This intermediation work is thus very ambivalent: on the one side, frontline agents surely “back” the young persons, promote them and highlight their qualities, qualities of the young person that might not have been seen by the employer if that person was brought to him through the classical market-based recruitment channels. Frontline agents can activate alternative orders of worth (Dahmen 2019) and make them count in the recruitment decisions of employers. Young persons that do not have the best school degrees and such would never have passed the “gates” of the apprenticeship-market might have alternative qualities that an employer might find attractive. In the words of the economy of conventions, frontline agents both create and modify frames of valuation – the young person might not have a good school degree, but he is “stable”, “motivated” a “team player” and “physically resilient” as his year-long commitment of playing football in a mid-league football club testifies. On the other side, frontline agents’ contact with employers is an opportunity for gathering information on a young person that is potentially valuable for the people-changing activities in the Motivational Semester. As the evaluation documents are filed in the personal portfolio of every participant, every official in the Motivational Semester disposes of detailed knowledge of how the young person fared at a certain internship and has access to an in-depth assessment of how employers evaluated the internship candidate. Through this privileged access to information, frontline agents dispose of a panoptical view of the young person and a potentially totalizing control of their work-related behavior. As we will see in the next chapter, this knowledge is regularly put to work.

6.4. Constructing the Client that Can Create Himself: Technologies of Agency and the Production of a Will

The last two major sections showed how frontline agents operate within a complex institutional world, and how they balance different contradictory injunctions in order to “get along” in institutional everyday life. Both the chapter on sanctioning and the chapter on intermediation activities have pointed towards a central figure that I want to take up in the following section. To use Hasenfeld’s famous distinction between “people changing” and “people processing” organizations, the last two sections displayed the SeMo mainly as the latter: participants are processed according to administrative sanctioning criteria and value is assigned to them based on the valuation frameworks of the labor market or that come from the fact that the SeMo´s are a public policy. Nevertheless, both sections showed that beyond pure “people processing” the described practices have potentially deep implications for the subjectivity of the participants. As we have seen above, the abrogation of the administrative sanction criteria and the practice of non-sanctioning served to opens a “pedagogical space” in which introspection and reflexive self-evaluation

is accommodated for, while the gate-keeping and intermediation activities served to define individualized “employability troubles”. People processing thus involves people changing to some degree. Regarding the demands of institutional everyday life, it is obvious that the practices of intermediation, of sanctioning or of the reconstruction of viable job aspirations does not only alter the public or administrative status of participants (e.g. as “sanctionable” or “apprenticeship-ready”). Muchmore, these operations also operate on the level of the self-understanding of a person. These institutional classifications of clients are not only organizationally salient categories that provide justifications for the actions frontline agents take, much more “clients internalize them as a reflection of their own self-identity and valuation” (Hasenfeld 2009: 73). The relevance of these processes for the organizational regulation of individual biographies has been theoretically elaborated in chapter three: human service organizations are “discursive environments for self-construction” (Gubrium/Holstein 2003: 13), they act not simply as gate-keepers for admittance to different life-course stages and participation in institutionalized collectives but also operate on the level of “biography” that is, the identities of persons over time. They are in Hahn’s famous diction “biography generators”, they provide institutional incitements to speak and as such “elicit, screen, fashion, and variously highlight personal narratives [...] and provide narrative frameworks for conveying personal experience [...] such organizations incite participants to construct the stories they need to do their work” (Gubrium/Holstein 1998: 164). Chapter three has also shown that these processes can be understood as subjectivation processes operating through “technologies of agency” (Dean 1995) in which participants are brought into a particular relationship with themselves. The following subchapter will discuss these “technologies of agency” via an analysis of different institutional practices. The first section discusses how viable job choices are co-produced through an allegedly open self-exploratory process. A second section discusses the use of contractualized integration agreements and the negotiation of their content and shows that these do not only imply a future-oriented diachronic perspective but also attempt to gain control over the synchronic everyday life-conduct. A third section (“making up viable future selves”) analyses a document (a “portfolio-tool”) that links the individual activities of the participants to the institutional reality and the activities of the participants as they progress through the Motivational Semester. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the construction of employable clients through subjectivation practices.

6.4.1. Constructing Viable Job Choices Through Guided Self-Exploration

As we have seen above, the Motivational Semesters face the contradictory situation: They deal with participants with specific labor-market barriers but have only limited leverage on those structural barriers. That is the reason why these barriers
are re-signified into individualized “employability troubles” that are to be treated on the level of the individual. One of the few characteristics of participants that the Motivational Semesters have a hold on and that can be changed are the professional aspirations of the young job-seekers. This is also reflected in the contract agreement between the public employment service and the provider of the Motivational Semester. One of the central official goals of the Motivational Semesters is to support the young participants in finding a “realistic and realizable” job choice that considers on the one side their “interests” and that on the other side, considers the “realities in the labor-market”. In life-course language, the Motivational Semesters are asked to link the “biographical” with the “structural”.

A central institutional “site” in which the construction of viable job choices happens are the weekly individual counseling sessions between participants and personal advisors. In these sessions, the progress of the participant is evaluated, future actions are planned, and all issues related to the participant’s future pathway are discussed. Frontline agents described the work in the weekly counselling encounters – despite the obvious institutional demand to consider the actual labor-market situation – as a process of guided self-exploration, in which they invite the young person to explore by themselves what “professional project” they are willing to pursue and what kind of profession and apprenticeship “fits” their proper inclinations. As one counselor put it, “we re-place the young person in the middle of his project, and then ask, in a non-menacing way, look, what will your life-course look like? What do you want to do?” (I.1: 355-357). This quote carries the idea that performing a job choice is above all something that the young person must do by himself. It is an invitation to a future-oriented self-exploration and points to the intention to foster a kind of “biographical reflexivity”, an invitation to project oneself into the future and to develop a concern for the future life-course. The fact that this quote describes goings that happen within the face-to-face situation of the weekly individualized counseling sessions is central – in such a context the utterance “what will your life-course look like?”, does not prescribe a fixed answer but opens up a space in which the subject is demanded to behave reflexively, that puts the person into a position in which he is demanded to take a self-explorative stance. The institutional arrangement of individualized counseling puts the service user in a position in which he is asked to analyze his past life, define certain characteristics of his personality, unfold his motivations and his interests. This instauration of a calculating, planificatory, future-oriented posture seems to be the main goal here, as the same professional argues: It is about “just bringing everybody to where they ask this question to themselves” (I.8.: 455). This initiation of biographical reflexivity, and the incitation to develop biographical plans amounts to a demand to project oneself into a socially structured opportunity space. As Bjorn and Jensen put it these regular individualized counseling meetings amount to a form of “dialogue-based activation” in which
Regulating Transitions from School to Work

“you receive a new chance to present or narrate yourself in a new manner in forms which makes you a participant in a dialogue leading to a social contract. It is a new occasion to do what we all are doing, i.e. to create and maintain identity through the reproduction and renewal of the autobiographical narrative” (Born/Jensen 2010: 328).

The encouragement to produce a self-narrative of possible future selves is not happening in a free-floating space: even though professionals highlight the fact that they “start from dreams, from self-representations, of what they wish for themselves, and from how a job should look like on order that they are happy”, the narrative self-imaginations fostered here is very much oriented towards the production of “viable” future selves which are “realist and realisable” and which “keeps the road” (or can withstand) the evaluations of the labor market. The most striking about the was these future-oriented planning activities are portrayed is the strong normative individualism that comes with the language of choice. The choice of a profession, despite obvious demand-side barriers, is described as a “reflexive choice biography” (Beck/Beck Gernsheim 2000), as a reflexive project of self-realization. This gets even clearer when we consider this quote in which an interviewee describes the questions he regularly asks in the individual counseling sessions:

“What do you have? what are your resources? Who are you? You may be unbearable, but you are so creative! And what does that mean? What profile will you be? Artistic profile? or rather entrepreneur? Do you prefer working with others or alone? Inside? Outside? This allows us to bring everybody to the point where they are asking themselves these kinds of questions” (I.8.:451-455).

The above-cited quote can be read as a practice of adressation, in which young people are “interpellated” (Althusser 1972) as a specific subject. The performative dimension of these words places the subject as an individual “manager” of one's life-course and biography, and the strong focus on the individuality and the own preferences of the young person aims at producing “individuality herself, independently capable of action and driven by her internal motivations” (Ehrenberg 1999: 311). The importance that is put on the fact that “young people have to ask themselves these questions” reveals the reluctance to directly impact, control or prescribe on the biographical plans of the young persons, and reflects the idea that young person's exercise this control on themselves and interiorize structural limits by themselves. It furthermore points to the instauration of specific relation to oneself, in which the young person rationally calculates and evaluates, based on self-observation (“what do I want?”) their labor-market options (“What can I rationally expect?”) a project of the self. The fact that there is no mention of structural factors (for instance the labor market situation) which potentially impedes the execution of a biographical plan and the high importance that is put on the idea of “self-realization” through work
shows that structural factors are faded-out in this adression practice, conceptualizing the young person as autonomous manager of his biography. The institutional practice that is involved in constructing viable job choices is an “institutional incitement to speak” (Foucault, 1978: 67 f.), in which a narrative is manufactured in organizationally circumscribed ways. The organizational circumscription of these few utterances can be described as follows: Firstly, the adression is based on the premise that job choices primarily matter of individual, naturalized dispositions that simply have to be discovered. In consequence, the client is brought to see himself as the author, the only source of a (legitimate) biographical description of an envisioned future. In conclusion, seen in such an individualistic fashion, he is the only person that can possibly do something about it and is accordingly responsible to do so. Secondly, he is installed as a responsible self-observer, that observes his current everyday activities, hobbies, inclinations as expressions of individual skills and competencies that are intrinsic to his personality and constitutive to whom he is as a person (“Who are you?”). He learns to describe himself as a bundle of competencies and capacities. Thirdly, he learns to evaluate himself in the light of specific social norms – in this case, a social norm of self-realization and self-optimization – and potentially interiorizes them as a privileged relation to himself.

6.4.2. Negotiating the Integration Contract

The norm of self-realization and the superficial absence of coercive elements extends to the more administrative elements of the institutional practice of the Motivational Semesters. While the guided self-exploration of possible job choices follows a logic of self-discovery, other practices imply more that young persons actively participate in the construction of their own integration trajectory. Particularly during the first few weeks at the Motivational Semester, the counselors negotiate with every young person an individualized integration contract. These integration contracts have a hybrid character: They are both a sort of administrative form as well as an institutional ritual to foster the young client’s inner dialogue through negotiating its contents. On the one side, the integration contract has administrative character – objectives are fixed in written form, there exists a blank form which contains a checkbox for the goals and fields for the signature of both partners. Furthermore, the goals are equipped with a field for the date in which the achievement of a goal has been evaluated. The integration contract document is stored in the individual file of the participant and can be used for different purposes in case of need. Integration contracts also imply an evaluative exercise: the negotiated objectives are taken up regularly in the counseling encounters where the progress towards reaching the objectives is discussed. The fact that there exists an operationalization of the objectives in terms of indicators and proofs indicates a specific concern for transparent and measurable steps. This is reflected in one
of the most common topics of integration contracts: being too late. As such one interviewee describes the way in which he negotiates the goal of not being too late anymore with a young person:

“We ask: What could you do to arrive on time? And then, we fix that goal and write it down. The aim is to arrive on time, using the means the person has by herself. We want to enable her to arrive on time, including to help her perform all those little steps like maybe setting an alarm a bit earlier or go to bed on time” (I.3: 673-676).

The goal of “not being too late” is not simply written down and stipulated by the institution, it is translated into an interactive demand to reflect on the smaller steps that lead somebody to be on time. These possible steps are to be formulated by the client, based on the resources and means he has at the disposition. The administrative tool “integration agreement” becomes a pedagogic tool to make express the young person’s goals and to fix – qua documentation – the means of realization and the indicators of their future evaluation. The indicators of their future evaluation are thus not imposed from the outside but emerge from a dialogue about what the young person could possibly want for himself and for his future. This situation is paradoxical in several ways: As described in the first section of this chapter, being too late is officially a sanctionable behavior and would lead if repeated to an exclusion from the Motivational Semester. In the process of negotiating the integration agreement, this administrative rule is ignored deliberately in order to do “as if” the young person would set himself these goals. The “control” is displaced from organizational dispositive and disciplinary practices into the person, who is asked to perform this control on himself. As the following quote shows, the practice of negotiating the integration agreement amounts to fostering an “inner dialogue” about what one wants to achieve by oneself:

“When it comes to the integration agreement, me, I ask them to bring some ideas, and very often the answer is: “I do not know”. We try to talk to them, and when I see that they have no clue, I ask them to think about it for the next time, and then we take more time. I will propose some things too, because, sometimes there are things I see very clearly and I want them to work on these things, so I try. If they are “taking it” – much the better – if not, them sometimes it is complicated, because some of the goals are so important that we cannot ignore them” (I.7.: 856-902).

In the attempt to make the young person “express” a goal to figure in the integration agreement and to which they “commit” themselves freely, without obvious coercion, the case-manager is operating in a balancing act between imposing specific goals and letting space for the expression of individual plans. Here, professional action oscillates constantly between “should do” and “can-do” subtly mixing the refusal to act paternalistic and to “moralise” behavior of clients, to impose what one
thinks is the best, with the maintenance of the injunction “to take oneself in one’s own hands, to get implied and to be engaged” (Cantelli/Genard 2007: 25). We see that the contractualized matrix of the integration agreement is a “powerful pedagogical motor” (Pattaroni 2007). On the one side it installs the young person as a responsible self-observer, which can work on himself insofar he “knows” what own characteristics are impeding him from entering the labor market. On the other side, this contractual agreement activates several techniques that individualize the person and oblige the person to “account” for his actions and to stand up for what he did (or did not). It addresses the person as a responsible and autonomous person. In this process, a specific relation to oneself is fostered in which the person promises, to himself and to the social worker to act in a certain way in the future. The contractual relation assigns a “grammar” of autonomy (Pattaroni 2005), as it assigns the person a “self” from which he must account for his actions and deeds.

The moment of the negotiation and discussion of this personalized integration agreement is highly interesting. On the one side it fixes the rights and duties to which the young person has to commit to under threat of sanctions, on the other side, the personal integration contract figures as a strong pedagogical tool (aiming at producing a “will” and inducing the young person to act as a responsible self-observer). The individualized integration agreement can thus be seen as a form of a “dialogue based-activation” (Born/Jensen 2010) which is constituted within a contradictory mix between compulsion and a commitment to the centrality of work with a “client-centered approach”. On the one side they are trying to “make emerge a will” and want the young person to set goals for themselves. This requires that the agreement is not something openly imposed, but that the young persons “agree” – in a certain sense with the goals figuring in it, respectively, that these goals are residing in an individual will. This negotiation of the goals figuring in the individual integration agreement aims at asking the young people to formulate goals for themselves – the quote below shows that this micropolitics of activation through contractualized individualized integration agreements is – at least in this context – less about coercive activation rather than about the promotion of a form of desirable self-regulation. The contract constructs the person as a morally self-responsible person. Institutions are here not acting in an openly coercive way, but governing through another rationality, which is based on the very core of the notion of Autonomy. Autonomy enshrines the idea of a person giving “laws” to himself (auto=sself nomos=law), thus a form of responsible self-governance. The individual integration agreement exactly aims at the promotion of desireable self-regulation. As the quote above shows, much of the institutional work deals with the issue of leading the young persons to “bring in some ideas” by themselves, making the young person express a goal by themselves that, in a second step, they can subject themselves to. On a more abstract level, the organisational technology of the individualised action plan is a prime example of the of the liberal paradox
“with people being socially subjectivated by individually subjecting themselves to a governing programmatic of self-rationalization” (Lessenisch 2012: 310) or — more precisely, of “self-mobilization and self-control” (ibid.). The liberal ethos of self-control forbids a strict disciplinary prescription of goals to be figuring in the integration agreement. On the contrary, opposite to the disciplinary prescription, the individual integration agreement governs through freedom, through a technology that does not prescribe but creates the individual as a responsible self-observer who acts upon himself. The exercise of power is subtle — the individual comes to recognize himself as a specific subject through subjecting oneself to the criteria of acceptable subjectivity, through adjusting to a specific hegemonic figure of the subject. This hegemonic figure of the subject is also enshrined in the notion of the contract, which supposes autonomous and self-sufficient individuals that know their preferences and can express them freely and deliberately. In this liberal ethos of self-control, contracts are made concluded on the basis of vested interests and on the basis of informed, non-coercive mutual agreement. The use of the grammar of the contract constructs young persons as a morally self-responsible person. “Good” clients are thus clients who are equipped with a plan and an autonomous will to rationally pursue a future-oriented integration plan. The “client who can create himself and his own fate” (Andersen 2007) is the ideal-typical figure of this contractualised welfare arrangement. From this background, problematic subjectivity is attributed to those who are not able to pronounce clear professional goals, who lack motivation to confront themselves with their own potential weaknesses and who are not willing or able to self-reflect. For the client, the contractual integration agreement comes with an obligation for self-transformation:

“If the client chooses to accept the contract offer, he also accepts the obligation to transform himself. The citizens’ contract requires the client to not merely receive himself passively but to actively give himself to himself. It is a way of admonishing the subject to invoke itself” (Andersen 2007: 121).

Contracts hold people accountable — the contract requires the contract partners to give a promise, the promise to act in a certain way and to do so tomorrow and the day after. The client is as such made held accountable for his deeds and invoked as a self-responsible person. This practice of responsibilisation amounts to a performative language-mediated act: Participants asked to “express oneself” and to “bring in some ideas” are asked to designate themselves as authors of their own acts, and as such, performatively “impute” actions to themselves. For Ricoeur, the “capacity to tell”, (Ricoeur 2000: 34) to raise voice and to designate oneself as the author of one’s own acts amounts to an act of imputation as a capable subject. For Ricoeur, this act is a condition for the possibility of attributing responsibility to an individual agent: “to impute an action to someone is to attribute it to him as its actual author, to put it, so to speak, on his account and to make him responsible
The performative “imputation” of acts presupposes that the action was an intentional act of that person, it performatively gives birth to an “authorized” subject equipped with a will and the ability to act differently.

It is exactly this dimension of “promise” that is enshrined in the quote above: young people are “invited” to raise voice and to publicly confess to goals that are thought of as residing in their own self. Once young people are committed to these goals through the contract, it becomes possible to use it as a tool to confront the young person with the promise given to themselves. If a person does not act accordingly, the contract becomes a tool that can be situatively activated for disciplining the young person. The underlying normative assumption of the young persons as self-responsible, self-governing agents, freely consenting to adhere to the contract and equipped with the possibility to deliberately withdraw from the contract if they wish so is an illusion, as the asymmetric power relationship between the young person and the social worker makes such a relationship impossible. The political ideal of the self-responsible and autonomous actor must rather be seen as a questionable political ideal than a fact, as it supposes, on the side of the young persons at the minimum a sufficient number of alternative acceptable alternatives.

6.4.3. Private Problems Becoming Public Issues

The integration agreements do not only contain goals relating to job search activities, behavioural issues or goals related to virtues relevant to the labour-market. In many cases, the goals negotiated and fixed in the contractualized integration agreements cover other areas of private life-conduct of the young persons. As one counsellor puts it: “it (the contractualized integration agreement, SD) can also touch a number of other domains, for instance, health, friends, addiction problems – all those things that can inhibit them from getting up in the morning, or coming here and not being ready to work” (I.11.:328-331). The negotiation of the contents of individual action plans thus gradually expands beyond the “public” sphere, in which the contract covers the legal obligations that citizens have to fulfil vis-a-vis the state, on to the private sphere of everyday life-conduct. This “de-privatization” (Gubrium/Holstein 1995; 221) makes individual life-conduct subject to publicly situated interpretation and negotiation. While the contractual form evokes the idea of “consent, freedom of choice and the willing assumption of mutual responsibility” (Freedland/King 2003: 470), in this example, it extends to a rather disciplinary behavior-management tool in the narrow sense. The individual action plan may contain attitudinal dimensions (being on time, respect the hierarchy, learning to control one’s impulsions, learning to communicate) and potentially covers issues of the personal life and the social environment (care for my self-presentation, care for my hygiene, limit my drug consummation, replace some of my frequentations (friends). In the framework of the contractualized integration agreement, becoming “employable” is thus not only linked to the direct labor-mar-
ket prospects but entails the whole person and reaches into the subtle dimensions of everyday life. The regulation of transitions does thus not only happen on a diachronic, biographical level (through the fostering of biographical reflexivity aiming at the development of projections of a realist and realizable possible self) but also entails at least to the same extent a “synchronic” regulation of individual life-conduct. The emphasis put on individual life-conduct makes perfect sense from a perspective that views the transition from school to work as a continual process of socialization and adaptation, in which the practices and engagements associated with being a young person where the “extended present” (Leccardi 2008: 126) is the temporal point of reference are being replaced by those required of “adult” life. Young people are embedded in a multiplicity of sometimes conflicting temporal horizons and everyday life-worlds (most prominently, the world of peers and same-age sociability and the world of work) that must be coordinated and mastered in order to develop a rationalized life-conduct which suffices the demands of capitalist economy. This includes finding a balance between the different key ecologies of youth life and their temporal orders and future options and possibilities. This ability to develop a stable balance between actual and future action-projects is not simply given and does not naturally emerge from the temporal rationalities of modern life-worlds, but it is something that is developed little by little. The mode of life-conduct the status of “working adult” implies has to be adopted slowly by the newcomers, it is not a natural component of their life-worlds. Not going out during weekdays because of school, the belief that getting a degree may be important for the future life-course is hardly conceivable without nurturing (and perhaps disciplining) parents, without considerable confident hopes for the future, and a strong assertiveness vis-a-vis the many short-lived temptations, activities and practices associated with the contemporary youth phase. The ability to perform a projection into the future is dependent on the ability – as Leccardi calls it “delayed gratification” that altogether that involves a strong capacity for self-control (see Leccardi 2008: 120). This basic socialization work, in which “young people are socially required to construct positive forms of relationships between their own time of life and social time” (ibid.: 126). earlier conducted by central societal institutions equipped with the legitimacy to entrench these values and behavioral codes, sometimes even violently, is – in the neo-social state – replaced by a model in which social intervention endorses the obligation to construct and reconstruct subjectivity as the capacity to conduct self-government.

6.4.4. Modulating Distance to Accommodate for the Pitfalls of the Contract

Despite the central role of these contractual agreements for the inner working of the Motivational Semester, their implementation in concrete practices was often not as straightforward as the last chapter may have suggested. While most frontline
agents made use of the contract-metaphor in a quite straightforward way, others highlighted that their use is tied to specific pitfalls, making them inappropriate for some youngsters. As such, several frontline agents expressed concerns regarding the very early implementation of integration contracts. In their quotes, a specific sensibility for the potentially devastating effects of the contract on the subjectivities of users makes room for modulation of the relational distance between the client and the frontline agent. Several frontline agents refer to potential vulnerabilizing effects of the contractual relationship for the capacity of young people to make plans and to project in the future. As one counsellor puts it:

“If you work via the contract, the young person commits himself in a very formal manner [...] that can bring up quite a high pressure and eventually even some anxiety, anxiety linked to not being able to reach the goals—“I signed—if I will not reach the goals, I will not have delivered. I will have broken the contract and at the same time the promise I have given. Thus I am incapable, I rather do not try anymore”. So, if we continue to put them in front of something, something too difficult to achieve, that’s too much pressure, especially at the beginning of such a process” (I.8.: 285-297)

The contractual relationship that asks the young persons to give a promise to themselves risks confronting the young persons with repeated experience of failure. The inability to fulfill the contractual obligation is experienced as failure of a person to conform to a norm of subjective self-mobilization whose potentially vulnerabilizing effects derive from the fact that it constitutes a self-set goal and not an external injunction. Autonomy, as enshrined in the contract, constitutes a symbolic and normative order that translates into imperatives of self-realization and self-responsibility. The inability to comply with self-set goals results in a failure to comply with this general social norm that is institutionally harnessed in the integration contract. The quote of the frontline agent shows a certain sensibility for the potentially deleterious effects of an iterated experience of failure and the negative effects on self-esteem deriving from it. The quote displays sensibility for the prerequisites of engaging into a contract, of giving a promise. As described above, the contractual tool implies a performative act of “imputability” (Ricoeur 2006) of designating oneself as the actor of one’s acts and has an ethical dimension as it implies a “promise” (to act tomorrow as promised today) that makes the subject accountable in front of somebody else. As Ricoeur puts it “The promise limits the unpredictability of the future – at the risk of betrayal. Subjects may keep their promises or break them. In this way, they make a pledge additional to the original promise: the pledge that they will keep their word, that they will be dependable” (Ricoeur 2006: 18). The risk of the “broken contract, and at the same time the promise” portrayed by the frontline agent, describes the risk of the contractualized mode of holding somebody accountable to leave the promise-giver in a situation where
he is not able to satisfy the promise not only given to the frontline agent, but also to himself. The contract is thus at risk of leaving the young person vulnerabilized, with a feeling of “incapacity”, that makes it impossible to subscribe to a plan, to try, to project oneself into the future. The ethical tragedy of the contractual agreement is that the failure of the promise implies the failure to comply with the self-set standard of autonomy, leaving the person with a feeling of inferiority (Thus I am really incapable, I rather do not try anymore”). The strongly individualizing norm of autonomy is at risk of unilaterally attributing responsibility: If “getting a Job” only depends on an individual’s willingness for self-mobilization, failure can only be linked to the incapacities of the individual. As the quote shows, the frontline agent tries to accommodate for this pitfall – through bolstering the non-accomplishment of a promise, but also through developing a specific sensibility for the preconditions necessary to engage in a future promise. As frontline agents often stated, they try to provide a “rail” for the plans of the young persons, a “corridor” for realist and realisable plans, using their experience to assess the viability of specific self-set goals and future plans in order to protect the young person from the vulnerabilizing experience of (repeated) failure. At the same time, they must balance this guidance with the imperative of not prescribing actions to the young persons – they – as has been described in part 6.4.2, oscillate between “can do” and “should do”, always at the risk of acting paternalistic and interfering with the norm of autonomy.

I have termed this process (as reflected in the chapter title) the “production of a will” to designate the contradictory task of producing something that cannot be externally produced. A “will” is per definition something that emerges from the person, that is not forced upon somebody. As such, the creation of the client who can create himself necessarily happens through a form of the accompaniment of a process of self-mobilization and self-control that comes from the young person. Nevertheless, the confrontation with the norm of subjective self-mobilization is something actively enacted by the frontline agents. But the confrontation with this norm only becomes productive through the fact that the young person themselves adhere to the norm of subjective self-mobilization. As described in part 6.4.3, the contractual tool “creates” this adherence as a “powerful pedagogical motor” (Pat-taroni 2005) that on the one side presupposes an autonomous accountable subject and on the other – performatively creates it through presupposing it. In addition, the negotiation of the integration contract contains an important time dimension, that is highly relevant to the issue of transitions. It is only through introducing a time dimension into the contract (promise today to do something specific tomorrow) that it becomes relevant for the biographical transition and the linked elements of identity transformation. “Getting up” by time tomorrow morning is linked to larger action chains that ultimately lead to a job interview, the far teleological horizon is clearly defined, both within an administrative-temporal order (see chapter 6.5.2 –
the duration of participation in the SeMo is limited to six months, with specific
tasks to be performed each month), as well within the subjective biographical time
of the young person. The tool of the contract tightly couples the process narrative
self-construction to the administrative temporal order: “the emphasis put on the
time dimension in the citizens' contracts, on the client as projected into the future,
ensures the continuity of the self-occupation” (Andersen 2007: 139).

6.4.5. Subjectivation Practices: Valuation and the Preparation to the
Conventional Demands of the Labor-Market

While the previous description of the Gate-keeping activities and its effects clearly
point to a subjectivating and normalizing power that induces young people to de-
velop a specific (individualistic) self-understanding of their transition, the activ-
ities of the Motivational Semester are more ambiguous, and a clear line between
“enabling” and “subjectivating” effects of interventions is mostly hard to draw. In
their roles as intermediaries of the labor market (see chapter 6.3), frontline workers
certainly proceed to a “sorting out” of young people according to evaluative criteria
of the labor market. At the same time, they also may act as “translators” of these
demands for some youngsters, attempting to delineate possible templates for self-
description that account for the sometimes-vulnerable young people’s self-under-
standing. Chapter 6.4. has shown that the young persons are not only processed
but also selected and evaluated according to the normative criteria of fit of poten-
tial training companies. Much more, competent persons are constructed and created
based on different Orders of Worth. As described in this chapter, much of this work
happens through the provision of an “institutional incitement to speak” (Foucault,
1978: 18), in which a narrative is manufactured in organizationally circumscribed
ways. The fashioning of “accepted” integration narratives happens mainly through
confronting young persons with an evaluative vocabulary that resonates within the
evaluative frameworks of the labor market and that at the same time guides the
self-reflection process of the young persons. Individual experiences are re-inter-
preted from the background of the evaluative repertoire of a potential employer.
Or, in the words of one professional commenting a situation where young persons
are asked to fill out self-evaluation questionnaire: “the hard work is to make them ex-
plain why they think that this adjective corresponds to themselves, that means, they have to
give examples and explain situations, why they think they are like this or like that” (I.11.:537-
539). Young people learn to describe themselves and to justify their own capacities
and competencies, to describe themselves within the evaluative frameworks of em-
ployers. This amounts to learning forms of self-presentation: “When they are in front
of an employer, and he asks for their qualities, their strengths they have to know what to say”
(I.4.:878-879). the creation of specific ways of presenting oneself is an act of submis-
sion and a mean of control. The condition for becoming a subject is – if one follows
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Judith Butler and Michel Foucault – the subjection below a specific symbolic order that controls, to a certain extent how the subject’s identity is formed. The formation of the subject is according to Judith Butler, based on subordination and of recognition through others, the self-presentation can be interpreted as an act of subordination, which aims at producing a marketable self, a self that is “intelligible” (Butler 2004: 42) and recognizable by the symbolic orders of the labor market. The sociology of conventions, in turn, would describe such a process as a practice in which young people incorporate the adequate vocabulary to pertain as a publicly qualified person in the “tests” with which young people are confronted when entering the labor-market. And in fact, when putting to light the concrete practices involved in practicing these forms of self-presentation that are intelligible within the evaluative repertoires of potential employers, we see that these do seldom involve the simple confrontation with an existing symbolic order, but that they amount to a “maieutic of subjectivity” (see above) in which specific aspects of the life-world of the young person are highlighted in order to craft a positive integration narrative and to provide possible “evaluative supports” for the confrontation with one’s own biographical future.

This becomes particularly visible in those cases in which young persons do not dispose of those recognized characteristics that allow them to become visible and intelligible within the evaluative Frameworks of the labor market. As it goes, many of the young persons do not dispose of those qualities (educational certificates, work experience a.s.o.) that are recognized in the evaluative “tests” of the labor market. In the words of the economy of conventions, they are evaluated as “small” in the common Orders of Worth that govern the selection of apprentices. The following quote shows that frontline agents refer to a practice of valuation to highlight specific characteristics of the life-world of a young person to “make them count” in the public tests of a Job interview. This preparation for the public tests of the Job interview has a double effect: on the one side, it aims at “valorizing” characteristics of the young people to make them count in evaluations that the young person is exposed to when being confronted with relevant gatekeepers of the transition to work. On the other side, it also aims at enabling the young person to see himself in the light of these evaluation frameworks, generating a sense of self-confidence that might allow him to do the next step.

„practicing a sport, for an employer, it is an indicator of social competence: being able to work with people that you do not necessarily like, to constrain oneself to be on time. Nobody forces you to be on time, but you are on time for training. This can be of value to an employer. And sometimes we talk to a youngster for 10 minutes and he starts to see qualities in himself that will allow him to talk about himself in a job interview – all this allows to give him some self-confidence within a job interview” (I.3.: 978–984).
In this situation, the frontline agent translates, through a process of valuation between the private, youthful lifeworld reality of a person and more public forms of justification that aim at validity in the regime of justified action. Starting from familiar attachments, a person is constructed that can respond to more “public” forms of justification as enshrined in the job interview. Little by little – starting from private aspects of the person (practicing a sport in a club) – other forms of valuation are activated (for instance being able to work with people you do not like – the domestic order of worth, being on time – the industrial order of worth). Based on attachments in the close sphere that a person is constructed that becomes intelligible within the frameworks of the labor market. On the level of valuation and of attribution of competences, a “mediation” between the logic of valuation of employers and the “competence” of the person takes place. The frontline agent acts as an “intermediary” (Diaz-Bone 2015:11). Backed by different quality conventions, he relates the different logics of valuation and creates a situated compromise between them. In this case, the SeMo acts as a “compromising device” (Thévenot 2001:411) between different logics of valuation that one finds in its organizational environment. Second, in this process, the frontline agents propose adequate and situatively appropriate vocabularies of motives, of ways of displaying oneself, of ways of talking about oneself that make it possible for the young person to potentially become intelligible and recognizable in the public tests of the labor-market (see e.g. Dahmen 2019). This form of pedagogical accompaniment that this process of compromising implies operates (as described in chapter 6.2.3) with a temporary suspension of the official convention-based evaluative horizons (Breviglieri/Stavodebauge 2007). It is only by acting “below the conventions” (ibid.), by temporarily suspending the evaluative frameworks of the labor-market that the young person becomes visible as a person with specific life-world attachments that then can be harnessed for the fashioning of viable integration narratives that potentially withstand the evaluation criteria of the labor market.

6.5. “Making Up” Viable Future Selves Through Evaluation – Working with the Portfolio-Tool

The follow up of a young person usually starts with a standardized assessment of school competencies and a psychometric assessment of competencies and career choice. Usually, these psychological aptitude tests are deployed by a professional guidance psychologist in smaller groups. Thereupon, each young person receives individual feedback on his test results where both the psychologist as well as the personal counselor of the participant assist and where a discussion on possible professional pathways are discussed. The subsequent institutional work is documented in a fifty-page "portfolio"-tool which is gradually completed during the in-