for consistency and parity of units of education; and managerial perspectives as a drive for more efficient and effective use of resources⁴⁸. Indeed, the rise of the two developments I was introducing (negotiated, work based learning programmes and the university accreditation of commercial training) can be seen as prime examples of an entrepreneurial drive and ideological perspective, which is about finding and maximising benefits from new markets. Returning to a scenario mentioned earlier, it is possible to see these ideological influences at work, and their effects in terms of how I was responding in practice. In the scenario where I was questioning whether it was appropriate or not to *continually* request that a learner apply correct academic referencing conventions to pass a module, it is possible to see that I was connecting with a ‘quality assurance’ ideological frame, whereby it is important and expected to reference academic texts. It is a feature of how quality is understood and assessed. But simultaneously, I was also connecting with the ‘entrepreneurialism’ ideological frame, where I was trying to enable the customer to pass the module, where referencing can be

⁴³ Žižek, 1999a: 63.

⁴⁴ Barnett, 2003.

⁴⁵ Rowland, 2002.

⁴⁶ Barnett, 2000: 6.

⁴⁷ Barnett, 2000: 6.

⁴⁸ These discussed in depth in Barnett (2003).

irrelevant in the real working life of a senior leader in a large organisation. Conflict arose when the same task was valued differently from each location. This was even further complicated under the circumstances of accreditation, where that learner is not directly my responsibility, but a trainee of the commercial training business; another consequence of connecting with an entrepreneurial ideological perspective. The ideological frames conflict, without a readily available resolution.

The value of these theoretical ideas was that they shifted the discussion away from lists of recommendations, popular in the above literature. Rather, as I will soon discuss, the shift oriented the research towards more coherent bodies of theory which highlight the role of covert forces structuring the way we think about our professional location and the way we should act in a situation. However, it also questioned the possibility of professional autonomy. In one sense, in recognising how ideological perspective can work to shape us and how we make sense of the world, and therefore engage in it, might be interpreted as a reduction in a previously assumed state of academic professionalism; I no longer set what is learnt and how, which characterises some notions of academic professionalism⁴⁹. But it also problematises this very notion of professionalism based on autonomously expressing one's specialised knowledge⁵⁰. In effect, if ideological dimensions are omnipresent in professional life, and are perhaps driven by powerful governmental regime, then they are continuously shaping behaviours and therefore the autonomy a professional has in acting. And this creates a situation where a professional *can* become a policy 'instrument'⁵¹.

But it also creates a situation where a professional *can* become aware of these issues and take steps to re-assert their sense of autonomy. Barnett⁵² and Wedgewood⁵³ conceptualise academic professionalism around another ideological frame, that of 'engagement' or 'engagement for the freedom of others'. The problem is, however, whether this is sufficiently different to the entrepreneurial ideological perspective, where the professional is framed as serving the customer; was it another expression in a new guise that would practically live out the same conception and create the same tensions in practice? Nonetheless, understanding that such ideological forces can influence thinking and behaviours, as demonstrated above, was a pivotal first

⁴⁹ Churchman and Kind, 2009.

⁵⁰ Robson, 2006.

⁵¹ Inden in Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 42.

⁵² Barnett, 2003, 2011.

⁵³ Wedgewood, 2008.

manoeuvre in re-establishing a sense of professional autonomy through reflection and self-awareness. The challenge now, however, was to identify the analytical apparatus that would be more precise about the ideological parameters in practice, to enable this very task of generating awareness and tackling these tussles.

1.2.2 Engaging different perspectives through narratives

So if ideological perspectives entrench higher education as suggested above, how specifically does it work to shape the way professionals understand themselves, their professional task, and how to act in a situation? And in terms of the professional issue discussed above, how was it working to create the tussles I was experiencing in my professional tasks on a daily basis? This section introduces part of the theoretical apparatus put to work to answer these questions. It outlines how ideological perspectives can be conceptualised as being embedded within the narratives we tell, and that we connect more or less with them as we speak, but in doing so, there is emotional fall out. I exemplify how I used these theoretical ideas to begin to work through a professional challenge in the first stage of this research. Though this was an important set of apparatus which helped understand ideological dimensions of practice, it is only part of the apparatus that helps understand how a professional can gain a sense of professional autonomy in their own work. This first step, however, focuses on understanding how situations can be engaged from different perspectives, structured by ideological frames and parameters.

For contemporary theorists Barnett⁵⁴ and Žižek⁵⁵, the ideological dimension, or particular ways of understanding the world we engage in, are embedded and live through in the narratives we tell. As we speak, we are actively identifying with the conceptions held by an ideological perspective. For example, for Habermas⁵⁶, language is a reflection of the society⁵⁷ that generates it, and is replete with the distortions resulting from particular modes of usage, such as a government insisting on packaging education in particular ways. But for other writers, such as Foucault⁵⁸, this suggestion of being able to access the ‘undistorted’ communication underneath is flawed. For

⁵⁴ Barnett, 2003, 2011.

⁵⁵ Žižek, 2006.

⁵⁶ Habermas, 1976.

⁵⁷ Or in the terms of Bourdieu, fields of activity, and in the terms of Holland et al, figured world.

⁵⁸ Foucault, 1997a, b.

Foucault, this situation of allowing “games of truth to circulate freely, without any constraints seems utopian... power relations are not something that is bad in itself, that we have to break free of”⁵⁹. Here, contemporary writers argue that such distortions are inevitable because of an immensely slippery relationship between that which is being *signified*, and that word which is being used to *signify*, or put another way, there is no ‘necessary relationship’⁶⁰. In turn, this type of relationship is conducive to enabling ideological forces to taint an object. Within this context of ‘a multitude of floating signifiers’⁶¹, ideological perspectives have a role to step in and ‘fix’ a particular signification of some-thing, through a particular perspective, and help us make sense of the world we are engaging with, *from* that perspective. Each and every perspective is partial, never unbiased, never value-free, and we can never truly access what supposedly lies ‘beneath’ the signifier, or the undistorted communication. For example, an entrepreneurial ideological frame highlights and values activities which engage with new markets, and so negotiated work based learning and university accreditation of commercial training are valued and important to it. In contrast, the mechanisms to ensure students use proper academic referencing conventions might be on the agenda of, and important to, a bureaucratic quality assurance ideological frame. But either practice may not feature as important in the other’s ideological map.

But what does this mean in terms of how professionals come to understand the demands placed on them? As we will see in more detail in chapter 3, identifying with a particular ideological perspective, or way of thinking about some-thing, therefore implicates how we understand a task we are engaged in and importantly how we understand ourselves in that world. In other words, they hold ‘implicit theories’ of what the task is and what the professional is⁶² which then provide a framework of how we think we should act. This can be demonstrated through a work issue that I experienced during the first stages of the research. In this scenario, I had become responsible for managing a ‘Joint Honours’ programmes at a university. These were considered by the university as a ‘flexible’ form of higher education where the learner could study two subjects of their choice, such as business and history. I became aware that I was trying to *control* the day to day operational challenges I was witnessing, such as resolving timetabling clashes, resolving conflicting information about module choices, and resolving module clashes between subjects. I was framing my challenge as *solving a multiplicity of problems*

⁵⁹ Foucault, 1997b: 298.

⁶⁰ Žižek, 1989, after Lacan and Mouffé, 1985.

⁶¹ Žižek, 1989: 95.

⁶² Holland, *et al.*, 1998.

through a multiplicity of mini solutions. In some ways, I was identifying with a managerialist ideological perspective, trying to ensure an efficient delivery of the programme.

However, I became increasingly aware of student narratives describing themselves being treated like ‘second class citizens’, and that this was reflected in other narratives in the university and across the sector in official reports over time⁶³. I found that the Joint Honours degree was being understood in a way that emphasised ‘half’ of a subject matter which lacked depth. This was reflected, for example, in the officially sanctioned, but additionally loaded, term ‘Specialist Honours’ being used rather than ‘Single Honours’ for those programmes that focused on one subject area. This makes sense when we understand a degree as being a certain number of credits typically delivered by an academic department with a specified subject, and where a Joint Honours degree studies ‘half’ of that area (as understood by the amount of academic credits). By implication, from this line of thinking, it makes sense to think that something important must be lacking which constitutes a ‘full’ degree – as one of my academic colleagues stated at the time; ‘these students don’t get a *full degree* in either subject’. Yet this was an understanding influenced from one perspective, from a quality assurance perspective, which defines what a ‘degree’ is and means within higher education. In contrast, viewed from an entrepreneurial ideological perspective, Joint Honours was a customer-oriented educational product that successfully attracted students. So there were different ideological frames, leading to different understandings and effects in the world, such as the students narratives of lack and disadvantage.

This additional awareness from understanding ideological influence also created a professional tension for me, partly because I felt that my own managerialist perspective was living out the conceptions creating and perpetuating this situation. So we see again a tension being raised because of a conflict in ideological perspective, but this time, I was aware of my particular identification and felt uncomfortable with it. I was tussling with the way I was understanding myself through ideological lens. But here, it is useful to return to psychoanalytic apparatus highlighted above to understand this tension in lived experience, and specifically, to return to the idea that these perspectives are only ever partial. Contemporary psychoanalytic writers such as Žižek⁶⁴ point out how language *itself* is inherently ‘violent’ because it simplifies what we are trying to signify,

⁶³ As outlined in the official reports by the Quality Assurance Agency, 2006a, b, 2010.

⁶⁴ Žižek, 2008b.

similar to a simplified world of meaning created by particular concepts of theories evoked by particular ideological perspectives⁶⁵. Through language, objects are simplified, and attention is directed to certain aspects of a situation or object that are retained within that simplification. In the issue above, for example, these simplifications included the idea of ‘Joint-ness’ as ‘half-ness’, or that I was a ‘manager’ of Joint Honours and so solving a multiplicity of problems through a multiplicity of mini solutions.

Importantly, for writers such as Žižek⁶⁶, this simplification, or more precisely, what escapes this simplification, is an important aspect to explore. These dramatic simplifications inevitably fail to capture the totality of some-thing or our-self that we are trying to signify; in a sense, we are tricked into thinking that these fantasies are our ‘realities’. The important point here is that it is this failure to capture that leads to emotional fall out and tension; ‘managing’ and ‘Joint’ just don’t quite fit in a constant move to capture totality. Similarly, in circumstances where we draw on multiple ideological perspectives, as we saw in the earlier discussions, we may be implicated in different directions, again creating a situation of discomfort and tension; each direction or attempt to capture misses the mark. In both circumstances, each attempt which misses, taints and motivates our engagement in everyday life to return us back to a desired, but illusionary, state of unity and harmony. So as we tell stories or narratives about who we are and what we do, we identify with particular ideological perspectives which motivate us in particular directions, because of that which is captured, and that which escapes. And this is a key aspect of what drives our professional manoeuvres (this is explored in depth in chapter 3). So if ideological forces work through language to foreground certain things over others, this gives some insight into how a professional might be able take a step towards establishing their own agency in a professional situation. And this was the next challenge in developing the theoretical apparatus for building a strategy for action. The next part of the theoretical apparatus is now explained, where we learn more about how we can create a sense of agency within this context of ideologically entrenched and structured experience.

⁶⁵ Holland, *et al.*, 1998.

⁶⁶ Žižek, 2006b.

1.2.3 Identifying differently through time, for different effects

So we make sense of the world through the frames of reference offered by ideological perspectives, and we need these to make sense of our world. This section outlines that although we may be structured when we connect with particular ideological perspectives, we can also identify differently to create different effects in the way we see and understand ourselves, which in turn, creates new options for different effects. I exemplify how I use this to shift the way I engaged with a professional situation, through identifying differently, thereby creating different effects than previously. However, this act of telling constructs me and the world as I see it, but it is not a static process that identifies with a perspective. Rather, the act of re-telling over time, constructs different versions over time, to enable additional and multiple constructions to be created. This emphasises the fragility of the relationship between words and meaning, and creates another source of professional agency. This section also exemplifies how this apparatus is another strategy for building action in practice.

So within this context of how ideology works through language, how can we create agency? Adopting the Habermasian outlined above, professional agency is generated through finding and then correcting ideologically distorted perceptions that aim for an unconstrained language, free from power relations⁶⁷. But I have already questioned the possibility of this⁶⁸. Indeed, for Bourdieu⁶⁹ and Holland *et al*⁷⁰ we cannot engage with a particular world without it, but for others such as Lacan or Žižek⁷¹ it is much more serious; we need these very structures to make sense of our experience and without them we would experience a psychic break in our reality (key fundamental differences between Holland *et al* and Žižek are discussed in more detail later). The point is that it is important to recognise that *each* ideological frame exerts power; shaping the way we understand our world and selves. So in this sense, the stories we tell (which evoke particular structurings) are creating effects in our experience⁷². Different identifications implicate us in different directions. Agency here, then, is not about trying to access things underneath language, but about identifying in different ways which evoke different ideological perspectives. Let's take an example of how this was a useful set of apparatus in the first stage of this research.

⁶⁷ For example, Habermas, 1976.

⁶⁸ Recall Foucault, 1980.

⁶⁹ Bourdieu, 1988.

⁷⁰ Holland, *et al.*, 1998.

⁷¹ Lacan, 1981; Žižek, 2006b.

⁷² Clandinin and Connelly, 2003.

As outlined in the previous scenario of managing the Joint Honours programme, connecting or identifying with particular conceptions of the world implicates us in particular ways. In terms of my professional identity, I identified with being a ‘manager’, the effect of which was that I was trying to resolve the multiplicity of problems through a multiplicity of mini solutions. The identification mediated how I saw my role, my action, and therefore the effects in the situation. Similarly, seeing a degree as a calculation of credits packages education up in a particular way, and so when we introduce other concepts of ‘Joint-ness’, this can lead to ideas of ‘half-ness’, and narratives of ‘less-able’, ‘less-decisive’ and so on⁷³. Again, how something is understood is manifest in narrative, which in turn constructs that thing. And these constructions create effects in the situation such that students shared narratives of feeling like they were a ‘second class citizen’. Yet the fragility between what is being signified and its signifier, introduced previously, allows the possibilities for other perspectives to step in. And it is this possibility that offers a source of agency for professionals, and was important to creating different effects in this situation.

After becoming aware of such framings on the professional situation, I attempted to disrupt these. I found a new direction of agency, shifting from narratives of ‘managing’ or ‘controlling’ the problems to narratives of how I was ‘sharing dialogue about enhancement’. For me, this was a letting go of the perspective of control, to influence how Joint Honours was understood amongst my academic colleagues. It sparked my sense of autonomy and opened up new ways to act to make subtle changes to my practice. This included communicating the strengths and talents of Joint Honours students through a professionally designed magazine, and facilitating discussions around the structure of the Joint Honours academic framework which defined ‘half of one subject, half of another’. Another radical possibility that opened up was to delete the term ‘Joint Honours’ in the university, and rather, simply have ‘degrees’ or ‘programmes’. These were all loosening the grip of particular ways of seeing the Joint Honours as something ‘lesser’. Indicators of the effects of these shifts were in the narratives of colleagues who began to introduce new programme structures, and who had changed how they referred to Joint Honours (and even dumped the term ‘Specialist’ Honours). From this new identification of ‘sharing dialogue about enhancement’, the multiplicity of problems seemed to reduce. It was not within the gaze of this perspective.

⁷³ These were other terms used to describe the students on Joint Honours programmes at the time.

In this scenario, I depicted the situation as a snapshot of a narrative and how it shaped a different route to navigate the demands as I saw them. However, Ricoeur⁷⁴ suggests that although the words we use to tell narratives can be fixed and discrete in a moment in time, how they are interpreted, or how meaning is attached to them, can change over time, and each reading conditions our subsequently understandings. As Brown explains:

I may wish to share my thoughts spoken or written. But as I say something, I may be more or less disappointed with how my thoughts sounds once converted into words. And through my attempts to reconcile what I thought with what I said, my understanding of the world might then be modified. So when I feel ready to speak again, there may be some shift in the way in which I express myself, as, in a sense, a different person is speaking. And so on... where understandings and explanations continue to disturb each other perhaps for as long as I live.⁷⁵

Though contrasting with the view of a Habermasian perspective which accepts the possibility of ‘undistorted communication’⁷⁶, this emphasises but also extends an earlier point that we can only access a ‘reality’ through our capacity to tell stories about it⁷⁷. And it is this that opens up possible ways to navigate professional situations and the ideological influences. I will now demonstrate this by continuing the story raised in the previous section about Joint Honours. In my early reflective writings, I was using third person narrative to tell a story of demand-led higher education, a shift that was happening independent of me, and how I think of myself as a (proud) instrument of that. But I did not see this until I had written the text and then had re-read the text after some time. As I re-read and began to re-tell the story of what happened in new reflective writing, the story shifted towards how I *then began* (at the time of re-telling) to see how I was presenting this demand-led higher education as an inevitable phenomena, the future of higher education, and a crucial, but ‘good’ development of higher education. In the re-telling, I noticed how I was previously drawing on evidence to critique any other way of identifying in that situation, especially the ‘academic freedom’ notion of professionalism which I labelled as ‘untenable’. Additionally, I also noticed how I was arguing that I needed to be aware of the ideological perspectives entrenching my world and that a reflective awareness based on valuing ‘engagement of others’ was important.

⁷⁴ Ricoeur, 1984.

⁷⁵ Brown, 2008: 405.

⁷⁶ Habermas, 1976.

⁷⁷ Clandinin and Connelly, 2003.

Ironically, the re-reading and re-telling enabled me to notice the effects of identifying with this entrepreneurial ideological perspective, highlighting flexibility for the educational purchaser.

In the re-telling, I questioned whether ‘engagement of others’ was just another expression of ‘entrepreneurialism’ in a different guise, and questioned why I could not see that I was constructing myself and my work as the instrumental machinery of governmental discourse. But the re-telling was a *different* story, where I was creating a new version of my understanding of the situation and of myself in that situation. The re-telling was mediating and affecting how I saw the world. Later, in a third re-reading and re-telling of the same sequence of reflections, I experimented with different words and constructions, trying on different labels for size; was I an academic, a manager, a specialist? Yet I realised I was attempting to get a settled version of who ‘I am’ as a singular form, and how this was not ‘fitting’ in any adequate sense. The effect was that I felt “marginal” or “peripheral” to any alternative descriptions of my role, and I was experiencing a “deep state of anxiety” from “role confusion” of who I was. A confusion and anxiety that was part of not knowing how I should act in my context.

In the *next* re-telling, informed by the theoretical ideas here, I realised this clear cut stable entity was futile, and would never be complete. The effect was that I reflected that “rather than trying to escape the complexity and confusion, I find energy and value in a slightly different notions... centred on the narratives in my practice rather than subject expertise”. And by this, I meant letting go of a role to ‘manage’ or ‘control’, and played with others such as ‘sharing dialogues of enhancement’. Narratives changed over time, after each subsequent utterance, and grew in different directions, showing different insights and manoeuvres. So telling and consequent re-telling offers us opportunities to develop understandings of ourselves and the world as we see it, and notice the effects of the particular identifications we activate as we speak. In this way, it offers apparatus to understand how ideological perspectives, as embedded and living through such identifications, can continually shape and structure us in different directions.

Together, this apparatus adds a distinctive contribution to understanding the professional tensions of professionals in higher education. It is distinctive in the weaving of two main aspects. The first aspect is that this apparatus does not assume that strategies for action are in the form of more organisational structures to serve the client, as suggested by many of the writers seeking to resolve the cultural differences described earlier in this chapter⁷⁸. Many of these recommendations ignore the wider ideological forces which structure how we see our world and therefore engage in it, and in effect continue to reproduce the commercial ideological grip on professional autonomy in practice. The second aspect is that it foregrounds the personal experience and agency of the academic involved in these professional tasks, rather than the wider institutional structures that tend to be more privileged in the related higher education policy literature⁷⁹. But how does this discussion provide a theoretical framework as a research enterprise? Discussion now turns to this question, in the final section of this introduction.

⁷⁸ In the vein of: CBI, 2008; Cooper, *et al.*, 2008; Wedgewood, 2008; Bolden, *et al.*, 2009; Dhillon, *et al.*, 2011; White, 2012.

⁷⁹ Sabri, 2013.

1.3 Research methodology

A key theme of the last section was how ideological perspective entrenches higher education, with each one reflecting a particular way of understanding the professional task at hand. This can also be said of research as a professional task, where there are different schools of thought, or paradigms, with different values, assumptions about reality and the “legitimate” mechanisms for research⁸⁰. From one perspective, for example, different paradigms are positioned against each other as clear, discrete research approaches. Here, they are incommensurate and oppositional, such as positivist/post-positivist, or qualitative/quantitative. Guba and Lincoln⁸¹ describe this as wars for “intellectual legitimacy... and supremacy”. With this frame, there are fundamental dichotomies about reality and how to access it (or not), and as we have already seen, the frame implicates the understanding. This ‘modernist’ frame, however, hides the “blurring of genres” which now characterises research practice in the social sciences⁸². Now, there are alternative constructions of knowledge and processes of knowledge production, and the perspective of bricolage⁸³ has emerged⁸⁴. Here, the researcher constructs and orients their methodological apparatus towards their research focus, purpose and own standpoint in relation to these. This section explains the particular methodological apparatus I draw on in this research to work towards my methodological focus, that is, understanding how professionals make sense of the demands placed on them, and how this in turn implicates them in practice. This is with a broader purpose of moving practice forward in some way, and to learn from the practice in attempting this goal.

The driver for this research was the professional tussle I was having in my daily practice in a higher education context, but which were also reportedly more widespread than my own experience. It was therefore important to choose apparatus that would help me understand an individual’s experience, as the individual understands it. Yet, informed by the theoretical apparatus that questions the relationship between the signified and its signifier discussed earlier, an approach was needed that would avoid ‘objective’

⁸⁰ Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 191.

⁸¹ Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 191.

⁸² Geertz, 1993.

⁸³ As coined by Lévi-Strauss, 1969 and adopted by Denzin and Lincoln, 2005.

⁸⁴ Denzin and Lincoln, 2005.

accounts of cause-effect typical in some forms of practitioner research. So rather than assuming a fully self-aware researcher, the assumption was that the researcher is rather less sure of how they might be influencing the situation at any particular moment in time, because they cannot be fully aware of their own motivations in that task⁸⁵.

Therefore, apparatus to help understand an individual's experience which was sympathetic and sensitive to this fragility was important. I opted for a more post-structural form of practitioner research, whereby:

the practitioner (me), with his or her perspective and his or her way of working, is an essential part of the situation being described... the self, and the situation he or she is in, are non-dualistic but rather, are mutually formative, as part of each other... the loss of supposed 'objectivity' is replaced by an account of what might be seen and how best to see it – a traveller's guide rather than a map or an encyclopaedia entry.⁸⁶

This form of research not only recognises that the relationship between the signified and signifier is slippery and that this is tainted by the professional looking on to the situation, but it also recognises how meaning changes over time, through the act of writing. Rather than trying to capture or uncover a reality masked by words⁸⁷, it focuses on the words, how these structure the professional and in turn, the effects these particular conceptions generate in practice⁸⁸. This emphasises a 'disposition towards studying texts' rather than any notion of underlying truth about the person or their experience⁸⁹. Therefore, methodologically, the research focuses on collecting texts.

In terms of methods to create or collate these texts, I could have used interviews with professionals in a similar context to me, as other higher education identity researchers have done⁹⁰. This would have allowed a comparison across a number of professionals over a period of time, potentially with the benefits of generalisability⁹¹. However, there were two main reasons interviews were rejected. The first relates to practicality. This study is practitioner research with a commitment to building strategies for action, and

⁸⁵ Returning us to the point made by Žižek (1999a) that we are motivated by that which escapes capture through language, but we may or may not be aware of it.

⁸⁶ Brown, 1996: 269.

⁸⁷ Recall the discussion about Habermas, 1976.

⁸⁸ Zukas and Malcolm, 2002.

⁸⁹ Clandinin and Connelly, 2003: 154.

⁹⁰ For example, see Whitchurch (2009), who predominantly uses interviews, followed by questionnaires for an cross-country comparison.

⁹¹ Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011.

this would have been *difficult* to achieve with an interview as a method. This is not to say that interviews cannot facilitate the creation of new perspectives with practitioners; researchers⁹² have called on the very ideas above about how language constructs us during interviews to do precisely this. The point is it would be practically difficult to initiate and monitor shifts over time with a number of practitioners given the time and resource constraints.

However, even if these practical constraints could have been addressed, there is also the more fundamental issue of validity in giving narratives in the context of an interview (with interviewer prompting and influencing) the same status as those narratives that are told in the course of daily work activity. Hammersley⁹³ explains this as making a judgement about “how serious a threat the interactive and co-constructed character of interviews poses to the validity of inferences drawn about perspectives and practices outside the interview context”. I take a lead from Swantz⁹⁴ who argues that in interviews, the researcher who adopts a dual role as a researcher and as someone who shares the situation and interests as the participants, can be self-deluded and thereby risk the validity of the narratives created. Rather than the narratives created in the interview setting, I am particularly interested in the narratives that are ‘mobilised on specific occasions’⁹⁵ in the work setting; these narratives shape practical effects in that setting, which are an important aspect to this investigation as practitioner research. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on the texts I, as the professional in the context of investigation, write in the standard course of my daily work. I argue that focusing on field texts from the context, provides a higher level of credibility and trustworthiness⁹⁶.

For Clandinin and Connelly⁹⁷, field texts become such as soon as they become relevant to the study. Primarily, I have chosen to focus on the documents I create or complete, the emails I write, plus the reflective accounts I create in my context. The selection of texts for analysis and inclusion in this thesis related to the extent to which the text said something about the tussles I was experiencing, and how I was understanding myself or the professional context I was in, at that time. Specifically within (and through) these texts, I want to interrogate the ways in which ideological perspective shapes how the professional sees the demands being placed on them. To emphasise the point, this was

⁹² Such as Schostak, 2006.

⁹³ Hammersley, 2012: 90.

⁹⁴ Swantz, 1996.

⁹⁵ Hammersley, 2012.

⁹⁶ Cohen, *et al.*, 2011.

⁹⁷ Clandinin and Connelly, 2003.

not in a way to understand the language ‘underneath’ or understand truth games in order to correct any distortions. Rather, the intention is to see in what ways the professional is being implicated in terms of their understandings of themselves in meeting the demands as they see them. To do this, I draw particularly on Žižek⁹⁸, a contemporary writer in psychoanalytic apparatus who is particularly interested in how narratives structure us and how we see the world, and how this creates an emotional fall out which motivates us to act in certain ways. This apparatus can be likened to the patient in the chair in a therapeutic relationship with the psychoanalyst, trying to release new insights and perspectives from new understandings of self and the world they occupy.

However, in psychoanalytic forms of practitioner research, the researcher is both the client and the therapist⁹⁹. The idea is that as I write, I reveal aspects or images of myself and the ideological perspectives I am using to construct and make sense of these images. Writers on educational research methods, such as Cohen, *et al.*, (2011) remind us of the ‘bias’ inherent in such forms of self-reporting. A bias which creates a loss of supposed ‘objectivity’. There is also the critique that rises from applying psychoanalytical approaches to itself as a practitioner research approach; I as researcher am also susceptible to my motivations that I may not be aware of, but nonetheless shape how I make sense of things. To some extent, this critique is based on the dualistic idea of finding and accessing an underlying truth to find the subject (me) in a natural state (recall the debate between Habermas and Foucault earlier). Rather, in this psychoanalytic form of practitioner research, my task as researcher is to offer a *convincing* account of what *might* be seen with demonstrable evidence¹⁰⁰; or as stated above, creating a convincing ‘traveller’s guide’ rather than a scientifically objective ‘map’. And specifically, it is a traveller’s guide to the new insights into practice that have been created as a result of this research, or more precisely, the new narratives on practice which open up new ways of acting in the professional context as it is understood.

⁹⁸ Žižek (2006b) leans particularly on Lacan’s latter theoretical expositions.

⁹⁹ Brown and Heggs, 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Clandinin and Connelly, 2003.

So, methodologically, this form of practitioner research produces “a chain of pieces of writing over time” where “meaning is derived from the succession of pieces of writing... [and is] dependent on the management of collated pieces of writings”¹⁰¹. As discussed above, the successive writing acts throughout this research will have created some shifts, as in each attempt to capture what has happened slightly misses the mark, but informs and motivates the next bit of writing. I use this psychoanalytic apparatus to interrogate the successive texts I produce, in terms of the documents I produce, emails I write and reflections I make regarding my professional practice. In order to substantiate, question and further extend my analysis, I employ additional apparatus, based on an alternative theoretical perspective¹⁰², and this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3. Indeed, the process of writing *this* thesis has itself involved a number of versions, and is essentially a re-telling of the story which documents and asserts key themes and professional manoeuvres during the research, towards the overarching theme of professional identity in higher education.

And this is what is now presented in front of you, the current research findings as they currently stand at the time of writing. To summarise, this practitioner research involved a sustained period of data collection in the form of the texts I have created as part of my daily work and reflective practices. They are analysed and interrogated to identify ideological perspectives and how they shape my self-understandings, and how therefore, I feel I should act in response to the demands as I see them. For Clandinin and Connelly¹⁰³ it is important to be explicit about the presentation of the narratives and analysis of them for consumption by the research audience. I present a version of these narratives in the next chapter. I use the device of speaking about myself in the third person which has two main, but mutually supportive, functions. The first is to aid the process of creating distance between the texts ‘at the time’ of writing (what I consider to be the data from practice) and how I am interpreting that text within the context of the thesis, where I adopt an analytical lens. This is from the perspective of how I come to understand those texts at the time of writing this thesis (as of course, as we learnt above, the meaning of the texts might change over time, as I change). Similarly, the second function is presentational; to clearly separate out these two elements for the reader.

¹⁰¹ Brown and Roberts, 2000: 655.

¹⁰² Holland, *et al.*, 1998.

¹⁰³ Clandinin and Connelly, 2003.

The next chapter presents cases from two points in time, which are accounts that demonstrate some of the challenges I experienced in my daily life. Both focus on the university accreditation of commercial training, as this area of work was the most pronounced during the period of research, and were where I experienced the tensions most sharply. The first set of cases highlights my engagements with some of the training organisations I work with in the university accreditation of commercial training provision, in the context of translating training courses into academic forms. And the second set of cases highlights my engagements with a variety of colleagues within my university, trying to deal with (or not) the challenges that arise in the on-going delivery of training accreditation. Each set of cases represents a different perspective in time of how I was engaging in my practice and the tensions I was facing as I saw them at the time, and draw on my text from reflections, emails and documents that relate to these tensions. As above, in the telling of the cases, I provide glimpses into the experiences of an individual professionally engaged and interested in higher education work. And these narratives then become the data which is then interrogated in chapter 3, using the theoretical apparatus discussed in this section, to help further develop professional understandings of my practice and build strategies for action as a response.

Chapter 2. Cases

The previous section outlined how this research came to focus on the professional challenges experienced in higher education, specifically, how particular ways of thinking about a professional situation shape how professionals think about the demands placed on them, and in turn, how they think they should act. Tensions in my own professional practice were a key driver of this, particularly in the area of the university accreditation of commercial training provision. It explained how other professionals working in similar professional locations to myself were also sensing tussles in knowing how to act in their practice. This is partly because of the alternative ways of making sense of those actions and the values attached to them. Furthermore, it also explained that these alternative frameworks for making sense, or ideological frameworks, embed perspectives which distort our experience towards certain aspects (and delete others). The analytical apparatus that enabled new ways of tackling some of these professional demands in the first stage of the research were outlined, but these also formed the basis of a methodological approach which informs this research; the collection and management of texts I create, which reveal how I identify (or otherwise) with the ideological perspectives living in contemporary higher education.

This chapter presents two sets of cases, each one presenting two different aspects from my daily professional practice. The first set of cases focuses on my interactions with a lead trainer at a training organisation involved in accreditation, from packaging the training in to academic learning outcomes and programmes, through to re-packaging these based on required changes. A key message from this set is how the identity of the academic is depicted as problematically pulled by the demands of a ‘client orientation’ and a ‘quality assurance’ orientation. Or so it seems (more about this below). The second set of cases collates my various interactions with others in my university during the training accreditation activity. Here, it is illustrated how these two ideological perspectives (client orientation vs quality assurance orientation) grip and lock perspective to create blind spots, highlight certain things, and create professional tensions. The cases are now discussed, using data from my practice. For the reasons explained in the previous section, I now switch to first person in the data (reflections and emails at the time) and third person to interpret the data in terms of what it might mean in the context of this thesis, that is, exploring how particular ways of thinking

about a professional situation shape how professionals think about the demands placed on them, and in turn, how they think they should act. Data has been anonymised to prevent the identification of the people or organisations involved.

2.1 Identifying in different directions:

‘the client’ and ‘the code’

2.1.1 How an academic understands his role

The role of academics involved in training accreditation typically involves enabling others to deliver the educational commodity, both within the university and within the purchasing organisation. This task can involve three linked but distinguishable activities (each of which will be discussed in more depth through the cases). The first involves the academic re-conceptualising existing commercial training into academic content and outcomes, so that the trainees can achieve university recognition in terms of academic credit. The second activity involves the academic monitoring and guiding trainers in assessing the extent to which the trainees have demonstrated achievement of the academic content and outcomes. Both of these activities involve the academic engaging with and using the formal processes, procedures and proformas of the university, as required by the university’s regulations¹ and wider regulating body². And the third activity is to act as the interface between the university’s organisational structures and practices and the training organisation.

In this activity, there are parallels with the role of ‘account managers’ in high-end business banking situations who maintain regular contact with their client to ensure they are satisfied and whether anything else can be done to serve them. Within this context, however, how does the academic describe his role to those who may not be familiar to his work? At the start of this research (in 2010), the academic wrote a short introduction to his role for colleagues unfamiliar to his role, outside of his university, and with the intention of helping them understand the type of work he does. At the time, he says he

¹ In what is known as the “*Handbook A: Validation, Revalidation and Modification of Academic Provision – Appendix M*” (actual title).

² The Quality Assurance Agency, or The QAA, which outlines its requirements in the “*Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education*” (actual title).

was attempting to write as clearly and as simply as he could, without any other in intention than to communicate what he did. He wrote:

I work as a Senior Lecturer within a university, on a negotiated, work based learning programme, where individuals negotiate the content and process of their learning (though I do not put my title on my email signatures, so I feel closer to my clients and appear more approachable to them). Although I facilitate individual and group learning with adult learners in the workplace, most of my time is spent in 'co-delivery'. 'Co-delivery' is my institution's term for attributing university credits or awards to a learning activity which is delivered/assessed by an organisation external to the university (in my case, my clients are commercial training organisations).

In my particular institution, approved 'Associate Tutors' in the external organisation design and deliver the training, and undertake 'first marking' (grade student work and provide feedback on it), and then I undertake the 'second marking' (a 'quality assurance' activity to ensure the accuracy of the first marker's judgements and its comparability to 'standards' across other 'modules'). As designated 'Associate Tutor Advisor', I work closely with my client to develop new provision and enhance current provision. It continues to be a personal and professional challenge to work in two locations, that of the institution, and that of my client, in order to ensure the requirements of both are satisfied as far as possible.

In one reading, the text illustrates how the academic depicts himself as a 'Senior Lecturer'. But in another, it reveals a particular kind of 'Senior Lecturer' that he is identifying with; one that has 'clients'. The academic refers to *his* clients a number of times in the text, and explains how he needs to be 'close' and 'approachable' to them, and work 'closely' with them to 'develop and enhance provision'. The academic uses the word 'client' throughout as the particular description of those purchasing the educational commodity of training accreditation, rather than other options such as trainers, training organisations, partners, and so on. However, whereas the academic appeared to be using inverted commas to indicate language which was specific to his professional context (more on this below), he seemed to be using the term 'client' to have a clear and universal meaning (no inverted commas). In the text, it appeared as a

clear and non-controversial designation; it was used in an implicit, taken for granted manner.

The academic was also aware of some of the language that he was using which is specific to the world of academe, as indicated by the use of inverted commas. For example, he highlights terms such as 'co-delivery', 'Associate Tutors', 'first marking', 'second-marking', 'quality assurance', 'standards' and 'modules'. A kind of marker that some of the words were peculiar, and are perhaps not well suited. And this is wider than the academic's own understandings, as illustrated by the the academic's other reflective writings. In the text below, for example, he acknowledges that the term 'Associate Tutor Advisor' has been recognised as not fitting by other academics in his setting:

Although 'Associate Tutor Advisor' is a recognised term within (our) everyday language, there is an ongoing debate within my own department about whether the term (Associate Tutor Advisor) should be changed to "better reflect" the nature of the role as one of client management, such as "Client Manager" or "Consultant".

But even becoming aware of the language being used in the original text (and within the academic's department, in the text above), the academic still *practically used* these words to describe his role and context, within the parameters of the accepted discursive practices of his professional context. So much so, he was even precise about the use of uppercase letters, for example in the term Senior Lecturer (uppercase S, L) and Associate Tutor Advisors (uppercase A, T, A) – both recognisable objects within the administrative practices prevalent in the academic's professional setting. This illustrates the point that although he thought he was being aware of how the particular context he is in constructs the world around him, it still infiltrates the way he fundamentally understands his professional role; they become *the way* to describe and understand the activity. This is particularly interesting because in the same text the academic is also identifying with a client-oriented type of academic, who intentionally *removes* the language of the world of academe (e.g. from his email signature), to feel closer to his client. He is aware the language is present, but this does not practically interfere with whether it is lived out or not. It seems that a stronger identification wins and the effect is that the administrative language is practically used to make sense of the world, and communicate – and therefore is regulated by it. This pattern provides a glimpse into how the academic identifies and how this manifests as tensions for academics involved

in delivering an educational commodity. The following cases illustrate this in a variety of situations, as the academic packages and re-package commercial training courses into academic forms.

2.1.2 Packaging training into academic learning outcomes

As mentioned in the earlier case, the academic involved in training accreditation works with the training organisation to re-conceptualise commercial training into academic content and outcomes, so that trainees can achieve university-awarded, academic credit. Later in 2010, the academic was working with a particular training organisation in accrediting a new training course. The training course was to train managers and leaders in corporate organisations in a particular form of leadership (this kind of leadership has been marked with an [x] in the data below, as it could identify the client and people involved). The academic provided the lead trainer at the organisation with the official proforma used by the university for the design and specification of standard academic modules. The lead trainer completed two proformas which translated the training experience into an academic form; in this case, two modules. The academic returned it with annotations and questions, and after a number of iterations of this process, the academic continued to pursue greater clarity around one particular part of the proformas; that which related to the learning outcomes of the training experience. The following data is an extract from one of the academic's latter emails to the lead trainer.

Email from academic to the lead trainer (the lead trainer's original sentence is in [] square parentheses):

Bear with me, regarding the content of the modules... let me see if I can re-articulate in my own words...

[module 1 name] - essentially, are the learning outcomes about 1. being able to differentiate between [x] and other forms of leadership, 2. being able to differentiate the impact of [x] and other forms of leadership, 3. creating a [x]-informed critically reflective framework and 4. creating an action plan for a change using [x]? 1. and 2. appear to be very theoretical, and I wonder if you are asking the students to *apply* the theories during the module, or developing, refining skills in [x]? Or does that arrive in the [work based project module]? I am trying to understand

where the experiential/reflective application to own context fits in... and hence impact on the participants and their work setting.

[module 2 name] - same as above, really, as they both use the same model... I like your last sentence as it's describing what you are trying to achieve. This means the module design of [the two module titles] would include something like (also with an underlying desire for simplicity):

1. Critically evaluate the distinctiveness and impact of [x] ideas and concepts
2. Critically apply [x] ideas and concepts to develop own [x] attitudes, behaviour and competencies
3. Critically apply [x] ideas and concepts to [create and justify own framework for critical reflection and personal action plan for a desired change]

In the email, the academic attempts to re-articulate the lead trainer's words into his own words, as a device to make sense of the words *from* his position. In doing so, he draws on concepts and words to depict himself as someone seeking and valuing 'application', 'skills' and 'simplicity' rather than being 'overly theoretical'. A move *away* from a type of academic that might be perceived as not being relevant to a so called real world of commerce, *towards* one that values action and improvement in that world. And the academic seemingly references that world in the email to know what is important in designing the learning outcomes. He does this by suggesting that his 'desire for simplicity' is a legitimate one (by its very utterance), and then suggests that it is the rationale for the particular form of learning outcomes he has written. The flow of text goes 'This means the module design... would include something like... with an underlying desire for simplicity', where the '*with*' is an implied but silent '*because of*'. In this way, he was drawing on the logic of the world to provide a rationale or justification for something to be the way he was suggesting. However, this does not mean that the academic felt comfortable in sending this email. His reflections after sending the email reveal another dimension that offer insight into the tensions in how he identifying.

Academic’s reflection after sending the above email to the lead trainer:

The email feels “crude” – I am trying to get to the ‘core’ of some learning outcomes that are appropriate at Masters level, and a ‘core’ of what the learners would actually be doing in the training – I know I am cutting away the clients words which I feel are distracting away from this ‘core’ – yet I feel uncomfortable in cutting through the clients own words – it’s their training...

Here, it seems the academic’s discomfort relates to ‘cutting away’ at the lead trainer’s words. One reading is that, the lead trainer’s words gain a particular importance, and changing the words becomes a significant act. Indeed, the academic refers to the dramatic act of ‘cutting away’ the clients words. Not tweaking, altering, adjusting, improving, enhancing – but ‘cutting’. As the academic explains in his reflections “it’s their training”, so he is suggesting that it was not legitimate for him to ‘cut’ the words of his client. Yet there is also a sense that the discomfort was from the ‘crudeness’ of the words that he was using; again, a feeling that the academic was not capturing exactly what he wanted when he drew on this concept of ‘simplicity’.

But it is interesting to consider the academic’s possible motivations for him changing the words in the email. Let us return to the statement in the email where the academic says *‘I am trying to understand where the experiential/reflective application to own context fits in... and hence impact on the participants and their work setting’*. One possible reading is that the academic is trying to help the client. But another reading is that the academic is actually trying to shape the thinking of the training organisation in ways that meet the academic regulations in his context. The academic regulations³ refer to ‘constructive alignment’ in designing academic programmes of study, which can mean that the academic learning outcomes of modules align or match up with the purpose of the broader programme to which they belong; a kind of cascade or Russian doll principle. In the academic’s case here, the modules the academic was designing were to be delivered as part of a programme which had the following aims⁴:

³ Specifically, the “Handbook A: Validation, Revalidation and Modification of Academic Provision – Appendix M”, as guided by “Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review” in the “Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education”.

⁴ The programme is called the Work Based & Integrative Studies (WBIS) programme. The programme aims are from the official document which outlines the programme: The WBIS Programme Handbook, 2011, p4.

- Promote personal and professional development and improve performance within the workplace
- Deliver coherent, meaningful, programmes of study which... achieve their desired outcomes in relation to their, and their employer's needs
- Facilitate reflective practice and develop knowledge and understanding of its underpinning theory in a work based context.

Revisiting the academic's email with the programme aims in mind highlights some interesting insights. In the first part of the sentence, the academic said that he was *'trying to understand where the experiential/reflective application to own context fits in...'*, which connects with the aim to 'facilitate reflective practice' within a 'work-based context'. And in the second part of his sentence, the academic references the need to *'impact on the participants and their work setting'*, which connects strongly with promoting 'personal and professional development and improve performance within the workplace' and delivering 'programmes of study which... achieve their desired outcomes in relation to [the student's], and their employer's needs'. This suggests that the broader programme purpose, alongside the regulatory concept of 'constructive alignment', have shaped what is important to the academic, what is noticed, and hence what is commented upon in terms of feedback to the trainer. Indeed, in the email above, the academic was attempting to 'ensure the 'core' of what was appropriate at Masters level'. In another email to the same lead trainer, the academic elaborates on what this 'core's is, and explicates particular important features:

...the more specific [the learning outcomes] are, the more focused the assessment will be on the 'areas' that 'matter' (i.e. criticality)... when these are broad, it can lead to a lot of description of 'what happened' (rather than why etc).

So it seems that although the academic might think his intention is to help the training organisation, there is also a question over whether it was for this intention, or whether it was to regulate the client in line with the academic frameworks at play. Importantly, it seems that this commitment towards the academic framework was not held consciously; the academic did not physically compare and contrast each of the programme aims with the outcomes of the module and the expectations of higher education study at a

particular level, according to the academic regulation⁵. Rather, it was held unconsciously, readily structuring the way the academic thinks and feels he should act in a given situation. He is practically motivated in a direction to get the ‘right form of words’ for learning outcomes that are recognisable and acceptable to the bureaucratic quality assurance system. So much so, he actually applies the same learning outcomes to the two new modules in a formulaic fashion (as he says, using ‘the same model’), with only a word different in each case, which referred to two aspects of this particular kind of leadership. It was a model or template that would ensure the creation of acceptable learning outcomes according to his world. This is a direction which simultaneously regulates the lead trainer, but because it has also already regulated himself. And these manoeuvres were successful; the academic’s words were accepted by the lead trainer and there was no further discussion about the learning outcomes.

2.1.3 Packaging training into academic programmes

The two new modules above joined a larger bank of other modules that the academic had previously converted from a training experience into academic modules. Now, the training organisation wanted to offer a range of accredited training courses for different educational purchasers, such as leaders or leadership coaches in different industries. And they wanted to achieve this efficiently by using the modules that had already been created, but combine them in different ways, which would meet the needs of these specific markets. The academic supported this idea and, as with the process of developing the academic learning outcomes above, the academic and the lead trainer engaged in cycles of questions, comments and re-development. For example, the academic questioned the lead trainer about the *order* in which the modules would be studied, on the grounds of the ‘coherence’ of the experience, and specifically, whether it would make sense to the different groups to experience the modules in that particular order. The academic raised an additional issue about the number of credits in the academic programme mapped out by the lead trainer.

⁵ In the university’s “Handbook A: Validation, Revalidation and Modification of Academic Provision – Appendix M” and specified by the Quality Assurance Agency in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

Extract from email from the academic to the lead trainer:

The last option in both of the documents state 40 credits for the last module. This needs to be 60 credits (for any of our MAs, there is a requirement of 60 credits 'work based project/research' - and the prep to be able to do it). This was my point (previously) about these participants having to do an extra 20 credits. You could stipulate that all engage in your journey, and then all have to do the [research methods module] and final module with the University, which could make your offer simpler? But would they be disgruntled in having to do/pay for an extra module? Do you have any intel yet about preferred routes?

The academics reflections after sending the email to the lead trainer:

Here, though not necessary evident from the text above, I had a sense of enjoyment designing the particular routes – a bit like working on a puzzle and then finding the answer with a real sense of pleasure. In this way, there was a sense I was being driven by 'getting' specific details 'right'.

It is interesting that even before this email, the academic had already drawn on the concept of 'coherence' to regulate the particular ordering of modules. This is another real device of the academic quality assurance regulation of the university⁶, but which is echoed throughout this email; 'the last module needs to be 60 credits' and 'for any of our MAs, there is a requirement of 60 credits 'work based project/research' - and the prep to be able to do it'. Uttered because of an assumed importance of the underlying regulations of how an 'MA' is defined⁷. This regulatory ambition was so strong the academic repeats the same regulation, asserting the solidity of the regulation – it both 'needs to be' and is 'a requirement of'. And the academic even encourages the client to 'stipulate' their own regulative parameters ('You could stipulate that...'). This regulative feel was also evident in the mechanical structure of the email: after stipulating *the* requirements, and then suggesting the trainer stipulates their own requirements, a number of additional checks were added to make sure this was being

⁶ Section 7 of The Code, but also, as we saw in the previous section, the Programme Aims: "Deliver coherent, meaningful, programmes of study which... achieve their desired outcomes in relation to their, and their employer's needs" (The WBIS Programme Handbook, 2011: 4)

⁷ A Master's is defined as having 180 credits according to the academic framework.

designed appropriately: “But would they be disgruntled in having to do/pay for an extra module? Do you have any intel yet about preferred routes?”. Regulation was a major driver of this communication, and it seems that engaging in this way was creating great ‘pleasure’ and ‘enjoyment’ for the academic; ‘a bit like working on a puzzle and then finding the answer’, or more precisely, find the ‘right answer’ according to the framework governing the academic’s thinking.

Yet at the same time, the academic also seems to be displaying a concern for the training organisation’s customers (not being ‘disgruntled’), taking their ‘preferences’ into account, and even whether the training organisation had any market ‘intelligence’ which could influence the design of the training experience. Or so it seems. The ‘would they be disgruntled... paying for an extra module’ elaboration is an interesting statement. Although the first part of the sentence might appear to be concerned for the training organisation’s customers (avoiding a ‘disgruntled’ customer), the second part of the sentence (‘having to do/pay extra’) is difficult to interpret. Here, is this ‘extra’ in relation to attracting another fee which the customer may not be happy with? Or is it ‘extra’ in relation to the academic framework which defines what ‘enough’ is, and therefore what ‘extra’ credits would be? In other words, it is only ‘extra’ because it falls outside the formal definition of what the qualification is⁸? This is difficult to comment on using the texts above, but the text illustrates, again, how although the academic might think he is acting in order to help the training organisation, but might actually be living out the academic frameworks within his context. This will be analysed in depth through the next chapter.

⁸ In other words, the students would be doing 200 credits rather than the 180 specified by the university, and therefore doing an extra 20 credits.

2.1.4 Enabling through regulating

Once the different combinations of modules had been clarified, the academic engaged in formal university processes to enable this to happen. This involved formally requesting permission for the training organisation to use the university's 'negotiated' programme⁹, mentioned in the introduction of this thesis. The negotiated nature of the programme would enable the organisation to combine modules in different ways, to meet the needs of individuals. The academic attended the formal meeting¹⁰, which oversees and scrutinises the use of the negotiated programme, and requested permission. The panel granted permission to use the negotiated programme but required the academic to "confirm the process in writing" of what the training organisation would and would not be allowed to do. The academic did this and soon after received formal approval from the panel. The academic found enjoyment in doing this, but also found it difficult to find a way of expressing the 'terms and conditions' in a way that he felt would be appropriate for the training organisation.

Extracts from the academics reflections after approval:

I'm ecstatic (relieved?!) that it 'went through' ok – I am excited to tell the client... but I am not sure I want to re-write it all... but I am aware that it is not written for the client, it was written for the panel... but it is a formal document... it's crude...

⁹ The Work Based & Integrative Studies (WBIS) programme.

¹⁰ Formally called the WBIS Approval Panel.

Extracts from the academics email to the lead trainer, 18/1/11:

You have been approved to offer negotiated 'routes' using your existing provision. The exact wording and parameters agreed are as follows - happy to discuss at any point, but it essentially means the pathways we have been discussing... can now be offered...

We propose that [the client]:...

- Can discuss and outline pathways and related award titles... using the formal Approved Studies Learning Agreement (ASLA) form
- Must submit fully completed ASLAs for scrutiny and approval at the [department] meetings...

[The client] will not:

- Be permitted to approve or indicate approval of pathways or titles – this is the role of the [departments] meetings
- Be permitted to offer negotiated routes which include modules from across Faculties of the University or be purely NELMs...

Mechanisms for quality assurance:

- ...all ASLAs (pathways and titles) will be scrutinised and approved at [department's] meetings and forwarded to the... Approval Panel with minutes (such awards will be made explicit in documentation)...

The initial drive for this activity was to afford the training organisation the flexibility to offer training to a greater number of people, or to help them grow; a legitimate concern for the client oriented academic. Yet how the academic communicates the outcomes of the panel is scattered with formally sanctioned technical terms of quality assurance and newly designed 'terms and conditions' for that organisation. The academic was technically precise about both what the training organisation can do, along with what they cannot do, for example, the client 'must submit...', 'must use...', 'must fully complete...', 'will not', 'be permitted...'. Part of this precision was using the official language of that quality assurance world. Examples include reference to the document which lists a specific module combination (the 'ASLA'¹¹), a work-based project module (the 'NELM'¹²) and the university qualification (the 'PGCert'), as well as academic quality assurance terms such as 'scrutiny', 'approval' and 'mechanisms for quality assurance'. The use of the terms 'ASLA' and 'NELM' is interesting here, as it departs from the academic's previous use of the terms in previous emails. For example, in the previous discussion about the number of credits in a Master's programme, the academic referred to a 'work based project', resisting the term 'NELM'; a possible indication that the academic wanted to speak in terms which were most accessible to the training organisation. Rather, this email is much more formal and technical in relation to the academic quality assurance. This is not surprising, as it was written for that audience and purpose in mind; to achieve formal approval within and by the system which governs his practice and packages higher education in particular way.

Insightfully, the academic's reflections at the time seemingly express a great sense of pleasure and enjoyment in achieving this approval; he exclaims "I'm ecstatic" about getting it "through" the formal process, something he got right. There is a sense here that this pleasure is derived from being able to correctly use the highly technical terms, designing the formal documents, specifying the terms and conditions through the scrutiny process, all the way through to formal approval (getting it *through*, getting it *right*). Cross referencing back to how the academic described his role, this is interesting as again he caught in using the academic language he was seeking to avoid (remember the lack of signature?). But at the same time as getting this great pleasure and enjoyment, there were also tensions about how he would communicate it to the training organisation in a way that would make sense to them. Motivated to address this, he

¹¹ Which stands for the Approved Studies Learning Agreement.

¹² Which stands for Negotiated Experiential learning Module.

attempted to add a short 'which means' explanation, but recognised it was 'crude'. It was not right. He recognised that the words he had used were from and for the academic world, not *the client's* world. So this intense pleasure from getting it right was also met with a discomfort because of a recognition of it not being right for the training organisation. At the same time, even though he felt it was not right, it seems that the academic did *not* translate or reconfigure his text into something else because it was a *formal* statement of *regulation*. And these were important to his world – it had to be *right*, and *right* is defined by what the formal approval panel had sanctioned. In this way, he was caught between trying to get it right to serve the training organisation, and keeping it right from the academic assurance angle Caught and stuck.

Though there was a sense of achievement and pleasure in the academic's reflections, there was also a tension or difficulty in labelling the exact sensations he was feeling at the time – was he feeling 'ecstatic' or was he feeling 'relief?!'? This appears as a momentary afterthought, placed in parentheses, along with question and exclamation marks. He was not exactly clear at the time, but perhaps it was a 'relief' that something else did not happen, like getting the *wrong* outcome. Importantly, shortly after declaring his "ecstatic" feeling, the academic mentions his 'excitement to tell my client', so perhaps the 'relief' was in relation to 'not getting it wrong' for his client. Perhaps this was the same kind of discomfort expressed earlier about sending the email in a form that he knew was 'not right' for his client. Within this situation, the academic was aware of missing the mark but still gaining great pleasure from living out a regulatory function. Again, the regulatory function wins, but leaves the academic tussling with what he should do, how he should do it, and feeling it is not right when he does.

2.1.5 Responding to (and navigating) alternative demands

So far, the discussion has highlighted the tensions of how the academic identifies during the re-conceptualisation of training courses into academic learning outcomes, modules and programmes, and in engaging with formal university processes to achieve formal approval. After these processes, the academic may need to re-package the training in order to respond to the emerging needs of the training organisation. It has already been illustrated how in activating the notion of 'the client', the academic is seemingly shaped to serve them, in terms of what he feels is right to do. And so responding to the training organisation's demands, as understood by the academic, is an entirely legitimate way of working with the training organisation. An example of this emerged after permission was granted to the training organisation to deliver the negotiated programme. Here, the lead trainer asked the academic whether the university could offer "bits of paper", or a university awarded certificate of some sort, which were smaller than the full university qualifications currently being offered¹³. The idea was that the training organisation could attract more people on to the larger qualifications through smaller (shorter, less expensive) training experiences. The training organisation therefore wanted to re-package the existing academic forms into new forms for their clients. The academic took some time to carefully formulate a response. He felt the university could not provide smaller bits of paper, but advised that *the client* could award the bits of paper, but which linked to the current academic forms of the module and the programme. The email is short and does not provide detailed explanatory details to the concepts the academic is referring to, but together with his subsequent reflections, points to some of the tussles he experiences.

¹³ Within the academic framework, the smallest award is a Postgraduate Certificate, which is defined as 60 credits or 3 x 30 credits.

The academic replied to the lead trainer:

I think the easiest way to achieve the 'bit of paper' would be to design and 'award' "[client] Awards"... which indicates the number of credits with the University's logo on it... This way, [you] 'award' the 'certificate'. In a wider sense, though, this might lead to a wider offering... in essence, it is a framework which everything feeds everything...

1. [client] 'CPD bites' - a part of module, such as a 1 day seminar
2. [client] CPD Awards - Award in [module x]
3. [client] Practitioner Programmes - a PGCert in...[y]
4. Recognition and Accreditation of Expertise - essentially recognising the expertise and experiential learning of the experienced practitioner... then... *Negotiated professional transformation journeys*
5. Professional Development Pathways - Negotiate your professional development in to an internationally recognised Masters qualification.

The academic then reflected on the email sent to the lead trainer:

I've taken a while to answer this email... I have struggled to answer the original request – the university can't offer anything else... I'm having difficulty finding the right words to describe my ideas... I am conscious that the words I am using have multiple uses, so I'm using lots of inverted commas... I hope the client understands what I am getting at... I am trying to find words that have currency 'outside'... I can't find a better word than 'programme'... how can we describe a negotiated award that has meaning for my client's customers?

In marking out the different packages, I found myself using labels/concepts which breached and existed 'outside' of formal definitions within my context – all of the terms were not formally recognised in my context.

But...

I gained great satisfaction in preparing the response, constructing a structure to meet the demands of my client – the different ‘bits of paper’ that could be constructed to enable the client to create greater income and profit through a ‘taster’ strategy. I was proud of my creation which had taken me time to construct, but which created a solution for the client.

In this case, the academic responded to the training organisation’s demand for a new way of packaging the training, beyond the immediately available academic framework he was typically referring to in the previous settings. Here, again, he uses inverted commas to indicate to the lead trainer – and, as we learn through his reflections, to himself – that the words are ‘roughly right’ in some notional way, but also that they were not right. It was an uncomfortable tussle that becomes typical and repetitive through his interactions (this will be examined much more closely in the next chapter). He knew that the current academic framework was failing to provide him with a structure to use; indeed, this was the nature of the request from the lead trainer in the first instance. Even though the academic framework could not provide a solution, there are still glimpses of it appearing in the new solution, through the use of the words ‘awards’, ‘programme’, and ‘pathway’¹⁴. Indeed, the academic offered a translation of the new structure into his typical academic framework; a way of him making sense and recognising the new labels – for example, “Practitioner Programmes” – was trying to signify another signifier – a “PGCert in...[x]”).

But the academic was also ‘breaching’ the formally recognised terms with attempts at new concepts and language: ‘CPD bites’, ‘CPD Awards’, ‘Practitioner Programme’, ‘Professional Development Pathway’ and ‘Recognition and Accreditation of Expertise’. A ‘CPD bite’, for instance, did not exist within the academic framework of credits in his context. But it did make sense from a commercial training perspective (for busy professionals wanting an easily consumed chunk of knowledge or skill). Additionally, rather than the official language for a selected list of modules in a negotiated programme¹⁵, the academic chose to use the term ‘Practitioner Programme’. But the

¹⁴ Typically used in formal documentation to refer to a particular combination of modules within a negotiated programme.

¹⁵ The Approved Studies Learning Agreement (ASLA).

academic recognised that this was still not right; he could “not find a ‘better’ word” (to reflect what he wanted to create). There was a never reconciled tussle between which expression was going to capture the right solution for the training organisation; a navigation between what the training organisation will understand and value, and what is permissible under the academic regulation.

The academic’s dissatisfaction can be read in different ways. On the one hand, perhaps he apparently wanted to find a solution that would fulfil a demand for him to serve his client, and this featured in the solution (for example, a ‘CPD bite’). Yet he also felt he failed to find a correct solution that was in the right form for the client. But on the other hand, perhaps the source of this discomfort was because of a lack of a framework from which to create the solution he felt he needed to provide; it was not possible to judge whether the solution was right or wrong according to an established quality framework. What he created was not easily recognisable to the framework he typically referred to in structuring the way he sees or engages in the world (though there were glimpses in the solution, as discussed above). It is not clear what the source for the dissatisfaction was, but it is interesting to note a structure reminiscent of the academic regulatory structures which use clearly defined labels with uppercase letters for these labels (e.g. CPD Awards, Practitioner Programmes, Recognition and Accreditation of Expertise). Nonetheless, the academic admits that he reaped satisfaction from crafting a ‘structure’ for his solution, a solution that created a new structure using what he already knew in relation to what his client will understand and value and from the existing academic frameworks.

Yet this tussle can have other effects, and is demonstrated through another scenario. In this following case, the lead trainer informed the academic about a group of their trainees who “felt constrained” by a word count limit to achieve the academic outcomes of a module. The module requested that each learner produce an essay of 2,500 words which accompanied a formal observation by the trainer. Rather than the 2,500, the lead trainer requested that the word count limit was raised to 4,500, as the lower limit did not allow the trainees to “express any depth... and... restricted [the trainee’s] ability to gain higher grades”. The following extracts tell the unfolding story as the academic responds and reflects to replies from the lead trainer and a trainee.

Extracts from the academic's reply to the leader trainer:

The issue with raising the limits for the written element is that the assessment becomes significantly out of kilter with expectations for a 20 credit module - both in their programme, across our programmes, and national expectations. They will be over-assessed. Pragmatically, also, we also recognise that that would increase their workload in a context when workload is important.

There are a number of points I could raise with the group:

- The essay is not about capturing a FULL account of what happened or even ALL learning - part of being critical is highlighting 'key' ('critical') points that build up a story sufficiently to demonstrate learning (or change/shift) - and providing a storyline that persuasively demonstrates 'criticality'
- This could mean capturing between 1 to 3 (max) significant points of shift / realisation / learning - any more denies depth (1 is fine if it is significant and complex)...
- Be wary of 'descriptive creep through pseudo analysis', i.e. where you are 'pretending' to analyse by drawing in more description of the situation.

The key is depth, and it is possible to achieve depth in even 500 words at masters level, but there may only be one learning point, and some bullet points.

The lead trainer communicated the academic's response to the trainees, but then responded back to the academic. The advice given by one of the trainees was "rejected", and this particular trainee wanted to be able to "write more for his own personal learning", and did not think the line of argument was "legitimate". The following extracts are taken from two sets of reflections about the matter, followed by the reply to this 'rejection'.

The academic's initial reflection:

I'm not sure how to respond to this... our policy doesn't penalise students for going over the word count prescribed in Module Descriptors... even though the group have previously said they wanted less writing... More writing does not mean more learning... but we can't insist or penalise for going over the word count...

The academic's next reflection:

It was an unexpected response: I was expecting my advice to be accepted without question. Why would I think that? On reflection, I seemed to be using a line of thinking that would ask: who would want to write more than they needed to?... More importantly, though, who would question parity across our programmes and who would question parity with national expectations? Who would question Section 7 of The Code (*Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*) and Section 6 of The Code (*Assessment of students*), which outlines how the University must “ensure that assessment is conducted with rigour, probity and fairness and with due regard for security (Precept 5)” and “have transparent and fair mechanisms for marking and for moderating marks (Precept 7)”? Isn't being 'out of kilter' wrong? Unfair? Inconsistent? This thinking, of course, held the assumption that others were in the same world as me, and held the same concerns and values, as determined by Sections 6 and 7 of The Code. And that is the version of 'me' within a regulative quality assurance mode. The “rejection” from the trainee was frustrating for me.

The academic's reply to the lead trainer:

...they can clearly choose the greater word length option... We do not have a policy which issues a penalty for going over the word count. Technically, then, they can go over the word count, but we recognise that they may be doing more than they need to.

The academic's initial response to the request from the lead trainer was to make sense of what it would mean in terms of the academic framework that was governing him and his practice. In other words, what would it mean to write 4,500 words, *according* to the framework? According to that framework, as he understands it, it would become 'out of kilter with expectations', not just 'in their programme', but also 'across our programmes' and even with 'national expectations'. He then offers a variety of suggestions to work within that expectation, as stipulated within the formal university documentation. And when this is rejected, he reverts to whether there were ways to penalise or sanction the behaviours that deviated from the expectation. Specifically, he draws on the regulative apparatus to offer strategies to enable the group to 'focus' on 'critical points', 'criticality', 'depth', 'clarity of learning points', 'minimal description', and 'being wary of descriptive creep' – all of which are, according to the five bullet points, important at 'masters level'. And the group being 'over-assessed' and 'doing more than they need to...' is only ever in relation to an excess as-defined-by the regulatory expectations of the quality assurance system. In this way, he used the underlying academic framework to make sense of and structure a response to the lead trainer.

Yet the initial response to the lead trainer seemed to be justifying why the trainees should not be going over the word limit from their perspective: it would 'increase [the student's] workload' (an issue that the students had previously raised). Although he was initially unaware of this, the academic's second reflection illustrates his awareness of how the regulatory frameworks were influencing his thinking and behaviour in responding to the lead trainer. This experience left the academic 'frustrated'. Perhaps this frustration was the academic's anxiety in being unable to find immediate regulatory policies that would support him in his response. Within his initial reflection, he seemed to be searching for but not finding a regulatory device; a 'policy' which 'insisted' or 'penalised' those trainees who do not follow and 'get right' the particular 'word count' expectations of the regulatory quality assurance framework. He then proceeds to consider alternative rationalisations using (quoting) specific sections of the academic framework, followed by more explanations relating to helping the client ('writing more than they need to' and 'more writing does not mean more learning'). Ultimately, however, the academic was attempting to find regulatory apparatus, but failing. His final reply to the lead trainer admitted that the learners could write to the higher word count because 'we do not have a policy', but then tries (again) to recover this lack of structure

through a weaker attempt to regulate: 'we recognise that they may be doing more than they *need* to'. But he is not aware that this 'need to' is always in reference to the academic framework governing how he sees and makes judgements in his professional setting.

This set of cases illustrated some of the tensions involved in how the academic identifies within his practice, in terms of how he understands the demands being placed on him. This is a problematic picture of being caught between wanting to serve his client, but being practically compliant and even a guardian of the administrative quality assurance frameworks prevalent in his professional setting. But perhaps more insidious, is how the quality assurance systems seem to infiltrate and structure how the academic understands his role, what higher education study is, and how he should act in a given scenario. These tensions live throughout the first set of cases presented here – including how the academic describes his professional role to others, how he interacts with the purchasers of the educational commodity in re-conceptualising their training into academic forms, as well as how he deals with the requests from his clients to re-package training in new forms. This concludes this set of cases (for now), as we move in to the second set of cases which takes a different focus, and considers the academic's interactions within the university. In time, it follows the above period.

2.2 Effects of different angles

The first set of cases focused on how the academic was identifying or depicting himself in interactions with commercial training organisations. Sometimes he was aware about how this was implicating how he acted, and sometimes he thought he was being critical about this but practically continued to act anyway. And sometimes he was unaware of how the particular view (or form) of higher education embodied in regulation was implicating his view of the world and himself. His identity is depicted as a problematic one – motivated towards a client orientation, but practically caught by a different motivation to uphold quality assurance regulation. In this second set of cases, the focus shifts from the academic's interactions with the training organisation to the interactions with the academic's colleagues within his own university. This set of cases collates a variety of interactions the academic has across different parts of the university, indicative of the types of activity the academic engages in in order to deliver the educational commodity of training accreditation. These cases highlight how the tensions outlined in the previous set of cases are alive beyond the academic's interactions with the training organisation. Importantly, however, the cases also highlight that these identifications manifest beyond the academic's relationship with the training organisation. In turn, professional tensions emerge and unfold with different practical effects.

2.2.1 Communicating vs baffling – and knowing one's place

As illustrated throughout the set of cases above, in the academic's case, he is using the formally sanctioned language of quality assurance in order to make sense of his role, and even comment in a way he thought was distanced from that very language. Yet the intent is not necessarily the effect of the communication, as illustrated through this next scenario. In this scenario, the academic had just converted a training experience into academic proformas, and had official approval of these documents¹. He then receives an email from the department that is officially responsible for these formal procedures, known as Registry². The email referred to the official procedure of how a certain group

¹ From the official meeting that oversees the negotiated programme, the WBIS Approval Panel.

² Registry is the administrative centre of the university officially recognised in policy documents for being operationally responsible for setting out and enforcing the university's policies and procedures related to the design and assessment of academic qualifications.

of learners from the training organisation should enrol on the newly accredited programme. The name of the training organisation and modules involved are disguised so not to identify the training organisation or the students involved. It is important to recognise that you, the reader, are unlikely to understand much of the text that immediately follows; this is intentional, and reflects the experience ('bafflement') of the academic on receipt of the email.

The academic's reflection:

I was completely baffled by this email today. It was sent by a senior member of staff in Registry...

Extract from Registry's email:

Following the conversations today can we confirm that when students commence the newly validated... Level 6 top up with [training organisation x] they will do so by enrolling on a single module ROA for the [first] module. When they have completed this they will commence the second module on a new course join (ie new SCJ). This is different to normal... practice whereby the original course join is changed if students start on ROA. This will allow funding for the first module to be counted in 2010/1.

The first students are expected to start on this in December/January and might be moving on to the degree course join having completed the [first module] in the Spring. Both SCJs will of course need to be flagged as EmpEng.

The academic's reflection:

I have no idea what this means! What do I need to do? What do I need to tell my client? Will it affect their business?

I asked our administrators – I thought they may know... No, they too were unclear, so they've emailed Registry again...

After not hearing anything for a while, I asked our administrators...

Reply from the administrator in the academic's department:

I think they'll be dealt with in the standard way. Sorry if that doesn't sound very helpful... I'm not too clear on the process. As far as I'm aware they don't complete application forms like other students...

The academic's reflection:

I am surprised and shocked! These students account for such a large proportion of our business... we should know this. Am I the only one who cares?! No further action has been taken, and we still don't know what the email means.

Although the academic apparently embodies regulatory language and apparatus in the previous set of cases, this extract suggests a limit to that embodiment. Here, the academic does not recognise or understand the intent and content of the email; he was 'baffled'. There were many terms that were alien to the academic's world, and so could not make sense of them³. Yet these were standard, every day concepts in the bureaucratic administration of academic quality assurance, and were precisely how the student, their learning experience, their learning achievement, and who was funding it, were *represented* on the information systems of the quality department. The person who sent the email was making sense of the situation, in a very strict sense, using the administrative quality assurance systems in which they worked. For example, rather than training or even accreditation, the email refers to the very precise objects readily recognised in academic policy documents⁴. This echoes how the academic was using the officially sanctioned language, proformas and procedures as he re-configured training courses and creating great pleasure and enjoyment in doing so. And the email seemed to echo the expectation and value of compliance: to 'confirm' the specific (regulatory) processes that 'needed' to be followed, according to the formal processes of the institution. The identity revealed through the email was aligned to being a "guardian of quality assurance", valuing precision and procedure, and ensuring that all involved in the newly approved provision were 'informed'. The notion of 'the client', as used by the academic, is absent from the email; it was not important to making sense of the world for the sender of the email.

³ Terms like 'ROA', 'SCJ', 'new course join', 'flagged' and 'EmpEng'.

⁴ For example, 'newly validated Level 6 top up'.

The academic may have been baffled, but what spurred the resolution of this bafflement? Seemingly, the academic was unsure what, if anything, needed to be done as a result. But more precisely, it was an uncertainty in relation to his own actions with respect to helping his *client* – he was concerned about what he needed to ‘tell my *client*’, and whether it would ‘affect *their* business’. An anxiety seemingly spurred by a concern for the training organisation. This anxiety spurs the academic to ask an administrator in his own department who would typically know proper procedures in quality assurance, and then subsequently follows this up with them. In this way, the sense of being anxious comes from wanting to know, so he can take the ‘right’ actions (to help his client). So much so, when the administrator could not provide a definitive answer to what the email meant, the academic expressed ‘surprise’ and ‘shock’ that this could happen. Why? It seems that the academic associated it with implicating the ‘client’s business’ and the department’s business (‘our business’). Not being clear in what this meant was read by the academic as Registry and the administrator not ‘caring’. So much so, the academic appeared to feel alone in his ‘caring’ for the client; he exclaims “Am I the only one who cares?!”.

In addition, although the academic felt an urge to change this situation and become aware of the language and what was meant by the email, this situation not change; there was no further knowledge gained about the email and what it meant for the academic and any action required. Ultimately, the academic and the administrator did not pursue it. Was there something else at play stopping both the academic and administrator from pursuing an understanding? The academic reflected on this after the episode.

Academic’s reflection:

At the time, I don’t remember thinking it was really an option to pursue this with anyone else. It’s not really the ‘done thing’ for someone in my shoes to question Registry. I felt stuck. Isolated. Nowhere to turn.

The academic’s reflections echoed the idea of ‘isolation’ from his colleagues, as mentioned above. And perhaps this was a learned response, over time, of when the academic had experienced similar situations in the past in working with Registry. It seems that the academic felt that there was no other real ‘option’ for ‘someone in my shoes’ to take another option; it was the ‘done thing’ in his professional setting. This alludes to how the academic understood how he *should*, legitimately, relate to and

engage with the Registry department. This is an important point to explore further. The chapter so far has already illustrated how the academic was making sense of the world using the bureaucratic administration of quality assurance orientation, sometimes unconsciously, and that he was engaging in it to structure his professional responses to the training organisation. Is it important that Registry is symbolically (and hierarchically) central to the establishment and policing of quality assurance instruments? Is there something which structures the way the academic (and the administrator) understands their role in relation to the body that regulates their world? Is it important that it is a body that structures what people think about when it is appropriate or inappropriate (or right or wrong) to engage in this world even further (i.e. to know the technical language in more depth)? These questions signal some wider political structuring that may be at work, and this area will be examined in more depth in the next chapter (Chapter 3, Theoretical discussion).

2.2.2 Deviating vs complying – and halting until confirmed

Understanding a situation in particular ways can also embody very strict interpretations of what is considered allowable or legal within a particular professional setting. And part of this might include the proper ways to deal with manoeuvres which are considered deviant (or even potentially deviant) from that legislation. Importantly, this might halt any professional manoeuvres until the proper process is carried out to confirm (or otherwise) whether the manoeuvre is indeed deviant or compliant. In the following scenario, a training organisation emails the Registry department. To aid a trainee to progress through their training faster, the lead trainer is asking whether the trainee could start additional modules alongside their current ones. But the lead trainer was unsure whether this was possible because the modules were at different higher education levels. The modules that the student was currently studying had been packaged as part of one academic programme⁵, but the others had been packaged as part of a different academic programme at a higher level⁶. They were progression in the sense the first was designed to lead to, or be ‘topped up’ to, the second⁷. The sequence of text below highlights Registry’s reply to the training organisation, and how the academic reflects and then responds.

⁵ At higher education level 5.

⁶ At higher education level 6; a BA degree.

⁷ The official term for this is ‘Level 6 Top Up’, meaning a topping up of academic credits at level 6.

Registry's reply to the request from the training organisation:

I've sought advice from [a senior member of staff in Registry] and [s/he] has confirmed that as the BA is specifically designed as a Level 6 top-up only, it isn't possible to register the student on the BA at Level 5. Completion of 240 credits is an entry requirement so we cannot allow a student without the required number of credits at levels 4 and 5 to register on the BA. The student will therefore have to complete the remaining Level 5 modules before commencing the BA.

This was a technically correct answer; the above text meant that under the regulation of the university, the student must complete the programme at the lower level in order to start the programme at the higher level (the BA). This was because the higher level programme, the BA, was specifically packaged as a 'top up' which specifically referenced the lower level programme as an entry requirement in its design.

The academic reflected:

I'm not entirely satisfied with this as an answer, I'll reply...

Rather than conceiving of the training as two separate programmes, whereby the higher level programme required the lower level one, the academic saw a different solution. His solution involved switching the student to a different programme altogether – a negotiated programme at the higher level, i.e. a negotiated BA. This meant the learner could combine a variety of modules of their choosing, without the restrictions mentioned above.

The academic replied to Registry:

...if the student moved on to a [negotiated] award (not the Level 6 progression route), and forsaking his FdA, then we can do this - this is what we've been advised previously, and has happened previously.

Registry's reply to the academic was:

You'll have to speak to [a senior member of staff in Registry] about this if you want to pursue it.

The academic's reflection:

Very simple/blunt!

Nothing happened...

Soon after, my line manager confirmed my proposed solution, and reinforced the requirement to complete level 5 before embarking on level 6.

Immediately, [a senior member of staff in Registry] confirmed this was possible, and requested the student complete a "transfer of programme form so we have a clear audit trail". I then worked with my client to deliver the solution.

Registry's response used the official language of the regulation to represent the learning journey⁸, and referenced the academic regulation to studying at the higher level⁹.

Understandably, they were making sense of the request from this framework.

Importantly, it also displayed what the sender thought was an appropriate response from that perspective. The sender had been spurred to 'seek advice' from a 'senior member of staff', seemingly to check whether what was being proposed was a legitimate or legal move within the formal procedures. From this perspective, a move of such a kind is a potential threat to the integrity of the regulation and procedure that is valued and respected in this world – and 'seeking advice' from higher up the hierarchy is appropriate. And there was also a sense that the guidance was final, clear-cut, and unambiguous: a "requirement", "it isn't possible to register...", and "we cannot allow...". This was entirely consistent with, and integral, to the quality assurance perspective. Trying to connect with and utilise this perspective, the academic's response used the same quality assurance language and acknowledged a precedent within the existing framework ('as we've been advised previously, and has happened previously'). Yet there is a sense that the academic's proposal was also interpreted as a deviation from what is acceptable within the framework, and the academic was instructed to 'speak to a senior member of staff' if this course of action was to 'be pursued'. Again,

⁸ Such as 'Level 6 top up'.

⁹ That is, 'Completion of 240 credits is an entry requirement'.

this seemingly was an unambiguous action (“have to...”), motivated to guard and police the regulatory framework.

As previously illustrated, the notion of client and serving the client was not present as a concern or value within the emails from Registry; *correct* application of established procedure was. Yet the notion of the client seemed to be motivating the academic’s reaction to the original email sent from Registry; ‘I’m not entirely satisfied with this as an answer’. And as we see in the academic’s reflection on receiving a response from Registry, he had noticed (what he had interpreted as) the ‘bluntness’ of the email from Registry. Here, there is a sense that the academic wanted something more than the response he got: it was ‘Very simple/blunt!’. Was he expecting a discussion to reach the solution? Was he expecting alternative solutions to be suggested? Was he interpreting this ‘bluntness’ as a lack of flexibility that was important to reach the solution? It is not clear from the text what the academic was expecting, but there is a sense he wanted something more beyond being ‘blunt’. Again, we see a repetitive motion of understanding the ‘same’ situation differently, from different positions.

But there is another important point about how this interaction emerged. The academic did not take any action until the ‘senior member of staff in Registry’ had confirmed what was permissible (i.e. ‘nothing happened’ in terms of ‘working with the client to deliver the solution’). And it seemed that the senior member of staff in the academic’s own department ‘confirming’ the legitimacy of the academic’s suggestion was instrumental in achieving Registry’s confirmation. These gestures of *proposal* followed by *confirmation* echo many of the formal procedures in the first set of cases where the academic sought formal approval from the quality assurance system. This is the pattern of how things are formally approved within the academic quality assurance system; indeed, after confirmation, Registry’s senior member of staff added how it was important to complete a formal ‘transfer of programme form... so we have a clear audit trail’ of this confirmation. So it seems that Registry instructing the academic to ‘pursue’ his proposal with a senior member of Registry staff held sufficient power to stop the academic in making any additional moves until the proposal had been formally sanctioned. Again, the academic did not question or make a move that might query or question Registry, the very department that embodies the power to set the way he makes sense of the world. And again, was the hierarchical location of Registry in relation to the academic shaping and structuring his professional response in this way? This is

explored in more depth in the next chapter, but there is a hint that these political gestures were important with the sequence of activity above.

So, in this sketch, Registry staff are paying specific attention to the application of procedure, and whether it is strictly correct. For them, the ‘client’s’ problem and finding a solution to it was not recognised as an issue – but deviating from the regulation, or even *potentially* deviating from regulation, was a problem. And it was this that was driving their communications and professional responses – they were interpreting the proposals from the training organisation and the academic as potentially *deviating* from procedure. Political gestures of *proposal* (with support from people higher in the hierarchy) and *approval* were seemingly important in confirming what was actually correct within that system. For the academic, he had found a solution for his client which he thought *complied* with the regulation, but was dissatisfied with the ‘advice’ and responses given by Registry because the advice was not going to help the client, and there was no other solutions being offered. So there was a gap in perspective and subsequent experience, but the academic was also simultaneously gripped by the quality assurance system; he became professional paralysed to act until formal confirmation (approval) had been given within the hierarchy. This scenario was not just an example of how the academic was being gripped by perspective, but also how this created professional tensions when it was in a different direction to others in his professional setting.

2.2.3 Being inequitable vs strategic – and remaining silent

In the last two cases, there were different interpretations of ‘the same’ email (communicating vs baffling, or deviating vs complying), gripping from different angles. It was illustrated that although the orientation had a structuring role in interpretation and subsequent behaviour, other structures might be at play. In this scenario, it is illustrated how the logic embodied within one way of thinking about a situation can override others. In effect, this can lead to the professional remaining silent and complying with the logic without ever raising a concern. Here, at a team meeting, the academic becomes aware of a particular issue of the accessibility of the university’s online learning resources for certain training organisations. Specifically, the issue was related to the

version of software used to access the online learning resources¹⁰, and how the version they had was not displaying the resources properly. The specific issue had been raised on a variety of occasions with the department officially responsible for the learning resources. This department will be referred to as the Learning Technology department here. There had been no resolution of this issue until a senior member of the Learning Technology department sent a reply to the team meeting. It was presented as a formal, printed letter, rather than an email or oral communication which was more typical in these meetings. An extract from the letter is presented below, followed by the academic's reflections on the meeting at which it was presented.

Formal letter from Learning Technology:

As a progressive organisation, we must take a view that we make certain requirements of organisations we work with, especially in light of continual technological progress and change. You will be aware that... version 6 is now 10 years old, and is no longer supported by Microsoft. As such, [the department], with the roll out of [a new system], was required to drop support for [version] 6 users which account for less than 5 per cent of our user base. We recognise that some businesses are still using this software, but we recognise the drop of support by Microsoft, and given the swift change from versions 6 to 7, 8 and later this month, version 9 – we no longer have the capability to support it going forward.

As the workaround removes access to the Portal, we are also aware that this puts some students at a disadvantage as they are unable to access other University services, documentation and communications. The workaround that will be delivered... is only a temporary measure...

The academic's reflection:

Colleagues are angry that they don't cater for our needs. I can understand and agree with what is being said by my colleagues but also by the technologists – all departments have limited resources... but that doesn't help my clients... I am not sure what to do...

¹⁰ Microsoft's Internet Explorer software used to access web pages.

Another reflection by the academic:

Both the Learning Technology department and I seem to want to *serve* (or “support”) a client... the Learning Technology department want to serve the generalised whole of the university and my colleagues and I want to serve a specific part, or “5%” of the wider whole (our clients). Both have clients, but two different targets of who the client actually is from the respective perspective.

As “progressive”, and dealing with “continual technological progress and change” implicated it in ways with a specific concern of the deployment of resources. For example, the Learning Technology department “*must* take a view that we make certain *requirements* of organisations we work with” (emphasis added), and so it “was *required* to drop support for... users which account for *less than 5 per cent of our user base*” and therefore they “no longer have the *capability* to support it going forward” (emphases added). There is no room for manoeuvre or negotiation to serve the specific needs of this particular client group, indeed, the notion of “client” is not present within the letter; they are ‘organisations’ rather than ‘clients’. In this sense, it is taking what might be called a ‘strategic’ approach to its management of resources. From this perspective, the academic department’s request for a solution was problematic; to cater for such a small percentage of total system users, less than 5%, would be an illegitimate drain on key resources. Within such a context, only “temporary workarounds” can be provided; a legitimate use of resources for such a small group. From this perspective, it was (strategically) important to focus the department’s limited resources and capability on designing and servicing the majority of the users. From this grip, only certain things are revealed as being important and worthy of attention and action; serving the majority of users is important.

From one angle, the academic seemed to agree with this managerialist logic, as he says he ‘can understand and agree with what is being said... by the technologists’. He identifies with this, as he confirms in his own mind that “all departments have limited resources”. It was interpreted by the academic as logical and legitimate from this angle. Yet from a different angle, the academic’s reflection also revealed his motivation to help his clients, but realising that the response ‘doesn’t help my clients’. A kind of anxiety that this will not help, which seemed to be shared by his academic colleagues. From this angle, it was infuriating for some of the academic’s colleagues that the Learning

Technology department would not, by choice, help the clients; a kind of marginalisation of a large proportion of the department's clients (a third), which might be seen to impede the department's ability to service its customer group. A kind of inequality which would not enable the academics to help their clients. Though it is interesting how the academic's later reflection interpreted the move of the Learning Technology department as a move to help *its* clients. Here, he is *now* interpreting and making sense of Learning Technology's move through the lens of having clients- which indicates that this view of the situation was stronger than other views.

In this way, the response from the Learning Technology department was both strategic from a view that is concerned with the deployment of resources, but also inequitable, as understood by the academics and servicing of their clients. Although we might say there was one letter, it was interpreted in different ways, from two different perspectives. And the academic was seemingly entangled in the duality of using both views. The effect of this for the academic was a situation of momentary paralysis ("I am not sure what to do..."). From one angle it was illegitimate not to act to help clients, whereas from the other, it was illegitimate to act because there was not the resource to do anything other than a workaround. As such, when the perspectives are constructed in this way, there was no way to reconcile the gap in perspective – until, it seems, one view is usurped by a stronger one. The line of thinking almost becomes 'it is logical and legitimate to focus on the majority, because the majority is the *client* of Learning Technology'. When the conflict is smoothed over, the academic agrees, accepts and then complies with the resolution suggested by the Learning Technology department, and raises no issues.

2.2.4 (Mis)recognising the irreconcilable gap

The academic in the previous scenario was aware of the initially felt tensions of paralysis but was unaware of how his particular way of understanding the situation was influencing him. Yet even when the academic becomes aware of how he is constructing a situation, he may carry on regardless, thinking he is being critical or aware of influences at play. In this particular case, the academic seemingly becomes aware of a debate that his academic colleagues are having in relation to the assessment of academic modules, and specifically the word count limit of written pieces (but was some time after the word count scenario mentioned in the first set of cases). The debate was

prominent in the meeting, and took up a third of the two hour meeting, which was unusual for any single issue, given the number of issues normally discussed. The episode was important to the academic, as it revealed a moment of supposed new insight about how perspectives were working to structure his own thinking about his professional practice.

Academic's reflections after the meeting:

We talked at length today about word length and penalties for going over the word limit. There seemed to be those people wanting it – because it is unfair to other students who can achieve the same result (grade) in less words... people listed many different ways we should control... limits, penalties, directions, guidance. Why? For parity and fairness for the other students who take time and effort to do it well within the word limits. Others were wanting it because the student would find ways to put it in the appendix. I said “I have to say I don't feel that comfortable telling an executive who is enjoying the writing process to cut the words because he'll lose marks”. To which I was told we should be treating people the same, whether an executive or administrative worker.

I became frustrated with talking so much about controlling the student, with no consideration of learning I said “I am here to facilitate learning, not be a bureaucrat monitoring and controlling word count”. (*see Figure 1 below*).

And as soon as I said it, I realised that I was already a bureaucrat! In my own practice, I use “word budgets” to constrain - though *I am* attempting and wanting to facilitate. I focus the student on ‘what matters’.

I recognised the edges of my perspective – from that parity perspective, I was deviating, and creating a situation of inequality. From the learning perspective, they were being bureaucrats. It seems that this is not a battle to be won – the two perspectives can not be reconciled.

<p>Introduction (50 words)</p> <p><u>Learning Target 1...</u></p> <p>WHAT? (400 words)</p> <p>1 paragraph – describe/justify approach, with reference to theory + evidence</p> <p>2 paragraphs – key points of analysis (approach/performance), with reference to theory + evidence</p> <p>SO WHAT? (500 words)</p> <p>3/4 paragraphs – explore key “might be” explanations, with reference to theory, with reference to theory + evidence</p> <p>NOW WHAT? (200 words)</p> <p>1 paragraph – identify learning and actions as a result, with reference to theory + evidence</p> <p><u>Learning Target 2...</u> (as above)</p> <p>Conclusion (50 words)</p> <p>References</p>
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Figure 1 Example of a 'word budget' for a written assessment

From one angle, the word count situation was being understood with primary concerns for ‘parity’ and ‘fairness’ in terms of the way students are treated and assessed. This is important to the regulatory systems of the university, where assessment must be conducted with ‘rigour, probity and fairness’ and ‘have transparency’¹¹. And it appears the academic becomes aware of the ‘many different ways’ to achieve this fairness, including ‘limits, penalties, directions, guidance’. All of which are effectively regulative instruments to live out the regulation. From this way of understanding the situation, these sorts of actions are legitimate and logical to achieve fairness (and as we see in the other scenarios, other moves can be interpreted as ‘deviations’). Yet the academic had interpreted the moves as being ‘bureaucratic’ and ‘controlling’, so much so, he was driven to share his ‘objection’, publically, of such a discourse. Here, a dichotomy was revealed between either wanting to ‘facilitate learning’ or being a ‘bureaucrat monitoring and controlling word count’. For him, his role was more to do with supporting the ‘executive who is enjoying the writing process’ than being a ‘bureaucrat’. And in this sense, two different ways of understanding the situation arose, each with different values of what should be a proper professional response: facilitating learning vs ensuring fairness and parity.

¹¹ See Quality Assurance Agency, 2006a.

Chapter 3. Theoretical discussion

3.1 Examining commodification

The previous chapter presented cases from practice, interpreting some of the challenges of working in my professional space. This chapter adopts a theoretical lens to analyse and explain the cases, but also begins to comment on the more theoretical concern of how ideological perspective shape and construct professionalism and professional agency. The added value of this chapter is therefore to provide a robust explanation of the descriptions provided in the previous chapter. A key theme that arose in the first part of this research was how I was positioning myself and my practice within demand-led higher education. Here, I was telling the story of how I, and the practices I was developing (negotiated work based learning, university accreditation of commercial training provision), were instruments of a government policy to increase engagement between universities and employers; this would make, in turn, UK businesses, and hence when aggregated, the country, more globally competitive. I was directly involved in selling and providing higher education accreditation services to training organisations; a cog in the machine of business – providing a service to clients. In this sense, I was telling the story about how I was experiencing the commodification of higher education study – how I was packaging up higher education study, and indeed, the training experience, for an exchange of money. I was packaging up something with a value for the training organisations, enabling them to potentially sell more and create profits for themselves. And the cases illustrated the various practices involved in such commodification, from two angles: my interactions with the training businesses and interactions with colleagues within my own university. Both sets of cases expressed the troubled experiences and identities in working in this site of commodification.

As already explained in chapter 1, I developed analytical apparatus during the first part of the research that would help me examine the ideological dimensions of my practice which shape and influence how I see the demands placed me. Aspects of Žižek's apparatus were put to work for this goal, as a key contemporary theorist with commitments to social revolution and change¹. For some, Žižek provides an “iconoclastic interpretation of the ubiquitous and deeply naturalised nature of ideology

¹ See Butler, 2005; Taylor, 2010; Wood, 2012.

today... min[ing] the (only apparently) obvious and prosaic in order to produce startling insights”². The aspects I draw on here are highly relevant for this study in two ways. First, the apparatus selected, following Marx, focuses on the role of commodities in shaping us; apt for this study in the context of educational commodities. For Žižek, Marx’s apparatus exerts such an “influence in the general field of social sciences... offering us a key to the theoretical understanding of phenomena... [where] there is definitely more at stake than the commodity form”³. Briefly, Marx argued that within capitalism we develop a commodity fetish, whereby we hold the product being exchanged to mean something mystical, something which is *more than any* commodities being exchanged, and *more than* the social relations that are involved in the making and exchanging of it. For Marx, this was a ‘false consciousness’, or a distortion of a self or being, that was based on something other than a so-called ‘natural’ way of being (in a particular type of economy). But we experience this false consciousness as real; a consciousness distorted by ideological perspective, or how Žižek defines it, by particular “doctrine, composite of ideas, beliefs, concepts...”⁴ and so on. Here, ideological perspective functions to grip us into this way of thinking, this false consciousness, and keeps us there through social structures. Or more precisely, according to Marx, it grips us and keeps hold of us because ‘we do not know what we do’ until we do become aware of it and revolt in some way, morphing the capitalist society into something else.

The latter point is an antagonistic one, as this theoretical assertion has not been found to be a good predictor of social revolution. Žižek agrees, to an extent. Importantly for Žižek, it is not that people ‘do not know what they do’, rather; “The main dangers lie in the ‘unknown knowns’ – the disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices we pretend not to know about”⁵. In other words, people *do* know about the ways they are being influenced, but they practically *carry on* and comply anyway; ideology has done its work proper when we have become so ‘excessively close’ to this way of experiencing our world, that ‘familiarity breeds consent’⁶. This is an important point to emphasise because Žižek, after Marx, goes as far as saying that “things (commodities) themselves believe in [our] place”⁷. Butler explains this radical notion in the context of

² Taylor, 2010: 3.

³ Žižek, 1994a: 301.

⁴ Žižek, 1999a: 63.

⁵ Žižek, 2004: np.

⁶ Taylor, 2010: 9.

⁷ Žižek, 1989: 31.

money; “it does not matter that we know money is not an immediate expression of wealth... All that matters is that in our actual behaviour we continue to act *as though it is*”⁸. This is a useful theoretical position, therefore, to explore through the cases presented earlier. Let’s now turn to the second point of relevance of Žižek’s apparatus to this study.

In addition to dealing with such distortions in a context of commodification, the Žižekian apparatus selected also focuses on examining the experience of the individual, as the individual understands it. Rather than accepting Marx’s idea of a ‘natural’ state of human society which revolt will eventually lead to, Žižek rejects it, and looks to psychoanalysis for an alternative. Specifically, Žižek adopts a form of psychoanalysis which enables sophisticated analysis of how commodifications, which embody ideological perspectives, manifest and play out to influence how we think and act, particularly through discourse and the unconscious⁹. Or in other words, adopts apparatus to help us understand how we can ‘know what we do, *but still...*’¹⁰. Žižek particularly draws on the theoretical constructs of Lacan¹¹ (discussed in this chapter) and the position that the idea of a single, stable human identity is an impossible project, an illusion, a false consciousness. This is apt, given the earlier discussion about how the work of professionals in higher education has come to be conceptualised as ‘blended’¹², ‘fragmented’¹³, ‘flexian’¹⁴ and ‘super-complex’¹⁵, where the professional can be understood (and understand themselves) through competing ideological frames (such as educational, bureaucratic or even entrepreneurial). In bringing these theoretical ideas together, Žižek presents cutting edge ideas on how the ideological dimension works in relation to the formation of identity (or, as we will see, identities). Žižek therefore provides useful analytical apparatus to explain how a person’s sense of professionalism is formed, and hence how professional agency can be asserted in practice.

⁸ Butler, 2005: 5, emphasis added.

⁹ This kind benefits from transcending the boundaries of psychological or sociological disciplinary thinking, and is set to work in analysing art, literature, culture and other areas. See, for example, how it is used to analyse Hitchcock movies in Žižek, 1991.

¹⁰ Žižek, 1989: 31.

¹¹ And particularly Lacan’s later theoretical developments.

¹² See Whitchurch (2008a, b, 2009, 2010).

¹³ See Rowland (2002).

¹⁴ See Smith (2012).

¹⁵ See Barnett (2000, 2003, 2011).

A key theme in the first stage of this research was how particular perspectives can highlight or privilege some areas and mask or delete others, much the same as research paradigms or approaches and theoretical apparatus (see section 1.3 Research methodology, page 32). This is inevitable, so supplementing this apparatus with another but different theoretical perspective affords a numbers of benefits. Adopting another theoretical angle enables a different examination of the cases, in terms of any processes or influences that may be occurring in the professional situation which are not caught by the angle of Žižek’s apparatus. And in turn, this can strengthen or disrupt some of the findings from using the original apparatus, and thereby provide a more theoretically robust analysis of the cases. It is important, however, that the additional apparatus is sufficiently different to offer an alternative perspective, but which still can be applied within the context of my methodological frame, i.e. of exploring an individual’s experience, as they understand it, but with a commitment to enabling professional agency.

A contemporary theory which explicitly separates itself away from psychoanalysis, but which is increasingly used to understand and examine how identities are formed and expressed in practice¹⁶, is Holland *et al*’s theoretical framework of ‘practiced-identities’. Holland *et al*’s theory offers an explanation of the processes by which ‘one’s senses of self’ are *produced* (and hence figured or commodified) through practice¹⁷, and caters for the multiple self understandings¹⁸ which became evident through the cases. In addition, although Holland *et al*’s framework draws from the same sociocultural frame as Wenger¹⁹, it goes further than Wenger to conceptualise how identity is produced and how people can respond to such shapings²⁰. For Wenger, “the experience of identity in practice is a way of being in the world... it is not in its essence, discursive or reflective”²¹, and relates specifically to production through practice. Holland *et al*, in contrast, not only point to the importance of how identity is produced through language, but also how people can respond to create (author) new identities through language. This aligns closely with the analytical apparatus developed in the early stages of the research, discussed in the introduction.

¹⁶ Urrieta, 2007, Gee, 2011; Carlisle, 2012; Faircloth, 2012; Williams, 2012; Barron, 2013.

¹⁷ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 8.

¹⁸ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 8.

¹⁹ Wenger, 1998.

²⁰ Barron, 2013.

²¹ Wenger, 1998: 151.

Therefore, Holland *et al*'s framework offers a useful framework to understand and explain my own lived experiences, how my identity forms in practice *and* through language, and why there were tensions amongst multiple self-understandings in practice: the key theme of this thesis. Importantly, however, although explicitly distanced theoretically (which will be explained further below), the intentions and commitments of the theories are broadly similar. Žižek aims to enable the subject to become aware of the ideological entrapments in order to navigate them in new ways (through the critique of ideology), whereas Holland *et al*'s aim is to enable the subject to become aware of the 'cultural entrapments produced through activity'²² in order to navigate them in new and different ways. Again, though Holland *et al* use a similar frame as Wenger, Holland *et al* consider the ways in which people can navigate such shapings to create different outcomes.

The fundamental difference between Holland *et al* and Žižek concerns *how* the subject, and associated identities, form in and through practice. Holland *et al* dismiss psychoanalytic "processes that may lead to identification of self within the social inscriptions"²³. On the contrary, in their own reading of psychoanalytic theory, they argue that psychoanalysis generally posits an "over-emphasis on the determinants of the subject" where subjects are "left with no "surplus"... by which to escape complete and utter domination and compliance"²⁴. They describe this as psychoanalysis 'suturing' or stitching a social position onto a person to produce or finalise them. Rather, they argue they offer an alternative whereby:

persons develop through and around the cultural forms by which they are identified, and identify themselves, in the context of their affiliation or disaffiliation with those associated with those forms and practices. A better metaphor for us is not *suture*, which makes the person and the position seem to arrive preformed at the moment of suturing, but *codevelopment* – the linked development of people, cultural forms, and social positions in particular historical worlds²⁵.

²² Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 8.

²³ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 8.

²⁴ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 33. It is important to note that Holland *et al* do not refer to Žižek's apparatus, and although they refer to Lacan, this reference is cursory and do not capture the 'surpluses' that Žižek (after Lacan) use in his theory. This will be discussed later.

²⁵ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 33. Emphasis added.

This highlights a fundamental difference between Holland *et al*'s and Žižek's apparatus. In Holland *et al*'s apparatus, the subject is formed through the processes of codevelopment, as described above, but for Žižek, there are powerful social structurations that are evoked as we engage (these are discussed in more detail in this chapter). For Holland *et al*, the forces involved in codevelopment are powerful but how the subject is formed is never 'hermetically sealed'²⁶; identities and how we act in a given moment are the coming together of a number of forces to create *improvisations*. In this sense, there is a kind of uncertainty, though only a "modicum", as to how such improvisations (and identities) will be structured in the next moment. But this is also a key aspect that is missed in Wenger's conceptualisation of understanding how identity is produced²⁷; Holland *et al* assert we not only author ourselves through narratives, but also have the possibility of authoring different and multiple ways of understanding ourselves.

Yet Holland *et al* do not refer to Žižek's interpretation of such structurations, under which, the subject may not escape structurations, but rather can take a form of control and agency in the way they are structured. In this way, this is *practically* similar to the 'modicum' of control Holland *et al* offer through their framework, but this discussion is particularly pertinent to the last chapter of this thesis in relation to professional agency. Rather, the key point here is that the way the two bodies conceptualise *how* the subject, and its identities form, are different. Holland *et al* therefore provide a sufficiently different theoretical framework to analyse and explain the cases presented in chapter 2, but which aims to understand how I understand my lived experience and the forces at play in shaping this understanding.

²⁶ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 18.

²⁷ Barron, 2013.

A fuller comparison between the two theoretical frameworks is worked out through this chapter, but, reinforcing the point, the intention in cross-referencing these different perspectives in this way, is that the two perspectives theory offer a distinctive but theoretically grounded framework to analyse, explore and understand the cases, and therefore, comment more robustly on the engine of commodification and how it affects professionalism and agency in practice. This chapter first uses Žižek's ideas to explore and understand the cases, and then cross-references these ideas to aspects of Holland *et al's* ideas to highlight similarities and differences. The final part of this chapter then summarises and synthesises key theoretical insights from putting each theoretical perspectives to work.

3.2 Žižekian mechanics of ideological force

This section examines the cases from the perspective of Žižek's ideas of how we understand our experience. It explores how my sense of professionalism and professional agency is shaped through the cases, and presents a picture of how ideological influences seems to be working in my own professional context. In particular, Žižek uses Lacan's later theoretical expositions of the Borromean knot (see Figure 2, below)²⁸. This depicts the three key dimensions (or orders) of subjectivity – the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real²⁹. The notion of the knot indicates the interdependencies of the three dimensions; if one is cut, they all fall apart (or less dramatically, if something happens in one dimension, the others are implicated)³⁰. In describing how the three dimensions work together, Žižek provides an account of how identity is constructed and how ideological perspective influences, or more precisely, structures, how we identify ourselves, and hence shapes our engagements in our reality, or more precisely, the reality as we understand it. I will now examine the cases from the perspective of the three orders and identify what they tell us about one's sense of professionalism and professional agency.

²⁸ Myers, 2003; Wood, 2012.

²⁹ I will maintain uppercase characters to refer to these particular dimensions, for consistency.

³⁰ Evans, 1996.

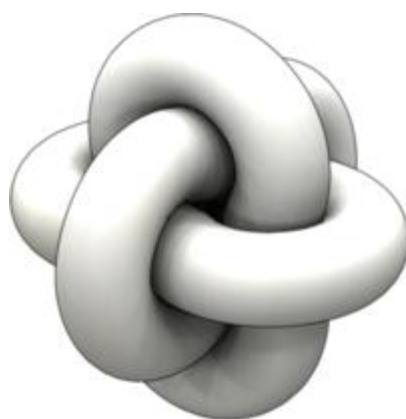


Figure 2 Lacan’s Borromean knot of the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real

3.2.1 Images of self in The Imaginary

The first aspect of the model relates to the images we hold of ourselves, which not only give us our sense of self, but also call us to act in certain ways, and partly helps us judge what we think we can and should do in situations. This is the realm of the Imaginary.

Lacan describes this through the example of the baby looking in to a mirror for the first time. The baby looks into the mirror and recognises herself as the total, unitary entity in the mirror. But as Žižek describes it, “to achieve self-identity, the subject must identify himself with the imaginary other, he must alienate himself – put his identity outside himself, so to speak, into the image of his double”³¹. In other words, the baby is recognising the mirror image ‘as if’³² it is the totality of herself. In terms of the cases, I paint a picture of myself of a particular kind of academic, one that wants to be closer and approachable to his clients. And this continues throughout the cases; where I explain I want to help the training organisations achieve ‘simplicity’ in their programmes (2.1.2), make sure that their trainees do not have to pay more than they need to (2.1.3), enable the training organisation to work flexibly (2.1.4) and respond to queries to enable a learner to study (2.1.5). The following text perhaps best captures the image I was painting:

³¹ Žižek, 1989: 116.

³² See Žižek (1994a: 302).

I work as a Senior Lecturer within a university... though I do not put my title on my email signatures, so I feel closer to my clients and appear more approachable to them - 2.1.1

This *Imaginary identification*, as Bhabha describes it, “assumes a *discrete* image which allows it to postulate a series of equivalences, sameness, identities, between the objects of the surrounding world”³³. The problem with identifying in this way, according to Žižek, is that recognising this discrete image ‘as if’ it is the totality of the self is a *mis*-recognition; the mirror can only ever provide a partial or ‘violently’ simplified, or fantasy, versions of self³⁴. But for Žižek, although they are ‘as if’ fictions, we act ‘as if’ they are real; “fiction is more real than the social reality of playing roles”³⁵ because “there is a domain of fantasmic intimacy which is marked by a “No Trespass!” sign”³⁶. Or in other words, “when I speak, I always constitute a virtual place of enunciation from which I speak, yet this is never directly ‘me’”³⁷. These fictional simplifications are necessary to deal with and make sense of the ‘brute’ reality we are immersed in, and it is too painful and traumatic to be without them. One of the consequences of seeking order and coherence in this way is that any differences experienced between a unified image (in the mirror) and a fragmented image (as experienced) are bracketed out, to the favour of the unified image³⁸. What this means for the baby is that even though she experiences a sense of fragmentation within her body, and inability to control her body in unity, she *still* identifies with the mirror image as herself; incongruences are painful and are bracketed out.

Returning to the text presented above from the first set of cases, the text illustrates how I was simultaneously identifying with different Imaginary versions of me: I present a picture of being a “Senior Lecturer” (an academic image), but of a particular kind, that is, one with “clients” (a client-oriented image). As we will see in the next section, identifying in these ways activates ‘as if’ roles with corresponding expectations of how I should act. But these identifications are often held with tension and trouble; the so called ‘client-oriented academic’ identification never quite fits, nor produces words or actions that fit. Although there are competing expectations activated by the identifications, one of the identifications is often usurped without my awareness;

³³ Bhabha, 1994: 77.

³⁴ Žižek, 2008b.

³⁵ Žižek, 2001: 75.

³⁶ Žižek, 2001: 72.

³⁷ Žižek, 1996: 194.

³⁸ Žižek, 2009a: np.

incongruences are smoothed over and bracketed out towards a need for unity and to eliminate painful alienation. And even when I feel I do become aware of it, I may practically persist with the identification I think I am being critical of. I will unravel this analysis as we progress through this chapter, but the important points to introduce here are that within the Imaginary order, there is a need for a fictional simplicity and unity to make sense of the reality around us, and painful incongruences are smoothed over to maintain it. So how specifically do these ‘as if’ images come about which lead to such tensions? And how specifically did it play out in the cases? To answer these questions, it is important to reference the other two aspects of the Borromean knot (the Symbolic and the Real), as each dimension is intimately linked. The first part of the answer to these questions lies in the Symbolic and the structuring power of language.

3.2.2 Structuring meaning through The Symbolic

To understand how these self-images come about, Žižek points to the idea of subject as a ‘lack’ or ‘void’³⁹. Here, the subject is ‘no-thing’ until the Symbolic, through language, is drawn upon to create some-thing, or create structure and meaning. So, we might ask: Without the word ‘client’, what is there? Without the words ‘training organisation’, what is there? Equally, without the word ‘modules’, what is there? Without ‘learning experience’, what is there? For each of these questions, we have had to enter the Symbolic realm. Importantly here, we have had to use language to signify the same ‘thing’ in different ways, such as ‘module’ or ‘learning experience’. This is because there is no natural relationship between words (signifiers) and what they are attempting to represent (signified)⁴⁰; in order to attempt to explain something, we have to explain a word, and then use other words to explain that first word, and then explain those other words, and so on, rather like an endless chain. Here, there are many ‘floating signifiers’ we can draw upon to signify, each providing a “quilt” or fixing effect to grasp the reality we are seeking to portray⁴¹. Without this structure, our subjectivity would break, as a form of psychosis, and we cannot recognise or engage in our experience; a kind of ‘forced choice’ between some-thing and no-thing, but which can only be known *after* entering the Symbolic⁴². So Symbolic identification creates meaning for us.

³⁹ Referring to Sartre’s idea that consciousness is based on no-thing-ness (Sartre, 1966).

⁴⁰ After Lacan and Mouffee (1985).

⁴¹ Žižek, 1989: 95.

⁴² Žižek, 2002: 69.

Within the cases, two important Symbolic identifications are being played out. The first is related to the signification of the training organisation as the “client”, which is expressed a number of times throughout the cases. I have already made the observation in the previous chapter that I am using the term ‘client’ as an accepted, taken for granted term, where I feel the need to explain and define other academic terms. Beyond that, the term ‘client’ is spread liberally throughout the earlier reflections:

I work closely with my client to develop new provision and enhance current provision - 2.1.1

I know I am cutting away at the clients words - 2.1.2

I am excited to tell the client - 2.1.4

I gained great satisfaction in preparing the response, constructing a structure to meet the demands of my client - 2.1.5

At the same time, I am drawing on a different Symbolic identification; *bureaucratic academic quality assurance*. In the following text, I had unknowingly drawn on the quality assurance language to describe the world I am part of (see underlines):

I work as a Senior Lecturer within a university... most of my time is spent in ‘co-delivery’... In my particular institution, approved ‘Associate Tutors’ in the external organisation design and deliver the training, and undertake ‘first marking’... and then I undertake the ‘second marking’... to ensure the accuracy of the first marker’s judgements and its comparability to ‘standards’ across other ‘modules’). As designated ‘Associate Tutor Advisor’, I work closely with my client to develop new provision and enhance current provision. - 2.1.1

And in other places, I am drawing on the language resources used in official proformas, which require clearly defined “learning outcomes” and need to be “clearly critical” (2.1.1) but also form a ‘coherent programme’ with the right number of credits when put together (2.1.3):

...the more specific [the learning outcomes] are, the more focused the assessment will be on the 'areas' that 'matter' (i.e. criticality)... - 2.1.1

We propose that [the client]:... Can discuss and outline pathways and related award titles... using the formal Approved Studies Learning Agreement (ASLA) form... [The client] will not: Be permitted to offer negotiated routes which include modules from across Faculties of the University or be purely NELMs... - 2.1.4

Importantly, the signifiers drawn upon are not a neutral representation of the organisation or the people in it; “language does not simply name a reality which pre-exists it, but rather *produces* the concept of reality through the system of differences which *is* language”⁴³. This is exemplified by the scenario of the patient in a hospital with charts at the end of his bed displaying temperature, blood pressure, medications, and so on⁴⁴. The display (the signifier) represents the patient (being signified), within meaningful boxes or statistics, meaningful according to the body of medical knowledge, and the ideological framings that construct it in this way. The story being told through the display does not capture the whole of the person, but the mis-recognised whole that is determined meaningful by a medical language, meaningful within that specific medical world. This powerful structuring is also referred to as the ‘Big Other’; the “social repository of collected and projected beliefs, which we all relate to and reply upon”⁴⁵. In connecting with particular ideological frames through language, Žižek says:

There are the rules (and meanings) that I follow blindly, out of custom, but of which, upon reflection, I can become at least partially aware (such as common grammatical rules), and there are rules that I follow, meanings that haunt me, unbeknownst to me (such as unconscious prohibitions). Then there are rules and meanings I am aware of, but have to act on the outside as if I am not aware of them... which one passes over in silence in order to maintain the proper appearances. The symbolic space acts like a standard against which I can measure myself.⁴⁶

⁴³ Easthope and McGowan, 1992: 68.

⁴⁴ Based on Žižek (1998).

⁴⁵ Taylor, 2010: 73.

⁴⁶ Žižek, 2006a: 9.

In other words, the significations we use draw from (and therefore produce) what we are and mean within a wider system. In this way, it is loaded with a particular way of looking at the world, and hence this is where we see that an ideological perspective has already stepped in to create a simplified or *commodified* version of what or who I am trying to signify. In terms of the cases, we can see that a client-oriented frame has stepped in, a hallmark of capitalism, with all of the connected meanings and connections to that way of seeing and being in that world; *serve a customer, the customer is king, help them make a profit*. So there is a Symbolic identification with a *client-orientation*. Though at the same time, I am often also drawing on the language of a ‘bureaucratic academic quality assurance’ system, and I am drawing on its particular *commodified* version of higher education study. A commodified version laid out by official watchdog for higher education (and broader educational frameworks in the UK and Europe) and operationalised in the university’s various formal handbooks of regulation⁴⁷. In this way, it activates a particular way of seeing and being in the world – the commodified version of higher education study is represented through highly defined signifiers (e.g. a Masters is 180 credits at Level 7 - section 2.1.3).

But for me, these Symbolic identifications do not exist in harmony, and create the sorts of tensions alluded to in the discussion about the Imaginary above. For example, in the scenario where I was trying to enhance the wording of the training organisation’s modules, I felt uncomfortable to change *their words*. From the ‘client-orientation’ identification, I am there to *serve* them. But at the same time, the ‘bureaucratic quality assurance orientation’ implicated me to get the wordings right so it met the right standards of academic regulations, that is, as defined by “criticality” (2.1.2). And these sorts of tensions where I express a kind of anxiety with the challenge of meeting the demands of both worlds are plentiful:

I know I am cutting away the clients words which I feel are distracting away from this ‘core’ – yet I feel uncomfortable... - 2.1.2

I’m ecstatic (relieved?!)... – I am excited to tell the client... but I am aware that it is not written for the client, it was written for the panel... but it is a formal document... it’s crude... - 2.1.4

⁴⁷ Precisely, “Handbook A: Validation, Revalidation and Modification of Academic Provision”

I have struggled to answer the original request... I'm having difficulty finding the right words to describe my ideas... I hope the client understands what I am getting at... I am trying to find words that have currency 'outside'... I can't find a better word than 'programme'... - 2.1.5

In this way, part of the tension relates to each Symbolic identification activating different expectations of what I should do. Taking the examples above, it is right and proper to ensure that the learning outcomes are clearly expressed so that they can be properly measured, but changing 'my client's' words of their product is not, because it is important to respect and keep 'the client' happy (2.1.2). And, it is right and proper to write in simple terms to explain that 'the client' can operate flexibly (2.1.4), but writing a long and detailed list of 'terms and conditions' in complex terms that 'my client' will probably not understand is not. But at the same time, I feel the organisation *needs* to be aware of the full regulations that govern them. The cases demonstrate that I am commodified and caught within and between the two locations, structured by different ways of seeing or acting in the world. Indeed, this seems to be a wider experience in my own department (2.1.1), which is caught in an ongoing chain of not getting the right images and implied meanings:

Although 'Associate Tutor Advisor' is a recognised term within (our) everyday language, there is an ongoing debate within my own department about whether the term (Associate Tutor Advisor) should be changed to "better reflect" the nature of the role as one of client management, such as "Client Manager" or "Consultant". - 2.1.1

So it is the *use* of language in a situation that shapes a reality, and is done so "only within the terms which the laws of language allow"⁴⁸. This partly explains how the Imaginary identifications are formed: in drawing on language, Symbolic identification "encapsulates the [imaginary] individual looking out to a fantasy world filtered through the ideological framings brought to it"⁴⁹. Or, more precisely, it is the structures *in* that language that create our realities and it is there where particular ideological perspectives, or particular sets of ideas, beliefs and assumptions are invoked and hence enacted⁵⁰. Therefore, ideological forces, infused in language, act as 'frames' creating a kind of demand or an expectation of what is required by a particular designation;

⁴⁸ Easthope and McGowan, 1992: 68.

⁴⁹ Brown, Atkinson, and England, 2006: 39.

⁵⁰ Freedden, 2003; Sim and Van Loon, 2009.

shaping how we construct ourselves and the world around us, or more precisely, how *we are constructed* by the ‘laws of the language’ sets we draw upon.

The cases demonstrate how in Symbolic identifications with client and quality assurance orientations create commodified or simplified versions of me (or simplified images - Imaginary identifications) with their own competing expectations of who I am and how I should act. In turn, this creates tensions in knowing how to act sensibly. In other words, commodified versions of the self are created in referring to commodified versions of objects, constructed by engaging in the language of the governing ideological frame⁵¹. So this gives us another part of the explanation of how these tensions come about. But there is more; how do these tensions persist, and particularly whether I am aware of them or not? The final part of the knot relates to the Real, where we find a source of motivation for persistence and re-production of such tensions.

3.2.3 The Real as the cause of desire

So we have seen how these images are created and shape me in the cases, implicating me in different directions. But how does this filter through to a motivation to think, feel or act in such ways to live out the client-orientation or quality assurance identifications? This can be explored through the realm of Lacan’s notion of the Real. According to Lacan, the Real is “that which resists, the impossible, that which always comes back the same place, the limit of all symbolisation”⁵². In earlier discussions in this chapter, we have already heard how “we cannot ever acquire a complete, all-encompassing sense of reality – some part of it must be affected by the “loss of reality”, deprived of the character of true reality”, and this missing aspect “is precisely the traumatic Real”⁵³. In other words, what is not symbolised through the Symbolic order is beyond language and hence beyond imagination. This is the final order, the Real, which came to be the most central order within Lacan’s Borromean knot – as the ‘centre’ of human subjectivity⁵⁴. By ‘centre’, it is a crucial part of the explanation of why these Imaginary and Symbolic identifications come to be and come to persist; it is the *cause* of human passion, or *desire*. In other words, it is this “surplus of the Real over every symbolization that

⁵¹ Žižek, 2006b; Brown and McNamara, 2011.

⁵² Lacan, quoted in Critchley, 2008: 63.

⁵³ Žižek, 2001: 66.

⁵⁴ Freedden, 2003.

functions as the object-cause of desire”⁵⁵. This cause of desire is never known, but is always experienced as a lack, of something missing, thereby creating a constant search for something – a kind of ‘wish’ for something⁵⁶. Although desire is experienced as a lack, or pain for consistently looking, there is a pleasure gained out of seeking and not finding – a motivational force to always look and not find, because of course, that something does not exist. This “enjoyment” persists as long as this lack is experienced⁵⁷.

But Lacan also refers to a particular manifestation of desire, as *drive*. Whereas desire continually seeks its objects, drive is an acceptance that ‘that missing something’ which activates desire, cannot or need not, be captured⁵⁸. Here, the pleasure *through* pain (seeking but never finding) is achieved through a repetitive movement, circling around the object, ‘returning to a closed circuit’⁵⁹, or ‘getting things right’ in ‘going through the motions’. Žižek refers to the example of a person trying to grab something in a manual task (desire), but when he starts to get pleasure from continually trying to reach for it and missing it, it becomes drive. He sees such behaviour as a manifestation of drive where “we get caught into a closed, self propelling loop of repeating the same gesture and finding satisfaction in it”⁶⁰. This kind of fetishistic satisfaction may be achieved by working to formulae, templates, set pieces, models, regulative frameworks, etc⁶¹. Importantly, desire comes about through the Symbolic order, activated through language and its Symbolic identifications, because “just as there is no such thing as the unconscious without language, it is through language that desire comes into being”⁶².

But how does this live out in the cases? Within the cases, it is possible to see glimpses of desire and drive in operation, but the problem is that they do not necessarily point in the same direction of the commodified versions of me. Within the cases, there was a consistent desire to be a particular kind of academic, one which serves his clients, continually seeking to serve and satisfy – always seeking a greater level of satisfaction from the client. Though at the same time, I am caught in an ongoing loop to ‘get things right’ according to the academic structures that I live by. The examples are plentiful in

⁵⁵ Žižek, 1989: xxv.

⁵⁶ Lacan, 1977; Žižek, 1989.

⁵⁷ Žižek, 1994a: 330. The term ‘jouissance’ is also used to refer to this notion of ‘enjoyment’ through a lack/gap.

⁵⁸ Žižek, 2006b.

⁵⁹ Evans, 1996.

⁶⁰ Žižek, 2006b: 63.

⁶¹ Brown, 2008.

⁶² Freedden, 2003: 70.

the cases. Take the scenario where I actively sought to enable the client to operate flexible programmes for their aspirations for greater efficiency and profit (2.1.4). I get pleasure from working towards pleasing the client, but at the same time, I get pleasure from writing the regulative apparatus which 'is right' in relation to the academic framework. It is complete, completes the loop, ready to be activated again.

I'm ecstatic (relieved?!) that it 'went through' ok – I am excited to tell the client... but I am not sure I want to re-write it all... but I am aware that it is not written for the client, it was written for the panel... but it is a formal document... it's crude... - 2.1.4

Take a second example, the scenario where I actively intervene communications between the client and Registry to enable a request from the client to enable them to serve one of their customers, outside of existing academic accreditations (2.2.2). I was pulled towards intervening, and got pleasure from that, but I was drawing a solution from the existing framework of regulation. There is no end point, but continually driven and with tremendous pleasure from moving towards this desire.

I'm not entirely satisfied with this as an answer, I'll reply...

...if the student moved on to a generic [negotiated] award (not the Level 6 progression route), and forsaking his FdA, then we can do this - this is what we've been advised previously, and has happened previously. - 2.2.2

And also a sense of enjoyment from working to the academic regulations when designing new programmes with the client (2.1.3):

I had a sense of enjoyment designing the particular routes – a bit like working on a puzzle and then finding the answer with a real sense of pleasure. In this way, there was a sense I was being driven by 'getting' specific details 'right'. - 2.1.3

In each case, desire is created after Symbolic identification, teasing out particular directions of action. Importantly for Žižek, this ideological influence only works when we *unconsciously believe* that there is a powerful Big Other that is governing us; that we unconsciously believe in that coherent embodiment of rules and laws, emerging from an unconscious desire to create some-thing from an object which is no-thing (e.g. me, the subject). Here, it is important to recognise the significance of the *unconscious*; to hold

all of the rules from the Symbolic order in conscious awareness at the same time as interacting is impossible. As Žižek argues:

the field of social practices and socially held beliefs is not just simply at a different level from the individual experience, but something to which *the individual him/herself has to relate*, which *the individual himself* has to experience as an order which is minimally ‘reified’, externalized... [it] *exists only insofar as individuals treat it as such, relate to it as such.*⁶³

Although we may unconsciously accept the language and consequential productions / constructions because of the assumed presence of this Big Other, this is an illusion, much the same as the singular self-image⁶⁴. Unlike Marx, Žižek⁶⁵ suggests that we are practically compliant to these ideological forces that govern our lives even if we notice this compliance. And if we do become aware of the ideological framings which create discrepancies in our self-image or way of working, we may ignore it. Žižek refers to this as two modes of engagement with ideological influence:

Two modes of fetishism, the cynical and the fundamentalist... while the fundamentalist ignores (or at least mistrusts) argumentation, blindly clinging to his fetish, the cynic pretends to accept argumentation, but ignores its symbolic efficiency. In others words, while the fundamentalist (not so much believes as) directly ‘knows’ the truth embodies in his fetish, the cynic practises the logic of disavowal (‘I know very well, but...’)⁶⁶.

In both cases, we comply with the wider calls to action through identifying in the Symbolic order. Within the cases, I oscillate between the two modes. There are many examples of how I was a blind ‘fundamentalist’, but often, I was mis-recognising the source of my desire. Take the scenario of when I was wanting to express the learning outcomes in ‘simple’ terms for my client, to help them (2.1.2). Though I thought I was living out my client-orientation, I was practically regulating the client, and their form of words, in to something more acceptable to the academic quality assurance system – they needed to be clear and precise, measurable, critical, and constructively aligned to the aims of the programme, as per The Code. I (thought I) was living out a desire created by

⁶³ Žižek, 2006b: 6, original emphasis.

⁶⁴ This belief in the Big Other can constrain human agency, but it can also release it to identify differently in the telling of stories, in terms of how one defines oneself and then engages in the world. This will be discussed later.

⁶⁵ Žižek, 1989.

⁶⁶ Žižek, 2009b: 68-69.

a capitalist ideological perspective, but unconsciously complying with a bureaucratic quality assurance ideological perspective. It was a regulatory function produced by my Symbolic identifications with that system. A further example. Take the scenario where I was working with the training organisation to package a training programme into a variety of qualifications including a Postgraduate Diploma (2.1.3):

The last option in both of the documents state 40 credits for the last module. This needs to be 60 credits (for any of our MAs, there is a requirement of 60 credits... This was my point (previously) about these participants having to do an extra 20 credits. You could stipulate that all engage in your journey, and then all have to do the [research methods module] and final module with the University, which could make your offer simpler? But would they be disgruntled in having to do/pay for an extra module? - 2.1.3

Here, I was supposedly helping the organisation design a qualification that would be attractive to their clients, including checking whether they would accept having to do an extra module. But of course the 'extra' is only extra in relation to the academic framework that is governing it; a Master's *is* 180 credits. I comply in living out the ideological parameters of a bureaucratic quality assurance way of seeing education, and live with the permanent struggle of the contradictions that result. Indeed, it is interesting to consider the status I give to the Big Other which is permanently present in the cases; in the embodied form the higher education watchdog's "The Code of Practice". This is important to pick up in the texts, where I give it the status of The Law:

who would question parity across our programmes and who would question parity with national expectations? Who would question Section 7 of The Code (*Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*) and Section 6 of The Code (*Assessment of students*), which outlines how the University must "ensure that assessment is conducted with rigour, probity and fairness and with due regard for security (Precept 5)" and "have transparent and fair mechanisms for marking and for moderating marks (Precept 7)"? Isn't being 'out of kilter' wrong? Unfair? Inconsistent? - 2.1.5

But I also engage in ‘cynical’ mode too, where I adopt a supposed distance away from the ideology, but in doing so, fall into the Lacanian trap; “those who do not let themselves be caught in the symbolic/fiction and continue to believe their eyes are the ones who err most”⁶⁷. In other words, those who *think* they are *not* caught by ideological framing, and then continue to believe what they see, *are* already caught. Let’s take the example of where I am discussing the issue of whether to penalise students if they go over the word count limit (2.2.4). I had apparently become aware of the difficulty of connecting with particular ways of understanding the function of word counts and impact on the students (e.g. constraining or enabling). In my reflective account, I thought I was being critical of the ideological structures framing me and the situation, but in doing so, I am using the very concepts which are helping to construct the issue in the first place:

I recognised the edges of my perspective – from that parity perspective, I was deviating, and creating a situation of inequality. From the learning perspective, they were being bureaucrats. It seems that this is not a battle to be won – the two perspectives can not be reconciled. - 2.2.4

I had already been caught by the entrapments creating the tension in the first place. The trick relates to when we think we are seeing the ideological dimension at play, or try to step outside of it, and try to analyse it. But this is where ideological force “weaves its magic, for we are *only* able to criticise others for being ideological by assuming there is some [object] that others... get wrong”⁶⁸. In other words, we refer to that so-called ‘wrong’ to critique. For Žižek, this is an important way ideological force works and continues to work; the paradoxical “stepping out of (what we experience as) ideology is the very form of our enslavement to it”⁶⁹. It is a case of: I can see that the problem is that there are two perspective constraining and paralysing me to act (parity vs learning, above); but in naming them in this way, I and the situation have already been infected by the ideology. Caught by the very apparatus that created the issue in the first place.

⁶⁷ Žižek, 2005: np.

⁶⁸ Butler, 2005: 47.

⁶⁹ Žižek, 1994b: 6.

Indeed, Žižek argues that this form of *cynical distance* is a requirement for ideology to do its work. But how is this the case? Žižek argues that each time I speak, the particular signification I choose (from the Symbolic) creates a “question mark” over the particular signification chosen⁷⁰. For example, I may ask “Why am I... [a teacher, a master, a king...]?”⁷¹. And I ask this because each time I reach out to capture something through a signification, I fail to capture, and something escapes (because the Symbolic always escapes the Real – it is unknowable). But exactly after the moment of failing, *a gap is created, and it is the gap that mobilises desire* – a desire which creates a source of enjoyment in continuing to attempt to grasp or continuing to ‘close the loop’ on. Importantly, without the gap, there is no tension or pull of desire to be called to act in certain ways. So for Žižek, it is this very *gap created after the moment of interpellation* – of being “unsure” because of the unknowability of the Real – that enables interpellation work to the call of ideological perspective. He argues:

the last support of the ideological effect (of the way an ideological network of signifiers “holds” us) is the... kernel of enjoyment. In ideology, “all is not ideological (that is, ideological meaning)”, but it is this very surplus which is the last support of ideology⁷².

Just like how I was mis-recognising the cause of my desire in the earlier discussion, these “question marks” also implicate how we read the tensions I experience throughout the cases, in terms of what is ‘truly’ creating them. For example, in the scenario where I was trying to ‘simplify’ the wording of the training organisation’s learning outcomes (2.1.2), was my discomfort in ‘cutting the words’ of the training organisation in order to make it clearer for the trainees (identification with a client-orientation)? Or was it in relation to ensuring there was ‘constructively alignment’ between the module outcomes with some broader programme aims (identification with a quality assurance-orientation)? Similarly, in the scenario where I was asked what other ‘bits of paper’ the university could offer as forms of recognition, I had tensions in responding (2.1.4). Were these tensions because I could not find a readily available solution that would be understood by the client (a tension created by identifying with a client-orientation)? Or were they tensions from not being able to find regulatory apparatus from which to judge the quality of the proposal I was putting forward (a tension created by identifying with quality assurance)? Or in all of these cases, was it something else? These are difficult

⁷⁰ Žižek, 1989: 111.

⁷¹ Butler, 2005: 55. Based on Lacan, 1981: 315.

⁷² Žižek, 1989: 140.

questions to answer confidently, because the object of desire is always unknowable, but always motivates action. And of course, these questions are themselves enslaved to the ideologies creating them – a cynical form of engagement. However, we can look to ‘what we do’, as a *form* which escapes our awareness⁷³; here, we can see how although the client orientation sometimes appears to sustain action, the bureaucratic quality assurance orientation often usurps it and wins to regulate the client (see the earlier discussion in this section).

But being “unsure” in this way is precisely why, according to Žižek, ideological frames are enabled to take hold and implicate the subject (e.g. me) in such ways. It allows the sustenance of a gap between how we are implicated by a particular identification and that which escapes it, creating the possibility of enjoyment from trying to close the gap. Importantly here, then, ideological forces succeed not so much through a societal interpellation whereby we are “hailed” or invited into particular identity without us knowing it; like being called on the street, retrospectively constructing us as a clear object⁷⁴. Rather, ideological force succeeds because we want it to succeed; we get enjoyment from continuously attempting to grasp at a coherent identity activated by particular identifications, *after* this retrospective hailing. In a sense, we interpellate ourselves into particular illusory identities towards our desires⁷⁵. So in sum, so far, this section has highlighted key aspects of how the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real interrelate to effect the way professionals see the demands placed on them – and keep those grips locked in place. Yet there is still more to say about how the Real operates which implicates us, and in turn, shapes how it creates certain effects in our relations with other people. It is here where attention now turns.

⁷³ Žižek, 1989: 30.

⁷⁴ As theorised by Althusser, 1971.

⁷⁵ Sim and Van Loon, 2009.

3.2.4 Effects of parallax gaps

So far, we have seen how, according to Žižek, a space is created after being ‘hailed’ by a particular identification, a space where desire creeps in to motivate a continual loop of trying to grasp at a solid, tangible ‘me’. And through the cases, two identifications appear around a client-orientation and a bureaucratic quality assurance orientation. They never quite fit, but because of this, spur me into action. Importantly, however, there is more to learn about the Real and how it functions. As Žižek argues, “ultimately, the status of the Real is purely parallaxic and, as such, non-substantial... the parallax Real is... [that] which accounts for the very multiplicity of appearances of the same underlying Real”⁷⁶. But what does Žižek mean by this? Here, he is commenting on how, because of the unknowability of the Real, we are able to see and make sense of objects from different angles. In the cases, for example, how can I view the case of colleagues ‘not caring’ whereas they are simply going about their standard, daily business? Why is this? In order to answer this, it is important to return to desire and how that functions. As Žižek says:

[an] object assumes clear and distinctive features only if we look at it “at an angle”, i.e. with an “interested” view, supported, permeated, and “distorted” by *desire*... an object that be perceived only by a gaze “distorted” by desire, an object that *does not exist* for an “objective” gaze... outside this distortion, “in itself”, *it does not exist*, since it is *nothing but* the embodiment, the materialization of this very distortion... “objectively” nothing, though, viewed from a certain perspective, it assumes the shape of “something”.⁷⁷

In other words, for something to exist to be subjectively experienced, it must be framed (in the first place) by a desire. For Žižek, “our vision of reality is anamorphically distorted”⁷⁸. By this he means that a particular (so called, distorted) perspective is required by a spectator to see an image. This is demonstrated in Hans Holbein the Younger’s well known painting, *The Ambassadors* (see Figure 3, on the next two pages). Here, something is recognised across the bottom of the frame, but it is not clear what it is; it is distorted, meaningless. However, viewing the same image from a distorted angle, an acute angle, transforms it into something meaningful – in this case, a skull. We can see the same in anamorphic sculptures such as in Figure 5 (on page 101).

⁷⁶ Žižek, 2006b: 26.

⁷⁷ Žižek, 1991: 12.

⁷⁸ Žižek, 2006b: 26.

Again, from one angle, something is nothing, but from another angle, it is recognised. To this extent, this returns us to highlight the point that ideological frames are always partial; desire structures our ability to recognise some-things over others (which extend beyond the view of our desires).



Figure 3 The Ambassadors, 1533⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Google Art Project, 2012.

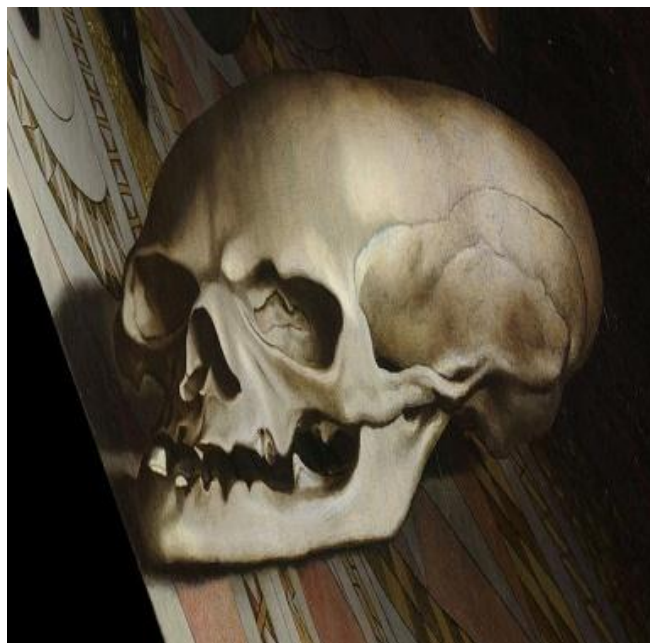


Figure 4 Looking awry at The Ambassadors⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Google Art Project, 2012.



Figure 5 Different angles of the same object⁸¹

⁸¹ Math Art, 2012.

But why is that important? When desire constructs these anamorphic objects, according to Žižek, *parallax gaps* can occur. This is where two perspectives exist where there is an “antinomy which can never be dialectically “mediated/sublated” into a higher synthesis, since there is no common language, no shared ground”⁸². The perspectives are gripped, locked by the gaze of the perpetuating passion of desire. Žižek gives the example of the parallax gap invoked when Josef Fritzl was in the media for raping and hiding members of his family. From one angle, Fritzl was constructed as a *monster*, doing terrible, unthinkable things to his own family. Yet, from another angle, he was the opposite, in his own accounts of why he did what he did; he was a *loving* father, protecting his family from the dangers of the modern world. And this is made even more explicit, perhaps dramatised, in a very recent and pertinent example by Collini, talking of his role as a university academic:

I work in the knowledge and human-resources industry. My company specializes in two kinds of product: we manufacture high-quality, multi-skilled units of human capacity; and we produce commercially relevant, cutting-edge new knowledge in user-friendly packaged of printed material... Let me put that another way. I'm a university teacher. I teach students and I write books... I teach at a British university.⁸³

This is the major focus of the second set of cases, where parallax gaps appear between perspectives amongst people within the university. In the first scenario (2.2.1), Registry sends out an email to confirm the details of the process to register new students from a training organisation I am associated with. From a quality assurance angle, it is clear and concise, using the specialised everyday language of Registry. From a client-orientation angle, I cannot ascribe meaning to it, as I do not understand the technical language. But as a consequence of my angle, and the desire constructing and keeping it in place, it creates anxieties about what it means for the client, and tensions amongst colleagues within the department in terms of me interpreting their behaviours as not ‘caring’. Ultimately, this leads to a sense of isolation (of being the only one who *does* care). As I reflect:

⁸² Žižek, 2006b: 4.

⁸³ Collini, 2012: 132.

I was completely baffled by this email today... I have no idea what this means! What do I need to do? What do I need to tell my client? Will it affect their business?... I am surprised and shocked! These students account for such a large proportion of our business... we should know this. Am I the only one who cares?! - 2.2.1

But this angle is created by my desire and the gap in perspective ultimately leads to me not knowing that language or the meaning of it (apart from having to write this research up in order to explain the terms). And this provides an explanation as to how the not-knowing is re-produced over time through these gaps; the gap never gets filled and objects remain unrecognisable. Yet there are other effects from such anamorphic perspectives. Take another scenario with Registry (2.2.2), where I intervene communications between the training organisation and Registry. I see a situation where Registry is not helping the client, and I become frustrated. But, again, this is the angle created by my desire, to uphold my identification with being client-oriented. However, from the angle adopted by Registry, these are potential deviations from The Code, which are illegitimate moves that could/would disrupt the integrity of living out the established procedures; I am required to pursue a solution with senior members of staff. So from one angle, I am deviating (from The Code), but from another, I am problem solving within a flexible framework (for the client). Each makes sense from the respective angle, invoked by the language and ideological frame it draws upon.

The parallax gaps in the first three scenarios (2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.2.3) never reconcile, creating professional anxiety and tension practice – I never feel the response is ever quite the way it should be, because of the way I have been commodified, simplified by my Symbolic identifications. From one side, I am a *client-server*, and the other I am a *quality-bureaucrat* – and I oscillate between understanding the world from both angles. A cynical engagement in this might ask; which is the reality? The problem is that there is no neutral answer, from a space of desire. Indeed, the Möbius strip⁸⁴, a favoured metaphor of Žižek and Lacan, illustrates how the answer is *both*. It apparently has two sides, but this is an illusion; as Žižek tells us, “if we progress far enough on one surface, all of a sudden we find ourselves on its reverse”⁸⁵. Running your finger along the sheet (see the dotted line) demonstrates that rather than having two distinct sides, the finger can never spot the point at which one side turns in to the other. This “enables us to see

⁸⁴ A Möbius strip is created by twisting a sheet of paper and then joining the ends together (see Figure 6, above).

⁸⁵ Žižek, 1992: 227.

[things] as continuous with each other: the one, as it is, is the "truth" of the other, and vice versa"⁸⁶. In other words, the point is that the Möbius strip can never be seized in one glance, and when we find ourselves in one place (on one side – Fritzl as a *monster*) it also includes its opposite (on the other side – Fritzl as a *loving father*). There is a duality present, depending on the angle at which you look, and we make sense of one in relation to the other. This returns us to, and emphasises Žižek's earlier statement about how "our vision of reality is anamorphically distorted..." but also helps to explain that this is the reason "[that] accounts for the very *multiplicity* of appearances of the same underlying Real"⁸⁷.



Figure 6 Möbius strip

Within the cases, I appear to become aware of this duality at two points. In one scenario (2.2.3), where the academic department receives a reply from Learning Technology about how they are creating a work-around for the training organisations to access learning materials online. However, this time, I am professionally paralysed to act; I can see both angles, but do not know which to take. From the quality assurance angle, I can see that Learning Technology needs to serve the majority according to The Code, and in serving the needs of this particular group (beyond a workaround) would distract resources to do this (it is strategic). But I can also see that this is not helping 'my client', and see it as inequitable. As I reflect:

⁸⁶ Žižek, 2007: np.

⁸⁷ Žižek, 2006b: 26.

Colleagues are angry that they don't cater for our needs. I can understand and agree with what is being said by my colleagues but also by the technologists – all departments have limited resources... but that doesn't help my clients... I am not sure what to do... Both the Learning Technology department and I seem to want to *serve* (or “support”) a client... the Learning Technology department want to serve the generalised whole of the university and my colleagues and I want to serve a specific part, or “5%” of the wider whole (our clients). Both have clients, but two different targets of who the client actually is from the respective perspective.

For the other example, let's return the scenario of my colleagues and I discussing word count and whether to penalise (2.2.4) and explore this further. Here, from one angle, the academic quality assurance angle, it was important to institute ways to regulate the word count (and the students) in order to achieve The Code's principles of parity. And instituting limits and penalties for going over the word count were legitimate ways to achieve this. From another angle, the client-oriented angle, rather, there was not an issue with not having a penalty, as it meant that they could follow their interests. And from this angle, it was important to facilitate learning towards achieving the best experience and highest performance within an assessment, rather than penalising the client. However, the difference this time was that I recognised that this was a construction in the way I was thinking about the issue. So it was a case of facilitating *parity* vs facilitating *learning*. But, unlike the previous example, there was a moment that I realised that this was a battle that would never be won – both of them are right and proper. The word limit could be seen as both, alike the Möbius strip; word limit as controller and word limit as facilitator. A shift towards a case of not “running after “objective” truth, but by holding onto the truth about the position from which one speaks”⁸⁸. In this sense, I recognised that they were being held by different ideological perspectives. However, rather than creating an anxiety or tension, I accepted both versions and realised the limits of my perspectives. In each case, a parallax gap was activated from different perspectives on the same thing (the sheet of paper in the Möbius strip).

⁸⁸ Žižek, 2008a: 3.

But again, although I thought I was becoming aware and critical of a parallax gap, I actually continue to use the language that invokes the Symbolic identifications that construct it in this way the first place. A *cynical distance* enslaving me to the language that constructed the issues in the first place. In this way, I am practically setting up the parallax as I utter, so in effect, continuing to live out the ideological influences. I was caught by the particular versions of me implicated by the conceptualisations activated as I connected with particular worlds of commerce and bureaucratic quality assurance. And as we see, the gap never shifts; it is held in place by the continuity of the desires and drives never fulfilled – because the language that invokes them continues. After all, within the texts, I continue to recognise ‘the client’ within my role as a particular kind of Senior Lecturer. Importantly, as a result, this implicated the effects in the Real; there was no action or new understandings in the first scenario (I did not learn the language of Registry to understand the email) and there was no change or mutual understanding of a solution in the second (in terms of the legitimacy of my suggested solution for organisation). Very real and important effects as a result of unconsciously adopting particular views of the professional and the world through ideological frames.

3.2.5 Summary

To summarise, this section has analysed the cases in relation to the three interdependent orders which Žižek argues are important to understanding human subjectivity, and in particular, to understand how the ideological dimension structures professional identity and agency in practice. Within the Imaginary, we identify with certain pictures of ourselves, which implicate us into particular ways of being or acting in practice. Importantly, we seek completeness over fragmentation, so *commodified* versions of ourselves stand in for the totality of us (‘me’) – it is too painful and traumatic otherwise. The cases showed how I was variously identifying with being a particular kind of academic, a client-oriented one, and a guardian of bureaucratic quality assurance; each creating competing expectations of who I am and therefore how I should act (*serve the client* or *guard quality through regulation*). These commodified versions are activated through the Symbolic, where we draw on language to engage in the world. In trying to signify something through language, not everything is captured, and something escapes. This tension is sometimes in awareness, as the identifications never seem to produce a response that fits from either of the angles. But what *is* caught reflects particular

ideological parameters, that is, its ideas, beliefs, assumptions, or generally, ways of seeing the world. Like the way the person in the bed becomes commodified as a display board on the end of the hospital bed, I am commodified throughout the cases. Often, the identifications hold competing expectations of how I should act and professional tensions are created. However, in an attempt to create the pleasure of unity, one of these identifications are smoothed over and bracketed out. In turn, this partly explains why sometimes I (mis-recognise) that I am working towards the demands of the client, but *practically* being caught in regulating the client within the terms laid out in the university's rules and regulations.

Importantly, this 'something that always escapes' does so within the realm of the Real; a traumatically unknowable space. With each grasp at signification, and subsequent failure, a constant desire towards returning to unity is created – and this *attempt* to return gives us enjoyment. Though each signification is an illusion (not capturing the total me), it spurs action nonetheless; we act 'as if' it is real. The cases show a constant pull towards being client-oriented (satisfying the client) and quality assurance-oriented (getting the correct answer according to the system) – and the associated enjoyment of doing so. The cases demonstrate how I oscillate between enacting out these ideological structurings *without* awareness (as a 'fundamentalist') and *with* supposed awareness (as a 'cynic'). In the latter, though I think I am stepping out of ideology to critique it, I am actually engaging in the very ideological structurings to do so. Importantly, far from undermining the work of ideology, such cynical distance is a requirement for ideology to fully grip and lock us in ideological perspective. *After* each signification, there is a sensed gap between the signified and its signification; there is a 'question mark' or uncertainty because something has escaped. Yet this provides the conditions for which we can get enjoyment from trying to close the gap; a desire is activated in the Real, and we get enjoyment from trying to close that gap. In other words, ideology grips us from precisely in the gap *after* we are 'hailed' by a particular identification. These 'question marks' also make it difficult to 'truly' know the source of the tensions within the cases – the Real, where desire lives, is unknowable. But we can look to what I practically do to know which of the ideological frames I am living out. Here, again, we see that the client-orientation is often usurped by a drive to regulate the training organisation according to university regulation. And this demonstrates an unconscious belief in the Big Other-ness of the rules and regulations of academic quality assurance orientation.

But in identifying in these ways, we are not just implicating our unconscious desires. These desires also act as frames, or glasses, because of which, we are able to recognise some things and not others. It allows us to have an anamorphic skull, an anamorphic sculpture, and an anamorphic Collini⁸⁹, only viewable from certain perspectives. It also makes possible the situation of a parallax gap, where perspectives are activated through competing identifications that have no possible reconciliation – recall the Fritzl as loving vs monstrous. The perspectives are locked in by the enjoyment from continually attempting to achieve two different desires, for as long as we engage in the language that constructs the desire remains. As the Möbius teaches us, however, both are an illusionary part of a real, and that we come to know both only through reference to each other; nonetheless, we act ‘as if’ they are real. The cases demonstrate the parallax gaps that result from the anamorphic effects that are activated between the client-orientation angle and the academic quality assurance angle; communicating vs baffling (2.1.1), deviating vs complying (2.1.2), and being strategic vs inequitable (2.2.3). But the effects of this are real for me; there was no action or new understandings in the first scenario (I did not learn the language of Registry to understand the email), there was no change or mutual understanding of a solution in the second (in terms of the legitimacy of my suggested solution for organisation), and nothing changed in the third (I was paralysed to act). These are very real and important effects as a result of unconsciously adopting particular views of the professional and the world through ideological frames.

In these ways, therefore, we see how identifying in such ways creates competing understandings of who a professional is and how they should act in practice, as we draw on language. That these expectations infiltrate the unconscious, constantly motivating us in particular and sometimes competing directions, explains how they are kept in place even, or perhaps more precisely because, we think we are aware of them. The gap after being ‘hailed’ spurs us and captures us. But of course, this is only one theoretical exposition of how this occurs, and now we turn to another theoretical base to cross-reference against Žižek. Discussion now turns to the key points of comparison with aspects of Holland *et al*’s theoretical apparatus.

⁸⁹ Collini, 2012.

3.3 Figured worlds of commodification (with Holland *et al*)

The previous section put aspects of Žižek's theoretical apparatus to work to help understand the work of ideology in commodifying professionals in their work. As stated earlier, however, these insights are generated through looking at the data in the cases in a particular way, that is, through the lens of theoretical apparatus proposed by Žižek. This will foreground some aspects, background others, and omit yet other aspects. Putting another set of apparatus to work, from a different perspective acts as a kind of theoretical triangulation, and helps highlight other kinds of processes which might not be in the gaze of Žižek's theory. Holland *et al*'s theory of 'practiced-identities'⁹⁰ was chosen because it was sufficiently different to Žižek's apparatus to offer alternative insights into how identities were being shaped in the cases. Importantly, Holland *et al*'s framework goes further than Wenger's⁹¹ ideas in that they conceptualise identify production as more than just participation in practice, but includes language as a strong structuring force which a person can actively use to engage in a situation (see pages 95-96). From a positivistic perspective, Holland *et al*'s theories have been criticised for lacking operational specificity for measurement purposes, though others have interpreted this as offering the flexibility to apply the theory in multiple ways⁹². Indeed, measurement is not the purpose of the discussion here. Rather, it is a cross-reference which highlights central themes which arise when the two sets of apparatus are juxtaposed. The following discussion is not intended to be a comprehensive exposition of Holland *et al*'s full theoretical apparatus, but a cross-referencing of key aspects of it against those aspects of Žižek's deployed so far. The ambition is to identify similar aspects (and therefore provide additional theoretical support) and also different aspects (and therefore additional areas of analysis). Reference to the cases is made to exemplify and help explain some of the consequences of such a comparison. In turn, this provides an approach which allows us to become more specific and explicit about the engine of commodification in practice.

⁹⁰ Holland, *et al.*, 1998.

⁹¹ Wenger, 1998.

⁹² Urrieta, 2007.

At the start of this chapter, I highlighted how Holland *et al*'s approach to identity formation was a kind of *codevelopment* of a number of influential forces; the fall-out from “the meeting of persons, cultural resources, and situations in practice”⁹³, creates particular identities and subsequent behaviours, which in turn then become part of the “heuristics for the next moment of activity”⁹⁴ in a continuing fashion. In other words, I fashion an identity through a coming together of ‘me’ and my experiences as a ‘senior lecturer’ (and before it), those discourses I engage in as I speak or act (as analysed above), those tangible artifacts I use in my daily work (such as university proformas), and the immediate situation (such as dealing with an email from the Registry department). As we will see shortly, these elements work together and codevelop over time, in ways which mean that people are always “producing self-understandings that may guide subsequent behaviour”⁹⁵. From this perspective, all of these forces are powerful but the outcome is never ‘hermetically sealed’⁹⁶; identities and how we act in a given moment are the coming together of a number of forces to create *improvisations*. This will be examined more closely in relation to agency in the next chapter, but the important point to emphasise here is this moment of improvisation. Improvisations occur when:

our *past*... meets with a particular combination of *circumstances*... for which we have no set response. They constitute the environment or landscape in which the experience of the next generation “sediments”, falls out, into *expectation* and *disposition*. Such productions... are always being appropriated by people as *heuristic means to guide*... [T]here is a continual process of heuristic development: individuals and groups are always (re)forming themselves as personas... through cultural materials created in the immediate and the more distant past.⁹⁷

⁹³ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 40.

⁹⁴ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 40.

⁹⁵ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 4.

⁹⁶ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 18.

⁹⁷ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 17-18. Emphasis added.

Specifically for Holland *et al*, these improvisations occur in and through ‘figured worlds’. Figured worlds are the “*processes or traditions of apprehension* which gather us up and give us form as our lives intersect them”⁹⁸, or in other words, provide the context in which we come to understand ourselves, our work, and what is expected from us. The rest of this chapter discusses key processes involved in figured worlds which feature as part of Holland *et al*’s theory. As outlined earlier, I will do this through cross-referencing to Žižek’s ideas already discussed above, and identifying important similarities and differences to between the frameworks. I discuss four key areas which arise from this theoretical juxtaposition: the anamorphic effects created when we engage in our professional activities, how particular identifications taint and grip our motivation and drive us to act in particular ways, how one knows one’s place in professional circumstances which influence whether we decide to speak or stay silent, and finally, how one identification often usurps another in professional situations. Each of these points highlights additional insights in understanding how commodification works in practice.

3.3.1 Structuring powers of fantasy in making meaning

A key area of similarity between the two theoretical perspectives relates to an *aspect* of how our social reality is figured and how this shapes the way we see the demands placed on us. Within Žižek’s interpretation of the Borromean knot, because we have the unknowable Real, we can only ever know simplified versions of us and the world around us as we engage with the Symbolic realm. In using specific language or using artifacts such as proformas, for example, we are ‘hailed’ or implicated in particular ways that reflect the simplified (or commodified) forms dominant in the ideological perspective. In turn, this partly influences how we make sense of and understand the object. Although these are fictions or fantasies, we treat them ‘as if’ they are the real; the ‘brute’ Real is too traumatic to know. In this way, they have an important, but partial, role in framing and shaping our behaviour; as I utter ‘client’, I have immediately positioned myself and certain expectations about that relationship with that which is being signified. So far, this conceptually aligns with Holland *et al*’s ideas; they too refer to the ‘as if’ character of how we experience and make sense of the flow of activity we engage in. As they argue, a figured world is:

⁹⁸ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 41. Emphasis added.

a socially and culturally constructed *realm of interpretation* in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a *simplified* world populated by a set of agents... who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state... as moved by a specific set of forces... These collective “as if” worlds are... interpretations or imaginations that mediate behavior and so, from the perspective of heuristic development, inform participants’ outlooks.⁹⁹

For example, in a figured world of ‘romance’, there are lovers (or flirts), who fall in love (or flirt), moved by love (or lust) – all of which are made sense of within, and through, participation in *that* figured world. And in the way these figured worlds impose “specific points of view on the world... each characterised by its own objects, meanings and values”¹⁰⁰, it is properly ideological in Žižekian terms. Also aligning with Žižek, these worlds are anamorphic in character; they are frames/angles that are *necessary* for understanding words and artifacts, because “people assume that their words and behavior will be interpreted according to a context of meaning – as indexing... a culturally figured world”¹⁰¹. This can be seen in the text below, where I imply, through the use of inverted commas, that some terms are supposedly not recognised in the world I am indexing, that is, some world outside of the higher education sector. The inverted commas act as a kind of ‘what we call it’ message. Whereas other terms, such as ‘client’ or ‘Senior Lecturer’, are assumed to be recognised (with no inverted commas). In this way, the text points to a notional figured world of ‘client-oriented academe’, a flow of activity that is my daily work.

I work as a Senior Lecturer within a university... most of my time is spent in ‘co-delivery’... In my particular institution, approved ‘Associate Tutors’ in the external organisation design and deliver the training, and undertake ‘first marking’... and then I undertake the ‘second marking’... to ensure the accuracy of the first marker’s judgements and its comparability to ‘standards’ across other ‘modules’). As designated ‘Associate Tutor Advisor’, I work closely with my client to develop new provision and enhance current provision. - 2.1.1

⁹⁹ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 52. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁰ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 170.

¹⁰¹ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 52. Emphasis added.

Importantly, and also in line with Žižek, Holland *et al* argue that we are “socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses and their artifacts”¹⁰². But they go slightly further than Žižek to usefully *foreground and explicate the specific forms* of how we are implicated, using the concepts of ‘theories of person’, ‘theories of task’ and the ‘affordances’ these theories allow in identification and behavior. For example¹⁰³, though it can be used for other things, a hammer’s generic function is to connect objects by driving a nail through them. Its material shape is predominantly driven by its nail hitting function, and as such, a hammer ‘*affords*’ hitting nails. In this way, every hammer can be seen to simultaneously encapsulate both a ‘theory of the task’ and a ‘theory of the person’ who undertakes the task: the head is made of material that does not shatter when used, and the handle is shaped to fit the human hand. Tack hammers have small heads and small handles that affords light tapping, and a sledge hammer has a large head and long, thick handle to enable a person of sufficient strength and build to hold with both hands and swing from a height. Similarly, in using these notions, we can see more vividly than when using Žižek’s interpretation of the Borromean knot the ways we are implicated throughout the cases. The following text indicates the sorts of professional tasks that I engage in:

I work as a Senior Lecturer within a university... most of my time is spent in ‘co-delivery’... In my particular institution, approved ‘Associate Tutors’ in the external organisation design and deliver the training, and undertake ‘first marking’... and then I undertake the ‘second marking’... to ensure the accuracy of the first marker’s judgements and its comparability to ‘standards’ across other ‘modules’). As designated ‘Associate Tutor Advisor’, I work closely with my client to develop new provision and enhance current provision. - 2.1.1

I gained great satisfaction in preparing the response, constructing a structure to meet the demands of my client - 2.1.5

¹⁰² Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 26.

¹⁰³ Based on Holland and Cole, 1995.

In terms of the client-related aspects, we see that my professional task is structured by the notion of ‘client’, whereby the task is about ‘developing new and enhancing provision’ and ‘meeting their demands’. Similarly, and in line with that notion, the theory of the person becomes to serve that client’s needs. And in terms of the academic-related aspects, we see there are Senior Lecturers (the specific recognised agents) who work at governmentally audited and approved universities (the recognised site), who ‘teach/first-mark/second-mark’ programmes of higher education study (the recognised activities or movements), which value particular ‘standards’ (recognised values) through formal proformas (recognised artifacts).

Indeed, Figure 7 on the next page is an example of one of those artifacts, a proforma, which is a manifestation of that figured world. Here, we see the task of higher education study as understood as academic levels and credits, learning outcomes, assessment strategies, word counts, and so on – in a context of transparency, comparability and auditability (note how the proforma records the date of the meeting which gave formal ‘approval’ to the document). A task of performing to learning *outcomes*, within word *count*, which are defined by specified *levels*, and credit *weightings*, against specified assessment *criteria*. It becomes a bureaucratic task. When figured in this way, it *affords* us a higher education study which is consistent and comparable across universities, a “collective remembrance”¹⁰⁴ of the historical, governmental drive towards professionalisation and consistency in higher education through standardisation and modularisation across the UK and even across Europe¹⁰⁵. And when figured in this way, the implied theory of person that undertakes the task is that of a guardian against these commodified versions of higher education; a guardian that ensures these things are achieved (boxes are filled or ticked).

¹⁰⁴ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 61.

¹⁰⁵ In the UK, this is CATS (Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme) and in Europe, this is ECTS (the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme) through the Bologna process.

So far, although Holland *et al*'s concepts enable us to say similar things to Žižek about how commodification works through the discourses and artifacts we interact with, they give us additional explication about how the 'theory of task' and 'theory of person' give us 'affordances' to think and act in particular ways. These more explicit dimensions indicate more detail about aspects which are the notional, instrumental hammer of ideological force, or particular ways of viewing something, that knock us in to that shape. If higher education is captured as boxes and as a bureaucratic task, it is to be undertaken by bureaucratic guardians of quality assurance.

1. Module Code		2. Module Title			
3. Level		4. Credit Value		ECTS	
6. Available to / Restrictions					
7. Expected Student Learning Activity and Contact Hours			8. Attendance Guidance		
9. Module Content					
10. Aims					
11. Methods of Learning and Teaching and Formative Assessment					
12. Learning Outcomes		13. Assessment & Reassessment Components & Weighting			
14. Key References					
15. Module Leader		16. Subject / Programme Assessment Board			
17. Approved By		18. Date of Approval			

Figure 7 A 'Module Descriptor' with a theory of task and person

A second subtle difference in Holland et al's framework, compared to Žižek's, is that Holland *et al*'s apparatus provide a *more vivid and explicit articulation* of how these discourses and artifacts filter through to the psychological functioning of the person. My interpretation of how Žižek (and others) use the Borromean knot is that this feature is a conscious attempt to surpass such specificity; the knot intentionally floats above the bounded-ness of constructs such as cognition, for example¹⁰⁶. In contrast, Holland *et al* argue that discourses and artifacts are 'pivotal' in the sense they evoke a "*shift* the perceptual, cognitive, affective, and practical frame of activity"¹⁰⁷. Indeed, we initially learn to use discourses and artifacts as 'cultural tools' to 'bootstrap' ourselves to think or act in particular ways in our environment, in order to properly participate, but over time we internalise them in a way that they become 'self-administered' without even noticing it.¹⁰⁸ They argue:

At first... devices may be tangible, used voluntarily and consciously... Repeated experience with the tangible device may eventually become unnecessary, and its function may be "internalized"... that is, its representation within the "inner speaking" (and more generally, inner activity) that constitutes whatever substance there is to self-consciousness, comes to evoke the routine originally organized. Finally... the evocation of control may become automatic... escapes notice, and the behavior becomes... "fossilized".¹⁰⁹

The notion of 'inner speaking' will be returned to more fully over the coming section, but the point is that it represents that realm we need to "sense (see, hear, touch, taste, feel)"¹¹⁰ the flow of activity we are in. A kind of imprint or stain, which is then part of me. For example, I have had to learn to use the particular university proformas, such as that shown in Figure 7, and understand what is meant by the different symbols within it, such as 'learning outcomes', in order to successfully engage in a particular world of academe. Over a prolonged period of time, these symbols or conceptualisations have become embodied structure how I think, feel and act. So, I *feel* it is important to tell the client to change their words (2.1.2), or I *feel* it is important to ask the client whether their clients will be happy to do 'extra' modules (2.1.3). And in other instances, I *see* Registry not helping when a client makes a request (2.2.2), and I *see* the administrator

¹⁰⁶ Žižek, 2006b.

¹⁰⁷ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 63. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 50.

¹⁰⁹ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 37.

¹¹⁰ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 52.

not helping when I receive a baffling email (2.2.1). There are more examples in the text below, where I implicated by how I have learnt to engage. Indeed, this sort of packaging up can also be seen in the essay structure format that I gave to students, which are manifestations of the same ideological apparatus highlighted in (2.2.4, reproduced in Figure 8, on the next page). But importantly, this structuring had become unconscious; recall in the case (2.2.4) where I had only *just* had an ‘insight’ about my own bureaucratic forms during discussions about word count. This additional dimension does not feature explicitly in Žižek’s framework, but Holland *et al* usefully *foreground* how discourses and artifacts might become infused with our “mental and emotional faculties”¹¹¹.

I have struggled to answer the original request... I’m having difficulty finding the right words to describe my ideas... I hope the client understands what I am getting at... I am trying to find words that have currency ‘outside’... I can’t find a better word than ‘programme’... - 2.1.5

I’m ecstatic (relieved?!) that it ‘went through’ ok – I am excited to tell the client... but I am not sure I want to re-write it all... but I am aware that it is not written for the client, it was written for the panel... but it is a formal document... it’s crude... - 2.1.3

¹¹¹ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 50.

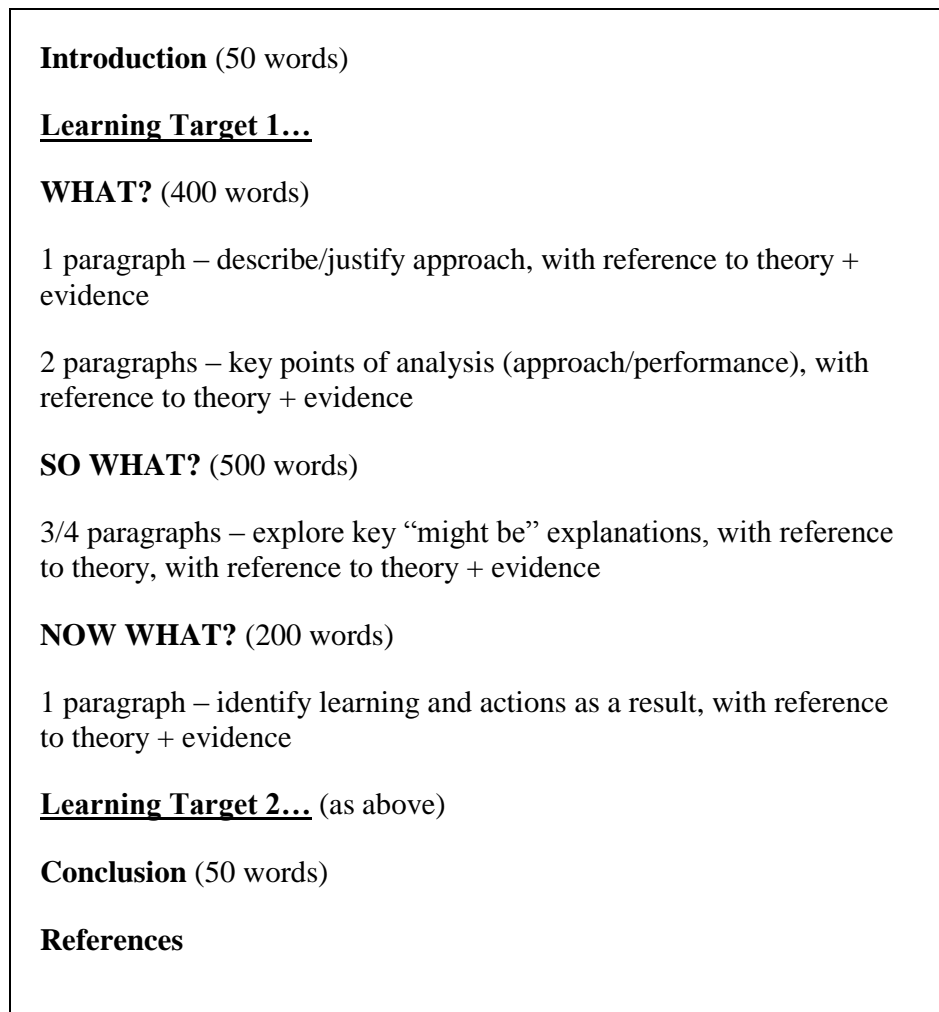


Figure 8 An ‘essay structure’ with a theory of task and person

So there are strong parallels and compatibilities between Žižek's interpretation of the Borromean knot and Holland *et al*'s apparatus, but there also two subtle differences which are useful in eliciting how and what is implicated in commodification. However, there are two other related points of difference here that relate to the conceptualisation of how meaning is created through engagement in the flow of activity, but which were also important to the cases. The first returns us to the discussion of Žižek's interpretation of the Borromean knot earlier in this section. Recall that I had highlighted that this explanation was, so far, only partial, and there were other relevant aspects. According to Žižek, as soon as something has been 'hailed' by such fantasies, according to a particular signification, a gap opens up between that which is being signified and the signifier (in the Real). Not only does the 'hailing' implicate how we make sense and understand the object, but *the gap* also taints how we continue to make sense of something. This is an aspect that escapes Holland *et al*'s theory, but is important to Žižek's theory; as we heard earlier, this gap creates the possibility of gaining enjoyment from continually trying to capture (but missing), and for Žižek, it tells us about how motivation is tainted and gripped to act in ways structured by the very ideological perspective used to signify. This Žižekian point provides a useful insight into how commodification captures us over time and will be taken up next.

The second point of difference relates to circumstances when a number of competing or alternative frames (figured worlds) exist to interpret/structure experience. Žižek alerted us to the anamorphic nature of and effects in the Real, as demonstrated through the cases. Similarly, Holland *et al* also agree that social reality are fantasy 'frames' and constructions that, although are fantasies, have a very (socially) real flavour which mediate action according to the parameters of the figured world. However, Žižek also alerted us to the possibility of their associated parallax gaps, which was also raised as an important issue in the cases. These parallax gaps can lead to deadlock where two alternative perspectives cannot be resolved or reconciled. Holland *et al* do not consider this issue or possibilities of re-thinking this in the same way as Žižek, but offer different apparatus which provides further insight into understanding how these competing frames play out in practice, and particularly in the cases. Both of these points will be discussed in this chapter, but attention will now turn to the first of these issues, related to the gap that taints and grips our motivation to act in particular ways.

3.3.2 How identifications taint motivation and turn to grip

The next issue that is raised through juxtaposing Žižek's interpretation of the Borromean knot and Holland *et al*'s apparatus relates to how our identifications, and their ideological framings, not just taint our motivation to act, but also continue to grip us. Recall that for Žižek, as we speak or act, we are not just 'hailed' or commodified in a particular way, but we are also implicated because of the gap that opens after being 'hailed'. In being 'hailed' and always missing the mark (the gap), it creates the possibility of enjoyment by trying to fill it; we seek the pleasure of coherence, and avoid the trauma of sensing discrepancies from the Real. So this creates a situation of continuously trying to grasp something (through a particular identification), not quite hitting the mark, and being propelled into a highly enjoyable cycle of attempting to. In this way, the gap is the space (or object-cause) of desire which motivates our actions. But as a consequence, we are continually structured in particular ways; we see in the cases how I continually strive to please and satisfy the 'client' (see section 3.2.3, The Real as the cause of desire). Indeed, Žižek argues that 'cynical distance' is required for ideological perspectives to fully take grip; a gap created by us thinking we are being aware or critical of an ideological grip, but using the very terms of that ideological perspective to talk about it. These are the places where motivation is not just tainted, but turns to grip, constantly seeking that enjoyment.

There is a dimension of similarity here. For Holland *et al*, the discourses and artifacts that are present in a figured world not only figure people, but also figure their desires, or more broadly, what appeals to them. Recall in the previous section, how figured worlds are realms of interpretation which "establish particular sets of roles, actors, institutions, settings, durations, and organizational requirements"¹¹² that make sense to *that* world. They embed particular "demand[s] and are organized around different sets of understandings and expectations"¹¹³, which although are fantasy evoked by the discourses and artifacts of that world, those who identify with it, act 'as if' it is real. Holland *et al* draw parallels with the child playing:

¹¹² Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 56.

¹¹³ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 57.

desires become related to a “fictitious ‘I’, to her role in the game and its rules”... Her motives become defined by the motives of the game. Here... the individual gets caught up in a particular game or figured world and sees herself as an agent in it... The overall activity is emotionally engaging.¹¹⁴

We can see this throughout the cases and the examples already referred to in this section: in positioning myself as having ‘clients’, I am not only affording a particular theory of task and person as someone who needs to serve them – I have also figured my desires. Within that world, the motivational force is defined by the needs and satisfaction of ‘my clients’. Recall this expression which indicates the directions of the prevalent desires in my practice: “I gained great satisfaction in preparing the response, constructing a structure to meet the demands of my client” (2.1.5). In the first half of the sentence, we see a desire for ‘constructing structures’, related to the bureaucratic and regulatory bodies which govern my practice, but then a second desire relating to ‘meeting the demands of my client’ in the second half. This echoes what we learn from the application of Žižek’s apparatus, where I am being implicated in different directions, according to how I am identifying. But we also see how I was continually striving but also continually missing what I was trying to achieve in my desires; see the text below.

I know I am cutting away the clients words... – I feel uncomfortable... - 2.1.2

I am excited to tell the client... but I am aware that it is not written for the client, it was written for the panel... but it is a formal document... it’s crude... - 2.1.4

I have struggled to answer the original request... I’m having difficulty finding the right words to describe my ideas... I am trying to find words that have currency ‘outside’... I can’t find a better word than ‘programme’... - 2.1.5

Take the scenario where I was trying to package up training into academic modules for the training organisation, or ‘the client’ (2.1.2), where I feel compelled to change the words, but feel uncomfortable in doing so; “it’s their training”. I am trying to live out the identification, but missing. Similarly, in the scenario where I have successfully worked the system to enable the client to be more flexible (2.1.4), to serve their own clients, but feel that my attempt to explain the ‘terms and conditions’ are ‘crude’. Again, I am trying to live out the identification, but missing. And a final example from the cases, where I am trying to find ‘bits of paper’ which offer the trainees of the training

¹¹⁴ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 119. The quotation marks refer to Vygotsky, 1978: 100.

organisation some university recognition – I struggle to find the ‘right words’; I am trying to satisfy their needs but feel I can never quite get it right. These are just three examples of a constant reach to achieve the desire, but never quite achieve it – but I continue nonetheless.

In applying Holland *et al*’s framework, we may acknowledge that these allude to the desires as figured in the figured world, or, we might suggest that this reflective data is telling us about how I have learnt to act in this figured world. But neither of these explanations provide a persuasive explanation as to *why* this continually appears as an attempt to grasp something, and never feeling it is quite right. More importantly, they are also unhelpful in explaining the moment of ‘cynical distance’ and its important role in ensuring figurations perpetuate over time. This can be seen functioning in the cases relating to a deadlock created by figuring ‘word count limits’ as facilitating *parity* or facilitating *learning* (2.2.4); see the two extracts below. This is a key dimension which Holland *et al*’s framework does not attend to, but it is a dimension that helps us understand how ideological perspective is working to structure our engagement. For Žižek, the gap after being ‘hailed’ by a discourse or artifact is important for creating a compelling loop of desire, especially in moments of cynical distance; a dimension of how commodification figures our behaviours and it perpetuated over time.

I recognised the edges of my perspective – from that parity perspective, I was deviating, and creating a situation of inequality. From the learning perspective, they were being bureaucrats. It seems that this is not a battle to be won – the two perspectives can not be reconciled. - 2.2.4

who would question parity across our programmes and who would question parity with national expectations?... Isn’t being ‘out of kilter’ wrong? Unfair? Inconsistent? - 2.1.5

However, there are other aspects of Holland *et al*’s apparatus which offer different insights into the cases, which escape Žižek’s view. For Holland *et al*, it is not *just* a case of the figured world shaping the person’s desires in the moment by moment participation in a figured world. As alluded to earlier, people learn to participate in a recognised sphere of activity, and over a prolonged period of time, figurations within that figured world become fossilised to an individual’s ‘inner activity’ and ‘higher mental functions’. For Holland *et al*, this is how “thoughts and feelings, will and

motivation are formed”¹¹⁵. We see this in the examples referred to above, where I “come to experience [myself] *not* as following rules or maxims taught by others but as devising [my] own moves”¹¹⁶. Or so it seems; Holland *et al* argue that these processes “may or may not have anything to do with instigating or even guiding an individual’s behavior”¹¹⁷. They alert us to the idea that although motivation may be tainted and gripped by particular worlds, the extent to which they do is influenced by a number of other dimensions. As they describe, these dimensions also codevelop over time:

expertise, salience and identification codevelop in an interrelated process... The manner of presenting the content of a cultural world – as if grasped by an expert – implies a level of *savoir faire*, a level of salience, and a level of identification that may apply only to a small subset of the people who are presumably participant in that world. Thus the directive force... integrally depends upon the realized world of social position... as well as upon cultural forces.¹¹⁸

According to Holland *et al*, there are a number of interrelated elements here that determine whether and to what extent the discourses and artifacts shape our motivations and subsequent behaviour. The first of these is *the extent to which a person identifies* with a figured world, and hence the extent to which it used in understanding and organising experience. An indicator of this identification is the extent to which they have developed *knowledge* (‘*savoir faire*’) of the games and moves that are legitimate and proper within that world; “identification... comes only after a certain degree of competence is reached”¹¹⁹. We can see in the cases that I have an intimate knowledge of the academic rules and regulations which govern my practice. For example, the number of ‘modules’ and ‘credits’ that constitute a recognised ‘programme’ of higher education study, and the particular requirements of the ‘last module’ being 60 credits (2.1.3). And we can see I hold many of these conceptualisations as important, or as Holland *et al* describe it, the “*cognitive salience* of cultural symbols”¹²⁰. In the scenario where I exclaim “who would question parity across our programmes and who would question parity with national expectations?” (2.1.5)¹²¹, I am questioning how someone could *not* live by such *important* rules. At the same time, there are scenarios which indicate the

¹¹⁵ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 100. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁶ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 118.

¹¹⁷ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 116.

¹¹⁸ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 123.

¹¹⁹ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 119.

¹²⁰ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 105. Based on Spiro, 1982. Emphasis added.

¹²¹ To an extent, this particular aspect echoes Žižek’s discussion of the Big Brother; its rules have motivating powers *only if* we believe it to exist.

limits of my knowledge of the figured world I am in, and hence am not spurred to act by the discourses or artifacts being used. For example, in the scenario where “I was completely baffled by” an email from the Registry department (2.2.1):

Following the conversations today can we confirm that when students commence the newly validated... Level 6 top up with [training organisation x] they will do so by enrolling on a single module ROA for the [first] module. When they have completed this they will commence the second module on a new course join (ie new SCJ). This is different to normal... practice whereby the original course join is changed if students start on ROA. This will allow funding for the first module to be counted in 2010/1.

Here, I cannot recognise or decode the message or symbols in the email and indeed cannot understand the action that is required from me. Using Holland *et al*'s concepts, my knowledge of the regulatory discourses in the email is minimal, and so too is my identification with it. Therefore, I attach minimal cognitive salience to it, and in turn, it does not spur me to act. Rather, the discourse of the ‘client’ steps in and more or less spurs me to find out what “this means to my client”. We will return to this point in the next section, but the point to make here is that these elements are useful additions which are not picked up by the Borromean knot; they give us insights into the cases, particularly around explaining why there were variable motivations to act.

So, there are similarities in the way Žižek and Holland *et al* argue that the ways in which we identify taints our motivation to act; we are partially implicated as we are ‘hailed’ by the discourses and artifacts inherent to a particular activity. But Žižek alerts us to that necessary gap after being ‘hailed’, and the notion and necessity for cynical distance, for ideological apparatus to taint and grip us in spirals of grasping but never achieving (but enjoying it nonetheless). These are covert ways ideological perspective creep in and influences us, and offers useful ways to explain some of the patterns in the cases of ‘not quite getting it right’. Holland *et al*'s framework does not attend to this aspect, and in doing so, misses such hidden ways in which we are influenced by ideological perspective. In this way, it does not offer us apparatus to understand some of the more insidious ways discourses and artifacts can influence us; we could potentially misrecognise a particular ‘bootstrap’ as affording us a new way of thinking and acting, but simply reproduces the existing parameters (I return to this in the last chapter). At the same time, however, Holland *et al* provide useful features which help us become more

precise and explicit about how ideological perspectives shape us in practice. Their discussion of how discourses and artifacts (with implicit theories of person and task) come to fuse with our mental functioning provides an additional, more explicit dimension.

In addition, Holland *et al* also offer the idea that the extent to which we are motivated by the discourses and artifacts in a flow of activity links to the extent to which a person identifies with that activity, and their specific figured role within it – but that this also inextricably links to our ‘expert’ knowledge of that world and importance we hold to it. These are not explicit features of the Borromean knot, but afford us additional subtle insights into how our motivations are tainted and turn to grip in a site of commodification. Indeed, for Holland *et al*, one’s position in a figured world is very important in figuring how we participate in it; as highlighted in the example above, where I was ‘baffled’ by an email from Registry. Discussion now turns to exploring this in the next area of juxtaposition; how one comes to know one’s place or position, and the associated effects in practice such as knowing when to speak or when to remain silent.

3.3.3 How one knows one’s place

In this chapter, the role of fantasy in structuring or figuring how we understand and make sense of our social realities as we experience them has been highlighted. This was a feature of both frameworks being juxtaposed here, as was the anamorphic character of figured worlds and the Real, in terms of how people look at the world from a particular perspective. However, there are two other important aspects which are central to and foregrounded in Holland *et al*’s framework. The first of these is that figured worlds “divide and relate participants... [through] social position or rank”¹²². Here, they explain that discourses and artifacts hold implicit ‘theories of person’ which index to “social categories and positions of privilege relative to those with whom we are interacting”¹²³, and considered over the long term, are “acts of inclusion/exclusion, of allowing/compelling only certain people to evince the sign, that maintains positions and the value of artifacts as indices of position”¹²⁴. The consequence of this viewed over the

¹²² Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 41.

¹²³ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 127.

¹²⁴ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 134.

long term, leads to the second important aspect; that after prolonged participation such social ranking and knowing when to speak to remain silent are fossilised; they become part of the mental functioning of the individual. As Holland *et al* argue:

At some point of apprehension... [people] come to know these signs as claims to categorical and relationship positions, to status. More important, they learn a feel for the game... for how such claims on their part will be received.... A set of *dispositions* toward themselves in relation to where they can enter, what they can say, what emotions they can have, and what they can do in a given situation.¹²⁵

We can see glimpses into this social rank throughout the cases. For example, recall the scenario of when I was ‘baffled’ by the language in the unsolicited email from Registry (2.2.1). I did not pursue the meaning in the email; I spoke to administrative colleagues in my own department but I did not speak to Registry, and did not develop the knowledge of Registry’s alien language. Additionally, take the example of when the Learning Technology department would not integrate a full solution so that my learners could have better access to online learning materials (2.2.3); I remained silent. But also recall the scenario of when the training organisation contacted Registry to ask whether one of their trainees could do a second course ‘at a different level’ and Registry said it was ‘not possible’ (2.2.2); I was asked to ‘pursue’ it with a senior member of staff in Registry. But I did not pursue it with Registry; I remained silent. Indeed, my reflections at the time indicated that this was not a legitimate move for me (see the text below); “It’s not really the ‘*done thing*’ for someone *in my shoes*”. I knew my place within the institution; I ‘knew’ I could not influence senior members of staff in Registry (section 2.2.1 and 2.2.2), because, in this world, they hold more power over individual academics. I was often left with anxiety and frustration, and lacking in knowledge to fully participate. In one case, I was even left with a sense of isolation (recall the statement ‘am I the only one who cares?’ - 2.2.1).

At the time, I don’t remember thinking it was really an option to pursue this with anyone else. It’s not really the ‘*done thing*’ for someone in my shoes to question Registry. I felt stuck. Isolated. Nowhere to turn. - 2.1.1

¹²⁵ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 143. Emphasis added.

Žižek's interpretations of the Borromean knot do not explicitly foreground these issues, but rather it might be interpreted as being *part* of what is implicated by the Symbolic realm; Symbolic identifications manifest materially in different parts of the Real, but to an extent we can never know. That said, if we explore wider than the Borromean knot, we see that Žižek does comment on the structural relations amongst people which echo what Holland *et al* argue. For example, he recounts Hegel's comment that "No man is a hero to his valet", and explains that this is not because "the man is not a hero, but because the valet is a valet, whose dealings are with the man, not as a hero, but as one who eats, drinks, and wears clothes"¹²⁶. He explains this further in another example, whereby people treat a king is a king because they believe in the commodified structure already imposed upon the king in his behaviour:

‘Being-a-king’ is an effect of the network of social relations between a ‘king’ and his ‘subjects’; but... to the participants of this social bond, the relationship appears necessarily in an inverse form: they think that they are subjects giving the king royal treatment because the king is already in himself, outside the relationship to his subjects, a king; as if the determination of ‘being-a-king’ were a ‘natural’ property of the person of a king.¹²⁷

This relates to the Holland *et al*'s earlier point about how figured worlds of recognised activity position people, to the extent they identify with it, have knowledge of it, and that it is important to them. The point here, then, is that Holland *et al* explicitly foreground the positionality of figured worlds, in that they position and rank everyone who identifies and participates in them. Though Žižek's interpretation of the Borromean knot does not readily identify these aspects, he does comment on the very same issue as Holland *et al*. Importantly, however, Holland *et al* do go further to argue that these figurings, through discourses and artifacts, can also become internalised and fossilised within the mental functioning of an individual. Holland *et al*'s framework again helps to offer a more explicit and precise exposition of commodification that we see at play in the cases. And in becoming increasingly explicit about the ways in which these discourses and artifacts figure me, or figure commodified versions of me, associated motivations, and ranked relations, I return to an issue raised at the start of this section. Within the cases, it is possible to see two forms which seem to be implicating me in different directions – one towards serving the needs of the client, and one towards

¹²⁶ As Hegel cited in Fragile, 48.

¹²⁷ Žižek, 1994a: 309.

guarding the bureaucratic quality assurance. This is the final dimension to be explored, and is where discussion now turns.

3.3.4 How one identification usurps others

In applying Žižek's interpretation of the Borromean knot, we can identify two different identifications; one towards a client orientation and one towards a bureaucratic quality assurance orientation. In turn, these direct the self-images or understandings in the Imaginary realm, but come into being and are structured by the Symbolic realm. As we have seen in the previous chapter and through the discussion so far in this chapter, these fantasies or fictions have a strong force in shaping our self understandings. For Žižek, identifying involves a violent 'symbolic castration', or simplification of the totality of something (e.g. me, my world) in order to make sense of it; the Real is too full of complexity and discrepancy and hence too traumatic to know. But importantly, in order to maintain it, when we do experience such discrepancy, we bracket it out and smooth it over. From this angle, this offers an explanation as to why sometimes we see both the client and bureaucratic quality assurance orientations in the cases but one ultimately pragmatically usurping the other. And this re-connects us with Žižek's comment that 'we *do* know what we do, *but still...*' or in other words, it is in the form of behaviour, that we can find the work of ideological influence, as this particular form escapes us¹²⁸. For example, when trying to help the client develop new programmes of study (2.1.3), I was trying to serve the needs of the client, but doing so only in reference to the frameworks of the bureaucratic quality assurance system. In line with this regulatory identification, I even encourage them to stipulate their own regulations:

The last option in both of the documents state 40 credits for the last module. This needs to be 60 credits (for any of our MAs, there is a requirement of 60 credits... This was my point (previously) about these participants having to do an extra 20 credits. You could stipulate that all engage in your journey, and then all have to do the [research methods module] and final module with the University, which could make your offer simpler? - 2.1.3

¹²⁸ Žižek, 1989: 30-1.

This highlights that there are often circumstances when a number of competing or alternative ideological frames exist to interpret/structure experience, but that one tends to win in practice. As we saw earlier, Holland *et al* align with Žižek in the respect of the anamorphic nature of the flow of activity, but also explicitly acknowledge that we have a “tendency to encompass a number of views in virtual simultaneity and tension, regardless of their logical compatibility”¹²⁹ and as such, have “composites of many, often contradictory, self-understandings and identities”¹³⁰. Holland *et al*, however, have an alternative explanation as to how one of these identities tends to usurp others. For them, alike Žižek, all languages are “not only abstract semiotic systems but also inevitably and inextricably ideological”¹³¹, as each embody particular ways of seeing the world. Within this context, Holland *et al* argue, dealing with such multiple identifications “is a matter of *orchestration*: arranging the identifiable social discourses/practices that are one’s resources... in order to craft a response”¹³². And this returns us to, and reemphasises, the earlier point about how figured worlds of activity position and rank us. Holland *et al* point out that:

different languages and perspectives come inscribed with differing amounts of *authority*, which suggest how they may be orchestrated... Sorting out and orchestrating voices is much more than sorting out neutral perspectives... the voices... are associated with *socially marked and ranked groups*.¹³³

In other words, then, we see how the position afforded to me through identifying the way I have throughout the cases often *privileges* the regulatory, bureaucratic quality assurance orientation. Take the scenario where I was trying to ‘simplify’ the wording of the training organisation’s learning outcomes (2.1.2); I said I was ‘cutting the words’ of the training organisation in order to make it clearer for the trainees (identification with a client-orientation) – but it might have been an effort to be able to judge whether it was ‘constructively aligned’ between the module outcomes with some broader programme aims (identification with a quality assurance-orientation). Similarly, in the scenario where I was asked what other ‘bits of paper’ the university could offer as forms of recognition (2.1.4); I thought I was creating a solution to help the training organisation service its clients (identification with client-orientation), but I was also creating a

¹²⁹ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 15.

¹³⁰ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 8.

¹³¹ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 70.

¹³² Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 272. Emphasis added.

¹³³ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 182-3. Emphasis added.

structure based on understandings of the existing academic framework (identification with a quality assurance-orientation). Indeed, Žižek refers to the notion of authority in relation to an assumed Big Other which holds the social rules and regulations of particular identifications; such scriptures hold authority for as long as we *believe* it to exist. He also tells us that we prefer one for the pleasure of unity and coherence, but Žižek's apparatus does not offer ways of thinking through the *relative* aspects of authority ascribed to competing identifications, and their associated expectations – and particularly *why* one might win over another. This is another dimension which Holland *et al*'s framework explicates and foregrounds, which appeared to be important in the cases.

However, we can also see in the cases how there are circumstances where two identifications are juxtaposed in ways which lead to a deadlock. We have already explored, for example, the case of my parallax reflections about how 'word count limits' either 'facilitate learning' or 'facilitate parity' (2.2.4). In discussing the function and utility of using such devices, the deadlock was set up by two alternative perspectives: "I recognised the edges of my perspective... It seems that this is not a battle to be won – the two perspectives can not be reconciled" (2.2.4). Žižek provides the concept of the parallax gap to explain the possibility of when two alternative but irreconcilable perspectives arise. For Žižek, this is not just possible, but inevitable in the context of a properly anamorphic Real, and hence why he offers the Möbius strip as useful way to bypass such fantasy constructions (see 3.2.4). This particular dimension does not appear in Holland *et al*'s framework, so do not offer us explanations as to why they might happen or how to reconcile them. But a number of such deadlocks appeared in the cases, and were importantly lived out in the context of reflection, where even though I thought I was being critical of them (to free myself of them) I was explaining them in the same terms as the ideological framings that created them (the situation of cynical distance, another aspect missed by Holland *et al*). So although Holland *et al* offer the additional dimension of relative authority, they miss the concept of deadlock from parallax gaps, which was particularly important given cynical distance. The next section now collates the key points of juxtaposition created through this cross-referencing.

3.3.5 Summary of cross-reference

In cross-referencing Žižek's theoretical apparatus with Holland *et al*'s, the ambition was to strengthen or question analytical points about the processes of commodification demonstrated within the cases, and offer additional dimensions. The result is that many analytical points are theoretically supported and therefore strengthened, but additional processes were revealed as being important to commodification and its implications for a person's sense of professionalism and professional agency. Though expression of the ideas may be different, a synthesis is possible, and provides a useful, more specific framework to theoretically understand how commodification works in practice. I will now bring the key points together in a modified summary. Both frameworks tell us that our identities are constructed around the use of discourses and artifacts which embed particular ways of looking at the world. Both agree that we need such structurings to enable us to recognise ourselves and others in a particular activity, the activity itself, and the proper ways of engaging with it. These are kind of fantasy frames which create simplified constructions of objects and subjects, but we act 'as if' they are real.

In using such discourses and artifacts, we are 'hailed', packaged up or commodified in ways which are coherent to the ideological ways of seeing things. Holland *et al* usefully go further than Žižek by foregrounding and explicate the specific forms of how we are implicated, using the concepts of 'theories of person', 'theories of task' and the 'affordances' these theories allow in identification and behavior. Holland *et al* also offer a more vivid and explicit articulation of how these discourses and artifacts filter through to the psychological functioning of the person; over time, these discourses and artifacts filter through to our 'automatic' cognitive and affective responses in a way that become fossilised to the extent they affect how we "sense (see, hear, touch, taste, feel)"¹³⁴. These additions enable us to emphasise some of the figurations within the cases, but also that sometimes they have left ready awareness whilst in practice. When they do come to awareness, it is Žižek who alerts us to the idea that we have probably done some work to bracket out and smooth over any discrepancies, or ideology has, to create a cynical distance. Either case, we have been gripped.

¹³⁴ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 52.

We can also see that these implicit theories of person and task hailed through engagement of discourses and artifacts also structure what and how we desire, or taint our motivations in certain directions. They give rise to the expectations according to the particular identification and the ideological perspective; we act in fantasy roles, but act them out ‘as if’ real. However, it is Žižek that enables us to see it is not just the implicit theories within ‘hailings’ that implicate us, but also what escapes them; the gap after being hailed creates the possibility of getting enjoyment from attempting to fill the gap. For him, over time, this creates a perpetuating grip, but an enjoyable one at that. It is in this way that cynical distance away from the ideological perspective, is an ideological device; it opens up a gap which motivates and grips us to fill it, but only in terms of the ideological apparatus that has opened it up. This is a particularly useful aspect which enables us to see the repetitive motion within the cases, of always grasping at a particular identification, but never achieving.

In terms of understanding other dimensions of how identification shapes us, Holland et al’s framework adds two other elements. First, they go further to explicate that such motivational structurings are not just momentary, but after a prolonged period of time with recurrent participation in a particular world, become part of the mental functioning of the individual; the taint becomes a semi-permanent stain creating a form of disposition. This is a particularly useful dimension to emphasise *how* these motivational dimensions leave awareness within the cases. But again, it is Žižek who reminds us even when we I think my motivations have come to awareness in the cases, my need for clarity, or ideology’s need for cynical distance, might be tricking us into misrecognising it. And second, Holland *et al* also allow us to recognise that not all identifications will be as powerful as each other, all the time. That is, the extent to which motivation is tainted and hence turned into grip depends on a number of interrelated dimensions: the extent to which a person identifies with a particular world, their knowledge of it (‘savoir faire’) in terms of the games and moves that are legitimate and proper within that world, and the cognitive salience they place on it. This is a particularly useful additional dimension which enables us to see how the motivational power of particular discourses were varied and limited in different scenarios in the cases.

But a new area that becomes prevalent in using Holland *et al*'s apparatus relates to the positioning that happens when engaging with the discourses and artifacts in a world. In identifying with these in particular ways, Holland *et al* foreground not just the inevitable positioning of people in terms of theory of person (as above), but also in terms of social rank and hierarchy. The rules we sign up to in using discourses and artifacts tell us when it is legitimate to act (or not) and we can speak (or keep silent). And as we engage with them over a prolonged period of time, these positions become *dispositions* in the automatic mental functioning of the individual. This is particularly useful to some particular occasions in the cases, where sometimes I may speak to close colleagues (departmental administration), but never directly to those in power (senior members of staff in Registry) – even though I may be aware of a consequence of not doing so (such as not knowing how to act next).

And finally, both frameworks claim that there are circumstances where there is a number of competing or alternative frames exist to interpret/structure experience in the ways described above. Holland *et al* enables us to consider that some identifications have greater authority than others, linked to positions of social rank and hierarchy that are implicated in being hailed. This helps us understand how in the cases, one identification might become to prevail over another. Whereas Žižek enables us to see that in our attempt for unity and coherence, and bracket out or smooth over discrepancies, so we can often ignore this or misrecognise it – and even if we do become aware of it, we might engage in its terms to describe it (thereby deepening its grip). But Žižek also enables us to see the possibility of when two of these alternative perspectives create a deadlock, and there can be no reconciliation; a parallax gap. This enables us to see and better understand some of the reflective data in the cases. Overall, used together, then, the frameworks are largely complimentary, but both frameworks offer additional elements to help explore the data presented in the cases, and comment more extensively on how commodification works in professional practice. The next section concludes this research with comments on what this means for the commodification of higher education, and where this leaves professional agency in my context.

Chapter 4. Conclusions

The previous chapter used a Žižekian perspective of subjectivity and the mechanics of ideological force to look at and theoretically understand the cases presented in this research. And in cross referencing it with Holland *et al*'s theory of figured worlds, I was able to support, strengthen and extend this theoretical apparatus to provide a broader theoretical response to understanding my professional circumstances. The theoretical analysis provides insight into a number of interconnected themes, which are brought together here for summary and recap. A central focal point of the research was the professional tensions within the professional practice of commercial training accreditation; the cases have presented it as a problematic space, with consistent tensions of what is the right and proper thing to do, and never quite getting it right. How professional identity was depicted in this space was caught between competing locations; academe and commerce, but the power of the former often usurps the latter in the behaviour that materialises. Processes of commodification are a central mediator of these issues; simplified, mis-recognised commodified versions of me stand in for me, never quite feeling right. Importantly, commodified versions of higher education study also stand in for higher education, and implicate my identity in the process. Language and other material artifacts have a crucial role in structuring our experience and sense making, but also hold positions of rank and hierarchy; all of which reflect and materialise the ways of seeing and making sense of the world from a particular ideological perspective. In turn, and in the same way, commodification implicates our professionalism and professional agency; the commodified versions influence how I see the world, the experiences I have of the world, and how I feel I should act. Ideological force works insidiously and overtly to materialise in ways to ensure it persists.

This chapter highlights the key themes of this thesis: how commodification works in higher education, and how it implicates professional identity, professionalism and professional agency in my specific context of training accreditation. These key themes represent the areas of professional understanding that I have developed through this extended project, and through empirical and theoretical support, form together to be the central contribution of this research. Following the methodological stance I have chosen (see section 1.3 Research methodology, page 32), I recognise how the readings and understandings of these themes may change over time, as my own professional

understandings change (and hence change me). So I offer them as current holding versions at the time of writing this version, and expect to re-read and re-understand new insights over time. In this vein, the last section of this chapter re-views these professional understandings and ‘ends’ this version with ideas and insights into professional manoeuvres that I am exploring in my professional context, in a way to assert my own professionalism and professional agency within this problematic space.

4.1 Commodification of, and in, higher education

The issue of commodification is raising questions for contemporary higher education writers. Recently, Miller¹ asked the question ‘what is being commodified in higher education?’. He identified and discussed three different models, or answers; credentials, skills, or consumption. By credentials, he means how people buy the credentials that a higher education qualification would provide; it provides something extra, something that demonstrates an additional layer of credibility. This resonates with the idea that an undergraduate degree is now not an elite possession, but rather, a standard qualification; it is a postgraduate degree (or two) that can provide an edge over competition. Similarly, in terms of skills, people are buying abilities to partake in particular industrial or professional areas, such as accountancy or dentistry. And under the consumption model, people are buying higher education neither for credentials nor skills. It is *for* consumption – a kind of expectation that drives people to engage in higher education, because it is what people do. Miller’s answer to his own question is that ‘all of these’ models can exist in the higher education sector. On the same line of questioning as Miller’s, Brown and Carasso² also ask a question of higher education, but a different one; ‘everything for sale?’. Brown and Carasso focus on how market mechanisms are shaping the industrial structures of higher education, and specifically frame commodification in terms of how ‘the student’ is being understood as ‘the consumer’. Both questions are useful at this point, as we experience an increasing drive towards understanding higher education as educational commodities.

¹ Miller, 2010.

² Brown and Carasso, 2013.

The problem with Miller's answer is that it focuses primarily on the motivation of the sale: people buy credential, people buy skill, people buy consumption, or they buy a mix of these. Similarly, Brown and Carasso's answer focuses on the wider, market influences of a demand-led drive on market structures. Both offer a narrow answer to, or perspective on, the questions being asked, and it is here where this research makes a contribution. This research has highlighted a number of processes and consequences of the commodification that happen within the higher education context. Although the buyer is important within the context of commodification, commodification goes beyond buyer motivations, and can directly shape the individuals working and studying in that context. And although wider market structures are changing, there is part of that story that escapes; how professionals in the context of higher education experience their changing world. An alternative answer to Miller's question is that higher education *study* (as the task) is commodified and the *people* that engage with it to deliver it, are commodified. In my case, that includes the training organisation, their trainers, and myself. And in a sense, to answer Brown and Carasso's question, it is not just higher education, the academic, the trainer and the student that are 'for sale', but through the process of exchange, identity is up for sale. That said, and as has been hinted at in the cases, the professional does have some agency to engage in narratives and invoke perspectives which do not recognise such demand-led questions in the first place. This will be discussed further in this section.

This research has explored the specific processes of commodification through the cases, and through using theoretical apparatus from Žižek and Holland *et al.* Commodification works in and out of awareness, through practices, artifacts, discourses and language, to construct particular versions of things which emphasise particular ideas, ways of looking and values – or ideological parameters. In terms of language and discourse, signifiers are 'violent'³ simplifications of a real we can never know, but they help us make sense of and interact with the world – but each one commodifies in particular ways. There is a slippery relationship between the signified and their signifier, but ideological framings step in to help with particular signifiers that make sense in the context. And within the context of training accreditation, the training organisation becomes my *client* (though of course, it is both, neither, and more). This is a context driven by commercial gain, drawing on a capitalist ideological perspective or worldview. The signifiers we use implicate the things we are trying to signify, helped by

³ Žižek, 2008b.

ideological perspective, and offer us particular ways of seeing and proper ways of acting. It offers a ‘theory of the task’ of working with that object; a *client* also brings with it the connotations of how we should act in relation to it – we should serve them, respect their words, help them create profit, help them serve their customers, help them access the learning materials. The training organisation has become commodified as a *client*, and all that means.

At the same time as drawing on commercial language and ideological frame, I simultaneously draw on the language of academe; I am a *Senior Lecturer*, delivering *Programmes*, at different *Levels* and *Credit Values*. And these are embodied in key cultural artifacts such as official quality assurance documentation for modules and programmes⁴. In participating in practice, I am drawing on a particular version of what higher education study is, a commodified version constructed by an ideological frame of bureaucratic academic quality assurance. Here, the version commodified by the ideological frame is a version which is packaged into highly defined objects recognisable to that frame; the learning outcomes, assessment strategies, assessment criteria and word counts specified in official proformas for modules. And the ‘right’ number of modules and credit values in a coherent list, to qualify for an award within the university’s academic framework (recall the mantra: “a Master’s is 180 credits”). This is a particular, commodified form of higher education which historically intends to create consistency across time, space and location, regardless of where it is delivered, and hence recognised across institutional boundaries within the UK, and across Europe. In the UK, this drive for consistency and recognition was behind the significant modularisation movement, and the invention of the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS). And in terms of Europe, consistency and recognition was behind the invention of the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS), which encourages mobility across European member states. Effectively, it is an instrument of the Bologna process. This was also supported by the drive towards professionalisation and the invention of the Higher Education Academy (previously, the Learning & Teaching Centre); to work towards greater clarity and consistency of delivery of the internationally highly valued higher education sector, and thereby ‘protecting’ it⁵.

⁴ As shown in Figure 7 A ‘Module Descriptor’ with a theory of task and person, or in Figure 8 An ‘essay structure’ with a theory of task and person.

⁵ Robson, 2006; Brown and Carasso, 2013.

However, commodification does not stop here. In engaging with these commodified versions, the individual who is engaging is also implicated; with each commodification, there is not just an implied ‘theory of task’, there is also an implied ‘theory of person’. Not only am I drawn in to particular ways of interacting, my own identity is implicated, both in terms of who I am, and how it is right and proper to engage with that being signified. In terms of my ‘client’, I should serve them – and in terms of academe, I am a guardian of quality assurance. In drawing on the language and enacting out practices over time, the ideological frame and its parameters seep in to our unconscious desires and drives, and shape us in ways which we are not aware. But it is not just what is captured in commodification that taints our motivation and grips it, but what escapes; we get enjoyment from always trying to capture ourselves. In addition, the ideological frame can become embodied over time, fossilised in our mental functioning, so it *feels* right to act in certain ways, and *feels* wrong not to do certain things. And this is where the professional tensions and struggles in practice can originate; each location can evoke divergent or contradictory responses. From one perspective, I may want or attempt to get words right in an email, but at the same time, fear not communicating the details of the regulation. Or, I may want to design a new attractive programme, but feel uncomfortable in not working to the regulation. Or, I may want to help the client get the words right for learning outcomes, but I feel anxious in changing their words to make sure they are critical enough.

These are tensions that are consistently played out in practice, as demonstrated through the cases. They result from identifying with the commodified versions of higher education study and the commercial training organisation, and by implication, commodified versions of myself. Although both of these client-oriented and bureaucratic quality assurance ideological perspectives exist in my practice, my mind prefers a simpler version of me, and so the ‘theory of person’ that wins, is the guardian of quality assurance. It is one I appear to most strongly identify with in the form of my behaviour, one that I demonstrate intimate knowledge of, and one which I hold as important (recall: who would question...?). As explored earlier, this was usually out of my awareness. But importantly, even if I become aware of this structuring, or any of the processes discussed so far, and think I am analysing ideological perspective, I can be trapped by cynical distance: ideology has again already stepped in, has already commodified the objects in the situation, and I deal with the situation only on the grounds permissible by the winning ideology. Indeed, there was an interesting moment towards the end of the second set of cases, where I was discussing word count with the

colleagues in my department. In the desire to be client-oriented, I exclaimed that “I’m not a bureaucrat!”, but as soon as I did, I realise that “I am a bureaucrat” in my practice – I use word budgets to constrain the learner. The theory of the task implicated a ‘theory of me’ which I became aware of, but only through the terms of the ideology that created it in the first place.

In this way, ideological perspectives give us ways of understanding our experience. But they are anamorphic in the way they help us interpret and make sense of situations; the way we are commodified mean that we see some things in a situation and not others, or care for some things in a situation and not others. I cared for ‘my clients’, and Registry cared for upholding university regulation (both legitimate from the respective positions). Sometimes the most authorial one will win, in this case the bureaucratic quality assurance one, and sometimes a deadlock is created when two competing frames are available to make sense of something (a parallax). But other times we may not know enough about a sphere of activity to fully engage in it, and be baffled by it; situations where we can recognise some ‘thing’, but could not make sense of it (much the same as the skull in the painting). This is analogous with the situation of when I am working with a trainer from a training organisation who asks the question ‘what does a learner have to do for *a* credit?’. When taken from fully bureaucratic quality assurance perspective, this feels like an odd question, as 1 credit is not a meaningful currency in contemporary higher education; it is usually made sense of in larger chunks of 10 or 20 credits. But the question itself indicates how the person has not understand the world of academe, or put another way, it indicates how this knowledge, language or way of thinking, is not part of their world, and in this way, determines to what extent they can engage in the conversation or the world of academe.

Indeed, another consequence of such commodifications relates to power relations and how they influence the shape and make-up of the communications and behaviour. The ideological frame is not only embedded within language and artifacts, it is also embedded within the power relations between people, through rank and position. For example, in recognising that the words were related to quality assurance – why did I not investigate it further, given I was anxious to know whether it would affect my client or not? This is where my position in relation to others also mediates my sense of what was right and proper to do in my context; it was not right and proper to ask senior members of staff. I knew my rank, below and subservient to the central regulatory hub of the university. In this sense, position leads, over time, to be disposition, or in other words, I

know when to speak out, or when to remain silent. In this example, it was not right and proper to learn the new language of Registry, so I did not learn the more detailed, technical language. In turn, this limited how much engagement I had with Registry, and access to any other particular commodified forms they use. But the parallax and social ranking keep a firm grip on the extent to which people are allowed to participate over time.

This research is primarily about professional identity, using the specific context of accrediting commercial training, and highlights how ideological forces work through commodification to shape identity. Whether or not a buyer of higher education is being bought for credentials, for skills, for consumption, is irrelevant; higher education has already been commodified by its regulatory body⁶ and its regulatory policies, which are then lived out in the principles and practices of academic frameworks across the UK. It is a bureaucratic version, which creates a form of higher education which can fit in boxes; boxes for grades, boxes for passes, boxes for assessment items, boxes for learning outcomes, boxes for check lists, boxes for attendance, boxes for amount paid, and so on. These boxes are the instruments for consistency and comparability, enabling league tables to compare and contrast performance in certain boxes, with apparent certainty and confidence – regionally, nationally and internationally. Yet there are implications of such commodifications; these boxes create a particular version of higher education study and a particular version of the people living it out, which implicates professional identity and agency. Or in other words, a particular version creates a form of education which changes the way people think about themselves. This is not unique to higher education, and we have seen the same in primary and secondary schools through the institution of the National Curriculum, and guidance to deliver it for teachers⁷ and further education and their awarding bodies⁸. Here the National Curriculum and other awarding bodies offer a kind of commodification which alters teachers' sense of self, what it means to teach, and indeed what the subject matter is. In turn, commodification leads to a privileging of certain ways of seeing over others. This is the work of the ideological dimension.

⁶ The Quality Assurance Agency.

⁷ Brown, *et al.*, 2006; Brown and McNamara, 2011.

⁸ Robson, 2006.

So a bureaucratic commodification of education may be a wider phenomenon, but perhaps what *is* unique, is the living with the constant duality of two positions; academe and commerce. Within my own context, through the cases presented here, I identify with a bureaucratic guardian of academic quality assurance through engaging with this form of higher education study – but have to deal with the additional identifications with being client-oriented. In practice, though they exist, a desire to be client-oriented is caught by a drive to be a guardian of quality assurance. These are not always battles in consciousness, but the effects of the battles are felt, nonetheless. Together, these locations gather particular commodified versions of higher education held by quality watchdog for higher education, and a governmental drive towards business and community engagement. And together, they create problematic identifications through practice. Though this research has focused primarily on the case of training accreditation practice, the pressures and particular forms of commodification may extend further across other contexts of business and community engagement practice, where these two ideological perspectives come together. Given the current literature on this broader area, it seems to be the case; a gap separates the two worlds⁹.

⁹ In the vein of: CBI, 2008; Cooper, *et al.*, 2008; Wedgewood, 2008; Bolden, *et al.*, 2009; Dhillon, *et al.*, 2011; White, 2012.

4.2 Professionalism and professional agency

The discussion about commodification is also central to a discussion about professionalism and professional agency. Indeed, the discussion above has already highlighted how commodification influences my sense of professionalism, or what it means to act right and proper in work contexts, and how it structures professional agency in practice. For example, and as outlined above, in drawing on particular language and interacting with artifacts and discourses, I am drawing on particular ways of seeing, always ideological, always from a position. I am drawing on pre-existing notions of what it means to act right and proper in a particular context, and this goes beyond language, but is revealed through it; as I utter *my client*, I am immediately-already positioned in relation to that which I am trying to signify, and I am the server. In this way, my professionalism is structured by my participation in the world. And in the same way, my sense of professional agency is structured by such participation; the boundaries of what is possible are shaped by my sense of professional identity and professionalism. In my context, professionalism and professional agency were problematic because of variable identification with two locations, drawing on different world views, and as stated above, leading to potentially contradictory desires or drives. What it means to be a professional in academe is different to that in commercial training, but driven by the cultural artifacts within the context. The particular, commodified form of higher education study was central to how I saw my role – as a guardian of quality assurance, which usually became a stronger mediator of action than I was aware, often mistaking it for a desire to help the client. I was firmly held in my identifications, because I believed in them – a sign of the fossilised embodiment of the ideological views of the world prevalent in business and community engagement in higher education contexts.

So where does this leave my agency? As mentioned earlier, Žižek presents the mechanics of ideological force as a powerful engine producing our consciousness and unconsciousness through participation over time. And though we may be able to have slight glimpses into the effects of such penetration in the Real, the Real is an unknowable realm, so we can never know. The mechanics of ideological force sounds like a powerful determinant of professional agency; indeed, it sounds unfortunate for professional agency. Or does it? For Žižek, because of the unknowability and the impossibility of the Real, and because signifiers are so slippery in capturing that to be

signified, there is scope and space for agency. In this way, our fate is not ‘hermetically sealed’¹⁰, and there is a “modicum” of control we can assert.

Agency, here, is not about evacuating language and its representation altogether – this leads to an absence of psychic structure and therefore psychic breakdown. Rather, for Žižek, it is about recognising two particular fictions. The first is recognising that the unitary self is a fiction, based on lack, rather than any neutral or naturally occurring object. Returning to the Möbius strip, this illustrates how one thing has within it, its opposite; we understand one thing in relation to its opposite. Josef Fritzl is a monstrous father and a loving father, depending on which side of the Möbius strip you are situated. I am both a Senior Lecturer and Client Advisor, amongst other (mis)recognitions. The second fiction that Žižek says is required for agency, is to believe, unconsciously, that the Big Other is an illusion – and by this, he means, specifically, if you act like it the Big Other does not exist, the belief will follow. He says that “The status of the same person... can appear in entirely different light the moment the modality of his/her relationship to the big Other changes”¹¹. For Žižek, profoundly, the most radical act of agency might be withdrawing from a situation, and thereby not living out an ideological perspective or its parameters. As he says, “(non)activity undermines the master’s charisma, suspends the effect of ‘quilting’, and thus renders visible the distance that separates the master from the place he occupies”¹². In other words, loosening the fiction loosens the grip.

This position has been theoretically and practically criticised by some seeking ‘practical solutions’¹³, but it is coherent with his theory – I live out an ideological perspective by participating in it. Here, agency comes about not through “direct confrontation” with the power structures, but the task is to undermine those structures “in power with patient ideologico-critical work, so that although they are still in power, one all of a sudden notices that the powers-that-be are afflicted with unnaturally high voices”¹⁴. This ‘patient’ work for some means being aware of the points of “original entry into the symbolic and relive it as though it has not already taken place, and thus think what is lost by it”¹⁵. The point here is that although we cannot live outside of ideology¹⁶, we can

¹⁰ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 18.

¹¹ Žižek, 1999b: 330.

¹² Žižek, 2002: 103.

¹³ Taylor, 2010.

¹⁴ Žižek, 2009b: 7.

¹⁵ Butler, 2005: 19.

¹⁶ Žižek, 1994b: 19.

choose our designations which activate a different “designate place in the intersubjective network”¹⁷. This is not about escaping ideology, but rather, for Lacan “a choice between ‘bad’ and ‘worse’”¹⁸.

Others have interpreted this to mean, within practitioner research, that the person explores new ways of identifying in the Symbolic order, through new ways of expression and interaction¹⁹. In other words, I can not only come to understand my professionalism in different ways through telling different stories, or even different versions of the stories, I can also express my professional agency through such strategies. In doing so, I invoke different language and significations, and create different unconscious desires and drives which are produced by such. In turn, I can monitor and learn about the effects these have in my social reality. This becomes a continuous story telling process, a “reflective/constructive narrative layer that feeds whilst growing alongside the life it seeks to portray”²⁰. This narrative layer has grown and developed during the writing of this research, driven by the new professional understandings that have emerged over time. After writing the first set of cases and analysing it, I reflected:

I was unaware of my identifications until this... and how I had therefore become commodified as a ‘service-provider’ to my clients. I do connect with the ideologies behind/within each identification... as a professional, then, should I be so driven (and dependent on) the right ‘academic answers’? Is it possible for me to be? I work as a Senior Lecturer in an academic environment – I do get a lot of personal satisfaction from that identity. Yet what would it mean to let that go? I’ve been experimenting with different labels – facilitator, adviser, coach. Each has different implications and motivations for me. Nothing seems to fit – though would it ever fit? It now seems a mistaken expectation/assumption – and a mistaken desire.

And professionally, in terms of university systems, should I expect to keep the two commodifications apart (training packaged for client-customers, training packaged for academic audiences)? In which case, communicatory layers need to step in for the different audiences (and do *they* then become commodified

¹⁷ Žižek, 2002: 76.

¹⁸ Žižek, 2002: 75.

¹⁹ Brown and Jones, 2001; Brown and McNamara, 2011.

²⁰ Brown and Jones, 2001: 443.

versions, which are even more separate from the academic versions)? As EBTA²¹ says informally, universities should ‘try to keep their wiring hidden’ when working on training accreditation – the ‘wiring’ being the processes, procedures and even language that a university uses in its usual endeavours. I’ve started to experiment with such communicatory layers, by encouraging my clients to move away from the “Module Descriptor” as the key document, to using their own training documents with ‘assessment briefs’ which outline what the trainees will be assessed on and how. Yet again, is there another space, a so called ‘third space’ where we can create something that accommodates both worlds?

Here, unlike the reflections within the cases, there is a sense I am aware of the identifications I am using, and how they are shaping me and my professional agency. But I find it difficult, almost resist, the stepping away from the two identifications from which the struggle is created. I question what it would ‘mean’ for something else to be in the place of these identifications. Of course, these identifications create me, provide a structure of me, my world and my practice - all of which I feel I know, and get great satisfaction from. Yet I continue to experiment and play with alternative identifications, each time, never finding an identification that fully captures – again. I do not find a ‘victory narrative’ but there are glimpses into possible new lines of inquiry and thinking about myself. I hold on to the idea that one of the labels, or more accurately, illusions, will eventually fit. I hold on to the fiction that there will be, one day, a unitary self that I can cling to and define who I am, and will tell me how I should act. And as a consequence, I start to experiment with different communicatory layers which loosen my attachment to and construction by the Module Descriptor. I feel this is helpful in some way, to create a new space where both worlds can be accommodated in a different way. After writing and analysing the second set of cases, I reflected again:

I feel like I have put on Žižek’s so called “critic-ideological spectacles”... I can now see how my identifications construct, constraint, create the world I engage in, and perpetuate some of my struggles. But I know I cannot escape or free myself from ideological perspectives, though why would I want to? I need spectacles to see, even if that is always an angle, never pure, never real. Is an alternative attitude for my professional agency about being open to the different

²¹ The Employer Based Training Accreditation Service; a body trying to enable businesses and universities to work together.

identifications for my intentions? For example, in the first situation (2.2.1), could I have been more open to learning a new language? In the second situation (2.2.2), could I have used more regulatory language to better connect with Registry? And in the third, could we have appealed to the strategic perspective of the university to influence our situation (2.2.3)? For each, the answer is a ‘yes’, now that I can see the ideological, insidious influences and implications for my practice... becoming more of a professional ‘mediator’? That feels more open and tolerant of difference and perspective.

I had started to experiment with framing myself as an “Accreditation Specialist” (rather than Senior Lecturer or Client Advisor), which feels more congruent and flexible when offering advice in this work – I feel I can talk with authority internally and externally. I feel it allows me to assert myself towards the *outcome* of the collaboration... But perhaps we could explore “learning partners” (rather than clients), “learning partnerships” (rather than client advice). But I ask why adopt such an attitude, for what intention? Fundamentally, does it still come down to satisfying my client, my kernel desire, which then frames all of what I do? Does it not recreate the parallax gap that was seen in the third scenario, where I internalise the struggle, which can lead to inaction and no change?

Here, I seem to have let go of the idea of a unitary identity, and accept Žižek’s critical lens and share my thoughts on experimenting with different identifications in practice. In this way, I am finding ways to express my professional agency and monitor the effects in my world. For me, I am finding that taking a flexible “attitude” to experiment with identifications is useful in being more “congruent and flexible” in my role, which helps me in my key purpose, to help the organisations I am employed to facilitate. But I am also aware that it is my very location within the university, and wider construction of my role, my department and my faculty, as being ‘client-oriented’, which locks me in to a certain perspective. I question how far it is possible for me to live out (or through) alternative identifications, and hence, question whether is it possible to tackle the struggles and tensions that arise as a consequence? For me, at that point, this flexible “attitude”, however, does provide an insight into how I am expressing my professional agency for greater personal congruence to deal with the struggles and tensions in practice. But I am sceptical of whether I am mis-recognising my true intent, and recognise that I might be caught in a constant circular motion of cynical distance (which

I appear to be). I recognise my limits to knowing myself, because perhaps this ‘myself’ does not exist as I previously thought. And then as I continued to write up this research, additional reflections emerged:

As I read and write about The Code, I get a real sense of pleasure and authority. It is a real source of strength. Yet I know it is only in the world of academe. It has limited currency. Out there, it is other stuff, like how good a facilitator or trainer you are. But I feel – no, know – that within my context, I can not exist without drawing on academe. Rather it feels more like a game of expression. Unless I break from the employment, it is not possible to exist outside. I long for a third space, but how can a third space be created with such strong boundaries?

I recently listened to a conversation about students. It went something like this...

Management see students as customers. We (teachers) see them as learners. Managers don’t have to teach them.

I said, well, yes, aren’t they both? There is still a person stood in front of you. They are both a customer and a learner. Don’t you want to help the learner learn, and do things to help them? Isn’t that what business about, helping the customer?

The proponent of the argument agreed and reflected.

For me, it was that moment travelling on the Möbius strip, where you can be more than one thing, and these things can be irreconcilable. Opposites, created by the parallax view.

And in that way, the awkwardness and unease I once felt from hiding my identity as a ‘Senior Lecturer’ has morphed into a greater flexibility of becoming opposites, at the same time, and appreciating how I can be.

The reflections travelled from a sense of recognising what I was valuing, through to recognising the limits of that value, or in a sense, the limits of the figured world that I had identified with. But subtly, I also recognise the limits of how I was constructing the world, through reference to the Möbius strip. I am both sides of the Möbius strip; one valuing academe, and one valuing commercial training. Where both are opposites of each other, but each containing each other because I can only understand one in relation to the other. And this was a shift in perspective that I had also experienced during the word count issue within my department; as soon as I uttered the words “I’m not a bureaucrat”, I realised that I was very much a bureaucrat, and that the practice that I was enacting could be seen and made sense of from different angles. I was both a bureaucrat and not (and more); just like the ‘word budgets’ I was adopting in my practice could be seen to be a regulatory practice (from one angle) as well as a facilitative practice (from a different angle). It was this subtle shift in angle that creates a new perspective in the way I saw identity – I can be many, multiple and none, and I have a real choice, even between/outside of opposites (regulatory vs facilitative). A real emancipatory moment that resonates with Žižek’s comment, ‘we can be radicals in our minds’²².

But this also strongly resonates with how we can create agency through Holland *et al*’s framework, where I seem to recognise that “there is no such thing as experience outside of embodiment in signs... it is not experience that organizes expression, but the other way round – *expression organizes experience*”²³. But in knowing this, it enabled a kind of discourse ‘play’, recognising that “play frees people from the generic forms that govern [our] actions”²⁴. And in consciously using discourses to directly affect myself and my environment in this way, this is the kind of “symbolic bootstrapping”²⁵ that Holland *et al* refer to as a fundamental part of freeing ourselves from particular entrapments. Bootstrapping, in other words, is the active use of discourses or artifacts to create particular desired outcomes; pulling one’s self up to another form of identity and behaviour. Indeed, it might be argued I also tried to do this in the first set of cases; the scenario where the training organisation asks about ‘what other bits of paper can the university provide?’. Here, the academic framework did not afford smaller bits of paper, or awards/qualifications, but I improvised in the sense that I used the academic framework as a basis for something new, linking and merging the languages and discourses of the training organisation and the university. This was a kind of agency

²² Wood, 2012.

²³ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 187. Original emphasis.

²⁴ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 237.

²⁵ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 48, after Vygotsky, 1978.

through improvisation to create something new, which connected to both worlds, but did not exist in either, alone.

To re-iterate, however, such bootstrapping is not a silver bullet to alleviate all tensions or issues explored in this thesis, or to be liberated from the ideological powers of discourses or artifacts. On the contrary, each bootstrap submits itself “to another set of cultural forms that have their own peculiar limitations and constraints”²⁶. Rather, returning to the discussion in the previous chapter about how one identification tends to usurp another, it is about a re-orchestration of the possible identifications that are available in a particular situation – which might involve rearranging, rewording, rephrasing. And this is possible; there is evidence of how I did this to attempt to find a solution for the training organisation to offer more ‘bits of paper’. I re-orchestrated, re-worded, re-phrased what the trainer in the training organisation and I both knew was the standard academic framework, to identify a new orchestration, or framework of thinking about educational commodifications. This provides a signal to continue experimenting or re-orchestrating to find out how it affects practice, and how I think about myself. But the same time, being cognisant that recurrent habitual use of such bootstraps can create a situation where they “become resources available for personal use... and finally constitutive of thought, emotion, and behavior... a mediating or symbolic device that... [is used]... to organize a particular response”²⁷. Or in other words, cognisant that although powerful, if used over a prolonged period of time such resources can become my inner functioning, with their own constraints and limitations.

²⁶ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 64-5.

²⁷ Holland, *et al.*, 1998: 50.

4.3 Next steps, new narratives

As case studies and ‘best practices’ continue to sprout in the literature²⁸, the voice of the higher education professional (and particularly the academic professional) continues to be suppressed, or ignored. It seems that getting the academic frameworks and processes in place to facilitate employer engagement is of greater interest than the impact this has on the people that enact the agenda, including staff, students and training organisations. This is not surprising given the ongoing governmental discourses that continue to push the marketisation and commercialisation of higher education institutions. It is a kind of fetishistic interest that wants to operate within the world the bureaucratic, commodified form of higher education study; of course this is understandable given that it is this which makes sense and gives sense in that world. But what about the professional in this? Where are they? How are they implicated? These are important questions given the increasing commercialisation of higher education, now charging full-tuition. This research provides some answers to these questions in this marketised higher education sector, and contributes to an unfolding literature that foreground the professional, and the tensions of working with those outside the higher education institution. For example, Wall and Meakin²⁹ problematise not just how the academic professional questions their own understanding of their role, but their relationship with their colleagues; they even ask ‘who am I here – part of the university or part of the client?’. But now, where have these newly developed professional understandings left me, as a professional within the context of training accreditation? I draw from some reflections as I come to complete this version of the research:

The notions of fiction and parallax have become important to me in realising how they implicate me in my practice. And I now take agency from the idea of play, or ‘serious play’. I can play with labels and see what happens. I recently worked with directors of a training company and we focused on the learning that they wanted to instil. And we talked about the sorts of ideas that they wanted people to play with in their own practice. We did not talk about learning outcomes. We talked about what we wanted the learners to do with the ideas and their practice, and we used the idea of Live Labs for practicing with ideas and monitoring the effects in their practice. There was a real different tone and focus to the meeting, in comparison to the cases presented here. And I did not get a

²⁸ Felce and Purnell, 2012; White, 2012.

²⁹ See for example, Wall and Meakin, 2013.

sense of awkwardness or anxiety about whether I was meeting the regulative requirements or serving the needs of a client. There was a sense of mutual discussion and development. I felt more like a partnership (not in terms of a formal academic partnership), but a learning partnership.

Of course I can see this in different ways. On the one hand, perhaps this 'learning partnership' approach was another attempt at serving the needs of the client. It may be so. On the other hand, it is an attempt to experiment and see what happens, how I become constructed in the process, and how the training organisations react to this particular approach. But it is both. As I have previously reflected, it is difficult to imagine existing in my university without using its language and artifacts. But I know I have the agency to change both over time. Learning partnership is a useful concept which implicates me in different ways, and I have the academic freedom to express this in my own practice. And artifacts are changing as a result. At the end of 2012, I was heavily involved in changing "Module Evaluation Forms" (a 'cultural artifact'). This artifact packaged up education in boxes, as expected and considered so laudable within the bureaucratic system.

The 20+ boxes tried to capture evaluations (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) in areas related to: the clarity of the module descriptor, student preparation, the module's assessment requirements, support offered during the module, to what extent the tutor understood the learning needs, to what extent the tutor was approachable and supportive, the teaching and learning approaches, the accessibility and usefulness of learning resources, and so on. For me, the tick boxes implicated what the task of higher education study was, and both the facilitators of it (my colleagues and I), and of course the learner. I felt passionately about changing this, and offered alternative, open ended questions which required the learner to think, such as 'what were the most important things that facilitated my learning during this module?' and 'what will I do differently in the next module?'. This positions the task as an active thinking task, and the person completing it, as a person who can think and generate their own answers to the questions.

This move was seen by some as radical – so a compromise was made; we had a mix of ticks and open ended questions. Interestingly, one of the comments that came back as a rationale was that Registry likes to see some sort of measurable analysis. This was insightful; highlighting both the need to package higher education study into measurable boxes, but also highlights the position and rank of the Registry and its ideological thinking. That said, to move from boxes to include active thinking questions is a move in a different direction – a direction which partially manoeuvres away from boxes to enable other modalities of higher education study. This is the start of a new narrative which is now building momentum in my practice.

Reading these reflections, now, there is a sense that the flexible attitude mentioned previously remains, but has grown with a greater confidence and sense of authority. There is an acceptance of the fiction of a unitary self, to an extent that I accept that ‘I am contradictory – to an extent that ‘what I am’ does not really feature, but rather what I do. There is a shift towards placing more of my attention on *learning* as the object, where I facilitate, and also a shift from using the terminology of *client*. A kind of new bootstrap oriented around learning, pulling me up to different behaviours in practice. This seems to be creating different effects in this example, whereby tensions are not being raised, but I accept that why I am doing it might also be seen from different angles. I accept this duality and monitor the effects for my own sense of professionalism and agency. And this modality and resulting agency seems to be filtering through to wider practices, such as the ‘module evaluation form’ proforma; a move from passively ticking boxes, to encouraging the learner to actively generate a narrative. In a sense, this new bootstrap is activating a different modality of higher education study, but with implications of how I am commodified. Or in other words, allowing this new bootstrap to implicate other behaviours in my practice.

Becoming aware of different ways of seeing and evoking new bootstraps were particularly important to my own evolving understandings of academic quality assurance during this thesis. At the start of the research, and as explained in the introduction, I appeared blind to the way university quality assurance structures were shaping the way I was thinking about my work and my role. Rather, I was enticed by the fetishistic allure of being ‘demand-focused’, and criticised anything other than being ‘client-driven’. But *I* did not appear in my writing; I was absent in the third person narratives I was telling. Becoming aware of the way narratives shape and organise

experience and sense-making, and looking at my own narratives more closely, I realised that although there was the commercially driven ideological perspective at play, I was also living out a quality assurance ideological perspective. This was not a value judgement on whether this was good or bad, but rather a point of significant insight of knowing how I am being implicated through practice. And neither was this a critique on quality assurance per se, but rather an acknowledgement of how a *particular* form of quality assurance, that is, a *bureaucratic* form of quality assurance, was implicating me to be a guardian to ensure forms are filled in correctly, according to the bureaucracy at work.

Ricoeur³⁰ reminded me that although we might try to capture our meaning and intent at one moment in time (say, through quality assurance documents), how these are interpreted over time changes with each reading. And, after Holland *et al*, certain interpretations can become ‘fossilised’ as sacrament over a period of time. But it was Žižek who pointed out that we are only shaped by the *bureaucratic* form of quality assurance for as long as we believe in the Big Other-ness of it. And it was this insight that enabled a more ‘meta’ perspective to appear which gave more choice about how to make-sense of the professional situation I was in, and hence respond within it. This was not a matter of escaping quality assurance, as I continue to understand them as important to my existence in a university system. Rather, I could make sense of those demands differently. In the cases above, for example, I was engaging in dialogue with the *learning partner* (the training organisation) with a new focal point of *learning* (rather than documents) and *learner feedback and reflection* (rather than ticking boxes in module evaluation forms). These are new directions, but with a stark acknowledgement that, at any point, I might think I am living out a different direction, but may still be living out a *bureaucratic* form of quality assurance in my behaviours.

Although the thesis did *not* seek to make value judgements about quality assurance per se, these new directions highlight that there *are* value judgements in deciding how to respond, which tell us something about one’s broader values and beliefs in the professional context (which might be referred to as a teaching philosophy). Though, as argued through chapter 3, these are themselves shaped by the processes examined in this thesis, and are subject to the ideological mechanics and structurings over time. In this way, such values and beliefs can also be the subject of further examination using the apparatus here, but is beyond the scope of this particular thesis. Indeed, this is not a

³⁰ Ricoeur, 1984.

victory narrative; the system has gripped others in my department, and the fullness of this new modality grates against the prevalence of the bureaucratic commodification of higher education study. The task of changing the system is beyond this research, but this part of the story provides a glimpse into how my own professional agency can change and develop with new narratives, opening new spaces for new identities to appear. And I acknowledge in my reflections above that this is a continuing story with new narratives and effects to be made – driven by what I do not currently know. And that... is another story to be written.

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