'Ça tient qu'à toi' : Cartographies of Post-fordist labour in Laurent Cantet's *L'Emploi du temps*

We now travel without an idea of destination to guide us, neither looking for a good

society nor quite sure what in the society we inhabit makes us listless and eager to run

(Bauman 2000: 134)

Le sens contemporain s'est atomisé: il est devenu, à l'image de ce que vivent bon nombre

des individus de la société hypermoderne, un sens solitaire, un sens où l'individu est à lui-

même son propre horizon, son propre compagnon de route… (Aubert 2006b : 87)

Laurent Cantet's *Ressources humaines* (1991) and *L'Emploi du temps* (2001) have emerged as

landmark films in the context of French cinema's renewed interest in the world of work in the

1990s and 2000s. Both films focus on a central male character caught at a point of crisis arising

from the uncertainties and contradictions of work in France in an era of advanced capitalism. In

Ressources humaines Franck, a business student, returns to his hometown in order to undertake a

work placement in the factory where his father and sister work. Franck is working on a research

project concerning the implementation of the new 35-hour working week legislation, a measure

for which he initially has a good deal of enthusiasm. However, he soon realises that the *35 heures*

will not benefit the factory workers, and will mean that his father will be made redundant. Franck

finds himself caught between ambivalent identifications with both his working-class family and

the management world of the *cadre* that he ostensibly aspires to join. What is more, it becomes

clear that the research questionnaire that Franck has distributed to workers has been

appropriated by the management of the factory in order to justify redundancies. Much of the

drama of the film is generated by the powerful portrayal – using a number of non-professional

actors – of a relatively conventional conflict between labour and capital, and also by the dramatisation of the divided loyalties that this situation creates for Franck. Ultimately, Franck chooses to side with the striking factory workers and, in a pivotal, emotionally charged scene, he angrily confronts his father who initially refuses to join the strike.

L'Emploi du temps (2001), in contrast, explores the texture of immaterial, post-Fordist labour for the networked, but ultimately isolated *cadre*. Vincent, a middle-aged business consultant, having lost his middle-management job, fabricates a fictional occupation as a business consultant with the UN in Geneva.[1] The film follows his 'working' existence as he struggles to maintain the impression that he is employed by the UN as a business consultant working with NGOs in Africa: he fraudulently appropriates money from friends and acquaintances for a non-existent investment scheme, as well as borrowing money from his parents under the pretence of renting a flat in Geneva. He also spends a brief period in partnership with a black-marketeer (played by Serge Livrozet) who is smuggling goods from Eastern Europe into France. Ultimately, and inevitably, Vincent is unable to maintain these multiple deceits, and he cannot face his family when they discover the extent of his deception. He flees the family home, and suffers what the viewer assumes is a nervous breakdown, abandoning his family. The film ends with Vincent – presumably after a period of recovery – being interviewed for a new consulting post, and it is clear that his father has used contacts in order to facilitate this opportunity. Much of the film follows Vincent on the road, travelling between his home near the Swiss border and Geneva, where he briefly inveigles himself into the UN building, before he is forced to leave. The film is shot in gloomy, wintry conditions, and many of the locations are characterised by an atmosphere of joyless anonymity (motorways services, border posts, etc.). Vincent's demeanour throughout the film veers between detachment, barely concealed panic, and occasional bursts of performative self-confidence. These elements combine to convey a general sense of suspense and dislocation. The setting of a 'paysage transfrontalier' near to the Swiss-French border evokes the globalising forces of capital

that are increasingly blurring the boundaries of the contemporary nation-state. In contrast to *Ressources humaines* there is no fixed location in which the conflict between labour and capital can take place.

Much of the existing criticism on the two films has tended to focus on the dramatisation of the ways in which shifts in the organisation of capital and labour give rise to a crisis of masculinity that manifests itself in the domestic sphere as well as the sphere of work (Higbee 2004; Archer 2008; Franco 2008). Although both films do undoubtedly deal with issues of masculinity, and in particular father-son relationships, the focus here will be on the striking new tone and aesthetic approach that Cantet develops in *L'Emploi du temps*. Whereas *Ressources humaines* is a broadly realist text, *L'Emploi du temps* – whilst still containing realist elements – is characterised by a dreamlike, allegorical, and what might be thought of as a 'metapsychological' register. Cantet himself acknowledges this change in tone in an interview that was published shortly after the release of the *L'Emploi du temps*. As he sees it, one of the aims of the film is to create a sense of suspension, of 'floating' time:

> Il s'agit aussi d'un procédé de narration plus complexe. Ne serait-ce que d'une espèce de restitution d'un emploi du temps, d'une chronologie, mais sans vouloir être trop précis, pour avoir le sentiment d'un temps un peu flottant, mais qui pèse parfois, et manque par ailleurs… (Axelrad & Tobin 2001: 17)

Similarly, Pierre Chevalier emphasises the move away from the potentially transformational ethical and political choices dramatised in *Ressources humaines* to a more purely cinematic tone of 'suspense' – in the sense of deferred action – in *L'Emploi du temps*:

> *L'emploi du temps* c'est vraiment le suspens, *Ressources humaines* c'est l'acte, la décision, la séparation, c'est la possibilité d'une autre vie, plus dure, plus terrible à la suite d'un acte fondateur assez bouleversant. Il y a moins de cinéma-acte que dans *Ressources humaines*. Mais il y a plus de cinéma: il y a un langage plus élaboré, des articulations beaucoup plus

fines, des cadres, des images propres à la grammaire cinématographique. (Lebtahi &
Roussel-Gillet 2005: 50)

This portrayal of 'flottement' on Vincent's part, combining detachment and alienation, is
not simply an aesthetic choice designed to convey the complexities of a profound psychological
crisis. Instead, the film attempts to trace some of the affective and existential components of a
new, networked, flexible, and deeply individualised world of work. *Ressources humaines* dramatises
the complex articulations between private and public, individual and collective, domestic and
work spaces, and the narrative retains a sense that there is some sort of separation between these
spheres, however problematic that may be. Within this framework, characters have the
possibility of decisive and transformative action, although this may be at great personal cost. In
contrast, *L'Emploi du temps* portrays an emerging social reality in which the requirements of work
have in many ways become integral to the construction of the bourgeois, *entrepreneurial* self.
Previous divisions between work and family, and the public and private self have largely
dissolved. Paradoxically, although values of decisiveness and dynamism are attached to this new
entrepreneurial self, the double-bind of intense affective and libidinal investments in the world of
work, combined with the requirement of 'flexibility', combine to create a sense of disorientation
and the inability to act for the individual. In this sense, the film constitutes an attempt to trace
the contours of what Deleuze calls a *control* society.

In many ways, the shift in tone and narrative approach between *Ressources humaines* and
L'Emploi du temps encapsulates – in condensed form – the move from 'classic' to 'modern'
cinema that constitutes one of the central theses of Gilles Deleuze's *L'Image-temps* (1985).
According to Deleuze, the 'organic' narrative structure of 'classic' (by this he means largely pre-
war) cinema takes place in what Kurt Lewin calls a 'hodological space' (Lewin 1952). This is a
social field of forces marked by tensions which can, in certain circumstances, be resolved or

overcome by the actions of characters (167). In short, much of the drama of classic cinema is generated by the characters' attempts to negotiate the forces that compose a social field:

> Le milieu et ses forces s'incurvent, ils agissent sur le personnage, lui lancent un défi. Et constituent une situation dans laquelle il est pris. Le personnage réagit à son tour (action proprement dite) de manière à répondre à la situation, à modifier le milieu, ou son rapport avec le milieu, avec la situation, avec d'autres personnages. Il doit acquérir une nouvelle manière d'être (*habitus*) ou élever sa manière d'être aux exigences du milieu et de la situation. (Deleuze 1983 : 197)

In contrast, in 'modern' cinema characters encounter a reality that is diffuse, enigmatic, open-ended and lacunary; it is characterised by suspension ['l'attente], discontinuity, immanence and contingence. The common-sense co-ordinates of hodological space become more fluid and uncertain. The narrative is not driven by a clearly determinist causality and characters do not generally progress by means of a series of transformations or moments of epiphany. Charles Tesson picks up in this shift from a cinema of action to something more enigmatic in the context of the move from the depiction of characters as *actors* in *Ressources humaines* to Vincent's distance both from himself and those around him:

> Dans le film [*Ressources humaines*] la vieille croyance à l'acteur, au personnage, y est tenace. Le rythme des plans de *L'emploi du temps* diverge de la construction et du montage de *Ressources humaines* car ce qui se passe pour les personnages diffère, leur existence n'est plus la même. Le mode de filmage dans *L'emploi du temps* est plus lent, plus fluide, plus froid, voire clinique. La mise en scène et le rythme traduisent une sorte d'absence un peu cotonneuse du héros à lui-même et à son entourage. (Lebtahi & Roussel-Gillet 2005: 200)

Vincent is, in Deleuzian terms, a definitively 'modern' filmic character, who forms a dreamlike connection to his milieu, and for whom the possibilities of action or transformation appear limited: 'On dirait que l'action flotte dans la situation, plus qu'elle ne l'achève ou ne la resserre' (1985: 11) As Deleuze sees it, modern cinema is a cinema of *seeing* rather than action, in which scenes frequently focus either on the apparently banal and everyday, or on moments that rupture the continuity of the everyday. He looks in particular on American cinema of the 1970s in which a number of themes appear that indicate the fragmentation of the 'sensori-motor schema' of classic cinema (1983: 278-83). In films like Altman's *Nashville* the links between milieu and action become weaker, and the *balade* form, in which characters undertake a rambling, digressive, often circular and inconclusive journey, appears in films such as Scorcese's *Taxi Driver*. The landscape of these new, 'urban' journeys no longer has the affective texture of the transformative road movie: it is now the undifferentiated and anonymous fabric of the modern city (the disused warehouse or the marshalling yard). Directors like Lumet and Altman also explore the ubiquity of clichés, which not only circulate in the external world, but also penetrate characters' interior lives. Finally, films such as Coppola's *The Conversation* convey the presence of conspiracies, plots and technological surveillance.

As Deleuze suggests, these themes emerge in American cinema in the 1970s in large part both as a response to the collapse of post-war optimism and 1960s idealism, and also as a reaction to the increasing influence of the media and its capacity to generate images and clichés. They express, in short, a crisis of confidence in the solidity and reliability of the external world. It is striking to note the extent to which these themes resonate with *L'Emploi du temps*, and it is clear that Cantet is responding to an analogous crisis of confidence in France in an era of advanced, post-Fordist capitalism. The film takes the shape a long circular journey, ending with Vincent returning, with great reluctance, to a form of post-Fordist work - business consultancy – to which he is clearly unsuited. His active engagement with this environment is undermined both by the fact that his working life is purely fictional, and also because he aspires – or feels he

should aspire – to the abstract, immaterial labour of the post-Fordist knowledge economy. The pervasive clichés of this form of work – 'investment', speculative risk taking, and networking – exert a powerful influence on Vincent. However, since his actions are directed towards the maintenance of a fiction, this means that they cannot, by definition, transform the reality in which he exists.

Deleuze suggests that the problematic connections between characters and the world they inhabit in modern cinema is frequently expressed in the recurrent appearances of 'spiritual automata', who exist in a distant, trance-like, even hypnotised state. There is clearly something of this somnambulism in Vincent, as he moves through an anonymous landscape of motorway service stations, motel lobbies and rest stops in a vain attempt to establish some sort of belief in the world that he inhabits. His position as voyeur, and his distance from the milieux in which he finds himself, is emphasised throughout the film with recurrent scenes of him looking through windows or screens. The film opens, for example, with a shot taken from the interior of Vincent's car, as he wakes up in the morning at a motorway rest stop. This scene is mirrored in the penultimate scene of the film when Vincent has fled from his family. The shot is taken from the interior of the car again and, in a literal expression of his absence, Vincent can be seen through the windscreen walking out into the darkness as his wife Muriel's voice can be heard on his mobile phone pleading with him to return. However, this general sense of detachment is accompanied by the capacity, on occasion, to engage with, to 'seduce', and to respond to, those around him. As Cantet emphasises, Vincent is, in this respect, a paradoxical character:

> Moi, cela me paraît assez séduisant! La force de Vincent, c'est une force d'inertie. Il se laisse porter par son environnement et, en même temps, c'est quelqu'un qui agit tout le temps. Il ne cesse en fait de répondre aux sollicitations de ses proches. Il navigue à vue. En cela, il est d'ailleurs plus séducteur que séduisant. Et oui nous avions envie de créer un personnage à la fois attachant et totalement opaque. (Cantet 2001)

As will be discussed later, this alternation between distance and somewhat manic engagement is characteristic of what a number of French commentators have identified as a distinctively *hypermodern* mode of subjectivity.

A diagrammatic approach

Both Higbee and Archer touch upon important *spatial* themes in *L'Emploi du temps*, and in doing so they suggest ways in which the film can be viewed as a portrayal of post-Fordist work within a new, emerging social reality. Higbee, for example, suggests that these indeterminate spaces evoke the potential for the resolution of crises offered by Augé's 'non-places' and Foucault's 'heterotopias': a potential that is ultimately unfulfilled (see Augé 1992). Similarly, Archer focuses on the way in which Vincent's failure to escape the reassuring 'bubble' of the *non-lieu* is an expression of 'longing for an indeterminate point between work and the working lifestyle, between familial constraint and the desire for solitude' (2008: 141) Taking a cue from these spatial allusions, it is possible to develop an analysis which, in line with the approach adopted by Martin O'Shaughnessy both in this collection and elsewhere, explores the film's engagement with post-Fordist work patterns . Whilst acknowledging the importance of the issue of crises of masculinity in the world of work, the focus here will be on a wider crisis of the *self*, and the route into this 'hypermodern' crisis is a spatial analysis that draws on the transition from 'disciplinary' societies (Foucault 1975) to 'control' societies (Deleuze 1990). This theme is taken up by Pascal Houba in a short piece on the film, 'La communauté manœuvrée' (2003). Houba bases much of his reading upon Boltanski and Chiapello's *Nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (1999), in which they identify a 'mutation de contrôle', whereby a new series of less direct but ultimately more pervasive and insidious forms of control are exerted upon individuals in the workplace. By exploring further these spatial themes the aim will be to sketch what might be thought of – borrowing from Deleuze's analysis of Foucault's concept of disciplinary society – as a *diagram* of the forces that impact on Vincent (Deleuze 1986).

In *Surveiller et punir* (1975) Foucault portrays discipline as a political anatomy of detail in which the individual body is trained and drilled in order to circulate through a series of discrete, closed institutions: prison, school, hospital, asylum, barracks, etc. Minutely regulated timetables, surveillance techniques, various forms of examination, and normalising sanctions are all employed in order to construct docile and useful bodies. Writing in response to *Surveiller et punir* Deleuze identifies in Foucault's historical approach a 'new cartography', a capacity to analyse the forces at play in social fields by constructing 'diagrams' of these forces (Deleuze 1986: 31-49). These diagrams map the interactions and articulations between a number of heterogeneous components: discourses, buildings, bodies and technologies. The most influential and widely-discussed example of the diagram in Foucault's work is, of course, the Panopticon. For Foucault, Bentham's Panopticon is not simply an architectural model designed to facilitate a highly efficient means of surveillance: it is also a ideal schema for a wider *disciplinary* social field (a diagram) that emerges in the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries. Its functioning extends beyond the prison to hospitals, schools, factories, etc. However the descriptive power of the Panopticon in *Surveiller et punir*, along with the nature of the pervasive power relations that Foucault describes in this book, has meant the general analytical utility of this diagrammatic methodology with reference to other social fields has been neglected. For one thing, there is no single diagram: the Panopticon is not the ultimate expression of social control, but rather a contingent, historical construction. As Deleuze emphasises, there are as many diagrams as there are social fields throughout history (1986: 42). Also, the heterogeneous nature of the components that comprise any diagram means that it is capable of combining and articulating apparently contradictory elements. So, in the case of the prison, penal law defines and punishes delinquency, whilst the prison reproduces delinquency and categorises it as a useful social object of control.

Furthermore, as far as the analysis of *L'Emploi du temps* is concerned, it is useful to supplement the Foucaldian diagram with the Deleuzian concept of the *assemblage* or social

machine. The notion of a social machine provides a way of thinking about desires and investments in the context of articulations and aggregates that go beyond the subject, and thus to portray profoundly social affects. Art – particularly films and novels – are capable of exploring the social, impersonal, as opposed to psychoanalytic, dynamics of desire. As Claire Colebrook suggests, authors have the capacity to create characters which are not merely representational variations on a basic human template, but are rather composed of intensities and affects:

> Dickens composes characters from quirky phrases, strange body tics, irrational desires and affections and highly partial histories. Character is not a single unified ground or body which then has certain distinguishing features; characters are collections or 'assemblages' of randomly gathered affects. (2002: 83)

Vincent can be read as a classic, clinical case of mythomania, and this inability to distinguish between truth and reality might be explained by dysfunctional family dynamics exacerbated by a mid-life crisis. However, such a psychological-psychoanalytic reading diminishes the importance of the social machine that produces Vincent as a pathological expression of a series of affects that are in general circulation in the social field that he inhabits.

From discipline to control

Before looking at the ways in which the film represents and articulates some of the components of the control diagram, it is necessary to consider in more detail the nature of control societies as set out by Deleuze. In a short piece written in 1990, Deleuze addressed what he saw as a significant shift in social and economic organisation that takes place in the post-war era (1990). In the spirit of his earlier analysis of Foucault, he acknowledges the descriptive power of the notion of a disciplinary society, but he emphasises that this is a historical phenomenon: post-war societies have moved away from from *discipline* to *control* as a dominant mode. Individuals no longer move in quite the same way from one enclosed 'milieu d'enfermement' to

another, starting anew each time. The disciplinary grid of discrete institutions has blurred into more diffuse continua of control, and he identifies a general crisis of milieux of enclosure: prison, hospital, factory, school, and family. The move from a close disciplinary grip on individuals to more fluid forms of surveillance and prediction is in part technologically driven. Computing and digital technologies open up the possibility of new phenomena such as electronic surveillance and predictive genetic techniques.

From a political perspective, one of the key trends that Deleuze identifies is the broadly neo-liberal drive to 'reform' institutions of all kinds by opening them to competition, incentives, and the necessities of marketing and self-promotion. 'Enterprise' emerges as a pervasive form of control: 'La famille, l'école, l'armée, l'usine ne sont plus des milieux analogiques distincts qui convergent vers un propriétaire, Etat ou puissance privée, mais les figures chiffrées, déformables et transformables, d'une même entreprise qui n'a plus que des gestionnaires' (245). *L'école* is replaced by *la formation permanente* and, in turn, the 'spirit' of *l'entreprise* now permeates *l'école*. In more general economic terms, the shift from discipline to control parallels a shift in capitalism that Deleuze construes, without actually using the term, as post-Fordist. The factory as a site of capitalist accumulation and concentration (in terms of the means of production, labour and specialised production) gives way to focus on marketing that lies at the heart of the *entreprise*.

In many ways, Deleuze's piece functions as a sort of poetics of the control society, and he draws on a range of images to convey a general sense of fluidity, modulation and *smoothness*. Emphasising the diffuse nature of the *enterprise* in contrast to the factory, Deleuze suggests that it takes the form of a 'gas' (242). Whereas the disciplinary individual is placed in a series of *moulds*, the typical trajectory of the individual in a control society is continuous and wavelike. A number of commentators have argued that the move to new, post-disciplinary working milieux frequently means that individuals are subject to ostensibly 'softer', but ultimately ever more insidious forms of control. Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello in particular have highlighted the significance of this shift:

Les nouvelles formes de management sont associés à de nouvelles formes de contrôle qui, faisant moins intervenir une surveillance directe, exercé dans le face à face par des personnes investies d'un pouvoir sur d'autres personnes qui en sont démunies, sont moins visibles sans être pour autant absentes: autocontrôle, contrôle par le marché et contrôle informatique en temps réel mais à distance, se combinent pour exercer une pression quasi permanente sur les salariés. (1999: 520)

In short, demands for independence and autonomy are incorporated into systems of control. This, in turn, means that the total surveillance of Taylorist organisation is replaced by a more indirect 'control of control': surveillance societies become audit societies. They are perhaps even more insidious because they thrive on individuals investing in them. This apparently more open, fluid, flexible system of control has the effect of stimulating the drive on the part of the individual to adhere to a norm that is not given in advance.

Discourse

L'Emploi du temps is characterised by the circulation of the language of contemporary management, *le consulting*. Throughout the film, Vincent is portrayed learning and performing this language as if he were an actor preparing a part or a student revising for an exam. Strikingly, and in contrast to his usual detachment, this careful preparation means that he is, on occasion, able to act the part of an engaged, dynamic business consultant with some conviction. For example, when he meets his former work colleague, Fred, in order to convince him to invest in a fraudulent investment scheme, Vincent is persuasively confident, adopting the language of enterprise and risk-taking in reaction to Fred's self-deprecation: 'Non, mais attends. J'ai juste tenté ma chance et ça a marché. Ça tient qu'à toi.' However, the disjunction between this performing self and his resistance to real engagement in this type of work is conveyed most

acutely in the final scene of the film in which Vincent is interviewed for a post that has clearly been arranged by his father. Vincent sits in the interview, which is evidently a formality, mute and panic struck. The confidence he has previously displayed is absent, and he appears to be crushed, being verbally disempowered both by conversations that his father has had on his behalf and by a form of motivational language ('il s'agit d'une aventure humaine') to which he is required to respond positively.

The fiction of work that Vincent constructs is not simply a psychological response to the pressures of work and the trauma of unemployment: it also fulfils an allegorical function as a means of representing and critiquing the 'fictional', virtual nature of 'le consulting'. This interplay of fictions is encapsulated in two key scenes in the middle of the film. In the first scene Jean-Michel, having seen through Vincent's deception, sets out the straightforward economics of his smuggling venture. Watches costing 200 francs in Poland and worth 15000 francs in France are sold by Jean-Michel for 1000 francs, a rate of return that far outweighs Vincent's fraudulent investment scheme, as Jean-Michel points out, borrowing Vincent's own discourse of investments in 'emerging markets': 'On est loin des deux cents pour cent *aléatoires* des marchés émergents.' In the second scene at his parents' home Vincent attempts, with apparent engagement and sincerity, to convince his father of the efficacy of the work he claims to be doing at the UN: 'Écoute papa, tu as tort. L'éducation du développement, je te l'accorde, c'est peut-être une expression un peu gonflante. Mais c'est loin d'être une coquille vide.' His father, however, remains unconvinced. 'Tu rêves? Du consulting en Afrique? Comment tu peux te faire croire une chose pareille?' Adding a further layer of irony and ambivalence, Vincent's father is simultaneously dismissive of the political and economic efficacy of the project, but encouraging of Vincent's enthusiasm and 'investment': 'C'est bien que Vincent s'investisse là-dedans, mais ne me rancontez pas que ça va changer le monde.'

Buildings, bodies and technologies

As discussed already, Bentham's Panopticon constitutes the ideal abstract model of the disciplinary diagram. It represents the 'dream' of the disciplinary gaze at its most efficient, and its ultimate effect would be self-discipline (since the panoptical individual never knows when he or she is being observed). The glass structure of the ONU offices constitutes a visbility that supplements the harsh disciplinary beam of the Panopticon with the capacity to 'seduce' employees:

> Lorsque Vincent visite l'entreprise où il rêve de travailler, une tour de bureaux où dominent les closions vitrées, il peut flâner longtemps dans les couloirs, jeter un regard dans chaque bureau, surprendre les propos échangés lors d'une réunion avant d'être lui-même repéré par les caméras de surveillance. D'ailleurs, il ne se cache pas, on peut même dire qu'il semble jouir de sa visibilité qui le rassure sur lui-même. En effet, la visibilité n'est pas seulement synonyme de contrainte pour le travailleur, elle comporte également un aspect flatteur pour son narcissisme […] (Houba 2003)

As Martin O'Shaughnessy points out in this issue, the UN building corresponds closely to the significance of what Yiannis Gabriel has called 'glass cages and glass palaces' as distinctive architectural figures of advanced capitalism (2005: 9-27). Gabriel explores the ways in which the shift from concrete to glass as a 'signature' contemporary building material corresponds to an parallel shift in organizational paradigm away from Weber's 'iron cage' of reason and bureaucracy. Whereas modernity features 'solid' buildings, the buildings of post- (and hyper-) modernity symbolise and mediate flexibility and transparency. The glass cage of contemporary organization evokes the surveillant assemblage of ubiquitous CCTV cameras, along with the obsession with feedback, appraisals, and league tables that characterise the ambient audit culture of post-Fordism. The idea of 'glass palace' refers to the elements of display and performance at play in the glass cage of flexibility and transparency. Crucially, the link between the glass cage and the glass palace is the figure of the *consumer*. The employee is disciplined by the critical gaze of

the consumer, whilst being offered opportunities for exhibitionism and narcissism. The glass cage in this sense is marked by a fundamental ambivalence, 'between the anxiety of continuous exposure and the narcissistic self-satisfaction of being part of a winning team or formula' (Gabriel 2005: 19). Vincent's behaviour in the UN building encapsulates precisely this ambivalence. Quite simply, he is able, however briefly, to experience the narcissistic self-satisfaction of display and inclusion, without the anxiety of exposure within the world of work. He briefly becomes a consumer of the signs and libidinal pleasures of work: a hypermodern *flâneur*.

Vincent's bodily demeanour throughout the film corresponds in various ways to the Deleuzian distinction between discipline and control. As mentioned already, for Deleuze, the individual in a control society is no longer a producer of energy, but rather takes on a wave- or beamlike 'orbit'. 'L'homme des disciplines était un producteur discontinu de l'énergie, mais l'homme du contrôle est plutôt ondulatoire, mis en orbite, sur faisceau continu' (244). Vincent is, in this sense, a 'controlled' individual whose professional and personal existence is characterised by 'flottement' and 'glissement'. He maintains his prolonged absence from both his family by carefully maintaining and constructing – largely by use of his mobile phone – a fictional work life. Also, the scene in which he enters UN building in Geneva, simply by dressing plausibly and attaching himself to a group entering the building evokes Deleuze's allusion to *surfing* as the paradigmatic sport of control societies: an energetic conception of movement, whereby the individual acts as a lever or point of resistance (running, throwing, etc.) has been replaced by sports such as surfing and deltaplaning, in which it is a question of inserting oneself into a pre-existing wave form (1990: 165). Vincent loiters outside the building, dressed in a similar fashion to other employees entering the building and with some skill, adopts the demeanour and cadence of the group to which he attaches himself.

Affects: *l'individu hypermoderne*

If a diagrammatic approach can de deployed in order to read *L'Emploi du temps* as a portrayal of a control society, it is necessary to supplement this reading with current theories of the *hypermodern self* since these also help to analyse the ways in which Vincent displays – in an extreme form – symptoms of new forms of subjectivity. Nicole Aubert and Gilles Lypovetsky identify the hypermodern as a generalised condition of acceleration, uncertainty and intensity in an era characterised by economic globalisation and the concomitant rise of commercial and market logics, along with rapid technological development, particularly in the field of digital communications. If, as Lipovetsky suggests in *L'Ère du vide* (1993), the emergence of a new, postmodern individualism in post-1968 France offered genuine spaces for self-development, this moment of post-disciplinary relaxation was short-lived. In the 1990s individuals begin to experience the development and intensification of tendencies that were already established in the postmodern moment (Lipovetsky 2004: 51). Three elements of this hypermodern condition suggest themselves as particularly relevant to the case of Vincent: a new, fraught experience of time; an emphasis on 'responsabilisation'; and a generalised ambiance of intensity.

As far as the experience of time is concerned, on the macro-level Lipovetsky highlights a dual focus on an increasingly manic present – driven in part by digital technologies and globalisation – and the anxious contemplation of an uncertain and frequently threatening future. The 'culture insouciante du *carpe diem*' of postmodernity has been replaced by the constant requirement to manage the demands of both the present and the future (2004: 72-4) As Lypovetsky emphasises, the closing down of the future as a space of potential freedom and relative optimism means that the present is inflected with new norms of constant reinvention: 'Moins le futur est prévisible, plus il faut être mobile, flexible, réactif, prêt à changer en permanence, supermoderne, plus modernes que les modernes de l'époque héroïque' (2004: 55). On the micro-level, Nicole Aubert focuses on the shift from time as a series of external disciplinary obligations and rhythms that characterise work and social life to an ultimately futile internalisation of the drive to 'dominate' time. The contradiction that underpins this drive is

characterised by the mobile phone, which gives the individual a sense of existential ubiquity, whilst at the same time exposing the individual to the urgent demands of instantaneous communication (Aubert 2006a: 159-60) For Vincent, this tension expresses itself in the most paradoxical of ways, in that he constructs what amounts to a fully networked escape. Vincent's attempt to appropriate or 'use' time on his own terms becomes yet another constraining and alienating 'emploi du temps'.

In the hypermodern era, demands for autonomy have largely ceased to be liberatory, and are frequently transformed into isolating and individualising modes of control. Autonomy becomes burdensome, and an anxious, 'responsabilised' individual emerges in the context of a shift from external disciplinary norms to a much more fluid and mobile social field, in which external identifications such as class, party politics and religion play a greatly diminished role. In short, autonomy becomes normalising. As Boltanski and Chiapello argue, network capitalism generates a new set of desirable qualities for the working individual: 'Ce sont, par excellence, celles du manager, chef de projet, mobile, léger, ayant l'art d'établir et d'entretenir des connexions nombreuses, diverses et enrichissanates et la capacité d'étendre les réseaux' (1999 : 520). Houba takes this further, arguing that, in the absence of centralised disciplinary sources of power and authority, individual identity becomes entirely relational, and is consequently destabilised. Under such circumstances, power as a normalising and controlling force does not simply disappear. Instead, employees are required to express and 'own' an appropriate set of drives and desires. However, in the absence of any form of collectivity or professional solidarity, desire is dependent solely on the desire of the other: 'Ainsi, Vincent redéfinit les paramètres de sa vie professionnelle en prenant comme seuls critères le désir que ses proches (et en particulier son père) formulent à son égard' (Houba 2003). As Vincent le Gaulejac suggests, in some ways Vincent represents a pathologised version of the contradictory requirements of autonomy:

Chaque individu doit être libre, se réaliser et en même temps être bon travailleur socialisé par l'école, l'emploi, la famille, le couple. Est-ce qu'on pourrait renverser les choses, est-ce que pour Vincent, c'est sa façon d'aller jusqua'au bout de l'autonomie que de basculer dans une vie d'errance, où il n'y a plus de sens. (Quoted in Lebtahi & Roussel-Gillet 2005: 115)

Emphasising the dimension of intensity, Aubert suggests that the contemporary individual is characterised by the contrasting extremes of excess on the one hand and 'lack and emptiness' on the other (Aubert 2006b: 74). In the world of work the demands of increasing personal investment, instant decision-making and communication, along with the necessity to succeed within a global marketplace, frequently result in a 'hyperfunctioning self'. Unsurprisingly, as Aubert also points out, this state of excess gives rise to a number of pathologies: drug and alcohol dependency, eating disorders, and various forms of burnout. Like overheated machines, hyperfunctioning individuals run the risk of shutting down and disconnecting from the world around them. Aubert also adopts Richard Sennett's (1998) notion of the 'corrosion' of character in material, rather tham moral, terms: 'Comme si le caractère, tel un matériau, se trouvait en quelque sorte dégradé progressivement sous l'action du milieu ambiant, rongé, attaqué comme par une action de type chimique' (Aubert 2006: 78). Similarly, Lipovetsky argues that the relatively positive opportunities for autonomy and self-realisation that characterise the postmodern moment are now more threatening and destabilising:

Moins les normes collectives nous commandent dans le détail, plus l'individu se montre tendanciellement faible et déstabilisé. Plus l'individu est socialement mobile, plus apparaissent des manifestations d'épuisement et des 'pannes' subjectives ; plus on veut vivre libre et intensément, plus s'accroissent les expressions de la peine à vivre. (Lipovetsky 2004: 82)

It is clear that Vincent in *L'Emploi du temps* is suffering from burnout of this nature, and his character has been 'corroded' in the general moral and ethical sense indicated by Sennett, in that his relationships with others are manipulative and deceitful. Beyond this, the simultaneously dreamlike and doom-laden atmosphere of the film conveys a sense of Vincent as an absent presence. He is the dramatic centre of the film and yet he remains stubbornly apart, frequently viewing the world and those around him through a series of screens and windows. At the same time, Vincent also exhibits symptoms of what Aubert calls 'la transcendance de soi'. In an era when collective identifications are on the wane some individuals seek out new reference points that might provide meaning and orientation, such as 'recycled' spirituality or the commercial imperatives of the *entreprise*. In other cases, individuals are drawn into pathological projects of self-discovery and self realisation without reference to external frameworks (2006b 83-4). Vincent's *dérive* is clearly on one level an attempt at a form of suicide, of going beyond the limits of the self. He embodies, in this sense, the hypermodern tendency to extremes of behaviour, in that his passivity and distance is balanced by an attraction to risky and dangerous forms of behaviour.

A crisis of confidence

If the main drama of *Ressources humaines* is generated by Franck's uncertainty over his 'place', and the shame that is generated by this uncertainty, *L'Emploi du temps* explores Vincent's ambivalent and paradoxical attempt to escape any sense of place. Unlike a classic – in the Deleuzian sense – filmic character, Vincent does not seek to change his life, but he is driven to escape it:

Nous avions de Vincent l'image d'un héros plutôt positif, un personnage radical malgré lui mais qui, à partir d'un moment d'absence, ayant abouti à son licenciement, décide de mener une vie différente et qui va tout mettre en œuvre pour y parvenir. Le film peut

être vu comme une vaste tentative d'évasion. Mais il s'agit là d'une évasion extrêmement ambiguë, car Vincent, en réalité, ne souhaite pas changer de vie. Il veut seulement s'affranchir de toute capture économique et sociale. (Cantet 2001)

L'Emploi du temps is, in sort, a drama of *confidence*. In the absence of external disciplinary norms, the effort to maintain coinfidence in oneself and others becomes untenable. Vincent is, in the general sense of the term, a 'confidence man', a fraudster who manages temporarily to maintain a complex web of deceit. However, these deceptions are of course threatened by a profound lack of confidence both in himself and the world around him. As is the case with much of the dialogue in the film, Vincent's appeal to his wife, Muriel, to support him in his new 'job': 'j'ai besoin que tu me fasses confiance', is loaded with irony. As Vincent admits to Muriel in a key scene in the film, he does not know what is expected of him. Significantly, those around him – his fictional work colleagues – offer no point of connection: 'Je regarde les gens autour de moi, les personnes avec qui je suis censé travailler. Je ne vois que des visages parfaitement étranges. C'est comme tellement d'absence'. As Boltanski and Chiapello emphasise, this lack of confidence is the price that is paid by the 'light' and flexible post-Fordist worker:

L'homme léger fait le sacrifice d'une certaine intériorité et de la fidélité à soi, pour mieux s'ajuster aux personnes avec lesquelles il entre en contact et aux situations, toujours changeantes, dans lesquelles il se trouve amené à agir (ce qui suppose aussi le renoncement à l'ubris du calcul, au bénéfice d'une rationalité limitée). (1999: 186)

The force of *L'Emploi du temps* lies in its capacity to convey this lack of confidence not simply as a psychological or psychoanalytic drama, but as a generalised *affect*. In this sense, the internal logic of the film is not, as Tesson suggests, 'spéculaire' (2001: 72), but rather, as Houba indicates, 'spéculative', in that Vincent's capacity to abuse the confidence of others mirrors the speculative logic of advanced capitalism. The film explores the way in which Vincent internalises

the desire of others, but goes beyond the level of the personal to construct a critique, as Houba suggests, of the commodification of desire and confidence:

> Le capitalisme introduit un mécanisme où le rêve et le désir sont produits comme valeurs marchandes. Le personnel est recompensé narcissiquement s'il partage ce rêve. On doit tout faire pour satisfaire le désir du client grâce à une production 'personnalisée'. On oublie cependant qu'une même stratégie est la source des désirs et de la possibilité de leur satisfaction. Ces éléments mettent à jour la difficulté pour le capitalisme actuel de concilier le désir individuel et les valeurs partagées par une communauté. (2003)

It is inevitable that speculative investments in the social field undermine notions of community and solidarity, as reflected in the title of Houba's piece, 'la communauté monœuvrée'. This, in turn, echoes the claim made by Deleuze in *L'Image-temps*, and which reverberates through much of his work on film and literature: that is to say, 'le peuple manqué' (1985: 281). In 'le cinéma classique' the people – i.e. a political community – are present, but they are duped, oppressed or lack collective consciousness of their situation. In contrast, contemporary political cinema addresses a situation in which a people no longer exists, and in which the boundary between the political and the private has collapsed. In classical cinema (Deleuze alludes to Pudovkin's *Mother* and Ford's *Grapes of Wrath*) the private affords a relatively protected space in which an individual can become conscious and develop resistance. In modern political cinema, on the other hand, no such space exists; the private is immediately political. A political community of the classical kind is clearly present in *Ressources humaines*, and the film portrays the emergent consciousness of both this community and Franck as an individual. What is more, Franck is able to develop his own understanding of the political stakes of the situation by drawing on the tensions he experiences in the domestic sphere. In *L'Emploi du temps*, however, no such community exists, and the private realm is absorbed into the troubling political reality of a control society.

Conclusion: *la délocalisation*

Any number of commentators have speculated on the contrast between the solidity and relative stability of modern insititutions and modes of social organisation and the fluidity and mutability of the structures and institutions that characterise our current social reality. At the same time, just as these structures have become more fluid and permeable, so individuals have both demanded more autonomy and flexibility, *and* have also been required to display the capacity for reinvention. *L'Emploi du temps* depicts a pathological case of the contemporary entrepreneurial self. In this hypermodern milieu of post-Fordist labour the immaterial labour of the *cadre* – in this case a business consultant – corresponds closely to the contours of contemporary capital. That is to say, it is delocalised, abstract, virtual: it is dependent on fragile networks of confidence, and consequently runs the risk of speculative collapse. On one level, *L'Emploi du temps* can be read as a psychological drama of deception and misplaced desire. However, the argument here has been that the complex and problematic issues that occur within the family unit are in large part a consequence of wider social forces. Vincent has become a 'delocalised' individual, detached from a sense of community that would enable him to establish work and personal relations of genuine confidence.

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[1] The film is loosely 'inspired' by the 'affaire Romand', which was widely reported and discussed in the French media on the 1990s. Over a period of eighteen years Romand, having failed his second year of medical school in 1975, maintained the fiction of a career as a doctor with the WHO in Geneva. He took money from friends and relatives for non-existent investment schemes, and he sold fraudulent cancer drugs. In 1993, when it became clear that he was about to be discovered, he killed his wife, children, parents, and his mistress: he subsequently attempted to kill himself. In 1996 he was sentenced to life imprisonment. The author and film director Emmanuel Carrère followed the trial of Romand and corresponded with him. His analysis of the affair was published as *L'Adversaire* (2002), and a film of the same name appeared in 2007.