Abstract

Care of the self, a technique for governing the individual in society, proves to be equally a control technique for the individual in the firm. In a firm dedicated to the cult of beauty, there is a blurring of the lines between employee and consumer individual. This blurring makes care of the self a control tool whose rising power over individuals is all the greater because it is nurtured and maintained by the individuals themselves.

1 Introduction

In organisations today, productivity, quality and innovation tend to be fostered less by Taylorian hierarchical control than by the active commitment of the employee, which guarantees an alignment of personal desires with the goals of the firm. This identification with the goals of the organisation is, for some scholars, the result of a control of the thoughts and feelings of the employee (Hochschild, 1983; Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989; Perlow, 1998). Governing organizational life to ensure “excellence” necessitates the production of certain types of person, namely “enterprising”, autonomous, productive, self-regulating, responsible individuals (du Gay, 1991, Rose, 1990). Creating enterprising individuals from themselves echoes the new forms taken by the desire to “enact oneself”, to become oneself in a performance-focused society. Describing the great developments in individualism in society, Ehrenberg shows that, “to the Gospels of personal fulfilment of the 1970s” have been added the “stone Tablets of individual initiative of the 1980s” (Ehrenberg, 2002, p.89). The emergence of “the cult of performance combines a model of action (being enterprising) and of justice (in sport, the first is always the best) with a style of existence (the personal fulfilment of an individual emancipated from the forbidden choices that prevented one from choosing one’s lifestyle) […] In short, the ideal is to become the entrepreneur of one’s own life” (Ehrenberg, 2002, p.90). The aspirations of individuals in society therefore seem almost naturally to meet the new forms of government within the organisation. However, the organisation’s instrumentation of care of the self must be discreet because the autonomy of the subject is the proclaimed ideal of the emancipating aim. Bearing witness to this are the discourses circulating on empowerment, presented as a process of the individual’s acquiring power (Kanter, 1983) or rather as a process enabling members of the organisation to nurture the feeling of their own efficiency (Conger and Kanungo, 1988).

In this paper, our aim is to understand how this ideal of being an entrepreneur of oneself may be used as a means of control within the organisation. In our study, the path that leads to this ideal is seen through the Foucauldian concept of care of the self (Foucault, 1984, 2001). A case study of the world leader in beauty products enables us to analyse the techniques of care of the self that are practised within the marketing function and to shed light on the mechanisms that make care of the self a means of governing individuals in the organisation. This instrumentalising of care of the self is made possible through a blurring of the lines between, or an amalgamation of, the different facets of individuals (employee and consumer)
and the diverse attributes of the organisation (brand and product). We show that this instrumentalisation presupposes a context where the values, the aspirations, and the representations of individuals converge with the goals of the organisation. To exert control over the individual, the organisation under study relies on the forms of subjectification imposed on the individual by the consumer society (the model of beauty, the diktat of fashion and slimming).

These findings ascribe our research to both a critical and a post-modern perspective. They effectively echo a diagnostic common to both approaches: a diagnostic according to which objects for management control are decreasingly labour power and behaviour and increasingly the mind power and subjectivities of employees (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996, p.192). This diagnostic reveals that organisations rely increasingly systematically on a form of instrumental reasoning that favours the means over the ends (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996, p.211).

The paper is structured as follows. After briefly sketching shifts in the notion of the individual in the organisation, we present the Foucauldian concept of care of the self. The paper then presents the methodology. The case study subsequently developed enables us to identify the different objects of care of the self as a control tool in the organisation. The last part sets out to show that the reasons for which these objects of care of the self become objects of organisational control lie in a blurring of the lines between the figures of the employee, the consumer and the product.

2 Governing the Individual in the Organisation through the Concept of Care of the Self

2.1 The Shift in the Position of the Individual in the Organisation

The emergence of the notion of the individual in the organisation is concomitant with the development of Taylorian scientific management at the beginning of the 20th century. The notion of the individual in the firm and in society as a whole has subsequently been marked by two major shifts: the dilution of the individual into the group after the Second World War, and the triumphant individualism brought in by neo-liberalism in the 1980s (Miller and Rose, 1990).

By founding the principles of scientific corporate management, (Taylor, 19111), Taylor constructed a technology of government. In fact, he attempted to produce a form of relationship that was stable, reproducible and standardised between individuals and things; this form of relationship was to result in foreseeable and efficient production. In this perspective, the worker subject becomes an object of knowledge, a target of intervention, as an individual able to be evaluated and governed on the basis of differences that distinguish him from the others (Miller and Rose, 1990, p.20). Scientific management therefore instigated an individualisation of persons in the firm: workers were no longer considered anonymous groups; instead, attention was paid to their individual performances (Miller and O'Leary, 1987, p.253). Individualisation went so far as to confer responsibility on the individual, making him a being capable of decision making (Miller and O'Leary, 1987, p.256-259).

After the Second World War, there was a marked shift in the modes of developing programmes for governing the individual. Notably, it was at this time that productivity and efficiency were thought of in terms of the attitudes of the employee towards his work. Work

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1 TAYLOR, FW (2006), The Principles of Scientific Management, 1st World Library (1st edition, 1911)
was started on the meaning of employee cohesion and the feeling employees had of controlling their work (Miller and Rose, 1990, p.22). A new lexicon then emerged to denote management activities. This vocabulary signalled the new significance given to regulating the internal psychological world of the employee through the calculated management of human relationships in the firm (Miller and Rose, 1990, p.22).

The nineteen-eighties were marked by a powerful individualism that has become the dominant rationale in society: individual liberation adorned a constraining and normative character: “today’s norms undoubtedly encourage one to become oneself, like those of yesterday commanded one to be disciplined. […] The “personal” is a normative artifice; like all norms, it is perfectly impersonal” (Ehrenberg, 1998, p.134).

This individualism also affects the firm. In contrast to the scientific management- or human relationship-focused firms mentioned above, organisations inspired by the neo-liberal project of the 1980s get the most from their employees not by managing group relationships to maximise satisfaction, nor by rationalising management to ensure efficiency, but by giving free reign to individual efforts of autonomy and creativity (Miller and Rose, 1990, p.26). “It is less the needs that are at the centre of the mechanism than the personality of the employee, who is freer because he has already made the organisation’s goals his own. Consequently, he is more inclined to judge as positive the very stringent constraints that this organisation imposes on him and to consider himself autonomous when, in fact, he does not hold any real power” (Bouquin, 2004, p.168). The employee is therefore seen as an individual who seeks to direct his own life in order to maximise his returns in terms of success. Du Gay expands this analysis by developing the concept of the enterprising self (du Gay, 1996; du Gay et al., 1996). He studies the creation of the manager through the management of his own conduct: “being ‘made up’ suggests a material – a cultural process of formation or transformation […] whereby the adoption of certain habits and dispositions allows an individual to become – and to become recognized as – a particular sort of person” (du Gay et al., 1996, p.264). This echoes what Foucault defines as a “practice of the self”. These Foucauldian techniques or practices of the self are a cultural set of exercises, rules, patterns, and behaviours by which a subject constructs himself and establishes a certain relationship with himself. Caring for oneself does not stem from having psychological knowledge but from focusing on ethical issues whereby the individual seeks to be as near to his potential as possible (Gros, forthcoming). These techniques therefore aim at an excelling of the self, not directed towards introspection but rather towards a performance that society and the organisation can appraise. Rather that enacting oneself or knowing oneself better, care of the self aims at conforming to the idea that we make of ourselves what others expect of us. Furthermore, the aim of care of the self is to constitute “a strong subject rather than a lucid subject”(Gros, forthcoming), meaning an individual who seeks performance more than an understanding of himself. This goal is consistent with the ambitions of governing individuals such as these ambitions appear in today’s organisations. It therefore seems relevant to analyse care of the self within the organisational context. It may be envisaged as a management tool that sets norms for individuals’ behaviours with a view to better organising the firm’s activities.

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF CARE OF THE SELF AND ITS TECHNIQUES

In the individualist era described by the socio-institutional school studying accounting, the rationality of the notion of individual autonomy is considerably strengthened by the technologies that model the behaviour of the consumer: popular television, the transformation of the supply of goods through techniques of product differentiation, of market targeting and
of marketing in general. These embedded\textsuperscript{2} technologies advocate the view of a free consumer, even an individual entrepreneur (entrepreneur of oneself). They aim to “form citizens in the techniques of governing themselves” (Miller and Rose, 1990, p.25-29; Jeacle, 2003). Care of the self may be considered as one of the techniques of governing the self.

Foucault (2001) draws up a history of the theme of care of the self. This theme, which he designates as one of the main threads that tie the exercise of philosophy with Christian asceticism, spans the centuries from an early philosophical formulation clearly appearing in the fifth century B.C. and running through Greek, Hellenistic and Roman philosophy as well as Christian spirituality (Foucault, 2001, p.13). Spilling over from its original framework and detaching itself from its first philosophical significations, this theme has gradually acquired the forms of a true “culture of the self”. This term should be taken to mean that the principle of care of the self has attained a fairly broad scope: the precept that one must take care of oneself is, in all cases, an imperative that can be found in a large number of different doctrines; it has taken the form of an attitude, of a way of behaving, and it has impregnated lifestyles; it has been developed into procedures, into practices and into recipes that have been thought out, nurtured, perfected and taught; accordingly, it has come to constitute a social practice that has given rise to inter-individual relationships, to sharing and communications, and sometimes even to institutions; it has given rise to a certain mode of knowledge and to the development of a body of knowledge (Foucault, 1984, p.59).

Applying oneself to the self does not merely require a general attitude, or a vague concern, but a complete set of occupations. It needs time. This time is not empty: it is peop led with exercises, practical tasks, and diverse activities. Taking care of oneself is not a walk in the park. There are health regimes, body care, non-strenuous physical exercise, and the satisfying of needs in as measured a way as possible (Foucault, 1984, p.65).

Around the theme of taking care of the self, a whole activity of speaking and writing has grown in which one’s own work on oneself and sharing with others are bound together. Here, we touch upon one of the most important points in this activity dedicated to the self: it does not constitute an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice. Its social support may be found in schools and teachings on how to direct the soul; yet it just as easily finds support in the broad cluster of the habitual relationships of family, friendship or obligation. When, in exercising care of the self, one reaches out to another whom one discerns as being apt to direct or advise, one is exercising a right; and it is not a duty that one is accomplishing when one offers one’s help to another, or when one gratefully accepts the lessons another can teach. It may occur that the play between care of the self and help from another intervenes in pre-existing relationships to which it gives a brighter hue and greater warmth. Care of the self – or the care we take of the care that others should have of themselves – consequently appears to be an intensification of social relationships (Foucault, 1984, p.67-68).

Care of the self also differs from a psychological technique because it is a preparation to act and not introspection (who is the real me?).

In the culture of the self, “a particular form of attention to the body” has also emerged. The point to which we pay attention in the practices of the self is the one where all the pains of the body and of the soul may communicate among themselves and share their malaises: the point

\textsuperscript{2} Programmes of government rely on complex networks of embedded technologies, whether they are to be found in management, in marketing, in advertising, or in the discourses of the mass media.
where the bad habits of the soul may entail physical miseries, whereas the excesses of the body manifest and maintain the foibles of the soul (Foucault, 1984, p.72).

Techniques of care of the self: the phase of preparing for action

In the practice of care of the self, “a whole art of knowing oneself has developed, with precise recipes, with specified forms of examination and codified exercises. To this is added the task of reflexive thinking” (Foucault, 1984, p.74). Foucault identifies three types of techniques: “doing practical tests, examining one’s conscience, and constantly filtering representations” (Foucault, 1984, p.75-79).

Practical tests have a two-fold role of moving one forward in acquiring a virtue and of measuring the point that one arrives at. The tests one submits to are not successive stages of deprivation; they are ways of measuring and confirming how independent one can be with respect to all that is not indispensable and essential. One of the examples of testing procedures proposed by Foucault refers to the practices described by Seneca: “In peacetime, notes Seneca, the soldier conducts manoeuvres; without an enemy facing him, he establishes a retrenchment; he tires himself with superfluous tasks, with a view to sufficing in the necessary work. You do not want this man to lose his mind at the height of the action. Train him before the action” (Sénèque in Foucault, 1984, p.76).

Beside these tests, it is considered important to submit oneself to the examination of the conscience. Foucault underlines that most scholars see this as a daily, if not bi-daily, practice. “At first glance, the examination to which Seneca himself submits constitutes a sort of mini court hearing, clearly evoked by expressions such as ‘appearing before the judge’, ‘prosecuting the trial of one’s own morals’, and ‘pleading or defending one’s cause’. The elements seem to indicate the splitting of the subject into a court that judges and an individual who is the defendant” (Foucault, 1984, p.77). However, Foucault points out that, unlike a reconstruction of court proceedings, examining one’s conscience does not deal with “offences”. Rather, it has more the semblance of an activity of inspecting, whereby the controller wishes to inspect work done or a mission accomplished, and of judging a mistake in relation to a code of conduct, which does not lead to a ruling of guilt or to a sentence of self-punishment (Foucault, 1984, p.78). The purpose of examination is therefore not to uncover one’s own guilt in its most minute details and to its deepest root causes. If one “hides nothing from oneself” and if one “is hard on oneself”, it is both to be capable of remembering legitimate ends, to have them in the mind subsequently, and also of recalling the rules of conduct that enable one to reach these ends by choosing the appropriate means.

This activity is not necessarily a solitary activity. Foucault mentions the example of Seneca presenting the interactions and their difficulties in exercising the examination of conscience: “the fact of discussing in too lively a manner with fools who, anyways, one cannot persuade; or of vexing, by criticism, a friend whom one wished to help progress. Seneca is not satisfied with these conducts insofar as the means, to reach the ends that one must indeed set out, were not those that were required: it is good to want to correct one’s friends, whenever it is needed, but the reprimand, when not measured, injures instead of improving; it is good to persuade those who do not know, but one must choose those who are capable of being taught” (Foucault, 1984, p.78-79).

The third technique of the self is the task of reflexive thinking. Rather than merely a test designed to measure what one is capable of doing (i.e. the testing procedure), it should also be more that judging a mistake with respect to guidelines of conduct (i.e. examining the conscience); instead, it should take the form of a “constant filtering of representations”: examining them, controlling them, filtering them. Rather than an exercise conducted at regular intervals, it is a constant attitude that must be adopted with regard to the self. When a
representation comes to mind, the work of discrimination, of *diakrisis*, consists in applying the well-known stoic canon that draws a line between what things do not depend on one and what do: the former, since they are beyond one’s reach, one does not accept; one rejects them because they must not become the object of “desire” or “aversion”, of “attraction” or “repulsion”. Control is a test of power and a guarantee of freedom: a way to ensure ceaselessly that one does not bind oneself to what does not lie within one’s mastery (Foucault, 1984, p.79).

3 Methodology

Diagnosing and analysing the practices of the self require particular thought on the methodological device to implement. This implies a specific posture by the researcher, who necessarily adopts a position as an empathetic ally, seeking to attain a high degree of intimacy with the interviewees. Empathy is, here, an instrument for entering the world of the informer. However, this entry is not the ultimate goal: it is in turn an instrument to reach the social mechanisms, which in turn may be considered as instruments for producing new concepts (Kaufmann, 2001, p.53).

In addition to the empathy established with the persons interviewed, a deep knowledge of the organisation also constitutes a key factor in comprehending complex social phenomena. This knowledge has been obtained by blending several methods for gathering data in an approach that we may qualify as a funnel. Indeed, this study is based on a qualitative methodology that combines participant observation and two series of interviews. The participant observation corresponds to three months of immersion in the Luxury Goods Market division of the firm under study. Even though this observation took place over a period when the researcher had no aim to conduct the present research, the observations and analyses conducted at the time contribute to improving the quality and the reliability of the interpretations that may be made of the data subsequently collected. A first series of interviews was conducted with 13 persons in the organisation who work in the positions of management controllers and product managers. By the end of this first wave of interviews, it emerged that the marketing function occupies a central position in the organisation and that its members are especially inclined to implement techniques of care of the self. The core of material presented in this paper arises from the second wave of interviews conducted in an exclusively marketing population. These interviews have been conducted face-to-face or, occasionally, by telephone; lasting a relatively long but variable amount of time (from forty-five minutes to two and a half hours), they have all been recorded. Analysing the material collected has been carried out through a process of moving back and forth between the theory and the observations in the field.

Recordings of the interviews were transcribed and coded for NUDIST NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis programme. This programme allows interview material to be coded line-by-line under the categories determined by the researchers. Codes can be drawn up from three obvious sources: existing research questions, theory, and empirical data, but more importantly the interaction of these three elements during the carrying out of research (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005). This initial coding framework, drawn from theory, was broadly supplemented over the course of conducting the interviews and evolved still further during their analysis. Our intention was to identify from the issues emerging during interview what the categories for coding should be, rather than structuring the interview around a number of predefined categories. As Anderson-Gough et al. states, this is one way of addressing the issue of ‘dynamism’ in the research process (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005). At the end of the coding, three main themes clearly appeared to constitute the main objects of care of the self: the body, taste and language.
4 Care of the Self as a Control Tool in the Organisation

Beauty is one of the world leaders in cosmetics. An analysis of its annual report illustrates a strategy of differentiation based on innovation and of conquering new markets. To attain this goal, Beauty has opted for a matrix organisation: the group is divided into four divisions, each handling different distribution channels; and in each of the divisions two types of subsidiary have been created – the Products subsidiaries and the Markets subsidiaries. Products, also called “International” or development, design products and work on their global market positioning. Markets then purchase these products and are in charge of promoting and distributing them on the local markets.

No matter which organisational level is analysed, the marketing function always plays a central role. The relationships maintained between the product manager and her interlocutors may be represented in the form of a daisy in which marketing is the central disc of the flower head from which the petals protrude. Each product manager is free to blend the tasks required to accomplish her mission within the framework of a network of constraints that extend considerably further than the traditional hierarchical framework. The pace of activity in the marketing population is set entirely by meetings that bring in different levels of the hierarchy and where the product managers must present and test their products and analyse the results obtained. The core of the activity is in fact centred on past or future product launches. The efficiency of such an organisation results less from the finer details of how it is formed than from the way in which managers at the different levels have internalised the overarching goals. With this in mind, Beauty favours young people in its recruitment, since integrating constraining norms is easier for malleable individuals: “Putting pressure on marketing is easy because they are so young. They are starting their professional careers. We easily have a strong hold on them” (Group Manager, Hair Care). Likewise, “parachuting” – recruiting externally for positions of responsibility – is extremely rare: “the culture is so incredible that, at a certain level of management, people coming in from the outside cannot adapt to it. All the cases are failures”, says a Group Manager in Hair Care.

The paradox of management control, namely the combination of delegating autonomy and maintaining control, takes on its full meaning in the case of product managers at Beauty, as product managers perceive themselves as true “orchestral conductors” (Javier, Product Manager, Luxury Goods; Dialogue between Emma and Anna, Product Managers, Mass Market). The challenge of control is equally a challenge of socialisation insofar as the marketing function benefits from a particular status among the other functions, embodying a necessary rung on the career ladder for those wishing to reach top management. The standardisation of career paths enables the firm to maintain pressure on individuals and to watch their adhesion to and their gradual integration of norms: “within Luxury Goods, there is a mandatory career path. It’s very much like a school system. You may begin in a subsidiary, then you go to brand L, then you quickly have to become a product manager, then product

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3 The names of people, organisations, and products have been changed to guarantee the anonymity of the persons interviewed.

4 See Beauty’s Annual Report, 2002. Within 12 pages of text that include summaries by the directors of each of the cosmetics divisions, the term “growth areas” appears 20 times, “launches” 28 times, “gains in market share” 9 times, and “innovation” 13 times. The notion of innovation is sometimes vague, including both technical innovations stemming from research, and marketing innovations. These innovations result in numerous product launches. On this point, competitors mention the “strike force” of Beauty. By multiplying launches, Beauty succeeds in retaining and increasing its market shares, in realms where the consumer is particularly sensitive to marketing and the idea of new products.
line manager, then you go on to a subsidiary, then you come back to Inter [International Centre for Product Development] where you will get a higher position like in the marketing management. The high-flyer’s career path cannot be done in a subsidiary but at Inter. Other important positions are positions of responsibility for large geographic zones (Europe, the US), or travel retail (duty free”).

There exists within Beauty’s marketing function an implicit association between competencies and sexual identity. This association seems to echo certain common stereotypes in wider society, but they are also rationalised (a posteriori) by the constraints of organising work. Product development and the most “creative” tasks are often reserved for male homosexual collaborators: “Today, marketing development is in the hands of gays. Because you are in a culture that revolves around beauty and aesthetics, because you’re asked for an enormous commitment in terms of workload, because you are highly likely to be moved to International, it suits everyone that you don’t have any family life” (Group Manager, Hair Care). Conversely, sales responsibilities, particularly in the Markets subsidiaries, seem “naturally” to appeal to male heterosexual collaborators: “If you take a homosexual, he would be ill-placed in a subsidiary. Integration could go very baldly indeed. There’s a hyper salesman atmosphere. The code is that you have to have a super virile mind; you have to be a bull in a china shop because, if not, you won’t succeed in reaching your sales targets. That’s how you get respect. If you put him in International [in development], everything will be hunky-dory. Being gay is a plus. There are guys who have difficulty doing development because they are not seen as being sufficiently gay. Clearly, being gay, or being creative, is almost the same thing” (Product Manager, Luxury Goods). Lastly, observation of the organisation Beauty brings out a sexual division of tasks and responsibilities.

**Becoming a marketing director in France [for a woman] is impossible.** There are crazy work schedules and they will obviously put in a man because it’s a firm where there are huge numbers of girls at the bottom of the pyramid and, the higher you go, the more men there are. It’s a misogynist firm. **The woman is present but she’s a woman object. […]** In large meetings, your projects are at stake, and there are only men. So, you have to be sexy and chic. There is a whole army of girls, who are professional seductresses of the masculine top-management. (Group Manager, Hair Care)

The sales functions and top management are male-dominated realms. Within the marketing function, the creative competencies are associated with homosexual profiles whereas the majority of the teams of product managers and group managers are women. We focus on this segment of the marketing population to analyse the objects of care of the self that are the body, taste and language.

### 4.1 The Body

The body is one of the three targets of care of the self, along with taste and language, which we will further develop below. The persons interviewed all mention the importance of the body in the image conveyed by the individual at Beauty, and all spontaneously tie the corporal aspect of someone to her slimness, which suggests the significance of one facet of care of the self: disciplining the body.

Weight is really important. In the marketing department, I know of only one woman who is obese. She is a barrel. Every time I go to see her, I think to myself that’s incredible… That’s incredible… because it is so rare. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

In general, I have always been obsessed with physique, so I fitted in well. For example, it’s clear that I was recruited for brand A because I had a certain discipline that I inherited from classical dance. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)
This disciplined body is compelled to adopt various techniques of care of the self. The above quotation reflects the intertwining of the three techniques of taking care of the self that are identified by Foucault. The Luxury Product Manager is confronted with a testing procedure during her recruitment; she submits to examinations of her conscience by checking that she matched the Beauty model; and she performs a constant filtering of her representations by being constantly obsessed with physique.

From the moment they are recruited, individuals go through testing procedures that make them aware of the corporal model.

There are **no ugly girls** here. It’s the **cult of beauty**. At the interviews, I think that the ugly ones, the fat ones are discriminated against. (Group Manager, Hair Care)

Once past the first testing stage, care of the self as a control technique continues to operate through a more refined form of self-control. The body permanently becomes the object of an internalised control by members of the marketing function. Care of the self is deployed not by referral to a hierarchical authority but through one’s observations of others.

Girls are recruited based on their physical appearance. It is obvious. It sticks out a mile. You have to be well groomed. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

Individuals develop care of the self by gauging their conformity to a corporal model in a recurrent manner, in places that Goffman (1969) would designate under the title “settings of representation”: the canteen, the cafeteria, etc.

The first thing that surprised me when I arrived as a trainee – the whole department was attending the New Year celebration, **all brand managers looked like models**. (Ex-trainee L, Luxury Goods)

Situations of socialisation such as office parties and lunch in the canteen are still more tests that lead to examinations of conscience imposed by oneself and by others.

This winter, I had French fries every lunchtime, at the cafeteria, and someone systematically looked at my tray to point out **what I was about to eat**. “Wow! You must be hungry…. .” (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

The import of these situations is the awareness attained of the desirable corporal model at Beauty. The moment of testing and the moment of examining the conscience that we distinguish when presenting the concept of care of the self in the work of Foucault appears to be embedded.

The comparison carried out by the individual between herself and the other members of marketing is a fundamental stage in care of the self. However, care of the self would be incomplete without taking action after these instances of observing and becoming aware of the model. Care of the self as it relates to the body effectively implies the individual’s conforming to this model. Conforming the body is enacted through dieting and hair styling.

During my training session, when I was being recruited, **I lost ever such a lot of weight**, as I saw that all the girls in marketing were really slim. We look at each other so much...

(Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

**If you are in hair care, you’d better have a great hairstyle.** It’s logical, but **it is really the judgement of others**. Basically, **you can’t afford to get it wrong**. You have to have people **adhere to** you, because reputations are made very, very quickly. It really is the

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5 That is to say, control exercised by the individual over herself, following an appropriation of the norms and values of the group.
King’s court. You cannot make mistakes, because you can very quickly be moved away. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

Above, conforming is sanctioned by peer judgement. This echoes a fundamental characteristic of care of the self: the fact that it is a social practice. Simultaneously, the perception that the individual has of her image in other’s eyes counts for more than the reality of that image. Once again, herein lies the notion of examination of one’s conscience to which the individual submits by practising care of the self. Care of the self entails examinations of conscience to which one submits oneself, examinations during which one considers having made a mistake in relation to the group’s guidelines of conduct. Neither the model – the norm – nor even the sanction in the event of non-conformity to the norm is explicitly expressed formally. The individual becomes aware of the implicit model by observing others and by finding herself the object of observation.

Nobody actually tells you that you have to be careful of what you eat. But I can sense it. […] All the girls watch their weight. You can feel their eyes on you… I can’t stand that. We always have to be careful about how we look. We have to try to imagine how others see us. It is exhausting. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

Care of the self as it relates to the body relies on constant observation between individuals; this observation enables them to become aware of the implicit corporal model of the organisation. This observation is compounded by an action that consists in conforming to the norms and complying with the model by disciplining the body. The practices of care of the self with regard to the body therefore stem from constant self-control by the individual with respect to an implicit model. This care of the self develops through tests and examinations of conscience. Care of the self as an organisational control tool is based on the immersion of the individual in a social group. It is this immersion that triggers the act of observation and the feeling of being observed, the key to care of the self as a control tool of an organisation.

4.2 TASTE

Like the body, taste is one of the targets of care of the self. One’s look is fundamental at Beauty. Clothing, make-up, and hair styling are not secondary considerations. One’s whole appearance must be carefully thought out. Indeed, every detail must be thought out. As a product manager in luxury goods emphasizes, “you must have an opinion about your clothes. […] You dress up to go to work”.

The taste that is manifest in clothing and accessories is part of the work of the marketers, as shown in the quotation below.

You can’t wear a perfume that is different from the one you work on. The reps will probably notice. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

Taste as an object of care of the self relates to the products on which marketers work and which they therefore have to represent. With taste, a new characteristic of care of the self in the organisation emerges: the fact that it serves as not only a control tool but also a work tool.

Care for the self with respect to taste has several similarities with care for the self with regard to the body. As with the latter, the observation of others is fundamental. Observing appearance is essential since it signals the objects of care of the self.

Someone is capable of taking your jacket off, just to see the label. This is a definite sign that you are being watched. (Product Manager, Hair Care)
Observation is not simply designed to make one aware of the model but it is deployed in a context of representation (Goffman, 1969) and of being on show, and is underpinned by a simulacra of the natural.

In the canteen, you’ve got a kind of aisle between the tables… it’s like a catwalk. Girls model and pretend not to be conscious of being watched as they walk. They just swing their hips and look straight ahead… (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

Consecutively, observing is a fundamental means of checking one’s own conformity to the model and the change in this conformity.

In the coffee-room, in the morning, everybody observes each other. You dress up to go to work. Everybody goes to the coffee-room: it’s a ritual. First thing in the morning, people come and check their popularity. When I arrived, I realised that while I was talking to my boss, instead of listening to me, she was watching people in the coffee-room. She was checking to see if she was being looked at… And if everybody had seen how beautiful she was, how nice her make up was… the King’s court! (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

Observing others is part of the daily work of everyone in marketing and is at the same time a means of constructing oneself and of understanding the tacit codes. This observing and the feeling of being observed leads to one becoming aware of the model of taste before conforming to this model. The model of taste, like the corporal model, does not need to be verbalised. It is enough to see it in order to understand it, implement it, and diffuse it, contrary to a classical strategic message (slogan, values) that must be carefully formulated and then diffused throughout the hierarchical line.

How do you become aware of the model?

You can see it. If you see a well-dressed girl going by, you know that she is from head office. You sense it. You see it every morning. When I was in the subsidiaries, I did not wear make up. But here, within two or three months, that was over. At the moment, we have a product manager who is not groomed. She has just come from the subsidiary. She does not make any effort. You see it immediately in the environment. It is noticed. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

Care of the self with regard to taste does, however, provide some new elements in understanding the concept. The object of taste implies another conformity in contrast to care of the corporal self. With taste, the product and the brand appear as fundamental factors in care of the self at Beauty. It is conformity to a product or to a brand that is sought after (does the individual correctly embody the brand?), whereas care of the self with respect to the body seeks conformity to a more general model (the top model, the slim woman)6.

To show one’s adhesion to the new perfume “V” that we had just launched, the director of half of the luxury brands at Beauty dressed all the time on the V brand. Everyone knew that it was a strong sign of her preference in relation to the other brands. Basically, she was saying to us: “I totally adhere to the creator and you are all outdated.”

Furthermore, the testing procedures are carried out in a different framework. With care of the corporal self, these took place during informal moments (office parties, lunch in the canteen). With care of the self with respect to taste, testing procedures correspond to major organisational events such as performance appraisals or meetings.

You know who is going to the monthly department meeting because you have the impression that it is a gala evening. The first time, I was fascinated. (Product Manager, Hair Care)

6 We may inquire about the origins of the models of the body and of taste. We will return to this question further on in the paper by emphasizing that these models come from the consumer society.
Moreover, we observe that during these tests, the expression of conformity or non-conformity to the model of taste is much more explicit than the judgement of an individual’s conformity to the corporal model. Here, the verdict is formulated by the hierarchy.

In this meeting to present products to the salesmen, a director looked at my shoes and said to my boss: “she’s ready for Inter” [Inter: products or development on an International scale, considered the royal road] (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

During the professional appraisals, they tell you if you are badly dressed. It happens to a lot of people. “You do not live and breathe the brand enough, you are not sufficiently within the codes of the brand”. […] This marks your bosses. At a given moment, they say to themselves, “are you in the brand or not?” depending on how you appear, how you dress. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

It is vital to embody one’s brand, which should lead to a differentiation. Simultaneously, we notice that conforming to the model of taste inspired by fashion leads individuals to a certain uniformisation.

At HQ, you are obliged to have a certain look. There is a dress code. In Beauty, it’s the glossy magazine style: a lovely girl. You don’t have your own style, that’s for other firms. Here, all the girls look alike. They wear certain fashionable brands. You have to be sexy, pretty and slim. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

An interviewee mentions the fact that, when a girl sets the tone with an accessory or an item of clothing that is pleasing, everyone copies her. Several reasons lead us to believe that care of the self with respect to taste entails wearing a uniform:

- Everyone has more or less the same outfit because they are following fashion and trends and because the girls copy each other.
- These are veritable work outfits (that translate the expertise of the individual in her domain, are a criterion of appraisal if not of career advancement, and a tool for socialising and for constructing a professional network).

The women of Beauty do wear a uniform. Even though it is very sophisticated, even though it is a tool for demarcation, it has characteristics similar to a workman’s overalls or a businessman’s grey suit. The members of Beauty are confronted with a paradox in managing their appearances: they must stand out in order to show their adhesion to a product and, at the same time, comply with the codes of fashion that tend to standardise their appearance.

Care of the self with respect to taste embodies a paradoxical requirement of the organisation: the simultaneous search for uniformisation and differentiation of its members. On the one hand, the Beauty woman in marketing must represent a fashionable consumer. This implies her following the trends dictated by magazines and some of her avant-garde colleagues, hence the uniformisation of appearances. On the other hand, the marketer is also supposed to represent her brand and therefore to express its uniqueness through her appearance. At Beauty, they postulate that an individual who does not sufficiently embody her product will not know how to sell it to the consumer. It is through testing procedures corresponding to major formal moments in the organisational cycle (monthly meetings, appraisals, etc.) that the marketers become aware of the link that is made between the model of taste and their performance. During these tests, the coherence between their choices of clothing and the image of the product on which they are working is tested. As a result, this leads marketers to employ care of the self as a work tool.

Finally, care of the self with respect to taste entails the wearing of a uniform, namely work clothing that is common to all. Marketers need to wear a specific outfit to show that they are performing their work correctly. This outfit is standardised through the compliance with the diktats of fashion.
4.3 Language

Although there is no “jargon specific to Beauty”, in the words of a group manager in hair care, choosing one’s words and oral expression overall are the key elements for success in the organisation, making language another object of care of the self.

You are judged on the hard-hitting words that you find to talk about your brand. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

To succeed in marketing at Beauty, you have to know how to take the public stage.

What counts are your supports, as in any political system. What you do is vaguely known, but nothing is written down and nobody remembers; what counts are the stories that are told. For instance, if they want to move you to a position, they may amplify your influence on a past project. (Group Manager, Hair Care)

Meetings represent a major testing procedure enabling one to test the quality of care of the self as seen in language. This care of the self takes two forms: the capacity to develop an ambivalent discourse; and the capacity to incite favourable gossip on the grapevine about one’s projects. During meetings, the marketer must play a complex game where her discourse must “leave its mark” and persuade, whilst remaining ambiguous enough to allow opposing interpretations. Here, the realms of appearance and of marketing reign supreme. The techniques used to persuade consumers are the same ones used to persuade peers and the hierarchy.

You are in a hyper political firm where a spade is not called a spade. In a meeting, from a slide, you must be able to argue anything and its opposite. For example, you’ll put down a figure and depending on the mood of the meeting, you’ll say whether that figure is bad or very good. You never put a problem-defining title on a slide. That’s part of the codes. During meetings, I’ve seen bosses change their minds like the wind changing direction. (Group Manager, Hair Care)

Since the hierarchical superior is also subject to this imperative of ambivalence as the previous quotation shows, the individual cannot count on her to find support for her project in case the “wind is against her”. She therefore stands alone in the test.

To test her team, the manager is used to letting it jump in the deep end without a lifebelt. She lets it sink, and then gradually fishes it out of the water. […] It’s a very individualistic firm. (Group Manager, Hair Care)

As a result, marketers need to mobilise other resources within the organisation. To this end, they will build up a grapevine. The goal will be to model the representations of the other members of the organisation. This activity entails lobbying and requires soliciting the attention and adhesion of a maximum number of people.

You have a system for selling projects that is totally transversal. Whatever the divisions, the way of selling to your hierarchy a shampoo that you want to launch tomorrow is completely set in norms. It’s a Beauty system for selling your ideas internally, with identical codes from one division to another. These codes are: listening a lot before speaking at the outset, networking above all else, giving before receiving, building a team, pre-selling your project on the grapevine, before going into meetings. You hammer out your meeting before doing it. It’s very political, like a campaign. (Group Manager, Hair Care)

This last consideration leads us to underscore the importance of the second facet of care of the self with regard to language: the capacity to incite favourable gossip on the grapevine about one’s projects.
It is the sum total of oral things that move in the direction of your project that enables it to take form. (Group Manager, Hair Care)

Individuals realise that the grapevine is a key element to work on because it determines not only whether a project is accepted or rejected during a meeting, but also future career advancement.

You are identified as a high flier when you have succeeded in selling your project, when there is a consensus about you. It is said that your visual is beautiful, that your campaign is successful. It creates a buzz and it comes back to you. It makes a stir. You realise that people are talking about you and your project when they don’t even know you. A lot goes through the “grapevine”. (Group Manager, Hair Care).

The network, or grapevine, which the individual is able to create to find support to complement support from the hierarchy, is an essential means of spreading gossip. By developing one’s grapevine, one optimises the potential impact and the scope of gossip. If you don’t have a network, the others move forward more quickly. Because you must be co-opted by others, they have to adhere to what you say. You have to be talked about and liked. Anyone who doesn’t do this loses 90% of his work. (Group Manager, Luxury Goods)

The grapevine is not solely a vector for diffusing gossip; it also has a surveillance function with regard to competing projects. Moreover, it constitutes a means of testing one’s project in order to anticipate the reactions of those who will assess it.

Your network is personal to you. You’re the one who builds it for yourself. It is the people you rub shoulders with and who support you. These are the people who will alert you, to whom you’ll be able to ask questions. You phone them for information. Anyone who does not have a network cannot work. (Group Manager, Luxury Goods)

Language appears as a third object of care of the self in the organisation. It refers to the way of expressing oneself and to the words chosen by the marketers. Care of the self with respect to language takes two forms: the capacity to develop an ambivalent discourse and the capacity to provoke favourable gossip on the grapevine about one’s projects. The grapevine that the individual is able to create is an essential means of spreading gossip. By developing it, the marketer ensures the potential impact and scope of gossip.

The Beauty case study has therefore enabled us to identify several practices of care of the self. The first consists in disciplining one’s body; the second deals with working knowledgeably on one’s “look”, whereby individuals seek to be at the cutting edge of fashion and must represent their product; and finally, the third relates to one’s language and the control exerted as much over how messages are conveyed as over how they are formulated, being both necessarily ambiguous and powerful. The following section sheds light on the mechanisms that explain how care of the self can become an organisational control tool.

5 The Mechanisms of Transforming Care of the Self into a Control Technique

We are capable of manufacturing beauty products because we are all obsessed with beauty. In fact, you can see that we are obsessed with our look. If you are not obsessed with that, people will say “she doesn’t have any taste”, so “she’s not going to know how to make a good product”. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)
The mechanisms of transforming care of the self into a control technique rely on a blurring of the lines between the figures of the employee and the consumer individual. In this system, the individual’s satisfaction is based on the diffusion of an illusion of uniqueness and of freedom.

5.1 BLURRING EMPLOYEE AND CONSUMER INDIVIDUAL

The case study of Beauty allows us to envisage care of the self as a control tool in the organisation. This care of the self relates to three objects: the body, taste, and language. We may inquire as to why, in this organisation, care of the self relates specifically to these three objects.

Beauty’s ultimate purpose is to nourish a consumer society by meeting its needs whilst creating new ones. This organisation judges only those employees who have internalised the trends of the consumer society as performing well. Indeed, according to Beauty, this is the necessary condition for employees to be able to find the solutions to fuel this society. In this respect, Beauty is a mirror of its target, the consumer society. The organisation employs care of the self as an organisational control tool by leaning on the aspirations of the consumer individuals. In fact, the body, taste and language are the central objects of care of the self in the consumer society. The works of Baudrillard constitute a relevant reference for theorising about the consumer society and more particularly about fashion in our societies (Lipovetsky, 1987, p.201). In particular, they enable us to understand the correspondences between the objects of care of the self at Beauty and the pillars of the consumer society.

5.1.1 Beauty as an Imperative of the Consumer Society

In the firm, you are constantly playing a role. You represent your product. We are the embodiment of beauty. It is the company’s vocation. Beauty is the firm that creates products to beautify women. This is what differentiates Beauty from other marketing companies.

Baudrillard shows that beauty has become an absolute imperative in the consumer society: “Being beautiful is no longer an effect of nature nor a surplus of moral qualities. It is THE fundamental, imperative quality of those women who care for their faces and their figures as they do their souls” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.207). This beauty imperative at Beauty, which is materialised in the disciplining of women’s bodies, echoes the theme’s omnipresence in the consumer society. “The all-pervading presence [of the body] (and specifically of the female body) in advertising, fashion and mass culture – the cult of hygiene, dieting, and therapies which surround it, the obsession with youth, with elegance, with virility/femininity, the treatments, the diets, the sacrificial practices that are entailed” make the body the most beautiful, the most precious, and the most outstanding of all that is in the “panoply of consumption” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.200). It is actually by working on one’s body that one may claim to reach an objective of beauty that is based on the diktat of slimness. “This imperative beauty […] inscribed across the forehead of the consumer society as the right and the duty of everyone […] is indissociable from slimness” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.221). The body thus becomes an object of care of the self within the framework of the consumer society. “Modern woman is both the guardian and the manager of her own body; she takes care to keep it beautiful and competitive” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.220). Care of the self entails disciplining this body and working on its appearance: “It is important that the body, far from being denied or ignored, be deliberately invested” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.200). Analysing an article taken from Elle, Baudrillard (1970, p.202) explicitly states this imposed investment: “if you do not do your bodily devotions, if you sin by omission, you will be punished. Everything that you suffer from is due to your guilty irresponsibility towards yourself (your own salvation)".
The fact that care of the self with regard to the body focuses on the exterior, a representation of the self in relation to a group, shows that it is not a matter of introspection but a matter of a social practice and is, in fact, a potential control tool. “Besides this latent terrorism that speaks out in Elle, most notably to women, what is interesting is the suggestion to turn inwards into your own body and to invest it narcissistically from the “inside”, by no means in order to know it in depth, but instead, in line with a totally fetishist and exhibitionist rational, in order to make it, on the outside, an object that is smoother, more perfect, and more functional” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.202).

Being beautiful in a consumer society implies not only an asceticism of the body but also an unbridled consumption of objects to enhance it. “[Woman] can only be slim and lean, […] she is even rather thin and skinny in the profiles of top models and cover girls, who are both the negation of the flesh and the exaltation of fashion” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.221). Therefore, taste as we have defined it (materialised in the choices of appearance) is, like the body, an object of consumption. Once again, the organisation Beauty employs care of the self with respect to taste as an organisational control tool by leaning on the desire of its members to be at the cutting edge of fashion, but it also contributes to fuelling this desire.

You are constantly in the system. In our profession, we are constantly looking at magazines. You work for that. You sharpen your eye. For example, you know what the trends in colours are and you cannot pretend not to know. It creates desire in you. You obviously want to appropriate it for yourself. It’s only natural. You’re being pushed but you also want to be. (Product Manager, Luxury Goods)

This analysis entices us to go beyond the interpretations proposed by Du Gay with regard to the relationship between the consumer and the employee. Du Gay shows how the members of a firm become “slaves to customers’ desires” (1996, p.159). At Beauty, the process is more insidious because the employee is slave to herself. Indeed, the marketing employee must represent and embody the consumer (the female customer or the Beauty woman type). Furthermore, to increase her knowledge of the competition, of the trends, etc., the marketing employee must consume (magazines, luxury goods, etc.) Thus, employee and consumer individual are now but one and the same.

5.1.2 Language, the Tool of Persuasion Serving the Consumer Society

As with the body and taste, language constitutes an object of the consumer society. Baudrillard spells out how language may be consumed. “From the moment that language, instead of being a vehicle of meaning, […] becomes a material of exchange, to be used internally in the group or the class – its real function becoming, behind the alibi of the message, a function of connivance and recognition, from the moment when, instead of conveying meaning, it conveys itself as a password […] in a process of group tautology (the group talking to itself), then it is the object of fetish consumption” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.193). At Beauty, it is gossip on the grapevine, a declension of language, which serves as the material of exchange to be used by the group.

Language is not only an object but also a medium for developing this consumer society. Instrumentalising language to serve the consumer society is materialised in the art of advertising. Advertising “consists above all in inventing persuasive pitches that are neither true nor false. […] The truth is that advertising is beyond the true and the false, just as fashion is beyond the beautiful and the ugly; as a modern object, in its function as a sign, it is beyond the useful and the useless. […] Like all myths and magic words, advertising is founded on another type of verification – that of the self-fulfilling prophecy” (Boorstin in Baudrillard, 1970, p.197). Language in the consumer society is not limited to being the vehicle for its
principles and its values; it constitutes its very own truth: “Advertising is a prophetic statement [...] which does not assume any previous truth (that of the value of using the object), but subsequent confirmation by the prophetic reality of the sign it emits. Therein lies its mode of efficiency. It makes the object into a pseudo-event that will become the real event in daily life through the consumer’s adhering to its discourse. [...] The mode of the self-fulfilling prophecy is the tautological mode” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.197-199). This conception of language echoes the versatile use that is made of it at Beauty. We saw that, in meetings, a statement must mean everything and its opposite; what is important is not whether it is true but whether it is convincing. Marketers may be likened to advertising agents, and participants in meetings to consumers. Once again, Beauty sees itself as the mirror of the consumer society that it is seeking to seduce. Care of the self as a control tool once again relies on blurring the lines between the employee and the consumer individual.

5.2 THE ILLUSION OF UNIQUENESS AND THE ILLUSION OF FREEDOM

Both the consumer society and the modern organisation are constructed around the notion of the individual. This notion of the individual echoes uniqueness and freedom, which are both illusory. “Our societies have entered the age of unlimited potentialities: nothing must limit this new aspiration, this strange passion of being only oneself, but it is not because things are more ‘personal’ that they are less social” (Ehrenberg, 2002, p.86-96).

Uniqueness is boiled down to its congruous portion because the mechanism of consumption inevitably leads to a standardisation. We then came back to what Baudrillard calls the “dialectic of conformism and originality”: “There is, first of all, a structural rationale of differentiation, which produces individuals as ‘personalised’, meaning being different one from the others, but in line with a code to which, in the very act of being unique, they conform. [...] Conformity is not the equalisation of statuses, the conscious homogenising of the group (each individual aligning himself with the others); it is the fact of having the same code in common, of sharing the same signs which make them different all together, from another such group” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.109).

By analysing care of the self with regard to fashion at Beauty, we identify a paradox according to which marketers must stand out in their choices of appearance in order to show their adhesion to a product whilst, at the same time, also comply with the codes of fashion that tend to standardise their appearances. Baudrillard shows that there is no question of a paradox: differentiation never ceases to be a collective function of the fact of specific narcissism that the consumer society causes in the individual. Standardising bodies and appearances is actually a key to the development of the textile industry (Jeacle, 2003, 2006).

This process is diffused at the level of each individual without ceasing to be a collective function, which explains why it does not contradict conformism at all. On the contrary, “the individual’s narcissism in a consumer society is not the enjoyment of uniqueness; it is a refraction of collective traits” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.137).

Uniformisation, the conformity expected of individuals, raises the question of the individual’s freedom in a consumer society: “this narcissistic reinvestment, orchestrated as a mystic of liberation and fulfilment, is in fact always simultaneously an effective, competitive and economical investment in style. The body is thus ‘re-appropriated’ from the outset in line with ‘capitalist’ goals: in other words, if it is invested, it is so in order to provide returns. This body is not re-appropriated according to the autonomous aims of the subject [...] but according to a constraint of instrumentality directly indexed on the code and the norms of a society of production and of directed consumption” (Baudrillard, 1970, p.202).

At Beauty, this pseudo-freedom is reflected both in the choices of appearance, where individuals are constrained to represent their product and no other, and also in the conduct of
their projects and their careers, where decision-making, based on volatile gossip, is out of their hands.

6 Conclusion

Our paper shows how care of the self can become a control tool developed and maintained by the individual that serves the organisation. This posture is unusual because, at first glance, it seems that care of the self, as “an undertaking of wisdom”, cannot be imagined according to any rationale other than the freedom to be oneself: care of the self cannot be “ordered or even imposed by a management structure” (Gros, forthcoming). If care of the self is used as a control tool at Beauty, it is because of the blurring that takes place between the employee and the consumer individual. Beauty relies on the personal aspirations of individuals who are imbied with the consumer society, and transforms them into objects of control. We have shown here that if care of the self cannot be imposed on the individual, “the freedom to be oneself” may nonetheless be instrumentalised and transformed as a support for governing individuals in the organisation. Our study therefore invites us to envisage care of the self as a managerial practice that underpins a subjectification of the individual in the firm.

In this sense, this paper ascribes to a lineage of Foucauldian research in the management sciences that sets out to go beyond accounting for control modes and tools as merely disciplinary instruments. In this paper, we do not really focus on management practices as surveillance tools but more on management practices as modes of subjectification leading to self-control by individuals. We have seen that practices of care of the self cannot be limited to practices of disciplining. This study therefore confirms that if “surveillance may be considered as a technique for governing the firm, […] governing the firm is not limited to techniques of disciplining.” (Pezet, 2004).

Moreover, our study proposes another way of reading and applying Foucauldian thought by moving away from the study of government in the firm towards studying the government of the individual by himself. We have emphasized that the organisation Beauty relies on the forms of subjectification imposed on the individual by the consumer society (a model of beauty, the diktat of fashion and slimness) to exercise control over the individual. It is this use of techniques of governing at the level of society as techniques of managerial government that allows the firm to move away from imposed government towards a government of the subject by himself. If care of the self as a control tool were not used, we would not end with this subjectification of the individual developed by the self rather than imposed from the outside. Our project, which consists in putting into perspective a Foucauldian concept (care of the self) with respect to Baudrillard’s analyses of the position of the individual in the consumer society, finally enables us to reconcile Foucauldian research dealing with disciplinary mechanisms with those dealing with constituting the subject and governing the self.

One criticism that may be levelled at this research paper is the fact of having chosen an empirical viewpoint (the marketing function within a firm dedicated to beauty) that can only go in the direction of the theoretical analysis of care of the self. Indeed, it may seem obvious that, in an organisation whose mission is “women’s beauty”, care of the self as a control tool relies on the founding principles of the consumer society. The objects of care of the self would undoubtedly differ in other sectors of activity. This limit seems to weigh on all monographic research. In our opinion, this is in fact a traditional criticism levelled at qualitative studies (whether monographic or not) with regard to their weak power to
generalise findings. With respect to this criticism, we believe it is important to underline that the main interest of this research does not lie in any empirical generalisation (the reproducibility of findings), but more in the potential transferability of its findings to analysis of other organisational situations, one of the fundamental criteria of validity for qualitative research according to Langley (1999). On this point, it seems to us that this study proposes axes of analysis that could decipher in a relevant way other domains where organisations are both invested by and interested in the mechanisms of the consumer society. Notably, we are thinking about the sports industry where there is an increasing blurring of the lines between sport, money and branding. We are also thinking about the mass media with its reality TV programmes and its successful singers created from scratch to embody the cares of a whole generation of individuals and to sell a wide range of merchandising products.

Analysing other organisational situations using care of the self as a control tool is one research path that deserves further development; focusing on the effects of care of the self is another. In this paper, we have focused on shedding light on the way the mechanisms of care of the self work as a control tool. We have not fully dealt with its effects, which is the subject of another research paper in progress. At an individual level, care of the self as a control tool may result in various possible situations ranging from adhesion to a brand and an organization, to cynicism (Fleming and Spicer, 2003) and even self-exclusion whenever individuals can no longer bear the corporal discipline and financial commitment they are compelled to incur and the fact that they are reduced to objects. At the organisational level, we may assume that care of the self as a control tool will entail the creation of career-types (that are sexually structured, as suggested at the beginning of this article), a preference for individual work over teamwork, and a lack of innovation caused by risk-aversion.

7 Bibliography


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