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Governing Work
Through Self-Management

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editorial

- Governing work through self-management* 97
Thomas Lopdrup-Hjorth, Marius Gudmand-Høyer,
Pia Bramming and Michael Pedersen

articles

- The managementization of everyday life – Workplace health
promotion and the management of self-managing employees* 105
Christian Maravelias

- Resisting self-management? On the possibility of dissolving
oneself in fast food restaurants* 122
Alexander Paulsson

- Self-management through shame – Uniting governmentality
studies and the ‘affective turn’* 138
Helle Bjerg and Dorthe Staunæs

- Fearless speech: Practising parrhesia in a self-managing
community* 157
Diane Skinner

notes

- The Five Obstructions: Experiencing the human
side of enterprise* 176
Sverre Raffnsøe

- Tripping up the perfect* 189
Jørgen Leth, Sverre Raffnsøe and Peder Holm-Pedersen

- Organizing obstructions to manage organizations creatively:
Reflecting The Five Obstructions* 204
Mary Jo Hatch

roundtable

Management of self-management

212

Pia Bramming, Marius Gudmand-Høyer, Dan Kärreman,
Charlotta Levay, Michael Pedersen, Sverre Raffnsøe,
Jens Rennstam, André Spicer and Sverre Spoelstra

reviews

Parrēsia: The problem of truth

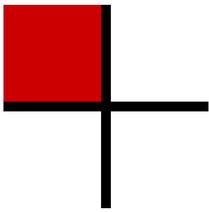
225

Joakim Kromann and Thomas Klem Andersen

Amidst the wreckage

231

Alan Bradshaw



Governing work through self-management

Thomas Lopdrup-Hjorth, Marius Gudmand-Høyer, Pia Bramming and Michael Pedersen

While self-management has emerged as a robust way of getting things done in present-day work life and organizations, it also presents itself as a conception of considerable multivalency and ambiguity. In a broad sense, self-management seems to require that employees think, feel and act in ways that contribute to the realization and improvement of the individual worker, but only insofar as they concomitantly anticipate and contribute to the various needs of the organization (Manz and Sims, 1989; Thomas, 2002; Costea et al, 2008). In addition, self-management does not only show up within greatly diverse contexts but is also utilized by a range of groups and actors holding largely contradictory views on core political and organizational issues. Accordingly, self-management has been called upon both to intensify capitalist work practices and to overturning their exploitation, thus expressing at the very same time our fears of subordination and our hopes for emancipation. Whereas complications of this sort have already been noted by several scholars within Critical Management Studies (CMS) (e.g. Parker, 2002; Knights and Willmott, 2002), the aim of this special issue is to scrutinize even further the ambiguity and the multivalence pertaining to self-management. A starting point of this endeavour is the proposition that, regardless of the final end towards which it is mobilized, self-management presents itself equally as a problem and a solution relating to a variety of managerial, organizational, and existential concerns. In this issue, the complexities of managing work and organizations through self-management are analyzed as they show up in relation to fast food restaurants-workers, teachers and pupils in schools, artists, organic farmers, and health promotion experts. In the remainder of this editorial we will try to designate some of the common traits that seem to surround self-management as a way of governing work: first, by indicating to what degree self-management can be seen as a form of management and what the call to self-manage implies; secondly, by briefly touching upon some historical roots of this contemporary phenomenon. Lastly, we introduce the papers, the discussions, the conversation and the reflections representing the bulk of the special issue.

Self-management as a form of management

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Self-management as a form of management

The introduction of self-management to the field of management seems to begin with something like a replacement of the long, historically established, superior rank accorded to managers with a more widespread and fair distribution of management among empowered employees (Shipper and Manz, 1992). On closer inspection, however, this 'progress' comes at a rather high price (Grey, 1999). While self-management has been pushed as an emancipatory and glorious conception, downsizing, short-term employment contracts, and increased job insecurity have followed in its footsteps (Parker, 2002), all of which have apparently been intensified with the advent of the projective logic of the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Contemporary discussions on control and resistance in forms of management, centred on the subjectivity of employees, affirm the cost of self-management: questions regarding the production of the appropriate individual (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), normative control (Kunda, 1992), neo-normative control (Fleming, 2009), and issues such as cynicism (Fleming and Spicer, 2007) or 'decaf resistance' in liberal workplaces (Contu, 2008), all indicate how self-management is a way of governing the behaviour of workers through their self-understanding and identity. As suggested by Costea, Crump and Amiridis (2008: 673), the preferred site of intervention is the 'subjectivity of workers' due to the fact that the significant displacement of the objects of organizational control in the end of the 20th century has been 'from external to inner attributes of the subject who is urged to self-manage'.

In light of the discussions available in the present special issue, it may be helpful to consider this displacement of managerial control with reference to three different but interrelated aspects, which we here, heuristically, designate: Managing by yourself, Managing your own self, and Managing through passions.

Managing by yourself – The first aspect of managing by yourself has to do with the capacity among employees to manage their own job-tasks, to coordinate these tasks with co-workers, and to take responsibility for the success (or failure) of these tasks (see also Manz, 1992). Here self-management denotes the employee as a subject capable of and willing to take responsibility for finding the best way to solve the task (Manz and Sims, 1989). Moreover, such faculties of judgment, decision-making and self-control are considered more efficient if they are unburdened by supervision and the meticulous outlining of task-prescriptions (Manz and Sims, 1989; Willmott, 1993). As summarized by Thomas (2002: 4): 'instead of complying with detailed rules, workers are now asked to be proactive problem solvers'. Or put more bluntly, being a self-managing employee implies that you manage by way of yourself. In the present special issue, this first aspect of self-management is discussed in the Paulsson paper, critically examining not only what self-management entails as a form of management but also how employees in fast-food restaurants try to cope with and resist the call to manage by way of themselves.

Managing your own self – The second aspect of managing your own self is to be seen in continuation of the first. In so far as self-management relies on proactive problem solving, it is also often stated that successful management by yourself implies involvement of the subjectivity that characterizes this self (Costea et al. 2008). To be able to manage yourself necessitates an investment of the individual's unique desires,

feelings, cognitive capacities, aspirations and creativity into the work-process (Neck and Houghton, 2006; Pedersen, 2008). Efficient self-management therefore includes a level of 'existential exposure' at work (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009: 574). In this issue, the call to manage your own self in relation to existential exposure is reflected in the Bjerg and Staunæs analysis of how appreciative management practices presuppose and require not only the utilization of positive but also negative affects (such as shame), which come to partake in a demand for existential self-management.

Managing through passions – Besides managing your own self and by way of yourself, self-management also comes with attempts to identify the very want to self-manage. From a managerial perspective, self-management implies that employees are given a space to do the task at hand. However, to ensure that they fully engage in this task and maximize their productive potential, they are also expected to have a passion for the work they do (Fleming, 2009). Indeed, it is the passion, either for the purpose of the work-task, for doing the task well, or for receiving the status and recognition that the accomplishment of the work task might culminate in, that guarantees and mediates successful performance (Neck and Houghton, 2006). As a form of governing, then, self-management involves more than giving the employee increased influence over, and responsibility for, task-performance. It also involves the expectation that the employees are inherently passionate about their work, publically display this passion, and that they are able to manage this passion in ways that connect personal desires with organizational interests. This third aspect of self-management is investigated in Maravelias' paper, demonstrating how health promotion programs are significant in this regard, since they come to serve as the authority that help decide to what degree employees are in fact able to manage themselves passionately.

Emerging as a form of management, self-management can therefore be said to involve both, forms of task empowerment and existential empowerment (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). While employees formerly were expected to comply with the standards dictating how the task should be performed, self-managing employees are today given a level of self-determination but are also expected to display an appropriate amount of enjoyment, since their productivity is viewed as critically dependent upon this. Employee self-expression and passion thus become signs of a convergence between the employee's concern for their own interest, well-being, career, and self-actualization, at the same time that they embody 'the organization's desire for productivity, performance, cost and risk minimization' (Kelly et al., 2007: 269)

Some historical roots of self-management

It may appear a relatively new idea in present-day organization and management thought that managing individual passions has to be called forth and utilized in order to insure productivity. However, this conception also has important historical predecessors that seem to have nourished contemporary understandings of self-management as discussed above. Following Michel Foucault's history of governmental reason (2007; 2008), some of these predecessors can be localized as pertaining to the problems of government that gained momentum from the middle of the 18th century. Thus, in the major works of political economists such as François Quesnay ([1758] 1973) and Adam

Smith ([1776] 1999) modes of reasoning were set forth which in various ways pointed to self-regulating and natural principles that had to be taken into account if one was to govern in the best possible way. These thinkers discovered a naturalness running ‘under, through, and in the exercise of’ the art of government (Foucault, 2008: 16), with the implication that the economy was beginning to be conceived of as something having a spontaneous, self-regulating naturalness to it that had to be respected (Quesnay, [1758] 1973; Smith, [1776] 1999). The new reflective prism through which this liberal art of government became articulated was based upon the idea that the economy should be viewed as a natural force that could not be controlled through and through: a force that was beneficial not to interfere with too much and which consequently had to run its course for this mode of governing to function (Gudmand-Høyer and Lopdrup Hjorth, 2009). While initially formulated in conjunction with the political government of men in the late 18th century, this principle of governmental self-limitation, of letting things run their course instead of operating from the imperative that management has to be as all-pervasive and detailed as possible, is oddly similar to what we see recurring in contemporary discussions of self-management.

Seen in this perspective, contemporary forms of self-management can be viewed as resurfacing from this delicate liberal problematic between the ‘too much’ and ‘too little’ intervention (Gertenbach, 2008). Hence, just as developments within political economy entailed a reconfiguration of the art of government, management of organizations has gone through a similar transformation. And whereas political economy discovered a certain naturalness that had to be respected in order to attain governmental goals, management thought has today come across a similar problematic entailing that it also ceases to be beneficial (i.e. profit maximizing) beyond a certain degree of intervention. In this sense, self-management has become an essential precondition for certain contemporary forms of organization. Or, almost reiterating the historical logic of liberal government, management thinking that praises self-management today is to organizations what political economy was to the state. Just as political economy established the play of interests as a necessary part of a liberal economy, management has discovered self-management as a necessary and increasingly fundamental organizational premise that has to be mobilized in the creation of value (Boutang, 2011).

Self-management, however, also has other historical roots. It is not solely reducible to the rise of a certain form of management. In fact, self-management has an inherently progressive or even utopian ring to it, especially when presented with the prefix ‘workers’ in front of it. As Knights and Willmott (2002) have demonstrated, the various discourses on self-management and the self-managing worker draws heavily on the concepts of autonomy and freedom, no matter whether their primary concern is formulated in accordance with a managerial or a Marxian inspired conception of work. Here Knights and Willmott point back to the Enlightenment heritage as having left a long-lasting imprint on the way we conceptualize autonomy and freedom in relation to the self-managing employee. In the present issue, this historical relationship between self-management and the characteristics of the novel human maturity pertaining to Enlightenment thought is also reflected upon by several of the scholars participating in the closing round-table discussion.

In light of this heritage, it is perhaps no coincidence that the conception of self-management is also to be found in a recently published dictionary of alternatives (Parker et al., 2007: 316-17), presenting a range of entries on historical, fictional and theoretical notions to be utilized for imagining how currently dominant structures of economic and managerial forms of organizing might be challenged on their basic principles and, possibly, be replaced by more legitimate community-based modes of organizing. Such works not merely point to largely forgotten or ignored possibilities otherwise relegated to the dustbin of history, but also provide impetus to present considerations as to how organizational practices might mobilize self-management in accordance with utopian aspirations that has a foundation in former experiences. While history provides examples of such experiences, not least in former Yugoslavia (Adizes and Borgese, 1975; Vanek, 1975) as well as during the Spanish Civil War (Marshall, 2008), the paper by Skinner in this issue explores some of the problems evolving in the context of the more utopian and independent instances of self-management. Hence, she investigates the conditions of speaking freely and critically in a self-managing organic farming community and how consensus is reached when no one is a leader.

Finally, however, it is important to recognize that no matter how one is to assess the concept of self-management in relation to either worker self-management or the rise of a new form of management, it is obvious that both of them imply that individuals are actually capable of managing themselves within specific organizational contexts. Indeed, self-management is in both instances found to be superior to more traditional forms of managing – be it, as seen from the perspective of managers, because an organization relying upon self-management is more effective and innovative – or, as seen from the perspective of workers, because it is fairer and provides greater degrees of autonomy. For that reason, it is also evident that considerations pertaining to self-management already have gotten a fair amount of attention within CMS, but also that this attention has been invested with a rather strong prose running along the lines of co-optation, ideology, power, and suppression, but also resistance, subversion, emancipation, and liberation. Observably, the connotations attached to self-management in this regard, whether negative or positive, surely reflect the analytical and conceptual tools by way of which it is dealt with. More significantly, however, it also reflects the fact that something important and delicate is at stake, something that is impregnated with a highly charged sensitivity. What self-management exactly is, then, is contested. But the very fact that it is contested and associated with such heterogeneous assessments and conflicting normative aspirations perhaps attests to the fact that it is truly a problem pertaining to our ‘actuality’ (Foucault, 2007). In this sense, and despite the multivalence and the ambiguity, self-management seems to be one of the core concepts of our contemporary organizational vocabulary, indeed worthy of further investigation. As a consequence hereof, this special issue takes up this task by way of investigating how self-management presents itself as a problem worthy of consideration as it becomes manifest within a range of different contexts.

The contributions

The special issue comprises three sections, all of which are concerned with managing self-management but in different setups.

1. The papers – The first paper by Christian Maravelias takes its point of departure in the increasingly blurred distinctions between work life and private life, reflecting upon this using a concept of managerialization. Managerialization implies the efforts to manage the parts of individuals' lives that are generally considered to be excluded or closed for management. Taking health professionals as his privileged example, Maravelias considers in what way such managerialization unfolds, and how health professionals and their associated therapies do not solely come into view as significant points of authority in the management of self-managed individual lives and careers, but also how they come forth as authorities that manage the population by singling out the 'economically feasible' from the 'economically burdensome'.

The possibility of resistance to self-management is taken up by Paulsson in the next paper. Paulsson shows how responsibility without authority is a consequence of the introduction of self-management in fast food restaurants that leads to resistance and transgression of rules and expectations in the employees' struggle with the demand to self-manage. Employees who are managed through self-management techniques – i.e. by being assigned certain individual responsibilities – find themselves caught in a dilemma of trust between co-workers and management. Through a number of empirical examples taken from blogs written by fast food employees, Paulsson pinpoints the various resistance strategies of the self-managing employees.

The affective dilemmas instigated by self-management, touched upon by Paulsson, are further elaborated by Bjerg and Staunæs. In their paper, the authors delve deeper into the darker and irreducible forces of humanness in their analysis of self-management as an affective leadership strategy in the context of schools. Through the case of Appreciative Leadership and Management practices, they propose that affective leadership strategies are not only relevant for employees but are also used to manage pupils. Moreover, the authors point to how these strategies not only rely on positive but also on what we traditionally conceive of as negative affects, such as shame. Shame is, Bjerg and Staunæs affirm, a prerequisite for the managerial production of selves. To manage oneself one has to accept a certain context and a certain normativity in this context which implies that you may fail not only in your own eyes, but also in those of who you deem the significant other in that context.

Yet another context for self-management is taken up in the last paper. Here, Skinner elaborates on self-management dynamics in a self-managing organic farming community and inquires how consensus is reached when no one is a leader. To shed light on this problematic, Skinner introduces the concept of *parrhesia*, elaborated by Foucault, to her ethnographic study. Different forms of ancient *parrhesia* (lit. 'to say it all', 'to speak freely') are found to be active in the ways in which individual community members bring up and respond to issues about the 'organicness' of farming practices. Skinner shows how a combination of political, philosophical and monarchic *parrhesia* is brought to bear on the decision-making process, and how different kinds of *parrhesia* bring up different themes such as risk, courage, status differences, criticism, and self-criticism.

2. Conversation and reflections – In the issue's special section on self-management and Jørgen Leth's and Lars von Trier's collaborative movie project *The Five Obstructions*,

management of self-management is discussed in relation to the production of art. A theme that recurs in the section is how self-management in an artistic setting works through strict rule-following and rule-breaking. What is investigated is what happens when rules imposed from the outside become a tool for self-management instead of a condition of control. The main part of this section is represented by the conversation between Leth and Sverre Raffnsøe on the movie project. However, Raffnsøe also provides this special section with a prologue clarifying the connections between self-management and the obstructions. Finally, Mary Jo Hatch rounds off this section with a reflection on the way in which the creative process displayed in *The Five Obstructions* is generated through principles and rules largely at odds with established managerial beliefs.

3. Round-table – The issue ends with a round-table discussion on management of self-management that took place at a workshop at Lund University in November 2009. Here a number of questions relating to the ambiguities and multivalence of managing self-management are discussed, both in terms of autonomy, productivity and normativity and in relation to the complex emancipatory heritage of the Enlightenment.

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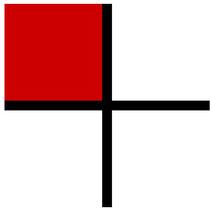
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The managementization of everyday life – Work place health promotion and the management of self-managing employees

Christian Maravelias

abstract

Critical management studies (CMS) has shown how developments in contemporary work organizations tend towards an increasing 'managementization' of employees' social identities and lived organizational experience. Such findings indicate that organizations create a need for other 'external' sources of authority which may legitimately influence spheres of life beyond work. Yet, little attention has been paid to this issue. This paper seeks to compensate for this gap by shedding some light on how the managementization of employees' identities and lives is linked to expertise and practices dedicated to the improvement of employees' health and wellbeing. Based on a case study of the occupational health service industry, the paper shows how health expertise and its therapeutic techniques have become ideological and practical forces that augment the processes of managementization that CMS has studied. To the extent that the managementization of life, that CMS has studied, pushes or motivates individuals to adopt an investment orientation to life in general, the paper points towards how health expertise grounds this orientation in scientific discourse and paves the way for a strident moralism where a life in the pursuit of health and professional success comes to distinguish good and promising individuals from those who lack moral character and talent.

Introduction

A main argument of the burgeoning critical management tradition (CMS) has been that developments in contemporary work organizations tend towards increasing the 'managementization' of employees' lives. Allegedly, 'flexible', 'entrepreneurial', 'mission driven', 'value and team based', etc., organizations no longer seek to control the concrete tasks and behaviors of employees. Instead, it is employees' social identities and lived organizational experiences that are to be aligned with overarching organizational interests (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Casey, 1999).

CMS' argument points towards the idea that classic distinctions between the professional self and the private self, between professional life and private life, are becoming increasingly blurred (Cremin, 2003; Fleming and Spicer, 2004; Kunda, 1992). Furthermore, it points towards how managerial authority, in its urge to increase its sway and scope, progresses beyond its traditional and legitimate field of jurisdiction (Costea et al., 2007). Given that management hereby opens a need of other, external

sources authority, it is somewhat surprising that the majority of CMS studies have maintained a focus on strict management techniques and on activities that take place within work organizations. Relatively little attention has been paid to how discourses, activities and actors external to the structured domain of work organizations function so as to extend management as an ideological and practical force. This paper seeks to compensate for this gap by shedding some light on how the managementization of individuals' identities and lives links to discourses, practices, and expertise dedicated to the improvement of employees health and wellbeing. Based on a case study of the Swedish sector for occupational health services, the paper shows how health expertise and its associated therapeutic techniques have become ideological and practical forces that augment the processes of managementization that CMS has studied. Hence, the paper focuses on the 'managerialism' of health and medicine, i.e. the ways in which health expertise and practices can be understood as forms of management. To the extent that the managementization of life, that CMS has studied, pushes or motivates individuals to adopt an investment orientation to life in general, this paper points towards how health expertise and practices ground this orientation in scientific discourse and paves the way for a strident moralism where a life in the pursuit of health, wellbeing and professional success, comes to distinguish good and promising individuals from those who lack moral character and talent.

The paper contains three parts. First, it accounts for CMS' argument about managementization. Thereafter it presents empirical findings from a study of the occupational health service sector in Sweden; followed by a conclusion.

Managementization

CMS has combined various schools of Marxism, post-structuralism, and feminist theory to provide an approach to analyzing management that interrogates its philosophical assumptions and the imperatives and techniques associated with its practice (Fournier & Grey, 2000). This has given rise to a rich, and by now numerous, series of studies that raises questions about the scope and objectives of organizational power relations. Two arguments appear to have been particularly salient. On the one hand, CMS has pointed towards how the scope of organizational power relations has been extended and intensified in contemporary work organizations (e.g. Deetz, 1992; Fleming & Spicer, 2004). Management is suggested by CMS to have become less a matter of regulating and constraining individuals' free and spontaneous choices, than of working through these free and spontaneous choices (Maravelias, 2003). Via sophisticated recruitment procedures (e.g. Bergström & Knights, 2006), mentoring (e.g. Covaleski et al., 1998) and other HRM techniques that accumulate knowledge about employees and use it to coach and guide employees towards higher achievements (e.g. Barratt, 2003; Maravelias, 2009), organizational power relations are alleged to seep into individuals' very identities, thus making them up as 'corporate clones' (Covaleski et al, 1998: 294), i.e. distinct self-managing entities that nevertheless map the goals of the organization. On the other hand, CMS has argued that these, more encompassing forms of management, implies a moral discrimination, or differently put, an idealization of a particular type of subjectivity, namely that of the 'entrepreneur' (e.g. Cornelius et al., 2008; DuGay, 2008; McCabe, 2008). Allegedly, the 'good' employee is no longer the

obedient and predictable 'organization man' that Whyte (1956) once presented as the product of 20th century corporate fordism, but an 'active' and 'motivated' entrepreneur that is both willing and able to reconfigure him or herself to whatever criteria underlies the tasks and social settings at hand.

The term 'managementization' is meant to capture both these arguments: it refers to how management has overflowed its traditional organizational habitat so that it is now the life of employees that are to be (self) managed for the sake of upholding social, active and flexible selves striving for professional success. More specifically, managementization is meant to capture the three interrelated dimensions implied by these arguments: an extension of management as an ideological and practical force into the 'free' spheres of individuals' lives; a transformation of management into self-management; and an idealization of a particular type of self-managing individual, namely the individual that acts as an entrepreneur of him or herself.

Conceived in this way, managementization implies that attempts to manage individuals who expect and are expected to self-manage their work and life will inescapably be sensitive, in part contradictory, and possibly illegitimate. Who is entitled to interfere with how individuals manage their lives? To what extent and how can such interference be aligned with the notion that individuals freely manage themselves? Hence, managementization points towards the relevance of studying the possibilities of subtle and legitimate forms of managing self-managing individuals. More concretely it points towards the relevance of studying those parts of individuals' lives, which traditionally have been considered to fall outside the confines of work, as objects of management. Of particular interest, then, would be studies which consider individuals' lifestyles, family life, and social life as managerial sites and objects which are at times aligned with, and at times kept separate from, work. Furthermore, it points towards the relevance of studying sources of authority and expertise which traditionally have been considered as non-managerial. Discourses on health and wellbeing, various forms of health expertise and their associated therapeutic techniques, lifestyle discourse and lifestyle coaches, etc., appear here as examples of forms and domains of authority whose managerial functions and effects have been given relatively little scholarly attention.

A few exceptions are worth mentioning. One is Garsten and Grey's (1997) study of the function and effects of contemporary 'How To' management texts. Garsten and Grey argue that such texts represent a form of secularized Protestant ethic. Within contemporary 'post-bureaucratic' organizations they are alleged to provide a form of individualistic self-help that encourages an aesthetic reflexivity among employees; i.e. they make the self a site for purposeful impression management, underpinned by the maxim that 'we are not what we are, but what we appear to be to others' (Garsten & Grey, 1997: 219). Garsten and Grey's study is interesting in that it indicates how the involvement of the whole authentic self may be just a play act that individuals' learn via the 'how to' discourse (cf. Kunda, 1992; Fleming and Spicer, 2004). Furthermore, it is interesting as it acknowledges how sources of expertise, which are formally unrelated to organizational hierarchies, nevertheless have considerable effects on individuals' management of their selves at work. Yet, their study still maintains a focus on the management of the professional self within work organizations.

Pedersen's (2008) work on occupational stress and coping is interesting in this regard; it explicitly focuses on how individuals manage the boundary between the authentic self and the professional self, and between private life and professional life. More specifically, Pedersen points out how contemporary post-bureaucratic organizations subordinate individuals to two partly contradictory imperatives: 'commit yourself' and 'deal with it'. Whereas the first imperative implies that individuals are expected to involve and instrumentalize their whole authentic selves in work, the second imperative implies that individuals are also expected to be able to cope with the negative stress reactions that may follow from such a complete involvement by setting limits to it. Differently put involve your whole self, subordinate your life to principles of work and management, but make sure to know when and how you should set limits to that ambition! Yet, Pedersen's work does not present empirical findings and it says little about the interference of different forms of authority (such as therapists, stress coaches, etc.) that may 'help' individuals to manage these contradictory imperatives.

Finally, Hancock and Tyler's (2004) study of the 'lifestyle discourse' is interesting in this particular regard. Via an analysis of lifestyle magazines, Hancock and Tyler show how the lifestyle discourse has become a point of authority which 'teaches' individuals, at once, to energize their professional selves by developing active and rich lifestyles, and to balance professional and private concerns by setting limits between these two spheres of life. In line with Pedersen's (2008) argument, Hancock and Tyler (2004) show how the lifestyle discourse paradoxically advises individuals to protect their private spheres from the intrusion of the professional sphere by subordinating it to instrumental values and principles of management. That is, they show how the lifestyle discourse has become impregnated with managerial imperatives, encouraging and coaching individuals to adopt a managerial mindset and an 'investment orientation to life' in general.

Hancock and Tyler's (2004) study can be criticized for overstating the power of popular lifestyle discourses to influence individuals' lives. Even so, it is an interesting example of what I have referred to as 'the managementization of life', where, in this case the lifestyle discourse comes forth as an authoritative resource for individuals who attempt to instrumentalize their selves for the sake of more happiness and professional success. Hereby it points towards the significance of studying discourses, activities and actors external to the structured domain of work organizations as forms of management. That is what is attempted below. More specifically, via a study of the occupational health service sector in Sweden, I seek to show how transformations in the discourse and practices around the healthy individual imply an idealization of a type individual subjectivity which displays several affinities with the notion of the self-managing, social, active and above all entrepreneurial individual, as it appears and is idealized in contemporary managerial discourse. Furthermore, I seek to show how occupational health services and expertise can be considered as forms of management that take the lifestyles and selves of individuals as their objects of control and manipulation.

Methodology

The basic interest in the study of the occupational health service (OHS) sector in Sweden was to understand better how its services relate to human resource management (HRM) programs and activities within its client companies. More specifically, to the extent that contemporary HRM practices increasingly seek to make use of ‘the whole’ individual, attempting to foster particular subjectivities that freely subordinate to corporate values (Barrat, 2003; Covaleski et al., 1998), the aim was to study what role occupational health services and health experts play in this pursuit. The material presented below is part of a study of the Swedish sector for occupational health services that was conducted in two stages, first between 2004 and 2006, and second between 2007 and 2009. In the overall study, 43 in-depth interviews were carried out; yet for spatial reasons only about 20 of these interviewees are reported in the material presented below. Five separate groups of interviewees were involved in the study: the first group consisted of health professionals from seven different organisations within the occupational health service sector. This group could be further broken down into the interviewees’ specific professions as physicians, physic-therapists, psychologists, health coaches, ergonomists, and so on. For the sake of the readability of the text, however, I have referred to all of them as ‘health professionals’ in the account below. The second group consisted of executive staff from the seven OHS companies. The third group consisted of human resource managers working for four different firms that are customers to the occupational health service companies. The fourth group consisted of line-managers in the customer firms. Finally, the fifth group consisted of employees who had taken part in some kind of health promotion program or service. Human resource managers, line managers, as well as employees who had taken part in some health promotion program were contacted in client companies to the selected OHS companies. The selection of companies in the OHS sector as well as client companies was based mainly on access. Interviews were semi-structured; participants were asked to describe their role, how they found this role to have changed, which main problems and issues they dealt with and which concrete methods they used.

Worksite health promotion in the Swedish sector for occupational health services

During the last decade, the Swedish OHS sector has undergone a significant transformation relating to its system of finance and regulation. Traditionally it was regulated by cooperative agreements between unions and employer organisations and 50% of the costs were subsidized by the Swedish state. In the mid 1990s state funding was terminated and the OHS sector became market financed. This had a number of significant ‘contractual implications’ (Donzelot, 1991), i.e. effects on organizational, individual and professional identities, and on professional relations: in particular, the new contract mechanisms resulted in that the cooperative agreements were replaced by supplier-customer relations. That is, OHS companies were driven to establish relations with and win the loyalty of employer representatives – who now became their customers. In that process both the type of clients/customers and the type of health services offered shifted. Previously, OHS had primarily been directed towards the quantitatively largest groups of employees in the working population and the services

mainly concerned prevention and rehabilitation of work related injuries or illnesses. Now, an executive of an OHS company explained:

The leading OHS companies seek to get away from working with prevention of illness and injuries. I mean, heavy labour intense industries, where a significant part of the preventive health measures used to be directed, have either been thoroughly automated or have moved to low-wage countries. And there is no money in working with the lower end of the service sector. It is among the high-end companies that the profitable customers are to be found. Normally such companies do not have problems with directly work-related ill-health; they have problems with stress and other socio-psychological issues, which concern their employees' private lives as much as their working life.

Hence, being successful in the profitable segment of the market is no longer about preventing ill-health; it is about providing services that help employees stay healthy and fit for work. High-end companies are explained to have employees that have to deal with a high tempo, high but imprecise expectations, an abundance of choices and opportunities, and potentially conflicting interests especially relating to the private and professional life balance. A health professional explained:

Such employees confront health risks that concern the difficulties of managing all parts of their lives; at times they suffer from stress, they are depressed because they do not spend enough time with their kids, sometimes they do not sleep well, and so on. But that is not the whole story, they are also part of a culture where the norm is that you should constantly try to improve, become healthier, etc.

The OHS companies have responded to the needs of these customers by providing services that concern both dimensions touched upon in the last quote: helping employees steer free from health risks and helping them improve their health and well-being. The general term for such services is Work Site Health promotion (WHP). A health professional defined WHP in the following way:

If our objective is to prevent ill-health, we search for concrete health hazards in employees' immediate work-environment and give directives as to how these can be handled. When, however, our objective is to promote employees' health and wellbeing our perspective is much broader and we do not give directives, but try to help or coach employees to freely choose a healthier way of working and living. Hence, rather than saying that an employee should work and live in this or that particular way, we map the employee's work routines and lifestyle, trying to distinguish what is already good from what is not so good, and then we try to promote the former by providing the necessarily skills.

This view corresponds with that reported in other studies, where WHP is distinguished from traditional medical treatments by its ambition of being patient-centred in its approach and holistic in its mode of analysis (e.g. Mead and Bower, 2000). In the OHS sector this has implied that the focus of the OHS companies has shifted away from the work-environment towards the private sphere of their clients' lives. A health professional explained that this change of focus...

...is somewhat problematic because the very definition of OHS is to deal with work-related health issues. I am not saying that our services do not concern work-related health issues. But mostly the distinction between work-related health and non-work-related health is very difficult to make. If, for example, one of my clients is stressed out and depressed, is this because he has a hectic job with a lot of responsibility, or is it because he has three children and his wife wants a divorce? In such a situation I obviously cannot leave the family situation a side, but neither can I truthfully say

that the roots of the problem are work-related. But mostly this does not matter, because if the employee is important to his employer, the employer wants him back regardless if his basic problems are private or professional.

As the quotes above more or less explicitly state, the turn towards WHP implies a fundamental change of the OHS sector. Whereas OHS was defined by its concern with health issues that were work related in that the causes of ill-health or some health risk were to be found at work, OHS now increasingly concern health issues, which affect or may affect employees' work performance, but where the causes of potential or actual ill-health are to be found in the private sphere or in the integration of the private and professional spheres of employees' lives. Hence, with the turn towards WHP the main task of the health professionals in the OHS sector is to help companies make sure that their employees' whole life-situation is such that they are likely to remain not only healthy in a restricted bio-medical sense but also in the sense of being able and efficient at work.

The fact that the OHS sector has begun examining their clients using a much wider lens is also reflected in how the very notion of health was understood. A health professional said:

To us, health is no longer merely a question of whether or not our clients are defined as such in medical tests, it also relates to clients' lifestyles; if they are motivated, active, self-conscious and able to take care of their health.

Hence, health is increasingly seen to signify certain behavioural and personal characteristics. The active and motivated employee that seeks to improve in all areas in life, and that maintains a vigilant attitude towards his or her health and wellbeing, is typically seen as healthy, whereas the employee that lacks drive, that is negative, and seems unwilling or unable to care for his or her health, is typically seen as representing a risk group of 'the potentially ill'. A health professional pointed out that this new, more encompassing notion of health is directly related to a new culture and management philosophy in their customers' organizations:

I think the new type of health services that we provide relates to how health has become an integrated part of most of our customers' culture and philosophy. It is often assumed nowadays that a healthy company is an efficient company. Healthy individuals are seen to be more change prone, self-going, and so on; so nowadays all companies want to take the 'health-turn'.

Hence, the turn towards WHP conveys a partly new notion of health that implies a particular life as active, motivated and self-aware. Furthermore, this new, more encompassing notion of health is not merely seen as a value in its own right, it is also seen as a vital resource that makes employees more productive, flexible, and generally more appropriate for the type of work and careers that contemporary working life can offer.

Worksite health promotions – two examples

The OHS companies offer a range of services that may generally be given the label WHP – stress programs, work-family life programs, body mass index (BMI) programs, and so on. To illustrate the more concrete meaning and effects of such programs I will

account for two examples below. One is a so-called *lifestyle, health and career coaching* program that many OHS companies offer. Mostly employees attend this type of program as a form of benefit, a sign that one is considered valuable by one's employer. An HR manager explained that:

These programs are not for all employees. They are intended for those employees that are in the middle of their careers, that want to perform better at work, that want to be more challenged, more enthusiastic about work, and so on, but that find it difficult to combine those ambitions with the rest of their lives where they might have a family, a house with a garden and all of those things.

Typically a lifestyle and career-coaching program involves a series of three to five steps. A health professional explained:

The first step is to help the employee describe for him or herself how he or she lives on a day to day basis; what kind of work he or she is doing; whether or not he or she is happy with life in general; whether or not he or she is satisfied with his or her work and career; whether or not he or she is able to uphold a sound balance between work, family and private life, and so on.

By asking and answering these questions, the employee is meant to become aware of his or her life and career, and can begin to think about whether or not he or she is on the right track. The second step is to establish a comprehensive 'self-analysis'. Here the employee is asked first to describe his or her personal characteristics, then to describe what he or she believes that other people would say are his or her main personal characteristics, and finally to point out which of these characteristics are his or her strong qualities and which that are his or her weak qualities. Based on the two first steps, the employee is then, as a third step, given the task of working out his or her visions and goals, on the one hand concerning his or her work, and on the other hand concerning the rest of his or her life. Once these steps are completed the health professional helps the employee work out a concrete plan of how the career and life goals can be achieved. But this was not something that the health professional did for his or her client:

My role is that of a coach. I ask the questions and thereby direct the employees' attention in some directions instead of others. But it is the individual that comes up with the answers. It is so much more powerful to hear yourself say what you feel about yourself, your job, etc., than to hear it from someone else.

In these mapping, analysing, and goal setting activities, work and private life are treated as two separate spheres that should be managed using the same basic principles. A health professional said:

While it is important to keep these spheres apart, it is also important to see how they interrelate. You cannot excel in your career if you do not consider how it affects your private life and vice versa. So in both spheres strategic problems need to be pin pointed and related to one another and goals have to be set which consider how the other sphere is affected.

A concrete example of such activities was given by one health professional who had recently coached a promising, up and coming manager in his mid 30th. The manager had begun showing signs of stress, which, amongst other things, surfaced in the form of a sleeping disorder and in irritated and aggressive behaviour that significantly affected the working climate among his subordinates. The health professional explained:

In this case I helped him see how his professional life and his private life were two equally important domains; because, until then everything had been about work. At first he did not admit that, but when we mapped out his daily routines, his interests, what he thought about, dreamt about, etc. it became obvious that most of his days and nights were occupied by work.

The 'solution' that the health professional worked out with this client was to treat his work and his family life as two separate enterprises. The health professional went on:

By treating his family as an enterprise of equal importance as the professional enterprise he was managing, he began to find it easier to balance work and private life. His wife, who is a housewife, was titled president of the family enterprise while he was president of the professional enterprise. So, now there were two managers and two enterprises.

In general the lifestyle, health and career program can be seen as expressions of how OHS companies seek to exploit a growing concern among HR managers, that employees who may have the proper formal competencies lack the necessary and required social and lifestyle skills (e.g. the capacity to flexibly adjust to changes in the work situation, to cope with stressful situations, staying fit and healthy, etc.). As expressed by an HR manager:

Companies have always searched for excellence when they hire and promote people. But today, the meaning of the word 'excellence' has much wider connotations. It is no longer just a statement about the particular set of occupational skills that a person may hold. Now, excellence is also used to characterize a person who leads a particular type of life; who is physically active, who eats proper food, who avoids unnecessary risks, who is moderate on drugs and alcohol, etc.'

In this context, the *lifestyle, health and career program* is supposed at once to help companies monitor the potential of their human resources and to help employees help themselves become healthier, happier and, in that process, better able to match the expectations of their employers.

Another type of WHP program that many OHS companies offer is the *stress program*. In terms of the issues this program seeks to cover, its focus is narrower than the *lifestyle, health and career program*. Furthermore, in contrast to the former program, it is intended for employees that have shown early signs of ill-health caused by stress. Yet, the programs are still basically similar in that they do not primarily analyse and correct the organization of work, but the lifestyle and the self of the individual. In the case of the stress program, the objective is to teach individuals how to handle stress, or perhaps rather, early signs of stress, by giving them better 'self-knowledge' and abilities to maintain 'a dialogue with themselves'. Yet, a health professional explained, 'it all has to start with the clients accepting that they are responsible for their lives; that they are not victims and that they always have a choice.' The health professional explains:

Many clients initially place their stress-problems outside themselves. It is their job that is too demanding, or their boss that expects too much or is unable to set realistic and clear goals and performance standards. We try to turn that around. We want them to see that the problem and the solution lie within themselves.

Hence, the idea of individual responsibility is emphasized by the stress program. A health professional explained that the focus on individual responsibility does not imply that the OHS companies would consider the employees' work conditions as unproblematic with regards to stress:

On the contrary, but the possibilities of changing work conditions are generally very limited. We can help by temporarily limiting the responsibilities and the performance criteria of those employees that come to us with stress problems. Yet, in the long run the employees either learn to cope with their work or try to find other less demanding work.

In this respect, the professional environment of the clients is basically treated as given, i.e. as something that profoundly affects the clients' health and wellbeing, but that the clients cannot do much about, other than learning to cope with it. A health professional explained:

Ultimately we do try to teach them how to cope with their work and life, we teach them to listen to themselves, to choose, and to accept the fact that in the final instance it is they themselves that are responsible for their health and wellbeing. If the result of the stress program is that a client decides to leave their work for some other career, so be it.

Hence, in the stress program the focus of the therapeutic sessions is the individual and the aim is to teach the individual to adapt to work rather than the other way round. Differently put, the problem, or at least the part of the problem, that the health professional seeks to do something about, is found on the individual level, not on the organizational level; it is the individuals' lack of abilities to cope with stress and to set limits and prioritize that is at the centre of the health professionals' attention. In this pursuit, the first step in the therapy is to establish a trustful climate that helps the employee to accept and commit to 'the fact' that he or she has a problem with stress. A health professional said:

Daring to be open and honest about the fact that you do have a problem is very important; because stress has a lot to do with an experience of not being able to meet expectations. Declaring openly that you have a problem relieves you of some of that burden, at least momentarily, and gives you the opportunity to be honest towards yourself and to accept that you have a problem.

A second step in the therapy revolves around mapping out the daily routines of the employee. These mapping procedures did concern how the employee not only handled his or her work but also the rest of the employees' daily routines. A health professional said:

Many companies talk about 'the 24 hour employee' these days. It means that they take an interest in and care for their employees both at work and in their lives outside work. This is not merely a question of being nice and caring. Managers know that the ways in which employees live outside work significantly affect their abilities and their efficiency at work.

Clients are taught to deal with stress not only by being more aware and reflective about their own behaviour and attitudes but also by starting to think in strategic terms about all areas of their lives. More specifically, clients are taught to make distinctions between work, private life and self, and to set goals in all three areas. A health professional explained:

it is a mindset that we want our clients to adopt. They should be aware of what they are doing and they should think in terms of how the different areas of life, work, private life and self, relate to another.

With regards to the WHP programs accounted for above, as well as to others offered, it is generally underlined that participation is voluntary and that active and motivated

participation is required for any of the WHP programs to have any positive and lasting effect. An HR manager explained that ‘whereas the employees have a direct right to demand that their employers see to it that the work environment is safe, the employers cannot command their employees to eat properly, to exercise, and so on’. In that connection, a health professional said that ‘we can provide our clients with the necessary knowledge and skills and inform them about the responsibility they have to keep themselves in shape, but we cannot obviously demand that they actually do what we advice them and want them to do’. Yet, some of the health professionals underlined that there are delicate issues implied here: ‘Even though it may not be spelled out, nowadays companies tend to employ people, not only because they have certain formal competencies, but also because they are fit, healthy, and perhaps even because they look good’. In that connection, some health professionals underlined that ‘if you never read anything, just sit around watching TV, eating fast-food and never exercise, you might end up as a very unattractive employee’. These quotes indicate that although the employers have no right to command employees to live in such a way that they remain not only healthy but also attractive and capable employees, this was still expected, especially from employees with career ambitions. An HR manager meant that this is furthermore underlined by the fact that ‘many companies have begun to focus on health issues in recruitment processes and in the yearly development talk that all employees have with their superiors’.

In addition to this normative pressure there is also a potential coercive pressure on employees to take part in and to follow the WHP programs provided by the OHS companies. This is when an employee is unable to cope with work because of his or her health status. As said by a health professional: ‘if someone cannot cope for instance with stress and is relieved from work because of illness, this person is obliged to follow the therapeutic procedures and the directives outlined by the responsible medical professional’. In general, this relates to what Parsons (1951) referred to as ‘the sick role’, namely, that a person who is diagnosed as sick or injured has a right to care and is relieved of his or her ordinary responsibilities – e.g. concerning work – provided that the person subordinates to the authority of medical expertise. What this means is that when an employee has been diagnosed as ill because of his or her incapability to work, the health professionals have considerable power to influence all spheres and parts of the employee’s life. Furthermore, the employee has considerable incentive to follow the directives of the health professionals since limited health improvements, or limited motivation and activity in trying to become better, can be taken as a sign that the employee is inappropriate for his or her job and should seek other assignments. A former client of WHP services (a key account manager in a bank) said that:

When I began working here I was very ambitious and my bosses gave me loads of work. I never said no, and I could not, really, because I mean, you are not supposed to say no; it is sort of expected that new employees who are relatively fresh from the university should be prepared to work hard and long hours. Yet, after two years or so I started getting stress problems – at times I could not sleep and I got emotionally unstable. I did receive help from a therapist, but I still remained unable to put in those long and demanding hours. My therapist eventually advised me to seek another job because of health reasons, and I did. But I think it is sick that I should be considered ill because I cannot cope with a job where it is expected that you work enthusiastically up to 12 hours a day.

Discussion

This paper attempts to contribute to the discourse on self-management and the management of self-management by studying how measures and expertise, which are geared towards furthering the health and wellbeing of employees, take part in a managementization of particular lifestyles and selves. Generally, the case study concerning the OHS sector has pointed towards the affinities between the discourse on health and that of enterprising employees. Almost as a repetition of the person idealized in the discourse on enterprising employees, we saw how contemporary WHP programs picture the healthy individual as one that leads an active life, is motivated and, above all, self-managing. The current affinity between these two discourses is, however, somewhat paradoxical from an historical point of view. For whereas the former is intimately related to the neo-liberal political doctrine that was forcefully implemented in Europe and the US in 1980s via Thatcher's and Reagan's right wing administrations (e.g. Rose, 1993; Du Gay & Salaman, 1992), the latter derive from the 1960s' and 1970s' protest movements located at the very far left of the political spectrum (e.g. Crawford, 1980; Korp, 2007). More specifically, it was in the late 1960s, when a series of research reports by public authorities on health risks related to smoking, chemicals, occupational hazards, etc, was acknowledged by anti-authoritarian and anti-corporate groups within the burgeoning environmental movement, that the roots of contemporary discourses and practices of health were established in the form of the 'healthism movement' (Crawford, 1980; Zola, 1972). Healthism emerged as a critique of medical expertise' and practice' specific etiology; i.e. the ways in which medical expertise and practice isolate the individual from the social context in which ill-health is acquired. Hereby medical practices were criticized for seeing and treating merely the symptoms of ill-health while missing out on the more fundamental causes of ill-health which, according to healthism, were to be found in the social and material context surrounding the individual. Yet, even though healthism hereby opened the possibility for multiple causes of ill-health, its anti-authoritarian inclination drove it to situate the problem and the solution of ill-health at the level of the individual (Crawford, 1980; Lupton, 1997). More specifically, healthism turned the attention towards the macro-constraints of to health and well-being, but emphasized that we should not, and need not, subordinate passively to authoritarian medical professionals. On the contrary, our health was seen to be directly related to the extent to which we took control over our own lives. In this respect, healthism emphasized that we do have a choice and a responsibility to cultivate a lifestyle and a self that lead us to greater health and well-being.

Despite its anti-corporate – leftist – origin, it was this emphasis of individual agency and responsibility that opened up an interest for healthism both, among the professional middle-class and among private corporations (Korp, 2007). In the 1970s, after decades of steady growth, the stagnating economy in the US and Europe gave the professional middle-class reason to question its class position. In the continuous efforts to maintain class position – and to cope with the 'fear of falling' – that, since then, has been character trait of the professional middle class (Sennett, 1998; 2003), healthism appears to have been embraced as an element that can help it reassert its work ethic. The steady growth of the market for WHP programs since the 1980s (Zoller, 2003) is the clearest sign that private corporations also have welcomed healthism. Through WHP programs, private corporations have received more than instruments for the provision of healthy

work; they have received instruments for the institution of an ethic saying that individual employees should continuously seek to improve in all areas of life.

In the account above, we saw how WHP programs were embraced in both these regards. On the one hand, we saw how they made health, wellbeing, and prosperous careers derivatives of individuals' choices of lifestyles. Via the health professionals' advice and support, individuals were provided with knowledge to sleep better, to balance private and professional life better, to eat better, etc. Yet, more important than providing individuals with 'proper' knowledge was to make them accept that they were responsible for their health and to make sure that they had enough 'self-discipline', 'motivation', and 'self-control' to shoulder this responsibility. Hence, the WHP programs contributed to nurturing ascetic personal qualities and management oriented practices intended for all spheres of life.

On the other hand, we also saw that the WHP programs represented opportunities for those that had the required character traits to mark their distance and moral superiority over those that lacked them. This discriminatory tendency is in fact implied already by the name WHP, which indicates that the purpose of WHP programs is not to create self-discipline, motivation, self-control, etc., i.e. the moral faculties that are seen to underlie health; rather, it is to promote them and to guard against the threats that may result if individuals lose them. In this respect, the WHP programs are not conduits to better health, wellbeing and success which are available to everyone. On the contrary, for those that lack the moral faculties required for a healthy life and a prosperous career, they instead come forth as a form of tests revealing precisely these deficiencies.

To the extent that WHP programs thus operate as mechanisms that enable some employees to emerge as 'winners', worthy of praise for their self-managing capabilities and their moral qualities, can we then conclude that they also let other employees emerge as 'losers', worthy of nothing but blame for their lack of moral character? I am inclined to answer no, because as we saw in the account above, the tendency was not to allocate blame to those individuals that failed to mobilize the positive and disciplined spirit required to meet standards of health; the tendency was rather to define them as ill or potentially ill. Even though WHP emerged from the healthism movement with its holistic focus and empowering therapies that developed as an outright critique and attack on traditional medical practices, it appears at this point to enable a profound 'medicalization' of those that fail to live in accordance with the healthy lifestyles they seek to promote (cf. Korp, 2007). By 'medicalization' I then mean processes whereby more and more of everyday life comes under medical dominion, influence and supervision (Zola, 1972). In the account for the OHS sector, there appeared to be two main reasons for the medicalization of employees and their lifestyles. One relates to how the very basic principle of WHP programs, i.e. to further health by making individuals aware of the criteria of healthy lives, also makes individuals aware that they are inescapably surrounded by health risks. Somewhat paradoxically, WHP hereby contributes to making all people potentially ill (Lupton, 1997). The other relates to 'the economy of medicalization', i.e. to what the parties involved gain and lose by being diagnosed as ill or disabled. Generally, medicalization leads the diagnosed individual into 'the sick role' (Parsons, 1951), which, essentially, implies that the individual is relieved from his or her responsibility for the condition he or she is in, provided that the

individual subordinates to the prescriptive rules of medical authorities (Hallerstedt, 2006; Parsons, 1951). Once diagnosed as ill, employees that are unable to cope with their work because they are overweight, drink too much alcohol, are stressed out, etc., can no longer be blamed for their carelessness, but can instead demand both, to be relieved from work and to receive medical care. Employers, on their part, can get rid of unproductive employees without being drawn into 'a blame game'. Furthermore, via medical authorities, they receive legitimate powers to demand that employees actually change their behaviors (e.g. eat better and less, exercise more, and so on) in accordance with the prescriptions of medical authorities.

Generally, the account indicates that these medicalization tendencies pave the way for two, in part new, forms and functions of professional medicine. On the one hand, a form of medicine that does not provide care for the sick but anticipatory care for the healthy (Skrabanek, 1994). Examples from the account above are the so called 'health screenings' that most OHS companies offer their clients. Such anticipatory medical services are not the same as traditional preventive medical services, which typically concern merely vaccination against specific diseases and the reduction of the spread of infection (Skrabanek, 1994). Instead of such attempts to control identifiable agents of disease, anticipatory medical services combine the risk calculating methods typically used by insurance companies with medical expertise to provide clients with probabilistic speculations about health risks and expert advice as to how clients may avoid or post-pone these risks. As we saw in the account above, it was via an alliance between such anticipatory medical services and WHP programs that a modified version of the classical Parsonian sick role was established (Parsons, 1951), a 'potentially sick role', i.e. a role that tells us that we must never forget that we are always potentially ill, and that makes us aware that we have a responsibility of making sensible use of the opportunities (e.g. WHP programs) we are given for the sake of managing our lifestyles for continued health, wellbeing, and professional success.

On the other hand, the medicalization tendencies appear to open for an authoritarian medicine, which takes care of the increasing number of individuals who are diagnosed as ill, disabled or as suffering from one of a multitude of new psycho-social 'disorders' that have emerged during the past two decades. The common denominator of these new diagnoses is precisely that they originate in some deviance from norms of healthy and functional lifestyles. Examples abound: compulsive gambling, substance abuse, eating disorders, stress disorders, sexual addiction, learning disabilities, procrastination disorders, etc. The labeling of groups of individuals as sick or disabled because they have failed to manage themselves in accordance with norms and ideals of health, wellbeing, employability, etc. is a way of leading them into the classical Parsonian 'sick role' where they are relieved from their moral responsibility, and thus from their failure, provided that they subordinate to the authority of medical expertise and to public authorities that make administrative decisions based on medical diagnoses.

Hence, whereas anticipatory medicine joins hands with WHP to distribute opportunities and freedom to shoulder the responsibility for one's health and career, authoritarian medicine distributes labels of ill-health and the freedom from responsibility for one's health and career that comes with subordination to medical and public authority. In

either case, it makes the individuals' selves and lifestyles objects of managerial interventions.

Conclusions

Issues of health in working life used to be seen as closely related to the classical liberal notion of 'the social' (cf. Dean, 2007). 'The social' emerged in the 19th century as a concept encompassing a critique of the ills and risks related to the functioning of the industrial capitalist economy. It gave rise to a social way of governing (which reached its apogee in the European welfare state projects of the mid 20th century) that combined collective responsibility and individual compensation in areas of health, unemployment, education, and so on. Dean (2007) argues that the current neo-liberal regime implies the gradual dismantling of 'the social', and the social way of governing, in favor of a new system that emphasizes individual responsibility and choice among resources and expertise in the areas of health, education, employment, etc., which are no longer made available by the state, but by the market. With regards to this issue, Cornelius et al. (2008) recently asked whether health professionals are becoming means that no longer primarily help individuals by protecting them from the ills of the economy, but that instead help the economy by maintaining a population of 'economically feasible' individuals, or by turning 'economically burdensome' individuals into 'economically feasible' individuals. Differently put, are health professionals becoming resources that no longer protect the social against the ills of the economy, but that instead protect the economy from the ills of the social?

By and large, the study of the OHS industry accounted for in this paper outlines some of the consequences of the dismantling of the social described by Dean (2007). As such it also generates a partly affirmative answer to the question raised by Cornelius et al. (2008). More specifically, the OHS industry and the WHP programs it offers employees in its customer companies, emerge as parts of a neo-liberal way of governing society that views the social, and the systems of collectivized responsibility for the potential ills and risks of the economy that it implies, as risks themselves to the performance of the economy (Dean, 2007). Collectivized responsibility via a welfare state is typically seen to lead to a reduction of individuals' freedom of choice, to an unfortunate shrinking of the market economy, and to a lethargic, irresponsible population (Cornelius et al., 2008). Here the provision of WHP programs by market financed OHS companies comes forth as a dismantling of the social through an individualization of health risks. Differently put, it comes forth as a new form of 'prudentialism' (Rose, 1993) where the main focus is no longer the employer's collective responsibility for the safety of the working environment, but the employer's distribution of opportunities to employees who are meant to use them, to take an individual responsibility for leading a life that makes them not only healthy but also up to the challenges of work.

The study of the OHS industry has shown how the possibilities of such a shift in responsibilities are closely related to a partly new way of understanding health. More specifically, the study has shown how health has come to imply not merely that an individual passes a clinical test but also that the individual leads an active, flexible and above all self-managed style of life. The study has furthermore shown how it is in

relation to such an understanding of health that health professionals stand out as potential authorities in the management of self-managing and enterprising individuals. As noted in the introduction to this paper, the management of self-managing, healthy and enterprising individuals is at odds with all forms of direct authoritative interventions; just as entrepreneurship cannot be called forth via orders or demands, so also healthy lives cannot be maintained via authoritarian medical instructions. The management of self-managed, healthy and enterprising lives must instead be based on the provision of proper knowledge and therapy, or coaching, to help individuals freely adopt the active and motivated attitude required to shoulder their accepted responsibilities. It is this role that WHP programs, and the health professionals providing them, have the potential of playing; they contribute to making up individuals that manage themselves for greater health, wellbeing, and professional success. Here, however, it is important to point out that the paper has also shown how the affinities between health and a self-managed and entrepreneurial lifestyle tend towards transforming those groups of individuals that lack 'motivation' and 'initiative', that remain 'dependent', 'collective', and 'self-sacrificing', i.e. those individuals that fail to display or learn the character traits and lifestyles of the idealized enterprising individuals, from a status as unsuccessful and unemployable, to a status as ill, potentially ill or deviant. Hence, health professionals and their associated therapies do not merely come forth as significant points of authority in the management of self-managed individual lives and careers, they also come forth as authorities that manage the population by singling out the 'economically feasible' from the 'economically burdensome'.

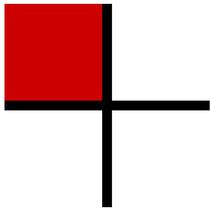
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Resisting self-management? On the possibility of dissolving oneself in fast food restaurants*

Alexander Paulsson

abstract

Self-management is normally not associated with resistance. For the most part, self-management is rather conceived as a form of self-development, in which the subject realizes his- or herself while benefitting the organization. This study of blogs about work in fast food restaurants, however, shows two things: how self-managed workers use the freedom that comes with self-management to refrain from doing certain actions, and how this freedom is made possible due to the workers' ability to change their ways of being. Taken together, self-management is resisted when the techniques of self-management are in the service of and for the worker; whilst moving in the direction of dissolving one's sense of self.

I am a robot. After several months working at the fast-food restaurant I've realized that I have become a slave to its codes and conducts. Everything is systematic, follows certain logics, and in addition I now talk in a special way.

[...]

I just want to throw the food on the customers instead of putting it on the tray. In the past you could see me be happy and nice. But the fast-food restaurant changes everything about you as an individual, and of course also my body language. (Anonymous, *The fast food restaurant*, 26th of November 2007)¹

The self-management literature almost exclusively focuses on knowledge work and the creative industries. Indeed, very few authors would describe work in fast-food restaurants as self-management. This paper, however, shows that self-management is important even in work settings that are highly standardized and controlled. The quotes above already give a hint of this. This fast-food worker would like to act according to *her* feelings, or behave in a manner that would satisfy *her* desires, not the corporation's. She would like to 'throw the food on the customers instead of putting it on the tray'.

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1 All translations from Swedish to English are by the author of this paper.

This suggests that she is engaging in self-management, albeit involuntarily. Her feelings urge a certain action, but she manages herself, at least for the moment.

The importance of controlling or managing one's emotions in service work has been central in Hochschild's (1983) study of flight attendants. In her book, Hochschild shows how flight attendants need to self-manage their emotions, to do 'emotional labour', in order to create a good atmosphere for their passengers. This is part of the way fast food workers manage themselves as well (see also Rafaeli, 1989; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1990). But self-management is broader than emotional labour: it also includes the freedom to determine how to fulfill tasks that are defined by the organization (e.g. Markham and Markham, 1995). Traditionally, fast food workers enjoy very little of that freedom but, more recently, fast food restaurants have started to experiment with promoting 'mild' forms of self-management. For example, some of the self-managed workers in this study are given the task to do 'management', which includes the freedom on how to give content to this broad label.

In contrast to studies that emphasize the liberating and empowering effects of self-management, this paper shows how workers utilize the freedom that comes with self-management in resisting their work. To do 'management', self-managerially, is not something that these workers are happy about: it is rather seen as a burden that they could do without. The paper shows empirically that different tactics are employed in achieving this end.

The empirical material that this paper draws upon is taken from two blogs dedicated to the experience of working in fast food restaurants.² In these blogs, workers share, reflect and comment upon their work experiences. By doing so, they not only describe their experiences but also invent, develop and fantasize about different tactics that may be used to avoid the self-management that is imposed on them by the organization.

This study is structured as follows. In the first section, different notions of self-management are discussed, including related concepts such as self-leadership and empowerment. After this follows a section where resistance within self-management is elaborated. This part draws on Foucault's ideas on the possibility of resistance and also on others' interpretations and uses thereof. This section is followed by a short methodological section. In the subsequent empirical section, the tactics that workers employ to resist their work are analyzed in relation to the concept of self-management. In the discussion that follows, those tactics are put in relation to previous studies on resistance. From this, it is suggested that these tactics give new insights in how self-management is resisted in standardized and formal work settings

What is self-management?

Self-management has been described as an effective and efficient method for managing, but also for empowering, subordinates in an organization (Shipper and Manz, 1992;

2 The blogs used for this paper are *The fast food restaurant* [<http://fastfoodrestaurangen.blogg.se>] and *Jamesy* [<http://jamesy.blogg.se/>]

Ross, 1994).³ By flattening the organizational structure, and by defining tasks and goals clearly, costs of control could be lowered as subordinates could work, by and large, without superiors. Self-management is thus as much a consequence of cutting-back management (Barker, 1993; Freeman, 1999) as it is of human relations and empowerment ideas put into practice (Stewart and Manz, 1994).⁴

Although self-management could be understood as a ‘substitute for leadership’ (Manz et al., 1980), this does not mean control or management is absent. On the contrary, in self-managing teams, peer-groups consist of ‘about 10 to 15 people who assume total responsibility for their area of accountability whether they work in a service, manufacturing, or information industry’ (Barker and Tompkins, 1994: 225). In such peer-pressure environments, ‘identification becomes a key variable essential for the functional control of work’ (*ibid.*: 226). Kirkman and Rosen (1999) also found that the more responsibility a team is given, the more it is empowered and also productive. So, for self-management to work, a high degree of identification with the organization is necessary. In case of dis-identification, individuals may be severely sanctioned by the other team members. This implies that individual responsibility is present after all, although formally the team is the responsible entity. That said, identification is sometimes not more than a façade, not more than management talk, as workers sneeringly, reflexively and cynically distance themselves from such attempts to regulate identity (Kunda, 1992; Cederström and Grassman, 2008). Needless to say, over the years, scholars interested in self-management have been moving away from behavioral programming (Manz and Sims et al, 1980) to emphasizing organizational design (Mills, 1983; Manz et al., 1990; Manz, 1992), to management of culture and norms (Shipper and Manz, 1992) and the benefits of empowering subordinates (Ross, 1994).

The role of leadership in self-management has also been discussed (Manz and Sims, 1987). Stewart and Manz (1995: 750) summarize the challenge in this by posing the following question: ‘How does one lead others who are supposed to lead themselves?’ In their answer, they stress how leaders ought to engage in ‘social learning’. Neck and Manz (1992; 1996) similarly argue that self-management can be learnt by ‘thought self-leadership training’ and that this results in more optimistic perceptions of the situation at hand and, consequently, self-efficacy. Wageman (2001) as well as Druskat and Wheeler (2004) reaffirm the belief that self-managing teams need an external leader in order to be efficient. External leaders need to balance between building relationships, and empowering and persuading their teams for them to function (Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Kirkman and Rosen, 1999). Along the same lines, Langfred (2004) points out that a high degree of trust weakens peer-pressure. Through this, small self-managing teams might end up being less functional than intended (see also Uhl-Bien and Graen, 1998).

3 Historically, self-management has been a way for workers to organize production themselves. In Yugoslavia, for example, the task of organizing factories and production was transferred from the federal state to the workers. In Chile, during the 1970s, before the coupe d’état, workers also self-managed production to some extent (Petras and H Veltmeyer, 2006; Flaherty, 2003)

4 In health care, self-management could be seen as a way to cut costs by letting the patient take care of his or her own health treatment (see e.g. Groessl and Cronan, 2000).

Self-management has also been criticized. Markham and Markham (1995) argue that the level of analysis in self-management is wrong; or, rather, that it misses its target. Self-management focuses too much, they claim, on the individual, his or her well-being, and not the tasks to be performed or the well-being of the organization. They argue that self-leadership is a more adequate concept, or at least broader, in the sense that it also includes self-management. Drawing upon Manz (1992), Markham and Markham (1995) differentiate the concepts by saying that ‘the application of self-management techniques tends to allow employees significant self-influence regarding how to complete a task to meet a standard (as defined by the system), whereas self-leadership addresses *what* should be done and *why*, in addition to *how* to do it’ (Markham and Markham, 1995: 346). They admit that such a distinction is hard to identify empirically as their rewards are not that easily separated into different categories (i.e. system and personal rewards). Yet, they claim that to ‘lead oneself’ is different from managing oneself, mainly due to the fact that the former does not include task-descriptions whereas the latter does.

Autonomy and self-efficacy is required for self-leadership (Norris, 2008). When the employee is granted autonomy, self-leadership is moreover supposed to be empowering. Empowerment, however, relies on self-regulatory behavior, which seems to come into conflict with the simultaneously granted autonomy. In order to reconcile this contradiction, Neck and Houghton (2006: 271) argue that self-leadership aims at ‘a self-influence process through which people achieve the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to perform’, and ‘consists of specific behavioral and cognitive strategies designed to positively influence personal effectiveness’. So, for self-leadership to work, it is necessary to have a ‘hierarchical organization of the self-regulatory system in the form of superordinate and subordinate feedback loops or goals’ (Neck and Houghton, 2006: 276). It is noteworthy that hierarchies of self-regulatory systems, and thus of managerial control, are required for self-leadership and also for self-management to work. Although this effectively reaffirms the notions of normative (Kunda, 1992) and/or concertive controls (Barker, 1993) in post-bureaucratic organizations, where employees have a high degree of autonomy, it does not provide any satisfactory answer to the question of how self-management, in more formal and standardized work settings, is taking place, or how it possibly can be resisted.

What actually constitutes self-management is still debated however (Castaneda et al., 1999; Markham and Markham, 1995; Millikin et al., 2010; Neck and Houghton, 2006; Norris, 2008). Although most scholars have moved away from proposing behavioral programming (e.g. Pearce and Manz, 2005; Tsui and Ashford, 1994), the quotes above, from the blog, nonetheless suggest that this, at least to some extent, is prevalent in fast-food restaurants. Remarkably though, most previous research has studied self-management in teams, between teams, or in terms of (thought) self-leadership, but not how selves become manageable, managed and held responsible through self-management in formal and standardized work settings.

Resistance as self-management

In the fast food restaurant, to ‘manage’ is not only something done by managers. Workers also do managerial tasks, sometimes against their will. But, when resisting,

what are the workers struggling against when doing self-management, oneself or the management? To answer this question, it is not necessary to look into resistance as such, nor into the specific kind of resistance that has been labeled sabotage, parody, cynicism, etc. Either such acts of resistance are 'decaf', i.e. not involving real acts of opposition (Contu, 2008), or 'unproductive' insofar as the subject is seen as already-present and hence not produced while resisting power (Fleming, 2005a). Instead, what is called for is a notion that can elucidate the connection between self-management and acts of resistance. Such a notion of resistance moreover needs to show how selves become manageable through techniques of power, on the one hand, and how manageable selves can enact resistance, on the other hand.

Foucault does not explicitly mention the concept of self-management (e.g. Spoelstra, 2007). A common thread in many of his analyses of power, however, is how one is managing oneself. When following Foucault, resistance and power are inseparable. It is said that power needs resistance to function, but resistance also needs power to exist (Hoy, 2004). The mere existence of resistance represents perhaps the clearest sign that power, in one way or another, is functioning. If power would not be functioning, resistance would not exist. The idea that power requires resistance is perhaps best captured in an oft-quoted phrase by Foucault: 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault, 1998: 95). This phrase, its notion of resistance and the implications thereof, have been discussed widely and in various contexts. Also in the context of self-management, defined broadly, some tentative implications have been discussed. For one thing, if power requires resistance, then the subject must have agency if only to choose to align with the present power relation (e.g. Smart, 1982; Taylor, 1984). Otherwise, power would be absolute. Additionally, if the subject is able to go beyond the present power relation, the subject must necessarily have autonomy, or degrees thereof, hence making resistance possible (Thompson, 2003; Wisniewski, 2000).

It is assumed that power comes from below, exists in relationships and is found everywhere (Foucault, 1998). Moreover, by being neutral, relations of power are reproduced whilst also being asymmetrical and unequal. The key question then is whether power works through domination or on a voluntary basis. For Foucault (1998), the short answer is that power works through domination, within forced relations. There is no voluntarism involved in upholding any relations of power. If this is correct, then the relations on which power is dependent for reproducing itself can be disclosed *and* inverted, thereby causing a change in the way power functions. That said, Foucault (1984/1987) emphasizes that he does not speak about power in general. There is no universal, ahistorical or objective theory of power in his writings (cf. Fraser, 1989). Instead, he speaks about 'relationships of power', nothing else. It follows that relations of power, their technologies and deployments (disciplinary, bio-power, governmental etc), have to be studied in particular contexts.

Even though domination and force are key concepts for Foucault, he did change his view on power (Hoy, 1985). In his later work, Foucault seeks to describe how conduct and action work in shaping the relationships of power and, in particular, how it works within and through the subject. This is made most clear in the influential and much debated essay 'The subject and power'. Here, Foucault writes that 'what defines a

relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future' (1982: 789). That is to say, once again, power seeks to produce subjects through conditioning the context, thereby forcing the subject to manage herself. Not only does this tend to reproduce present power relations but it also shows that the foremost outcome of relationships of power is the self-managing subject. Insofar as the subject is an outcome *of* power, not merely a condition *for* it, one could say that power produces useful, adaptable and appropriate human subjects through domination *and* the self (Foucault, 1982; 1984/1987; and 1993), and this is done by narrowing the possible ways of conduct in the temporal category of the futural (Hoy, 2009).

Criticisms of Foucault have focused on a variety of issues, ranging from the lack of a normative standpoint and of justifications for resistance (Fraser, 1985; 1989), to the incoherence of his argumentation (Taylor, 1984) and the question of agency (Smart, 1982; Taylor, 1984). Foucault responded to some of this criticism in his later writings (and interviews). Regarding the latter issue, i.e. the question of agency, Foucault (1982; 1984/1987) asserts that power needs 'free' subjects to function. In an oft-quoted phrase, Foucault also writes that 'Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are "free"' (1982: 790). By this he is often said to mean that relations of power designate and disseminate 'free' subjects, but because they are 'free' they also become trajectories for retaining the present relationship of power. Conversely, suppose subjects were not to be 'free', then power would be absolute. As this is not the case, presumably, this implies that if the subject is 'free' to manage herself by way of consent, this would at least require agency. To act 'freely' only within present power relations is not sufficient for radical change though. Rather, the subject has to go beyond, even while staying within present relations of power. Insofar as the subject must go beyond present relations, resistance cannot solely be based on agency but must have a basis in autonomy also (Healy, 2001; Thompson, 2003; Wisniewski, 2000). The question, then, is whether this is possible.

Although Foucault does not speak about agency or autonomy, per se, the later Foucault (1982; 1984/1987) speaks about liberty and freedom, and how this is required for both power to function and for resistance to exist.⁵ The importance, here, of autonomy has also been recognized by some scholars (e.g. Healy, 2001; Thompson, 2003; Wisniewski, 2000). Yet, Bevir (1999) claims, and rightly so according to me, that autonomy is unfeasible as subjects always work against a pre-individual background from which they cannot escape. Similarly, Thompson argues that 'to develop resistances against these [existing] practices from within them would remain merely reactive; they would do nothing other than counter the subjugation that the technologies of subjectivity seek to forge' (2003: 131). If so, then self-managing subjects operate only within the area defined by the relationships of power, thereby limiting the possibility of resistance to this area.

5 The exception to this are the published lectures from 1982-1983, *Government of self and others*. Here Foucault (2010) frequently mentions autonomy when lecturing on Kant.

Resisting self-management might seem like an unfeasible or even impossible task. Despite this, or perhaps rather, thanks to this, several scholars have tried to understand the possibility of resistance – sometimes by referring to Foucault, sometimes not. One stream of thought which draws on Foucault's ideas suggests, it is by contesting oneself as a subject, or by de-centering one's sense of self, that resistance becomes possible. To resist is accordingly about 'dissolving your sense of who you are and disrupting your sense of what the right thing to do is' (Hoy, 2004: 89). Which is to say, resistance is about dissolving oneself and not so much about 'providing an alternative account of who you are and what you ought to do' (*ibid.*). Foucault also asks himself (and the reader): 'Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are' (1982: 785). From this question follows the idea that resisting self-management is a matter of reclaiming the self, of placing the relations of power in the service *of* and *for* ourselves (Thompson, 2003).

Approaching the blogs

The blogs referred to in this article are about work in fast food restaurants. Since many of the blog posts describe the typical work in fast food restaurants, they are used as a source of empirical evidence. I followed them on and off for about six months, during the second half of 2009. I was an observer and did not participate in any discussion. Still, one may wonder, what do one or two blogs about work in fast food restaurants say about all the things happening in such a place? Or, are fast food restaurants even particularly appropriate workplaces to study if one is interested in self-management, and how this can possibly be resisted? I do not know the answer to these questions; it is left for the reader to answer. Additionally, I do not know if it is possible to study work in fast-food restaurants online, through blogs, at all. The assumption is nonetheless that blogs, as being part of an online world, stand in relation to the offline world. Wittel (2000, paragraph 22) also argues that 'e-mailing, online chatting, web surfing and other interactive practices are very real experiences for the people performing them'. He continues by arguing that '[i]t has to be acknowledged that the use of interactive media for communication can be as real as a talk on the phone or a face-to-face dialogue' (*ibid.*). That is to say, to be online is as real as being offline. Similarly, Ward asserts that '[t]he notion of a purely virtual community and the idea of the post-human are both extremely optimistic and rather grand given that the majority of people do not have the opportunity to live their lives as "pure information"'. 'Instead', she persists, 'they continue to fight their social and political battles in the wider, concrete social world' (Ward, 1999: 103). I agree with Wittel's argument as well as with Ward's conclusion that 'any individual virtual community must be perceived as being in a relationship with the wider physical world', for better or for worse.

The fast food restaurant and its blogging workers

Fast food restaurants are well-know organizations, and for various reasons. There is no need to give a detailed description of a particular restaurant or to give a bird's eye-view of the whole industry. Instead, let us begin straightaway, and do so where the action begins: at the cashier.

The cashier

I repeat everything as I've learned to do this when working at the cashier. The problem is that this mental injury, coming from the work, penetrates into other elements of life and work. For example, I repeat everything my supervisor asks me to do, as if I were an idiot. (Anonymous, *The fast food restaurant*, 26th of November 2007)

The cashier is the employee who meets costumers. At the register, the cashier is supposed to repeat what the customers order. The cashier does so in order to avoid any misunderstandings. Any misunderstandings that cause mistakes in the order will take time and resources away from doing other things. Not only is the cashier supposed to repeat every order but he or she is also supposed to follow certain standardized scripts.

I hate my cashier-voice, it is so fuuucking inferior and pathetic. "Is there aaaanything else I could do for youuuu?" (Jamesy, *The fast food restaurant*, 26th of November 2007)

Jamesy's mind gets twisted at, and by, work when describing how her voice adapts to corporate policies. She is obviously disdainful about it but not without still paying due respect to customers. One might even say that she is reflective about her behavior in a masochistic way (Cederström and Grassman, 2008), as she now, on the whole, looks back scornfully and, in doing so, distances herself from her own conduct. To distance oneself from the organization, to dis-identify, has earlier been described as a strategy for resistance (Collinson, 1994). But to dis-identify in this position is difficult as customers identify the employee working at the cash register as (a member of) the organization. Consequently, in addition to the demands stemming from the organization and its management, customers are also demanding.

On one side, you have an unpleasant, grumpy and unrealistic customer that you have to smile in the face, even though you only want to jump over the counter, swinging a left hook and let hell break loose. On the other side, you have a nasty supervisor whose face you just want to press down into the deep-fat fryer. (Anonymous, *The fast food restaurant*, the 21st of Sept 2007)

Here, the blogger is squeezed between the customer on one hand and by the manager on the other. Against her will, she has to smile towards the customers and follow her supervisor's instructions. But what she really wants to do is to use physical violence towards both of them. Still, she is aware of her position in which she reifies present relationships of power. On one side, there is management 'whose face you just want to press down into the deep-fat fryer'. On another side, there is the customer who is 'unpleasant, grumpy and unrealistic'. Occasionally customers also report to management if they are unhappy with the service. So, instead of jumping 'over the counter, swinging the left hook and start the inferno', she smiles. In addition there are the co-workers. If co-workers do not get along with one another, for any reason, they might inform management of what is happening, spreading rumors. All in all, management, customers and co-workers are the three primary relations of power at work in the fast food restaurant (see also Lopez, 2010).

As suggested by this, the fast-food worker is surrounded by relations of power. Yet, the work at the cash register is standardized and controlled, leaving almost no space open for self-management. It is when management imposes this task as such to the workers, that they are allowed to self-manage themselves. It follows that self-management has to

be learnt by the worker somehow. Markham and Markham (1995: 347) also argue that 'the formal superior must take some type of proactive stance with respect to developing his or her subordinates so that they can reach the desirable end state of self-management (or, if the situation warrants it, self-leadership)'. But while formal superiors try to assist the subordinates so that they will be able to self-manage, they are also opening up the possibility for them to resist.

Resisting management

When workers carry out managerial tasks and are held responsible for doing so, the idea of self-management emerges (Manz, Sims et al, 1980; Manz, 1982). It also stems from the development of the objectives of self-management: from cutting costs to motivating and empowering the workers (Kirkman and Rosen, 1999; Ross, 1994; Shipper and Manz, 1992). It is by giving responsibility to the workers, i.e. by wanting them to want to do management tasks, that managers try to empower them. The workers, however, receive this reluctantly, as expressed by Jamesy:

For some reason I do not yet understand, many at work trust or rely on me. Or, of course my colleagues trust me. They know that I would never gossip, pass things on or manage them. They know that I do not care if they violate nonsense-rules, take breaks or eat French fries when supervisors are not present. But there is another kind of trust or confidence I'm talking about. Work leaders' trust. They seem to think that I'm honest and obedient, a good worker simply.

[...]

In any case, many more have gotten the idea that they can trust me, to keep an eye on things when they are away/in a different part of the restaurant. Increasingly, I hear 'Anna, do you tell the cashiers to blah blah.., Anna, make sure this gets done when I do some paper work? etc...'. (Jamesy, *Jamesy's blog*, 17th of Jan 2008)⁶

Having trust from someone suggests that control is not necessary since trust is the main ingredient for self-managing teams to function, although too much of it can weaken the indispensable peer-pressure (Langfred, 2004). But this is not simply the delegation of authority as what is delegated, sticking to this managerial concept, is in fact managerial tasks. Instead, what is happening here is the downscaling of managements' responsibility through the means of self-management. Insofar as management is taking advantage of the asymmetrical, non-reciprocal and unequal relation of power, trust allows the worker, Jamesy in this case, to go about the tasks that she has been given: it allows her to self-managerially do management tasks. Now she is not only a worker, doing manual labor, but also an 'empowered' worker with managerial responsibility. Allegedly, she is not ready to cope with this; but nevertheless she seems to cope with the situation by way of consent, by accepting the power relation temporarily. Still, she is more of a bystander than a manager doing management as she allows events to occur without intervening. By having managerial responsibility, she is able to turn self-management within the existing relation of power against the intentions of management.

To master against one's will

6 Anna is not her real name according to the blog.

In addition to management and customers, the relation between co-workers is also enmeshed in power. When subordinates are obligated to carry out tasks beyond their formal responsibilities, for instance management tasks, they are, as previously mentioned, empowered (e.g. Kirkman and Rosen, 1999). This, however, implies that workers identify with the organization. But this is not always the case. Jamesy does not identify with the organization. It becomes clear as she writes about the responsibilities inherent in the managerial attempt to impose managerial tasks and the kinds of dilemmas this puts her into.

This puts me in a difficult situation. I have to pass on orders to my co-workers, which puts me over them. I cannot do that. I'm really uncomfortable in such a situation. Firstly, I do not want to do that, and secondly, I am almost unable to do so. Not that I cannot take initiative, lead a group if needed, and the like. But to give orders is quite another matter. I did not understand the difference in full until now. In my circles, open hierarchies in which such things prevail are non-existent; to take the lead there is always on the mandate of the others. I do not find that a job in today's society gives a mandate like that, and definitely not over others with the same occupation. It's called to master, which I hate when others do to me at work. (Jamesy, *Jamey's blog*, 17th of January 2008)

To 'master' is against her will. To 'master' without mandate from others is unthinkable in her circles, as she puts it. However, this does not mean that there is no will to power on her side. Instead, the will to power manifests as power to resist mastering others. Following this, one could say that power is de-amplified, or, rather, that the relation of power is weakened. What makes this possible is the fact that her subjectivity is not entirely colonized by the organization. Her idea of self is formed exterior to the relations in fast food restaurant. The 'circles' she mentions are such an exterior space for de-subjectification of the self. Not that power is excluded there either, as a state of post-power is not possible, but it allows another (additional) sense of self to emerge.

Changing positions

It seems Jamesy can bear with the fact of managing herself. But doing management tasks generally is conceived as a burden, something imposed, not as rewarding or empowering (cf. Kirkman and Rosen, 1999; Shipper and Manz, 1992). Yet, Jamesy copes with the situation by consent, or, rather, by turning into a temporary self-management mode. In other words, she is complying by simply forwarding orders given by management. When doing this, she emphasizes that it is not her that is being responsible for the orders as such, but instead the work-leader or manager. She states this by saying that:

My tactic so far has been to nod and smile, and then let the others stand still [to have short break] and rest a bit before saying that X wants us to sweep and wipe off. Nothing forced, nothing that is personally addressed. But they comply anyhow. And I stand there and feel uncomfortable. If it is not obvious, I usually lie to the supervisor when s/he comes back and say that we did not have the time, but usually it is too obvious. When I avoid saying anything at all and pretending it is nothing, I am the one who has to take the invisible punch. This is nothing that I have anything against; I rather take irritated eyes than have to command others. [...]

I'm thinking of saying it straight out the next time it comes up. To simply say 'Nope, orders, those you have to give yourself. I am not a manager. It is not part of my job tasks'. (Jamesy, *Jamey's blog*, 17th of Jan 2008)

A comment by someone called nicx, on the same blog-posting, advocates that she should:

Argue! Otherwise there is a risk that unconsciously you will start to give orders to people even though the manager did not ask for it. You don't get paid for bossing around, say it simply and clearly if the WL [work leader] complains. (nicx quoted in, *Jamsey's blog*, 17th of Jan 2008)

These quotes elucidate how attempts of imposing management tasks are both conceived and contested by the workers. Jamesy, for example, emphasizes that giving orders is done without force, as she does not want to be held responsible amongst her co-workers. She manages herself on the one hand, while allowing the manager to speak 'through' her on the other hand. By emphasizing that this is what manager or work leader X want 'us' to do, she is circumventing the responsibility of carrying out managerial tasks amongst her co-workers. She is still responsible though to the work leader. But, in this relation, she can take 'the invisible punch', if so necessary.

Finding new tactics

The quotes above suggest that bloggers write about emotions, resistance and much else happening at work, even at home presumably. To be that engaged or committed to work while at home could be seen as the corporate colonization of nonwork space and time (Caproni, 2004; Cerulo, 1997; Hill et al, 1998), and subsequently the heart of a managed subjectivity (cf. Fleming, 2005b; Hochschild, 1983). But instead of seeing these blogs as an expression of the corporate colonization of non-work space and time, they could be seen as spaces where to discover new ways of being and doing resistance. For example, the blog 'The Post Office' [*Postverket*] carries an email from one of its readers:

I have spread the word about the blog a little. Basically, I have talked about it, when at the coffee machine, to colleagues that I usually hang out with at work. A number of small positive, more or less obvious, effects have come from the blog. Colleagues whom I talked to about it, spreads it further and discuss it with others. A few colleagues with whom I in earlier discussions more or less taught how things were, they have now read the blog and since become much more active as they have "read" and "know" stuff that I have before had to burp up. They participate in discussions with more confidence. A few motivational suggestions have come up, such as "we could also do that" and discussions of how things should be done on both a small and a larger scale. The blog has thus opened up more and more direct discussion about our situation. The funny thing is that in the past, I was usually the one initiating these discussions, whereas it is now my co-workers who start them – sometimes, by referring to the blog. (*Postverket*, no date, March 2009)

Indeed, what the boss says can actually be questioned, contested and resisted as this has virtually been done before. Meanwhile writing, reading and commenting on blogs, it is possible to gain insights into novel tactics of how to resist self-management. This might also effect what is happening in the offline world, as illustrated in the Post Office blog. If so, then offline and online worlds are connected, as suggested by both Wittell (2000) and Ward (1999).

Discussion

Self-management is often seen as a way to cut costs, to empower employees, and so a 'substitute for leadership' (Manz, Sims et al, 1980). Usually it is also understood as involving responsibility and autonomy as far as the worker is 'free' to fulfill tasks as defined by the organization (Markham and Markham, 1995). Yet a self-regulatory hierarchical system is needed for self-management, let alone for self-leadership, to work as intended (Neck and Houghton, 2003). Along these lines, the proponents of self-management argue for its benefits, both, for the organization and for the individual employee. This relates in various ways to the notions of power and resistance in the later Foucault (e.g. 1982; 1984/1987; 1993; 1998). If the relations of power produce 'free' subjects, then these 'free' subjects have no choice but to 'freely' manage themselves. As any other technology, however, self-management is neutral, without properties. Self-management can thus be used in both negative and positive ways.

In the fast food restaurant, self-management is made possible due to management's attempts at imposing, or rather down sourcing, the task of doing management as such to the trustworthy and reliable worker. For the worker, in that situation, there is no choice but to be empowered, to be forced to self-manage. But as it turns out, the freedom inherent in self-management also makes resistance possible. Freedom, as here understood, is limited to the possibility of refusing and not refusing to fulfill what one is expected to in specific designated positions. One could say, echoing Foucault (1998), that resistance is only exerted within the freedom granted by the relations of power, neither beyond nor exterior to them. As this freedom is within the realm of the relations of power, i.e. the fast food restaurant, it resembles agency (Bevir, 1999) more than autonomy (Thompson, 2003; Wisniewski, 2000). The self-managed worker can, in other words, by means of being 'free', refuse to be master over others. It follows from this that *resistance is more about resisting oneself from doing certain actions at certain times, and about resisting oneself from being in certain position at certain times, than anything else. Put differently, resistance is about resisting one self from being and doing what one is 'free' to do.*

Turning to previous studies, it has been repeatedly shown, perhaps most notably by Kunda (1992), how workers use different means in order to rebut attempts to normatively control them. Some of the strategies or techniques of resistance include distancing (Collinson, 1994; Fleming and Spicer, 2003), coping (Carls, 2007; Pedersen, 2009), or circumventing and speaking (Prasad and Prasad, 2000). What a lot of these have in common is that resistance is part of a dis-identification process, away from, and against, the organization. It has also been suggested that dis-identification processes are part of the production of a new sense of self. When so doing, not only is one distancing oneself from the organization, but one is also distancing oneself from oneself (Fleming, 2005a). Still, if cynicism is the subject's production of subjectivities, or identity-based resistance, is this not merely following the call for 'flexibility' in the contemporary employability regime? As far as this regime usually goes, workers are expected to stay at work, while at home, yet being 'flexible' enough to search for other jobs continuously (Contu, 2008; Maravelias, 2007). Since the occupational self is insecure (Collinson, 2003), let alone singular, the self is placed socially in-between work, home, and the possibility of having to search for a new job. This makes identity-based

resistance more of an outcome of power than a means of resistance. Therefore, it is not enough to 'just be yourself' insofar as this is a form of neo-normative control (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009). Instead, one must seek to go beyond dis-identification practices, and Costas and Fleming (2009) consequently argue that self-alienation is the way forward.

This study contributes to this body of knowledge by arguing that resistance is not so much about the creative production of subjectivities, but rather, that resistance is about derailing the entire notion of subjectivity. In order to achieve this end, self-management has to be employed.⁷ The self needs to be reclaimed by means of self-management, and the relations of power need to be placed in the service *of* and *for* ourselves (Thompson, 2003). This is done to a certain extent, as it were, also in the extremely standardized and formal workplace setting of the fast food restaurant. Here, self-management is imposed, seen as a burden, and subsequently something individual workers attempt to resist. However, within the freedom granted by self-management, one may 'freely' change positions. That is to say, it is possible to resist relations of power insofar as one is 'free' to self-manage within these. But resistance is not about changing positions; rather, changing positions makes it possible to go in the direction of refusing what we are (Foucault, 1982: 785), or of dissolving oneself (Hoy, 2004). So, if the freedom inherent in self-management allows the worker to 'freely' change positions within the relations of power, then, *resistance is most of all about resisting oneself*.

Conclusion

In this article it has been showed that self-management can be resisted. It can be resisted as the self-managed workers use the freedom that comes with self-management to refrain from doing certain actions. The freedom of refraining from certain actions is made possible due to the workers' ability to change their ways of being (within the present relations of power, i.e. the restaurant). The workers' ability to change their ways of being illustrates that the freedom inherent in self-management is not only used against management's intent, but against oneself as a subject. Resisting self-management is thus a matter of managing oneself in such a way that one is resisting oneself. When resisting oneself, the worker is on his or her way of dissolving one's sense of self in the fast food restaurant.

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7 After having read these blogs, someone might actually end up resisting imposed self-management. Apart from being the empirical material for this study, these blogs are also part of the internet, and by that also part of a larger public sphere from which others can gain access about new ways of being (i.e. not being 'workers') and of doing (not 'working').

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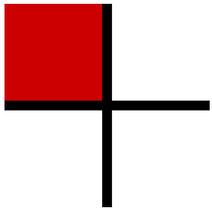
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Self-management through shame – Uniting governmentality studies and the ‘affective turn’

Helle Bjerg and Dorthe Staunæs

abstract

Critical studies of managing self-management and governmentality have primarily concerned the production of identities, subject positions and reflexive elements of self-management. The aim of this article is to challenge and contribute to the field of critical studies on managing self-management in two ways: Firstly, by considering management of self-management from the perspective of *the affective turn*; secondly, by showing how managing self-management has an ambiguous production of affects in everyday managerial processes of organisations. Drawing on examples of appreciative leadership and management (ALM) in a school setting, the article outlines an affective economy in which appreciation, interest and shame are produced and exchanged. Here, the article argues that the success of ALM relies not only on the production of positive affects related to recognition, but is also linked to the production of shame or at least potential shame. This argument is developed on the basis of Brian Massumi’s theory of affectivity combined with Silvan Tomkins’s theory of shame. The article draws on examples concerning management of self-management through the practice of ALM in a school setting.

Self-management: From reflexivity to affectivity

This article contributes to the study of managing self-management by introducing concepts from what is known as ‘the affective turn’ (Massumi, 2002; Clough, 2007; Koivunen, 2010). In opposition to the growing literature on self-management and the management of self-management, which is aimed at increasing performance (Neck and Houghton, 2006; Manz and Neck, 2004), the point for critical studies of managing self-management is intervene with governmentality studies (Andersen, 2008b; Foucault, 1991; 2009; 2010; Raffnsøe, 2010). In these studies, the production of subjectivities is seen as an effect of discursive power (Rose, 1996; 1999), technologies of power (Dean, 1999), and discursive orders and patterns of the normative (Fleming and Spicer, 2003). They also show how the development of selves is entangled in organisational values and norms, and moves from outer to inner spaces of the Self (Knights and Willmott, 2002).

Several thinkers, informed by Foucault and Luhmann, have published seminal work on ‘governmentality’, i.e. how subjects and subject positions are produced by and govern by management technologies in companies and cooperation (e.g. Andersen 2009; Kunda, 1992; Miller & O’Leary, 1987; Townley, 1993). The concept of

governmentality has also been successfully applied in the literature. This demonstrates how education is important in governing mentalities (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998), 'flexible souls' (Fendler, 2001) and how (school) children contain a potential for the future (Hultqvist, 2005). While critical studies of management as well as education are very inspiring, these approaches have primarily been occupied with how the production of identities, subject positions, and the reflexive elements of self-management contribute to shaping the self in relation to a certain appropriate identity (e.g. the creative pupil or the self-developing employee). In addition, they often take a macro perspective on normative and moral orders and discourses while focusing less on the precise machinery of productive processes as they play out in life.

The narrow focus on reflexivity and the neglect of everyday human life, results in a blind spot concerning the affective aspects of organisational lives. The turn towards affectivity is therefore not meant as a corrective to the established research on governmentality. Rather, the aim is to add an additional dimension to the mentioned critical studies of managing self-management and governmentality.

The empirical trigger that made us turn towards theories of affectivity was the observation of how some managerial technologies seem designed to energize the register of affectivity. These technologies concentrate on the production and formation of intensity rather than identity. In other words, the subject is managed not (only) through offers of reflexivity, but also through offers of being moved by a special affectivity or intensity. In using the term 'intensity', we point to the increase and decrease of tensions and quality in affects, atmosphere, senses and emotions (Massumi, 2002). In management practices such as appreciative leadership and management (ALM), affects and affectivity are not simply by-products or something to be overcome, but the core matter to be managed by and through. Thus, these practices of management relate strategically and directly to the production of certain affects. Consequently, the new practices of management through affects seem to challenge the notion of what can become the object of management, the type of managerial capacity that might come into existence and, not least, who or what guides management. In this sense, affectivity is not a counter force to the discursive. Rather, affectivity is one of the precise mechanical parts that fits managerial purposes and makes governmentality work.

The main argument of the article is that management of self-management works through complex intra-actions between reflexivity and affectivity, within an ambiguous affective economy of both negative and positive affects. This ambiguity is the prerequisite for producing not only self-managing subjects who can handle themselves in the actual situation, but also self-improving subjects that create even better versions of themselves.

In the following, we unfold our theoretical take on affectivity based on Massumi's Deleuzian theory, where affectivity is conceptualised as gradually changing intensities (Massumi, 2002). This overarching conceptualisation of affectivity is combined with a certain perspective on the close relationship between interest and shame developed by the social psychologist Silvan Tomkins. His theory on shame defines shame as the most self-reflexive affect of all affects: 'Shame is an experience of the self by the self' (Tomkins, in Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 136), and shame therefore confronts us with

ourselves. In the theoretical section, we furthermore discuss the combination of governmentality and the affective turn as well as the coupling of Massumi with various shame theorists. The analytical section elaborates on the theoretical framework by carefully examining data from school settings.

In this article, we take appreciative leadership and management as our empirical point of departure in order to contribute to critical studies of managing self-management. Our ambition is to produce new knowledge of, and a conceptual language for, the type of management and managerial relations that unfold when appreciative leadership and management is played out – both, when successful and when these types of management seem to miss the target. In order to fulfil these ambitions, we turn to theories of affectivity. By asking whether appreciative leadership and management also produces shame or at least sensitivity to shame, we wish to challenge the idea of shame as something bad or as a feeling one ought to be freed from. Moreover we have no intention of criticising or accusing appreciative approaches of spreading shamefulness. Rather, our hope is to contribute a more complex analysis of the affective economy played out in the management of self-management when it goes through affective approaches. But first, let us describe the methodology and the data used in the article.

Self-management through shame

At first shame does not seem to be on the agenda for ALM. Textbooks on modern leadership and pedagogy do not suggest ‘better ways of shaming your employees or pupils’. Rather, reprimands and being sent to the corner have been replaced by motivational strategies, desire technologies and the imperative of self-management. ALM concerns the ways executives, such as school principals, can introduce, nurture and develop human values in organisations through recognition and encouragement. ALM is highly inspired by the work of Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) on appreciative inquiry. Their anthology *Appreciative Management and Leadership: The Power of Positive Thoughts and Actions* (Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1999) stands as one of the core texts in current ALM. Furthermore, ALM is inspired by the body of literature on positive emotions and positive psychology in studying organizations and learning (Fredrickson, 2001; 2003; Fried, 2001; Peterson and Seligman, 2003a; 2003b; Sansone et al., 1992). The strategy of ALM is part of the Psy-leadership trend, now spreading to educational institutions, which addresses the affective aspect of management practices with a focus on managing the intensity and quality of human relations. Below we present examples of how appreciative leadership and management are carried out by managers and teachers within a school setting, we should point out that the affective economy cultivated within these managerial processes bear a strong resemblance to affective economies. This emphasis the cultivation and exchange of recognition, desire, involvement, motivation and shame plays out in other organisational settings but is based on similar managerial technologies. The argument for teachers and executives to undertake appreciative leadership and management seems to be that, if pupils and employees should do their best at all times and engage in continuous learning processes, the driving forces must be desire, involvement and motivation. Pupils and students must have ‘a desire to learn’ and to be ‘involved in the learning process’. Employees must be committed to their work. The ‘positive’ and the

‘good’ must be used as management tools in a type of affective flux and exchange. This turns the task of the teacher and the principal – as well as the business executive – into managing the development and unfolding of desire. As a precondition, appreciation and positivity of management must be translated into desire and involvement among employees and pupils. In turn, this must be translated into greater commitment, quality and competence (see for instance Andersen, 2008a; Borch and Molly, 2010; Hildebrandt and Fibæk, 2009; McAdam and Lang, 2009). Executives, principals and teachers have adopted the trends of ALM in their daily relations with employees and pupils as well as in certain managerial technologies, such as the staff development interview and the teacher-pupil appraisal conversation (a staff development interview at the child’s level). These technologies are designed to help employees and pupils reflect, (re-)create, improve and thereby assist management (Staunæs, Juelskjær and Knudsen, 2009).

Methodology

As the main argument is primarily theoretical, the data presented in this article is used mainly to illustrate the analytical perspectives in this approach. We here draw on data collected in connection with the project: *Schooling identities – (self) management in the multicultural school* (2005-2008). It consists of: 1) 60 video recordings of teacher-student appraisal conversations in two 7th and two 8th grade classes at a municipal school in Copenhagen; 2) 20 qualitative interviews with the principal, teachers and pupils about school life and the teacher-student appraisal conversations; and 3) around 4 months of participant observation. Furthermore, we draw on material from the ongoing project, *Psy-leadership – new perspectives on educational leadership* (2009-2012). *Psy-leadership* (Staunæs, Juelskjær and Knudsen, 2009) is leadership informed by the psychosciences – psychology, psychiatry, and pedagogy (Rose, 1999). This material consists of a growing number of documents, handbooks, qualitative interviews (currently 30) with educational managers (Principals, Vice-Principals and heads of teams) and CEOs of large private companies, concerning the challenges of psy-leadership, and finally participant observations of seminars and meetings with HR staff and consultants.

In this article we use data from both projects. In other words, we bring different bodies of material, produced within the same theoretical and analytical framework, into juxtaposition, where certain themes are strategically scrutinised and theoretically developed (for the method of collapsing data see Kofoed, 2007; Lather, 2007). This does not imply an overload of data or comparing variables on the basis of narrow scientism in imitation of the natural sciences. The reason for using interviews, and quoting both children and grown-ups in different contexts, is that the affects, emotions and experiences conveyed are examples of those produced when ALM is unfolded in reality. Naturally, the manager-employee relations are not like teacher-pupil relations – different social and managerial technologies are in play. Nonetheless, management practices that employ appreciation as a tool share many features. Our material includes many examples of the ‘caring’ and ‘understanding’ teacher/principal who manages by, among other things, inviting conversations in which the pupils/employees help set the standards by which they are assessed. The teacher/principal/employer, together with the pupil/employee, facilitate the optimisation of personal resources through reflexive

questions and appreciative, dialogic forms of interaction. These forms of interaction take place within a more or less fixed scope and use fixed technologies. Our analytical starting point is empirical examples of management situations in which something still, vibrates, fails or is noisy. We examine how these interactions produce sensitivity to shame.

Intensities and affects

In order to understand the production of affectivity as part of management of self-management (MSM), we are inspired by the affective turn in the human and social sciences (Clough, 2007; Gorton, 2007; Koivunen, 2010). The affective turn may be seen as a critique of the linguistic and poststructural turn but, in our perspective, it develops the insights into the performative from the linguistic turn (Barad, 2003; Butler, 2010; Du Gay, 2010), and expands the concept of performativity as a way of thinking in relation not only to language, but also affectivity and materiality. This means that more than 'just' language, as argued for in the linguistic turn, becomes constituent of subjects, organisations and management. Bringing together Foucault with the Deleuzian Massumi approach may seem somewhat contradictory, but as Deleuze (2006) points out in his book *Foucault*, his own texts should not be read in contradiction to Foucault, but rather as a further specification of the vitalisation, forces and lines of flight that are implied in Foucault. In that sense, the turn towards affectivity is not about turning away from the insights of poststructural discourse theory, but about returning to and complicating theories and analyses (Staunæs, Juelskjær and Ratner, 2010).

For Massumi, the very distinction between affect and emotion is a cardinal point, and Massumi would probably never venture into a linguistic definition of affectivity (Massumi, 2002). Sara Ahmed takes another approach and does not differentiate between emotions and affects, but uses them interchangeably in order to show the fluidity of conceptual boundaries (2004). Finally, Tomkins, according to Sedgwick & Frank (1995)¹, uses the word 'affect' for biological intensities – for instance, shame and interest. As an analytical strategy, we follow the distinction between undefined affectivity and linguistically defined emotions, but when the managerial technologies are supposed to be strategic acts upon affectivity, and when the act is an attempt to seize affectivity in specific ways, we need two different sets of conceptual tools: one that lets us follow the increase and decrease of affectivity, and another that lets us examine the quality of affects as such and of particular versions of affects.

In *Parables for the Virtual*, Massumi (2002) elaborates on anti-individualistic, Deleuzian and Spinozian ideas of forces and intensities. Discussing 'affects' and 'affectivity' instead of feelings or emotions, Massumi describes how the concept of affectivity includes moods, sensations, sense perceptions and sentiments that 'affect' and move us in different ways (*ibid.*). The use of the term 'affect', rather than 'feeling'

1 Tomkins narrows affectivity down to nine distinct affects: Interest/excitement, enjoyment/joy, surprise/startle, distress/anguish, anger/rage, fear/terror, dismal, contempt/disgust, and shame/humiliation. The first part names the mild manifestation and the second, the more intense (Tomkins in Sedgwick & Frank, 1995).

or 'emotion', is thus an attempt to conceptualise impounded aspects as well as to appreciate the intensities, as they are expressed in the body (such as blushing, rapid heartbeats, sweaty palms etc.), that have yet to be classified by a certain feeling (Massumi, 2002; Clough, 2007; Probyn, 2005). It is also an attempt to dissociate from the understanding that subjects *are* or *have* certain feelings (Ahmed, 2004; Deleuze and Guattari, 1972/2004; Massumi, 2002; Probyn, 2005). Instead, we argue that affects can *have* or *seize* subjects and relations. Affectivity means to affect and be affected (Massumi, 2002) and thereby affectivity becomes a qualitatively different way of experiencing the world and yourself, than cognitive reflexivity as such (Thrift, 2004). Thus, the concept allows us to see how affects can be transformed and moved not only *in* people, but also *between* people or between people and other non-human actors.

Affectivity is another register of experience, which is being deployed politically (Thrift, 2004). One example is when a managerial technology, like the staff development interview, affects both, the employee and the manager taking part in the conversation. From the perspective of affects, the question is therefore not whether a person can or cannot be shameful, for instance, but rather how a given relation or situation may produce affects that influence or possibly even seize the intensity in the quality of shame. Moreover, this concept of affectivity also makes us aware of how the formation of affectivity happens, and how affects can be transformed. For instance, pain can turn into hatred, fear into shame, and longing into anger (Sedgwick, 2003; Ahmed, 2004).

Bringing together studies of governmentality and the affective turn, and following Thrift's idea of affectivity as another register of experience which is deployed politically (Thrift, 2004; Ahmed, 2004), we argue that affective management can be understood as a strategic endeavour to capture, generate and seize intensity in certain ways to allow the subject to create him or herself. In other words, management of affects may be described as an extension or a further specification of the governed subjectivities described in studying management of self-management. Understanding affective management contributes to MSM by paying particular attention to the fact that management of affectivity facilitates and makes specific certain possible self-relations and subject formations while simultaneously precluding, cancelling and paring off others.

Affective economy, translations, and keen ears

To take our analytical perspective one step further, we employ the concept of affective economy. Affective economy is dealt with in a number of other texts; some use the term but do not incorporate it in a managerial or organisational context (Ahmed, 2004; Probyn, 2005). Others discuss affective economy in an organisational and/or managerial context but do not employ the term itself (Hochschild, 2003; Hardt, 2007; Fineman, 2008). 'Economy' denotes the careful use of money and supplies as well as management of activity. In an affective economy, however, affects rather than money are economised. Thus, affective economy is not a matter of simply having feelings. Management in and of an affective economy concerns the strategic administration and organisation of relations to ensure the potential of the organisational members to feel, experience, sense, act and create themselves and the organisation in certain ways

(Staunæs, 2009; 2011). The currency administered, exchanged and produced in the affective economy of a given organisation or management, begins as various affects that successively translate into productivity and quality – if the system works as intended.

Management, in this view, may be understood as the transformation of affectivity. Transformation of affectivity differs from the simple translation of a clear and direct message of action from the manager to the employee (or vice versa). Derrida offers an understanding of this transformation when he writes about translation: ‘It is the ear of the other that signs’ (Derrida, 1985: 51); and he stresses that the transfer of a message is not unaffected; it is not until the recipient transforms the message into his own understanding that the meaning and sense of the message come into existence. ‘To hear him’, Derrida writes, ‘one must have a keen ear’ (*ibid.*). To manage is, in this conceptualisation, an intra-action, or a relation between manager and employee, which seems to rely on their mutual capability of *tuning in* on certain frequencies in which the message is not simply heard, but translated in particular ways. It seems to us that the conceptualisation of managerial processes as translations becomes even more relevant when focusing on forms of management that aim at cultivating particular moods and sentiments. In order for these forms of management to work, they seem to rely heavily on the capabilities of managers and employees alike to tune in and be affected by the right frequency.

To sum up, applying concepts from the affective turn in studies of governmentality and self-management allows us to conceptualise management as processes of translation, in which both, managers and managed, are receptive to and moved by moods, affects, feelings, sentiments and sense perceptions. In that sense, affective management may be seen as a strategic action on the intensity of relations and, thereby, a strategic action on the possibilities to affect or be affected. Management, in the sense of making employees do your exact bidding, is impossible. Only the relation, not the subject, can be governed. Within this conceptual framework, ALM can be seen as presupposing a particular affective economy if the affective appreciation within the relation between manager and managed is to be translated or converted, not only into motivation, but also further into quality and efficiency.

In the following sections, we will seek assistance from Tomkins and take a closer look at what it may mean to be ‘interested’ and to have a ‘keen ear’ in managerial relations based on appreciation, i.e. which affective over- and under-tones the employees and the manager must be able to tune into for the translation to succeed. The analysis below draws on Tomkins’ informed authors like Elspeth Probyn (2005), who has theorised shame in detail, and Sara Ahmed (2010), who has brought valuable insights to the question of shame in relation to the cultural politics of emotions. The latter was part of her critical scrutiny of the promise of happiness in current trends on positive approaches. We will emphasise that, in our discussion of affectivity, it has never been our intention to dwell on personal and private feelings a person may bring into an educational institution. We do not wish to subscribe to the ontogenetic explanations that found Tomkins’ model. Instead, we look for aspects of Tomkins’ theory that allows us to understand self-management as correlations of interest, desire and appreciation and shame. With reference to the concept of affective economy, we stress that our discussion concerns affects that are produced, cultivated and exchanged in relations.

The formulation of shame as the experience of the self by the self seems to cut through the span of time from the 1960s into the widespread forms of (managing) self-management by reflexivity that we see today (Andersen, 2009; Foucault, 1991; 2009; 2010; Raffnsøe, 2010).

Producing interest, reflexive selves and shame

Tomkins' affect theory conceptualises how the cultivation of interest is closely connected to the cultivation of potential shame. This seems an analytically fruitful contribution to our attempt at unfolding how processes of translation within ALM may rely on a particular affective economy implying both, the cultivation of interest and also of shame through appreciation. According to Tomkins, 'interest' is decisive for humans to maintain focus/attention long enough for us to learn about and investigate our surrounding world (Tomkins, in Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 77). Thereby interest is tied to learning, development and change, which is a model of thought we recognise from pedagogical and managerial strategies.

Yet in Tomkins' theories we find a special complex of interest, desire and shame. This complex is productive in an analysis of ALM practices that work towards creating a learning environment that entices involvement and interest. Tomkins' contribution is how the positive affects of interest and desire are closely connected with the affective spectrum of shame and humiliation (*ibid.*: 136). To be able to feel ashamed of something or towards somebody, one must be invested or involved in the matter or person: 'Without positive affect, there can be no shame: only a scene that offers you enjoyment or engages your interest can make you blush' (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 16). The point here is that relations built on interest also seem to cultivate a sensibility towards shame. One may argue that shame profits from the fact that one has invested oneself in somebody or something. When a subject is constituted through the investment in somebody or something – a relation, a person, an object, a particular self-relation – this dedication also bears the risk of producing more or less terrifying shame, if and when the subject, for one reason or another, is not capable of meeting or maintaining the dedication and positive expectations invested therein. When focusing analytically on shame, we are very well aware that a number of other affects may also be produced when ALM is unfolded. Still, Tomkins' conceptualisation of shame seems particularly relevant in the analysis of managerial strategies aimed at appreciative relations, the production of interest and engagement, and the management of self-management through reflexivity. For Tomkins, shame is a central and powerful affect, because shame confronts us with ourselves: 'Shame is an experience of the self by the self. At that moment when the self feels ashamed, it is felt as a sickness within the self' (Tomkins, in Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 136).

When being shameful, the subject is confronted with both itself and the 'object' – the relation, person or activity outside the subject – that triggers shame. Shame is an ambivalent experience because it makes us look down and turn away in order to protect ourselves from the confrontation with the surroundings that triggered the shameful feeling. At the same time, the blush of the cheeks reveals the intense awareness of visibility, transmission and investment in the relation: 'In shame I wish to continue to

look and to be looked at, but I also wish not to do so' (*ibid.*: 137). When shame strikes so hard that the subject's cheeks blush and his eyes look down in an attempt to deny the surrounding world, it is because the subject has already 'invested some of himself' in the relation and expected a positive affect in return: 'One of the paradoxical consequences of the linkage of positive affect and shame is that the same positive affect which ties the self to the object also ties the self to shame' (Tomkins, in Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 138).

If the subject is to disengage himself from the shame, he must also disengage himself from the object or relation in which he has invested himself. This disengagement entails barring himself from both, part of himself and a source of positive affects. Herein lays the ambivalence of shame. Shame makes the self turn away from the object that triggered shame, but still keeps up the wish to maintain or re-establish the relation in order to regain access to the positive affect. That is why the involved person can become particularly sensitive to shame, which may be the affect that thwarts actions, due to its close ties to interest and involvement: 'The pluralism of excitement and enjoyment is without limit, and hence shame, too, knows no bound' (*ibid.*: 150). Just as the sources of excitement and enjoyment are multifarious, shame is boundless, as Tomkins writes. Linking up to the concept of translation through 'keen ears', we may argue that when appreciation is actually heard, the ear becomes equally alert or sensitive to frequencies that may translate into interest as well as shame. A keen ear to appreciation is also the ear that may potentially blush from shame.

Using tone and mood

In this last section of the article we exemplify the dynamics of affect and intensity in ALM and self-management strategies, with particular focus on the production of interest and sensitivity to shame. We include excerpts from interviews from different empirical contexts, with a focus on interviews with a school principal, a teacher, and a pupil in order to elaborate on the theoretical arguments presented above. Handbooks on educational leadership, such as ALM, often pay special attention to atmosphere and environment as important fields of management. The specific claim of appreciative leadership and management is that development is best facilitated in an appreciative and respectful atmosphere (Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1999; Andersen, 2008a). This approach is elaborated in an interview with Jill, who is a school principal in a large Danish town.² Jill has enthusiastically plunged into ALM, practised both, as a manner of conduct and management. Here she focuses in particular on how the precondition for management is characterised by the overall culture, mood, tone and approach of an organisation. As such, her way of practising ALM may be seen as a case of affective translations unfolded within the relationship between manager and employee:

It has to do with respecting my employees' and co-managers' diversity. They are not supposed to be like me. That would just be dull. Appreciation and management are very much about being seen and being heard and being taken seriously, and that you can get your communication tested. So, if I go out and make a decision, and naturally I do that often, then I have to test whether I have been understood correctly.

2 This interview stems from the database of the *Psy-leadership* project.

When listening to Jill's descriptions, the relational character of management, understood as strategic ways of acting on social relations and the intensity in these relations, becomes clear:

When I enter a room it's almost like being the class teacher for children. I have my ear to the ground and notice how people look, where they are and who needs me for something, and whether there are any urgent matters. And every single day, someone has a special need to see me. So, it's a matter of managing a multitude of relations simultaneously.

For Jill, ALM is about tuning in to moods and emotional needs. This applies both, when she enters the teachers' common room as well as in the classroom. Also, it extends all the way to the pupils' homes and families. ALM is a matter of giving the employees a sense of being seen and heard, and a matter of facilitating shared reflection and decision-making processes. In her own words, Jill previously practised a more 'result-oriented style': 'I think we should do this and that and then just power ahead'. Now she takes the relation – to the employee/teacher (to the pupils and their parents) – as something she should not only 'act' on, but also mould. Her task is not simply to facilitate the (desirable) actions of others; it is also to strategically facilitate a desirable intensity in the social relations. Jill's practice of ALM may be in the high and advanced end of the scale, and not least in her self-demand to tune into the affective frequency of each and every person she meets professionally – from the employees and the pupils, to the occasional workman. Many of the ideas in her approach to management resonate with current trends in educational institutions and across the wider managerial landscape regarding attention to management of relations through appreciation, and by creating desire, motivation and involvement. Indeed, this includes managing by means of 'the good' and 'the positive'.

Trying to become better – Encouragement of shame

In this section, we shall see how the management of self-management is both practised and experienced within a teacher-pupil relationship. The case is constituted by teacher-student conversations in the seventh grade at the Sea School in a large Danish city. Firstly, we turn to an interview with the teacher, Anne Marie, on how she practices these forms of pupil self-management, and subsequently we shall turn to how these conversations are experienced by a 14-year old pupil, David.³ The point is to see how this form of management of self-management works not only through the production of self-reflexivity but is also facilitated through the cultivation of affects, where the potential of shame plays an important part.

Anne Marie conducts the obligatory teacher-student conversations as dialogues, with the aim of facilitating self-management. She contemplates the types of reflections that may increase pupil awareness of their potential for (self-)development:

Naturally, I see them as being in development. It's a process and here at the school we help them in that process. An important thing is to open your eyes for some of the possibilities they have.

3 Both interviews stem from the project *Schooling identities*.

And that they think more about themselves in relation to others; “Who am I?” and “What do I do?” and “Why do I do these things?”

Anne Marie uses metaphors to speed up pupil reflection processes. In video recordings of the teacher-student conversations in the seventh grade, she opens the conversation by drawing a ball, which she refers to as a symbol of knowledge. She asks the pupils where they see themselves in relation to the ball/knowledge using questions like: ‘Are you far from the ball? Can you see it? Are you about to catch it? Have you kicked it away?’ Some of the students immediately relate to the drawing and describe their academic and personal standpoint in relation to their idea of knowledge and of the level at which they interact with the ball/knowledge. Other pupils however, mumble, hesitate and seem to ponder on why they are supposed to talk about a ball when they expected to be talking about maths or learning Danish. Anne Marie senses the pupils’ position and tries to invite them into the conversation by means of various types of interview techniques. After the introductory metaphor exercise, the teacher-student conversations develop into talks about areas in which the individual pupil is doing well and about his or her competency development, but also about areas in which they are less successful academically, socially and personally. Yet, sometimes Anne Marie is dissatisfied with the progress of the conversation. In one interview she says:

Sometimes you just get upset that you can’t speed things up – to make things happens. It bothers you that they don’t have a better understanding, but at the same time, you know it is a process that takes time.

During the teacher-student conversations, Anne Marie tries to facilitate self-reflection, which may help the pupil get ‘beneath the surface’, as she says, but often she feels that her attempts are far from successful. How can we configure this teacher dissatisfaction through the issue of shame? Anne Marie believes pupils should not just reflect on their current life, they should do so in a particularly ‘profound’ way and at a faster pace or, we might add, in a more intense manner. It is against the background of the production of intensity and increased investment of the self that we suggest an analytical perspective on how the appreciation, the dialogue and the reflection may not function without the production of potential shame or sensitivity to shame. If the social technology of the conversation is to provoke and move the self and the self-relation in the manner Anne Marie wants and seeks, specific affects must be cultivated. In our perspective, social technologies, such as teacher-student conversations/staff development interviews, constitute affective contact zones that potentially open up very emotional, but also ambivalent, opportunities. In order for the self to experience itself in a sufficiently intense manner, self-reflection must hold the possibility of shame as the torment of self-consciousness (Tomkins, in Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 136). The pupils must invest themselves in their relation with the object – ‘the ball’, the subject, the teacher and the self – in ways that produce shame when they do not manage to perform or do not show improvement. It is a matter of positive investment that produces vulnerability: ‘Shame reminds us about the promises we keep to ourselves’ (Probyn, 2005: XIV). It could be added that shame reminds us of the promises of development and improvement we made to ourselves but were not able to meet.

In Anne Marie’s assessment of the teacher-student conversations and the pupils’ reflections, she wishes for more depth in some cases. Within our perspective she is

looking for intensity and committed investment. The pupils need to be committed to self-management to succeed. In another interview, 14-year-old David reflects on a video recording of his own teacher-student conversation with Anne Marie. He says:

It's difficult to explain how you feel. I mean, it's not bad, but it's not good either. It feels a bit strange. It's like you're excited. Like you are about to do something great, and at the same time it's as if something *really* bad is about to happen, because you're always afraid of being told off and that they will only say bad things. It's just a really weird feeling. You know, it's not a good sensation sitting with the teacher, who's telling you all sorts of strange things. I want to leave because I don't like it at all, and it's really uncomfortable feeling like that.

In this excerpt, David describes – somewhat hesitantly – how affectivity can unfold and affect interlocutors during an appraisal and development conversation. He uses words such as ‘feeling’ and ‘sensation’. He articulates excitement and fear, and he talks about ‘weird’ and possibly confused feelings and about feeling ‘uncomfortable’. He also talks about the action triggered by this complex of affectivity: the desire to walk away. David's comment can hardly be characterised as superficial or lacking ‘depth’ when he describes how the sensation of excitement, and a trembling and unresolved atmosphere, fill the room. This situation could go either way. At the moment it is no fun, but he hopes it will end well. David stays despite his desire to leave and his urge to turn away his face. Even though the excitement increases, even though he is ‘uncomfortable’ and even though the discomfort prods at him and makes him anxious, something makes him stay. David has difficulty explaining; he breaks off his sentences, rephrases and tries to articulate how he senses something that might ease the discomfort: ‘Something is telling you that you must. Something is telling you that you'd better know. So you can try to improve’.

Here it is important to mention that David is not talking about ‘someone’ who motivates him to stay and listen. Rather, what makes David stay is his recognition that ‘you can try to improve’. David's reaction to the discomfiting situation may be seen as a tingling sensation, which involves not only self-reflection but also a trembling sensitivity to shame or potential shame. In an attempt to escape, David and several of his classmates ‘just say something to say something’. This may be the surface talk that displeases Anne Marie. However, by speaking, the pupils commit themselves to the relation and the premise of improvement. They may therefore be expressing not apathy, but rather intensity, which makes the situation and relation nearly unbearable.

The teacher-student conversation as a method of self-management opens up an entirely different affective economy than is the case in the talks between David and the principal:

If it's at the principal's office you practically know what you're about to hear. If you've done something, they'll just tell you not to do that. But unexpected things may come up *there* [i.e. the teacher-student conversation] if it's like a private room conversation. Suddenly [you] are told something about something; like you think you're doing well in something and then, then in fact you're not doing particularly well after all.

In these exchanges, the principal identifies a wrongdoing and reprimands, while the pupil is asked to acknowledge the wrongdoing (Knudsen, 2010; Kofoed, 2007). In the teacher-student conversation, however, defectiveness creeps into the talk. One does not know beforehand what will be valued as good and what will be deemed as requiring improvement. It is not made clear from the start, and nobody will tell you straight away. It slowly emerges through self-reflection. The conversation takes its point of departure in potentiality and excitement but as it progresses, words and reflections are captured that indicate a direction one did not know beforehand. You think you are doing well and then suddenly in the middle of the 10-15-minute conversation you may be hit by a different mood. In that sense the teacher-student conversation opens up an entirely different, more unpredictable realm of possibilities and a more complicated exchange of affectivity. Our analytical suggestion is that, to be efficient at instigating a quest for self-improvement and self-management, the conversation relies on the complex or paradoxical affective exchange of recognition and potential shame.

The exploration of opportunities for improvement within the conversation does not simply evolve from reflection but is supported by an intense sensation of the need to catch up, and this intensity thrives on a strong engagement with recognition. Only ears keen to hear appreciation attune to the sensation of inadequacy of oneself in oneself. The affective economy ties interest and investment, produced through appreciation, to sensitivity to and readiness for shame: 'If you don't care, then attempts to shame won't move you [...] the things that make me ashamed have to do with a strong interest in being a good person' (Probyn, 2005: XIV). Or, from another perspective: 'Shame can also be experienced as the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence' (Ahmed, 2004: 107). Here, shame is the fear of not living up to what is recognised as the standard. Furthermore, shame is the fear of contempt and exclusion (Probyn, 2005). David's description of how he is affected during the conversation may be summarised with Probyn's words: 'Shame makes us feel small and somehow undone' (*ibid.*: 2). David's ears seem to be very keen indeed. He not only listens but also reaches out for his potential self, and it seems that he is not only moved by the promise of appreciation but also by the strong impetus of avoiding shame. In this example, we notice how shame emerges through the threat of separation from the appreciation and recognition of the other.

In the following section, we discuss how shame may also emerge through the relation to oneself, and how shame seems to be an inevitable player when improving the self. Indeed, it is pivotal in self-management.

The time of self-shame

The analysis of the excerpts above shows how the production of shame requires a relation characterised by interest and, we add, positive investment. Thus, shame may also be perceived as the fear of not being worthy of the other's appreciation and may be intensified when witnessed by others. Ahmed writes:

Shame feels like an exposure [...] To be witnessed in one's failure is to be ashamed: to have one's shame witnessed is even more shaming. The bind of shame is that it is intensified by being seen by others as shame. (2004: 103)

The witness could be the one who comes close as, for instance, the principal/teacher who takes part in the facilitation of the reflection process in the peer review conversation. The teacher offers you appreciation, is disappointed by your inadequacy and witnesses your sensation of shame when you realise your inadequacy. It feels humiliating when one's inadequacy is revealed, but it may be even more humiliating to be recognised as one who is ashamed. David expresses how he longs to feel 'comfortable', which may produce a desire to act in order to escape the shame and to reconstruct the relation to the other by becoming worthy of appreciation again. Maybe this is what creates the urge to improve that David mentions. By giving in to this urge, one accepts the responsibility for the improvement.

The sense of shame that may be produced by ALM may also make the individual assume responsibility for restoring the relation to the other. In the movement from being wrong to trying to improve lies a crucial difference between the 'naughty corner' and the self-technology based on affectivity. While an authority controls the use of the naughty room, which points out and places shame, the development interview (with adults or children) leaves it to 'self-managing', to reflect on the discrepancy between the present and the desired position. Thus, it is also up to the employee to shame himself, to practice self-shame. The principal/teacher does not point out inadequacy or place shame. She simply facilitates the investment process, which is a prerequisite for the production of shame. Contrary to the talk at the principal's office, shame is thus personified as an inner authority in the development conversation. Self-management takes the form of self-shame. Self-shame has thus been encouraged (!) in the person who is supposed to feel ashamed.

Economising of intimacy

The described affective economy within the teacher-student conversation presupposes a subtle interplay of intensity and intimacy in management relations. The teacher-student conversation may be seen as an example of a self-technology resembling, for instance, the staff development interview. Our point here is not to deem shame as a solely negative or unproductive feeling, and appreciation as a solely good or productive action. Rather, the affective economy, which forms the backbone of ALM, seems to have appreciation, shame and interest as different interchangeable currencies and this exchange opens and closes different types of involvement. Rather than appraise the individual affects, we find it more interesting to look at what the currencies can do – together and to each other (Probyn, 2005).

As illustrated above, Jill aims at achieving a certain quality and intensity in her relations to her employees. The aim is to make them feel seen, appreciated and heard. However, inherent in these intensive relations is also the danger that the intensity may get out of hand and complicate – or even obstruct – the managerial work. Jill cannot imagine socialising with her colleagues or co-managers privately because the increased closeness and intimacy could make it more difficult to separate the relation of professional appreciation – with a dash of care and empathy – from personal emotional involvement.

Jill seems to be aware of transgressed boundaries for the 'intensity sphere' that threatens to make the relation between her and an employee so close that 'it becomes too relation-like in a way that involves emotions', as Jill explains in an interview. Hereby she draws a sharp distinction between wanted and unwanted emotions, and productive and unproductive types of closeness and intensity. According to Jill guarding the frontier between too much intimacy and wrong intimacy has two purposes: one is to protect yourself as a manager and the other is to protect the employees. From the perspective of shame, the issue can be interpreted in various ways.

One reading could be the responsibility of protecting the employee against potential shame if, for instance, an employee was to become exposed in some manner. Here, the manager can choose to take care that the employee does not get himself into a situation that – successively – may be perceived as more or less shameful. The danger of a relation where the manager-employee relation becomes too personal or too close to a friendship (Staunæs et al., 2009) is that it potentially undermines the position of manager. The manager is supposed to be the one in charge of the relation through which shame is produced. Jill notices the importance of 'maintaining the asymmetrical relation; it must be present', she says. Otherwise she would no longer be able to help and manage her employees in the best possible way. Another interpretation could be that a breakdown of the asymmetrical relation would dissolve the configuration of who is receptive to shame. As the manager distances herself, she chooses to maintain and protect the option of triggering shame in the employee. A co-manager may be introduced into this situation in order to reduce the intensity and intimacy of the relation between Jill and the employee, and help her maintain her position as chief executive (and shame executive).

A different configuration of shame can be identified in a case, in which Jill has a problematic relation to a senior employee who struggles with failing qualifications. 'For some reason he keeps a distance to me', she explains. The teacher in question is partly in need of guidance regarding teaching and partly in relation to his (in)capacity to manage his position as a teacher. Jill explains how her relation to this particular employee is characterised by distance, which she relates to her own position of being the principal; but she is also open to the possibility that it might have 'something to do with my personality'. According to Jill, the communication between the concerned teacher and the vice-principal is much better:

That's why I tell my vice-principal I think it's important you deal with it, because you have a better approach. If it's you, we get a more honest, real and appreciative process and I'm afraid he would clam up on me.

Here, the relation is problematic not because of closeness but because of distance, and Jill must act strategically by using a co-manager to moderate the relation. Thus, in connection with shame, there can be both too much and too little shame. On the face of it, the employee's distance suggests that he has not invested enough of himself in the relation with his principal, who therefore cannot use appreciation or potential shame as management tools. On the other hand, the situation could also suggest that the shame is too intense in this relation between the female principal – competent, involved and respected – and the male teacher – senior, possibly worn out – who finds it difficult to manage his own teaching. Jill's diminution of the manager-managed relation could be

seen as a form of consideration for the employee, although it may also be a way of protecting herself against the embarrassing and potentially shameful situation of witnessing another person's shame. By carefully guarding the frontiers of intimacy, Jill offers the employee a chance to escape from his shame and enter into a relation with another person in which less seems to be at stake, possibly because of higher degree of appropriate closeness.

Intensifying shame, intensified shame, intensified self-management

We have discussed how affective management, as it has emerged in appreciative leadership and management strategies, can be perceived as a management tool that motivates pupils through personal recognition and interest, and through the promise of positive affects such as self-fulfilment, excitement and challenge to invest and manage themselves. We have shown that when those who are to be managed are encouraged to invest themselves in activities, other subjects (e.g. the manager) or in parts of their selves, they become sensitive to the fact that these relations could produce shame. At the same time, the individual's investment of self in the relation makes it complicated for him to reject or disengage from the shame-producing relation or activity, as that would also entail disengaging from one's self. Yet, if those who are to be managed are met with management strategies of contempt and reprimand (as in the case of the conversation at the principal's office), it is easier for them to escape from a given relation, as it does not presuppose or produce positive investments of the self. As a consequence, the distribution of the self in relations will be less extensive (Tomkins, in Sedgewick and Frank, 1995: 138).

Our point is that precisely because new management practices such as self-management create selves, and draw attention to selves through recognition, individualisation and (self-) reflection, the cultivation of (potential) shame is neither replaced nor dismantled, but rather intensified and developed. With reflexivity and affectivity as a close couple, one has reason to assume that the affective economy of the ALM style operates with currencies other than positive affects, and that affects like shame may be an important catalyst of (self-) improvement. The affective economy is thus a more complicated form of self-management than described in the celebratory literature. Consequently, it adds to the production and possibly even the acceleration of its challenges. Negative affectivity is not only an aspect of the organisations or managerial strategies of the past. In fact, it may be the flipside and a driving force of the mechanisms in today's management of self-management. Shame is not solely a negative or unproductive feeling, and appreciation is not solely a positive or productive managerial tool. As a result, this kind of management of self-management runs in variable directions, which leads to ambivalent challenges. And these challenges require a language more sensitive towards complexity than we have traditionally been presented with in the praise literature.

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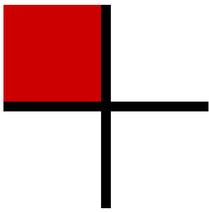
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Fearless speech: Practising *parrhesia* in a self-managing community*

Diane Skinner

abstract

Through ethnography, this paper applies the conceptual themes of *parrhesia* to the contemporary setting of a self-managing organic farming community. A reading of Foucault's later work on *parrhesia* in classical Antiquity is made, following on from which the paper analyses the contributions put forward by individual community members in reaching agreement on how to farm organically through practices reminiscent of *parrhesia*. A combination of the different forms of ancient *parrhesia* are found to be re-enacted in a contemporary setting. These include political *parrhesia* as enacted in the formal Assembly of the Athenian democracies and informally in the meeting places of the *agora*; and philosophical *parrhesia* as enacted in the Epicurean communities through self-writing. Furthermore, in speaking out against the higher-status long-term residents, a newcomer re-enacts the scenario of monarchic *parrhesia* and some forms of philosophical *parrhesia*. For this Special Issue on governing work through self-management, the paper contributes by providing an empirical study of how consensus decision-making is enacted in a contemporary self-managing community.

Introduction

This paper applies the conceptual themes of *parrhesia* to an ethnographic study carried out by the author at a self-managing organic farming community. A reading of Foucault's later work on *parrhesia* in classical Antiquity is made and used to investigate communal decision-making in terms of how individuals organise themselves to speak out or keep quiet.

More specifically, the study examines how community members work together at farming organically without direct rules to follow. All commercial organic food producers are required by law to comply with a set of standards produced by an organic certification body. Since the community produces food for self-sufficiency rather than

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for profit, there is no obligation to comply with this requirement. The community offers an exceptional opportunity therefore to study how a group of individuals from varied backgrounds establishes communal organic farming practices when they do not have to defer to formal rules. Accordingly, the following research question is addressed: how do individuals in a self-managing community contribute in reaching agreement on how to farm organically through practices reminiscent of *parrhesia*?

Ethnography is used to conduct an in-depth study of the everyday life of a group of people as they discuss organic farming practices and related issues. Unlike those studies where the researcher investigates dozens of communities (Kanter, 1968; Sargisson, 2004), ethnography enables intensive study through 'the prism of the local' that permits the researcher to 'see the possibility of something quite different' (Miller, 1995: 13). For Miller, 'ethnographic observations are vital' if globally used terms are 'ever to be more than glib generalities' (*ibid.*: 9). Accordingly, this paper focuses on the globally used terms of 'organic' and 'self-management'.

Modern management in contemporary hierarchical organisations inhibits speaking out by employees (Donaghey et al., 2011; Milliken et al., 2003). This paper, in analyzing the contributions to decision-making made by members of a non-hierarchical community who live and farm together, turns away from the literature on modern work organisations to seek theoretical inspiration from Foucault's analysis of the ancient practice of *parrhesia*. Although *parrhesia* was practiced in communities in Antiquity, *parrhesia* did not form part of the initial theoretical framework. Nevertheless, the current paper attempts to operationalise the concept of *parrhesia* by evaluating negotiations in the empirical setting of a community in relation to the different forms of *parrhesia* that Foucault identifies in classical thinking. Whilst the analysis is comparative, I am not looking for precise reconstructions of these different classical forms of *parrhesia*. Instead, I seek to excavate from a contemporary setting the practices of speaking out that are reminiscent of the forms of *parrhesia* in classical thinking about which Foucault writes.

By studying a community, this paper contributes to management and organisation theory by presenting an alternative way of using Foucault in a field dominated by studies of work organisations that are orientated towards control through surveillance, the management of subjectivities, and the implementation of culture change strategies (see Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Styhre, 2001; Casey, 1999; amongst others). The current paper contributes to management and organisation theorists' understanding of Foucauldian concepts by analysing the contributions individuals make to the decision-making practices centred around the word 'organic' in terms of the various forms of the practice of *parrhesia* identified by Foucault as occurring in Antiquity. For this Special Issue on the topic of governing work through self-management, the paper contributes by providing an empirical study of how consensus decision-making regarding farm work practices is enacted in a contemporary self-managing community.

The paper begins by introducing ethnography as the most appropriate methodology to use for answering the research question of how individual members contribute to decision-making about communal farming practices. Next, to provide a conceptual framework, a reading is carried out of the different forms of *parrhesia*, or speaking out,

that are identified in Foucault's later texts as practices of Antiquity. The empirical section that follows comprises an outline of the decision-making organisational framework, followed by an in-depth exploration of how individual community members self-manage their contributions to the establishment of farming practices, analysed through the various forms of *parrhesia* practised in Antiquity.

Methodology: Ethnography at a self-managing farming community

The theorising of how individuals contribute in reaching agreement on how to farm organically through practices analysable as *parrhesia* was an unexpected finding from the research I carried out at a self-managing non-commercial organic farming community. Greenfields¹ comprises housing accommodation in self-contained units of varying sizes, together with communal areas and adjoining farmland. The community includes singles, couples, and families. Since start-up, members have joined and left at various times and the period of research activity includes one co-founder and several newcomers. Experience of farming organically or non-organically is not a prerequisite for newcomers.

The potential richness and depth to be gained from studying people in a communal setting that is a site for organising not only work but also home lives, families, social lives, and so on, seems to me to be best explored through ethnography. Because I was visiting community members in their own homes, I wanted to nurture relationships on the basis of friendship and cordiality. I wished to avoid feeling like an intruder. According to Coffey (1999), prolonged fieldwork entails developing rapport and the ethnographic research relationship is more personal than other qualitative research relationships.

The flexibility that ethnography offers in terms of both theory development and recourse to multiple methods is attractive. Regarding theory development, the research direction can be changed easily; ideas that occur during the fieldwork can be tried out 'and, if promising, followed up' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 24). In the initial stages particularly, I preferred to pursue the open-ended approach of 'Never say never', of letting the data 'speak' to me and finding a theory to explain the data, rather than mapping the data to a theory I had decided on before commencing data collection. I felt that this approach would support the explorative element of the research and was more likely to produce some unexpected outcomes (see Dalton, 1959). Regarding access to multiple methods, in retrospect ethnography enabled access to a wider range of insights than would have been available through interviews alone. I was able to hang out in communal areas and chat with community members informally. By listening, rather than asking questions, I could find out things I would not have thought to ask. Also, I was able to chat with some of the people who did not put themselves forward for interview. One communal area in particular, the Buttery, served as a hub for information-sharing via the blackboards on which messages were chalked up and the

1 Greenfields is a pseudonym. To help preserve anonymity, I choose not to disclose the number of adults residing at the community.

noticeboards on which minutes of meetings, rotas for milking, and so on were pinned. Community members came in and out to keep up to date with changes and to pin up, mark up, or rub out their own messages.

I used a mix of observation, participant observation, interviewing, and document analysis of blackboards, notice boards, books, notebooks, ring binders of information, and minutes of previous meetings. Participant observation comprised participating in weekend work-gangs, attending social events, and having full access to the buildings and grounds, enabling walking around and chatting informally within the context of daily community life. I was also allowed to observe several Farm meetings. My key contacts were a community member and his wife who I had met previously at Christmas dinners held by the organisation that employs both him and my partner. Previously, my partner and I had visited the community at the summer parties held for families and friends. Access was agreed collectively at a community meeting; however individual access was not so easy to negotiate². To get started, I conducted a pilot study for one week during November 2004. This allowed me to get chatting with some of the residents and arrange initial interviews. During the pilot study, I conducted interviews with five residents, had lunch with the Farm Chair, and spent a day with one of the original founders who told me about the history of the community and provided a guided tour of the communal areas and farmland. From the pilot study, it was clear to me that the community was a fascinating site for studying the self-regulation of organic food production. What I had not anticipated was the level of organisational infrastructure that supported decision-making at the community on issues central to farming and living communally.

Fourteen adult community members consented to an in-depth interview and some of the newcomers I interviewed twice with a gap of nine to 12 months between interviews. Four people asked to be interviewed as two couples. Hence, in total, I conducted 15 semi-structured recorded interviews, several of which exceeded two hours in length with the remainder of approximately one hour's duration.

Interviews were semi-structured and comprised open-ended questions. Interviews were held in private, except for those residents who I interviewed as couples. During the pilot study, I directed some interview questions towards information-gathering, asking about organisational issues such as 'How do the sub groups work?' 'Tell me more about any current outstanding issues' and 'How do you resolve differences?'. Several interview questions such as 'Why join the community?' were relevant throughout the research period. As the research progressed, I adapted some of the interview questions accordingly to pursue topics of interest. Sometimes, I prompted respondents by asking unscripted questions. Later on, events from my own experience of living at Greenfields helped me to ask more probing questions. As the research progressed, I became aware of the central role of the organisational framework for promoting debate and resolving issues to do with organic farming practices. Accordingly, I aimed more questions

2 If you join a community, do not expect to have a rest! There is general agreement at Greenfields that each adult tries to commit 16 hours weekly to maintaining the farm and the communal areas. On top of this, a number of residents work full-time, including away from home in other locations. There are children to look after too.

around the negotiating and decision-making processes of the Farm meeting. The questions became more specific, for example ‘Any thoughts on consensus decision-making and the way it is implemented in the Co-op?’ and ‘At Farm meetings, do some people dominate more than others?’

To provide a theoretical basis for the ethnography presented here of how individuals participate in directing and controlling organic practices through speaking out in a self-managing community context that is atypical of the modern work organisation, I turn now to the practice of *parrhesia* in Antiquity as identified by Foucault.

Conceptual framework: Speaking out through *parrhesia*

In the Collège de France lectures of 1981-2 (2005) and 1982-3 (2010) and the Berkeley lectures of 1983 (2001), Foucault locates *parrhesia* in texts from Antiquity ranging approximately from 500 BC-AD 500. Etymologically, *parrhesia* translates to ‘telling all’ (2005: 372) or ‘saying everything’ (2001: 12), although Foucault prefers ‘franc-parler’ which translates to ‘speaking freely’ (2005: 373). In Antiquity, the use of *parrhesia* is not available to everyone and, on top of this, employing *parrhesia* is often a risky strategy. For Jack, also, ‘speech is never free’ (2004: 121). Rather than ‘free speech’, therefore, I choose to translate *parrhesia* as ‘fearless speech’, the title under which the Berkeley lectures are published (2001).

In the early part of *Fearless Speech*, Foucault identifies several characteristics of *parrhesia* including frankness, truth, danger, criticism, and duty (2001: 12-20). *Parrhesia* is a way of speaking the truth or, more specifically, the speaker’s version of the truth³: ‘In *parrhesia*, the speaker is supposed to give a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what the speaker thinks’ (*ibid.*: 12). *Parrhesia* is characterised by frankness and ‘an exact coincidence between belief and truth’ (*ibid.*: 14). There is a direct correspondence between what one believes to be true and what one says for the *parrhesiastes* ‘is the subject of the opinion to which he refers’ (*ibid.*: 13). In short, being subject to what one is saying synchronises with being subject to one’s belief in what one is saying: ‘What authenticates the fact that I tell you the truth is that as subject of my conduct I really am, absolutely, integrally, and totally identical to the subject of enunciation I am when I tell you what I tell you’ (Foucault, 2005: 407).

Foucault makes a number of distinctions between different forms of *parrhesia* employed in Antiquity. For the purposes of providing a simple conceptual framework to use in the forthcoming analysis, therefore, I choose to make a broad distinction between political *parrhesia*, as enacted on the political stage of the Athenian Assemblies and

3 As is made clear at the start of *Fearless Speech* (Foucault, 2001: 13-15), Foucault is analysing truth-telling as an activity rather than truth itself (2001). In modernity, the notion of truth-telling in itself is problematic. Veridictions are based on truth-telling and are understood by Foucault to be ‘the forms according to which discourses capable of being deemed true or false are articulated with a domain of things’ (Florence, 1994: 315). Therefore, modern-day truth is constructed through veridictions according to specific rules of verification and falsification. More specifically, Foucault links veridictions inextricably with the government of ourselves and of others (Foucault, 2010: 3-5).

later on in the king's court, and philosophical *parrhesia*, which can take place in face-to-face encounters within any context and is related to care of the self practices (Foucault, 1984).

Political parrhesia

Political *parrhesia* emerges from a form of *parrhesia* practised at Delphi. In Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytus* (428 BC), human beings talk to the gods in the form of a game between *logos*, truth, and *genos* (birth). At Delphi, *parrhesia* is the freedom to speak one's mind, a 'civic right of the well-born citizen of Athens' (Foucault, 2001: 102). In *Ion* (c.418-417 BC), the site for *parrhesia* shifts from Delphi to Athens, where political *parrhesia* takes the form of a game between *logos*, truth, and *nomos* (law). Political *parrhesia* is 'an essential characteristic of Athenian democracy' (Foucault, 2001: 22) where it is enacted on a political stage or a decision-making site such as the Assembly or the courts (Foucault, 2010: 340). Political *parrhesia* is used in two ways: firstly, by privileged citizens who are elected to speak out to the democratic Assembly where prospective legislation is voted upon and, secondly, between individual citizens in the public meeting places of the *agora*.

Euripides' *Orestes* (408 BC) identifies a crisis arising around the use of *parrhesia* in the Athenian democracies at the end of the Fifth Century BC. The function of *parrhesia* and its relationship to democracy are problematised, particularly regarding the effectiveness of allowing everyone the right to use *parrhesia*: 'Who is capable of speaking the truth within the limits of an institutional system where everyone is equally entitled to give his own opinion' (Foucault, 2001: 73). *Parrhesia* bifurcates into good, or positive, *parrhesia* and bad, or negative, *parrhesia*. Bad *parrhesia* is characterised by 'chattering', that is saying everything in one's mind 'without qualification' (*ibid.*: 13) thereby producing 'ignorant outspokenness' (*ibid.*: 73). A division occurs between those who think that everyone should be able to use *parrhesia* and those who think that its use should be restricted according to social status or personal virtue.

The problematisation of *parrhesia* produces two transformations. Firstly, with the demise of the Athenian democracies, political *parrhesia* grows and develops in the Hellenistic communities, centred on a personal relationship between a sovereign and an advisor to the sovereign (Foucault, 2001: 22). This form of *parrhesia* is referred to as monarchic *parrhesia*, where 'an advisor gives the sovereign honest and helpful advice' (*ibid.*: 19). The advisor's duty is to use *parrhesia* to help the king in decision-making and prevent the king from abusing the power invested in the role (*ibid.*: 22). Monarchic *parrhesia* is therefore quite different to the form of *parrhesia* exercised in the public arena of the Athenian Assemblies.

Secondly, *parrhesia* becomes related increasingly to 'the choice of one's way of life' (Foucault, 2001: 85), as philosophical *parrhesia*.

Philosophical parrhesia

Philosophy becomes a site for *parrhesia* during the fourth century BC. Philosophical *parrhesia* 'requires a personal, face to face relationship' (Foucault, 2001: 96). Philosophical *parrhesia* takes the form of a game between *logos*, truth, and *bios* (life)

and is associated with care of the self. For example, Socrates assumes a *parrhesiastic* role in advising Alcibiades to take care of himself (Foucault, 2001: 23-4). With philosophical *parrhesia*, no longer does every citizen have the same right to speak as every other citizen. Instead, the *parrhesiastes* has ‘something extra which is the ascendancy in the name of which he can speak out and undertake to lead others’ (Foucault, 2010: 341).

Philosophical *parrhesia* reduces considerably the role of political *parrhesia*, but does not replace it (Foucault, 2010: 342). Philosophical *parrhesia* is no longer linked just to the Athenian Assembly or to the king’s court; it can be used anywhere. Philosophical *parrhesia* can take the form of the interpellation of the powerful as criticism of the way they exercise power. Philosophical *parrhesia* is also practised in communities by the Epicureans in particular and also the Stoics: ‘*parrhesia* occurs as an activity in the framework of small groups of people, or in the context of community life’ (Foucault, 2001: 108). Another way of using philosophical *parrhesia* is by means of interpellation of an individual or a crowd such as ‘the Cynic and Stoic type of preaching in the theater, the assemblies, at the games, or in the forum’ (Foucault, 2010: 345). Philosophical *parrhesia* is also used in the philosophical schools where students are trained to become philosophers. Another type of philosophical *parrhesia* is employed by Seneca, Serenus, and Epictetus in the form of an internal dialogue.

Parrhesia post-antiquity

In Antiquity, you were told the truth by another person who provided guidance (Foucault, 2005: 409); in Christianity, you obtain the truth by some other means such as reading a book. Modern philosophy retrieves *parrhesia*: ‘maybe we could envisage the history of modern European philosophy as a history of practices of veridiction, as a history of practices of *parrhesia*’ (Foucault, 2010: 349). Foucault uses Descartes’ *Meditations* to demonstrate an act of *parrhesia* in that it is the philosopher who speaks, saying ‘I’. ‘You have the great resumption of the *parrhesiastic* function that philosophy had in the ancient world’ (Foucault, 2010: 350).

In contemporary management and organisation studies, *parrhesia* is cited as a practice for the critical management scholar to adopt in order to engage actively in critique, rather than academic theorisation alone, to challenge those in power. Drawing on Jack (2004), Bridgman and Stephens (2008: 268) recommend that scholars learn from the practice of *parrhesia* by understanding critique as a personal ethic rather than as something located in specific institutions. In this way, scholars would be encouraged to engage more actively with critique as follows:

If we were more frank by writing with greater clarity, if we were more willing to speak directly to those in power and if we were willing to risk the privileges that come through our membership of the university, we might come closer to fulfilling the emancipatory potential of CMS. (268-9)

Huckaby (2007) elaborates on the risks facing the *parrhesiastic* scholar who challenges oppression and hegemony in both research and teaching, including the impediment of tenure and promotion prospects and the potential for legislative action by students. Scholars must make choices about how they play the *parrhesiastic* game, particularly when considering whether to accept funds that would redirect their research in an

unwanted direction (Huckaby, 2007). Reference to the *parrhesiastic* game is also made by Tuck (2007) to examine dialogues between Inland Revenue officials and those responsible for managing the tax affairs of corporate firms.

The above analyses relate to bureaucracies, whereas the current study is investigating the alternative organisational form of a community through ethnography. The closest match is provided by Neiwirth (2004) who analyses the activities of the non-hierarchical cyber-publishing network Indymedia through participating as a member and conducting interviews, a survey, and document analysis of Indymedia websites. In seeking clarification as to how Indymedia operates in creating new forms of participatory media-making, in contrast with profit-driven corporate media organisations, Neiwirth draws on the five characteristics of *parrhesia* referred to earlier: frankness, truth, danger, critique, and duty.

What none of these studies do is to break down *parrhesia* into the different forms outlined in the previous two sections. In Antiquity, the various contexts for *parrhesia* show ‘a whole range of modalities’ (Foucault, 2005: 407). As Jack contends: ‘These different contexts bring attention to the variety of ways in which fearless speech was practised in Antiquity and might continue to be practised today’ (2004: 130). Often practised in Antiquity in communal settings, *parrhesia* might provide a more appropriate framework for studying a modern-day community than would theories centred on bureaucratic forms of organising, particularly in the context of speaking out. Correspondingly, to find out how individuals contribute to decision-making about organic practices in a self-managing community, I draw on the following sources where appropriate: firstly, the enactment of political *parrhesia* in the Athenian democracies and the Hellenistic communities; secondly, the enactment of philosophical *parrhesia* in the Epicurean and Stoic communities. In addition, I shall take into account the aforementioned general characteristics of the practice of *parrhesia* (frankness, truth, and so on) where appropriate.

In the next few sections, I analyse the enactment of *parrhesia* at Greenfields.

Analysis: The enactment of *parrhesia*

The decision-making framework

I begin by introducing the organisational framework maintained at Greenfields for decision-making about farming issues.

On the supermarket shelf, an organic apple looks no different from a non-organic apple except for an organic label. That label identifies a process rather than an end-product, certifying that a product has been farmed according to a set of organic standards. At Greenfields, food is not produced for profit and therefore the community is not obliged to farm according to the standards, or rules, of an organic certification body. Nevertheless, the word ‘organic’ provides a common reference-point for debating farming issues. To reiterate, and expand, the research question: how do individual community members at Greenfields contribute in reaching agreement on how to farm

organically through various forms of practices reminiscent of political and philosophical *parrhesia* identified by Foucault as being enacted in Antiquity?

Decision-making regarding farming practices at Greenfields is by consensus at the Farm meeting held once every four weeks during the school term. A proposed change does not go ahead until everyone agrees. A community member can propose a change to a farming practice by submitting a proposal to the next Farm meeting. Proposals and supporting information are attached to the Agenda which is pinned onto a noticeboard one week prior to the meeting. At the Farm meeting, the Farm Chair goes through each new proposal in turn. When a proposal is read out, the proposer has to be prepared to answer questions from those community members who are not willing to commit to a decision without finding out more. This may simply be 'How much will this cost?'. If perceived by all to be a sensible minor change with no potential repercussions, the proposal is quite probably accepted without further discussion. However, some proposals generate prolonged debate that has to be continued outside the meeting. In these cases, the proposal remains pending until the next meeting to allow a more prolonged debate and a temporary sub-group is instigated to collect further information in response to questions asked at the meeting. One person takes responsibility for organising the sub-group, deciding when to have meetings, researching the topic, and reporting back to a subsequent Farm meeting. The sub-group cannot make decisions on its own. I was informed that a sub-group generally comprises a mix of supporters and objectors.

In the Athenian democracies, *agoras* were the places 'where the people, the assembly, met for political discussion and debate' (Foucault, 2001: 67). According to the American School of Classical Studies at Athens⁴, the *agora* in Athens was a large open square where citizens gathered together for various functions including markets, religious processions, and theatrical performances. The public buildings used for running the democracy were located on the edges of the *agora*. Proposed legislation was prepared by the *Boule* for presentation at the citizens' Assembly, the *Ekklesia*. The *Boule* met at the *Bouleuterion* almost daily and comprised 500 members, made up of 50 from each of the 10 tribes who were chosen by lot and retained office for one year. All male adult citizens had the right to vote on the proposed legislation at the Assembly which assembled every 10 days approximately in the *Pnyx*, a large area set into the Acropolis.

The Farm meeting, in providing a forum for individual community members to articulate their thoughts through speaking out whilst the community negotiates collectively current and prospective farming practices, is reminiscent of the Athenian assembly where prospective legislation was negotiated through political *parrhesia*. The sub-groups and other less formal encounters at Greenfields in which Farm meeting issues are debated through potential re-enactments of political *parrhesia* I take to be more reminiscent of the public meeting places of the *agora* outside the Assembly. Philosophical *parrhesia* could be exercised during Antiquity in any context; Foucault refers specifically to the communal settings of the Epicurean and Stoic groups and to

4 Athenian Agora Excavations, American School of Classical Studies at <http://www.agathe.gr/overview/>, accessed 2 February 2011.

the form of self-examination used by Seneca. Finally, *parrhesia* can also be explored through the general characteristics of frankness, truth, danger, criticism, and duty.

Several Greenfields community members expounded the opportunities for discussion at the Farm meeting, compared with meetings held in their respective workplaces. For example, I was told:

You know, in my line of work, meetings are just a formality. Meetings are just there to decorate a decision you've made already. But here, there's genuine discussion.

Another resident informed me that joining a sub-group also provides a 'chance to have an influence on the decision'. How do community members speak out about organic issues in a way that is reminiscent of the enactment of political *parrhesia*, in either formal Farm meetings or more informal encounters?

Persuading the assembly

I was told that consensus tends to favour maintaining the status quo because only one person is required to block a proposal for change. A newcomer informed me that residents who have lived and farmed at the community in the long-term resist new challenges initially, protesting 'But that's the way we've always done it!'. A long-term community member commented that some of the residents have heard the issues raised before: 'But it's been gone over three years ago or four years ago and, you know, oh Gosh, it's up again, for heaven's sake'. A Greenfields community member informed me: 'I think you've got to kind of expect a rejection first time round'. There was general agreement that, in theory, consensus gives everyone a chance to speak out but, in practice, not everyone does. According to a long-standing resident, engaging in consensus is a skill that newcomers have to learn:

Some people just aren't as able to put forward their views coherently and neatly. So that's a skill and I think it's a useful skill that you learn here after a while. If you want to get anything done your way, you've kind of got to. And it is important to know how to use the process because if you discuss it with people in advance, put something up in writing that they can read, make them understand where you're coming from, almost always people say 'Oh, yeah, that's OK then'. But if it comes as a shock or it isn't explained properly, then you'll get blocked all the time. So it is really important to be able to use the meetings, you know, the whole system really, effectively.

On top of this, I found out that some residents also hold a managerial post in a work organisation and are more likely therefore to be well-practised in taking part in meetings. Others may not be so well rehearsed at articulating themselves. Indeed, I was told 'Some people find it much harder to say things in meetings'. Another resident expressed difficulty in speaking out:

There's people that earn their living in committees and there's people like me that don't. You know, that's their life, committees and talking and stuff. So you've either got to learn or you've got to take their decisions. You've gotta get in there and put your point of view over. And I find it difficult, I do. It's a bit intimidating.

The way that the Chair runs the Farm meeting has different effects in terms of different individuals speaking up. At one meeting I attended, a new Chair asked each member who was present in turn to contribute their thoughts on a proposal. Afterwards, she told me that, since some community members are louder and get their voices heard more than others, she had set out to make sure that everyone present was able to make a statement. This tactic had not been adopted at the Farm meetings run by the previous Chair.

However, pushing a proposal through the consensus decision-making process is not just a question of obtaining the agreement of everyone else. There are other strategies involved in getting something ‘done your way’ that go on in the background of the Farm meeting that may or may not resemble *parrhesia*. Whilst the Farm meeting is a contender for re-enactment of political *parrhesia* in the Athenian Assemblies, informal negotiations around the subject of ‘organic’ take place in encounters outside the formality of the meeting that are more reminiscent of political *parrhesia* between individual citizens in the public meeting areas of the *agora*. One way of persuading other residents to accept your proposal is to chat to other community members informally outside the structure of the meetings. I found that the blackboards in the Buttery were a good meeting place because this is where people chalk up the latest news and update the rotas. Some residents employ lobbying strategies to try and persuade others to support their own point of view:

Sometimes if you have a proposal, you go and talk about it to people. Some people go and talk to their friends. Some people go and talk to the people who they think will agree. Some people will deliberately go and talk to people they think won’t agree, so they can raise issues and maybe you can deal with them ahead of the meeting ... Sometimes those things are incredibly important. Sometimes people will come up with compromises outside of the meeting.

Clearly, speaking out to friends and in informal groupings in communal areas provides additional opportunities to win people over to your own point of view. Also, those who have difficulty in articulating themselves to a large assembly at the Farm meeting might be less intimidated by informal encounters. By persuading a few people to agree informally, your confidence might be sufficiently boosted to speak out effectively at the next Farm meeting. Also, if you convince your friends, then you might save yourself the job of having to speak out: ‘Some people don’t like to do it themselves so they try and get other people to put their ideas forward’. Couples have a probable advantage over singles in that they can provide mutual support. A resident told me how he would sound out ideas by discussing an issue with his wife before talking with other people. Also, I was informed, it is handy to have somebody to talk to late at night after a rather turbulent meeting.

Who can use parrhesia?

In all of Antiquity, it was considered inappropriate for certain people to engage in *parrhesia*. In Euripides’ play *Hippolytus*, Phaedra avoids committing adultery with Hippolytus and the resulting dishonour because she wishes her sons to be able to exercise *parrhesia*, a practice that is not available to herself as a woman (Foucault, 2001: 30-1).

The Greenfields Farm meeting represents the Assembly of the Athens democracies where political *parrhesia* was enacted. On the political stage of the Athenian Assembly, the speaker must be not just a citizen, but ‘must be one of the *best* among the citizens, possessing those specific personal, moral, and social qualities which grant one the privilege to speak’ (Foucault, 2001: 18, emphasis in original). At the Greenfields Farm meeting, while each community member has the opportunity to speak out, both men and women feel silenced by other residents:

You’re shouted down ... he just talks on and on and on. And he won’t listen to what you say.

Personalities always come into it obviously. It often depends who’s at a meeting and who speaks loudest. I have to say that does happen. I think it’s inevitable.

And when you’re sitting in the meetings, there are some people who can say ‘No’ with a very loud voice and they seem to have more votes in the consensus than people who say ‘No’ very softly. Or ‘Yes’ very softly.

If nobody disagrees openly, then consensus is assumed. This last quote suggests that, by not speaking up, one is perceived incorrectly as agreeing to a consensus. Therefore, some decisions that appear to go forward on consensus would have been challenged by individuals except that they lacked the *parrhesiastic* courage to speak out. One resident alluded to the inevitability of ‘false consensus’ arising from time to time. Also, if everyone else is in agreement to a proposal, a single community member might withdraw their objection in order to achieve consensus and this is something that occurs at Quaker meetings also (Louis, 1994).

However, in using *parrhesia*, the speaker chooses truth instead of falsehood or silence (Foucault, 2001: 19-20). Exercising *parrhesia* requires courage as proof of the sincerity of the speaker (15). Speaking out fearlessly entails being brave enough to overcome one’s feelings of intimidation rather than remain silent. Residents who have farmed organically before are more compelled to speak out about non-organic practices:

So when we have noticed things that go against our feelings of what organic is, then we have tried to bring it to people’s attention and get people to review it. But we have had some rather nasty shocks!

The context of the debate, including the area of farming under discussion, was said to have a bearing on which residents choose to speak out and on how loudly they speak out. For example, if you are involved heavily with caring for the sheep, then you are more likely to care about decisions made about the sheep. A number of residents said that speaking out is linked to how strongly one feels about an issue:

Some people dominate more than others because they’re involved more.

But also if somebody feels very strongly about something, then they’ll be more forceful. They may not even be particularly articulate, but they will be very forceful in how they put their point across. They’ll put more emotion into it.

How can one be certain that those who shout out are any more courageous than those who are silent? Is caring more a form of courage? When Socrates tells Alcibiades that he must learn to take care of himself before he can learn to take care of Athens

(Foucault, 2001: 23-4), is this an act of courage or does Socrates care more for Alcibiades than the sycophants do? The words ‘dominate’ and ‘forceful’ used above imply that being involved or caring more gives a community member a political advantage in decision-making. A community member elaborates:

There are other areas where people can become very territorial: ‘This is the way it’s done.’ So discussion is muted, stopped. ‘It’s the way I do it!’ And there will always be people like that move here ...Most of us have the ability, I think, to think ‘OK. Well, I can work with this. This isn’t going to hurt me too much. I can work round it.’ It’s obviously really important to that person. But some people do feel really strongly about things and really do want them to change.

Passion is not something that Foucault provides a detailed elaboration of in relation to *parrhesia*. This emotional aspect of speaking out through *parrhesia* at Greenfields therefore enriches our understanding of *parrhesia* in practice. Emotions clearly contribute to speaking out at the Farm meeting, but are emotions harnessed deliberately to add weight to speaking out? Do some residents gain a greater leverage in the decision-making process by making out that they care more? One community member breaks the link between caring and speaking out, showing that reluctance to speak out is sometimes connected to something other than not caring about an issue:

There are people who are not really talking and putting their point over, but they feel just as involved and committed as people that can talk and talk and talk and talk until ‘Oh, Do what you want to do!’

The acquisition of status was also found to contribute to who speaks out and who is expected to speak out. Epicurean communities comprised artisans, small shopkeepers, and poor farmers (Foucault, 2005: 115). Members of these communities did not distinguish between poor and wealthy, high-born and obscure – ‘there is no difference of status’ (118). Applicants to join Greenfields are not discriminated against on grounds of religion, politics, or employment status and there is a mix of professionals, manual workers, and retired people, and of left-wingers and right-wingers. Nevertheless, community members can attain a certain status whilst living and farming at Greenfields through knowledge acquisition:

There are key people who are key to the running of the farm and they cover lots of areas. So lots of us feel quite deferential to them because they know more. And my position would always be if somebody knows more then, unless I’ve got a very strong reason for objecting, I trust them to make decisions.

At Greenfields, longevity of tenure counts most towards having the right to speak. Newcomers are not expected to speak out: ‘But some people seem to want to make their mark immediately they come in. Which isn’t quite so comfortable’. During the research period, most newcomers acknowledged their willingness to defer to those who have resided for longer at Greenfields. Because their experience of farming was limited, one couple was prepared to listen rather than speak out: ‘I think I speak for Marcus too, we feel we’re here to learn and so we’ll listen to everybody else.’ Another newcomer, who had farmed full-time non-organically was happy to defer: ‘So who am I to come in saying “you should be doing it this way”’. Also, as one resident said:

In the early days, you might not realise the implications of something. You know if something is going to happen, then that means that there might be a knock-on effect. There might be implied labour that's not made explicit by somebody's proposal.

The findings from this section show that in communal decision-making related to maintaining a communal 'organic', the ideological principle of consensus to provide each individual with the opportunity to participate equally in decision-making is problematised when applied in practice. Moreover, the notion of *parrhesia* as a truth-telling practice is mediated by how effectively a community member is able to put on a performance of competence or to employ an emotional outburst to walk over everybody else. The truth about 'organic' is something that is never achieved but is constantly negotiated and renegotiated.

Clearly, at Greenfields, newcomers have a lower status in the decision-making process than residents who are well established in the community. Because newcomers lack in-depth knowledge and experience of the farming practices carried out at Greenfields, they are not expected to speak out during debates on farming issues, as commented on by one of the more established residents:

So he's come in and he's been quite vocal from an early stage. So other people say 'Who does he think he is? He doesn't know. He doesn't have a right.' And I have an issue with us saying 'When does somebody have a right to be vocal?' So most people who come in are deferential and do sit and think 'When I have more knowledge, I will.' But what if somebody comes in and they are really experienced? Well, actually, if they're paying all their contributions, who are we to say when they have a right to say or when they have a right to challenge?

What happens then when a newcomer arrives at Greenfields, having farmed a smallholding recently to organic certification standards set by the Soil Association?

The parrhesiastes: challenging those with higher status

Up to now, I have explored the possibilities for individual members of speaking out and having a say in the running of the farm at Greenfields community. In theory, every community member has an equal say. In practice, some individuals hold themselves back when they wish to speak out, some defer to those with greater experience of farming at Greenfields, and others defer to those who put more emotion into their utterances. Newcomers have a lower status in the decision-making process, although the co-founder explained to me that a newcomer can change people's minds: 'but you'd have to argue it strongly to convince us'.

When the Athenian democracies ended, political *parrhesia* went on to be practised in the Hellenistic communities between a sovereign and the sovereign's advisor in the form of monarchic *parrhesia*. With monarchic *parrhesia* and some forms of philosophical *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes* provides advice to a person of higher status. In this section, I identify a newcomer who, in speaking out against the longer-standing residents, is particularly representative of this type of *parrhesiastes*. The newcomer, who from now on I refer to as the *parrhesiastes*, has a lower status at Greenfields than the residents with greater longevity. Nonetheless, he farmed as a Soil Association certified smallholder directly before joining Greenfields. Therefore, he can claim with validity to be an authority on organic farming. Greenfields, meanwhile, is maintaining a

version of organic that has been constructed over years of negotiation by various residents, each of whom came in with their own particular version of organic. Having taken up residence at an organic farming community, the newcomer observes farming practices that the Soil Association would not consider to be organic. He challenges some of these practices but, as a newcomer, he is not expected to speak out and therefore causes quite a disturbance.

First of all, he tries to remove a commercial udder cream from the farm. The udder cream is intended for application after milking to help keep the cow's udder supple, but the *parrhesiastes* is surprised to see milkers apply the cream immediately prior to milking: 'Putting a little bit on their hands and a bit on their fingers and they were using it to get a lubricated teat'. Two other people told me that the label on the udder cream instructs users to wash off the udder cream applied at the previous milking before milking again. Concerned at the risk of producing milk contaminated by the chemicals in the udder cream, the newcomer perseveres at achieving consensus to ban this particular practice. He rings up the udder cream manufacturer and speaks to a vet:

I phoned up the company who made it and I asked the vet ... 'look we're using this product for milking on the udders, is it OK? ... And he phoned me back and said 'Well, no, if it gets into the milk, you have to throw the milk away'. He told me the chemical that was in it and he said 'Oh, you don't want to be eating that'.

Along with another person who has lived at the community longer and who has questioned the practice previously, the *parrhesiastes* consults a local herbalist who makes up a herbal version of the udder cream that can be applied before milking. By presenting an alternative, he manages to persuade longer-standing community members to stop using the commercial udder cream. This newcomer is a *parrhesiastes* in the sense that his status is lower than the more long-standing community members and he objects to a practice that the others have carried out long-term.

Secondly, the *parrhesiastes* succeeds in blocking a well-researched proposal by speaking out against the wishes of everyone else. The proposal that he blocks has been put together by another resident and comprises a request to spend £600 on enviro-mesh to protect field fodder crops from rabbits, pigeons, snails and flea beetles. An observer recalls:

I thought this was a really interesting one because the person who objected to it is a vegetarian and he's only been here a year. Now he objected to it because he said the enviro-mesh costs £600, and he said 'But that's a lot of money when we're just protecting fodder crops for the cows; it's actually a luxury food item; it's not essential to their diet. So why are we spending £600 on enviro-mesh for animals?' ... So those who objected, it wasn't really just about the fact that we didn't get the enviro-mesh. The objection was 'this is somebody who's only just arrived here and he's got a big mouth on him'. And actually, you know, he is allowed to say '£600 is a lot of money, I don't think it's an essential crop; and £600 could do an awful lot in the garden for human consumption, direct human consumption, rather than through the animal'.

The observer went on to say that the person who put in the proposal is particularly hard-hit by the negative decision because he is left with a massive amount of hand-weeding to do in the future. The majority of residents do eat meat and are prepared to pay £600 to save labour on producing crops for animal consumption. The *parrhesiastes*, who is vegetarian, is not bothered at all about protecting fodder crops that will be used to feed

the farm animals. He is committed not just to farming organically but also to sustainability. ‘No one forces him to speak; but he feels that it is his duty to do so’ (Foucault, 2001: 19). He cannot allow himself to be the one whose action, that of giving in and agreeing, endorses putting £600 towards a crop that is not being grown directly for human consumption.

When a community member engages in *parrhesia* at Greenfields, the risk taken is that of upsetting a neighbour. At Greenfields, community members not only farm collectively; they also live closely within the confines of two buildings. Speaking up within a group of people with whom one lives and works requires varying degrees of courage and this is more so if what one says goes against the majority. I was told by an occupant: ‘You have to be quite tough to live here. To survive anyway’. Hence, some community members choose to avoid the risk involved in exercising *parrhesia*. To disagree, one has to stand up in front of everyone else and make a stand and not everyone feels able to do this, as expressed by one resident: ‘I have definitely seen things ... that I didn’t agree with. I didn’t feel it was my place to step up’.

By speaking out, one runs the risk of upsetting other community members to such an extent that life becomes uncomfortable enough either to feel one must leave the community or to remain there without a sense of collective belonging. One has to decide whether to say: ‘This is the way you behave, but that is the way you ought to behave’ (Foucault, 2001: 17) or to keep quiet and avoid the risk of offending a fellow community member. On the other hand, some community members risk upsetting a friend through *parrhesia* by taking a position of opposition during a debate, as a resident points out: ‘I notice people that I am friendly with - they don’t always argue on my behalf or in my favour in meetings. And I think that’s very healthy’.

Knowledge management: Parrhesia as self-criticism

While criticism is a general characteristic of *parrhesia*, this can include self-criticism also, as Foucault points out: ‘This is what I have done, and was wrong in so doing’ (2001: 17).

The *parrhesiastic* practices that take place in the Epicurean communities are recorded in fragments of Philodemus’ book *On Frank Speaking*, recovered from Herculaneum. At group confessions or meetings, community members disclosed their thoughts, faults, misbehaviours, and so on in turn (Foucault, 2001: 114). Compared with the Christian form of confession, the Epicurean confession is different. The object of the Epicurean confessions was for community members to provide salvation to each other so that they may lead good, beautiful and happy lives. Epicurean community members gave a ‘detailed account of the faults one has committed which one recounts either to one’s director, or even to others, in order to get advice’ (Foucault, 2010: 345-6). At Greenfields, I found evidence of a present-day reproduction of the *parrhesiastic* practice of confession with a more practical objective: to learn from one’s mistakes. Community members write down confessions of their farming mistakes, as these extracts from the Legumes and Root Crops ring-binders show:

Paul's Legumes 2002:

The worst things I did – failed to keep beans wet enough in the late summer drought which caused early end to crop. Grew too many beans to keep picked.

Fennel Bulb:

Varieties were Romanesco and Argos. 200 planted in Nodules in March and April. 100 planted in June.

Suffered from slugs until established. I used to go out and manually pick off slugs in evening or early morning, keeping an eye on them for the first two weeks or so. Fennel tended to flower (bolt) early rather than really fatten up but was edible and tasty even when just bolted.

Next time I would plant 50 every 2 weeks from Mid-March until June 1 (or 100 plants beginning of each month, April-June).

Roots – Sadia's Part of Plot 4 2000/2001:

Generally a difficult year – very cold and wet early on, loads of tiny slugs nibbled up all the seedlings, I didn't rake the soil for the early sowings into a fine enough tilth and also I sowed the seeds too deeply. So I had to resow each bed about 3 times. Eventually the nodules in early summer were very successful.

The self-written ring-binders held in the Buttery contain declarations of how someone went wrong, what they did or should have done, and what they would do next time. Unlike the Epicurean communities where one confesses to obtain advice, at Greenfields written confessions are used as a form of knowledge management from which others can learn. They function as memory-joggers for the writer and other members and demonstrate a useful tool for knowledge sharing at a community.

Conclusion

The paper presents a study of individual and collective self-management at a contemporary self-managing organic farming community. The analysis of the paper, which addresses the question of how community members contribute in reaching agreement on how to farm organically, is framed round various forms of political *parrhesia* and philosophical *parrhesia* practised in Antiquity and identified by Foucault.

The practice of *parrhesia* in Antiquity, as referred to by Foucault (2001, 2005, 2010), informs the study of the contributions made by individual community members in bringing up and responding to issues about the organic-ness of certain practices by suggesting themes by which the findings can be analysed. These themes include risk, courage, status differences, criticism, and self-criticism which provide a rich analysis of the data. A combination of different forms of ancient *parrhesia* are found to be reactivated in a contemporary setting. The Farm meeting provides the setting for persuading the rest of the assembly that a proposal for a farming change should be pursued, thereby re-enacting the form of political *parrhesia* exercised in the formal Assembly of the Athenian democracies. Speaking out can also be used by other attendees in their support or rejection of a proposal. While theoretically everyone has a

chance to speak out, in practice some community members dominate more than others. In addition, the residents who have lived at the community longer and accumulated more knowledge are assigned a higher status than newcomers. Most newcomers defer and refrain from speaking out. Outside the Farm meeting, informal encounters take place that present opportunities for further discussion and for lobbying other community members into adopting one's own point of view. Such encounters are reminiscent of another form of political *parrhesia* practised in the Athenian democracies, which is the exchanges conducted between citizens in the public meeting places of the *agora*.

One newcomer engages in an interesting re-enactment of monarchic *parrhesia* and some forms of philosophical *parrhesia*, through which a person speaks out against those who have higher status. I identify this person as a *parrhesiastes* for he challenges the authority that has been established at Greenfields by the longer-term residents. Whilst engaging in *parrhesia* at Greenfields does not involve risking one's life, a significant risk is taken of upsetting people who live and work in close proximity to oneself. Furthermore, the *parrhesiastes* risks upsetting the currently held collective truth about how to be the good organic farmer. Through perseverance, however, a person of lower status can push through a proposal. Also, besides criticism of others, residents were found to engage in *parrhesiastic* acts of self-criticism. The *parrhesiastic* confessions typical of Epicurean communities are reactivated via the self-writing (Foucault, 2000) of community members in writing down feedback about their failures and successes in a form of collective knowledge management. Finally, and not noted earlier on, one resident was observed debating outstanding organic issues with herself in a communal area, in a form of self-examination reminiscent of the form of philosophical *parrhesia* practised by Seneca.

The current study adds to understandings of *parrhesia* by underpinning the impact of the emotional content of speaking out. Of the part that emotions had to play in the enactment of classical *parrhesia*, Foucault is vague. This paper shows how, in contemporary re-enactments of the practice of *parrhesia*, showing more emotion whilst speaking out gives some individuals an advantage in the decision-making process.

Currently, studies presented by management and organisation theorists are dominated by work organisations that are mainly bureaucratic. Organisation theory has been criticised for marginalising the rural peasantry (Burrell, 1997) and focusing instead on manufacturing and service organisations (Burrell, 1997; Egri, 1994). This paper makes a contribution to organisation studies by beginning to address these imbalances. Moreover, a turn is taken away from control through surveillance and the management of subjectivities that dominate Foucault-inspired studies to present the alternative approach of focusing on 'organising', as opposed to 'being organised', thereby assigning a proactive role to the individual in organisation studies. In doing so the paper adds also to a small collection of Foucauldian analyses of alternative forms of organising (see Mangan, 2009).

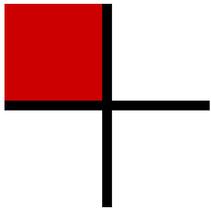
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The Five Obstructions: Experiencing the human side of enterprise

Sverre Raffnsøe

Today, too, I experienced something
I hope to understand in a few days
Leth: *The Perfect Human* and *The Five Obstructions*

Released in 2003 by internationally renowned Danish directors Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth, *The Five Obstructions* is a short film, 88 minutes long. As will be evident in this section of the special issue, however, this ‘minor’ work is also a unique, dense, multi-layered, and intriguing piece of art, with a wide range of implications.

A film-experiment that permits us to follow its own genesis in the making, *The Five Obstructions* presents itself both as a documentary and a feature production, as it renders the construction of a previously inexistent fictitious work. Being the result of a contest between two auteurs, the work permits us to follow a power game in detail as it develops. In addition, the film may be viewed as a collaborative cinematic experiment, concerning, experimenting with and challenging, not only received rules of film making, but also our conception of rules and creativity in a broader sense.

More than art and the rules of creation are at stake, however. As soon as one begins to study the film more closely from the vantage point of the management of self-management, it appears that the film also explores conditions of human existence, characterizing modern work life, modern social life and modern society. By depicting the possibilities and challenges of the modern human condition, rendering them in an especially pointed, provocative and seductive, way, Trier’s and Leth’s creation raises, explores and addresses the following questions/difficulties: (How) is it possible to manage not only your own self but also that of your fellow human beings in ways which promote productivity and facilitate creativity, given that an essential prerequisite or condition for true human and social existence, in the work place as well as elsewhere, has become the ability to cope with and overcome limitations on our existence imposed by our surroundings? Are there ways to manage yourself and others that are beneficial to furthering the creation of novelty, in a social setting where self-management (and thus freedom as the ability to become major by going beyond and overcoming what we are confronted with) is constantly presupposed, demanded of you and exacted from

you? How is it possible to manage yourself and others productively if freedom and the transcendence of limitations and rules have become the rule? Finally, how is the fundamental mode or plane of existence, which enables us to relate creatively to ourselves and to others, to be conceived of and constructed?

In the following section of the current special issue devoted to *The Five Obstructions*, these issues will be further developed. The essay by Mary-Jo Hatch (Copenhagen Business School & Gothenburg University) entitled 'Organizing Obstructions to Manage Organizations Creatively: Reflecting *The Five Obstructions*' shows how Trier employs the method of obstructive limitation to break Leth out of his filmmaking habits. By obstructing Leth's immediate path to success, Trier is able to manage his creative output in ways that further creativity. Hatch rightly describes *The Five Obstructions* as 'a wonderful tutorial on creativity that weaves in and around management' (204). The article is followed by a dialogue between Leth and Raffnsøe entitled 'Tripping Up the Perfect'. Here the interlocutors examine and discuss various aspects of *The Five Obstructions*, e.g. the fierce power game between Leth and Trier, the film's analysis of modern work life and self-management, its relationship to rules and creativity, to sports, to welfare, purity and impurity.

In order to facilitate a more elaborate discussion and interpretation of the film, however, the present introduction aims to introduce the setting of the film, its basic elements and course of events.

The draughtsman's contract

The Five Obstructions begins by showing how Leth, in an interview with Trier, is given and accepts the assignment of producing five new versions of his own short film *The Perfect Human*, originally released in 1967/68. The new versions are to be made according to strict rules laid out by Trier (Leth, 2008a).

The making of the contract and the co-operation dates further back in history, of course, since in the first instance it goes back at least three years before the release of the film. After having invited his former teacher to contribute to formulating an analogy to the famous *Dogma 95 Manifesto*, in the form of statements drawing an outline of the rules of documentary film making, Trier suggested that he and Leth should make a film together. In an ensuing exchange of e-mails the proposal is launched in the following terms:

Dear Jørgen, The challenge/The Film you are supposed to solve/make is called: The five obstructions.

As a starting point I would like you to show me a 10-minute film, you have made – *The Perfect Human*.

We will watch the movie together and talk about it – then I will set up limitations, commands or prohibitions, which means you have to do the film all over again. This we will do five times – of this the title. I would find it natural if our conversations became a part of the final movie – with the six small films, of course. [...]

Let me know how you feel about this. Please write.

Best regards,

Lars. (Hjort, 2008: xv-xvi; Leth, 2009: 259-260)

The suggestion seems to turn Leth on immediately:

Dear Lars, I find the assignment tempting. I can see an interesting development between film one and six, the route around the obstacles, the conversations. I'm sure we'll get a lot out of this. It is exciting. I look forward to your obstructions.

I really like the idea of having to change, adjust, and reduce according to given conditions in the process. Best regards, Jørgen. (Hjort, 2008: xv-xvi; Leth, 2009: 259-260)

In accordance with the established agreement, the five sequences in the film follow a regular pattern. Each opens with a discussion between the two directors during which the rules to follow are laid out. Subsequently, we follow Leth closely through a demanding creative process in which the filmmaker strives to surmount the obstructions created by Trier, or other external impediments, in order to arrive at a satisfactory product. This having in turn been shown to the audience and shared by the two filmmakers, they join forces to evaluate the merits and the shortcomings of the work of art presented. In immediate continuation, they move on to stipulate the rules to be followed in the ensuing sequence.

Initially, then, one party (Trier) stipulates the conditions of the contract, stepping forward as the active part, the man in control. His opponent is first and foremost supposed to follow the designs given by the original draughtsman. On the other hand, his contender (Leth) is also supposed to have a will of his own and to act accordingly; and as the film progresses, the roles are reversed to an increasing extent, as is the case in Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract*. In the present *Filmmaker's Contract*, the slave becomes master; and the master becomes dependent. The predator becomes the victim; and the victim asserts sovereignty.

The formation of the self-managing creative di-vidual

On closer inspection, then, the interaction between Leth and Trier rendered in the film mirrors a familiar pattern in modern work life. The film's narrative takes on the form of and is parsed by a series of equivalents to Performance and Development Reviews (PDR), or PDR-meetings in which managers and employees meet in order to evaluate previous performance and negotiate the rules and the goals for performance in the future. In between these divisions, the co-workers carry out their work according to their interpretation of the rules agreed upon. To what extent this is the case will be evaluated during the next PDR-meeting in which future goals and rules will be negotiated.

In unison with a number of other contemporary management technologies, such as coaching, performance management, auditing, lean and bench-marking, PDR-meetings presuppose that employees are capable of managing themselves. It is impossible to

imagine PDR-reviews in which employees refuse to develop or keep tabs on themselves and their assignments. The present management technologies all presuppose an employee capable of relating to him or herself independently, while, at the same time, even promoting and empowering him or her. Thus, self-management has become ubiquitous and all pervasive, not only as the latest management fad, be it theory or technology, but also as an unavoidable condition for management (Raffnsøe, 2010).

Self-management effectively affects the identity of the employee. When managing yourself along the lines stipulated, you are supposed to establish a split relationship with yourself in which you do not take yourself and your situation for granted. You do not just do as you are told or carry out orders, you also reflect upon yourself, your condition, and the conditions and rules given. A split relationship to your self implies that you are no longer presumed to be an individual, an indivisible unit or 'atom'. Instead you are presupposed to become a 'di-vidual' (Bäckius, 2002), a divided self, constantly distinguishing itself from itself, relating to and reflecting upon itself.

Furthermore, self-management implies that you become a self that assumes responsibility for itself and its activities in various ways (Manz and Sims, 1980; Manz and Sims, 1989). With self-management a responsabilization of the self becomes crucial for management, the employee and the organization. As a self-managing employee you have to assume and display responsibility for yourself, for your various tasks, for management and for productivity, and maybe most importantly, for relating reflexively to yourself and for transgressing yourself and the conditions and rules given.

A number of the characteristics of the self-managing, dependent and self-dependent, di-vidual are put on display in Leth's character in *The Five Obstructions*. As rendered in the film, Leth's very existence, in its own pointed or acute way, appears as a showcase of the possibilities, challenges, the obstructions, and the pitfalls of self-management.

Perfecting human perfection

When inserted in a context it itself indicates, the film throws light on a further challenging aspect of the self-managing existence. As hinted at in the opening dialogue of *The Five Obstructions*, the origins of the film date back even further, even beyond the 'original' mutual draughtsman's contract between Leth and Trier, established in the email exchange three years earlier and re-confirmed in the film. By confessing to have studied Leth's earlier work *The Perfect Human* at least '20 times' since his formative years as a student at the Danish Film Academy where Leth was part of the teaching staff (Leth, 2008a), Trier traces the link between Leth and Trier back to the 1980s and the prehistory of the film back to Leth's short film released in 1967.

Leth's own synopsis to the film formulates the crucial subject of investigation. With 'a beautiful young couple' as 'demonstration models' it exhibits 'how a human being becomes more proficient at living' (Leth, 2009: 17).

Everything is shown without irony, it is not a satiric movie; on the contrary, it is an instructional movie; we are to see how the perfect human is created and lives. [...] The cinematography is to be a hybridization of the vibrant vital extraversion of screen advertisement and the matter-of-factness

of instructional film. In this film we are to observe the dream of flawless modern day existence, as expressed in a sort of picture postcard whose beauty is undisturbed by officious views or postulates. It is not to serve as the gofer of some ideology. [...] The film will document Life in Denmark in the year 1967. *The Perfect Human* shall be on display, created by our wishful thinking as it is expressed in various ways in our daily life, especially in advertisement. (Leth, 2009: 106-107)

Thus, by presenting a fictional(ized) study or documentary of *The Perfect Human* in a cleansed empty space, Leth cultivates and illustrates deeply-rooted human urges for human perfectibility. The film displays, in a state of pure cultivation, the possible results of a drive for perfecting the human which is not only 'the driving inner force' (Leth & Raffnsøe, 2011: 196) and the charm of advertising, but also, informs our daily lives (Leth, 2009: 17). According to Leth's voice over, the film examines 'the perfect human in a room without any limits, without any-thing(s)' (Leth, 2008a).

This drive for human perfection operates as a major motivating force in modern work life and modern organizational life, especially as it is based on self-management as an inherent condition of possibility for productivity. As self-managing employees we are not only given new importance, freedom, and power; we are also allocated greater responsibility – namely, to continue to develop ourselves and our work assignments. At the same time we have to be innovative and figure out how we can contribute to the greater whole of the organization, not only as it already exists, but as we imagine it could be. When going to work, we must now constantly consider the extent to which we can and are willing to enter into a process where we always find ourselves 'at our limit', or on the verge of becoming ourselves. We need not, perhaps, go beyond ourselves, but, rather, constantly expand our potential human capacity. To be able to perform optimally, we have to be on the tip of our toes.

As human beings, consequently, we have to become 'trans-human'. We have to dedicate ourselves to human amelioration and to amelioration of the human (Leth and Raffnsøe, 2011), to modulating our selves in order to transgress the hitherto unsurpassed maximum of human existence - be it that of our individual personal past and present way of life, or that of the human species in general.

The human stain: Unveiling human imperfection and imperfectibility

Because the film explores the perfect human, what appears striking is the way in which its opposite, namely the imperfect human, human imperfection and imperfectibility, enters.

As the perfect human strives to do everything perfectly, the viewer cannot help noticing that the film documents precisely how he or she (the actor, the person or the human being as a human being?) does everything imperfectly. Trying to uncork his Chablis, 'he' fails to do so (accidentally or by design? thereby going wrong or succeeding at another level?); and accordingly, he appears clumsy as he has to take refuge to using his teeth. Slowly and sensually 'she' strips off her nylon stockings, apparently flirting with the camera and the spectator, until one of her stockings suddenly gets stuck, if only for a

second. As 'he' rubs his nose with his pipe in the opening shots of the film, he happens to skew it, making himself appear just a bit silly.

'We observe the surface, the skin, the simple actions, and discover the cracks and the minor defects on the surface. The human in pseudo-anthropological circumstances' (Leth, 2009: 17). By taking the 'wish', the obligation and the challenge 'to become an accomplice in living, to be a perfect human' (Leth, 2009: 17) to its extremity, *The Perfect Human* stages a subdued documentary of human perfectibility and with it a documentary of human imperfection. The film unveils the human stain surfacing, unavoidably and seemingly contra-intentionally, amidst the drive for perfection, thereby also making a case for human imperfectability (Leth, 2008a).



As is the case in modern work life, however, these minor incidents do not take place at the centre of attention in *The Perfect Human*. Human imperfection becomes noticeable at the fringes of our perception, ephemerally and not to be retained as a productive contribution, appearing only for an instance, just to disappear again.

All this changes radically in *The Five Obstructions*, however, as the approach and the perspective is reversed. When stating in the opening sequence that *The Perfect Human* is 'a little gem that we have to ruin', Trier indicates an important motive on his part for inviting Leth to reiterate his original work. Trier wants to coerce Leth into shooting the film in a radically different way. This becomes even more conspicuous, as Trier's immediate suggestions all seem to be the exact reversal of Leth's original approach. Since Leth's original voice-over contained a number of questions, Trier demands that they should be answered. As Leth preferred and generally prefers few or no cuts, Trier demanded that no single edit should be longer than 14 frames. Since Leth admits that he

has never visited Cuba and that he would prefer shooting with a screen, Trier demands that he should shoot the film on location in Cuba, without using a set.

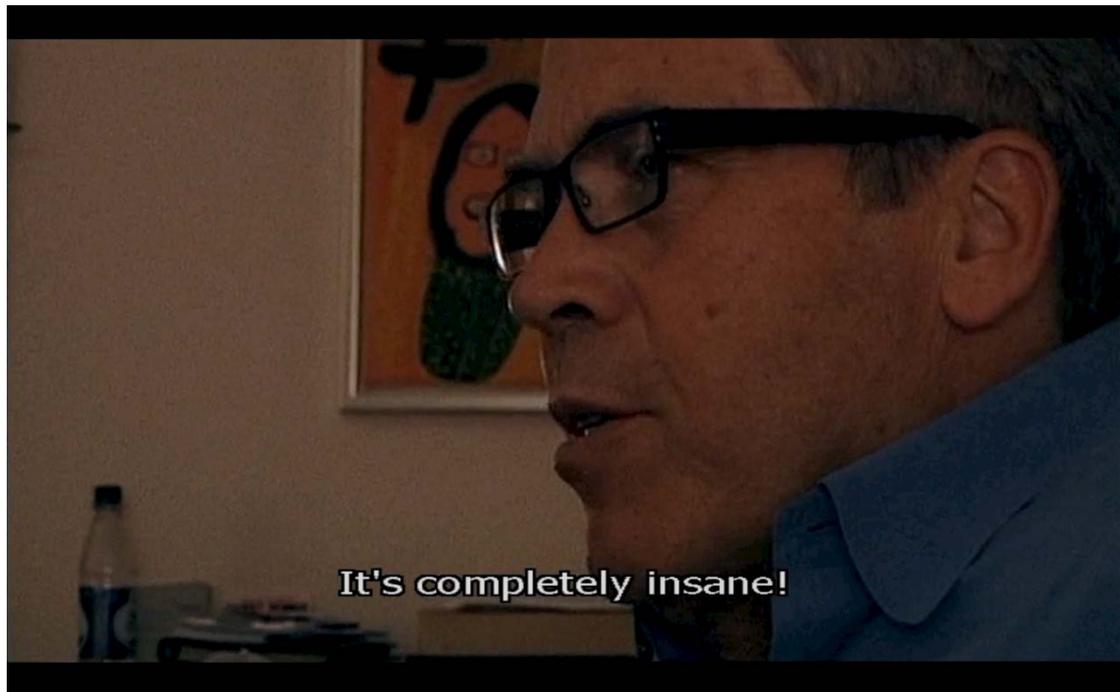
By forcing Leth to cover new territory in all these ways, Trier also follows a settled determination to free Leth from the aesthetico-anthropological detachment from reality that made *The Perfect Human* possible. At once pushing Leth and tripping him up, Trier urges the former to leave the position of an anthropological observer behind and abandon the search for aesthetic perfection in order to permit himself to 'fuck up', thereby becoming part of the surrounding world of ordinary human beings. In *The Five Obstructions* human imperfection and imperfectability is no longer waiting in the wings, but begins to take center stage. The human stain becomes the centre of attention and the chief concern.

The human side of enterprise: Rules as measures

The inversion is achieved through the introduction of strict rules. To a large extent these rules are set by Trier and acquire the status of severe regulations to be followed and carried out by Leth, thus giving Trier the status of the ruler or the director in command and control.

On the other hand, the rules set by Trier evolve out of and respond to the interaction between the two film directors; and Leth is expected to relate to the dictates in an independent or self-dependent way, thus being able to create a unique and hitherto unseen work of art that Trier would be unable to predict. Thus, the rules in the end acquire the status of measures. At first, a rule set is a measure taken to fashion Leth as a self-managing unit, relating independently not only to himself and his own previous work, but also to the dictates voiced by Trier. Subsequently, the rule functions as a gauge constantly referred to by the parties concerned, as they try to assess the value of the somewhat intangible product created by the self-managing di-vidual.

The rules are intended to place obstacles in the way of the director, thereby pestering him and making him lose control. As he leaves to carry out the assignment, Leth's logical immediate retort is: 'It's completely insane! It's totally destructive!' and he seems on the verge of giving up (Leth, 2008b).



By inhibiting a director who is presumed to know where he is going, making him trip and lose his balance, however, the strict rules also force Leth to find his balance anew, taking refuge in what he cannot control. Laying bare his vulnerability and humanity, the rules compel him to relate to and reflect independently upon his given self, its workings and products, while ensuring that it cannot be handled as an isolated unity. The rules not only expose the self-managing di-vidual to but also force him or her to rely on chance.

The obstructions laid out in *The Five Obstructions* can be summarized as follows:

1. In the first sequence, *The Perfect Human, Cuba*, no single edit may be longer than 12 frames, and the questions in Leth's narration in the original film should be replaced by answers. Leth is to re-do the film in Cuba, but without using a set.
2. In the following sequence, *The Perfect Human, Bombay*, Leth is to re-make the film in the most miserable place possible, but without actually showing the misery in question. Leth is to re-do the sequence in the original film in which the actor Claus Nissen is a man eating a gourmet meal, while himself playing the role of the man.
3. In the third sequence, *The Perfect Human, Brussels*, Trier imposes a choice on Leth in order to punish him for having allegedly failed to meet the requirements imposed upon him in the previous obstruction: Leth is either to go back to Bombay to re-do the obstruction or make a free-style film with no limitations. Considering that he cannot go back to Bombay, Leth chooses the free-style option, even though he reckons the imposed choice between impossible alternatives to be a severe punishment.
4. In the fourth sequence, *The Perfect Human, Cartoon*, Trier requires the re-making of *The Perfect Human* as an animated film.
5. In the fifth session, *The Perfect Human, Avedøre, Denmark*, finally, Trier stipulates that he himself is to make the last obstruction, but that Leth will be credited as director and will read a text written by Trier as director's voice over.

In this way, the resort to rules forces the participants to give up control and acknowledge a human side of enterprise. Still, the approach differs from the

augmentative approach to management voiced in McGregor's classic book from 1960, which urges us to make room for the human and assume the best about people, as it is likely to increase creativeness and productivity (McGregor, 2006). The crucial point in the film is no longer to acknowledge the human factor in order to empower it and promote its perfection. Here, instead, constraints impose an awareness of an all too human side of enterprise upon us, a recognition of human limitations, of human finitude and frailty, which alleviates us, as it liberates us from the augmentative approach and makes room for the imperfect.

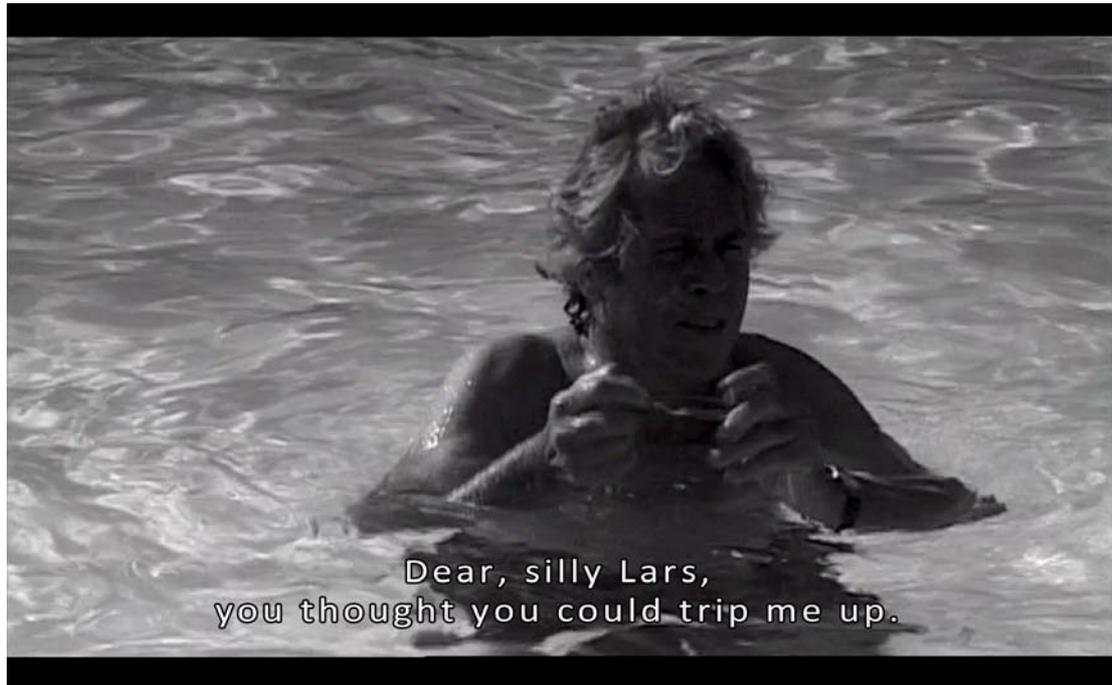
Upon closer scrutiny, however, the agreement on strict rules establishes a mutual contract between Leth and Trier that forces both contenders to surrender to overarching external forces beyond their control. This diabolical contract neither forces them to commemorate the place of the human within the confines of the given world, nor does it satisfy a limitless desire for knowledge and power. Instead, by engaging in this modern Faustian bargain, they impose limits on their limited human selves that force them to surrender to forces they cannot control, be it in the outside world or in the Other.

Rules trip you up and force you to transcend your own subjectivity and rely on chance, which is, according to Leth, a 'good friend'. It is not a friend, however, who 'hands out presents haphazardly. There must be room for them and humility to receive them. The key word: openness' (Leth, 2009: 15). In a short text stating his documentary poetics, written as he was getting ready to work on *The Five Obstructions*, Leth stressed:

We are just as clever and as stupid as fishermen. We can go out when we like [...] and sometimes we stumble over a magic moment. That is what we are searching for, but we must not be too eager or too sure of it. Experience tells us that it exists. (Leth, 2000: 31)

And then, *mirabile dictu*, it so happens that, in all likelihood due to their very selfless submission to rules and their willingness to abandon their selves in their immediately given form, Leth and Trier both manage to reappear and assert themselves in a fresh and even more lucid form. As the film progresses, Leth not only manages to stand forth as an auteur or as a distinctive aesthetic signature in the works of art that he is able to produce despite the obstacles he has to overcome. He also confronts and reasserts himself in the face of Trier as a distinct self, committed to the world exactly by his insistence on maintaining an aesthetic distance to the world in order to avoid producing garbage. Likewise his 'opponent', Trier, stands forth as who he is by virtue of the fact that he differs from Leth in a various respects and by virtue of the fact that he increasingly acknowledges the dissimilarities.

The process culminates in the final remake of *The Perfect Human*. Here Trier instructs Leth to refrain from directing, except for reading a script written by Trier as director's voice over and being credited as the director of the fifth film. The script is an imagined letter from Leth to Trier in which the former reflects upon the project, the process, the results and the development of their relationship so far, accompanied by a mix of images collected by Trier from Leth's own filmmaking and his own filming of Leth (Hatch, 2011):. The voice over spoken by Leth but written by Trier begins with the sentence: 'Dear stupid Lars'.



Where does Trier end and Leth begin? It is impossible to establish a definite boundary, enabling us to discern the two as separate from one another. Still, nowhere else do they and their work stand out more clearly and distinctively than in this final section where they are able to establish and maintain a close togetherness, not by blending but by relating to one another. Establishing a close togetherness in the form of an interdependence that recognizes and makes room for their differences, they appear differentiated and capable of establishing a sense of self at a heightened level of awareness. Challenging each other and thereby pointing out their mutual differences, strengths and limitations, they both appear as very distinct, challenging and generous human beings. This is a particularly graceful moment in the film. As the interaction in this scene begins to light up the route followed, however, one may in retrospect begin to find similar moments throughout the film.

The ontology of self-management and self-creation

When taking refuge to strict rules in order to experiment with creating a new genre between documentary and fictional drama, however, we seem to be breaking new ground. As we follow the documentation a midland between fact and fiction in the creation and as it develops, we might begin to enter a new plane of existence. Trier touches on this point in a short text formulating his documentary 'poetics':

We are searching for something between fiction and fact. Fiction is limited by our imagination and facts by our insight and the part of the world that we are seeking cannot be encompassed by a 'story' or embraced from an 'angle'. [...] The ultimate challenge of the future – to see without looking: to defocus! In a world where the media kneel before the altar of sharpness, draining life out of life in the process, the DEFOCUSIST will be the communicators of our era – nothing more, nothing less! (Trier, 2000: 31)

Dissatisfied with the factual world that confronts us, as we perceive it through our senses and apprehend it through reason, we may want to set our hopes on another world yet to come, that of fiction. We may become inclined to leave the given world and its limitations behind us in order to be moved and led by the seemingly unlimited and free creative powers of our imagination, inviting us to enter the promised land of the fictitious, of a not yet existing place that we bring about, even as we conceive of it.

In modern work life with its focus on self-management, we tend to follow this inclination to the bitter end. As self-management is gaining acceptance, we establish a collective agreement that what we expect of each other and what generally binds us together is a human obligation (to each other) to overcome what we are confronted with immediately, by relating to it freely, seizing power courageously through an independent and imaginative recreation (Raffnsøe, 2010: 61).

What we run the risk of stumbling upon, however, when we follow the seductive, transcending powers of imagination as they lure us into uncharted potential worlds, is less a chimera, a fanciful creation that vanishes into thin air, or an elf that faces us and incites us to follow her in various European folktales until all of a sudden she proves to have a hollow back as she turns away from us. What we are all too liable to face, when we enter this plane of potentiality is, to our own astonishment, our all too human selves as we go along on our way to perfection. Undisturbed, we encounter the stories that our egos would like to tell at the expense of all decency in order to maintain decency. Untroubled, we tend to reiterate 'the worship of pattern, the one and only, at the expense of the subject matter from which it comes' (Trier, 2000: 31), the given ways in which we tend to visualize the world and in which we would like to go on imagining the world.

Imposing restrictions on ourselves and others may assist us in the endeavor to reach the intermediate plane between the factual and fictitious. By disturbing not only what is, but also what we already deem to be possible and try to realize, through the establishment of binding rules, it is possible to be humbler and more ambitious, to dislocate our repetitive aspirations for perfectibility and enter the plane of the factitious.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Marcel Proust discovered a children's game, a questionnaire concerning one's personality, originally in the English language, and answered it several times, always with great commitment and enthusiasm. To the question: 'Your main fault (French *défaut*)?', he responded at the age of twenty: 'Ne pas savoir, ne pas pouvoir "vouloir"' (Proust, 1889/1999). Thus, he deemed his own deficiency to be 'not knowing, not being able, not being able to 'want' and to 'will'.

In this way, inadvertently, he pointed towards a very significant truth, which has since then been fully revealed. We may have entered the knowledge society in which your main fault is not knowing. More importantly, however, and partly by way of the knowledge society, we have entered a 'society of volition.' We, the willing selves, have bound each other to a 'purposiveness without purpose' (Kant, 2009), an ever ongoing perfectibility, a society in which the main fault becomes the inability to will or to be able, especially the lacking ability to will. We seem to have committed ourselves to the

metaphysics of the will that Heidegger diagnosed as the last, maybe terminal phase of metaphysics (Heidegger, 1991).

By forcing us ahead, strict rules shake up the subject and support the willing self, while, at the very same time presenting a certain relief. Challenged and inhibited in this way, it may not be entirely your fault if you fail to produce or create the perfect. You may feel liberated from being obliged to liberate yourself from mutual dependency in order to realize your own full potential, and, consequently, be able to create a space in which the unexpected may be disclosed and discovered.

It may well be that true filmmaking, like true writing, and even creation in general, in the studio or at work, is all about seeing, not in the sense of focusing or representing, but in the sense of discovering, being impressed by what may occur and what we cannot predict: the wisdom, the detachment from *and* the involvement in the world, in non-intentional seeing, in experiencing what we may hope to understand sometime later. In that sense, the incapacity that Proust felt to be his own, could also be regarded as a virtue, and understood as part of his aptitude as a creative writer. The poet and film director Leth may be read as suggesting this at the very beginning of his own 'autobiography', *The imperfect human. Scenes from my life* (Leth, 2005: 5). At any rate, his 'film memoir in words' opens with the following short allegoric exemplum:

Seeing. Before his son leaves on his first journey abroad, his father tells him: 'Remember to use your eyes, son.' [...] The son goes abroad and gets around. He does as he is told by his father. [...] He forms his perception. [...] He tries to understand what he sees. [...] He decides that he shall go on keeping his eyes open throughout his life.

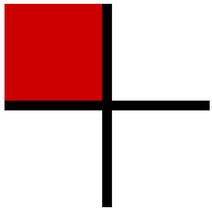
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Tripping up the perfect

Jørgen Leth, Sverre Raffnsøe and Peder Holm-Pedersen

In mid-2008 the editor of Turbulens.net Peder Holm-Pedersen brought together film director and author Jørgen Leth and Sverre Raffnsøe, Professor of Philosophy at the Copenhagen Business School and head of the research program Management of Self-Management, to talk about rules, freedom and productivity in art and the modern workplace. We reprint a translated version of the conversation in this issue.

The conversation begins with a discussion of a film that Leth made with Lars von Trier, The Five Obstructions, which, according to Raffnsøe, displays a number of characteristic features of how power, rules and freedom operate in contemporary society and, especially, the modern workplace. They also discuss whether von Trier is a good coach for Leth, and why the sport of cycling is an excellent metaphor for the modern human condition and the form of freedom to which we are all committed.

Holm-Pedersen: By way of introduction, could you, Sverre Raffnsøe, give us an overview of what aspects of the film by Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth, *The Five Obstructions*, you can use for philosophical reflection on the modern workplace?

Raffnsøe: We use *The Five Obstructions* as a springboard because I found a number of relationships and management technologies in the film that we recognized from the modern workplace. The film takes these technologies to an extreme, explores them, even reconfigures and augments them.

For example, the interaction between you and Lars von Trier can be seen as a series of performance and development reviews, so-called PDR meetings, where managers and employees meet and set goals for performance in the future.

There are also elements of coaching at play. Von Trier clearly has the idea that he wants to unleash something or other in you.

Leth: Yes, it's highly suspicious ...

Raffnsøe: It almost slips into a therapeutic relationship in which, for Trier, it's all about saving or healing you and your soul even in spite of yourself. We're almost talking about forced therapy.

Leth: And then there are the hidden agendas. What I want from him. I'm the innocent pawn of von Trier but might have my own agenda.

Raffnsøe: That is another aspect of the relationships at play in the film. From this perspective, your relationship can be viewed as a competition in which you challenge and tussle with each other. You talk about it in the film as a sort of tennis match in which von Trier serves and you return.

It's like an updated version of the Homeric agon, the ancient Greek contest in which people constantly challenged each other and competed to outdo the other, so that the competition could take them someplace new, both together and separately.

Last but not least, the rules have a quite elemental function in the film. That a set of rules is agreed upon, and they must be followed. Of course, they must, it could be said, but the goal and function of the rules is not so much given by the fact that you follow them. It has more to do with the fact that the rules make possible and animate the process of getting somewhere you otherwise would not have gone.

It seems to me that all these features are beginning to appear in social life generally – and particularly in the modern workplace – with all the challenges and possibilities that come with them.

Holm-Pedersen: However, aren't there also a number of marked differences in the way in which these rules and technologies are developed in the film and the way they are traditionally used in modern work life? Here I'm thinking, first of all, of the distinct power relationship and the strictness with which the rules are formulated. They are not up for negotiation.

Raffnsøe: In a certain sense, the film makes visible a lot of what often lies hidden in modern management technologies. In PDR meetings, for example, people don't really want to admit that there are rules and a power relationship at play. It's very soft, something you want to negotiate together through dialogue. What would you like? What goals shall we set? And so on.

The film and von Trier clearly play on this. One of his first lines in the film is: 'Let's see what we can come up with. I'm not the one who decides' – whereupon he dictates everything to come. It's totally top down management. Von Trier is the boss, he gives the orders, and you are the underling.

Leth: There is no doubt that there are some strict rules laid down in the film. They aren't something we can just talk about. It's not like society today. It's a dictatorship.

But it's not a chain of command laid down by nature. It's a rule of the game we agreed on from the start. And the distribution of roles is quite natural. Von Trier would very much like to be the villain, while I would like to be the hero. You can see this in a lot of his other films. He's looking for a victim, Nicole Kidman and me, right? So, it's a question of how you behave as a victim, whether he gets something out of it himself.

He's interested in that sort of down-and-dirty power game. In a certain sense, he is trying to attain purity through the torments to which he subjects his victims. There is something sadistic about it.

Holm-Pedersen: Could the division of roles have been different? Could you have laid down rules for von Trier?

Leth: No, I couldn't. I could never be as quick as he is. I'm not a dynamic force who can lay down a bunch of diabolical rules. But I can react to the rules and hit the ball back into his court – in a diabolical way.

Raffnsøe: There is also something liberating and productive about power stepping out into the open. There are some clear rules that you can challenge and play against, just as there is a certain relief connected with the fact that power is out in the open. Von Trier says at one point: 'You can take it easy, Jørgen. The responsibility is mine.'

This is sometimes missing from modern work life. You don't want to be in a power relationship, and so everything becomes weirdly confluent, where you can't really assign either blame or responsibility. It creates uncertainty. And, somehow or other, I think that there is much more power entwined in these technologies than we want to admit.

That may also be part of what von Trier wants to show. The film might very well be a part of a little project about modern work life. After all, he later directed *The Boss of It All*.

Leth: It's possible there is something political about it from von Trier's side. My peculiar innocence lies in the fact that I don't think politically. Except for Haiti. I don't think about 'exposing' political intentions.

In the film, there is always this balance of power in which I am quite clearly promoting my naiveté and innocence. I'm actually using my innocence to respond to his guilt, his completely 'loaded' approach in which he holds all the cards and may even have a political ambition. I don't know. But it is deeply satisfying, when you can meet the challenges. When you can use the rules expansively. The rules have a set of springs in them. You can jump on them and catapult yourself further.

Raffnsøe: From a broader power perspective in which power is not just about deciding – in the sense of commanding or ruling others, there can be an incredible power in promoting one's naiveté and innocence. Especially for people who, like von Trier, are almost aroused by innocence and naiveté. He'll try to get power over and manipulate it to see what happens when you befoul and besmirch innocence. Whether it is destroyed or could, perhaps, return in a higher, purer and more liberated form. This has been an ongoing quest for von Trier ever since *The Element of Crime* or, at least, since *Epidemic*.

In this context, the naive and innocent can achieve incredibly great power by virtue of the fact that he – or she, as it most often is – who is allotted that role is capable of

bringing his or her counterpart actively onto the field and establish a binding mutual connection.

Holm-Pedersen: So, in this Greek contest, you exploit your naiveté, your apparent powerlessness, to become powerful and, perhaps, even win the contest?

Leth: I think it's interesting to be subjected to raw power in that way, to do something on the conditions he dictates, conditions that are supposed to get me to make something crappy, as he says. This is the premise for the contest: can he force me to do something hackneyed or get me to make something crappy. I accept that, but with the express – and unexpressed – knowledge that I count on being able to meet all the challenges. I don't doubt that for a moment.

Raffnsøe: Not even while you were making the film?

Leth: While I was making it, I had some doubts. But the more we got into the film, the clearer it became to me that I had won the match. And then he got more and more malicious, diabolical and calculating, and it became impossible for me to predict what he was going to come up with.

But the more he pressed me, the more I thought that this is my film, that I'm winning, that I can beat him even on the worst terms he can set. This is the drive, the engine, that's pushing me. An agonism in which it's no good if he just gets his way. In the game, it is clear that I use my naiveté. It is one of my weapons, which allows me to resist and respond to his attack and actually make a good film. But it would never have come about without him and the rules he sets, so it's not that I don't want to share the credit for the film with him.

Raffnsøe: The plot development in the film also points to a development in the way power makes itself felt. On one level, the film shows a traditional and slightly old-fashioned display of power in which one party tries to establish himself as the person who decides and sets the rules and the framework for the other.

On another level, it is an exercise of power in which you seem mutually committed to each other. It is an exercise of power that presumes freedom on both sides of the relationship. Where power and freedom are not contradictions of each other but presuppositions for each other because, at the same time that you exercise power over each other, you promote or encourage each other's freedom. It is on this level that I can see a modern version of classic agonism in the film, because in an agon you establish a sort of mutual relationship between free individuals, the effect of which is to challenge and develop each other mutually.

During the course of *The Five Obstructions*, there is a shift from the first to the second level. So, it also becomes more and more difficult to say who is really deciding and has taken over as the film progresses. And it is difficult to determine who has really won. Perhaps, you both won by virtue of the fact that you have gone places with each other you would never have gone, at the same time you each become more clearly who you are in your difference. Through the contest, in Pindar's words, you can 'become who

you are, by learning': stand forth and become clear in relation to others who challenge you.

Leth: In a tennis match, the players each step into character in their contest with each other. They become clear. In their style of playing and mode of being.

Raffnsøe: In the modern workplace, you can see a similar shift toward greater mutuality and mutual freedom take place. This doesn't prevent the parties from trying to get power over each other and to decide what other people do.

In industrialism's forms of production, as we know them from the factory, it is clear who is in control and who makes the decisions. It is the manager. From some sovereign perch high above the others, he makes sure that the work process goes smoothly. He exercises power over others and charts out the rules to be followed.

The new forms of labor and production that are prominent today are based to an increasing degree on self-management. The individual employee is at the center. It is from here that production and value creation are supposed to come. This means that traditional authoritarian forms of power and traditional management have a hard time or, at least, they lose self-evidence. Rules are no longer something you just have to act in accordance with. Instead, they are supposed to get the self-managing employee going. He or she must relate independently to himself or herself and the rules that have been laid down. That is, it is expected that, as an employee, you will do what you have been told but also that you will add something to the process. You have to do something extra. Come back with something unexpected.

As I see it, this is a problem you tackle in *The Five Obstructions*. The rules don't merely function as a limit; they also have a productive function – as a path for creating something new. As obstructions, the rules are also a path for exploration and learning in relation to what you are working on, be it the artistic process, yourself, or a work project.

Holm-Pedersen: How is it that rules and obstructions can be so productive?

Leth: The more stringent the rules, the more creative it becomes. That is absolutely the lesson from *The Five Obstructions*: the stricter the conditions, the more interesting the result. I know all about that. It comes as no surprise to me, because that's how I've always worked. Because in sticking to some very strict rules, you have to invent a new language, something you didn't already bring with you.

What I brought with me is a creative relationship to the concept of the rules of the game. I'm very faithful to rules; they must not be stretched or changed around. They are to be used, because they provide an enormous productive freedom in what you're doing.

I have a little saying I use in my artistic practice: throw something out there and see what happens.

But you have to throw something out there. Otherwise, it isn't interesting to see what happens. It has to happen within the rules. They provide the springboard for the artistic leap.

When, for example, I made my America film, I had a rule that the camera could not be moved and that I couldn't use the zoom. That is a very tough rule. What was going to happen had to happen within the frame of the picture I had selected.

If a hamburger came into the picture frame, fine. If it didn't, that was fine, too. If a fly came in, that was excellent. And if it didn't, then a stretch of time was filmed. I love that sort of thing, because I'm convinced that you enter into a sort of magic contract with chance. The more severe the rules, the better the contract. In a way, it's a sort of metaphysics I'm dealing with.

Raffnsøe: It's also interesting in relation to a more theoretical discussion of aesthetics. In the aesthetics of rules and beauty that was dominant until sometime in the 1700s, rules were something to be followed and observed. This appears in the normative tradition from Aristotle's Poetics up to, for example, Boileau, who in his 1674 Art poétique (The Art of Poetry) was still formulating the rules that the artist and the aesthetic must comply with throughout all time, if one wants to be able to produce proper and beautiful works of art.

Today, the rules have acquired a completely different function and status. Certainly, rules are still incredibly important, but they are not in themselves essential. They are not the goal but rather the path, because now it's what turns up with the help of the rules that's interesting. In this way, the concept of the sublime or the elevated begins to gain increased significance in relation to the beautiful. Not just as one aesthetic experience among others but as a fundamental aesthetic category that, from the Enlightenment onwards, is the aesthetic experience par excellence.

When the world is beautiful, we experience an immediate accord between the world of our senses and a higher being, between our rules and what we are trying to grasp through them. This intuition of an immediate accord or connection disappears in our experience of the sublime. Here, we experience a discord – a going beyond. What appears through the rules is too big, too boundless, too dynamic to allow itself to be fixed within rules.

This doesn't mean that rules don't matter, quite the opposite. They become the indispensable approach to the sublime, a way out of our own narrow, little subjectivity.

Leth: And von Trier knows I have that kind of a relationship with rules. And that relationship, of course, becomes clearer than ever in *The Five Obstructions*, because it is von Trier and not me who formulates the rules. He is also more malicious than I could be myself.

But he crosses the line and breaches the contract, when he sets me a task without rules. He has discovered that I react pretty damn positively to rules. Of course, he knew that before, but he experiences it first hand in our little game. He also has his own vanity on

the line here, because it's not just a contest. There is an Oedipal aspect to it as well. He wants to kill the father.

Raffnsøe: As I see it, you both breach the contract or, at least, threaten to breach it. You put it into play and thus renegotiate the agreement. He, for his part, is supposed to set the rules and, instead, he says: I won't do it. And you, on the other hand, breach the contract, since you refuse to go back to Bombay and re-make the film he believes has not lived up to the rules.

This again is very telling in relation to the modern workplace, because we have here a negotiation of what the whole contract is supposed to be about. That is, what are the criteria and guidelines that form the basis for an assessment of the work? In principle, everything is open to negotiation.

Leth: I believe I fulfilled the contract. That I only indulged in a slightly creative interpretation of the rules and that von Trier was just being the worst kind of stickler.

Holm-Pedersen: Obstructions and rules are also a way of bringing something alien, something you have not conceived or could not conceive, into your work. Like the fly that comes to visit. Can you draw a parallel in this connection to the way value is created today? Here, it is also to a high degree a matter of getting something new, something alien, into the productive process. Repetition on an assembly line is no longer value-creating. It's all about repetition with a difference. And rules seem to be an effective way of creating this.

Leth: For me, it's clear that the rules act as the scaffolding that makes it possible to do anything. If you start with nothing at all, with no rules, you're left to your own stupid devices. And what do you really have to offer yourself?

That's why it is crucial that something alien come into the work, and you can get that through these rules or obstructions. They may be disgusting or pleasant, any sort of substance. But they have to be there. There has to be something to butt your head against, a challenge that demands a solution from you and gets you going. And as you tackle the difficulties, rage against them and, hopefully, overcome them, you absorb the material, the alienness of which the difficulties consist. They become part of the work.

Therefore, the rules must also be strict because, if you can just blithely leap over the obstructions, it's not interesting. Then, they haven't really been used. The difficulties must be absorbed into the work as a part of the structure and the dregs that remain and make it into a grubby work. A wonderfully grubby work that contains all the odds and ends, the emptiness and the fragments. All the dregs from the everyday.

Raffnsøe: It has to do with getting beyond self-referentiality, one's own repetitiveness. And when the rules come in, there is an alienness to start with.

Once again, if we draw a parallel to the way the economy functions today, you see here some developments that, as you point out in your question, have to do with the fact that value is no longer created through repetition but through repetition with a difference. It can be added parenthetically that this is precisely the project you're engaged in by re-

making *The Perfect Human*. Through the many obstructions, something new is introduced into the old film, i.e. a repetition with a difference.

Whereas, in the industrial age, you created value through monotonous labor on an assembly line, the eternal repetition of mass production, we have established an economy today in which productivity and added value arise where we do something else, something different from what we've done before. For the same reason, the entrepreneur is attributed crucial significance. For he is the symbol of the economic actor who creates innovation.

Likewise, change is not something you try to keep out of the production process, as was the case in classic mass production. Instead, it becomes vital for the management and organization of the work to integrate change and innovation into the firm or organization and their production processes.

The current fascination in business and management literature with art and the special processes of artistic creation must also be seen in this context. For in these creative processes, people have not traditionally put repetition but the production of something new and unique at the center. They have developed tools, methods, and existential modes of relating that put the creation of something new and unique in the spotlight.

Holm-Pedersen: Raffnsøe mentioned *The Perfect Human*, which *The Five Obstructions* takes as its starting point. Can you try to say a little about the motivation for making the film? You wouldn't immediately think that there was much room for the dregs you talked about before in a film with that title.

Leth: When I made *The Perfect Human* at the end of the '60s, I was reacting against what I thought was the most boring kind of social documentary films. It was simply the most boring idea that, by just walking out into reality where it's rainy and gray, like now, you could gain more credibility, importance and conscientiousness. I had to reject that way of working and go the opposite way.

For me, it was more interesting to use the world of advertising and empty space to study people. And so the model became that I would try to study the phenomenon of perfection, which is the driving inner force of advertising, to teach the human being to be perfect--with the help of what we can buy, of course, but still.

So I created a white room, brought in two people, put them in their Sunday best, and watched what happened. I held up perfection as a model, the almost porcelain-like surface. The white room and the camera movements, which were very gentle and incredibly white. The rest was pretty much process and improvisation. And the process consisted of the fact that the two people were in no way perfect. The perfect human did everything imperfectly. He couldn't get the cork out of the bottle, so he used his teeth. He fumbled with the fish. The clumsy, actually, quite petit bourgeois, way of pouring the sauce on the potatoes. It was all one gift after another.

There are always cracks in the perfect surface. The imperfect inevitably turned up and became very clear within this framework. And this is what is documented. The cracks and the imperfection. So there is a lot of imperfection in *The Perfect Human*, and this is

not to be sublated or completed in any grand, magnificent gesture. It should just stay where it is.

Raffnsøe: There's a crack in everything. That's how the light (and the life) gets in, as Leonard Cohen once suggested. Paradoxically, it is through strict rules that you can establish and maintain these sorts of cracks or openings. In this way, a seriality also appears. The individual product comes rather to function like a springboard for going further than a stable, rounded work that represents everything and which you can be finished with describing or comprehending.

Leth: It is a sort of aggregation strategy. Through some rules, you collect the material that appears and see where it is heading. But there is no expectation or hope of a final conclusion or a definitive answer. Only the curiosity and the material that guides you.

Holm-Pedersen: I'd like for us to talk a little about the relationship between rules and freedom. At first glance, it seems paradoxical that rules can be liberating. At least, in certain conceptions of freedom, they should be contradictory. Can rules help create another form of freedom?

Raffnsøe: As I see it, the relationship between freedom and rules that is expressed in and taken to an extreme in the film has gradually become a part of a general social contract to which we are all committed today.

On one hand, we operate with a liberal and negative concept of freedom in which freedom implies a freedom from different forms of external compulsion or limitation. There has to be room in which to develop your freedom. As far as possible without limitations.

We have also traditionally operated with another more positive and substantive concept of freedom, namely, the conception that you are free when you are free to develop and realize yourself and your innermost being. We are talking about freedom for something. It is this concept of freedom, for example, that Kant operates with, when he claims that we can become free by following and subjecting ourselves to the moral law and what it bids us to do.

But in the gap between these two concepts of freedom, there appears a third concept of freedom that is applicable to a degree today and which I also believe is at play in the film. Kant begins to outline the contours of this concept of freedom in his 1783 writing, *What is Enlightenment?* This is the crucial question: How can human beings emerge from or leave behind their (previous) self-incurred immaturity? This third form of freedom is not a freedom from or a freedom for something. Instead, it has to do with the fact that we become free individuals by constantly overcoming ourselves and the situation to which we are bound. In this sense, we are not free as a starting point. It is something we are always on the way toward becoming. Freedom is something that is continually becoming or emanating. We are always on the way toward becoming mature and adult but without achieving a persistent form. Always *unterwegs* und *zwischen*. The eternal teenager struggling to become independent, free and mature.

It can produce the strange sensation of standing at the edge of the abyss, because you have nothing firm to grab onto. Therefore, some help with the task would be welcome, and the rules can provide this. It is a classic, ancient experience that, for example, we rediscover in antiquity's concepts of asceticism. Asceticism has to do with imposing limitations on yourself in order to become powerful, i.e., to be able to control yourself to such a degree that it becomes possible to overcome yourself.

Leth: Or like the great Buddhists. Asceticism makes them free. It's very strange.

Raffnsøe: But it works. Today, we have a lot of these technologies such as coaching and PDR meetings to help us realize ourselves. But here the rules also have a slightly different function. It is not just expected and stated that people are supposed to follow the rules and act in accordance with them. Rather, the rules have the character of being interim instructions. Something to which you are supposed to relate independently, so you can go beyond yourself and what already exists. At the same time, it implies a risk that you might lose your way and come home to be punished by your – today, most often – absent father. Or von Trier.

It expresses exactly the attraction and curse of freedom. It is hard always to act independently and to go beyond yourself, and that is why you also need to help each other. It is clearly shown in the film how pushing the envelope contains a fascination, a freedom and an enormous burden. An aversion and a distaste, because the task and the constant self-overcoming that is required are almost too much. And, at the same time, there is a great desire and a joy at overcoming and realizing yourself in a new form.

Leth: If this is the model, or the idea, and I'm sure that von Trier – as opposed to me – grasped all the nuances of his vision for the film from the start, then I must say that one of my own inventions was brilliant, because I came up with the idea of describing the work process as well. And this actually fits in quite well as an extension of what you are saying: the strictness, the process of suffering and my struggle to get a grip on things should also be described as a part of the process.

Raffnsøe: So, apparently, where there looks to be a very free space in which the autonomous individual can develop his or her freedom, it turns out that there is actually a great need for management. There is always someone who is supposed to get involved or intervene to help the individual to realize this freedom.

Holm-Pedersen: In this connection, it seems obvious to touch on von Trier's more personal project with you. The therapeutic aspect. I don't know whether you could exactly call it helping you; but like some sort of coach, at least, he would like to set Jørgen Leth free through this exercise of going down into the muck and coming out again cleansed and liberated from yourself.

Leth: Yeah, what would you call it? Does he want to make me more like himself, replace my conscience with his? Or is it a political agenda? It is, at any rate, a very ambitious agenda.

Raffnsøe: I don't quite know, but he undoubtedly wants you to be someone other than who you are. He wants to set you free from your limitations, which are the viewer's. He

wants to do his bit, all that's necessary for you to be reborn and rededicated to life. He wants to interfere in this 'fine art of surfacing' that you practice, so you can move on. You have to engage with life and get down into the dirt, so it rubs off on you. Maybe, his intentions are for the best or, maybe, he's being diabolical; it's hard to say.

Leth: It's clearly on his agenda to get me to move from being an observer to being a participant. But that is a petty project. And utterly reprehensible from my point of view. He says he wants to help me attain a new dimension.

But I will claim my right to be an observer to my dying day! Also as an artistic principle. I have no desire suddenly to become a political activist or religious. That is a long way away from me. I don't want to see the light. Absolutely not. I don't need it!

If I can just understand a little more about life and myself through what I'm doing, then I'm satisfied. That's what it's all about. And in this project, there is no hope of a quick conversion. That is completely outside my horizon. It just is. Perhaps a slow conversion, but that has more to do with insight and understanding. Being able to hold out and stay alive. That's the most succinct way to put it.

There is also a colossal hubris on his side. A hubris I can never accept. Who is he to think he can expand my boundaries?

Raffnsøe: It's also a hubris that is quite ordinary in most couples.

Leth: I know it well.

Raffnsøe: In relationships, it is often done for the sake of the other partner. And it is probably also the case here with von Trier's project of being your coach.

Leth: I could imagine Lars von Trier as my personal coach.

Raffnsøe: That's something else I'd thought of asking you. Whether von Trier was a good coach?

Leth: In his own diabolical way.

Raffnsøe: In a certain sense, he's a good coach, because he helps you realize yourself and reach new places. On another level, he's a bad coach, because he thinks he can tell you who you are.

Leth: Nevertheless, I take it as a wonderful working model, because it can take me new places. But I get there on my own terms, not his.

Raffnsøe: And that is crucial. It is only because you're capable of handling him, taking up the challenge and, in a certain sense, working against him. So, on one side, we can see that a cogent chain of command and clear management are necessary to take you new places. At the same time, it is also necessary to be able to turn the tables on this chain of command if anything is to come out of it. Otherwise, it won't be you going new places, just von Trier, who imposes his own will and tells you who you are.

This also points toward the shift I mentioned earlier in the way power functions, which I believe takes place in the film. It's not just von Trier who decides everything. There is to a great degree a mutual influence of power, which also becomes a mutual liberation.

Therefore, ultimately, it all becomes quite intermingled. On one hand, you each step very much into character as who you are. Your differences become very distinct. But you emerge through and by means of each other. Of course, it culminates in the last film in which your differences come forth most clearly through the very personal and self-revealing text that von Trier wrote in your name and has you deliver as a speech to and about him.

Leth: The genius in this film didn't hit me all at once. But, gradually, as I was making it, I thought: This is really trippy. And powerful.

I realized that, in reality, he was exposing himself to a degree. In a very subtle way. I'm still very moved when I see it. It's an act of love on von Trier's part. You have never seen him so emotionally committed as in that line. At screenings of the film around the world, I have heard people say many times that they can understand von Trier now; he is completely human.

So, he also acquired some new facets to his own work. Through his project with me.

Raffnsøe: By letting things emerge, he reconciles you both in your own right. Von Trier is in a way very naked and graceful. He gives a lot of himself, at the same time that he gives you permission to be: I had my project with Leth, but it was my project. It doesn't have anything to do with him.

There is also a kind of freedom in that. All that about us being different, but we can be here beside each other. And by virtue of this difference, we can create this thing that has come into existence.

Holm-Pedersen: I want to return to the concept of freedom, that is, freedom as something that comes into being through our self-overcoming and as a freedom to which we are committed in a mutual social contract that applies to our society. But there doesn't seem to be any definitive end to this project?

Raffnsøe: There is something to that. We do not, as before, have any clear conception of the goal of these projects. In ancient Greece, they operated with a substantive concept of the good life as a fundamental and obligatory guideline for the individual and society. It had to do with living and creating the conditions for the good life. We have a hard time making substantial and coherent sense of such a conception of the good life today. Yet, I still believe that there is a form of coherent normative guideline that is applicable to these projects today. A common ethos that is binding on our form of life; and I call it welfare (or improving welfare. At least, it is the touchstone to which we as a society and as individuals relate.

Welfare actually just means to fare well in life, i.e., to improve one's condition in order to approach well-being. Consequently, you could also call it perfectibility, understood as being on the way toward the perfect, toward *The Perfect Human*.

But since these concepts of welfare and the perfect have become insubstantial for us today, it also means that we never reach our goal. There is only infinite improvement left. Therefore, the problem of assessment emerges. We always have to be evaluated whether we are good enough. In a certain sense, it is a tragic project we are engaged in. To overcome emptiness.

Leth: By filling it up with doodling.

Perhaps, that's why it seems to me inevitable that something melancholy seeps into the concept of the perfect human. There is a depressing undercurrent in the very endeavor. Perfection is unachievable in life. You can only achieve happiness in glints when, on the rare occasion, you dance to James Brown, for example.

Raffnsøe: Still, we are constantly at work on the case!

Leth: Right! Resignation is no help. Just don't screw it up.

But it also has to do with people just wanting to be better at living. That's what I was most interested in back when I made *The Perfect Human*. Certainly, in an ironic way but it was also a very genuine desire. Who wouldn't want to be better at living? I would.

Raffnsøe: But there are other concepts of this life that we are supposed to become better at living. It's no longer about life finding its natural form. Today, life is something that is supposed to unfold and set the agenda for its surroundings. A form of heroism and a vitalism in which we live large and push the envelope.

Therefore, the person, who is at the center of these endeavors, is not someone who finds himself and his way home. In a certain sense, it is the transhuman person who is at the center. We must always become other people, better people than we are. Overcome ourselves and our immediately given nature.

Leth: So, through this lens, what is it von Trier wants for me when he, as we spoke about earlier, wants to move from the perfect human to the human?

Raffnsøe: Perhaps, there are a variety of problems. Because, on one hand, he wants to make you better and, in that sense, perfect you. There is something you're lacking. And, on the other hand, paradoxically enough, what you're lacking is the imperfect. In a sense, he wants to create space for the imperfect in the perfect. In this way, it is reminiscent of what you yourself were getting at in your attempt to cultivate the perfect in *The Perfect Human*, in which the imperfect inevitably emerges and becomes evident.

Holm-Pedersen: Apropos of creating space for the imperfect: This obligatory freedom project or welfare project seems to be quite comprehensive. It comprises many aspects of our existence, which become implicated in this optimization movement. There is no room for deviation or jubilant excess. Has it turned into a semi-totalitarian welfare project that leaves no room for the imperfect?

Raffnsøe: It is both a very obligatory and an almost all-inclusive project. Everything is directed into this optimization and perfection project. Therefore, the apparently liberal freedom project is also at the same time its own totalitarianism.

The room to maneuver is actually quite limited, because we are so busy realizing the perfect or, at least, the perfectible human. Eventually, there is nothing that cannot be made a little better. And therefore should be made a little better, as it quite naturally comes to be expressed. As a result, there is not much room left over where we can go off the rails, because everything is subordinated to the overall vision that I have just mentioned.

Goethe writes somewhere in a letter, 'I believe that humanity has triumphed; only I fear that simultaneously the world will turn into a vast hospital in which everyone will be the devoted nurse of everyone else.' This demonstrates that these things have been underway for a long time. It is a Faustian contract you enter into with the devil, where everything has to go forward if you don't want to lose it all...

One of the dangers of the project is that there will simply be no room to live. We are familiar with this kind of existence from the classic idea of the artist who burns for his art.

Leth: In my time as a jazz critic, I really admired the people who burned themselves on the altar of art and died as a result. Quite unreservedly. I have always admired the people who were the most inflamed. Rimbaud, for example. He is one of my heroes. The same with sports. Michael Rasmussen, Marco Pantani and Fausto Coppi. The most fragile ones. The ones who burn up.

Raffnsøe: They are also the ones who take this project to the extreme. There is a clinical purgation present as a possibility in this. All for this. All for the perfect or, at least, for perfectibility. And everything that does not contribute to this project – the offbeat and the messy – must be sacrificed.

Leth: Michael Rasmussen is for me the very image of a monk who purges himself by extreme suffering and who speculates in the engine of suffering. It is incredibly ascetic. Therefore, it is also unjust that he got nailed for a violation, because that is not the point in his case. It is his total renunciation of a normal life.

Raffnsøe: Our modern fascination with cycling is not accidental. In cycling, we rediscover in an enlarged and condensed form some of these features from our ordinary sociality. The demand to push the envelope, to always overcome yourself, all the while you are on your way toward some vague goal that fades away into the distance. Like a finishing line on a mountain top that remains hidden in the clouds.

Leth: Cycling is a fantastic image of this.

Raffnsøe: And therefore we also easily fall prey to looking very moralistically at doping. Precisely because it reminds us of and makes clear the downside of the project in which we all, to different degrees, are engaged. The mirroring is difficult to accept. We don't want to know that depression is lurking, that aids like doping might be

necessary. We make use of almost the whole variety of adjustment and optimization techniques offered in this medicated normality we are on the way towards. The medication can be quite concrete, like doping, or less concrete, like mental techniques, coaching in all aspects of life, job satisfaction policy in the workplace, or health policies. But, at bottom, it is the same thing. Thus, we have those moral qualms when doping shows its face and reminds us of the downside of what we ourselves are doing. It wasn't even necessary to prove that Michael Rasmussen had done something wrong in order for him to be judged and condemned.

There is an enormous rule-consciousness and moralization in this movement. Even on a general level. It is very easy to make a slip and be disqualified on this path. Again, it shows that there is no room for deviation or jubilant excess.

In this sense, it comes to contain its own totalitarianism, the fact that everything must be sacrificed for a higher end. If we look at it in an unrelenting light, these were some of things people did in the Third Reich, when they tried to improve mankind.

Leth: Some time ago, I was asked to comment on Lene Riefenstahl's Olympia film at an event in connection with the Golden Days festival at the Østerbro Bathing Hall, in itself a splendidly fascistic locale. And Riefenstahl's film is fantastic. But it fills me with disgust. This cultivation of the athlete as a demigod.

Raffnsøe: It may be repulsive and extreme, because what's missing is the imperfect, the messy.

Leth: We're missing the wonderfully messy. The dirt in sports and the cycle races, which I love, where anything good or bad can happen. The chaos and the mishaps. And doping.

Raffnsøe: And that's the way it has to be in this grand project. It is utterly necessary that there be room for the messy, the imperfect, if we are to be able to live in and with the optimization project. If not, our bare existence or life makes itself felt as an obstruction and an opponent. That is what we see in the modern workplace with the increasing incidents of stress and burn-out despite of all our efforts to do good.

the authors

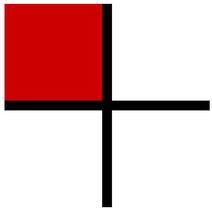
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Organizing obstructions to manage organizations creatively: Reflecting *The Five Obstructions*

Mary Jo Hatch

According to Schlegel critique ought to transgress the received Kantian notion of critique. Instead of judging the work of art condescendingly, assessing its pros and cons, telling it what to do and not to do, confining it within certain limits, the true work of the critic consists in helping the work of art realize itself, in helping it become even more 'transparent', in assisting it to transgress itself in order to become more fully what it already strives to be. (Sverre Raffnsøe, 2010, personal correspondence)

The central action of *The Five Obstructions* involves the repeated remaking of a beloved short film *The Perfect Human* whose studied imperfections are painful to watch, yet, in exposing the limitations of humanity, express the beauty of imperfection. We do not live so sublimely in most organizations. We rarely take time to savor the trials, or to nourish our creative power. We are always on our way to the next success, or at least to the next meeting. More wants more. Ironically this film shows us a way we *can* have more – more perfect human imperfection – if we take time to challenge one another from depth to depth and to nurture what is worth repeating so that we can watch it soar to newly imagined heights.

The Five Obstructions is a wonderful tutorial on creativity that weaves in and around management. The film proves the point that limitations can be productive of a creative process, and the method Lars von Trier offers Jorgen Leth is an old one for pushing artists toward mastery by having them 'repeat' a work multiple times (e.g. paint the 'same' subject twenty times). In this film the method von Trier proposes involves Leth remaking *The Perfect Human* five times, each time obstructed in some new way.

Throughout *The Five Obstructions* von Trier employs the method of obstruction to try to break Leth of his filmmaking habits. While von Trier persists in telling Leth that the obstructions will be productive of creativity, Leth successively describes them as 'perverse', 'destructive', 'spastic', 'satanic', 'suicidal', and ultimately 'diabolical'. For example, at one point von Trier tells Leth that by following his direction Leth will probably produce crap, which he assures him will be welcomed, and may even be necessary. Leth perversely responds by producing multiple versions of *The Perfect Human*, each better than the last.

How professional management obstructs creative organizing

What most struck me on reviewing this film comes from my sensitivity to organizing and reflections on the teaching of management. Leth and von Trier made a film about filmmaking without demonstrating much interest in revealing how their filmmaking was organized. We see Leth in one segment crossing off a list of scenes to be shot, and once we overhear von Trier discussing flight bookings. Snippets of conversation, the occasional appearance of an assistant or a camera crewperson, shots of rehearsal, and the list of contributors that scrolls across the screen in the final credits, similarly attest to organizing that remains otherwise unseen.

Still, to make this film required sorting out ambitions, establishing priorities, assembling resources and transforming them into action that could be filmed, edited, presented, and so on. Somebody had to book those tickets, determine the sequence of shots, cast and schedule actors, rehearse and dress them, direct, set up cameras and lighting, shoot and develop the film, edit, get the finished product into distribution, and so on. I am certain that handling details like these constitutes the bulk of everyday professional life for most filmmakers. Yet von Trier and Leth keep silent about such matters, putting the heroics of their creative process on display rather than the banalities of organizing.

What occurred to me while watching *The Five Obstructions* through this lens was how downplaying organization brought creativity forward, which seemed to me a great improvement over the effect most management classes have on their students. Management classes typically foreground the banalities of organizing to the detriment of creativity. While this approach genuflects before the altar of professionalism, it makes a sacrifice. In most business schools, the means of professionalizing management has supplanted the ends of teaching students to organize for a creative purpose with the net effect of transforming banalities into heroic actions and professional managers into heroes. As business schools churn out professionals, this means-ends reversal reveals their heroes performing tragedy because, unfortunately, the successful professionalization of management has left most businesses crying for creativity.

One thing became clear to me as I reviewed *The Five Obstructions*: neither von Trier nor Leth designed the perfect organization to make their films. They organized, if imperfectly, because it was a means to realize creative filmmaking. If creativity is what you are after, then management must organize and then reorganize to serve it, a point repeated five times as I watched von Trier presenting Leth with a series of increasingly challenging obstructions. Von Trier improvised most of the five obstructions by playing off Leth's increasingly sophisticated responses to rising expectations of impending failure. This escalation, alongside the determined engagement of the two men with the task they mutually defined and refined as they proceeded, seemed to unleash creative forces in both.

But what is this odd notion of organizing and how is it to be managed? Is it the goal-driven, pre-planned, buttoned-down version we so often teach in management schools? Or is it meandering and stubbornly inefficient, groping toward an ill-conceived, ever-

shifting and always partially obscured ambition with holes big enough to welcome surprise? Which characteristics – the clear and planful or the fuzzy and improvisational – best match our expectations about management and how do these expectations constrain or even undermine the conditions that inspire creativity?

If you believe we need management and organizing practices that better fit the conditions and spirit of creativity, then what light does *The Five Obstructions* shed in the dark tunnel of current management education? Might we re-enchant organizing or impassion management after the fashion of von Trier urging Leth to produce crap? Are we who are and who teach managers in need of obstruction?

Please, lord, give us constraint

At this point I would like to offer my thesis, which is (at least for now), that in *The Five Obstructions* the more von Trier's efforts to foil Leth's attempts to succeed fail, the more we see into the convoluted process of successfully managing others in service to creative ends.

Management Lesson 1: When you organize through the work of others you may convince yourself that you are in charge, but your exercise of control ultimately leads to its loss.

Some of the parallels between film direction von Trier style and the management of others are clear. For example, observing how von Trier gets Leth to make von Trier's film even as he remakes his own, revealed at least one occurrence of ambiguous and competing ambitions intertwining with decisions and actions to produce creativity. Through Leth's reactions to him, von Trier realizes his initially obscure ambition to enhance Leth's creativity, even as he clarifies what that ambition was/is. For his part Leth uses von Trier's obstructions as a springboard to creativity in the sense that constraints and limitations nearly always provoke the creative force within.

While the multiple remakings of *The Perfect Human* attest to the wonders of obstruction, a related observation is that, in the process of clarifying and realizing von Trier's ambitions those ambitions were also thwarted and profoundly changed by Leth's competing ambitions expressed in his ongoing creative responses to von Trier's efforts to obstruct his success. It may seem outrageous to manage someone's creative output by obstructing their path to success, but such has it ever been with art if not life in general, that the shortest distance between where you are now and where you want to go is rarely a straight line.

Management Lesson 2: There can never be one set of ambitions to tackle or a single vision for the future to consider in the process of managing others.

Received wisdom suggests that managers are supposed to *remove* obstructions, not invent them. Although von Trier's obstructions amount to a reversal of these expectations, in reality most managers create far more obstacles for their subordinates than they remove. But their obstructions are not typically as inspiring of creativity as are von Trier's. Why not? Could teaching managers to present their subordinates with

‘destructive’, ‘spastic’ and ‘diabolical’ obstructions move us toward more creative organizations? Are managers’ control efforts not already ‘destructive’, ‘spastic’ and ‘diabolical’ in the eyes of their subordinates? And are not subordinates’ abilities to thwart management control evidence that they are quite creative already? How shall we work in such a convoluted world?

Management Lesson 3: Learn to use indirection – point away from the desired end in order to help your subordinates more quickly achieve it.

If the value in letting go control is that its loss can produce the very creativity you were hoping your control efforts would bring, and if one’s own ambitions cross those of any others involved, then how does one go about making the necessary sacrifices of each one’s habitual ways of working? Would a closer look at the dance between Leth and von Trier revealed in *The Five Obstructions* give us further insight?

Embracing the destructive power of management

In proposing what the first obstruction should be von Trier took inspiration from the original version of *The Perfect Human*, which of course was also Leth’s starting point. Von Trier asked Leth to limit his first remake of his film to 12 frames per clip and in it to provide answers to all the questions raised by the original film’s narrator (who happens to have been Leth). Von Trier located inspiration for the remaining rules in Leth’s reactions to these first two. As Leth thinks about his challenge he puffs away at a Cuban cigar, and von Trier instructs the cameraperson to keep filming Leth while von Trier engages in some pondering of his own.

Smoking and seemingly deep in thought, Leth slips into a narrative, describing his cigar and mentioning off-handedly that he has never visited Cuba. Like a shot von Trier concludes Cuba must be the place for the first remake of *The Perfect Human*. Leth reacts by starting to organize, musing about building a room or maybe shooting against a screen. Von Trier blocks this urge with the fourth and final requirement of the first obstruction: no set!

As we leave Leth setting off for Cuba, we hear him mutter that he should be careful in future not to reveal his thinking to von Trier lest it be used against him. This remark repeats a common lesson learned by subordinates in many organizations: give your boss as little information as possible lest it be used to control you! However, deviating from the scenario one expects to unfold on such occasions (i.e., employee resistance to management control), Leth permits himself to be filmed close range as he finds ways to thwart von Trier’s first obstruction and make a successful film in spite, if not because of the constraints he accepted from von Trier.

There is another aspect of management to consider here, to do with the shared (or not) vision to produce a creative product. Notice that, as Leth uses his creative powers to undermine von Trier’s efforts to help him, von Trier features Leth’s creativity in outsmarting him in *The Five Obstructions*! How might we teach managers to appreciate, as von Trier does Leth’s abilities, their subordinates’ efforts to thwart management control? Could we reframe them as expressions of creativity rather than as

attempts to circumvent their manager's power? If managers could be taught a course in subordinate appreciation, would they learn to leverage knowledge of the subversive side of creativity and thereby mobilize it? Can von Trier's style of diabolical management be taught?

As the second obstruction is introduced, von Trier replies to Leth's concern not to reveal too much by equating the process of producing *The Five Obstructions* to therapy. He asks Leth: 'How can I help you unless you open up to me?' Von Trier then opens up to Leth by revealing his own ambition to 'banalize' Leth in order to break down his habit of being the detached observer, to force Leth closer to his subject. To do this von Trier presents his second obstruction: Leth must act in his own film and the second remake is to be set in the most miserable place Leth can think of. Von Trier further specifies that Leth not explicitly show the place he has selected and that he include the scene from *The Perfect Human* of the perfect human eating a meal, but this time without the woman.

Leth chooses the red light district of Bombay for his setting, having been 'horrified' by a previous visit to the place. There he remakes selected scenes from *The Perfect Human*, including eating a fine meal, which he performs in front of a semi-transparent screen permitting him to show bystanders who are busy watching his tuxedoed self consume the meal laid out on a gleaming white tablecloth. The inclusion of the partially obscured observers adds irony – one of Leth's trademarks (i.e., now Leth is the observed rather than the observer) – as well as visual commentary about the suffering of the poor to his second remaking of *The Perfect Human*.

While Leth readies himself to star in his meal scene, von Trier's camera catches him in his underwear shaving, thereby assisting in the total remake of *The Perfect Human* by providing a new version of the shaving scene featuring Leth himself. Sweating profusely as some onlookers interact with him, we also see Leth filming two other scenes from the original film, the first involves Leth jumping up and down in full costume and the second taking his jacket off and then putting it back on. In filming these scenes in sequence Leth is able to show us his sweat-drenched shirt when he removes his jacket, thus pointing to the heat permeating the location. This presumably fulfills the requirement of not showing the place chosen, but Leth then includes the bystanders peeking at him through the screen, thus violating that same requirement.

Von Trier rejects Leth's effort in the second obstruction on the basis of the semi-transparent screen. He chastises Leth for breaking the rule about not showing the place and as a consequence instructs Leth to return and remake the second remake. But Leth, in the most genuinely emotional moment we have seen thus far, refuses. It is too much to ask. His ethical limits have been (b)reached by playing it so cool in the heat while eating a rich man's meal in front of some of Bombay's poorest. Leth then describes a nightmare he had two nights after finishing the film and his fear that his fear will turn into madness if he follows any further down this path.

Von Trier, empathizing with Leth, just as he had hoped to force Leth to empathize with his subjects, concedes the point, but says that Leth must then be punished in another way, a way he declares should be of Leth's own choosing. Leth states that he prefers

that von Trier make the decisions, which of course seals his fate. The third obstruction will have no rules for Leth to thwart. He is to remake his own film in his own way. Von Trier calls it free-style filmmaking. Leth appears to suffer extreme chagrin.

The film based on the third obstruction is melancholy and mysterious. It features a man whose face, Leth comments, reveals his deep experience of life, and a woman whose status and relationship to the man is ambiguous. Is she a prostitute? Is she the perfect woman of his dreams? All we see is that she is not the woman he ultimately takes to bed. The film is set in Brussels, in a hotel elevator, in its lobby, and on its roof, on a highway, amid shots of passing trains and an industrial setting with rainy grey weather swallowing it all. There are scenes of shaving and lovemaking in the backseat of a car, and a car parked alone in an empty parking structure. The film ends with a shot from the point of view of someone riding in a boat motoring down a misty river. Unanswered questions ring in my ears, haunting echoes of the original film: Who is in the boat? What is this river? Where is he going? Of course, none will be answered, but now we have traveled well beyond the first three obstructions into uncertain new territory.

Von Trier, upon viewing the third remake of *The Perfect Human* responds to the beauty of the film but pronounces his judgment that the process so far has left not one mark on Leth. He says the latest effort has been like chopping cabbage in the mirror. He states that the greatest gift an actor can give a filmmaker is to screw up and that Leth refuses to give him that gift. He suggests Leth should be a tortoise on its back but instead Leth persists in using his cleverness to avoid what von Trier has asked of him. Leth responds that precise framing (e.g., the unknown occupant of the boat on who knows what river that now seems like Leth telling von Trier how he feels at this stage of the filmmaking process) is his way of examining a theme. He cannot help himself, he says, von Trier must do that for him. Served and volleyed: Leth 3, von Trier 0.

Von Trier, puzzling over what to do now, reflects on his filmmaking saying that often, in spite of himself, in the middle of a film everything turns to crap. Leth then says, somewhat sheepishly and as if to encourage him, 'I love it when something gets out of control' to which Von Trier responds: 'I'd be thrilled if [what you produced] was crap.' Von Trier finds inspiration for the fourth obstruction in his revelation that Leth's refusal to produce crap has landed von Trier in the crap he often finds at the midpoint of his moviemaking. His inspiration for the fourth obstruction is to demand Leth make a cartoon. Leth becomes fully resistant now: he will not learn new technology, he fumes, or spend time at a drawing board. But the obstruction stands as the two men revel in their mutual hatred of cartoons.

Following this exchange we see Leth on the phone discussing what must be done about the next obstruction with an unseen unnamed other. He says that because von Trier hates cartoons as much as he does, Leth can see the logic of remaking *The Perfect Human* as a cartoon. He says that nothing new will be filmed for this remake, but rather they will reuse film already shot, recycle it but use it differently, in a new context bringing freshness to it. Von Trier may want it to be sloppy or stupid but, Leth announces, he cannot do that.

Next we hear Leth talk about 'him' to whom clips were sent and now we see Leth on his way to meet this person. We have the feeling it is someone who makes cartoons. Leth reveals that people in his organization selected this person on the basis of his reputation and that he has been sent a selection of clips. Leth pulls up in front of a house where a man greets him. They enter and Leth begins looking at computer-animated images based on stills from his various versions of *The Perfect Human*. We see Leth flipping through many stylistically different animations of still shots we recognize from the earlier versions and the original film. He responds to them as he goes, some he immediately says he wants to keep but then, responding similarly to other images, expresses an inability to decide which he wants to use. He appears to want them all, 'This should be in the film,' he says. And then, 'This is possible too. This one is good too. I don't know what to do.' We leave Leth sitting in front of hundreds of stills, but there does now seem to be something like an ordering of images that stand more or less one after the other. Is a fourth version of *The Perfect Human* emerging from Leth's indecision?

We cut to Leth walking in Haiti, buying food in an open market and talking about the new film, anticipating von Trier's reaction. He says he is afraid it won't be a load of crap. Next we see him sitting in a Haitian garden talking to von Trier who we learn is back in Denmark. The two immediately and simultaneously watch the film. Nice touch having technology mediate discussion of a film that has been similarly produced through the mediation of technology the product of which is the fourth remaking of *The Perfect Human*, now animated.

With no further explanation we see a brilliant cartoon of surprising beauty based on images transformed from cuts taken from earlier versions, including the original. Maybe nobody knows how it happened. All the viewer witnesses is that out of mutual hatred evolved a creative product that, upon viewing throws Von Trier into a frenzy, inspired by realizing he has and probably will not succeed in his ambition to thwart Leth's ambition to produce great work.

Having been unable to force Leth to produce crap, Von Trier decides to make the fifth and final remake of *The Perfect Human* himself. For the last obstruction he orders Leth to do nothing. Nothing apart from allowing von Trier to give Leth's name as director and also to narrate from a script to be provided by von Trier. Von Trier's script is an imagined letter from Leth to von Trier. In it Leth reflects on what von Trier has been up to in making *The Five Obstructions*. Leth speaks von Trier's words over a mix of images von Trier gathered from Leth's earlier filmmaking combined with his own filming of Leth.

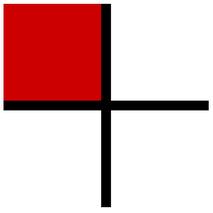
Who is in or out of control here? Do we care any longer once we reach this point? Von Trier was drawn to Leth by the influence the older man's work had on him as a young filmmaker. He clearly desired to repay that gift by inspiring Leth. But instead of reciprocating Leth, he received another of Leth's gifts. Leth gave von Trier his full commitment to being directed by accepting his obstructions and the critique that followed his efforts to make good films. What followed this strange gift to von Trier was another. By volleying von Trier's intended gift for him, Leth gives von Trier a moment of self-realization caught in the instant of hearing Leth read von Trier's words.

The way Leth throws himself to von Trier's wolves makes a subtle point about following another's lead that could easily be lost in the fray of these two artists butting heads, or alternatively as I see it now, dancing to unheard music (the one scene neither Leth nor von Tier remade until now, where it appears in my mind). To be led effectively means to follow artfully. To relish what seems an obstruction for the creativity it can bring is to love the source as well as the obstruction. When the obstructor's act of love is repaid in kind, creativity is the reward. It is a shared act in which leader and follower blend into one artistic whole in a joyful encounter with creation – every distance collapsed. Could this, in fact, be organization out in the open, missed by my first reactions to the film because they lay on a different plane of consciousness than the one on which I arrived?

I have gained tremendous value from watching and re-watching this film about remaking a film already made yet made anew with each (re)viewing. It has made me wonder if we might yet invent a way of organizing, managing and teaching management that is equally layered and, similar to *The Five Obstructions*, filled with inspiration, despair, hope, irritation and the realization of less than perfection – but so much more than crap.

the author

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Roundtable: Management of self-management

Pia Bramming, Marius Gudmand-Høyer, Dan Kärreman, Charlotta Levay, Michael Pedersen, Sverre Raffnsøe, Jens Rennstam, André Spicer and Sverre Spoelstra

abstract

The following roundtable took place at a one-day seminar at Lund University, 23 November 2009, and was organized jointly by *ephemera*, Copenhagen Business School and Lund University. The general topic of the seminar was to what extent self-management can be understood as a way of governing work through subjectivity. Topics discussed included the social bonds in and obligations of self-management, the relation between disobedience and self-management, self-management's relationship to productivity and well-being and finally also how therapeutic practice that conceptualizes depressive illness as specific deficits of self-management re-conceptualizes the classic notion of autonomy.

Introduction

In November 2009 *ephemera* co-organized a seminar on the management of self-management as a lead up to this Special issue. The other organizers were Copenhagen Business School and Lund University. The general topic was a discussion of self-management as a way of governing work through subjectivity. The seminar overall question was what the content of and limits to self-management is today? Before the roundtable discussion, transcribed below, the day had four presentations which we will broadly summarize here as the participants in the roundtable referred to day in their discussion:

Under the title 'The obligation of self-management: The social bonds of freedom', Sverre Raffnsøe argued that self-management today is present in virtually all current forms of management. For Raffnsøe self-management implies that we as employees take responsibility for ourselves when we work, while, at the same time, we independently figure out how we can best create value for the organization of which we are part. Self-management provides employees with new independence and opportunities for development, but with the obligation to leave the state of immaturity and become free comes the burden of freedom and self-development.

In his presentation ‘Self-management in product development’ Jens Rennstam spoke about the possible relevance and applications of the concept of self-management as a concept signifying something that takes place in the workplace and in work life. As a basis for the reflections, Rennstam used his research on product development work in an engineering firm. In light of that research he argued that extensive self-management and even disobedience is, on the one hand, a prerequisite for productive work to emerge, but on the other a euphemism for work in a ‘duck-pond’.

Pia Bramming’s presentation on ‘Well-being, self-management and productivity’ departed from the research project WESP¹ (well-being, self-management and productivity) which considers self-management a managerial concept and technology that associates new economy demands with worker subjectivity. This presentation shared some of the empirical materials that the project has gathered and invited to a common discussion on the questions that these materials raise about the relationships and conflicts between well-being and productivity among self-managing employees.

‘Management of depressive deficits of self-management’ was the title of the final presentation of the day, by Marius Gudmand-Høyer. In his presentation, Gudmand-Høyer mapped out some features of the management of self-management associated with current anti-depressive procedures such as cognitive behavioural therapy and psychoeducation. In this context he questioned what happens to the classical notion of ‘autonomy’ when it comes to a therapeutic practice that conceptualizes depressive illness as specific deficits of self-management.

Roundtable

Sverre Spoelstra: In today’s presentations and discussions we have come across a number of ‘funny’ phrases and paradoxes. ‘Management of self-management’ is already a somewhat strange notion. It appears paradoxical: why would one manage someone who is already managing? Sverre [Raffnsøe] mentioned Kant’s ‘purpose without purpose’ as well as ‘virtuality without virtue’, as descriptors of self-management. We also talked about the self-managing employee as some kind of ‘hero without heroism’; someone who breaks the rules and transcends everyday life, like a hero, but who is not considered to be a hero. Then Jens spoke about ‘productive disobedience’, which we may also translate as ‘dysfunctional functionality’ perhaps. We have also heard several times today that the self-managing employee is within the organization by being outside it. That sounds like a paradox as well. Pia stressed that self-managing employees must be passionate *and* distanced from their passions [when they become unproductive] and from Marius we learned that the actions of self-management can appear as a ‘passionate pathology’ and that autonomy is a way to prepare for non-autonomy. Sounds paradoxical! More funny phrases have occurred like ‘responsible responsiveness’, or the ‘conduct of conduct of conduct’. There were more, but you get the picture: when we talk about self-management, we quickly resort to paradoxes. The question that may get us started is: Why is it that our common language,

1 <http://www.trips.dk/>

our commonsensical dichotomies, appear to break down when trying to grasp the management of self-management?

I am thinking of yet another paradox. It seems to me that, similar to Kant's purposelessness without purpose, a lot of what is at stake in self-management may be captured in the phrase 'the usefulness of uselessness'. Perhaps it is the discovery of the stuff that is useless by organizations that ends up being the most useful thing. This is where bio-politics comes in, where thinking and knowledge comes in, it is where play, humanity, authenticity, spirituality, existence, come in. All the stuff that we think of as useless, or as something that has its own intrinsic value, is turned into something that is useful, or valuable for the organization. And maybe this could explain why we so quickly resort to paradoxes when we talk about self-management?

André Spicer: There are two responses to this. The first is that making the useless useful, is a process of commodification. Organizations often run out of places to make a profit; then they need to look around for new opportunities, and this is where things like spirituality come in. The second response is that people are also asking for these things like spirituality or authenticity to become commodified so that they can make a living from them or they can have them recognized as important. So I think we have a kind of paradoxical situation here. On the one hand aspects of 'life' like play, authenticity and spirituality become a source of value and profit for organizations and individuals, but at the same time they become zone of emancipation or autonomy. These two apparently conflicting processes seem to create a weird self-reinforcing cycle of commodification and emancipation.

Dan Kärreman: Yes, there is some play between opposites here, but it strikes me more as irony and not paradox. We do not have a break-down. It is quite clearly possible for us to talk about this empirically. So I think irony would be the more interesting way to talk about this. I think we confuse this. For me self-management is about management. Yes, it exists in the background of autonomy or conditions of autonomy. Management, the way we think about it, has a very strong social power that it counters. But it is still a form of a management. I agree it is a kind of fuzzy concept, but it makes more sense if you look at that way. It is a management of machine, it is a way of economize on people's autonomy. What it does is that it substitutes their autonomy. It is not really people doing what they want. It is a way of harvesting their agency. It is clearly instruction that counts here. If you are self-managing, you are told to do in a particular way. You will have agency, of course, that is the 'self' part, but the 'management' part comes in some sort of directions. I thought Marius Gudmand-Høyer had an excellent point about this when he looked into how this is played out in therapy. I actually did some research, believe it or not, into this area.² In health-care settings self-management is used mainly as a way of conceptualising self-administration of therapy or self-administration of drugs. But here it is clearly not a question of autonomy. You are clearly instructed how to do. So what happens here, when you talk about self-

2 Alvesson, M., D. Kärreman, A. Sturdy and K. Handley (2009) 'Unpacking the client(s): Constructions, positions and client-consultant dynamics', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 25(3): 253-263.

management, is that supervision or other people's authority becomes invisible, but it is clearly here. And I think this is part of the confusion that leads to this paradox.

Jens Rennstam: I can see your point. But you may see it as signifying that previously, it was productive to follow rules, to be obedient, but today it is productive to be disobedient: a sign of the times. There is still bureaucracy, there is still a structure, there is still formal management that is in charge of putting up goals and re-organize, and they have a higher status. When we talk about post-disciplinary society and closures that are opening up, I think we are exaggerating a little bit. Organizations are not open spaces like that, they are still quite bureaucratic. Many things we associate with bureaucracy are still there. But a lot of employees engage with disobedience to be productive, which is interesting in terms of self-management.

Sverre Spoelstra: To me this still sounds paradoxical. Obviously, it is not any kind of disobedience that is productive. We are looking for a particular kind of disobedience. And apparently we do not have a very good term for it, other than 'productive disobedience'?

Marius Gudmand-Høyer: I think this question about productivity of disobedience is an interesting one. If you look into the world of health-care, there are two aspects that might bring more light to this issue. First, it is true that self-management has been a much regulated process in this context. But at the same time this is also the context within which managed care discovered that it had to take disobedience into account in order to produce health. 'Compliance' is the old concept for the patient following the regime prescribed by the doctor, particularly after the 1940-50s when self-administrated pills became the most popular treatment modality. The doctor had his authority and you as a patient were compliant. However, in the last 10-15 years still more new notions for this relationship have been proposed to replace compliance, now deemed to be all too authoritarian and demanding in tenor. 'Concordance' is the last one, while 'adherence' is the new neutral term. But this introduction is not only an element in the current celebration of patient autonomy and agency. It was also related to the shocking discovery that only about 50% of all patients actually take their pills as prescribed, a problem still producing enormous costs for the health care systems. Hence, here you have a problem of lost productivity of non-compliant disobedience. And the problem is that you cannot get people to comply just by telling them what to do, even if you are right. You had to make yourself relevant in another way when acting as a manager of somebody's self-administration of pills. Yet, the second aspect is that now we have all these participation-ideas, shared decision-making, being equals, making treatment contracts, and so forth, and it all seems to work well, much better than compliance at least. But what is interesting is that 'empowerment' has become another important word here. 'Concordance' is an empowerment-word, while 'compliance' is definitively the opposite. This I see as another side of the disobedience problematic, namely that we can also work on this non-compliance by empowerment. And here current medical research indicate, very interestingly, that if people behave as adherent as can be shown now with measures of empowerment and concordance, that is, in accordance with their own wishes and beliefs, they behave completely like the originally compliant persons should have behaved. The authority of compliance and the autonomy of concordance seem to coincide in the very same type of conduct being productive for health. But you have to

go another way to reach the same point; you have to take into consideration the potential disobedience together with the patients' way of relating to themselves. If we look into the general history of societal regulation of self-regulation, for instance as Foucault studies it in his 1979-lectures on the birth of biopolitics, he here shows how classical governmentality has developed into a liberal variant that steps back from direct control and seems to be characterized by this fact: that now you as a manager have to conduct the conduct of others not according to the managerial rationality you might possess but according to the rationality of the managed themselves.³ Here the problematic of disobedient productivity becomes productive exactly in so far it becomes a new field for potential concordance with new possibilities. And this apparent paradox, I believe, is another reason why management of self-management has come into view as a pertinent response to general organizational problems. It is capable of dealing with disobedience-concordance circulations in a way that also seems productive also for something as individually relevant as your health.

Sverre Raffnsøe: I want to return to what Sverre [Spoelstra] presented as the paradoxes of self-management. According to the sciences of logics or semantics a paradox is a proposition or an expression which is strange, surprises, or even clash with common sense, because it describes a situation which has or involves two facts or qualities you would think could not both be true at the same time. For example, if it describes two states which seem to logically mutually exclude one another as present or obtaining at the same time. And as a self-managing employee I have to lead an all too striking paradoxical existence. I have to endure an apparent dichotomist 'either-or' while incessantly living or performing it as a 'both-and'. When managing myself, I have to be a manager and be managed at the very same time. I have to transgress myself, to leave myself behind, to find myself anew authentically, only in order to transgress myself again to find myself again on the verge of myself. I also have to work and have a life at the very same time; and I have to do that while I go to work; and when I enter my homes, where we also have to work. The fact that this paradoxical life or existence seems logically impossible does not prevent me from leading this life. The famous last thought which comes to Josef K.'s mind just before he dies, dog-tired, towards the end of *The Trial* is: 'The logic is unshakeable, but it yields to someone who insists on or perseveres in living.'⁴ The paradoxical nature of this existence does not render it impossible, does not preclude us from performing it, but it creates an ongoing problematization of our very existence and also of that of the organizations. Situated in between two seemingly opposed states, we have to lead a rather speculative mediating and intermediate existence, constantly renegotiating the given.

Pia Bramming: To follow up on that, organizations today are to a large extent managed by the idea that we cannot keep up production if we do not change ourselves. This has been furthered in management literature at least since the 1980s when the learning organization and innovation entered the management literature in a big way. When we talk about obedience, disobedience, or well-being and self-management in

3 Foucault, M. (2008) *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79*, trans. G. Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

4 Kafka, F. (1925/1998) *The trial*. A new translation, based on the restored text. Translated and with a preface by Breon Mitchell. New York: Schocken Books.

organizations, we don't talk about these issues from a humanistic point of view: Now we'll make some more human management and we want people to be happy because we want them to be happy. It is a question of managing the potential productivity of the organization, and if our employees are not able to stay fit, not to become overweight, and if they are not able to add value which we could not predict, then production will simply stop. And this is where the changes in economy become interesting. We have this overarching way of thinking the economic system in a capitalistic sense, and that is why we are forced to talk in these interesting paradoxes, because everything is potential productivity. And self-management then becomes to do *as if* the management technology or management ideas were your own ideas. You have to take them in and then you have to add something extra, otherwise you do not add anything to this changing world. 'A career is nothing without a personal life' as an ad for one big Danish company said⁵. If you do not have a life, the organization cannot use you in the potential sense.

Michael Pedersen: Could we dwell a bit more on this. Today we have discussed the concept of autonomy in self-management a lot. But some of you also just brought up the concept of productivity in self-management. What kind of concept of productivity do we have in self-management? What is the failure of the bureaucratic, formal understanding of productivity, if we need self-management?

Dan Kärreman: Two main responses to this. I do think that bureaucracy in some form is compatible with the question of work and in this sense also with some sort of notion of self-management. Universities are very bureaucratic, but they also provide excellent spaces for people like us, and we do not really like to be bossed around. So that is a good argument. Researchers are the prototypical self-managing people. Having said that, in terms of industrial processes, I do think that certain kinds of work, in particular service work and knowledge work is too complicated and too expensive to regulate and supervise within the traditional bureaucratic needs, so there is actually an economic reason why self-management becomes important target or important technique or practice. We could not make the case if we did not really know in an international sense. Although, it seems to be the easiest way to engage in some sort of control for these types of groups: professional service, professional knowledge worker. As a researcher I am very interested in this concept of self-management because it provides a way of thinking about the interface between professional autonomy and management. Self-management is basically a way of accessing and controlling a particular kind of productivity that comes from complex work. I think it is much more interesting to relate to productivity instead of autonomy. Autonomy is a bricolage that is actually substituted by self-management.

André Spicer: I think it is quite easy to argue against Dan here, or at least makes his claim a little more modest. He made the point that the only way we can manage service work is through self-management. But if we look at any form of productive service work, what we find is a massive degree of rationalization, bureaucratization, and external control. He claims that if you look at complex work like management

5 Cf. Pedersen, M. (2011) "'A career is nothing without a personal life' – On the social machine in the call for authentic employees', *ephemera*, 11(1): 63-77.

consultancy you do not find it. But if you look at management consultancies, they are made of a whole bunch of 25 year old kids implementing ERP-systems. And their work is highly controlled. They too record what they are doing every seven minutes to keep track of their 'billable hours'. So it does not seem that these consultants are particularly self-managing.

Dan Kärreman: Yes, this is precisely my point.

Andre Spicer: Yes, the result is that people begin to think about their life in terms of seven-minute slots. So their whole life becomes series of seven-minutes slot, which is being scheduled for meetings and so forth, and now I am going to drink a beer and network with my friends, and next 7 minute slot I will make my girlfriend happy, and then next seven-minute slot I will go and send some emails. Recent work I have been doing with Johan Alvehus points out how this kind of seven-minute thinking becomes a way these professional service workers begin to financialise their whole life.⁶ Their life becomes a series of seven-minute slots, which they can then buy, sell, invest. So I think that Dan is right in pointing out that these forms of rationalized controls become a kind of self-management. So maybe simply opposing the two forms might be a little foolish.

Dan Kärreman: Yes, but I think that if you research this empirically you will see that it is extremely difficult to translate the kind of control that literally exists on an assembly line to service work and to knowledge work. Metaphorically speaking, yes, we can see that something like this is happening, but I would argue that for this control to really come alive, to be performed, it needs much more self-management than on an assembly line, because they are actually forced. You cannot disconnect from that. You can engage in other kinds of thinking. Why in the service sector or knowledge work, you have to engage in these techniques to make it happen.

Marius Gudmand-Høyer: Here we might go back to one of the conceptual discussions we have had. What are we actually talking about when we talk about self-management? On which level of analysis? Societal, organizational, inter- or intrapersonal? It is interesting to relate this to what Sverre Raffnsøe talked earlier about the normative level, where self-management comes up as an answer that we repeat although it does not answer exactly what we are trying to do. Although self-management fails in the first situation, it is still what we take up in the next. That is how normativity works, it is stubborn, it is a wilful normative expectation, and this is also why self-management becomes relevant to study. Of course it is different in different empirical instances and on different levels of analysis, but it is certainly a concept that now has some sort of general societal prevalence. And to return to Dan's question about productivity: without knowing much about productivity per se, I can at least say that the one aspect that seem to be part of self-management and productivity is that organizations now seem to identify what is relevant for production outside the organization itself. It seems to lease out and be interested in aspects that are not already a part of the organization, but which is not complexly detached from it either. Andre Spicer has a brilliant concept for this:

6 Alvehus, J. and A. Spicer (2009) 'Financialization as a strategy of workplace control in professional service firms', paper presented at the 25th EGOS Colloquium, Barcelona, Spain, July 4-6.

an ex-stitution.⁷ However, this particular interventional field, which is situated just on outer surface of the organization, not within it, but not completely detached from either, is of course also part of a major historical movement as well; the whole idea of regulating the self-regulating of civil society is basically the same idea. It is a particular external reference nourished by the belief that if people managed themselves, not as they do now, but as they potentially and willingly could, it would lead to a better productivity, so let us therefore facilitate exactly this. This matrix of ‘extitutional facilitation’, I believe, has not only become an integral part of production and value-creation, for instance as co-creation. At the same time, the matrix represents a general framework in which management of self-management has emerged as something so prevalent and highly relevant for all sorts of governing.

Andre Spicer: Here you have examples of how the self-management process does not work. The concept of bio-morality is useful here. The central idea is that to be a healthy person, you are a morally good person. If you are engaged in a lot of yoga, go for jog every day, think positives thoughts then you are a morally good person. And, if you do the opposite you will be a bad person. This idea can be found in recent work by Torkild Thanem on workplace health programmes.⁸ He found that some workplaces spent an inordinate amount of time monitoring their employees eating. As an employee in these workplaces you should have an apple for breakfast, you should check how much water you are drinking, and by all means avoid having a burger at lunch time. Essentially employees were being treated like children who need to be told what to eat. But then to resist that, what would you do? Would that involve eating ten pizzas and never doing any exercise? This of course is extremely childish too. So the result is that you get in to this trap where you treated as a child, act like a child, but if you resist that you are also like a child. This is a strange because self-management is supposed to be all about responsibility. But it seems that self-management programmes actually make us all into irresponsible children who need to be told what to do all the time.

Charlotta Levay: From a general reflection based on the perspectives from which I have studied governmentality, I think that anyone would have emphasized the extent to which this self-management has the potentiality of rendering new aspects of existence controllable.⁹ It is not a question of autonomous people asked to produce self-management, but rather a general kind of effort to solve the puzzle of how to control autonomous individuals or autonomous people. People that are in a context of society where the ideal of autonomy is so strong, so what do you do? You support their autonomy, create their autonomy, create models, recipes, and descriptions and calculations and network and anything for them to be autonomous and act in autonomous ways. It is this constructive element of it I find important, and then to say, did this add to their autonomy or did this restrict them? This points at the whole idea of them being autonomous. Take for instance the case of some anti-obesity programmes

7 Cf. Spicer, André (2010) ‘Extitutions: the other side of institutions’, *ephemera*, 10(1): 25-39.

8 Thanema, Torkild (2009) ‘“There's no limit to how much you can consume”: the New Public Health and the struggle to manage healthy bodies’, *Culture and organization*, 15(1): 59-74.

9 Cf. e.g. Levay, Charlotta and Caroline Waks (2009) ‘Professions and the pursuit of transparency in healthcare: two cases of soft autonomy’, *Organization studies*, 30(5): 509-527.

which I have studied.¹⁰ They encourage patients to reflect on their life and start controlling it better, and obviously that implies indirectly controlling the patients. Previously, I do not even know if this was an area of control of self-control. It was people living their lives, and then it becomes a project; you can describe it systematically and start controlling it.

Jens Rennstam: Michael asked about how this is a new kind of productivity. As to this, one of the paradoxes brought up by Sverre Spoelstra, the purposefulness without purpose, can be solved in a linguistic sense. Purposefulness is an attitude we can have, but there is no purpose anymore that we know of. God is dead, it is said, so he is gone for people of religious belief and thus produces no purpose for most people of today. But we still act as if there was one. So linguistically, we may express this by saying that there is purposefulness because we act as if there is purpose, but there really is none. Hence, purposefulness without purpose. This may be connected to productivity in the way that it is not about ‘speed’ anymore, which resembles purpose in the sense of something that is attainable and a final goal, but it seems to be more about ‘acceleration’, which resembles purposefulness in the sense that it is not finite but more like an attitude and specifically an attitude that there is no final goal and there is no end to production. We need to be productive but there is no clear goal of the production other than acceleration. It is not so much about transforming raw material into things in a productive way anymore. At least in the Western world we basically have sold all the useful goods, at least in any fundamental sense. In terms of use-value one may argue that there is very little new during the past 50 years – we’ve got food, shelter, comfort, etc. At the same time we seem to want difference. Not everybody wants a black Ford anymore, we want different kinds of Fords; we need to experience some kind of difference. This is why this acceleration is needed and this is why we need to tap into something other than just bureaucracy and behaviour that is planned, because if you plan behaviour is just not productive enough, you need to tap into people’s selves and make them behave in a productive way without any bureaucratic rules. For a little while more we may be able to live up to the capitalist idea of productivity, but then we need new sources – I guess self-management is one of those potential sources.

Sverre Raffnsøe: Earlier in our discussion we touched on an important point. It’s the fact that self-management has become some sort of a prevalent idea, an ideal or normativity that we have to live up to and keep up with, and which we are quite unwilling to dispense with. Self-management has become kind of an *idée fixé*. Even when it is dysfunctional we tend to stick to it, it is not refutable in any simple way. We also tend to stick to it even when it proves to be very difficult to maintain or unproductive. Today we even apply the notion of self-management as a very challenging demand to people who have become victims of severe depressions, as discussed in the presentation by Marius; and we ask them to manage themselves even though they are quite incapable of fulfilling exactly that obligation. It might not be that it’s your own fault, and it might not be that you’re to blame for the rotten condition you ended up in, but still you have to assume responsibility and display agency. We have

10 Levay, C. (2010) ‘Microphysique d’une intervention sur l’obésité: Technologies de soi comme moyen de traduction’ in H. Bergeron and P. Castel (eds.) *Regards croisés sur l’obésité*. Paris: Éditions de Santé and Presses de Sciences Po.

become obsessed with presupposing and installing agency. In this very instance management of self-management seems to attain its extreme margin of what may be cultivated; it comes close to the boundary of the realm to which the notion and the normativity applies. This is where we encounter the limits of management of self-management; it has to be perfectible in some ways. Things have to be perfectible in order for this machine to work. Where it encounters the imperfectible; but as Michael Pedersen has also discussed in his article on self-management and stress, the machinery of self-management almost breaks down, while at the same time the machine seems to reboot immediately, maybe even intensified by its lack of success, in order to overcome the obstacle.¹¹ Its failure is its very success!

Marius Gudmand-Høyer: In continuation of what Sverre Raffnsøe just said I think we have to look at self-management not only at the normative level but also as an impending activity of sorts. Self-management is not the equal to any philosophical concept of autonomy, nor is it the same as empirical self-regulation as such. In my opinion, it is a specific process or processing of autonomy, just as it is a specific activity of responsibility, by means of self-regulation. Indeed it presupposes that you can have some free will, or some responsibility or some autonomy, but it is not really about creating a situation in which you actually *are* self-managing in an autonomous way. It is a situation in which we constantly may be on the verge of doing this; but it is always an imperfect prescription too, and therefore it fosters activity. I think there is an interesting and important historical aspect to it, if you go back to Sverre Raffnsøe presentation on the Kantian ideas about autonomy, immaturity and enlightenment. This was the idea that we were actually standing in a spot where we were not as free as we could be, where we needed to move in direction of this freedom and the total use of personality and reason in order to become mature. But if you go back to the ancient Greek way of approaching the same problem, they actually said that we, at least in principle, were completely free from the beginning, and that this was our most important problem because we had to limit our freedom in specific ways in order to conduct ourselves ethically or satisfyingly as to ourselves. Current self-management is also dealing with this Kantian idea that we are not really using as much of our freedom as we could if we really did it in the best way possible. But there is more to it than that. This may be illustrated well with reference to the work of scholars of self-management such as Charles Manz, Henry Sims and Christopher Neck, who, by the way, already in the 1980s introduced the fantastic concept of ‘SuperLeadership’ for ‘leading others to lead themselves’.¹² Now, however, they make a distinction between ‘self-management’ and what they label as ‘self-leadership’, both conceived of as so-called ‘substitutes for management’.¹³ Self-management they define as a process in which you regulate

11 Pedersen, M. (2008) ‘Tune in, break down and reboot: New machines for coping with the stress of commitment’, *Culture and Organization*, 14 (2): 171-185. Cf. also Pedersen, M. (2009) *Tune in, breakdown, and reboot: On the production of the stress-fit self-managing employee*. PhD Series 6, Doctoral School of Organization and Management Studies, Copenhagen Business School.

12 Cf. Manz, C. C. and H. P. Sims (1989) *SuperLeadership: Leading others to lead themselves*. New York: Prentice Hall Press.

13 Cf. e.g. Neck, C> P. and J. D. Houghton ‘Two decades of self-leadership theory and research: Past development, present trends and future possibilities’, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, special issue on self-leadership, 21(4): 270-295.

yourself in order to reduce discrepancies between your own performance and externally set standards. Here you already know the standards of what you actually should do at work. You also know the rationale for these standards, or why you should perform in accordance with the given standards. But what you do not know is the precise self-regulation needed to put this into work. Hence, it becomes a Known-Known-Unknown structure of some sort. But what comes up with self-leadership is that we do not know the standards beforehand, nor do we know the rationales for them. We have to take part in formulating these standards and their rationales ourselves in order to be really productive, which means we would now have three unknowns. Or more precisely, I think, we have an Unknown-Unknown-Partly Known structure, since we do know for sure that the two unknowns have to be met with some sort of self-regulation activity. We positively know that we have to conduct ourselves productively in respect to these two unknowns, if we want to be really productive. This is a very open system of self-leadership in opposition to the relatively closed system of self-management. However, we should not say that this is either-or situation. It is not self-management *or* self-leadership we have. Rather, I would argue, we should say that the current phenomenon of self-management is somehow stretched out between these two categories with their associated ideas about the nature of freedom and autonomy. What we have is two different experiences at the very same time: With self-management it is the experience that we are bestowed with less maturity than we actually feel we have, which leads to the Kantian problem of freedom as emancipation. With self-leadership it is the experience that we are expected to have much more maturity than we think we have, which leads to the Greek problem of freedom as limitation. It is within this framework that many of the normative activities of autonomy and responsibility are now taking place, oscillating back and forth between passive and active problematics of freedom. For example, the knowledge worker at a university has to be self-managing in accordance with fixed standards of teaching hours, quantities of publications and so forth. But at the same time this person has to be self-leading in order to continuously formulate a productive future of new research projects with unknown standards and rationales. In sum, I believe that many of the problems with the management of self-management and autonomy we talk about today are connected to the ways we try to deal with this double challenge of freedom and maturity, be it practically or empirically, theoretically or conceptually.

Pia Bramming: Hegel questioned an individual conception of freedom stating that freedom is when you don't feel what binds you.¹⁴ Freedom is not an absence of constraints on our liberty or the possibility to do as we desire. What we experience as self-directed is also mediated by others. When we experience independence it happens in a social interdependency. I think when we talk about productivity in organizations, if we had to contextualize it, then the constraints we do not feel in a work context must be seen in light of the obligation to be free, and the obligation to change or to produce value for the organization must be seen as freedom itself. It is a way of cultivating the management technology into a personal ideal. Making a difference between constraints and change, constraints and self-management, or personality and self-management it does not really make any sense when we have said that life itself, or actual management

14 Cf. Hegel, G. W. F. (1821/2008) *Outlines of the philosophy of right*, trans. T. M. Knox. Revised, edited, and introduced by Stephen Houlgate. New York: Oxford University Press.

itself, is the central product of capital, if that is the truth. Change is produced in relation to constrains.

Andre Spicer: You could also argue for the opposite proposition: Maybe this is just about trying to keep people busy, entertained, or amused. We go to work and what do we do - what are the most people doing at work? They get very stressed out and worried because they have been continually engaged in self-management processes that are not necessarily producing a lot, apart from themselves. So this will be one possible way of keeping people busy. You ask them to engage in self-management. Maybe this is just too cynical. Perhaps what we are witnessing here is the introduction of a new set of morals based on the ideas of autonomy, connectivity, network; kinds of words which you heard again and again. The idea of autonomy seems to come up in all sorts of different settings: Radical activists and anarchists doing media work talk about their organization being highly autonomist. Indigenous peoples engaged in armed struggles throughout the world use it. Management consultants talk about autonomy too. So you see this weird thing, that people who are so opposed and doing very very different things using the same kind of moral claims to justify what is going on within their life. So is not that we live in a society without purpose. It is rather that we seem to be able to use the same purpose for some many different activities.

Sverre Raffnsøe: Not only is the management of self-management a paradoxical notion, there is also some sort of irony connected to it. Consultancy firms and even managers often claim and expect that self-management will make life a lot easier for the managers, since each and everyone assumes his or her responsibility for managing him- or herself. But, surprisingly and ironically, it is quite the other way about. What emerges with the introduction of self-management is an urgent and almost insatiable demand for management coming from the self-managing employees, and a demand that represents a different kind of management in order to make self-management possible. It is a need for management as empowerment, as a caring for you, something that makes you visible, and something which makes it possible for you managing your task at work. The introduction of self-management carries with it a need for existential management. The introduction of self-management was supposed to make things easier for management, but what happens is quite the contrary. I think it also make management very precarious because the manager always seems to do either too little or too much in order to make it possible for you to do the things that you would like to do at work. If he or she does too much, he or she interferes and becomes a nuisance; he or she limits your freedom. If she or he does too little, you feel that she or he abandons you and empowers you insufficiently; the manager helps you insufficiently to help yourself, she or he does not offer her or his assistance to assist you in making use of your freedom ...

Michael Pedersen: On that I think we should end. I would like to thank the panel for a very interesting and enlightening discussion. Thank you.

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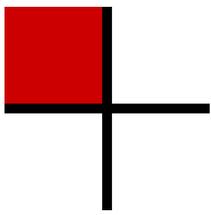
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***Parrēsia*: The problem of truth**

Joakim Kromann and Thomas Klem Andersen

review of:

Michel Foucault (2010) *Government of self and others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-83*, trans. G. Burchell. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (HB: pp. 402, £19.99, ISBN 1 4039 8666 5).

The painter is standing a little back from his canvas. He is glancing at his model; perhaps he is considering whether to add some finishing touch, though it is also possible that the first stroke has not yet been made. (Foucault, 1989: 3)

This opening in *The Order of Things* with reference to *Las Meninas* bears some resemblance to the lectures Foucault held at the *Collège de France* in 1983. Here Foucault presents his work-in-progress, and it is not certain when or if the work will be conclusive – or to what degree it has even begun. This unfinished form, nevertheless, makes the lectures worth reading as they give us a good sense of how Foucault works with his material. Through the subject of the lectures, the Greek concept of *parrēsia*,¹ he explores the relation between philosophy and politics as well as the problematization of conditions of truth. As such, the analysis of *parrēsia* ties central aspects of Foucault's authorship together in a clarifying way.

The lectures begin with a programmatic exposition in which Foucault positions his preceding works by explaining what he has been doing, or always intended to do (3). What he has been doing is a history of thought based on an analysis of the central experiences of our culture (e.g. criminality, madness, sexuality), their development and transformation. Such an analysis is carried out through three overlapping analytical approaches. These are 'forms of possible knowledge', 'normative frameworks of behavior', and 'potential modes of existence for possible subjects'. Together, these approaches create the 'focal point of experience' in our culture (*ibid.*). The analysis of *parrēsia* clarifies the relation between these three analytical approaches since they are related to the central question of 'truth-telling in procedures of government and the

¹ The lexical definition of *parrēsia* (παρρησία), whose meaning Foucault tries to re-shape and re-assemble, is 'outspokenness, frankness, freedom of speech' (Liddell and Scott, 1940: 1344).

constitution of [an] individual as subject for himself and for others' (42; brackets in original).

Foucault finds inspiration for this general frame of analysis in the Kantian question of the *Aufklärung*, stating that a part of Kant's legacy was to raise two questions that founded modern philosophy. First, examined by analytical Anglo-Saxon philosophy, the 'question on the conditions of possibility of a true knowledge'. Second, elaborated by Continental philosophy, the question of the status of our present reality, which Foucault famously calls 'an ontology of the present' (20-1). The latter is the one to which he, unsurprisingly, links himself to, and it is on the basis of an analysis of *parrēsia* that Foucault articulates this ontology of the present. *Parrēsia*, then, reinforces elements of his prior studies but points towards future research as well.

This clear schematic division found in the first and last lecture is in marked contrast to Foucault's actual analysis of *parrēsia*, which produces a myriad of analytical distinctions and subdivisions that are neither schematized nor explicitly joined together. The question thus arises: *how* is he doing what he says he does? A discussion Foucault undertakes when addressing an objection from one auditor outlines the way in which he carries out his analyses. The objection is directed at Foucault's elaboration of the concept of *parrēsia*, arguing that the canonical definition of *parrēsia* is simply 'free speech'. Foucault answers:

I would correct this everyday definition of the word *parrēsia* by saying that it is not just freedom of speech; it is frankness, the profession of truth. [...] When we say "speaking freely", this is of course an everyday, ready made expression which does not have a strong meaning. Nevertheless, it remains the case that free speech is a political problem, [...] a technical problem, and also a historical problem. I would say the same is true of *parrēsia*: it has an everyday, current, familiar, and obvious meaning, and then this precise and technical meaning. (188)

In order to find the precise meaning of *parrēsia* Foucault dives into the archive of antique texts, continuously displacing older definitions and identifying nuances in the various meanings of the word. In this way he traces the problem of *parrēsia* through a careful collation, exegesis and juxtaposition of a variety of texts. The tracing is so detailed that reading the lectures is somewhat like reading the texts themselves, with Foucault giving the reader a unique insight into the way he conducts his analyses.

In spite of the different meanings of *parrēsia*, two general moments of *parrēsia* emerge through Foucault's analysis (340). The first moment, based on a reading of classical tragedy and history, is concerned with the political problematization of *parrēsia*. This moment, treated in lectures 3 to 6, is derived from the works on the tragic figure Ion (Euripides) and the political figure Pericles (Thucydides). The other moment, primarily devoted to the work of Plato, is philosophical. It is examined in lectures 6 to 8 and constitutes the Socratic and philosophical problematization of *parrēsia* (353). With this distinction in place, Foucault assembles the various aspects of *parrēsia* in an expositional rather than strictly analytical way.

***Parrēsiatic* moments: The political and the philosophical problematization**

Foucault sketches out how political *parrēsia* is a practice of fundamental importance for the political realm. It revolves around four conditions: it is a part of democracy; it includes a ‘game of ascendancy’; it involves truth-telling; and it is executed with courage (173-5; cf. also 299). The central question for this moment is how truth and truth-telling play out within this realm (89). Truth is not something already given or simply established through truth-telling itself. On the contrary, truth is an unstable affair. It can, however, momentarily be settled through the ‘passions’ circulating *in* and *between* political individuals (119). With such a conception Foucault is hinting to how truth is not exclusively *constituted* by *logos*; truth, rather, is *supported* by *logos*, through a complex mass of social relations, educational apparatuses, and individual desires. Nevertheless, within the domain of politics truth keeps on quivering and does not sediment once and for all.

Consequently, the central problem for politics becomes how truth is to be maintained. A discourse of reason, *logos*, is necessary, but what *kind* of *logos* can establish truth? Who has the ability to conduct this discourse within democracy? And, given that this ability to speak truly may give this person the right to lead others, who should be delegated the responsibility of governing others? Political *parrēsia* cannot solve these problems adequately. There might be ascendancy in democracy, some may actually govern, but the governed always constitutes the reverse side of governing. The governed too may expose a reasonable discourse when speaking up against the powerful – something of interest for the governing:

Those, however, who think differently from what the Assembly in general desires, he [Isocrates] says, really must look for rational and true arguments in order to persuade the Assembly and get it to change its opinion. Consequently, an assembly would do much better listening to those who speak to it against its opinion, than to those who merely repeat what it thinks (191).

Governing and governed are thus intimately related and continually displace the problem of who may speak the truth. Both parties *may* have an answer, and *parrēsia* in its political moment remains therefore a risky affair: something that may not fulfill itself and something that must be guided. This insecure situation opens up a new kind of discourse that enables the rise of a new conception of *parrēsia*: philosophical *parrēsia*. Political *parrēsia* is not replaced with this new conception. On the contrary, they co-exist in a chiasmic relationship. Political *parrēsia* constitutes philosophical *parrēsia*, and the latter modifies the first. Thus, *parrēsia* continues to be a problem for politics, but it is characterized by an instability that philosophy responds to.

According to Foucault, philosophical *parrēsia* also revolves around four conditions: it is still executed with courage but without running a risk; it refers at the same time to general principles and particular circumstances; it is addressed to both the governing and the governed in order to ‘elicit a certain kind of behavior’; and it must ‘confront reality’ (276-9). Philosophical *parrēsia* no longer unambiguously refers to an act of speaking up courageously when a political subject suffers from injustice. The

philosopher no longer ‘takes the risk of reproaching someone powerful for his injustice’ (134). Rather, within the domain of philosophical *parrēsia*, the philosopher *advises* the powerful. This is not done by addressing the powerful directly, but by speaking in general principles to all parties. This generality disrupts the political use of *parrēsia*, which was explicitly directed to the Assembly or the governor. Now *parrēsia* acts, in what Foucault calls a ‘psychagogic’ manner (cf. 334-6), towards both governor and governed. In this setting, the problem of *how* philosophy should be concerned with and related to politics arises, because in order for philosophy to be a constitutional part of politics it must confront political reality. It must not remain merely discourse (*logos*) but turn into action (*ergon*) by confronting the political field with truth-telling (247-55).

Philosophy can only turn into *ergon* when it is listened to and, as a particular discourse of truth that is different from the one in political *parrēsia*, becomes worth listening to. With its apolitical discourse – although politically influential – philosophy speaks truly and deals with the problem of truth within the political. However, the problem of the political, when subject to philosophy, is not politics as such:

What concerns philosophy is not politics, it is not even justice and injustice in the city, but justice and injustice inasmuch as they are committed by someone who is an acting subject; acting as a citizen, or as a subject, or possibly as a sovereign. Philosophy’s question is not the question of politics; it is the question of the subject in politics. (319)

The subject, and the care for itself, thus becomes the central concern for philosophical *parrēsia*. Caring about oneself Foucault writes, ‘consists first and foremost in knowing whether or not one does know what one knows’ (326). With this conception of *parrēsia* Foucault is able to weave together politics, philosophy, subject, truth and caring. With the conjunction of these dimensions the title of the lectures, *Government of Self and Others*, is the underlying unifying leitmotif. In the lectures we do not find a direct or careful unraveling of governmental relations. It comes up occasionally, sometimes discretely in relation to caring. At other times more concretely, as when Foucault demonstrates how the governor may turn to philosophy when handling political issues. Through this engagement with philosophy the governor turns towards himself and guides himself towards his political (and philosophical) task. This turning towards oneself implies the need to exercise a variety of different self-practices in order to carry out the creation of a new way of being that improves political governance – philosophy thus becomes a ‘practice of self on self’ (254).

Politics and philosophy

But philosophy has to tell the truth [...] not about power, but in relation to power, in contact with, in a sort of vis-a-vis or intersection with power. It is not for philosophy to tell power what to do, but it has to exist as truth-telling in a certain relation to political action; nothing more, nothing less. (286)

Philosophy is related to power. It indirectly guides politics by constituting a new mode of being within the political in order for politics to guide power and itself. This is done by questioning rather than lecturing, leaving the political to reflect upon its own actions. Telling the truth, however, can have socio-political consequences for oneself and others, and has the possibility to transform the field of politics. Philosophy as a practice of

truth-telling that addresses the political field, therefore, is a practice that must also reflect upon its own circumstantial *when* and *how*.

From this point of view, the analysis of *parrēsia* and the conditions of truth-telling lay bare not only the historical conditions of Foucault's own practice as an intellectual, but also the conditions and possibility of intellectual truth-concerned activity in general. This in the sense that the lectures show how modern philosophy has come to deal with questions about the conditions of truth and the practical implications of telling the truth in a certain way, at a certain time, and knowing that this truth-telling can have consequences for its own present.

In the final two lectures, Foucault points out more directly that his analysis could be understood as such an uncovering: 'Maybe we could envisage the history of modern European philosophy as a history of practices of veridiction, as a history of practices of *parrēsia*' (349). Elsewhere he calls for historical analyses of 'ontologies of the discourse of truth' (309). Such historical research, Foucault suggests, would ask three questions: (1) What is the mode of being peculiar to this or that discourse, when it introduces a certain specific game of truth into realities? (2) What is the mode of being that this discourse of veridiction confers on the reality it talks about? (3) And what is the mode of being that this discourse of veridiction imposes on the subject who employs it? (309-10).

Foucault presents these as questions *to be posed* by research. Yet it seems quite clear that they are also the research questions he actually indirectly employed in his previous analyses. Following this, Foucault states that all truth should be understood and analyzed as a game of veridiction and every ontology of this as a fiction (310). Hence, what emerges in the lectures is a sense that truth as an object for analysis is essentially conditioned. Understanding ontology as fiction and truth as conditioned, however, does not seem to discredit the idea of truth as such. In Foucault's account, truth becomes highly interesting in another sense, and seeking truth emerges as a question of asking: Why does this obvious experience (madness, sexuality, etc.), which in principle is contingent, insistently present itself as obvious and with particular claims to truth? As a discourse on truth, the role of modern philosophy is to question its own conditions and conditioning effects. The concrete ontology of truth undertaken in the lectures is then not only an ontology of the discourse of truth in antique Greece but also of present philosophy (and politics). The lectures are thus an archeological and genealogical attempt to uncover the provenance of critical thought and the relation to truth that characterizes modernity. Through a genealogy that goes further back than the Kantian question of enlightenment, Foucault therefore emphasizes that 'philosophy through the critique of the *Aufklärung*, became aware of problems which were traditionally problems of *parrēsia* in antiquity' (350).

This first tentative exposition of *parrēsia*, in retrospect, represented the first move towards a more complete elaboration of the concept, which Foucault would present more systematically in a lecture series held at Berkeley in 1983 (Foucault, 2001), and in his final lectures given at the *Collège de France* shortly before his death in 1984 (Foucault, 2011). Following the displacements of the notion of *parrēsia* through his analysis, the *Government of Self and Others* provides an interesting glimpse into the

analytical machinery of Foucault's work. Reading with Foucault is important and valuable, allowing us to gain a concrete idea of how he actually dealt with his material: continuously analyzing, developing and displacing concepts – a way of working in which concepts can hardly be *applied* in other contexts. Thus the central lesson to be learned from the lectures, if we are inspired by his work in our own analytical endeavors, is to ask ourselves: Should we *use* what Foucault says, or *do* what he does?

Conclusively, these interesting aspects of how Foucault undertakes his work are of great relevance to academic disciplines interested in how significant concepts are *analytically developed* rather than *analytically applied*, whether they are Foucauldian or derived from any other source. For organization studies, and for the topic of the management of self-management in particular, important general questions to be posed by research inspired by Foucault could be: Why and how does the experience of self-management insistently present itself as obvious and with particular claims to truth? How does self-management present itself as a managerial, economical and political problem, and how is truth conditioned in these different problematizations? In so far as this research considers itself as a discourse on truth in line with modern philosophy, it will have to question its own conditions and conditioning effects in relation to the experience of the management of self management, and in that sense address its own truth problems.

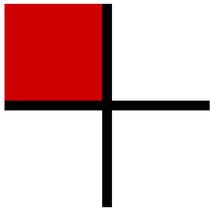
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Amidst the wreckage

Alan Bradshaw

review of:

David Harvey (2010) *The enigma of capital and the crises of capitalism*. London: Profile. (PB: pp. 312, £8.99, ISBN-10: 9781846683084)

Slavoj Žižek (2010) *Living in the end times*. London: Verso. (HB: pp. 432, £20, ISBN-10: 9781844675982)

Analyses of the crises, instability and precariousness of the entire capitalist enterprise are presented in two new works: *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* by David Harvey and *Living in the End Times* by Slavoj Žižek. Both texts provide eschatological treatises of financial collapse and ecological catastrophe while both, in their idiosyncratic styles, are as terrifying as they are comprehensive in terms of portraying the seriousness and violence in which we find ourselves.

Harvey's *Enigma of Capital* is presented, in part, as a response to Elizabeth Windsor's characteristically regal question posed to faculty at the London School of Economics: Why had they failed to see the financial crisis coming? In response, a group of economists admitted to having neglected 'systemic risk,' an economic phenomenon immediately recognisable to Harvey, as ever the devoutly close reader of Marx, as the contradictions of capital accumulation. Hence Harvey sets about the task of analysing geographies of capital accumulation as capital flows through countries, expands exponentially and exerts systemic crises that increase in volume and devastation.

The greatness of Harvey's analysis must reside in his ability to render as blindingly obvious and simple that which is typically overlooked, or never considered at all. For example, he demonstrates that if the notional healthy rate of capital accumulation is maintained at 3% then this effectively commits us to a doubling of the global economy over the next twenty years, a \$300 trillion global economy by 2030 (imagine the consequences for our individual productivity and consumption). A number of urgent realisations arise. First, given this phenomenal growth it is surely nonsense to imagine any meaningful corporate sustainability. Second, given that in the last twenty years we have witnessed the opening of China and the former Soviet Union to capitalism, we might ask from where the next market opening might arise to facilitate additional compound growth. This leads to the third realisation, which serves as the basis of

Harvey's analysis: that when capital encounters obstructions to accumulation it responds by causing often devastating crises and that the more capital at stake, the bigger and more catastrophic each crisis becomes. The final realisation is that this trend cannot continue indefinitely.

Harvey's text becomes an anatomy of crises not *of* capitalism, but rather *for* capitalism, as crisis is re-cast as a means of capital's agency for re-structuring and rationalising markets, economies and countries in accordance with its own insatiable demand for accumulation. An historical overview is presented of decades of crisis after crisis, ranging from property market crashes and oil price hikes during the 1970s, the developing countries debt crises of the 1980s, the Mexican peso rescue of the mid-1990s, the Argentine debt crisis, the dot-com bubble-burst to the current 'sub-prime' market collapse. Harvey identifies that these crises are not temporary errors that could have somehow been avoided or contained, but rather are endemic to and a function of the paradoxical nature of capital accumulation in which each solution creates the circumstances for the next crisis. For example, recent British history is read as a cycle of crises starting with capital encountering the obstacle of trenchantly organised labour, an obstacle dutifully overcome by the Thatcher government. Having disciplined labour and brought about significant reduction in the real value of worker's salaries, a further obstacle arose as there was a corresponding reduction in consumer buying power. The solution to this was to make cash available in the form of generous/reckless credit, which brings us to our current sorry predicament. As Harvey demonstrates, such is the agency of capital that the role of government is to ensure that whenever habitual crises arise, everything will be done to rationalise the country to ensure a prompt return to the 3% 'healthy' growth, no matter the human cost.

If Harvey's book patiently builds arguments, never shying away from repeating core points for the benefit of the reader, Žižek's *Living in the End of Times* is surely its opposite: a crazed and spectacular book that attempts that grand task of reviewing both conceptually and contextually just about everything at stake as the entire capti-parliamentarian structure arrives at its end point. Terrifying and captivating are many of the vivid details provided of ecological catastrophe, social exclusion, biological revolution and profound inequalities within global capitalism, all taking place amidst an ideologically infused climate of passive post-politics and its violent counter-point found in acts of terror. In short, Žižek argues that we are in no less than the latter days of arrival at the apocalyptic zero-point of capitalism itself.

This vast scope of analysis jumps from detailed discussions provided by dozens of philosophical encounters, while films are reviewed, science labs inspected, theology catechized, architecture observed, art studied, Muslim veils pondered, politics probed, geo-politics considered, heavy metal listened to and literature analysed. To be sure, Žižek presents himself at his most heroic and gripped with infinite self-confidence as he sets about the task of writing a book so enormous in scope.

Ingeniously, Žižek finds the perfectly simple structure for such a mammoth undertaking. It is the five stage model of grief that follows, for example, learning that one has a terminal illness, as described by the psychologist Kubler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (viewers of the Simpsons will remember Homer

going through each phase within a thirty-second period). Hence every chapter is structured around a specific phase. Denial, for instance, is reviewed in terms of the ideological liberal utopia presented as an erasure of the background noise of apocalypse. Anger is to be found within the bubbling theologico-political tensions and its manifestation as a series of crises within a multi-centric world. Bargaining appears in a return of the critique of political economy, as though an appeal to a rejuvenated Marxist-fuelled politics might somehow offer us an escape route, or similarly desperate proposals for survival such as the progressive capitalism of Bill Gates (with charity problematised as an act of non-love and aggravation of difficulty, as though for the price of a couple of cappuccinos you can save a child). Depression allows for an exploration of the psychological condition of trauma as socio-political reality imposes multiple versions of external intrusions and the subjective forms of life within a context of devastation and all the libidinal, obscene and kitsch manifestations of the hopeless case. Finally, a discussion of acceptance is presented with re-imagined ideas of communism emerging as the inevitable outcome; a communism predicated upon a total form of immersion into a social body, a dissolution of the critical individualities celebrated within liberal consumerism (albeit with a preservation of what Žižek presents as 'authentic idiosyncrasies') and a commitment to maintaining universal spaces for rational thought.

Of course, although it is a book about apocalypse and severe pessimism, *Life in the End of Times* nonetheless remains saturated with humour, obscenity and mischievousness. Tellingly, Adorno's mastery of the maxim is subjected to Adorno's own critique of Wagner's use of leitmotif, leading Žižek to ask whether Adorno's maxims generate idiotic pleasures for the reader by focusing attention on Adorno himself. Žižek speculates that Adorno's critique of Wagner was an allegorical critique of Adorno's own writing, an exercise of self-relating which I imagine he expects us to infer is, in turn, a pre-emptive critique of Žižek's own spectacular writing style. To be sure, *Living in the End of Times* is a *wunderhaus* for the id with characteristic boisterous humour and a penchant for all things scatological surfacing whenever possible. The restless jumping from topic to topic, the ridiculous allusions, the seductive analyses from such films as *Kung Fu Panda* and *Batman* to the stage craft of Rammstein, the incessant and funny twisting of discourse (for example, the statement 'I love you all' is read by Žižek as implying 'I hate some of you' and a recent atheist poster proclaiming 'There is no God, so don't worry and enjoy life!' led to an Orthodox church counter-poster which proclaimed 'There is a God, so don't worry and enjoy life!' This complementarity prompts Žižek to generate a series of variations: 'Whether there is a God or not, life is shit, so one cannot really enjoy it!', 'There is no God, so everything depends on us and we should worry all the time!' and 'There is a God who watches what we are doing all the time, so we should be anxious and worry continuously!') all serve to cultivate the increasingly popular cult of Žižek and will no doubt lead detractors to dismiss *Living in the End of Times* as a grandstanding act of affectation. But there is no denying the pay-off for the reader in terms of the richness of the theoretical analysis and the urgency of the questions raised by Žižek. In the mind of this reader, the quality of writing should not be read as masking a lack of substance, but as wonderful writing in its own right. Like Harvey's *Enigma of Capital*, this is an important intervention at a time of theoretical possibility and profound paradigm shift.

Taken together, both texts provide masterful critiques and explanations of why the here and now is not sustainable, forcing attention to the violent agency of capital and its perverse fetishes and habitual catastrophes. These are two books that jolt us awake and, for this reason, are to be heartily recommended.

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