Introduction

Before the Industrial Revolution work and home were one - the household was a unit of production in the 'industrious home' (Quiney, 1986); the geographical and ideological boundary between home and work did not exist. But gradually, 'work' occurred away from home, mainly in large organisations, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Those who were not 'at work', were 'at home'. The ideal home was a passive, private, and domestic place - emulating the 'rural idyll' (Davidoff et al., 1976).

In recent years developments in the home would question this passive image - if it was ever entirely appropriate. In 1983 Gershuny noted the growth in the informal economy; services were again being provided at home, even amongst the better off. Household labour was combined with capital goods and consumer durables. Pahl (1986) found that it was the households with money that could be active and productive.

The number of people working from home, as part of the formal economy, was also rising; and it was predicted that this trend would continue. Interest focused rather narrowly, however, on two groups. On the one hand, much attention has been paid to the 'teleworkers' or 'new home-workers', using personal computers, modems, FAX, etc. (Huws, 1984; Henley Centre for Forecasting, 1988). But the numbers involved have remained small (Stanworth & Stanworth, 1989). Alternatively, from a very different perspective, research highlighted the persistence of the traditional women 'homeworkers' (Hakim, 1982; Allen & Wolkonitz, 1987; Pennington & Westover, 1989).

The self-employed working from home have been relatively neglected, though sometimes portrayed as almost part of an alternative lifestyle (Handy, 1985; Robertson, 1985). They could equally well be seen as symptomatic of a 'flexible' (part-time, temporary, contracted-out, self-employed) workforce, or of the fragmentation associated with the 'end of organised capitalism' (Lash & Urry, 1987).

Whichever perspective is taken, however, the image of the home as separated from work has rarely been questioned - has not been seen as problematic.

Contrasts and Contradictions

From the interviews that formed the first phase of the research drawn on here it was clear that the meaning of 'home' was problematic; apart from difficulty in defining it, there was an apparent tension between what the members of Ownbase - a network of predominantly self-employed professionals - felt about home and what they believed the general public felt about home. A questionnaire was sent to a sample of members to take up the points arising from the interviews (of 156 sent out, 111 were returned and usable, the mainly open-ended questions having been answered fully).
Specifically addressing the image of home, a pair of questions asked:

**Question 1:** "What is the meaning of 'home' for you - and what associations does it have for you?"

**Question 2:** "Do you think there is a generally accepted image of 'home' - if so what do you think it is?"

The purpose of these questions was to compare the Ownbase group's own meaning of 'home' with what they believed to be the general public's image of home.

Using an interpretative approach appropriate for qualitative data such as this, the responses were separated out into categories, which were then grouped again. The aim was to produce an inclusive framework that would (a) allow all parts of the (usually multiple) responses to be categorised, and (b) reflect as closely as possible the meaning of those responses.

In this way six main dimensions associated with home were generated from the responses:

A family/people;
B positive feelings - identity, relaxed;
C freedom/autonomy;
D work, busy, active, demands;
E not work - domestic, traditional;
F material possession/house
(G don't know).

The results can be seen in Figure 1, with the scores (on the above dimensions or categories) for the 2 questions.

The only one of the dimensions (other than G) to receive a higher score of responses for Question 2 - the generally accepted image - when compared with the scores for Question 1 - respondents' own understanding of 'home' - was group E. There were four sub-headings in this group:

- E1. retreat from outside world/not work/privacy;
- E2. domestic/servicing;
- E3. division of roles (male/female);
- E4. television!

If this represents the general public's image of home, as experienced by people working from home, it is hardly encouraging.

It can also be seen that for all the other dimensions, and sub-groups, the scores were greater for Question 1, the respondents' own image of home. This is perhaps not surprising in the case of D, which deals with responses that refer to work, activity, being busy etc., as well as the demands that these involve; the widest discrepancy being for D1, which specifically refers to work and being busy.

The remaining results were more surprising and interesting perhaps. Why, for example, should the general public's image of home - as perceived by this group - be less to do with family and people than their own? Also, if the assumption is that home is a retreat from work outside home, an 'antidote' of some kind, then why were the differences as great as they were for B, which was to do with positive feelings? In fact the greatest difference was found to be in respect of home as representing a refuge, a place of peace (B4).
Curiously, in view of earlier research (Abrams et al, 1985), it very much serves this purpose for this group of people who work from home. The highest overall score (40) was found to be in this group - for B1: feeling 'at home', relaxed, comfortable, warm and/or happy. The score for the perceived general public image was relatively high (22), but the difference was pronounced.

One of the two remaining dimensions, the results for C - freedom/autonomy - complement these trends. For the Ownbase group, freedom, choice and autonomy were clearly important factors associated with home, whereas they hardly figured in what they assumed to be the general image of home.

Finally, there was relatively less variation between the two sets of scores for F, which referred to the physical house - somewhere to live and the possession of it. Just two points are worth making here: first, that 'home' is often substituted for 'house', by developers for example, but the two seemed to be kept separate here; second, the Ownbase group may well have felt that they 'lived' in their homes more than did those who work away from home.

The overall picture presented by the responses to the two questions would seem to indicate that the respondents felt that their own perception of home - which was in harmony with using it as a place of work - was not supported by the general public's image of home.

If this is so, as seems likely, it will have an effect on the way their work is viewed; which was borne out by other sections in the questionnaire.

A further pair of questions referred to 'proper work' - a term settled on after the somewhat unsatisfactory use of 'serious work' in the interviews; the
intention was to get as near as possible to a phrase that would indicate whether the respondents' work, being carried out from home, was acknowledged as 'legitimate', and was therefore seen as of equal value and credibility as the same work carried out in a more conventional place of work. The questions were again designed to compare the respondents' own perception with what they saw as the general image of 'proper work'. The questions were, therefore:

**Question 1:** "What is the meaning of 'proper work' for you - and what kind of associations does it have for you?"

**Question 2:** "Do you think there is a generally accepted image of 'proper work' - if so what do you think it is?"

Generated in the same way as before, the dimensions found to contain the range of responses were:

- A Home/family
- B Time
- C Place
- D Expressive
- E Businesslike/professional
- F Employment/organisational
- G Money
- H Negative connotations
  (I no response, cannot answer, impossible to say, etc.)

The results can be seen in Figure 2.
What is immediately noticeable is that the dimensions for which the responses to the second question (the general public's image of 'proper work') were greater than those for the first, were those relating to: time, place, employment and organisations (plus negative connotations, to a lesser extent). In essence, the generally accepted image of 'proper work' was seen to be such that it constituted a rigid stereotype: employment in an organisation between 9 and 5, in a specific place away from home. Again this image clearly contradicts the position of those surveyed.

For all the remaining sections, the scores were higher for the first question, referring to the respondents' own perception. Money was mentioned somewhat more, marginally so in its own right, but more so in connection with 'supporting other interests' (group C); and family and home (group A) were mentioned noticeably more.

The two remaining sections were more revealing in the present context. Each represented responses that indicated (1) a professional job or approach (competence, high standards, good service, etc.) and (2) a businesslike approach (efficient, practical, responsible, accountable, committed, etc.). Scores for Question 1 were significantly higher than for Question 2, and the term 'professional' was found to be one that the group in general identify with. This image of 'proper work' makes a contrast with the organisational image thought to prevail amongst the general public.

The final section, D, was made up of a variety of types of response that seemed to suggest an expressive, as opposed to an instrumental, attitude to work. It comprised:

- D1 enjoyable, fulfilling, interesting
- D2 personal autonomy, independence, choice
- D3 human, caring, of value to others
- D4 concerns the environment or society
- D5 includes unpaid, voluntary, work
- D6 identifies with 'proper work', values own work
- D7 variety, flexibility, challenge
- D8 using skills, creative

While it is a fairly mixed bag, this section covers areas in which the scores for respondents' own perception was not only higher than that for the 'generally accepted image'; for six of the sub-groups (D2, D3, D5, D6, D7, and D8) there were no responses representing the public image that could be included under these headings. For the remaining two these scores were 2 in each case. It is in these areas, therefore, that the Ownbase group appear to see themselves as distinctively different from the general public. These findings, together with the importance of the family and the desire for autonomy, can be linked to Scase and Goffee's thesis concerning 'reluctant managers'.

The highest score for question 1 in this section can be seen to be for D6, which indicated that the respondents identified with the term 'proper work', and valued their own work. The next highest was for D1, perhaps the most interesting, being to do with work as enjoyable, fulfilling and interesting. So, although the public image of 'proper work', as they saw it, would seem to preclude their own work, nevertheless they themselves tended to value their work in a very positive way.

These last two points were confirmed by other sections of the questionnaire. For example, when Ownbase members were asked whether, in their experience,
they thought that work done from home was usually seen as 'proper work' by:

(a) friends  
(b) people they met socially  
(c) people they did work for  
(d) the general public

answers to (a) and (b) were variable, but over half the respondents gave a positive answer to (c) but a negative answer to (d). It seemed that although they found that their work was recognised by those they did the work for, they felt that the general public did not recognise their home-based work as 'proper work'. A follow-up question asked about changing attitudes. The overwhelming majority believed that attitudes were changing; this they explained predominantly in terms of the increasing number of people working from home - and the interest, even envy, expressed in this (45 responses in this category). Also the improved image which accompanied the move towards high status and 'professional' work, using modern technology; with a significant number (21 of the total of 44 in this section) pointing to the greater legitimacy home now had as a place of work. The actual place of work was thought to be of decreasing importance.

Finally, when asked which of two images of work they identified most closely with:

(a) part of a changing and perhaps exciting new pattern of work, with greater flexibility and autonomy; OR  
(b) part of a peripheral, secondary workforce - mainly less well paid, less secure than the primary workforce;

the overwhelming majority (90) responded positively to (a). A provision for qualifying their answers indicated, however, that insecurity and poorer pay were relevant in many cases. On the other hand 16 of them made the observation that the negative attributes might be true of other (traditional 'homeworker') groups, but not of them. From the interviews it was clear that the term 'homeworker' was almost totally rejected; it had very negative connotations.

Conclusion

The experience of those who work from home emphasises that both 'home' and 'work' are socially constructed concepts or representations (Berger and Luckman, 1976; Breckwell, 1991); furthermore that the relationship between them is a dialectical one - each reciprocally influencing and contradicting the other. Their meanings have been constructed over time by a majority for whom the separation between home and work has become the norm. Consequently the respective images or representations of home and work are a problem to those who work from home. Their situation lacks the 'normative dignity' (Berger and Luckmann, 1976) of those working away from home; it contravenes the 'legitimate order' (Weber, 1947). They can only attempt to renegotiate meanings and social representations, and there is evidence that this is what they are doing (Randall, 1991).

Their situation can usefully be viewed, in many respects, as characteristically postmodern: they 'transgressed' boundaries (Lash & Urry, 1987:14); they have apparently rejected much of the organisational rationality associated with modernism (Ibanez Gracia, 1991:9); and they are spatially dispersed (Harvey, 1989:176). It is true that they have capitalised
on much of the most advanced technology - but nevertheless follow a model that is to be found in the past.

If more people are to work from home (and there are all kinds of environmental as well as economic reasons why this may be encouraged), an appreciation of the meaning of 'home' must take into account the way we see 'work' and vice versa.

References

Henley Centre for Forecasting (1988) Tomorrow's Workplace: harnessing the challenge of teleworking CBS/BT
Robertson, J. (1985) Future Work: jobs, self-employment and leisure after the industrial age, Aldershot, Gower
Weber, M.