

3 Niche Marketing and the Production of Flexible Bodies

It was a beautiful spring day in 1996, nearly four years after Gerber had bought Alima. I stood in line outside the factory along with a crowd of Alima-Gerber employees and distributors, waiting to board the bus that would take us to an elegant theater in downtown Rzeszów. The AG employees—all white-collar workers from the office building—and I fidgeted and whispered to one another nervously. This was show time: we were about to launch the product that would make or break Alima-Gerber.

Once seated in the auditorium, we listened to the Polish head of the marketing division as he proudly displayed the firm's new line of fruit juices. Surprisingly, the bright, colorful drinks in large glass bottles with a jazzy black label were not for babies. "Frugo!" announced the marketer, who showed us that the brand came in four colors, not flavors. He explained that red, orange, green, and yellow Frugo juices were destined to be the hit product of the year: they were developed on the basis of *niche marketing*, a form of marketing that had never been used in Poland before. "A product for everybody is a product for nobody. Nobody identifies with it," he said. "That's why Frugo is aimed especially at youth. Frugo will be a part of the young world like no other brand. It will be a fragment of their culture."

The lights dimmed, and we sat anxiously as a giant movie screen dropped from the ceiling. All at once, there was an explosion of noise and color. "Frugo!" intoned a disembodied voice speaking Polish. Then, set against a dynamic background of color and noise, a young kid dressed like a Los Angeles gang member appeared, wearing fashionably baggy clothes and spray painting graffiti. In the background, a voice whispered the Frugo slogan, "Frugo without boundaries" (*Frugo bez ograniczeń*). Suddenly, there was a rupture: the commercial became quiet, and the scene jump-cut to a mo-

notonous, drab setting. In each of the four versions of the commercial, the ad presented a stereotypical adult, fat and unmoving, who began to speak. In the commercial for red Frugo, for example, the hated adult was a fat woman in black clothes and a beret, sitting against a red background. She said, aggressively, "Fruit? They want fruit? When I was young, we often lacked *beets!* And they're asking for fruit!" In the orange ad, a dumpy older woman with dyed orange hair and long orange fingernails sat at a table decorated with fussy lace doilies. She said, tremulously, "Fruit? Fruit is good for decorating tables. But of course, plastic fruit can be aesthetic, too."

In all of the ads, as soon as the repellent adult finished speaking, the scene began to expand like a bubble. As it became wider and shorter, the audience saw a Frugo bottle, with a hand on it, pushing down on the scene until it exploded. The hand belonged to the main character, the cool kid, who was using the bottle to squash and rupture the hated adults and their whole settings. The loud drum music resumed, the bright colors began wheeling around, and the audience saw the cool kid spray painting out of view of the camera. The ads ended with a recitation of the product's punnish slogan, "So, drink up!"—or, as it was in Polish, "*No, to Frugo!*"

The audience roared with delight, and the employees grinned with a mixture of enthusiasm and relief. The commercials were a hit with the distributors, which boded well for their reception by a wider Polish audience. I had a difficult time participating in the festivity, though. What did these ads mean? Why did everyone squeal with laughter when the dumpy adults appeared? What was so funny about these commercials, anyway? After employees explained to me the symbolism of the ads, I soon began to notice similar images in other places: in the sartorial habits of Polish managers, in the talk of American managers, and, accompanied by biting commentary, in discussions on the shop floor. These images of movement and stasis, flexibility and rigidity, age and youth, resonated strongly with employees as well as consumers.

What I came to discover was while niche marketing is ostensibly about structuring consumer markets by identifying and proposing new social identities, it also helps commodify labor and segment labor markets by constituting new social identities and reconfiguring old ones. The images deployed so brilliantly and humorously in the Frugo ads were part of a larger process in which some people were categorized as "flexible," "rational," and "individualist," while others were being labeled "passive," "collectivist," and "rigid," hence a priori incapable of playing a leading role in the economic "transition." Niche marketing linked marketization and personhood not only to transform the economy from one constrained by supply to one con-

strained by demand but also to reconstruct desire, identity, class, and occupation.

Making Postsocialist Niche Markets: The Birth of a Strategy

The general atmosphere of nervousness and tension among employees at the Frugo launch was easily understandable. Gerber executives assuaged employees' fears during privatization in 1992 by painting a picture of a prosperous future. They promised that the new Alima-Gerber would be the center of Gerber's expansion efforts in European markets. They said Alima's employees would all be making good salaries while making food for Russian, Czech, Hungarian, French, and maybe even Middle Eastern babies. But by 1996, it was clear that the situation was not as rosy as both Alima and Gerber had hoped. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic downturn across the Eastern Bloc, exports had dropped dramatically. The Polish baby food market was not expanding as quickly as AG hoped, and the machines that Gerber had paid so dearly to move into AG's baby food division sat idle roughly half of the time, not even counting nights and weekends.¹

The factory was covering costs by selling Bobo Frut domestically, but sales were dropping. The firm had no other products to take up capacity on the line. People were being laid off, jobs were being outsourced, and salaries were not keeping pace with rampant inflation. People on the production floor and in the office building were worried; the threat of unemployment hung over their heads. Employees waited and watched to find out how Sandoz would respond to AG's travails, fearful that the pharmaceutical giant might decide simply to shut the company down.

In response to this dilemma, AG devised another strategy. While growth in the baby food market was slow, growth in the beverage market was skyrocketing. Poles consumed 197 percent more juice in 1995 than in 1992. Although 1995 per capita consumption had reached 7.9 liters, AG officials believed that as Poles obtained more disposable income, their consumption could reach average Western European levels (15 liters per capita per year) or even German levels (38 liters per capita).² AG had long experience in making juices for children. The juice market for small children, however, had low growth potential because AG already controlled about 80 percent of the market. The beverage market for adults was crowded and highly competitive. So, instead of focusing on either young children or adults, AG decided to attempt to resegment the domestic market in order to sell a new

product. Frugo, the new juice drink, was aimed at thirteen- to eighteen-year-olds—the age group with the lowest per capita consumption of juices.

The Frugo strategy was a classic use of niche marketing. Marketers define a specific group or “target market,” list the qualities of the group's members and outline their particular needs, and then develop and advertise a product that meets those specific needs. Often, this group is carved out of an existing market. In this way, a new social group—perhaps one that heretofore had not recognized itself or had not been recognized as having special “needs”—is created through advertising and marketing strategies. As anthropologist Sidney Mintz points out in reference to American advertising strategies,

TV treatment of foods is intended to encourage consumption. As such, it is differentiated in order to reach many different (and segmented, but sometimes overlapping) populations, such as little boys and girls, adolescent males and females, adult singles, both male and female, families eating out, couples eating out . . . and so on. This design aims at reaching the widest possible variety of audiences, each on its own terms, but also leaving room for continuous redifferentiation by subdivision (for instance black male basketball players and white male basketball players) . . . in order to perpetuate the sensation of innovation and of participatory membership upon which heightened consumption battens.

Making the product “right” for the consumer requires continuous redefinition and division of the groups in which he, as an individual consumer, defines himself. The deliberate postulation of new groups—often divisions between already familiar categories, as “pre-teens,” were created between “teenagers” and younger children—helps to impart reality to what are supposedly new needs (Mintz 1982, 158; see also Schrum 1998).

In essence, marketers deliberately fragment the market into smaller segments by using two techniques: contrived product differentiation and contrived social differentiation (Samuelson 1976; Dickson and Ginter 1987). Niche marketing is a strategy commonly pursued by post-Fordist capitalist industries throughout the world. Flexible production systems rest on the idea of small-batch production for quickly changing niche markets (Harvey 1989, 156). In contrast to the Fordist era, when stable product lines were designed for mass markets, competition in the post-Fordist era depends on specialized and differentiated products and a rapid rate of change in production design and product mix (Schoenberger 1988, 252; Piore and Sabel 1984).

As common as these techniques have become in the capitalist world, the niche marketing strategies that AG pursued were almost completely new in Poland. Socialism was based on the Fordist idea of mass consumption: economies of scale could be obtained by consolidating producers and product lines. Because of socialism's focus on mass production, because of the chronic shortages that plagued the economy, and because of the underground exchanges of gifts and favors, there were no niche markets. Everyone wanted everything. Even if one did not have a child, for example, Bobo Frut was a valuable commodity because it could be traded for something else through the extensive networks of personal connections that typified state socialism.

True, the socialist state went to great lengths to differentiate groups of people (mothers, children, pensioners, and so on) and to give them access to valued goods. Socialist states created different documents (e.g., the "child health book," which proved one had a child) and different purchase points (e.g., stores for party members) to classify groups of people by age, gender, occupation, class status, ethnicity, and party membership. These classifications gave some people access to particular kinds or quantities of goods that others could not get. Anderson (1996) calls these differentiations "citizenship regimes." The regimes determined not only what goods one could get, but by reifying differences with documents and privileges, they also determined *what kind of citizen one was*. Citizenship regimes are not the same as niche markets, however. Citizenship regimes are necessary only when desire is generalized—when everybody wants everything, and a product for everybody is a product for anybody:

Socialism . . . which rested not on devising infinite kinds of things to sell people but on claiming to meet people's basic needs, had a very unadorned definition of them—in keeping with socialist egalitarianism. . . . As long as the food offered was edible or the clothes available covered you and kept you warm, that should be sufficient. If you had trouble finding even these, that just meant you weren't looking hard enough. No planner presumed to investigate what kinds of goods people wanted, or worked to name new needs for newly created products and newly developed markets. (Verdery 1996, 28)

Niche markets, in contrast, are about creating groups with specialized desire and products that precisely match the minute differences in those groups' wants. In this system, products that don't meet specialized wants don't sell—and that means a product for everybody is a product for nobody. Niche marketing therefore contributes to the transformation of the supply-

constrained economy into a demand-constrained one. More important, it is part of the restructuring of desire and social personhood. Now a consumer has to be a particular sort to want a certain product—or, perhaps, finds that wanting a certain product is enough to become a particular kind of person.

The introduction of niche marketing meant that AG was not only discovering "the market," it was learning to create and make use of multiple *markets* that could be resegmented and redefined in order to boost consumption via the practice of *marketing*. It was precisely socialism's inattention to consumption and the dearth of technologies, habits, and traditions in that domain that made it so possible and so fruitful to import Western marketing techniques. Alima-Gerber was one of the first companies in Poland to aim a product at a narrowly defined target market. This marked a major change in the way Polish enterprises approached markets. Rather than being fixed entities that passively absorbed product, markets and consumers became objects that could be subjected to technologies of government; they could be studied, classified, created, destroyed, and manipulated.

Both AG's Polish advertising and marketing staff and the staff of Grey and Associates, the New York-based advertising agency hired for the Frugo campaign, described the genesis of the Frugo strategy as if there were a well-defined group with an unfulfilled need. However, it was not at all clear that either the group or the need existed prior to the product. That was why the advertisements had to define the "teen" target group as a distinct social entity in order to sell the product (see also Schrum 1998, 158).³ Making teens distinct from babies and toddlers was easily done. AG removed all traces of the Gerber name from the product, with the exception of the company name and address, in small type on the back of the label. When the product was put in stores, AG ensured that it was placed on shelves next to soft drinks and juices for adults rather than on the Gerber racks.

Making teens distinct from adults was a more difficult problem. The Frugo advertisements did this by contrasting not only socialist and capitalist lifeworlds but also socialist and capitalist persons. On the one hand, the adult lifeworld was a stereotype of the socialist era. The first adult in the commercials—the woman set against a red background who complained that youngsters didn't know about beet shortages—represented the Party, with its emphasis on the nobility of sacrifice and struggle. The second woman represented a person trying to create elegance in the face of a shortage of material goods. In both cases, the stereotypes were tongue-in-cheek. While the orange woman clearly believed plastic fruit has aesthetic value, for example, the audience was expected to realize it is horrible and ugly.

Table 1. Ideas of socialism and capitalism

Socialism	Capitalism
Backwardness	Modernity, civilization
Stasis	Dynamism, movement
Rigidity	Flexibility
Age	Youth
Drabness	Colorfulness
Deprivation	Satisfaction of desire
Obedience	Critical self-reflection
Collectivism	Individualism
Personalized "connections"	Impersonal relations based on rational calculation
Gifts	Sales
Isolation within boundaries	Transcendence of boundaries

On the other hand, the ads showed the teenager rejecting the entire socialist lifeworld—not just the Communist Party, but the entire experience of the socialist era—in favor of another, new form of being. These adults, the ad implies, just could not change with the times. Such images indexed and mocked socialist ideas of noble suffering and sacrifices for the radiant future.⁴ They also indexed qualities such as drabness, passivity, immobility, and unresponsiveness to needs and desires, all of which are imputed to the socialist system. In contrast, the teenaged boy (and Frugo) was associated with dynamism, foreignness, color, noise, and the gratification of desire. This strategy, of course, rested on the creation of difference: if both the product and the targeted consumer were not somehow “different” from others, there would be no need for this specialized product.

The idea of creating new differences in personal identity using socialism as a foil was not unique to Alima. A similar process was going on across the Eastern Bloc. Ads often sorted images and personal characteristics into categories of “socialist” and “capitalist” and associated their products with one or the other. “Businessman” cigarettes and “Business Centre Club” beer were blatant examples of domestically produced products that marketed themselves by conjuring an image of capitalist personhood.⁵ In an analysis of Czechoslovak political imagery, Holy (1992) found that the planned economy was associated with highly negative characteristics, whereas the market economy was associated with a wealth of positive qualities. Table 1 illustrates some of these dichotomies.

Part of the drive to create new social identities through consumption may have been a reaction to socialism’s demand that people be the same and to its dislike of social differentiation. As the Czech president and former dissident Václav Havel explained,

The fall of communism destroyed this shroud of sameness, and the world was caught napping by an outburst of the many unanticipated differences concealed beneath it, each of which—after such a long time in the shadows—felt a natural need to draw attention to itself, to emphasize its uniqueness, and its difference from others. (1993, 8)

The accusation that people under state socialism were all alike is, of course, exaggerated. Ethnographic work conducted during the late 1980s showed that people set themselves apart from others and marked themselves as participants in subcultures by doing everything from adopting particular fashions, to becoming deeply involved in reenactments of American Indian powwows (Rayport 1995), to struggling to preserve regional identities. But socialist mass production gave people reason to feel that the socialist state was pushing for sameness and discouraging people from differentiating themselves through consumption. For many Poles, consumption became a way of rejecting socialist egalitarianism. Producing black market goods, making one’s own (more stylish) clothing, and acquiring Western goods on the black market was a way for socialist citizens to show they could have things the regime said they didn’t need. As Verdery notes, it was a way to “differentiate yourself as an individual in the face of relentless pressures to homogenize everyone’s capacities and tastes into an undifferentiated collectivity. Acquiring objects became a way of constituting your selfhood against a deeply unpopular regime” (1996, 29).

It is no wonder, then, that in the immediate aftermath of socialism, Eastern Europeans reacted with a flurry of pent-up consumerist desire. Socialism had engendered the desire to create oneself as a different kind of person through consumption, but the economy of shortage had by and large denied people the means to do so. While the pump was primed for niche marketing, then, the social differences that niche marketing depends on were not necessarily “naturally” present and waiting to leap out once the lid of Communist oppression was lifted. Rather, new and different kinds of personhood were actively created through a variety of means: advertisements and fashion magazines, identity politics, redefined occupational hierarchies, and leisure-time activities (Sampson 1996, 92). Companies like AG were primed to step in to meet the desire for differentiation and to help create new identities—including the identity of the flip, hip, rebellious teen. With the aid of Western advertising agencies like Grey and Associates, AG was ready to help school Poles in the art of assembling themselves as they assembled products to consume.

Postsocialism, Postfordism, and Flexibility

By gambling so heavily on Frugo, AG bet the company's survival on its ability to differentiate consumers and to elicit in them the "need" for new products to define their own identities. But why did AG choose these particular images to differentiate groups? Why portray socialism as dumpy, drab, immobile, and rigid, and why portray the hip capitalist teen as hypermobile, agile, and colorful? Oddly enough, the Frugo images of mobility, agility, and flexibility echoed a wave of similar advertising in the United States. In her study of American popular culture, Emily Martin found ads for baby shoes with "flexible soles" that promised to make children more "agile." She also found ads for bank cards that billed themselves as "your flexible friend" and offered consumers flexible payment schedules. Advertisements for management seminars promised to help executives gain "flexibility—the most important leadership tool of this decade," while an ad for a temporary services agency used Gumby, the iconic rubber cartoon character, to demonstrate how much flexibility temporary workers could give a firm (Martin 1994, 150–54). Martin argues that by vaunting flexibility and nimbleness, the ads rejected the "rigidity" that was the hallmark of Fordist production (Harvey 1989, 142) and instead embraced post-Fordist flexible accumulation, an aesthetic style associated with a particular kind of capitalism (Piore and Sabel 1984; Schoenberger 1997; Jameson 1991).

By using similar images of "flexibility" to reject socialism, AG's simple commercial made a strong statement about socialism's ills and postsocialist people. By portraying socialism as "rigid," the commercial presented a broader narrative that portrayed the centrally planned economy as "stagnant" (Sachs 1993, 3), "ossified" (Csaba 1995, 35,) and incapable of changing without collapsing (Kornai 1992, 383). This echoed the fundamental critique of Fordism:

More generally, the period from 1965 to 1973 was one in which the inability of Fordism . . . to contain the inherent contradictions of capitalism became more and more apparent. On the surface, these difficulties could best be captured by one word: rigidity. There were problems with the rigidity of long-term and large-scale fixed capital investments in mass-production systems that precluded much flexibility of design and assumed stable growth in invariant consumer markets. There were problems of rigidity in labor markets, labor allocation and in labor contracts. . . . Behind all these specific rigidities lay a rather unwieldy and seemingly fixed configuration of political power and reciprocal relations

that bound big labor, big capital, and big government into what increasingly appeared as a dysfunctional embrace. (Harvey 1989, 142)

Others have made the equivalence between Fordism and state socialism more explicit, portraying socialism as a *kind* of Fordism, complete with heavy industry and mass production. Zygmunt Bauman argues that socialism failed because it was too rigid to give up the modernist dream, even when the West had moved on to a more flexible, postmodern economy:

The communist state, in its own admittedly unprepossessing way, seemed to serve the same ideals of the modern era which even its capitalist haters readily recognized as their own. In these now uncannily distant times the audacious communist project seemed to make a lot of sense and was taken quite seriously by its friends and foes alike. Communism promised . . . to do what everyone else was doing, only . . . the real doubts appeared when the others stopped doing it, while communism went on chasing now abandoned targets; partly through inertia, but mostly because of the fact that—being communism in action—it could not do anything else.

In its practical implementation, communism was a system one-sidedly adapted to the task of mobilizing social and natural resources in the name of modernization—the nineteenth-century, steam-and-iron ideal of modern plenty. It could—at least in its own conviction—compete with capitalists but solely with capitalists engaged in the same pursuits. What it could not do and did not brace itself to do was to match the performance of the capitalist, market-centered-society once that society abandoned its steel mills and coal mines and moved into the postmodern age. (Bauman 1992, 169)

Of course, making state socialism into a kind of Fordism meant ignoring that, in practice, socialism diverged significantly from the Fordist ideal. The advantage of making Fordism and socialism into equivalents, though, was that it gave economists and managers—Americans as well as Polish "converts"—a set of ready-made tools with which to change the planned economy. At the macroeconomic level, that meant using neoliberal techniques for undoing the Keynesian welfare state to dismantle the socialist welfare state. At the level of the firm, it meant engaging in massive processes of "reengineering," which changed the organization of the firm and the daily practices of its inhabitants.

The fad for "reengineering" Fordist companies' internal organizations came from the idea that they were "inefficient in the face of a turbulent environment" and "unable to accommodate the need for rapid and continual

change by virtue of their structure” (Schoenberger 1997, 84). Fordist firms were organized with a central authority—the CEO—who made multiyear plans, aggregated the firm’s resources, and then distributed them to subordinate divisions. Each division then disaggregated the budget and the production quota, handing down production targets and money to buy raw materials to their subordinate divisions. This division of labor inside the company made design, manufacturing, and marketing into separate departments with little communication among them, supposedly delayed the pace of innovation, and hampered the firm’s ability to respond to the market:

The extreme compartmentalization of the information characteristic of an advanced division of labor undermines the organization’s ability to recognize and respond to significant disruptions that do not present themselves in the established categories. Often the left hand truly does not know what the right hand is doing, so the organization can end up working at cross-purposes with itself. (Schoenberger 1987, 84)

When American managers came to Poland and began to hear about how the central planning system was supposed to work, they immediately found it familiar. Because socialist firms were *supposed* to work like Fordist firms (although, thanks to shortages, they rarely did), and their formal organizational structures *looked like* those of Fordist firms (although, because of labor shortages, power was distributed quite differently inside the company). Thus, American managers saw state-owned enterprises as analogues of the Fordist companies they had been working to transform for more than a decade. At AG, Gerber managers immediately focused on the command-and-control organization of management, which was organized as a pyramid with Maria Czartoryska at the top. John Jones was aghast at the vertically organized bureaucracy in the firm:

Maria Czartoryska had this little pad on her desk stamped “REGULATION,” and anything she wrote on it was assigned a number and became law in the company, just like that, without consulting with any of the other managers.

Although neither of them used terms like “Fordism,” both Jones and his colleague John Turnock immediately identified Alima’s internal organization as a source of “rigidity” that would keep the firm from responding “flexibly” to market demand. In keeping with post-Fordist management practices used in the United States, they rushed to break down what they saw as the compartmentalization of knowledge in the firm. John Jones was absolutely floored by what he saw as barriers to the free flow of information

inside the company. “Can you believe the fax, the telephones, and the Xerox machine were all under lock and key when I arrived?” asked Jones. “You had to fill out a form in triplicate just to make a photocopy.” Unlocking the Xerox machine took on great symbolism for Jones, who saw it as a way to “empower” employees and to encourage them to communicate with one another across departmental lines.⁶

Applying post-Fordist remedies to make the firm more flexible didn’t stop at unlocking the Xerox or reorganizing the chain of command (although Gerber did both those things). One of the great innovations of post-Fordist management was a set of techniques to make individual workers, not just firms, more flexible and adaptable. In the United States, firms sent individual workers through Outward Bound-type programs, to stand on teetering poles and jump off cliffs with only a climbing rope to prevent them from plummeting to the ground. The programs were supposed to instill agility and an appreciation for risk into workers’ psyches via their bodies:

The bodily experiences of fear and excitement deliberately aroused on the zip line and the pole are meant to serve as models for what workers will feel in unpredictable work situations. (Martin 1994, 213)

In Poland, few people rushed out to dangle off belay ropes. Nonetheless, Poles rushed to incorporate metaphors of flexibility into their physical selves. In the postsocialist atmosphere of intense consumer demand, it is not surprising they chose to redefine themselves as “flexible bodies” by consuming products like Frugo. Products that conferred flexibility did more than create niche consumer markets, however. They contributed to making niche labor markets. Like the American employees who went on Outward Bound courses, many of the Poles who consumed “flexible” products were employees who sought to keep their jobs by exhibiting their “flexible capitalist dispositions” on their bodies and through their presentation of self. In so doing, they were to prove that their labor was a valuable asset to the corporation and that they were inherently suited to positions of power in the new economic order. But the opportunity to become “flexible” and to gain status in the new economic order was not open to everyone. Other groups of people were remade into the embodiment of socialism, which naturalized their increasing powerlessness and impoverishment.

From *Kierownik* to *Menadżer*: Managing the Self

As foreign investment rushed into Poland in the 1990s, white-collar Poles came under enormous pressure to transform themselves and to differentiate

themselves as a class. Much of this pressure came from the way foreign investments were structured. Whether foreign investors were purchasing state-owned enterprises (e.g., using the trade sale method of privatization) or setting up new subsidiaries, most of them came to Eastern Europe with a strategy to transform themselves from foreign to local entities. Although they initially staffed management positions with expatriates, they had strong incentives to train local executives to run the company. This was not only because expatriate managers are costly—a two-year tour of duty can cost more than \$1 million—but because rapid turnover in management jobs as expatriates come and go creates unwanted turnover in the firm. Rather than rotate expatriates through jobs, it made more sense to attempt to transfer knowledge of capitalist business practices to local Eastern European executives (McDonald 1993). Having received this knowledge, Eastern European managers were supposed to diffuse it to other firms, thereby making the economy as a whole more flexible.

Gerber employed this strategy from the time it took control of Alima. Gerber wanted personnel from Fremont to retrain existing management at Alima. However, when Alima's managers proved recalcitrant, Gerber fired them and hired new managers who, it hoped, would be more able to adapt and to adopt Western management practices. Gerber was not alone in this strategy. In many other companies whose managers I interviewed, foreign management made decisions about which employees were capable of adapting to new conditions and which were not.

On what basis did foreign managers decide who received the all-important knowledge of foreign business practices and who would be fired? Most American managers I interviewed told me that the most important criterion they used was "attitude." Sam Kendall, an American manager for Transco, told me that some experienced managers in the Polish SOE that his firm acquired would soon be fired.⁷ "These people want an eight-to-five job, but those are the people who won't be joining us," he said. Instead, he planned to evaluate each of the firm's managers, looking for people who "had the ability to adapt and change" and who were "willing to take responsibility." He said that Polish managers who gained experience under socialism "may not have the same attitude toward career advancement" as he would like and therefore "might not have the right attitude."

We might summarize the difference between the "right attitude" and the "wrong" one with the distinction between two Polish words for enterprise managers: the Polish word *kierownik*, and the newly popular polonization of the English term "manager," *menadzer*.⁸ *Kierownik* refers to a stereotypical socialist manager, an inflexible paper-pushing bureaucrat. This kind of

manager, as American consultant Bob Murphy told me, is always trying to build his own power while escaping responsibility. *Kierownicy* were also portrayed as relying too much on personal or social ties with employees in order to manage them. Because the *kierownicy* are supposedly enmeshed in these ties, they are said to be ineffective. In the words of another American manager, "They can't swing the ax."

In contrast, people used the term *menadzer* to refer to the stereotype of a manager who is highly flexible and eager to change. He might not have much experience. In fact, inexperience is an asset rather than a liability, since he is therefore autonomous and not enmeshed in messy social ties with ministries and workers.⁹ However, he has the inner qualities that allow him to learn new managerial techniques, to apply them rationally and impersonally, and therefore to succeed. These qualities would get him a job in privatizing companies. As an article in the *Harvard Business Review* put it,

In seeking [Eastern European] general managers, Western partners look for self-confidence, initiative, and sophistication as well as work experience. They pay attention to their own first impressions and instinctive likes and dislikes. . . . They tease out underlying beliefs about business ethics, profits, labor relations and political institutions. (Lawrence and Vlachoutsicos 1993, 49)

To attract the attention of a Western manager, land a managerial job, and gain access to Western business knowledge, Polish managers had to demonstrate the right personality characteristics: attitude, beliefs, flexibility, receptivity, and initiative. But how did they go about demonstrating these very personal, "inner" characteristics? Unlike their Western counterparts, Polish managers could not rely heavily on resumés listing their past achievements. For many Poles, job histories and track records were of little value because of their ties to the socialist past.¹⁰ Instead, they had to rely on the idea that the outer self signals changes in the inner self. They used changes in dress, personal possessions, and personal space to display their supposed transformations from a socialist being—a *kierownik*—to a capitalist being—a *menadzer*. By signaling this inner transformation from socialism, managers hoped to demonstrate that they had the "right attitude" and were ready and willing to learn new Western management ideas.

A look at some of the glossy Polish-language business magazines showed that Polish businessmen saw this recreation of self—of both the interior, knowing self and the exterior façade—as a crucial part of doing business. The first half of the July 1993 issue of *Businessman* magazine, for example, had articles on interpreting economic indicators, buying computers for a

more efficient office, and motivating employees. In the second half of the magazine, however, were articles seemingly not about business: an article on the history and rules of tennis, a piece on how to buy and drink fine port wine, and a photo essay on the new men's fashions from Milan. The magazines presumed little prior familiarity with either business or tennis or port. But what was interesting about them was not just their primer-like quality but their emphasis on acquiring knowledge about Western business culture, including leisure habits, dress, and consumption practices, as a means to self-transformation. Like a Western business journal, the magazines showed the equation between knowledge, power, and money. Like a Western women's magazine, however, they stressed changing one's inner and outer being to become pleasing to another. These magazines were how-to guides for Poles who wished to acquire the selves that they imagine Western executives possess by acquiring the habitus of the Western businessman.¹¹

I saw one striking example of this one Saturday night in Warsaw in 1993, at a restaurant across from the new IKEA and the second Warsaw McDonald's. Billed as "an American restaurant," the Falcon Inn offered high prices, foods fried in no-cholesterol vegetable oil, and tall blond waitresses in t-shirts and short, cut-off jeans. It was rumored to be where the American businessmen went to eat. But on the Saturday night I was there, no American businessmen were to be seen. It was about eleven-thirty at night, certainly outside of regular business hours. As I sat on the sidewalk terrace, waiting for my drink, a group of Polish men arrived. They seated themselves at a café table. Then each one bent over, rummaged in his briefcase, and took out a cellular telephone. Carefully—almost reverently—each man placed his phone upright against the umbrella pole in the center of the table, so that the phones made a circle. None of the phones rang while the men were at the table, and none of the men made any calls.

The point of having the cell phones went far beyond making calls. By adopting the dress, leisure habits, and consumption practices of Western businessmen, Polish managers signal their desire for membership in the imagined community of the transnational market economy. The men at the Falcon Inn carried their cellular phones at midnight on a Saturday night because cell phones have potent symbolic value: they represent membership in a network of people who are important enough that they must be able to be reached at any time. Because the cellular networks bypass the antiquated and often impossible-to-use Polish telephone system, they also represent membership in a community that transcends both national borders and the national infrastructure. The men at the Falcon Inn wished to signal that they were new, modern, and European. They attempted to show that they pos-

sessed advanced technology and instantaneous links to the rest of the world, that they were ready to do business in a capitalist economy. In many ways, they and their cell phones symbolized the same thing as the Frugo advertisements: an existence without borders and without limits, based on instant adaptability and moved by continuous change.

One of the top-level managers at AG was a negative example of the same phenomenon. He was one of the only executives at AG who had neither lived abroad nor had much previous experience with foreign firms. He was a painful example of the importance of symbolism in becoming a *menadżer*. He struggled mightily to acquire all the prestige goods (a Ford Taurus, two cellular telephones, imported skis, a Franklin Planner, and so on) that would legitimize his fragile status. Yet his lack of knowledge often tripped him up. His symbolic errors, like hiring a stripper to entertain at the company party, wearing striped ties with checked jackets, and making off-color remarks, were the subject of endless gossip. He often appeared ignorant or uncouth, and he knew it. Finally, he hired an elegant assistant who had lived in New York. A large part of her job was managing his personal appearance and arranging for him to acquire the necessary prestige goods. Regardless of how much this man knew about industrial management, he had to "manage" his own social personhood as well, and he knew his rise to the top was blocked by his ignorance of these matters.

The experiences of the cellular-phone-toting, Ford-driving Polish middle manager might be dismissed as simple cultural imperialism. There is nothing particularly unique about an influx of American (or French or German) cultural, commercial, and technological forms following American (or French or German) corporations abroad. Nor is it unique for foreign business and governmental organizations to create a local elite partly assimilated to foreign culture. But it appears that in this case, more was at work than simple cultural imperialism. When Polish managers acquired the habitus of the Western businessman, thereby making the leap from *kierownik* to *menadżer*, they literally embodied the idea of the transition from socialism to capitalism. The way magazines and my corporate informants portrayed *kierownicy* and *menadżerowie* illuminates the manner in which Poles, Western Europeans, and North Americans conceived of what socialism was and what capitalism would be. Just as in Frugo advertisements, images of flexible, dynamic capitalist people were juxtaposed with caricatures of people from the socialist era in order to highlight the novelty and implied superiority of the new system.

The transition from *kierownik* to *menadżer* is an important aspect of the privatization of persons. In turn, this aspect is a critical element in the trans-

formation of the socialist economy into a capitalist one, because it promotes an ideology of individualism. The corporate managers I spoke with labeled *kierownicy* inflexible because they see *kierownicy* as tied down by extensive personalized social relations with both subordinates and superiors. This fits well with their critique of socialism, which they also see as inflexible and inefficient (Wedel 1986; Kornai 1992; Bauman 1992). The *kierownik* becomes an icon of this entire system and its problems: he represents both the person to blame for socialism and the person shaped by it. The *menadżer*, as an ideal image from the pages of *Businessman* magazine, represents the other side of the coin. He is supposed to be flexible precisely because he has no experiences of socialism and was not shaped by that system. He represents a free-floating and autonomous person who can shape and reshape himself. In the view of both the foreign and Polish managers I interviewed, the *menadżer* is the representation of the system to come: a system in which the impersonal logic of the market rather than personal ties dictates the rational and efficient allocation of goods.

The transition from *kierownik* to *menadżer* represents not just a transition from socialism to capitalism but also a transition from an orderly, bounded, and rigid system to a fluid, flexible, and global one. The foreign managers' conflation of socialism and Fordism, on the one hand, and post-socialism and flexible accumulation, on the other, determined the kind of managers they sought to hire or retain. Polish managers were therefore forced to demonstrate certain attributes. This was certainly the case at AG, where the managers Gerber hired were almost all English-speaking Poles highly familiar with the world of international business.

In essence, then, a particular niche within the labor market was quickly built in the years after 1989. There was a labor surplus in the Polish economy, but the kinds of managerial jobs that required a symbolic presentation of self as a *menadżer* were initially quite hard to fill. As the economic transformation continued, more and more Poles became trained and qualified for these jobs. By 1995, the only jobs that were hard to fill were in specialties like finance and strategic planning. Marketing, sales, and human resource management—three disciplines that did not exist under socialism—were all suddenly booming job markets.¹²

Although they don't say so explicitly, executives who aspire to become *menadżerowie* are pursuing essentially the same strategy that Frugo marketers did: they seek to segment the market by associating "capitalist" or "post-Fordist" values with their products. Private or privatizing companies become their market niche, as they caricature "socialist" persons in order to show the distinction between the lifestyle they wish to have associated with

their products and the habits and values of the past. The difference between *menadżerowie* and Frugo marketers, of course, is that the product the *menadżerowie* market is themselves. Because their experience is of little value (unless it was acquired outside Poland), the quality of their labor can only be specified in reference to their internal qualities. To commodify their labor and to portray themselves as desirable assets, they must learn to manipulate images and to change their own habitus (cf. Schoenberger 1998).

Slick Salesmen and Simple People

The new breed of manager could contrast himself to a stereotype of an old-style *kierownik* in order to show his rejection of socialism and to appropriate the qualities of flexible capitalism. He could do that precisely because there were managers before 1989, ready-made "others" against whom he could define himself. People in occupations that did not exist under socialism were not the same type of "other" and therefore had to seek to define themselves and their niche in the labor market. This was particularly true for sales representatives, who worked in a department that did not exist before 1993. Like managers, they gained value by associating themselves and their labor with flexible capitalism. To highlight their flexibility (and all the related qualities of flexible capitalism), they had to constitute an "other" against which to contrast themselves. At AG, the "other" opposed to the sales force was the workforce in the production halls. This opposition between sales representatives and shop floor workers was constantly repeated throughout the plant, even though the sales representatives were rarely there and the two groups almost never met.

The redefinition and division of groups within the firm began from the moment sales representatives were hired. Sales representatives were believed to have special qualities that made them different from other employees (especially shop floor workers) and similar to the product they sold: they were supposedly dynamic, agile, and assertive. These qualities were also supposed to make them fit for a new department and a new kind of firm.

I saw how this "sales representative" identity was created when I sat in on a full day of job interviews for a vacancy in Lublin. All of the nine candidates for the position were men and, with one exception, all under thirty years of age. The interviewing team, which included the district manager and the director of sales, was led by Iwona, a psychologist in her late twenties who worked as the firm's recruitment specialist.¹³

Iwona began by asking the candidates what they were looking for in a job and what they imagined a day's work might be like. Without exception, all

nine candidates responded that they wanted to be sales representatives because they liked "ruch," movement or circulation, and abhorred the idea of sitting behind a desk. Then, Iwona asked them about their job experience. Most of them had already been in four or five jobs, even though they had only been out of university for four or five years. Short job tenure didn't bother Iwona, however. She told me later that people typically worked six months here and five months there, and she really never expected sales representatives to stay long, anyway. Keeping the one hundred sales-rep jobs filled was a full-time job for her. After the last candidate left, the four of us discussed, analyzed, and compared the job seekers. Iwona was partial to a man she called "the rugby player." In her opinion, his athleticism made him a desirable candidate, since he had the strength, aggression, and dynamism needed in a sales representative. She dismissed another candidate because he was too quiet and still; she said he was "hiding something." The interview process was designed to allow Iwona to make these kinds of judgments about the personality and predisposition of the candidates. According to her, experience in this type of work was less important than predisposition. "You can train someone to sell," she said, "but you can't train them to have more energy, to move faster, or to be extroverted."

The key theme in all of these discussions was movement. Movement, rather than being a sign of instability, failure, or flightiness, was seen as bold and innovative. Most important, the images in our conversation after the job interview transformed the idea of movement from an *activity* into a *personality trait*. The same qualities of movement that managers like Iwona believed were desirable in an economic system (flexibility, circulation, change) became aspects of people's personalities. The interview process was designed to allow the hiring committee to see these personality traits as they were manifest on the surface of applicants' bodies—through their dress, gestures, voices, and mannerisms. Just as the physical persons and possessions of *menadzerowie* were icons of the new economic system, so too were these salespeople. By rushing around, actively moving products from the factory to the stores (rather than passively taking orders, as company representatives did under socialism), these salespeople were to contribute to the transformation of the company and of the macroeconomy.

The manner in which new hires were trained reinforced the idea that internal dispositions were a critical element of being a sales representative. Iwona and her colleagues showed each salesperson a video on self-presentation. The video demonstrated how to make internal dispositions such as vitality, friendliness, and self-confidence manifest through dress, speech, and body language. The aim was to convert these internal qualities into bod-

ily activity that would elicit another form of activity—purchase—from wholesalers and grocery store managers. Later, all the salespeople in Poland, including the new hires, were invited to the annual two-day sales training seminar. At this meeting, AG's human resource department lectured on topics such as "negotiation skills," "creative thinking," and "business ethics." The point of this training was not to transfer a certain body of facts. Instead, through a set of simulations, games, exercises, and explanations of human psychology, the trainers asked sales representatives to examine their own "mentalities." They were asked to search within their own characters and to transform their own thinking. In this way, they were to become more *intensely* energetic, mobile, and outgoing, and they were to externalize these qualities and display them to potential customers more effectively.

The sales reps and the company together engaged in a form of image or niche marketing similar to the one used by the Frugo advertising campaign. First, in the hiring game, the salespeople sold themselves: like the product, which was supposed to transfer its qualities to the consumer, the candidates billed themselves as employees who could transfer their qualities to both firm and product. As they began working for the company, the firm used them to transfer qualities among firm, product, employee, and consumer. A sales manager told his salespeople: "A sales representative is a calling card from our firm." Jarek and Mietek, two sales representatives from Warsaw, assured me that they quite literally "represent" the firm. So their look, demeanor, and actions create images of the company and its products in the eyes of clients. Even the formal job description said that sales reps' duties included "developing and maintaining the trust and faith of clients through pleasant and friendly relations and an elegant look." As the assistant director of sales told a group of new sales reps, "*Wygląd i opinia o was będzie reprezentowała nasze produkty.*" This phrase literally means "Your look and others' opinions of you represent our product," implying that the salespeople, rather than the product itself, elicited trust and goodwill from consumers.

The goal of all of this image marketing was to create another sort of identity between the sales representatives and the product. If the sales reps moved quickly, circulated among clients, and elicited good feelings in them, the product would also circulate quickly through the store. It would come in from the firm, pass through the store, and go out the door in customers' bags, while money would trace the path backward from customer to firm, thus hastening the circulation of capital.

Just as in Frugo commercials and among cell-phone carrying managers, the niche for dynamic people was created in opposition to an image of sta-

tic, rigid, ignorant people. In this case, the foil was shop floor workers, who are constructed as the antithesis of the sales reps. In one of the job interviews I attended, the candidate mentioned that in another firm he had worked for, production workers were given the option of interviewing for sales representative jobs. AG's director of sales and the Lublin area manager were clearly horrified by this idea. They quickly vetoed it, saying that because the two jobs have such different characters, the people who do them must also have different characters. Hence switching between the two jobs was clearly impossible.¹⁴

When I asked Alima employees in sales, marketing, and operations why shop floor workers could not be moved to other jobs within the corporation, or why they could not be organized in such a way that they took greater responsibility for production, the response inevitably was "*Oni są proste ludzi*" (They are simple people). *Proste* carries a variety of meanings: literally, it means "uncomplicated" or "straightforward" but often is a euphemism for "unintelligent."

This view of the workers as unthinking—or incapable of thought—permeated the production process, particularly in the field of quality assurance protocols. Shop floor workers conducted some of the tests at various stages of the production process. However, they were required to follow instructions and record results, rather than make judgments about which tests to perform and when to perform them. There were strict written protocols for how the tests should be conducted. As a quality control manager told sales representatives, "People can forget how to do the tests, or they can forget to do them. They might feel bad, or have a quarrel or something and forget the tests or do them wrong. That's why we have directions on the report pages, and why there are directions in the binders at each station." Shop floor workers quickly pointed out that there were no similar directions written out for either salespeople or the president of the company, although presumably they also might have bad days or quarrels, and interpreted these protocols as a slight by management.¹⁵

Shop floor workers were equally irritated that even the people who did the tests were not permitted or required to analyze the data they collected or to make changes in the production process. Instead, changes to the product or the production process had to be made after samples had been sent to the quality control laboratories for confirmation and a manager decided to make adjustments.

The training procedures for shop floor workers also presented a view of workers as merely physical labor, not thinking beings. Unlike the sales representatives, who were trained in thinking skills and interpersonal relations,

shop floor workers only attended two types of training: an occupational health and safety class mandated by the Polish government, and classes on the operation of different machines. The courses were superficial and aimed at delivering a specific body of data. For example, the in-class exercises for sales representatives asked them to rate their "reactions to conflict and disagreement." In contrast, the examination for the occupational health and safety course asked, "After working four hours, how many minutes is a break?" and provided multiple choice answers. Workers who took the course (and who had to pass the examination in order to keep their jobs) were allowed to cheat on the exam.

When I took the exam, the members of my brigade circulated a list of the question numbers and the letter of the correct answer during the test. The health and safety inspector saw this and even encouraged it. When one of us lost track of the number-letter correspondences and marked down the wrong answer, he came and corrected it before the paper was handed in. In this way, the whole training process not only deemed production workers incapable of critical thinking, self-reflection, and making decisions, it (and the health and safety inspector) also constructed them as incapable of understanding even simple concepts and memorizing facts.

The lack of self-reflection and thinking that employees outside the shop floor attribute to shop floor workers also led them to categorize production workers as people who could not understand the changes in the economy and therefore in business practice. This assumption disqualified them for other jobs in the company. Shop floor workers were not just subsumed under a Fordist separation of mental and manual laborers. They were also construed as products of the socialist system who could not adapt to changing economic conditions, precisely *because* they did not have the ability to think. A member of the marketing department, for example, told me:

These old people, who worked here before, they don't understand the need for the existence of marketing. Marketing only started in 1993, and it was never in Poland before then. These people on production used to only have to produce as much as they could; they never had to worry about selling it. They didn't understand then why marketing was needed, and they don't understand now.

The marketer drew a parallel between work experience, being in production rather than distribution, lack of understanding, and the socialist system.

No one actually called the shop floor workers "socialist" in the sense of accusing them of having been members of the Communist Party. That

would have been ridiculous, since many of them were affiliated with Solidarity. However, managers and salespeople clearly associated them with “the way things were before” and the inefficiencies of the socialist system. One way nonproduction employees made that connection was by asserting that shop floor workers were older than other employees—even though a survey I conducted showed that the average worker on the line was only about thirty-three, or *younger* than the thirty-five-year-old cutoff for newly hired sales representatives. One manager told me shop floor workers can only take orders because they spent too long submerged in the strongly hierarchical socialist system. The image of shop floor workers as “older” reflected not their chronological ages but the fact that because they began work at a younger age rather than continuing in the educational system, even thirty-five-year-olds had fifteen years of experience working under the socialist system. By assuming that shop floor workers were “older” and therefore “more experienced under socialism,” other employees implied that these workers were passive, dependent, and incapable of the independence higher-ranking positions now required.

By assigning particular qualities (or the lack thereof) to different kinds of persons that reflected the differences between images of “socialism” and “capitalism,” people in the firm were soon classed not just as “privatized persons” or “objects” but as “assets” or “liabilities” with distinct values. The Frugo advertisements and management ideologies contrasted images of immobile, backwards, old socialist persons with young, dynamic, mobile ones. Descriptions of shop floor workers and sales representatives also contrasted socialism and capitalism. On the one hand were persons associated with production, backwardness, lack of critical or analytic thought, collectivity, and an inability to innovate. On the other were highly mobile, active, modern individualists associated with sales, who continually learn because of their self-awareness. In the process, the managers and sales representatives who used these images mapped a set of ideas about socialism onto shop floor workers, so that they came to embody the socialist past. Just as advocates of market economy believed that socialism was unreformable, shop floor workers were seen as untrainable and unchangeable, and hence liabilities (Kornai 1992, xxv; cf. Martin 1992). In management’s view, the only flexibility on the shop floor was in the size of the labor force—and the only way to reduce the “liability” that labor force represented was to reduce the number of workers.¹⁶

A view of shop floor workers as untrainable, whether due to disposition or lack of native intelligence, is an integral part of flexible production in multinational firms. As Wright (1996) points out in her study of the Mexi-

can maquiladoras owned by U.S. firms, for some workers to be constituted as “trainable,” others must be made “untrainable.” In the post-Fordist organization of production within multinational corporations, “unskilled” workers are “the uniform constant for reading everyone else as comparatively more skilled and legitimately more powerful” (1996, 200). Similarly, for some employees in Eastern Europe to have “dispositions” that make them more amenable to sales or management, some other group of workers has to be classified as lacking those traits.

The general idea of organization learning in FDI [foreign direct investment] situations is that an imported “top management” becomes the font of wisdom for a managerial elite of local employees. The latter group is immediately signalled out for special attention—although indoctrination might be the more appropriate term. At the same time, the local labor force as a whole is daubed with the brush of commercial ignorance as a result of the bogey of Marxism [in the East European case]. (Czeglédy 1996, 328)

By “othering” shop floor workers and portraying them as “inflexible,” “socialist,” and “incapable of thought,” sales representatives and managers carry out another key element of the privatization of persons: the commodification of labor. As Polanyi (1944, 73) pointed out, the idea that labor is a commodity—the personal possession of the laborer—is essentially a fiction. Segmented labor markets, in which different kinds of labor are sold at disparate prices, depend on that fiction. But to have segmented labor markets, which depend on qualitative differences in *labor*, first *laborers themselves* must be differentiated and commodified.

Niche marketing of consumer goods helps that process. As the Frugo advertisements demonstrated, newly reconstructed relationships of personhood and possession mean that *who one is* and *what one has* are becoming overlapping categories in Eastern Europe. At the same time, the distinction between *who one is* and *what one does*—the distinction between the labor and the laborer—is becoming blurred as well, through disciplinary techniques like Iwona’s job interviews and employee training programs like those the sales representatives went through.

The result is not just that workers are changed from acting subjects to labor power, a generalized commodity. They are transformed into different kinds of labor power that are qualitatively different kinds of commodities and become assets in distinct niche markets. Because personal identity and one’s position in niche labor markets melt into one another, the disparate value of different people’s labor comes to be seen as a natural emanation of

the kinds of people they are rather than as the artifact of a socially constructed division of labor or as the product of a class system.

This creation of difference leads to increased inequality, both of condition and of opportunity. The construction of shop floor workers as “inflexible” excludes them from arenas where they might gain more knowledge about Western business practices and the habits and values of Western businesspeople. Since this kind of knowledge is a prerequisite for social mobility in postsocialist Poland, people from the working class are handicapped in the race to acquire power and wealth. However, at AG, shop floor workers did not accept these differences or the attempts to naturalize them. Instead, they challenged the definitions of themselves as *proste* and inflexible and looked for other bases on which to determine the allocation of resources within the firm. They reinterpreted socialism to break up the associations that put them at a disadvantage while appropriating parts of the powerful new ideology of Western business. To do so, they challenged the bases on which laborers were commodified. They denied that they were privatized individuals and put forth an alternate form of personhood.

Alternate Interpretations of Socialism

Because the new management techniques at AG were filtered through the culturally constructed categories of socialism and capitalism, shop floor workers could dispute them by arguing about the meaning and interpretation of the terms. That is, the dichotomy did not go unchallenged: the terms within it were often recategorized and used to resist management practices. Shop floor workers did this intentionally. They argued that their experience under socialism made them *better* workers for a capitalist firm because they could adjust to batch production more quickly and create better quality products. In this way, they reinterpreted “socialism” as a symbol and recontextualized it so that arguments about the character of socialist production became disputes about the organization of production in the present. Such reconfigurations and negotiations went on constantly, disrupting the company’s attempts to institute American management techniques.

During my first few days at AG, I asked Ula, one of the union representatives, if she believed that what I had heard in Warsaw was true: workers who worked under socialism cannot adapt to the new requirements of capitalist enterprises. She responded,

We all worked hard to build this factory, to build Poland after the war. So they can’t tell us we don’t know what we are doing, that we have nothing

to contribute. You can’t say that everything was bad under socialism. What was bad under socialism will be bad under capitalism, and it has to go. What was good under socialism will be good now, and it has to stay. [ECD: What things were good here under socialism?] Well, everything. This was a really good firm. It’s not like there wasn’t an economy under socialism, you know. We made profits, and that has to stay. Frankly, we don’t have to make very many changes here, because this was the best firm in Poland.

Ula’s lecture significantly complicated the idea that what was socialist was inefficient and bad, and what is capitalist is necessarily better. She, like many other workers, believed that aspects of the socialist organization of work were suited to the new constraints of the capitalist enterprise. Workers with long experience, she asserted, are not merely repositories of “bad habits” but also have expertise that can make the firm successful as a capitalist enterprise.

This idea recurred during my stints as carrot peeler, time-stamp inspector, and bottle-cap cleaner in AG’s Division 4. The Division 4 line could produce either baby foods or Frugo. Baby foods for Russia, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Kuwait as well as Poland came off the line on days when we made baby food. In the course of one shift on a baby food day, we often made four or five different kinds of baby food, each destined for a different market. Even if we made only one flavor of baby food all day, the recipe and the packaging had to be changed between batches, since, as everyone assured me, each nationality has “different taste,” and Polish babies won’t eat food made for American babies.¹⁷ Often, we had to do more than change recipes for the same thing all day. We had to shut down the line after a small batch of forty or fifty thousand jars, wash everything, reset all the machinery, and begin production of a completely new product. Depending on the degree of change, we could have the line down and back up again in under thirty minutes.¹⁸ In all, the Division 4 brigades could produce more than forty-one different kinds of baby food and four kinds of Frugo, not including different recipes for the same product.

Small-batch production with extremely quick changeover times is a hallmark of post-Fordist flexible specialization and is the production component of a niche marketing strategy (Piore and Sabel 1984). At AG, just after the last bottle of a batch passed each station, the workers in my brigade would quickly clean their machines, reset, and move to the stations the next batch called for without being directed by supervisors. Workers moved quickly from sterilizer to pasteurizer, for example, when we switched from

meats to fruit. Brigade leaders quickly dispatched those no longer needed at their stations to the vegetable processing area to peel carrots or potatoes, or to another division to begin fermentation testing on finished juice products. When I commented to Marysia, my brigade supervisor, on how smoothly the changeovers went, she replied, "Oh yes! These are universal people—our brigade workers can do any job in this factory."

This very "universalism" was a means for production workers to defend their jobs, both against layoffs and against being replaced at prestigious stations by lower-paid temporary workers. Permanent employees constantly asserted that although unskilled workers from the *spółka* (temporary labor firm) might be able to replace workers with years of experience at certain tasks, there was no way temporary workers could ever replace them at the full range of the various tasks they are called on to perform. In making this kind of assertion, the permanent workers adopted much of the language of flexibility and mobility that management and the sales representatives called upon as their ideological justification. Shop floor workers stressed that they, like other kinds of workers, had the ability to move quickly between tasks and adapt to changing conditions without wasting time. Yet, they reversed the assertion made by niche marketers, that a product for everybody is a product for nobody. Shop floor workers argued that their labor, as a product for everybody, was a product for anybody and any job.

The production workers, however, did not ground their assertions of flexibility in their individual characters or in terms of Western management jargon, as the sales representatives did. Instead, they called on their histories as production workers under socialism. Marysia explained that before Gerber bought Alima, Alima used to make literally hundreds of different products—not only juices for babies but also ketchups, jams, canned dinners, and frozen vegetables. This wide variety in products was necessitated both by seasonal variations in the fruits and vegetables available and by the socialist economy of shortage. When Alima lacked some of the ingredients for one product, it simply shifted to another that could be produced with the materials on hand. Even when shortages caused such extensive delays in production that fruit rotted in wagons by the factory gates, Alima had a product that could be made: fruit-based alcohols were in the repertoire of the company and its employees.

Marysia asserted that these constant shifts in the production array made workers highly flexible: since they had to shift jobs all the time, they learned a wide variety of skills and could move quickly between tasks. She presented a set of traits in the language of "flexibility," which is an ideology with a lot of power in the firm. Yet, it was a different kind of flexibility from that of the

sales representatives. The salespeople based their assertions of flexibility on their *specialization*, especially on the specialization of their characters and personalities. The production workers, however, used historical experience to assert that their *generalism* makes them flexible.

The salespeople, whose claims to special efficacy were based on personality characteristics, also based their claims on their *individuality*—their uniqueness, competitiveness, and ability (or need) to work alone. This was a stark contrast to the shop floor workers' claims to flexibility based on their *universality*, or the interchangeability of experienced workers within and among brigades. Sales representatives based their prestige on a particular niche in the labor market; shop floor workers based their "flexibility" on eradicating niches altogether.¹⁹

Shop floor workers based their claims to flexibility and interchangeability not on the attributes of their individual characters but on their work community's continuity. Permanent workers argued that since they had worked together for so many years, they could coordinate their labor and hence were uniquely suited to smooth over the difficulties and irregularities of production. That is, they asserted that their interpersonal connections were an asset, not a liability. This ideology often set them in conflict with the firm's managers, almost all of whom came to AG after privatization and who had no roots in the community. These managers tried to use merit bonuses and individual quotas to increase workers' productivity and flexibility by setting up competition between individuals. Permanent, full-time shop floor workers saw this as divisive and counterproductive, since it would make it impossible or impractical for them to help one another, break the community apart, limit interchangeability, and impede the smooth flow of work. Danka, a worker with fifteen years of experience, told me that once individual merit bonuses were put into effect, mutual aid among workers would end. "Then nothing will get done around here," she snorted.

It is debatable whether the historical experience of socialism makes workers somehow more flexible. Certainly, the kind of flexibility required by socialism was different from that required by capitalist production, since socialist production required adaptation to uneven quality and supply of inputs, not to consumer demand.²⁰ It is significant, however, that shop floor workers reconstituted "socialism" as a contemporary symbol, as both a social and an economic system. They refitted specific aspects of state socialism and historical experience into a new context in order to challenge the niche labor-market system that devalued them and their labor. After all, workers did not argue that socialism or the socialist organization of production was wonderful. Rather, they insisted that the experience of socialist

constraints made them better workers for a capitalist enterprise. Rather than accept the assertion that their ties to others made them inflexible, they asserted that the interpersonal connections they generated in response to shortage constituted a flexible response to an inflexible situation (cf. Burawoy and Lukacs 1992).

In this way, workers constructed a kind of expertise that allowed them to take control of the production process to some degree. In Division 1, for example, bottles went from the filler to the capper, clattered down the line to the pasteurizer, then moved down to the labeler and finally to the packer, which put the bottles into boxes. As in most production lines, all the machines did not produce at the same rate; workers had to rely on their experience and sense of community to control the line speed. For example, the capper at the beginning of the line could cap more bottles per hour than the packer could put into boxes at the tail end of the line.

This unevenness was a serious problem. If the packer at the end of the line slowed down and backed the line up to the pasteurizer, hundreds of bottles that were capped but not pasteurized could sit too long in the machine or sit on the line waiting to be pasteurized. These bottles became microbiologically contaminated and had to be thrown away. Hence the workers running the packer, the labeler, the pasteurizer, the capper, and the filler all had to be attentive to the speed at which the others were producing, watch for production problems, and adjust the running speed of their machines. Moreover, not all the workers at these stations could actually see one another, especially if pallets of juice were stored in the production hall. To solve this problem, the workers at these key stations devised a system to notify one another. If the packer backed up, the lead worker at the packer "hooted" over the deafening din to notify the pasteurizer operator, who signaled the person running the capper to slow down.

Likewise, although they were supposed to wait for reports from the laboratories, workers often notified one another about defects in the product and worked out their own solutions. When the capper was making microscopic cracks in the glass bottles one day, the pasteurizer operator, who could detect the flaws when the cracked bottles filled up with water from the pasteurizing bath, informed the capper operator, who changed how tightly her machine screwed on caps. This kind of coordination and adjustment, workers told me, was a direct result of the experience of socialism: workers learned how to coordinate among themselves to compensate for defects in raw materials and machinery (see also Burawoy and Lukacs 1992). In effect, it gave workers power to resist their deskilling. As long as the line speed varied and production problems occurred that could immediately be fixed, the

"experts" who worked in the labs or wrote protocols could not completely control workers.

"People look on you differently when you give them presents"

Shop floor workers used ideas of interpersonal connection and social embeddedness to challenge the objectifying and individualizing effects of niche marketing. In doing so, they indexed a completely different form of personhood. This form of personhood is based on social interconnectedness rather than individualism. In this "embedded" form of personhood, people are defined less by their internal qualities and more by their places in networks of social relations. More than just symbolism was at the heart of this revision of personhood: just as the creation of the "privatized individual" centered on practices like niche marketing, "embedded personhood" centered on the practice of gift exchange.

These two contrasting forms of personhood are discussed in greater depth in subsequent chapters. The important point here is that expectations of gift giving often made the division between "socialist" and "capitalist" persons, which I have presented in clear-cut fashion in this chapter, much more ambiguous. Although managers and sales representatives had incentives to appropriate qualities associated with "capitalism," they often had to confront or even make use of practices associated with "socialist" personhood. In short, they could not completely reject the socialist habitus, including the practices, symbols, or rationales of socialism. Rather, they had to confront and manipulate them, often in the course of conflicts with other groups of employees. At Alima-Gerber, this was never as clear as during battles over the marketing budget.

Problems surrounding the marketing budget centered on the small promotional items the company gave to salespeople. While sales staff were highly encouraged to create "professional" rather than "personal" relationships with clients, the clients often expected salespeople to engage in the personal networking that was typical of socialism. In the socialist economy, people often gained access to goods in shortage by forging personal relationships with people—like store clerks—who had the power to allocate resources. Those relationships were often created and maintained through the exchange of small gifts. Once marketization had changed the economy from a supply-constrained one to a demand-constrained one, grocery-store workers began to rely on their power to buy goods from suppliers rather than on their abilities to allocate goods to consumers.²¹

Since relationships with suppliers were created and maintained by ex-

changing gifts, clients often refused to deal with salespeople who did not offer them. This forced AG's salespeople to struggle with the company in order to get the resources they needed to meet their clients' demands. Salespeople had to confront the discrepancy between a construction that made them out to be the representatives of capitalism and the "socialist" practices that they had to use to get sales.²² They entered a domain where one of the most important practices mandated by Gerber—the creation of a separate budget line for sales and marketing—went up for negotiation. These negotiations were complex. Since the marketing budget battles were about the transformation of socialist reciprocity, they formed a spectrum of values and interpretations that led to conflict. Yet, the lines of conflict were not always clear. People in different positions within the firm had to contend both with the structures and values of the socialist system as well as with the imperatives of a profit-making business and the rhetoric of Western management.

The first conflict was between the salespeople and the marketing department. The marketing department had a fixed sum of money, which had to cover advertising, promotions, and "freebie" giveaway items, such as t-shirts and pens with the company's logo on them. Marketing decided to focus its attention on television advertising, with a secondary focus on print advertising. Marketers saw ads as more effective, since they reached a broad spectrum of the population and covered the dispersed members of a targeted niche market.

The sales representatives disagreed strongly with this use of advertising funds. Mostly, they bemoaned the loss of pens and t-shirts and plastic bags to give to their clients, the grocery store managers. The salespeople were caught in a problematic situation. While AG marketers and many clients (mostly owners or managers of large private stores) wanted to create relationships based on mutual profit, impersonal relations between businesses, and a constellation of business practices they labeled "professionalism," other store managers ran formerly state-owned shops as if they were still state-owned. Selling to these managers entailed using the repertoire of practices developed under state socialism, including the building of personal relationships through gift-giving. The use of both these tactics—and the different systems of relationships and value they implied—was often difficult for sales representatives to negotiate.

A salesman named Jarek showed the contradictions in his approach to gift giving when we were in a shop in Lublin. The store manager refused to buy any more creamed turkey (a bestseller) until she had sold the jars of

lamb she still had. Jarek, fuming, tried patiently to explain that if people wanted turkey, they weren't going to buy lamb any more than they would buy apricots. They would just go to another store and get turkey. She held firm. Outside the shop, Jarek exploded: "If people want coffee, they won't buy tea! They'll go to another shop! Doesn't she know there are other shops around the corner? Stupid Communist, that's what she is!" More quietly, he muttered, "I bet she would have ordered that turkey if I had given her a present. She bought a lot of stuff when I gave her some pens." "Why don't you give her a present?" I asked. "Because I don't have any, that's why!" he crowed. He seemed happy that he could refuse to use the old system of creating personalized business relationships through gift giving. Yet, when he had gifts with the AG logo on them, he did give them away in exchange for purchases or concessions from shop owners. "After all," he reflected, "people do look on you differently when you have given them a present, don't they?" Other sales reps said they could not get permission to hold promotions, to place their products on advantageous shelf space, or to write orders without these promotional items, if the store manager was experienced under socialism.

Salespeople were therefore in an ambiguous position. They had to rely on different strategies depending on the relationship they felt the client wanted: either old-style "arranging" with managers of formerly state-owned shops or an emphasis on quality, customer service, and other tenets of *nouveau* management theory when dealing with managers of new, privately owned, or foreign-owned grocery stores. They were caught in the middle of shifting forms of economic relations and had to have the tools to deal with different groups of customers with very different beliefs about how business is done.

Shop floor workers were appalled by the outflow of gifts from the firm to the salespeople. They tended to see the marketing budget as a part of the firm's overall budget rather than as a discrete budget line and therefore argued that money spent on ballpoint pens or sales reps' cars was money not spent on wages. Yet, production workers' complaints were not simply about the use of company resources. Rather, they were disputes about the way various kinds of personhood were constructed in the firm. Production workers did not see the pens and t-shirts and so on as tools that salespeople used to build relationships with clients in order to sell more product. Instead, they saw them as gifts from the firm to the salespeople, which were for the salespeople's personal use and were meant to create personal relationships between them and the company. Shop floor workers did not object to the fact that salespeople received these gifts. Rather, they were angry that the com-

pany did not offer the same presents to production workers. The workers often implied that by excluding them from gift exchange, the company was treating them as objects rather than persons.

The issue was contentious and burst out at odd times. When I was given a small pocket calendar with the firm's logo on it, a shop floor worker named Arlena commented, sourly, "They have those for everyone but us. But of course, we're not people, we're just negroes (*murzyn*)."²³ My jaw dropped when Arlena said this. But she continued on, unaware how shocking such racist terminology was to a North American listener. In Poland, where there has never been a substantial black population and where the society is not polarized around black-white relations, the term "negro" is not considered to be particularly venomous or even socially gauche. Assumptions about race and ethnicity are completely naturalized. Racist remarks that would offend Americans pass by in Poland without comment.²³ In using the term, then, Arlena did not mean to be as pejorative as the English term suggests. Rather, she meant that she felt the firm considered line workers to be "slaves" or "unpersons" in an abstract sense. By using the term *murzyn*, she asserted her belief that the gift of pocket calendars expressed a kind of human relationship between the firm and its employees and clients that production workers, considered as machines or slaves, were excluded from.

The issue of the cars (which bore the firm's logo and also came out of the sales and marketing budget) was even more contentious. During contract negotiations between the unions and AG, the sales reps (who were non-unionized) had to send in their car registrations to prove the firm still owned the automobiles and had not presented them as gifts to the sales reps. Sales and marketing, in the eyes of most production workers, diverted company funds to nonproductive and unnecessary activities or directly into the sales reps' pockets, thereby depriving production workers both of the money and of their rightful status as human persons.

The same marketer who dismissed shop floor workers as "those old people" and insinuated that they were relics of socialism told me that workers

don't understand why all this money should be spent on marketing, or why sales reps should get cars and good salaries. They look at the money that we spend, and see it as money that could be given to them. They think they work hard, and they don't understand why they don't get that money. They see it as coming out of their pockets.

What the marketer failed to appreciate was the likeness production workers saw between the firm and a family: the resources of one member were the resources of all and should be shared equally. Moreover, most produc-

tion workers continued to believe the firm had the same quasi-parental role toward its employees that it had under socialism and should be "caring" for them both materially and symbolically, in exchange for their labor (Verdery 1996, 61-82).

The idea underlying the shop floor workers' complaints was that persons are connected to one another and therefore have obligations to one another. From this viewpoint, persons express their connection and their obligation through the exchange of goods. Ula, the union representative, expressed this notion cogently when writing about the employee social fund in the company gazette. The social fund, one of the most significant ways that the firm "cared" for employees, was teetering on the brink of insolvency:

It is hard for me to agree with the thesis that in capitalism everyone must look out for himself. We live together, we work together, and we must help one another. Sometimes people who earn a lot must sacrifice and give a morsel of cake to those who find themselves in difficult circumstances.

In essence, by arguing that people are not individuals but are (and must be) socially connected, Ula argues for completely different forms of personhood and person-object relations than the ones expressed by niche marketing. Niche marketing emphasizes the relationship of persons to things. It implies that persons are defined by possession—that is, the objects persons incorporate into themselves through the relation of ownership become defining elements in their social identities. At the same time, niche marketing in segmented labor markets supposes that persons are objects whose qualities can be transferred to other objects via the activity of work. The relational personhood that Ula indexes, however, emphasizes the relation of persons to persons. For Ula, persons are connected to one another in social groupings. They create, maintain, and express that connectedness through the exchange of objects. For Ula, redistribution is not necessarily the defining feature of socialism. It is the defining feature of human personhood.

Socialism, Capitalism, and Forms of Personhood

As the management gurus expected, the transformation of state-owned enterprises did indeed lead to substantial changes in employees' "mentalities." As the property regime changed and as firms developed needs for new kinds of labor, the labor market was segmented in new ways. Employees were forced to reinvent themselves to enter these new labor market niches. The result was a giant dance in which people not only evaluated themselves but also evaluated one another using particular tropes, stereotypes, and

practices and sought to forge new (or at least refurbished) identities out of material imported from American capitalist disciplines and distinctions. At the heart of this drive for flexibility was the reorganized firm's demand that its employees become privatized individuals—people cut away from entangling social connections who could sell their labor as a commodity. Just like the products coming out of a flexibly specialized factory, which had specific characteristics to meet the needs of minutely defined consumer groups, employees were supposed to create specialized forms of labor to sell to the firm. They did so by changing themselves as human beings. The marketization of Poland therefore depends to a large extent on precisely the sorts of processes occurring at AG, whereby persons come to be perceived and to perceive themselves as internally and essentially different from others.

Given the tremendous amount of pressure on Polish state-owned enterprises to transform themselves into post-Fordist firms (and at Alima, the particular pressure that came from Gerber to do so), it was no wonder the firm sought to reconstruct its workers by applying disciplinary techniques like the job interviews and the training courses. Given the ever-present threat of unemployment, it was also understandable that employees worked so hard to transform themselves and participated eagerly in the firm's attempts to change them as persons. What was surprising was the role that images of socialism played in that process. State socialism was continually invoked as the antithesis of new flexible capitalism. Managers and sales representatives struggled to define themselves as flexible bodies by defining themselves in opposition to the blue-collar workers they portrayed as socialist. This is postsocialist Eastern Europe's own variant of Orientalism: for the flexible capitalist self to be naturalized and unmarked, certain people, practices, and aesthetics have to be made into the marked and denigrated other.

That the creation or attenuation of difference leads to increasing inequality should come as no surprise. In her study of concepts of flexibility in the United States, Martin (1994) discovered that both the medical establishment and corporate human resource departments portrayed members of groups traditionally excluded from power—blacks, women, homosexuals, the working class, the elderly—as physically and mentally less flexible. Discrimination was legitimized on a new basis. A similar process is going on in Poland. Ideologically, at least, the eradication of inequality and difference was at the heart of the socialist project. The famous slogan “we all have the same stomachs” was not only about treating all members of society as equals but also about treating them as fundamentally the same. Because this notion was such a fundamental part of the socialist ideal, and because opposi-

tion to socialism tended to be based on socialism's antithesis rather than on a different concrete program, the creation and naturalization of inequality and difference is a major social project in the post-1989 era.

Most advocates emphasize that income inequality in particular should be based on “merit,” on achievement rather than on ascription. Images of flexibility play into this in a peculiar way: while they are ostensibly about achievement (e.g., successful adaptation to changing circumstances), they in fact conceal ascribed characteristics based on age and class. One is deemed more flexible because one can display the attributes of upper-middle class standing, not the reverse. Ideas surrounding socialism and capitalism or rigidity and flexibility therefore naturalize the exclusion of some groups from the sources of knowledge, wealth, and power.

As much as managers, marketers, and sales representatives might like to make socialism and capitalism into polar opposites, however, in practice they are forced to become hybrids who rely on socialist ideology and socialist practices—like the formation of social networks through gift exchange—as much as they rely on capitalist competition and individualism. If shop floor workers are forced to define themselves in terms of flexible capitalism, then managers and sales representatives are also forced to continually confront enduring social practices and institutions of state socialism. Although the sales representatives might like to make socialism “the past,” it is continually reactivated as “the past in the present.”

Constant ambiguity and the lingering presence of the socialist past in the post-Fordist present provide employees disadvantaged by “flexibility” with grounds for objecting to the commodification of laborers and to growing inequality. While new forms of employee discipline constitute persons as individuals and premise social interaction on sale or purchase, some employees constitute themselves as persons embedded in social context. They do so not by stressing ownership but by focusing on the gift. In chapter 4, I examine these two forms of personhood in more depth. I look at another form of employee discipline: quality control, as it is applied to both persons and things. Quality control elaborates the private individual by creating persons *qua* individuals, as objects with interior spaces that can be measured and changed. Quality control, however, does not go unchallenged. Some employees use practices of gift exchange, like the ones discussed in this chapter, to cultivate networks of social relations known as *znajomości*. With these networks, they blunt the effects of capitalist discipline and create alternate forms of personhood.