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Authority and Autonomy: Paradoxes of Modern Knowledge Work

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Authority and Autonomy

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Authority and Autonomy

Paradoxes of Modern Knowledge Work

Susanne Ekman

Doctoral School of Organisation
and Management Studies

PhD Series 22.2010

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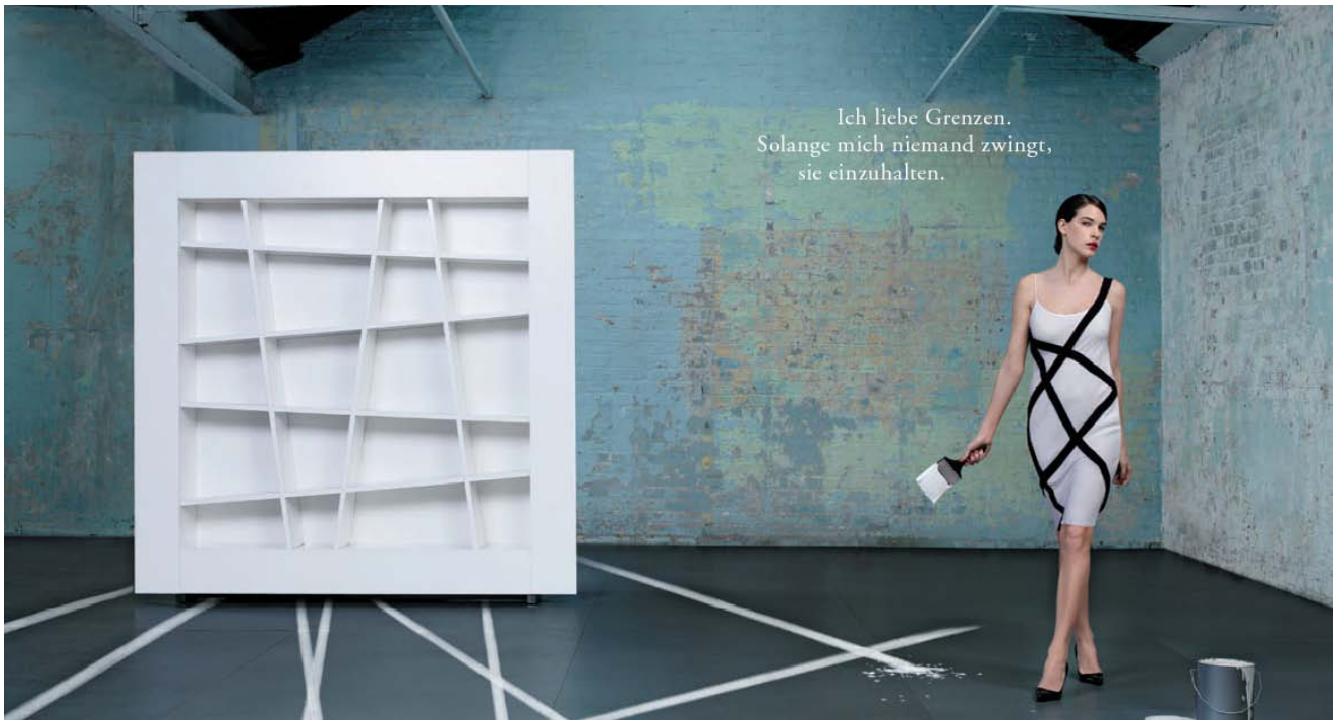
Authority and Autonomy

Paradoxes of Modern Knowledge Work



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The Doctoral School of Organisation and Management Studies (OMS) is an interdisciplinary research environment at Copenhagen Business School for PhD students working on theoretical and empirical themes related to the organisation and management of private, public and voluntary organisations

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INTRODUCTION
Desire, Discovery, and Disillusionment in modern working life

I open the women's magazine I just bought in the supermarket. The feature story is about Michelle, a well-known host from the respected debate program on Denmark's intellectual TV channel. To her viewers, Michelle represents professionalism, insight, and competence. Her questions are always sharp, and her demeanor calmly self-assured. Now she is on the front page of a women's magazine under the heading: Anxiety Took Over.

In the interview, we learn that six months ago, Michelle had to call her boss and tell him she was unable to work and did not know when she could return - if ever. Preceding this call, Michelle had experienced increasing difficulties sleeping. She had grown anxious and unfocused, and she found it hard to retain the research she made for programs. The symptoms were deeply disconcerting for Michelle who had always been in perfect control at work. She scolded herself, increased her working hours, and assumed that self-discipline would dispel the condition. One day, she fell asleep while checking mails and broke her shoulder when falling off the chair. Soon after this incident, her exhaustion was so deep that it prevented her from getting out of bed.

In retrospect, Michelle admits that it is extraordinary how she could ignore these symptoms and just keep working. She explains that she had always been a highly ambitious woman who did not include in her repertoire the message: I can't do it. Her work as a TV-host was the pinnacle in her career, and she was proud to be faced with such challenging assignments. In fact, much of the time, her assignments were so challenging that she was uncertain whether she could pull them off. But this just served as an extra motivation for her. The job was like a pioneering voyage – always exploring new horizons and treading unfamiliar ground. It was also a source of pride and inspiration to be among such ambitious and talented colleagues. As a member of this workplace one felt special and select. But of course, having been chosen for this extraordinary responsibility required dedication and perseverance. Her manager's motto was: Work or Die. So Michelle worked. And practically worked herself to death.

Michelle's story is so common that most of us could describe the plotline just after hearing the heading. It contains a number of classical elements for this kind of narrative: an ambitious employee, a prestigious workplace, the feeling of being 'chosen', the desire for making discoveries, the fear of limitations, and finally the collapse into disillusionment – from whence rises a wiser, humbler, and more stable individual. The sequence is almost a mandatory formative repertoire for high-skilled workers. It

was precisely this cultural plotline which sparked my original fascination with work as self-realization. I found it fascinating because of its intensity, its cultural predominance, its repetition (the same people could go through the same process again and again), and its inherent contradictions. It seemed to me that this narrative did not just tell us something about working life, but about our cultural condition in general. When I chose this issue as my research focus, I was intent on understanding precisely those aspects of the phenomenon: the intensity, the recurrence, and the contradictory elements. I had the feeling that they composed an intricate machinery which reproduced itself against all odds, being constantly on the verge of breakdown – not just on an individual level, but also on an organizational level. How could such a precarious dynamic be so resilient, I wondered?

Returning to Michelle's story, there were several aspects which I wanted to make sense of with my research. First, I wanted to understand the nature of the lure which being the 'chosen one' had on modern employees. How could this status warrant so much pain and suffering? What were the longings and fantasies driving this perseverance? When asking myself that question, I was intent on not resorting to one-dimensional and judgmental answers. I did not want to end up concluding that Michelle was willing to work herself to death, because capitalism had found a sophisticated way to colonize her soul and mobilize her desire. Although I recognized that this aspect might be part of the story, I was convinced that there was more to it. One could say that I wanted to take Michelle more seriously. I wanted to assume that there was something *real* in it for her. The willingness to endure pain while referring to it as self-realization should not just be reduced to a sign of 'false consciousness' or normative pressure from her workplace. I wanted to take Michelle's word for it, when she said that this kind of work gave her existential meaning. I wanted to find a gaze which could capture this meaningfulness without reducing it to a 'lack' installed by capitalism, which it then profited on by promising its fulfillment through labor. At the same time, I did not want to deny aspects such as exploitation and normative control exerted by employers. Taking dedicated work seriously should not be synonymous with political naiveté where I construed modern organizations as power-free platforms for self-realization. So my challenge was to find a perspective which could grasp the real meaningfulness of Michelle's work *at the same time* that it could grasp the exploitative mechanisms of work as self-realization.

Apart from wanting to capture the simultaneity of existential meaning and exploitation, I also wanted to pursue the matter of *vulnerability* into the relationship between manager and employee. It would be natural to concentrate on the remark made by Michelle's boss: Work or Die. This remark suggests a workplace with powerful managers subduing their vulnerable employees. However, I suspected that employees of Michelle's caliber – ambitious, bright, skilled, and competitive –

represented a considerable pressure for their managers and organization. I was curious about the distribution of power and vulnerability in a relationship where employees were just as, if not better, skilled than their managers. I was also curious about the power-dynamics arising out of a relationship which on the one hand involved parameters such as profit and contractual demands, and on the other hand contained narratives about existential journeys and 'being the chosen one'. How could contractual and existential aspects go hand in hand like that, and how did this influence the relationship between manager and employee? In other words, my second concern was with the simultaneity of influence and vulnerability. I wanted to explore the distribution of these two conditions on *both* managers and employees, instead of automatically attributing influence to the managers and vulnerability to the employees.

Finally, I was interested in a third kind of simultaneity. I was curious about whether the focus on self-realization at work was as predominant and pervasive as the many stories in magazines and newspapers suggested. Did no one work for money or out of a sense of duty anymore? I also wondered whether more classical norms such as authority, obedience, and the split between work and leisure had truly receded so much. Could it be that these norms somehow coexisted alongside the new norms about self-realization and autonomy? And if so, then how did these different norms interact and influence the understanding of work and the commitment between manager and employee?

When embarking on this research journey, I made one vow to myself. Having spent years in the halls of Academia, I was familiar with the status one could achieve from spectacular and abstract meta-narratives. The task I set myself was to challenge this norm. I vowed that this study would dedicate itself to the famous 'how' rather than just the 'what'. That is: "Don't just tell us *what* is the case, show us *how*". I vowed, that for every analytical claim I made, I would don it detailed empirical flesh and blood. If I mentioned a certain norm, I would make several examples of how this norm was practiced. And not only that: I would choose examples which showed the *variety* of ways and degrees in which this norm might influence people. In other words, if the current study was guided by a self-realization agenda (and why would this author be exempt from such a general cultural trend), then it was to challenge my own aptness for seduction. I would not let myself get away with sweeping diagnoses, even if I recognized my own propensity for it. I decided that the spirit of this study would be a concern with painstaking substance, even if it might result in a less spectacular narrative. As a measure for this vow, I chose to have *two* audiences: The academic community and the world of practice. Whenever I presented academic discussions, I wanted them to be framed in a way which would make sense to knowledge-work managers and employees. And vice versa, whenever I delivered nitty-gritty illustrations and examples, they should appear relevant to central academic discussions. I wanted to contribute to an

academic environment, but only to the extent that my research simultaneously asked questions which were practically relevant.

In order to pursue these agendas, I faced several challenges. First, I needed to find a language which was capable of handling simultaneities and contradictions while at the same time capturing decisive regularities. Second, I needed to find a gaze which recognized exploitation and control while remaining sensitive towards meaningfulness and freedom. Third, I needed to strike a balance between my dedication to open empirical exploration on the one hand, and the recognition of existing research on the other hand. The thesis is composed in a manner which addresses these challenges: In Chapter 1, I start by positioning my research interest in a larger field of literature on late modernity and work as self-realization. This positioning is shaped as an ongoing dialogue where I combine my presentation of the writings with explanations about my agreements and disagreements. In this way, I slowly tease out my own perspective, and how I wish to challenge or supplement the canonical scholars on the subject. At the conclusion of Chapter 1, I formulate my precise research issue. In Chapter 2, I proceed to formulate an analytical language equipped for my particular agenda. This language is meant to steer me clear of both political naiveté and habitual suspicion towards high-involvement work. It is also meant to ensure a high tolerance for contradictions and surprises in my empirical findings. Thus equipped, I spend Chapter 3 describing the concrete methodological tools which I applied in order to implement my ethical and analytical agenda. The framework established during these first three chapters serves as the starting point for my actual analysis: Chapters 4-7 are detailed empirical investigations of the predominant discourses about work and about the interaction between managers and employees in creative knowledge work. These analyses nuance some of the general diagnoses made by sociologists of late modernity in the sense that I argue for the existence of *both* traditional and post-traditional dynamics in modern organizations. The analyses also challenge some of the critical organizational research which casts high-involvement work as a symptom of capitalist exploitation. Instead, I argue that the arrival of self-realization discourses engenders a reshuffling of power dynamics between employers and employees where *both* parties become vulnerable and *both* parties are opportunistic. Furthermore, I argue that the tension-fraught working life engenders *both* profit maximization and existential meaningfulness, sometimes in the very same instance.

My hope is that the empirical thickness and analytical arguments in this thesis may offer a meaningful contribution to sociological diagnoses and critical organizational discussions about work in an era of self-realization. I also hope that managers and employees can use its details to engage in renewed and *concrete* dialogue with themselves and each other about the joys and challenges of working

life. To the extent that my dual audiences have compromised my aptness in both contexts, I ask for sympathy with the intention behind it.

CHAPTER 1
Affective Labor and Post-bureaucracy

As mentioned in the introduction, I first directed my attention to the field of modern working life, because I sensed that this area condensed some of the general issues of life in late modernity. In the many circulating work tales, ranging from depressive crises to pioneering exploits, I recognized a number of themes which seemed the signature of our time: the desire for uniqueness and the nostalgia for routine; the quest for freedom and the longing for authority, the chase of visibility and the dreams of quietude. All of these contradictory forces coexisted and seemed to strike at the heart of our present condition. I was attracted precisely by the intensity of the forces, and by their contradictory nature. It was this initial puzzlement that guided me as I entered my field. But it was more than a mere puzzlement. It was also a sense of awe towards the existential precariousness at stake. I wished to understand the nature of this emotional intensity in a way which could capture *both* the moments of meaning and the moments of despair. In other words, I wished to find tools which could capture the *simultaneity* of contradictory forces in modern working life, rather than to diagnose them as a symptom of one or the other. I was also guided by an initial curiosity about a specific phenomenon: Often I experienced that people suffering from stress and exhaustion in their working life were disinclined to move to another, less taxing, setting. Their explanation for this reluctance was that they would not let go of the *possibilities* in their job. They associated their work with meaningfulness and freedom, even if it caused them pain. So my interest revolved around the emotional intensity of modern working life, and how this intensity seemed to support fantasies of freedom and unlimited possibilities. I found it very intriguing that such fantasies could survive in organizational settings which are, as we know, largely concerned with reaching 'instrumental' goals such as profit or growth.

In order to frame my study, I pursued the theme of freedom and self-realization at work through sociological literature about late modernity. After this I continued with organizational studies about self-realization discourses in 'corporate culture' and 'post-bureaucracy'. When reading this literature, I was struck by a certain tendency towards generalizing diagnoses. Many prominent writers depict the trends of self-realization as a symptom of a specific 'era' or 'cultural condition'. For example, a group of sociologists (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2003; Giddens, 1997; Sennett, 1998) diagnose the present as a precarious, even pathological, condition centered on the celebration of authenticity and personal choices. They claim that this comes at the risk of dismantling loyalty, long-term commitment and true political struggles. In contrast, the *proponents* of 'corporate culture' in management literature see the increased individualism and emotional involvement as a sign of empowerment and freedom for

employees (e.g. Handsfield & Ghosh, 1994; Shrednick et al., 1992; Senge, 1990) Finally, with similar generalization, the *critics* of corporate culture argue that the celebration of emotional involvement is in fact a sign of more sophisticated control than the bureaucratic model it purports to replace (e.g. Ray, 1986; Willmott, 1993; Barker, 2002). Being committed to micro-sociological details, I wished to supplement these general diagnoses and the somewhat polarized positions for or against emotional attachment to work. As an alternative, the current project insists on empirical density and its capacity to engender diagnoses tolerant of contradictions and ambiguities. My general aim is to develop a methodological and analytical approach which can capture *simultaneities*, rather than reproduce traditional dualisms. I wish to capture the simultaneity of pain and joy in modern working life. I also wish to capture the simultaneity of power and freedom, rather than to suggest that self-realization trends are an expression of one or the other. Finally, I wish to capture the simultaneity of *various* discourses and *various* dynamics of interaction.

When I entered this research field, I was equipped with the theoretical and empirical toolbox provided to me by my anthropological background. This means that I looked at modern working life through a lens of sociological theories about late modernity and capitalism. With this as my platform, I have then made excursions into discussions in organizational literature dealing with a similar agenda. My dialogue with organizational literature concentrates on the debates about 'post-bureaucracy' and 'corporate culture' in Critical Management Studies. I selected these texts as interlocutors, because I see in them an analytical drive similar to mine. I share their wish to conduct research based on solidarity, just as I share their skepticism towards 'mainstream' management literature which is often uncritically enthusiastic about flexibility, corporate culture, and self-management. Finally, I share their selection of key themes, namely questions about freedom and the relation between instrumentality and authenticity. Given these commonalities, they were an obvious choice for dialogue. I do, however, have important disagreements with this literature. The disagreements relate to what we mean by 'critical', and how we practice critique methodologically and analytically. At the center of this disagreement lies a question of whether we subscribe to an analysis of *suspicion* or an analysis of *compassion*. My claim is that some of the canonical texts in the CMS literature on corporate culture risk practicing the former, while certain analytical and methodological precautions may help us practice the latter. When it comes to offering meaningful critique, it is my firm conviction that compassion does a better job than suspicion. I will write much more on the distinction between suspicions and compassion below.

The chapter is divided into seven thematic sections which each represent important discussions in the literature: detraditionalization and flexible capitalism, corporate culture as empowerment, corporate

culture as control, teams as iron cages, authenticating techniques, enterprising selves and emotional capital, and forms of resistance in capitalism. These themes are the ones that reverberate in the CMS discussions about corporate culture and work as self-realization, and I use them to tease out the relevant framework for my own empirical investigations. Each theme represents a large field of debate, and one could write an entire thesis on the subtleties of these questions. In the present thesis, I only have space to present the central arguments of the discussions and how they have influenced my analytical and methodological choices as I set out on my fieldwork.

DETRADITIONALIZATION AND FLEXIBLE CAPITALISM

Several prominent sociologists have focused their research on diagnosing the condition of post-traditional society, which they name by various terms such as 'late modernity' (Giddens, 1991: 8), 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000: 2) 'second modernity' (Beck & Lau, 2005: 526) or 'new capitalism' (Sennett, 1998:9-10). There are a number of differences between their diagnoses, but they have important arguments in common. They claim that our current era involves an increased *reflexivity* brought about by the dissolution of traditional biographies and structures. Instead of leaning on external frameworks, individuals must now conduct their life based on personal choices. There are no longer any unquestioned authorities whose scientific, religious or professional mandate might relieve us of these reflections. Although we may decide to follow the guidelines of such authorities, it would still be considered a *personal choice*. Beck calls this the mandatory 'do-it-yourself'-biography (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2009: 15). The demise of unquestioned authorities and the concomitant focus on personal choices creates a precarious condition of increased maneuverability and increased vulnerability at the same time. All four sociologists agree that the main challenge in this condition is the establishment of long-term commitment, trust, and political solidarity (Bauman: 2000: 35; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001: 29; Giddens, 1991: 96; Sennett, 2006: 196), and all of them agree that these challenges extend into working life as well.

Anthony Giddens pursues the question of commitment into the field of marriage and partnership. In his book about the transformation of intimacy (1991), Giddens identifies a new approach to love which he calls 'the pure relationship'. This pure relationship is precisely defined by reflexivity and is markedly different from partnership based on tradition. Giddens' study is relevant in this context; because it analyses how traditional forms of commitment evolve into more 'reflexive' forms. Similar issues are at stake between managers and employees in modern knowledge-work organizations, which I will describe in later chapters. According to Giddens there are seven characteristics of the pure relationship:

1. It is not "anchored in external conditions of social or economic life" but is rather "free-floating". Put differently, it is the quality of the relationship itself which must sustain its continued existence, since it is not ensured longevity via tradition or structural pressure. (ibid.: 89)
2. It "is sought only for what the relationship can bring to the partners involved." (ibid.:90)
3. It is "reflexively organized", which means that it rests on an ongoing "self-interrogation" by the partners involved. This self-interrogation runs along the lines of "am I truly happy?", and if this question cannot be answered positively, the relationship is endangered. (ibid.:91)
4. It depends on commitment. By commitment is meant something other than a binding-together based on external factors. Rather it is a willingness to accept the risks and tensions of the relationship out of a conviction that this same relationship offers personal rewards which outweigh them. The commitment is always in a precarious balance with the reflexivity, in that the 'am I truly happy'- question cannot remain too negatively answered for too long without threatening the commitment. (ibid.:92)
5. It is focused on intimacy, by which is meant an ongoing concern with 'the nature of the relationship itself'. Once the relationship begins to slip into more habitual or routine-minded interactions, both parties must "re-commit" in order to grow close again. (ibid.:94)
6. In the absence of explicit and traditional duties, the pure relationship depends on mutual trust between partners. This trust must be nursed and re-established continually, since the intimacy requires that it must not become rule-based. (ibid.:96)
7. It is not a matter of one individual simply being affirmed by another, but rather of both parties finding recognition through the possibility of undertaking self-exploration via the relationship of intimacy with the other. (ibid.:97)

The interesting thing about the pure relationship is not only its absence of traditional frameworks, but its active opposition to them. If the relationship becomes too routine-minded, or if the commitment appears to be rule-based rather than 'authentic', then it is conceived as false or insincere. In other words, the focus is inwards, towards the relationship itself, rather than outwards towards the context of the relationship and the positive 'external' effects which such a relationship might engender. We shall see similar trends in the way that my participants relate to their work and to their most important counterparts at work.

The sociologist Ulrich Beck is also interested in the reflexivity, individualization and inescapable 'do-it-yourself'-biographies which the post-traditional period engenders. He claims that the development has oddly paradoxical consequences: At the same time that individual lives are set free from pre-given trajectories, society exerts a unifying pressure far greater than we have ever witnessed before. Modern welfare society is a pervasive 'institutionalizer' which demands of all its citizens that they be included in the same taxation rules, pension systems, unemployment benefits etc. In other words, second modernity is a form of 'institutionalized individualism' which introduces increased individual possibilities (and uncertainties!) at the same time as it introduces increased institutional pressure. However, the institutional pressure is expressed in the mode of individualism, in the sense that external circumstances offer no legitimate excuse for one's current condition. All responsibility is cast as individual and turned into a matter of personal choices: "Think, calculate, plan, negotiate, define, revoke (with everything constantly starting again from the beginning): these are the imperatives of the 'precarious freedoms' that are taking hold of life as modernity advances. Even not deciding, the mercy of having to submit, is vanishing", he and Beck-Gernsheim say. (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2009:20) The consequence, according to Beck, is that do-it-yourself biographies may easily turn into breakdown biographies, as individuals collapse under the pressure of personal responsibility and unrelenting uncertainty. This is the double face of individualization: on the one hand emancipation, on the other hand anomie[1]. Out of this double condition arises an inherent challenge to create and maintain integrated societies capable of fostering solidarity and long-term commitment. How do detraditionalized people, focused on the uncompromising authenticity of their personal choices, manage to align expectations and coordinate action, and how do they even manage to discern collective agendas rather than personal issues? These are Beck's concerns, and he does not purport to have answers. Whether individualization and integration are mutually exclusive remains an open question, he says (ibid: 33). In other words, Beck, like Giddens, speaks of a present 'era' where life is precarious and traditional scripts have been lost. These trends influence all major contexts in individual lives, such as marriage, family, and work, they claim. The question one might ask of both Giddens and Beck is whether these traditional scripts have indeed been lost, or whether they still live alongside the new and more precarious ones?

[1] Anomie is Emile Durkheim's (1897) term for the alienated and purposeless condition of individuals living in a society without norms or common ethics – often due to radical structural and economic changes, and due to the discrepancy between existing ideals and what is realistically achievable.

Following the same lines of diagnosis, yet with more pessimistic language, Zygmunt Bauman discusses the issue of commitment, political involvement and solidarity in an individualized world. Bauman takes Beck's points one step further, claiming that the focus on individual identity does not simply complicate the matter of establishing communities. In fact, it serves as a permanent distraction for the absence of real and long-term involvement. It is a surrogate for community, he claims, not just a challenge to it. (Bauman, 2009: 10) He speaks of 'vagrant's moralities' (Bauman, 1993: 17) and 'nomadism' (Bauman, 2000: 13) as people confound freedom with consumerism, and interpret the focus on possibilities as an invitation to permanently shop around in existence without ever committing to something lasting. This absence of solidity leads Bauman to diagnose our present era as 'liquid modernity', characterized by a condition of permanent ambivalence due to the lack of support from traditional and commitment-based networks.

In a similar diagnosis, Sennett (1998, 2006) claims that flexible capitalism and modern project-based work 'corrodes' character and important virtues, such as solidarity and community. He asks: "How can mutual loyalties and commitments be sustained in institutions which are constantly breaking apart or continually being redesigned?" (Sennett, 1998: 9) According to Sennett, flexible capitalism is responsible for disorienting the individual, since no long-term goals are worth pursing in a context where employers repeatedly change direction and restructure organizations. While Fordism at least afforded job-security and the stability of routine, flexible work disrupts craft and discourages delay of gratification for the sake of future goals. In short, flexible work hinders the establishment of a sound work ethics. Organizations 'sell' flexible work as freedom from traditional hierarchical control, but flexibility represents an even more invading control, claims Sennett. It is invasive, because it is invisible and often decoupled from accountable managers – implemented a.o. through pervasive information technology and other devises for surveillance and measuring (Sennett, 2006: 58).

All four sociologists call for a repoliticization where individuals awaken from their identity-fixated slumber and instead mobilize to common causes and moral concerns reaching beyond the Self and its immediate gratification. Bauman expresses the need for "re-collectivizing the privatized Utopias" so that we are once again able to concern ourselves with questions about the 'good society' and 'just society'. (Bauman, 2000: 51). Sennett is the most dystopian of the four, seeing mainly pathological consequences emanating from the current condition:

> "The new institutions, as we have seen, are neither smaller nor more democratic; centralized power has instead been reconfigured, power split off from authority. The

> institutions inspire only weak loyalty, they diminish participation and mediation of commands, they breed low levels of informal trust and high levels of anxiety about uselessness. A shortened framework of institutional time lies at the heart of this social degradation; the cutting edge has capitalized on superficial human relations. The same shortened time framework has disoriented individuals in efforts to plan their life course strategically and dimmed the disciplinary power of the old work ethic based on delayed gratification." (Sennett, 2006: 181).

The three others all point to a potential for maturity and new forms of commitment inherent in individualization and reflexivity. Beck speaks of the possibility that the very reflexivity which individualizes us may also re-politicize and collectivize us, as we become aware of our mutual challenges, such as ecological disasters, impending unemployment crises etc. He tentatively suggests that we may use Sociology as a means to create integration and cohesion without fighting the inescapable facts of increased individualism (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2009: 33-34). Giddens believes to glimpse the arrival of a 'post-scarcity system' which via globalized coordination helps us move beyond both capitalism and socialism, thus removing many of the current sources of conflict (Giddens, 1991: 166). Bauman voices the hope that we may become skilful 'translators', trained in the art of reaching enough mutual understanding, across great differences, that we can at least 'go on', even if we do not truly share meaning (Bauman, 1999: 202).

These sociological analyses are acutely apt in showing the new vulnerabilities and contradictions brought about by individualization, focus on self-realization, and flexibilization. As such they provide the basis for the current study. However, they tend to remain rather abstract. Although the four sociologists, in each their way, try to grasp both continuities and ruptures in our current condition, their diagnoses often operate on a very general level. This level tends to lack systematic empirical explorations and sensitivity to micro-level variations which might nuance their assumptions. For example, I miss more empirical flesh backing up essayistic remarks such as: "The place of employment feels like a camping site which one visits for just a few days, and may leave at any moment if the comforts on offer are not delivered or found unsatisfactory when delivered –" (Bauman, 2000: 149) Returning to Michelle in the introduction, I do not believe that such nonchalant metaphors take the actors in modern working life seriously enough. The concern with diagnosing entire eras brings along the risk of displaying reductionist approaches to the people they study. In contrast, the current thesis takes its point of departure in Michelle's everyday working life, showing sensitivity to the complexity of her motives and the social dynamics in her context. Out of this fine-combed micro-level analysis I then develop suggestions for more general diagnoses - not the other way around. Adding nuances to the

above literature, I investigate empirically whether traditional forms of commitment have really faded, and whether values such as craft and solidarity are truly absent from modern working life. I also explore whether there are *various* forms of commitment in the current 'era', and not only ones based on self-realization and corrosion of character. In other words, while being profoundly inspired by the sociological analyses of detraditionalization, I will question the prevalence and unambiguity of this detraditionalization. I will do this by establishing analytical and methodological tools capable of reading for difference and surprises rather than corroborating general diagnoses. These tools will be presented in later chapters.

CORPORATE CULTURE AS INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT

Moving the perspective from society at large to organizational settings, similar discussions about the merits of late modern values have taken place. From the 1970s and onwards, a surge of popular management literature challenged hierarchical and bureaucratic organizations, recommending instead the structural implementation of corporate culture based on values such as strong common goals, flexibility, self-management, and individual excellence (see e.g. Allen et al., 1982; Deal & Kennedy, 1985; Hickman & Silva, 1986; Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Traditional bureaucratic organizations were associated with practices such as explicit rules, systematic division of labor, clearly delineated hierarchy, merit-based promotions, and a strict division between professional and emotional spheres (see a.o. Alvesson & Thompson, 2004: 489; Webb, 2006: 22-23). In a reaction against this, the popular management literature spoke in favor of strong visionary values and high emotional involvement as a means to achieve both excellence and well-being. An often-quoted example is Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman's book called 'In Search of Excellence' (1982). This book launched a frontal attack on bureaucratic management which, so they claimed, was based on the misguided notion that human beings are rational. Instead, they suggested a management model which could handle the irrational and contradictory nature of man. Inspired by the psychologist Ernest Becker, Peters and Waterman believed that the primary challenge for management was to reconcile two human drives: the wish to belong and the wish to excel. This reconciliation could be brought about, so they suggested, by offering employees a strong collective and transformational vision. Once employees entered this visionary community and accepted its parameters, they would be allowed great individual difference and autonomy. Put differently, Peters and Waterman claimed that the focus on visionary goals and emotional involvement could handle the paradoxes of working life: collective versus individual, safety versus originality, and instrumentality versus authenticity. Employees were offered a place of belonging, and within this setting (given that they embraced the fundamental values) they could find a space in

which to excel. In fact, they were more likely to excel under such circumstances, since this empowerment would turn "the average Joe or Jane into winners" (1982: 61) It was, according to Peters and Waterman, a win-win situation, since employees were offered meaning and self-realization, while organizations gained in growth and profit. 'In Search of Excellence' was one among several books promoting strong 'corporate culture'. Some of the essential elements in this new model based on corporate culture were:

- Communicating strong corporate visions and values which employees are expected to know, embrace and be guided by
- Promoting passionate and personal identification with work
- Rewarding individual excellence
- Deconstructing highly specialized, centralized and hierarchical organization structures, instead offering autonomy and responsibility to decentralized units, e.g. multi-disciplinary teams responsible for the achievement of common goals ('flattening' the pyramids, cf. Carlzon, 1993)
- Reducing administrative and management layers, focusing instead on 'frontline personnel' who should keep customers happy through model behavior based on corporate values
- Striving for dialogic and coaching management rather than authoritarian and rule-based

(See e.g. Webb, 2006: 154-157)

William Ouchi (1980) has referred to this form of organization as 'clans'. The clan displays high cohesion and solidarity due to a strong belief that the interest of the individual is best served by pursuing the interest of the group. According to Ouchi, clan-resembling organizations arise when bureaucracy fails in the face of increasing individuality and non-standardized criteria for quality. In the absence of bureaucracy's contractual logic, strong goal alignment keeps the group efficient and committed. In modern organizations, the promotion of corporate culture as management strategy comes in several different forms, under names such as Human Resource Management (HRM), Total Quality Management (TQM), and Transformational Leadership (Willmott, 1994; Alvesson & Thompson, 2005). All these strategies are based on a great faith in the innovative and efficient momentum created by the loosening of traditional structures in favor of a focus on common goals, meaning, flexibility, and autonomy. As writes management guru Jan Carlzon: "In a boundaryless

atmosphere, a good idea sprouts and blossoms and is nurtured by all. No one cares where the seed came from." (Carlzon, 1993: 361)

CORPORATE CULTURE AS CONTROL

During the late 1980s and onwards, a number of both theoretical and empirical studies by critical scholars problematized the proposed merits of corporate culture (e.g. Ray, 1996; Kunda, 2006; Willmott, 1993). They questioned whether corporate culture was indeed empowering, meaningful and integrating, and whether it did indeed transcend the tensions between instrumental rationality and authenticity.

In her famous article 'Corporate Culture – The last frontier of control?', Carol Ray makes the claim that far from being empowering and liberating, corporate culture is in fact "simply an addition to other forms of control which companies have tried to implement". (Ray, 1986: 287) She distinguishes between three successive forms of managerial control. First, there is the bureaucratic control which attempts to control through promises of future rewards and appeals to loyalty. Second, there is the humanistic control (exerted by the so-called 'humanist school') which seeks to control by making the tasks satisfying, thus enhancing employee loyalty. And third, there is the culture control which manipulates symbols, rituals and myths in order to instill in the employee a deep-felt love of the firm and its goals. (ibid: 294) Ray's argument is that while the first two forms of control operate on external parameters (financial or hierarchical rewards, and the construction of tasks), the latter crosses the 'last frontier' of the working subject by entering its soul. The very fact that corporate culture is not a formalized or explicit set of rules, but rather an implicit understanding about 'how we do things here', makes it very hard to resist, she argues. Ray underscores how the embedded cultural beliefs, attitudes and sentiments address the emotional and irrational side of employees, thus making "an evangelist, a shaman, a statesperson" (ibid: 289) out of the manager. The sermons of the manager become a control device, because the values promoted in these sermons serve to reach company goals such as profit and efficiency. Through the promise of inclusion in a meaningful and high status community, and through the celebration of each individual's potential to 'become a winner', employees are turned more productive and more dedicated, so Ray claims. A number of other studies analyzing the, according to them, disquieting parallels between corporate culture management and spiritual sects have been made, also in a Danish setting (see e.g. Salamon, 2002)

Similar arguments are put forward by Gideon Kunda in his famous study of the engineering company 'Tech' (Kunda, 2006, orig. 1992). During his fieldwork, Kunda followed everyday working life in the high status 'Tech', interviewing both managers and employees. While talking to a manager about how to manage modern, well-educated employees', the manager made the following comment:

> "Power plays don't work. You can't *make'em* do anything. They have to want to. So you have to work through the culture. The idea is to educate people without them knowing it. Have the religion and not know how they ever got it!" (ibid: 5)

It is precisely this management intention of 'spreading the religion' which Kunda pursued in its practical implementations during his fieldwork at Tech. He studied how culture was 'pushed' via speeches, manuals, glossaries, culture exercises and 'boot camps', and how increase in rank usually implied decrease in resistance to these cultural norms. In line with Ray, he pointed to the 'deepness' of the control exerted by the company due to its instrumentalization of employee "thoughts and feelings, 'mindsets' and 'gut reactions'" (ibid.: 7). He argued that his findings at Tech corroborated how control was shifting from economic to normative instruments: The Self of the employees was targeted, while during the years of economic management devices this Self remained a private matter. Kunda's work is based on a thorough empirical study and thus has a lot of 'flesh' to support his claims. It is interesting, however, to note how he describes his own analytical puzzlement at the beginning of the study:

> "Are the people whom we encounter there happy automatons? Brainwashed Yuppies? Self-actualizing human beings? Do they think of their experiences at work as authentic expressions of themselves or as stylized roles? Is the Lyndsville engineering facility a prison or a playground?" (ibid: 17)

These questions present the reader with a number of choices which all invite to a strict maintenance of the dualism between instrumentality and authenticity. The employees are *either* brainwashed (i.e. thoroughly instrumentalized by their firm) *or* self-actualizing (i.e. 'authentic'). They are *either* in a prison *or* playing freely. Kunda never asks whether the employees might be instrumentalized and self-actualizing at the same time. Nor does he suggest that limiting rules may sometimes be conducive to meaningful play. He insists that we choose. A similar insensitivity to simultaneities and contradictions can be seen in his general empirical approach. He is concerned with how effectively the corporate culture affects employees (ibid: 14). But why is he only interested in employees? Would it not be important to study how it affects managers? Are they simply the insistent wielders of this corporate

culture or are they not also 'controlled' and 'reined' by it? And could it not be possible that the very same corporate culture may be 'wielded' by employees in the form of demands made towards the organization and the managers? In other words, would a consistent 'reading for difference' not allow Kunda to capture contradictory consequences of corporate culture for all the parties involved, rather than reproducing the normative distinction "employers (exploitative) and employees (victims)"?

Another example of Kunda's insensitivity to contradictions and overlappings is his willingness to take at face value the pervasiveness of 'corporate culture' in Tech. One wonders whether there are not other ways of understanding and practicing organization in Tech. Kunda's approach does not seem to consider this possibility or even have a gaze which would be able to capture it. But what if modern organizations are not either 'post-bureaucratic' or 'bureaucratic', but have elements of both? (See e.g. Alvesson & Thompson, 2005: 95 for this argument). Despite his 'thick' empirical material, Kunda seems predisposed to having 'usual suspects'. These suspects are capitalism, managers, instrumental goals, and control. There is a limited room for surprise in this framing of his empirical study. My claim is that he, as a number of other critical management scholars, practices an *analysis of suspicion* which is in danger of reproducing its suspects and thus missing some of the nuances in the question of work and self-realization. By analysis of suspicion I mean that the researcher has a set of positions, activities or values which he is in the habit of considering as problematic. Instead of challenging these critical habits, he structures his studies in a manner which is unlikely to engender revisions. Often the negative aspect of a certain activity or position is used as the very foundation for the research endeavor. For example, Kunda sets out with the agenda of investigating the effects of corporate culture on employees. Corporate culture is the suspect, and we are not convinced during his book that he does a thorough methodological job making room for surprises. Exaggerating my point a little, an analogous case would be that one wished to study 'the exploitative effects of modern information technology'. The point is that one has decided beforehand to suspect modern information technology, and that the whole research design is set up in a manner which fails to challenge this suspicion. In all fairness, one should keep in mind that Kunda's study is a reaction against the mainstream literature described above, which uncritically celebrates the promotion of corporate culture. As such, I sympathize with his agenda. My only point is that we should be careful not to replace radical "naiveté" with radical criticism, thus reproducing the same dualisms, only with inverted normative approaches.

A number of scholars, including researchers from CMS, advocate a new methodological orientation in order to counter this tendency. In their article on 'constructing mystery', Alvesson and Kärremann (2007) argue that CMS theory development would benefit from researchers' willingness to expose

themselves to 'breakdowns'. By breakdowns they mean that the framework and assumptions which the researcher has defined at the outset turn out not to match what the field insists on (not) expressing. An example could be if researchers concerned with leadership discover that their research participants find this theme irrelevant, because their working life revolves around different problems. Elsewhere, Alvesson (2008) takes stock of CMS and its future, claiming that CMS risks reproducing the very structures they are trying to oppose. This happens, e.g., when researchers are too concerned with their own 'performativity' (as in journal output), thus becoming reluctant to carry out detailed and time-consuming empirical studies. He also challenges the over-idealistic (/hypocritical) approaches to emancipation which he finds prevalent among CMS scholars. Maybe, he suggests, CMS should be more open to the positive aspects of management sometimes. And maybe, he goes on, CMS should be more pragmatic in their approach to productivity, control, hierarchy and coordination, because "without some degree of these qualities social life may be characterized by the tyranny of structurelessness". (ibid: 19) Kanter too points to the importance of grappling with the *contradictory* phenomena in modern organizations, such as the *coexistence* of bureaucratic and 'authentic' norms (Kanter, 1989: 90). And from a sociological perspective, Gill & Pratt make the same point (Gill & Pratt, 2008: 16). The chapters on analytical strategy and methods in this thesis take up the challenge of capturing simultaneities and contradictions by constructing what I have called an *analysis of compassion*. This analysis of compassion grapples with the same issues as the analysis of suspicion, yet it attempts to open up for more surprises and tensions. Both chapters contain detailed and concrete tools for turning the predictability of suspicion into an explorative attitude of compassion. In its briefest possible definition, the analysis of compassion is concerned with challenging usual suspects and habitual dualisms. It does so by extending solidarity to all the positions involved, and asking about gains and costs for everybody, instead of operating with predefined normative positions such as exploited, victimized employees and colonizing, powerful organizations. In the compassionate perspective, social techniques such as corporate culture are contradictory phenomena with a *variety* of consequences – some involving increased vulnerability, some involving increased influence. I will write much more on this in the next two chapters.

Continuing in the analysis of suspicion, Hugh Willmott (1993) takes up the theme of corporate culture and criticizes HRM, TQM, and the 'gurus of excellence' for colonizing the 'hearts and minds' of employees. The gist of his argument is that these managerial trends equal, in principle albeit not intensity, the brainwash of Newspeak described by George Orwell in his novel "1984". The similarity between corporate culturism and Newspeak lies in the fact that both attempt to efface ambiguities through thought control while insisting on calling it 'freedom', says Willmott. He sees the Culture of

Excellence promoted by Peters & Waterman as an attempt to produce employees who willingly carry out the instrumental tasks defined by the company, all the while being under the impression that they are actualizing themselves. He describes how, just like in '1984', strong and ideological language is capable of effacing the common laws of contradiction, so that it can successfully claim that 'up is down' or 'control is freedom'. Corporate culture preaches 'respect for the individual', yet punishes or silences 'non-believers', claims Willmott. It masquerades as "a 'therapy of freedom' ", all the while "manufacturing consensus". (ibid: 274)

Willmott draws on extensive literature to support his suspicious analysis, and the reader feels quite convinced that there are indeed inherent and invisible contradictions in the Culture of Excellence. Nevertheless, I would claim that the perspective of suspicion does not capture all the relevant nuances. Once again, the focus on usual suspects leads to an absence of certain kinds of analytical and empirical questions. Willmott habitually considers employees as victims of the corporate culture, but I would like to know if they too might practice 'doublethink', thus exerting considerable pressure back on the organization and their managers. Likewise, Willmott consistently treats corporate culture as the antithesis to 'authentic' freedom, but I would like to know if strong corporate values might not engender *both* control *and* increased maneuverability for employees. It seems as if the analysis of suspicion is not well suited for grasping contradictory aspects of a given cultural phenomenon. It rarely stops to wonder whether it may be liberating and oppressive *at the same time* - or whether it may represent opportunities and bindings simultaneously. The backdrop for this suspicion seems to be a romantic image of emancipation, where we are encouraged to strive for a condition free from bindings, restrictions and loss. As we shall see later, my chapter on the analytics of compassion argues against this romantic vision and suggests another critical ambition which accepts the premise that freedom and power are always two sides of the same coin.

TEAMS AS IRON CAGES

Corporate culture often involved the reduction of hierarchical structures in order to replace them with self-managing teams. The proponents of these reforms believed the teams to be beneficial for both productivity and employee well-being. They were beneficial for employees because they enhanced autonomy, influence and meaningfulness, claimed the proponents. And they were beneficial for productivity, because a number of the rigid and heavy administrative procedures in more rule-based management could be left out. Furthermore, there were savings associated with cutting several layers of middle-managers. And finally, the influence and meaningfulness of work made for more engaged and committed employees. Similar to the critical objections raised against the spread of corporate culturism,

CMS scholars have conducted empirical studies of companies introducing team-based work and judged them anything but liberating.

James Barker followed the process in the company 'ISE' of converting traditional hierarchical structures into self-managing teams. He was interested in how control was manifested in this new form of structure, and whether it actually transcended traditional bureaucratic control. After a very encompassing empirical study, involving months of fieldwork and interviews, he ended up concluding that not only did the teams reproduce many of the control mechanisms in bureaucracy, they also intensified them, because they were enforced through 'invisible' peer pressure rather than explicit rules. The subtlety of the control made it much more pervasive and much more difficult to resist, according to Barker: "The team members accept that they are controlling their own actions. It seems natural, and they willingly submit to their own control system" (Barker, 2002: 206) Barker describes the process after the dismantlement of the hierarchical structures as evolving in three phases for the new teams: consolidation, developing strong norms, and formalizing the norms into rules. His point is that once the team has arrived at phase three, the control is as encompassing and rule-based as the former bureaucratic control. In addition, however, it has an element of informality which makes it harder to pinpoint and resist. Rather than just making instrumental corrections to behavior, teams can sanction team members with threats of exclusion, thus questioning the moral integrity of critical colleagues. Once again, the main concern of the Critical Management Scholar is the shift from explicit to normative control in organizations. Barker ends up concluding: "The iron cage becomes stronger. The powerful combination of peer pressure and rational rules […] creates a new iron cage whose bars are almost invisible to the workers it incarcerates." (ibid: 207)

Barker's empirical studies are impressively extensive and detailed, and his close description of the three phases in team consolidation is very convincing. His suspicion seems to the point, one could say: Yes, the claim that team work equals freedom from control is 'suspect'. But when it comes to the implicit backdrop of the suspicions, I would claim that Barker reduced his openness to surprises right from the 'get-go', due to the way he addressed the field. His gaze was fixed on matters of control. He may have asked open questions, but they all related to control. My claim is that control forms part of an implicit distinction which has 'freedom' as its other side. And this distinction is highly loaded with normativity in the sense that freedom is considered preferable. In order to allow for surprises in this normative framework, it would be necessary to ask questions reaching *beyond* the predefined dichotomy between freedom and control. They could be questions asking for instance about 'times of satisfaction' or 'times of frustration'? Might not such questions, which do not presuppose the relevance of

distinguishing between freedom and control, yield surprising answers? Maybe they would be able to capture moments of great satisfaction associated with precisely the kind of team norms which Barker suspects as control. The normative backdrop of the study makes Barker empirically blind to instances in which rules and control give rise to experiences of meaningfulness and freedom, rather than 'crushing' them. Maybe the problem arises, because Barker does not investigate 'control' and 'freedom' in an 'emic' way, meaning a focus on local meanings rather than ideological ones. We never find out what his participants say about freedom. One gets the feeling that Barker knows what freedom is, hence why he assumes that his participants cannot tell him anything new and surprising about it. But Barker can tell *them* something surprising about freedom, namely that they do not have it, even when they readily assume that they do. Just like Willmott, Barker seems to operate with an implicit alternative to the current condition that involves an absence of control; a kind of 'natural' state where individuals never experience fetters or the need to discipline inner authenticity for the sake of external goals. One wonders how Barker imagines a workplace based on such a 'natural' state. How can the necessary ingredients of work, namely commitment and coordination, be practiced in the absence of rules and control? Operating with such abstract ideals as the backdrop for one's research makes it very hard to translate into practical action and concrete improvements.

Another study of team-based work was made by Catherine Casey, who conducted an extensive fieldwork at the large multinational corporation 'Hephaestus'. Casey's conclusions are very similar to Barker's, namely that the informality and subtlety of the new forms of control make them semi-totalitarian. Her interest is especially directed towards the use of metaphors about 'family' used by management in order to describe the new form of organization to their employees. Casey argues that management's invocation of family values silences critics who can be scapegoated as disloyal or selfish. The scapegoating is often carried out by team members rather than management, Casey claims, thus supporting Barker's observation above. From a psychoanalytical perspective, Casey argues that the insistently positive family rhetoric which censors the expression of negative experiences creates a high tension in employees between experiences of being instrumentalized on the one hand and norms about being authentic on the other. This ambivalence causes widespread anxiety and has a "dependent, narcissistic effect" on employees, she claims. (Casey, 1999: 165) The anxiety is intensified by the high demands put on employees and by their consequent exhaustion.

Casey is very apt in her analysis of the anxiety and tensions which arise in organizations operating with an implicit and unclarified combination of instrumental and authentic models for work. She skillfully describes how some of the emotional patterns usually pertaining to family life (such as sibling

rivalry, projections, rebellions etc.) now enter an organizational setting which adds extra dilemmas to them due to its instrumental framework. In other words, Casey's suspicion leads to a very valuable indication of suffering in modern organizations. But like the other studies above, she only captures one side of the issue, I would claim. Because she is suspicious rather than compassionate (i.e. asks only for costs, not for gains), she unravels suffering without eyeing the parallel experiences of meaningfulness. Similarly, she points to vulnerability, without seeing the complementary empowerment. I would have liked Casey to investigate how the metaphors of family affect the managers and the organization. Cannot employees invoke family values in order to 'control' or influence managerial styles? And cannot employees operate equally strategically in their shifts between instrumental and authentic models for work? Another set of questions pertains to the sources of anxiety among employees. Casey mentions high demands, ambiguity and exhaustion. But what about desire? She describes how Angie, a creative employee at Hephaestus, feels recurrently anxious and distraught at work. Yet Angie does not leave, because: "I have the golden handcuff sensation, that I'd like to leave but the security and benefits are such that I'm not sure I could adjust my lifestyle". (ibid: 167) Would it not be interesting to explore that 'golden handcuff sensation' which makes Angie stay, even though she has the option to change job? Maybe employees have desires and expectations towards working life which are a vital element in these patterns, and which do not so readily fit into the picture of instrumentalized victims.

EMOTIONAL LABOR AND AUTHENTICATING TECHNIQUES

The studies on corporate culture are supplemented by another line of research similarly interested in the consequences of normative management. This research studies how employee emotions are mobilized, and how this affects the domains of instrumentality and authenticity respectively. One of the early systematic researchers in this field was Arlie Hochschild, who coined the term 'emotional labor'. In her book, The Managed Heart (1983), she uses Marxist theories of alienation to analyze what she considers the commoditization of human feelings in certain types of modern service work. Based on her empirical study of flight attendants, Hochschild argues that modern service work turns emotions into commodities which one can sell for a wage, given that they have the proper 'exchange value'. In the case of flight attendants, such emotions should be displayed through 'sincere smiles' to the customers for instance. She calls this attachment of exchange value to feelings 'emotional labor', which she contrasts with 'emotion work'. Emotion work occurs in non-commercialized settings where people have to manage their feelings in order to adapt to society. For instance, they should be able to display sadness at a funeral, and they should be happy at weddings. Acting in a socially appropriate way sometimes involves a certain management of emotions, when they do not initially conform to the

norms – hence the term 'emotion work'. While emotional labor has 'exchange value', emotion work only has 'use value'. Use value, in the Marxist sense, means that it has a function or can induce pleasure, but not necessarily that you buy, sell or trade it. Hochschild argues that the attachment of exchange value to emotions leads to employee alienation as they constantly attempt to bridge the gap between what they 'really feel' and what they are 'supposed to feel'. Some end up more or less erasing the gap by adapting their feelings to the norm, Hochschild claims, and she sees this 'deep acting' as a fundamental repression of human authenticity. Others constantly struggle to manage the gap by offering various kinds of resistance such as smiling less sincerely or less frequently. Hochschild's theory of emotional labor has been immensely influential, and a number of scholars have applied her approach in empirical studies. She has also been exposed to a great deal of criticism, most of which addresses her sharp distinction between emotion work and emotional labor. Critics ask whether she does not underestimate the 'real' pleasure that employees may take in their work, and vice versa whether she does not overestimate the degree to which management can instrumentalize employee feelings.

The same interest in commoditization of emotions has been pursued by scholars in the Italian autonomous movement, most famously represented by Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri (2000) Drawing on Marxism, like Hochschild, Hardt and Negri argue that capitalism has undergone a fundamental shift as the principles of 'immaterial labor' become increasingly dominant. Immaterial labor concerns itself with the production of ideas, communication, knowledge, affect and other social phenomena. It depends upon the reservoir of 'lived life' and 'subjectivities' of its workers. The fact that immaterial labor must feed on Selves and lives in order to be productive, renders the demarcation between time of work and time of non-work precarious. Everything becomes potentially productive, and everything could be attributed exchange-value, Hardt and Negri claim. They call this expansion of productivity 'The Social Factory' in order to indicate that society as a whole has become what shop floors used to be in factories. Immaterial labor is precarious on structural parameters too: It tends to take the form of temporary contracts in order to sustain flexibility and mobility. Stable and long-term work commitments decrease while the importance of networks and production potential in social relationships increase.

Hardt and Negri, like Hochschild, underscore the alienating aspects of immaterial labor, since phenomena which are related to deeply intimate realms in the employees can be commandeered and sold by managers. Whether it is their dreams at night, their existential yearnings, or their ability to shape human relationships, personal modalities of the employees can all be put to use in the machinery of value-production. Also in line with Hochschild, Hardt and Negri emphasize that there is a great

potential for resistance embedded in this new form of immaterial labor and its dependence on Selves and lives. Because modern capitalism mobilizes affect and social relationships to such a degree, it opens up for spontaneous communities with intense agendas. Furthermore, because organizations depend on the 'authenticity' of their employees, they would spell their own extinction if they managed to completely colonize the souls and lives upon which they must feed. In other words, modern capitalism is a kind of double movement, in which the rise of immaterial labor at once increases exploitation and increases organizations' dependence on authenticity.

Picking up the thread from Hardt and Negri, CMS scholar Peter Fleming embarks on an investigation of the role of authenticity in modern day workplaces. (2009). He defines authenticity as 'the truth of oneself' (ibid: 1) and states that the space of employment has traditionally spelt the necessity to put aside such true feelings in order to pursue instrumental goals. However, Fleming finds that in the recent managerial trends which urge employees to 'just be themselves', we now see an unprecedented co-existence of instrumental and authentic discourses. Fleming's book is an endeavor to describe and analyze what he terms 'authenticating techniques' in modern management, which, according to him, serve the purpose of catering to the Generation Y employees who hate capitalism yet still want to benefit from it. By offering promises of excellence, uniqueness, autonomy and celebration of difference, modern management can attract young employees who wish to think of themselves as creative, independent and 'beyond' capitalist motivations. But the promises of authenticity and autonomy soon turn out to be a honey trap, Fleming claims, in that employees are prevented from ever reaching beyond fundamentally instrumental agendas. They are limited to 'designer resistance' which makes aestheticized displays of authenticity, all the while remaining deeply dependent on the consumer logic and commoditization which it claims to transcend.

As such, Fleming's argument is a reiteration of Hardt and Negri's central point, namely that authenticity, souls and lives become a reservoir on which modern productivity can feed. He tries to explain how this trend is able to appeal so efficiently to employees, despite the fact that it deepens the wound which it purports to heal. Its appeal consists in an offer to fill the 'lack' which modern capitalism instills in its subjects, he claims. This lack, in its shortest possible definition, is simply a *lack of life*, Fleming purports. The lack of life arises from the conditions which profit-seeking firms impose on us when we are employed by them: "It is a lack of power, lack of control, lack of choice, lack of dignity, lack of meaningful joy, a lack of community outside the commodity form" (ibid.: 5), he argues. Fleming then moves on to illustrate a variety of authenticating techniques practiced by modern management. These range from corporate 'fun games', endorsement of corporate 'rebels', to CSR, all of which have

in common, he claims, the fact that they allege to invite autonomy and authenticity while in fact powerfully co-opting these expressions in the service of profit accumulation.

Where, then, can we find actual authenticity as employees today, he asks. How can we exercise a form of authenticity which is not co-opted? Fleming suggests three different forms of freedom which offer each their mode of authenticity in relation to work. One is freedom through work, the second is freedom around work, and the third is freedom from work. Freedom *through work* can open up for pockets of authenticity when employees offer local resistance to co-optation. Fleming mentions an example of how employees in a customer service insist on their sameness, banality and subordination despite management's official celebration of difference, uniqueness and autonomy. Freedom *around work* can offer authenticity through leisure, sex, fun, neighborhood solidarity etc., yet Fleming emphasizes that these kinds of authenticity are ever in danger of co-optation, since leisure and work are symbiotically attached to each other, and are usually mutually constitutive. Finally we arrive at freedom *from work* which is clearly Fleming's favorite suggestion. Once again he draws on Hardt & Negri as he underscores the possibilities for authenticity embedded in decreasing the importance of and time spent on corporate work. He mentions the down-shift and slow down movements as existing examples of such endeavors. There are, however, still dangers attached to these strategies of 'reduction', since they may easily slip into simple freedom around work, Fleming claims. Therefore, he believes the most efficient road to authenticity to be the more radical 'Exodus' promoted by the Italian autonomous movement, also embodied in the Refusal of Work movement. Put very briefly, this exodus involves a radical denial by employees to be cast in a working relationship – based on the premise that all work already implies exploitation. Instead, employees mobilize politically in order to establish platforms for cooperation and existence which challenge the decisive role accorded to employment in modern capitalism.

Fleming's book displays a thorough knowledge of both organizational and philosophical research on the question of working life and emotions. Like Hochschild and Hardt & Negri, he is very succinct in his indication of how authenticity takes on a number of co-opted forms which sustain the very machinery it claims to transcend. But these suspicious scholars of emotions in organizations also have in common some predefined assumptions which I believe would have benefited from more openness to surprises. Once again, I would have liked a gaze which was able to capture not only management but also employees as strategic and co-opting agents, using the authenticity discourse to reach their own goals. There is an assumption of employee innocence and vulnerability which I believe to be romantic. Work is a strategic field in which both managers and employees play with power. While modern capitalism may entail a certain amount of 'flexploitation', it also offers employees new possibilities for

choice, opportunism and powerful normativity directed at management. Where are the research methods which engage with management vulnerability? And where are the research methods which investigate employee power? Working with a romantic backdrop, namely a staunch belief in the fact that work is always exploitation, we become unable to capture those muddy, messy moments of working life which temporarily transcend the neat opposition between powerful managers and vulnerable employees – and between instrumentality and authenticity. While the daring of the Refusal of Work movement fascinates me, I still fear that radical and romantic movements are in greater danger of being ambushed by their own monsters than the reformist approaches which tolerate contradictions and nuances. This danger is primarily due to the lack of concreteness and the difficulty in implemented the romantic ideals in everyday practice. One of the main endeavors in this thesis is to insist on concreteness and on the contradictory aspects of work, rather than promoting reified romantic dualisms.

FREEDOM, ENTERPRISE AND EMOTIONAL CAPITAL

While the scholars above focus on emotional labor and 'authenticating techniques', other scholars have approached the same issue of instrumentality and authenticity by investigating how modern psychology and the Self-Help culture influence employee subjectivities. One of the most influential scholars in this field is Nikolas Rose. Greatly inspired by the works of Michel Foucault, he has undertaken thorough studies of modern subjectivities and their development following the enormous influence of humanistic psychology and its narratives of self-actualization. In an organizational context, Rose attempts to make a precise incision in the complex web of interconnected processes influencing employee subjectivity: "governmental rationalities, social strategies, human technologies, and techniques of the self" (Rose, 1989: 60) He traces the various managerial techniques applied from the interwar years and onwards, and describes how they became increasingly influenced by psychological science, resulting in the current condition where the emotions, fantasies and neuroses of employees have become legitimate territory for management interest and intervention. He argues that the post-war period witnessed a rise in management technologies derived from the military and the experiences of war which focused on group relations. Management promoted this focus through a rhetoric of 'solidarity' and 'leadership' which demanded 'morale', 'communication' and the right 'attitudes' from employees. Underlying this rhetoric was a belief that the workplace could emulate democratic society as a whole, including its mechanisms to secure rights and pre-empt oppression. Rose claims that the former war-psychologists , now working as industrial psychologist, transferred to the organizations the values which had guided World War II, namely: 'freedom, citizenship, and respect for the individual'. (ibid: 88) As mentioned

earlier, these 'humanistic' managerial techniques proclaimed the end of antagonistic work relations and the rise of work as an opportunity for self-actualization.

Rose then moves on to a more general diagnosis of the present based on the same observations. He claims that the narratives of self-actualization and the focus on 'growth' and 'potential' have put modern individuals under an imperative of autonomy or an 'obligation to be free'. He sees this 'freedom obligation' as the site where newly molded personal desires meet late modern political rationalities: The dogma of self-reliance and infinite potential fits well with the entrepreneurial spirit of neoliberalism now increasingly dominant in Western welfare-societies. Neoliberalism casts the traditional welfare state as a bureaucratic monster which lacks innovative momentum and exerts oppressive control over private domains such as family and health. Instead, neoliberalism promotes an increase of 'free choice' through privatization of state enterprises and through the mechanisms of competition. Its proponents praise entrepreneurial values such as boldness, risk, optimization and exploration, and they argue that the support of such 'free' entrepreneurial processes will increase social benefits for all, due to the ensuing general growth. According to Rose, the entrepreneurial message of neoliberalism joins the self-actualization message of humanistic psychology, both contributing to the all-pervasive message of late modernity that above all else you must be free (cf. Beck above). You must be able to make informed and autonomous choices which reflect who you are and show you capable of forming your own life. Should you fail in this endeavor, psychotherapy jumps to the rescue and offers you the tools which can reconstitute you as an ever-competent and choosing subject, says Rose.

Rose's diagnosis is impressively succinct and thorough. He manages to avoid common simplifications by insisting on the interrelatedness between political rationalities, organizational technologies, and individual strategies. He shows us how the 'same' phenomenon, namely a focus on individual autonomy and growth, appears in different versions and with different components in all these contexts, and how personal desires and political agendas thus become aligned. However, Rose's theoretical approach implies a certain sequence of event (first came the economic, political and managerial techniques, and then came the individual strategies and technologies of self). I would like to show the *simultaneity* of these processes, and how they are mutually constitutive. There is no sequence, and power is not situated primarily in the social techniques. Social techniques and individual strategies are simultaneous aspects of the same phenomenon. This illustration of simultaneity is, as already mentioned, one of the primary ambitions in this thesis.

In a similar vein to Rose, the Israeli sociologist Eva Illouz has studied the intensification of therapeutic and emotional communication in recent decades and coined the term 'emotional capitalism'. (2007)

Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of 'cultural' and 'social' capital, Illouz claims that since the advent of humanistic psychology in the 1930s, these two kinds of capital have been joined by a third, namely 'emotional capital'. Like social and cultural capital, emotional capital influences the individual's likelihood of gaining success and possibilities in society. Accumulating emotional capital depends on one's ability to communicate emotions in a socially relevant way and to appear as a 'reflexive' and psychologically insightful subject. Communicating emotions has become a central competence in a number of fields which did not require this repertoire before - for instance organizations. Now, the competent manager should be able to display empathy, communicate dialogically, and steer conflicts in the direction of consensus. According to the episteme of emotional competence, the ideal manager is able to transcend all power issues and antagonisms by virtue of *communication*. Communication is the deus-ex-machina of emotional capitalism, so to speak.

After this definition of emotional capital, Illouz proceeds to argue with a number of the critical scholars on emotions and organizations. She mentions their widespread assumption that the new emotional style equals 'false consciousness', 'surveillance' or 'ideology', and she 'begs to differ'. (ibid: 17) According to her, the deconstruction of traditional hierarchies in favor of narratives about equality and the importance of personality opened up new possibilities for employees. She also underscores that although emotional competence may be instrumentalized in organizational settings, it simultaneously serves as a meaningful tool for interpersonal relations such as marriages, friendships etc. In other words, the very same competence can be a means of instrumentalization and simultaneously a source of authenticity. If this is the case, Illouz argues, we need to sophisticate our critical approach. We should not simply ask how emotional techniques serve to exploit employees. Rather, we should ask: Who becomes powerful and who becomes vulnerable in a field where emotional competence and psychological knowledge are decisive for gaining social status. (ibid: 71)

In setting this research agenda, Illouz establishes a greater sensitivity towards complexity and surprises than some critical organizational scholars mentioned above. If we probe the empirical field openly for social inequality we may be surprised to see who gains and who loses in this emerging field of emotional capitalism. New relevant distinctions may appear other than the one between powerful organizations and victimized employees. And also, as Illouz suggests, other than the one between instrumentality and authenticity.

RESISTANCE IN CAPITALISM

The question of authenticity in capitalism has also been studied from a more macro-level perspective by sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello. In their big work, The New Spirit of Capitalism (2005),

they analyze the moral aspects of capitalism. For this purpose they challenge the classical Marxist split between base and ideology and instead suggest the concept of 'spirit', which is inspired by Weber's notion of the protestant ethic. They claim that capitalism is surprisingly apt at incorporating critical voices into its own logic of profit maximization. It does so precisely with the help of an eternally flexible and changeable moral 'spirit', or justification, which adapts to the demands of the time without fundamentally challenging the core mechanisms of profit maximization. This "recuperation" of criticism resulting in a new moral justification for capitalism makes the system almost immune to radical revision.

Through 'morale' or 'spirit', capitalism makes itself attractive to the participants it must recruit in order to survive – i.e. the owners, managers and employees. The spirit is so to speak the 'persuasion' which capitalism mobilizes in order to enroll people in its dynamic. It is precisely the split between the basic principle of profit maximizing on the one hand and an ever-changeable spirit on the other, argue Boltanski and Chiapello, which gives capitalism its remarkable immunity to critique. They offer a detailed analysis of the three successive spirits of capitalism, each being the result of capitalism incorporating the most vehement criticism into a new version of its morale. Not only can the morphing spirit neutralize critique, it can in fact turn it into enhanced productivity and accumulation.

According to Boltanski and Chiapello, the current 'projective' spirit of capitalism is the latest example of how a vehement critique has been absorbed into the capitalist morale and thus turned into an asset for profit maximizing. The critique was voiced in the 1960s when Leftists protested against capitalism's suppression of authenticity, creativity, freedom and individuality. In the following decades, working life came to be characterized by flexible and temporary contracts, a focus on the emotional life of employees as an asset to the organization, the spread of self-directed work, and similar developments already described above. That which was originally absent from the capitalist spirit turned into a central element. Authenticity was no longer excluded from work life, but instead served as momentum for more profit accumulation.

The absorption of the Leftist critique into the capitalist spirit resulted in the formation of what Boltanski and Chiapello call 'The Projective City'. By city they mean the dominant normative landscape of a given context and time. Boltanski and Chiapello have identified several such cities coexisting in modern society, the projective being the most recent one.[2] They describe the person who embodies the

[2] Of other cities, they name e.g. the reputational city where high status depends on the opinion of others, the industrial city where status depends on efficiency and professional abilities, the commercial city where status depends on enrichment by supplying desirable products etc.

projective city's values as follows: enthusiastic, involved, flexible, adaptable, versatile, employable, autonomous, in touch, tolerant, knows how to engage others, and has potential (ibid: 112). Conversely, people should refrain from displaying characteristics such as being intolerant, authoritarian, local, rooted, attached or preferring security.

In the projective city, high status depends on the ability to *mediate* or to create and maintain networks. The word 'projective' refers to 'project', because the development of and participation in projects is the most important activity in the projective city. 'Life is conceived as a *succession* of projects; and the more they differ from one another, the more valuable they are' (ibid: 110). The greatest risk of exclusion in the projective city lies in the lack of projects and the concomitant lack of opportunities to explore and expand networks. Put differently, the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion pertain to individuals' ability to display *mobility*. Those members of the labor market who for one reason or another cannot or will not be mobile are at a great risk of invisibility and thus of exploitation. According to Boltanski and Chiapello, exploitation in a capitalist context means not being justly remunerated for one's contribution to profit creation. In the projective city, the mobile and visible employees are remunerated; the immobile and invisible ones tend to lag behind in status, maneuverability and salary.

Boltanski & Chiapello are incredibly convincing in their arguments, and their analysis displays a rare thoroughness and scope (700 pages). The main criticism against them has been that their sources are too specifically French, and that they have not supplemented the archival research with empirical studies (Katz, 2007; Kemple, 2007; Leca & Naccache, 2008; Parker, 2008; Wolfreys, 2008). Obviously, it is the latter critique which I identify with. Although the authors have been completely explicit about their macro-level perspective, it would nevertheless be interesting to see whether micro-level studies might nuance or challenge their conclusions. And if not, then at least they might provide some empirical flesh to their sweeping diagnosis of capitalism

From a more micro-level perspective, CMS scholars have focused on the phenomenon of critique and resistance, and how this is offered by employees in modern organizations (Ashcraft, 2005; Collinson & Ackroyd, 2005; Collinson, 1994; Fleming, 2005a, 2005b; Fleming & Spicer, 2008; Messner et al., 2008; Mumby, 2005; Prasad & Prasad, 1998). While the Marxist approach to resistance usually looks for intense collective efforts to antagonize power and exploitation, later versions of critical management studies claim that modern working life features resistance which is often individual and more 'commonplace'. It should be found, so these writers claim, in the small cracks of everyday working life where employees distance themselves from the dominant corporate values. This alternative to collective

antagonism has been labeled 'carnivalesque forms of resistance' (Contu, 2008: 368), in that it is usually related to phenomena such as humor, cynicism, parody and misbehavior. CMS scholars have studied these forms of resistance in service work (Hochschild, 1983), engineering and high-tech companies (Casey, 1995; Kunda, 2006), communications companies (Fleming, 2005), amusement parks (Van Maanen, 1991) and many other places. The motivation for these studies is to locate spaces of autonomy which employees manage to carve out for themselves despite the corporate attempts to control their identity.

This CMS focus on individual and carnivalesque forms of resistance is put under critical scrutiny by Alessia Contu who ends up calling it 'decaf resistance'. (Contu, 2008) She quotes Mumby (2005) for capturing the dynamic of this resistance through a Malaysian proverb: "When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts". (Contu, 2008: 369) Leaning on Zizek, she claims that the fart, just like the irony, cynicism, humor and misbehavior, depends on and reproduces the structures which it claims to challenge. In the case of modern employees, the carnivalesque resistance nurtures the very fantasy on which late capitalism depends, namely "the fantasy of ourselves as liberal, free, and self-relating human beings to whom multiple choices are open and all can be accommodated." (ibid: 270) We want to have our cake and eat it too, Contu argues. So we fart in order to manifest our autonomy, but only silently, so that no major disturbance is brought onto the system which brings us so much convenience and luxury. Free and provided for all at once!

Contu also questions some of the suggestions for meaningful freedom provided by Foucauldian CMS scholars. They believe, she claims, that the 'deadly embrace' between power and resistance, which characterizes modern organizations can be escaped in work-setting communities where the individual may pursue technologies of self in order to find meaning. These settings are thought to provide spaces which are not entirely colonized by alienating corporate agendas. Contrary to this view, Contu argues that such desire for meaning and technologies of self are quite the opposite of 'real' resistance. Rather, they are the necessary fantasies of 'completion' and 'wholeness' which sustain the employee's eternal striving for optimization and growth. Just like cynicism and irony, they consolidate the belief in individual autonomy and endless, yet costless, choices. Contu remarks that many studies which operate with a discursive focus are unable to explain why the acts of resistance end up strengthening the system they purport to oppose. This explanatory problem is due to the fact, she claims, that they miss the existence of the 'libidinal economy' formed around desire, fantasy and lack. Only when we include this in our perspective can we make sense of the self-perpetuating liberal capitalist machinery, she suggests.

As a counter-image to the decaf resistance, Contu refers to Lacan's notion of 'the real act'. Instead of feeding on the fantasmatic logic embedded in the oppressive structure, the real act involves that one

lets go of this fantasy. By daring to let go, the 'really acting' individual is sent into completely unknown territory where there is no longer any guarantor. There is freedom, but you have no way of knowing whether you are provided for. So in fact, the individual undertaking the real act risks death, both symbolically and physically.

Contu's diagnosis of decaf resistance is painfully apt. She points to one of the most important fuels in liberalist capitalism, namely the faith in individual autonomy, choice and growth – and how this fuel seems to magically resist all attempts to neutralize it. It is simply too desirable, it seems. However, Contu's study, like many other CMS studies, does not offer any *concrete* suggestions as to how one may counter this. The abstractness of her ideal about a radial 'real act' makes it hard to translate into practical political actions. Furthermore, one might ask whether Contu does not run the risk of perpetuating the very dynamic she is trying to break – just like she suggests about her colleagues? Does not the 'real' act of resistance imply an autonomous and reflexive individual making personal choices? 'Real resistance', in Contu's view, involves "radical freedom from, and suspension of, the pleasure principle and its utilitarian logic". (Contu, 2008: 375) It requires "risking all" in an act of "unadulterated freedom". (Contu, 2008: 376) By this she implies that all those moments of enjoyment, happiness and meaningfulness experienced by people at work are 'unreal' or 'unfree'. This is indeed radical, and some might find it condescending. Once again, I am left with the impression that the critical scholar believes to understand 'true freedom' better than the people she studies. I am also left with the impression that the implicit backdrop for her critique is political romanticism. By political romanticism I mean an invocation of abstract and radial ideals about 'untainted' freedom and power-free social interaction. I mean an image of the desirable society as a kind of 'natural state' where each individual is secured inviolable autonomy and the possibility to pursue authentic goals. This political romanticism never moves from abstract criticism into concrete political priorities[3]. Contu's foundation for criticizing the present is an abstract ideal about absolutes: An absolute absence of fantasy; an absolute absence of need for guarantors; an absolute freedom. Considering that the empirical field is management and organizations, one wonders how the massive coordination of human action necessitated by work places might be implemented concretely in this state of radical freedom.

[3] See Carl Schmitt for an extensive discussion of political romanticism. In his definition, political romanticism is the anti-thesis to political activity in that it permanently postpones decisions in order to keep all possibilities open. It strives for a radical autonomy where the limitations of concrete choices and stands are considered fettering. Schmitt says: "Political activity is not possible in this way, only criticism, which can discuss everything and inflate it ideologically." (Schmitt, 1986: 159)

My suggestion is that already when we plan and design our research, we should try to avoid reproducing usual suspects and political romanticism. Instead, we could follow moments of happiness and moments of frustration empirically without deciding beforehand whether they are connected to 'authenticity' or 'instrumentality'. We could decide to challenge habitual dualisms and hypothetically allow for, say, happy moments of instrumentality and unhappy moments of authenticity. Maybe surprising results would appear if we were open to the possibility that sometimes instrumentality feels more authentic than the absence of it. Avoiding usual suspects also means being wary of self-fulfilling research issues. A research issue about 'resistance' is, I would say, in danger of being self-fulfilling, because it encourages us to decide beforehand who is powerful and who offers resistance. If we study resistance, we should as a minimum be willing to explore whether managers might also need to resist employees, and whether organizations might also be vulnerable. In short, we should be theoretically and methodologically open to the possibility that good guys & bad guys; power & vulnerability; and freedom & utilitarian logic sometimes overlap, intertwine or transcend each other in ways which we can only learn empirically.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter I have presented a selection of sociological and organizational literature which deals with the question of authenticity, self-realization and individualization, and how these cultural phenomena relate to commitment and to instrumental agendas. I am indebted to this literature for helping me frame my approach to modern working life. The sociological literature has helped me sharpen my focus on the precariousness of commitment and long-term goals in project-based organizations. It has also informed my understanding of freedom and choice as mandatory practices in our current society. Furthermore, it has brought my attention to the remarkable phenomenon that individualization is accompanied by increased institutionalization – a phenomenon which makes the requirement to appear unique and one-of-a-kind even more challenging. In general, one could say that this sociological literature ignited my curiosity about the *simultaneities* and *contradictions* of the detraditionalization process, which is a major focus in this thesis.

The sociological literature has also served as a source of frustration on a number of points. This frustration primarily concerns its tendency towards general and abstract diagnoses and its willingness to consider traditional values and organizational forms as a thing of the past. Very early in my fieldwork it became obvious to me that bureaucratic values and 'traditional' understandings of work were most vigorously present in the organizations and lived alongside the new focus on authenticity, flexibility and individuality. It became an important part of my agenda to engage with the effects of this simultaneity,

rather than to continue diagnoses announcing ruptures and breaks. Although Beck, Bauman and Giddens all consider themselves theorists who focus on continuities (hence the terms 'late modernity', 'second modernity' and 'reflexive modernity' rather than *post*-modernity), they do in practice paint a picture of a radically altered world compared to the one based on tradition and faith in authorities. As Giddens says: "The modes of life brought into being by modernity have swept us away from *all* traditional types of social order, in quite unprecedented fashion." (Giddens, 1991: 4) My agenda is to show that traditional values *coexist* with reflexivity and individualism.

From the critical organizational literature on corporate culture, affective work and authenticating techniques, I have learned how organizational actors can be taken hostage by emancipation and empowerment discourses which claim to be power-free, all the while exerting a massive, now unaddressable and invisible, control. I have also learned that the establishment of boundaries becomes precarious when the neat division between 'work as instrumentality' and 'private self as authenticity' is blurred. The many empirical CMS studies on corporate culture show the risk of strong organizational values turning into sectarian dynamics, where the manager becomes a prophet with the totalitarian mandate to steer employees based on a self-referential moral system.

However, I do still disagree with the critical organizational literature about certain of its analytical and methodological preferences. As already mentioned, I consider its predominant research design to be guided by an analytics of suspicion, which risks reproducing its own conclusions. Although UK and US labor market may be radical compared to the Danish 'flexicurity' system, I would still expect more nuances and contradictions in the effects of corporate culture and authenticity discourses than the ones mentioned by CMS scholars. I have argued that CMS' implicit subscription to political romanticism makes it insensitive to the many empirical variations arising out of the simultaneity of freedom and power. It is this task which I have set myself in the current project: To develop an analytical and methodological approach sensitive to this simultaneity and capable of illustrating it in great empirical detail. For this purpose I have developed an analytics of compassion which will be the theme of the next chapter. Based on the combined inspiration from the above-mentioned literature and the initial findings during my first weeks of fieldwork, I ended up with a research issue as follows:

"Understood from a perspective of an 'analytics of compassion', how does the increased focus on emotional involvement and self-direction within largely 'instrumental' organizational settings influence the general approach to working life and the interaction between managers and employees in knowledge based organizations?"

The research issue is supplemented by a number of more specific research questions:

- What are the dominant norms in the discourse about self-realization and authenticity at work?
- Are there other discourses about work co-existing with the one about authenticity?
- Which forms of interaction and commitment exist between managers and employees?
- What are the consequences of these interactions for the distribution of influence and vulnerability in organizational contexts?

Equipped with these questions, the next chapter describes how I went about generating my material in a 'compassionate' manner. Included in the analytics of compassion are reflections about the question of 'being critical' and the question of involvement for the researcher.

CHAPTER 2
Setting the Scene - Analytics of Compassion

Before I describe the ethical and analytical framework for the study, I will begin by presenting my setting. I conducted my fieldworks in two creative knowledge work organizations. One was a publishing house; the other was a media company. Both companies are anonymous in this thesis, and I refer to them by the pseudonyms Booker and Media. While Media was willing to be named publicly, Booker preferred anonymization. I decided to maintain anonymity for both of them so as to ensure a primary focus on cross-organizational trends rather than work-place specific issues. Another reason for this decision was my concern with confidentiality. My material contains many delicate personal matters which I have gone to great lengths to keep anonymous. Becoming the container for so many intimate, often conflict-laden, accounts places a burden of trust on the researcher. I have taken this burden very seriously and applied a number of anonymization techniques on my material, which I describe in the next chapter. Below, one will see that the presentations of Booker and Media differ in detail and length. Originally, they were equally long, but Booker asked me to cut down a substantial part of my vignettes, because they believed that the information was too specific. Since Media did not have similar concerns, I left that description in its original version.[4]

BOOKER

Booker is a large Danish publishing company with a number of different editorial groups. During my fieldwork, I was physically based in the children's books group, but I interviewed people across the organizational divisions, and I also participated in meetings and arrangements throughout the organization. The various publishing groups differed somewhat in working conditions and 'culture'. The department for children's books published a very large number of books ranging from 5-page mini picture books to 400 page novels for older children and teenagers. Due to the large quantity of books and to the relative lack of 'star quality' associated with the authors, this group had more 'craft' focus than publicity focus, and they spent a lot of their time dealing with the demanding logistics of publishing so many titles a year. Contrary to this, the literary group, e.g., was very concerned with their image and the cycles of press and general public attention. Their authors included national 'celebrities' who required a certain amount of special attention and catering, and in general this group of editors

[4] My presentation of the two organizations paints a picture from the time of my fieldwork, namely 2006-2007. Both organizations have changed considerably since then.

seemed closer to the limelight and all the attendant phenomena. Despite these differences, the predominant discursive themes about working life were the same in the various departments; they just differed in degree and intensity.

The vast majority of the editorial employees in Booker had an academic education, although there were a number of 'self-learned' editors who started in the business when they were very young, maybe even teenagers. Some of those would express a certain ironic amusement about the 'stereotypical modern editor', who they claimed to be 'hyper-sensitive, leftist women in their thirties with a background in the humanities'. Taking a quick glance at the organizational diagram, one could corroborate at least the gender factor of this statement. Generally, people were proud of their job and had strong feelings about being in the publishing business. There was a widespread sense of 'vocation' and of a closely knit (sometimes even slightly 'incestuous') community including all the people in the country who worked in publishing. It was a common notion that the 'publishing world' was a small, exclusive environment which was hard to get into, but loyal to its 'members', once they had been included. This loyalty was cross-organizational, so that people employed by Booker felt that they would be eligible candidates for positions in other publishing companies, should they desire to change jobs. For a number of the participants, the publishing world offered an almost 'total existence', furbishing them with work, social activities and personal network. In this sense, it could be difficult for them to distinguish between working life and private life. Some employees maintained tighter shutters between home and work, but it was a general opinion that 'mingling' with 'the publishing crowd' was synonymous with increased career opportunities. As we shall see in the next section, there are a number of similar tendencies in Booker and Media despite the fact that they differ in size, product and organizational structure.

MEDIA

The building housing Media is large, and numerous people are flowing in and out of the main entrance. In the reception, I am asked to wait while they telephone my contact person in the Department of News and Facts. After this I receive a name tag and am allowed to enter. The vestibule is still confusing, although I have come here every day for a few weeks. I spend some time wandering around, wondering if I am lost, but finally I find the lifts. As I enter, a national TV-celebrity joins me. He is a young man, famous for his experimental show about current affairs. He smiles and addresses me although we have never met: "So! What are you up to?" I wonder if he does this with every stranger he meets in the lift. Politely, I explain that I am conducting fieldwork in the Department of News and Facts. "Aha!", he exclaims, "you're undercover! Do you know my friend Frank?" I admit that I do.

"Well, tell him that you will report his every move to me, so he should look out!" The TV-celebrity looks mock-stern as he announces this, and I play along, saying that I will be sure to pass that on. On the next floor, the young man exits with a charming nod of the head. The lift moves upwards, and I contemplate the fact that he never told me who he was. How could I pass his message on to Frank? I then try to picture a life in which you can address strangers and assume that they know who you are.

As I arrive in the Department of News and Facts, I am once again lost in a maze of hallways and open office spaces. The place is buzzing with people. Some are running to and fro, some are engaged in conversation with each other or on the phone. Others are immersed in work on the computer, apparently able to concentrate despite the buzz and activity. The majority of the employees are under 50 years of age. Their dress code is obviously informal, and the place seems like an odd mixture between a corporate office-scape and a 1970s hippie commune. Desks, lamps and computers are modern. The open offices are interrupted by minimalist glass-walled meeting rooms. Yet the shelves on the walls are scattered with a large assortment of knick-knack: baseball caps, plastic plants, board games, old LPs, toys and other items which fit no obvious categorization. The walls are plastered with posters provisionally pinned up with needles or sticky tape.

I wander around trying to find the meeting room of the seminar which I am meant to participate in. Finally I track it down and arrive just in time. Inside the room, ten employees are seated behind tables facing a blackboard. By the blackboard, the young middle-manager is getting ready for the seminar. The purpose of this seminar is to develop visions for a future version of the Facts Website, which is part of Media's extensive website. Apart from being responsible for the Facts Website, this group produces a number of 'factual' programs for radio and TV. I learn later that the group has recently been through a similar development seminar for the same website. That resulted in an encompassing plan for content and design, which then ended up being discarded, because (yet another) organizational restructuring demanded that new 'core values' and new 'target groups' should inform the website. The fruits of those two days of hard work with the whole group present would never be implemented. Now the same group was gathered in order to develop the same website for the second time, taking into account the requirement that they signal more 'presence' and more 'societal perspective'.

To an outsider, the situation looks very professional. The middle-manager uses many technical words for the development process, and the employees are activated in various exercises to generate creative ideas. However, I notice that two young men seem very ironic about the procedures. Everybody is divided into two-man teams and given the task of preparing a creative vision for the website. After 15 minutes, each team conscientiously presents its suggestions. When the turn comes to the two young men, they stand up in mock seriousness and start an elaborate presentation of their

'vision'. The rest of the employees exchange glances and some giggle: The vision is a grotesque fairytale which increases in absurdity as the two men expand on it. It is obvious even to an outsider that the fairytale was never meant as a serious proposal. There is an undercurrent of aggression in the whole scene, although everybody laughs and shakes their head in amused hopelessness. "Yes, thank you", the middle-manager cuts them short, and the next team is on.

Media is a large Danish media company employing more than 3000 people. The majority of these people work with the production and development of radio or TV programs and with website communication. The remainder occupies administrative or managerial positions. Media has a very complex organizational structure which has changed several times over the last few years. The most poignant feature of the structure is the existence of an 'internal market'. This means that a powerful group of Editors-in-chief has the freedom to make broadcasting strategies and then buy suitable programs from relevant internal departments or external producers. Put differently, the strategists with financial power are not in direct contact with the everyday reality of the producing staff. This organizational structure was introduced in the 1990s in order carry out comprehensive rationalizations in Media, which was experiencing a crisis of popularity and finances.[5]

The new structure has a number of consequences for the employees. Mainly it means a high performance environment in which your colleague is also your potential competitor. Furthermore, it engenders a widespread use of temporary positions in order the meet the current demands of the Editors in Chief. It also produces a general sense among employees that those deciding over your working life are removed from your practical reality. And finally, it creates several layers of middle managers negotiating the communication between Editors in Chief and producing staff. The overall impression among employees is that the exact authorization of these middle managers, and the differences between them, is very difficult to assess. Many see them as a thick middle layer with muddled agendas obscuring the access to those truly in power.

My fieldwork was conducted in a department occupied with 'current affairs' and 'facts'. I split my time between two groups, one working with daily news and one working with weekly programs. The two groups differed somewhat in working conditions: The daily news group had very short deadlines and a very fast pace. Their working hours were demanding, involving very early or late shifts. The 'fact' group had longer deadlines and worked with more thorough research. They were under the pressure of

[5] The same organizational structure was introduced in BBC in 1992 by the new director-general, John Birt. This organizational reform is commonly referred to as 'Hong Kong', 'Big Bang' or 'Year Zero' (see Born, 2004)

proving that their particular program was original and relevant and thus qualified to continue. Both groups were subject to the insecurities associated with a relatively removed and unpredictable group of Editors in Chief.

The employees in Media were a mixture of academics and journalists. There were many temporary employees, especially in the daily news group. Generally, they were all proud of working in Media and considered it a both prestigious and meaningful workplace. This being said, there was a predominant narrative of 'decline' according to which Media was becoming increasingly superficial suffering from too frequent restructurings, all of which made it more difficult for the employees to actually produce something of quality. Everyone I spoke to complained about increasing demands and decreasing resources making their working life frustrating and stressful.

ETHICS AND POLITICS

As the presentations above illustrate, my original impression of creative knowledge work as a highly existential setting was confirmed when I entered the field. Very few people spoke of their work in terms of mere strategic considerations or practicalities such as salary and obligations. Despite my neutrally phrased questions such as: "Please name in bullet points the five most important aspects of work for you", the themes inevitably became a matter of identity and meaning. In the narratives, accounts of 'banalities' such as assignments, collegial disputes, and job change were always intertwined with strong currents of longing, pain and doubt. The intensity and existential quality of the stories challenged the theoretical framework which I had counted on to carry me through the study. I was informed by a post-structuralist perspective, and had hoped to design my research as a discourse analysis following in the footsteps of social researchers who had operationalized Foucault in connection with fieldwork and interviews (e.g. Malkki, 1995; Potter & Wetherell, 1992; Søndergaard, 1996, 2000). However, there were existential and personal elements in my field which did not go well with an exclusive focus on discursive phenomena. Simultaneously, I was challenged in my position on matters of *involvement* in the field. The conflicts and pain I witnessed somehow seemed to call for solidarity. Yet, how to handle this pull towards engagement without abandoning my allegiance to an epistemologically sound anthropology?

These questions sent me down a path of exploration to see how the dilemma had been tackled by other thinkers in the field. I followed disputes revolving around concepts such as normativity, critique, diagnosis, social pathology and recognition. My wish was to find a kind of middle ground between the two trends I was inspired by: On the one hand the version of post-structuralism which insists on a strictly non-normative sociology, concerned only with the study of *contingency*. On the other hand critical

scholars such as the Frankfurt School and Critical Management Studies, who advocate an expressly normative sociology, concerned with the positive definition of '*good life*' and an attempt to move humanity in that direction. One could say that this exploration was a fairly personal endeavor – a need to confront the ethical and political dimensions of my own research. On the basis of this ethical exploration I have formulated both my analytical strategy and my methodological design. It has led me to the concept of 'compassion' which runs through the whole thesis. The exploration also presents some of my major agreements and disagreements with critically informed research – a theme already touched upon in the previous chapter.

The result of my exploration was to formulate a position which stays true to the late Michel Foucault, meaning the writings in which he added a concern with ethics to his previous focus on power and truth (see e.g. Foucault, 1984b: 387). However, I exposed this agenda to the concerns about solidarity and hope voiced by Axel Honneth (1989, 2003). I have formulated a middle-ground which rests on the concepts '*analytics of compassion*' and '*solidarity of detachment*'. These concepts are meant to continue a Foucauldian project albeit with a small homage to critical theory. The small twist to Foucault, which I credit to Honneth, is a matter of flavor more than concrete tools. It is a slight moderation in mood, which nevertheless seems crucial to me. I wish to follow less in the footsteps of an analytics of suspicion and pessimism for which Foucault has often been used in the last decades (see e.g. Barratt, 2002, see also Foucault, 1984d: 343 about his pessimistic stance), and more in the direction of hope. But I did not want to formulate hope from a moral or romanticized high ground at the risk of excluding, condemning, and judging certain of my participants. It was in the negotiation of the balance between suspicion and hope that I wished to let Foucault and Honneth mutually impregnate each other. Precisely how I have done this will be recounted below. First, let me give a short recount of the positions I traced while trying to formulate this middle-ground – positions which bear many similarities with the literature described in the previous chapter.

The question of social science and normativity

The ethical aspect of conducting science – i.e. how we conceive of the relationship between our research and the society that it studies – is a matter of heated debate. Often this debate revolves around the notion of norms[6] (see e.g. King, 2009; O'Regan, 2006). Should science have a moral and therapeutic agenda, or should it simply offer insights and leave the suggestions for change to other actors in

[6] The two primary stances are referred to as normative (foundational) and non-normative (relativist). There are many discussions about this distinction and whether there are middle-grounds between the two. I do not have space for the details of this discussion in the current context.

society? Commonly, critical theorists are associated with the former stance, while post-structuralists are associated with the latter.

The poststructuralist movement is for many present-day social researchers embodied by Michel Foucault. Foucault described his own project as an attempt to 'diagnose the present'. The diagnostician of present looks for societal disruptions which may indicate what direction we are heading in, and what we are about to leave behind (see Raffnsøe et al.; 2008: 322). When defining 'a diagnostician of the present', Foucault makes a distinction between the universal and the specific intellectual. While the universal intellectual seeks to speak truths of the world that transcend time and space, the specific intellectual only attempts to speak about the present in a manner that allows it to seem less determined. So while the universal intellectual operates with a demonstrative Truth (look, this is how the world is) and attempts to formulate a general method for reaching this kind of insight, the specific intellectual looks on truth as an event (Foucault, 1984c: 70). 'Truth as event' means that we do not look for The Truth, but for the historical and cultural conditions that allow specific truths to come into being at a given moment. The purpose of discarding with Truth is to raise the awareness of power dimensions in the production of knowledge. It was a central part of Foucault's lifework to analyze how knowledge, meaning how we choose to define reality at a given time, functions as an act on other people's decisions, or as "actions on actions" (Foucault, 1983: 220). Foucault's intention was to show this power aspect of knowledge and its dual nature: that it opens up possibilities for some, and in some respects, while it closes others. Knowledge is fundamentally political in nature, and the researcher as a politically situated 'diagnostician' thus becomes a kind of power broker. This position calls for ethical awareness. Foucault's suggestion for ethical awareness was to develop analytical tools which rest on the attempt to support continual movement and transformation. The commitment to open up what has become fixed or closed helps keep the negotiation about definitions of reality dynamic and potentially less exclusive. This toolbox of transformation simultaneously casts the Scientist as a craftsman whose craft is *as* much embedded in a cultural and historical context as those on whom he exercises his craft.[7]. At the same time (precisely in the service of transformation) it is an essential element of the Foucauldian approach that the diagnosis never turns into therapeutics or intentions of healing. In his view, the very activity of diagnosing is what matters, and the scope of such a diagnostic intervention does not go beyond wishing to help people live with the diagnosis and its possible associated prognoses. (Raffnsøe et al.; 2008: 322)

[7] The deconstruction of classical scientific authority as neutral and universal has been a general trend in the last decades. Another important French thinker, Pierre Bourdieu, has devoted many pages to describing Academia as a regime of taste, rather than as an objective institution of expertise. (Bourdieu, 1996, 2005)

Foucault's emphasis on context and contingency and his revolt against therapeutic and 'curative' science have had a *hell* of a victory, as say Raffnsøe et al. (ibid.: 330). His views are by far the most dominant among present-day sociological students and researchers alike. Even if you do not agree with Foucault, you still have to argue against him. Foucault has become Normal! This is why he probably would have found the victory rather hellish, as Raffnsøe et al. suggest in their pun. Members from the latest generation of the Frankfurt School make precisely this charge against the sweep of Foucauldian and post-structuralist thought: Its victory has come at a cost! They claim that Foucauldian thought has deconstructed the legitimacy of normative standards to a degree that it now serves as an obstacle to efficient critique of domination. Their argument, primarily phrased by Axel Honneth, runs as follows: When we do not dare formulate positive standards for the integrity of man, but instead restrict ourselves to understanding the historical and cultural conditions for a given regime of normativity, we undermine the possibility to create a popular platform for solidarity. Honneth insists on the necessity to formulate positive moral standards for a dignified and non-pathological life (Honneth, 1992: 275). According to him, recognition is an essential element in such a life. Man needs recognition – be it from next of kin, peers, the legal system or civil society. Without recognition, says Honneth, Man cannot experience integrity. And vice versa: With recognition, in its various forms, Man is given the best possible conditions for a dignified and non-pathological life.[8] Honneth is very careful to emphasize that the explicit normative model must remain absolutely minimal. It should not go beyond a very basic formulation of the preconditions for personal integrity. He also underscores that although the importance of recognition is universal according to him, we should be careful not to generalize its specific historical and cultural content. That is: Precisely which shape and which possible subcategories recognition comes in, is contingent. Honneth has identified a three-element model of recognition for the modern Western world. It is based on the mutually dependent subcategories: love, rights and solidarity (see Honneth, 1992: 211).[9] This model does not, according to Honneth, transcend time and space. But the fact that recognition is a prerequisite for integrity does.

So why do we conduct social science, according to Honneth? We do so in order to analyze and help alleviate the social pathologies arising from lack of recognition – or in his operative word: disrespect.

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[8] See Honneth's discussion with Nancy Fraser about the consequences of placing recognition at the center of a model for ethics and justice. Fraser argues that recognition which is not simultaneously coupled with redistribution is simply symbolic. (Fraser & Honneth, 2003)

[9] Put very briefly, Honneth's model for recognition in Western modernity operates with three mutually dependent aspects: the private, intimate aspect expressed through nurturing and non-dominant love; the legal aspect which involves formally securing the right to autonomy for every individual in society; and finally the communal aspect which involves the experience of solidarity and of being an appreciated and needed member of society. This triangle of love, rights and solidarity is Honneth's attempt to integrate the thoughts of psychoanalysis, libertarianism and communitarianism.

Our job as sociologists or philosophers is to zoom in on those practices in our field of interest which support, encourage to or depend on forms of disrespect. If we study the West, Honneth suggests that we look for forms of disrespect which are associated with the three subcategories of recognition. So in the field of love, we should look for the violation of physical integrity (e.g. torture and rape). In the field of rights, we should look for practices which deny people what they are legally entitled to. And in the field of solidarity, we should look for forms of insult, humiliation and degradation (Honneth, 1992: 214-215).

If we return to the main issue of this section (the question of how the researcher copes with involvement), then how can we summarize the disagreement between Honneth and Foucault? Where Foucault would have been likely to see the threat of totalitarianism in Honneth's model for ethics, Honneth on his part says of Foucault's stance:

> "He withdraws from the effort and necessity to identify the norms in the social practices of a given society which one can use as a legitimate basis for criticizing the current condition. When we let go of this binding, as does Foucault, we risk a contingent concept of critique. Then we can no longer show or argue why our critical scale should be considered reasonable by others. That is: We let go of the last remainder of a claim for universality which critique presupposes." (My translation) (Stojanov & Honneth, 2006: 142)

And elsewhere, Honneth goes on to say about postmodernism and neo-Nietzscheanism (in a controversy with Lyotard):

> "The antipathy to universalism forbids a solution to the very problem which he came up against with his demand for an unforced pluralism of social language-games. For, if recourse to universal norms is on principle blocked in the interests of a critique of ideology, then a meaningful argument in support of the equal rights to coexistence of all everyday cultures cannot be constructed" (Honneth , 1985: 155)

To sum it up, Honneth's objection against the staunchly anti-normative stance is that it, too, has an agenda of emancipation, but that it will not take the full consequences of it, thus taking the 'easy' road and even risking hypocrisy. But maybe the two thinkers are not as different as the sharp division of the approaches into either 'normative' or 'non-normative' suggests. In their book on Foucault, Raffnsøe et al. (2008) argue that Foucault has many affinities with critical theory. They focus on Foucault's

ambition to be a 'diagnostician of present' and claim that this ambition does indeed possess both critical and normative elements. To quote Foucault (and Raffnsøe et.al.), the concern is to:

> "… 'show how, and through what, that which is could be different than it is.' The way to do this is to look for the 'fragile lines' in the present: those moments where an outrage or a revolt rises in that it creates 'ruptures and fissures which open up to a room of freedom' ". (Raffnsøe et.al., 2008: 359, my translation)

It seems that despite the habit of considering Honneth and Foucault as belonging to irreconcilable camps, and of presenting the former as normative thinking par excellence, and the latter as its major opponent, they do in fact share a number of concerns (see e.g. Schaff, 2002, for another argument about the commonalities between Foucault and critical theory): They are both deeply interested in those places where a movement of popular outrage occurs. They both wish to support the possibility of revolt against forms of oppression – through raising awareness of the historical conditions that enable this oppression. Furthermore, they both have the notion of freedom as a central motivation in their work – and neither of them consider freedom to be an absolute. Neither believes that history will reach an End where complete emancipation has been achieved.

Maybe the best way to understand the subtle difference is by paying attention to their worst fear. In an ultra-short version, Foucault's greatest fear seems to be the totalitarian project, whether it takes the form of Scientific Objectivity or the form of Diagnosing-in-order-to-heal. Honneth's greatest fear seems to be the loss of solidarity and the spread of domination which makes active use of the fragmenting and individualizing trends in modern capitalism. In this perspective, the controversy boils down to whether one wishes to diagnose a pathology and assign a cure or whether one will not go beyond 'problematizing' (Foucault, 1984b) a given field and its set of practices in order to illustrate its associated pain and its contingent nature. You can never permit diagnoses and cures, if your worst fear is totalitarianism. And you can never dispense with them, if your worst fear is loss of solidarity and compassion.

So where does this leave me in my dilemma of involvement? I recognize the fears of both Foucault and Honneth. But it struck me that there might be a ground for attending to both fears at once, so that we neither flirt with totalitarianism, nor shy away from active solidarity. Based on the challenges arising in this particular study, I have chosen to define the middle-ground as an 'analytics of compassion'. This analytics of compassion commits to a *multi-perspective* approach which does not apply *pre-defined* categories of 'victims of disrespect' and 'perpetrators of disrespect' as could easily be the empirical result of Honneth's approach. The solidarity is not a matter of identifying disrespected groups or

people, but of analyzing patterns of interaction in such a sophisticated manner that it allows us to make sense of all the actors involved. Compassion and solidarity thus become a project of deep and detailed analysis which reaches beyond stiffened categories like perpetrator and victim and instead shows the logics of certain social dynamics and their multiple associated positions.

This kind of analysis is able to show how power and powerlessness cut across traditional categories such as warden and prisoner, teacher and student, and manager and employee. It pursues a level of sophistication which can at once illustrate the power and powerlessness of both manager and employee – and how these complicated positions are rooted in the very same societal dispositions. In other words, the analytics of compassion is an attempt to move away from the kind of Foucault-reception which uses concepts such as 'subjectification', 'technology' and 'discourse' to illustrate the powerlessness of individuals in the face of social pressures (see Barratt, 2002, for a similar point in relation to Foucauldian critical HRM studies). An analytics of compassion practices solidarity in the most fundamental sense of the word – that is: solidarity with everybody. Compassionate analytics names no bad guys, it simply analyses the stakes, agendas, risks and perspectives of the relevant positions in a given social dynamic. It also does not refer to 'systems', 'structures' or 'discourses' which in a semi-personified manner spit out helplessly subjectified individuals. The analytics of compassion uses a focus on moments of freedom and on individual agendas to introduce an element of hope. It recognizes that there are structural pressures and social dispositions, but there are also ever-transforming individuals who may use those very pressures and dispositions in the service of their own existential plans. And the individual stakes may lead to new groupings, identifications and solidarities where likeminded people challenge existing social pressures.

The focus on existential agendas is not intended to reintroduce the 'phenomenological subject' as a pre-discursive agent, which Foucault was so adverse to. But I do wish to introduce an agency which has existential room for maneuvering, although it is profoundly embedded in a social and discursive context. (See Ian Hacking: 2004, for more on such an approach). My main lesson from critical theory is the need for hope and for faith in the transformative potential of solidarity. The very fact that one pursues this hope based on compassion with *everybody* should, I believe, help reduce dualistic and romanticizing tendencies as the ones described in Chapter 1.I found that a combination of the 'late' Foucault and some of the present readings or developments of him supported this ambition. My main lesson from the late Foucault is that social pressures are at once restricting and enabling. They may be limiting, but these very limits are at the same time the backdrop for practices of autonomy. In fact, limits (be they social, individual or practical) are not the opposite of, but the *prerequisite* for freedom:

Only through our interplay with limits, and our recuperation of these limits into something personal, can we 'practice freedom' (Oksala, 2005: 167). Foucault never ceased to underscore the fact that a vision of freedom beyond limits was fundamentally totalitarian.

ANALYTICAL INCISIONS

Equipped with this agenda of compassion and of a sophisticated perspective on the limitations and possibilities in the field, I set out on my fieldworks. After months of interviewing and participating, I developed the precise analytical tools and concepts which could help me carry out my endeavor. I looked for a gaze that could handle contradictions, rather than dissolving or reducing them. The gaze should capture both the manager's and the employee's perspective in order to avoid 'usual suspects. It should also capture both the social dispositions and the individual agendas in order to maintain the focus on freedom and power as simultaneous (Foucault, 1983: 221). I did not want to place the center of gravity on either one of these four poles, but rather to focus on the complex and vibrating tension *between* them. To do this, I developed an analytical gaze operating along two axes: On the one hand, I took the manager-employee axis, which committed me to always pursuing both perspectives on a phenomenon in the field. On the other hand, I took the disposition-agenda axis, which committed me to see the interplay between cultural norms and personal agendas. Finally, I turned my prism one more time looking at 'forms of interaction' – a prism which also activated all four poles at the same time. The following analytical concepts helped me carry out this ambition:

1. Discourses and nodal points
2. Ethical care for the self
3. Fantasmatic logic and utopias
4. Forms of interaction

Discourses refer to the overall normative tendencies: What is considered desirable and what is considered problematic or unthinkable in the social context. *Ethical care for the self* refers to the concomitant individual practices performed in pursuit of happiness or meaning. *Forms of interaction* refer to dynamics and patterns based on certain sets of expectations between two parties. *Fantasmatic logic* refers to the emotional investment which each individual has in the various plots and positions available (or not available!) in the social field. And finally, Utopia refers to the societal projections which are capable of mobilizing great forward drive and personal willingness to endure pain. I will now proceed to explain these concepts in detail, and how they will be operationalized empirically in the following chapters.

Discourses

As mentioned above, Foucault was concerned with the way in which historical and cultural conditions shape the different ways one can imagine acting and being a subject. One of his main concepts for understanding this was that of 'discourse' or 'discursive practices'. The concept has become so popular that is has almost lost concrete meaning[10]. Therefore, it seems necessary to define the present use of it. I take this definition from the Danish political scientist Peter Kjær, who says:

> "Discourse means exactly that we have to do with a specific speech, made possible by a specific linguistic code, which puts into play certain ways of distinguishing or equating. […] Discourse is a manner of verbalizing or turning into language a certain relation, which both defines this relation and makes it visible." (Kjær, 2005: 150, my translation)

Put differently, discourse brings something into existence by creating relations, differences and equalities. A discursive practice, be it a statement or an act, has a certain pertinence to the social dynamic. The claim: "My boss doesn't pay enough attention to the innovations I've made in the radio program" brings several phenomena into existence. It brings into existence a boss who is met with a certain kind of expectations from his employee. It brings into existence 'innovations' as something which deserves praise. And so forth.[11] For a researcher studying working life and self-realization, this utterance therefore qualifies as a relevant discursive practice. Determining what qualifies as relevant or not is an ongoing and tentative process. In the early phases of the study, one will tend to include many discursive practices in the material because the criteria of pertinence are still vague. In the later phases of constructing the material, the researcher may be more selective. Being very selective depends on a quite precise definition of what one is looking for. And the precise definition of what one is looking for depends on an extended process of fairly open exploration to begin with. To sum up: Discursive practices are defined by their active contribution to the formation of 'thinkable' or 'legitimate' social worlds. They constitute a normative and regulative cultural pressure which influences conduct without wholly determining it.

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[10] There are many different definitions of discourse circulating the world of social sciences. They are often rather confusing or all-encompassing, and there is certainly not one authoritative approach (Bredsdorff, 2002: 9; Howarth, 2000: 13; Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999). All seem to agree that discourse has to do with culture and language as active elements in the definition and construction of social reality. And here ends the agreement.

[11] Behind the notion of a statement as an utterance which gives rise to existence lies an assumption of there being utterances which do not. Some social constructionists would beg to differ on this point, claiming that every action or utterance is a contribution to the social reality, working either as corroboration or a challenge of the existing normative dispositions. You cannot be outside the 'negotiations' of social reality, according to this line of thought. See e.g. Søndergaard 1996.

Being thus equipped with a criterion for selecting relevant information, the researcher can then proceed to assemble these practices into an empirical material. In his description of how precisely one goes about the construction of a material or an archive, Foucault is relatively uncompromising. He says: "One ought to read everything, study everything. In other words, one must have at one's disposal the general archive of a period at a given moment." (Foucault, 1998: 263) Foucault was well aware that this was an impossible endeavor, but he wished to underscore the importance of variety and width in the material. I have followed the same line in the construction of my material, composing it of a variety of different sources: I combined the reading of existing archival studies with interviews, field notes, public speeches and organizational documents such as stress policies, Human Resource tools, employee satisfaction studies, job ads, job applications etc. This means that I have 'borrowed' the conclusions made by other social researchers working with extensive textual archives. Using their analyses as a point of departure (i.e. having it as a hypothetical assumption at the outset that there *is* such a thing as a discourse of authenticity or self-realization in modern working life), I then pursued these assumptions and donned them the flesh and blood quality of detailed ethnographic observations. My contribution lies in the deep and thick description of local complexities and mutations in the larger societal dispositions. As Clifford Geertz said, while reflecting on the microscopic nature of ethnography and on his own studies of Berber sheep herders:

> "The reason that protracted descriptions of distant sheep raids (and really a good ethnographer would have gone into what kind of sheep they were) have general relevance is that they present the sociological mind with bodied stuff on which to feed. The important thing about the anthropologist's findings is their complex specificness, their circumstantiality. It is with the kind of material produced by long-term, mainly (though not exclusively) qualitative, highly participative, and almost obsessively fine-comb field study in confined contexts that the mega-concepts with which contemporary social science is afflicted – legitimacy, modernization, integration, conflict, charisma, structure, meaning – can be given the sort of sensible actuality that makes it possible to think not only realistically and concretely *about* them, but, what is more important, creatively and imaginatively *with* them." (Geertz, 1973: 23)

Ethnographic studies can illustrate in detail how cultural norms and personal agendas meet in an ongoing redefinition of what we can accept and imagine as legitimate forms of existence – and how individuals are never just a product of the social expectations in a given period.

Next to the concept of discourse, Foucault developed the concept of dispositive. While discourse concerns a specific field or activity (say work or marriage or parenting), dispositive refers to a more overarching normativity in society. In their article on dispositional analysis, Raffnsøe & Gudmand-Høyer define dispositive as "the particular and historically imbedded inclinations in the normative network of social reality" (Raffnsøe & Gudmand-Høyer, 2010: 3). They quote Foucault for referring to dispositive as consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, law, administrative measures, scientific statements, and philosophical, moral and philanthropic proportions (ibid.: 1). In other words: discourses are a local element in the more general societal inclinations, such as they are formed in the dispositive. But what discourse and dispositive have in common is that they both refer to normative pressures and inclinations in the social interaction of a given time and place. And both constellations should be understood as precisely pressures and inclinations, rather than determination. They refer to the way in which certain actions, self-presentations, narratives and appearances become more likely than others in a given context. And it is precisely in order to understand what becomes more likely, what becomes unlikely (or unthinkable), and how these dispositions have arisen out of certain cultural and historical circumstances, that we study discourses and dispositives. My analysis focuses mainly on the discursive level.

The discourse theorist Ernesto Laclau has added certain analytical points to the understanding of discourse. According to Laclau (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), one must distinguish between discursive formations on the one hand and discursivity on the other. Discursivity is a field of elements with infinite potential meanings. Once certain meanings are attached to elements, they enter into relation with one another, thus establishing a discursive formation. The formations are temporary and only semi-fixed, because they function as an arena of political contestation for the subjects operating within them. Attaching a different meaning to a specific element, or forming different relations between elements may serve a purpose for certain individuals or groups. For example, as we shall see in later chapters, the matter of whether the manager-employee relation is considered a 'considerate' relationship or a 'power' relationship has significant consequences for both parties. Getting to decide which it is can be of great importance.

According to Laclau, the discursive formations can only exist because they have a *center* which assembles the elements around it in relational positions. He calls this center a 'nodal point'. The interesting thing about the nodal point is that it is drained of concrete meaning, which is why Laclau also refers to it as a 'floating' or 'empty' signifier. It is precisely its relative emptiness and the ensuing malleability that accords it its magnetic power and its ability to represent the discourse as a whole. It is

an overarching theme or concept which can legitimize, reproduce and hold together the discursive formation. Laclau uses the example of the political discourse of populism. This discourse is held together and legitimized by a concept of speaking on behalf of 'the people'. The very fact that it lends voice to 'the people' is used as rationale for its authenticity and reliability. But upon closer inspection, 'the people' turns out to be a muddy concept which can be filled with all kinds of meaning depending on the agenda of the subjects operating within the populist discourse. Similarly, one could argue that movements such as Greenpeace operate in a discourse of 'nature conservation' which has 'the environment' as its empty signifier. Expressing concern for 'the environment' is sufficient legitimization for the discourse of conservation, but the precise meaning of 'environment' and 'conservation' is a very contested issue which can be appropriated to pursue a number of different, even contradictory, political ends. Alongside this concept of nodal point, he operates with a notion about 'the constitutive outside' or 'antagonism'. The constitutive outside is what the participants in the discourse imagine keeps them from fully realizing the central ideal of, say, 'populism' or 'healthy environment'. They use it as an explanation for why they have yet achieved their desired condition. Torfing defines this as follows:

> "… the outside is not merely posing a threat to the inside, but is actually required for the definition of the inside. The inside is marked by a constitutive lack that the outside helps to fill." (Torfing, 2004: 11)

In other words, for the ideal about 'healthy environment' to function as a powerful nodal point, it must have an outside such as, say, 'capitalism' or 'industrialism'. It is the antagonism towards that outside which keeps the central political agenda alive. When analyzing the discourses about work, I look for both nodal points and antagonisms in order to see what the political intensity revolves around.

The question remains, of course, how one implements this analytical gaze empirically. In order to find relevant methodological tools, I looked to other social scientists with a discursive perspective and an empirical approach. (E.g. Jørgensen & Phillips 1999; Kvale 1997; Søndergaard 1994, 1996, 2000; Wetherell & Potter 1992; Wright 1994) Picking from their various perspectives, I ended up with the following points as my primary focus of attention:

- Which inclusion and exclusion mechanisms can be observed? (What is constructed as normal or deviant? What is constructed as obvious and as surprising)?
- Which implicit or explicit pairs of opposites are used and how do they affect the repertoire of culturally legitimate modes of self-presentation and action?
- Which metaphors are used and what do they further or inhibit?

The social psychologist Dorte Marie Søndergaard has coined the term 'cultural wind-directions' (Søndergaard: 1996: 60). It serves as an excellent guide for a Foucault-inspired researcher working with interviews and fieldwork. By 'wind-directions' she means the subtle signs in social interaction which illustrate whether a statement or an action is considered meaningful and desirable. Does it have the wind behind it or against it? Does it meet support or resistance? There are many little rhetorical indications of such cultural wind directions, which the researcher can look for. For instance, consider the following statement: "My boss decided to give me more routine assignments, even though I have been working really hard for the last year." The interesting indication in this statement is the 'even though'. What does this 'even though' tell us? It tells us that this person is disappointed about the increased number of routine assignments, because she feels she has earned something else. This in turn tells us that routine assignments are not considered desirable – they may even be considered a sign of low status. The cultural wind directions are against routine assignments, so to speak. This then becomes an occasion for the researcher to pursue what might have the cultural wind behind it. What would this person have liked to receive as reward for her hard work? Do other people in the field feel the same way? And so on.

The analysis of discursive practices is presented in chapters 4, 5, and 6. In chapter 4, I present an analysis of the general understanding of work in the creative knowledge sector. The chapter explores what is considered desirable and undesirable; what is considered natural and unlikely; what is tabooed, marginalized or looked down upon. In chapter 5 and 6, I explore a specific dimension of these discursive practices, namely the expectations towards the interaction with one's primary counterpart at work. In other words, I analyze from a discursive perspective what employees expect from the manager-employee interaction and what managers expect from the same interaction. I do this in order to answer my own research question about how the trends of self-realization and authenticity affect the understanding of commitment between these two parties.

Ethical care for the self

While the analytical term 'discursive practices' focuses on cultural pressures and dispositions, the term 'ethical care for the self' focuses more on the tension between these pressures and the individual agendas. In his essay "Technologies of the Self" (Foucault, 1988), Foucault makes a study of how various historical periods have been dominated by different tools with which individuals could attempt to form themselves and make their lives meaningful. He says: "Perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between

oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of self." (ibid: 19)

In this essay, Foucault analyses various techniques of the self which were predominant during different periods of the Greco-roman culture and early Christianity. He defines technologies of the self as acts which "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality." (ibid: 18). One example of such a technology of self is the Stoic 'askesis'. Exercises of askesis involved the subject practicing and strengthening his preparedness for whichever difficulty or challenge life might expose him to. For instance, this could involve the practice of abstinence, in that the person prepared a lavish meal and then served it to his servants, while he himself only ate a stale piece of bread.

The point of the term 'ethical care for the self' is to indicate a room for individual action and existential freedom which at once represents autonomy and cultural disposition. 'Care' suggests that each individual does this out of a wish to create a meaningful and personal life for himself. It is a very private and personal endeavor. 'Ethical' suggests that this endeavor presupposes the existence of several modes of action – simply because ethics are about choosing, not about being determined. So freedom is a prerequisite for the ethical care of the self. On the other hand, this care does not come in a universal or ahistorical form (cf. the section on ethics and politics above). The ways in which we attempt to attain happiness and wisdom are strongly influenced by the times we live in. Not many modern knowledge workers would be likely to seek meaning and perfection through the stoic exercises of askesis. Neither would they practice years of completely silent listening to teachers and masters. Yet this was a common technology of the self in Pythagorean culture. So in 'ethical care for the self' we see the conjunction of social pressure and personal freedom, and in this conjunction we also find a site where social dispositions are either consolidated or challenged. Some ways of caring for the self support the existing trends, while others seem to challenge them and make way for ruptures and fissures in discursive inclinations.

Just like the concept of 'discursive practices', the concept of 'ethical care for the self' is operationalized in chapters 4, 5 and 6. When using this concept in my selection of data material, I focused on tales that involved intentions about personal development, quests for happiness, or search for meaning. In all three chapters, the analysis of discursive practices and 'ethical care for the self' are intertwined to illustrate how the very thing which represents a cultural limit also represents a personal possibility.

Fantasmatic logic

Adding a more existential dimension to the discursive focus, I introduce the concept of fantasmatic logic. The concept is taken from researchers working in the theoretical intersection between discourse theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Glynos & Howarth 2007, Glynos 2008, see also Stavrakakis 2007). Jason Glynos and David Howarth have coined the term to gain a better understanding of why some discursive practices are reinforced, while others are contested. In other words, their project runs along the same line as mine, in that they wish to understand the complex interplay between social norms and individual agendas. How do personal desires, fantasies, fears and pains intertwine with the normative network of society, thus contributing to render existing practices either "possible, intelligible or vulnerable"? (Glynos, 2008: 5) The purpose of focusing on fantasies is to develop a gaze which can capture how individuals invest differently in various social dynamics, thereby making certain cultural continuities or changes more likely than others. And this investment has to do with emotional intensity.

According to Glynos, the logic of fantasy is based on a narrative structure which evokes an idealized scenario of either 'beatific' or 'horrific' nature. Put in plain language, the logic involves an image of fulfillment and a concomitant image of disaster. The fulfillment scenario is so idealized that it cannot ever be achieved, but it serves as a tool to appease anxieties and reduce the discomforts of ambiguity and uncertainty. To protect himself from confronting the impossibility of the ideal scenario, the individual furnishes his fantasy with notions of 'obstacles' or 'threats' which serve as explanation for why the fulfillment has not yet occurred. Fantasmatic logics can serve either to sustain or to challenge existing practices. When an individual harbors strong fantasies, he is more likely to read all aspects of his situation along the lines of his fantasmatic narrative and less likely to 'read for difference' (ibid: 13). This 'single-mindedness' can support status quo, for instance if employees harbor fantasies about personal uniqueness, thus becoming oblivious to how they accept excessive workloads. But it can also challenge status quo, such as when those very same fantasies of uniqueness result in uncompromising refusal to perform routine assignments, even though these assignments were traditionally part of their job function. While technologies of the self refer to active and conscious strategies on the part of the individual, fantasmatic logic refers to a more fluid landscape of emotional topography. It concerns the zones and degrees of emotional investment, intensity and stakes, and how they interact with the existing cultural norms.

The concept of fantasmatic logic is operationalized in chapter 7. Here, I seek to show how the discursive practices delineated in three preceding chapters are associated with a certain set of fantasies and fears that are fairly pervasive throughout the field. The fears and fantasies are moments of intensity

which are handled very differently by the various actors, but which set the scene for existential moments which serve to either consolidate or challenge the existing norms.

To sum up, the concepts 'ethical care for the self' and 'fantasmatic logic' serve to sharpen my focus on individual negotiations of cultural dispositions. They both focus on the tension between social dispositions and individual desires. Just like the two former concepts, the concept of fantasmatic logic had to be made empirically useful and practical. For this purpose I was forced to develop my own guidelines, since the literature on fantasmatic logic does not offer concrete tools. I initiated a process of back-and-forth mutual refinement between observations and analytical gaze which led me to name the following phenomena as indications of high emotional involvement or fantasmatic undercurrents. One can say that the guiding perspective is *intensity* (I will write more about this in the next chapter on methods):

- Expressions of longing, desire or fantasies
- Expressions of distress, confusion or fears
- Intensity in language, body language or expression
- Recurrence of themes, expressions or comments
- Contradictions, e.g. using a 'positive' plot, but expressing 'negative' emotions (which might suggest that certain fantasmatic plots are 'mandatory')
- Dramatic emplotment, i.e.: assigning an important or decisive role to other actors in the personal narrative – e.g. the manager

Forms of interaction

The final analytical focus is meant to capture the dynamics arising between managers and employees on the basis of the existing discursive, individual, and fantasmatic trends. How do the two parties attempt to coordinate action and establish mutual commitment in this field? I have looked for concepts which were able to handle contradictory or even paradoxical elements in interaction, and for this purpose I turned to various versions of systems theory (Bateson et al., 1956; Teubner, 1996) and discourse theory (Laclau, 1988). The exact concepts do not make sense prior to reading chapter 4-6, so I will present them during my analysis in chapter 7. Suffice it to say, that my ambition was to be sensitive to a *range* of dynamics and commitments, rather than to conclude with a diagnosis of *one* late modern 'corroded' form of commitment.

Altogether, the analytical model developed in this chapter is meant as a compassionate and complex approach to modern working life. It works along two major axes which it seeks to keep in play throughout the entire analysis: an axis of manager and employee, and an axis of societal dispositions and individual agendas. These axes then meet in a final chapter which describes forms of interaction between managers and employees and how these illustrate the simultaneity of power and freedom in the same cultural tendencies. Obviously, this analytical model rests on a certain set of methods which ensured me a sufficiently detailed, diverse and relevant empirical material. The following chapter will explain how this was undertaken.

CHAPTER 3

Methods – The Solidarity of Detachment

In this chapter, I pick up the thread from my analytical strategy in order to describe how I *practically* implemented an empirical study guided by compassion, as was the ambition. Finding this answer required that I think 'out of the box' methodologically and dare find inspiration in a number of different sources. I ended up drawing on the following approaches: anthropological schools of multi-sited ethnography, medical discussions about *sympathy* versus *empathy*, and therapeutic studies of communication based on solidarity. What all these lines of thought have in common is an interest in pursuing compassionate involvement while still avoiding both emotional invasion and naiveté. This particular challenge is familiar to anthropologists who mostly generate knowledge based on a highly intimate interaction with the actors in the field. Generally, fieldworkers grapple with the tensions of how to couple intimacy with the distancing movement of science: There is a wish to exercise solidarity, yet there is awareness that detachment is required.

Studying a problem via anthropological fieldwork involves a form of 'total immersion' for the researcher. This immersion is corporeal, emotional and intellectual. It uses a principle of closeness and inter-subjectivity as a way to construct data. Precisely by being a subject among the subjects of study, the researcher gains her insights. This involves a both exhausting and rewarding play between intimacy and distance, at the end of which the anthropologist commits to exiting the field and recounting it on a different order. The play has been described as a kind of suspense (*'mellemværende'*) wherein the researcher temporarily exposes herself to the formative pressures of the practices being studied (Nørgaard, 2005: 387).Through the anthropologist's willingness to deconstruct her own position and instead be suspended in another, there opens up a room for reconstructive analysis which rests equally on bodily experience and intellectual insight. It is precisely the tension inherent in various forms of suspense which I wish to turn constructive in a formalized way when formulating my methodology and the ensuing mode of representation. Instead of fretting over the methodological paradoxes and dilemmas, I wish to make them active motors in my research – very much in line with my ambition to make the paradoxes and dilemmas that I observe in my empirical context a primary concern in the study.

Tension, suspense and dilemmas are an inevitable and immediate concern when you are an anthropologist and commit yourself to the method of fieldwork. The very method is a testimony to

grey zones, muddy categories and liminality. You participate, yet you observe at a distance. You are intimate, yet you dissect. You study a field, but you also change it. You are inside the power structures, yet you transcend them.

It is precisely the liminality; the being 'betwixt and between'[12], which at once gives the study its potential and its extreme precariousness, both emotionally and morally. I have tried to make these tensions explicit, not in order to escape them, but in order to embrace them and turn them into a tool. That which initially felt as constraint and interference, I have attempted to turn into positive preconditions for my research.

SOLIDARITY AND DETACHMENT

While my analytical strategy was dominated by tensions between positions (manager and employee) and between 'forces' (discursive and personal), my methodological engagement with the field was dominated by another tension. This tension has to do with solidarity and detachment, and it comes in many different forms. It comes as a spectrum on which one moves back and forth while researching and analyzing. It also comes as doubt and pain, when one feels unsure whether involvement or detachment is the proper reaction in a given situation. And finally it comes as dilemma, when the circumstances seem to demand both distance and intimacy at once. The tension is probably familiar to most social researchers. It is an inherent element of relating to people both as persons and as objects of study. You elicit confidential and highly personal tales which ethically calls for solidarity. However, you finish by detaching yourself and assuming the position of a diagnostician. The diagnostician is someone who speaks about other people's conditions and actions with professional authority. You claim to know things about people in a different way than they themselves know it. Precisely how this 'different way' is interpreted is a very precarious matter. Elements of condescension, 'Besserwissen' or cynicism can have a profound impact on those being diagnosed. On the other hand, the task of the researcher is to speak from a different position than that of the participants. This constitutes the very contribution of research.

So how does one speak from a distance, yet without 'Besserwissen'? How does one maintain solidarity while still detaching oneself? That question was at the center of my methodological concerns. I undertook extensive studies of texts on both methodology and ethics, following my core analytical

[12] Liminality and 'betwixt and between' are concepts taken from anthropological analyses of rites of passage. They refer to a phase during the initiation in which the ritual subject is between structures: no longer belonging to the previous structure and not yet entered into the new. He or she is floating between existing categorizations and moving in an indefinable and ambiguous grey zone, which at once entails a lack of societal position and an extended range of possibilities. For instance, in societies marked by strong sexual segregation, the ritual subject is often referred to as both man and women at once. He transcends the primary social divisions, so to speak, until he has been initiated into his new state. See Victor Turner (1967).

concept 'compassion'. In its most abstract definition, compassion is an ethical concept which describes a choice about how one relates to Otherness. I traced the notion of compassion or empathy through very diverse writings in sociology, psychology, medicine, Christianity and Buddhism. This extensive and slightly unorthodox literary research, (seen from the point of view of social science), was meant as an attempt to allow inspiration from lines of thought which have in fact meditated upon compassion for many centuries. I wished to see if these texts could teach social science something about the conundrum of distance and closeness.

So next to anthropological texts on fieldwork (e.g. Ellen, 1983; Hastrup & Ramløv, 1989) and sociological texts on research as *changing*, rather than *mapping* the field (e.g. Bourdieu, 2005), I also read philosophical texts on ethics and the question of relating to the Other (Lévinas, 1995; Løgstrup, 1956; Ricoeur, 1992). Then I went on to read psychological texts on solidarity and compassion (Hendrix, 2005), medical texts on sympathy versus empathy (Aring, 1958), and ended up with religious and spiritual texts on compassion (Buber, 1955; Dalai Lama, 2001). The context of this thesis does not permit me to recount in detail the results of my literary study. I mention it, nevertheless, because the striking thing about these readings was how similar they were in their primary message about compassion. This message was: Compassion does not mean a high degree of intimacy which risks being disrupted or broken through distance. On the contrary, what constitutes compassion is intimacy *coexisting* with a fundamental distance. In other words, the notion of compassion seemed to offer me a definition of the approach I was looking for: Speaking from a distance, yet without 'Besserwissen'; extending solidarity from a detached position. Consider the following paragraph, in which the American neurologist Charles D. Aring, distinguishes between sympathy and empathy while contemplating the doctor-patient relationship:

> "The act or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another is known as sympathy. Empathy, on the other hand, is not only an identification of sorts, but also connotes an awareness of one's separateness from the observed. One of the most difficult tasks put upon mankind is reflective commitment to another's problems while maintaining his/her identity". (Aring in Paul & Paul, 1990: 84)

Although ethnographic researchers are not doctors treating patients, they nevertheless share the challenge of having to manage great intimacy within a project that relies on professional distance for its successful outcome. The notion of empathy or compassion offers an approach which helps us handle the tension, or at times even dilemma, between solidarity and detachment. Having a compassionate approach allows us to move beyond the choice between involvement and professionalism, and instead

to see the two as mutually constitutive (just like freedom and power in the previous paragraph). In Buddhism, which has compassion as its primary lesson, they stress that one must be able to distinguish between *feeling with* somebody and *being attached to* somebody (Dalai Lama, 1998: 91-102). The element of attachment or of desiring a certain outcome of the empathetic relation is a potential source of confusion. Consequently, the challenge lies in finding that point at which the 'feeling with' is rendered deeper and clearer precisely by virtue of a fundamental distance. If one is merely a distant observer, never sharing the emotions and concerns of the research participants, one is likely to end up with a reductionist or even cynical diagnosis of the field. However, sympathizing (as in: wholly identifying) with the concerns will most likely lead to a partial, 'native' or 'first-order' diagnosis. The challenge is to 'feel with' and 'let go' at one and the same moment. This challenge is common to many professional disciplines, ranging from nursing, medicine, pedagogy, therapy and social science.

In anthropology, *attachment* might mean insisting on 'going native', insisting on a specific 'cure', insisting on authoritarian diagnoses, or insisting on exhaustive coherence. All these approaches fail to 'let go'. What then would *compassion* mean in the same context? I would claim that it means maintaining equality and difference at the same time. The 'suffering with' makes the anthropologist equal with the participants, as she enters and endures the suspense of fieldwork. The exit from the field makes her different. The compassionate researcher assumes responsibility for this exit and offers a professional diagnosis. While the authoritarian diagnosis puts itself *above*, the professional diagnosis puts itself *outside*. Notably, the fact that the professional diagnosis does not put itself above does not mean that it claims equality in the sense of 'sameness' or 'all interpretations are equal'. Due to its outsideness it is precisely *professional*. For this it *assumes responsibility*. The professional researcher is willing to make claims and be held accountable for them, and she accepts the concomitant solitude and demand to 'let go' of pure intimacy. This 'letting go' also means to accept the fact that her diagnosis may cause ambiguous or negative reactions among those being researched. As must doctors, nurses, therapists and all those professionals whose job it is to engage compassionately with human beings without invading or abandoning them.

On a more practical level, I suggest that the methodological focus on compassion can serve as a safeguard against biased and one-dimensional analyses, just as it can act as a protection against the default suspicion lurking in critical theories (cf. above and previous chapter). For example, if one is primarily concerned with disrespect, like Honneth, there is the risk of only extending one's solidarity to those seemingly the victims of disrespect. We thus determine from the beginning who qualify as sufferers and who qualify as those inflicting suffering. Such an approach is likely to reproduce the very

ills it strives to alleviate, I would claim. If our aim is to 'open up to spaces of freedom', as Foucault puts it, I believe that we must commit to addressing the precariousness at stake for *all parties involved*.

Speaking in slightly exaggerated terms, the methodology of detached solidarity seeks to witness the precariousness experienced both by 'victim' and 'perpetrator'. It serves as a temporary 'symmetry installer', which helps the researcher pursue her analysis beyond the preexisting categories of 'powerful' and 'powerless'. The purpose is not to deconstruct the notion of power abuse or victimization, but to strive for an analytical thoroughness, which can also grasp the powerlessness of the powerful and vice versa. Striving to pursue our analysis in this extensive and 'flat' way, will hopefully help show how perpetrators, victims, pain and desire are all interlocked in a network of mutually constituting practices. Precisely how I applied the approach of detached solidarity in practice will be explained in more detail below. First, I wish to explain how I went about constructing and delineating my empirical field.

CONSTRUCTING THE FIELD

When initiating an anthropological study, the first challenge is to define the field. Traditionally, anthropologists have defined 'field' as a matter of geographical or physical separateness. It is no coincidence that many of the founding fathers conducted their studies on far-away tropical islands. Islands are a very convenient way to make one's field tangible. Although many modern anthropologists have turned their attention to more familiar settings, the traditional way of defining a field is still common: It is a matter of selecting geographically or physically discrete arenas. But the very notion that discrete or naturally delineated fields exist is increasingly under pressure from theories operating with notions like complexity, globalization, networks etc. In this light, fieldworkers have developed new ways to delineate and define their fields of observation. One example is the so-called multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995). Instead of electing a physical setting – say a hospital – as the field, the multi-sited ethnographer uses one or more of following strategies:

1. Follow the people (e.g. surgeons, relatives, patients)
2. Follow the thing (e.g. commodities, machines, patient files, administrative systems etc.)
3. Follow the metaphor (e.g. metaphors about the body in AIDS research etc.)
4. Follow the plot, story or allegory (e.g. narratives of memories in studies of social memory and forgetting)
5. Follow the life or biography (e.g. autobiographies of scientists in science and technology studies)

6. Follow the conflict (e.g. "gender equality" as perceived by doctors, nurses, patients, relatives, management etc.).

(ibid.: 106 pp.)

While the selection of a bounded physical setting seems to suggest that one can 'map' it exhaustively, the multi-sited ethnography pays more homage to constructivist epistemology, according to which the body of research material will always be a result of selection and construction by the researcher. However, choosing a bounded physical setting as one's field does not exclude a constructionist approach. The choice can be based on an assumption that the phenomenon under study will be particularly accessible or pronounced in this setting – not on an assumption that the setting is a natural entity to be mapped and indexed. Marcus calls this 'the strategically situated single-site ethnography'. (ibid.: 110) In my case, the original research problem was formulated as an interest in modern working life and discourses about self-realization and authenticity.[13] Consequently, my field should have the quality that it could illuminate how these trends influence modern workplaces. For this purpose, I chose two organizations which I considered likely candidates to pronounced versions of discourses about self-realization and authenticity. This means that the initial construction of my field was based on physical setting. But within those settings, I applied the multi-sited approach, rather than the 'mapping' approach.

While traditional ethnography (e.g. Mead, 1929; Malinowski , 1987), just like much traditional organizational analysis (e.g. Schein, 1985), sees the field as 'a culture' which is bounded and relatively coherent, the multi-sited approach sees the cultural trends of a given field as contested, complex and reaching beyond the delineations created by the researcher. To maneuver analytically in such a field requires different criteria of relevance. For this purpose, the multi-sited ethnography has looked for inspiration in Actor-Network Theory (ANT). What multi-sited ethnography borrows from ANT is precisely the dismissal of research oriented towards bounded fields. Instead, the focus in both ANT and multi-sited ethnography is to follow the networks of relations and how the specific constellations of networks permit certain factors (people, technological devices, institutions or whatever) to become powerful and pervasive, while others become fragile or marginal. John Law, one of the founding fathers of ANT, has described the difference between field-based research and network-based research as the difference between a political map of Europe displaying nations and a traffic map of Europe

[13] I designed my methodological approach so that it was sensitive to the eventuality that a self-realization discourse was non-existent or only marginally present. If this turned out to be the case, it would require a reformulation of my research problem along the way. But as the dissertation will hopefully illustrate, the hypothesis was more than warranted and did not call for a reformulation.

displaying infrastructure. They are two fundamentally different ways to make sense of the 'same' phenomenon (Law in Jensen, 2005: 196). For the current study, I do not intend to take over the entire program of ANT, which would involve a great focus on material factors, architecture, technological devices etc. Instead, I subscribe to the moderated version which has been incorporated in multi-sited ethnography. The gist of this version is to focus on "chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions" in the field. (ibid: 105). It is similar to the concept 'matters of concern' in ANT. Put very simply, ANT uses 'matters of concern' as the primary criterion of relevance in constructing the field. It works as a kind of snowball method: Instead of deciding beforehand that you will map the human resource department or the management meetings in a given organization, you start at a given point and then let the messages from this interaction lead you on to your next focus. As already mentioned, multi-sited ethnography mentions a number of different chains or conjunctions one could pursue: persons, objects, conflicts etc.

In my fieldwork, I primarily followed persons, metaphors, stories and conflicts. This means that if an interview with an employee led me to understand that a certain administrative system gave him much grief, I would then make sure to ask (in an open and non-leading way) about this administrative system in my next interview with another employee. Similarly, if a middle-manager was greatly preoccupied with a certain person from top management, I would make sure to interview this top manager and (again in a non-leading way) ask about the kinds of issues which had been of concern for the middle-manager. This 'matters of concern' approach is well in line with my analytical strategy in which I wish to look for sites of intensity and high investment. It is also well in line with my methodology of compassion, in that it commits to hearing both sides of a conflict and understanding what is at stake for the various parties involved.

Once I had identified a number of the central issues and matters of concern, I designed my fieldwork so that I could pursue these matters in contexts which shared these concerns but did not have access to each other. Mostly, this meant participating in management meetings about, say, the above-mentioned administrative system, and then participating in lunch breaks with the employees and overhearing their informal talk about the same topic. This multi-context approach allowed me an impression of how the central actors read each other and to what extend their readings were synchronized. Maybe management imagined that a certain middle-manager was reluctant to perform his administrative duties because he had not been given strict enough instructions. And maybe the middle-manager would tell his colleague that his lack of administrative zeal was due to ideological disagreement with such a management style. In other words, one party read the conflict as a matter of discipline, while the other party read the conflict as a matter of ideology. This lack of synchronicity influenced

their interaction with each other in many respects. Collecting a number of such mutual readings or mis-readings gives the anthropologist an impression of what is at stake for the various parties, and how successfully they gauge the stakes for the other parties involved. This again helps paint a picture of the social dispositions associated with the various positions in the field, and how they mutually constitute or challenge each other.

DESIGNING INTERVIEWS

When designing my interviews, I sought to pursue the same commitment to compassion and to multiple perspectives. In practice, this meant to keep asking and observing until the stories told by each central actor 'made sense'. Much methodological literature on interviews expands on how to pose questions which do not simply generate the responses one is looking for (e.g. Kvale, 1994; Silverman, 2000; Spradley, 1979; Søndergaard, 1995). I combined this literature with inspiration from tools developed in couple therapy. Couple therapy and anthropological interviews have in common that their aim is to engage one part with another (spouse with spouse or anthropologist with research participant) in a manner that reaches beyond stiffened and habitual categories. Both seek to establish a dialogue where the precariousness of the Other is allowed to express itself without being silenced by inflexible expectations. One could call it a way of asking questions which leaves room for surprise. It should be noted that the tools for empathetic questions are taken not from the therapist–client interaction, but from models which the therapist suggests be implemented between spouses. I do not seek to copy the therapeutic dynamic between councilor and client, which aims for active treatment and possibly the establishment of transference. Rather, I seek to discipline myself as interlocutor in a manner that is best equipped to 'read for difference'. By difference, I mean messages and data which do not immediately correspond with my hypotheses, with my theoretical 'darlings' or with the dominant tales of the field.

In the kind of counseling called 'Imago', (see Hendrix et. al., 2005), psychologists have developed dialogical tools which serve to enhance the listening for difference. They speak of a three-phased process of dialogue, involving mirroring, validation and empathy. In the mirroring phase, the listener takes care to establish a tolerant, safe and shame-free context for the speaker. He then makes an effort to echo the message sent by the speaker, using phrases such as "Let me see, if I got you…" etc. This gives the speaker an opportunity to correct or sophisticate his message, after which the listener makes the invitation "is there more?" The following phase of validation is relatively simple, but usually of great importance to the nature of the exchange. In this phase, the listener acknowledges that the message makes sense. It does not have to be an acknowledgement of agreement, but can simply be an

acknowledgement of understanding. Finally, the phase of empathy involves identification with the feelings which the speaker harbors about the situation or topic being discussed. One could say that this phase is a form of mirroring on the basic emotional level, rather than on a plot-level.
The gist of the Imago-dialogue is to construct a room for communication which curtails the resort to stereotypes, prejudice, habit or defensiveness – both in the speaker and the listener. In my inspiration from the model, I have primarily drawn on the mirroring phase to extend the explorative and open dimension of the interview as far as possible. I combined this with techniques from the ethnographic interview, primarily as described by James P. Spradley (1979). Spradley's approach to interviews focuses on learning 'native' categories, taxonomies and plots, rather than imposing the analytical agendas of the anthropologist.

Furthermore, I designed my interviews so that they underpinned my dual analytical interest – that is in social dispositions on the one hand and individual agendas on the other. I did this by asking about the same themes both from a generalized, normative angle and from an individual, emotional angle. The purpose was to investigate whether there were significant differences in the answers to these two kinds of questions and whether these differences could tell me something about muted experiences and fissures in the discourse. For example, I would ask questions such as: "Could you state in five bullet points the most important characteristics of a good manager?" The question is fairly general and thus invites to a normative answer running along the lines of general social trends. Later in the interview, I would approach the same theme from a detailed and personal angle by asking: "Can you name one great experience you have had with a boss during your career?" This question invokes an emotional context and is thus less likely to be wholly recuperated by the discursive pressures. Often, when I compared the answers of question number one with question number two, they varied greatly, as we shall see in the following chapters.

To read even further for difference, I would approach the same theme from the opposite angle, both in a general and an emotional way. This means that I would ask the participant to state in five bullet points the most important characteristics of a *bad* manager – and I would ask him to describe the last time he was very *displeased* or upset with his manager. Interestingly, this did not always come out as a simple inversion of the positive manager.

I combined this elaborate exploration with extensive use of the so-called mirroring approach: I restated the message and kept asking for more or allowed for prolonged silences which invited to further description – all of this in order to reduce premature conclusions on my part. In the end, the comparison of positive versus negative questions and of general versus emotional questions rendered a

complex picture of the ambiguous or even contradictory notions and experiences of management held by employees and vice versa.

PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

As already mentioned, I chose two organizations as the platform for my empirical studies of discourses about self-realization in knowledge work. I chose these two organizations based on the following selection criteria:

- They are considered prestigious workplaces
- They attract ambitious, talented and highly educated employees
- The majority of the job functions contain a certain amount of creative or innovative tasks
- The organizations are large enough to allow for extensive empirical study featuring a number of interesting variables (gender, age, type of job function, seniority, departments, hierarchical stations etc.)

I spent three months in Media and Booker respectively, doing fieldwork and conducting interviews. In both settings I chose two departments (or 'editorial offices') as my primary focus. The two editorial groups were chosen in an attempt to gain variety. In Media, I chose a group with relatively long deadlines and project-based work on the one hand, and a group with very short deadlines in daily news programs on the other.

In Booker, I chose one group working with the highly prestigious fiction books and another group working with the less prestigious children's books. Although all groups had in common the factors mentioned in the bullet points above, they still differed in matters of prestige, public visibility, working hours, working conditions, and degree of continuity. Although my material is not statistically significant, these variables would nevertheless allow me an impression of what might cause differences in investment, pressure, patterns and problems.

In both Media and Booker, I was included as a regular employee with a mail-account, access to the Intranet, Outlook-invitations to meetings etc. When I was not conducting interviews or participating in activities, I spent time at my desk either talking to 'colleagues' or going over internal mail, Intranet messages and so on. I participated in lunch breaks, sales meetings, staff meetings, seminars and monthly company breakfasts just like the other employees. But I differed from my 'colleagues' in that I also participated in top management meetings and middle-management meetings. In one way, I featured as a regular employee, but in another I skirted freely hither and dither in the hierarchical

contexts. As already mentioned, this skirting constitutes a kind of liminality in which the anthropologist transcends existing categories and power structures – thus being allowed a comparative view which the participants do not have access to.

While conducting the fieldwork, I wrote field notes about the observations I made 'at work'. They constitute one part of my data material. Furthermore, I was given access to a number of organizational documents such as development plans, stress policies, organization profiles, strategy papers, employee satisfaction studies, and human resource papers such as performance interview forms etc. Beside these documents, I also gained access to a number of job advertisements from the organizations and the applications which they received in response to these advertisements. Much of this material is confidential, which means that I cannot refer to their specific content. Nevertheless, I could still use the documents as an indication of relevant issues and as a potential corrective or sophistication of the observations I was making along the way.

My interviews were designed as in-depth individual interviews with an average duration of one and a half hours. When I selected relevant interviewees, I considered parameters such as gender, age, seniority, temporary or permanent contracts, and degree of creativity in job function. I only interviewed people 25 – 45 years of age, because I was looking for settings and groups in which the high-involvement and self-realization trends were likely to be very pronounced. I decided to do this rather than spread myself thin over several different types of organizations and types of employees. It was my hypothesis that the trends would be more pervasive among young employees. Another criterion of relevance, which I have already mentioned, was the so-called snowball-factor. If one interviewee made eager reference to a certain manager or a certain colleague, I was likely to pick this person for the next interview. This selection method was a consequence of adhering to the multi-sited ethnography principle of tracing 'matters of concern'.

Altogether, I made 25 interviews in Media and Booker. 15 were in Media, 10 were in Booker. Out of these interviews, 9 were with managers and 16 were with regular employees. Several of the managers were middle-managers who were then interviewed both as employees and as managers. I also spoke with former employees who had left the workplace out of dissatisfaction with the conditions. Each of these interviews was transcribed verbatim, and the average size of a transcribed interview was 10 pages. After being transcribed, the interviews were coded using the computer program Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti is based on the coding principles of grounded theory. The gist of grounded theory coding is to maintain an ongoing interplay between open, explorative sampling on the one hand, and analytical sophistication on the other (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). From a postmodern angle, grounded

theory has been criticized for its concern with eliminating 'subjective distortions' in the research process (Clarke 2005: 3). Grounded theory's purpose for creating a systematic and continuous interplay between exploration and sophistication was to curb analytical prejudice and invite the empirical world to challenge the researcher's assumptions. This endeavor has been labeled positivist by many postmodernists who are more concerned with the recognition of knowledge as contextual. Nevertheless, as argues second-generation grounded theorist Adele Clarke, the criticism overlooks the fact that grounded theory shares the focus on perspective entertained by postmodernism. It was precisely out of a wish to understand the varieties and complexities of different local contexts that Glaser & Strauss sought to develop qualitative tools which were systematic and empirically sensitive (ibid.).

In the current study, grounded theory coding has proved an invaluable analytical tool. It helped me handle a large body of material and check whether my intuitions corresponded with the actual messages in the interviews. I may have had an impression of employees suffering from nostalgic longing after simplicity and authority – but how many employees actually expressed this feeling? Atlas.ti would allow me to make an exact count of this. It would also allow me to systematically pursue whether the nostalgic longing coexisted with other kinds of longing which suggested different issues at stake. In short, Atlas.ti served as an excellent tool of 'falsification' which helped me challenge my own darlings and make me more open to surprises. Using the coding techniques helped me read for difference and notice angles I had not previously considered. I undertook the coding of the first interviews while I was still active in my fieldworks. This allowed me to pinpoint certain themes for further investigation, which I then pursued in the following interviews. One could say that Atlas.ti helped me implement a 'matter of concern' approach within my research design – constantly trying to trace hints of intensity or heightened investment.

Another source of correction and sophistication were the countless informal talks I had with both managers and employees while at fieldwork. As many anthropologists have noted, much of the essential information is given during times when the recording device is turned off. This is the time when people dare confide or give the deeply personal version of what was recounted in a more formal manner when the recorder was on. The information given under such circumstances exists only in my field notes.

Yet another source of material came in the form of active feedback from participants. Both at Media and Booker I made presentations of my initial findings to the staff. The comments made during these arrangements also served as an interesting supplement to the fieldwork. They had some similarity to a focus group setting in that central issues were being discussed under the influence of group dynamics

(see Bloor, 2001; Halkier, 2002). They differed from focus groups, of course, since I did not fulfill the role of a moderator, but rather acted as a professional diagnostician. Nevertheless, the discussions and responses served as a source of data which I included in my final analyses. It was interesting, for instance, that the older employees simply did not believe that working life was increasingly used as a source of personal validation and existential development. Just like it was interesting to see that the younger employees laughed in semi-embarrassed recognition and told their seniors that they were "afraid it's true".

STRATEGY OF REPRESENTATION

Following in the footsteps of the post-structurally minded anthropologists in the last few decades, I have made my strategy of representation an explicit concern. The 1980s witnessed a veritable eruption of representational experiments from anthropologists seeking to break with their positivist and colonial past. Instead of practicing various versions of explaining to the West about the Rest (read: the savages), anthropologists now engaged in critical reflections about exotification and 'othering' (Clifford & Marcus: 1986; Fabian: 1983; Geertz: 1988; Said: 1978). These reflections lead to a period of anthropological research experimenting with representational modes, a.o. actively applying interpretive models and techniques imported from literary criticism (ibid.).

My own lesson from this so-called 'crisis in representation' (Flaherty et.al: 2002) is an informed reflection about the consequences of style, genre and 'author position' for both the reader and the ones being written about. I do not wish, however, to pursue the experimental or 'confessional' writing which arose in the wake of the 1980s. It took the form of either making the researcher and her subjectivity strongly present throughout the text so as not to pretend objectivity, or of stressing diversity by creating semi-cacophonic texts with numerous voices, numerous authors and numerous genres (e.g. Lather and Smithies, 1997). I find that these texts do not exhibit an increased sensitivity to local and contextual issues, as was the intention, but rather (paradoxically!) lose themselves in self-absorption. It seems to me that many of the radical revolts against traditional scientific genres import the very issue they are trying to escape: a longing for perfect transparency. Only, the transparency is no longer ensured by rigorous objectivist standards, but by equally rigorous references to ('distorting'?!) subjectivities and multiplicities. Although I subscribe to the critical reflections about the ethics of representation, I still wish to maintain a primary focus on my field, not on my own subjectivity. It may be a matter of taste, but I feel that the best way to render my field pertinent to the reader is by creating a coherent plot narrated by an author who has stated her purpose and perspective, yet otherwise remains fairly discrete and humble. My primary concern in the matter of representation has been to

ensure that the methodological ideal of compassion is also fulfilled in my writing. As I explained above, the gist of compassion is a coexistence of identification and distance in a way which allows the distance to deepen the quality of the identification.

My strategy for compassionate representation has been an attempted balance between writing which 'mirrors' the messages and narratives of the participants (i.e. rephrases them as precisely as possible, like a form of witnessing, cf. White, 2007) and writing which operates on a different and more analytical order. Furthermore, I have attempted to avoid an analytical mode which 'disqualifies' or 'snubs' the experiential mode in a know-better manner. It means a commitment to understanding and presenting actors so that they 'make sense' (cf. the paragraph on Imago above). Striving for respectful analysis is not, however, synonymous with the so-called 'participant validation', according to which research conclusions are false if the participants disagree with them (Bloor, 1978). Disagreement from participants has been included as valuable information in my analysis, but I weighed it against the collected messages and observations in my data material, before I decided whether it warranted a reformulation of my conclusions. Nevertheless, respectful analysis does require that one mentions and reflects upon disagreement or criticism voiced by participants.

In accordance with my analytical strategy, I have looked for a representation which does not rest on a plot about 'victims' and 'perpetrators'. As best I could, I have tried to present both the vulnerabilities and powers of all positions. This does not mean that I have attempted to equally distribute the vulnerabilities and powers – in fact I make an effort to point out the differences between the various positions in the field. My point is simply, that the representation should commit to a complex and non-reductionist description. Another way to describe this strategy is to say that the representation is concerned with a description of patterns rather than essences. I do not write about 'good guys' or 'bad guys', nor about 'exploited' or 'exploiters', but rather about the dynamics which facilitate certain kinds of exploitation and certain kinds of freedom. Who exploits and who rejoices should hopefully appear as a surprisingly complex matter, which reaches beyond positions like, say, 'employer' and 'employee'.

CRITERIA OF QUALITY

Whichever way one sets about delineating the field, the task still remains to define what constitutes a finished set of data. When do we stop constructing and expanding our material? In my assessment of when I had constructed enough data, I used the criteria 'thick description', 'saturation' and 'trustworthiness'. These criteria are part of an interpretive and constructionist approach which does not subscribe to the semi-positivist criteria imported into social sciences from the so-called 'hard sciences'. Such semi-positivist criteria would attempt to make knowledge claims as objective as possible by

focusing on parameters like generalizability, reliability and validity. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kvale, 1994: 69pp) The ideal would be to produce science which is as independent as possible from the perspective of the researcher, and can be generalized as much as possible beyond the context in which the research has been conducted. Instead, I wish to apply revised versions of these criteria, which discard the ideal of neutrality and context-independence, but still seek to make a claim of relevance and quality that reaches beyond 'recounting local tales'. Below, I will explain in more detail the meaning of the criteria I have selected.

The concept of 'thick description' was originally coined by Clifford Geertz (1973) and has become a hallmark in anthropological methods. Geertz developed the term in disagreement with the defenses mobilized by anthropologist when they were confronted with the criticism of being too local and microcosmic. In Geertz's characteristic language, he labeled the two main defenses: "Jonesville-is-the-USA microcosmic model" and the "Easter-Island-is-a-testing-case 'natural experiment' model". The rationale behind the first defense from anthropologists is that microcosmic is not at problem, because what we observe during our ethnography in Jonesville counts for all of America. Geertz's rather terse comment to this was: "The notion that one can find the essence of national societies, civilizations, great religions, or whatever summed up and simplified in so-called 'typical' small towns and villages is palpable nonsense. What one finds in small towns and villages is (alas) small-town or village life." (ibid. 22) The rationale behind the second defense is that conducting fieldwork on, say, Easter Island, equals the experiments conducted by scientists in laboratories. So microcosmic is not a problem, because we are conducting relevant experiments. Geertz also finds this claim to be nonsense, first and foremost because it is hard to find the resemblance of an island with a laboratory when none of the island's parameters are manipulable. He discards the underlying notions in this defense that ethnographic data should be purer or more solid than other data. What he does instead is to reduce the ambitions of ethnography's contribution to social science. He says:

> "One can add a dimension – one much needed in the present climate of size-up-and-solve social science; but that is all. There is a certain value, if you are going to run on about the exploitation of the masses, in having seen a Javanese sharecropper turning earth in a tropical downpour or a Moroccan tailor embroidering kaftans by the light of a twenty-watt bulb. But the idea that this gives you the thing entire [..] is an idea which only someone too long in the bush could possibly entertain." (ibid)

In other words, Geertz believes that the microcosmic details can speak to large issues in ways which are important for our understanding of these issues. But they can do so only in the very humble sense of 'adding a dimension'. His suggestion for how this dimension should be added in an anthropologically sound way rests on the concept of thick description. The gist of the concept is that one must explain human behavior in a contextual manner, so that we understand the web of meaning and significance attributed to it. His astronomically famous illustration of this is the story of the wink. In a so-called 'thin description' performed in the mode of a 'neutral' camera recording, the account of a wink would simply be that the eyelids of a boy's right eye contracted. In contrast to this, the thick description acts on an interpretive level, committed to making cultural sense of the contracting eyelids, such as it is experienced by the relevant actors. A thick description could thus understand the wink as a conspiratorial invitation to a friend in one situation, and simply as an involuntary twitch in another, although the movement is technically identical. Geertz then goes on to explain how the contracting of eyelids could also be a boy mocking his friend's recent wink, or it could be a boy practicing his winking skills at home in front of the mirror. The point is that actions and utterances take on their meaning according to their context, the intention behind them, and the way they are read by the surroundings. The difference between a twitch and a wink is vast, remarks Geertz, "as anyone unfortunate enough to have had the first taken for the second knows". (ibid: 6) It is this complex web of meaning which thick description commits to expand upon.

I have attempted to make thick descriptions in the sense that I pursued the central themes, utterances, gestures and stories from as many perspectives as possible. To stay in the wink-metaphor, I tried to establish when and if winks were significant to the participants. If they seemed significant, I tried to understand the nature of this significance and how or if it differed for the various parties involved. If the wink had different significance to the participants, I tried to understand how this difference in significance might be related to their positions in the field. Furthermore, I tried to investigate whether they were aware of the differences in significance amongst each other, or whether they assumed that the other parties operated with the same purposes and agendas in relation to winks. If there seemed to be systematic mis-readings between the participants, I sought to analyze how these affected the dynamic between them and the personal stories constructed by each of them. Additionally, I tried to gauge the social norms of when winking was permitted, who was permitted to wink, and who would be considered inappropriate or 'weird' if winking etc. Following this, I would investigate whether these social norms seemed to give rise to ruptures or fissures, e.g. in the form of heightened intensity, fantasies, fears, sense of isolation, sense of powerlessness, or conflict which might potentially challenge the existing social codes.

The concrete way to test whether the criterion of thick description was adhered to is via a parameter of complexity. If the researcher's account seems too coherent, there is reason to be skeptical. Of course, there must be a minimum of coherence, or there would be no theorizing. But as says Geertz: "There is nothing so coherent as a paranoid's delusion or a swindler's story". (ibid. 18) A good thick description is therefore dominated by multiple perspectives, conflicts and tensions. It is as far from the functionalist "this fits that" approach as can be.

I have supplemented the criterion of thick description by that of 'saturation' (Kvale, 1994: 109). Saturation means that you are no longer told anything dramatically new or different about the research questions you have decided to pursue. Your observations and your interviews no longer lead you down new paths, but instead seem to corroborate what has been said and done during your study so far. The criterion of saturation presupposes fairly precise formulations of one's interest. If this precision is missing, there is no way of knowing 'what' one is trying to saturate. As mentioned above, the precise research problem arises out of a slow and painstaking exploration using open and thematic questions. The criterion of saturation only makes sense in so far as one has committed to an explorative phase in the beginning. If not, the process simply becomes one of prejudice and proving what one already knows. To prevent this, it makes sense to complement the process of saturation with a process of 'falsification' or 'reading for difference' as I have called it, during which one systematically seeks to challenge analytical 'darlings' and presuppositions. Speaking concretely, I tested the saturation of my analysis by coding my data with grounded theory techniques and then pursuing new data based on the information and corrections arrived at during the initial coding.

This brings me to my final criterion of trustworthiness[14]. As the term suggests, this criterion is concerned with the 'truth-value' of the analysis. Since I have discarded the ideal of Truth posited by the universal intellectual, and instead subscribed to research as truth-event, I must define the truth-value accordingly. Put in very plain language, the criterion of trustworthiness should answer the following question: "Why should I believe a word you say?" For the answer to this question, I lean on Kvale's comment about trustworthiness in poststructuralist research: "The stronger attempts of falsification a claim has survived, the more valid, the more reliable this knowledge is." (ibid: 236, my translation) The reason why you should believe a word I say, and the reason you should trust this to be more than a

[14] 'Trustworthiness' is a slightly modified and personalized version of the traditional qualitative criterion called validity. The question of validity has to do with whether "our observations actually reflect the phenomena or variables we are interested in". (Pervin in Kvale, 1994: 233, my translation)

mere reflection of my personal idiosyncrasies, rests on the fact that I have persistently and systematically sought to read for difference while engaging with my field and my data. How I read for difference has been described above, and will continually be described as the thesis proceeds into its closer empirical accounts. For example, the fact that I ended up focusing much on *another* discourse than the one about self-realization was a result of such reading for difference. Despite the fact that I have read for difference, there are naturally weaknesses and blind spots in the perspective which I have applied. I will write more on that below.

ANONYMITY

As already mentioned, many of my data involved intimate and volatile stories which made the question of confidentiality and anonymity pertinent. During my interviews, I promised the participants that their contribution would be anonymous. Furthermore, I promised that precarious, intimate, or conflict-related comments would be unrecognizable to their colleagues. I made these promises in order to establish the feeling of safety and trust which I deemed necessary for the kinds of issues we were talking about. These standards of confidentiality posed several challenges to my analytical presentation.

First, it meant that I had to minimize my ambitions about evocative descriptions of atmospheres and personalities. Such descriptions would necessitate information which rendered people recognizable. Consequently, the majority of my analytical sections feature quotes which are stripped of any 'atmospheric' contextualization. I speak of 'Lisa' or 'Nathan', but I do not attach any further descriptions to these people. From a sheer presentational perspective, I would have liked to complement their quotes with images of how they looked and acted, and what their personal stories were. However, confidentiality concerns made that impossible. The only evocative sections in the thesis are the vignettes which precede my analytical strategy in Chapter 2. During these sections, I take great care to disguise the identity of the people featuring in them, and I do not include any intimate information.

Second, my tactic for ensuring anonymity is very encompassing: Obviously, none of the participants appear with their own names. But apart from that, I also operate with at least two pseudonyms for each participant so that one cannot deduct who they are simply by collecting the information we learn about, say, 'Nathan' during all his quotes. Adding further to the anonymity, I do not adhere to gender consistency in my pseudonyms. Some male participants are quoted with female pseudonyms and vice versa. Although this interferes with the potential analysis of gender aspects in the thesis, I decided to prioritize confidentiality. When presenting the interaction between managers and employees, the information is often highly conflictual, and the number of managers is so low that gender accuracy

would make recognition too likely. If I assessed that there were clear gender issues at stake in an interaction, I obviously maintained gender consistency in my pseudonyms. As another confidentiality precaution, I also veil a number of the assignments which people refer to. People are often very recognizable from what they do. How many people edit Japanese cartoons, for instance? My description of assignments, project groups and departments are therefore often quite unspecific, and in some cases I even equip people with assignments which they do not have. A person whom I describe as working in the department for children's books may in fact be working in the department for teaching materials. When choosing these 'disguises', I pay attention to structural similarities. For example, I would never present a high-profile TV host as a back-office editor of hourly news, because these two positions differ too much in circumstances.

My final tactic of anonymity is that I often refrain from specifying whether the quotes derive from Media or Booker. In situations where the issues where organizationally specific, I obviously did, but if they concerned more general matters such as 'what is a good manager', I did not. Analytically speaking, this detracts from the precision of the study, because I cannot make as detailed comparisons between the two organizations. However, I deemed that since my research question concerned general discourses rather than organizational differences, I could defend this decision. Again, my concern was with anonymity, and I have taken the burden of trust very seriously. I did not want to risk that people could no longer work together after reading my thesis and recognizing confidential comments about each other.

Summing up, one can say that my elaborate tactic to ensure anonymity infringes on my analytical quality in several ways: I cannot supply descriptive and evocative sections which might help nuance quotes. I cannot offer concise analysis of gender aspects. And finally, I cannot focus in depth on the differences between the two organizations, but rather have to focus on the similarities cutting across them.

BLIND SPOTS

The particular research design developed for this study involves a number of blind spots and limitations. These limitations are related to selection and construction of field, selection of participants, selection of focus, selection of methods, and qualities in the researcher.

Deciding to conduct fieldwork in two prestigious knowledge work organizations (one of which is dominated by journalistic tasks) created certain blind spots. It constructed a field which features very pronounced versions of the high-involvement and self-realization trends. There is a high degree of autonomy, flexibility and creativity for the employees, and a relatively low degree of administrative tasks

and predefined quality criteria. Also, there is a fairly high number of temps and a high turnover of employees. Consequently, the picture I paint is likely to be more radical than it would have been, if I had also conducted fieldwork in, say, public administration or engineering. The radicalism is enhanced by the fact that my participants were all quite young. Interviewing seniors would certainly have nuanced the picture of a working life dominated by existential issues and personal projects. I chose this limitation, because it allowed me to go deeper into the complexities of the self-realization trend. I did not feel that the current study had the capacity to present a comparative analysis. But my results certainly call for elaboration and contrast from other studies made in different settings and with different groups.

Deciding to focus on the tension between social dispositions and individual precariousness has also influenced the nature of my results. It has given me a strong focus on language and cultural categories, which tends to overlook or downplay material factors such as architecture and technology. Also, being very interested in the complexities of norms and their individual reception, I give less attention to formal elements such as organizational structure, management reforms, financial circumstances and market conditions. This creates the risk of observing cultural norms as the source of events and processes which might be better understood through a focus on structural factors. An interesting supplement to this study would therefore be how differing organizational structures, management reforms and market conditions influence self-direction and high-involvement.

As already mentioned, the ethnographic method has as its greatest strength and weakness the microcosmic and local context of knowledge production. I have tried to compensate for the micro-perspective by extensive reading of research made with different methods on the topic. Several large archival studies support the claim that self-realization and authenticity have become an increasing concern in modern working life (e.g. Rose, 1999; Åkerstrøm & Born, 2001). I have used these studies as my hypothetical point of departure when making my local in-depth analyses. Nevertheless, it would nuance my results if they were supplemented by quantitative explorations or studies made in other contexts.

Finally, the results have been influenced by a number of characteristics in me as a researcher. Most prominently, they have been influenced by the fact that I myself am a young knowledge worker whose job situation is very similar to the participants of my study. For better or for worse, my focus is informed by the hopes, fears, and challenges I face in my own working life. On the one hand, this similarity increases my sensitivity to the stakes in the field. On the other hand, it requires more effort to read for difference and to accept the fact that what is joyful and painful for me at work may not be so for my participants, and vice versa. I have tried to compensate for this risk by installing a number of

'reading for difference' techniques, which I described above. Still, the study is fundamentally influenced by my affinity with the field and should be read as such. Studies made by researchers of a different nationality, age or job position could very well have turned out differently.

This being said, now let us turn to the world of modern knowledge work. In the following three chapters, I will present my empirical analyses of discourses about work and discourses about commitment between managers and employees.

CHAPTER 4

Contractuality and Authenticity – the dual discourses about work

In this chapter, I paint a picture of my participants' predominant discourses about work by exploring the most pervasive themes in their reflections and stories. I pursue what is important to them, and what they consider irrelevant or taken-for-granted. One could also say that I look for recurring zones of intensity, e.g. in the form of hopes, fears, frustrations or conflicts. During this exploration, I adhere to the analytical strategy described in Chapter 2, namely a simultaneous focus on discourses and ethical care for self. My intention is to present a field whose dominant trends appear both in the shape of discursive pressures and in the shape of active personal endeavors. I have chosen to present this analysis relatively devoid of theoretical language, focusing instead on empirical thickness. As already mentioned in my introduction, it was a central part of my ambition to deliver a study with strong focus on empirical saturation. In pursuing this ambition, I have made a choice about genre which follows more in the tradition of anthropological monograph than in the genre of organizational studies. This means that I have stylistically separated the theoretical tools and the empirical analyses in order to give the empirical chapters a specific 'phenomenological' style. This does not mean that the material appears in a non-theorized form. The text in this chapter is a result of going over my data with the concepts described in my analytical strategy: discourses, nodal points, constitutive outside, and ethical care of the self.

Based on this analysis, I ended up defining two major discourses about work, which I call *authenticity* and *contractuality*. Both discourses are centered on a specific nodal point, namely *transgression* and *limits* respectively. Within the discourses, there are sub-themes which contain a number of variations around the same nodal point. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to describing these two discourses, their nodal points and their sub-themes. As the many quotes will show, all participants alternate between states of normative pressure and states of creative appropriations of these norms. In other words, the same discursive tendencies represent both moments of normalization and moments of freedom for the people involved.

AUTHENTICITY – TRANSGRESSING LIMITS

As we saw in Chapter 2, both Media and Booker are characterized by a number of factors common to many creative knowledge work organizations: They are busy, there are many young employees, there is a relatively high overturn of staff, there is a focus on innovation combined with a high frequency of

organizational restructuring, there is an element of internal competition, there is an accelerated rhythm of production and output, and there is a focus on visibility, networking and innovation which sometimes seems to overshadow craft-oriented skills. When I asked the employees what they considered to be the purpose of work, they answered, a.o.:

- to have fun
- to use my potential 100%
- to do something good
- to realize myself
- to be stimulated
- to develop personally
- to be validated
- to have my personal needs fulfilled
- (…and other things in the same vein)

Out of all the participants, only one answered: 'to make money', and two mentioned making money along with 'being stimulated'. The rest referred to personal or existential parameters for satisfaction such as those above. The fact that intense experiences, self-realization and personal development counted as criteria of success for working life was corroborated throughout my material. The trend was so strong that every single participant mentioned criteria of self-realization during the interviews, and it was obvious that their joys, fears, doubts and conflicts revolved around this theme. The participants differed in their 'allegiance' to the trend and in their coping with it, but nobody was indifferent to it. These existential parameters for work were part of a larger discourse which I have called *authenticity*. I will describe it in detail below. Put briefly, the nodal point of this discourse is an ideal about transgression, in the sense of deconstructing, overcoming, and moving beyond limits. The authenticity discourse is focused on possibilities, both on a practical and a personal level. It features four different sub-themes which all revolve around the ideal about transgressing limits, namely progression, passion, indispensability, and agency.

Progression

Peter was one of my close 'colleagues' at Media. My table was close to his in the big open office, and we often cracked jokes about the 'under-cover anthropologist' and how she should make sure to note

this and that. I liked Peter; he seemed to have an encyclopedic knowledge of a wide range of topics, and his self-ironic sense of humor was a great contribution to the general mood in the office. Like most of my interviewees in Media, he was in his thirties and had an academic background combined with years of journalistic work experience. His position involved producing a radio program called Radio X which on a weekly basis transmitted interviews and discussions about factual themes. Although Peter was very pleased with his work, he mentioned during our interview that there were some hard aspects about having found his 'dream job' right from the beginning of his career. I found this intriguing, so I pursued the matter:

> Susanne: What is it you find hard about having found your dream-job so early?
> Peter: Maybe it makes it harder for me to strive for something else or to have an ambition about mastering something else or reaching something else, because I actually got it all in one go. It's not as if it's really torturing me (self-ironically). But sometimes it feels like I would probably have an easier time developing or trying to learn something new if I had started in a field which didn't really interest me. Then I could say: 'One day I would really like to make Program X'. It can actually be a bit inhibiting. And that's one of the reasons why I'm going to help organize a conference: Simply to whip myself into trying something else.
> Susanne: What would happen if you did not give yourself that kind of challenges?
> Peter: Well – what would happen is the thing which has kind of happened during the last two years: It all becomes a bit too much routine. I can feel it. I don't know if anybody else feels it. […] I talked to a coach last weekend who mentioned something about needs and demands. It made me think that I'm quite convinced I fulfill all the demands. But the question is: Are all my needs met? And I don't think they are. But I don't think I have any problem fulfilling the demands. […]
> Susanne: So the routine dimension does not cause problems with the quality of what you produce?
> Peter: Well no, that's my impression at least. But it's a little complicated. I mean – routine is bad when it means that you do the same thing every week - when you do things in exactly the same way.

As we can see in the quote above, Peter is pleased with his job. In fact, it is his dream job. He is also convinced that he does his job well – that he meets the demands. And yet, things are not ok. They are not ok, because he feels an obligation to care about his *needs*, and not just about his *competencies*. And once those personal needs are put to scrutiny, Peter finds himself wondering if they are actually met. The fact that he is happy is not enough to quell his worries. On the contrary (and paradoxically, since we are concerned with needs here), it is a source of worry that he is happy. If we pursue this worry a bit

further, it becomes obvious how it rests on the assumption that a 'happy Peter' neglects a focus on progression or on striving for something different. While 'happy' may seem like a desirable end in working life, Peter's reasoning shows us that the urge to develop and expand repertoires represents a more powerful discursive pressure. This pressure seems to operate in a hermetic and self-reinforcing cycle of reasoning:

- We work in order to meet our personal needs.
- Meeting our personal needs is a matter of existential development.
- If we feel that our needs are met without posing ourselves existential challenges, we are flawed and should consult coaches so as to get in touch with our actual needs: existential development.

While happiness may appear as a likely result of working life based on pursuing personal needs, it soon becomes evident that the end-all and be-all of this working life is the *pursuit* itself. If one attempts to insert a small 'why' into this preoccupation with continuous pursuit, the inquiry is cut short by the notion of 'routine'. Once the prospect of routine arises, it activates strong normative sanctions which escape further questioning. Routine is considered bad in a fundamental way. There are no concrete explanations attached to this sanction. It is not a matter of routine leading to bad quality - in fact Peter feels quite convinced that he delivers good quality, also when he is in his routine mode. Routine is simply bad, because it is bad. This end of reasoning makes the norm very hard to negotiate.

Peter's distrust of happiness and worry about routine is an example of the theme about progression. Behind the notion of progression lies an ideal about working life as a scene for constant personal development. In a 'progression'-context, we do not work in order to carry out certain assignments or in order to ensure the livelihood of ourselves and our family. These aspects are included, but they should fit into a larger framework of an existential project. This existential project involves a permanent transgression of existing limits, be they personal or professional.

Peter is a person who finds the discourse of progression challenging. When I ask him about his dream scenario for a future career, he tells me that he would actually be happy doing the same thing he is doing now, only with small variations. That is: 'tell stories', as he calls it. And in fact he would appreciate a relatively large element of practical and routine elements in his work. He loves that day of the week when he has decided on a theme, has recorded the interviews and only has to put it together in a fun and entertaining way. The great thing about that phase is that it combines creative challenges with solid craft and routine. "It's kind of like when gravity just takes over", he explains and mimics with his hands how he simply runs down a slope and reaches his goal. But the fondness of craft and routine

meets resistance from the progression theme and requires elaborate balancing acts from Peter. He is required to find a narrative for his security-oriented temper, which pays homage to the plot of working life as limit-breaking existential development. Rather than simply declaring that he only thrives in work which contains a large amount of routine and security, Peter therefore self-diagnoses in the following way: "In some ways I guess I'm kind of a security addict." Turning the desire for security into a matter of 'addiction" which he confesses to suffer from, Peter thus implicitly supports the progression theme rather than challenging it. The need for security is not a legitimate characteristic, but a flaw he admits to. Flaws can be compensated for in different ways. Peter does so by committing to a therapeutic and curative approach. He engages with his flaw and seeks to minimize it, albeit still recognizing its existence. Below, he describes an important career choice between two workplaces, The Newspaper and Media. This choice involved a conflict between security and challenges, and here are his reflections on the process:

> Peter: It was pretty wild for me to freelance at Media. But the assignments were so much more fun than at the Newspaper (his previous job). It was 100 times more fun to make a story for Program X than to write a little note for the Newspaper. If both jobs had been equally fun, I would have stayed at the Newspaper because it was more permanent. But they weren't. Media is 100 times more fun, so I chose that, even if I had to run a risk and say: Now I'm a freelancer, we'll just have to see how it goes.
> Susanne: So in your final decision, your interest in the assignments weighed more than the sense of security?
> Peter: Yes, a lot! Thank God! It's one thing to be a security addict, it's quite another to be pathologically security addicted. And I would feel that I was, if I chose a boring, but secure job rather than an exciting job with less security. I wouldn't feel that it was the right choice to make. So I'm happy that I jumped right into it.

The Newspaper was a work place offering Peter a permanent and secure job with relatively predictable assignments. In contrast, Media only offered very uncertain freelance contracts, yet with assignments which were stimulating and challenging. As Peter contemplated his choice between these two workplaces, it became evident how persistent the requirement for progression was. The thought of choosing predictable (albeit still academic) assignments over more innovative projects, merely on the basis of security needs, prompted highly derogatory labels such as 'pathology' and 'addict' from Peter. While it was possible to find a legitimate space for security needs, they should obviously never reach a degree which compromised the overall project of personal development. Peter, being someone who is obviously tempted by the stability of The Newspaper, therefore coped with his 'proclivities' by way of

'desensitization'. Rather than 'giving in' to the needs, he exposed himself to his fears and thus conquered new territory. While he may never be 'free' of his security needs, he nevertheless minimized their effects by making the 'right' choices of progression.

Peter represents a somewhat conflicted end of the spectrum when it comes to the progression theme, but many other employees in both Media and Booker inhabit the opposite end. They do not express ambivalence about facing challenges and pushing limits. Rather, they are frustrated if someone or something stands in the way of their exploration and pioneering. While Peter may experience the challenges as a demand, these employees regard them a personal right, the absence of which may very well drive them to changing jobs. Consider Lisa's remarks about the necessary ingredients of a 'good job':

> Lisa: I think it's really important to be challenged all the time. And that could be one of the reasons why I would look for a new job. […] The moment I'm no longer challenged, I have to leave. Then I have to move on. If the managers won't help me find challenges, then I have to challenge myself and go somewhere else.

For Lisa, anything smacking of routine or of doing it 'the way we have always done it' engenders a strong feeling of frustration. She enters a new job setting with the intention of doing things radically different than how they used to be:

> Lisa: I try to tell the managers that it would be cooler if we did it like that or like that or like that. And I keep making suggestions about how we could change things.

In her last job, she spent three years making suggestions for reforms. The whole purpose of work for her is to 'make things happen'. She cannot thrive in an environment, she says, in which there is not a large room for improvisation and development. Having put forth a substantial number of possible alternatives to the current routines without hearing any notable enthusiasm from management, she decided to leave. Her managers were pleased with her performance, but they were not very interested in radical innovations, and this made it impossible for Lisa to stay. For her, work was not a matter of being 'good enough', but rather of constantly exploring how much better she and the product could become. And now, having just started in a new position, she was full of ideas about how to pursue this commitment to progression.

Sarah and Karen were other examples of regarding challenges as a prerogative in working life. Below, Sarah explains how she dislikes predictable work:

> Sarah: I just think it's boring. There are not enough challenges. I mean, if I had been doing Melissa's (a colleague) job – just writing articles every day for four year. She must really like it. I couldn't do it. I'd feel that I didn't learn anything new. I'd feel that I only learned something about that particular field which the article dealt with. But it's too much of the same thing. It just becomes too boring.
> Susanne: And what happens when your work is boring?
> Sarah: Well, then I'm just not happy when I go home. I'm not enthusiastic. I wouldn't say that I get downright…well, yes, maybe I actually get really sad in the long run. I think I do. I'd like to come home and think: 'Wow, amazing!' To sit on the bus and think about all the stuff I've learned today. That also makes me feel like I have so much more to offer to other people.

In other words, Sarah goes to work to have her horizon widened and her abilities optimized. Her job should make her go '*wow*', and it should turn her into an interesting human being with much to offer to her surroundings. Essentially, work should be a *formative process*, and if it is boring, the formative process has failed. Interestingly, it is not a feasible thought for Sarah that boring work could have a desirable formative effect. Nor does she think about Melissa's approach to work in any other terms than 'liking' or 'disliking'. It seems almost self-evident to Sarah that if Melissa did not like writing the articles, she would do something else. So a job should always be a one-to-one reflection of one's existential choices, rather than a matter of coping with an ambiguous setting of demands, duties and obligations.

In a similar vein, Karen explains to me why she decided to decline an offer of a permanent position in a small media workplace in favor of freelancing for a larger company. There was a question of distance, since the small company was relatively far away. But more importantly:

> Karen: I think that some of the stories we made there were too minor. It was simply too local for me.
> Susanne: You were bored?
> Karen: Yes, actually. They were nice people and they offered me very good circumstances. But it just wasn't exciting enough, I think.

In contrast, the large company offered her a set of very varied assignments involving both domestic and international issues – albeit on a freelance basis. Interestingly, while Peter found the freelance basis somewhat harrowing, Karen found herself reluctant to give it up. She felt that it offered her a sense of freedom and of exploration where she could refuse boring assignments and pursue the interesting ones

instead. The notion of a permanent position seemed downright frightening to her, until, as she told me with a grin: "my partner pointed out that one can always quit". After this epiphany, Karen decided to say yes to an offer of a permanent position in Media. As much as Karen associated her freelance life with flexibility and freedom, it had often turned out to be quite demanding in practice, for instance lacking in advantages such as pensions and salaried maternity leaves. Despite being relieved from these pressures, Karen still found herself feeling nostalgic about the projects she might have made as a freelancer, had she not been employed by Media.

Employees like Lisa, Sarah and Karen embrace the norm of progression and feel that it offers them a very meaningful working life. They feel transported out of routine and predictability and into a space of exploration which is empowering and intense. At the heart of the intensity lie experiences of memorable achievements witnessed by a significant audience such as managers, viewers, readers, and listeners. Often these achievements involve a sudden and radical expansion of the employee's capacities, so that the constraints of everyday life seem to evaporate by way of pioneering tour-de-forces. Carla tells me how, after having worked in radio for years, she was one day invited to be responsible for a number of sessions in a weekly TV-program, despite her lack of experience. She describes the feeling of being part terrified, part exhilarated at the thought of taking this plunge with no security net under her. She also recalls the thrill of succeeding, despite the risk of failure, and how this very combination: the risk, the authorities' faith in her, and the in some ways unlikely success, was one of her most meaningful moments in working life.

> Carla: It was like: YES! I just grew several centimeters taller. It means a lot, I think: To try something new. To just be thrown out, and then: *Woooow*, finding out that you can manage the jump.

Carla's yearning for intensity and for being the center of attention at work bewilders her, because she considers herself a quiet and thoughtful girl. To her own puzzlement she must admit that a working life without that feeling of accomplishment which she gets from 'throwing herself out in a parachute' and 'making it happen' would not make sense to her.

As we can see, the recurring metaphors in this discourse are those of plunging, jumping or parachuting. The implicit suggestion is that a willingness to run risks and face the unknown contains the promise of great victories. Even if you cannot swim, you may yet be the first to cross The Channel. These intense moments of accomplishment seem to rest more on explosions of effort than on extensive and

laborious perseverance (see Ehrenberg 1991, for a similar point about the rise of heroic tales at the cost of meticulous craft). There are tales of how introvert people suddenly blossom as hosts of giant conferences, how inexperienced employees revolutionize traditional output, and how mere students receive the attention of the country's most powerful people. For many employees, this self-transgressing intensity seems to combine existential satisfaction with the feeling of being a quintessentially desirable asset on the labor market. Conversely, the absence of such moments may give rise to great frustration and insecurity. Louise tells me about the time she returned from her maternity leave. During her absence, another person had taken over her usual assignments, and instead she was now asked to produce 'hourly news'. This involved sitting in a group around a table writing telegrams for the hourly radio news.

> Lisa: It was simply an assembly line. I felt that I was just editing other people's stuff – I mean other people's interviews which I had to cut down to ten seconds, blop, blop!

Lisa experienced this assignment as a demotion and a sign that she was not considered good enough for other job functions. She described her condition during this period of working with hourly news as almost bordering on depression. Her situation was exacerbated by the fact that all her previous colleagues felt increasingly sorry for her. Everybody agreed on how awful it must be to 'only' do the hourly news when one was able to do so much more. Lisa's story was one of many which illustrated how the degree of autonomy and innovation required in one's assignments was seen as directly equivalent to one's value in the organization. Both Lisa and her colleagues interpreted her routine tasks as a sign of devaluation from management. Nobody suggested that this might be a matter of logistical circumstances. Furthermore, Lisa did not contextualize this comment on her value to an external and practical setting (the workplace), but extended it into a more encompassing existential dimension: "Suddenly I was somebody who didn't have any competencies. Coz' there had to be a reason why I was put there, right?". She explained that she could not go home and think 'Oh, that's just work. It doesn't matter. I have a lovely husband and lovely kids.' 'It doesn't work like that', she said.

The employees' sense of value was intrinsically linked to the notion of *having potential*. And having potential should be directly reflected in the degree of innovation and responsibility one was offered at work. Once the sense of having potential was compromised, it extended into a larger realm of existential dissatisfaction which could not be appeased by consolations from the domestic setting. The urgency of 'having potential' can be illustrated by the lengths employees were willing to go to in order

to nurse and optimize this potential. It was not infrequent that people left jobs they found rewarding and satisfying, simply because they feared that stagnation or limitation might render them vulnerable in a competitive and fast-moving labor market.

Below is an excerpt from my interview with Mary. She had just started her third job and was reflecting on how wonderful her first job had been:

> Mary: There really weren't any limits to what I was allowed to do. So in that sense I could easily have stayed there for the rest of my life. But it's another time now – I mean, in our current society you don't stay in the same company all of your life. Our parents did. But it's as if – and maybe it's a bit silly, 'coz you might as well – but it's as if people say: "Oh my God, have you really been there for so many years?!" When I tell people that I stayed in my first job for 12 years, they think it's an incredibly long time. And after that I stayed seven years in the next job, while people usually move on after three years or so. And I don't think that's good. I think that it takes time to get to know an organization and find your place. So I don't want to just jump around. But for my own sake it's good to move on and see something different and find out that there are different cultures and so on. You learn a lot from changing jobs. If you would like to keep your edge, you do learn a lot from it. And then there is the matter of age too, which was a concern when I changed job this last time. You are not attractive on the job market for very long – only in your 30s and early 40s. Then you start being a less attractive candidate for the job interviews. So if I wanted to get to do a few things before I settled down, this was a good time to move on.

Mary, like Peter, was ambivalent about the norm of progression. Her ambivalence was not related to a need for security – in fact she spent a lot of the interview describing how she loved challenges and 'limitless' work. Such challenges were abundant in her first job, but she still felt compelled to move on. This was because the norm of progression made her feel outdated if she stayed in the same place for more than three years – no matter the amount of challenges this work offered her. In order to make sense of her job changes (which she obviously felt very ambiguous about), Mary resorted to a narrative of 'learning'. That was a common phenomenon among my participants: When confronted with the difficulties of a flexible, fast-paced and competitive working life, the plot of learning served as a way to make sense of it (see Åkerstrøm & Born, 2002, for a description of 'pedagogical codes' and 'learning' in modern knowledge work). Rather than challenging the norm of progression by 'refusing' to develop, most participants coped with the pressure by telling stories of how learning was meaningful and 'good for them'. The plot of learning could make the ends meet - it made sense of losses and hurts while at the same time rendering one more attractive for future employments.

It was obvious that the employees' sense of value and attractiveness rested largely on the notion of eternal expansion and reinvention. Nobody I talked to expressed the feeling that decades of commitment to and perfection of a certain craft would ensure one's employability. On the contrary, after a certain period in one place (4-6 years seemed to be the average), people felt that they should move on, lest they become too 'predictable', 'narrow' or 'lose their edge'. These concerns, which were very prevalent, were nourished by various threatening images: That one might suddenly be on the outside of the labor market. That one might suddenly see the high-velocity train fly by and not have what it took to get on. There was a general preoccupation with being 'ready' so as not to 'miss' the opportunities. And the implicit alternative to such 'missed opportunities' was not 'fewer opportunities', but rather a notion of complete exclusion.

While the employees differed in their allegiance to and compatibility with the norm of progression, they virtually all of them paid homage to it in some way or other. The pervasiveness of the norm was enhanced in two ways: First, Media and Booker attracted employees who subscribed to self-actualizing work; second, both organizations were slowly, but consistently ridding themselves of 'old-timers' who did not. In connection with the (remarkably frequent) organizational restructurings, 'old-fashioned' or 'conservative' employees were made redundant – although the official explanation for them being fired often referred to economic reasons rather than mind-set.

Passion

After reading the section above, one might wonder where the employees found the momentum for such a degree of progression and limit-breaking. As I pursued the matter of motivation, it became obvious that the transgressive mode was sustained by feelings of *passion*. While specified assignments with explicit criteria for outcome could be carried out based on a sense of duty, permanent pioneering required another fuel. It required a fuel with a high octane level. And precisely the metaphor of fuel or burning pervaded my interview material:

> David: I think it's incredibly good fuel if you get to try something new and different. This thing where you know your assignments forwards and backwards can really make me stagnate. Then I have a hard time finding the motivation after a while. For me it's gasoline to try something new.
> Susanne: What happens when you know your job forwards and backwards?
> David: I think that everything becomes more and more of a routine. It becomes increasingly hard to get that spark.

In other words, progression and passion sustain each other: If you were offered the limitless promises of progression, they 'sparked' the burning passion which made pioneering possible. If the passion was present, you could manage the aforementioned plunges into deep waters – and come out victorious. Conversely, if the passion was absent, the job lost meaning and a change of setting was called for. Burning passion was the *sine qua non* of limit-breaking work. Below, Karen describes her thoughts as she had to decide whether she would return to her old position after having spent one year as a substitute in another department:

> Karen: I decided that I didn't want to go back. I just couldn't stand returning to the old department. Not that I don't like the people. But just the thought of looking at the same old curtains and the same old people I have been looking at for ten years! It's like moving back home to Mom or an old boyfriend with all his dirty underwear.

This quote illustrates both the progression discourse and the passion discourse, and how closely they are intertwined. The metaphors of 'moving back home' refer to a sense of regression or 'unnatural' development: In the healthy developmental process, you do not move back to Mom unless in an emergency. Similarly, in a job setting, returning to one's long-term position after a short break is not associated with positive values such as continuity or belonging. Instead it is associated with dysfunction, weakness and a failure to sustain the proper existential progression. We have seen several examples of this in the section above. Meanwhile, the metaphors of ex-boyfriends and dirty underwear refer to the passion theme. The implicit suggestion of Karen's metaphor is that commitment should be based on romance and its concomitant sense of open horizons. The quintessential antithesis to romance is dirty underwear. It is romance turned mundane and everyday reality infringing on the pleasures of infatuation. When this moment arrives, many modern employees see it as a sign that they should move on. Whether the dirty underwear takes the form of predictability, boredom, routine tasks or administration – once these dimensions of working life reach a certain level, these employees feel compelled to either instigate revolutions or change jobs. If they had a sense of long-term commitment or obligation, it was towards the sense of passion itself, rather than towards an external setting or assignment. The spark should be kept alive. Commitment without spark was a working life gone awry. As Christian summed up his expectations to work:

> It should always be fun, and it should be fun for me! That's the most important criterion.

In a similar vein, Brian commented:

> I just can't imagine getting up every morning knowing that now I'm going to a job which I don't find really, really cool. I just couldn't. I mean, dammit! Life is… You only get one chance! It has to be fun and stimulating.

As I spoke to Brian, he had just been given a new and (according to him) relatively boring assignment which would take up a substantial amount of time in the future. He explained to me that he could see the rationality behind the assignment and how it made sense from the organization's point of view. But he just did not find it exciting and consequently he decided to look for a new job. So despite the fact that the assignment was reasonable and that he was perfectly able to carry it out, Peter felt compelled to leave his position, simply due to its lack of 'spark'. Many managers confirmed this tendency. They explained how a certain (and increasingly common) type of employee just could not cope with practical or logistical restrictions to their creative output. Like Brian above, their primary allegiance was to an existential or authentic dimension of work, and having to perform a tedious task simply because it was necessary to the organization engendered many protests.

Certain employees with a more pragmatic approach to the norm of passion handled the process of disenchantment differently. Peter, whom we met earlier, explained that the danger of falling madly in love with your job was that you risked 'waking up and finding out that this wasn't really it after all'. Again, the commitment to work is described in romantic terms. Peter's first period at Program X had been intoxicating, and the years following that initial rush felt like a steady downwards curve. He attributed the downwards curve to a number of external circumstances which interfered with his passion for the 'métier', namely producing radio. He mentioned continuous cut downs in resources combined with increasing demands for productivity. He also mentioned more numerous administrative tasks and a series of internal conflicts influencing the work routines and content of the program. Staying in the metaphor of love, he compared this process to a relationship which was indeed based on love, but which suffered from external pressure such as one part being unemployed, the mortgage going up, or the car breaking down. Although the two people still loved each other, circumstances could lead to a collapse of the relationship, he explained. Peter still loved his métier and did not want to leave. He was pragmatic about the passion norm in that he 'stuck out' the disenchantment and stayed put. But while being pragmatic, he was not indifferent to the norm. He paid homage to it in several different ways. First of all, he still subscribed to a model of work based on notions of love and romance

– albeit a romance with more tolerance for disappointment than many of his colleagues displayed. Secondly, Peter saw his 'real' work as producing radio. Other aspects, such as dealing with conflicts, having to revise expectations etc., he considered to be external factors intruding upon his métier. In a more traditional and duty-oriented approach to work, these factors would be considered part of the job, however frustrating. So once again: the primary commitment was to passion, not to an external context. This notion of commitment is strikingly similar to Giddens' concept about 'the pure relationship which I presented in Chapter 1. The passion theme about work downplayed the contractual or duty-based aspect of work in favor of aspects such as self-exploration and intimacy. One could also call it a focus on 'authenticity' in that the ideal was to do something for the sake of its *intrinsic* value as opposed to its *instrumental* value.

Passion and duty were often described as irreconcilable elements by my participants. Duty and routine were frequently used almost synonymously, and they both seemed to embody the epitome of lost passion. Those employees with the strongest subscription to the passion norm expressed very intense negative feelings about duty and routine. Consider the excerpt below: I was talking with Lisa about various virtual job scenarios. She had just sketched a dream job which involved her being a host on a show with very little interference from management. I then proceeded to experiment with this sketch in order to get a sense of her priorities. I asked her how she would feel if her team contained a lot of employees who had been ordered to participate, rather than having opted for it themselves. I described them as people who 'had their heart somewhere else'. Lisa reacted with loud noises of repulsion such as:"Oooh! Yuck!" She called it a 'nightmare scenario'. I made sure to point out that these people would be doing their job; they just would not burn for it.

> Lisa: Well….no! Yes, sure they'd do their job. But it just wouldn't be the same. I really don't think it would be the same. They may claim that they do their job – and they probably do what they're paid to do. Maybe they make small suggestions here and there. I just don't think they'd be open to all the possibilities. I don't think they see enough possibilities if they don't burn for it.

I interjected that they would be seasoned journalists who had a great deal of routine in these matters. Lisa firmly shook her head and said: "It just wouldn't be good enough". She finalized the theme by once again calling it a nightmare scenario. The interesting thing about this interview excerpt, apart from the sheer intensity of Lisa's exclamations, was her focus on *possibilities*. This is precisely where the passion norm distinguishes itself from more duty-based norms: It is concerned with pioneering, with

exploration, with going beyond the familiar boundaries. Finding the momentum for that requires passion. Lisa did not trust that her routine-oriented colleagues[15] would embark on such a precarious search for possibilities, no matter how seasoned and skilled they were. "They'll just go home at four o'clock, even if we haven't decided whether our idea is great or not!", she predicted. As her remarks indicate, Lisa rarely went home at four o'clock. Her commitment to passion and to the continuous exploration of possibilities made her feel ambiguous about a domestic setting which confronted her with very tangible demands. Although she adored her partner and child and wanted to prioritize them, she found herself saying yes to extra work again and again. When reflecting on this pattern of hers, she said that she found it hard to say no, because she felt cheated of the experiences she might have had at work, if she stayed home. Home was boring compared to work, and Lisa needed a setting which allowed her to vent some of the intense energy she possessed. This was also why she rarely just hung out at home with her child. When she had a day off, she took the child on action-packed outings to the Zoo, the pool or other places.

At certain intervals, Lisa decided to change her working pattern and focus more on domestic life. This usually lasted a couple of weeks, and then she was back in her old mode. She described making deep-felt vows to her partner that things would change, and then she described his expression when she presented him with the monthly work schedule. Because at the end of the day, she still said yes to working evenings and weekends. She just could not help it, even if she felt ashamed about it.

As we can see, the passion norm is a double-edged sword of desire and anxiety. It comes with its own set of taboos, just like the progression norm tabooed security. In passionate work, routine or duty-oriented completion of assignments is not legitimate. It is associated with a form of predictability and 'in-the-box' mindset which does not suit the explorative and authentic mode of creative knowledge work. The passion norm is closely related to the progression norm. They form part of the same pattern of limit-breaking and transgression. The next section will describe one more norm which is an equally vital element in that pattern: the norm of indispensability.

Indispensability

The momentum for continuous progression has one more fuel than that of passion. This fuel is closely intertwined with both 'progression' and 'passion', and often more or less indistinguishable from them. I call it 'indispensability' or being the chosen one. Just like passion, it draws on metaphors and patterns

[15] Although Lisa sounds as if she is thinking of specific colleagues when we talk about 'routine-minded employees', I never met anyone who fit the description – at least in their self-presentation.

which stem from romance and infatuation (see also Åkerstrøm & Born, 2002, for 'codes of love' in modern knowledge work). Being the chosen one means that your contribution to work is original in a way that does not permit reproduction. No other employee could replace you in your position and copy what you are doing. This is, so the norm goes, because your contribution does not rest on craft alone, but on a unique combination of craft and inner personal potential. The uniqueness of this combination - the way that you and only you can perform the work of pioneering in this particular manner - makes you indispensable in your job function. Others may be able to reproduce the craft, but they cannot deliver the personal touch. And as we have seen above, craft in itself is 'just not good enough'.

The theme of being indispensable and irreplaceable also mimics features from Giddens' 'pure relationship' where the bond between partners is based on an exclusive commitment to seeing and understanding each other's specialness. This exclusiveness at once constitutes the solidity and the vulnerability of the relationship. It is solid in the sense that it does not promote easy substitution of participants, precisely because they are cast as the only relevant partners for each other. It is vulnerable in the sense that it must confirm and nurture the plot of exclusiveness against the pressures of banality, diverging agendas, and shortage of resources like time and maneuverability. Decisions based on mundane logistical considerations or on other factors external to the mutual specialness do not sit well with the norm of indispensability. Once too many infringements of this kind are made on the space of exclusivity, the commitment becomes threatened.

In my interview material, there were many stories of being or wanting to be especially chosen. These stories often presented the selection of this particular employee as a matter of management trusting his *innate* talent, rather than his concrete skills. The employee was hand-picked for his 'specialness', so the story goes, and the matter of concrete craft or skills was dealt with afterwards. Louise described how she, as a very young journalist, was chosen for an assignment which she had no experience with whatsoever. It was one of those 'plunge in and find out you're a great swimmer'- stories which I mentioned above:

> Louise: Thinking back, it was great to start at Company A. I hadn't done any TV when I started, so they began to teach me. On the one hand, I had some very tough circumstances where I was just thrown in at the deep end. On the other hand, I could manage it. And they knew that I could. So they kept pushing me to do more things. And that is incredibly developing. That is fantastic!

In this quote, the 'thrown in at the deep end' story is connected with a feeling of great validation and meaning. Louise felt that the plunge happened in a context of being recognized by management as

'unique' and full of pioneering potential. But interestingly, there was another version of the same plot which did not offer the same sense of personal reward. In that version, the plunge was perceived to be 'random' and 'emergency-like' by the employee, as opposed to the 'special trust' context. Louise told me about situations of logistical challenges during which she had to step in and make ends meet – not because she was unique or special, but because she happened to be around:

> Louise: Sometimes in Media it's maybe more out of emergency that you're pushed into something than it's a matter of trust or whatever. It's sometimes a bit more 'ooops'-like. "Well, can't you do it then, because now the one that we'd really prefer seems to be too expensive?" Something like that, right?

These plunges, albeit offering the same kind of progression possibilities, were associated with very negative feelings of not being recognized, or even of being exploited. Thinking back on the pure relationship, it was essential for maintaining the commitment that it was based on trust rather than logistical or instrumental concerns. Similarly, in the discourse of indispensability the offer of limit-breaking and pioneering only makes sense insofar as it is coupled with an 'authentic' recognition of the employee's potential – i.e. a recognition which is not motivated by instrumental concerns, but by a concern for the employee himself. In other words, the progression discourse only makes sense when coupled with the indispensability discourse and passion discourse. Breaking limits and optimizing one's potential is a practice which is intended to spark intense feelings of meaningfulness and be witnessed by 'special others'.

As indicated, the discourse of indispensability rarely involves a focus on concrete skills, but rather on a more vague notion of 'being special' and 'having what it takes'. The lack of concrete content in being the chosen one at once constitutes its enchanting aspect (it is truly unique and therefore not possible to copy by others) and its immense pressure. It is a 'total condition' which one must continually sustain, yet never quite knows the criteria for. The core aspect about the indispensability norm is that one is invested with trust by powerful people who believe that one can accomplish marvelous things which no one else could do quite the same way. This trust is empowering and disempowering at the same time because of its lack of rules and predictability. Great things can be accomplished, this discourse suggests, but great failures and disappointments lurk behind every corner. Below is an example of the promises of greatness which the indispensability discourse seems to offer. Mary describes a certain period in her working life which she is very nostalgic about:

> I had so many possibilities for development. I was allowed to try so many things, and they gave me a really long leash. Right from the first day – having studied only one year at university – I was offered a position as manager. It was just [Mary widens her eyes in an imitation of how awed she had felt] - I mean, I spoke at the stock market building, addressing the Danish power elite. Little me, 20 years old, stood in front of that great painting [refers to a famous painting in the building] with all those men, you know, and felt completely in awe. It was truly exclusive to be there and talk to them about the importance of what we were doing. And I was allowed to circle the whole system – I did everything from practical work to strategy and communication. The organization did not limit me in any way.

Contrary to all likelihood, Mary had the opportunity to address the Danish power elite, despite her youth, her unfinished education and her lack of experience. This was made possible by the fact that her management did not limit her in any way. This particular plot, with its ingredients of talent, opportunity provided by trust, moments of success witnessed by an audience, and reduced relevance of painstaking routine, experience, and practice, is the core plot behind the norm of indispensability which reverberated throughout my entire interview material. It varied somewhat in the extent to which craft and experience were considered irrelevant, just like it had different degrees of intensity and spectacularity. Some employees just recollected wonderful moments of telling stories to a captive audience or of innovating 'old school' products. Others spoke of 'making a difference in people's lives' (the listeners, viewers, readers etc.) or even of 'changing the state of Denmark'.

As the examples above illustrate, the condition of being indispensable was very intangible because it lacked concrete scales and categories. It obviously represented to the employees an image of being on the 'inside' as opposed to the ever-lurking and equally intangible images of being 'outside', 'excluded', 'passed by' or 'having lost the edge'. But the insideness of indispensability was never certain. It should constantly be maintained and be confirmed by 'significant others' or 'gatekeepers', precisely due to its lack of concreteness. This engendered an often hectic preoccupation with sustaining one's uniqueness – also during those hours which were technically off-work.

Nathan explained how after work he would often go home and write an article or produce a program for the radio. And once he was done with that, he figured that he might just have the time to line up something for the next day. This frequently resulted in 20 hour work days. Similarly, Clarissa told me that she often found it difficult to relax when she was home. She worked in a temporary position and did not quite know what awaited her after the end of her contract.

> Clarissa: I'm not good at allowing myself to think: 'I'll just watch some telly tonight, or I'll just do nothing.' I prefer to accomplish something. Then I just have to read some chapters in a good book, or I have to work a little on a children's book I'm writing, or I just need to think about something at work. I guess I have this thing where I feel I should accomplish something all the time.

Clarissa wonders whether this might be a result of her growing up with a very active father. But she remembers that while she was writing her thesis, she did not find it difficult to relax during the weekends.

> Clarissa: But now, because I haven't really defined where I'm going… should I start my own company? Should I work as a freelance journalist? Should I stay in Media? It's just there all the time, this awareness that there are things I could become better at. I guess I just have some kind of drive to try out new things. And that can also mean that you rarely give yourself some time off. But I mean – I get frustrated if I just fool around a whole weekend.

Although Clarissa seeks to ascribe the accomplishment mode to personal aspects such as personality and upbringing, it is also obvious that her external circumstances promote this attitude. In the face of her unknown future, the demand of personal improvement and progression becomes a generalized state with no legitimate ending point – or even just temporary relaxation point. On the one hand, Clarissa describes it as a state of permanent restlessness. On the other hand, it obviously constitutes a space for many dreams and fantasies of what she might accomplish in the future. As we have seen in the other examples of the indispensability discourse, it is precisely this duality of great expectations and great pressure which characterizes it. The state of wanting/having to be unique appears at once as liberation from traditional restrictions and a loss of predictable guidelines. Within this framework, the faith in one's own ability to steer and manage life becomes vital, as we shall see below.

Agency

My participants often talked with great intensity about the importance of being the director of one's own life, rather than being a product of circumstances. I called this the theme of agency. This theme is based on an attribution of great power to individual volition and a consequent discomfort with plots suggesting helplessness or even simply coincidence. Coincidences and circumstances may be part of the present situation, but they should not be the decisive factor. Consequently, employees went to great lengths to claim authorship to their own lives.

Christy told me the story of how she ended up in her current field. She started as a student assistant in Booker helping out with practical tasks. Then she was hired temporarily in one of the departments, because they desperately needed a book project to be completed. After this, a position opened in the department of teaching materials, and Christy was offered the job. Christy had never pictured herself working with teaching manuals. She was never 'turned on' by this field. But to her surprise she found the job very rewarding and interesting. Despite the fact that Christy enjoyed her work, she was seriously considering a career change. She explained that she had thought a lot about how this position just came to her out of coincidences. She never actually *chose* it. This made her feel uncomfortable, and she mused about what she might have chosen, if she had had the chance to go for what she *really* wanted. She figured that she would probably have chosen the department of literature, and now she contemplated a career move in that direction. In other words, within the framework of the agency discourse it is not enough to enjoy your work; you must also have chosen it on the basis of fundamental existential considerations. The motto seems to be: Always the captain, never just a passenger.

This plot had a dual effect: On the one hand, my participants regarded their lives as full of potential which they should be able to seize if they administered their agency correctly. On the other hand, it meant that strategies of acceptance, resignation or externalization (i.e.: attributing frustration or pain to outside circumstances rather than to flawed agency) met cultural resistance. Interestingly, the fact that externalization met cultural resistance seemed to provoke a simultaneous trend of extreme externalization in situations where the agency norm was put under pressure. Extreme externalization might represent a kind of 'last resort' in which the employees could escape the uncompromising demand of agency. Rather than to modify their notion of agency and instead think of personal will as existing within a context of structural limitations, many employees seemed to jump straight from one extreme to the other: The only alternative to absolute agency was absolute helplessness or dysfunction.

This trend became visible, for instance, in Carl's approach to his own recurring stress symptoms. He explained how he was close to a nervous breakdown on most Tuesdays, because he knew that come Thursday he should have formulated a groundbreaking idea for his weekly radio program. He described a condition of intense discomfort, sometimes even anxiety, when he was scanning his inner horizon for sufficiently original themes. I asked him what could be done to relieve this recurring condition, and he explained that one could organize a database with themes which were ever-relevant as opposed to themes pursuing 'current affairs'. In times of crisis or impending mental breakdown, one could resort to this database. I asked Carl if he intended to construct such a database, and he admitted that he was quite reluctant to do so. He explained that he disliked the idea of neglecting his idea-hunt and instead

simply resorting to pre-existing themes. It did not sit well with his pride and desire to be original. I probed Carl's willingness to let go of this agency-approach and accept outside intervention or structural conditions: I asked him how he would feel if his boss simply told him to construct the database. Carl replied that he would be greatly offended by this. He would feel this intervention as an infringement on his autonomy and on his personal responsibility for the radio program. Below, is Carl's description of his instinctual response, if his manager, Christian, should make the suggestion:

> Carl: Hands off – it's not your program. It's my program, and if I go down with a stress neurosis Tuesday afternoon, then it may be your responsibility ultimately, Christian, because it resorts under you. But it's my fucking program, and I will walk the plank!"

This I how I picture Carl walking the plank. Behind him is Christian yelling: Just make a database!

Carl knew that Christian was technically entitled to make the demand, because he could be held responsible for the program in the end. Carl also knew that the database was a 'very sensible idea', as he said. Nevertheless, he expressed strong objections to such an intervention, because it would challenge his sense of autonomy – and his sense of successful agency. His subscription to the notion of agency made him willing to prefer the acute stress neurosis (or 'walking the plank'), rather than accept an explicit structural limitation to his autonomy. Carl did not seem to see the merits of a middle-way which combined the possibility of making innovative programs on 'good Tuesdays' with a protection

against limitless idea-hunts on 'bad Tuesdays'. Every Tuesday should embody a space for Carl's personal agency, and if not, he preferred the breakdown.

The normative pressure to see oneself as 'captain' also made employees willing to assume responsibility for conditions which a sober spectator might be more inclined to regard as structural circumstances. One employee described his symptoms of stress in work situations which contained few guidelines and a tight deadline. He offered the following conclusion on this description:

> I don't really know what it is. I guess it's part of my personality make-up that I just can't handle situations where I haven't figured out what I'm going to do.

Rather than telling a story of how inherently stressful such a work situation was, the employee diagnosed his own personality make-up in order to explain the stress. Similarly, Karen reflected on her own ability to handle pressure at work. She explained that she was 'pretty bad at saying no and drawing limits'. As an example she mentioned that she would never take a well-earned day off until she was certain that somebody else was there to put news on the website. The website was part of Karen's job function, but she was not solely responsible for it, nor obliged to put news on the web every day. This was why she considered it a personal issue that she had a hard time just insisting on her day off. What she neglected to include in her narrative was that there was a persistent lack of guidelines from the manager on how and to what degree of quality the website should be maintained. There were also recurring technical problems, and the general vision of the website was opaque. Furthermore, Karen was in a short-term position hoping to have her contract renewed. All these factors could easily appear as viable explanations for why 'simply insisting on a day off' might be hard, but to Karen it appeared as a weakness in her own stress-management. (See Petersen, 2009, for an extensive treatment of the consequences ensuing from this focus on individual responsibility in stress management).

Just like the themes described above, the agency theme is a double-edged sword: On the one hand, it offers a sense of empowerment and of great horizons waiting to be conquered. On the other hand, it impedes strategies of acceptance or externalization, and instead promotes strategies of internalization which place the responsibility for frustration and pain inside the employee. Also, like the themes above it is associated with a fairly polarized landscape of actions and interpretations, which lack in grey-tones and nuances.

THE OUTSIDE OF AUTHENTICITY

Summarizing the themes in the authenticity discourse, they all have in common a quest to transgress limits in order to maximize possibilities. In the progression theme, my participants wish to maximize their possibilities by expanding their repertoire of competencies and personal capacities. For example, by learning TV-skills they transgress the limitations of being a radio host and thus increase possibilities for future assignments. In the passion theme, they maximize their possibilities by exploding the 'fettering' rules of craft and instead focusing on the infinite potential of 'personal touch'. When they do not need to solve their tasks by adhering to specific standards, but can strive for quality through the playful challenging of these standards, the possible outcomes multiply. In the indispensability theme, they maximize their possibilities by transgressing the bindings of contractual commitment with the manager and instead practicing a non-rule-based mutual 'recognition'. This focus on recognition and appreciation allows for greater flexibility in the interaction. The fact that mutual expectations need not explicit and rule-based allows for an increase in potential solutions. Finally, in the agency theme, my participants maximize their possibilities by investing personal agency with the power to orchestrate life in detail. By subscribing to a belief in agency rather than structural circumstances, my participants maintain a notion of external limitations as something which can always be overcome, if only they apply their agency in the right manner. This again keeps the horizon of the future wide and full of potential. Referring back to Laclau's analytical tools, the 'constitutive outside' of the authenticity discourse is *limits*. Limitations or restrictions cannot find a legitimate space within this discourse. They may occur, but they are cast as aberrations, exemptions or failures – hopefully temporary, soon to be transgressed by progression, passion, indispensability or agency.

On closer inspection, it is obvious that each authenticity theme contains a specific freedom fantasy promising my participants to be free *from* something. The progression theme carries a promise of being free from *shortcomings*. The passion theme carries a promise of being free from *predictability*. The indispensability theme carries a promise of being free from *banality*. And finally, the agency theme carries a promise of being free from *powerlessness*. These promises of freedom rest on a firm belief in the self-actualizing individual's ability to push beyond existing limits. Interestingly, the other major discourse, which I name in this study, namely the contractuality discourse, practically inverts this transgressive logic, which we shall see below.

CONTRACTUALITY - EMBRACING LIMITS

When my participants spoke about work, they did not always subscribe to the ideals about transgression. In fact, it soon became obvious that there was a set of parallel ideals which differed greatly from the authenticity discourse. I named these ideals the contractuality discourse, referring to 'contractuality's' connotations of standards, justice and predictability. Contrary the authenticity discourse, the contractuality discourse *celebrated* limits as a prerequisite for sound and functional working life. This celebration was expressed in two themes which I have called craft and collegiality. Both themes stressed the importance of predictability which again rested on a notion of explicit and mutually accepted limits.

Craft

When describing moments of meaningfulness at work, my participants often mentioned pride in their craftsmanship. Craftsmanship was understood as an adherence to common and established standards of quality, and it was associated with thoroughness and reliability. When speaking in the craft theme, my participants did not necessarily focus on how the assignments contributed to their existential development. In the craft theme, it was tolerated or even celebrated that identity issues were not central to performing the tasks. The theme was not concerned with 'special touch' so much as with 'proper quality' according to criteria presumed to be common and explicit. Helen told me that what she really loved about her job was to 'tell stories'. It was the pleasure of being a mediator between guests on the radio and the audience listening. She loved turning people into good narrators through the right kind of prompting, so that somebody 'out there' got a great listening experience. "They don't have to listen to me", she said. "They should just listen to the story." If the craft of interviewing and researching worked well, Helen did not care about being the voice at the center of attention, she explained. In fact, she was equally pleased to broadcast an interview made by a colleague, if the craftsmanship was good.

Similarly, Karen described what went through her head when she performed an interview. She imagined her colleagues and how they would evaluate her performance from a craft perspective. She pictured them noticing that she did not use a proper prompting method or did not establish a good dynamic between the two guests. These internal images of being evaluated on her craftsmanship made Karen want to stay sharp and live up to the standards. When talking about this, Karen seemed more concerned with the quality of her contribution than with the promises this contribution might offer to her existential development. In the craft theme, the understanding of 'good' and 'bad' seemed much more concrete than the criteria of success in the authenticity discourse.

Virtually every talk about craftsmanship was followed by laments over the current conditions for performing one's craft. There was an all-permeating theme of 'fewer resources and far more demands'. According to this theme, the standards of quality were put under pressure due to rising demands of productivity and versatility. The assignments considered by employees to be their core contribution represented an increasingly lower percentage of their total assignments. Journalists claimed to spend less time researching, editors less time editing, and managers less time managing. The complaints ranged from frustration that one's product "could have been better", to feelings of 'not doing a decent job', to regular shame of one's professional performance. The first might be a case of having to curtail creative ambitions when developing a program, because it had to fit into a certain financial framework and time perspective. The second could be a matter of not living up to one's own standards of professionalism, because one ended up leaving important mails unanswered or making do with superficial research to an interview. The third concerned cases which challenged the very notion of craftsmanship and reliability. Journalists described instances of interviewing people about themes they had never researched, and editors described examples of publishing books they had never read despite being their official editor.

In Booker, there were frequent sales meetings attended by 20-30 employees from different departments in the organization. At these sales meetings, the editors should prepare the sales people for how to pitch a particular book to the book shops. Several times Sharon attended such sales meetings presenting books which she had never had the time to open, 'faking it' with the help of Amazon.com and other websites. "You think – oh my God, they will expose me soon, they will find out", she explained, shuttering at the memory. Although it was not a secret within the company that such things occurred, nobody wished to be caught doing it. Sharon described the pangs of shame she felt towards her family and friends sometimes, when they talked about her job. They assumed that being an editor meant reading, or rather, scrutinizing books. How could she tell them that in her job it sometimes mattered more to find the right timing for a book or to launch the right quantity of titles, than to perform the craft of editing well – if at all? Many employees expressed the feeling that top management did not understand the realities behind good craftsmanship:

> Mary: They have so much power and they force their administration systems on us without having a clue about what it means to produce a good program. They don't have a fucking clue. They have no idea what it means to start with an empty piece of paper and then end up having a half hour program ready for broadcasting – and the same thing next week, and next week, and - hey! – next week too. They don't even begin to grasp it. They just think: 'Well, it's just about piecing some stuff together and getting it

> ready'. Well, it's not! If it is information heavy like our program, then it entails a giant research process, lots of networking etc. And they get this wild expression in their face when you tell them, because they just don't get it.

In other words, the craft theme referred to a scale of quality which was presumed to be given, explicit and mutually agreed upon by the craftsmen. There was 'good craft' and 'bad craft', and the quality was not a matter of challenging existing standards and breaking limits, but rather of fulfilling established criteria. In the craft theme, experience, thoroughness and reliability were heralded, contrary to the improvisation, velocity and pioneering of the authenticity discourse. Notably, the same employees subscribed to both discourses in different contexts.

The craft theme was most explicit in the interplay between manager and employee. It was more subtle in the interplay between colleagues. Here, it might feature as a point of reference for the individual employee who imagined being measured on a craft scale. But I only heard few instances of conflicts or struggles between colleagues cast in the craft theme. In the manager-employee interaction, however, the craft theme often constituted a site for negotiating issues such as resources, level of ambition etc. During such negotiations, the line between the craft theme and the authenticity themes could be blurry. While employees might claim that they were pursuing the right to perform professionally sound craftsmanship, their managers might claim that the employees were insisting on the right to limitless exploration, disregarding the logistical and financial realities.

Consider the quote below. David described how the relation between productivity and resources had developed on his radio program within the last decade. It started out as a 12-16 man team, then it was reduced to eight and then to 3,5 employees. The program still has the same frequency and length, and David felt convinced that ten years ago employees would have 'cracked up' if they heard about the current model.

> David: I mean – the ambitions are still sky-high. We're expected to produce quality – and that's what we try to do.
> Susanne: Who expects that?
> David: When you look at the concepts. We are supposed to be a 'current affairs program which sets the agenda'. And we are very few people to fulfill this ambition. So it's bad for your well-being when you cannot deliver what is expected of you – even though you really try.
> Susanne: Who has these expectations? Is it the editors-in-chief?
> David: Yes, partly. But also the audience, of course. In a way, I don't give a shit about the editors-in-chief. If the audience thinks it's shit, then we have a problem.

> Susanne: So it's also a matter of your own professional pride?
> David: Yes. The problem is that on several programs we have found that when we complain about too scarce resources, too few employees, then we're told: 'You just have to reduce your ambitions'. I think that's the worst message imaginable. It's demotivating. It's like telling people:' Don't bother to shower in the morning, it doesn't matter if you smell'
> Susanne: So you really don't like to do that? Then you would rather press yourself a little extra?
> David: Yes, then we'd rather press ourselves a little extra and stay that extra time on the job or bring that extra work home. Because we all demand something of ourselves and the stuff we broadcast. We put our name on it. The editors-in-chief don't. The managers don't. In this line of business you *are* your name. If I want a job somewhere else, then I have a name. I don't' think that regular people notice who writes in the papers or makes programs on radio or TV. But the people in this line of business do. And if I put my name on something which isn't good, then it isn't good for me either.

There are several interesting aspects in this quote. First of all, as the interview progresses the source of 'high expectations' wanders. David starts out presenting them as a burdening pressure put upon the employees by some unnamed external power. Implicitly he suggests that if only the program was allowed to be less ambitious, ends would meet better. As I press for a specification of the source of expectations, David skirts back and forth between two external parties: the editors-in-chief (those with the power and money in his organization) and the audience (the target group of his program). Upon further reflection, he ends up proclaiming that the expectations stem from neither of these, but rather from potential future employers in his line of business. In fact, his own management asks him to reduce ambitions, so that they may fit better with existing resources. As David's imaginary counterpart changes, so does the concept of 'good enough craft'. In relation to the editors-in-chief, 'good enough craft' means producing the best possible program considering the existing resources. In relation to the audience, 'good enough craft' means getting good evaluations from the listeners. And finally, in relation to potential future employers 'good enough craft' means establishing and re-establishing your name as something worth remembering.

The quote suggests two things. First, it suggests that although the craft theme implies the existence of a common scale which allows one to assess the quality of a product, this scale may be less tangible and unanimous than assumed. 'Good craft' may mean different things in different settings. Second, it suggests that David and other employees may find themselves in a conflict or 'grey zone' between the craft theme and the authenticity themes. As the judges of quality shift from counterparts such as editors-in-chief or listeners to 'imagined counterparts' such as potential future employers, the scales of

quality slip into a more transgression oriented approach. While editors-in-chief demand a specific assignment solved within an existing logistical framework, and while listeners return concrete evaluations, potential future employers expect you to be 'memorable', so the assumption goes. Being memorable is about uniqueness. And uniqueness out is a core value in the authenticity discourse. As we shall see in later chapters, there are many slippery lines between the two discourses.

Summing up, the craft theme is part of the contractuality discourse which celebrates limits as the foundation for sound working life. The craft theme celebrates limits such as external, common and tradition-based parameters for quality rather than the limit-breaking improvisation and exploration.

Collegiality

The virtues of limits were celebrated in one more theme, which I have called collegiality. The collegiality theme stressed that 'good colleagues' were a vital element in an attractive job. When asked explicitly about what constituted a good working life or what contributed to the daily well-being at work, virtually everybody mentioned good colleagues. Although the collegiality theme was not as pervasive as the authenticity themes, it was nevertheless able to challenge the 'authentic' approach to work. Employees might spend more time musing over issues such as personal development, indispensability, and originality, but when it came to making decisions about staying or leaving, colleagues were a decisive factor. In practice, this meant that people with a strong subscription to the authenticity discourse might still leave a challenging and prestigious job, if they were not pleased with their colleagues. Vice versa, they might also be willing to stay in a routine-oriented job, if they were greatly pleased with their colleagues.

Lisa started her career in a job which was unrelated to her educational background. It was relatively low-status and did not involve creative or innovative assignments. We met Lisa in one of the sections above, where she reacted strongly against the idea of working with colleagues who had a craft-oriented approach to their tasks, rather than being passionate. In other words, Lisa expressed a strong subscription to the authenticity discourse. Nevertheless, she told me that she could have stayed in her first job for the rest of her life, if her colleagues had not started dispersing and leaving. She remembered the place as a wonderful environment with lots of laughter and lots of friendly coffee-drinking. It did not occur to her to apply for other jobs until most of her great colleagues had left.

> I like things a little cozy. I feel really great about somebody making coffee in the morning and somebody saying 'good morning'. And that somebody knows I've been to Barcelona in the weekend, right? I think that's really great.

The same Lisa who could not stand the thought of colleagues with a less than passionate approach to work told me that she would be happy to work all her life in a place with relatively boring assignments and lots of 'cozy' colleagues. Pursuing what my participants meant by 'good colleagues', I got answers like the one below:

> Christian: I prefer to say what 'good colleagues' are. Because a department should be a team where people care about each other, I think. Where you like each other. And then there can be great differences. Of course people are different, and there should be space for that. I think I've been lucky with the places I've worked in – that they have been really good departments with great teams, and with enough space and tolerance to create a really great ambience. And I think that there's a great ambience in our department now. We joke a lot, and we take the time to talk to each other, even when we're busy. […] People actually care about each other and pay attention to how their colleagues are doing. That's very important.

The mention of humor was recurring in the collegiality theme. Also the notions of tolerance and care seemed vital:

> Karen: It means a lot to me that I'm happy about going to work and that I have somebody I talk to, not just about work, but also about personal stuff, and someone I can laugh with. That's really half of it for me, I think. And I feel that we have that a lot here in our department.

In the collegiality theme, the workplace was presented more as a social community than a site for intense individual pioneering. While the implicit imaginary 'inclusion' in the authenticity discourse rested on a notion of being chosen above others on the basis of one's outstanding excellence, in the collegiality theme it rested on a notion of group solidarity where everyone was different but equal. When speaking within the collegiality theme, my participants referred to their contribution as part of an organic whole which required the cooperation of others. Just like the craft theme, the collegiality theme celebrated limits. In this case the limits concerned the necessary restraint put upon one's individual ambitions in order to nurse solidarity and group dynamics. In the context of the collegiality theme, intense individual pursuits of career would often be condemned, if the ambitious person did not pay

proper respect to his colleagues – either by way of supporting common agendas, or by way of explicitly recognizing other people's contribution to his success.

THE OUTSIDE OF CONTRACTUALITY

As already mentioned, the nodal point of the contractuality discourse is limits, either in the sense of explicit standards, tradition, or individual restraint in the name of solidarity. The constitutive outside of this discourse is ambiguity. In the contractuality discourse, the focus is not on maximizing possibilities (which perforce necessitates a certain degree of ambiguity), but rather on establishing clarity and predictability. The logic is that only through reliable and common limits can such a state be achieved – hence why ambiguity should always be cleared out and replaced by consistency. So good craft is a matter of following clear criteria for success, and collegiality is about prioritizing consistent solidarity over unpredictable personal ambition. In the following chapters, we shall see many more facets of the contractuality discourse, once we start looking at the interaction between managers and employees. We shall also see how both managers and employees subscribe simultaneously to the authenticity discourse and the contractuality discourse in their understanding of how manager-employee commitments should unfold.

CHAPTER 5
Captain or Comrade – what employees expect from their managers

In the previous chapter, we met the participants and learned about their approaches to working life: What motivates them, what disappoints them, what constitutes recurring sites of frustration and conflict? It turned out to be a very tension-ridden setting involving expectations and ideals which were conflicting, or even mutually exclusive. I split these expectations into two discourses which I called authenticity and contractuality. The former celebrates *transgression* and challenging the taken-for-granted, the latter celebrates *limits*, predictability, and common quality standards. Usually each participant would subscribe to some variety of both discourses at the same time without any reflection or meta-language about the inherent conflict between them.

The same two discourses continue in this chapter, as I move on to investigate how employees speak of their interaction with the manager and the organization. By following issues such as hopes, expectations, disappointments, condemnation, dissatisfaction, praise and complaints, I seek to paint a picture of the existing norms about managers and about the mutual commitment between the two parties, seen from the point of view of the employee. In a similar vein, the next chapter deals with the same question from the point of view of the managers vis à vis their employees. The main argument in these two chapters is that both employees and managers operate in two contrasting discourses when they speak about their expectations to the counterpart and to the nature of the mutual commitment. But neither operates in a meta-discourse capable of handling the tensions between the two discourses. This lack of meta-discourse creates a highly paradoxical and tense setting, as conflicting or even mutually exclusive expectations flourish without the existence of a 'final arbiter' to decide which should overrule which. In Chapter 7 I will present some of the forms of interaction which these tensions give rise to.

Below, I describe the two discourses and their sub-themes. They are the same discourses as the ones described in the previous chapter. However, in this chapter I focus on a specific issue within those discourses, namely the manager-employee relationship. There are variations and even conflict between the sub-themes in both discourses. I still order them under the same discourse, because they share the same nodal point (*limits* and *transgression* respectively). Put differently, the *intra*-discursive variations are much smaller than the *inter*-discursive variations which are based on two different nodal points. For a full overview of discourses and themes, see the table on page 184.

CONTRACTUALITY DISCOURSE

As already mentioned, I call the employees' first major discourse about managers and mutual commitment 'the contractuality discourse'. The contractuality discourse is in favor of limits as an organizing principle between manager and employee. More specifically, contractuality suggests that the relation between manager and employee is defined by formal rights and duties which are meant to ensure predictability and impartiality. The relationship should asymmetrical, but still consists of mutual obligations, which revolve around the product: This means that the employees have the duty to deliver good products, but in turn can expect fair remuneration and optimal conditions for production. Vice versa, managers have the duty to deliver optimal production conditions and fair remuneration, but in turn can expect diligence and good quality products from their employees. The contractuality discourse is pervaded by a strong ideal about clarity, and the lack hereof is considered a dysfunction. The dysfunction may be recognized as inevitable, but it is considered disruptive and should be temporary. (As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the authenticity discourse features a very different approach to clarity and ambiguity.) Given the importance attached to clarity, one of the manager's main functions, according to this discourse, is to act as a strategic moderator within the organization, so that he may deliver the maximum degree of consistency to the employees. This is expressed, among other things, through the ideal about justice, and the image of the manager as an 'objective' arbiter of rights and duties based on unequivocal common standards. We shall see examples of this below.

The constitutive outside of the contractuality discourse is *ambiguity*, as we learned in the previous chapter. Ambiguity should be avoided or removed, and alongside that a number of related phenomena such as improvisation, taste, unpredictability and personal interests. All these are seen as a threat to the nodal point of the discourse, namely limits. Below, I offer a detailed empirical description of the contractuality discourse about managers and mutual commitment seen from the point of view of the employee. I will present it through a number of its core themes and metaphors, namely: hierarchy, authority, and justice.

Hierarchy

We met Carl in the previous chapter. He worked in Media and was responsible for producing the weekly Program X. During our interview, Carl expressed a certain amount of dissatisfaction with his management circumstances and the lack of clarity about who was in charge:

> Carl: Every time you turn your back, they make a new construction. I mean [the managers] go in and out. It's impossible to figure out. So right now, I think it's a guy named Paul.

Carl's program had been subjected to a long process of managerial disagreement where areas such as host responsibility, editorial responsibility and personnel responsibility were contested. During this long process, Carl did not have any clear management reference in any of these issues, but rather had to maneuver between several authorities who all believed they were in charge. At the time of our interview, he was still not quite sure who was responsible for what, although there seemed to be an opaque construction involving one person handling editorial decisions, another handling personnel issues – and a third guy named Paul with the final responsibility. This lack of hierarchical transparency left Carl somewhat disgruntled. He felt that it was the duty of the organization to deliver a clear definition of tasks and authority structures so that he as an employee could focus on the content of his program:

> Carl: It's hard to have a factual discussion about innovation of the program because it ends up as a matter of who is responsible for what and who does what. So very quickly it becomes a discussion about who has the jurisdiction to say anything about anything. And that makes it very hard to find your direction.

Carl's expectation of transparency and unambiguous distribution of responsibility from above is an example of what I have called the hierarchy theme. According to this theme, the 'healthy' organization has a management which is able to construct, maintain and practice a layered structure with precise delineations between fields, both vertically and horizontally. The division of labor and responsibility is seen as neatly separated between the different managers and between managers and employees. There should be no overlaps or ambiguity. Opaqueness or contestation of responsibility zones are considered as temporary dysfunctions which should be resolved as quickly as possible. The relationship between manager and employee is seen as inherently asymmetrical. While the employee is obliged to fulfill his production duties, the manager in turn is obliged to be accountable for his decisions, to 'facilitate' the power structure, and to pave the way for the employees' undisturbed focus on production. As Brian says about his expectations towards managers:

> Explain, what is my responsibility and what is yours? Transparency! Make clear how the hell this construction works!

And similarly, Louise says:

> I just think, the fact that people who've been here for years can't figure out the organizational structure – I mean, that's pretty telling, isn't it? That you're just wondering: What's "HR"? Oh, that's Human Resource. Oh, that's what used to be called 'personnel". Oh, ok. And "CR"? And then what's "PD"? It's pretty wild, isn't' it? I mean, we're not that big. I would dare claim that you could go to any big company like Novo Nordisk, Arla or Grundfoss, or whichever, with much bigger staffs, which even have subcontractors and a large market they need to reach, and you would still be able to understand their organizational structure much better than this one. I think that's pretty telling!

So in this discourse, organizational transparency is considered a sign of professionalism. And within this transparency, the manager is expected to be accountable for the way in which he exerts his power. This is another element of the transparency ideal. While the relation between manager and employee may be asymmetrical, it is not totalitarian. In the hierarchy discourse, the employees expect those in power to deliver rational explanations for their decisions. They recognize (albeit reluctantly) that management has other concerns than improving the conditions for production, but once these conditions are infringed upon, the employees feel entitled to a dialogue or at least a target for their frustration:

> Carla: Who decides? I mean all these programs that are shut down! He [the middle manager] 'regrets' that they are shut down and says: 'It's terrible. It affects us all'. It's not him we should be mad at or confront with our anger. But who is it? I don't know. I have no idea who it is. It's something that trickles down the system: 'Up there they say this and that'. But WHO is it?! There's so much management rubbish. So many managers and middle-managers. Now I've been here for two years, and I still haven't figured out the hierarchy.
>
> Susanne: So this thing where you don't know who's responsible for the decisions – that's unpleasant?
>
> Carla: Yes! I mean, that's anonymous management!

While the hierarchy theme stresses transparency, accountability and protection of the employees' production circumstances, it splits into two contrasting expectations for how this should be carried out. The first expectation stresses the middle-manager as a 'politician' or 'general' acting as the champion of the employee on the larger scene of territorial skirmishes within the organization. He should know the

political game and the strategic maneuvers necessary to serve the interests of his group or department. The other expectation stresses the middle-manager as a production-near expert following 'shop-floor' working life closely and placing honor in 'substance' and 'solidity' rather than political buzz-words. Most employees expressed both sets of expectations towards their middle-manager at the same time. They generally recognized that this squeeze between conflicting demands from above and below made the position of middle-manager difficult. Nevertheless, the expectation that he should be able to handle those conflicts was fairly relentless. Lisa voices the general opinion when she says: "It's a middle manager position, and it's totally crappy. But if he can't handle it, then he shouldn't accept the position."

The strategic politician

According to the first expectation, the middle-manager should be a strategist who fulfils obligations on the internal 'political arena' of the organization. The manager should fight for the employees' cause in the larger power struggles of the workplace, so that they are protected from the negative consequences of territorial skirmishes. The strategist manager is a protector of territory - a territory to which the employees feel entitled, so that they may focus on production without being disturbed by boundary struggles or infringements from competing territorial groups. Below, Christian describes what he expects from his manager:

> Christian: Take responsibility! Don't push it downwards. Be a good politician at the top level: Realize what you are responsible for and what not.
> Susanne: What could be the consequences of not realizing this?
> Christian: For example, it could be a strong expectation that: 'You can just solve this yourselves'. Where we think: 'Hey, it's your job'. Because once you've created hierarchical systems, you must acknowledge that it's also important to be able to act as a politician. You can lose assignments if you don't know how to act politically. If you're too much of a boy-scout who thinks the game is just about being nice and not contradicting those above you. And if you don't nurse your alliances and contacts, then... […] Getting the assignments isn't just a matter of who makes the best proposal, but rather who can impose his power.
> Susanne: So it's a problem if you're a bad politician [as a manager]?
> Christian: Yes, actually it's a big problem. And it's a problem which can be felt in the entire department if you then push that responsibility downwards and say: 'It's your fault'. No!
> Susanne: So they should assume responsibility?

> Christian: Yes – they should be absolutely clear about: 'what is my responsibility as a manager'?

When subscribing to the ideal about 'the strategic politician', the employees consider their manager's primary function to be that of 'clan leader' protecting his clan against a fractioned and power-struggling sphere of other clan leaders and 'chiefs'. The organization is seen as an internally conflicted zone displaying struggles over resources and opportunities. And within this zone, the middle-manager should be the champion of the employees so that their resources and opportunities in relation to optimal production are protected or enhanced. Put differently, the employees expect that the political and conflictual dimension of organizational life is handled by the middle-manager, so that once he interacts with his employees, he can present them with a transparent and accountable model of their workplace. This model should offer optimal protection of their territory, which is production. In other words, the strategic manager is expected to represent the employees' interests in the political power struggles. Lisa says:

> I see my boss as being my representative upwards in the system. And that's why he has to recognize the kind of position he has. It's a middle manager position, and it's totally crappy. But if he can't handle it, then he shouldn't accept the position. I'll always expect him to represent me.

The strategist metaphor for middle-managers focuses on their professionalism as managers and politicians rather than 'craftsmen'. The good strategist manager should be educated as a manager so he is equipped to handle organizational dynamics. Lisa:

> I just don't get why you hire people who aren't educated as managers. And I've never ever had a manager who was actually educated to be so. I've had a media student…former media student… who ended up in some management job. And currently I have a journalist as a manager. And neither have any clue about what it means to run a company.

The practitioner of substance

According to the second expectation towards the middle-manager within the hierarchy theme, he should be solidly founded in practical experience with production level realities and go about his managerial tasks in a no-nonsense and reliable manner. He should be stable, thorough and persistent, and there should be a match between what he says and what he does. In other words, those very

political skills of strategic rhetoric and 'playing the game' which were celebrated in the 'strategic politician' are considered vices for the practitioner of substance. The expectation about practical substance involves a thorough distrust of anything resembling 'Newspeak' or fancy new models for management. Instead, the manager is assessed for his reliability, practical experience and concrete problem solving. Below, Brian explains about his early period in Media, when his position was split between two different programs:

> Brian: When they placed me in two different places, they had many brilliant ideas about 'synergy effect' and other buzz-words. And they hadn't considered the problems which might be involved with working in two places at once. I don't' know if it was because they lacked proper practical experience with this. In the best case scenario, they would have invited me to a talk within the first two weeks, asking me how things were going and how one could cope with the problems I had encountered. And then maybe it would have ended up with a schedule for the bosses: these days I refer to you, these days I refer to him.

Those buzz-words which may work wonders in the upper-level political game are frowned upon in the 'substance theme' which subscribes to ideals about solidity and no-nonsense. In the no- nonsense approach, management should preferably reduce itself to a minimum, so that it only focuses on production concerns. Management exploring itself professionally, management reflecting upon management, or management reforming management is seen as an unnecessary and unwelcome disruption. In short, management as a political enterprise is considered a hopeless waste of resources. Below, Peter explains some of his frustrations with his current manager:

> Peter: I think it's hard that he initiates so many things and then closes them down shortly after, only to initiate other things. And in a way it's fine that he learns some things, which he wants to try out, because he thinks it'll improve our production circumstances or cooperation or development potential. Many of the things are good, in principle. But when you have to consider for the seventh time whether we should have a fortnightly meeting about this and that matter and with this and that focus, and it's then cancelled after two weeks, because he needs to go to other meetings, then you start thinking: 'Stop it! Stop the invitations to meetings and the Excel sheets and all that crap'. Because it ends up being about how he performs as a manager rather than about him simply being that manager.

In line with the emphasis on practical experience, there is also a negative evaluation of managers who are too far removed from the realities of production, either because they have an administrative background, or because they never participate in the concrete routines on the shop floor level. Again, the concern with production is at the centre, and contrary to the 'strategist theme', the 'substance theme' considers managers with management education to be a liability. Louise is very adamant about her dissatisfaction with the management situation in Media:

> Louise: There are more lawyers and economists in this business now. We have more managers at more levels, and there are more managers who don't have anything to do with production, but do lots of outside stuff. While we who produce feel that we are being cut down again and again, they introduce new 'spaces for development and marketing' [*Louise mimics commercial speech*]. What the hell are they doing? And all those studies of listeners and viewers. How many man-hours are used finding out about all kinds of segments, which are then no longer called segments. And all those who sit around talking about…- yes, because now we should no longer talk about segments. Now it's called 'age groups' again. And it used to be called that back when I started here. And that's the thing – when you've been here long enough, you start thinking: What's happening to these people?! There are way too many bosses attending way too many power point courses instead of concentrating on the actual content. I think I've been through several of these: "Now Media stands for this and that". I mean, then there's the 'lighthouse', and then there are other 'houses' and 'towers'. And there are tons of people who have to spend a lot of time learning this and then teaching others and then implementing it in their work. […] It becomes this self-feeding system.

Louise is also dissatisfied with her own manager whom she considers out of touch with daily production. She finds that this makes discussions and negotiations with him difficult because he simply does not understand what she is referring to when she claims to need more of this or do things more like that. His ignorance makes her wish for an arrangement which made it compulsory for managers to spend a week every year in each team, so they might understand the actual working circumstances and production processes.

Other employees expressed the same dissatisfaction with 'distant managers'. Christian felt that his boss was living on 'another planet', and John told me a story of a disagreement with his manager which according to him was rooted in the manager's 'ignorance' and lack of insight into the realities of an editing job. John was a seasoned editor with many years of experience and a large personal network of authors. When management decided to impose a number of very rigid demands on him in connection with tasks he was used to handling more intuitively, he felt the victim of incompetence and improper

control[16]. He claimed that a knowledgeable and production-near management would have known that the control systems only deteriorated the outcome which they were supposed to improve. This made John downright furious, because he felt that the realm of editing and of nursing authors was his and should be left to him by management, instead of being tampered with based on inadequate or false knowledge.

A similar frustration with managers' lack of production-near competence was expressed by Brian. His manager frequently arranged feedback sessions when the employees had produced a program or an article. But Brian was reluctant to receive this feedback from him, because he lacked a journalism degree:

> Brian: I don't like getting feedback from Dan, because he isn't a journalist. In that sense I think it's problematic, also if he coaches me or helps me with an article. I don't think he's very good. I don't think I can use it. I mean, he really likes the 'actant model', which he always pulls out of the pocket. It's the one with the fairytale hero: you have some helpers and some opponents and you need to reach a goal. And he wants to apply that to everything. And it's fine sometimes, but Dan only ever pulls that one out.

In other words, the substance theme treasures a no-nonsense, experience-based, newspeak-free manager who walks the walk rather than talks the talk. Carl makes a similar point:

> Once in a while, Russell [the middle manager] gives us feedback and coaching - .. great idea, but it doesn't originate from us. That means that as soon as he lets go of the reins, it fizzles out. But when he's production near, he's great. He's been really supportive about my program and given me great comments. But he's just a tad too manager-like when he isn't production near. I mean 'manager' in the farcical sense of the word, where it's got more to do with leading than with actually leading us somewhere.

While the strategist theme stresses the manager's skills in the organization's political arena, the substance theme stresses his production skills and his daily presence in the shop floor realities. Both themes stress the fact that the manager's primary function is to protect his employees and the resources for production, and both themes consider political dynamics to be external and disruptive to the 'actual work'. The mutual commitment between organization and employee is seen as more or less restricted to the issue of production, thus downplaying issues such as logistics, market realities, strategy,

[16] See Thygesen, N.T. og Åkerstrøm Andersen, N. (2007) for research dealing specifically with this increase in control and steering systems and how they engender unpredictable and, ironically, uncontrollable side effects.

competition, and internal power struggles. It is all about making the best possible product, and the middle manager should ensure optimal conditions for this production by protecting his employees from such 'outside' factors. Once the production conditions deteriorate, there should be a thorough display of regret, understanding or compensation from the manager. The employees do not only consider optimal production to be a duty, but also a right. While the manager is definitively cast as an authority figure entitled to steer the employees, this entitlement rests on his pledge to protect their production conditions and be accountable for deteriorations in these conditions. It is the fact that the product is at the centre of the relation, which accounts for the insistence on limits and clarity in the contractuality discourse. The clearer one can negotiate one's right to undisturbed focus on production, and the clearer the standards for 'good products', the higher the likelihood of becoming a 'good employee'. As we shall see later, once the focus shifts to authenticity and the existential nature of the mutual commitment, then limits, predictability and standards appear as offenses.

Authority

While the hierarchy theme focuses on how the manager arbitrates the tensions between strategic concerns and production concerns, the authority theme focuses more on the micro-level interaction between manager and employee. The gist of this theme is that the manager should act as a father figure who draws protective and clear boundaries around the employee. These boundaries consist of making very precise definitions of what is expected from the employee. They also consist of displaying a very concise administration of 'human resources'. By the latter I mean that the employees expect the manager to draw lines when members of their staff are prone to over-performance. The manager should specify and steer quality, guidelines and degree of involvement, so that the employees only need to do what they are told. Christy tells me a story about a certain assignment of hers. The assignment used to belong to a colleague, but after this colleague quit, all his assignments more or less implicitly landed on Christy's table. One such assignment involved a book project which Christy had no prior experience with. She asked her manager, Melanie, to give her instructions before she embarked on the project, but Melanie, being very busy, neglected to pursue the matter. Christy repeated her request several times to no avail, and she desisted to pursue the project without instructions.

> Christy: I could go ahead and just do it. But I have a billion things which are more important to me. When I tell her: 'You have to get me going'- and this is like three weeks ago or so, and the author has returned for an answer twice -, and every time Melanie just says: 'I'll do it, I'll do it.', but she doesn't make it…
> Susanne: And what would happen if you just sort of did it on your own?

> Christy: Well, what would happen is that I would figure it out. But then I would be the one having to spend a lot of time on this.
> Susanne: Yes. And you think it's her task?
> Christy: Yes, kind of. Also because it's an assignment I didn't have previously. And because they sort of just assumed that now I'll handle it.

In this quote it becomes obvious that Christy subscribes firmly to an asymmetrical relationship between employee and manager. The manager should supply the employee with guidelines, directions and precise criteria for success so that she can carry out the task using the smallest amount of time possible. Christy's request for guidelines is not based on a fear that she would be unable to carry out the task satisfactorily – she is convinced that she would 'figure it out'. Rather, the request is based on a notion of rights and duties within a specific division of labor between her and her manager. In this division of labor, the manager is obliged to be explicit and precise in her delegation of tasks, and in turn, Christy as an employee will carry them out dutifully once they have been handed to her in the correct fashion. Another aspect of being explicit involves that assignments should not all of a sudden land on an employee's table and implicitly be transferred to her area of responsibility. Christy expects her manager to make an official note of this transfer, so that the contractual clarity is maintained. There is an interesting slip in Christy's argumentation, when she says that she has a billion things which are more important 'to her'. Although this is a small rhetorical detail, it nevertheless suggests that Christy applies other parameters than simply those of duty and rules when she assesses how to prioritize her assignments. It would be unfair to claim that Christy exploits the 'rights and duties' theme in the authority discourse to resist assignments which are less personally rewarding. Other parts of the interview illustrate that she is very overworked and finds her total number of assignments unrealistic. Logistical pressure is most certainly part of the reason for her resistance. Nevertheless, there is a hint of a dissonance in her musings, when her rhetoric slips back and forth between a contractual discourse and a different set of ideas about how the work-load should be negotiated between manager and employees. This other set of ideas suggests a promotion of personal preferences and assessments on the part of the employee where it is legitimate to prioritize tasks which appeal to one's own individual motivation. Interestingly, that very aspect of fluidity (as opposed to strictly contractual and duty-based considerations) is precisely what she objects to when her manager expects her to solve the task without instructions. How these tensions between different, yet simultaneous, approaches to the nature of the manager-employee relationship are managed in practice will be the theme of Chapter 7.

Similarly to Christy, Matthew expresses the wish to receive precise guidelines and targets for his assignments:

> Matthew: I think that my assignments were made more difficult because it didn't get clear enough goals. It was kind of like this big mess in front of me. And if we'd spend some more time on it and said: 'You should focus on that and that and that, and forget all the rest' - that would have made my tasks easier.

So in the authority discourse, the manager is a leader paving the way for the employee who in turn follows it dutifully and with zeal. An essential part of the manager's authoritative duties is to draw limits for the employees and tell them what they should not do and when they should stop doing more. As such, the manager is a father figure who protects the employees against their own over-involvement through his clearer vision of the goal and the necessities.

> Lisa: He should be strong enough to say 'no' when he can tell that there is work overload. Like: 'Now you should find someone different to do that, because other things are more important.'

In the authority discourse, the manager is very much a protective figure who organizes the chaos of daily practices into a coherent and manageable system for the employee. He draws lines and sets standards. It is his job to protect and to let the employees know how they are expected to 'serve': "He should be responsible and say: 'Did you get that done for today?'", as Brian comments.

The 'protect and serve' logic involves that the manager has not only the right, but also the duty to set his employees straight when they become self-indulgent or unrealistic in their expectations towards work. Fundamentally, in the authority discourse, limits are cast as desirable and advantageous for the employee. Limits are seen as reducing complexity, thus offering the employee a form of security and predictability which allows for a more undisturbed focus on production. In this sense, the implicit contract between manager and employee is seen as very clear and unambiguous. Below, Lisa tells me what she expects of a 'good manager':

> Lisa: I want someone who calls a spade a spade, right? I mean, really! And they should mean it, right? I really want someone who... I mean, I really want the critique. Like: 'This is what you do great. This is what you do badly.' And the stuff I don't do well, I had damn well better start improving. Just so we get a little straight talk. And also somehow the approach that: 'You're getting paid for this. So don't sit there and bitch all the time, because you actually get a monthly salary for this. And this is what you should do, and these are the things you don't do well enough'. And vice versa: 'These are the

> things you do great. So either you get a raise or it simply compensates for the fact that there is other stuff you suck at.' [*laughs*]

A prerequisite for such clarity and unambiguous division of obligations is the fundamental asymmetry in the relationship, which is stressed throughout all the themes of the contractuality discourse. There is no fondness of hobnobbing or pedagogical devises based on democracy. The manager should lead and not try to be 'one of the guys'. Below, Sarah explains what she sometimes misses in her current manger:

> Sarah: I like – and maybe I think that he lacks that a little – that a manager is a manager. We have a manager who is a bit like: 'What do you think?' But a manager is a fucking manager! I expect him to be that, so I can act in that space. We shouldn't try to pretend that we're equals, because when it boils down to it we're not!

If the manager steps out of the hierarchical mode, it is seen as a form of manipulation, trying to paint a picture of the relationship which is contrary to its true nature. Leading is both the prerogative and the 'damned duty' of the manager. But in order for the employees to respect this leadership, the manager should qualify as a form of role model. In some way or other he should be 'bigger than' or 'better than' the employees. He should be someone they can aspire to and admire. Below, Clarissa muses about 'good managers' and her concrete experiences with a female manager:

> Clarissa: They should be people you can somehow look up to. Otherwise it's kinda hard to accept assignments from them – if you don't respect them. It was nice to work with Lindsay [female manager] these couple of days [during the seminar], so I could get an indication that there <u>are</u> some things she's good at. Still, some of the comments she made.. I just thought: 'That wasn't super bright.' Or at least not any more bright than what I might have said.

In the authority discourse, respect for the manager is based on his superiority to the employee. Since his primary function is to lead the way, the employees do not wish to find themselves in a position where they are suddenly ahead of their manager. When Lisa describes the 'good manager', she stresses this:

> Lisa: He should be more intelligent than me. And very importantly: Someone who's not afraid to give praise. He should be able to say positive things. Someone with a great energy – with lots of energy. Someone who doesn't collapse if he has to run back and

> forth and do lots of stuff. Because I have a high energy level. So I should feel that his is higher.

If the manager is simply the employee's equal, the employee feels potentially abandoned. As Lisa points out, one of his key functions is to give praise. And the implicit notion seems to be that giving satisfying praise rests on a position of undeniable superiority. Charlotte tells me about one of her former managers who did not manage to establish this superiority. She explains that he was not very well educated, but had a weakness for employees with high education. So after a while, he simply could not keep up with his own employees, Charlotte concluded. "We had run him over," she said, so "he was of no use to us." In a similar vein, Nathan emphasizes that unless you can aspire to your manager, and unless the manager is more competent than yourself, it is very hard to work for them. So the manager should be competent and able to lead the way. But the manager's superiority did not necessarily have to rest on professional competence. In some cases, employees were willing to accept certain weaknesses in, say, the manager's journalism or editing skills, if he displayed 'admirable' personal characteristics. They mentioned virtues such as a sense of justice, honesty, empathy or the courage to handle conflicts. In this way, the role model expectation can be combined with both the 'strategist' and the 'substance' themes about managers. It is not decisive whether the superiority is in the political, the production-near or the personal realm, as long as it represents something to which the employee can aspire.

Justice

In the final theme of the contractuality discourse, the notion of justice is at the centre. When asked about periods of dissatisfaction at work, several employees mention experiences of injustice as all-time lows. Similarly, the virtue of 'justness' in a manager is stressed as very vital for the wellbeing of the employees and for their willingness to stay in a certain position. Below, Clarissa explains what she finds to be important characteristics of a 'good manager':

> Clarissa: It's also to do with things not being unjust. In my previous job, we had a female manager whom I was very pleased with in many ways and who was very likeable. But she tended to fall for those smart-ass boys. So they were allowed to do a lot more and they got the fun assignments – like if some radio journalists came to make interviews with us or stuff. They could twist her around their little finger. I didn't wanna kiss ass. And that just meant that I wasn't picked. And I actually knew that I was good at it, but I started doubting it in the end. Because the boys would keep talking about how great they were in class, and the manager didn't really comment. So you ended up thinking: Well yes, maybe they actually are a lot better. And then when I quit she said:

> 'No, of course! We know that you're much better than them.' And then I just thought: Well, then tell me for Christ's sake'

So as the quote from Clarissa indicates, justice has to do with managers not being guided by personal taste or preferences in their interaction with employees. The core aspect of justice is *impartiality* and it thus entails a specific code of conduct which prevents the one in power from susceptibility to flattery, bribery or pressure. Above, Clarissa is indignant about what she perceives as unequal treatment of the employees. She has the impression that her manager is 'corruptible' when it comes to gender and charm factor. While Clarissa considers herself a competent and hard-working employee who deserves both praise and opportunities, she finds that those being favored display no excellence professionally, but merely get rewards based on being cute, self-assertive – and male. The core of the impartiality value is that rewards and punishments should be distributed based on merits such as they are defined explicitly in a given system. In a work context, these merits, according to the justice theme, are based on competence and hard work. In other words, there is a close connection between the justice theme and the craft theme in the previous chapter: Contrary to the authenticity discourse, there is a focus on external, measurable and commonly accepted standards which should serve as parameters for synchronizing expectations and delivering a sense of predictability. The predictability which these standards are supposed to deliver, according to the justice theme, is that one is rewarded and punished according to professional merit and not 'x-factor'. Clarissa continues her description of injustice, explaining how the 'boys' always took long smoking breaks and spend hours playing table football, while the girls conscientiously looked after the phones. She felt 'regular sadness' when her manager did not notice this and punish them accordingly. In other words, according the justice theme, inclusion, acceptance and reward should be based on professional contribution, so that no-one gets a 'free ride' – and most certainly not at other employees' expense. A similar point is made by Karen when she describes one of her former work places:

> Karen: Our manager didn't particularly like female journalists, but she was very fond of male journalists and catered to them. And some of the men thought it was wonderful, and others, like Peter, thought it was awful. [..] He was one of those who chose to struggle with her and say no. And that cost him too! I mean, it was hard for him too. [..] I've been to a morning meeting where we had to decide which story we would pick, and where there were no male employees present. Then my manager said that there was a great story with the potential to set the agenda. But then she looked us over and concluded with a sigh that we would have to drop making that today, because none of

> the 'right' employees were present. And of course that pissed us off. […] There was that kind of ambience, and that was really nasty. It was a relief to get away.

Just like Clarissa's story above, Karen's tale concerns a manager who blatantly favors one segment of her employees over another. And furthermore, she delivers retributions to those employees who object. So not only does this manager violate the norm of impartiality, she also violates another norm of the justice discourse according to which matters of fairness should be addressable without risk and with the promise that they will be taken seriously. We shall see another example of this norm below.

Both Clarissa and Karen experience injustice as having a connection to gender, but these were not the only kinds of injustice mentioned by employees. There were other cases where injustice was seen as having more to do with the manager's lack of insight into his own psychological fragilities than with his preference towards one type of employee. John told me such a story. He and his manager had certain temperamental differences as to how some of the editorial assignments should be handled. According to John, his manager was driven by 'disproportionate anxiety' in his approach to the matter, and John had repeatedly expressed his disagreement with this. The matter climaxed in a conflict as the manager invited John to a crisis meeting via mail during a time when John was abroad. Due to various practical circumstances, John did not see the mail in time. Consequently, the manager plus a number of other key figures in the company waited for him in vain and were very cross with him. As John recollects this episode, he expresses deep indignation and calls it an example of a time when working life simply 'stopped making sense' to him. He interprets the situation as a matter of management falling prey to its own over-urgent and irrationally anxiety-driven agenda, not taking the time to check whether their initiatives could really be carried out under the given circumstances:

> John: I end up looking like an idiot, when in fact it's all about management's anxiety. And that kind of stuff pisses me off big time. And then I get really, really depressed and my mood gets really bad, because I feel that my professionalism is questioned due to other people's agendas which I don't recognize as being important. […] And that [injustice, SE] is one of the only things which can make me depressed - apart from being bored or if something exciting doesn't happen at least every second day *[laughs somewhat self-ironically*].

Impartiality is also about the ability to rein emotional tides and instead make decisions based on rational, realistic and, not least, loyal considerations. The manager should have his emotional life under control so that employees do not become pawns in his personal struggles. In this sense, emotions are seen as a potential source of 'distortion' or bias, and thus injustice. The ideal about emotional

reflections and integrity also means that managers are expected to suffer the discomforts and risks associated with speaking their employees' cause, rather than downplaying or ignoring injustices out of larger strategic concerns. Sharon told me how she as a senior editor made less money than she was entitled to, considering her experience and contribution. Her middle-manager agreed with this, but when she pushed the agenda, he ended up refusing to pursue the matter with the top-manager. This caused a very strong reaction in Sharon which she herself referred to as a 'loss of confidence'. She found that her middle-manager let his 'cowardice' determine the outcome of this situation, and she felt a profound disrespect for his decision. Her interpretation of the situation was that the case was inconvenient for her middle-manager, because he wanted to save the top-manager's good-will for other matters more important than this particular raise. Letting personal interests or emotions intervene in matters of loyalty towards employees is strongly objected to in the justice theme. As Sharon says, once he had acknowledged that her salary was not at an adequate level, he should have fought for the case. Since he did not, she immediately started looking for other jobs.

One could say that Sharon's story is an example of how the justice theme involves an expectation that managers be able to make impartial adjustments about conflicting claims. These conflicts should not just be resolved by taking recourse to convenience or 'the road of least resistance'. At the minimum, there should be a compromise, or an attempt at compromise, between the conflicting demands. In this case, the conflict was between Sharon's entitlement to more pay and a number of other issues in the department which also required precarious negotiations with the top-manager. According to the justice theme, the middle-manager should have insisted on some sort of improvement of Sharon's situation, even if it did not amount to what she hoped for. Sharon's story is also an example of how the justice theme involves the notion that everyone in the same structural position should be subject to the same rules – be they privileges or duties. In Sharon's case, she demanded to receive the same privileges that she believed other editors with her experience received.

The importance accorded to loyalty and to protecting the rights of the individual employee was also stressed by Agnes. She told me a story from her previous work place which had resulted in a long period of frustration and unhappiness work wise. She had given birth to twins and had been at home on maternity leave for a while. Upon returning, a couple of her (female) colleagues complained to their middle-manager that they felt Agnes' contribution was less than acceptable after she became a mother. When Agnes told me this, she expressed great indignation with her colleagues for not talking to her directly about the matter. But even more so, she felt indignation about the way her manager handled the situation. According to Agnes, she worked as much as her colleagues, albeit at somewhat less regular hours, because mornings and late afternoons could be a challenge logistically. The primary thing

for Agnes was that the key message from her colleagues, namely that she did not work enough, was unjust. Instead of supporting Agnes against what she considered an 'unhealthy working environment' with slandering and gossiping colleagues, the middle-manager took their word for it and applied pressure on Agnes to work more. In Agnes' interpretation this was a 'breach of trust' on the part of her manager, and she ended up leaving the work place. She says that the worst thing a middle-manager can do is to 'betray' an employee.

> If they do this, without even saying it to you – maybe because they themselves feel squeezed or threatened. If a middle-manager isn't aware that his task is to present things so that everyone can maintain their honor. If a middle-manager simply takes his instructions from the top and then goes down to whip his employees without taking into consideration the individual's situation.

Agnes was one of numerous examples of how loyalty towards employees was considered a quintessential characteristic of a good manager.

As already mentioned the justice theme focuses on impartiality and explicit rules. Another aspect of this was that such rules should be realizable in practice and not just part of a rhetorical strategy. Furthermore, it should be possible to receive satisfying descriptions of these rules, so that the employees could understand when they applied, and what the rationale behind them was. If not satisfied, the employees felt entitled to a formalized process of complaint. Karen told me how she usually accumulated the right to about one week of compensatory time-off within one and a half months of work, because she worked so many extra hours. Yet no one would tell her when she was actually permitted to take that free time. She would often make the request for a few days off up to two months in advance, but the standard answer was that this was simply not possible with the current schedule. So although she had the formal right to compensatory time-off, in practice she was never permitted to cash it in. Karen felt very frustrated that she had no way to invoke her rights, and that she was simply cast as the 'difficult' and 'inflexible' employee when she insisted on taking the discussions with her manager. She also felt that there lacked a formal system for handling her complaints, because the matter was being pushed around between different layers of management without anyone really being responsible in the end. This led her to take the matter up with her union representative at the work place, and in the end to find another job.

There were other, less dramatic, stories about how important it was for employees that their managers kept their promises. In the contractuality discourse, the employees accepted their part of the bargain only on the premise that the manager was reliable and clear. The manager's right to steer and decide over them rested on his ability to handle this power in an impartial, consistent and trustworthy manner. Once the trust was broken, it could have far reaching consequences for the relationship and even end in the employee looking for a different job. In short, the justice theme refers to ideals about management based on impartiality and on formal scales for quality rather than personal preferences and taste. Diligence and experience should be rewarded while bluff, boasting and flattery should be unmasked and discouraged. Justice also means that the same rules apply to everyone in the same structural position and that rhetoric is matched by practice.

In the sections above, I have described the three major themes of the contractuality discourse as expressed by employees. They were: hierarchy, authority and justice. The hierarchy theme was divided into two contrasting sub-themes, namely 'the strategic politician' and 'the practitioner of substance'. Despite the variations in focus and metaphors within these themes, they all have one feature in common which renders them into a coherent discourse. This feature is the nodal point 'limits'. When employees speak about managers and commitment in a contractuality discourse, they stress the importance of limits, clarity and predictability. Limits are the sine-qua-non of the discourse. As mentioned above, the concurrent *constitutive outside* of the contractuality discourse is ambiguity. Ambiguity is the one feature which the contractuality discourse seeks to exclude. Put in popular language, it is the 'external enemy' which unites the disparities of the themes within the discourse. The individual themes may disagree on much, but they agree in their hostility towards ambiguity. Returning to my critique of sweeping diagnoses in Chapter 1, it is interesting to note how the contractuality discourse draws heavily on norms informed by traditional and bureaucratic approaches to organizations. Impartiality, authority, hierarchy, justice, transparency etc. are all classical bureaucratic virtues which, as we can see above, continue to thrive and influence modern day work settings. This does not mean that the diagnoses of reflexivity, self-realization, and authenticity are completely off the mark. As we shall see below, these kinds of tendencies exist *alongside* the more traditional ones.

AUTHENTICITY DISCOURSE

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the authenticity discourse is concerned with maximizing possibilities. Its nodal point is *transgression*, and consequently its constitutive outside is *limits*. Obviously, this represents a great contrast and potential paradox in relation to the contractuality discourse. Below,

I will narrow in on a specific aspect of this discourse, namely the employees' expectations towards their manager and towards the mutual commitment. We have already seen some examples of how the authenticity discourse influences the manager-employee relation – most notably in the indispensability theme which concerned the employees' focus on being 'the chosen one'. I divide the following part of the authenticity discourse into three sub-themes, namely autonomy, validation and sincerity. Just like in the contractuality discourse, the themes vary in focus and concern but all have in common their nodal point.

Autonomy

In the autonomy theme, the employee expects his manager to give him independence and influence. We have already seen a good example of this in the description of Carl's approach to his nerve-wracking Tuesdays in the previous chapter. To briefly reiterate, Carl recurrently felt close to a 'nervous breakdown' on Tuesdays, because he had to figure out a brilliant theme for next week's program. Despite this recurring experience, he expressed something akin to aggression at the thought of his manager imposing on him the protective instruction that he should construct a database with predefined themes. He expected his manager to leave him alone and trust him with the ability to get the program done. If this process involved semi-debilitating emotional states, Carl would deal with them by himself. His expression was that he would rather 'walk the plank' (i.e. risk the 'crocodiles', so to speak) than accept an intervention establishing more predictability. In the autonomy theme, the manager should be the screen on which the employees can project their unique and individual explorations on, contrary to the contractuality discourses which casts the manager as a father figure drawing stabilizing limits. Transgression is only meaningful if it happens in an interaction with something or somebody. The primary interaction partner for the employees in this process is the manager. They want the manager to be a figure they can defy and rebel against, yet all within a larger framework where the manager considers their rebellion as an important contribution to the organization. For example, Charlotte explains how enthusiastic and passionate she is about her job. Part of this enthusiasm consists in fighting for innovations and changes, and she expects this effort to be rewarded and appreciated: "I take the fights. I take a million fights. I scream and yell at my boss and say: You have to do like this and this and this."

'Taking the fights' is an expression, Charlotte uses with pride. She obviously considers this a valuable contribution to the work place, and if her managers fail to see this, she looks for another job. This has happened twice in her career already. Charlotte wants to be validated for her willingness to

rebel, and she wants her rebellious or innovative suggestions to be carried out. Otherwise, she feels rebuffed or misplaced.

Similarly, during our interview, Nathan frequently stresses his own capacity to speak up against authority:

> I'm a fucking talented journalist. And I'm happy to put in some extra hours. I'm happy to run risks. And I'm willing to challenge management to get the right story out - something which the organization and the brand 'Media' should be very pleased with. […] Yes, I'm not afraid to interrupt the boss if I think that something's unfair. I realize there's a balance, because you obviously shouldn't make enemies out of people. But I kind of place an honor in saying what I mean, if I feel that I have a good case and a good argument – even if I sense that this may not be how the boss would have phrased it.

Nathan knows that there is a balance to be kept – that his rebellion should not cross that invisible line where it becomes decidedly antagonistic to the manager. But up until that line he believes that his unconformity and independence represents an attractive resource for the organization. It is the very fact that he runs risks and crosses lines which makes him valuable to his manager. Media would not be well served, he implies, with an employee who simply follows guidelines and accommodates authorities. In the same spirit of using authorities as a screen on which to project one's transgressions, many employees consider it vital that their manager supports their critical approach. Again, being critical means to challenge existing standards, but still within an overall framework of common goals. In this context, simply performing tasks according to fixed and predefined standards appears as an oppression of the employee's right to autonomy. Carla tells me how she could never work in marketing, because her personal and critical contribution would be curtailed:

> Carla: I'm a journalist! Again – it's the professional pride which I feel I would be compromising.
> Susanne: And you mentioned the idea of some head of the municipality making red marks in your text. What's so unpleasant about that? That's a manager who relates to your work, at least. [*Carla has mentioned that as desirable earlier*]
> Carla: [*laughing ironically*] Giving me some feedback, yeah! But the red marks aren't a sign that what I did was wrong or bad. They just suggest that it doesn't have the right style.
> Susanne: So it's got more to do with what they give you feedback for? That he doesn't give you feedback on your skills, but just on –
> Carla: - on the message or the mood. Or: Does it have the right spirit, the right pep-talk? That's the difference between being a marketing assistant and a journalist. And it would be the same if you worked in a medical company as a communications assistant

> and had to promote a medical product and send out press releases about 'Now we have this product which can do this and that'.
> Susanne: What does the good journalist do which is different from the marketing thing?
> Carla: The good journalist doesn't sell his soul. And I feel that you do that a little… I should be careful what I say. I might end up in a job like that one day. But, I mean, you do kind of sell your soul, because you're bought by that company to be uncritical towards it. Here, I'm bought to be critical towards everything.
> Susanne: And that gives you professional pride – the thing about the independence?
> Carla: Yes. If I'm hired by a bank, then I have to think that their pension programs are the best in the world. Then you use your language skills, but you don't use your journalism skills. Of course it's connected to the journalism skills – the ability to communicate and get a message across. But you use them in a distilled way – they only want that, not my personal journalism…

The quote from Carla shows how she can only make sense of her own professional contribution if it is made on the basis of independence, personal judgment and a critical perspective. Being limited by strategic, financial or market concerns equals 'selling her soul' for Carla. One could also say that Carla does not want to use her creative and professional skills for instrumental purposes. They should have a value in themselves and be used in the service of truth-seeking. Carla's dislike of marketing work operates with an implicit opposition between 'authentic' work which does not permit itself to be instrumentalized, and (using a somewhat radical metaphor) 'prostitution' which requires the sacrifice of something invaluable (her soul) for the sake of filthy lucre. The insistence on avoiding instrumentalization and on preserving the right to criticism rests on an ideal about individual independence, where the employee to a certain extend challenges the hierarchical norms described in the previous section. As an authentic and critical employee one will only serve the work-place insofar that its activities reflect the employee's inner values. There must be a match between the employee's convictions and the goals of the company. Or put differently: Solving a task which does not allow for individual interpretation and which is not amenable to being associated with a certain degree of existential or 'authentic' importance, makes the employee feel exploited. So while the hierarchy theme stressed the importance of precise instruction and clear professional standards for a 'good product', the autonomy theme stresses the importance of the employee's authentic approach to the work process. It is no longer the product which is at the center, but rather the existential quality of the work process itself. According to the authenticity discourse, a good manager is therefore concerned with 'seeing' the authentic potential of his employees and allowing this potential to unfold itself as limitlessly as possible, without fettering it by instrumental concerns.

Similarly, the autonomy theme challenges the hierarchy theme in that the autonomous employee does not want to simply receive instructions from a manager who has cleared the 'political game' on his own. The autonomous employee wants to have a say in how the manager handles the political game. Brian works with Project B, a scientific journalism project. He expresses his dissatisfaction with how management has handled the political game concerning the protection of Project B:

> I'm not sure I feel that Dan, and Ray who is my actual boss, have handled this properly. When they heard that there wasn't much future for Project B, they went up to Aaron, who has been our top boss, sort of, until now, and presented him with their vision for a new Project B. And they did that without consulting me or Peter who are producing Project B. I feel they handled that the wrong way, because they went behind the backs of those who actually produced and helped develop the project.

Brian as an autonomous employee does not simply leave the strategic concerns in the hand of his bosses. As an independent, critical and innovative contributor he feels entitled to be heard in political questions which end up influencing the definition of goals and targets. Brian does not just accept clear instructions about 'the good product' passed down from above – he wants to participate in the definition process. This is because he believes that his personal and independent approach is vital to the quality of the product. It is not just a standard product – it is a product he has helped develop. The product only exists by virtue of Brian's independent contribution, and so he must perforce question whether his bosses are qualified to define the proper revision for it. And since the autonomous employee has a tacit expectation that the organization buys his creative independence, and not his uncritical obedience, Brian is reluctant to let management level concerns such as intra-organizational power games or financial pressure overrule his professional opinion. He continues:

> Brian: It's because top management wants to cooperate with Company A, because it has a lot of value for the organization. But you can't influence the product very much. And it's a cooperation which we are pretty unhappy about [*he and his colleague*]. Because we don't feel that there's a lot of journalistic freedom in that cooperation.
> Susanne: You feel that it's a very fixed task?
> Brian: Yes.
> Susanne: What would you lose that you like in your current work?
> Brian: It depends how much money there is to do something else on the side. But if this was our primary task, we would lose the freedom to decide which stories we want to write. Because it will be material which flows from Company A to us. And I see us becoming robots just making new versions of things. They say that we won't, but I just don't see how it can be otherwise.
> Susanne: So you think that a lot of the creativity disappears?

Brian: Yes.

Susanne: And your right to choose?

Brian: Yes. It's a fundamental journalistic right to write the stories you want to write.

For Brian, making good stories out of themes which are more or less determined by external factors is not a satisfying job. In fact, he equals it with becoming a 'robot' and considers it an infringement on an inalienable right to critical independence. Such an infringement, however reasonable from the point of view of company strategy, is not acceptable to him, and after a few months he left the company. Once again it becomes obvious that in the authenticity discourse, the tacit contract between employee and organization is that the employee is hired for his ability to offer something unique. If the manager does not find room for this ability to express itself, the employee is likely to object or even terminate the job. The question is what this 'freedom', which Brian and so many other modern employees feel entitled to, actually means? We shall return in more detail to that question in a later chapter. Below is an example of how an employee envisions the perfect set-up for autonomous work. I have asked her to describe her dream work scenario. According to her, such a scenario involves a manager who practically avoids exerting any restrictions, such as the ones described by Brian in the case above. Instead, he is an enabler who carves out room for undisturbed creativity, only interrupted by sessions of feedback during which he acts as a professional mentor. This mentorship does not include any sanctions or radical impositions on the product, but rather represents the company's marked interest and involvement in the creative output which its employees can engender.

Susanne: How would it be when it comes to, say management and working hours and such?

Charlotte: Well, I guess we have to have a boss, right. And the working hours simply have to be self-planned *[i.e. completely flexible, as long as the deadlines are met]*. They simply have to be! Then we can deal with the problems later [*laughs*]. So I'm self-planned and I have a boss who has simply accepted that we make this project. He has bought the concept the way we've made it. And then I have a financial assistant who's made a budget for the next two years, and that budget has been approved. That means we have two years to do this, and we're completely sure of that.

Susanne: Mmm. And then the boss is out of the picture, or?

Charlotte: Yes.

Susanne: Ok.

Charlotte: And then the boss comes back when we've made our first program.

Susanne: Ok. And what happens next?

> Charlotte: And then the boss says that he thinks it was great. But maybe we could just make some small adjustments of this and that parameter. And he tells us our share of viewers, and then that's that. And then we just produce our next program.
> Susanne: Ok. So the boss just comes in once in a while and gives you that feedback?
> Charlotte: Yes, he gives us the feedback for what we've done and how we could make some small improvements, and which parts worked really well. Yes, I think so. And then he tells us what other people thought of it.

First of all, Charlotte is very adamant about her right to plan her own time. She wants to be as free as possible in her planning of the project. Secondly, she wants to be relieved of external constraints on her creative output: The finances should simply not be an issue for two years, and the boss should allow her to do her thing without interference, until she delivers a product. Once that product is delivered, however, she wants feedback. As we shall see in the section below, feedback is a very central theme in the authenticity discourse. And although feedback also involves critical comments, it is very different from impositions and restrictions made by an indisputably superior authority, such as the one described in the hierarchy theme. The primary purpose of feedback in the authenticity discourse is to give the employee *validation*, not instructions, as we shall see below.

Validation

As already mentioned the authenticity discourse focuses on independence and possibilities rather than guidelines and fixed tasks. Along with this explorative approach to work follows a great deal of insecurity about the definition of 'good performances'. When is one's contribution good? When is it excellent? And when is it simply not good enough? How is this determined in a working context which to a large degree has abandoned explicit criteria for success? As the validation theme illustrates, the employees seek to determine this through the feedback they receive from their managers. The individual relationship between manager and employee serves as a locus for determining the quality of the employee's performance. So at the same time that the authenticity discourse stresses independence and autonomy, it also stresses an urgent need for recurring and detailed feedback from the one in power. In this sense it differs from the hierarchy theme described in the contractuality discourse. In the hierarchy theme, the manager is expected to deliver clear and unambiguous guidelines which then leave the employee 'free' to simply focus on the product. The 'authentic' dimension of the manager-employee relationship has less importance in that theme, because expectations can be synchronized through explicit and common standards. Below, Lisa describes how she felt in some of her former positions when the managers did not give her feedback:

> Lisa: Then I feel that I don't get the thing from them that I want. Ergo, I don't know if what I'm doing is simply crap, or what?! Then I begin to distance myself… I become less ambitious. I kind of put a lid on myself, and then I usually start surfing for another job.
> Susanne: Ok. But how do you feel about your job when you have gone a long time without feedback? You say that you reduce your ambitions, but… does it affect your experience of the tasks themselves?
> Lisa. Yes. I don't want to do it at all. I mean, I don't want to be there. If no one can sort of give me a medal for what I do great, or say what I do badly, then I don't wanna be there.

So Lisa wants or medal in the form of feedback. And if she does not get that medal, she splits. The authenticity discourse has an inherent tension between the demand for freedom and the demand for intense involvement from the manager. The cardinal point seems to be that the intense involvement of the manager should come as a matter of 'seeing' the employee and 'recognizing' him for his authentic striving and potential rather than as a matter of enforcing decisions upon him. In my interview with Lisa, I try to pursue this tension:

> Susanne: I'm trying to understand you correctly. You say that you do not thrive with a manager giving you too narrow limits, but you want him to tell you what to do and what not to do?
> Lisa: Yes, yes!
> Susanne: Could you tell me a little bit more about that?
> Lisa: No.. aaah, yes. It's really complicated. But I think it's this thing about: Tell me what to do or not to do… Uhh.. No, maybe it's more like: Give me feedback for what I do. I mean – when I get this ultimate opportunity for influence then I just do something. I mean, I take initiatives and do a lot of stuff. Then I'd like to know if what I'm doing is right. Is this the right direction or are we heading straight into some black hole? Just so they don't show up afterwards, I mean long after it has all gone awry, and say: 'This is just not acceptable'. Then I'd prefer that somebody knows what I've got going.
> Susanne: You need somebody to follow you?
> Lisa: Yes – to follow me, yes!

It is interesting to note how Lisa feels more or less in the dark about the quality of her own performance, unless her manager evaluates it. It is only the feedback from the boss which can give her

a hint at whether she is doing great or is on her way into a 'dark hole'. The power to define quality lies within the personal manager-employee relationship, not in common external guidelines. Given this power of the personal relationship, a recurring fear among employees is not to be seen. Unless they are seen and recognized by their managers, they literally feel left in the dark. Below, I ask Carla to describe sources of frustration or strain in her everyday work:

> Carla: I think the classical issue in this department is that you don't get any feedback from management or your closest bosses. We're just going at full speed and playing around, but is it ok, the stuff we're doing? Is it just to fill out some minutes [on the radio], or is there somebody who thinks that what we're doing is good? There is a general lack of feedback. But everybody is pining for feedback in our line of business – and maybe also in other creative jobs where you give a lot of yourself, I could imagine. Everybody thinks: 'How do you like it? How do you like it?' But we can't be asking that all the time: 'How do you like it?' And colleagues don't always have the time to say more than: 'That was good' or 'That guest wasn't so good'. But [we miss] the detailed feedback, not just about the journalism, but also: 'How do you function here in the department, and what are the possibilities? What do we want to do with you?' We don't get enough of that.

Just like Lisa, Carla feels the threat of being redundant or mistaken, unless she receives frequent feedback from her managers. Despite doing her very best every day, she still wonders whether she is just 'filling out some minutes' without it having any importance to anyone whatsoever. Along with the lack of clear assignments and criteria for success follows a lurking sense of meaninglessness and invisibility. Why are we solving this task? Whom does it benefit? Is it necessary at all? And in order to appease this worry, the employees need to be seen not just 'locally' in relation to the quality of their performance, but also in a more general perspective as 'Selves' on a developmental journey inside the universe of working life. They want to know which 'possibilities' management sees for them, and how they may be crucial elements in future plans. Management must recognize them as carriers of potential and possibilities, and not just as local elements solving specific tasks. The need for recognition on a personal level is very pervasive among employees.

> Nathan: It's something I've started noticing lately, because I feel that I don't get so much of it here: Recognition! It may be that I don't notice the signals. Certain events in my past suggest that. For example, at my former workplace: They may just be a little slower at giving the recognition than I expect. They don't give it until I really put my

> foot down. And maybe I just need to read the signals they're sending. But it matters to me.
> Susanne: What happens when you're not sure if you –
> Nathan: (interrupting) – then I get insecure. Then I get insecure and I might act a little more rashly. I might act quickly and make some quick decisions, and then there are some things I don't think through properly. But I'm also able to lean back and really think things over. I spent a long time thinking over my thesis, so I know the process of really pondering things deeply. And I think I could make some more deliberate decisions and suggest some more deliberate ideas if I got more recognition.
> Susanne: So one could say that when you feel insecure, you increase your performance velocity?
> Nathan: Yes. Very well put, yes.

Nathan's quote is yet another example of how the lack of feedback and recognition can give rise to anxiety and uncertainty. While Lisa reacted by withdrawing, Nathan reacts by hectic performance. They both have in common that if the lack of feedback lasts too long, they start looking for another job. The authenticity discourse often seems to engender a highly polarized field in which employees see themselves as either completely useless or completely fantastic, and in which the manager should either be completely present or leave them completely alone. Often employees harbor these polarized expectations simultaneously. This is evident in the quote below where Nathan tries to describe how he would like his manager to behave towards him:

> Nathan: I think that the thing which frustrates me is when my bosses don't lift me up to being the fantastic employee that I really am.
> Susanne: In terms of getting praise or in terms of the assignments you're given?
> Nathan: I'd say, I'm actually pretty easy, because if they give me enough praise, they actually don't have to give me more opportunities. You just have to figure that out about me. That if they put me in a corner and shower me in praise, I won't ask for more. I mean, I'll perform, but I won't ask for more.

On the one hand, Nathan expects his bosses to see his potential and help it unfold in its entire splendor. Elsewhere in the interview, he stresses that this requires a large room for maneuvering and a boss who is not restrictive. On the other hand, he claims that he is perfectly happy to be confined in a small corner with unimportant tasks, if only he gets the right amount (which means a large amount) of praise. Once again it is the oscillation between extremes: splendor and humility, great opportunities and tedious confinement. The only constant seems to be the need for praise which may serve as some form

of temperance on the polarized field. It is within the relation between the projecting, limit-breaking employee and the 'seeing', recognizing manager that some sort of middle position may be carved out. Once that relation is too absent or too infrequent, leaving the employee alone with his projections and limit-breaking, that the polarized magnetism sets in. Another employee describes the need for recognition in a somewhat more down-to-earth manner:

> Agnes: If I'm expected to perform so much on the external front – or feel that I'm expected to perform….or have the ambition to perform… then it's pretty important to me that the internal lines are calm, and that I get recognition internally. Not all the way into the care-giving mode. But at least that there are absolutely no questions asked if I aim too high and then don't succeed.

In this quote, the opaqueness of performance requirements is also evident. Where do the demands for excellence actually come from? Are they expectations imposed on Agnes from above, is she simply imagining these expectations, or do they actually stem from her own ambitions? In the absence of clear guidelines, the field becomes open to interpretation and colonization, and the interaction between personal agendas and organizational demands becomes very complicated. This opaqueness engenders a fundamental need for recognition as a complexity reducing element. Recognition is able to handle the tension between autonomy and anxiety in that it may reduce the latter without necessarily also reducing the former. It does so precisely by offering security without imposing non-negotiable limits. For this to be possible, the recognition must perforce direct itself at the Self of the employee rather than at the product. It must operate in an open and potentially limitless space (the Self) which cannot be reduced to scales of quality based on a wrong/right or good/bad distinction. While a concrete product with a concrete purpose is either good enough or not, the developing Self of the engaged employee is conceived within the framework of 'potential' and thus escapes the restricting dualist logic and the fettering instructions which such logic is likely to carry along. Within the realm of recognition one can somehow be free and secure at the same time. The small hitch to this freedom is of course that it rests upon an enthralled spectator (the manager) who is able and willing to offer the recognition. When the spectator fails to fulfill his obligation, the freedom tale is severely compromised. This will be discussed at more length in the final chapter.

To reiterate, the employee's tension between striving for autonomy and longing for security is handled by moving the focus from the product and concrete guidelines onto the Self and its infinite potential. While 'guidelines' increase security, but reduce autonomy, 'recognition of potential' seemingly expand

both. But it is not without importance *who* recognizes. Since the key word are 'potential' and 'possibilities', the recognition should come from someone who is truly in a position to couple the recognition to increased possibilities. Seeing as the explorative product does not have a natural ending point (the 'good enough' according to explicit guidelines), its goal is to qualify to continued development. And this qualification must come from a person who can ensure organizational back-up for this development, namely the manager. Put differently, one could say that according to the authenticity discourse, inclusion in the organization does not rest on delivering the 'correct' and 'good enough' product, but on showing developmental potential. And whether such a potential has been sufficiently illustrated is determined by the feedback and recognition given by the manager. Getting praise from colleagues is therefore not enough to appease the anxious, autonomous employee, as we can see in the quote below. Carla has just emphasized the importance of receiving feedback:

> Susanne: Who would you like that feedback from?
> Carla: I want that from my boss.
> Susanne: The department manager?
> Carla: Yes.
> Susanne: So it's not the sub-editor you want it from? [*The sub-editor makes journalistic decisions, but has no influence on personnel decisions*]
> Carla: Yes, I want that too in my daily work. But I miss someone with more power and influence on my future here than the sub-editor. Someone who can say: 'We want you'. Or: We won't put our money on you, so you might as well start looking for something else'. I mean - someone with the power to hire and fire.
> Susanne: So what you're saying is that sometimes you can feel a little uncertain about your position, because you're never told whether you're good or bad?
> Carla: Yes. And then I was on the phone with the sub-editor […] …and we were discussing…- She had asked for a meeting with me to hear about my plans and expectations for when I come back from my three months of holiday and sabbatical. We talked a little about how I'd like to make some more television. Then we talked about feedback from management, and she said: 'Well, Ray [*department manager*] thinks you're a really good host. He's really pleased. He thinks you're bright and that you do a great job.' Then I think: 'Why doesn't he ever tell me?!' He just mentions it when they're at a meeting: 'That was a good interview this morning'. But he doesn't tell the people themselves. So you never really know if you're in the doghouse or what.
> Susanne: So this thing about knowing where you are on the scale, that really matters?
> Carla: Yes!

Carla wants to be seen and commented upon by the hire-and-fire manager, because he is the one who can appease her tension between striving for autonomous development (i.e. wanting to produce more television) and anxiety (i.e. worrying whether she is 'in the doghouse'). He is the magic mirror which can tell her how her potential is perceived from the point of view of the organization. The sub-editor cannot appease Carla's tension, because sub-editors operate on a strictly product-oriented level, making concrete suggestions for improvements of programs. The product-oriented, concrete approach and the lack of personnel-related power make them inadequate as projection screens for the autonomous and authentic employees. Again, we should notice how the absence of commenting, mirroring managers engenders a polarized field in the employee between limit-breaking dreams (going from radio to TV) and fundamental self-doubt (am I in the doghouse?). Staying on the fairly undramatic middle-ground of 'good enough' work is very difficult, once the criteria for success fluctuate constantly. The widespread state of inner tension among autonomy-seeking employees creates a generalized demand for present and attentive managers. The employees want to be followed closely, albeit without infringements on their autonomy. They want to be seen and empathized with, not corrected or instructed.

> David: [Managers] have the obligation to notice how people are feeling. I don't think that's always the case in Media – that they have a sense of this.
> Susanne: So sometimes you miss a more present –
> David: (interrupting) – more present managers, definitively! I think that the managers in Media - that is, the editors and the department managers, have their attention focused towards the top rather than towards the shop floor.

According to the validation theme, managers are obliged to notice how their employees *feel*. They should be intimately present and *sense* the condition of their staff members. The manager's intimate sense of the individual employee's inner state is vital, because it is only this sense which will allow him to serve the purpose of potential-furthering, anxiety-reducing mirror. And this purpose can only be served by relating to each employee on an individual level, taking the point of departure in this particular person's current state. There is no legitimate recourse to standardized frameworks, because such frameworks cannot address the autonomy-anxiety issue. Below, another employee stresses the importance of present managers:

> Brian: If I were Dan [the middle-manager], I would have a closer relation to the work which my employees were doing. I know you can't be 'one of the guys' when you're the

> boss. After all, you belong to another level. But work wise I would follow closely what they were doing, where they were at – and I'd also be good at sensing if there were any problems: Are there any people who have problems? What are people concerned about, work wise? And then I'd do something about it or emphasize that nothing can be done. A close manager!

Although Brian stresses the fact that a boss cannot be 'one of the guys' and that his attention should focus on work-related matters, he also uses expressions such 'sensing' and 'following closely'. A manager's intuition and intimacy become vital in a context where he cannot resort to explicit scales when synchronizing expectations with the employee. Instead, he should notice and recognize each individual's work process, precisely as an individual endeavor without standardized solutions. Each employee should be seen for his personal interaction with the assignments and for his unique set of hopes and qualms arising out of his quest to unfold his potential.

> David: [The department manager's] gaze has definitively been directed more upwards than downwards. A gaze towards the Board of Editors, towards making strategies for ensuring that the department gets assignments. Like: 'Which employees should we hire?' Instead of maybe focusing more on: Which employees do we have? How do we treat them? How are they feeling?
> Susanne: So the more personal dimension of management has been missing?
> David: Yes it has!

In the validation theme, the political game must never happen at the expense of the intimate interaction with the individual employees. Although a successful administration of the political game may ensure future work and improved working conditions, it is not perceived as *caring* for the employee. And the autonomous employee wants to be cared for. He does not want to be a tool in a large machine with external, objective goals. These external goals exist, and he knows, but they should not be pursued in a manner which renders his authentic exploration of work obsolete or invisible. The manager should always see the employee as an end in himself and should treat him with empathy, not just logistical effectiveness.

> Susanne: If you were to write the profile of the [ultimate] person for a management position – how he is personality wise, but also how he carries out his job on a practical level – then how would you describe this?
> Carla: There are some human and some professional characteristics. As for the human ones, he should be a good judge of character. He should be good at talking to people.

He should be trustworthy. There are some people whom you simply trust and feel that you can tell anything, even though you can't quite explain why. I mean: You trust that you can say whatever you want. But that also requires that he's present and knows people, and that we know him or her. It should be a person who gives feedback – a lot of feedback. Pats on the shoulder – or the opposite. Who always asks questions or invites one to confide in him about one's dreams about the future.
Susanne: Work wise?
Carla: Yes
Susanne: So one should be in an ongoing dialogue with this person?
Carla: Yes.

As we can see, the importance of managers being present, sensitive and involved is stressed again. And they should be trustworthy in the sense that one feels capable of confiding in them. It is in other words a very intimate relationship which goes far beyond mutually clarifying the parameters for a certain product that the employee should deliver. The manager's first concern should not be the product, but the employee. This also entails that management decisions must be explained with reference to the employee's potential and not just logistical or strategic needs. Decisions should be communicated in a personal framework where the employee's future development is presented as a vital issue – if not a determining factor – for the process. Below, Kay describes how she experiences the meetings in the department and the management communication in general:

Kay: It's not as if we don't have enough meetings! But it's like this: The whole department gathers, and then [mimicking the department manager]: 'I just have some stuff I'd like to tell you about. Our plans and so on.' But he doesn't meet with our specific group, asking: 'How are you guys doing?' Or with me personally. It's a collective message – 'Are there any comments?' And blah blah. It's very impersonal. I'm criticizing now, but it's because I've actually never experienced a boss who's been personal during all the time I've worked for Media.
Susanne: Personal? Could you elaborate what you mean by that?
Kay: If the decision is made that I should no longer continue on Program Y after my maternity leave, then nobody assumes responsibility and says: 'I made that decision'. It's like there are too many bosses and managers who hide behind each other. You can't figure out: Who made that decision? Who thinks that I'm not good enough? To whom should I address my frustration? And it's the same in this case: If I go to the department manager and say: 'I'd like to be used more in a television context. Why don't I get more television assignments, even though you say that I do a good job?' I've asked him that question. And he said: 'There are no assignments. And management may feel that you

> should just try out something else before you convert completely to TV.' It's somebody from 'up there' who makes these [decisions].

There are two points in Kay's quote. One point is that the management levels and sources of decisions are not transparent, which makes it difficult to establish a dialogue about specific issues or disagreements. This point was also made in the contractuality discourse and is thus an overarching concern among employees no matter the discourse. The other point is that she expects decisions which affect her future to be justified with reference to her individual development possibilities in the company. She wants management communication with her to be 'personal', just like she assumes that the decisions arise out of 'personal' evaluations of her, e.g. that she is not 'good enough'. It does not occur to her that the decisions may have been made out of strategic concerns which are completely unrelated to her individual potential. In the validation theme, management decisions are seen as personal comments to individual employees. And if they are not personal comments, they ought to have been. The absence of a personal dimension in management decisions is interpreted by the employees as a sign of disinterest or even disrespect. Matthew explains how he talked to his manager several times about insufficient editing resources, and how the manager promised changes every time. Nevertheless, it was not until Matthew reported severe stress symptoms that actual measures were taken by the manager to improve the resources. Matthew recognizes that the reason for this tardiness was most likely a general lack of resources which made it difficult for the manager to fulfill everybody's wishes. Nevertheless, he felt that he was not taken seriously in the matter:

> Susanne: So the pressure on you was reduced – something came out of it. And in your opinion that might as well have been done the first time you talked to him?
> Matthew: Yes – or he should have followed it more closely, really. I was left with a feeling of not being heard.
> Susanne: And when you tried to interpret why you weren't heard, then what thoughts went through your mind?
> Matthew: Two thoughts went through my mind, I think. One was that he was obviously more concerned with a larger perspective. That there were other more important things – or things he assessed to be more important. That was one thought. The other thought was that I quite simply felt as if he didn't respect me enough or that I wasn't heard … to some extent. So I felt that it could be directed back at me.

As we can see, Matthew is fully capable of deducting rational and non-personal reasons for why the manager was slow to react when asked for more resources. However, he still ends up will a feeling of having been personally rebuffed or disrespected. In saying that it can be 'directed back at him', he

suggests that if he had been a more important or respected employee, the manager would have reacted immediately. In the validation theme, it is very difficult for the employee to maintain a neutral or logistical perspective on the manager's actions. Every action undertaken by the manager is seen as a personal comment to the employee whose situation is affected. Because the manager-employee relation is the only locus for testing one's position in the organization – both in the sense of reducing anxiety and of seeking fulfillment for autonomous strivings - the relation becomes hyper-loaded with significance.

Sincerity

Given the loaded nature of the manager-employee relation in the authenticity discourse, it becomes of utmost importance to the employee that the manager is *sincere*. Managers who simply act efficiently and with strategic goals are likely to engender frustration, anxiety or feelings of being 'exploited' among employees. In the authenticity discourse, the employees need to be the primary end for the manager – the product should come second. Since the level of anxiety is often high within the authenticity discourse, employees cannot bear a form of communication which focuses on the product or the logistical goal at the expense of mirroring the employee's 'potential' and 'uniqueness'. This causes a strong dislike of too 'professionalized' management, which is seen as manipulative or pseudo. Below, Peter describes how he experiences his middle-manager's way of handling conflicts:

> Sometimes he's really good at handling conflicts; really focused on dialogue. The problem is that you can feel how it's something he's learned to do. It's not a natural openness. He reins his irritation and reacts the way he has learned to react in a course. And that's cool. But sometimes you have these really finely tuned sensors for when you are being 'handled'. And being handled can be fine sometimes, because then you can feel free to vent your dissatisfaction. Other times it's simply so provocative. Like a therapist who always repeats the last word you said with a question mark added. "….added?" [*Illustrating his point. We both laugh*]. It can almost be like that sometimes.

In the sincerity theme, the manager should not only focus duly on the subtleties of the human interaction among employees, he should also be authentic, sincere and spontaneous about it. Professionalized handling of such situations and their ensuing challenges for the organization is not considered legitimate. Authentic employees do not wish to be 'handled'. They wish to be taken seriously. 'Handling' them suggests that there is another goal to which they simply serve as means – e.g. a particular product or strategic result. But the autonomous, authentic employees always want to be an

end in their own right. They want to be seen, heard and felt for who they really are. Consider the quote below:

> Susanne: If you were to describe a really lousy daily manager what would some of his characteristics be?
> Christian: The first thought which comes to my mind is - but that has more to do with the level of the department manager - to pretend listening without actually doing it. It's almost worse to have a boss who pretends to listen and then doesn't [than to have one who doesn't even pretend to listen].
> Susanne: How do you know? Is it because nothing comes out of it?
> Christian: No, nothing comes out of it. No.
> Susanne: So you'd like your managers to be transparent? Either they really listen or they are transparent about not listening?
> Christian: Yes. I think that the most important thing!

As we can see, the matter of being sincerely present is one of the quintessential demands made by employees towards their manager in the authenticity discourse. There is no room for compromises or slackening, no room for absentmindedness or professional distance. The manager must be available as the barometer on which the employee can read his own importance to the organization. And since this importance is based on unique performance rather than standardized goal-fulfillment, it can only be gauged through a sincere mirroring on the part of the manager, not through professionalized conduct. In other words, pretence is the ultimate threat in the sincerity theme. This is corroborated by Clarissa's remarks below:

> Susanne: If you were given a half-day assignment to coach Russell [*middle-manager*] for his management, which five points would you tell him to work with?
> Clarissa: He should practice saying things more clearly – not always drift so much. Some of it is also just because he's so busy. He should have some more time to come over and ask: How is this and that going? And just follow up on some things. It's hard, because I like him, and I think he's been good at writing mails to me, if he was worried that I was sad or troubled about something. But it seems as if many of the others feel that he doesn't have that ability. So he should be better at that. For example, with regards to Justine – maybe he should be faster. I don't always know whether it's because he's afraid of conflicts, but sometimes it seems like that, because he gives a higher priority to other things than for instance telling Justine: 'I'm sorry, but your contract won't be prolonged'. Instead she learns it indirectly through a mail. And I don't find that ok, even though you're busy. So it's about remembering that it's people you've got to do with,

> even though you're busy. Even though you can get tired of these people sometimes. Once in a while it seems as if he's a bit condescending. But that's also because I hate it when he's standing there with some theory, saying: 'How could we imagine making this program cooler?' It makes me puke! Because I know perfectly well that he has some very specific ideas about how he wants it. Then he should say: 'I have some very specific ideas about it, but I'd really like to hear what you think'. Sometimes he reads a lot of theories, but then it becomes too much theory and not an intention where you say: 'We're a group of people – how the hell can we make this work?' When you can feel that he rambles something off he has read in a book, then it gets really artificial, I think.
>
> Susanne: What do you find condescending about it?
>
> Clarissa: He creates a situation in which we're all supposed to figure out how this should work. But I know perfectly well that he has thought this through already and has an idea about how he wants it and what he wants to get out of it. He shouldn't try to create the idea that we're in the same boat, just because he's learned in a course that you should be dialogic with your employees. It was the same thing in that shop where I used to work: They hired a coach who cost a fortune to talk to us employees – many of us with a university degree. And then he asks us: 'When a customer enters the shop, should you then turn your back on him?' And it wasn't a rhetorical question! You were expected to raise your hand and answer. I just can't take something like that. And Russell can get a little bit like that sometimes.

There are several things worth noticing in Clarissa's quote. First, there is the tension between the busy multi-tasking manager and each individual employee's need for close and sensitive attention. Clarissa understands the challenge which being so busy poses to the manager. On the other hand, she expects him to be present for every worry and trouble which each employee might have. In fact, he should preferably be able to anticipate them. Second, she reiterates the dislike expressed in several quotes of management feigning authenticity and reciprocity. The reciprocity should be sincere, and if this is not possible, then she prefers a clear display of hierarchical management, she claims. It seems as if the employees conceive pretence as a kind of illicit check-mate move on the part of the manager. By feigning authentic mirroring, yet in fact operating with fixed expectations, the manager breaks the implicit agreement about the open and explorative nature of the relationship, according to the authenticity discourse. One could also say that the employees demand of their manager that he does not ask to have it both ways at once: flexible (on the part of the employee) and fixed (on the part of the manager). Chapter 7 will show in more detail, precisely how the concrete interactions between managers and employees abound with such double-meanings and double-expectations, and how this 'doubleness' may engender both enabling and oppressive circumstances.

In a discourse which encourages authentic, sincere and non-instrumentalizing relations between managers and employees, it becomes a recurring problem how to handle the fact that the manager does indeed have power over the employee. How can you be authentic and reciprocal while simultaneously wielding instruments of force? How can you sincerely empathize with your staff while you must perforce be guided by strategic concerns beyond the individual employee? Below, Matthew describes this uncertainty towards his own manager:

> Matthew: I'm a little uncertain about what he wants to achieve with it.
> Susanne: With what?
> Matthew: With it all. I can get the feeling that it's a very political game to him – both when it comes to top-management, to the board, and to his own future career. And that he isn't top-solid in that sense.
> Susanne: You doubt whether it's the substance or the strategy which interests him? Or you could say – is it the power game or the actual substance?
> Matthew: Yes. I may have a feeling that to a large degree it's the power game which interests him.

Elsewhere in the interview, Matthew explained that he feels very closely bonded to his manager. He compares the relation to a father-son relationship in which he, as the son, wishes to make the father proud. At the same time he emphasized how he is perfectly aware of the contractual nature of their interaction, and how it would be unreasonable to expect anything other than professional parameters to guide their relationship. It is the same unresolved tension between authenticity and instrumentalization which so many other employees express within the authenticity discourse. They recognize the professional nature of the relationship, but they also feel exploited if it is reduced to that. As Matthew puts it, he is not quite sure whether his manager is 'top-solid' in that respect. By 'top-solid' he means 'sincere' and guided by empathy and reciprocity. The 'top-solid' manager would always see Matthew as Matthew, before he even started contemplating Matthew as a strategic resource in a large profit-generating machine. Another employee struggles with the same tension while ruminating about her manager: "One should never be mistaken: He's always your boss, before he's your friend." She expresses deep-felt respect for him and she trusts him 'to a very large degree'. But she explains that she has learned to always maintain a small reservation, because she has realized that he is a 'power person'. He is a great strategist, and as such, he 'plays chess with small human pieces'.

So the core of the authenticity discourse expressed by employees is that the manager should relate to them in a non-instrumentalizing and non-manipulative manner and instead synchronize expectations through sincere empathy and mirroring. The authenticity discourse is fraught with tensions, on the one hand the tension between autonomous strivings and security-longing anxiety, on the other hand between intimacy and asymmetry. To trust or not to trust, that is the question in the authenticity discourse. In the next chapter, we shall proceed to look at the inversed angle, namely what the managers expect from their employees and the mutual commitment.

CHAPTER 6

Predictable or Pioneering – what managers expect of employees

In the previous chapter, we learned about the two contradictory discourses subscribed to by employees when they talked about their managers and the mutual commitment. But it was not only an employee phenomenon to harbor contradictory norms about the counterpart and the nature of the commitment. Managers displayed a similar set of dual discourses which could be attributed to the same two nodal points, namely transgression and limits. However, their version of these nodal points was slightly different from the employees'. This I will describe in detail below.

CONTRACTUALITY DISCOURSE

When I talked to managers about 'good employees', they often emphasized the need for clear limits, instrumental focus, and explicit rules. As such it was obvious, that the manager version of the contractuality discourse also had *limits* as its nodal point and *ambiguity* as its constitutive outside, just like the employee version. However, the understanding of ambiguity was slightly different. While the employee version disfavored ambiguity in their manager by way of personal taste, injustice, and inconsistency, the manager version disfavored intimacy, self-realization, and anti-authoritarianism in employees. There were two sub-themes in the manager version of the contractuality discourse, namely *hierarchy* and *instrumentality*. Both promoted norms very similar to traditional bureaucratic virtues (cf. Chapter 1). However, they were not simply a continuation of traditional management discourses. Rather, they were practiced as a form of counter-movement to the self-realization trend which has entered working life during the last decade. Many manager quotes concerned what they did *not* like in employees, rather than what they liked. In this sense, the contractuality discourse expressed a frustration over recent developments and a nostalgic invocation of traditional approaches associated with more clarity and predictability. It was a *reactionary* discourse and it thus made sense only insofar as one considered the trends which it reacted against. Consequently, the description of the themes below often focuses on what managers did *not* like in employees, and based on this, I have deducted what they would have preferred instead.

Hierarchy

Rodney is a middle manager who has been in the business for many years, starting as a young apprentice who learned the craft by doing it. He did not arrive with a formal education, but followed

the seniors as an assistant, until he mastered their skills. He tells me that he finds the developments during the last decade somewhat disconcerting: At some stage, all the secretaries were fired and replaced with computers, he claims, "and since then everybody has more or less turned into an editor-in-chief". He would like to reintroduce some more hierarchical structures which allow for a distinction between those who make creative decisions and those with more routine-like tasks. In other words, Rodney is critical of the trend he believes to see among his employees, where everybody expects to be celebrated as extraordinary and as meriting self-directed working conditions. I ask Rodney to describe if there are certain kinds of conflict which recur in his interaction with employees. He explains that one of his female employees (who happens to be a favorite of his) often gets 'pissed off' if he doubts that she has everything under control. She does not want him checking her work, because she expects him to trust her with it. "But sometimes they don't have it under control!", Rodney exclaims with exasperation, and then proceeds to describe a situation in which the same female employee made an error which resulted in considerable trouble and extra work.

Here, Rodney's understanding of work assumes the existence of 'mistakes' and thus implicitly of 'correct solutions', which therefore, according to him, invites to control by the manager. In several situations, I have observed him getting very upset and annoyed if he learns about errors or oversights made by employees, because he expects the things to be done 'just so'. He identifies strongly with the company, and some of his employees interpret him as someone whose personal pride is hurt if top-management can put a finger on anything in his department. Many also refer to him as a 'bottle neck' and a 'control freak' and see his professional nitpickiness as a sign of managerial incompetence, because he should be able to delegate more. Yet everybody agrees that he is extremely competent when it comes to the craft dimension of work.

Rodney's managerial attitude in these situations is an example of what I have called the hierarchy theme. It focuses on values which are very similar to the ones expressed by employees in their version of the hierarchy theme: There should be an *asymmetrical* relation between manager and employee, and the employee should accept the rules of the *power-based* organizational structure. The hierarchy theme favors limits in the sense that it promotes a clear command structure whose purpose is to ensure a *goal-oriented* work process. There are thus limits to the space allowed for critical or self-assertive attitudes among employees. They are expected to understand the 'food chain' and rein in their anti-authoritarian inclinations so that they can play the '*game*' of a hierarchically organized workplace.

In the same spirit, the middle-manager Jim explains about recurring conflicts he has with his employees. He describes his staff as primarily 'young' and 'enthusiastic', and he is generally very proud of his employees. Nevertheless, he says, a number of the young people behave less than enthusiastically

when they are asked to carry out assignments which do not invite to artistic explorations, but simply need to reach a predefined goal. In these situations, Jim makes sure to signal a contractual and hierarchical relationship:

> Jim: I just make sure that there is a fundamental spirit of: Of course you should deliver something.
> Susanne: You mean: 'We expect you to do something'?
> Jim: Yes! They're hired by Media on a contract, so of course we have an assignment for them. Nobody should say 'What if blah blah'? It's an official order that they should deliver this. If they don't, then they've sort of fired themselves.

In this quote, Jim stresses the fact that the relationship is official and based on rights and duties. It is not a relationship which allows for limitless negotiations and critical obstinacies from the employee. Once an assignment has been handed over, it should be solved according to expectations, and if not, the manager will invoke his power mandate, namely the possibility to end the contract. This 'spirit', which Jim evokes, does not favor the transgressive employee who offers his own unique and unpredictable exploration to the workplace. Instead, there is a focus on predictability, precisely by invoking very clear standards, both when it comes to end-product and when it comes to the manager-employee interaction. In the same spirit of predictability, another manager, Curtis, describes an employee who 'drives him nuts':

> He's extremely frustrating to work with. He's really nice, but he's completely hopeless, because he's an anarchist. I can't control him. If you tell him: 'Listen, the deal is that you should do this and that' – and he then says 'yes'. Then he'll go out and do the exact opposite. I mean, to the extent that if you tell him: 'Don't make any more of these contracts', then he'll make more and put them in the drawer. I mean, really… I just can't take that. It's too much.

This quote from Curtis uses the word 'anarchist' in a negative sense. The 'anarchist' is depicted as disruptive and uncontrollable, or even downright disobedient. All these characteristics are referred to as 'hopeless' and 'frustrating'. Curtis implies that he would like an obedient employee who simply carries out assignments according to the precise guidelines given to him. The implicit version of the organization in this quote is one of a machine based on accuracy, linearity and clarity, to which the employee should contribute. Interestingly, both Curtis and all the other interviewed managers describe their own organizations as semi-chaotic and constantly restructuring spaces which require versatile and

independent employees. As the section on authenticity will show, the managers expect their employees to be forces of innovation and change. While change and out-of-the-box thinking are not synonymous with downright disobedience, such as the one allegedly displayed by this employee, it is nevertheless interesting to note that the same employees are met with a requirement to follow precise instructions in one context, and a requirement to think beyond traditional solutions in others. I will write much more on these changing expectations in Chapter 7.

In the question of authority versus autonomy, the middle-manager Daniel suggests that finding the right mode is the employee's responsibility. In fact, he believes that there is a *natural* attitude, which involves an intuitive understanding of the balance:

> I can sense that some employees have a *natural* attitude to the question of when to discuss things with me and when not. Some have an unnatural attitude where it becomes too frequent, and others have an inherent skepticism about engaging with managers. I dare say there's been a lot of that in this company!! I think, if I should paint the values of employees from Department Alpha *[famous for its independent and critical products, SE*], then it's definitively a disrespect towards the necessity of a manager – or the necessity of somebody relating to what you do, period. Because they know best, of course [*this is said ironically*].

Once again, we have a manager quote which describes what is undesirable in employees – namely an anti-authoritarian and self-sufficient attitude. Department Alpha employees are the embodiment of the 'constitutive outside' in the hierarchy theme. They are often used as part of a common plotline in the company which refers to them as a 'vestige' from earlier times when money was plenty and the need for rationalizations had not yet dawned on top-management. At directorial meetings and in strategic discussions they are used as a symbol of what the company is moving away from. Remarks like 'It's not a Department Alpha attitude we're looking for' can often be heard from managers. When piecing all these odd remarks together, one ends up with at picture of Department Alpha employees as left-wing, critical, anti-authoritarian, elitist, and displaying a pampered scorn towards parameters such as efficiency and target-group relevance. They just want to make things which they find personally interesting, in the manner which they find personally rewarding - so the stereotypical image goes.

Turning this picture around one can elicit what counts as a desirable employee in the hierarchy theme: He should be respectful towards management, be willing to receive instructions, be willing to put aside personal aspirations in favor of external and fixed goals serving the company, and not insist on his right to a personal and critical opinion in every situation. In other words, he should consider

himself and his services as a means to an end, namely the interests of the company. He should respect a number of limits to his independence, opinions, and professional 'darlings' out of the realization that he is a local element in a large, power-based structure. Precisely the acceptance of one's subordinate position in a large power structure is something which managers often find lacking in a certain kind of modern employees. Below, the middle-manager Wendy describes a conflict she had with an employee just after she had become his manager:

> William was completely impossible to have a constructive conversation with. During the last decade he had gotten used to just making so much trouble that the manager gave up in the end and simply let him sit in the corner doing nothing – or not very much. But this company does not have the finances for something like that anymore. So I ran a pretty tough process with him, going over everything, every time. [..] William has actually become a really harmonious person. I wouldn't claim that he's a dream employee, but he's very relaxed. He has hated me more than anything. To the degree that he thought I was the devil himself. […] It was deeply unpleasant.
>
> He had gotten some habits where it made sense to be against managers and never think that anything good or anything reliable could come from them, when they suggested some developments. He seemed to think that all developments and everything you offered were done in order to destabilize him or say 'you're not good enough, you're out!' [..]
>
> He was *so* close to being fired! Finally, it culminated in me writing an official letter to his staff file. When you do that, it becomes formal, then it can end up in an official case, and then it results in the formulation of very concrete demands.

According to Wendy, their cooperation works well today, because William has started following the advice and guidelines given to him. Wendy is nevertheless convinced that their stories about the process are very different. She imagines that William regards the smoother cooperation as a result of his own ability to 'tolerate' his manager despite her 'fascist' behavior. Wendy's own version is that William thrives with the stricter guidelines and the praise he is given for the new kind of product they engender. But, says Wendy, 'there are limits to how much a person can admit. There are limits to how much he can bear thinking about how unfair he was to me'.

The conflict described above is an example of a manager finding his employee too anti-authoritarian and too insistent on a self-directed approach. Wendy describes this employee as a lazy troublemaker who has been able to survive in the company for years, because there used to be different standards for efficiency and different financial possibilities. But come the need for rationalizations, such an employee must face the realities of being controlled by a manager and met with 'very concrete demands' or even

the risk of being fired, Wendy explains. While conveying this version of the story, Wendy also describes what she imagines the employee's version to be. Here, she uses the word 'fascist' to describe the employee's view of her as a manager. 'Fascist' is a very strong word, suggesting totalitarian and violent exertions of power, and it is remarkable that Wendy reads this into the employee without this word having ever been uttered. It is one example among many of how managers use the hierarchy theme with certain uneasiness and express defensiveness against the implicit norms of the authenticity discourse. Obviously, the authenticity discourse has more legitimacy in this line of knowledge work, and although the contractuality discourse exerts just as strong a normative pressure, it often operates less explicitly.

Another example of managers expecting their employees to understand 'the larger picture' can be seen below. The middle-manager Daniel has just told me about a conflict he had with his employee Carl. According to Daniel, Carl insisted on his own interpretation of what a 'good' and 'proper' product was, even when top-management ordered something different. Here are Daniel's reflections on the conflict:

> It's absolutely vital to show that we are willing to change and not just stand here stamping our feet every time someone tells us to do things a little differently. Nor should we demand of top-management that they must know more about the subject before they make suggestions for change. Because even if the top-managers were stupid as a hole in the ground, they're the ones with the money, so they can come and make these demands. It's part of the game.

In this case, the employee Carl feels that the changes required by top-management are not founded in substantial arguments about craft, but rather reflect arbitrary whims from distant managers (so he says in his interview with me). However, Daniel, as the middle-manager, finds that Carl is unreasonably narrow and self-indulgent in his perspective, because he refuses to recognize that there are other things at stake than craft. It is interesting to note that the question of craft and professionalism is contested within the hierarchy theme, although it is often used as an apparently objective argument. Carl understands professionalism as detailed insight into a specific subject matter, while Daniel understands it as a matter of balancing craft and strategy. These different versions reflect that they have different stakes: Carl wants to deliver good products and thus nurture his image as an employable craft person in the creative industries market. Daniel wants to please top-management by appearing as a middle-manager who can deliver good products within the parameters set up for him. Another aspect of the different perspectives is that Daniel is confronted more brutally with company logistics. Both middle-

managers and top-managers frequently face the 'larger picture' of the organization, in which the consequences of favoring craft may look quite different than from Carl's perspective as an individual employee. Carl is protected from the pains of hard structural priorities and is thus not aware that insisting on specialized craft may lead to deficits and even future redundancies. The employees' lack of insight into the 'larger picture' is often mourned by their managers when speaking in the hierarchy theme. As we shall see later, the 'larger picture' is practically absent in the authenticity discourse, and its absence is part of the possibility-oriented energy which this discourse is driven by.

In line with the focus on the 'larger picture', the hierarchy theme also emphasizes the importance of not veiling power aspects in the manager-employee relation. This means that the theme sometimes clashes with the HR-approaches in the companies which encourage managers to communicate pedagogically with their employees. In Booker, I attended an annual course offered by the HR Department to all managers with personnel responsibilities. The main part of the course focused on going over the form used in the annual appraisal interviews with the employees. The form contained 20 mandatory themes, including self-assessment, requests for additional education, and the manager's assessment of employee performance. When going over the final theme, the HR consultant stressed the importance of conveying critical messages pedagogically, so that the employee did not 'shut down'. She then described a number of communicative instruments for handling 'difficult' subjects, and drilled the managers in using them. As a reaction to this, the manager Gordon asked with irritation:

> Is it really relevant to activate the whole giraffe model when it concerns basic things like tidying? Why should I share my feelings with him [*the employee, SE*]? He had just damn well better tidy up!

Gordon referred to the so-called 'giraffe language', also called 'non-violent communication' which is very popular as a pedagogical tool in organizations. The HR consultant had just made a number of exercises with the managers in this kind of language, whose fundamental premise is that communication should be concerned with empathy rather than 'rights' and 'judgments'. Apparently, this series of exercises was more than Gordon could bear, and he emphasized his prerogative to make use of hierarchical communication: If he wanted the office tidied, the employee should follow orders and get going. Throughout the whole course, Gordon was quite impatient with the implicit celebration of pedagogical models, and he generally signaled the opinion that modern employees are a tad too pampered and seem to have forgotten that this is a workplace which pays them money to render a service. In a similar reaction against 'intimate' or 'empathy-based' modes of handling the manager-

employee relation, the top-manager Curtis described what he finds to be a common source of trouble in the workplace:

> Experience tells me that you will end up having trouble if you don't take the consequences of the 'stinks' you've discovered: An employee who doesn't work enough, or is sick too often, or is a wrong match. Maybe an ok employee, but not correctly matched with his job. If you don't dare deal with this, then this employee will be squeezed, and he kind of knows it himself, but doesn't get any clear signals from his boss. The other employees know it too, and so on. So in fact, entanglements often arise out of an exaggerated degree of humanism. So sometimes I go to my people *[his middle-managers]* and say: 'Now you have to do it – get that person fired.' It's also an ugly part of the job, but you see… sometimes you think: 'No, I feel too sorry for him, he's doing his work so well.' And then you think: 'We'll just wait and see.' And then after a year it's just.. Then weird things happen, and other problems arise. Insecurity – all kinds of stuff. And in fact, maybe if you'd acted right from the beginning, we could have done a lot of things with the department. It could have entered a different dynamic and rolled in a different direction. And then we wouldn't have ended up here at all. I think one should be very aware of this. Sometimes, when you have management responsibility, you should use it, even if you tend to think: 'I will just leave it down in the drawer, because people know I have it, so I don't have to use it.' But sometimes you simply have to say: 'We're moving on!'

This quote stresses the virtues of power-explicit and hierarchical management and mentions empathy as a source of ambiguity and insecurity. It suggests that good management assumes responsibility for drawing limits and displaying clarity, because the absence of this may end up causing more trouble than the 'ugly' and seemingly brutal decisions. The quote also illustrates the qualms often harbored by managers in the process of making 'difficult decisions'. The hierarchy theme and the contractuality discourse in general do not efface the emotional dimension of management, but they deliver a rationale for decisions which involve emotional costs. They do so by referring to external factors of seemingly objective nature, such as 'mis-matches' between employees and their jobs, or 'inadequate' performances. These objective problems must be removed, and the sooner the manager accepts this unpleasant task, the better. The same two phenomena could be interpreted completely differently in the authenticity discourse which puts the relational and empathetic aspects at the centre. In this discourse, the so-called mis-match between job and employee is not necessarily seen as an objective fact, but rather as a result of circumstances. It might be considered the result of management not having 'developed' or 'coached' the employee sufficiently, or it might be the cause for general 'systemic'

considerations about the synergy of the department, the way the assignments have been conveyed etc. In other words, the hierarchy theme uses reference to external, 'objective', and inescapable realities as legitimacy for authoritarian decisions with emotional costs.

The fact that the power element is explicit in the hierarchy theme, allows for playful or appreciative talk about it. In contrast, power is usually moderated, apologized for, ignored, or denied in the authenticity discourse. Below, the top-manager Curtis answers my question about when he had fun at work recently:

> Curtis: Well, today I battled Rodney [*one of his middle-managers*], and that was lots of fun. [*With a twinkle in his eye*]
> Susanne: Okay!? [*Smiling at the expression 'battled'*]
> Curtis: It was a kind of crisis management. It was something serious we disagreed about, and it ended up with us being able to say – after a pretty hands-on confrontation over a couple of days: 'Hey, fair enough. Now that's been settled.' We had negotiated it to a place where I could live with it, seen from my perspective, and he could say: 'Ok – this makes sense.' And that's fun – a hell of a lot of fun, actually!
> Susanne: What's fun about it?
> Curtis: Well, the fun part is the negotiation element in it – that you kind of… I mean, it's easy to just yell at people who don't do what you tell them to. But it's more interesting if you can... I mean, he's a smart man, so he also says stuff which you end up considering. But I might have some other concerns and say: 'It just won't work. It would be cool for you, but I will just get infinitely bigger problems over here' – or whatever. To make those ends meet is fun, right?!
> Susanne: So the fun part is making the ends meet. But it is fun to battle too, or what?
> Curtis: Yes, it's lots of fun to battle too. It's lots of fun to learn that it's a contact sport. At least, I think so! Not everybody does. But people who have a position such as Rodney's usually don't mind.
> Susanne: It's an interesting metaphor you use: contact sport. Do you have to enjoy that in a position like yours, you think?
> Curtis: Yes, I think you do. You have to assume responsibility for a lot of things – some of which are really unpopular. So you have to… At least it's no use if you find it really unpleasant that people think you're an idiot. Come on, it's my job. Some of these decisions… it's also a distribution of roles: They know that this has to be done, and then I do it, and then I'm 'stupid' when I do it. Sometimes you make mistakes, or you do things in a bad or incorrect manner. But there's also a distribution of roles – which is fine, I think. I also insist on my right to think that my manager is an idiot. She knows that. And I know that's how it plays.

As we can see in this quote, and as was the case in several of the quotes above, the larger picture is often referred to as a 'game' or a 'sport' in the hierarchy theme. There are also recurring metaphors taken from military language, such as 'battling', or references to 'territory'. This explicit mention of power is legitimate in the hierarchy theme as opposed to the authenticity discourse which is ill-at-ease with the power dimension. In the hierarchy theme, power differences and their ensuing conflicts are a taken for granted part of working life. One may either reluctantly accept them or professionally enjoy mastering them, but they are considered fundamentally inescapable. Once again we see the maneuver used to cope with the explicit – and at times unpopular – power dimension: Curtis 'depersonalizes' it and turns it into an externally given necessity which somebody must step up to and assume responsibility for. So the 'nasty' decisions are a given and must be made. Whoever happens to take it upon himself is a matter of structurally defined 'division of roles'. Depersonalizing the difficult aspects of power in this manner makes it possible for Curtis to separate himself and his personal assessments and motivations from the power-laden decisions, and he is thus relieved from some of the emotional, existential and relational complexity which they might otherwise engender. Such a maneuver would not be possible in the authenticity discourse where no escape into depersonalization is ever offered.

In Curtis' quote we can also detect a manager's appreciation of the battle-competent and battle-ready subordinate. It is fun to be challenged by a resourceful employee. However, this kind of battle is not synonymous with the anti-authoritarian insistence on personal preferences which many managers have objected to in the quotes above. Rather, it is a battle in which both parties are acutely aware of the 'rules of the game' and compete for an optimization of their strategic standpoint without ever losing sight of 'the larger picture'. Once again, the end all and be all of the hierarchy theme – and the contractuality discourse in general - is that employees should never forget the formal nature of the affiliation to the workplace and should thus be able to limit their contributions and expectations to something which fits the instrumental reality of organizations.

The other side of this focus on formality and externally defined goals is that managers often expect the same kind of formality from themselves when they exert their power. If they fire a member of their staff, they should deliver formal explanations based on a contractual logic. Since, according to the contractuality discourse, the individual employee 'fits' a certain externally given set of assignments, the rationalization for firing them should make reference to that very 'fit' – or the lack hereof. Once again, the hierarchy theme can resort to the notion of a given external reality which dictates (and legitimizes) management decisions. As already mentioned, the authenticity discourse is less prone to such 'essentialist' legitimizations, because it focuses more on the ever-expandable potential of personal

development and relational malleability. Below, the manager Richard describes how he handled the demand from top-management that he fire a number of his employees in order to cut down expenses. He spent several weeks systematically going over every employee file comparing the existing assignments with the individual profiles of the employees. He explains why:

> It's important, in those difficult situations where you have to fire people and choose who in a group of serious and competent employees can no longer stay, that it is founded in serious arguments based on the kind of assignments they have. Then you can make it as comprehensible as possible both to yourself and later to the employee. It was worth all those hours of preparation – both for me, but also for those receiving the message. Because given those explanations it was easier for them to accept, than if it had been an arbitrary lottery or wrong explanations.

From Richard's comments we can see that the focus on predictability and clear lines goes two ways in the hierarchy theme. Managers expect these qualities from their employees, but they also expect them from themselves. And this code functions as yet another legitimization of the explicit power dimension: The asymmetry is there, yes, but the 'good manager' will not handle it randomly or based on 'incorrect' motivations.

Summing up, when managers speak in the hierarchy theme, they stress the virtues of clear limits, explicit power structures, standardized professionalism, and a focus on the good of the company. They expect their employees to respect the 'rules of the game', be pragmatically goal-oriented (as opposed to guided by 'inner values'), and in tune with organizational 'realities'. Often the hierarchy theme arises as a reaction against employees who have a very autonomous or self-directed approach to work, and as such it is often in a defensive dialogue with the authenticity discourse. As we shall see below, that is also the case for the next theme in the contractuality discourse, namely instrumentality.

Instrumentality

When talking to the middle-manager Rodney about his criteria for hiring employees, he explains to me that he has learned not to pick 'passionadas', because it is too painful for them to let go of their 'darlings' in the daily work. They must be able to fit into the machinery where finances or political concerns will frequently overrule artistic or craft-based standards, he says. (As a little aside, it is interesting to note that this observation comes from a manager who is reputed among his employees for his nitpickiness and for his inability to delegate, because he does not trust other people with

carrying out the assignment 'just so'). Rodney's approach is an example of what I have called the instrumentality theme. This theme stresses limits in the form of goal-oriented problem solving rather than 'transgressive' exploration. While the hierarchy theme above was concerned with the nature of the power relation, the instrumentality theme is concerned with the nature of the product delivered. The two themes are often very similar, but I have chosen to make the differentiation in order to highlight both aspects: the relationship and the product. In the instrumentality theme, the managers emphasize the need for employees who are able to understand the pragmatics of organizational and market realities, and who can thus carry out assignments with aspects such as efficiency, target groups and strategy in mind. Put differently, the employees should be able to limit their personal desire for authenticity and instead accept their work as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself. Their product should be measured by its instrumental value, not by its authenticity. Just like the hierarchy theme, the instrumentality theme is often expressed in connection with reactions against employees who claim a right to authentic and self-directed work. Below, the middle-manager Daniel relates a conflict he had with one of his employees, who according to him was unable to accept instrumental limitations to his product. He wanted, so Daniel claimed, to pursue his own interests without any interference from external factors, whether they were management feedback, target-group relevance or other:

> Conrad called me and said he was writing a suggestion for a theme on a radio program, but that financially speaking it would require that we also made a broadcast about it in another of our recurring programs. I said: That sounds super interesting, Conrad. Try making a pitch for it, and remember to write what the premises for the program are, which criteria of success you have, and how you are going to carry this out. And also how it's possible to make two programs about the same theme which will manage to give those listeners who happen to hear both programs the feeling that they've been given two different things. Then he told me off, saying that I couldn't come here as a manager questioning his professionalism. He had been here for ages and he wasn't about to invent his craft all over again. And if I didn't trust that when he had a good idea for a program then he would end up producing a good program, then I simply wasn't competent enough for my job. […] He has been very, very angry with me about this, and it was more or less the reason why he wanted to leave the job.

Daniel is obviously in an instrumentality-oriented mode when he discusses the idea for the program with Conrad. He requires specifications before he will 'buy' it, and furthermore he requires legitimizations with regard to target group and finances. In other words, he treats the program idea in a

very means-to-an-end and fixed-criteria-for-success kind of way. He also lets Conrad know that the procedure for approval is not a mere formality, but that he will indeed make a number of demands and make a number of controls before the program is likely to hit the air – if at all. In so doing, Daniel challenges both the self-direction expectations and the personalized craft approach which Conrad allegedly displays. According to Daniel, Conrad's reaction is very strong when he objects to being 'questioned' and 'not trusted'. Behind this choice of words seems to be a feeling of offence or even humiliation. While Daniel handles the interaction in a framework of procedures, standards, control, and instrumentality, Conrad seems to be looking for an informal and trust-based process. As we saw in the previous chapter, employees speaking in the authenticity discourse consider formalities and guidelines as a personal affront. In the authenticity discourse, trust is quintessential, and the absence of rules is a prerequisite for developing a good product. Daniel and Conrad's conflict is an example of an interaction where the two parties subscribe to two different discourses. We shall see many examples of such conflicts in Chapter 7.

Another middle-manager mentions what she finds to be a problematic attitude in one of her teams:

> They have displayed a degree of inertia instead of developing. And I also think that in some periods they've had less focus on whether this was the right product and more on whether they thought it was interesting to produce. […] I think that they still pull out darlings, and then I have to say: 'Listen, this doesn't address our target group'. But they just think it would be super interesting to work with.

Here, the manager refers to the 'right' program as if it were an uncontested and externally given standard. We learn later in the quote that 'right' means 'addressing the target group', and once again the instrumentality theme defines professionalism as a matter of meeting strategic goals rather than striving for originality. In the instrumentality theme, 'darlings' are used as a derogatory, more or less synonymous with lack of professionalism. As we have seen above and shall see below, the authenticity discourse, in contrast, scorns standardized professionalism practiced without passion and risk. It is interesting to note that the female manager above speaks in the contractuality discourse, but still refers to 'development' as a desirable employee virtue. 'Development' carries all the positive connotations from the authenticity discourse. It is associated with flexibility, existential growth, and transgression of limits, as we saw in Chapter 4. However, the manager uses it to promote *contractual* parameters. This mingling of discourses in order to get the best from both is something we shall see much more of from both managers and employees in Chapter 7.

In line with the instrumentality theme's focus on limits, managers frequently complained about the 'immoderate ambitions' which they believed to witness among employees. During the HR course described above, the consultant went over the theme 'Career Goals' in the appraisal interview form. She stressed that this theme offered the managers an occasion to adjust the *unrealistic expectations* which some of their employees might harbor. The ensuing discussion showed that most managers considered many of their employees out of touch with the 'realities' of their own abilities and the scenarios which the organization could offer them. Precisely words like 'realistic' and 'adjust' illustrate how the instrumentality theme operates with a notion of fixed and measurable standards. The employees are not considered infinitely optimizable resources, but rather intrinsically limited. And these limits should be acknowledged by both parties in order to ensure a stable work process. In contrast, one of the primary purposes of the authenticity discourse is to challenge traditional ideas about what is realistic and what is not. Here, the key is to be original, not realistic.

The discussion at the HR course was an example of how the contractuality discourse often occurs in an implicit or explicit dialogue with the authenticity discourse. Or put differently: When managers speak in the contractuality discourse they are usually acutely aware of the likelihood that they will be met by employees who answer them in the authenticity discourse. (Obviously, they do not refer to 'discourses', nor do they even have a vocabulary which suggests two distinct sets of values. The tensions are implicit - not systematically verbalized). When discussing how to 'adjust immoderate career goals' among employees, the majority of the managers emphasized that such an endeavor was most precarious and likely to engender trouble. They expected their employees to be hurt, angry or disappointed by such a message, and there was a long talk about how best to cope with such emotional reactions. In a similar vein, the manager Roland told me about his employee, Christian, whom he considered to be 'stable, but not very talented'. When Roland was working on an opening for a new prestigious position, Christian frequently came by his office in order to stress how eager he was to 'develop'. Roland read this as Christian trying to sell himself for the new position. In Roland's assessment, however, Christian did not have the necessary competence for such a position. When he had been given extra responsibility earlier, it ended up "going really, really badly", said Roland. This led him to ponder:

> I don't know. Somehow I have to create a lot of value around the stable work he's doing. [..] But he just doesn't really have an eye for these things. [..] I tell him to be more thorough. But it's difficult, because he thinks that he's thorough. [..] He has very high ambitions and would really like to work [with the prestigious assignments]. But that's not going to happen.

As we can see from Roland's ponderings, he finds Christian's ambitions to be unrealistic. At the same time he knows that he is facing an employee who expects to be met in the authenticity discourse where themes such as development, personal potential and transgression dominate. Roland does not tap into the authenticity discourse in this matter, but he tries to find a way for the instrumentality theme to interact with the authenticity discourse in a way which can appease Christian. He does so by looking for ways in which 'stable work' may appear as a source of pride for the transgression-focused Christian. This is yet another example of how the contractuality discourse is often employed in a defensive dialogue with the authenticity discourse.

Another example of the contractuality discourse being in defensive dialogue with the authenticity discourse can be seen below. During a management meeting, the managers at Booker discussed whether to make a formal division between editors who handle text-based tasks and editors who handle writers, networking and other more outward activities. They discussed this, because they found that the talents among their editors varied, and not everybody excelled at the extrovert activities, although these were associated with a lot of prestige:

> Carl: Should we distinguish between desk editors and editors who are good at handling writers?
> Curtis: We should distinguish between editing and production. Otherwise it'll be a discussion about feelings, when it ought to be a rational discussion about which concrete assignments there are.

Carl wants to distinguish between two kinds of editors so as to have formal tools for differentiating assignments. He finds it a waste of resources that editors who have limited networking or social skills should solve tasks such as mingling at receptions or catering to writers. Curtis objects to this, because he anticipates a lot of emotional upheaval in the wake of such a differentiation. In Booker, it is common, albeit implicit, knowledge that writer contact and networking are high status while 'mere' text editing is less prestigious. Curtis therefore expects a lot of resistance on the part of those editors who would be categorized as 'desk editors'. Booker's managers know that they are dealing with employees whose agendas are personal development and originality. In order to enforce the differentiation, they therefore have to establish categories which do not activate the matter of status and prestige in the same manner. Curtis' suggestion is to distinguish between editing and production, because 'production' sounds a lot less glorious than 'handling writers'. And once all these existential dimensions have been

circumvented, the managers can go about implementing the instrumentality-based differentiation of assignments.

The manager Caroline tells me about a similar challenge when it comes to adjusting employees' expectations into the realities of the organization. She mentions a certain kind of 'young employees' whose ambitions are very excessive:

> Caroline: They are young employees, too quick to think that they can walk on water and that they don't need to learn from other people's experience, say from me or their older colleagues, who offer good advice. No, they think they already know best in every situation - that they can do it all, and that they should be paid as if they were hosts on the Daily News [*one of the most prestigious positions in Media, SE*]. [..] To a certain extent it's ok, because it's also about personal pride and drive and wanting to achieve something. But sometimes I see the negative side of it, namely when they're too quick to think that they're irreplaceable. And that's far from true, because there are really, really a lot of very talented people.
>
> Susanne: What happens if you start correcting them or telling them to do things differently?
>
> Caroline: Well, they feel as if… I mean, you just offer them some good advice to make the best of the situation, but they perceive that as a personal offense, either because they are not given acknowledgement in the form of a higher salary, or because the assignment which they wanted went to somebody else. They take it very personally – more than what I find warranted.

Caroline expresses a certain frustration with a number of her young employees who have a hard time accepting guidelines, corrections or other limits to the unfolding of their potential. She notes that advice or the absence of considerable rewards is likely to be taken as a personal insult, rather than as a purely instrumental intervention. Again, we have a situation in which a manager would like to handle a process in the contractuality discourse, but finds herself defensively faced with the authenticity discourse. In the authenticity discourse, no 'purely instrumental' messages can be conveyed without them being seen as an affront to the relationship between the manager and the employee. This is because the authenticity discourse does not accept the premise of a purely instrumental contract, but rather promotes the notion that each manager-employee relation is unique, authentic and based on trust. It is interesting to note that Caroline frowns on her employees' view of themselves as irreplaceable. As we have read above and in the previous chapter, being irreplaceable is one of the driving forces behind employee motivation in the authenticity discourse. Similarly, as we shall see in the section below, managers encourage that very approach in employees when they speak in the

authenticity discourse. But when managers speak in the contractuality discourse, they refer to notions of irreplaceability as being inappropriate and unrealistic. During a lecture on the management of creative knowledge workers, Anne Knudsen, editor-in-chief of the intellectual weekly newspaper, Weekendavisen, made a remark which very succinctly captured the spirit of the contractuality discourse:

> Naturally it's an advantage that the organization has a size which permits me to walk around and keep an eye on people, seeing how they look – if they're happy or disgruntled. But it's not an organization which is just concerned with us being nice to each other. No. Obviously, it's about people performing - and performing better next week than they did the week before.

In other words: The contractuality discourse does not shy away from the power dimension of management and is explicit in its prioritization of company needs above individual emotions and dialogic solutions to disagreements. The contractuality discourse does not blatantly disregard emotions and dialogue, but it does not hesitate to *explicitly* overrule them in favor of organizational agendas if needs be. As we shall see in the section below, the authenticity discourse has a very different approach to limits, goals and power.

AUTHENTICITY DISCOURSE

The primary difference between the contractuality discourse and the authenticity discourse is their approach to limits, as I have mentioned several times. In the manager version of the authenticity discourse, three different forms of limit-transgression are promoted: a *reciprocal* relationship between manager and employee; *explorative* or innovative products, and *flexible* approach to work. In each their way, these three aspects favor a certain ambiguity or 'flux' as opposed to the fixed, clear and hierarchical lines endorsed by the contractuality discourse. Below, I describe in detail how each of the three themes manifests a focus on transgression and authenticity.

Reciprocity

Larry tells me how in his early years as a manager he attended a lecture by a 'management philosopher'. He describes the lecture as 'extremely weird' and 'extremely provocative'. Yet:

> Then it did end up planting a seed somehow. Like: 'Yes, things can be done differently. We don't always have to think in hierarchical structures – we can also think more in relational structures and such.' And I'm very, very interested in that today. I don't think in hierarchies as much as I think in relations.

Larry's move away from a hierarchical focus towards a relational focus is emblematic for the reciprocity theme. According to this theme, the manager-employee interaction cannot be captured, nor meaningfully handled, by a classical rights-and-duties approach based on power asymmetry. The reciprocity theme focuses on aspects such as dialogue, empathy, loyalty, and trust in the interaction between managers and employees. Given this focus, many managers speaking in the reciprocity theme consider employees to be their main 'product' as opposed to books or radio programs. In the reciprocity theme, the 'human substance' is the centre of attention, and managers often take pride in molding this substance into a certain condition or maturity. As the manager Rodney says of an employee: "It's such a lot of fun to create Melanie and see her grow."

So in the reciprocity theme, human beings are 'created' and 'developed', and the work setting becomes an opportunity to enter a formative space in which existential issues help set the terms for professional processes. While the product and external, instrumental goals are at the fore in the contractuality discourse, the human being and its relations dominate in the authenticity discourse. When I ask Callie what she finds interesting about management, she says:

> For several years now, I have found it extremely exciting to move people – not force or manipulate – but move through conversation. In other words: through coaching. That is something which I really enjoy – the social aspects of it. I mean: This thing about leading through dialogue – all the complexity that a conversation can have. And to return, and return, and return to the matter until it finally really works, right?

As we can see, Callie wants to 'move' people. She wants to handle her managerial role through coaching and dialogue. This is in stark contrast to the hierarchy theme described above, in which managers expect of their employees that they respect the power asymmetry and obey when organizational agendas dictate it. Employees who stamp their feet risk being left behind in the hierarchy theme, while such employees would be candidates for recurring sessions of dialogue and coaching in the reciprocity theme. The important thing to notice about Callie's quote is how she distinguishes dialogue from both 'force' and 'manipulation'. The approach to power is very different from the explicitly asymmetrical hierarchy theme. Not only does Callie want to avoid force, she also wants to avoid manipulation. The core of manipulation is to skillfully lead somebody in the direction one desires without this person realizing the agenda. The opposite of manipulation thus involves honesty, transparency, and mutuality. Here we see one of the defining features of the authenticity discourse, which is that the relation between manager and employee should not be instrumentalized. The relation

should remain 'authentic' and an end in itself, never just turned into a logistical means to an end. It should be 'wholehearted' and based on trust. Maintaining this approach while still being in possession of a power mandate naturally makes for a substantially more multi-layered and ambiguous management than the explicit invocation of rank which the contractuality discourse legitimizes. Putting it differently, one could say that the reciprocity theme seeks to transgress the asymmetry of power by focusing its criteria of success on the *nature of the relation*, before it focuses on the product.

The reciprocity theme often revolves around managers' feelings for and empathy with their employees. They identify with the employees and wish to care for them. The reciprocity theme strives for consensus and for overcoming conflicts and differences in interests through mutual efforts. Having to fire people is thus an intervention which greatly challenges the reciprocity theme. The managers mostly handle this by trying to 'coach' their employees out of the organization, showing them that they have better self-realization opportunities elsewhere or that they would have ended up unhappy in this position anyway. In the reciprocity theme, power is presented as concern – or at least power and concern always go hand in hand.

As the term 'reciprocity' suggests, the theme also involves expectations of concern the other way around. The manager-employee relationship is conceived as being based on mutuality and on the inclusion of existential aspects in the process of problem solving. In the reciprocity theme, the relationship is not considered satisfying if it only operates on contractual premises – the managers also expect emotional involvement from their employees. Simply doing what you are told is not enough. The manager Larry explains how his group was experiencing dramatic cut-downs as the whole company needed to make major reductions in expenditures. These cut-downs engendered intense inter-group struggles over the remaining resources as each group tried to secure future projects and assignments. During this process, Larry found himself in a crisis over his work, considering whether he wanted to continue at all. This crisis was not so much due to the cut-downs, but more to a disappointment with his employees and how they handled the situation:

> There were some existential things in it: Do I really want to lead these people if they don't give anything? And now I know that I don't. People who aren't involved and don't bother to come along, those I don't want to lead. I mean – figuratively speaking. There can be lots of concrete difficulties. But fundamentally speaking we should agree that we really want this. And if we don't, then I just can't be bothered.

What Larry describes is an existential crisis about the matter of management and leadership. This crisis is instigated by the fact that a number of his employees do not actively back him up and show loyal

involvement during a time of organizational hardship. This lack of reciprocity makes Larry wonder whether he is willing to manage these people at all, and he ends up concluding that he is not. Only people who display reciprocity can earn his management. Larry ended up summoning the employees at a seminar, saying: "It's now or never – if you want this, you have to fight." The seminar turned into a great success, giving rise to numerous ideas which could help the group to a better result in the intra-organizational struggle over resources. Retrospectively, Larry concludes that this episode clarified for him that mutuality was a prerequisite for management to be meaningful.

In contrast, in the hierarchy theme, managers never expect their employees to 'give something', in the sense of displaying emotional involvement and loyalty. Employees are there to deliver useful products within a highly instrumental organizational setting. In fact, the hierarchy theme often stresses the disturbing nature of intimization between manager and employee, and laments the fact that 'rational' decisions are hampered by emotional sensitivities. The hierarchy theme insists on resorting to external and instrumental factors when directions have to be set and decisions made. How the employees feel about it is secondary.

Managers speaking in the reciprocity theme do not only request loyalty and involvement from their employees, they also request validation. Just as the employees speaking in the authenticity discourse want to be *seen* by their managers, so the managers speaking in the authenticity discourse want to be *seen* by their employees. Below, Callie describes her top three favorite employees and what she appreciates in them:

> I really appreciate – and maybe this sounds silly – but that you can talk with them. That there is something deeper than just this pure 'I am here to deliver a product'-relationship. And by that I also mean a kind of unprejudiced attitude. I came home last night after having worked like a maniac for the last three months. And then it struck me: Whom am I actually working for? Am I working for someone who will appreciate it when we reach these goals? And then I can be hit by this: 'Oh!' [*exhausted and frustrated voice*] Because there are really people who will never be able to appreciate that we actually make a giant effort here. Some of them simply don't have the imagination for it.

The existential backdrop of the reciprocity theme becomes obvious in Callie's quote when she poses herself the question: Whom am I actually working for? Will it be appreciated? Her desire for appreciation is not directed towards her managers and the openings which such an appreciation from above might give her. No, interestingly it is directed towards her employees who do not have any power mandate over her and are thus not in a position to promote her or offer her more interesting

assignments. In other words, the desire for appreciation is not concerned with career options, but has a fundamentally existential character. It concerns the nature of the mutuality between the two parties – the manager and the employee. Callie does not just work in order to make money or reach goals defined by the company. No, Callie works in order to find meaning, and this meaning must be found in the existential resonance with her employees, among other things. Callie expects of herself that she meets her employees in a dialogic and concerned manner, as we saw in the earlier quote from her. In return, she wishes them to express the same sensitivity towards her by not taking her for granted. She continues her musings:

> It was remarkable the other day. One of our employees said: 'Yes, and then I was just so lucky that this things happened' And I just thought: 'God dammit! We have worked for one and a half months to make sure that it seemed coincidental and good and wonderful for you'. And they don't even think about it. We've had so many things going in order to make this happen. So I like it when people really know how to appreciate that other people do something good. […] You should be big enough to tell other people: 'Damn, you really did a great job here!'

Callie speaks solidly in the reciprocity theme here. For one, she describes how she and her management colleagues have spent weeks trying to create a certain *feeling* for an employee. They wanted to arrange specific changes so that they seemed not only 'good' and 'wonderful', but also 'coincidental'. While wanting an employee to feel good and wonderful can be seen as a form of 'basic' care, wanting changes to seem 'coincidentally' good and wonderful is a much more subtle and, some would even say, therapeutic agenda. The purpose is to make working life seem rewarding without the employee ever realizing that there are people pulling the strings behind these rewards. Here, we are as far as possible from the explicitly instrumental and asymmetrical hierarchy theme as can be. It is the employee and his well-being which is at the centre of attention, and the manager wants to mould this employee's working experience into an existential flavor which offers meaning and self-esteem. In order to do so, she will even orchestrate events a certain way, rather than be transparent about the strategic work behind them. All this, so that the human potential in the employee can be optimized as best possibly to blossom in an existential space shielded from instrumentalism.

The other aspect of Callie's quote is that she expects something in return for this careful orchestration of existential meaningfulness. Despite the fact that she strove for an impression of 'coincidence', she regrets that the employee did not recognize the effort put into this. In other words, the offer of existential meaningfulness is not a 'free lunch'. Callie wants reciprocity. In fact, she wants

the employees to turn her work into something existentially meaningful precisely by appreciating her generosity and care. So while the hierarchy theme and the instrumentality theme push aside emotional and existential agendas as something disruptive and 'distorting' in the organizational power setting, the reciprocity theme depends on them in order for work to make sense.

In the hierarchy section earlier, we met the manager Curtis. He described his fondness of management as a 'contact sport', and how you simply had to embrace the role as a 'brutal' power broker, even if this involved being unpopular among employees. In the quote below, we hear him speaking about management and employees in a very different manner. He describes one of his all-time favorite employees whom he met already when he was a young and fairly inexperienced manager:

> Curtis: When I started, it was really great to be her manager, because she was loyal to me. I did everything wrong. Mention anything one could do wrong, I did it! And practically all at once. It was quite terrible for me. And in that situation she was just really wonderful, because she said sort of: 'Well, I'd like you to be here...' She was a very faithful employee. And that was pretty cool.
> Susanne: So it matters to you that employees are loyal?
> Curtis: Yes. And by that I don't mean that they should be jellyfish, not at all. On the contrary, you could say. But of course it matters that they are forthcoming, because if you have a staff which… That's something you see when there are restructurings – that some basically aren't forthcoming. Then you have to be a bit more experienced for it to succeed. But if you've never tried it before, then it's fucking difficult. You can just tell how they're waiting for you to make a mistake. She wasn't like that. On the contrary, she was like: 'We'll help you make this work'.

Curtis' quote is an example of the reciprocity theme. His description of management here is very far from the brutality-endorsing 'contact sport' mentioned earlier. On the contrary, he emphasizes how considerate, supportive and forthcoming employees matter a lot to him. In the 'contact sport' approach, the end justifies the means, based on the premise that 'it's a brutal world', and 'somebody's got to do it'. In other words, being considerate and understanding is not the called-for qualities in the manager-employee relationship. The interaction exists for the purpose of making things such as profit, efficiency, and output happen, and that purpose always comes first. In the above quote, however, Curtis endorses forbearance towards professional incompetence (his own) in the name of 'faithfulness', 'loyalty' and 'help'. Here, the care for the relationship may temporarily suspend instrumental concerns.

It is also worth noticing the vulnerability which Curtis' associates with the management position, when he says 'You can just tell how they're waiting for you to make a mistake'. This is the manager's impression of employees' brutality, one could say. And in the face of that, he appreciates the reciprocal and considerate employee. In his earlier quote, he handled the same issue of brutality (his own and employees') by considering it a 'role play', meaning a systemically determined phenomenon which people take it upon themselves to enact. So while brutality is a personal and frightening experience in one theme, it is an un-personal and systemic mechanism in the other.

Summing up, the reciprocity theme is part of the authenticity discourse which favors the transgression of limits and fixed standards. The reciprocity theme favors transgression in the sense that it focuses on the ever evolving, ever unique, and existentially flavored interaction between manager and employee. This interaction cannot be captured by a rule-based, explicitly asymmetric approach, nor does it endorse instrumentally motivated decisions. Whenever decisions are made, they should be made out of concern for the mutuality, rather than for external agendas. In other words, the relationship should always be an end in itself, never just a means to an end. It should be authentic. Furthermore, the authentic recognition of and care for the other should go both ways. Not only should the manager see and validate the employee for his authentic efforts, the employee should do likewise with the manager. Therefore, when a manager exercises power over his employees in this theme, he does it with reference to his concern for their 'development', 'self-realization' or 'well-being', and he seeks to give it the form of dialogue and consensus.

Exploration

Another theme in the authenticity discourse expressed by managers was 'exploration'. While the reciprocity theme concerned the nature of the relationship between manager and employee, the exploration theme concerned the nature of the professional contribution which managers expected from their employees. As the word suggests, this contribution should consist in the challenging of traditional ways in order to optimize versatility, innovation and creativity. Just like the other themes of the authenticity discourse, it favors the transgression of limits, namely in the sense that standards, predictability and solidity are seen as 'old-fashioned', while 'networking', 'flair' and 'initiative (all that which cannot be captured by standards) are seen as desirable. During our interview, the manager Janette used the term 'old-school employee' several times. I asked her to tell me what she meant by that term:

> It's a way to think publishing house which is very outdated [...]: Where the editor's role is to move commas. And where it's all about a book ending up as 16 sheets, and if it doesn't you'll have to cut it down. It's that combination where that which is written in the book doesn't matter. It's all about fitting it into an envelope which shouldn't be too thick. And the thicker it is, the more it costs in stamps - just to caricature it a little… In general it is something which the public doesn't care about at all, which is never reviewed, and which is always made according to a formula. And that doesn't interest me to put it plainly. Then it's just production of books. And you might as well produce all sorts of other things.

There are a number of interesting elements in Janette's description of the old-fashioned publishing approach. For one, there is the remark that the editor simply 'moves commas'. Moving commas is a very standardized craft equipped with clear criteria for the successful outcome. In fact, there is a 'right' and a 'wrong' way to place commas. As we saw in Chapter 4, the authenticity discourse does not favor an approach to work which leaves no space for personal creativity. Assignments with a predefined solution are considered inferior. The same thing is at stake, when Janette speaks with distaste about the '16 sheets' and the 'formula'. Again, the personal interpretation and the explorative dimension of the task are absent, displaced by standardized instructions. She calls this 'production' – or more precisely: 'JUST production' – and remarks that then it might as well be something else you produce. The suggestion here is that once there are predictable frameworks for assignments, they lose their meaningfulness. They lose that indefinable 'non-production' aspect whose essence is uniqueness and originality. The difference between production and originality is that the former can be carried out by anyone capable of grasping the instructions, while the latter require that 'special something' which no-one can put a finger on, but which nevertheless makes the difference between a great and a mediocre editor. We shall see this opinion expressed by several managers below. Janette's remark that one might as well be producing anything else is also significant. It illustrates the element in the authenticity discourse which insists on irreplaceability. People and assignments gain their value by being irreplaceable. The moment they could be replaced by something else without this having any major effect, the authenticity discourse is threatened. So employees should be unique and offer contributions which could never be carried out just according to standards. And products should be unique in the sense that each product is meaningful and original in itself.

Puzzled by Janette's characterization of old-fashioned employees, I asked her to elaborate. She continued her description:

> Janette: It's that classical remark: 'That's not how we usually do it'. Or: 'I don't believe that'.
> Susanne: How do they do it usually then? I'm just trying to imagine the 'old-fashioned' employee's approach to work, as opposed to a –
> Janette: *[interrupts]* – well, they do it the way they've always done it. […] There are still a few of these people left in the editorial offices. But most of them have slowly been sifted out.
> Susanne: But which skills did they lack?
> Janette: They basically lacked that skill of being extroverted which is required in order to be a modern editor: That you have a large network and make sure to be informed about the world around you, and that you can therefore pull in ideas – rather than just sitting in a closed office editing texts.

Once again, we can see how predictability and standards are frowned upon in the exploration theme. Employees who want to do things the way they usually do it or who question new ways are not treasured. They lack that versatility and 'connectionist' talent (cf. Boltanski & Chiapello, Chapter 1) which allows for continual development rather than continuation of tradition. As we saw in Chapter 4, craft involves a large element of doing things the way we usually do it. Craft is precisely the establishment of specific criteria of success based on the accumulation of extensive experience. While craft does certainly not rule out change, it has a very different prioritization between originality and reproduction than innovation does. It only allows originality if it is based on a solid base of tradition, one could say. This classical craft with its element of conservatism is considered more or less obsolete from the point of view of the authenticity discourse. As many statements of managers illustrate, and as my field observations corroborate, this attitude is being implemented in practice too. The classical craft people are being 'sifted out', only to be replaced by more 'aggressive', versatile and inventive employees. As the manager Ingrid says:

> To put it very plainly: We need employees who can get us the best copyrights, and this thing about getting the book work done, that can be bought outside the house. […] We need to move in the direction of being fewer people, but with a stronger profile in this area, and then have freelancers - so that when our portfolio goes up and down, then our costs will also increase and decrease - instead of having a large permanent staff.

In other words, Ingrid says that the classical editor who is skilled in the craft of text editing should more or less cease to exist. He should exist only to the extent that he also possesses very strong talents within the field of copyright-hunting. And such hunts require networking, initiative, risk willingness and

independence. So the permanent staff should be small and consist of such versatile, connectionist people. In case the need for editing increases, the craft-focused assignments should be handled by freelancers. This appreciation of the explorative and out-of-the-box talents in employees is very different from the predictability and reliability emphasized in the contractuality discourse. Predictability is celebrated in the latter and considered out-of-date and obsolete in the former.

Despite the strategic visions among many managers, there is still a lot of editing in the daily work of Booker. And when the managers talk about the editing in the explorative theme, it becomes obvious that it is far from the 'follow my instructions' approach mentioned in the hierarchy and instrumentality themes. Below, the manager Roland explains what he appreciates in his employees:

> We have some employees here who are truly fantastic and very competent – and who are very different. I really like that. I mean: they're completely different from me. I think that's a lot of fun, and that it brings a certain dynamic into the editorial office – the fact that people are interested in different things. And they have a strong sense of responsibility, dedication and flair for editing. It's hard to put your finger on it – and yet: It's about making a text work; looking at the connection between text and image. And some people can do it, some can't.

This quote perfectly illustrates the gist of the exploration theme: You cannot put high quality on a formula. You cannot reach the desirable outcome by following instructions. The good editor has 'flair', and this flair is something one cannot pinpoint. Some have it, some do not. The implicit consequence of this 'flair' approach is that those who do not have it simply become obsolete. They become obsolete, because flair cannot be taught. It is an inherent and unique quality – never reducible to instructions.
Another aspect of the quote is the focus on versatility and dynamic: How difference is considered good, and how homogeneity and predictability are thus implicitly considered problematic. Again we see the ever recurring key-word in the authenticity discourse: 'Dedication'. Being dutiful is 'just not good enough', as Lisa said in Chapter 4. We shall see more of this demand for dedication in the self-direction theme below.

When talking to the manager John, he described that member of his staff whom he considered the closest to being an 'ideal' editor:

> She has this slightly unorthodox approach to things, which means that she is able to work creatively. She just needs a bit more experience. [..] She has this extremely creative language which makes her capable of truly understanding the writer's work. She's a fucking great writer herself, which is also important, I think: Having that personal pen.

When John describes his near-perfect employee, he emphasizes the fact that she is unorthodox. She is not a traditional craft person who does things 'the way we usually do it'. On the contrary, she challenges existing (orthodox) ways and is thus able to work 'creatively'. What John appreciates here is that 'contained rebellion' which I have spoken of earlier in the section about the autonomy theme expressed by employees. It is the ability to think beyond authority, guidelines, and tradition with the aim of creating something unique and remarkable. This 'thinking beyond' should however still respect that 'ultimate line' at which rebellion ends and the needs of the organization take over.

John also mentions how this editor, due to her own creativity, is able to 'truly understand' the writer's work. This 'true understanding' is similar to the understanding called for in the reciprocity theme above. It is an understanding which cannot be captured in rules, guidelines or regulations, but requires an 'authentic' identification and empathy. It is a meeting between one existential being and another, not between two 'roles' or 'functions' in a system. Just like the reciprocity theme does not want to reduce the hierarchical relation to an interaction between the functions 'manager' and 'employee', so the exploration theme does not want to reduce the sub-contractor relation to the functions 'editor' and 'writer'. Every meeting and every interaction is unique, whole-hearted and un-learnable. Either you've got it or you don't.

The un-learnable aspect is also emphasized by John's remark that she has a great 'personal pen'. Once again, the inherent flair or talent is highlighted as an essential feature in the good employee. This editor's personal pen is not a result of years of schooling or courses. In fact, John emphasizes her lack of experience. The personal pen is an x-factor which this particular employee is endowed with – and that very x-factor, that very non-experience-based, un-pin-pointable quality is considered decisive in questions about promotion or continuation of contracts, as we have seen above.

A similar focus on 'raw talent' is expressed in the Media context. Below, the manager Jim tells me about his recruitment strategy:

> We try to get them in through the back door in Media, because they aren't all educated journalists. They might just be talents or geniuses or mavericks, or whatever you wanna call them. Getting them into an otherwise very stringent system called 'TV production' and 'radio production', getting them launched and seeing that this is just the kind of people who often end up being very successful in media. They make people think: 'Wow, how great that we have someone like [*mentions avant-garde TV celebrity*]', or: 'How great that we have someone like [*mentions similar celebrity*] who can challenge us'. And [*another very unorthodox TV celebrity*] comes in from the side, after Media has produced news in the same way for many, many years – 50 years! Then he just comes and does it

> his own way. That's really refreshing! That's where you can do something different. And that's where I focus on employees, recruitment and employee development. […] My products aren't just TV programs – especially not since I became a manager. My products are also employees.

Here Jim tells us about the employees who, according to him, end up being very successful in the media business. He refers to them as 'talents', 'geniuses' and 'mavericks' who often lack formal education. As his labels suggest, their appeal consists in certain inherent human qualities which simply transcend the need for education. They are able to 'challenge us' and revolutionize procedures with more than 50 years on their back. Solely due to their unorthodox and original nature, these people make experience more or less redundant. The painstaking exercises and nitty-gritty practice required to become a good craft person are not necessary if you posses the right raw material, so the exploration theme suggests. Given this unique personal constitution, you can achieve high quality through 'explosion' or 'revolution' rather than through extensive perseverance. Once again, the exploration theme emphasizes that valuable contributions cannot be reduced to standards, craft or tradition.

Another interesting aspect of Jim's quote is his remark that employees are his products. A similar remark was made by Rodney at the beginning of this section. In both cases, the point is that managerial focus is on the human potential, precisely as this potential flourishes through individual existential dimensions, rather than through schooled and formalized regulation. So Jim congratulates himself with his ability to spot human potential and allow it entrance into a formalized world without ruining the unspoilt raw material.

To sum up the exploration theme, it concerns the expectations which managers have towards the contribution delivered by their employees. The theme focuses on the value of transgressive, explorative and unique approaches which challenge tradition and standards. It revolves around an idea about irreplaceability where the high quality employee and product are original and could never just be substituted. So while the hierarchy theme and the instrumentality theme focus on reliability, the exploration theme focuses on rebellion (albeit 'contained').

Self-direction

The final theme in the authenticity discourse expressed by managers concerns the *general attitude* which they expect from their employees. While the hierarchy theme focuses on the employees' ability to follow rules, meet standards, accept authority and act predictably, the self-direction theme focuses on employees' ability to be independent, flexible and highly dedicated. In the self-direction theme, those

very rules which are emphasized as vital in the hierarchy theme are seen as constrictive and a sign of 'old-fashioned' mind sets. Managers speaking in the self-direction theme express frustration with employees who insist on clear lines and predictability based on rules, rights and duties. Below, I have just asked the manager Curtis which employees he finds 'difficult' in the organization. He muses:

> Curtis: Well,… what's difficult..? [*pondering*] I find it difficult when people are, like, obstinately stringent. You know, people who can't move. Those where you can't have that which I described in the beginning – that thing I really like: those crises where you move each other's attitudes a little. So they end up actually being able to fit in the box – or we end up being ok with the box bulging a little on one side. If people are unable to do that, then it's very difficult to make it work, because then you have to rebuild the whole world around them in order for them to stay.
> Susanne: So if you were conducting a job interview and you sensed this tendency, it would set off some alarms in you?
> Curtis: Yes! It would!

As we can see, Curtis calls for employees who are willing to 'be moved'. He wants employees who will engage in those 'contact sport' duels described earlier. Above, I used the quote about 'contact sport' as an example of the explicit power dimensions in the hierarchy theme. When Curtis returns to the contact sport quote above, he alters the parameters almost imperceptibly, yet very decisively. Where he spoke about *battle* before, he speaks about '*being willing to move'* now. While the 'battle' was determined by a showdown of strategic force (where both parties subscribed to the 'systemic' and 'functionalist' understanding of the mutual commitment), the 'moving' of people is determined by something else. Here, the dynamic does not leave room for employees who consider their manager's decision completely idiotic. 'Moving' people requires that they end up 'fitting in the box' (even if the box can be permitted a certain amount of bulging). In other words, it requires a final result of *consensus*. Those who are not willing to be moved to this consensus are considered 'obstinately stringent'. Putting it differently: In the power-explicit hierarchy theme, both parties are accorded the right to enforce limits: Managers may enforce their power mandate, and employees may express their disagreement (as long as they obey). But employees may also (as the theme illustrated) insist on rules and standards and on managers adhering to them. In contrast, the dialogue and symmetry oriented authenticity discourse dismantles limits. This means that managers must now strive for consensus, rather than enforce power. However, this in turn robs the employee of the right to express dissatisfaction and insist on rules. Insisting on rules or standards equals being 'obstinately stringent'. The core of the self-direction theme is that the employee should be able to move beyond the 'old-fashioned' understanding of mutual

commitment as based on rules, standards and regulation. They should 'assume responsibility' and move into a mode of 'initiative', 'involvement', 'flexibility' and 'independence' which does not involve a guiding and authoritative manager. Asking for rules and guidance is frowned upon by managers in this theme.

Below, the manager Paul describes two employees who have just joined the department upon leaving another department:

> They are used to being guided even more, while the employees here have a great sense of responsibility about their work and don't ask back and forth a billion times. Not that I mind questions, but I just have these mail correspondences back and forth with those people where I say: 'Fine, you deal with it'. And then it takes like ten mails before they actually do what they should do. So they are just used to a different work process.

When Paul describes the difference between the newcomers and the old staff, he contrasts their need for guidance with the 'great sense of responsibility' entertained by the employees from his department. In other words, asking for guidance is a sign of an inadequate sense of responsibility in the self-direction theme. Implicitly, Paul says that the 'good employee' is able to work independently, coping with the insecurity of responsibility rather than looking for certainty from the authoritative manager. This is in stark contrast to the themes of the contractuality discourse which stressed the importance of employees following instructions and relating to their managers as authorities. He continues:

> Paul: Right now I think that the big frustration is those employees who will not take responsibility for their own assignments; where I have to answer questions which they are perfectly capable of finding the answers to themselves. I mean, like checking some numbers in the data base. I don't have to do that for them! Stuff like that is actually a very big frustration right now, because I feel that I get stuff sent back to me all the time. I delegate an assignment, and then they come putting a paper on my table: 'Here are the numbers.' 'Yes, but we also need some analysis, you can't just give me the numbers'. So I miss more awareness of… [*doesn't finish the sentence*]
> Susanne: Yes. What do you do to change this pattern?
> Paul: [*laughs, half ironically, half despondently*] I give it back. I say: 'No, I probably didn't make myself clear: I need you to analyze this, and then come back when you have gotten as far as you can. And of course, if there's a question along the way, then give it to me. If there's something you're not sure about, which could change the whole direction of this, then fine. But not these little drops all the time.' It drives me insane, because I end up being interrupted 57 times an hour.

Here, just like in the quote above, Paul requests of his employees that they should be able to work independently. They should be able to find relevant numbers in the data base without him helping them, and they should be able to conduct analytical work without asking frequent and detailed questions. Only if their questions concern things which could 'change the whole direction' of the assignment, then they should feel free to come by his door. In other words, Paul expects of his employees that they are able to display independent judgment, rather than just following orders. They should be able to assess what are minor and what are major stakes, and they should be willing to assume individual responsibility for the minor stakes without consulting him. They should show initiative in learning the skills required for their assignments, also when they are new in an apartment and the systems are not familiar to them. In short, they should not presume that the matters of security and authority can simply be delegated to their manager. On the contrary, they should be their own managers, coping with uncertainty, responsibility, assessment and initiative, up until that point where the stakes are so major and the risks so big that a 'higher level' manager *must* be involved. And furthermore, they should be able to correctly assess when this is the case.

The tendency within the self-direction theme to insist on management qualities in employees sometimes goes so far that the manager position and the employee position are referred to as two of a kind, involving precisely the same conditions of responsibility and flexibility. As says the manager Jim:

> We are very self-planned. We are very like: Listen, before the summer holiday you need to get that website going and steer that process. And if it then turns out along the way that you happen to be the only one who knows about some of the old things they used to make a couple of years ago, which have now crashed, and they then come to you and say: Could you just help?, and then you end up using one day here and one day there, and then you get behind schedule – well: You have been given the final responsibility which is: You are self-planned. It just has to be done. I don't care whether you work more or less. It just has to be done. Plan your time; enjoy your working hours and your leisure hours and all that stuff. I mean, precisely like us managers – the same conditions, really.

In Jim's view, the fact that his employees are 'self-planned', meaning working with deadlines, but not with fixed hours, renders them structurally equivalent to managers. Both are granted flexibility and influence on the condition that they assume responsibility for a final result. It is worth keeping in mind, that the issue of being 'self-planned' is highly contested and even associated with exploitation by some employees, as we saw in Chapter 4. Jim's quote is also a good example of subscribing to two discourses at once: It is not entirely clear which issues are open for debate and influence from the employee, and

which issues are dealt with in a strictly hierarchical matter. Are the employees allowed to question the deadline, for instance? Are they allowed to decide the content of the website? Would it be without retribution if they simply told those asking for help to go shove it, because they had a website to finish? In other words: Do they have the rights from the authenticity discourse, or only the obligations? And should they accommodate both contractual and authentic demands simultaneously? Such questions about overlappings and ambiguities will be the theme of the next chapter.

The long quotes below illustrate how managers speaking in the self-direction theme frown upon employees who do not willingly accept the flexibility and responsibility endorsed by the self-direction theme. The manager Richard speaks about 'old-fashioned employees' and recurring conflicts arising out of his interaction with them:

> There are still a few employees left in Media who are from the 'old school'. On a positive note, I experience this as a modern media company where people are flexible, open and more interested in personal development than the fact that seven hours have passed and they want to go home. But there are a few left who focus more on rules about working hours and all sorts of professional subtleties. That bothers me and provokes me – mostly because I find it puzzling, since they're actually the ones who will end up losing to others. And when I try to motivate them to find other ways to move on with their expectations towards themselves and their surroundings, they stubbornly persist.

The self-direction theme is very obvious in this quote. Richard describes the good employees as flexible, open and 'more interested in personal development' than rules. The 'old-school' employee, on the contrary, insists on his right to leave after his daily seven hours. The interesting thing in this quote is how Richard contrasts a focus on rights and rules with an interest in personal development. The contrast suggests that insisting on your right means that you are unimaginative, rigid, and not in possession of that incontestably desirable quality called self-realization drive. The fact that you lack this drive means, so Richard claims, that you will end up 'losing to others'. So he finds it downright puzzling that old-school employees do not out of a sheer cost-benefit perspective switch to the self-developing mode. The rationale behind his assumption rests on an understanding of success and promotion as depending upon the display of flexibility and enthusiasm. In other words, Richard puts the weight of power behind his focus on authenticity. Be authentically engaged or be extinct, is the message. Nevertheless, he still speaks of flexibility as freedom. Consider his quote below. He is reflecting on self-planning and flexibility. As already mentioned, being self-planned means that you work with deadlines rather than fixed hours. In Richard's department, they work with three months

cycles, meaning that every three months they calculate the number of extra hours each employee has worked and then allow them to take the relevant amount of compensational time off:

> Richard: We are self-planned, which I think is really good, because it suits modern knowledge-oriented people. We used to have three months cycles, and we still do, formally speaking. But in some places we experiment with softening it up to six months, for example. The great majority of the employees think it fine, because it fits better with the production process. While you research and shoot, you may have days which are longer, without getting inconvenience pay. You just think: 'Now we're at it, and this is fine'. And vice versa, in the end of a long working period you may have three weeks of compensational time off on top of your normal holiday. Many think that this is good and fine. But a few say that we shouldn't change the three month cycle. But I just think that it's their own loss, because that just means that they have less organic production processes.
> Susanne: What do you think might be the reason that they insist?
> Richard: Well, I guess it's some misguided way of holding on to an old-fashioned manner of handling your life and your structure. And it's not as if we don't have rules about work. We have all kinds of rules and labor agreements. It's just a matter of those areas where the parties agree to create as much flexibility as possible to the benefit of both. Then it puzzles me that one party doesn't use that possibility but sees it as the employer exploiting them. Because that is far from the case, I think.
> Susanne: So you don't think that their reaction might be due to a sense of pressure – that they're afraid it'll be too much for them?
> Richard: No, because it's only 5% of the employees. Those employees are not under more pressure than all the others, who are in fact able to find a very positive way to have a better life by having more freedom. I mean: they don't have to call me, if they need to go to the dentist at 9.30 am. They can just do it. That is a great freedom to give to people, and it is also a great freedom to have. And it is really fundamentally important for mutual trust.

Letting go of rules equals freedom, in Richard's view. Not letting go of rules equals a 'misguided' way of handling your life. He admits that certain rules are relevant, and he emphasizes that they exist in abundance in Media. He just wants to abolish rules in those contexts where their abolishment is to the mutual benefit of both parties. Interestingly, he believes the six months cycle to be mutually beneficial despite the fact that 5% of his employees object strongly to them. It remains unclear what he understands by mutually beneficial, except that it has to do with 'freedom'. Freedom is an ungainsayable attraction in the self-direction theme, which makes it downright incomprehensible for

Richard when employees refuse it. But it is not only considered an attraction, it is also considered a compulsory 'ability' if you wish to advance in the organization. So freedom and the willingness and desire to have it turn into a competence. It is a personal asset, not a social or practical condition. It is something you do, and when you do it well, you become an attractive employee. When Richard describes how you do freedom well, he speaks of the ability to think and work 'organically', rather than on the basis of regulations. Once again we see how the themes of the authenticity discourse underscore the importance of transgressing limits. Working organically means dissolving clear lines and standardized procedures in order to 'go with the flow' and let an explorative rhythm guide the intensity and amount of work. Rather than invoking 'fair' and 'just' scales for the individual contribution, Richard invokes the notion of a 'natural' intensity for various aspects of work. Some phases 'call for' extra hours, others 'permit' less intensity. How one determines precisely how many extra hours a certain phase calls for remains unspoken. It becomes a matter of personal judgment from the competently freedom-practicing employee. And furthermore, it becomes a matter of *trust*. So in a context of freedom, one's approach to work is organic rather than regulated, and one's approach to the manager is trust-based rather than rule-based, so Richard suggests. It follows that insisting on rules means that you do not trust your manager, that you do not master organic work, and that you are not mature enough for freedom.

Summing up the self-direction theme, it promotes qualities such as initiative, personal judgment, independence and flexibility. It calls for employees who have a managerial approach to their assignments in the sense that they assume responsibility for an end product and do not ask an authority to relieve them of the pressure of uncertainty by asking for frequent instructions. They should also have the managerial ability to assess priorities rather than just expect to be guided through such choices by simply following orders. The self-direction theme scorns limits in the sense that it considers rules and regulation a sign of being old-school, while the organic, explorative and intuitive mode of work is the future. In other words, approaches which cannot be standardized.

Above, we have seen that the managers' authenticity discourse is divided into three themes: The reciprocity theme focuses on the nature of the manager-employee relation and promotes a dialogic and mutually validating dynamic. The exploration theme focuses on the nature of the contribution delivered by the employees. It promotes a non-standardized, un-orthodox, often self-taught type of work. Finally, the self-direction theme focuses on the nature of the employees' attitude towards work. As we have seen above, it promotes independence, flexibility and responsibility. The quote below is a wonderful

illustration of all three themes in the authenticity discourse. The manager John describes two of his best editors and tries to explain why in the end he prefers one over the other:

> Luke is also fucking competent, but he's more like a classical editor, because everything you tell him to do, he does right. He's good at everything in writing. He's creative with his language, in the sense that it works great with everything he does, whether it's back cover texts or catalogue texts or whatever he might be writing. And he has a good sense of what needs to be done and when he can't do it alone and therefore has to ask me, for example, for help or support. He's a fucking good editor. But he lacks that *extroversion*. He goes to work, and then he goes home. So that social dimension… He's a good editor. If you tell him: Listen, we need to get this and this book done before spring, and it should be in this and this way, then he does it. But he's not the one who comes to me suggesting: 'Hey, let's speed this up, I'll make sure to get some good authors'. […] He doesn't challenge me. I'm the one who has to say to him: 'Now you should do this and that'. And then he's fucking great at it, and you think: 'Damn good going!' But he doesn't take any initiatives on his own.
>
> Camilla, on the other hand, takes all sorts of weird initiatives where some of them are like… Where you go: 'Come on, Camilla, that's too far out'. But I mean, it's just so funny, so you just get so much fun out of it. And maybe every tenth time you go: 'Wow, that's just too fucking cool!' And also, Camilla just likes to be in that social interaction where you develop each other. You know: Entering into that communication and dialogue which make you develop each other. I mean, I also need to feel that somebody develops me. And none of the other editors do. They don't challenge me. Camilla does, because she's so weird *[laughs appreciatively]*.

John speaks in the reciprocity theme by underscoring his need to be challenged and developed by his employees. The relation has an existential backdrop and should be personally rewarding both ways.
He speaks in the exploration theme by underscoring his appreciation of un-orthodox contributions. And finally, he speaks in the self-direction theme by praising Camilla's ability to take initiatives rather than just waiting to be guided by her manager. In this sense, Camilla is the quintessential 'authentic' and modern employee, and as we shall see in the next chapter this does not only offer a number of opportunities for her, it also involves a great deal of vulnerability.

In the following chapter, I will show how the co-existence of the two contrasting discourses, and the absence of a meta-discourse which addresses the contrasts, affects the interaction between managers and employees and their attempts to establish reliable mutual commitment. See the next page for a complete overview of the discourses and themes described in Chapter 5 and 6.

OVERVIEW OF DISCOURSES AND THEMES IN CHAPTERS 5-6:

Discourses about interaction	Themes expressed by managers	Key words	Themes expressed by employees	Key words
Contractuality	Hierarchy *(focuses on the nature of the manager-employee relation)*	'Power game', impersonal, systemic, hierarchical, asymmetrical, instrumental, predictable, rule-based, dictated by 'external necessities'	Hierarchy *(focuses on the manager's position in the organization)*	Clarity, division of labor, transparency, unambiguity, accountability, protection of production (splits into two contradictory expectations: 'strategic politician' knowing 'the game' and 'practitioner of substance' knowing the details of shop-floor)
	Utility *(focuses on the nature of the employees' contribution)*	Product rather than relationship, focus on external goals, 'larger picture', needs of the organization, 'realistic expectations'	Authority *(focuses on the nature of the manager-employee relationship)*	Parental figure, protection, drawing boundaries, role model, giving guidance and instructions, intervening, monitoring
			Justice *(focuses on the manager's attitude and values)*	Fairness, impartiality, same conditions for same positions, not favoritism, not personal agendas, consistency, synchronizing rhetoric and practice
Authenticity	Reciprocity *(focuses on the nature of the manager-employee relationship)*	Coaching, dialogue, care, mutuality, validation, existential relation, meaning, loyalty, authentic relation not to be instrumentalized	Sincerity *(focuses on the nature of the manager-employee relationship)*	No instrumentalization, relationship is an end in itself, not a means to an end; the individual and the relation come before product or strategy, no manipulation, no power game, trust
	Exploration *(focuses on the nature of the employees' contribution)*	Not 'old-fashioned', non-standardized, innovation, creativity, 'flair', human potential, raw talent, initiative, out-of-the-box	Validation *(focuses on the 'management style')*	Good quality determined in authentic mirroring by manager, recognition, frequent feedback, close contact, detailed interest from manager, 'present' managers
	Self-direction *(focuses on the employee's attitude and values)*	Involvement, dedication, independence, development, flexibility	Autonomy *(focuses on the manager's attitude and values)*	Celebrates rebellion, authentic truth-seeking, independence, criticism, inherent value – not instrumental value

CHAPTER 7
Coping with contradictions - tensions, double binds and hybrids

So far, I have argued for and carefully described two contrasting discourses in creative knowledge work, which I named contractuality and authenticity respectively. Based on that analysis, the point of this final chapter is twofold. First, I wish to continue my commitment to empirical details by showing the variety of manager-employee dynamics which the co-existence of these two discourses can give rise to. Put differently, I will describe the discursive relation between contractuality and authenticity as it is played out when managers and employees attempt to align expectations and establish commitment with each other. This is meant as a correction to the line of literature suggesting that we are in a new 'epoch' of post-bureaucracy or a new period of individualized, even narcissistic, modernity (cf. Chapter 1). I will show that there is no such sharp division between periods, and I will illustrate how new trends of self-realization and individualization co-exist with older trends of hierarchy and authority. Second, based on this empirical thoroughness I wish to nuance some of the critical writings against the alleged pathological and exploitative effects of corporate culture and the societal and managerial focus on authenticity (again, cf. Chapter 1). Following the credo of late Foucault, I will argue that (and not least *show how*) power and freedom are two sides of the same coin. This means that the very same trends of authenticity can serve as organizational tools for exploitation in some situations and as personal tools for empowerment in others. The same thing goes for contractuality. In fact, I will argue even further, namely that the same situation can have both exploitative and empowering effects for a given person *simultaneously*. In other words, I will show how social technologies are at the same time ethical care for the self and how this simultaneity of power and freedom makes for highly complex dynamics of power, vulnerability and dependence between managers and employees, and between organizations and their associated agents.

Translating the Foucauldian approach into more hands-on analysis, one could say that I will look for the gains and costs associated with the simultaneity of contractuality and authenticity. One of my points in this analysis is that the simultaneity renders *commitment* highly precarious, just like Sennett et al. claim. In this context, I understand commitment as the act of binding oneself, intellectually and emotionally, to a course of action in the future which involves being reliable and consistent towards another party. The reliability and consistency is based on a certain understanding of the distribution of rights and obligations. In other words, commitment serves the purpose of defining a common framework which ensures mutual reliability in the face of adversity as well as rewards. As already mentioned, all my

participants subscribe to *both* discourses at once. Since there is no overarching discourse capable of addressing the existence of two contrasting discourses, it is not institutionalized or possible to verbalize which discourse is in play for the given actors when they attempt to align expectations with one another. This gives rise to an amazing spectrum of negotiations, misunderstandings, tensions, promises, disappointments and fantasies as organizational actors attempt to establish forms of commitment with each other. The rest of this chapter will present a number of these interactions. I argue that the co-existence of two discourses gives rise to opportunism from both managers and employees, just like it engenders both moderate compromises and high-intensive commitments. In other words, the ambiguities render commitment tentative, complex and in eternal need for revisions. However, contrary to Sennett (1998), who sees this development as exclusively pathological, I will argue that these circumstances for commitment can be both 'corrosive' and a cause for respect, compromise and meaningfulness.

I have given the interaction forms different names. The names are inspired by three thinkers, namely Ernesto Laclau, Gregory Bateson and Günther Teubner, who all have in common a focus on communication and interaction. Laclau is a discourse theorist, and the two latter are system theorists. Rather than rigidly applying their models, I have selected a number of their analytical concepts and supplemented them with other concepts from common usage which I believe capture important dynamics in my material. I name six interaction forms: antagonism, tension, oscillation, gradation, double bind, and hybrid. In fact, these forms can be divided into three groups: The first two describe situations where manager and employee subscribe to contrasting discourses. The next two describe managers or employees shifting between discourses in different situations, often without making explicit the parameters for these shifts. And finally, the last two describe situations in which managers or employees subscribe to both discourses at the same time, giving rise to two very different dynamics – one conflictual, the other highly involved. In other words, the two middle interactions involve a time perspective, while the other four concern interactions in specific situations. I am aware that this typology is a little awkward, but I found these distinctions necessary in order to capture the recurring forms of misunderstanding and conflict in my material. Once again, this study works its way from empirical observations to analytical categories, more than the other way around. What it lacks in analytical elegance, it gains in empirical dedication. This has been the explicit agenda all along, as mentioned in the introduction.

On a final note, it is important to stress that it is not the intention to conflate discourses and actors. When I mention examples of people who subscribe to the contractuality discourse, I do not claim that they are 'contractual persons'. At other times, the same people subscribed to the authenticity discourse,

and vice versa. Although some people emphasized one discourse more than the other, everybody subscribed to both discourses and skated in and out of them according to the situation.

INTERACTION FORMS

Antagonism

During my fieldwork, I witnessed situations which involved very conflictual interaction between manager and employee. Sometimes these interactions were so antagonistic that they practically ruled out constructive communication. When an interaction between manager and employee took the form of antagonism, it involved that the two parties approached the same situation with mutually exclusive expectations. In Laclau's definition, antagonism means that the two discourses are fundamentally irreconcilable. They are not just expressions of different emphasis on the same continuum, which could reach a compromise through moderation. On the contrary, the one discourse can only exist by virtue of radically ruling out the other (Laclau, 2006: 104)[17]. Antagonistic interactions in my material involved that one party subscribed to a staunch version of the contractuality discourse, and that the other party subscribed to a staunch version of the authenticity discourse. Due to the absence of meta-language, neither of them had the possibility to 'step outside' the antagonism and gaze at it from an external standpoint which might mediate the situation. During interviews, the participants usually referred to these antagonistic episodes in a puzzled and frustrated manner, seeming at a loss to understand the motives and resistance of the counterpart.

One such case was the conflict between Christy and her manager Melanie described in Chapter 5. Briefly recapitulating, Christy told me that after a colleague left, his assignments suddenly landed on her table. This happened without Melanie ever approaching Christy and explicitly requesting of her that she take them over. It was simply presumed that she would do it, Christy said. Due to this absence of formal procedures, and due to the fact that the assignments were new and not 'really' hers, Christy was reluctant to put great effort into them. She expected of her manager that she should offer instructions and guidelines, and that the whole process should be explicit and transparent. Although Christy

[17] In an interview, Laclau makes the following example to illustrate an antagonism: "Take the Sicilian case. A landowner is trying to expel a peasant from the land and the peasant is resisting. The basic argument is that in this type of confrontation you do not have an objective relation between the two poles. The two poles are not the expression of a deeper process that could embrace both; the clash is irretrievable from the point of view of objectivity. You can think of many antagonisms that can be seen in exactly this way. Now, there are forms of relation between adversarial forces in which the space of representation operates as something deeper than the antagonism between the two opposite forces. But there are other situations in which antagonism prevails over a reform of objective representation. […]From the point of view of the landowner, the discourse of the peasant is completely irrational; from the point of view of the peasant the discourse of the landowner is equally irrational. So, there is no common measure between the two discourses. So, the moment of the clash is constitutive in a transcendental sense." (Avgitidou & Koukou, 2008: 90)

believed herself capable of solving the tasks without instructions, it would involve a lot of extra work which she was not willing to put in when the procedures had not been followed. In this situation, Christy obviously subscribed to the contractuality discourse. She wanted limits by way of instructions, rules and transparency, and she considered Melanie's attitude as an infringement on these rights.

Melanie, by contrast, felt that Christy was "unwilling to assume responsibility" for assignments which had been given to her. She expressed a great deal of frustration over Christy's lack of independent thinking and initiative, and she felt that every time she asked for an analytical contribution, Christy merely gave her facts, stats and tables: As Melanie commented with great frustration: "I need more insight from her..." In other words, Melanie subscribed to the authenticity discourse in this situation and expected of Christy that she should take initiative, work independently, and engage with the assignments as far as possible before approaching Melanie again. "I don't want 57 interruptions every hour", she complained, emphasizing that a responsible employee would only ask questions when she had done as much as she possibly could on her own. Both Christy and Melanie interpreted the counterpart's attitude as a lack of respect. Neither of them had access to a meta-language which could help them address their mutually exclusive understandings of the interaction. The situation between Melanie and Christy was exacerbated by several factors: They had only recently started working together due to the fusion of two companies, and they came from two different 'working cultures'. The work procedures of the newly formed department were as yet relatively unclear, and last but not least, the work load was very high. Both Christy and Melanie spoke of highly stressful working days with piles growing rapidly and the room for satisfactory task solution diminishing by the day. Altogether, these factors contributed to an antagonistic atmosphere where both parties retreated into staunch positions, each insisting on their rights (defined in two different discourses, as it happens), rather than looking for compromises. The fact that there were two simultaneous, yet undifferentiated, understandings of rights also precluded stress management based on both parties adhering strictly to a common 'contract' of rights and obligations. In other words, the situation was stressful, and there was an absence of complexity reducing tools for the interaction.

Tension

There were other conflictual interactions between manager and employee which were more moderate and thus open to compromise. I refer to these interactions as being tense, rather than antagonistic. While antagonism practically shut down constructive communication, *tension* [18] still allowed for

[18] The term 'tense' is mine. Laclau does not operate with this concept.

negotiation and mutual adjustment, despite the existence of considerable frustration. In Laclau's terminology, two such discourses would not depend on the exclusion of one another. In a certain, moderate version, both discourses would be able to co-exist. Tense interaction occurred when manager and employee attempted to handle the same event with slightly different emphasis on contractuality and authenticity. They differed in focus but were not as such 'incomprehensible' for the counterpart.

An example of a tense interaction was between the manager Rodney and his employee. We hear about this interaction in Chapter 6: Rodney was very pleased with Sonya and was grooming her to a managing position. However, he found it frustrating that Sonya insisted on doing everything herself and that she considered it an insult when he controlled her work instead of trusting her to do it. Rodney saw Sonya's approach as a symptom of the young generation's attitude where everyone feels entitled to managerial work before they have even learned the craft. As mentioned earlier, Rodney subscribed to the contractuality discourse in this situation and wanted an interaction with Sonya within the framework of clear limits, standards, predictability and authority.

Sonya was as pleased with Rodney as he with her. They enjoyed working together and had the same love of editing and of finding the best illustrations for books. However, Sonya's interpretation of their tensions was quite different from his. She regarded Rodney's interferences as 'old-fashioned' management and referred to him as a 'control freak' and a 'bottle neck'. According to her, Rodney's approach was a hindrance to efficient and high-quality work, because he failed to delegate and insisted on being involved in every possible detail of department assignments. "Micro-management", she scoffed, when we talked about it. In Sonya's mind, mistakes came with the territory, if you wished to do creative and efficient publishing work. Trying to prevent all mistakes, putting everything on a formula and steering your employees in an old-fashioned hierarchical manner was just out of tune with present day publishing business, she felt. In other words, Sonya subscribed to the authenticity discourse which focuses on individual initiative, personal assessments, autonomy and risk-readiness.

Contrary to the antagonistic situations described above, Rodney and Sonya were able to find common ground. First of all, they knew that they differed in temper and values, so their frustration could be dealt with in the open. Furthermore, it was explicit between them that Sonya had been 'chosen' for something bigger, which offered them the protection of a benign and positive framework for the relationship. Also, they shared their enthusiasm about the craft of editing which allowed them to find a common external point rather than being stuck in the interaction differences. In other words, because the discursive contradictions could be subsumed under a common agenda about the 'good product', their interaction took the form of negotiable tensions rather than unflinching antagonism. On a 'good day', Rodney and Sonya's tensions would let them complement each other and bring the best

of both worlds into their product and their logistical decisions. On a 'bad day', their tensions would slow the process, detract from the quality of the product, and wear them both out.

Oscillation

While antagonism and tension described interactions in one specific situation, there were also sources of frustration and misunderstanding which had to do with how the parties' expectations *changed from one situation to another*. One such process of interaction I called 'oscillation'. Oscillation occurred when one party expected of the other party that he should handle a specific type of events 'contractually' in some situations and 'authentically' in other situations – often without specifying the parameters for shifts.

An example of oscillation was a process between top-manager Curtis and his employee, the middle-manager Rodney. During a top-management meeting, Curtis explained to his fellow top-managers how frustrated he was by a certain incident with Rodney. A few weeks ago, Curtis had asked of all middle-managers that they write a strategy plan for the coming year. He had emphasized that there was a fixed deadline for this plan and that much depended on its timely delivery. Meanwhile, Curtis was very concerned with the task of 'catching' new authors and writing contracts with them. The publishing house depended on having promising authors on contract, and this issue ranged above all else, Curtis agreed with his fellow top-managers at the meeting. Consequently, he had been very annoyed when he found out that Rodney had lacked the initiative to hunt down a group of 'free authors' as the opportunity arose. When confronted with this annoyance, Rodney had countered that given the strict deadline for the strategy plan, he had not had the time for such a hunt. Curtis literally sputtered with frustration as he recounted this at the top-management meeting: "What the hell kind of a priority is that!? Of course he can have a two week postponement of his strategy plan so he can catch the writers!!"

In this situation, Curtis sent double messages to his employee. On the one hand, he told Rodney that strategic choices were a matter to be run by top-management and that they should happen within a hierarchical framework where clear limits reigned, in the form of deadlines and orders. On the other hand, he was angry that Rodney did not challenge this hierarchical framework and question the relevance of the strategy deadline based on an independent assessment that hunting writers mattered more. So in one situation, Curtis wanted strategy handled contractually, and in another situation he wanted it handled authentically. In Curtis' opinion, it was obvious why the two situations differed from one another: One was a matter which could bear postponement; the other was a matter which could not. But from Rodney's perspective both situations involved strategic actions, and Curtis had not

clarified when strategy was a contractual matter in the sense of following orders, and when it was an authentic matter in the sense of being independent.

Gradation

There was another form of interaction which involved changing expectations from one situation to the next. It sometimes resulted in conflict and other times in a certain degree of stability between manager and employee. I called this interaction *gradation*. While oscillation involved implicit shifts between instrumentality and authenticity, *gradation* involved the implicit expectation that the counterpart mastered both, yet recognized one of them as dominant.

During a management meeting, the top-manager Ingrid mentioned her disapproval of how the middle-manager Janette was handling her responsibilities. For a while, top-management had put some effort into signaling that middle-managers were given more individual autonomy. These signals had led Janette to believe that she was free to change some of the standard formats for products, Ingrid complained. As it happened, top-management by no means considered the formats as part of the newly expanded middle-manager autonomy. But according to middle-manager Janette, a different version of the formats would be able to signal the kind of renewal and spark which she had been hired to achieve. According to top-manager Ingrid, a change of formats equaled an untimely intervention in well-established procedures which it had taken considerable time and money to develop. In this case, both Ingrid and Janette skated through the contrasting frameworks of contractuality and authenticity, and neither found a way to align these expectations with one another. Ingrid did indeed expect authenticity from Janette and obviously placed great emphasis on that when she employed her. However, she only wished authenticity up to a certain point, and from then on contractuality should take over in the name of logistics, profit, and coordinating pragmatics. Janette had interpreted Ingrid's message as a confirmation that she was not just obliged to, but also *entitled* to be creative and independent. She did not understand, or did not accept the message that there was a specific roof for this independence. Despite her irritation, Ingrid was willing to assume a certain amount of responsibility for this confusion: "We aren't specific enough about what this increased autonomy means. We are too far removed from shop floor", she admitted.

A number of similar misunderstandings and conflicts took place between Ingrid and Janette. In general, Ingrid's reading of Janette was that she had great creative and innovative momentum, but that she thought too highly of herself to commit to the boring, time-consuming and limiting realities of administration and logistics. Janette's reading of Ingrid was that she had many strategic skills, but practiced an incompetent and controlling micro-management of her middle-managers based on fear of

failure and lack of insight into shop floor realities. The conflicts between these two women tended to play out with Ingrid leaning on the contractuality discourse and Janette leaning on the authenticity discourse. Both were willing to make concessions and appreciate the values and skills associated with the other discourse, but at the end of the day, the core conflict was rooted in the fact that they subscribed to different gradation principles. For Ingrid, contractuality had the final word, for Janette, authenticity did.

In cases where the interaction was guided by one or both parties subscribing to a gradation principle, there could be different outcomes and processes. Sometimes the process was hostile and the results dramatic, such as forceful management vetoes or bitter employee resignations. Such cases often occurred when the circumstances were acute, e.g. during times of large cut-downs or impending threats to major assignments. During an extended struggle to keep a specific product and department alive, the manager Carrie landed in a fierce conflict with the product-responsible employees. After what she described as a lengthy attempt to find a form which met the demands of the commissioner, while also allowing room for the employees' creative ambitions, Carrie gave up the dialogue and resorted to purely contractual principles:

> In the end I just thought: These people aren't even important in my universe. Now it's just about making this department survive. In the end, I didn't care about them and who they were at all. […] So the task actually changed from being relational to being strategic. […] And then it became easier.

In other words, this interaction started as a gradation issue where Carrie leaned on both discourses, albeit in a gradated manner. As the conflict escalated, Carrie ended up reducing complexity by turning it into a pure antagonism and using her power mandate to overrule the 'authentic' demands made by her employees. The conflict reverberated strongly through the group and department and gave rise to very intense feelings and turmoil. One of the core employees resigned in anger and others harbored bitter stories of deceit and betrayal. Both parties referred to the counterpart in very graphic psychological language, using diagnostic labels to make sense of their behavior. They spoke of 'sickness' and 'paranoia', of attitudes which were 'unwholesome', 'pathetic' or 'disturbed'. And both parties considered the counterpart to have abused power and betrayed trust. While the employees considered Carrie's intervention to be ruthless and cynical, Carrie considered the group's attitude to be self-absorbed and indifferent towards the department and its survival.

At other times, the gradation interaction ended up representing a welcome reduction in complexity for both parties. Wendy described how one of her employees received a formal warning, because he

was counterproductive and in constant opposition to management interventions. He often complained that the formalized work procedures quenched every bit of creativity and artistic spark in his work. After the warning, Wendy formalized a mandatory work process with him which involved deadlines, lists of titles in the making, and descriptions of background and motivation for titles. She told me this story with a big smile on her face: "I think he loves it!" Wendy described how just today she had received two emails from him, each containing eager questions as to how one might best meet the requirements of the work process. "You would never get him to admit it, but I think that this man has never felt more peace of mind", Wendy told me. "It's against his values, because he feels sort of 'artistic' about the whole thing. But I think that this warning is the best thing which has ever happened to him", she concluded.

Double bind

The two last forms of interaction which I will describe involved that one or both parties subscribed to *both discourses at the same time, in the same situation*. While the first version produced an inability to compromise or make sense of each other, the second version opened up for a potential transcending of the paradox between the discourses. The first I have called double bind, the second I have called hybrid. In both these forms of interactions, issues of consistency, opportunism and exploitation become relevant.

My use of *double bind* is inspired by Gregory Bateson's original formulation of the term. According to Bateson, a double bind involves a relationship of dependence, in which one part communicates mutually exclusive demands towards the counterpart, both demands combined with threats of punishment or sanctions. The counterpart has no possibility to exit the situation or to apply a 'meta-language' which points out the paradoxical communication (Bateson, 1972: 207). A psychologist mentions the following example of a double bind communication from his work with marital therapy: The wife says to her husband: "I'll kill you if you stay" (i.e.: do not stay). After this she continues: "I am used to people leaving me" (i.e. do not abandon me). She concludes by saying: "That's right. It is so typical of you to piss off and leave me. No guts to face your problems. I'm prepared to stick with this" (i.e.: do not leave the situation). In popular language, we refer to double bind situations as 'damned if you do, damned if you don't'. The gist is that you can neither satisfy the requirements, nor point that fact out, nor leave the situation.

In my data material, there were cases of double bind practiced by both managers and employees. The relationship of dependence did not just go one way: In an era of flexicurity, skilled knowledge work employees can choose to 'dump' their employers in favor of more forthcoming ones, just like

employers can 'dump' their employees in favor of more amenable or hardworking ones. For both parties, a rupture undertaken by the counterpart involves an immediate loss or disadvantage – either in the form of (subsidized and temporary) unemployment or in the form of lost investment in training and lost access to a specific employee expertise. While managers have structural means to enforce their double binds, employees have logistical means, in the sense that unhappy or resigning employees may lead to loss of commissions (if they depend on the skills or man hours of that particular employee), loss of networks (if important contacts have been 'nursed' by a specific employee), and loss of clients (if some of the key clients are loyal to the employee rather than to the company).

Looking at double binds from the perspective of commitment, one could say that they represent a situation in which one party demands the rights from both discourses, yet simultaneously neglects the obligations from both discourses. When *employees* practiced double binds, they usually wanted the right to be highly creative and self-directing, while simultaneously wanting the right to be protected, guided and given clear criteria for success. Put differently, they felt entitled to transgress limits while being protected by limits at the same time. Their double message to the manager was: 'If you draw limits, you offend me. If you do not draw limits, you fail me'.

Nathan was a very ambitious journalist determined to make a difference through his work. He wanted to take part in setting the agenda in Denmark, as he put it. When I talked to him about managers, he expressed a great deal of frustration and told me how this had led him to resign several jobs in the past years. It seemed that Nathan felt the victim of a general lack of understanding and appreciation from his current and previous managers. However, tracing his frustration, it became obvious that it was based on mutually exclusive expectations. On the one hand, he was dissatisfied with the lack of clear guidelines for the program he worked on at the time. "It's a big mess!", he complained. "Where do they wanna go with this program?!" On the other hand, when I asked him, who should set the guidelines, his instinctual answer was: "Preferably me!" A few minutes later he underscored that he would like the top-manager (not the middle-manager, nor the project manager) to set the guidelines and provide detailed, frequent feedback to Nathan on how he assessed his execution of those guidelines. Continuing our talk about managers, Nathan emphasized how annoyed he was with his current project manager (i.e. the person in charge of editing decisions on a daily basis). According to Nathan, the project manager simply did not match him when it came to talent and skill in journalism. The project manager had some likeable personal traits, Nathan admitted, but professionally speaking he was not equipped to set guidelines for an ambitious person like Nathan:

> If my manager isn't more talented or skilled than me, then… well, of course he loses face. But somehow, he just has to give me room to do my thing. And then he should just be happy that he has hired someone better than himself.

Considering the frustrations expressed by Nathan, it is difficult, if not impossible, for a manager to meet his expectations. On the one hand, Nathan is frustrated by the absence of clear guidelines from an authority – and the concomitant frequent feedback cum validation and corrections. On the other hand, Nathan prefers to be the one who sets the terms himself. And furthermore, he considers his own skills to be of a nature which invites to fairly unlimited influence, or to 'doing his thing' without management interference. Putting it in the language of discourses, Nathan wants the right to influence, 'free play' and far-reaching ambitions while at the same time being protected by the clear guidelines, detailed feedback and protective framework delivered by an authority. In other words, he wants the rights from the authenticity discourse and the rights from the contractuality discourse *at the same time*. Looking at Nathan's career trajectory and his career narrative, there is a pattern of initial high expectations followed by great disappointment and feelings of betrayal or humiliation, upon which he decides to leave and find another job. Many of the highly ambitious (and highly successful) employees followed a pattern similar to Nathan's.

When *managers* practiced double binds, they usually wanted the right to expect highly unique, creative and self-managed projects from their employees, while also wanting the right to standardize, routinize and micro-control at the same time. In other words, they assessed and rewarded their employees based on their ability and willingness to transgress limits, yet they simultaneously measured and punished them based on their failure to adhere to these limits. They sent the double message to their employee that: 'If you just adhere to limits, you are not interesting and committed enough for us. If you do not adhere to limits, you are not reliable enough for us.'

In Booker, one such case concerned top-management's approach to editing (which I mentioned briefly in Chapter 4). On the one hand, editing as a craft was considered increasingly peripheral, and editors should rather spend their time networking, catching authors or developing innovative ideas for new 'concept books'. A large degree of the editing was sent outside the house to freelance editors, based on the assumption that the permanent staff had more important assignments. Qualitatively speaking, editing was becoming 'invisible' in the sense that there was no measuring system capable of distinguishing between the kinds of editing required in different books. The measuring systems to which employees and middle-managers were accountable operated on a premise that the fewer editing hours, the better. If one translated book had cost eight editing hours, and another literary novel had

cost 100, then the latter appeared as a less successful accomplishment. But as middle-manager Christian pointed out: One might just require a quick proof reading while the other involved nitty-gritty language issues and plot challenges. This cost-effective approach to editing was reinforced, according to Christian, by the fact that top-management consisted of an increasing number of people from other educational backgrounds than the humanities. To them, editing was simply an expense which should be minimized. On the other hand, there was a simultaneous tendency to expect from the in-house editors that they ensured extreme accuracy, reliability and flawlessness in the editing work – even if they technically did not have the time to do the work themselves, nor go over the work performed by the freelancer. This focus on accuracy stemmed from increased public interest and from a number of cases where Danish publishing companies had been accused of severe plagiarism. So on the one hand, the craft of editing was considered inferior or peripheral and accorded less time in each book project. Editors were rewarded if they managed to minimize their editing hours, and often the publishing plans put editors under so much pressure that they simply did not have the time to even open the books whose freelance editing they were supposed to check. On the other hand, editors were held responsible for mistakes and omissions and were expected to ensure top quality accuracy and reliability in the editing. This was a case of management double bind where employees were punished if they did not prioritize authenticity (in the form of innovation, publicity etc.), but also punished if they did not prioritize contractuality (in the form of accuracy, reliability etc.). Both demands were sufficiently radical in their form to be mutually exclusive in many cases.

Hybrids

While the double bind interaction paralyzed and potentially broke down the counterpart, the hybrid[19] interaction was capable of handling two simultaneous, yet mutually exclusive, sets of expectations in a manner which strengthened and supported both discourses at the same time. Basically, this interaction depended on the emergence of a 'higher level' form of commitment which at once consolidated and transcended the two contrasting discourses. This became possible through a focus on *future possibilities* rather than present realities. In other words, the hybrid form was a 'projective' interaction which coped

[19] My use of the term 'hybrid' is inspired by systems theorist, Günther Teubner (1993; 1996). Teubner developed his version of the term out of an interest in an emerging economic phenomenon which transcends the classical distinction between contract and competition. Usually, these two are considered mutually exclusive: contract invites to cooperation and inclusion, competition invites to antagonism and exclusion. However, new forms of networks are emerging which seemingly compete and cooperate with each other at the same time. Teubner's argument is that these networks emerge as a response to the inherent vulnerabilities in both contract and competition when they stand alone. For a parallel to the argument about future possibilities, see Åkerstrøm (2006) who expands on Teubner's hybrid model.

with inconsistencies and dissatisfaction through a fantasy about the future. This fantasized future would, according to the actors in the projective dynamic, deliver satisfaction and erase current dissonances. By introducing a fantasmatic future - a kind of virtual level - both parties increased their tolerance for frustration and inconsistencies in the present. They also increased their willingness to risk and involvement, supported by a logic which promised that the greater the investment now, the greater the rewards in the future (cf. Chapter 2, section on 'fantasmatic logic'). As already mentioned in Chapter 2, the future scenario of the fantasmatic logic is so idealized that it can never be achieved. Its primary effect is to engender high involvement and tolerance for anxieties and ambiguities. The fantasy can survive many blows, because it is furnished with a narrative about 'obstacles' and 'threats' which serve as an explanation for why the ideal state has not yet been achieved.

One such case of fantasmatic logic involved Camilla, a young employee who had recently been hired for a demanding and self-directed position. She described the feeling of going from being a 'nobody' or just 'a student' to getting 'inside' and finding an identity. That first day of her new job, she biked home and thought: 'Now I'm somebody'. She was very pleased that her job involved working with the literature she considered closest to her heart. Furthermore, she found herself working with projects intimately connected to her own life, such as editing for a young writer from her own neighborhood who had similar interests to hers. Camilla did not work out of career concerns, she assured me, but out of a wish to 'feel good'. She would rather live on oat meal any day than hold a job which was not meaningful. The purpose of working, she stressed, was self-actualization. She wanted to 'use' herself and her talents, to spend her day engaged in something she 'felt for' and could 'identify with'. Consequently, she considered it very validating that her manager 'threw her in at the deep end' and handed her a great amount of responsibility despite her limited or non-existent experience. Without any period of training she received numerous demanding assignments and was brought along for many prestigious events. The fact that her manager invested her with this amount of trust made Camilla feel very privileged. She believed that he saw her as having a special talent. At the same time, she admitted that he had never told her what her job was "actually about". Quite frankly, she did not really know what was expected of her, or what her precise function was. However, she was afraid to disappoint him and ruin his trust in her, so instead of asking for directions, she attempted to meet the increasingly numerous and unspecified demands as the piles grew higher and the expectations more opaque.

The guiding fantasy in Camilla's life was 'self-actualization' which involved 'feeling good' and doing something 'meaningful'. This fantasy was strong enough to sustain her through periods of very high pressure with unclear and unrealistic demands from her management. By being offered the position as 'the chosen one' by her manager, she could make sense of the pressure as a necessary cost on her way

to fully actualizing the potential which he was able to see in her. His validating eyes became the promise of future dream fulfillment, so to speak.

The fact that the fantasies sustaining this projective logic are so uncompromising means that the logic can easily convert from radical involvement to radical disinvolvement. There is little room for the moderations in between. During periods of intense administrative work load, Camilla found herself considering if she would rather just live on unemployment benefits and actualize herself by writing a book or undertaking another personal project. Answering my questions about why she entertained such thoughts, she skated back and forth between two explanations. On the one hand, she said that administrative work was simply too boring and constricting for her. On the other hand, she said that she was simply afraid that she could not carry out these assignments satisfactorily, since she had never received any instructions. And as mentioned above, asking for instructions was not included in her perception of the 'chosen one' package, she had accepted. Both worries were based on Camilla's reluctance to modify the fantasmatic logic in her work. In the end, she decided to stay. She loved 'her' writers, and she loved the events and networking coming with the job. However, one day she found herself passing out and being taken to the ER in an ambulance, with dangerously high blood pressure and heart fibrillations. Only at this point did Camilla decide to have a chat with her manager about guidelines.

Returning to my definition of 'hybrid' above, Camilla was a case of being met with extreme expectations from both the authenticity and the contractuality discourses by her manager: She was hired by virtue of her innate and unique talent – a talent whose quality apparently made instructions and apprenticeship redundant. Yet simultaneously she was expected to be responsible for very encompassing administrative tasks which required specialized knowledge and precise instructions. In many ways, this situation looked like a double bind. The decisive difference which turned it into a hybrid was that Camilla and her manager shared a vision of a fantasmatic future which would satisfy them both and make the seemingly incompatible ends meet. In this future, their meaningful accomplishments and personal development would have eradicated the current dissonances and incompatibilities. In the name of this future scenario, Camilla was willing to tolerate the mutually exclusive demands, and her manager was willing to tolerate her lapses. Based on a strong faith in the individual ability to transgress limits, the manager assumed that in the end there would be a perfect marriage between profitability and personal meaning. Camilla's innovative work would generate resources which would solve the current lapses in administrative discipline. And so, through a logic of projection, both contractuality and authenticity could maintain their positions as legitimate and important discourses without having to rule each other out – even though they were practiced

simultaneously in their most radical and thus, technically, mutually exclusive form. The fantasmatic solution was different from the compromise solution achieved in the tension-based interaction, because no moderation of the two contrasting discourses took place. On the contrary, in the fantasmatic logic, both discourses were practiced in their most intense and radical form where they were in fact mutually exclusive on a practical level. So while the tension-based interaction made the ends meet practically and concretely in the present, the fantasmatic interaction projected such a scenario into the future, thus escaping the immediate need for consistency.

As we can gauge from Camilla's visit to the ER, this projective logic was not without risk. It was based on the premise that you can have your cake and eat it too, to put it in vernacular. Conventional rules of contradiction were suspended by introducing a virtual space (the future) which would make everything add up in the end. This logic invited to limitlessness and to a deferring of gratification, the strain of which might eventually cause body or mind to crash. As Camilla woke up in the ER, she was ready to sacrifice some of the fantasmatic logic, namely the image of herself as the limitlessly trusted 'chosen one' who was 'beyond instructions'. So she arranged a meeting with her manager about her work situation, telling him that she could not bear the stress she was under.

Interestingly, the talk did not end up in any agreements about future work processes or practical tools which could make the ends meet and thus prevent a similar kind of stress. Instead, the talk was more like an intimate sharing of experiences. Camilla's manager, John, described how he too had had several periods of stress, and that she was not alone with this experience. In other words, nothing was done in order to practically reduce the mutually exclusive demands on Camilla. The projective logic was kept intact. However, the talk did take a great deal of pressure off Camilla's shoulders, because she learned that having personal limits and being the chosen one did not rule each other out. She was still the chosen one, despite her break-down. However, it was her private challenge to handle these personal limits in a way which allowed the projective logic to continue, preferably without her breaking down (too often).

When people chose to stay in the projective logic, usually their strategy to avoid burn-out was to introduce pockets of 'checking out' and 'recharging' between the periods of high intensity. For some, these pockets were always instigated by some form of exhaustion breakdown. For others, the pockets were less acute periods of low investment, sabbaticals or journeys.

There were other people breaking under the strain of the projective logic who, unlike Camilla, insisted on leaving the fantasmatic dynamic behind. They did this by actively countering the fantasmatic narrative, insisting instead on consistency in the present. No deferment of gratification, no virtual

arithmetic. They demanded that it all added up right now – even if it involved no longer being the chosen one, and even if it involved changing work place or line of business.

Going over the fantasies sustaining these projective dynamics, they often involved the element of being 'chosen'. Being seen as unique or special seemed to offer such fantasmatic sustenance that it could compensate for considerable pain and frustration in the present. There was also a strong link between the narrative of the 'chosen one' and a narrative about 'freedom'. When I probed into the nature of this freedom fantasy, its defining feature was an absence of limits. It was a condition in which one's uniqueness would lead to the realization of a full potential where banality, powerlessness and personal limitations no longer existed. One would practically become the epitome of individual agency and transgression, and this condition would guarantee a life without suffering and disappointments (see Craib, 1994, for a similar argument). The fascinating thing about this fantasy was that it was capable of bracketing experiences of disappointment in the present so that the core narrative remained intact. When disappointments occurred, people usually explained them as local dysfunctions or temporary lapses that would disappear in the future – either by virtue of personal development, the gratifications of future achievements, or the identification of a new work place which offered the same dreams (presumably without the disappointments).

Clayton was an ambitious and driven project manager whose responsibilities and status had increased substantially during the previous year. There was a general consensus that he was one of the top-manager's 'chosen ones', an understanding which Clayton seemed to share. When I asked Clayton to describe a typical work-day, his story did not at all resemble a life of 'freedom'. Usually he slept very little, because stress and high velocity made it difficult for him to wind down. So in the morning, he was already very tired. As he entered the reception, he would feel his stomach constrict as he got ready to face another day at work. Sometimes he found it hard to breathe. Then he would get on his way to the office and plunge himself into the many projects and tasks awaiting him. Usually there was no hope of getting to the bottom of the piles. But he would work and work and work the best he could. He explained that a difficult childhood had taught him to keep laboring where others might stop. He seemed to have no limits when it came to work, he mused. He also explained that he was disappointed with his top-manager whom he had always conceived of much like a father figure. He was no longer sure whether the relationship was really authentic, or whether the top-manager just acted strategically.
During the same interview, Clayton also spoke about moments of deep pride and excitement when new projects were won or when accolades were received for completed ones. These stories emanated of adventure and innovation. One got the feeling of a dedicated pioneer living in an intense romance with exploration and creativity. When relating these moments, Clayton's work setting was not associated

with stomach cramps and breathing trouble, but instead with a world of opportunities and magic waiting to be discovered. In the same vein, Clayton would refer to his top-manager with deep affection and admiration, describing how important it was to him that he lived up to his expectations.

At the end of the interview I asked Clayton to describe what he would most like to happen in his future career. He paused a little, reflecting. Then he explained that he would most like if an important person approached him and offered him an extremely unique position. It should be a position of high responsibility and of such scope that he would not be sure whether he was able to carry it out. But he would do it anyway, because this important person believed that he, and only he, could pull it off. I asked him what was so appealing about this scenario, and he replied: 'It's freedom'. The scenario which Clayton described as his greatest fantasy about the future was strikingly similar to the work situation he was in when I interviewed him. And this work situation, when described purely phenomenologically, seemed to involve a great deal of suffering and considerable experiences of powerlessness. However, these experiences did not serve to revise Clayton's freedom fantasies. On the contrary: The greater the current stress, the stronger the fantasies. Clayton was one of the clearest examples of the projective logic: Through agency, uniqueness, transgression and validation, suffering and limitations will be overcome, so it goes. All we have to do is precisely what we are doing now – yet in another time or place. Thus virtuality and fantasies maintain a space where extreme efficiency and extreme existential meaningfulness can coexist or even feed off each other, and where the concomitant pains and disappointments are channeled into a virtual space of future redemption.

While Clayton represents an intense version of the projective dynamic, there were other examples of it which were less high-strung existentially. These situations did not necessarily involve the 'chosen one' element. For instance, Sam told me how he had recently been offered a temporary position as a host of a weekly show. Sam was perfectly aware that his manager would eventually replace him with somebody else, even though the explicit rhetoric was that Sam was great for the job. But Sam was willing to play along with this, because, as he said: "We are both perfectly aware that we are exploiting each other: I get a better resume and a better network, which will enhance my career options. He solves his logistical problems right now, until he finds another host." In other words, for the manager the situation could satisfy the requirements of the contractuality discourse such as logistics, practicalities and budgets until he found the ideal host. For Sam, the situation was acceptable because it could satisfy the requirements of the authenticity discourse such as increased possibilities, development, innovation etc. Again, it was the aspect of 'investing in the future' which made Sam willing to accept ambiguities in the present. Only, in this case it was not as strong a fantasy as the one Clayton harbored.

COMMITMENT IN A CONTEXT OF AMBIGUITY

As we have seen above, the co-existence of two contrasting discourses without a meta-discourse creates highly precarious circumstances for the establishment of stable commitment between managers and employees. There are many recurring conflicts, misunderstandings and feelings of betrayal. At the same time, there are also new forms of commitment based on tenuous compromise, ongoing revisions, or mutual fantasies about the future. Some of the individual strategies to handle the ambiguities are *defensive* and practically devoid of reciprocity, for instance in the staunch antagonism or in the self-centered double binds. Other strategies are focused on *establishing predictability* such as the compromise-seeking tension or the attempt to make clear gradation principles. Still other strategies handle the ambiguity by maintaining a *permanent openness to revision*, such as the oscillation and certain versions of the gradation. And finally, many situations are handled through a *strategy of projection* where contradictions are permitted and even encouraged out of a desire to keep as many possibilities open as possible. There are different risks associated with these strategies. The strategies acting defensively risk causing communication melt-down, which can lead to ruptures of the commitment and even to emotional breakdowns. The strategies attempting to establish predictability risk being incapable of responding sufficiently fast and differentiated to the ever-changing requirements of modern knowledge work. They may function in times of relative stability, but they are likely to come under pressure in times of crisis. The strategies attempting to remain open and fluctuating risk causing too many misunderstandings and too much exhaustion for the participants. Finally, the strategies attempting to transcend contradictions through projection risk 'bubble-bursting' if a projection is no longer convincing. They also risk compromising the organizational need for accountability, and they risk causing severe personal breakdowns due to exhaustion.

Another aspect of the challenges to commitment is the question of reliability and opportunism. As already mentioned, commitment involves a mutual understanding of rights and obligations which one can rely upon in times of reward and times of hardship. When the parameters for this reliability are ambiguous, feelings of betrayal may easily arise, and the possibility for opportunism is enhanced. Below, I have sketched what a consistent set of rights and obligations would look like in each discourse. I have called this 'commitment models'. Based on these models, one can analyze whether people in a given interaction fulfill the obligations associated with the rights that they are demanding. Furthermore, one can analyze whether people sometimes expect their counterpart to fulfill the obligations of a certain model, all the while denying them the concomitant rights. And finally, one can

ask whether some people succeed in reaping the rights of both models while shopping freely through the obligations according to convenience.

Contractuality

Rights (what the manager or organization should deliver to the employee):

- *Clarification and administration of fair limits through*: Transparency, clarity, unambiguity, consistency, protection, standards, guidance, instructions, interventions, monitoring, reliability, predictability, tradition, impartiality, 'structural rewards' (salary, promotion etc.)

Obligations (what the employee should deliver in return)

- *Adherence to limits through*: Obedience, playing by the rules, following instructions, meeting standards, reliability, predictability, pragmatic craft rather than passionate 'darlings'

Authenticity

Rights (what the manager or organization should deliver to the employee)

- *Facilitation of transgression through*: Autonomy, independence, influence, right to define scope and nature of assignment within the parameters of general organizational requirements, encouragement of critical approach, validation, presence, dialogue rather than instructions, consensus rather than orders, sincerity, trustworthiness, care, 'personal rewards' (praise, appreciation, responsibility, trust, influence)

Obligations (what the employee should deliver in return)

- *Delivering transgression through*: Innovation, creativity, flair, talent, potential, initiative, involvement, dedication, passion, 'drive', flexibility, development, independence, risk willingness, personal responsibility, individual assessments, loyalty, mutuality, validation, care, sincerity, identification

The models are described from the point of view of the employee. Roughly, one can simply invert them in order to see the managers' perspective. For instance, in the contractuality discourse, one of the manager's rights would be to request obedience and reliability, and one of his obligations would be to offer transparency and clarity. Basically, the commitment models are interesting in cases where one or both parties subscribe to two discourses at the same time, or when they shift at will between the two discourses without specifying the parameters for change. In such situations, reliability becomes weak and the risk for exploitation and opportunism arises.

Obviously, double bind interactions are the clearest example of situations which involve inconsistency and opportunism. I have witnessed such forms of interaction practiced by both managers

and employees. They basically involved that one party sought to reap the rights from both models without committing consistently to any obligations. They were dynamics which placed the counterpart in a position of "damned if you do, damned if you don't". Double binds are a strategy based on maximizing self-interest through opportunism: Instead of committing to rights as well as duties in a reliable manner, the opportunist disregards principles and goes for the best of both models. While double binds are per definition obstructive, interactions such as oscillation and gradation sometimes lead to reliable dynamics and other times to unreliable ones. What makes the difference is whether the person practicing oscillation or gradation makes his parameters for shifts and prioritization explicit and open for dialogue. If this is the case, both interactions can help increase maneuverability and opportunities while still involving a reliable commitment. If not, situations of opportunism may arise.

Picking up the thread from Chapter 1, the important thing to notice about this precarious relation between discourses is that it engenders highly complex dynamics of power, vulnerability and dependence, just like it engenders highly complex issues about authenticity and exploitation. There are several reasons for this precariousness.

First, precariousness arises, because both individuals and organizations must maneuver in ongoing ambiguity. Once they attempt to remove ambiguity, their lack of flexibility renders them highly vulnerable. Neither individuals, nor organizations can be successful in the realm of knowledge work if they are not able to keep the contrasts and tensions between contractuality and authenticity alive. If they resort to contractuality only, they lose their competitive edge. If they resort to authenticity only, they lack the necessary accountability and stability. This means that paradoxes and ambiguities become the order of the day, rather than an expression of dysfunctions or exceptions. In other words, commitment in modern knowledge work must *always* grapple with the challenges from paradoxes, tensions and ambiguities. The unambiguous contract known from bureaucratic organizations is no longer an option.

Second, along with the permanent condition of ambiguity come more sophisticated forms of opportunism and exploitation. The interesting thing about these forms is that they are practiced equally by managers and employees, thus representing both gains and losses to the organization. In the world of temporary projects, networking, event-making, innovation and brands, new forms of interdependence arise between organizations and their employees. In some ways, employees become more vulnerable due to the absence of long-term employment and clear contractual criteria for rights and duties. The term 'flexploitation' has been coined in order to describe this condition (Gill & Pratt, 2008). In other ways, employees become more powerful, since skills and talents are individualized and

thus harder to replace. As already mentioned, individual employees may represent irreplaceable value for an organization. Furthermore, the possibilities for quick transitions from one job to another can also cause great logistical challenges for the organization which depends on its temporary staff. The other side of flexploitation is therefore flexicurity. While the flexicurity model represents a challenge to for example older and unskilled workers, it represents influence and opportunities for highly skilled, mobile, and flexible workers. (Bredgaard et al, 2005: 26) Flexicurity gives strong employees the power to have 'great expectations' towards their workplace, backed up with threats of leaving for something better. Because they work for meaning rather than money, this 'something better' may even be periods of state subsidized unemployment spent on self-realization projects. Due to the precarious interdependence of organizations and their employees, both parties can use the permanent ambiguities as tools for exploitation and opportunism. Who is in a position to practice opportunism is not a fixed structural matter, but a more unpredictable issue influenced by local contexts, temporary trends, personal networks, individual personalities, and the moods of clients.

Third, the co-existence of two discourses engenders precariousness because the distinction between rights and obligations becomes blurry. Not only can people shift in and out of two different commitment models, but the 'authentic' commitment model does not have clear limits between rights and obligations. While the contractuality discourse is focused on justice, the authenticity discourse is focused on meaningfulness (cf. Giddens' 'pure relationship' in Chapter 1). Although the authenticity model involves obligations, these obligations are expected to appear as satisfying *ends*, not just instrumental *means*. In other words, the authenticity model challenges the classical split between obligations as means and rights as ends. It is based on the expectation that *both* obligations and rights should be meaningful and offer existential satisfaction. This means that the very same thing which employees fight for as a right, e.g. influence or autonomy, is also an obligation. It is an individual and highly phenomenological matter when influence transforms from an experience of a meaningful right to an experience of burdening obligation. The clear external parameters applicable in the contractuality discourse do not work in a discourse based on internal feelings (see Kristensen, 2010, for an extensive treatment of how we need to revise our understanding of 'limits' if we wish to cope with the phenomenological aspect of rights and obligations in modern working life). This overlapping of rights and obligations also means that it becomes more difficult to diagnose exploitation. The distinction between exploitation and authenticity is incapable of grasping all the complex forms of commitment and interaction in modern knowledge work. Think, for example, of the hybrid forms described above. On the one hand, one could claim that they involve exploitation, in the sense that employees are exposed to two mutually exclusive sets of expectations at the same time. On the other hand, many of

these employees consider the high intensity and fantasmatic opportunities associated with this commitment form to be their *right* in working life. In fact, it is precisely for the sake of such fantasmatic dynamics that they work at all. These employees would feel that their rights were *revoked* if they were placed in consistent yet moderate and compromise-based commitments. Simply calling this attitude a result of normative colonization is an expression of arrogance, I would claim. In the spirit of compassion, rather than suspicion, I believe that we must grant people the prerogative to find meaning in situations which from a traditional perspective equal exploitation. Here, the task is to sophisticate our diagnostic tools rather than to insist on applying habitual dualisms on a field not suited for them.

Returning to the theme about analytical approach, the point is that a *suspicious* perspective would be likely to focus on the costs of contradictions in working life for the people involved. It would most probably point to modern employees as victims of double standards and mutually exclusive expectations from management. It would also be prone to consider the hybrid interaction as a symptom of 'immaterial labor', where the capitalist machine profits on the unfulfilled desire in the human soul. In the *compassionate* perspective, these things look different. The compassionate analysis does not just ask for costs, but also for gains. It does not just look for victims, but also for victors. And most importantly, it insists on the possibility that people and phenomena can be both at once. It strives for a gaze which can capture and tolerate *simultaneity* instead of reproducing classical distinctions. So in the compassionate perspective, employees can be victims in one sense, and victors in another sense, as a consequence of the ambiguous discursive conditions at work. The same thing goes for managers! Similarly, there may be instances which represent capitalist exploitation and personal meaningfulness at the same time. Just like there are instances where existential agendas hamper organizational profit – and vice versa. The combinations are many, and the force of compassionate analysis is that it commits to exploring them as widely as possible.

CONCLUSION
Shaking analytical habits – an empirical quest for compassion

When I set out on this project, I had two primary ambitions. First, I wanted to contribute to the literature discussing corporate culture, work as self-realization, and affective labor. Second, I wanted to develop an analytical and methodological perspective capable of grasping *simultaneities* and *contradictions*. Obviously, these two ambitions melt into one in the thesis, since they depend on each other in order to succeed. Nevertheless, I would like to highlight them individually below, because they both represent central contributions.

On a thematic level, I have presented a detailed empirical analysis of discourses about work and discourses about commitment between managers and employees in knowledge-work organizations. I have shown that there are two predominant discourses which are in stark contrast to one another. The 'contractuality discourse' celebrates limits as the prerequisite for sound work and well-functioning interaction between manager and employee. It defines limits as the absence of ambiguity, secured for instance through explicit standards, impartiality, predictability, and hierarchy. The 'authenticity discourse', by contrast, celebrates transgression. It defines transgression as the absence of limitations, and it therefore always strives to move beyond authority, predictability, banality, routine, and powerlessness. The two discourses coexist, and all parties subscribe to both simultaneously. Adding to the complexity, there is no meta-discourse which can address the fact that everybody subscribes to two contrasting discourses. This contradictory discursive condition offsets a number of complicated interactions between managers and employees, since there is no unambiguous language in which to align expectations. Based on this analysis, my argument is twofold: First, I suggest that we need to modify the claim made by numerous researchers that we live in a new 'era' of detraditionalization and post-bureaucracy. Although there are powerful trends pointing in a 'post-traditional' direction, there are equally powerful trends based on the celebration of traditional and bureaucratic values. Micro-level studies help us see the *simultaneities,* not just the ruptures, and thus point towards the need for considering the consequences of these coexisting and contrasting trends.

Second, I suggest that the existence of contradictions and paradoxes, and the new focus on Self and transgression is not simply synonymous with 'corrosion of character' and disintegration of commitment. Again, rather than resorting to diagnostic slogans, we should make the effort to explore *varieties* of consequences. My claim is that commitment takes many different forms in the current context of ambiguity. Some of these forms are indeed conflictual, exploitative, and based on self-

interest as skeptical sociologists have suggested. But other forms display careful exercises in compromise. And yet other forms demonstrate highly productive and meaningful momentum, based on common Utopian fantasies. In other words, simultaneities, tensions, contradictions and varieties are my focus, rather than spectacular meta-narratives.

Summing up, one can say that the contradictory conditions of modern knowledge work involve increased possibilities for dialogue, equality, exploration, and existential meaning in working life. On the other hand, it also involves increased risks of opportunism, commitment breakdown, emotional breakdown, and exhaustion. Seen from a perspective of social inequality, the current trends favor versatility, flexibility and adaptability, and they thus represent a potential exclusion of people with low tolerance for ambiguity, with a focus on depth rather than scope, and with a limited talent for improvisation.

On an analytical and methodological level, I have contributed by developing practical guidelines as to how one may ensure a perspective capable of grasping these simultaneities and contradictions. The guidelines are concerned with suspending bias as long as possible, and with avoiding 'usual suspects' while still maintaining a critical edge. I formulated this approach in a response to the 'suspicious' analysis which I believed to witness among many critically informed organizational scholars (cf. Chapter 1). The suspicious approach, in my definition, has an explicit research agenda focused on solidarity with the 'weak', and on an active resistance against 'pathological', 'colonizing', and 'exploitative' aspects of working life. Its raison d'être is largely based on a frustration with 'mainstream' management literature which does not question the desirability of profit maximization, global capitalism, and the stockholder demand for eternal growth. Thus far, I share their critical agenda. My concern is with the risk that this criticism turns into political romanticism which remains devoted to an abstract ideal about radical autonomy which can never translate into concrete political activity. My claim is that such ideals underlie much of the critical research, and that it involves the risk of hermetic and self-reproducing analyses. These analyses tend to operate with predefined dualisms imbued with normative value, such as: freedom (good) and power (bad); employees (victims) and employers (exploiters); authenticity (good) and profit (bad). The habitual suspicion makes it less likely that the analyses will discover surprising findings where the normative attributes might be distributed differently. The surprises could be cases of victimized employers and powerful employees; or freedom arising in conjunction with powerful normalization; or moments of authenticity occurring while pursuing profit. Furthermore, the habitual dualisms also involve a low tolerance for contradictions and simultaneities, which makes them less likely to capture phenomena such as employees being victims

and victors *at the same time*, due to the same (contradictory) cultural trends. My claim is that the suspicious analysis risks becoming a simple inversion of the mainstream analysis, because it operates with the same reified dualisms.

In contrast to the suspicious analysis, I have developed a compassionate analysis which consistently reads for 'difference', for contradictions, and for surprises. It does so through a dual strategy of thoroughness and falsification. The thoroughness involves pursuing the same themes and conflicts through all the relevant perspectives (manager, employee, administration, logistics, existential meaning), until they make sense. The conclusion is never 'who wins, and who loses', but rather: What does *each* position stand to win and lose, given this particular dynamic. The falsification involves a careful scrutiny of the researcher's initial loyalties and political agendas, so that the study can commit to challenging them in its empirical probing. If my initial loyalty was with exhausted employees, I committed to challenge this loyalty by asking whether they themselves could be held accountable for some of this exhaustion. The intention behind this challenge was to end up with an approach to exhausted employees which grasped costs *and* gains, rather than just cost. Similarly, if my political agenda was to explore the exploitative effects of work as self-realization, I would challenge this by pursuing: 1) whether self-realization discourses had empowering effects too, and 2) whether there were other discourses which represented different pressures and possibilities. In short, the compassionate analysis is committed to reading for difference in order to make sense out of everybody. It extends solidarity to everyone in the field, not just the predefined 'victims'. The solidarity which it extends is characterized by a willingness to let go of 'attachment', as I wrote about in Chapter 2. The key element in compassion is the ability to exercise closeness through distance. Put in more practical language, it is willing to let go of personal darlings and private identifications when practicing solidarity, so that it takes the form of witnessing, rather than pushing for a specific outcome. This distant, yet loyal, witnessing has a high tolerance for contradictions AND for concreteness, and it is therefore, I believe, better equipped to offer critique which can make a difference in practice.

Aside from the thematic and analytical contributions, I believe that the primary virtue of this thesis is its empirical thickness. I have not only pointed to the existence of contradictory norms, such as authority and autonomy. I have also illustrated in great detail *how* these norms are practiced and which kinds of *concrete* interactions they engender. Right from the beginning, this thickness was my primary motivation, and I hope that the many stories and examples in this thesis can help frame practical and constructive discussions about the question of reliability, commitment, and meaning in modern knowledge work.

The findings in this thesis invite to a number of further studies. It would be interesting to consider the challenges of modern day unions and their struggle for rights. How does one frame struggle and demands in a context where rights and obligations overlap? Maybe it would be relevant to pursue the questions of opportunism formulated in connection with the commitment models above. How do we set up parameters for reliability and consistency without trying to escape the inherent ambiguity in modern knowledge work?

It would also be interesting to pursue the effects of the paradoxes and tension on employees' notion of professionalism. While the current thesis focused on the manager-employee interaction, another study might focus on craft and vocation. I have briefly touched on craft in Chapter 4, but the theme deserves a more encompassing investigation. How do nurses think about the craft of nursing? How do teacher think about the craft of teaching? Etc. What happens to skill and professionalism when they become a highly contested and political field? Is painstaking craft truly being sifted out in favor of networking and innovation, or are there contexts where craft is still the dominant value? Will we witness a counter-reaction against the celebration of scope and velocity, where powerful groups fight for their right to depth and concentration?

In a similar vein, it would be interesting to pursue the question of desire. Desire is one of the constitutive elements in the fantasmatic dispositive, just like it is in the capitalist dynamic. I have witnessed beginning trends towards a deconstruction of this desire, precisely in the face of the pressures exerted by ongoing optimization and its ensuing impermanence. Maybe the next step is that cultural workers dreaming of sheep farming and receptionist jobs will reach out for forms of existence based on moderation, choice, and being-in-the-present. Maybe we are witnessing a Dickensian journey of 'great expectations' where modern knowledge workers begin to worry that they may lose both Estella and Biddy. If so, then how does this affect the mutual commitment between profit-maximizing organizations and strong knowledge workers? Will there be new forms of work which attempt to accommodate such quests for moderation and humility? Will we witness new forms of employment where the notion of flexibility now serves to furnish modern individuals with more *time*, rather than with more *possibilities*?

The current study invites to the investigation of all these questions, so we may learn more about the interface between knowledge workers, commitment, capitalism, and late modernity.

DANSK RESUME

Denne afhandling er et grundigt empirisk studie af diskurser, fantasier og interaktionsmønstre på moderne videnarbejdspladser. Min fascination af emnet opstod på baggrund af den intensitet og sammensathed, som området synes at indeholde. Jeg var nysgerrig over de paradokser og ambivalenser, som moderne vidensarbejdere gav udtryk for, og jeg undrede mig over, hvordan et så prekært maskineri kunne vedblive med at fungere trods dets tilbagevendende episoder af sammenbrud, både følelsesmæssigt og organisatorisk. Hvordan kunne ét og samme felt indeholde både profitoptimering og intense eksistentielle længsler? Hvordan kunne det indeholde både stressdepressioner og frihedsforestillinger? Og hvordan kunne asymmetriske magtstrukturer sameksistere med kærlighedslignende dynamikker mellem ledere og medarbejdere? Min ambition var at finde et blik og et sprog, der kunne fange disse ambivalenser og spændinger, snarere end at insistere på klassiske dualismer såsom profit versus meningsfuldhed, instrumentalitet versus autenticitet, magt versus frihed, og hierarki versus jævnbyrdighed.

Til dette formål udviklede jeg en analytisk og metodisk tilgang baseret på medfølelse. Denne tilgang er ment som en 'tredje vej', der tilbyder korrektiver til to dominerende perspektiver i organisatoriske analyser: På den ene side den 'klassiske' litteratur, der i høj grad ser bort fra problematikker som udnyttelse, fremmedgørelse og skrøbelighed. Og på den anden side den kritiske litteratur, der taler op imod den klassiske med afsæt i et mistænksomhedsfokus og en dagsorden om at udvise solidaritet med 'ofrene' i moderne arbejdsliv. Mit argument er, at begge perspektiver opererer med prædefinerede dualismer, der er tilbøjelige til at reproducere deres egne konklusioner. Forcerne ved den medfølende tilgang er, at den inviterer til overraskelser og samtidigheder, der gør det muligt at få øje på hybridfænomener, såsom udsatte arbejdsgivere og opportunistiske medarbejdere, meningsfuld profitmaksimering, og frihedserfaringer baseret på specifikke magtdynamikker. Mens mistænksomheden abonnerer på en fast normativitet, der indebærer særlige ofre og særlige mistænkte, betragter den medfølende tilgang dette som et empirisk spørgsmål. Endvidere er den medfølende tilgang baseret på en antagelse om, at skrøbelighed og magt sameksisterer i alle positioner, snarere end at de er fordelt på hver deres position (hhv. medarbejder og kapitalistisk arbejdsgiver). Så mens mistænksomheder yder solidaritet til ofre, yder medfølelse solidaritet til alle. Det er vigtigt at understrege, at dette ikke er synonymt med en antagelse om, at alle er uskyldige eller at udnyttelse og magtmisbrug ikke forekommer. Pointen er ikke at se bort fra magtproblematikker, men snarere at åbne op for flere overraskelser og mere kompleksitet i denne sammenhæng. På samme måde som

medfølelsen yder solidaritet til alle, i den forstand at den forsøger at tage dem alvorligt og begribe dem uanset om de er arbejdsgivere eller medarbejdere, så betragter den samtidig alle som strategiske aktører i et magtfelt. I den henseende er den medfølende tilgang mere interesseret i sociale dynamikker og hvordan de producerer specifikke positioner med hver deres sæt af skrøbeligheder og muligheder, end den er interesseret i at udpege ofre og mistænkte.

Baseret på denne analytiske og metodiske tilgang går afhandlingen videre til at argumentere for eksistensen af to modsatrettede diskurser om arbejde og om den gensidige forpligtelse mellem leder og medarbejder på videnarbejdspladser. 'Kontraktualitetsdiskursen' fremhæver *grænser* som forudsætninger for velfungerende arbejde og hensigtsmæssigt samspil mellem leder og medarbejder. Den definerer grænser som fravær af tvetydighed, sikret bl.a. gennem eksplicitte standarder, upartiskhed, forudsigelighed og hierarki. 'Autenticitetsdiskursen', derimod, fremhæver *overskridelse*. Den definerer overskridelse som fravær af begrænsninger, hvorfor den altid stræber væk fra autoritet, forudsigelighed, banalitet, rutine og magtesløshed. De to diskurser sameksisterer, og alle aktører abonnerer på begge to samtidig. Ydermere er der ingen metadiskurs, der er i stand til at ekspliciterer det faktum, at alle abonnerer på to modsatrettede diskurser. Denne spændingsfyldte diskursive tilstand medfører en række komplicerede samspil mellem leder og medarbejder, da de ikke kan ty til et entydigt sprog for at afstemme deres forventninger til hinanden.

Med afsæt i denne analyse fremsætter jeg to argumenter: For det første pointerer jeg, at der er behov for at moderere påstande om, at vi befinder os i en ny æra af aftraditionalisering og 'postbureaukrati'. Selvom der er stærke tendenser, som peger i retning af aftraditionalisering, så er der tilsvarende stærke tendenser baseret på tilslutning til traditionelle og bureaukratiske værdier. Vores udfordring som sociologiske forskere er ikke blot at diagnosticere nye og markante periode, men snarere at fordybe os i den kompleksitet der opstår på baggrund af samtidigheden mellem brud og kontinuitet.

For det andet argumenterer jeg for, at eksistensen af modsætninger og paradokser og af det nye fokus på Selv og overskridelse ikke blot er synonymt med en 'fordærvelse' af personligheden eller en opløsning af gensidig forpligtelse, som mange kritiske forskere hævder. Igen mener jeg, at vi snarere end at ty til diagnostiske slogans bør gøre os umage med at undersøge variationer i konsekvenserne. Min påstand er, at forpligtelse har mange forskellige former i den nuværende kontekst af ambivalens. Visse af disse former er ganske rigtigt konfliktfylde, udnyttende og baseret på egeninteresse. Men andre former udviser møjsommelige øvelser i kompromis. Og atter andre demonstrerer højproduktivt og meningsfuldt momentum med afsæt i fælles utopiske fantasier. Med andre ord er bidraget i denne

afhandling gennem tyk empiri at fremhæve samtidigheder, spændinger, modsætninger og variationer i moderne arbejdsliv.

ENGLISH ABSTRACT

The thesis is a thorough empirical study of discourses, fantasies, and patterns of interaction in high-involvement knowledge work. My interest in the issue was sparked by a fascination with the intensity and contradictory nature of working life for many high-skilled workers. I was curious about the ambiguities and paradoxes existing within the same dynamic, and I was puzzled by the fact that such tension-ridden and precarious machinery could keep functioning despite its constant episodes of breakdown – be they emotional or organizational. My intention was to find a gaze and a language which could capture these ambiguities and tensions, rather than insisting on classical dualisms such as profit versus meaning, instrumentality versus authenticity, power versus freedom, and influence versus vulnerability.

For this purpose, I developed an analytical and methodological approach based on 'compassion'. This approach is meant as a 'third way', offering corrections to the two dominant perspectives in organizational analysis: On the one hand, the 'mainstream' literature which largely disregards issues of exploitation, alienation, and vulnerability. On the other hand, the 'critical' literature which opposes mainstream writings through a staunch program of suspicion and an agenda about solidarity with the 'victims' of modern working life. My argument was that both perspectives operate with predefined dualisms which tend to reproduce their own conclusions. The virtue of a compassionate third way is that it invites to surprises and simultaneities, thus being open to phenomena such as victimized employers and powerful employees, meaningful profit maximization, and experiences of freedom arising out of specific power dynamics. While suspicion subscribes to a predefined normativity involving specific victims and specific suspects, the compassionate approach considers this to be an empirical question. Furthermore, the compassionate approach is based on the assumption that vulnerability and power coexist in all positions rather than being distributed on each their position (e.g. the 'worker' and the 'capitalist' respectively). So while suspicion extends solidarity to victims, compassion extends solidarity to everybody. It is important to stress that this is not synonymous with the assumption that everybody is innocent or that exploitation and power abuse do not take place. The point is not to disregard power issues, but rather to allow for more surprises and complexity in these issues. Just as the compassionate approach extends solidarity to everybody, in the sense that it tries to make sense of them, regardless of whether they are capitalists or workers, it also considers everybody to be strategic actors in a field of power. As such, the compassionate approach in more interested in the social dynamic and how it produces certain positions with each their set of vulnerabilities and possibilities, than it is interested in naming suspects and victims.

Based on this analytical and methodological approach, the thesis proceeds to argue for the existence of two contrasting discourses about work and about the commitment between manager and employee in knowledge work organizations: The 'contractuality discourse' celebrates *limits* as the prerequisite for sound work and well-functioning interaction between manager and employee. It defines limits as the absence of ambiguity, secured for instance through explicit standards, impartiality, predictability, and hierarchy. The 'authenticity discourse', by contrast, celebrates *transgression*. It defines transgression as the absence of limitations, and it therefore always strives to move beyond authority, predictability, banality, routine, and powerlessness. The two discourses coexist, and all parties subscribe to both simultaneously. Adding to the complexity, there is no meta-discourse which can address the fact that everybody subscribes to two contrasting discourses. This contradictory discursive condition offsets a number of complicated interactions between managers and employees, since there is no unambiguous language in which to align expectations.

Based on this analysis, my argument is twofold: First, I suggest that we need to modify the claim made by numerous researchers that we live in a new 'era' of detraditionalization and post-bureaucracy. Although there are powerful trends pointing in a 'post-traditional' direction, there are equally powerful trends based on the celebration of traditional and bureaucratic values. Micro-level studies help us see the *simultaneities,* not just the ruptures, and thus point towards the need for considering the consequences of these coexisting and contrasting trends.

Second, I suggest that the existence of contradictions and paradoxes, and the new focus on Self and transgression is not simply synonymous with 'corrosion of character' and disintegration of commitment. Again, rather than resorting to diagnostic slogans, we should make the effort to explore *varieties* of consequences. My claim is that commitment takes many different forms in the current context of ambiguity. Some of these forms are indeed conflictual, exploitative, and based on self-interest as skeptical sociologists have suggested. But other forms display careful exercises in compromise. And yet other forms demonstrate highly productive and meaningful momentum, based on common Utopian fantasies. In other words, the contribution of this thesis lies in the illustration and analysis of simultaneities, tensions, contradictions, and varieties displayed at the micro-sociological level, rather than spectacular meta-narratives.

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