UNBOSS!

On paradox, passion, and power in decentralized work

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The University of St. Gallen, School of Management, Economics, Law, Social Sciences and International Affairs hereby consents to the printing of the present dissertation, without hereby expressing any opinion on the views herein expressed.

St. Gallen, May 20, 2019

The President:

Prof. Dr. Thomas Bieger

Ring the bells that still can ring,
forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack, a crack in
everything, that's how the light
gets in.

— Leonard Cohen
Anthem, The Future, 1992

For Isabell

Who sensed this opening first.

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Sydney, July 2018   Bernhard Resch

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ABSTRACT

By examining a management trend that promotes the decentralization of authoritative hierarchies, this study comprises an exploration of the paradox, passion, and power in 'bossless' organizing. In this dissertation, I show how discourses and everyday practices collude to produce affective mechanisms of control, and discuss their contradictory impacts. Departing from a discursive investigation that is based on the analysis of qualitative interviews, observational event visits, and practitioner-oriented management literature, the empirical research leads into a praxiographic field study to inquire into the practical adaptation of the discursive claims.

I present a three-part analysis of the aftermath of 'unbossing' and its power implications on a societal, organizational, and relational level. *First*, the management trend is divided into four discursive articulations, their different signifying strategies, and privileged subject positions. In order to assess the broader social relevance of these articulations, I discuss their conditions of production, circulation, and reception against the sociological framework of the 'spirit of capitalism.' *Secondly*, I conduct a psychoanalytically inspired, discursive reading of exuberant promises around a 'hierarchy-less flatland.' The analysis illustrates how excessive claims evoke three subconscious fantasies and delineates the development of unequal power relations if people become too passionately involved in these projections of ideal futures. *Thirdly*, I report on a praxiographic case study of a bossless organization and its everyday relational practices. I find an ambiguous affectivity that kept turning these affirmative practices around, and discuss a precarious 'ethico-politics of incompleteness,' the aim of which is to mitigate adverse effects.

Methodologically, I draw from onto-epistemological studies of discourse, practice, and affect. I acknowledge their contingent entanglement and performative enactment in multiple becomings of worlds. With 'post-foundational discourse analysis,' 'practice-based studies,' and '*agencement*', I therefore mobilize conceptual frameworks that are situated between socio-constructionist and neo-materialist assumptions. By employing different theoretical angles and sources for data creation, I was able to trace reciprocal effects between large socio-economic and small everyday phenomena.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In der vorliegenden Dissertation wird ein Managementtrend untersucht, der die Abschaffung autoritativer Hierarchien in Unternehmen propagiert. Der Fokus der Arbeit liegt auf Paradoxien, Leidenschaft und Macht in dezentralen Organisationen. Es wird aufgezeigt, wie Diskurse und Alltagspraktiken in widersprüchlichen affektiven Kontrollmechanismen zusammenspielen. Ausgehend von einer diskursiven Untersuchung, die auf der Analyse von qualitativen Interviews, beobachtenden Eventbesuchen und der Auswertung praxisorientierter Managementliteratur basiert, mündet die Arbeit in einer praxiographischen Feldstudie, in der die praktische Adaption der diskursiven Ansprüche diskutiert wird.

Dem Managementtrend und seinen machtpolitischen Implikationen auf gesellschaftlicher, organisationaler und relationaler Ebene folgt eine dreiteilige Analyse. Zunächst nimmt die Arbeit eine Anatomie des Diskurses vor. Es werden vier Artikulationen, deren unterschiedliche Signifikationsstrategien und privilegierte Subjektpositionen theoretisch aufgearbeitet. Um die breitere gesellschaftliche Relevanz dieser Artikulationen zu beurteilen, werden in dieser Studie deren Produktion, Zirkulation und Rezeption vor dem Hintergrund des soziologischen Rahmens vom ‚(neuen) Geist des Kapitalismus' analysiert. Im zweiten Teil der Analyse wird eine psychoanalytisch inspirierte diskursive Anamnese überschwänglicher Versprechen hinsichtlich eines hierarchielosen Wunderlandes vorgenommen. Anhand dieser Analyse wird veranschaulicht, wie diese exzessiven Visionen drei unbewusste Phantasien hervorrufen. Zudem wird die Entwicklung ungleicher Machtverhältnisse beschrieben, wenn sich Menschen zu leidenschaftlich in diese Projektionen einer idealen Zukunft involvieren. Der dritte Teil der Analyse umfasst eine praxiographische Feldstudie einer flachen Organisation und ihrer alltäglichen Beziehungspraktiken. Die Auswertung weist auf eine mehrdeutige Affektivität hin, die diese affirmativen Praktiken immer wieder in ihr Gegenteil verkehrt. Des Weiteren wird eine prekäre ‚Ethikopolitik des Unvollständig-Seins' diskutiert, die negative Auswirkungen abschwächen will.

Methodologisch wird in dieser Arbeit von onto-epistemologischen Ansätzen zu Diskurs, Praxis und Affekt ausgegangen. Es werden deren kontingente Verschränkung und performative Seinswerdung zu multiplen Lebenswelten postuliert. Anhand einer ‚post-fundamentalistischen Diskursanalyse' sowie Konzepten aus Praxis- und Affekttheorie wird in dieser Dissertation ein konzeptionelles Rahmenwerk zwischen sozial-konstruktivistischen und neo-materialistischen Annahmen mobilisiert. Durch die Verwendung verschiedener theoretischer Blickwinkel und Quellen der Datenerstellung gelingt es in dieser Studie, Wechselwirkungen zwischen ‚großen' sozioökonomischen und ‚kleinen' Alltagsphänomenen aufzuspüren.

PREFACE

Even if one admits that when one starts, one has already arrived in the middle of a specific and localized life, even if it sounds good to start by saying there is no start, we simultaneously all long for such a fresh start, for a space where new possibilities arise and arrive. When a child is born, we in some sense hope it can have its own chance, even if life has taught us adults the script of 'different life, same story'.

— Chris Steyaert,
Imaginative Geographies, 2002

Hierarchies are strange beasts. These ancients have been around me all my life. Sometimes they have tried to hide their savage roots, impalpably sneaking around on velvet paws. At other moments, I have felt their looming shadow, assessing, numbering, standardizing, benchmarking, judging, ostentatiously breathing behind my back. A few of them could not have cared less about me knocking on their studded oak doors. Some complacently blocked my road. Still, others reached out in a caring embrace, introducing me to new worlds, accompanying me along steep paths. However, I kept wondering if their protective grip would leave a bruise and was never too sure that their investment in me would be worth the conformance. We have been through a lot, but we never made friends.

Maybe I am holding onto some disenchantment, a childish grudge against absent role models or a religion that put me off with its deadening rites. I vividly remember a teacher who tried to break my indifference with her talk-and-chalk teaching by publicly shaming me at the blackboard. "The only place, where you would fit in is in a tree nursery," her piercingly distressed voice shrieked. Oh, hierarchy, why have you tried your old ways with me? If you had only seen me, enthused me, seized me. Maybe I would be yours. Now, I have ventured too far. I have witnessed your ignorant, machinic cold. My supervisor, the postman, routinely opened his third can of beer at six in the morning with

a loud and clear whizz. Main thing: he delivered. Or the money transporters, each of them holding dear a story of an aspiring career that ended due to some mishap or improvidence. Now they were stuck, resources of a global security provider that had no interest in their humanity. On yet another occasion, you insulted my wits. Among others, I was hired for pennies, rented labor to work under the glossy tent of an artistic performance multinational. And you had the guts to offer us ludicrous merchandize incentives instead of a fair share.

You taught me that climbing you ranks required self-assured rule-bending, sales pitches that shine, and the cunning association with winning coalitions of power players. Apparently, I never dared to push my ideas by challenging social norms, but I also did not particularly like what I saw on the upper floor. In the newsroom of a public broadcaster, I learned that senior staff could well end up in a prestigious glass cubicle, but without a role, because the last parliamentary election had swept away their political base. In agency work, on one day I could meet with executives, ambassadors, and keynote speakers in fancy restaurants, while I would spend the next with the wife of my boss waiting for a doctor. No, I would not carry ominous suitcases to reach my goals. I would not arrange meetings that had no purpose other than showing off who weighs more. But I have to admit you almost got me once. I was mesmerized by your capacity to conjure up a visionary organization with dream-dancer-like words. Disappointingly, the enchanting aesthetics crumbled as the 'participative stimulation arena' turned into a hamster wheel of meticulous micromanagement and overwork.

I am well aware that I will never be able to cast off the creature. Humans are social animals, entangled with many pasts and futures. Organizing inevitably entails passion, paradox, and power. Task-related hierarchies, and those emerging from engagement, expertise, and social networks are necessary, even desirable. But I am asking, if we can deconstruct hierarchy's indifferent, stratified, patriarchal, and narcissistic nature, can we not also rebuild it in a humane, sustainable, and reflective shape? How to love the beast?

1 INTRODUCTION

If every beginning is already inextricably entangled with what has been going on before and with the things yet to come, then there is no start. The outset of a story is always already an in-between. However, there are moments, happenings that open up new horizons, which affect us and linger, and instances in which things suddenly connect. What seems relevant is that we reconstruct our lived experiences in retrospective attempts to narrate our trajectories. Hence, I will start to reassemble and represent the story of the research process leading to this dissertation by jumping right into the middle. I will share three glimpses from the field that shaped the course of this project.

> I was attending a brown bag lunch in a social entrepreneurial coworking space at which the comprehensive self-management system 'holacracy' (Robertson, 2015) was being introduced. It was set in 'the garage,' a unit in a long row of formerly industrial warehouses, between shabby and chic. I spotted a kitchen. People were preparing their homemade meals, fetching drinks on a pay-by-yourself basis. The space had filled up by now. Chairs were being moved. The participants arranged themselves in two rows around a big white table and in a small gallery in the back. I recognized a metallic smell in the air that was now coalescing with all kinds of food odors. Next to me, a female organizational design consultant and a guy from a big telecom provider were exchanging some words. "We are crazy people and love to try crazy things," he said, and emphasized that they had over 60 internal coaches working with teams on design thinking and related issues. A brief round of introductions revealed an audience comprised of skeptical hipsters and entrepreneurs, curious corporate change agents, and consultants who were sick of turning the small screws. Then the speaker started to explain: "I'm working with a group of people who assist in switching to new forms of organization." To him, holacracy was unique because it was underpinned by the perception of humans as tension sensors. "Therefore, it enables change from anywhere in the organization," he stressed. As he continued to talk, a question was raised from the gallery, a chap speaking with a Spanish accent: "I'm working in the financial industry; this concept sounds too idealistic. How would you get investors if you employ holacracy?" The speaker replied that holacracy established new values, and therefore, investors would have to learn to see the world differently. More critical questions came up: "When you shine a light on some parts of an organization, others get inevitably darkened. What is holacracy blacking out?" "That's a tough question; we don't know yet."

Another participant in the front wanted to know: "Do you really get rid of politics with holacracy?" By now, the body language of the speaker had tightened up. With folded arms and slightly wet eyes, he simply replied, "Yes." (Vignette, October 2015)

His monosyllabic answer instantly curbed further critical discussion. He had probably expected to give a fleet-footed talk, but now he had been plunged into a defensive routine by the unexpected headwind that his visionary outline encountered. However, I argue that there is more to it. The management trend on 'bossless work' under scrutiny in this dissertation started out with some management gurus popularizing a handful of case studies (Carney and Getz, 2009; Hamel, 2011; 2012). These organizations experimented with abolishing their management layer and adopted various approaches to having their employees decide upon strategies, projects, salaries, procurements, and hires. A couple of years later (by which time I had started working on my Ph.D.), Frederic Laloux's *Reinventing Organizations* (2014) turned into a global bestseller, spreading enthusiasm for 'self-organized work' across national borders. Wherever I went – to corporate boardrooms, entrepreneurial coworking spaces, tech ventures, alternative social movements, future-of-work events, and political dialogues – people kept talking about its inspirational force. Laloux expanded the canon of case studies and distilled commonalities between bossless organizations, but he also introduced new age spirituality into the discourse. His stage-based and color-schemed model of human development (Wilber, 1996) augured the rise of 'teal' or 'next stage organizations,' where people could seek their life's purpose in the absence of hierarchies, becoming whole, more mindful and less ego-driven. As people grew increasingly passionate about self-organized work, I observed what I called 'sublime teal arrogance.' Encountering difficult questions, the speaker in the above vignette had seemingly leaned back, implying: "Well you cannot understand anyway since you have not reached teal consciousness." The more ardent I saw people become, the more ideologically they argued within self-referential systems, while being prone to adopting a missionary demeanor.

I kept myself asking, why people were so passionate about bossless work. This curiosity led to the analyses in chapters 5.1 and 5.2. In the former, I will distinguish four discursive strands: (1) *self-organizing systems*, (2) *networked commons*, (3) *self-managed disruption*, and (4) *democratizing work*. I will dissect their argumentative

strategies to make sense of the various vocabularies and repertoires of knowledge that were activated in this domain. In the latter section, a psychosocial reading (Kenny and Fotaki, 2014) will underscore how the discourse became appealing because it established forums to share grief over the indignations and disappointments suffered in contemporary work organizations. I will examine how unrealizable discursive promises triggered certain subconscious fantasies that affectively drew people into the articulations. Lacanian psychoanalytic thought (Arnaud and Vidaillet, 2018) will help facilitate understanding of how people who seek imaginary bossless futures are tempted to pursue enjoyment (and suffering) excessively in *growth*, *wholeness*, and *belonging*. I will argue that these passions leave them vulnerable to mutually exploitative and dominating relationships at work. I will discuss how new forms of psychosocial organizational control interact with established modes of soft power to keep unbossed organizations in check.

Another decisive moment on this research journey occurred during an elitist gathering of politicians, researchers, and business leaders in the Austrian Alps. I had been invited to record an interview with the CEO of a conglomerate of medical businesses, who had introduced participative facilitation techniques and flat organizing almost two decades before. He was part of a group of facilitators who designed the symposium more interactively by introducing new event formats that went beyond one-way communication in keynotes and panels. As we sat down for a coffee on a bench in front of a rustic hotel overlooking a picturesque Alpine panorama, he told me the following story:

> "We had an all-staff meeting. I can't even remember what the problem was, but I really didn't know the answer. We did a world café; everybody weighed in, and we found a good solution I was happy with because I didn't have an answer. After the meeting two of our staff people, who I always knew were going along – or I suspected they were just kind of going along, but really probably didn't believe in what we were doing – came up to my office and knocked on the door: 'Could we talk to you?' 'Of course.' They came in, and they were shaking. Just the fact that they were shaking, given that we'd been working like this for years…! And they proceeded to let me know: 'That meeting was disgraceful. You're the CEO. You should know the solution to those problems. You should be able to take care of those things. That was disgusting.' And I thought, 'Oh my God, how should I respond to this?' And so, I said to them: [asks me to shake his hand] 'Welcome

to the organization!' And they looked at me, and I said: 'The two of you have been wanting to tell me off forever. You finally did it. You are now a participant. You are no longer a bystander. Welcome to the organization.'"

The participatory problem-solving process appalled the two men in this account. In their view, a leader should not admit that he does not know the solution to a given problem, and never publicly ask his employees for help. Even though he had routinely neglected his perceived duties as a confident planner and executor, they had been unable to express their feelings of 'disgrace' and 'disgust' for years. For them, it probably needed an event of outraging humiliation to band together and confront their boss about his behavior. The fact that their bodies were shaking in front of the (de-authorized) authority shows how deeply subordination to hierarchy is ingrained in the workplace. It seems equally difficult for managers to step down from their absolute position and to facilitate multiple centers of decision-making. This episode epitomizes an opinion that has been expressed in numerous conversations. My interview partners did not see that the biggest obstacle to flat organizing was participative methods or governance structures, but deep-seated and subconscious patterns: *"I see the limits to self-organization in the question of culture, values, and worldviews,"* as an expert in public participation framed it. To me, this reference to organizational culture and individual values seemed vague. People referred to closer emotional bonds, the importance of trust, and the willingness to process conflicts, while they warned against a naïve belief in flat hierarchies. Nevertheless, my research participants could not pinpoint a functioning culture for bossless work, although some of them were experimenting with it every day.

This friction led to the decision to complement my discourse analysis with a praxiographic field study of a bossless organization. Through the observation of everyday interactions, I wanted to find out how the management trend was translated into a real-life setting and if I, as an outsider, would be able to discern cultural specificities that had become normal and impossible for the participants to grasp. In chapter 5.3, I will illustrate the findings of this participant observation by describing the New Zealand-based social entrepreneurial freelancer network 'Enspiral.' This will elucidate how their affirmative 'relational practices' (Steyaert and Van Looy, 2010) were continuously turned around in the face of forceful positive and negative affectivity. An ambiguous affective resonance between belonging and guilt became the primary source of control, leading to power inequalities and burnout. To keep up the struggle

against these detrimental effects, people established an ethico-political stance that appreciated incompleteness, incoherence, and impermanence. As decision-making had been moved from a strategic center to multiple teams, the managerial logic of planning and control that the two employees in the above story palpably missed was replaced by the primacy of collective responsiveness. The case study findings show how the organization has developed through many small experiments, in the course of which people practiced their ability to exchange sensual perceptions, vulnerabilities, and emotions as valuable sources of information. I will argue that this *'ethico-politics of incompleteness'* led to the mutual experience of Otherness, an organizational culture maintained through continuous infusions of transgression and disorder. The participants have built an intimate togetherness that is constituted by the interplay between sameness and difference.

The case study is also a bridge to an interesting phenomenon and social milieu that is fueled by the discourse around bossless work: the emergence of *'collective freelancing.'* A final glimpse of the field in this introduction opens a window to Enspiral's experimentation with so-called 'pods,' entrepreneurial work-families, and their radical vision of networked production without central management, employment relations, and traditional firms.

> Two dozen people had come together in a coworking space to join a peer-learning/info session about pods. Upon entering the office, I spotted do-it-yourself bicycle stands made from palettes. Plants were hanging from all possible and impossible anchorings. The coworking zone itself was dotted with adjustable high tables that enabled ergonomically varied working positions and a soundproof telephone booth. The walls communicated: yoga leaflets, inspirational quotations, podcast recommendations, and Polaroid pictures of people. The group formed a circle in one of the meeting rooms. I got into a conversation with my seat-neighbor, asking him about the visionary potential for pods as a new organizational form that might solve many problems, from income inequality to social atomization. "I'm not interested in ideas. Ideas change nothing," he replied. "They have to live. I'm interested in doing and creating," and countered by asking if I as a researcher might not be prone to losing myself in lofty realms of ideas. The facilitator saved me from answering. After a round of introductions, he asked people to hand-signal 'fist-to-five' their interest in possible topics: (1) His theory about pods, (2) questions 'pop-corn style' or a (3) history of pods. Number 2 succeeded. Everybody was encouraged to throw

questions into the room as they popped up. "What is a pod," someone asked. Several replies yielded the following: "A small company that never intends to get big in terms of people." "Its core purpose is to serve the human beings in it." "A company that collectively pools income to create a base-level income for everyone." "It gives space to each member to work on stuff that is important to them." "Everybody is a director, and it is a long-term project, a professional family." In addition, they all agreed that interdependence between pods was the 'killer principle.' Creating a commons between pods would allow shifting around projects, leads, and advice. Then, they discussed the learning that followed the first attempts at creating 'inter-pod products' in lean, shared companies that were contracting a network of pods to produce things. Finally, one participant explained her motivation for joining such a 'mutually supportive intentional professional family,' as she framed it: "I served a startup for the past five years. I wanted a company that served me." (Vignette, July 2017)

The increasing formation of freelancer cooperatives and entrepreneurial collectives signifies new forms of association in a milieu of new urban spaces (Gandini, 2015). An emerging class of independent contractors and enterprising individuals is starting to address issues of precarity and social atomization. In looking beyond the jubilant grand narrative of entrepreneurship and creativity as driving forces for urban economic development (Steyaert and Beyes, 2009), they are experimenting with new forms of sociality between the individual and mass society (Farias, 2017a). This movement of self-asserted 'neo-tribes' attempts to fuse the logic of mutualism, open source, and collective ownership with market-based profit generation. Their vision of networked value chains in a community of work-families is a mode of production without employment relations, primarily contracting groups instead of individuals. The central tension arising from this constellation is thus how to integrate commons and market-based concerns. Will they be able to accommodate paid and unpaid labor, and balance the paradoxical demands for stable livelihoods and equitable work lives with the profit-seeking motif?

In the analysis in subchapter 5.1, I will show how two of the articulations of the 'unbossing' trend are discursively sustaining this phenomenon, which I will frame as *'collective freelancing.'* I will then classify emerging organizational forms and work relationships in this context, and discuss them as a renewed form of critique in the context of Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) 'new spirit of capitalism.' At the same time, I will describe how the management trend facilitated the assimilation of the critics into

the capitalist spirit. I will outline how the remaining two articulations contributed to the conceptualization of a *'decentralized firm'* and how its advocates intended to enthuse employees with this ideal-type model. Following the abolishment of the management layer, they promised more self-directed, authentic, and team-oriented co-creation at work. However, as issues of ownership and the prerogatives of employability (Cremin, 2010) were not questioned, I will argue that the decentralized firm fuses well with contemporary images of conscious, mindful, and sustainable corporations (Costea, Crump, and Amiridis, 2008; Islam, Holm, Karjalainen, 2017; Wright and Nyberg, 2017).

The overall aim of this study is to take a critical and multi-perspective look at the management trend around bossless work. To answer the question of how power is reorganized in unbossed organizations, I pull together three sources of data generation (interviews, management books, and participant observation). By enlarging the focus, in the analysis, I can draw connections between societal, organizational, and relational repercussions of the trend. I will show how the discourse is mobilized, both in the service of a post-capitalist critique and for the reinvigoration of capitalist corporations. Both strands are proposed as a means of redesigning the relationship between autonomy and collectivity at work. However, both also result in a struggle with the same paradoxes: between horizontal power structures and charismatic movement building (Costas and Taheri, 2012); between self-realization in collaborative creation and the care for individual limits (Ekman, 2013b); between outcome control and responsive tolerance of ambiguity (Reedy, 2014). In being attentive to these paradoxes and gaps, I will identify the passions to grow, to become whole, and to belong as affective driving forces of power in flat organizing. The case study, set in the critical environment of collective freelancing, will exemplify how the desire to belong and the fear of not contributing enough to the organization function as omnipresent forces of mutual control. The affective resonance resulted in a zealous culture of personal over-investment, where the belief in flat power relations and the non-recognition of care work led to unspoken hierarchies and the drain of female leadership.

Conceptually, the dissertation is rooted in process organization studies (Helin, Hernes, and Hjorth, 2014; Nayak and Chia, 2011; Steyaert, 2007). In terms of this perspective, a social theory is proposed that does not account for distinct entities interacting with one

another, but rather for relational happenings. The theoretical leap from 'being' to 'becoming' implies that every phenomenon is generated within networks of interaction. There are no stable entities, but only events of entangled interrelations mutually constituting each other in momentary becomings. For the discursive examination, I utilize post-foundational discourse analysis (Cederström and Spicer, 2014; Marttila, 2015), while the case study is informed by a framework between theories of practice and affect (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Gherardi, 2017; Müller and Schurr, 2016). The conceptual background proposes an onto-epistemology (Barad, 2007), a social world with contingent foundations between social-constructionist and neo-materialist assumptions, where human and non-human actors equally assume agency. It is sensitive to how hegemonic constellations are negotiated between materialities, affects, and human bodies. Together they perform discourses and practices that make our world(s) intelligible. Within this perspective of a relational reality, the researcher is inextricably interwoven with the becoming of the phenomenon and playing an active part in the process. Thus, methodologically I take an 'ethico-political' stance (Willmott, 2005), in terms of which I seek to be reflective about the conditions of its production and about my own entanglement in the processes of world making. In this vein, data for this research was not 'collected' but 'created' in a participative way, with the aim of producing emancipatory insights into how to change present onto-epistemological unfoldings.

This study is structured as follows. *First*, I problematize the theme by contextualizing the event history of the current management trend with a historical outline of attempts at organizing without a ranked cadre of managers. I then relate these movements to conceptualizations of hierarchy in organization studies and beyond. *Second*, I introduce process philosophy as the meta-theoretical perspective of this dissertation and discuss its implications for theorizing. *Third*, I unfurl the process of data generation and analysis. I reflect on my involvement as a researcher and participant in the management trend and connect this to methodological considerations. *Fourth*, I proceed to the core of my thesis – the empirical chapter, which is organized into three parts: a societal, organizational, and relational take on unbossing. For reasons of clarity, each of the three subchapters includes a thematic literature review and a description of a concrete conceptual framework, against which I discuss the findings. *Fifth*, in concluding, I will compare the results across the three levels of analysis and highlight contributions to

organizational literature. *Finally*, an epilogue will help me to explore emancipatory hierarchical futures within Rancière's aesthetic conception of the Political.

2 PROBLEMATIZATION

I start this chapter by compiling an event history of the management trend around bossless work. I will discuss the major actors, publications, and movements that I have observed to create a template for the analysis of the discursive articulations. Thereby, I will also activate the context in which they are unfolded for the reader. I will then situate the trend in relation to preceding efforts to effect more horizontal organizing. The historical outline will shed light on the relationship between the present discourse and earlier attempts, and thereby prepare the ground for the assessment of its critical potential. In the final subsection, I will take a closer look at the question of hierarchy. Is a tendency to oligarchy indeed an 'iron law' of organizing, as the literature suggests, and what are the assets and drawbacks of these ranked, authoritative systems? In the search for answers, I turn to recent anthropological discoveries. I will show how the organizational experience of our forebears might provide some surprising insights into our current problems.

2.1 The story of a management trend

In 2011, popular management thinker Gary Hamel (2011) published a piece about the Morning Star Corporation, titled "first let's fire all the managers," in the *Harvard Business Review*. It was the onset of what would subsequently become a management frenzy. Moreover, it was also an important piece of the puzzle that inspired this Ph.D. project. In what follows, I will provide an overview of the most important cases, publications, and movements that contributed to the bossless work trend. In this process, the timeline of events in figure 1 provides a condensed overview. Morning Star is a tomato processing company based in California. It has been operating without managers, job titles, or promotions since the 1980s. The employees jointly decide on their job profiles, salaries, procurements, and new hires. "If such a 'boring' industrial firm can successfully operate without management hierarchies," I thought to myself, "then, I need to know how that works on a day-to-day basis." The idea stuck.
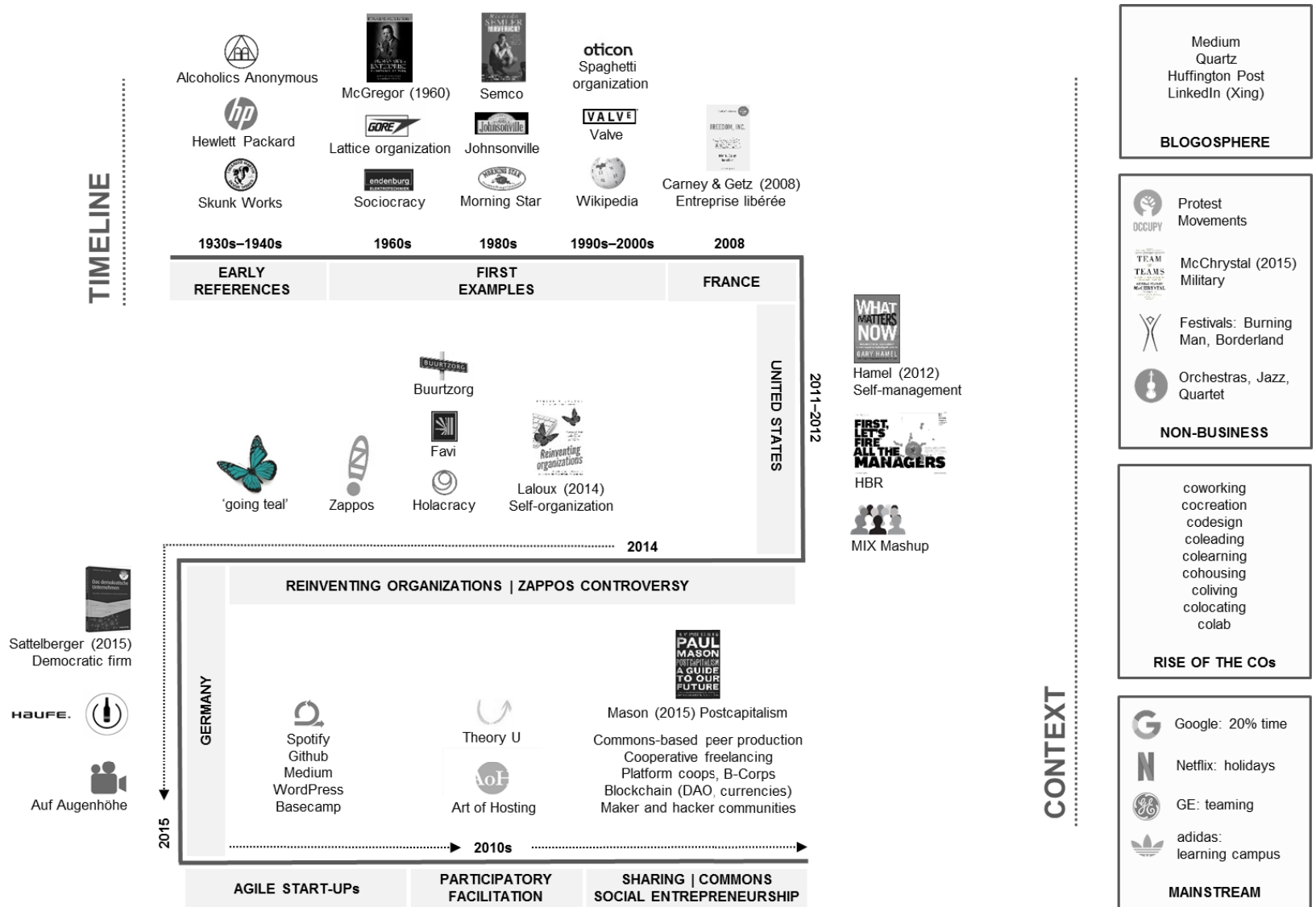
Figure 1: Timeline of events in the management trend of bossless work

Hamel continued to popularize case studies of what he called 'self-managed' organizations (Hamel, 2012). He built a platform called 'Management Innovation Exchange' that comprised online case studies, blog posts, and forums. It served as a vehicle to promote conferences with TED-style talks and awards. As the impact of the popular discourse expanded to blogging platforms, such as Medium, Quartz, Huffington Post, and LinkedIn, the canon of case studies grew as well. It includes the producer of water and windproof fabrics W.L. Gore and Associates (Manz, Shipper, and Stewart, 2009), computer-game designer Valve (Varoufakis, 2012), Johnsonville Sausage (Roberts, 1993), the Brazilian Semco (Siehl, Killian, and Perrrez, 1999), and the Danish hearing aid producer Oticon (Døjbak and Søndergaard, 2004). In earlier publications (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Semler, 1995), members of these organizations had already tried to popularize their efforts, while the success of decentralized organizations such as Wikipedia, Youtube, and Linux led to the notion of 'leaderless organizations' (Brafman and Beckstrom, 2006).

In the German-speaking realm, Thomas Sattelberger, a former board member of Deutsche Telekom, had started – similarly to Hamel in 2011 – popularizing the concept of 'corporate democracy.' Since then, the topic headed numerous conferences, won the German 'management book of the year' title (Sattelberger, Boes, and Welpe, 2015), and contributed to a fashionable movement under the umbrella of 'new work.' It found its expression in documentaries (*'Auf Augenhöhe'*), the 'New Work Award' presented by Xing (the German equivalent of LinkedIn), as well as in a plethora of online forums, events, and publications (e.g., Arnold, 2016; Zeuch, 2015). In France, *Freedom, Inc.* (Carney and Getz, 2009) triggered a wave of inspiration and subsequently, a new organizational form: the '*entreprise libérée.*' In their introduction, the authors refer to the management book *The Human Side of Enterprise* by Douglas McGregor (McGregor and Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 2006), originally published in 1960, that had also inspired the founder of Morning Star to develop a system of self-management. McGregor distinguished between two approaches to leading a company – the theories 'X' and 'Y.' The first one centers on the idea of human beings disliking and avoiding work. Accordingly, they have to be controlled and coerced into work, because they shy away from responsibility and rate security above all. By contrast, the latter's worldview is that if people are committed to their work, then their efforts are perceived to be as natural as

sleeping or playing. In terms of this perspective, humans actively seek responsibility and are rewarded with self-actualization.

In 2015, the bossless work trend climaxed, because the U.S. and international media frequently featured heated discussions regarding Zappos (see Gelles, 2015; Hodge, 2015), an online shoe retailer owned by Amazon, and its experiment with 'holacracy' (Robertson, 2015). Holacracy is a complex system of distributed authority that transforms traditional organization charts into a web of interrelating circles. The term derives from Arthur Koestler's 'holon,' a self-regulating unit that simultaneously functions as an autonomous whole and dependent part – a whole that is part of another whole. In practice, every member would self-reliantly adopt several changing roles instead of assuming job titles and participate in structured consent decision-making processes. Tony Hsieh, the controversial founder of the company (and by then the holacratic 'lead link'), who had previously been known for trying to revitalize downtown Las Vegas with a container and trailer park complex, issued an ultimatum to his 1,500 employees: Either they would support the company's radical switch to holacracy or take a severance package and leave. Throughout 2015, 18% of Zappos' staff took the buyout. The remaining employees received a copy of *Reinventing Organizations* (Laloux, 2014) – the book that arguably exerted the most significant influence on the discourse. Its merit was that the author had compiled the hitherto most comprehensive overview of 'self-organized' companies, comparing their structures and processes. Its appeal was to connect it to Wilber's 'integral theory' (1996), a stage theory of organizational and individual development. The new 'evolutionary stage' associated with bossless work featured the color 'teal.' *Reinventing Organizations* inspired an enthusiastic community. Under the slogan 'going teal,' they were interested in spiritual growth and mindfulness within purposeful 'next stage organizations.' It fused well with the movement around authentic, transformative, and servant leadership (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2016; Costas and Taheri, 2012), as well as 'participatory facilitation techniques' such as 'Theory U' (Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013) or 'Art of Hosting.' Scharmer's Massachusetts Institute of Technology-based Massive Open Online Course 'MITx U.Lab: Transforming Business, Society, and Self' alone attracted 28,000 registered participants in early 2015.

Against this background, people in more politically minded milieus embraced the promise of flat organizing to build their vision of a sharing economy. They aimed to expand the model of commons-based peer-production (Benkler, 2006) from open source software development to material fabrication. This 'post-capitalist' movement (Mason, 2015; Srnicek and Williams, 2015) sought to nurture communal economic spaces over and above profit-oriented ones, with the former eventually superseding the latter. This fusion of ideas around unbossed and decentralized organizing thrived, particularly in maker and hacker communities. Their visions included open design communities and 'desktop manufacturing' with the help of 3D printing and CNC cutting devices, but also the rebirth of crafts through online tutorials and marketplaces. To counter the emerging power of corporate platforms, this movement emphasized the need for platform cooperatives (Scholz and Schneider, 2016) that would ultimately lead to fully decentralized autonomous organizations enabled by blockchain technology (Cohen, 2017). These developments were nested within the wider cosmos of 'the rise of the co's' – 'coworking,' 'cocreation,' 'colearning' or 'coliving' – signifying a desire to live and work more collectively and collaboratively amidst the increasingly precarious individualization of lifestyles, careers, and risks.

The management trend was further fueled by a new breed of Silicon Valley startups, such as Github, Medium, and Basecamp, which experimented with flat organizational structures. Their intention was to scale-up to medium-sized enterprises, while not sacrificing their founder-led entrepreneurial spirit. In the broader context of the discourse, more established multinationals and their innovation strategies were frequently quoted. Among them were Google and its '20% time' (employees were encouraged to work on passion projects every Friday); Netflix allowing its employees to decide upon their holidays autonomously; General Electric and its 'teaming' approach (Edmondson and Harvey, 2017), cutting out middle management in factories; and corporate innovation campuses such as the one at Adidas. At the same time, the talk of bossless work collided with partially overlapping discourses around 'B Corps' (e.g., Ben & Jerry's, Etsy, or Patagonia) and 'deliberately developmental organizations' (Kegan and Lahey, 2016). While the former focused on integrating social, environmental, and business values, the latter strived to build a culture that cherished disclosure of vulnerability between employees as a vehicle for personal growth. In addition, analogies were drawn to various societal sectors. On the political level, leaderless protest

movements such as Occupy or the Spanish *Indignadas* served as an example for a new generation that, as was argued, would refuse to accept traditional stratified hierarchies. As proponents contended, even the military, which was facing unconventional warfare and technological innovation, was beginning to move to self-organizing structures, forming a 'team of teams' (McChrystal, Collins, Silverman, and Fussell, 2015). Others pointed to the flat organization of festivals, such as *Burning Man*, orchestras with elected (or without) conductors or improvisations between jazz musicians and classical quartets.

Advocates of this fashionable unbossing movement frequently emphasized that they were engaged in a 'new phenomenon.' By speaking in terms of 'paradigm change,' 'new operating systems,' and 'technological disruption,' they negated the notion that the question of equal power relations in organizations had been present since the early days of industrialization. In the following section, I will review some major attempts to organize work relationships horizontally.

2.2 Histories of decentralized organizing

The management trend around bossless work can be seen as the latest wave in a series of efforts to develop horizontally managed organizations. In this section, I will trace the diverse histories of movements that wanted to give workers a voice and a share in their labor process (for an overview, see figure 2). These range from comprehensive demands for industrial and economic democracy at the turn of the century to the human relations movement as well as social democratic and socialist experiments after the Second World War, up to the concurrent birth of alternative organizations and human resource inspired workplace participation in the post-Fordist era.
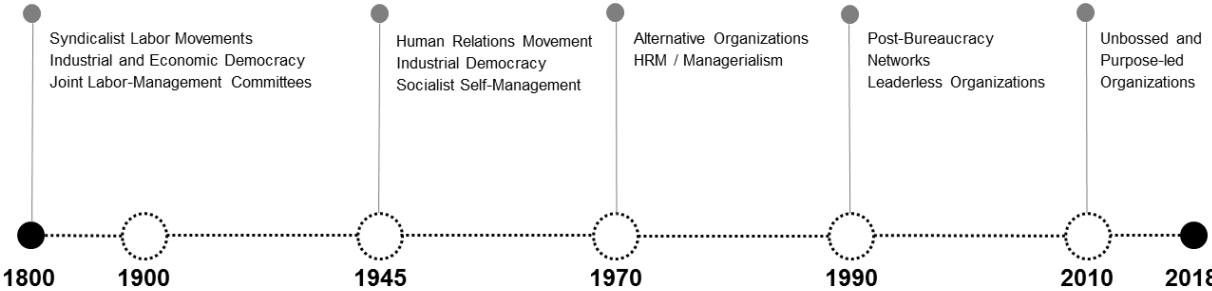
Figure 2: Historical waves of horizontal organizing

Deutsch (2005) sees the British socialist and syndicalist labor movements of the 1800s and the international radical trade union movements of the early 1900s as the inception of worker participation. At the beginning of the 20th century, economic scholars united under the banner of 'industrial and economic democracy' represented an almost mainstream intellectual movement (Landemore and Ferreras, 2016). During the Progressive Era, they advocated for worker-managed and worker-owned businesses, while rejecting communism. Academics such as John Stuart Mill and John Dewey (Johnson, 2006) informed the experiments of early socialists and social democrats. Their liberal and pragmatist thought mingled with ideas of European socialists, among them Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, as well as Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Mill, for example, regarded democracy at the workplace as the ideal playground for developing an open mindset that would in turn foster democracy in the wider society. Organizational innovations at that time were "very much the thrust of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, which in the 1920s called for political democracy (franchise), social democracy (social welfare state), industrial democracy (workplace decision-making) and finally economic democracy (wage earner funds and control over capital)" (Deutsch, 2005: 646). However, Deutsch also makes a noteworthy reference to the U.S., where, during both World Wars, firms established thousands of so-called 'joint labor-management committees.' They were thought to raise employee participation in daily decisions and to resolve conflicts, to sustain full production. Interestingly, the committees were immediately dissolved post-wartime, along with the increased number of female workers and on-site child-care. As a consequence, in 1919 philosopher Dewey criticized the hypocrisy of fighting a World War in the name of political democracy, while the struggle against authoritarian workplace governance at home had been ignored (Johnson, 2006). Eventually, those early efforts to create a space for industrial democracy were crushed between the emerging Fascisms, another World War, and the ideologically led systemic struggle between capitalism and communism.

Management science at that time was dominated by a view of organizations that favored functionality and efficiency over human needs or questions of power. As Morgan (2006) pointed out, Frederick Taylor's proposition to separate the planning of work from its execution was the most sustained legacy of his scientific management theory. Managers, who were epitomized as spare parts, were supposed to think and workers to act without thinking. Together with Max Weber's sociological assertion that "the bureaucratic form

routinizes the process of administration exactly as the machine routinizes production" (p. 17), a line of thought emerged in which organizations were viewed in terms of the metaphor of the 'machine.' Politics and human passions remained a taboo in organization theory. The 'Aristotelian view' (p. 202), which grants politics a constructive role in the creation of social order, would need a paradigmatic struggle to become conceivable.

The post-war recovery period between 1946 and 1975 led to the 'discovery' of human needs in management and a broad-based movement towards individualism and participatory democratic practices on all levels of society (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). In organization studies, Elton Mayo's Hawthorne Works experiments demonstrated that a sense of teamwork and mutual accountability raised productivity. Together with Abraham Maslow' work on human needs, this inspired a 'neo-humanist school' (Ekman, 2013a) concerned with the emotional life of individuals. Regarding democratic organizing, these developments gave rise to a stream of research, led by the London-based Tavistock Institute. It was associated with scholars such as Tom Burns, Philip Selznick, and Kurt Lewin, who were working on local projects as 'theorist practitioners' (Beirne, 2008) on the advancement of employee participation. Within a more interdisciplinary approach, a range of economists and sociologists established the field of 'industrial democracy' (Deutsch, 2005). They were concerned with practical experiments such as the 'Industrial Democracy Program' in Norway (Thorsrud and Emery, 1970), the self-managing approach to socialism in former Yugoslavia (Singh, Bartkiw, and Suster, 2007), Israeli *kibbutzim* (Simons and Ingram, 2003), and even socialist practices in Algeria (Zeffane, 1988). Meanwhile, varying systems of representative workers' councils and institutionalized co-determination focusing on contractual agreements and collective bargaining developed in corporatist democracies such as Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Moreover, Rothschild-Whitt (1979) influenced generations of organizational sociologists with her concept of the 'collectivist-democratic' organizational form inspired by her research on the cooperatives that emerged in the aftermath of the 1968 protest movements. In her account, the 'Port Huron Statement,' written in 1962 by a group of U.S. students serving as delegates of their student associations, is regarded as a moment of inception. Essentially, they issued a plea for participatory democracy and

anticipated how the coming movements of the New Left understood participatory practices as the primary means to counter corporate power. The statement may not be seen as a clearly identifiable onset. Nevertheless, the 1970s saw the formation of thousands of collectives and cooperatives, the members of which rejected hierarchical organizing in favor of an ideal of equality. They engaged with shared ownership, self-management, and various forms of collective governance. Rothschild (2016) emphasized the cumulative impact of uncountable mundane experiments with consent-based decision-making during those two decades, which led to disillusionment with special privilege and individual power. Nowadays, millions of organizations are enacting the same logic: "[T]hese groups devote [intense efforts] to the precise question of how they can best structure their organizations to maximize creativity (Chen 2016), while avoiding hierarchies and inequalities" (p. 5). She unfolded a broad overview of corresponding initiatives, to which I have added comments and further examples:

- thousands of cooperatives and communes, as well as micro-credit groups in the global south
- uncountable NGOs organizing in a co-operative-democratic manner
- regions where cooperative economic ecosystems developed; among them Kerala in India, the Chiapas region of Mexico, the area around Mondragon Spain, Emilia-Romagna in Italy, and the rural village of Marinaleda in Spain, which is organized as one big cooperative.
- community gardens and community supported agriculture
- housing cooperatives, ecovillages, and coliving experiments
- participatory budgeting at the city or community level
- local participatory community initiatives (participatory urban planning and budgeting, citizen councils, future councils, as well as new urban spaces)
- 'solidarity economy,' e.g., Argentina and Greece after their financial crises (cooperatives, worker-controlled businesses, bartering circles, local exchange trade systems, time banks, etc.)
- self-help groups devoted to overcoming personal problems (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous)
- a social movement society (alter-globalization, Occupy or *Indignadas*)
- open source software design communities
- participative festivals (e.g., *The Borderland*, *Burning Man*; see Chen, 2016)

This extensive list of alternative organizations comprises a variety of heterogeneous initiatives that instantly invite critique. Take cooperatives as an example; Heras-Saizarbitoria (2014) dealt with the perspective of worker-owners at the famous

Mondragon in the Basque Country in Spain. His study illuminated that not every cooperative was self-managed or democratically organized. At Mondragon, there seemed to be a growing gap between espoused principles and the daily practices, with managers making most of the decisions. Especially younger worker-owners perceived the democratic structure as detached from their day-to-day experiences, where top-down decisions were the norm. Nevertheless, job security in an environment ridden by unemployment remained a unique characteristic that served to create bonds. Similar arguments could be brought forward concerning *kibbutzim* (Simons and Ingram, 2003), whose participatory-democratic ethos had been watered down considerably.

Until recently, alternative organizing remained a minority topic in organization studies (see current special issues and volumes; Cheney, Cruz, Peredo, and Nazareno, 2014; Cruz, Alves, and Delbridge, 2017; Parker, Cheney, Fournier, and Land, 2014; Zanoni, Contu, Healy, and Mir, 2017). Similarly, research on organizational democracy retreated into a small niche after the 1960s (Battilana, Fuerstein, and Lee, 2018). After that, the triumph of human resource management (HRM) practices overshadowed more critical approaches. It echoed the language of individuality, freedom, and empowerment coined by the progressive movements of the New Left and introduced a great number of participatory practices into the business world. At the same time, it was mainly interested in stimulating high commitment on the part of employees, in cooperating more efficiently using participation (Budd, Gollan, and Wilkinson, 2010). The focus on profitability and efficiency meant that employees had to internalize control mechanisms and suffered from greater peer pressure. "[I]n these organizations, participatory practices suppressed authentic voice and engagement" (Chen, 2016: 75), because decision-making and strategic authority remained the prerogative of management. While the earlier human relations movement highlighted questions of power, voice, and ownership, those who adopted the human resource approach concentrated on job and workplace redesign.

The seemingly paradoxical consequence of these newly introduced 'horizontal' techniques, such as lean management, business process re-engineering or matrix organizations, was the strengthening of management. Critical management scholars began to frame these developments with the notion of 'managerialism' (Clegg, 2014; Costea et al., 2008; also 'new wave management;' Johnson, 2006). Employees were

gradually supposed to take over new roles formerly held by management, while leaders would share their power willingly (Kokkinidis, 2015b). In terms of managerialism, the manager was seen as a mentor, facilitator, counselor, and coach (Schulz and Steyaert, 2014), communicating horizontally with self-managing teams. From the 1980s onwards, the concept of 'organizational culture' was designed to raise the emotional involvement of employees. Following the 'cultural turn' in social sciences, culture was understood as a permanent, proactive process of reality construction. In this view, it could not be possessed by societies or organizations, because it was mutually composed. Realities seemingly imposed themselves as the way things were, but in fact people jointly created the worlds in which they lived. Consequently, a vibrant organizational culture became a synonym for success, while work was touted as an opportunity for self-realization, which tempted individuals to fall for it. In the following decades, this process intensified under the tropes of performance and knowledge management, and nowadays happiness, mindfulness, and wellness. "Thus, the entire meaning of human life becomes in varied guises the preoccupation of management, which presupposes the cultural legitimacy of blurred boundaries between working life and life outside work" (Costea et al., 2008: 671). Research has shown how affirmative concepts, such as 'work-life balance' (Bloom, 2016), 'authenticity' (Ekman, 2013a), 'wellness' (Dale and Burrell, 2014), 'conscious capitalism' (Fyke and Buzzanell, 2013), and 'employability' (Cremin, 2010) affectively tie subjectivities to organizations, masking managerialist practices and the intensification of work (hours). Under this guise, managerialism was able to spread meticulous tentacles of control that not even Taylor and his Scientific Management fancied; performance indicators, performance reviews, balanced scorecards, and all kinds of electronically supported benchmarking efforts became notorious.

Looking at the bigger picture, managerialism had turned into a comprehensive ideology (Clegg, 2014; Klikauer, 2015). A group of people, namely those administering companies, created the belief that management, as a universal skill, could be applied to any form of organization independently of a given context. Managers used a set of utilitarian calculative tools and their business school credentials to enshrine themselves at the command heights of organizations, at the cost of skilled employees and owners. "By inventing legitimizing ideologies such as competition, efficiency, free markets, greed is good, etc., management mutated into an ideological operation that has infected virtually all sections of human society" (Klikauer, 2015: 1105). Managerialism supplied

an institutional model that emphasized the similarities between different industries and prepared the ground for a professional caste that should take over decision-making powers, not only in private but also in public and non-profit organizations. This new model signified the demise of the multidivisional firm (Du Gay and Morgan, 2013). Triggered by the success of Japanese industry conglomerates (which combined industry-level partnerships and collaboration at the enterprise level) and the rise of information technology, it was held that Weberian bureaucracies were ill-equipped to engage with the qualitatively new and unstable configuration. Their dependence on hierarchical ordering and neatly measured workflows was deemed inappropriate in a world characterized by dispersed knowledge and ubiquitous communication. Thus, the newly established consensus heralded the ascent of knowledge-based 'post-bureaucratic' organizations, in which communication tends to spread in horizontal networks, because employees are required to collaborate. Critics underscored that post-bureaucracy also meant various modes of outsourcing and the transition to flexible labor regimes, which led to the demise of stable careers (Diefenbach and By, 2012). In traditional organizations, steady progression climaxing in a secure pension or a sense of security through institutionalized norms was regarded as the most important characteristic of bureaucracy (Clegg, 2012). Meanwhile, this had become a privilege for the 'old generation' and elites, with troubling moral consequences (Sennett, 2006). Critical analysis has uncovered ambiguous practices in knowledge-intense and post-bureaucratic organizations (Brown, Kornberger, Clegg, and Carter, 2010; Sturdy, Wright, and Wylie, 2016). Related initiatives were openly resisted or met with subtle ridicule and cynicism. De-bureaucratization seemed to have led to its opposite when increased visibility resulted in bulks of data, and the wish for accountability had been perverted into excessive reporting and standardized processes. "[P]ostbureaucracy, though bringing with it organizational forms that are flatter, rounder, and more loosely coupled than the traditional hierarchy, can nevertheless substitute technology and subtle team coercion for formal bureaucratic control" (Raelin, 2011b: 142).

Employees experienced these changes through a discourse of authenticity, autonomy, and empowerment (Du Gay and Morgan, 2013). In contrast to the bureaucratic model, the ideal-type form of subjectivation has been framed in terms of the 'entrepreneurial self' (Bröckling, 2015; Rose, 1990). The 'Me Inc.' does not define itself as an office holder, nor does it regard the demands of the office or the rule of law as the sole basis

for authority. Instead "…individualism, non-conformism, consumerism, market and fashion orientation seemingly lead individuals to find their own ways within, but also across and against existing hierarchical structures and processes" (Diefenbach and By, 2012: 8). Simultaneously, the worker's personal qualities are tapped as resources. Moreover, the managerial prerogative has been reassured by the role model of the charismatic leader, who is able to inspire a vision, while organizations can forge a collective identity. Under the conditions of managerial post-bureaucracy, direct control is not needed because informal control is exercised through cultural norms, such as trust, when employees join a shared corporate culture that facilitates the internalization of desired attitudes. Fleming (2012) speaks in this regard of the birth of a 'biocracy.' Thus, "all that Fordism once feared is now the medium of a new form of exploitation" (p. 205) – subcultures, identities, emotions, and personal qualities. There is consensus in the literature that post-bureaucracy does not represent the end of bureaucracy; it rather backs a subtler and differentiated set of both horizontal and vertical means of power that have been added to the prevailing stratification of society (Rhodes and Bloom, 2012). In sum, critics have questioned the emancipatory corporate rhetoric of HRM, managerialism, and post-bureaucracy during the past 30 years. This is because in practice it fuses autonomy with control; horizontal collaboration with vertical measurement tools; amicable and equal social relations with competition and profit; individualism with precariousness, self-realization with a culture that puts work above all other aspects of life; and, finally, entrepreneurialism with a lack of ownership.

Recapitulating these histories of horizontal organizing, earlier waves of industrial and economic democracy (also socialist self-management) had a collective orientation (Battilana et al., 2018). They wanted to transfer significant control and ownership of the work environment to the workers as a socially distinctive group. The turn to human resources mainstreamed a wide range of participatory and collaborative practices. It introduced individualistic rhetoric promising self-actualization and empowerment, albeit concealing that central control, unequal ownership structures, and a culture of overwork were still intact. On the margins, alternative organizations have practiced consensual decision-making and cooperative governance for decades. One of the aims of this research project is to fathom how the present management trend of unbossing situates itself within this spectrum. I locate it within the contemporary mainstreaming of consent-based alternative organizing (Polletta, 2014), but a question remains as to

whether it aligns with the collective orientation or if it instead contributes to the rejuvenation of the HRM paradigm and 'false' empowerment.

In the course of the three-part analysis below, I will dig deeper into selected areas of this review to inform the discussion of the findings. Subchapter 5.1 will comprise a dissection of four discursive articulations of unbossing against the background of Boltanski and Chiapello's 'new spirit of capitalism' (2005), a comprehensive sociological framework that roots the above developments in a dialectical struggle between capitalism and its critics. Subchapter 5.2 starts with a review of organizational control to clarify how bossless work mobilizes affective intensities, keeping organizations in check. Finally, subchapter 5.3 comprises a synthesis of the literature on consent-based organizing to gauge how a collective freelancing organization struggles with its mainstreaming. However, for now, I will conclude this problematization with the anthropological and philosophical question of whether human organizing is bound to lead into stratified hierarchies.

2.3 Narrating oligarchy

Robert Michels (2001 [1915]) delivered the catchphrase for organizational thinking about hierarchy and stratification: "Who says organization, says oligarchy" (p. 241). His theorem, the 'iron law of oligarchy,' perceives hierarchy as an eternal constant. Despite good intentions, every democratic effort would naturally deteriorate into hierarchies and the rule of the few over the many. Michels derived his insight from an extensive study of a political party in which mass-participation dried out. Consequently, the leadership did not support the interests of its members anymore. Today, both mainstream and most critical scholars in organization studies hold that hierarchy is a natural tendency in human organizing. Diefenbach (2018), conversely, deconstructed the 'functionalistic foundations' (p. 5) of the iron law and reformulated it into an 'iron threat' (p. 14). Michels had grounded the emergence of oligarchy in the demand for specialization and the division of labor. As specialists assume authority and become professional leaders, over time, the initial trust of subordinates in their supreme knowledge turns into discipline and obedience. All the while, leaders tend to isolate themselves in closed groups. In hindsight, the iron law's notion of 'expert leadership' (p. 7) was premised on the assumption that leadership skills were a discrete long-term professional

accomplishment and at the same time exclusively reserved for naturally predisposed individuals. Contemporary concepts of 'distributed' (Gronn, 2002) and 'collective' leadership (Quick, 2017; Raelin, 2011a) suggest that it can be given away, acquired, contested, and mobilized in a shared manner. Oligarchization is thus a highly likely but not inevitable scenario. Contemporary participatory-democratic organizations have developed a plethora of institutional checks and balances, governance rules, and task-sharing protocols that help to maintain a dissenting participative culture (see subchapter 5.3). Diefenbach (2018) admitted, though, that given the small number of democratic organizations and limited academic engagement, long-term studies on the preservation of horizontal organizing are rare (Jaumier, 2016).

Still, the inevitability of hierarchy has dominated the organizational literature. Max Weber emphasized that bureaucracy required a hierarchical apparatus to function. Karl Marx added that even cooperatives, which were considered the primary drivers of consent decision-making, would only perpetuate capitalism's exploitative dynamic because they were established on private property (Hoffmann, 2016). Seminal critique also came from the women's liberation movement of the 1960s. Freeman (1972) warned against the emancipatory illusion of 'structurelessness' as a means of masking power. While a structureless approach helped activist women to organize mutual exchange (getting together in 'rap groups') in the early stages, it proved disastrous in terms of forging national influence. This was because groups of friends built specific structures according to individual talents, predispositions, and backgrounds. "Any group of people of whatever nature, coming together for any length of time, for any purpose, will inevitably structure itself in some fashion" (Freeman, 1972: 152). Thus, it seems far better to have this process emerge within clear boundaries. Freeman argued for structure, transparency, and accountability, enabling the participation of newcomers and having networks of friends compete for formal authority. Elites feel responsible only for the group at large when they have to back their power by popular support, she contended. Following this line of argument, hierarchy cannot only be condemned as a means of top-down order and stratification but also praised (Du Gay, 2000), because it establishes "functional and social relationships" (Diefenbach and By, 2012: 2). Perceived in this fashion, hierarchy has positive and negative effects. On the upside, it creates a balance of power and, especially for those at the lower end, certain protection from others by rules. Dampening the arbitrariness of the powerful is a tremendous historical

achievement. Moreover, it gives orientation and nurtures hopes for the meritocratic advancement of individuals. Concomitantly, it offers a system of immense technical efficiency for standardized mass production. On the downside, hierarchy perpetuates unequal social relations by forming institutionalized differences. "Any form of hierarchy has got such principles of social inequality, oppression and exploitation incorporated in its blueprint" (ibid. p. 3). A hierarchical system marginalizes the majority.

The academic debate progresses as follows: Critical scholars have accused the mainstream of being fixated on functionality (Kokkinidis, 2012). In their view, management and its tools are wrongly considered to be value-free and strictly geared towards efficiency and rational design. The problem portrayed by the critics, then, is that existing power relations are legitimized by functional premises. In this light, hierarchy is not a natural law of human organizing, but a result of organizational politics. Organizations are thus mainly political arenas (Morgan, 2006). The case of hierarchy reappears as a set of ideologically encrusted assumptions that serve those in power. Furthermore, alternative organizing conceptualized as 'collectivist-democratic' (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979), 'utopian communities' (Kanter, 1972), 'polyarchy' (Dahl, 1973), 'adhocracy' (Mintzberg, 1980), 'circular organizing' (Romme, 1999), or 'heterarchy' (Fairtlough, 2005) show that horizontal governance can (at least temporarily) result in a more just social order. In return, mainstream thinkers have countered that, seen through the lens of political group dynamics, hierarchy emerges as a natural phenomenon. For groups, integrating different viewpoints and reflecting is a stressful endeavor. Thus, they resort to organizational defenses (Argyris, 1992), groupthink, and premature closure of debates. Researchers have observed 'basic psychological drives' (Pfeffer, 2013) that adhere to status ordering. People relate to each other in terms of similarity; they want to be with the winners and tend to *post-hoc* rationalizations or excuse the bad behavior of leaders. In general, there seems to be a breach between behavior that is good for the group and one that is beneficial for the status of the individual. Consequently, transaction cost economists suggested hierarchy as the best possible solution to safeguard efficiency under conditions of opportunism and bounded rationality. The post-structural answer to this argument is that hierarchy, together with its supposedly 'basic drives,' only appears to be a natural law. In modernity, people are subjectified within deep-seated meta-discourses on planning and

predictability, which are driven by individualist and heroic shapers of the world (Parker, 2009; Willmott, 2005). In this vein, people are socialized into shaping their identities through functional premises. They become what they are through their immersion in and identification with status differences, competition, individualism, rationality, and efficiency. Ultimately, hierarchy as a culturally shared imagination torments people with "the always immanent possibility of an eternally good leader at the head of a rational and just order" (Rhodes and Bloom, 2012: 143). From a psychoanalytic perspective, a tantalizing call for spiritual perfection is the underlying attractor for hierarchy to prevail. The psychoanalytic nip is that the real-life failure of this ideal only enforces the fantasy further because it creates a lack that makes the desire all the more appealing.

To disentangle this argument, it is useful to step back and look at the wider anthropological and philosophical picture. There are two competing stories about the evolution of human organizing that we tell ourselves, and both are wrong. Thomas Hobbes, the founding father of classical political theory, envisioned a hypothetical state of nature: When all men are free and equal, but yet without culture, the primary goal will be to secure one's interests in a brutish manner. The man is man's wolf, Hobbes stated, and called for a strong sovereign, preferably a monarch, who should be able to tame his subjects, thereby ordering the general social anomie. For Hobbes, curtailing individual freedom appeared to be the lesser of two evils. Since the rediscovery of democracy in political theory in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Jean-Jacques Rousseau challenged the Hobbesian view by stressing that people are only socialized into 'wolfishness' through malfunctioning society. In their natural state, people live remotely from each other and are neither good nor bad. With the advance of civilization, people voluntarily formed a social contract, which allowed them to develop a rational and good human nature in a sovereign and free manner. Over time, this hypothetical scenario turned into 'historical truth.' The narrative goes like this: Paleolithic men lived in egalitarian bands of hunter-gatherers. They shared their few possessions, nature was dangerous but also abundant, and thus the cavemen had to work for a few hours a day only. Around ten thousand years ago, the bands turned into tribes, herding cattle and farming crops. Accumulation, specialization, and the introduction of private property led to hierarchical clans, but also population growth and the creation of cities. These, in turn, necessitated centralized governance and enabled further specialization, which brought forth different classes and stratified societies, as we know them today. The only

measures that can undo inequality (at least temporarily) are war, decadence, disease, and revolution. As civilizing progress is equated with structural injustice, it seems redundant to ask why organization theory remains on an authoritarian trajectory, while communitarian and libertarian world-views became dominant in political and economic theory (Collins, 1997).

Contemporary archeologists and anthropologists, engaging with 'Paleolithic politics' (Wengrow and Graeber, 2015), debunked these stories as myth. Excavations of rich burials (of people with physical anomalies) and big buildings requiring public work (that at the same time have no city-like storehouses, fortifications or palaces) enable us to glimpse societies with a 'double morphology.' Depending on the season, they lived in small bands or came together in masses. As they followed herds of game or fish runs, they feasted together on abundance, they traded, but they also held rituals and created art. As the hunter-gatherers lived in bands as well as in societies, they experimented with religions, law systems, and political structures. Erection and destruction alternated. Research on contemporary Inuit societies demonstrates that people acquire different seasonal identities, which help them to consider their society reflexively and engage in social innovation. At the same time, Wengrow and Graeber underscored that early agricultural societies were more egalitarian than their hunter-gatherer neighbors were. Moreover, in China, cities existed a thousand years before the rise of royal dynasties, while in Mexico archeologists found evidence of cityscapes, where egalitarian villas superseded pyramids and temples. Even later, the European colonizers under Cortes encountered elected city councils. The anthropological perspective supports Lundholm, Rennstam, and Alvesson's (2012) approach for understanding the unfolding of hierarchical processes. They view hierarchy as an ambiguous, emergent phenomenon constructed in everyday practices – one might think of 'hierarching.' Hence, hierarchy and stratification begin, as far as everyday structural violence is concerned, with gender inequalities, age discrimination, and devalued forms of work and servitude. It seems like our forebears struggled against these emergent inequalities by engaging in cyclical practices of solidifying and disrupting their societies. As they periodically switched between egalitarian and hierarchical arrangements, they routinely lived in multiple worlds. This strengthened their social creativity. These findings suggest that successful horizontal organizing can never be a final state in a distinct unitary entity. It seems to demand a networked, segmentary, and polycentric understanding of organization

(Reedy, 2014), where conflict, imagination, and disruption is paired with intense local relationships.

The problematization expounded in this chapter will serve as a canvas to understand the repertoires of knowledge that are activated by the various threads of the management discourse. It will also help to assess their emancipatory potential. For this purpose, I recalled the main events and movements that mobilized the management trend on bossless work. Contrary to the popular narrative, I have thus situated the discourse as the latest wave in a long line of attempts to institute more horizontal, democratic, and equal work organizations. A closer look at the phenomenon of hierarchy unveiled that it had to be recognized as an intrinsic component of human organizing, leading to constructive as well as to adverse outcomes. Wishing it away is more dangerous than enclosing it in autocratic, bureaucratic or democratic constraints. Finally, a transdisciplinary perspective on the emergence of unequal and stratified societies highlighted the possibility of a more cheerful approach to organizing. Can we learn from the example of our ancestors to live in multiple worlds, subjectivities, and times, not shying away from frictions, ecstasy, and rupture? The notion of Paleolithic politics implies multiplicity, affect, and continuous change – an apt link to the next chapter on 'process organization studies,' the theoretical perspective of this dissertation.

3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

fuck immer das Gezapple
sitzt doch endlich einmal still
es wird nie eine Bewegung
was sich immer bloß bewegen will

fuck the steady floundering
sit still for once
it will never become a movement
if it's always on the move

— Laokoongruppe,
Ach Kinder, 2014

The worldview guiding this research project is informed by process philosophy and its reception in organization studies (Helin et al., 2014; Steyaert, 2007). The fundamental question at issue is how nature is constituted. Is it made up of discrete entities in motion or by an infinite continuum in constant flux? This question might sound like a lofty philosophical debate, but it has tremendous consequences for the way we conceive ourselves, how we relate to each other, and how we treat nature. Over the millennia, the fine line between 'being' and 'becoming' has caused deep rifts. In the West, the 'being camp' and its ontology of stable substances prevailed. This can be pictured as a trajectory from Plato, Aristotle, and Christian cosmology, all the way to modern scientific thought. At times, the altercation grew violent. Plato encouraged his disciples to burn the writings of his opponent Democritus, and over the centuries, Christian dogmatism did the rest (Nail, 2018). Very few works of 'becoming philosophers' such as Epicurus and Heraclitus have been preserved. Contemporary process thinkers, in turn, are castigating modern fixations on rationality and universal truth, blaming the mastery of interactions between essences for most of society's woes: the exploitation of nature, patriarchy or mechanical functionalism. Yet, it was amidst this vigorous opposition that modernity began and ended with two ironic moments between the frontlines.

Nail (2018) unearthed the history of *De Rerum Natura* (on the nature of things), a book-length poem by the Roman writer Lucretius, who was inspired by the philosophy of

Epicurus. It was rediscovered at the beginning of the 15th century in the library of a secluded monastery and soon became a huge hit among early enlightenment scholars. As Nail demonstrated, it exerted a major influence on the modern fascination for the exploration of discrete entities. However, the quest for 'atoms' and 'particles' it had set forth was based on a misinterpretation, probably a projection onto the few things people knew about antiquity at that time. In fact, Lucretius seemed to have consciously avoided those terms in favor of 'matters' and 'things,' but translators simply replaced them with the former. He also continuously used the language of 'folds,' 'pores,' 'bubbles,' and 'continuums,' which was all but ignored. Thus, ironically, the birth of enlightenment thought – a continuation of Plato's conception of atoms as indivisible lumps of matter that cannot change, except in location – was unknowingly fueled by an ontology of flows, entanglements, and contingent stabilizations. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus expressed this line of thought in his famous analogy: "Upon those who step into the same river flow other and yet other waters" (Heraclitus, in Chia, 2010: 118). However, modernity emerged as a quest for atemporal essences in order to discern, influence, and control the interactions of the tiniest particles that would add up to a shifting background substance (the 'aether'). A new ideal-type figure, the heroic male scientist, was devised. He was thought of as a rational external observer, who 'discovered' "eternal moments of disclosed presence" (Chia, 2010: 128), resulting in claims of universal truth. In organization studies, for example, organizations and individuals were regarded as locatable discrete entities, acting freely and autonomously from their base of stable identities (Langley and Tsoukas, 2011; Nayak and Chia, 2011; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Typically, context was excluded or seen as an external factor (Steyaert, 2016).

Four hundred years later, Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr and their extraordinary generation of nuclear physicists began to explore quantum mechanics. They recognized that an electron is neither a particle nor a wave. Instead, it may have particle-like aspects in some situations and wave-like ones in others. The smallest particles are not things, but rather relationships, or rather a nexus of interrelationships in which the parts take no specific place. They are non-local and have no inner properties that are independent of their environment. Their qualities depend on the observant. "Thingness, the quality of being a 'thing', emerges as a feature of indeterminate entanglement" (Akomolafe and Ladha, 2017: 826). Consequently, physical laws take the form of probabilities, and parts

are always components of the whole. Furthermore, Einstein's famous formula $E = mc^2$ illustrates that mass is a form of energy; matter is not inert but involved in a perpetual dance; on the move. From this perspective, the universe is a pulsating and expanding network of related events, none of which contribute final reasons for the whole (Dietrich, 2008). There are no foundations, only emergence. "All things are continually interacting with each other, and in doing so each bears the traces of that with which it has interacted: and in this sense, all things continuously exchange information about each other" (Rovelli, 2016a). The physicist Rovelli continued that our world is made up of events, not things, and that we can understand it as networks of kisses rather than stones.

> "The apples continue to fall from the trees, like that legendary one that is said to have inspired Newton's theory of gravity. In practice, Newton's teachings are still relevant. Nevertheless, their foundation has been literally withdrawn" (Dietrich, 2008: 272; own translation).

At the zenith of its explorations, modern science's greatest discovery shattered its core assumptions about the composition of the universe. Future historians might smile quietly to themselves about this paradoxical twist that started and ended modernity. In a way, the ontology of becoming had been always implied within the hegemonic logic of mechanistic units and was patiently waiting at its center to reopen the metaphysical struggle.

One has to remember that the story told here is a distinctively Eurocentric account. Chia (2010) pointed out that the notion of a fluxing and interconnected reality has always been acknowledged in Eastern-inspired worldviews and metaphysics: "The idea of life as intrinsically chaotic, precarious, and ever changing is taken-for-granted, living, breathing reality in the Oriental experience" (p. 113). In my view, process scholars have to be careful not to retaliate and establish a hegemony of becoming, motion, and entanglement. There is also a lot to learn from the experience of the global South and East to eventually arrive at a 'transrational' (Dietrich, 2008) understanding of being and becoming. The natural sciences point to such an integrated view. Quantum field theory, for example, suggests that that the smallest granules that we can measure (today: quarks and leptons) are fold-ups in a positive void, "bubbles washed ashore" by an infinite ocean (Rovelli, 2016b). Our space-time is definitely made up of quantum particles. One cannot say that it is simply a 'becoming' continuum. It might be better perceived as

continuous 'enfoldings.' At the same time, the latest findings in the fields of chemistry, (micro)biology, and astrophysics indicate relatedness in the Newtonian domain. The phenomenon of life on Earth, for example, can be understood only if one considers the world as a system or as a single living organism. The entirety of living matter forms, together with the atmosphere, the oceans, and the land surface, a complex system that has all the typical characteristics of self-organization (Dietrich, 2008). Moreover, contemporary astrophysicists have been able to determine the origin of chemical elements during the past 50 years (De Grasse Tyson, Strauss, and Gott, 2016). The elements of the periodic table – that of which we are made – derive from foregone stars. When they exploded, they shattered their elements across the galaxy. Subsequently, these elements enriched gas clouds that in turn formed the next generation of stars populated by our current planets. The scientists were able to find out that the most common elements in the universe – hydrogen, oxygen, helium, carbon, and nitrogen – resemble the same most frequent elements that constitute our bodies. Their conclusion: Not only do we exist in the universe; the universe itself exists in us. Finally, looking at human microbiology, 10% of our dry weight is made up of bacteria. They mesh with our bodies to produce Vitamin K and B12, and the mitochondria produced in our muscles during workouts stem from bacteria. "We literally come from messmates and morphed diseases, organisms that ate and did not digest one another, and organisms that infected one another and killed each other and formed biochemical truces and merged" (Sagan in: Akomolafe and Ladha, 2017: 825).

The fragment from the song *Ach Kinder* that opens this chapter condensates much of the bitter subtext with which the age-old conflict between being and becoming is charged. How to live and change? By acknowledging the constant flow and relatedness of all being, by striving for contingent interventions and small concerted experiments, or by freezing a certain rhythm, and mastering and adjusting it in a heroic effort? The former begs us to reflect: Who are you? The latter encourages us to act: What do you want? Is this struggle going to cause dissent for the next 2,500 years or can the shock of our recent inquiries into nature foster an integrative perspective that acknowledges the inextricable tension?

In organization studies, process philosophical perspectives can be traced back to Karl Weick's re-conception of 'theory' as 'theorizing' (Steyaert and Dey, 2007). At the turn

of the Millennium, it was more widely received in the wake of Tsoukas and Chia's (2002) account of organizational change as becoming. Moreover, a whole generation of scholars gathered at the annual 'International Process Symposia' across the Greek islands from 2009 on and produced the related *Perspectives on Process Organization Studies* book series. For the purposes of this thesis, I will mobilize three conceptual approaches from the process theory family (Steyaert, 2007): 'post-foundational discourse analysis' (analysis of the unbossing trend in subchapters 5.1 and 5.2), as well as 'practice-based studies' and '*agencement*' referring to theories of affect (case study of an unbossed organization in subchapter 5.3). Other family members (some of them decidedly older) include complexity theory, phenomenology, narrative and interpretive approaches, dramaturgy, ethnomethodology, and actor-network theory. In what follows, this conceptual chapter is organized in four parts. *First*, I will elucidate how the process perspective on organizations altered the understanding of research-worthy phenomena and the attitudes with which researchers approach them (chapter 3.1). *Second*, in section 3.2, I will explore the conceptual premises of discourse analysis, as well as psychosocial rapprochements as to why individuals desire to identify with certain discourses. Practice-based studies and the role of affect in organizing will become the topic of the *third* section (3.3). *Fourth*, section 3.4 will comprise a discussion of the role of theorizing in process organization studies: drawing conceptual connections, creating multiplicity, and nesting practical within theoretical action.

3.1 A wayfaring worm's-eye view

Heraclitus, Henri Bergson, William James, and Alfred North Whitehead were the first among a growing number of process philosophers whose thought was imported into organization studies. They stressed that the social world was not as it seemed, but the effect of a continuous process of world-making. Individuals and organizations were understood as contingently stabilized clusters of events that arose from a 'sea of ceaseless change.' "The creative flow of reality is hidden from our everyday action-oriented experience. As Heraclitus (in Geldard, 2000, p. 157) states, 'nature prefers to hide'" (Nayak and Chia, 2011: 284). Indeed, this is an extremely counterintuitive notion. In the traditional understanding, organizations, bureaucracies, norms, and rules were seen as rather rigid and fixed. They were thought to need strong, concerted, and well-

prepared initiatives to change. Consequently, researchers concentrated on the perspectives of decision-makers, on grand strategic scenarios, and institutional logics. Process organization studies, by contrast, proposed a 'worm's-eye view' (ibid. p. 286), in which the focus was on microscopic everyday change, which is subtle and hard to trace. In more recent volumes, such as the *Oxford Handbook of Process Philosophy and Organization Studies* (Helin et al., 2014), the range of philosophers earmarked for consideration expanded considerably, ranging from ancient Oriental thinkers to contemporary ones such as Michel Serres, Peter Sloterdijk, and Martin Heidegger. The latter contributed the concept of dwelling before building. Only if you are actively immersed in certain events, that is, only through actual living, do you gain the capacity to reflect and to build concepts (Costea and Amiridis, 2014; Marchart, 2007). If one accepts dwelling to be the primary mode of engagement with our life worlds – that we are drawn into our daily practices, most of the time acting in a flow without thinking – then our actions might be better described in terms of 'wayfinding' than 'navigation' (Thrift, 2011).

> "It is through these everyday practical coping actions and sensemaking interactions, prior to the existence of any form of explicit conceptualization and representation, that we collectively forge out a more coherent and livable world. This is how social orders and organizations emerge" (Nayak and Chia, 2011: 291).

Wayfinding as a mode of scientific exploration implies a plea for close attention to 'little narratives' (Steyaert and Dey, 2007), as Weick and Lyotard initially posited. Process researchers listen most intensely to those who work every day in their field of inquiry in order to develop theories without absolute truth claims. They would ask questions such as: How do the practitioners counter my perceptions? What kind of stories can I hear when I abandon the managerial discourse and take notice of seemingly minor voices?

3.2 Discourse and desire

The first significant processual rupture with relevance to this thesis was instigated by the linguistic turn in philosophy and social sciences during the 1970s and 80s. Scholars began to realize how language constructed reality, instead of merely reflecting it. Subsequently, discourse analysis (among other approaches) surfaced to re-conceptualize

language and power as productive forces that constitute societal arrangements and human selves. As a conceptual tool, it entered organization studies during the 1980s to become the most influential lens through which qualitative researchers viewed and inquired into organizations, as constituted by various types of texts. The focus on language as not simply describing reality is also reflected in a comprehensive understanding of textual practices: how texts are produced, disseminated, and received. "At its most basic, the study of organizational discourse is about understanding the processes of social construction that underlie the organizational reality studied by researchers using more conventional methodologies" (Phillips and Oswick, 2012: 438). Discourse analysis employs a processual perspective in which discourses are not conceived as objects or entities in their own right.

> "After all, discourses are not 'things' but form relations *between* things; they are not objects as such but the *rules* and *procedures* that make objects thinkable and governable; they are not autonomous entities but cohere among *relations of force*" (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008: 105, emphasis in original).

In such a relational epistemology, discourses are manifested in texts, which enact them, but they simultaneously stand in between them and on the outside. Hence, the concept covers three main dimensions (Phillips and Oswick, 2012). *First,* the focus of discourse analysis is not merely the frequency of the occurrence of certain words, as in a thematic study with lexicographic methods, but rather the sequences of statements. The *second* aspect is how meaning-making in a body of texts is organized through links to other texts; thus, how various discourses serve as the background of intelligibility. *Third*, and in contrast to conversational analysis, contextual factors are considered. It is important to note that in a discursive study one is not primarily interested in how actors perceive their life worlds as meaningful; rather, one wants to unveil the processes by which social reality is shaped. Or as Phillips and Oswick (2012) put it:

> "As a method, it provides a set of techniques for exploring how the socially constructed ideas and objects that constitute the social world are created and maintained. Where more traditional qualitative methodologies work to interpret social reality as it exists, discourse analysis attempts to uncover the way in which it was produced and is held in place" (p. 446).

In short: Influential discourses are difficult to call into question, because they appear utterly self-evident. Consequently, discursive thought made it possible to conceptualize

a new model of power, one that has productive rather than repressive effects. It operates locally and under historically distinct circumstances to construct subjectivities. Individuals become subjectified in the process of subscribing to certain subject positions (or of being positioned) that emerge in the interplay of dominant discourses. Foucault (2008) characterized modernity as disciplinary societies in which people are inevitably enmeshed into a plurality of conflicting and inconsistent power relations. Conceptually, this view deconstructs the modern subject, the way we understood ourselves as rational, consistent entities, as ahistorical selves who perform specific roles. Instead, the analysis highlighted how subjects are continuously shaped in the space of crisscrossing discursive power relations and how they take multiple, fleeting, and often contradictory positions. Hence, this form of inquiry aspires to lay bare "the very apparatuses and techniques through which it [the subject] was constituted" (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008: 94).

Developed in 1970s France, a time of diverse protest movements, this new reading of power and the anti-humanist conception of the subject can be seen as an answer to the fading explanatory power of traditional Marxist thought. A new generation of philosophers, among them Foucault and Deleuze, realized that the conception of ideology as state power and the base/superstructure model (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008), in which all social relations tended to be reduced to class conflict, could not reflect the societal developments of their time. Theoretically, the discursive stance is based upon Derrida's deconstruction of structuralist language theory (Martilla, 2015), which originally asserted constructive power to linguistic signification. Whereas in terms of structuralist language theory, meaning is produced by interrelations between words, and between words and concepts (signifier/signified), Derrida showed that there was no structural background to this process. Rules and meanings have to be enacted by a successive chain of practices that are not dependent on an abstract context. They are thus perpetually contingent and open to different interpretations. In contemporary organizational discourse studies, Foucauldian-inspired analyses and critical discourse analysis after Fairclough (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 2010) came as close as it could get to defining 'mainstream.' The first approach is interested in big historical power-knowledge relations or 'discursive formations' (Deetz, 1992 cited in Phillips and Oswick, 2012) and how their accompanying practices were able to shape subject positions and objectivities, such as knowledge. In what Foucault themed a 'genealogy'

(Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008), the inquiry is geared towards big paradigm-enacting systems of interrelated ideas and how they 'govern' (Oswick, 2012) bodies of texts to ultimately lay bare the seemingly natural certainties that render problems and subjects comprehensible. Critical discourse analysis, in turn, avoided this post-structural perspective, in which meanings are always indeterminate and subject to a power play between multiple discourses and interpretations, in favor of a more critical view that highlighted how a dominant discourse and a marginal one are engaged in a hegemonic face-off. This narrower focus on how voices are silenced and empowered is counterbalanced by an inclusive perception of discursive production and reception in (1) local texts, (2) practices (constituting language-in-use), and (3) contextual factors in the broader politico-institutional field.

Discourse analysis has been criticized for its definitional arbitrariness and methodological fuzziness, leading to an 'overpacked' view of social constructivism and 'muscular' assumptions about the real-life power of discourse (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011; Leitch and Palmer, 2010). Its practitioners would attempt to explain far-reaching social phenomena while being oblivious to the results of real-life organizing. Others retorted that simple definitions would only constrain study designs and produce the strenuous need to challenge them, while 'porous methodologies' were nimbly creating space for creative and interdisciplinary research (Hardy and Grant, 2012; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 2010). The most prominent categorization in the field, 'd/Discourses' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000), thus only involved a distinction between levels of investigation. Whereas capital 'D' refers to Foucauldian style analysis, the small 'd' signifies a micro-perspective, in which the social is constructed from local interactions – 'not by but in discourse' (Cederström and Spicer, 2014). People are then actively choosing from available linguistic repertoires that in turn, influence the prevailing set of discursive possibilities (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). However, discursive micro-studies still black box how certain discourses appeal to people, while others do not, and subsequently how they impose a way of being onto them. They continued to employ an overoptimistic ('muscular') perspective on the constitutive powers of discourse and downplayed the role of forces that may operate beyond the domain of language, such as affective intensities and material non-human actors.

To overcome these deficiencies, in this dissertation, I utilize post-foundational discourse analysis (Cederström and Spicer, 2014; Marttila, 2015). I will explain the conceptual and methodological aspects of the approach more thoroughly in subchapters 5.1 and 5.2. In the following, I will merely outline its broader framework. The approach is explicitly oriented towards non-discursive, subconscious, and possibly unnamable structures of 'the real.' One does not aim to unveil generative structures, as in critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2005). Instead, this approach is underscored by the view that discourses are formed around fundamental gaps. There are always aspects of the real that cannot be translated into a symbolical order, and it is consequently impossible to rest a discourse on a stable foundation. This does not imply that there are no foundations at all, but every single one is contingent. Without ultimate foundations, discourses can be understood only by defining what they are not, by distinguishing them from other discourses. However, the real does not contain only an unimaginable element; it simultaneously inflicts strong affective attachments that help to explain why some discourses are passionately espoused or why people share an emotional commitment to groups and institutions. "This means that a discourse consists of a form and a force, both of which do the same thing: fill in the lack" (Cederström and Spicer, 2014: 189). The post-foundational approach meets Derrida's insight halfway, acknowledging that the possible variety of discursive practices is endless, because every rule depends upon previous utterances; meaning is generated in the relationship between social components (Marttila, 2015). What the approach adds, though, is an elusive role for the real, which is felt and experienced, not cognitively understood. By recognizing these ungraspable and affective properties and by ascribing constitutive powers to the real, the framework incorporates the role of materiality into its gaze. It is positioned in the middle ground between social constructionism and realism, which means that it is underpinned by the notion that matter is contingently shaped into objects in discursive processes, and at the same time by the perception that structures of the real shape the formation of discourses.

Thus, the thesis is inspired by a strand of theorizing that combines Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) work around hegemony through signification and Lacan's psychoanalysis of discourses, desires, and fantasies (Arnaud, 2012; Arnaud and Vidaillet, 2018; Contu, Driver, and Jones, 2010). In terms of this school of thought, hegemonization is conceptualized as "a complementary process of signification and affective investment" (Dey, Schneider, and Maier, 2016: 1452). In Lacanian terms, human desires are oriented

towards an '*objet petit a*,' which is not only an object but also what is projected into it. To take an example from consumerism and marketing, the Tesla Model X car does promise not only useful electromobility, but also a sustainable and thus guilt-free way of driving an SUV, thereby showing off status, environmental concern, and an edgy early adopter mentality. Cederström and Spicer (2014) emphasize that marketed commodities are always playing with this 'fantasmatic space,' but similar dynamics can also be found in the workplace, as the rise of 'authentic leadership' (Costas and Taheri, 2012) suggests. When leaders obscure their symbolic authority within a discourse of love, autonomy, and well-being, they also obfuscate the lack beneath the managerial prerogative. Employees are then seduced by even more powerful leaders, who can place constant demands, because the capacity to desire alternative (power) relations has been dampened. Managers begin to fathom themselves as visionary leaders, while other organizational actors attach various fantasies to this heroic figure. The point is that discourses can never be complete and stable. Their objectives are perpetually somewhat out of grasp, and their promises of wholeness illusionary. Therefore, subjects will always try to retain these seemingly lost ideational properties passionately. This process is only partially pleasurable; indeed, it is also connected to pain and therefore themed '*jouissance*' (an excessive passion involving suffering; for a more detailed explanation, see subchapter 5.2). "[T]he subject is always driven by the *jouissance* they receive in death, in that they are seeking an impossible unity associated with a culturally provided desire whose very survival depends on it remaining forever unsatisfied" (Bloom, 2016: 597; own emphasis). The experience is so staggering that it has to be subdued by fantasies. In these collectively appealing imaginary landscapes, lost objects are envisioned in vibrant colors, whereas discourses are simultaneously wrapped in an emotionally captivating allure.

From a Foucauldian viewpoint, the subject is decentered, a more or less agential "material on which history writes" (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008: 106) its conflicting and intersecting trajectories. In addition, Lacan's subject is also internally divided, permanently struggling against lack and disequilibrium with a desire for wholeness. Steyaert and Van Looy (2010) ascertained that individualism, the cornerstone of modern subjectivity, a prerequisite for the rational agent of the free market economy "is a key obstacle that prevents organizational research from taking a full 'relational turn' in its theorizing attempts" (p. 5). Individuals are results of

relationships that evolve; their identity is not bestowed upon them before they engage with others. Consequently, subjects can be regarded as relatively stabilized agglomerations that are constituted by opposing tensions rivaling within them. "*Identity is the effect of difference*" (Nayak and Chia, 2011: 293; emphasis in original). Steyaert (2015) proposes a Deleuzian, queer perspective, which holds that becoming someone does not mean to become a distinctly outlined entity (in Steyaert's case, a woman), but to dissolve into a collectivity (a woman amid other women). In borrowing the term '*haecceity*' which means 'this-ness' from Deleuze and Guattari, he goes on to describe a form of individuation that is created out of intense feelings of transition that have no beginning or end – always in the middle. "We are not things but dramas, we have no nature, only history, we are not, though we live" (Ingold, 1986 quoted in Nayak and Chia, 2011: 284). Peter Sloterdijk added to this by saying that:

> "Basically, however, no life has a name. The self-conscious nobody in us-who acquires names and identities only through its 'social birth' remains the living source of freedom. The living Nobody, in spite of the horror of socialization, remembers the energetic paradises beneath the personalities" (Sloterdijk quoted in Beyes, 2014: 572).

This view suggests giving up the fantasmatic pursuit of a single identity, rather cultivating the ability to cherish small moments of ecstatic immanence that are caused by the excitement of not knowing what we might become next. We are not alone in this process. We are forming ourselves and are being formed by our relations with others, '*Zwischenwesen*' (inter-medial beings), as Sloterdijk coined it. "Our bodies are no longer 'ours,' haunted as they are by the 'other,' disturbed by 'ghosts' of restless entities whose feet have traversed preposterous times, worlds and possibilities" (Akomolafe and Ladha, 2017: 830). From a processual perspective, human agency – meandering between individuality and collectivity, between inextricable paradoxes – has far less capacity to change things than heroic modernity would make us believe. The universe washes over our egos and bodies.

3.3 Practice and affect

In dealing with the big turn to language, a couple of smaller turns to 'practice,' 'affect,' and 'materiality' developed around the turn of the millennium. They inform the second part of the analysis in this dissertation, which is an examination of the relevance of the unbossing discourse in everyday practice. Subchapter 5.3 will go deeper into the conceptual specifics of the relation between 'practice' and *'agencement'* (the latter developed by Deleuze and Guattari; see Gherardi, 2016; Müller, 2015). It is designed to facilitate a praxiographic study (Czarniawska, 2014) that is sensitive to sociomateriality, sensible knowing, and trans-individual movements of affect. I will not anticipate too much when saying that the *agencement* is a conceptual vehicle to grasp the co-constitution of multiple and at the same time, flat ontologies proposed by process philosophy. *Agencements* emerge, when humans, non-humans, and affects – people, animals, intensities, practices, things, sensitivities, ideas, and plants – are pulled together into a temporal cluster of relationships. Importantly, the emergent constellation results in a whole that lends agency to its parts (Müller and Schurr, 2016). *Agencements* are envisioned as dynamic entangled landscapes, where the elements are continuously becoming in their mutual relation to each other, while they are still embodying the universal one (or 'virtual' in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology) that brought them forth. Resonances between affective intensities that seize our bodies are seen as connective impulses between the sea of endless change and the bubbles it has washed ashore. They are understood as trans-individual forces that are incomprehensible in a rational manner, but which at the same time are able to 'actualize' untapped innate capacities in unexpected ways. Consequently, Thompson and Willmott (2016) propose a fundamentally new line of inquiry for the social sciences. The distinction between actual/virtual (ontic/ontological in their vocabulary) or the search for a "trace of contingency within the structure" (p. 484) should replace the cleavage between structure/agency. In this vein, the *agencement* transforms the one-dimensional understanding of ontology in modern thought into an ontological plurality. Peter Sloterdijk (Beyes, 2014) conceives the return to 'multiple spheres' living next to each other, much like in the perception of the ancient Egyptians.

Apart from the unsettling role of affect, I see practices as an integral and generally stabilizing aspect of *agencements*. The practice lens in organization studies (Gherardi,

2000; Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks, and Yanow, 2009) enables one to focus on what people actually do together every day, rather than on what they say they are doing or what they are told to do. It is emphasizing the stabilization of collective action mediated by artifacts (Corradi, Gherardi, and Verzelloni, 2010). Practices are seen as heuristic tools and 'molar phenomena' (Nicolini and Monteiro, 2016) that are made up of a number of subcomponents (such as activities) that are oriented towards a specific end. They "exist in configurations, which authors refer to as knots, networks, nexuses, assemblages and textures" (ibid. p. 115). They can be seen as a collective process of action in a field of connection. Hence, single practices have to be discerned by outlining their relationships. The traditional dualistic way of thinking in terms of subjects vis-à-vis objects collapses and gives way to relations.

In contrast to the notion of affect (as I understand it), practices bring epistemological concerns to the fore, as well as how discursive practices sustain the sense of doing in practice (Corradi et al., 2010). Knowledge is redefined from being a functional transferable commodity that can be acquired through mental processes to 'knowledge-in-practice' (Gherardi, 2000). It is situated in the dynamics of interaction, in language, objects, infrastructures, bodies, and the physical context. Practices mobilize these components and effect contingent systems of knowledge. Practice-based researchers undertake a paradigmatic shift away from the question of the value of knowledge and its cognitive application to a focus on how it circulates. The question is how people under specific circumstances engage in action to transform and produce knowledge in contexts of practices. Thereby, the practice perspective transcends the dichotomy between mind and body. Both are enacted in the course of social practices, which are, in turn, made possible by the bodily doings of the people who are immersed in the practice. The organization of a practice is not determined by individuals or processes, "it is a feature of the practice, expressed in the open-ended set of actions that compose the practice" (Schatzki, quoted in Steyaert, 2007: 467). Subsequently, non-individualistic expressive bodies perform within practices that are situated on neither micro nor macro level but enable the researcher to move like a spider along the lines of its web from tiny to large phenomena.

Following this, practices do not refer only to the production of situated action, but also to the reproduction of social order. As long as everything runs smoothly, people are

immersed in their doing. Besides a visible tip of explicit knowledge, they rely on an invisible iceberg of tacit knowledge that they have acquired throughout their socialization. We are acting in a flow of blurred subjects, objects, contexts, sensations, and thoughts, so to speak, in a pre-reflexive mode. Every car driver who regularly commutes along the same route knows the experience of arriving at work and not precisely knowing how he got there. The practice was flowing; he or she was "in the zone." Reflection only occurs when we encounter a breakdown. In this sense, practices operate recursively. They are local occurrences, performed anew every time. However, they simultaneously have a history in reiterated performances that are stabilized by networks of practices rooted in embodied and deeply socialized knowledge. As a result, webs of practices privilege specific courses of action; they produce norms and political orders. Not only are practices political, but research on practices is also a political project. Practice scholars represent their objects as discourses. They highlight certain aspects and downplay others, which demands a reflective attitude (Nicolini and Monteiro, 2016).

With respect to this study, two aspects of practice appear to be central: the role of materiality and sensible knowledge. The *first* is sociomateriality. There are no preformed substances, only performed relations (Bruni, 2005; Orlikowski, 2007). The social and the material spring from ongoing, situated practices. What emerges is a post-human assemblage:

> "Such an alternative view asserts that materiality is integral to organizing, positing that the social and the material are constitutively entangled in everyday life [...] the social and the material are considered to be inextricably related—there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social" (Orlikowski, 2007: 1438).

Consequently, the idea of performativity plays a central role. If entities, be they human or non-human, are formed in the course of concrete relations, and if these relations, in turn, have to be enacted by socio-material practices, "then they have to be performed in, by and through those relations" (Gherardi, 2000: 218). Orlikwoski (2007) scrutinized the practices in relation to the Google internet search, the ubiquitous power of which can be described as not only searching the web-reality but also creating it. The code behind the search engine is maintained by programmers; it runs on computers that perform relations and is enacted by billions of users. The censorship Google is willing

to accept in China "highlights how it can configure, in real-time, the performance of the emergent sociomaterial assemblage" (ibid. p. 1441). *Second*, the focus on practice emphasizes the role of knowledge that is produced through sensual impressions. Referring to Georg Simmel, Strati (2007) stressed that each sense was very different, but they somehow work all together, combining into aesthetic judgment. Sensible, local knowledge is at the same time about the seen and the unseen, the noticed and unnoticed, and the experienced and the unsaid. Active sensual perceptions bring about judgments that are sensible-aesthetic in the first place. Consequently, they are not expressed in a rational-analytical way, but in a poetic logic that works through "metaphorisation, visual thinking, and mythical thought" (Strati, 2014: 126). These judgments of the senses can be interpreted as the body's thoughts. Strati (2007):

> "Sensible knowledge concerns what is perceived through the senses, judged through the senses, and produced and reproduced through the senses. It resides in the visual, the auditory, the olfactory, the gustatory, the touchable and in the sensitive–aesthetic judgment. It generates dialectical relations with action and close relations with the emotions of organizational actors" (p. 62).

The notion of sensible knowledge helps one to understand how knowledge is 'co-born with the Other' (Strati, 2007). We cannot (1) disassociate the Other from his/her/its body or appearance, because we are corporeally involved in an experience of the world. Moreover, we are (2) immersed in constant interactions with Others but also with other things (nonhumans). This creates (3) a finite personal perception, which is simultaneously emphatically open to the plural world out there, which is quasi inter-corporeal. Through the contingent point of view from which sensible knowledge emanates, we are capable of experiencing the Other within ourselves. By discovering and combining the relational force behind the 'sociomaterial' and the 'sensible-aesthetic,' the practice-based approach makes it possible to transcend the cultural and linguistic turns in the social sciences. It constitutes an acknowledgment of the decisive role of objects (as relations) in practice and of sensible-emotional forms of aesthetic knowing before they are reflected upon and turned into proper discourses.

3.4 Metamorphic theorizing

I conclude this conceptual chapter with some thoughts on theory creation from a processual vantage point of world making. If particles and their properties are depending on the methods of observation, one can derive that the structures of the material world appear differently if they were viewed from contrasting angles. Scientists do not deal with the truth; they deal with limited descriptions of reality. If abstractions and representations are no longer regarded as unconditionally authoritative, what does this mean for theories? I argue that they should reflect the complexity of the world, not trying to understand it through simplification (Dietrich, 2008; Langley and Tsoukas, 2011). Theorists should experience the world together with practitioners and become agents of little narratives.

Moreover, listening to Karl Weick, he called for increasing reflexivity about the process of theorizing itself (Steyaert and Dey, 2007). With his notion of 'writing is organizing,' he framed an allegory that enables one to conceive of imagination as part of theory construction. Moreover, Weick underscored the emotional aspect of theorizing: "The theories that matter most are those theories that have emotional resonance" (Weick, 1999 quoted in Steyaert and Dey, 2007: 12). Finally, he has been a wanderer between the disciplines – science, literature, and poetics. He thereby forged connections between seemingly incommensurable areas, and a valuable practice of stepping aside and reflecting by adopting differing viewpoints, rhythms, and feelings. As there are always different positions from which to observe a problem, there is constantly more than one path to theorizing. Depending on the perspective, organizational problems can be either ethical or aesthetic (Dietrich, 2008). Thus, researchers will not make universally valid discoveries; they will rather be part of an ongoing process of conceptual creation (Steyaert, 2007). Theorizing is thus a rhizomatic endeavor, a non-hierarchical perpetual creation of conceptual connections and multiplicity. Its principal questions are how to imagine new things in the world ethically and how to make them possible. Thereby, scholars are asked to turn their attention to affects and desires, discourse and practices, to images, spaces, and relationships with nonhuman others. Old theories were 'metaphoric' (Morgan, 2006); new theorizing is 'metamorphic' (Steyaert, 2012). The process researcher turns into a cartographer who maps with his tools of close observation, intimate conversation and sparkling imagination 'ontologies of motion'

(Nail, 2018) in a quest for a people to come. She does not apply abstract and universal concepts, as he does not want to control but to invent. He is aware that the material would change more than the concepts would. In this sense, she embeds practical within theoretical action, and becomes a nomad, always on the move (Steyaert, 2012). In a Sloterdijkian 'ethics of generosity' (Beyes, 2014) he searches for ways to foster his hunger for experimentation, generosity, and joy.

4 METHODOLOGY

Human beings often cling to their certainties for fear that their opinions will be proven false. But a certainty that cannot be called into question is not a certainty. Solid certainties are those that survive questioning. In order to accept questioning as the foundation for our voyage toward knowledge, we must be humble enough to accept that today's truth may become tomorrow's falsehood.

— Carlo Rovelli,
The First Scientist: Anaximander and his Legacy

Keeping in mind that certainty is damaging for theorizing, the most reliable evidence and arguments informing this dissertation emerged as I exposed myself to changing perspectives in the field and at the desk. In this chapter, I will start by outlining how I translated the theoretical core assumptions into a multifaceted and reflective research methodology. I will then break down the study design and research questions that guided the exploration. Finally, I will delineate the process of data generation and analysis step-by-step.

In 2014, the year that I started this project, it became evident that my research topic was about to turn into 'the' management trend of the hour. More and more people in strikingly different milieus – from the founders of startups to innovation-dependent corporations, from sharing economy activists to organizational development consultants, from tech-savvy blogs to *Harvard Business Review* and the *New York Times* – discussed the phenomenon fervently. I realized that the thesis that I had originally envisaged to be rooted in a small collection of case studies would have to deal critically with this popular discourse. From the outset, I wanted to include a more diverse dataset than previous studies on management trends. As a consequence, besides the conventional examination of management books, I conducted qualitative interviews with people who were involved in the management trend from different angles. Members of bossless organizations and facilitators of participative processes shared

their personal histories and philosophies, and intimate stories of success and failure. Consultants and book authors tended to reiterate celebratory accounts and delivered their sales pitches, while academics were more critical and reflective. As a third complementary source of data creation, I engaged in participant observation at events. This ethnographically inspired process opened windows into different social worlds. It helped me to understand how the discourse was mobilized against the background of differing repertoires of knowledge and why people got so excited about it. Each event had, in its own way, an affective appeal: a participatory facilitation training with an atmosphere of non-judgmental listening among a large group of organizational change agents; a countercultural festival spirit at a sharing economy conference; an edgy 'creative disruption' mood at a corporate future-of-work event; and atmospheres of community and departure in social-entrepreneurial DIY hipster spaces.

On a practical level, the participant observation experience helped me to exercise my ethnographic skills for the upcoming field study, but it also forced me to reflect on my self-understanding and ethical position in relation to the unbossing discourse. In line with the processual methodology, I wanted to fuse critical analysis with an affirmative engagement for more livable worlds, opening "a space between being 'for' and being 'against'" (Parker and Parker, 2017). At the same time, I felt how different accounts or experiences pulled and pushed me affectively. While much of the talk about 'innovation' and 'authenticity' appeared to me like discursive grandiloquence and other 'systemic' perspectives on the natural harmony of self-organization left me skeptical, I felt excited about the emancipatory potential of collective freelancing organizations. Along the way, more often than not, I was aware of being an outsider, coming and going, being part of but observing, getting into conversations but thinking about what to jot down. Particularly when I took photos, I always felt sneaky. On the other hand, back at research colloquia colleagues questioned my analytical distance, because I 'was so deeply involved' with the movement. In the field, I tried to remedy this tension with a participative approach to data creation. For example, when I took part in facilitating training, I used a project development method to garner advice on how to organize inclusive data creation. At another event, I offered a storytelling workshop about conflict and emotions in bossless organizing, utilizing facilitation templates that I had learned earlier. Back at the research institute, exchanges with a close-knit group of fellow doctoral and post-doctoral students who were going through similar experiences helped

to create a healthy distance to the field. Over time, I was able to raise my self-observing capacities, recognizing more consciously how I became someone else in every setting and how this experience would, in turn, contribute to the expansion or contraction of the various life-worlds in my research. In hindsight, analyzing popular books taught me a lot about the argumentative and rhetoric organization of the management trend, but the interviews and events provided a personal experience of why the discourse became desirable in different domains. First-hand accounts of involved protagonists confronted me with the sources of their excitement (also with their failures, frustrations, and doubts), while the events triggered my emotional journey between enthusiasm and skepticism. In sum, by switching between different methods, I was confronted with changing narratives, actors, and arenas, as well with my dis/entanglements of inspiration and criticism. The experience of moving continuously between different worlds enabled me to reflect on the interplay of discursive strings and why they become influential or not.

However, examining talk about bossless work was not the original intent behind this thesis. I wanted to find out how the discourse was intertwined with everyday practices in a bossless organization. Steyaert (2012) called on the next generation of organizational scholars to translate process philosophy into innovative and creative methods and to engage in real-life studies of world-making to complete the relational turn. Consequently, I turned my attention to ordinary 'relational practices' (Steyaert and Van Looy, 2010), to the mundane concerns of collaboration in an organizational case that is oscillating between social entrepreneurship, collective freelancing, and alternative organization. Essentially, I employed the ethnographic methods of participant observation and colloquial interviewing (both on- and offline), using my body and its senses as a research instrument (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2011). Being conscious of my entanglement in the *agencement*, I wanted to co-create parts of the analysis together with my research participants. Thus, after an initial period of fieldwork, I undertook a preliminary analysis and wrote a brief account outlining my observations so far (see Appendix III). This document served as an invitation for a round of formal qualitative interviews. It also motivated people to tell their stories about the practices that I had observed. Some of the interview partners even described new relational doings that I had not witnessed before. The participatory process fleshed out my observations with accounts of personal experience and informed the next phase of

my fieldwork by expanding the repertoire of practices and elucidating the relationships between them. After the subsequent research period, I was keen to repeat and broaden this process. I composed a blog post (Resch, 2017) built around a vignette that bundled observations from the field with some analytical reflections. The article served as an appetizer and invitation for a story-telling lunch/workshop. In the end, I had to cancel the event due to low participation. This breakdown (for a more detailed discussion, see subchapter 5.3) was disenchanting, yet it forced me to refocus my attention. I moved from tracing connections between affirmative interpersonal practices to reassessing the many mundane conversations, arrivals, departures, and chance encounters that I had taken part in during the previous months. Soon I became more sensitive to recurring laments, exhaustion, and individual reorientations. Consequently, I became more apt at grasping affectively permeated problems, such as power inequalities, gender issues, and the underlying causes for overinvestment and burnout in the organization.

In this intense one-year process of ethnographic field study, I was once again confronted with balancing my borderline involvement between research and activism. I had started as a triple outsider, being foreign to the country (New Zealand), confronted with a non-native language (English with Kiwi dialect), and a stranger to the organization (Enspiral). Although I had felt optimistic that this multiple strangenesses might prove to be a good vantage point for recognizing patterns and relations that had become normal and unaddressable, upon my arrival I thought to myself: "What am I doing here at the other end of the world?" Nevertheless, here I was, standing amid an outlandish valley-estate and looking at that tent in the shape of a geodesic dome. Waiting for a bunch of strangers to come out, minutes felt like hours, but I also hoped they would last forever. All I wanted to do was to turn around and run. What am I doing here? Fortunately, I stayed. I was warmly welcomed into an organization in which I could listen to both major and minor voices. However, my role as a researcher was under constant critical scrutiny. A typical conversation about my research would include sentences such as, "You know we are all about doing; changing stuff; entrepreneurial venturing. There are so many ideas out there that never change anything. Are you not concerned about getting caught in a loop of ideas?" As time passed, being questioned within the domains of academia and practice strengthened my confidence that I could maintain the balance between the worlds. Not belonging to either felt uncomfortable and unsettling, but it strengthened my reflective capacities and nurtured my openness to different

perspectives. Although my life worlds had challenged me constantly to stay vigilant, fieldwork proved to be treacherous. In the end, I chose to wrap up my ethnographic exploration abruptly after I had participated in a workshop weekend at the house of an organizational member. Following a year of participant observation, I had acquired full contextual knowledge of the existing issues and had formed close personal relationships within the organization. Throughout that day, I realized how thoroughly I had embodied small routines such as 'check-ins,' collaborative note taking with google docs or mixed on/offline meetings using video chat that had seemed utterly strange in the beginning. During a workshop about how to engage members in the course of their 'organizational career' ideas connected naturally. At this point, I could have easily stepped up to become a central member of this organization. The next day, I was sure that this is what saturation must feel like, and I chose to release the ripcord. I went back to my desk at the university and disentangled.

After this experience, I decided to go back to my interviews, management books, and event material. I picked it to pieces and reordered it entirely into a discursive analysis. The results suggested that organizational control in bossless organizations was exercised mainly through immersion in passionate desires (see subchapter 5.2). Besides longings for 'growth' and 'wholeness,' 'belonging' emerged as a central affective category. In parallel, affective resonances between belonging and guilt were popping up everywhere in my case study field notes. This sudden 'aha-type' (or better 'oh, that's funny') connection between the various theoretical perspectives and empirical data was for me the single most fruitful moment in this research project. My meanderings through a plethora of milieus, methods, literatures, and conceptual lenses finally had led me to go aground in shallow waters. Unwittingly, I got stuck on a rocky cliff that had been hiding beneath the surface. Analogically, my material was not talking about all the excitement, guilt, comfort, and shame vested in the desire to belong. If I had not left the secure environment of my research institute both somber and intrigued, I would not have been confronted with these feelings. If I had not severed these trusted ties, only to land on an island in the south pacific, where my role between participation and observation left me in constant limbo between belonging and strangeness, I would not have developed a sensitivity for this specific 'co-subjective circuit of feeling' (Fotaki, Kenny, and Vachhani, 2017). The creative flow of reality is hidden from our everyday action-

oriented experience. Again, Heraclitus: "Nature prefers to hide" (Nayak and Chia, 2011: 284).

If the bodily, affective, and subconscious dimensions of our sociomaterial becoming are that hard to grasp (at least within the cosmos of my Western/modern socialization), the representation of processual research has to become more creative. Considering the established convention of the social sciences, this pertains primarily to language and writing. Nayak and Chia (2011) rightly point out that language is an ordering device, and the use of the Phoenician alphabet in the Western hemisphere is especially hindering the rise of a process view. It divides the perpetual flow of speech into sound bites.

> "It was therefore no accident that 'formal logic was invented in an alphabetic culture' (Ong, 1967, p. 45), and it is this alphabetization of the Western consciousness that led to the almost obsessive preoccupation with fixing, naming, classifying and thematizing of the material and social worlds to create order and predictability in an otherwise fluxing and amorphous life-world" (p. 292).

What we can know is dependent on the linguistic system we use. A humble reaction to this insight is to extend the expressive repertoire of our present language. As researchers, we could try to juggle with established representations of scientific writing, to bend and rearrange them into novel forms that facilitate a more subtle and creative use. In this regard, Steyaert (2015) spoke of a frame of writing that diverts from the 'molar text' or 'royal science' with its abstract and linear language that wants nothing more than to quickly come to the point. Without a doubt a masculine genre. In his plea for writing multiplicity, Steyaert advocates for a form that disturbs binary thinking, in which reading can be compared to a walk through a hall of mirrors. I am approaching this ambitious goal by representing my empirical worlds in multiple ways: interview passages, book excerpts, quotations, observational vignettes, and photographs. Sometimes, I use literary prose or song texts to argue in analogies (you can find a notable example in subchapter 5.2). To me, the most important objective is to narrate my findings – relational practices and discursive articulations, fantasies and their favored *jouissance* – not as patterns, but as unfoldings (Center for Environmental Structure, 2006). While a pattern describes a fixed shape that should be realized, an unfolding focuses on the process of development. While traditional research would prescribe ways to replicate successful patterns, unfoldings emphasize that similar processes will unravel differently in every iteration and setting. They require an activist methodology that is

not geared towards plans but desires – multiperspective and iterative – that facilitates holistic thinking but is at the same time able to see how the whole is always embodied in its parts. I have aspired to embody such an 'ethico-political stance' (Willmott, 2005): making space for a multiplicity of voices, feelings, and affects, listening within, and permitting uncomfortable reflexivity to come up. While I want to contribute to the expansion of specific forms of world-making that can be framed as the 'queering of capitalism' (Gibson-Graham 1996; 2006), enforcing commons next to market-based structures, I do not want to end up evangelizing a single new world. If any political intent behind this dissertation proves to be in vain, every pore of the project that breathes 'incompleteness' has contributed to my personal transformation. Emanating from the post-foundational struggle to fix meaning in the context of contingency (Mouffe, 2013) and situated in Lacan's lacking subject that necessitates an 'ethical logic' (Ekman 2013b; see also Lacan's 'analyst discourse,' Costas and Taheri, 2012), I want to make myself available for new relations and unsettling truths. In this sense, I might feel closer to new forms of collective freelancing than to corporate developers, but I am aware that change is spurious and will surface in seemingly unlikely places. While emancipatory movements might be perpetuating old inequalities, new worlds might be disclosed in blockchain-riddled insurance multinationals.

4.1 Study design

The analysis of discourses and practices of bossless work in this thesis is arranged in three parts, which are connected through their sensitivity to power, paradoxes, and affect. They are based upon a two-tiered method of data generation: The first two sections of the analysis, in subchapters 5.1 and 5.2, are examinations of a mix of qualitative interview material, observational vignettes (stemming from my participation in events), and excerpts from selected management books. They contribute to a post-foundational discourse analysis of the management trend around bossless work. Subchapter 5.3 is a presentation of the results of a field study, showing how the popular discourse is entangled with everyday practices. In accord with Mol's (2002) understanding, I conceive this exploration as a 'praxiography,' the examination of a 'field of practice' (with theorizing as one practice among others). Praxiographic research comprises an attempt to describe practices, assuming that "the words of women and men

in the field are as valid as the researcher's own words" (Czarniawska, 2014: 4). Thus, Czarniawska continues: "Fieldwork is an expression of curiosity about the Other – about people who construct their worlds differently than we researchers construct ours" (p. 5). The following table provides a comparative overview of the study design.

	Analysis I	Analysis II	Analysis III
Title	Spirited away: Post-capitalist critique and its assimilation	Welcome to flatland? Fantasies and frictions of bossless work	Organizing affects of collective freelancing: An ethico-political struggle for incompleteness
Conceptual framework	Post-foundational discourse analysis	Post-foundational discourse analysis	Agencement: sociomaterial practice and affect
Key authors	Laclau and Mouffe	Lacan	Deleuze and Guattari, Strati, Gherardi, Nicolini
Theme	Bossless work and the new spirit of capitalism	Affective organizational control in unbossed work	Ethico-political effects of affect in collective freelancing
Unit of analysis	Societal	Organizational	Relational
Findings	Four discursive articulations of bossless work and their signification strategies (self-organization, commons, self-management, democracy) ↓ they are contributing to Renewed critique at the new spirit (collective freelancing); at the same time absorbed into it (decentralized firm)	Three fantasies and their patterns of *jouissance* (growth, wholeness, belonging) as attractors of the discourse Discussing these excessive passions as the three principal axes of affective organizational control in bossless work	Belonging-guilt: affective resonance pervading and sustaining relational practices Tracing the ethico-political effects of affect in the practice of collective freelancing (weaving, sharing, caring) How sensible knowledge contributes to affirmative struggle for incompleteness
Individual contributions	Carrying on analysis of contemporary developments in the new spirit of capitalism (Chiapello, 2013; Kazmi et al., 2016)	Spelling out how affective investment in the desire of the Other (bossless work) leads to different forms of co-dependency	Empirical study showing entanglement of affect and practice. Pointing to ethico-political processing of negative effects of affects
Overall contributions	Multifaceted analysis of a management trend (interlacing methods and theoretical lenses) Tracing ambiguous realities of affective organizational control from the relational to the organizational and societal level – carving out affirmative ethico-politics of incompleteness		

Table 1: Overview of the three-part analysis

To study the production of accounts of bossless work closely, I became a collector of texts, but also an interviewer, traveler, observer, trainee, and facilitator experimenting with participatory ethnographic methods. I attempt to connect findings from the examination of local practices with those from wider societal phenomena by switching

between different levels of analysis (those in subchapter 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3), but also by referring to historical experiences and literary analogies. In discussing my results, I kept Czarniawska's (2014) research-guiding questions in mind: "Is it relevant (useful)? Is it beautiful (aesthetic)? Is it moving (edifying)? And, if yes, for whom and to whom?" (p. 141).

Analysis I *'Spirited away: Post-capitalist critique and its assimilation'* departs from Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) post-foundational discourse analysis concerned with the hegemonization of signification strategies in a 'field of discursivity.' Four discursive articulations will be discerned in the management trend around bossless work: (1) *'self-organizing systems,'* (2) *'networked commons,'* (3) *'self-managed disruption,'* and (4) *'democratizing work.'* Then, I will discuss their respective signification strategies (in a struggle against the hegemonic order of 'managerialism') in the context of Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) 'new spirit of capitalism.' From the vantage point of this grand socio-economic framework, historical capitalist regimes are co-evolving with their critics. They are periodically absorbing critical claims to re-energize their mode of production. The analysis will show how the chains of signification of the first two articulations of the unbossing discourse are supporting a 'post-capitalist critique' against the new spirit of capitalism. It will describe emerging forms of *'collective freelancing'* to depict this movement. Simultaneously, I will show how articulations three and four are contributing to the assimilation of the criticism, as they devise an ideal-typical *'decentralized firm'* meant to revive the fading energies of the new spirit. This section will conclude with further reflections about the future direction of contemporary developments in the spirit-scheme (Chiapello, 2013; Kazmi, Leca, and Naccache, 2016).

In the post-foundational perspective, hegemonization is shaped by the complementary doings of signification and affect. Consequently, the second analysis will comprise an inquiry into the question of how the unbossing discourse has become compelling to subjects. I will mobilize a conceptualization of affect centered on fantasies and desires that is based on the psychoanalysis of Lacan (1997; Arnaud and Vidaillet, 2018). Thus, the section is themed *'Welcome to flatland? Fantasies and frictions of bossless work.'* Its psychosocial lens will facilitate understanding of how the discourse seduces people into consuming fantasies, with promises to re-establish a fullness that has been inevitably lost. Subsequently, I will identify three subconscious 'patterns of *jouissance*'

(excessive desires) that are involved in this supposedly flat way of organizing. I will argue that if people indulge in boundless enjoyment and suffering in (1) *'growth,'* (2) *'wholeness,'* or (3) *'belonging,'* they will become vulnerable to mutually exploitative and dominating relationships at work. This analysis suggests that bossless organizing is contained within affectively mediated forms of organizational control that are interacting with established modes of soft power.

In the third analysis, *'Organizing affects of collective freelancing: An ethico-political struggle for incompleteness,'* I hone in on the mundane relational practices of a bossless organization. I discuss the praxiographic field study of a social-entrepreneurial network that is experimenting with the practice of 'collective freelancing.' The section illustrates how the interplay between the sub-practices – *'weaving,'* *'sharing,'* and *'caring'* – is bringing together a diverse set of independent actors in a community of work-families. They are conflating collaborative ethics with organizational democratization, which enables them to address diverse issues of social innovation. By reconciling the sociomaterial and posthuman studies of practice and affect under the umbrella of '*agencement*' (Gherardi, 2016; Müller, 2015) I will trace how the practice is maintained by forceful flows of positive and negative affectivity. The 'desire to belong' and the 'guilt of not contributing enough' to the organization both engender ambiguous ethico-political effects. The analysis will show how affirmative practices that are rooted in positive-psychology regularly turn sour, resulting in sedimenting hierarchies, gender inequalities, overinvestment, and burnout. The embrace of 'sensible knowledge' (Strati, 2007) and therewith vulnerabilities, emotions, hospitality, and Otherness will be identified as a key resource for maintaining an ethical *'struggle for incompleteness.'* It encourages a variety of feelings and affect by creating a space for the imperfect and fragmentary that allows disentangling from prevalent discursive desires.

4.2 Research questions

The overarching research interests of this project can be subsumed under the question: How is power re-organized in decentralized organizations? To answer this question in the context of the management trend on bossless work, I broke it down into several sub-research questions that will guide the tripartite analysis.

I.

- How does the popular discourse mobilize different bodies of knowledge and linguistic strategies to signify the 'unbossing of work?

- How do advocates of the discourse attempt to change the organization of work, and how does this influence broader socio-economic developments?

II.

- How do shared fantasies contribute to the affective appeal of the management trend on bossless work?

- How is this fantasmatic involvement in the unbossing discourse leading to psychosocial patterns of organizational control?

III.

- How is 'collective freelancing' enacted through relational practices?

- What are the ethico-political effects of affective intensities that are imbued with the relational practices?

4.3 Data generation and analysis

In this section, I describe the process of data generation and analysis, starting with the discursive part, and then proceed to the field study. After a first phase of book, blog, and article collection in the spheres of academia and the unbossing trend, the initial intent behind conducting interviews had been to tap into unmediated first-hand material. I primarily wanted to calibrate and enrich my literature review[1]. I also sought to gain a better understanding of the relationships between theory and practice and hoped to encounter access to a possible field study. I contacted 25 people directly via email or through personal connections. Eleven of them agreed to participate in interviews. The interviewees represented a mix of practitioners, consultants, authors, and academics.

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[1] Throughout this research project, I conducted various conceptual and thematic literature reviews, which have been synthesized in this thesis. I developed the following method of analysis: *First*, I read a paper or book, highlighted important passages (mostly in PDF), using an annotation scheme (*! [important], *z [quote], *l [literature], etc.). *Second*, I exported the annotations into a standardized 'summary file,' where I ordered my thoughts according to headlines such as "basically, what it argues is that…," "its principal findings are…" or "interesting, puzzling, questions…" *Third*, I jotted down short summaries next to each other in my (analog) notebook to create overviews, which I could access quickly (see an example in Appendix V). Overall, I worked through close to 70 key literature items in this structured way.

The interviews lasted between 24 to 93 minutes each. Eight of them were conducted via Skype or telephone, while three were held face to face. The qualitative interviews were semi-structured, and I had a manual with questions but used it flexibly (see an example of a full questionnaire in Appendix II). I recorded all but one interview (due to technical problems) with the permission of the interviewees, ensuring anonymity. Afterward, I transcribed them with the software *f4transkipt* and added contextual notes and photographs to the documents. Next, I conducted a preliminary analysis, read the interview transcripts a few times, and coded selected passages in the style of content analysis (Mayring, 2010). The transcripts were analyzed with *ATLAS.ti*, a program for qualitative data analysis and organization. I started building the code structure inductively from four interviews, which I selected according to the greatest possible diversity. As figure 3 illustrates, 39 thematic codes emerged from this process. These codes were subsequently assigned to four overarching code families. Figure 4 provides an overview of the codes and their quantitative distribution (data taken from the first series of eleven interviews).

Name	Families	Grounded
respect	Culture-/Paradigmshift	2
emotions	Culture-/Paradigmshift	5
ego practice	Culture-/Paradigmshift	7
representative	Culture-/Paradigmshift	1
paradigm shift	Culture-/Paradigmshift	24
motivation	Culture-/Paradigmshift	6
purpose	Culture-/Paradigmshift	15
culture	Culture-/Paradigmshift	19
cultural change	Culture-/Paradigmshift	14
create an outcome	Culture-/Paradigmshift	1
leadership	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	19
succession	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	3
personality traits	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	8
needs to be organized	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	6
action	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	2
hierarchy	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	18
facilitator/broker	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	2
empowerment	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	4
decisions	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	17
consensus - dissent	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	5
size limit	Prerequisites/Obstacles	1
space	Prerequisites/Obstacles	7
prerequisites	Prerequisites/Obstacles	21
transparency	Prerequisites/Obstacles	6
materiality	Prerequisites/Obstacles	6
IT/Virtual	Prerequisites/Obstacles	8
obstacles	Prerequisites/Obstacles	12
co-creation/collaboration	Theorizing	11
democracy	Theorizing	18
complexity & diversity	Theorizing	6
autonomy	Theorizing	5
timeless	Theorizing	2
wholeness	Theorizing	5
natural way	Theorizing	5
patterns/symbols	Theorizing	14
organizational structure	Theorizing	16
group dynamics	Theorizing	5
resilience	Theorizing	1
intergenerational	Theorizing	3

Figure 3: Thematic codes sorted by code families

Name	Families	Grounded
paradigm shift	Culture-/Paradigmshift	24
prerequisites	Prerequisites/Obstacles	21
leadership	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	19
culture	Culture-/Paradigmshift	19
democracy	Theorizing	18
hierarchy	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	18
decisions	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	17
organizational structure	Theorizing	16
purpose	Culture-/Paradigmshift	15
patterns/symbols	Theorizing	14
cultural change	Culture-/Paradigmshift	14
obstacles	Prerequisites/Obstacles	12
co-creation/collaboration	Theorizing	11
personality traits	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	8
IT/Virtual	Prerequisites/Obstacles	8
space	Prerequisites/Obstacles	7
ego practice	Culture-/Paradigmshift	7
materiality	Prerequisites/Obstacles	6
needs to be organized	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	6
transparency	Prerequisites/Obstacles	6
complexity & diversity	Theorizing	6
motivation	Culture-/Paradigmshift	6
emotions	Culture-/Paradigmshift	5
consensus - dissent	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	5
natural way	Theorizing	5
group dynamics	Theorizing	5
wholeness	Theorizing	5
autonomy	Theorizing	5
empowerment	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	4
intergenerational	Theorizing	3
succession	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	3
respect	Culture-/Paradigmshift	2
action	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	2
facilitator/broker	Leadership/Decisions/Hierarchy	2
timeless	Theorizing	2
resilience	Theorizing	1
create an outcome	Culture-/Paradigmshift	1
size limit	Prerequisites/Obstacles	1
representative	Culture-/Paradigmshift	1

Figure 4: Thematic codes sorted by frequency

I went on to cluster the quotations in a *word document* (research report) within the four code families and highlighted connections between the families. I subsequently distilled and formulated viable narratives and meta-themes, illustrating them with the most significant quotations. The goal was to highlight storylines, relations, concepts, and frictions within and between the code families. Concurrently, I incorporated or noted answers to the following questions: Which voices can be heard on the management trend? Who are the main circulators of this discourse? Why are they advertising their cause in terms of a paradigm shift? What are the major ties, frictions, and paradoxes across the narratives? How are ideas traveling across inventories of knowledge?

Next, I presented my preliminary interpretations with illustrative quotations in a Ph.D. working group and at a research workshop at the University of St. Gallen. I received insightful responses, incorporated the valuable feedback, and restructured the research report accordingly. Then, I went back to the drawing board and created four tag clouds along the lines of the code families to generate a schematic overview at a glance (see figure 5). The tags were differentiated by two font sizes, according to their importance.

Figure 5: The tag cloud

I returned to the original interviews and re-read them with a focus on connections, differences, and paradoxes, taking into account the different professional contexts and backgrounds of my interview partners. This led to a 'final' analysis, in which I abandoned the artificial 'code' and 'code family' structure that had served me well during the initial investigation. I synthesized a more coherent account that helped me to refine the questionnaire for the second round of interviews, where the focus was on issues of conflict, emotion, and personal engagement with work. In the second interview-wave, I performed eight additional interviews (with nine people), scaling up to a total number of 20. They lasted between 27 to 84 minutes each; five of them were conducted in the offices of the interviewees, with the remaining three done via video chat. Again, the interviews were semi-structured; I had a manual of questions that I used flexibly. All the conversations were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and afterward transcribed into computer files by *f4transkipt* and imported into the *ATLAS.ti* software.

Overall, my sample included 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews [60% male, 40% female] with practitioners [40%], consultants [30%], authors [20%], and academics [10%]. The participants were situated in seven different countries. I had been adamant about choosing them from varied backgrounds: multinational companies, small and medium enterprises, startups, social entrepreneurial ventures, and cooperatives, as well as independent academics, consultants, and facilitators. Taking all of them together, the duration of the interviews was between 24 to 93 minutes; eleven of them were conducted via video chat or telephone, with the remaining nine recorded face-to-face. To complement my dataset, I visited five related events. I observed, participated, and engaged in colloquial interviewing, but I also took photographs and jotted down field notes, which I later transformed into a series of ethnographic vignettes. I chose the events to represent the variety of contexts in which the management trend was enacted: a participatory facilitation training course, a glossy future of work event with star keynotes, a sharing economy conference with an activist-festival atmosphere, a brown bag lunch in a coworking space, and a retreat organized by a social-entrepreneurial network (for a more detailed overview, see Appendix I). Furthermore, I have integrated a close reading of four popular management books (Hamel, 2012; Laloux, 2014; Mason, 2015; Sattelberger et al., 2015) into this analysis. Building on this empirical material, I conducted a discourse analysis informed by a post-foundational methodology (see

Cederström and Spicer, 2014; Marttila, 2015; Walton and Boon, 2014). I describe this process more closely in subchapters 5.1 and 5.2. With this twist, I can make the analysis more intelligible by directly connecting conceptual and methodological concerns.

Finally, the following is an overview of my field research process in New Zealand with the social-entrepreneurial network Enspiral (a detailed description of the organization is given in subchapter 5.3). Upon my arrival in the country, I had already observed Enspiral's online channels for six months. Initially, it had been agreed that I would engage in participant observation with *Loomio*, the network's flagship enterprise (producing software for collaborative decision-making). Unfortunately, the cooperative went through financial difficulties and had been temporarily reduced to two paid programmers developing new features. Fortunately, one of my key contacts served a term as a so-called 'catalyst,' facilitating the organization of the network together with three other people. He invited me to participate in their meetings.

Following the catalysts *(three months, Feb-Apr 2017)*: The catalyst meetings were held online via video chat in an agile 'sprint format' roughly two times a week. The four catalysts understood themselves as stewards of network activities. Their task was to keep talking to individuals and organizations, mapping issues in the network, and generating overview. Along the way, they mediated conflicts and tried to resolve with individual difficulties. They emphasized that they did not want to be consumed by this process, as with a catalyst in physics. In hindsight, this was an early hint of considerable problems with overwork and burnout in the organization. Instead of doing the work that they had spotted by themselves, they tried to bring volunteers together in working groups and helped them to set-up processes. Two earlier catalyst cohorts were funded and thus played a more active role, but as the venture contributions to the network decreased, so did the scope of the catalyst's engagement.

Members retreat (*one day, February 2017*): One-day participation in open space workshops of Enspiral's core group at their annual retreat (30 participants).

Summer Fest (*four days, February 2017*): Participation in the annual retreat of the whole network, including guests (around 100 participants). People were meeting in various facilitated spaces to learn from each other, to share their visions and values. Rituals but also participatory facilitation techniques, such as open spaces and sharing circles, contributed to the overall purpose of bringing people into personal relationships.

The translation of spiritual practices into a social entrepreneurial context enabled the attendees to show vulnerability, humility, and generosity, but also excitement and openness to serendipity.

Human Methods Lab (*six months, February-July 2017*): Participation in an early stage entrepreneurial research project that involved creating a series of workshops, in which groups of people learned to recognize and utilize emotional and sensible undercurrents in their collaboration. Participation included the attendance of weekly project meetings (with 3-6 participants). I also helped in the design and co-facilitation of six related workshops.

Project Heartbeat Workshop (*half a day, March 2017*): Several Enspiral ventures sharing their learning, giving each other moral support and help, exchanging leads (also update from the enterprises to the network and publication of learning for other groups).

Working group 'Enspiral Circles' (*one month, March 2017*): Following the Summer Fest and its focus on the possible international growth of Enspiral beyond a single member circle, I participated in the online meetings of a subsequently established working group. It was a makeshift experience; not many core people showed up; mostly European contributors who wanted to launch a new member circle.

Feedback loop 1: Relational practices (*two months, April-May 2017*): As mentioned earlier, I drafted a brief two-pager (see Appendix III), lining out my observations of regular practices at Enspiral that foster interpersonal bonds. I then used this document as a prop for 10 interviews with Enspiral members. The subsequent analysis resulted in a more nuanced list of practices and an expanded collection of related stories.

Enspiral Growth Day (*one day, May 2017*): Three board members of the Enspiral Foundation initiated this whole-day workshop. They disclosed the precarious state of the network's finances and announced their retirement by the end of the year. I witnessed an astounding switch from a morning of confusing problem framing to the drawing up of concrete proposal for a solution by the afternoon. It included the creation of a new role called 'delegates' (a group of 6-12 people) who would do the work on the network for a period; members would delegate their decision-making powers to this group.

Online observation of the 'Delegates Proposal' (*three months, May-July 2017*): I then observed Enspiral's online channels (*Slack*, *Loomio*) where the subsequent debate of a

'delegates proposal' developed and witnessed the ups and downs of this activity. Over this period, intense participatory strategic discussions took place. The proposal to create a 'delegates experiment' started a frenzy: a block, emotional drama, change of minds, endless threads. It was hard to keep up.

Working in an Enspiral coworking space (*one month, June-July 2017*): Working from a flex desk allowed me to experience another Enspiral space, to grasp the atmosphere and to talk to people that I had not met so far.

Enspiral 'Pod Day' (*one afternoon, July 2017*): An information and peer-learning session about the concept of a new organizational form (see subchapter 5.1).

Feedback loop 2: Relational practices (*failed experiment, July 2017*): As mentioned above (and as will be discussed later in subchapter 5.3), I wrote a blog post (Resch, 2017). It started with an ethnographic vignette describing the unfolding of specific relational practices and led to a list of those practices with a short account of how I made sense of them. The idea was to invite people to write short blog entries by themselves, where they would share related stories. I also tried to organize a story-telling lunch for those less skilled at writing. Both ideas failed due to a lack of participation. I see this as an expression of the exhaustion and disappointment in the network at that time due to the intense process of precarious change.

Enspiral Work-a-thon (*one weekend, July 2017*): After the 'delegates proposal' had failed a so-called 'getting shit done' working group assembled for a workshop to deliberate on their working program.

In sum, I represented the fieldwork experience in 121 field notes (using the note-taking software *Evernote*) and transcribed 10 interviews, while I also wrote four extended reflective summaries, which I sent to my primary supervisor. In my analysis, I turned those field notes into 58 episodes, sketches of places, and reiterations of stories (using a template proposed in Emerson et al., 2011). This document proved a valuable source in the process of constructing vignettes. Next, I created a mind map in which I organized the relations between activities and practices, but also between practices (see Appendix IV). Before I started to write up the analysis, I met with a group of Enspiral members. I recounted the narrative as I perceived it, using the mind map as a visual cue. Their feedback was then incorporated into the analysis. Furthermore, I presented a first version

of the field study chapter at a doctoral colloquium at the University of St. Gallen. To facilitate a better understanding of the analysis, I will discuss the methodological implications of my approach and the steps of the analysis in more detail in subchapter 5.3.4.

INTERLUDE

Before switching to the analysis – the heart of this thesis – I invite you to take a quick tour through a photographic exploration of bossless work. This scarcely commented walkthrough will confront you with recurring themes, artifacts, feelings, and atmospheres that I have been immersed in on my research journey. The intention is to attune you to the theme and field of study. Together with the upcoming vignettes, interview fragments, stories, literatures, quotations, and personal reflections, the pictures will contribute to a multifaceted representation and discussion of the empirical material. Although it is not a lushly-featured 'hall of mirrors' in Steyaert's (2015) sense that confronts the reader with the multiplicity of sense-makings, feelings, and affects encountered in the field, it might still be characterized as an illustrative cabinet.
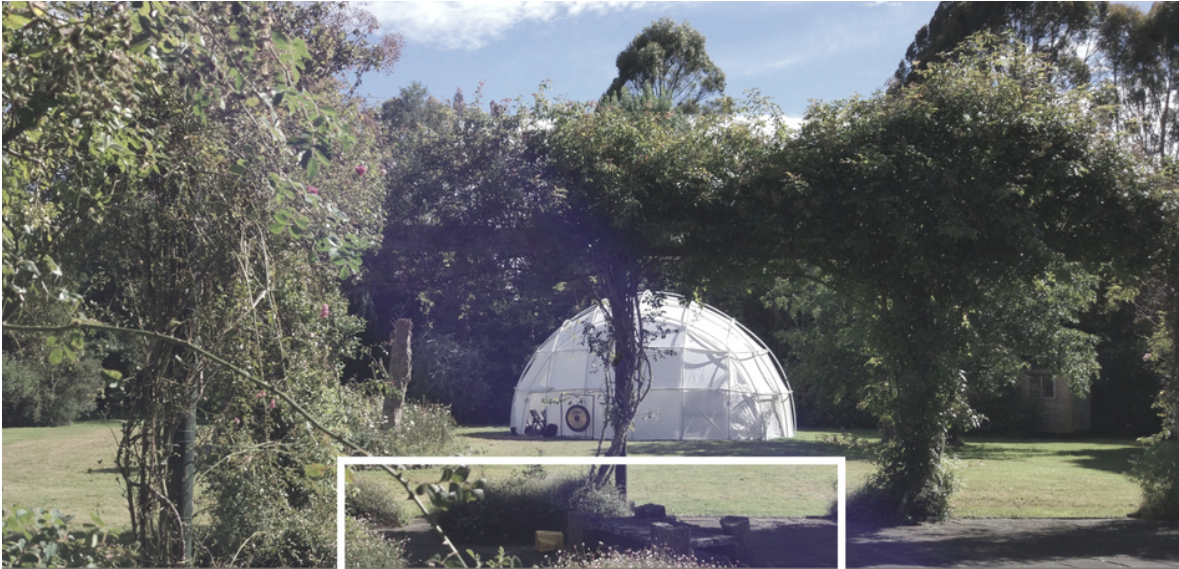
OUTSIDER

BEGINNINGS   a stranger to the country
a foreign language
a newcomer to the organization
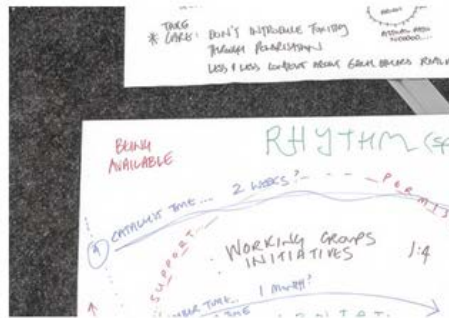
FLIPCHARTS

idea collection
collaboration
structuring processes
presentations
graphic summaries

Mindfulness: noticing what is happening right now with kindness and curiosity...

Tāngia te uwua pua whakarite ite tupu o te Harakeke

Clear the undergrowth so the new shoots of the flax will Grow

THINK INSIDE THE BOX

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOSS

CHAIR MAN

SHARE MEN

WORK IN PROGRESS

PROGRESS AT WORK

BAD COP

GOOD COOP

Simply pushing harder within the old boundaries will not do!

Karl Weick 1993

CIRCLES

POST-IT NOTES

collecting, noting, jotting, structuring, grouping, summarizing, co-creating

MINDFUL NESS

OPEN SPACES

01 COLLABORATIVE AGENDA-SETTING

02 WORKSHOPS VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

03 REPORT FROM THE WORKSHOPS

04 REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

HOLACRACY
SCRIBBLINGS
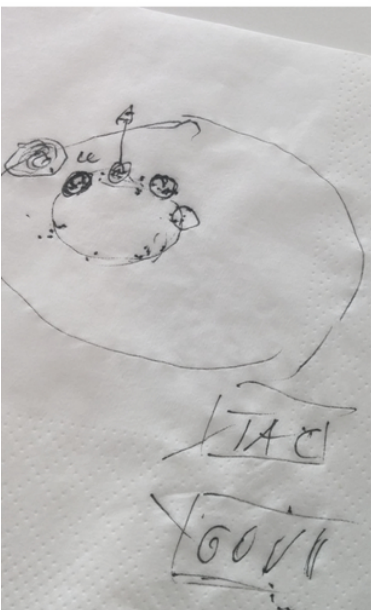
DIGITAL **CARE**

SELF-REPLICATING
BLOCKCHAIN
PLANTOID

5   FINDINGS

In this results chapter, I begin by analyzing the discursive organization of the management trend to discuss its societal implications (subchapter 5.1). I will then show how bossless work becomes appealing, as the discourse triggers fantasmatic desires. In subchapter 5.2, I delineate how excessive passionate involvement translates into co-dependencies and vulnerabilities, and affective modes of organizational control. Finally, a field study of an unbossed organization comprises a close look at the relational level. It illustrates how affective tension results in adverse ethico-political effects. I also explore a resistant 'ethico-politics of incompleteness' (subchapter 5.3).

5.1   Spirited away: Post-capitalist critique and its assimilation

Employing a post-foundational framework for discourse analysis (Cederström and Spicer, 2014), in this section, I identify and examine four discursive articulations of the management trend in bossless work. I show how their respective 'chains of signification' (Martilla, 2015) are clustered around central terms that are able to assume "a 'universal' structuring function within a certain discursive field" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: xi). These 'nodal points' – *'self-organization,' 'commons,' 'self-management,'* and *'democracy'* – are so frequently used that they have almost lost their specific meaning. Their relative emptiness enables them to become "privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain" (ibid. p. 112). Subsequently, the analysis shows how each articulation constitutes an attempt to signify three interrelated 'floating signifiers' – *'the firm,' 'work,'* and *'leadership'* – to construct a compelling argument for bossless work. This sets the scene for a 'field of discursivity' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) in which the four articulations are used in the struggle with the established hegemony of 'managerialism' (Clegg, 2014; Klikauer, 2015) over those floating signifiers. Before I delve into this analysis, I will explain the conceptual background of the post-foundational approach to discourse. I will describe its discursive mechanisms and underlying social theoretical considerations, in terms of which the social is perceived as fundamentally incomplete; an open plane on which hegemony operates as a form of political relation that implies voluntary consent to power.

In the next step, I discuss these findings in relation to Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) 'new spirit of capitalism.' In this extensive socio-economic framework, each historical regime of capitalism is seen to be justified by a legitimizing ideology. This 'spirit' ensures that participants perceive the system as fair and as contributing to their aspirations and livelihoods. However, capitalism is not able to supply these ideologies endogenously. It has to draw nourishment from its critics. In this understanding, capitalism periodically assimilates parts of the demands of those who criticize the system. Historically, it has incorporated claims that made the process of accumulation seem morally and socially acceptable and provided opportunities for more authentic and autonomous ways of working. With the eponymous 'new spirit,' Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) delineated how from the 1980s onwards passion understood as an intensified affective personal engagement with work has been utilized to re-energize people's commitment to capitalism. In subscribing to the logic of the project, the multidivisional corporation was restructured to a conglomerate of lean and vision-driven ventures. Specialized departments were transformed into multidisciplinary teams that would ideally self-manage, together with project managers who acted as coordinators, facilitators (Raelin, 2013), and coaches (Schulz and Steyaert, 2014). However, the leadership's hierarchical power was only ostensibly diminished (Costea, Crump, and Amiridis, 2008). Companies were still centrally managed, preferably by leaders who were able to convey a compelling vision and to inspire trust, thereby antiquating the need to issue orders. The new horizontal management techniques advanced together with meticulous tools of benchmarking. Workers traded a feeling of self-direction for internalized discipline, peer control, and the precarious notion of employability against a stable career.

I argue that this 'thorny problem of central control' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006) threatens to drain the energies of the new spirit of capitalism. While employees are encouraged to collaborate passionately and to act entrepreneurially, they are facing the limits of post-bureaucratic organization (Clegg, 2012; Sturdy, Wright, and Wylie, 2016). I discuss how two of the discursive articulations in the management trend, *'self-organizing systems'* and *'networked commons'* are contributing to a new 'post-capitalist' (Gibson-Graham, 2006) critique in the space of freelancer organizing. I outline different types of *'collective freelancing,'* which are proposing networked forms of production in close-knit communities that operate without employment relations.

Correspondingly, they lead to new work relations in which both market-related and commons-based concerns are recognized. In a similar vein, the other two articulations, *'self-managed disruption'* and *'democratizing work'* are helping to signify the incorporation of the criticism into the new spirit. They are envisioning technologically disintermediated corporations without central management and departmental boundaries. I map out the ideal type of the *'decentralized firm,'* which is horizontally driven by self-directed teams, providing employees with community experiences. As the members of these organizations actualize their 'authentic' selves with regard to the economic benefit of the firm, the dominance of work over all other domains of life established by the new spirit is reassured. Individuals continue to develop their intrinsic qualities to maintain employability (Cremin, 2010; Ekman, 2013). The simultaneous formulation and assimilation of critique signify an acceleration of historical dynamics. Hence, the chapter closes with a discussion of possible future scenarios on a spectrum between 'green capitalism' (Chiapello, 2013) and 'local small business systems' (Parker, 2017).

In what follows, I will outline Boltanski and Chiapello's framework for understanding epochal shifts in capitalist organization. I will then unfurl the post-foundational approach to discourse analysis and explain the analytical steps that led to this study before I go into the analysis and discussion.

5.1.1　The spirits of capitalism

Building on Max Weber's work, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) argued that in its essence, capitalism is an absurd and empty system. Nobody would want to participate, because "wage-earners have lost ownership of the fruits of their labor, as well as any hope of ever working other than as someone else's subordinate. As for capitalists, they find themselves chained to a never-ending and insatiable process" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006: 162). Therefore, each period of capitalism needs a moral ideology that enthuses people and assures collective advantages for the common good. Ironically, only critics of the system are able to supply its moral foundations and address the inherent deficit of motivation (du Gay and Morgan, 2013; Ekman, 2013). By recognizing some critical demands for integrity, social justice, and authenticity, capitalists periodically apply constraints to the process of accumulation, while

simultaneously turning the missing object of critique into a driver for profit generation. The spirit thus arises from the interaction between capitalism and its critics. By 'displacing' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) production to new modes or locations, the elites secure committed protagonists, satisfy criticisms, and serve profits. Repeatedly, capitalists have been able to endogenize their opponents in a disarming embrace. The spirits of capitalism as moral ideologies supply stylistic descriptions of new business conduct and role-modeling behaviors for individual success, while collective benefits are outlined that render the process fair and legitimate. Importantly, a spirit does not merely function as a rhetorical device, but commits people to the creation of new institutions and practices by stimulating them to conceive of their work as calling and vocation. A spirit is thus seen as an energizing discourse and a performative force (du Gay and Morgan, 2013).

5.1.1.1 Forms of critique

Chiapello (2013) categorized four major types of criticism: conservative, social, artistic, and ecological. *First*, conservative criticism of social inequality was most influential in early capitalistic transformations. Its advocates lamented the rural exodus, as well as the decline of noble duty and loyalty while being preoccupied with the idea of a moral order that is continuously endangered on both ends of the social spectrum, by excessive riches and unemployment. Conservative critics accept unequal societal positions. They are concerned with a more equal sharing of profits rather than questioning the legitimacy of private ownership. They emphasize the role of a responsible elite, although moral dignity is accessible to the poor as well (through work as moral education for a frugal life).

Second, social critics separated the social question from morality. In creating the conceptual language to speak about 'capitalism' in the first place, they portrayed labor as the source of all value that is unjustly extracted by capital owners, leaving workers in poverty and without the right to choose what work they would like to do. For its socialist strand, on the one hand, the aim was to collectivize the means of production, but its proponents were not able to move beyond hierarchical modes of organizing or wage labor. The aim of the libertarian orientation of social criticism, on the other hand, is to increase worker's autonomy both at the workplace and in relation to the state. From this

perspective, social democracy, involving the development of welfare measures and state planning alongside a market economy, can be seen as a wave of assimilation of social critique (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). The Fordist compromise foresaw solving the problem of social inequality through infinite economic growth.

Third, and related to libertarian social concerns, artistic critique emerged in the 1900s, also denouncing oppressive power relations at work. Crucially, this argument was extended to delineate the colonization of lifestyles through capitalism. Small intellectual and artistic circles launched a critique of consumerism, massification, and functionalism to show how life as a whole had lost its authenticity and had been essentially reduced to an alienated working life in a society of control (Foucault, 2008). Artistic critics convey an individualist and aesthetic ideal, where autonomy triumphs over profane manufactured pleasures, an 'aristocratic' (Chiapello, 2013) sense of refined beauty and authenticity against the ashen grey of mass-market standardization (Illich, 1973).

Finally, ecological criticism emerged in the late 20th century. "The focus is no longer on indignation at the worker's lot, the destructive selfishness of the dominant classes, or the disciplinary nature of society. Capitalism, by its very operation, is leading directly to the destruction of our civilization" (Chiapello, 2013: 73-74). The critique is divided between traditionalists, who envision locally sustainable production circles in self-organized communities, and modernists who want to tackle environmental degradation with technological innovation. As ecologist's deepest concern is the inability of capitalism to secure the planetary future of humanity, they do not focus on advancing democratic governance. Their critique is thus adaptable to most political systems and modes of managing work.

5.1.1.2 *The rise and fall of capitalist spirits*

Historically Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) located three successive spirits. At this point, it is important to note that a particular spirit cannot be conceived as a stable and integrated entity. Instead, it is always thwarted by a rival spirit or different forms of critique that narrow the void between the real and idealized worlds (Kazmi, Leca, and Naccache, 2016). A potent spirit has to fulfill three criteria sufficiently: *First*, individual commitment has to be rendered *exciting*, promising forms of liberation and enlivenment. The *second* yardstick is to assure a degree of *security* for the actors and their families,

while *fairness*, *thirdly*, alludes to a sense of justice regarding the common good and public interest.

The original spirit at the end of the 19th century has been coined 'domestic.' Its privileged subject was the bourgeois, who was engaged in a family venture and got excited by an entrepreneurial vision of freedom from old feudal class-based communities. Appreciation for bourgeois morality fed the security dimension, while a sense of fairness was primarily guaranteed by charity, personal property, and relationships. The consecutive spirit was situated roughly between 1930 and 1960 and was characterized by the integrated industrial firm with the salaried director at its helm. Excitement was gained from career opportunities and accompanying power positions. Stable careers also guaranteed long-term security in synergy with the evolving welfare state. Meritocratic fairness rested on the pursuit of formally certified skills, which were valued against their effectiveness in relation to management objectives.

During the 1960s, for the first time, artistic critique spread from limited avant-garde circles to become a popular mass movement that culminated in the countercultural protests of the 1960s. However, demands for self-management, personal autonomy, and creativity were not limited to the protesting youths; an increasing number of highly skilled engineers, technicians, and managers joined in as well. When the elite had to face the fact that further concessions to social demands would not put the crisis to rest, they acknowledged the push against the Tayloristic organization of work in hierarchical bureaucracies. Subsequently, the call for autonomy and authenticity in "opposition to 'the man', to sexual repression, to all aspects of conformity, consumption, and massification" (Du Gay and Morgan, 2013: 20) was translated into more flexible and flat organizations engaged in networks of partnerships. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) argue that this phase of recuperation since the 1980s bore the 'new spirit of capitalism.'

5.1.1.3 Pains of assimilation

In organizations, 'projects' began to replace bureaucracy as the primary vehicle to structure work. In a 'connexionist logic' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006), projects are ideally driven by cross-functional teams composed of self-managing individuals who are striving to express themselves in their work.

> "The last cycle of appropriation by capitalism fed on the anti-authoritarian mood to construct a more flexible world in which life was organized by projects, bringing out more individualized, creative, and fulfilling careers, with employers no longer telling workers what to do but stimulating their energies" (Chiapello, 2013: 72).

The excitement-dimension spelled out earlier was thus fueled by the expression of individual creativity and talent through a new kind of work that involved the whole person. The separation between work and life was waning, as passion, self-organization, and self-actualization, which had been banned from the industrial workplace in the name of efficiency, were recognized as sources of increased growth. Moreover, the new spirit of capitalism addressed the other two legitimizing factors, namely stability and fairness, in similarly innovative ways. While employees traded stable careers and parts of the welfare system against educational opportunities to maintain their employability, a sense of fairness came to be guaranteed by (annual) assessments of their flexibility and adaptability to succeed in projects. The ideal-type figure was no longer the 'organization man' (du Gay, 2000), holding an office and executing top-down control, but the charismatic 'project manager' (Raelin, 2011b), who led cooperatively by formulating a vision that generated a shared culture. Key attributes of this ideal type persona included networker, enthusiastic, autonomous, mobile, empathic, tolerant, informal, and adaptable.

> "What is relevant is to be always pursuing some sort of activity, never to be without a project, without ideas, to be always looking forward to, and preparing for, something along with other persons, who are brought together by the drive for activity" (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002: 193).

Inevitably, "the remedy of critique has turned into new forms of oppression which have to be remedied" (Ekman, 2013: 296-297). *Firstly*, anti-hierarchical arguments were given a moral verve that disguised the 'thorny problem of central control' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). From now on, project leaders should rather act as coaches, coordinators, and facilitators (Schulz and Steyaert, 2014; Shoukry and Cox, 2018) than as authorities. The overall direction of the company, though, was still subject to top-down control, preferably exercised by managers who embodied a visionary culture rather than issuing orders. Consequently and *secondly*, the costs of social control were deposited onto, or rather into, the individuals. In fact, the new spirit of capitalism

paradoxically increased both autonomy and control at work. Motivated by the promise of being able to develop a work life in line with their existential values, actors willingly accepted the new mechanisms of self-control that were reinforced using group pressure, information technology, and standardization (Ekman, 2013). What followed was that the demand for authentic self-expression through work was inevitably entwined with corporate attempts to commodify authenticity. "Not only are workers faced with contradictory demands, but they also have to struggle with the anxiety of their existential involvement being put to instrumental use in the organization" (ibid. p. 306). *Thirdly,* the invention of employability, meaning the development of one's capabilities and networks in the course of successive projects instead of a stable career, arose together with lower job security and gave management the chance to control the workforce (Cremin, 2010). Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) refer to this as a strategy of 'displacement,' and circumventing criticism by outsourcing work to companies in distant locations or modifying the criteria that define a successful career. As there are hardly any systems to assess employability; the critics can neither grasp it nor define alternatives.

5.1.1.4 *Contemporary critics*

To sum up, the new spirit of capitalism fueled enthusiasm, innovation, and profits by promising authentic self-realization through work in 'less hierarchical organizations' (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). However, this came at the price of increased self-control and reinforcement of the managerial prerogative in the guise of the visionary leader. Moreover, in a world with diminishing work-life boundaries, the individual has to navigate between his or her own and corporate authenticity, as well as to maintain employability under precarious conditions. Du Gay and Morgan (2013) phrased this as a reconceptualization of exploitation. A new cleavage was created between the mobile and the immobile. The vagrant emerged as the new hero of the networked economy, while the sedentary population is slowly sedimenting into new servant strata, caring for the weak and constituting the scenery through which the connexionist few gazed. So, what is the status of criticism then? During the 1990s, Boltanski and Chiapello referred to the new spirit as a spirit in-the-making that almost cleared the space of criticism. The emergence of lifestyle marketing supported this dynamic by successively appropriating

alternative movements to create new consumption patterns (Klein, 2000). Distinctive niche products offered the new academic middle classes the opportunity to acquire authenticity and celebrate their singularity (Reckwitz, 2017). Social critique was, in turn, effectively disarmed by the various displacements that were established in the new spirit. Trade unions had not only lost their members to outsourcing, freelancing, and self-help literature but also their adversary – the integrated multidivisional corporation – and consequentially their power position on employer's decisions. They were not able to frame a compelling narrative in a world of global outsourcing, tax competition, freelancing, and finance.

Kazmi et al. (2016) investigated corporate social responsibility (CSR) as an evolving spirit and concluded that it did not address the security and fairness dimensions adequately, because benefits for workers were ignored. CSR can be seen as a response to the ecological 'survival of the species' critique that reproaches the unsustainability and moral emptiness of the current regime. It boils down to corporations being re-embedded into the wider society, caring for social and environmental issues and paying their fair share for externalities. In contrast to all three preceding spirits, CSR does not promise increased individual freedom but emphasizes obligations to the wider society. In this vein, corporate governance involves stakeholders, creating responsible brands that resonate with consumer values and serve as symbolic markers in their quest for authenticity. Consequently, CSR holds the potential to bind members to the organization and increase profits at the same time. It lends itself to the (long-term) security of society and corporations but does not hold any benefits for employees other than symbolic rewards. Thus, Chiapello (2013) calls for an alliance between social and ecological critique but reckons that the social democratic dependence upon limitless growth is a major impediment. In her view, artistic and ecological criticism have already partially joined forces, coalescing around nature as the epitome of authenticity. She thus speculates about a possible wave of critique regarding local solidarity economies that evade state-control through self-organization and cooperatives, while they augment market relations with non-profit and commons-based organizing. Incorporation might take the form of CSR or 'green capitalism,' whereby either corporations work on regulatory frameworks themselves, side-lining states, or the states withdraw from neoliberal globalization in some form of neo-Fordism, leading to multilateral re-regulation. In this subchapter, I will expand this strategic analysis. I discuss how the

contemporary management discourse on 'unbossing' and flat organizing invigorates a renewed artistic and social libertarian critique. I also show how it is assimilated into the new spirit. Before that, the next section will spell out the conceptual background to the discursive analysis of the management trend.

5.1.2 Post-foundational discourse analysis

'Post-foundational' thought (Marchart, 2007) unfolds a 'contingent social ontology' (Parker and Parker, 2017) without final grounds, in which every 'truth' resembles a temporary and continuously contested hegemony. In modern societies, discourses create rival systems of differences that materialize in institutions and technologies. In a recursive process, this materiality, in turn, influences the interplay of discourses. Thus, identities are fundamentally relational: "[E]very social identity becomes the meeting point for a multiplicity of articulatory practices, many of them antagonistic" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 138). In organization studies, post-foundationally inspired discourse analysis has been popularized in the past decade via a liaison between the 'Essex school of discourse analysis' and the 'Lacanian study of lack and fantasies' (e.g., Cederström and Spicer, 2014; Contu, Driver, and Jones, 2010). The focus of this section is on Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discursive concept of hegemonization through signification, while the analysis in subchapter 5.2 mobilizes Lacan's theory of subconscious desires (Stavrakakis, 2008) to explain how people become affectively invested in particular discursive strings.

At the University of Essex, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) built their discourse theory around Gramsci's original conceptualization of hegemony as voluntary consent to domination. In their view, every socially accepted consensus or rule is the result of a discursive articulation that has become hegemonic. "Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 112). Importantly, they moved past Gramsci's class-based determinism by departing from Derrida's deconstruction of structural language theory. Their approach accommodates the fact that there is an endless variety of possible discursive practices because every rule depends upon previous utterances; meaning is generated in the relationship between social components (Marttila, 2015). In this sense, the process of hegemonization unfolds in a reciprocal

play between practices of articulation and a background of "sedimented and materialized discourses" (ibid.: 9). Hence, hegemonic discourses are not anchored in any intransitive structure; they have to be continuously maintained by discursive articulations. What seems like a foundation is only a "spatiotemporally distinctive structural arrangement of signifiers that functions as a 'totalizing horizon' of intelligibility" (ibid.: 4).

Laclau and Mouffe formulated their theory with 'politico-emancipatory intent' (Willmott, 2005). Any successful process of hegemonization only ever resembles an imaginary closure, because "it always has an 'outside' that impedes its full realization" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: xviii). This outside is determined both by the lurking possibility of dissenting meanings and by the fact that discourses are structured around gaps. With their 'ontological theory of discourse' (Walton and Boon, 2014), Laclau and Mouffe acknowledged a paradoxical primacy of materiality. There are always aspects of 'the Real' that resist signification and cannot be translated into a symbolical order. Consequently, it is impossible for discourses to rest on stable foundations. However, the unimaginable properties of the Real inflict powerful affective attachments that help to explain why some discourses are passionately espoused. "This means that a discourse consists of a form and a force, both of which do the same thing: fill in the lack" (Cederström and Spicer 2014: 189). In ascribing constitutive powers to the Real as an antagonizing absence, the framework is a middle ground between social constructionist and realist positions. It allows for matter being contingently shaped into objects in relational-discursive processes, but at the same time the structures of the Real shape the formation of discourses.

For instance, throughout human history, people looked at the sky but saw different things: games of gods and heroes, signs of the zodiac, a divine comedy or distant suns. Stars cannot be understood as autonomous entities in our social world; they have to be rendered meaningful through discourse. Simultaneously, though, there is something existential in the firmament that exceeds our grasp and triggers affective resonances. Furthermore, discursive patterns become more powerful when they are given material form. Prehistoric astronomical buildings such as Stonehenge or contemporary ones such as the Hubble Space Telescope are typical examples of materialized responses to questions about the cosmos. Discourses that go through successful 'processes of discursive sedimentation' (Marttila, 2015) start to appear self-evidential; they become

objectified. Their materialization in institutions, subject positions, and technologies disguises their contingent nature.

5.1.2.1 Nodal points: Giving form and channeling force

Conceptually speaking, the non-foundations or gaps around which discourses are constructed are blanketed by the construction of 'nodal points' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). The notion is derived from Lacan's *'point de capiton'* – an 'upholstery button' (Cederström and Spicer, 2014) – that brings an amorphous conglomerate temporarily into shaped form. They supply meaning to undefined elements (floating signifiers) and ultimately truss them into a discursive formation. At first sight, they are unlikely signifiers because they are almost drained of meaning, and thus also 'empty signifiers.' They are so ubiquitously referred to that their content gets lost. The resulting flexibility enables their users to establish commonality between various floating signifiers through mutual relations of difference. Thus, they are used to (1) build 'chains of equivalence or difference' in order to establish familiar ground. Alternatively, (2) they represent a shared identity or embody an elemental quality between the elements, and (3) construct relations of contrariety to oppose or marginalize other discourses and signifiers (Marttila, 2015). Without ultimate foundations, discourses can only be known by defining what they are not, by distinguishing them from other discourses.

In summary, the contribution of post-foundational discourse analysis is fourfold. *First*, it tackles the black boxing of agency found in post-structural Foucauldian accounts by scrutinizing how actors activate discourses in their own interest and how they relationally handle ambiguities and conflicts. It does so by observing how discourses are tied to nodal points, an analytical focus that brings power struggles to the fore. *Second*, it investigates how nodal points are held up by emotional attachments and underlying affective forces. In doing so, it stresses lacking, ambiguous, and subconscious aspects of discourse. Thereby and *thirdly*, it shows how they can become disoriented and powerless, thus weakening the 'muscular assumptions' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011) regarding the potency of discourses to determine the social world linguistically. Its *fourth* advantage is that it incorporates the role of materiality through its conception of the Real as a partially non-representable form steering affective intensities.

5.1.2.2 Data analysis

Boltanski and Chiapello's analysis of capitalist spirits has been criticized on methodological grounds (see Du Gay and Morgan, 2013; Ekman, 2013; Parker, 2008). They were unclear about the process of literature selection that they employed to collect a corpus of articles and books addressed to managers and did not discuss the conditions of production, circulation and, reception of those texts. Moreover, they used their exclusively French data to draw global conclusions about the development of capitalism. Critics also questioned whether those ideas of a specific group of management thinkers were really read and implemented in organizational practice. And finally, why did the investigation exclude the accounts of non-management personnel? In following up recent movements of critique and recuperation within Boltanski and Chiapello's framework, this analysis addresses such concerns by complementing its sample of popular management books with qualitative interviews and ethnographic event visits. For a detailed description of the process of data creation and initial content analysis (Mayring, 2010) that distilled thematic clusters, narratives, and frictions see section 4.3.

After a presentation of the initial findings, reporting the thematic results, I went into the discursive analysis using post-foundational methodology. Being attentive to frequently used terms but also to paradoxes, absences, and antagonisms, I identified three discursive articulations around their respective nodal points (expanding at a later point in four): *self-management*, *democracy*, *self-organization*, and the *commons*. The articulations were struggling to imbue three floating signifiers (*work*, *leadership*, and the *firm*) with meaning. Some interviews were referring to more than one discursive articulation, which helped me differentiate political struggles, sets of actors, and how they related to broader socio-cultural phenomena. Then, I went deep into the interview material and ordered close to 300 utterances (from a corpus of 95.758 words) accordingly. Against the background of a close reading of the selected management books (Hamel, 2012; Laloux, 2014; Mason, 2015; Sattelberger et al., 2015), I proceeded to the analysis of meaning-generating relations – 'signifying chains' as Laclau and Mouffe (2001) put it. I sought to explore how the links between 'nodal points' and 'floating signifiers' were configured, to explain "how the socially constructed ideas and objects that constitute the social world are created and maintained" (Phillips and Oswick 2012: 445). Finally, I localized a privileged subject position for every discursive
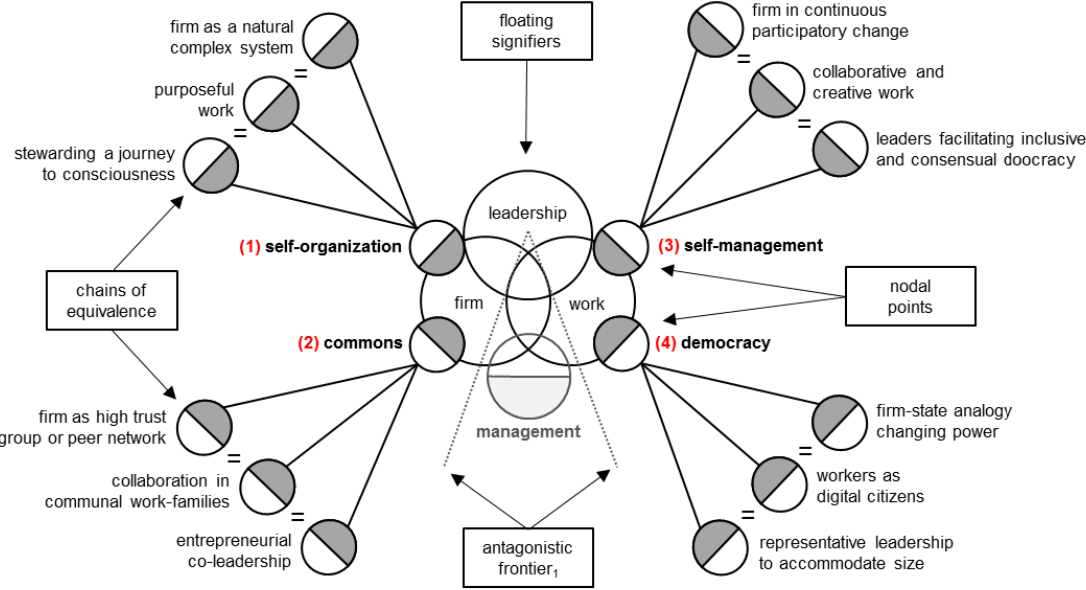
articulation, considering "the process by which subjects are seen to gain or lose a legitimate voice" (Walton and Boon 2014: 364). Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) delineated how the capitalist spirit of each age causes people to assess a person's worth through legitimate standards and tests, defining individual 'greatness,' and how to add value to society. For example, the 'great one' according to the new spirit is a project manager, who manages through listening and being attentive to differences. "S/he redistributes among them [the team members] the connections s/he has secured through networks. Such a project manager hence increases all his/her team-mates' employability" (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002: 192). I will now describe the four discursive articulations and show how they privilege certain subject positions to redefine individual greatness in support of their signification strategies.

5.1.3 The signification of unbossing

In this analysis, I identify four discursive strings advancing a management trend that advertises working 'bossless' without authoritative hierarchies. I delineate how these articulations were challenging the hegemonic role of 'managerialism (Clegg, 2014; Costea et al., 2008; Klikauer, 2015) and thereby also criticizing an essential element of the new spirit of capitalism. These counter-hegemonic attempts to destabilize a "moment of closure of a discursive totality" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 121) can be seen as an expression of anger and frustration. People were encouraged to work together collaboratively and entrepreneurially in teams, passionately investing in their careers and mobilizing their innate personal qualities to increase their employability. In return, they were promised that they would be able to lead more authentic lives, unfolding their talents and aspirations at work. Instead, less-hierarchical management techniques led to further centralization of power in the hands of 'visionary (project) managers' (Costea et al., 2008). As decision-making and strategic authority remained the prerogative of 'post-bureaucratic management' (Sturdy et al., 2016), people saw their initiatives jeopardized by a more nuanced set of both horizontal and vertical means of power (Rhodes and Bloom, 2012). What happened in practice was emancipatory corporate rhetoric that fused autonomy with control; horizontal creativity with vertical measurement tools; social relations based on equality, together with competition and profit; individualism

and self-realization in a culture that put work above all other aspects of life; and, finally, entrepreneurialism with a lack of ownership.

In what follows, I will trace (1) four discursive articulations – *self-organizing systems*, *networked commons*, *self-managed disruption*, and *democratizing work* as well as their respective nodal points – showing how they are invested in specific signification strategies to imbue floating signifiers – the *firm*, *work*, and *leadership* – with meaning. Furthermore, (2) an analysis of privileged subject positions will lay the foundation for discussing how the articulations constitute an attempt to de-naturalize management as the common sensual way of organizing business ventures. Proponents of the management trend criticized the hegemonic order, but their signifying chains also contained the seeds for the critique's assimilation into a spirit of capitalism. Figure 6 provides an orientation for understanding the results.

Figure 6: Signification strategies of the discursive articulations: (1) self-organizing systems, (2) networked commons, (3) self-managed disruption, (4) democratizing work (illustration adapted from Laclau, 2000; Thomassen, 2005; Walton and Boon, 2014)

5.1.3.1 Self-organizing systems

The most widely received book in the management trend, Laloux's 'Reinventing Organizations' (2014), portrayed self-organization as the natural way of organizing:

> "[Firms] are complex, participatory, interconnected, interdependent, and continually evolving systems, like ecosystems in nature. Form follows need. Roles are picked up, discarded, and exchanged fluidly. Power is distributed. Decisions are made at the point of origin. Innovations can spring up from all quarters. Meetings are held when they are needed. Temporary task forces are created spontaneously and quickly disbanded again." (p. 135)

In terms of this perspective, organizations are conceived as complex systems that are self-organized by their employees. Within hierarchical structures, these 'natural processes' are routinely covered by departmental boundaries, as one of my interviewees, the CEO of a medical association emphasized:

> "All of our office people would have relationships across the organization, but most of the time nobody ever pays attention to that or sees the potential – that because of the way they've self-organized, they could actually get work done. They were usually seen in isolated silos. But living systems don't work that way. That's a construct. That's not how their lives are lived. So, we try to pay attention to those things too. Where do natural systems occur?"

As this quotation exemplifies, the propagators of self-organization embraced a systemic perspective, where the doings of all workers are in one way or another related to each other. If this potential is recognized and encouraged, their naturally evolving cooperation and collective intelligence would lead to a capacity for systemic problem-solving. In this vein, hierarchies are human-made and respond to a world-view. It is maintained that today's increasingly complex and diverse business environments challenge us to abandon the old stratified perspective to arrive at more resilient and peaceful modes of organizing: *I think these temporary hierarchies form often and then they dissipate naturally. They are like clouds; they form in response to atmospheric conditions and they exist for a while, and then they dissipate"* (author and member of a manufacturing firm). The articulation projects a harmonized ideal of organizing that carries the danger of naturalizing inequalities and disguising contested politics.

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Indeed, with the increasing popularization of complexity theory, the exploratory concept 'self-organization' has become a political ideal (Uitermark, 2015). Participatory facilitators, agile organizers, design thinkers, and systemic environmentalists argue that work in complex systems cannot be planned and controlled. Due to their intricacy, they hold, these assemblages are fundamentally unintelligible to individuals. Moreover, contemporary business environments change frequently and erratically, so cause and effect are hard to discern. The supporters of the discursive articulation suggest moving from centralized strategy-making to team-based experimentation and iteration in close contact with customers and stakeholders. In this view, major change initiatives with beginnings and ends make way for continuous and participatory small-scale changes.

As the *'firm'* is re-conceptualized into a natural complex system, the floating signifier *'work'* turns into a purposeful endeavor. The notion behind self-organization is to recognize workers as whole human beings instead of reducing them to fit into prescribed roles. It is contended that if people can realize their human potential, they will be more passionate and motivated to keep an eye on the needs of the whole organization. The following two quotations illustrate this conviction:

> "The human being is seen as a whole. The human being does not play some role. And we should try to raise our potential that we all have; for the challenge and not because I am now a marketing director or chief financial officer. I do not only see my role, but I see myself as part of the whole." (Organizational developer and consultant)

> "Most of us as human beings want to mean something; most of us want to contribute; most of us wanna make some kind of difference, no matter who you are. When you let that happen, and you support that, new passion is in the organization." (CEO of a medical association)

One important outcome of this re-conceptualization is that the *'mythical line'* (in the words of one of my interview partners) between work and personal life is waning. Work-life balance turns into work-life fusion. The proponents of the discourse talk little about the problematic aspects of this coalescing and emphasize beneficial outcomes, such as being recognized as a human being and not seen as a resource. I surmise, though, that not everyone is prepared or able to invest that many personal resources into work to participate in strategic governance. An imperative to do so will lead to the dominance of work over personal life. Another result of this work-life fusion is that relationships at

the workplace become more intimate and emotive; private experiences are recognized and processed in meetings, while collective reflection needs to be practiced:

> "Emotions have their place and are allowed to surface, but then they also need to be guided in constructive ways [...] So, of course, this is a culture which makes it possible to express sensitivities early and not to sweep them under the table. Dealing with them is not always pleasant, by the way, not for me anyway." (Academic)

In the following exchange, the two co-founding partners of a consultancy further emphasized the painful nature of the aspired to self-reflective humility:

> A: "But this self-reflection is exhausting."
> B: "Exhausting and not funny."
> A: "Well, it can be joyful, but in the moment, yes…"
> B: "It is not feeling playful and light; it has a different quality."

The articulation demands self-confident, reflexive, and articulate subjects, ready to speak up, disclose, and debate. It seems likely that if reality does not live up to these high expectations, unspoken grudges and pathological behavior might ferment with no one feeling that they are responsible for resolving them. Moreover, which practices might be set aside to make room for these more intimate interactions, without thwarting operational readiness? My interview partners also acknowledged that making space for everyday emotions and negotiating sensual perceptions feels counter-cultural, like bringing the esoteric into business. To demystify intuitive reasoning, in his book, Laloux (2014) stressed that it is a skill that can be learned:

> "Intuition honors the complex, ambiguous, paradoxical, non-linear nature of reality; we unconsciously connect patterns in a way that our rational mind cannot. Intuition is a muscle that can be trained, just like logical thinking: when we learn to pay attention to our intuitions, to honor them, to question them for the truth and guidance they might contain, more intuitive answers will surface" (p. 47).

The quest for purposeful work results in a cleavage between more spiritual advocates of the discursive articulation on the one side and secular proponents on the other. While the former perceive organizations as pursuing a calling or inherent purpose, just like individuals, the latter seek to demystify organizations-as-entities, seeing them rather as meandering bundles of relationships. Spiritualists emphasize the relatedness of all

being: *"Life as a journey of personal and collective unfolding toward a more true nature"* (Laloux, 2014: 45). The worldly faction, in turn, underlines the potential of self-organization to emancipate individuals from brands and inauthentic corporate communities, liberating workers from their immature desire to be cared for by a fatherly entity.

The third floating signifier, *'leadership,'* is conceptualized as a process of stewarding and listening to the firm's and each other's potential and calling. My interviewees emphasized that self-reflective humility, the courage to admit that one person cannot know it all, was the basic stance of leadership. Experimental and decentralized governance can only work if actors accept the contingency of their experience and knowledge: *"After each learning curve, it will start all over again, because when I've changed my behavior, I need to re-assess what I did before. So, when I switch from crawling to going, I have to re-evaluate the world"* (Organizational developer and consultant). The interviewees agreed that self-organization had to be organized and depended on regular practices. Therefore, leadership and power were needed, but those who exercised it had to let go of control, embracing facilitation and empathetic listening. One of my interview partners, an academic, framed it as a tension between 'making space and steering':

> "It's not always just about holding the space for the collective to emerge. Leadership also means to intervene if it's necessary. If it doesn't run smoothly, you have to step in without asking for permission, saying: 'Let's stop here and move this way instead.' There are situations in which there is an active need not to let go of the oars."

The privileged subject position in the discursive articulation around self-organization can be thus themed a *'mindful steward.'* Subjects should be able to claim influence only if they are ready to take responsibility for working on a solution. Leaders have to be aware that decision-making is not only about the exchange of arguments but about co-creation and collective learning, an intensely collaborative process that includes community building. On the one side, the ideal of the steward stands in stark contrast to the visionary managerial project manager, who shapes his environment through the sheer force of his imagination and networks. On the other side, it further develops the facilitative and mediating leadership style developed in the new spirit, emphasizing circumspect qualities of attentiveness, care, patience, hosting, and nurturing. Regarding

its signifying strategy, the articulation does not only establish a link but a shared identity between the floating signifiers. The nodal point, 'self-organization,' forms a representational relation, because it embodies an innate quality between the discursive items – a 'single unity' (Torfing, 1999). This is a risky but at the same time very powerful strategy as the articulation seeks to position itself at the center of a world-view.

5.1.3.2 Networked commons

In the second discursive articulation in this counter-hegemonic struggle against managerialism, the *'commons'* is mobilized as a nodal point. It is maintained by proponents of sharing and maker movements, open source software developers, and members of tech and platform cooperatives (Scholz and Schneider, 2016), as well as in intentional communities and new urban spaces (Gandini, 2015). These 'post-capitalist entrepreneurs' (Cohen, 2017) propose a new model of value creation alongside the state and market, namely commons-based peer production (Benkler, 2006). In this vision, people come together to produce knowledge commons in open design communities, which can be utilized in a shared way through localized high-tech production methods ('desktop manufacturing'; Kostakis, Latoufis, Liarokapis, and Bauwens, 2016).

The floating signifier of the *'firm,'* traditionally signified within the boundaries of hierarchical management and employment relations, following a profit logic is radically re-signified. While managerialism and all successive capitalist spirits demarcated comprehensive units in a competitive environment, post-capitalist entrepreneurship reframes the firm into a high trust group or peer-to-peer network, exchanging gifts and indeterminate values. It resembles an open contributory system, where workers take collective ownership of open knowledge, shared designs, and free software. In his bestseller, *Postcapitalism* Mason (2015) pithily framed the consequences of *"the free stuff beginning to pervade the physical as well as the digital world"* (p. 165):

> "Today, the main contradiction in modern capitalism is between the possibility of free, abundant, socially produced goods, and a system of monopolies, banks, and governments struggling to maintain control over power and information. That is, everything is pervaded by a fight between network and hierarchy" (p. 167).

Two of my interviewees, one a member of a social entrepreneurial network and the other of a cooperative consultancy, further emphasized that people have tried to work in networked, autonomous, and collaborative ways for a long time, but new technologies are increasing the chances of success. They are seen as enablers for scaling distributed decision-making and dis-intermediating the firm, for creating open source organizations designed for the needs of their users, who resemble networks of communities rather than corporations.

> "We have applied to ourselves what we are doing in terms of products and services [design thinking], considering: 'We are the actual users of our organization. How should it look to meet our needs? Yeah, we always say we actually 'designified' the organization." (Member of a cooperative consultancy)

> "Just kind of like inspired by the open source software, how that works. It's basically like, well, you can get involved and contribute and be part of this community of people building something together, or you can just fork it and go and do your own thing." (Member of a social entrepreneurial network)

In the following two passages, the same interview partners explained that work and entrepreneuring happen in an atmosphere of 'hanging out' and friendship. Their ideal is a communal way of working and living together; a fundament of mutual support and care that creates a safe space to be honest and transparent with each other, where well-being has primacy over business.

> "[I]f people don't feel safe, they don't feel that they can actually say what they really think, that their voice is important. It's just not really gonna work. […] Personal development is a big part of our culture, mutual support. You know, we are quite honest with each other about things like, well, you know, my kid is sick, or I have a mental health issue or whatever it is…and support each other really openly." (Member of a social entrepreneurial network)

> "Of course, the better we understand each other, the deeper the empathy for each individual and the more one knows about the current personal background, the more you can comprehend: 'Oh, he seemed stressed, but I can totally understand because something has happened in the family.' This knowledge and also the feeling for each other is worth a mint." (Member of a cooperative consultancy)

Consequently, *'work'* is signified as collaboration in communal work-families that put the well-being and livelihood of their members before business. Theoretically, this model allows for dynamic organizing ("*we form and reform freely"*) that increases

people's capacity to debate with each other and to share emotional sentiments. A *"more community-minded, less ego-driven way of living"* (member of a tech cooperative) encourages personal development. In this collective spirit, *'leadership'* as a floating signifier is reframed as entrepreneurial co-leadership based on experimental iteration, consent, and emerging hierarchies. Comparably to the first discursive articulation, my interview partners portrayed their agile mindset: *"How we do everything, like experimental, being willing to fail, just try something and see how it goes. You know, experiment, iterate, improve, stay very close to feedback from the users you are trying to serve"* (member of a social entrepreneurial network). Even though there is no long-term centralized planning of strategic growth, the same interviewee continued, the development of hierarchies around experience, engagement, and social capital are inevitable:

> "I'm the kind of person, if I'm not careful, I will accidentally gain lots of power, because of my personality and my skill set, and somehow I can convince people easily of things. I like to talk. But that's not what I want. What I want is to share power. So, I have to be really conscious about creating the processes and culture to support that."

Therefore, the favored subject position – *'the entrepreneurial commoner'* – embodies *"a more community-minded, less ego-driven way of living"* (member of a tech cooperative). Tasks are constantly changing in these communal work-living projects, while leaders have to maintain a balance between taking responsibility and stepping down. From this perspective, exercising leadership means to navigate complex relationships, where people are likely to be friends, co-entrepreneurs, and team members at the same time. Leaders will invest considerable time in sorting out relationships and caring for others. They are seen to develop systems and processes for collaboration that encourage dissent:

> "I think that protecting voices of dissent is a big thing in our culture. One voice should be enough to raise a flag in a group that maybe something is wrong or that we could do better if we work together to come up with an evolved idea. This idea of autonomy, along with this idea of collaboration, I think, is really, really, important." (Member of a tech cooperative)

This entrepreneurial approach to building an organizational framework governing the commons comes with many unresolved problems, like how to do reporting, quality

control, or branding. While people enjoy solving problems without prescribed solutions, they are also suffering from the time-consuming and financially precarious nature of their endeavors. Some interview partners admitted that they struggled with information overload, emotional vicissitudes, and an impulse to feel over-responsible, which can quickly lead to burnout. Moreover, the articulation does not mention the possible caveats of the proposed 'tribalization,' which are likely to include strong in-group/out-group dynamics and internal pressures to conform. Those who, for whatever, reason leave the community will lose large parts of their private and professional network.

5.1.3.3 Self-managed disruption

The third articulation's nodal point, *'self-management,'* buttons up an understanding of the *'firm'* as revolving around continuous processes of participatory change. The line of argumentation is that if enterprises want to keep pace with the race of disruptive innovation, they have to tear down departmental and hierarchical boundaries. In an age, in which value is increasingly being located in interpersonal relations and creative work, self-management is portrayed as the most customer-friendly and efficient way to innovate. The following two interview passages illustrate the conviction that there should not be any barriers to communication whatsoever, thus allowing for collective reasoning between people who take ownership.

> "I very much enjoy the fact that we try to avoid barriers that prevent the best ideas from being implemented. It doesn't matter from where they come. It just matters like, okay, what is the best that we can do for our customers?" (Member of a software company)

> "For example, last year, we had a mechanic who theorized a better way to handle chemical. He analyzed the process; he theorized a solution; he sold the solution to his fellow internal stakeholders, who were colleagues, implemented the solution and realized a return on investment of something like 200 percent in three months. So, innovation is constant; it is continuous; it can come from anyone at any time." (Author and member of a manufacturing firm)

In this understanding, the firm is driven by the excitement of motivated co-entrepreneurs and not by predefined strategies. *"The CEO is becoming a venture capitalist and actually leads a federation of small, self-determined teams"* (consultant) that are feeling their way forward with small experiments. Along this way, breakdowns and impasses

are seen as inevitable, but hardly ever fatal if people embrace failure as a source of learning. Comparably to the discursive articulation around self-organization, purpose is regarded as the main factor fueling the passion of self-managed employees. Here it is less about the spiritual unfolding of individual and collective life journeys, but about building usable services, shaking the status quo of industries, or changing the lives of customers for the better. Ideally, employees then find their purpose in creating these meaningful products and services together. As a result of this collective, intrapreneurial spirit, people are expected to develop a shared sensitivity for the needs of the whole organization, as the following quotation from an organizational developer in a multinational corporation that adopted 'holacratic governance' (Robertson, 2015) shows:

> "Our work in holacratic circles, which is always cross-functional, creates a different sense of responsibility. Sometimes an order doesn't look that good for the production in terms of costs, but looking at strategy, it's a top customer."

Fittingly, the floating signifier *'work'* is conveyed as collaborative and creative. People and their relationships are perceived as the primary axis around which value is created. Managerially organized work is criticized due to its human resource focus that diminishes the role of human beings to input factors for profit generation and pitches them against each other, thereby draining their energies. Alternately, self-managed work proposes a more collective understanding of work, in which teams, not individuals, perform tasks. The following interview passage emphasizes trust as the most important ingredient of self-managed work:

> "[It] comes back to our basic principle of working in a multi-talented team, where you don't have personal goals or personal performance evaluations. We try to create the basic working unit, where the team succeeds as a real team. We train our people in active listening, and we also try to teach people to treat and meet other people as people and not objects. [...] People usually record when they come to work with us that they trust in the people who have been with the company for a longer time, like, they have unquestioned trust from day one. And that might be one factor that helps to bring down the costs of working together, like, in a team environment. It's somehow easy to discuss things with passion but without ending up in personal agendas or conflicts." (Member of a tech and design agency)

During my interviews, I recorded several accounts of new employees who were encouraged to speak up and who were made to feel free to offer their suggestions from day one. Keeping faith in each other was seen as an essential prerequisite of embracing conflict as the driving force of change and development:

> "It's about tensions. The tensions develop an organization. In strong hierarchies, there is no conflict culture; probably a very negative one, but not a constructive one. If you always expect to get roasted, you will keep your head down." (Member of a leadership training institute)

In an environment that recognizes productive friction, *'leadership'* is characterized as a set of skills that have to be dispersed into the organizational culture. Empathic, inclusive, and facilitative competencies are in demand. Ideally, the *'collaborative intrapreneur'* as a privileged subject position, acts in an entrepreneurial and engaging way, but at the same time is not ego-driven. These leadership figures have to be ready to participate in self-reflection, asking: *"How do I cause certain behaviors in others? Where do I have to put energy into restraint, even if it costs more energy than to decide?"* (Organizational developer in a multinational corporation) The discursive articulation stresses the importance of creating inclusive atmospheres where every stakeholder feels heard. Consequently, people are more inclined to accept informal consensus and focus on making (small) decisions. In one of my interviews, an author and member of a manufacturing firm mentioned the downside of this form of leadership: *"A person who is lacking in social skills or lacks the ability to elicit followership is gonna have a hard time being effective in this system."* At the same time, I heard leadership figures lamenting about people who want to participate loudly but are not ready to take over the responsibility of doing the actual work. This dynamic stifles initiative. To work on tacit hierarchies and inertia, my interviewees stressed that the members of their organizations had to learn to challenge the status quo and to talk about how things were working. Therefore, different practices of maintaining a certain level of continual development were introduced. Some organizations embraced the Japanese notion of *kaizen*; in 'holacracy' a distinction is made between 'tactical and strategic meetings' and 'agile methodology' introduced regular 'retrospectives' to make room for reflection.

The discursive articulation is taken up by growing tech-startups and hard-pressed transnational companies alike. Its chain of equivalence feeds into popular accounts of

an economic landscape that is confronted with waves of technology-induced change. By radically lifting the veil of organizational control, its optimistic accounts promise a panacea: happy employees, a culture of innovation, and reduced management costs:

> "So, everyone is involved in strategy and planning, organizing, controlling, hiring, and coordinating. Everyone does those things. So, salaries tend to be higher than in the marketplace. That's because everyone is engaged, and every single person is a manager." (Author and member of a manufacturing company)

The proponents do not mention employees who might be happy to assume routine tasks and who do not have the skills or abilities to take over leadership. Do they have a place in self-managed organizations? The narrative is trimmed to fit non-disabled, healthy movers and shakers, who subordinate other parts of their lives to their intrapreneurial mission. One might also question whether innovation exclusively requires transparency and openness, or if it can also be fostered in the secrecy of close-knit groups. Furthermore, the articulation stays silent on the question of ownership and the primacy of shareholder value. Therefore, it seems questionable that the saved expenses of the abolished management layer will flow in the direction of workers and not to shareholders. Furthermore, employees might get frustrated because the gains of their entrepreneurial venturing benefit a small group of owners.

5.1.3.4 Democratizing work

The final articulation revolves around the nodal point *'democracy'* to create a chain of equivalence by spawning an analogy between the firm and the state. Hence, workers are seen as citizens who delegate some of their decision-making powers to temporarily elected managers. Representation is introduced because consent decision-making is not regarded as a functional solution for larger enterprises. Comparably to the articulation 'self-managed disruption' the driving factor for *"employees [to] have a voice regarding the forms of collaboration, the time, place, style, and content of work"* (Sattelberger et al. 2015: 11) is to be better equipped for competing in the knowledge economy. However, this is underpinned by a fierce democratic spirit; employees breaking the chains of their disenfranchised corporate position, where they were either protected or controlled. They emerge as more autonomous individuals – as 'co-entrepreneurs' (Sattelberger et al. 2015: 17) – whereas collective actors such as 'firms' and 'unions'

forfeit power. The articulation 'democratizing work' encourages designing corporate governance that guarantees a balance of power analogous to the state: To get rid of managerial dictators who are likely to be corrupted by power the longer they hold their positions:

> "Actually, the central element of democracy is not at all the positive choice between A or B, but at the moment when something really goes wrong there is a mechanism to correct and intervene, to impeach the elected dictator." (Co-founder and chairman of a software firm)

Similarly, at the center of holacracy (Robertson, 2015) stands its constitution. With their signatures, CEOs of companies who adopt this ready-made system for self-organization symbolically submit their power to this 'democratic system.' The appeal of this discursive articulation stems partially from its optimism to frame corporate democracy as a regenerative source for state democracy. Citizens could refine their democratic skills in everyday work life, strengthening their capacity to interact in participative public spaces.

Supporters of the articulation argue that the hierarchical organization of work has become obsolete due to advancing digitalization. Hence, companies are challenged to experiment with disintermediation, using a mixture of grass-roots practices (such as participatory facilitation and consent decision-making) and representative elements to empower their workers as digital citizens.

> "Intermediaries are becoming obsolete; it's much more direct again. Now we have to see: Who are the intermediaries in companies? That's middle management, and that's staff divisions, like HR, finance, or controlling. They are going to change massively. There will be less, and those who still exist will have a different mission than they have today." (Co-founder and chairman of a software firm)

With the changing power structures, my interviewees held, the logic of leadership would change as well. *'Organizational citizens'* – the privileged subject position – exercise leadership with clear temporary and spatial boundaries (leading in one project and following in another). Leadership's task is to inspire followership; it has to convince. People are not willing to follow hierarchical authority anymore, as a consultant underscored in one interview: *"You're completely changing the dynamics of power in*

the company. Suddenly it's not about force, but about influence. How much are people really convinced about what they do?" Consequently, the increasing importance of charismatic power and social capital has to be addressed. My interviewees sought to attenuate these dynamics by stressing an inclusive management culture, where leaders are not allowed to give answers. Instead, they are encouraged to ask questions. However, integrating a culture of peer-to-peer conflict resolution was seen as one of the toughest challenges.

> "I should actually go to my colleague, saying: 'Straighten up and try harder.' To understand that this is my job and that I'm not an eager beaver or squealer. Everyone needs a little push from time to time. Actually, I have to appreciate when someone comes [to me] saying: 'Hey, you can do better,' because that makes us better. We have to normalize that kind of feedback to grow." (Co-founder and chairman of a software firm)

In the end, democratic leadership is perceived as leading to faster and better holistic decision-making. While clarification at the beginning takes much longer, implementation is usually more seamless. Moreover, the most significant strength of this mode of organizing is seen in issue framing, in figuring out that there has to be a decision at all. On the downside, several interview partners pointed out that organizational democracy could be easily repurposed to satisfy demands for empowerment superficially. It often serves as an alibi: Participation in everyday processes, while strategic decisions stay in the hands of the few. Corporations also have to invent innovative approaches to deal with the newly established non-linear career paths. Otherwise, emergent hierarchies are prone to sediment into castes of representatives, who might steer political fractioning to keep their power.

In the following section, I will discuss the four discursive articulations of bossless work in the frame of Boltanski and Chiapello's new spirit of capitalism. I will argue that they are simultaneously part of a renewed social-libertarian and artistic critique, while they are also bolstering the assimilation of the critics into the capitalistic spirit. I will depict how the four articulations can be seen as aspiring 'justificatory regimes' that intervene in the configuration of discourses that circulate to maintain and dissolve the new spirit of capitalism (as an 'order of discourse;' Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002).

5.1.4 Discussion

The above analysis of counter-hegemonic signification strategies against managerialism has shown that while a particular social structuring of semiotic difference may become part of the legitimizing common sense, it will always be contested to a greater or lesser extent. I argue that two discursive articulations of the management trend around bossless work – 'self-organizing systems' and 'networked commons' – are part of a renewed social libertarian and artistic critique against the new spirit of capitalism. They are questioning the 'non-inclusive involvement' of modern human beings in organizations (as role agents rather than as persons; Kallinikos, 2004: 23) and are fueling the entrepreneuring of post-capitalist (Cohen, 2017) modes of networked production. The other two articulations – 'self-managed disruption' and 'democratizing work' – can be seen as contributing to the recuperation of the critics, because they are proposing a decentralized model of the managerial firm that updates the 'connectionist logic' of the new spirit or might otherwise coalesce with 'corporate social responsibility' as a rising spirit (Kazmi et al., 2016).

5.1.4.1 A new critique: Cosmo-local freelance economies

In contrast to Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) framework, in terms of which the antagonistic but intrinsically entangled relationship between capitalist ideologies ('the spirits') and their critics (social movements) is perceived as the sole motor of modern history, my findings point to the catalyzing role of technological innovation. Frequently used terms such as *'paradigm shift,' 'evolutionary leap,'* and *'new operating system'* pervaded all four articulations. They signify a narrative about radical social change induced by the rise of information technology. Other discursive artifacts referred to historical analogies, such as the invention of writing, the printing press or the telegraph, to exemplify how each of these novelties led to a new idea of man, institutions, and modes of organizing.

Concerning renewed forms of social libertarian and artistic critique, information technology facilitates (1) the 'post-capitalist' argument (Mason, 2015; Srnicek and Williams, 2015) and enables (2) societal processes of disintermediation. *Firstly*, it is held that informational goods do not degrade when used; they are abundant and can be 'copied and pasted' without costs. Consequently, they disintegrate the market

mechanism, which works only for the distribution of scarce goods. As the marginal costs of more and more products are tending towards zero, the capitalist counter-measure was to enforce comprehensive copyright systems that led 'to something worse than capitalism' (Pazaitis, Kostakis, and Bauwens, 2017). Whereas we were used to seeing a movement from emerging and competitive markets, to consolidated ones, and then to cartels, oligopolies, and monopolies, market consolidation has turned into a series of monopolies (e.g., from Yahoo to Google, from Myspace to Facebook). *Secondly*, critics argue that information technologies increase the scope of disintermediation. Thus, they open the potential to end the rule of technocratic elites by distributing trust through digital means (Seidel, 2018). In this regard, the work of economist Ronald Coase (1937) was frequently quoted. He asked why firms as organizational forms are ultimately necessary and found an answer in transaction costs. The costs of permanent staff and managerial layers, and for integrating diverse functions into the firm are outweighed by the price of obtaining these goods and services on the market. Contracting is expensive. It entails costs for information gathering, bargaining, fetching of payments, but also for fencing off lawsuits or keeping industrial secrets. Today, the latest wave of platform-shaped Silicon Valley startups, such as Airbnb and Uber, are turning this balance around. With the help of mobile computing, sensors, artificial intelligence, social networks, and mutual ratings, they are able to build contracting ecosystems that minimize the need for managerial intermediaries.

On the other side of the equation, the rising numbers of freelancers and entrepreneurs have started to reframe their displacement from the corporate career as a chance to experiment with new organizational forms, creating innovative ways of working together. I will now elaborate a typology of these forms and work relations in the emerging freelancer society, where 'post-capitalist entrepreneurs' (Cohen, 2017) have started to engage with commons-based peer production, open design, and desktop manufacturing, social entrepreneurship networks, platform cooperatives, alternative currencies, and the design of blockchain-enabled decentralized autonomous organizations that rely on minimal organizing processes. Table 2 provides an overview.

Organizational forms	Work relations
ORGANIZED NETWORKS	**FLASH COLLABORATIONS**
Freelancers and entrepreneurs seeking community and networking in coworking spaces → 'orgnets' (Rossiter, 2006; Lovink, 2012): working on products in a networked way	People come and go, often members in more than one orgnet; passive vs. bursts of activity, flourish on conflict → very short term work groups, task forces, etc.
COLLECTIVE FREELANCING	**COMPLICITIES**
Freelancer coops, entrepreneurial collectives, pods: sharing livelihoods and income; from selling time to building products; joint business development	(Ziemer, 2013): too passionate for teamwork but too project-based for friendship; crossing established frontiers → short-medium term
NETWORKED VALUE CHAINS	**WORK-FAMILIES**
Polycentric and emergent forms of production, e.g., platform cooperatives and open contributory systems → integrating commons and market-based elements	Securing livelihood of its members; fluid boundaries between work-friends-family; hiring groups not only individuals → long term

Table 2: A future of work in the freelancer society

The most widely discussed phenomenon in the organizational literature on freelancer organizing is 'new urban spaces' (Gandini, 2015). Scholars have analyzed how collaborative hubs, coworking, hacker, and maker spaces spread out 'third spaces' to play with the temporal, physical, and relational boundaries of work (Spinuzzi, 2012). Crucially, their members want to experience more than working alongside each other. Coworkers and collaborative entrepreneurs shape a sense of community through collective actions (Butcher, 2018; Garrett, Spreitzer, and Bacevice, 2017). They share knowledge and utilize complementary skills (Gandini, 2015) "to reterritorialise the physical organisational structure previously offered by firms, […] but with flexible boundaries and affiliations" (ibid., p. 198). The critical debate unfolds around the question of whether new urban spaces inspire communitarian, or rather transactional, relationships. Lange (2009) describes an 'open source approach to work,' in which collaborative and non-hierarchical practices are nested in commons-based social ties that function as the primary production factor. The concurring narrative indicates a socialized mode of capitalist production: self-entrepreneurs fostering their social relations under managerial terms. They temporarily engage with peers in 'associated brands' (Gandini, 2015) to increase business opportunities and to mutually enhance their reputation. These ephemeral entities form and re-form flexibly around specific projects and against a canvas of network-based or 'distributed work' (Spinuzzi, 2012).

To better understand community building and networking in new urban spaces, which are taking advantage of physical and virtual means of organizing, it is fruitful to

transpose insights from media theory. Lovink and Rossiter (Lovink, 2012; Lovink and Rossiter, 2011; Rossiter, 2006) developed the concept of the *'organized network' (orgnet)* to name internet-based collaboration that is organized around the realization of a particular product. While the term 'network' conventionally referred to loose relationships and an exchange of experience, orgnets oscillate between decentralization and institutionalization. "Organized networks are best understood as new institutional forms whose social-technical dynamics are immanent to the culture of networks" (Lovink and Rossiter, 2011: 281). First and foremost, organized networks are far less permanent than traditional organizations. People come and frequently leave according to passionate affinities and interests. Moreover, they are often members of more than one orgnet, acting most of the time passively until they burst into unexpected activity. "Organized networks are clouds of social relationships in which disengagement is pushed to the limit. … Browsing, watching, reading, waiting, thinking, deleting, chatting, skipping, and surfing are the default conditions of online life" (Lovink, 2008: 241-242). According to Lovink and Rossiter (2011), orgnets are 'un-managed' meaning that they are not instrumentally goal driven. They abstain from benchmarking, performance measures, and process optimization. Instead, they thrive on shared issues, where passions trump profit. Moreover, networked cultures flourish on conflict and diversity (Lovink, 2008). Dissent is seen as a productive force, which demands a new political subject that is fluent in the language of disputes. "We have to experiment with new forms of organization. Install, update, crash, re-start, uninstallation" (Lovink, 2012: 207).

The discursive articulation around the nodal point of 'self-organization' highlights similarities. Comparably to orgnets, people are encouraged to follow their passions and work on something that is simultaneously purposeful to them and the wider society. At the same time, notions of 'ownership' and 'leadership' are reframed into 'stewardship' over communal spaces, peer networks, and shared assets. Managers are seen as temporary custodians who cultivate something that is bigger than they are rather than as controllers or visionary planners of efficient and profitable outcomes. Moreover, the embrace of conflict as a productive force of organizing and the move from cooperation to collaboration are connective motives running across all four articulations. Whereas cooperation suggests that the actors are dissolving as intact units after their joint activity, in collaboration people have to accept that they will be changed in the process and are

probably part of a community (Terkessidis, 2015: 14). The ethics of collaboration moves the locus of the organization from the boardroom to the teams on the ground (Raelin, 2011b), from individuals to groups as the basic unit of input, and from transactional, role-based interactions to relational and emotive bonds. Therefore, it can be seen as a resurgence of *artistic critique* against the new spirit of capitalism. The critics reclaim their intimate personal qualities (such as sociability or empathy) from their ab/use as a source of employability. They demand the inclusion of their whole selves into their work and the enclosure of the dominant profit motif under the umbrella of broader societal considerations. The question remains, though, of whether the artistic critics can challenge the dominance of work over all other spheres of life (Cremin, 2010; Kallinikos, 2003; 2004).

Translating the concept of orgnets from networked cultures to new urban spaces also requires the consideration of some limitations. The latter are combining physical work and community spaces with online networks. They are not primarily concerned with artistic production, but with the delivery of more mundane goods and services to sustain livelihoods. As the latest must-have of 'creative cities' (Steyaert and Beyes, 2009), new urban spaces are part of the grand celebratory narrative of entrepreneurship, play, and creativity as an engine for economic growth. On the one hand, that comes with little sensitivity to the accompanying precariousness and inequality it inflicts on individuals. On the other hand, the actors are experimenting with the "convergence of societal democratization and organizational innovation" (Jacquemin and Germain, 2017: 59) through the amalgamation of social entrepreneurship, a collaborative ethos, new technologies, and participatory-democratic decision-making. They are meandering between counterculture and business.

The discursive articulations 'self-organized systems' and 'networked commons' have contributed to a more recent development in new urban spaces that advances the above tension: the creation of '*collective freelancing organizations,*' such as freelancer cooperatives and entrepreneurial collectives. The idea is to form small companies or cooperatives with a handful of co-owners. The employment relation is replaced by close-knit and supportive contracting arrangements. These organizations are not built around a product or service but around the livelihood of their members. The term that signifies this movement on social media platforms is *'neo-tribes.'* At Enspiral (my case study

discussed in subchapter 5.3) people have called these enterprises *'pods.'* Participants have formulated a long-term commitment to work together, pooling income to share the risks of freelancing, and shifting from selling time to building products. In many cases, a resultant expectation is that people will be able to raise their income through network effects and thus have more time to work on 'passion projects' or entertain a more balanced work life. Early experiments point to a future in which collective freelancing organizations come together in networks, platform cooperatives, and open contributory systems to produce in *'networked value chains.'* The company of the future might not be a stable entity anymore, but an emergent and polycentric network emanating from trans-local orgnets in new urban spaces. A couple of collective freelancing organizations might join forces with customers and stakeholders to build a collectively owned separate organization that serves as the container for a specific product. Consequently, value is created in the interplay of multiple and partly overlapping small organizations that work without employment relations but with shared ownership. In this light, individual contracting becomes the exception. Usually, groups are hired. Some of these entities focus on the commons, securing the livelihood and shared assets of their members, while others want to sell products and generate profits on markets. In Chiapello's (2013) sense, one could say that this kind of freelancer organizing is renewing *artistic and social-libertarian critique*. It interweaves communitarian and market-related concerns in and between organizations. In addition, it seeks to legitimize open source regulation along with conventional property rights. Questions for further research include how the paradoxical demands of commons and markets can be met, and how actors can come together to fund an open source core around which commercial offers can grow.

Taken together, these new organizational forms, (1) organized networks, (2) collective freelancing organizations, and (3) networked value chains yield three different types of work relations: (a) *flash collaborations*, (b) *complicities*, and (c) *work-families*. *Flash collaborations* typically occur in the context of orgnets and community spaces, when a need to work on the networked commons emerges due to some problem or conflict. Engaged individuals volunteer or are paid to participate in a working group or task force that addresses the issue. Apart from these very short-term forms of work, people frequently engage in short to medium-term collaborations to realize an internal project or to get an entrepreneurial venture off the ground. In her work as an international cultural producer, Ziemer (2013) observed that traditional notions such as friendship,

teamwork, colleagueship or collective were inadequate to characterize the kind of working relationships that she had experienced. It did not fit 'teamwork' because the collaboration was far too affective, passionate, and messy. She could not call it 'friendship' either. The relationships ended abruptly once the project was over, although they were temporarily quite intense. Thus, she hijacked the term *'complicity'* to signify a collective way of working in small networks of no more than ten people. Every involved accomplice acts as a co-perpetrator in an affective and aesthetic mode of organizing, to creatively cross established frontiers; an intense relationship with a clear cut-off point once the complicity ends. These groups act on unfamiliar affects that they cannot integrate into their palette of known emotions and feelings. The resulting confusion and excitement prompt accomplices to create new orders. Therefore, they often act irrationally and euphorically, overshoot their targets, and want something that is not possible. Borrowing from the realm of the delinquent, Ziemer also deconstructs popular notions of transparency and open innovation. Complicity implies that creative processes are dependent upon free space, anonymity, and unconventional thought. Nontransparent and secretive practices guarantee such a space. Furthermore, complicities are not flat organizational forms. "The key for successful improvisation, as for complicity, is the ability to perform ad hoc role changes. Auxiliary functions alternate with solo or attendant ones; someone steps into the spotlight and tells his story, while the others cheer from the dark by being extremely present" (Ziemer, 2013: 150; own translation). Finally, *work-families*, close-knit long-term working relationships that find an institutional expression in collective freelancing organizations, meld the conventionally separated spheres of work, family, and friendship. Often, members cowork together on various projects in a new urban space, live in a shared housing arrangement or intentional community, go on retreats, and build close friendships by spending their leisure time together. In these settings, people have to learn to recognize and navigate these different levels of relationship and develop everyday practices to forge close personal ties with a diverse group of people.

Kallinikos (2004) argues that the core feature of bureaucracy is neither its hierarchical office structure nor its standardized processes, but the 'non-inclusive involvement' of individuals in organizations. For the first time in human history, modernity has separated work from other spheres of social life (e.g., family, religion, community, and public life). Accordingly, whole subjectivities – people as "coherent behavioral and existential

units" (Kallinikos, 2003: 600) – have been dismantled into separated role repertoires. Consequently, people act from more or less independent modules, depending on the current social sphere. The decomposable constitution has facilitated the tempering of emotional relations at work in favor of rational interaction and task orientation. It has also increased social mobility by replacing hereditable status with meritocracy. Since the advent of information technology, networks have introduced decentralization and flexible boundaries, while current socio-economic developments in the field of work "strike a new balance between forms of living and forms of work" and redistribute "life responsibilities away from the state and toward the individual" (Kallinikos, 2003: 603). However, Kallinikos emphasizes that the network, although often touted to replace bureaucracy, does not change its core feature of organizing.

My analysis challenges this last claim. Contemporary artistic and social libertarian critiques in the freelancer society try to overcome the modular subjectivity by inserting purpose as the guiding principle of their organizing. Moreover, their close-knit work-life relationships (complicities and work-families) are filling the void between massification and individuality that was created by modernity. They are challenging the 'society of strangers' where "anyone can enter into an exchange relation and be replaced without impact" (Farias, 2017a: 582). The experimentation with collective freelancing points to a new sociality, where people are (re)discovering how to sustain groups through 'praxis, not ideology' (Farias, 2017a) or difference instead of sameness. Sharing intimate experiences with a wider group of people, but also with strangers and dissenters, entails a fundamental re-conception of the Other, an openness to being affected and changed by Otherness (see subchapter 5.3). Finally, these new forms of freelancer association are also an attempt at 'queering' and 're-socializing' the economy (Gibson-Graham, 1996). Since they are learning to recognize and appreciate care work and emotional labor; since they are establishing shared commons and open source spaces; since they are starting to appreciate that a stable livelihood is also made up of informal, voluntary, and convivial relations, they are "cultivating subjects who can desire and inhabit non-capitalist economic spaces" (Zanoni, Contu, Healy, and Mir, 2017: 579).

5.1.4.2 Simultaneous recuperation: The decentralized firm

This section comprises a discussion of how the emerging social libertarian and artistic critiques are at the same time selectively taken up by corporate actors, preparing their absorption into the new spirit of capitalism. The discursive articulations 'self-managed disruption' and 'democratizing work' incorporate some of the key issues and solutions highlighted by the critics, but lend themselves to corporate reformists. I discuss how the advocates of this discourse are proposing the *'decentralized firm'* model to reignite the excitement of organizational members, which is slowly expiring due to the 'thorny problem of central control.'

As discussed in more detail in section 2.1 critical literature on post-bureaucratic organizations (see, Brown, Kornberger, Clegg, and Carter, 2010; Fleming and Sturdy, 2009; Sturdy et al., 2016) underscored that participation had been introduced since the 1980s as a means of enhancing profitability and efficiency. A plethora of 'horizontal' management techniques, from lean management to business process re-engineering, were deployed to increase participation and unleash creativity, knowledge sharing, and entrepreneurial furor within the workforce. Simultaneously though, they increased meticulous tools of benchmarking and control, such as performance indicators, annual reviews, and other reporting practices. Consequently, it is argued that this led to further centralization of power in the hands of the 'visionary (project) manager' (Costea et al., 2008), who should be able to inspire the cultural fundament of normative self and peer control. Another major limitation of the flattening of hierarchies in post-bureaucratic organizations is seen in the various modes of outsourcing and in the transition to flexible labor regimes that led to the demise of stable careers (Diefenbach and By, 2012; Kokkinidis, 2015b).

By enacting the discursive articulations around the nodal points 'self-management' and 'democracy,' their proponents want to bridge the widening divide between the aspired entrepreneurial excitement and the disheartening realities of post-bureaucratic organizations. They actualize the managerial mode of organizing with what I call the ideal-type of a 'decentralized firm' (for a comparison see table 3 on the following page). The goal of this signification strategy is to show that distributed authority can unleash self-directed innovation, while still controlling the organization with the same

efficiency: ensuring the accomplishment of work, integrating tasks across roles, attaining goals, maintaining accountability, and resolving conflicts.

	Managerial Firm	Decentralized Firm
Organization is driven by →	strategic vision profits	common purpose triple bottom line
People are connected by a → and are working together as →	transactional logic teams of individuals	relational logic communities and collaborative groups
Change is perceived as → and flows →	strategic change initiatives vertically	continuous participatory change horizontally
Logic of decision-making →	decision-making chains rational, plan and control	consent, direct action and/or representation emotional, sense and respond
Conflict is →	ruled, mediated or covered from 'above'	driving force of organizational development
Individuals take up →	assigned job title	multiple and changing roles
Leadership is →	tied to individuals	dispersed into organizational culture
Power is primarily organized through →	hierarchy and normative control	normative control, social capital, affect
Problems →	thorny problem of central control, stress, burnout, inauthenticity	informal hierarchies, overinvestment, ownership, inauthenticity

Table 3: Comparative conceptualization of ideal types: 'managerial' and 'decentralized' firm

In comparison to the critics, the elites ignore the post-capitalist argument but take up the narrative on increasing complexity, diversity, and technologically enabled disintermediation. They emphasize that rapid responsiveness is required to address the rising number of unexpected and non-causal problems. Only if all organizational members (and especially those 'on the ground') can freely contribute their ideas, can the organization succeed in developing 'disruptive innovation.' Therefore, departmental boundaries and status differences have to be disintegrated. The ideal type of the 'decentralized firm' – in practice called 'democratic,' 'self-managed,' 'self-organized,' 'responsive,' 'emergent,' and 'agile' – "decentralize[s] authority in a formal and systematic way" (Lee and Edmondson, 2017: 46). "The notion of 'reporting to' someone who has 'authority over' you becomes anathema in a self-managing organization" (ibid.). Whereas the managerial firm was driven by 'strategic vision,' the decentralized one localizes 'common purpose' at its center. 'Purpose' refers to a wider societal relevance that integrates social and environmental values with profit. Consequently, it should become possible to develop the organization as a community rooted in a set of

communal values, whose members perceive their doings as contributing to a better world. The focus on an overarching purpose is also seen to result in a culture of deliberation, in which conflicting values (profit, social good) and their 'hybrid logics' (Battilana, Fuerstein, and Lee, 2018) can be negotiated productively.

Consequently, the logic of interaction is perceived to change from transactional to relational. Ignited by intrapreneurial passion and the will to grow as an individual while fulfilling a shared purpose together, work is reframed as collaboration and co-creation. Teams, not individuals, are conceptualized as the basic units of task performance and evaluation. They tinker with continuous participatory change, feeling their way forward in the course of small iterative experiments and in close contact with customers. It is underscored that strategic initiatives and projects spring from the team-level; resource allocation, hiring, compensation, and evaluation is worked out in various degrees between peers and committees. In this process and in exchanges with the wider organizational community, local teams are perceived to develop a holistic perspective on the enterprise. They are also likely to forge trust and reflective capacities, which enables them to address conflicts directly. The discursive articulations stress the importance of a culture of continual development, where people reflect upon strategy and processes periodically (e.g., in holacratic 'governance meetings' or agile 'retrospectives'). Consequently, workers are encouraged to embrace tensions and conflicts as the driving force of organizational development, which teaches them to speak up and listen more actively.

From this perspective, individuals take up a number of changing roles instead of a job title. They choose what they want to work on. Similarly, to the critics and borrowed from the experience of alternative organizations (Rothschild, 2016), decentralized firms tout structured consent-decision making processes together with direct-action tactics (Leach, 2016; for a more detailed discussion see subchapter 5.3.1). Participants are allowed to exercise their veto rights only when they are ready to work on a solution. As in the managerial firm, leaders should be able to lead with questions instead of giving orders (Costas and Taheri, 2012; Raelin, 2013); to authentically inspire excitement and vision (Costea, et al., 2008); and be mindful and reflective (Fyke and Buzzanell, 2013; Islam, Holm, and Karjalainen, 2017) as to engage with others in counseling and mentoring relationships (Schulz and Steyaert, 2014; Shoukry and Cox, 2018). The

discursive twist is to untie leadership from individuals, to *"disperse it into the organizational culture,"* as one of my interview partners framed it. It seems likely that moving leadership 'from force to influence' and expecting everyone to assume it from time to time will exacerbate problems with stress and burnout flowing from self- and peer-based mechanisms of normative control (Du Gay and Morgan, 2013; Fleming, 2012). Moreover, the actors in the discourse frequently convey images and ideals of working in a hierarchy-less 'flatland' (see Valve, 2012). Such a stance carries the danger of glossing over emerging informal hierarchies due to status, experience, personal connections, and engagement, which leads to more pernicious informal and tabooed power inequalities (Freeman, 1972). The psychosocial repercussions of this idealization will be further explored in subchapter 5.2. Successful leadership in decentralized firms depends upon charisma and social capital as crucial factors for internal movement-building (indeed the above-quoted computer game designer Valve has been criticized for its informal status hierarchies; Maier, 2013). My interview partners stressed how workers in their organizations struggled with overinvestment. They are exhilarated by the feeling of making an impact on the organization, to find personal purpose and an authentic life trajectory in the shared purpose of the firm. Unhealthy levels of engagement then easily turn into burnout, as opposed to colleagues, who participate loudly (because everyone has an equal voice) but are not ready to assume responsibility. The resulting discussions and inertia drain people's energies. The articulation 'democratizing work' thus holds that consent-based governance does not work in growing organizations and suggests engaging in democratic representation with temporary elected leaders. In either case, the interviewees stressed that it was challenging to organize careers in the absence of the chimney model *("up, up, up, and out,"* as one of my interviewees put it).

Apart from overinvestment, informal hierarchies, and inertia, the question of ownership is likely to diminish the 'excitement' criteria, in Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) view. In pursuing a 'triple bottom line,' the ideal type decentralized firm transcends the fixation on shareholder value. Employees are involved in decision-making, and the voices of stakeholders and customers become more important. However, the question of ownership remains unaddressed. This gap leads to a "watered-down or softer notion of empowerment that fails to change the formal 'hard' power within organizations" (Battilana et al., 2018: 7). In several interviews, I heard that the founders of

decentralized firms as 'enlightened monarchs' who revoke their power, find it hard to remove themselves from the center of interactions within their organizations. In addition, established companies are tempted to implement decentralized structures on lower hierarchical tiers only. They abolish middle management while their executive layer remains intact (e.g., 'teaming;' Edmondson and Harvey, 2017). One of my interview partners, a documentary filmmaker, encapsulated the underlying motivation in the following statement: *"I think Google, Apple, and Co. are very innovative. If they would start with democratization – shared decision-making plus shared ownership, then I think they wouldn't get more innovative."*

As mentioned earlier, the decentralized firm projects a panacea: intrinsically motivated employees, a culture of innovation, and reduced management costs. It raises the 'excitement' about participating in the new spirit of capitalism by tearing down the post-bureaucratic boundaries of innovation. Therefore, people are more likely to live out their 'entrepreneurial selves' (Bröckling, 2015), to pursue self-realization and personal growth through work. At the same time, it prolongs the 'non-inclusive involvement of humans qua roles' (Kallinikos, 2004), the main feature of modern bureaucracy. In decentralized work, roles are probably less inclined to end up being 'behavioral molds' (Kallinikos, 2003) "designed in advance and without regard for the person" (p. 606), but 'employability' is maintained as the central axis of work life (Cremin, 2010). With the destabilization of other domains, such as family or community life, over the past decades, work issues have become an ever-growing part of people's lives. Personal choices are made, and intimate qualities developed in view of staying fit for possible employment. "Modular human agency is increasingly framed in terms of the enterprising of life" (Kallinikos, 2003: 613). Decentralized firms are designed to hatch these new 'whole' subjectivities that develop integral personhoods only to contribute to the flourishing of capitalist organizations. Moreover, closely integrated collaborative teams that are working towards a shared purpose are providing identification with a trusted social collective. They are compensating for the waning importance of religious, political, and local communities. I argue that they are catering to Boltanski and Chiapello's 'security' dimension, together with the promise of higher salaries provided by part of the freed-up resources from the curtailed management layer.

5.1.5 Pathways

In this section, I conducted a post-foundational discourse analysis of the management trend around 'bossless work.' I found four discursive articulations and their corresponding nodal points. Then I distilled their signification strategies and spelled out how they were intended to represent three floating signifiers – the 'firm,' 'work,' and 'leadership' – in a counter-hegemonic struggle against management. *Firstly*, with respect to 'self-organizing systems,' the firm is portrayed as a complex natural system in which the ideal leadership figure stewards his or her co-workers on a journey to pool their collective intelligence and to reach higher levels of consciousness. Work is seen as a purposeful endeavor, whereby individuals find their life's purpose in relation to the wider societal purpose of the whole organization. *Secondly*, the discursive articulation centered on the nodal point 'commons' heralded the emergence of a new kind of networked knowledge commons and cosmo-local production. The privileged subject position urges people to become co-leaders in social-entrepreneurial and post-capitalist ventures. The firm is reframed into a community of high-trust groups or a peer network, in which work is a collaboration of communal work-families. The *third*, discursive articulation, which centered on the nodal point 'self-management' conveyed an economic landscape riddled by technologically induced disruptive innovation. Consequently, work has to become more collaborative, self-determined, and creative to result in innovation. Leaders have to strengthen their facilitative, reflexive, and emotive qualities to enable an inclusive and consensual 'doocracy.' *Fourthly*, with 'democratizing work,' firms were equated with states, and thus democratic governance is touted in the workplace. Workers are perceived as digital citizens who delegate their decision rights to temporarily elected representatives – management with an expiry date.

Against the background of Boltanski and Chiapello's 'new spirit of capitalism,' I discussed how the first two articulations are fueling a renewed 'social libertarian' and 'artistic critique,' while the latter two are re-energizing the new spirit by contributing to the assimilation of the critics. Critical voices in the emerging freelancer society are experimenting with new forms of association and collectivization in networked value chains and communities of high-trust groups. I conceptualized how these new organizational forms (*'organized networks,' 'collective freelancing,'* and *'networked value chains'*) bring forth novel work relations (*'flash collaborations,' 'complicities,'*

and *'work-families'*) that move beyond employed labor to shared ownership and combine market- with commons-based concerns. The elite, on the other hand, proposes a *'decentralized firm'* without a hierarchical management layer and departmental boundaries, where workers find a playing field for more authentic self-actualization in self-directed, collaborative innovation.

Purpose can be seen as the connective tissue between the antagonistic camps. Both seek to provide the soil for more authentic and whole work lives by redefining the tension between autonomy and collectivity. The critics attempt to transcend the modular constitution of modern subjectivity by reclaiming the empty space between the individual and mass society. With their new forms of freelance association, they are building 'convivial' collectivities (Illich, 1973), a social space that was once held by pre-modern tribes. Freelancer cooperatives, entrepreneurial collectives, and livelihood communities meld the realms of working, private, community, and public life. To challenge anonymity and indifference, they try to redefine their relationship to Otherness, inviting dissent, emotional sensibility, and strangers into their experience. The assimilation of this critique works on the consolidation and expansion of a different kind of whole subjectivity, one that realizes itself in the confines of work. Hence, in the new spirit, the place of all other lifeworlds are defined in relation to work, and personal qualities are mobilized for employability. The decentralized firm can be seen as a countermeasure to reignite people's passion for participating in this process. It fosters both entrepreneurial autonomy and team-based community to strengthen its appeal.

Finally, some considerations concerning the strategic development of this struggle: Can the critique grow beyond social entrepreneurial, open source, and sharing activist circles? For the majority of the self-employed, it might sound too daring to participate in new organizational forms that are not adequately protected by institutional and juridical safeguards and require one at the same time to pool (parts of) one's income. Moreover, investing oneself in the experimental establishment of networked value chains, meaning to put new governance and financial regimes to the test, seems like a task for pioneers. Near-future visions, such as off-the-shelf solutions to establish digital platform cooperatives or 'cosmo-local' (Fournier, 2013) desktop manufacturing in open design communities, might be able to change this situation, but they still have to withstand the test of time. In the meantime, a viable strategy could be to ally with

ecological critics, who are on a comparable path to connecting people and build stronger communities around ecovillages, coliving houses, and food cooperatives. Such an alliance between ecological, social, and artistic critics (Chiapello, 2013) could expand the reach of coworking spaces by embedding them into what is increasingly called 'urban villages' (Shareable, 2018). The coalition could result in more diverse communities working on local energy, food, transport, and education solutions. I would frame it as a multiplicity of local attempts at 'queering capitalism' (Gibson-Graham, 1996) through child-care cooperatives, community cafes, tool libraries, repair workshops, urban gardening, and gift economy initiatives. They would then be complementarily connected to freelancer organizations, mutually supporting each other through precarious founding periods. It has been argued in the literature that the resulting 'localized small business systems' (Parker, 2017), 'economies that work for the common good' (Felber, 2015), and 'local economies on a human scale' (Chiapello, 2013) would be more resilient to shocks as they nurture requisite variety instead of economies of scale. With their emerging model of networked production in self-employed but cooperative work-families, freelancer organizing can contribute a means of decreasing income inequality and social exclusion. Its novel practices of shared ownership and communal organization can be interpreted as a gradual move towards 'post-capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2006). As the experience of Argentina (Atzeni and Vieta, 2014) and Greece (Daskalaki and Kokkinidis, 2017) has shown, moments of economic crisis can function as a catalyzer to expand the appeal of alternative organizing to wider societal groups. Political allies might be found less on the national level, but in participatory, commons-oriented urban politics, as the growing movement of 'municipalism' (Shea Baird, 2017) spearheaded by the Spanish cities, Barcelona and Madrid illustrates.

On the other side of the spectrum, the decentralized firm might serve as the missing puzzle piece for 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR; Kazmi et al., 2016), 'green capitalism' (Chiapello, 2013), and 'conscious capitalism' (Fyke and Buzzanell, 2013) to emerge as the next spirit of capitalism. CSR is sensitive to ecological criticism – the environmentally destructive nature of capitalism and its moral emptiness due to its shareholder value fixation. Consequently, responsible green corporations would value social and environmental concerns in their doings and open their governance to stakeholders. They "address consumer demand for brands to 'behave' in a way that

complies with their own values" (Kazmi et al., 2016: 750) and strengthen the 'excitement' dimension by raising the social capital of firms and their managers as conscious servant leaders. In this sense, the decentralized firm resonates more with CSR than with the new spirit, because the former's triple bottom line orientation promises a more authentic route for the realization of collectively purposeful endeavors.

At the same time, following Kazmi et al. (2016), the aspiring spirit struggles, because it is not able to address the 'security' and 'fairness' dimensions properly. So far, security is maintained in two ways. Individually, by continuing the firm's responsibility to care for the employability of its members, and collectively, by framing companies as corporate citizens who care for planetary survival. Regarding fairness, CSR, as a top-down approach, neglects the interests of workers, because financial rewards are reserved for management only. By adding the decentralized firm to the mix, these dimensions could be significantly strengthened. The model abolishes (at least partially) the hierarchical management layer and promises to redistribute some of the savings to the workers, while it also fosters a more community-oriented way of working. At the same time, ownership rights remain untouched, so the capitalist model is intact. Whereas all previous spirits have promised individual freedom, the aspiring next spirit would emphasize collective duties and a sense of community that counters the societal atomization that occurred due to the disintegration of social domains outside work. The vision of earning 'conscious profits' would have a good chance of support, at least from the tier of society that is engaged in the knowledge economy. The fate of the displaced of information capitalism would remain open. The working poor and rented labor, the prototypical Amazon warehouse worker or Uber driver, who might end up unemployable in the next wave of automatization, is not included in this narrative. One route, touted by Silicon Valley CEOs, is the introduction of a universal basic income. Another is the commodification of intimate and emotional life, resulting in a service-servant society.

5.2   Welcome to flatland? Fantasies and frictions of bossless work

> *Welcome to Flatland: […]*
> *It's our shorthand way of saying*
> *that we don't have any management,*
> *and nobody 'reports to' anybody else.*
>
> — Valve,
> Handbook for new employees

In this section, I continue the post-foundational discourse analysis of the management trend by addressing the question of how bossless work becomes appealing. Therefore, I attach Lacan's psychoanalytic conceptualization of subjectivity between desire and language (Arnaud and Vidaillet, 2017; Contu, Driver, and Jones, 2010; Glynos, 2011) to Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) post-structuralist discourse theory around hegemony. This perspective makes it possible to tease out how the discourse of bossless work as a 'symbolic Other' becomes desirable because it arouses fantasmatic images in the subconscious that tempt subjects to pursue unbossing excessively. I employ Lacanian terminology to examine how specific 'patterns of *jouissance*' (a relentless quest for desire, an enjoyment that has been taken too far and causes pain) are resulting in detrimental ethico-political effects. Hence, I show that the affective involvement in bossless work qua subconscious fantasies is leading to psychosocial forms of organizational control.

In the previous section, I emphasized the most important undercurrent in the world of work since the 1980s that is relevant to this dissertation: Passion has been mobilized to re-energize people's commitment to work. Work is increasingly seen as a source of self-actualization, through which individuals fulfill themselves as 'whole' human beings, to ultimately lead an authentic (work-)life (Cederström and Grassman, 2010; Spicer, 2011). Paradoxically, employee participation and more autonomous cooperation went hand in hand with the reinforcement of soft control and charismatic leadership. Managers were encouraged to develop empathic capabilities and a therapeutic language to lead as coaches and facilitators (Illouz, 2007; Schulz and Steyaert, 2014), but they

still presided over central strategy. Instead of issuing orders, though, they still had to instill visions and forge a strong culture, invoking self-regulatory practices and peer pressure in largely 'self-managed' teams (Costea, Crump, and Amiridis, 2008; Raelin, 2011b). Paraphrasing Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) argument, capitalism has endogenized forceful criticisms, in particular, a demand for self-determination and participation, while it consolidated the role of the manager at the same time. Consequently, the hegemony of 'managerialism' prevailed (see Klikauer, 2015; Parker, 2002). The idea of management as a universal skill-set prepared the ground for a caste of administrators, who – equipped with their business school credentials – had seized power at the expense of specialized personnel and owners in most sectors of society.

Amidst rising frustration with this paradoxical situation, the advocates of the unbossing trend promoted a scenario that wants to accommodate increasing (and fantastic) subjective demands for autonomy, individuality, and personal growth by turning everyone into a manager. In this section, I will sort through the various lines of argument and flows of desire in the discourse of 'bossless work' to show how the awaited 'flatland' is likely to be still ridden by unequal power relations. Empirically, I follow a number of social communities that are bringing about different articulations of 'bossless work' in a kind of public rehearsal of idealized organizational practices. I scrutinized their communicative efforts through participant observation at events, a close reading of management books, and qualitative interviews.

The analysis in this chapter contributes to a critical understanding of bossless work, because it distinguishes three interconnected 'patterns of *jouissance*' in (1) *growth*, (2) *wholeness*, and (3) *belonging*. It illustrates how they resonate with potent shared fantasies to establish psychosocial modes of organizational control. The examination shows how subjects become vulnerable through their affective investment in the 'desire of the Other' (bossless work), and thereby entangled in various forms of co-dependency. It suggests that bossless organizations, regardless of their context in corporate mainstream or post-capitalist freelancer organizing, will struggle with adverse ethico-political effects of their desires for creating flat structures.

5.2.1 Questioning control: Rational, normative or relational?

In organization theory, there is a distinction between rational and normative forms of organizational control. While the history of management thinking has been characterized as an ongoing change between these two main perspectives, alternative organizations have experimented with a relational approach to control.

5.2.1.1 Rational control

Robert Michels' (1915 [1966]) catchphrase, "who says organization, says oligarchy" (p. 365), still holds for current thinking about organizational control. Section 2.3 outlined how from examining a political party, Michels concluded that even highly espoused democratic efforts lead to elite-driven projects over time. Experiences within the antiauthoritarian women's liberation movement of the 1960s supported this observation. Freeman (1972) coined the term 'tyranny of structurelessness' to highlight that if leadership is based on interpersonal skills rather than on managerial position or bureaucratic office, tacit hierarchies with even worse consequences emerge. Hence, the solution was seen in a rational model of organizational control, "which it is not whether but how control can be best orchestrated under given conditions" (Raelin, 2011b: 137). In this view, managers exercise behavioral, outcome, and input control in the functional interests of the firm. They rationally apply the tools of observation, measurement, and training, while standardization supports those efforts indirectly.

Conversely, critical realist scholars argued that the functionalist ethos of bureaucratic organizations and their instrumental rationality represent only surface symptoms, which are shaped by underlying generative mechanisms such as class or competition (Willmott, 2005). Their research informed initiatives such as the 'Industrial Democracy Program' in Norway (Deutsch, 2005) or the self-managing approach to socialism in former Yugoslavia (Singh, Bartkiw, and Suster, 2007). In light of today's knowledge economy, the idea of altering structural dynamics by democratizing ownership and governance of firms (Dahl, 1989) is being re-examined. Landemore and Ferreras (2016) justify the 'state-firm analogy' on philosophical grounds, while Grandori (2016) suggests equal rights for 'human and capital investors' regarding efficiency.

5.2.1.2 Normative control

The primary critique of bureaucracy in functional terms was the lack of intrinsic motivation, flexibility, and entrepreneurial qualities that 'technocratic control' (Alvesson, 2004) caused in employees. This theme has been explored since Elton Mayo discovered in his Hawthorne Works' experiments that a sense of teamwork and mutual accountability raised productivity. The resulting efforts of the 'human relations' movement (Beirne, 2008) to translate this 'discovery' of human needs into emancipatory projects was soon thwarted by 'human resource'-driven workplace redesign (Budd, Gollan, and Wilkinson, 2010). Employees were encouraged to fashion themselves as entrepreneurial and to move flexibly in flatter organizations engaged in networks of partnerships. "From now on, work is no longer something we only do (consigned to a limited space and time) but also something we are, becoming a way of life or lifestyle," as Fleming (2012: 208) put it.

Post-structural scholars explored a systemic form of power in this arrangement, one that is productive because it shapes subjectivities. Organizational control is not imposed through coercion or manipulation (Fleming and Spicer, 2014), but results from discursively imposed norms and is thereby a function of social capital (Raelin, 2011b). Today's hegemonic discourse on the 'entrepreneurial self' (Bröckling, 2015; Weiskopf and Steyaert 2009) encourages individuals to become passionate, self-expressive, and autonomous. However, creative collaboration goes hand in hand with internalized control and the appropriation of emotions and personal qualities as a means of efficiency and growth (Han, 2014). In explaining how such a paradoxical subject position becomes attractive, research has turned to investigations into the 'visceral operation of power' (Thompson and Willmott, 2016). Apart from the sociomaterial notions of embodiment (Dale and Burrell, 2014; Sørensen and Villadsen, 2015) and affect (Bjerg and Staunæs, 2011), the study of psychosocial relations (Kenny and Fotaki, 2014) moved into the spotlight. Styhre (2008) utilized a Lacanian framework to describe how the locus of control shifted from the register of the symbolic (documentation, reporting, job descriptions) to the imaginary. In this light, normative control unfolds through ensembles of self-images or fantasies and corresponds to the ego "in which the individual experiences herself as a whole and complete subject" (p. 647).

5.2.1.3 Relational control

While organizational sociologists (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Rothschild, 2016) entertained a longstanding interest in cooperative and alternative organizing, scholars involved in organization studies revived the topic only recently (Cheney, Cruz, Peredo, and Nazareno, 2014; Parker, Cheney, Fournier, and Land, 2014). Regarding the issue of control, a common thread in this research revolves around the effects of consent-based decision-making. Importantly, it is seen as a practice that invites the exchange of dissenting perspectives but reaches beyond mere deliberation because it transforms the involved subjects and forges communities. Hence, scholars have argued that these organizations are "held together by 'personal identity relationships' (Pickard, 2006: 320) rather than by hierarchy, authority and other conventional structural elements" (Reedy, 2014: 650). The cooperative experience accentuates work as a collective effort towards a purpose for the common good, undertaken in light of a logic of mutual care and trust (Kokkinidis, 2015a). In addition, a striking commonality of successful consent-based organizations has been their tolerance of arbitrary and open processes. Consequently, no one is in control of the organization, but it is still operating in a controlled manner within the conflicting constraints of the dissenting relations.

In looking at the discourses and desires of bossless work, this section adds an affective lens to the study of organizational control in participatory democratic settings. An intense fantasmatic involvement in the articulations suggests that negative ethico-political effects will occur in alternative and corporate settings alike. In the following section, I explain the conceptual framework of this analysis.

5.2.2 Lacan's fantasies: discourse and desire

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) emphasized that discourses soar around gaps, which are obscured by the construction of 'nodal points' (or 'master signifiers' in Lacan's terminology). These terms supply meaning to undefined elements (floating signifiers) and mobilize them for their discursive formation. In doing so, they are constructing 'chains of equivalence or difference' (Marttila, 2015) to see a familiar ground. The goal of discursive articulations is to oppose or marginalize other discourses and signifiers. They are thus used in processes of hegemonic power formation. They create through exclusion, but, importantly, the suspended meanings never vanish utterly.

Lacan, who reconciled psychoanalysis with the linguistic turn, opens a window to understand why people get attached to certain discourses. His 'theory of the mirror stage' is crucial in the conception of the unconscious as a 'discursive manifestation of the Other' (Arnaud and Vidaillet, 2017). Before a child identifies with its image in the mirror, it experiences the world in unity and abundance. The moment of identification is the birth of the ego, henceforth supplying an imagined wholeness to the fragmented experience of 'the Real.' Crucially, the parents support this process by naming the image. Thus, the child dissociates from the mirror image and becomes attached to the domain of the symbolic. From then on, the subject is on a futile journey to retrieve fullness by the same means that initially caused the disconnection. The longing to fend off the lack causes desire and the affective attachment to discourses that promise recovery. Hence the prominent Lacanian aphorism 'desire is the desire of the Other.'

Organizing is thus understood as a psychosocial process (Kenny and Fotaki, 2014) in which individuals try to mobilize an integrated subjectivity from their "psychic repertoire of self-images" (Styhre, 2008: 644). The subconscious 'imaginary register' constitutes the self; it thus precedes language, but at the same time, it partakes in an attempt to cover the existential lack caused by symbolization (Glynos, 2011). The 'Real' in turn, connoting to the unsymbolizable forces of materiality and bodily experiences, mediates between the other two registers (imaginary and symbolic). In the process of dealing with the ego's anxiety due to emptiness and fragmentation, fantasies play a central role, because they are fending off the inevitable lack of 'the Other.' Subconsciously, they portray an ideal future state and also obstacles to overcome, while they simultaneously mask antagonisms, as well as the failure of the symbolic order to contain the excesses of the Real (Glynos, Klimecki, and Willmott, 2012). The objects in this fantasmatic journey are perpetually somewhat out of grasp and subjects will always try to retain these seemingly lost ideational properties passionately.

However, there is only so much enjoyment and passion that an individual can bear before it turns into its opposite. Consequently, fantasmatic pursuits are only partially pleasurable; indeed, they are also connected to pain and a feeling of being on the edge. Lacan named this process '*jouissance*:' "[O]nce you have started, you never know where it will end. It begins with a tickle and ends in a blaze of petrol." (Lacan, 1997: 72). In a psychoanalytic nip, the inevitable real-life failure of the fantasy only enforces the

jouissance further, because it creates a lack that makes the fantasmatic longing ever more appealing. By sharing their fantasies, groups create collectively tempting imaginary landscapes. They affectively charge their aspirations, whereas the involved nodal points are wrapped in an emotionally captivating allure (Bicknell and Liefooghe, 2010).

5.2.3 Data analysis

The management trend around bossless work departed from various repertoires of knowledge and sprouted globally in all kinds of social milieus and mediums of communication. This is best illustrated by its vast array of concurring buzzwords. Among them: self-management, flat hierarchies, decentralization, disintermediation, corporate and workplace democracy, liberated enterprises, healthy power, self-organization, emergent and responsive organizations, going teal, next stage organizations or holacracy, to name a few. In an attempt to do justice to this complexity, I decided to sample variations of the trend. I have thus captured discursive articulations that popped up around events, management books, and qualitative interviews. With this mixed sample, I could follow several fields of practice and their respective strings of discourse (for a more detailed methodological description, please return to chapter 4).

With the help of available models (Cederström and Spicer, 2014; Walton and Boon, 2014), the post-foundational discourse analysis was composed of three steps. By approaching the mixed sample with a discursive framework that is sensitive to gaps, materiality, and affect, I tried to address the 'parochial and isolationist' tendencies of the discipline (Phillips and Oswick, 2012) and to keep their 'muscular assumptions' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011) about the real-life power of discourses at bay. The *first* step of this analysis – identifying nodal points, ordering utterances, crystallizing signifying chains – was explained in the previous subchapter (5.1). The *second* step was to address the affective dimension. How are subjects affectively invested in specific articulations? Lacanian scholarship suggests starting by searching for fantasies. I tried to be attentive to paradoxes, absences, and antagonisms. Moreover, I watched out for stories reflecting a "scenario of wholeness and completeness" (and related obstacles to reaching this ideal place; Cederström and Spicer, 2014: 197) and 'postalgic fantasies' (ibid.) that draw a perfect future. Moreover, I paid attention to emotionally charged

terms that promised people to find something indeterminate. *Thirdly*, a close reading of the selected practitioner-oriented management books and the crafting of observational vignettes from my participation in several management events led me to the question of *jouissance*. What were the nodal points and fantasies concealing? Moreover, what might individuals find in them that warranted excessive involvement? After several iterative attempts of analysis that profited from the feedback of colleagues, three shared fantasies emerged, in light of which I will now accentuate the affective appeal and ethico-political consequences of the articulations.

5.2.4 Surveying the fantasmatic landscape of bossless work

I will now carve out three different fantasies and their related patterns of *jouissance* (for an overview, see table 4).

Shared fantasies	Collaborative disruption	Self-organized harmony	Postcapitalist entrepreneurship
	# open communication = limitless economic growth # worker as co-entrepreneur trusted team relations # continuous participatory change = treat frictions → reflective relationships	# self-organization as a universal organizing principle # individuals and organizations as purposeful agents → cooperation not competition # spiritual wholeness at work	# raising a commons-based economic sector → activism # from firms to decentralized contributory systems # cooperative work-families livelihood, not growth
Patterns of jouissance	*growth* # pursuit of personal and economic growth fuels cycle of mutual recognition # intrapreneurial stamina and personal traits mobilized for employability	*wholeness* # imaginary longing for stabilized subjectivity # self-referential elitism: 'going teal' # naturalization of power structures	*belonging* # (over-)responsibility and guilt of not contributing enough # leaving work-family = losing social network # diversity and autonomy vs. tribal group dynamics
Master signifiers	self-management, democracy	self-organization	commons

Table 4: Fantasies, patterns of *jouissance*, and master signifiers in the management trend on bossless work

Each part of the analysis is built by focusing on one distinctive data source (events, management books, interviews). This approach helps me to explain how the discursive communities employ various communicative practices to play on the affective resonances. It is important to note that every single discursive articulation evokes all three fantasies (and their *jouissances*), although they each heavily lean towards one. For

this reason, Lacan referenced his conceptual tools to the idea of topological space. A fantasmatic landscape is continuously performed and preserved under conditions of deformation, bending, and stretching. "We can say points are connected, but we cannot distinguish different types of connection or quantify them in terms, say, of closeness. […] What appeared locally to be an opposite is, from a different perspective, on the same side" (Bicknell and Liefooghe, 2010: 320).

5.2.4.1 Collaborative disruption

The first peek into the fantasmatic landscape of bossless work is set against the background of an economy that is gripped by waves of technology-induced disruption. The imagery circles around positively connoted terms that recur in the interview material: creativity, collaboration, teamwork, continuous change, and, most importantly, open communication and innovation. Along the same line, the antithesis of the entrepreneurial fervor is signified by 'negative' terms such as barriers, silos, departments, job titles, bottlenecks, hierarchies, and centralized decisions. It is interesting to note that the importance of growth and profitability is downplayed. Instead, the purposeful reinvention of markets, goods, and services emerges as the ultimate objective. I will structure the analysis of this fantasy, themed 'collaborative disruption,' around a series of observational vignettes that were created from my participation in a daylong event with the tagline: *"Hierarchy was yesterday – but what is today?"* Organized by a renowned leadership and organizational development institute, it exemplifies how a field of practitioners – consultants, facilitators, and trainers – promoted democratic and consensual practices in the corporate context. In doing so, they embraced mainly two strings of discourse around the master signifiers of *'self-management'* and *'organizational democracy'* to shake up conventional structures.

> The atmosphere at the event venue radiated between solidity and unconventionality. Upon their arrival, the participants helped themselves to sweet and salty croissants filled with a variety of salmon, spreads, and vegetables; business standard; but as soon as they entered the conference room, they were confronted with a loose arrangement of sleek oval standing tables and white leathery barstools instead of a proper theater-style auditorium. A couple of whiteboards on wheels served as flexible room dividers and workstations for graphic recording. The dominant design elements were dangling from the ceiling:

Plates with cartooned portraits and short bios of the various speakers. A glance out of the window revealed a stunning panorama over the city. The space was on the very top of a skyscraper.

At first, choosing the prototypical architectural symbol of hierarchy as an event site seems quite ironic. But then, one of the organizers explained the motif quite frankly over lunch: *"We are embracing the new trend of self-organization and holacracy to rebrand our services for a new generation of managers."* The target group of HR executives, change managers, and owners were thus confirmed in their comfort zone, while they received the unsettling message that they had better tear down most of their organization's structural boundaries to keep up with small, dedicated startups and global socio-economic shifts.

> Three moderators commenced the day with a well-rehearsed triple-act. Their presentation stressed that increasing "complexity and volatility will kill the old industrial model of hierarchical organizing. We see the rise of a new world order marked by digitization, disruptive innovation, and the economic rise of Asia." Exemplary images of Tesla, Netflix, and Uber were flickering across two huge screens in the back. Then, they referred to Karl Weick, stating: "Simply pushing harder within the old boundaries will not do." Finally, the moderators stressed some commonalities of "the new paradigm." These successful companies are "purpose driven," operate with "distributed authority," and every employee is encouraged to "sense problems and respond to them." The latter means that these organizations are in a "continuous prototyping mode, reinventing their organizational form on a regular basis."

The critical significance of 'purpose' in the above denotes the ideal image of decentralized firms that should be driven by the excitement of their entrepreneurial employees. Everybody manages and is managed at the same time. The quintessential employee develops a sense of ownership and a holistic perspective of the enterprise. In my interviews, members of bossless companies uttered similar demands: *"I act as if the shop is mine." "I must consider the firm in its entirety, think outside the box."* Another organization even formulated its purpose in relation to the metaphor of being a *"safe harbor for creative rebels."*

Such entrepreneurial imagery is commonplace in the sphere of post-bureaucratic knowledge-driven organizations. However, when the moderators at the event were emphasizing 'distributed authority' and employees who 'sense and respond to

problems,' they signified their wish to realize their fantasy by abandoning all (bureaucratic) boundaries. The following interview passages with two employees in self-managed firms (ascribed by themselves) illustrate this urge for radical openness.

> "In a self-managed ecosystem, anyone can communicate with anyone else at any time about anything. The artificial barriers to communication in a traditional hierarchy are removed; they are **abandoned completely**. It allows people to freely innovate continuously. Innovations can spring up from **anywhere, at any time**."

> "I very much enjoy the fact that we try to avoid barriers that prevent the best ideas from being implemented. It doesn't matter where they come from. It just matters like, OK, what is the **best that we can do for our customers**?"

The first quotation highlights the wish to create innovation by abolishing the constraints of hierarchical rank, job descriptions, or departmental echo chambers. To realize the underlying imagination of infinite economic growth, employees turn into entrepreneurs, becoming empowered from patronizing collective actors (firms, unions) that had either protected or controlled them. The fantasy promises individualization, people stepping out of a professional subjectivity that reduces them to a role or a human resource. They are encouraged to fulfill themselves in the workplace by entering into a community with their colleagues, and by honoring each other as 'whole' human beings. *"We try to teach people to treat and meet other people as people and not objects,"* as one of my interviewees framed it. With its emphasis on the benefit of the customers, the second of the above quotations reveals that this process of supposedly holistic self-actualization happens in a neatly confined domain of life, limited by the constraints of commodification, competition, and employability.

Interestingly, as subjects break loose from the embrace of massification, a new collective actor emerges: the team. In comparison *"to traditional organizations, where mostly the work might be more individuals working together, rather than like real teamwork,"* the team becomes the basic working unit, a member of a tech and design consultancy told me. Teams drive operations and strategy through iterative experimentation, depending on reflective members – or 'co-entrepreneurs' (Sattelberger et al., 2015: 17) – who maturely negotiate frictions in trusted relationships.

A *jouissance* in growth. Lacan framed *jouissance* as a paradoxical pleasure, an enjoyment that has been taken too far and is thus mostly felt as suffering. The fantasy of *'collaborative disruption'* engenders a joy in growth, both personal and economic. As people are tempted to go beyond the pleasurable edge in their pursuit of entrepreneurial innovation and individual authenticity, the need for mutual recognition is likely to trump the call for caring and reflective relationships. The following passage from an interview with a member of a self-managed firm exemplifies this dynamic.

> "It took me probably about two years to feel comfortable, finding a way to be a part. […] I was like, well, I am creating a new position at a company that has never existed before. **How do I become valuable?** I've got my own ideas about that but wanted to make sure that my notions of value accorded with what other people thought. It took some time to get used to it."

Being recognized for one's exceptionality and the value one is bringing to the organization becomes a central concern. This pressure is especially urgent for new employees, even though self-managed firms usually grant them considerable time to experience working in different teams. After all, social skills and the resulting social capital are vital to be effective in such a system. The demand to elicit followership and impact is lurking from day one. Consequently, patterns of control are likely to arise from excessive demands for attention and the desire for mutual self-affirmation. It becomes palpable that this quest is both pleasurable and painful. Moreover, the fantasy of *'collaborative disruption'* intensifies the *jouissance* in growth because it does not touch on the issue of ownership. Employee's personal qualities and intrapreneurial stamina are ultimately mobilized for the benefit of shareholders. Subjects become frustrated, but at the same time, the failure of the entrepreneurial ideal makes the fantasmatic pursuit of an authentic and whole subjectivity for the sake of increased employability even more appealing. At the same time, the accentuation of purpose over profit, and of personal growth and social contribution over financial goals, lift the emotional lid, keeping frustrations from boiling over.

5.2.4.2 Self-organized harmony

The second fantasmatic high ground in the discourse of bossless work is nurtured by the articulation related to the master signifier *'self-organization,'* which is promoted as a universal principle of organizing. Interestingly, this discursive thread becomes appealing due to the promise to resolve the gap between authenticity and employability, around which the imagery of *'collaborative disruption'* soars. I will build the analysis of this fantasy of *'self-organized harmony'* primarily from Laloux's practitioner-oriented bestseller *Reinventing Organizations* (2014). This draws attention to the most impactful artifact in the discourse on bossless work and helps me to show how the genre of the management book caters to specific fantasmatic qualities. Laloux reframed work as a mindful and spiritual journey towards reclaiming wholeness:

> "Organizations have always been places that encourage people to show up with a narrow "professional" self and to check other parts of the self at the door. They often require us to show a masculine resolve, to display determination and strength, and to hide doubts and vulnerability. **Rationality rules as king**, while the emotional, intuitive, and spiritual parts of ourselves often feel unwelcome, out of place. Teal Organizations have developed a consistent set of practices that invite us to reclaim our inner wholeness and **bring all of who we are to work**." (2014: 56)

The basic narrative that resonates within this passage is one of overcoming separation. Laloux argues that existing organizations pathologically favor efficiency and rationality. Instead, he woes for *"integrating mind, body, and soul; cultivating both the feminine and masculine parts [...] and repairing our broken relationship with life and nature"* (p. 48). His call to transform work into a place where employees can show up with their whole subjectivity is wrapped in the spiritual canvas of a systemic and emergent ontology:

> "Disidentifying from the ego is one more step of liberation on the human journey [...] it dawns on us that we are just one expression of something larger, an **interconnected web of life and consciousness**." (p. 48-49)

Bearing in mind that Lacan framed the nature of human subjectivity as inevitably torn, fragmented, and paradoxical, the wish to live in cosmic harmony by abandoning the managerial fixations on rationality, efficiency, and profitability, appears as nothing

more than a fantasmatic longing. Bossless work is thus infused with a specific kind of secular spirituality. It aspires to a stabilized subjectivity by integrating emotional and spiritual elements of the self into a domesticated ratio. Integrating positive psychology and mindfulness sustains the desirability of the fantasy considerably. The crucial term in this line of thought is 'self-organization,' a concept that was translated from the natural sciences to the sphere of organizing. The following quotation of one of my interview partners, the co-founder of a participatory facilitation technique, illustrates how self-organizing systems are seen as the way nature organizes in a peaceful way:

> "[W]ater, earth, wind, temperature, all of the things that we have called nature, are organizing themselves in a self-organizing way, and they are doing it more **harmoniously** without going to war with each other, without exploiting."

Firms are thus conceived as complex systems that are self-organized by their employees. Moreover, both the organization and its members are perceived as pursuing an inherent purpose: *"[O]rganizations, just like us, have a calling and an evolutionary energy to move toward that calling"* (Laloux, 2014: 199). Hence, business and work depart from a state of anxious self-preservation and competition to one of cooperation in a mutual quest for individual and collective purpose. Firms are no longer perceived as a property that has to be designed and controlled, but rather *"as an energy field, emerging potential, a form of life that transcends its stakeholders"* (ibid: 221). Thus, Laloux's work echoes a fantasy figure of the ideal leader as a *'mindful steward'* who is attentive to both the potential and calling of his co-workers as well as the organization. In an emotive and transformative process, these leaders ostensibly seek to build and understand the community: *"We are stewards of the organization; we are the vehicle that listens in to the organization's deep creative potential to help it do its work in the world"* (p. 221). In this light, the hierarchical logic of a group of managers trying to 'predict and control' actions is transformed into a cultural mode in which everyone in the organization is encouraged to sense problems and respond to them locally. Laloux calls on people to give up the illusion of control and perfection: *"They shoot explicitly not for the best possible decision, but for a workable solution that can be implemented quickly. Based on new information, the decision can be revisited and improved at any point"* (p. 211). The discursive analysis of signifying strategies in the previous chapter already underscored the installation of self-organization as a universal principle of organizing. By focusing on the involved desires, it becomes possible to specify this assessment

further. The discursive articulation evokes a fantasy that draws a coherent cosmology, establishing a spiritual world-view. This resonance between a desire of the Other for 'self-organized systems' and a fantasy that promises 'natural harmony' produces a potent affectivity.

A *jouissance* in wholeness. In a way, notions like purpose, spiritual growth or *"imbue our roles with our souls, not our egos"* (2014: 232), as Laloux put it, also play with the *jouissance* in growth. The crucial difference to the first fantasy is that here, the quest to realize an inherent calling or purpose is seen as the driver for organizational and individual activity alike. In the firm conviction that a focus on purpose will attract profits, questions around employability, innovation, and disruption are pushed into the background. People are rather running after an ideal image of their future self that has become whole. Their fantasmatic journey starts by working in an environment in which they are allowed to bring in their whole subjectivity, not just a professional part. They strive to embody a systemic world-view by practicing being reflective about their ego-related fears, letting go of the urge to control. The fantasy culminates in a stabilized self.

In a Lacanian sense, this fantasy of 'self-organized harmony' conceals the fact that identity is necessarily incomplete. Subjectivity arises continuously from the complex interplay of discourses, self-images, and the forces of the Real. A longing for wholeness negates the processual, contextual and paradoxical nature of this process and is thus necessarily out of reach. However, it is precisely the day-to-day incapacity to realize this harmonized end-state that sustains the allure of the fantasy. Furthermore, as people indulge in this *jouissance* in wholeness, Laloux's stage theory of human development reinforces the process. I will now go back to the vignette of a holacracy event that has been used in the introduction (chapter 1) to illustrate how the conviction that one has approached 'a higher level of consciousness in a next stage organization' can entice a smug self-referential exclusivity. The speaker gets into a defensive position due to several critical questions:

> The talk outlining basic features of holacracy was interrupted by a critical question: "I'm, working in the financial industry and this concept sounds too idealistic. How would you get investors when you employ holacracy?" The speaker replied that holacracy established new values and therefore investors would learn to see the world differently: "Most importantly, purpose has to become the guiding principle of the organization instead of money." The question

quickly encouraged others: "When you shine a light on some parts of an organization, others get inevitably darkened. What is obscured with holacracy?" "That's a tough question, we don't know yet," the speaker returned candidly. Another participant wanted to know: "Do you get rid of politics with holacracy?" Now, the somewhat irritated answer was a simple "yes."

Witnessing the speaker's body language – folded arms, slightly wet eyes – I had the impression that he was struggling between inspirational, relaxed explanations, and cramped defense. He prevented critical discussions with a one-word answer, implying that it did not make much sense to reason with someone who had not yet reached 'teal consciousness.' Seeking *jouissance* in wholeness becomes even more attractive if you perceive yourself as part of an elitist group, whose internal rationale forms a closed self-referential circle.

5.2.4.3 *Postcapitalist entrepreneurship*

Finally, the activist-utopian articulation around the master signifier '*commons*' induced the third fantasy in the discourse of bossless work. At first glance, its affective appeal arose from participating in the creation of a sector of knowledge commons alongside a capitalist one. Crucially, information technology is seen to render the market mechanism *ad absurdum* and to cause conventional firms to be superseded by decentralized contributory systems. Workers take collective ownership of open knowledge, shared designs, and free software. The fundamental argument challenges mainstream economics. Informational goods do not degrade when they are used, as Mason (2015) points out: *"Once you can copy/paste a paragraph, you can do it with a music track, a movie, the design of a turbofan engine and the digital mockup of the factory that will make it"* (p. 139). He argues that markets cannot allocate prices correctly under conditions of abundance. Thus, instead of fencing off information behind property rights and monopoly, the postcapitalist ideal favors a commons-based approach.

After having utilized ethnographic observations and popular management literature to depict the first two fantasies, the third one, *'postcapitalist entrepreneurship,'* will be illustrated mainly with interview passages. Kyla, for example, described her onboarding experience as a member of a cooperative network of entrepreneurs: *"Well, like most people, my first experiences were just hanging out and, like, volunteering and doing*

random stuff. And then just jump straight into the middle, really." Collaboration in entrepreneurial-activist maker, hacker, and co-working spaces is meandering somewhere between friendship, work, and family. *"We always say that what we have is more of an adopted family than a company,"* emphasized Zoe, who was part of a cooperative consultancy.

Work is visualized as collaboration in communal work-families ('neo-tribes,' 'freelancer coops,' 'entrepreneurial collectives') that strive to privilege the well-being and livelihood of their members over growth and profitability. *"We have recognized that we are the actual users of our organization. So, we asked ourselves: What should the organization look like to meet our needs?"* in Zoe's words. As these 'postcapitalist entrepreneurs' (Cohen, 2017) reframe the firm into a high trust group or peer-to-peer network, they envision an idealized future that does without employees. Instead, co-entrepreneurs and freelancers take over their role. Naturally, this entrepreneurial approach to building an organizational framework for a nascent commons economy comes with many unresolved problems. In many cases, it is a financially precarious endeavor. Ventures are struggling to create sustainable business models, and individual social security is an unresolved issue. It is also unclear how these tight-knit work-families and networks can achieve scale. Visions point to the creation of goods and services in open value chains, which are eventually organized into platform cooperatives and blockchain-enabled autonomous organizations (Schneider and Scholz, 2016).

While the postcapitalist entrepreneurs fancy they will find belonging in communal work relationships, they also struggle to live up to their ideal of horizontal organizing. My interview partners unequivocally acknowledged that hierarchies inevitably emerged in their organizations. In one account, the initial enthusiasm for flat organizing turned sour when newcomers admitted that they are reluctant to speak up in online discussions after long-standing and well-connected co-workers stated their opinion. To counter these dynamics, many organizations have introduced regular meetings to talk about unhealthy power patterns. Kyla gave an example:

> "Early in our development, it was just a blob or swarm, and there wasn't very much differentiation between roles. There was no hierarchy. Then we noticed, for example, there was one guy who would just, if he kind of wanted the organization to go in a certain direction, he would start going around and having one-on-one meetings with each person, co-convincing everyone. But what we

did, instead of denying that that was the case, was trying to be really honest about it and just named it. And we basically said: 'Look if we don't consciously create the power dynamics that we wanna see, what's going to happen is these backroom power dynamics and that's not what we want.'"

The fantasy figure of the *'entrepreneurial commoner'* is a person who has to have acquired leadership skills. However, there is no place for dedicated full-time leaders: *"It's just that hierarchy is always changing and that the leadership is not tied to a specific person or specific role. Instead, it's a force that operates in the culture, and it can be distributed among lots of people,"* Kyla went on to emphasize. Contrary to this ideal state, exercising leadership is a consuming task. It means navigating complex relationships, in which people are likely to be friends, co-entrepreneurs, and team members at the same time. Leaders have to invest considerable voluntary work in sorting out relationships and caring for others, a task that often feels unrewarding since it goes unnoticed. From the perspective of Lacanian analysis, it seems unlikely that subjects are equally engaged in practices of leading. The failure of this ideal image rather helps to sustain the affective appeal of the discursive articulation.

A *jouissance* in belonging. The fantasy of 'postcapitalist entrepreneurship' is sustained by a longing to find community in and through work. It is expressed in complementary feelings of over-responsibility and guilt (of not contributing enough) or shame (of not living up to the expectations of the group). In our interview, Kyla shared some insights into her struggles with the former:

> "You know, sometimes my sense of responsibility and my level of agency get out of whack. So, when I see a problem, but I can't solve it, then I start feeling really frustrated. It's also stressful to put a lot of energy into something, and then it turns out to be the wrong thing, but I can't necessarily steer the ship. I struggle with like wanting to solve all the problems by myself."

To indulge in the *jouissance* of belonging means facilitating participative strategic discussions and consent-building, while inviting dissenting voices. It builds on the subject's social capital within the group. Moreover, this task requires considerable voluntary engagement in terms of both emotional labor and coordination. People have to command the necessary social skills, resources, and motivation to do so, while at the same time accepting that they cannot steer the outcomes of the process. Looking at this overly demanding leadership profile, it seems likely that this potential only crystallizes

in a select number of individuals. One of my interview partners acknowledged, *"that such organizations are also very dangerous because they take a lot of time and displace everything else. The danger – that you are only there for the company – is really virulent"* (documentary filmmaker and activist). The consuming requirements emphasize the painful side of the *jouissance* of belonging: over-engagement and burnout. In addition, the circle of commitment is fueled by the lurking anxiety that one might lose one's entire social network if one leaves the work-family, and hence the guilt of not contributing enough to deserve membership. A final source of frustration is likely to result from the question of how the communal way of working and living can sustain its envisioned qualities of autonomy, diversity, and openness in the face of neo-tribal group dynamics.

To sum up, the post-foundational investigation into the fantasmatic dynamics that make the discourse on bossless work affectively appealing revealed three shared fantasies and their related patterns of *jouissance*. The *first* was the conjoining of enjoyment in personal and economic *growth* on a fantasmatic quest for *collaborative disruption*, whose excessive pursuit quickly turns into a painful cycle of mutual recognition. The *second* was *jouissance* that revolved around an imaginary longing for a stabilized subjectivity or *wholeness*. Embedded in a fantasy that strives for *self-organized harmony*, it nurtures the tendency to naturalize and harmonize evolving power structures. The *third*, a jouissance in *belonging*, which sustains reciprocal processes of over-responsibility and guilt, leads to exhaustion and burnout. It is particularly prevalent in the fantasy of *postcapitalist entrepreneurship*, which transforms corporations into cooperative work-families.

In thinking along those lines, it is essential to bear in mind that I introduced the conceptual boundaries for the sake of analytical clarity. While individual interview partners and management books can be categorized by referring specifically to one fantasy and one or two discursive articulations, residues of other fantasies and discourses remain in these accounts. Apologists of collaborative disruption, for example, promote the team as the central working unit and strive for an authentic entrepreneurial work life. They are thus also bolstering a *jouissance* in belonging and wholeness, only to a lesser degree compared to the one in growth. Even more so, organizational life will see a mingling, coalescing, and wrangling between the different patterns. However, the

analysis has shown that the management trend around bossless work is ensnared in the grip of the Other as discourse and desire. The fantasies bear tension-laden expectations, which ultimately lead to excessive demands on the self and others. Consequently, people become vulnerable and boundless, thus likely to pressure each other into self-exploitative and mutually dominating forms of organizational control.

5.2.5 Discussion

With the help of extant literature, I will now address the second research question of this chapter and discuss how the subconscious fantasmatic involvement in the discourse on bossless work is leading into psychosocial modes of organizational control. The underlying politico-ethical intent is to clarify how the mainstreaming of participatory-democratic practices feeds into established mechanisms of managerial control, how it installs new ones or if it eventually opens a path beyond control. In a Lacanian spirit, such an investigation starts with the exploration of the lack, the unsymbolizable absence that the discourse tries to cover, but which inevitably spills over into desire.

5.2.5.1 *The lack beneath managerialism*

As discussed in subchapter 5.1, anthropologists have argued that the defining feature of bureaucracy is not its administrative procedures and hierarchical office structure, but the construction of a 'modular man' (Gellner, 1994). To break the chains of premodern social immobility, human life was divided into a series of segregated spheres (work, family, community, etc.). Consequently, subjects had to learn to be involved in organizations "qua roles not qua persons" (Kallinikos, 2003: 597). Modern agency means enacting specific roles from a modular repertoire. This "makes, perhaps for the first time in history, enclaves of behavioural pieces (rather than the person) the basic anthropological input of organizational action/communication" (ibid.: 606). With the rise of managerialism, this separation has been undermined. As life is increasingly seen as an investment in employability (Cremin, 2010), work has come to dominate over other domains.

In today's knowledge economy, employees are facing a widening gap: They are asked to enter the workplace in an entrepreneurial spirit, conceiving work as the primary

source of self-actualization and being affectively invested as whole human beings. Simultaneously, they come up against hybrid post-bureaucratic realities (Rhodes and Bloom, 2012; Sturdy, Wright, and Wylie, 2016), in terms of which work is still prevalently seen as a role-based endeavor, which demands de-emotionalized, calculated, and task-oriented behavior in the service of shareholders. Throughout organizational life, this tension causes repeated mundane injuries, resulting in increasing fatalistic abstinence in the workplace. In one of my interviews, an organizational developer in a multinational corporation summarized it like this: *"I think relationships play such a small role in companies and that's what's really – in my opinion – draining people's energy and what burns them out."*

5.2.5.2 The mênis of the worker

In order to further understanding of the repercussions of this hybrid constellation between a modular and integrated subjectivity, I argue that contemporary workers are affected by what the ancient Greeks called *'mênis'* (Terkessidis, 2015). *Mênis* refers to a specific form of anger. A smoldering indignation due to a suffered affront, the aftereffect of a wrath that had to be swallowed. The crucial theme of Homer's *Iliad*, for example, is the *mênis* of Achilles. When his commander and comrade Agamemnon threatens to take his prize of war, a concubine, Achilles finds solace in his anger and breaks all his social ties with the Greeks. Similarly, today's workers are withdrawing emotionally from their workplaces, as popular employee engagement surveys (Gallup, Inc., 2017) suggest.

However, Muellner (1996) elucidates that *mênis* is not merely an individual emotion, but also a 'cosmic sanction' invoked by epic personages to forestall the breach of fundamental societal rules that threaten the coherence of the group. In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon treats an equal as inferior and imperils the established system of exchange between wartime commanders. The concept highlights that Achilles' subsequent retreat from society simultaneously alienates him from himself. The emotion has a social dimension in that it leaves him unable to form friendships. Similarly, the bitterness of today's workers diminishes their very ability to build relationships within the wider community (Terkessidis, 2015). This analogy highlights that it is not just stress and the dominance of the 'module' work that contributes to the atomization of society (Putnam,

2001). People have embraced the managerialist offer of the entrepreneurial self, but they are angered by its failed promise of an integrated subjectivity.

Homer's *Iliad* ends on a positive and humane note. Achilles has returned to the Greeks due to grief over his friend Patroklos (who died fighting as his paragon). In the final scene, he even sits together with the father of his enemy, and they mourn together. Homer thus suggests that grief is the defining moment of the human condition, and sharing it has the potential to bind bereaved communities together. Thus, part of the affective appeal of the discourse on bossless work is to open up spaces where it becomes possible to address the *mênis* of the worker: the individual wrath and alienation, as well as the collective inability to experience friendship and solidarity. Most of the events that I observed in the course of this research as a participant offered such spaces. On the one hand, eloquent keynote tirades against the 'hierarchical paradigm' and on the other hand, 'sharing practices' to connect with strangers. The following event vignette exemplifies the latter process, along with my own empathetic experience:

> For the first time, the six of us came together in our 'home group.' We were scheduled to meet every evening throughout the entire four-day-event. This format should foster a personal connection amidst the more than one hundred participants. Sophia, a member of the organization that was holding the event, set the tone by sharing how she came to be here: "Mine is a story of mid-career change. I've received a lot of bruises and wounds in my long career as a middle manager in various multinational companies." She went on to share her insecurity in joining this "strange non-hierarchical organization of 'twenty-somethings.'" My prejudiced pigeonholing of her as a careworn and distant woman crumbled. While everyone shared stories in a similar mood, I observed how an atmosphere of deep listening and understanding was taking hold of me. Strangely enough, though, I had not felt an initial sympathy for any of those people.

This observation illustrates how events that promote bossless work try to channel the *mênis* of the worker by using personal disclosure of anxiety and grief as a tool to facilitate a collective affect of general openness to each other. Comparably, discursive articulations in the management trend stress the importance of everyday practices that foster trust, reflective relationships, and a culture of peer-to-peer conflict resolution. Hence, bossless work can be seen as a multifarious creative attempt to address the lack in the tense field between the modular and integrated constitution of the self and society.

The patterns of *jouissance* in growth, wholeness, and belonging accentuate the various paths and pitfalls in this process.

5.2.5.3 A labyrinth of power

In the fantasy of 'collaborative disruption,' the lack beneath managerialism is still ajar. Subjects engaged in the *jouissance* of growth are pursuing an authentic work life in a co-entrepreneurial corporate context. The module-based organization of life (and the social dominance of the work sphere) remain intact. Questions of shared ownership are not addressed, and the pursuit of purposeful entrepreneurial work conjoins with profitability. The fantasy thus promotes bossless work in the container of the managerialist firm, which explains its attraction to both tech startups and multinationals, who just 'fire the middle managers,' putting self-managed teams next to a hierarchical founders or executive layer (e.g., GE's 'teaming'). Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) have highlighted that the capitalist *jouissance* in growth and profitability is an empty desire. People "find themselves yoked to an interminable, insatiable process" (p. 7); a process that moves to the core of the entrepreneurial self. As the subject struggles perpetually to contain a lack in his or her employability by dedicating personal qualities as exchange value, he or she is tempted to fantasize an "ontological closure or oneness with the boss" (Cremin, 2010: 134). Therefore, the analysis of such work practices could depart from Ekman's (2013b) observation in a creative industries context, where a longing for authenticity led to a complicated setup of mutual recognition and vulnerability. Critical voices such as Kokkinidis (2015b) have argued that self-managed firms such as Morning Star are simply prototyping increased levels of normative control while saving management salaries.

The aim of the fantasy of 'self-organized harmony' is to blow up the dominance of the capitalist work-module in contemporary society. The discursive installation of 'self-organization' as a universal principle of organizing frames individuals and organizations alike as purposeful and whole entities. Both are seen to be seeking purpose before profit. The fantasmatic imagery addresses the *mênis* of the worker by promising to enable one to transcend the alienation from oneself and the social group. However, as the fantasy feeds into the *jouissance* in wholeness, it reveals the pitfalls that are lurking on this journey of integrating work with community, nature, and spirituality. In a Lacanian

reading, the human condition is inevitably fragmented and an idealized longing for wholeness "captures little more than the imaginary function of the ego" (Driver, 2005: 1093). Consequently, the paradoxical enjoyment in and suffering from an impossible longing for harmonious relations and a whole subjectivity prepares a fruitful ground for further investigations into related issues of control. Costas and Taheri's (2012) work will be a good vantage point. They analyzed how employees are seduced into followership by 'authentic leaders,' who gain oppressive power as they undo symbolic authority. "The main danger lies in fostering imaginary relations through the seductive discourses of love, harmony and completeness as a replacement for authority and hierarchy" (p. 1208). As self-organization has transformed from an explanatory concept in complexity theory into a political ideal (Uitermark, 2015), future researchers could consider how contested dynamics such as exclusion and power concentration are naturalized in the guise of a universal harmonious ideal. Moreover, the burgeoning movement that emerged following the publication of Laloux's (2014) book aspires to form a group that has reached 'a higher level of consciousness in a next stage organization.' This elitist and potentially self-referential stance around mindfulness and spirituality creates another route for analysis. Studies on mindfulness have shown how it has been thwarted at the workplace by prevailing cultural fantasies about heroic masculinity (Fyke and Buzzanell, 2013) and how it was used as a rhetorical tool to align oppositions with dominant managerial perspectives (Islam, Holm, and Karjalainen, 2017). It is also likely that the central role of purpose serves as a form of 'aspirational control' (Costas and Kärreman, 2013) that attaches employees' consciences to the organization.

Finally, 'postcapitalist entrepreneurship' holds the promise that the rising number of freelancers and social entrepreneurs will find belonging in networks of work-families. The modular constitution of modern society will ostensibly be overcome through a fundamental reorganization of the political economy, building a strong commons-based sector that is distinct from capitalist markets. The fantasy addresses the *mênis* of the worker by (re-)creating ties of solidarity. New organizational forms such as entrepreneurial collectives, as well as freelancer and platform cooperatives aim to favor livelihood above profit, offering their members security without turning them into employees. The fantasy engenders a *jouissance* of belonging. Its joyful side promises an experience of autonomy, self-fulfillment, and activist-entrepreneurial excitement,

while the work-family guarantees stability and care in an intentional community. The painful part revolves around over-investment and feeling guilty about not committing enough or shameful about not living up to the group norms. Extant studies link to future research on the former. They have explored how the quest for an imaginary harmonious work life (Bloom, 2016) and demanding stress (Bicknell and Liefooghe, 2010) paradoxically infuse work with passion, as people enjoy perpetually futile longings that seem just within reach. With regard to guilt and shame, it is likely that they concurrently allow subjects to distance themselves from and bind themselves to these demanding structures (Spicer, 2011). Bjerg and Staunæs (2011) advise scholars interested in 'flat' organizational practices revolving around belonging to look out for 'affective contact zones.' Their study of organizational control based on the intensification of affective forces demonstrates a complex interplay between positive affects, such as challenge and self-fulfillment, and negative ones, especially shame, which is extremely powerful in catalyzing self-improving efforts.

5.2.6 An ethical logic of incompleteness

This post-foundational discursive investigation into a management trend and its psychosocial dynamics expanded Costas and Taheri's (2012) attempt to assess the space for more autonomous and emancipatory organizational relations with the help of Lacanian theory. I scrutinized the role of subconscious fantasies to explore how subjects become affectively invested in the discourse on bossless work. The analysis exemplified how three fantasies and their interrelated patterns of *jouissance* were the ground for new (and also familiar) forms of psychosocial control. The discourse of bossless work is still partially involved in the capitalist longing for (1) growth, thereby intensifying mechanisms of normative control, while some of its articulations are simultaneous attempts to resolve the *mênis* of the worker by striving for imaginary (2) wholeness and (3) belonging. As a consequence, flatland is better understood as a labyrinth, in which the desire of the Other may be lurking behind every corner to seduce people into mutually dependent and exploitative power relations.

To locate an escape from this maze, Lacan proposed following an 'ethical logic' (Ekman, 2013b) that exposes the historicity and contingency of all master signifiers (Costas and Taheri, 2012). In this view, productive desire and not the fantasmatic

pursuits of growth, wholeness, and belonging (induced by desire of the Other/bosses work) becomes the true political force. This can only emerge once subjects separate from the impossible ideals involved in the symbolic order and engage in an emancipatory play between master signifiers. My analysis suggests that such an 'ethical' approach in the domain of unbossed organizing could be called a 'logic of incompleteness.' This means, on the one hand, cultivating a deep cultural understanding of organizing as emergent, complex, and unplannable, and, on the other hand, to accept the self as non-linearly progressing, contradictory, and fragmented, never fully able to dissolve into a collectivity and never fully a self (Steyaert, 2015). In my discursive material, I found traces of such a cultural logic, which are expressed in minor narratives on 'agile,' 'design thinking,' 'sharing circles,' and 'check-ins.' The assessment of the practical significance of these narratives would be subject to further field-based research (of which the analysis in subchapter 5.3 in an example).

Apparently, though, such an endeavor would come up against huge hurdles. One would have to defer the distinctively modernist gaze on logic, structure, and reason, driven by individualist and heroic shapers of the world (Willmott, 2005) and deep-seated shared imaginations that torment people with "the always immanent possibility of an eternally good leader at the head of a rational and just order" (Rhodes and Bloom, 2012: 143). Despite the current mainstreaming of 'participatory-democratic organizing' (Polletta, 2014), the vision of organizations that are tied together by 'personal identity relationships' (Reedy, 2014), and evolving within the lived experience of 'democratic friendship practices' (Farias, 2017), has still a long way to go.

5.3 Organizing affects of collective freelancing: An ethico-political struggle for incompleteness

Following the analysis of the discourses, desires, and fantasies of bossless work, in this subchapter, I hone in on the structuring role of affect for organizational practice (Thompson and Willmott, 2016). The section comprises a 'praxiographic' field study (Czarniawska, 2014) of a collective freelancing organization that seeks to maintain bossless peer collaboration over time. I examine (1) how the practice of 'collective freelancing' is carried out through everyday relational practices and (2) inquire into the ethico-political effects of affective intensities with which those practices are imbued. Therefore, I track how radically democratic alternatives are struggling with the detrimental consequences of their affirmative ethos. I spell out the indissoluble tensions that are ingrained in dissenting efforts to reassert a convivial 'postcapitalist' togetherness in the void between modern individualism and institutionalized massification (Farias, 2017a).

I introduce the case of the Enspiral Network, a New Zealand-based alliance of social entrepreneurs that originated in a coworking space and turned into a community of groups, enterprises, and projects. Their activities have resulted in a diverse range of products and services, such as digital tools for collaborative decision-making and budgeting, a major youth mental health initiative, an academy for software developers, climate initiatives, a news publisher and a social impact community (for a detailed description of activities, see Pazaitis, Kostakis, and Bauwens, 2017). Lately, they have formed so-called 'pods,' freelancer firms with 6-10 co-directors, not designed around a product but to secure a stable livelihood for their members. Enspiral's network infrastructure (or commons), which provides for online communication, decision-making, and budgeting, as well as for physical coworking, meet-ups, and retreats, can be characterized as an 'organized network' (Lovink and Rossiter, 2011; Rossiter, 2006). Oscillating between institutionalization and decentralization, work at Enspiral unfolds in a translocal landscape and is structured around the values of collaboration, collective ownership, and decentralized governance.

As outlined in subchapter 5.1, collective freelancing can be seen as a critical movement against the paradoxes and inequalities involved in the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski

and Chiapello, 2005). In the wake of the latest drove of venture capital-funded startups that flocked to build digital platforms, the drive towards greater flexibility and mobility in contractual and project-based arrangements has been accelerated greatly (Cappelli and Keller, 2013). Some platforms have monetized user-produced content; others commodified peer-to-peer models such as car-sharing or established markets, whereby prospective buyers are connected with a broad array of in/dependent contractors (Kuhn and Maleki, 2017). Consequently, an increasing number of workers, from the gray economy to high-skilled professions (Huws, 2014), are encouraged to make a living through a patchwork of contract gigs. Looking to access 'workers on tap' (*The Economist*, 2015) even large corporate players like IBM are aspiring to reduce their full-time personnel by up to three quarters (Boes, Kämpf, Langes, Lühr, and Steglich, 2014).

In response, freelancers and founders, grappling with increasing precarity in concurrent projects, multiple networks, and transitory relationships, are experimenting with alternative organizational forms. These 'entrepreneurial selves' (Bröckling, 2015) identifying as 'coworkers,' 'social entrepreneurs,' or 'changemakers' (Bandinelli and Arvidsson, 2013) are banding together in coworking spaces and translocal communities ('impact hubs,' 'neo-tribes' or 'platform cooperatives,' as they call themselves). They seek to counter the 'eat what you kill' logic of the individualist freelancer society with an amalgamation of a collaborative ethos, social entrepreneurship, new technologies, and decentralized decision-making. This constellation has resulted in unusually hybrid organizations (Battilana and Lee, 2014) that aspire to combine networked and formal organization while fostering their shared commons as a community (Butcher, 2018; Gandini, 2015). To facilitate this frictional endeavor, many of them have adapted radical democratic practices from alternative organizations (Battilana, Fuerstein, and Lee, 2018; Parker, Cheney, Fournier, and Land, 2014; Rothschild, 2016).

To understand the affects of collective freelancing, the conceptual framework of this investigation rests upon a sociomaterial and posthuman understanding of practice (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Gherardi, 2016) and foregrounds 'relational practices' (Steyaert and Van Looy, 2010). In terms of this framework, one perceives the world – discourse and materiality, nature and culture, agency and structure, individuality and collectivity – becoming in an ongoing dynamic of mutual constitution. In this process affect, as a 'trans-individual force of organizing' (Michels and Steyaert, 2016) and

'embodied meaning-making' (Wetherell, 2012), is seen as the binding agent that creates capacities for interaction. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of '*agencement*' (Gherardi, 2017; Müller, 2015) is used as a conceptual tool to map how movements of encounter and difference facilitate circuits of resonance, yet not without their ethico-political struggles.

The case study discloses how the affective tension between a *desire to belong and the guilt of not contributing enough* acted as a powerful force of psychosocial control (Bjerg and Staunæs, 2011). The ambiguous affectivity permeated everyday practices of '*weaving,*' '*sharing*' and '*caring,*' and held them in fraught relations. Thus, the idealistic ambitions of the network members were confronted with emerging hierarchies, gender inequalities, over-investment, and exhaustion. I discuss how a precarious '*ethico-politics of incompleteness*' was enacted to counter these negative effects. Through embracing 'sensible knowledge' (Strati, 2007) in their practices – emotional, bodily, and aesthetic concerns – the participants were able to attune themselves to incompleteness, incoherence, and impermanence. I will underline how community-building progressing towards uniformity and exclusion, had to be routinely disturbed by transgressive encounters with the Other (Farias, 2017b) to nurture reflexivity, equality, and social innovation.

In order to emphasize the need to study the role of affect and sensible knowing in radically democratic organizing, I will now tease out strands found in the literature in which the antipodal importance of consent and direct action, as well as deliberation and agonistic politics, is stressed. It has been argued that navigating between such opposites necessitates a contingent and less formalized understanding of organizing that allows for recurrent destabilization through the experience of Otherness. The role of affect and sensible knowledge in this process is underexplored, though. Then, I will formulate a conceptual framework that acknowledges the interrelatedness of affect and practice, and translate it into a participative methodology that operates at the level of life itself. The results of my analysis in this subchapter will show how a conflicting and thus '*cloudy affectivity*' pervades everyday practice and leads to problematic effects. Finally, I will discuss how an ethico-politics of incompleteness is able to struggle against the limiting effects of passionate desire, eventually reorienting it toward a longing to '*belong through difference.*'

5.3.1 Radical democracy in alternative organizations

With this literature review, I argue that the study of collective freelancing needs to be understood in a longer series of formations of radical organizational democracy. Alternative organizations have experimented with decentralized and transient organizing for decades. Freelancer organizations are indeed adopting some of their participatory-democratic practices, a trend that concurrently reached the corporate mainstream (Lee and Edmondson, 2017; Polletta, 2014). Nested within the paradigm shift to entrepreneurialism and a collaborative economy, ethico-political motivations for this adaptation mingle with concerns for economic viability and social impact. Competing for innovation in competitive environments, these organizations seek to avoid broken or delayed feedback loops and want to relocate authority to those who experience the impact of decisions.

Since the pioneering efforts of Rothschild (1979; 2016) and Kanter (1972), the study of cooperatives and communes has broadened to include social movement organizations (Sutherland, Land, and Böhm, 2014), alternative solidarity economies (Sobering, 2016), the commons (Singh, 2016), and open source projects (Pearce, 2014). The literature emphasizes that sustained success depends upon (1) consent-decision making that is embedded in a culture of iteration and provides leeway for individual action, (2) reflexive deliberation that allows for the expression of dissent, and (3) hospitality to Otherness, disrupting the sameness of the organization through difference. In what follows, I will map out these three dimensions and criticize the neglect of the role of affect in the literature. Furthermore, I emphasize that the close examination of sensible knowledge holds the potential to shed more light on the productive role of difference in radical-democratic organizing.

5.3.1.1 Consent, autonomy, and experimentation

First, 'consent decision-making' represents a weak form of 'consensus.' Not everyone has to vote in favor of a proposal; the adoption criterion is that individuals can live with the decision. Substantial objections imply a readiness to formulate or work on alternatives. This process is complemented by what has been framed as 'direct action tactics' (Leach, 2016), 'doocracy' (Chen, 2016) or the 'advice process' (Laloux, 2014). In an attempt to decentralize agency, coworkers are encouraged to take the initiative and

decide on most day-to-day matters by themselves. Ideally, they communicate transparently along the way (e.g., in shared documents and online platforms), or consult affected stakeholders and experienced peers. In addition, processual innovations are an attempt to guard against endless meetings. Those include facilitated rounds of proposing, asking, and discussing (e.g., 'sociocratic' meetings), as well as changing discussion-formats between smaller and bigger groups (e.g., with methods such as open spaces or world cafés) and facilitation using a set of hand signals (Reedy, 2014). Likewise, storytelling (Chen, 2016) and food and music (Keevers and Sykes, 2016) help to translate organizational purpose and prevent exhausting debates. They help to create a mutual desire to accomplish operational tasks in the spirit of the greater cause, even if an individual may not entirely agree with a specific decision.

Given the long cycle from agenda setting to implementation, the experience of alternative organizations documents the feasibility of consent-based decision-making. However, Rothschild (2016) underlines that it needs to be embedded in a culture of autonomy and iteration, where all decisions are treated as provisional ("good enough, safe to try"; Leach, 2016). Reedy (2014) perceives this stance as a non-institutionalized understanding of organizing. It does not project organizations as clean-cut entities, but as networked, polycentric, and segmented processes between individuals. However, what is less explored is how such an experimental culture is enacted in everyday practices, and what affects emerge when established paths of forecasting, planning, and steering are abandoned. What are the ramifications of changing desires and anxieties, as people have to let go of control, are encouraged to act autonomously, and confronted with contingent structures?

5.3.1.2 Deliberation and agonistics

Secondly, the adoption of consent-based organizing depends upon practices of reflexivity. The literature holds that it is crucial for people to grow their ability to bring up issues in group settings and at the same time to remain susceptible to the ideas of others. Practicing active listening translates into the "cultivation of a consciousness of self-reliance, receptiveness, and openness to the Other," as one of Kokkinidis' (2015b: 866) research partners put it. It sets people up for a transformative journey, in the course of which "subjectivities are changed, solidarities forged and the common is produced"

(Reedy, 2014: 648). Practically, decision-makers have to explain themselves to objectors; coworkers have to be willing to engage in peer-to-peer conflict transformation, and, ideally, regular meetings provide space to reflect on domineering behavior and unequal power dynamics (Leach, 2016; Rothschild, 2016). Nevertheless, the emergence of hierarchies around experience, social capital, and engagement is regarded as inevitable. As a consequence, scholarship suggests aspiring to inclusion and openness. Kokkinidis (2012) maintains that people desire to feel that their concerns have been heard, even if it is not always possible to address them. Hence, he examines how knowledge in alternative organizations is understood as an open potential for the collective and not as a personal possession and source of status.

Studies of the Basque cooperative Mondragon (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014), and Israeli *kibbutzim* (Simons and Ingram, 2003), as well as Viggian's (2011) ethnography of a failed cooperative suggest that when it becomes taboo to address emerging hierarchies, top-down decisions and a managerial logic are likely to prevail. Otherwise, iterative structures and shifting hierarchies can become the source of constant quarrel. If emerging structures sediment into tacit hierarchies, accountability becomes blurred and, in particular, newcomers feel lost (Freeman, 1972). Successful consent-based organizations thus practice what Mouffe (2013) has coined 'agonistic pluralism.' From this perspective, consent does not primarily refer to an agreement, but an invitation to dissent. The goal is to draw as many participants as possible into the discussion, to encourage the exchange of diverse viewpoints, and to embrace conflict and disagreement. Even though Kokkinidis (2015a) concludes that agonistic and deliberative democratic practices are in fact complementary solutions to the problem of decentralized organizing, there is too little understanding of how such dissent is organized and what its potential problematic effects are.

5.3.1.3 Friendship as passion and action

Thirdly, the literature suggests that in order to understand collective freelancing, one has to investigate how distributed governance, reflexivity, and conflict reorder the regulation of emotional processes. In alternative organizations, intense feelings are an everyday phenomenon, and there is a more urgent need to grasp their meaning (Viggian, 2011). Anger and enthusiasm, and the expression of both negative and positive feelings

is widely accepted in cooperatives (Hoffmann, 2016). "While some emotions needed to be suppressed and others needed to be performed even if not sincerely felt, many members of the cooperatives reported being freer to express themselves at their cooperatives than they would have been in conventional, hierarchical businesses" (p. 169). Kokkinidis (2015a) traced this back to the framing of work as a collective endeavor. People are taking enough time to hone strong and reciprocal relationships that are oriented towards care for each other and shared commons. In this way, organizing evolves within 'personal identity relationships' (Reedy, 2014).

In her study of rural communes, Farias (2017a) utilized Derrida's (2005) double understanding of 'friendship' to examine the nature of such relations. Friendship viewed both as passion and action, as an exclusive affective bond and as a 'hospitable disposition' towards others, nurtures creativity and empowerment. In her case, the organization had developed multiple practices to welcome strangers and to confront them in their Otherness through shared experiences. This intimate way of relating to outsiders is daring, because "[t]he stranger disrupts the home, the sameness of the community, and the certainty of the self […] putting one's community and identity in danger" (Farias, 2017a: 581). The group dis/integrates through an ongoing oscillation between the lived, embodied experience of shared values and the critical reflection triggered by the irritating nature of hospitality. This contradictory movement between delimitation and its disruption points to a productive understanding of difference (Gangnon and Collinson, 2017) that produces social innovation. Instead of marginalizing minor voices, social bonds are constituted in the paradoxical interplay between difference and sameness.

Presumably, freelancer organizing – with regard to both its involved entrepreneurial and independent subjectivities and its fluid spaces of work – will involve the development of complementary practices of inviting Otherness. At the same time, I suspect that the tension between autonomy and collectivity, between being self-reliant and part of a work organization, will emanate affective desires and that indulging in these passions will lead to ethico-political repercussions. The role of affect in general, its socio-material entanglements, and its consequences for processes of subjectification are a minor concern in the literature (Singh, 2016). I attempt to work on this gap by focusing on relational practices and their attached affects. In doing so, my attention moves to the

paradoxical everyday relations between emotions, sensitivities, materiality, embodiment, and desire. This lens will help us to understand how an experimental culture of consent and advice is enacted and to assess the intimate consequences of agonistic pluralism. The authors who write about alternative organizing tend to portray its subject as an idealized form of association in which the participants have to struggle against the forces of capitalism and managerialism. I propose to change this subtext. With this study, I want to show that radical democratic organizing comes with its own frictions, pitfalls, and inequalities. In examining these ethico-political consequences in the hybrid context of collective freelancing, I will now lay out a theoretical foundation premised on studies of practice and affect that is receptive to sociomaterial relations, bodily sensing, and movements of intensities.

5.3.2 Conceptual framework

5.3.2.1 Practice

Following the turn to practice in social theory (Schatzki, 2001) "organisational life stem[s] from and transpire[s] through the real time accomplishments of ordinary activities" (Nicolini and Monteiro, 2016: 110). When people are working, they are immersed in a flow of practices. Most of the time, practitioners are "thrown headlong into use" (Gherardi, 2000: 215), mobilizing tacit knowledge and acting in a pre-reflexive mode. However, practices are more than routinized actions; they are enabling people to act. Reckwitz's '*homo practicus*' (2002: 256) is both 'carrying' and 'carrying out' practices. They are situated in the body, in language, in the physical context, and simultaneously performed in novel ways, adapting in response to ever-changing circumstances. In this vein, practices are highlighting the recursiveness between situated enactment and the reproduction of social order ('innovation by repetition'; Corradi, Gherardi, Verzelloni, 2010: 279). My research is nested in a critical stream of practice-based studies (Gherardi, 2016) that mobilizes a relational epistemology and draws from the sociology of translation (Latour, 2005). Hence, the investigation is concerned neither with individual doings nor with entities, but rather the mapping of relations. I consider local relational doings and also "the social effects generated by a practice in connection with other practices" (Corradi et al., 2010: 277). In observing the collective processes

of action in a field of connection, this practice lens destabilizes human-centered epistemologies and dissolves the concept of context into contingent webs of association (Steyaert, 2016). As actors and structures become conceivable as entangled relations, the dichotomy between micro and macro disintegrates. Schatzki (2011) instead speaks of large phenomena, whose roots can be traced to small ones.

The practice-based approach also implies a rejection of conceptual oppositions such as nature and culture, mind and body or cognition and action. It proposes an alternative to functionalist theories of knowledge as an entity that people can gain through cognitive processes and exchange as a commodity. Instead, knowing is framed as a collective activity; people become competent in participating in sociomaterial practices. Practice scholars share a view on knowledge that is situated but dispersed among heterogeneous elements (Bruni, Gherardi, and Parulin, 2007). They trace how this distributed, or even fragmented knowledge is enacted and altered into the activity of knowing. In this process, materiality assumes identity and agency. Knowledge is embedded in humans and non-human objects alike (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). "[T]he social and the material are constitutively entangled in everyday life, [...] inextricably related" (Orlikowski, 2007: 1438). In this sociomaterial and posthuman perspective – where knowledge is activated in relational actions – sensible, aesthetic, and non-articulated forms of knowing are emphasized. Active sensual perceptions bring about judgments that are sensible-aesthetic in the first place. Consequently, they are not expressed in a rational-analytical but in a poetic logic that works through "metaphorisation, visual thinking, and mythical thought" (Strati, 2014: 126). Because they are closely related to action and emotion, these judgments of the senses can be interpreted as the body's thoughts (Strati, 2007). In this sense, humans are inter-corporeal, able to experience the Other within themselves, as they are carnally immersed in ongoing interaction.

5.3.2.2 Agencement

In the early years of the new millennium, the practice turn converged with a turn to affect (Kenny and Fotaki, 2014). They coincided in studying bodily experiences and embodied knowing, but whereas the practice lens enabled a focus on bodies that transmit aesthetic knowledge, scholarship on affect concentrated on intensities that travel between human and non-human bodies (Gherardi, 2017). They pay attention to visceral

forces, such as an atmosphere that affects a body's senses upon entering a room. The encounter might trigger goosebumps or a cold shiver, but it remains unspoken and preconscious; initially, it eludes logic. Nevertheless, affects resonate between bodies, creating collective rhythms or 'co-subjective circuits of feeling' (Fotaki, Kenny, and Vachhani, 2017). Researchers scrutinize how these contagious movements alter the 'ongoing flow […] of forming and changing bodyscapes' (Wetherell, 2015: 147), how they influence the capacity for bodies to interact with one another. Affective analysis is concerned with physical responses to felt experiences, how "knowing proceeds in parallel with the body's physical encounters, out of interaction" (Thrift, 2004: 61). The primary interest is 'processes of being situated' instead of 'situated action.' Affect refers to a plane of interaction that is running prior and alongside to language, epistemologies, and representations. A realm populated by the un-subjectified parts of human selves; anonymous being-in-connection that – although hidden from logical reason – triggers productive forces of world making.

Affect thus plays a vital part in spelling out an ontology of becoming (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Nayak and Chia, 2011; for a more detailed discussion, please see chapter 3), where action is always a movement of multiplicities. Analogous to the sphere of quantum mechanics, our reality is made up of 'happenings of entangled relations' (Akomolafe and Ladha, 2017). The properties of the human and non-human parts are iteratively enacted in 'intra-actions' (Barad, 2007), "an ongoing promiscuity that makes thingness possible, the waltz of a thousand im/possibilities" (Akomolafe and Ladha, 2017: 831). Consequently, agency is a result of processes of building associations. I utilize Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of '*agencement*' to understand processes of connecting to temporal clusters of relationships. Importantly, the resultant wholes represent more than their aggregate pieces, and they steer action (Müller and Schurr, 2016). "Assemblages are productive. They produce new territorial organisations, new behaviours, new expressions, new actors and new realities" (Müller, 2015: 29).

Whereas 'practice' helps one to perceive the stabilizing of networked relations, '*agencement*' highlights ongoing coupling, morphing and breaking up – processes of 'deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization:' "[I]t is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy.' It is never filiations which are important but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind" (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 69).

Analogous to 'wind,' affects (as flows of invisible forces) unsettle and entangle us to live and experience the texture of the world anew. They simultaneously act as a catalyst or 'trans-individual force of organizing' (Michels and Steyaert, 2016) and allow for multiple and open-ended trajectories that drive unexpected socio-material becomings of worlds. The *agencement* implies a metaphysics in which entities are perceived as always containing properties distinct from the relations of the assemblage in question (Müller, 2015). The concept is grounded in the notion of the 'virtual' (Müller and Schurr, 2016), the universal one, which is not realizing but actualizing itself ('dividing and positioning in time and space;' Linstead and Thanem, 2007: 1492). The virtual contains unnumbered alternative forms of the real but is not directly related to it; it is a separate existence that can 'differ from itself' (ibid.). Moreover, once one of its pieces is actualized, the whole still exists in the part, beholding a "trace of contingency within the structure" (Thompson and Willmott, 2016: 484). Against this background, in this section, *agencement* is activated to bracket practice and affect. In a sociomaterial and post-human vein, the concept helps to analyze processes of forming associations and distributed agency, where the facilitative forces of 'collective knowledgeable doings' (Gherardi, 2016) and of 'uncanny and unsiting' (Beyes and Steyaert, 2013) affective resonances are regularly trespassing on each other.

5.3.3 Enspiral: Extreme hybridity

Founded in 2010 in Wellington, New Zealand, Enspiral began as a group of freelancers doing contract work from a coworking space. The intention was that networking effects would enable people to raise their hourly rates, freeing time to work on social impact or 'stuff that matters,' as the organization's tagline would have it. In a second phase, Enspiral developed into a social entrepreneurial network of freelancers, cooperatives, and enterprises that chose to come together under the roof of a foundation, where they practiced participatory governance and collaborative finance. At the time of this research, the inner organizational tier of the so-called 'members' was made up of 29 people. Members have an equal stake in the foundation and have blocking rights in network-wide consent-decision making. Enspiral's outer layer comprised a more loosely connected network of about a dozen ventures and 142 people (roughly 40% female, 60% male), working as employees, freelancers, and founders. I observed the network going

through an uncertain process of strategic change (overall network membership had fallen from around 300 in 2015 to 171 in 2017), pointing to the third stage in its development. A mix of key government-funded projects phasing out and ventures either declining or becoming successful but 'adolescent' (in other words growing and disconnected) was drying out the shared resources. Work on the network went from paid to largely voluntary, and, in parallel, several key members became burnt out or left the network. At the same time, the Enspiral model attracted much global attention, resulting in the internationalization of the contributor-base, while central actors moved out of the country or started working nomadically on teaching, consulting, and speaking assignments. To withstand precariousness, groups within Enspiral started to form the aforementioned 'pods:' small, close-knit companies or work-families, where people commit long-term to share their incomes and support each other's ethical livelihood. Several pods would own the shares of a product-selling company (together with customers and stakeholders), resulting in a networked value chain that operated with groups of contractors instead of employees. That way, commons and market-based concerns became intertwined in a decentralized and economically democratic governance structure.

Enspiral valued collaborative ethics centered on mutual support and common purpose. The latter was not explicitly spelled out but enacted in daily practices. The network rejected ideological principles. Instead, autonomy and equal participation were strongly espoused. Several members framed Enspiral as a 'deliberately developmental organization' (Kegan and Lahey, 2016), meaning that personal preferences and individual rhythms, growth, and mutual learning were highly respected. In facilitating a constructive 'playground environment,' the organization was signified by constant experimentation and the participatory democratization of decision-making and finances. In some ways, the network was like a movement that utilized transparency, open source knowledge, and open design to empower people to act on change. Time, money, and skills were pooled to create shared commons and to open source organizational structures and products, while cooperative elements helped to secure economic fairness.

Enspiral has been discussed as an 'open cooperative' (Pazaitis et al., 2017) and within the category of 'postcapitalist entrepreneurship' (Cohen, 2017). I characterize it as an 'extreme case' (Flyvbjerg, 2006) of a 'hybrid organization' (Battilana and Lee, 2014),

juggling multiple organizational forms. As a community of social enterprises, it has to deal with the paradoxical demands of charity and business. It further blurs established boundaries by dis-enclosing some of its parts for communal use and engaging in public-private partnerships. Structurally, it, therefore, resembles a network of diverse high trust groups. It mixes and recombines the disparate economic governance forms of clans/communities, markets, and democracies while struggling with bureaucracy or the question of how to standardize and spread processes (Grandori, 2016). Flyvbjerg (2006: 229) highlights that extreme cases capture dramatized versions of more general developments, thereby helping to crystallize them analytically. In this sense, the article contributes to theorizing by "adding together ever-shifting cases and learning from their specificities" (Nicolini and Monteiro, 2016: 127). It formulates non-general principles and shares surprising lessons that help us to understand how contexts travel across webs of interrelation (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011).

5.3.4 Data analysis

Turning to practice and affect means to be concerned with what people are doing, with bodily experiences, and the agentic powers of materiality. Nicolini (2013) recommends using an empirical toolkit to draw from ethnographic approaches and participative (action) research while maintaining an ethical and reflexive stance and representing the material imaginatively. Consequently, I became a contributor to the Enspiral Network and engaged in participant observation, performing a multi-sited praxiography (Czarniawska, 2014). Data generation extended throughout a year, from 2016 to 2017. It started online by joining internal *Slack* channels and *Loomio*, a software for collaborative decision-making. From then on, I took part in three retreats, joined a variety of regular meetings and working groups, and participated in four strategic workshops. For two months, I also worked on a daily basis at a network-owned co-working space and became a member of an early-stage entrepreneurial research project (for a more detailed description, please go back to chapter 4.3). Dividing the fieldwork into a series of short periods gave me time to record detailed field notes of all observations and interactions in an online journal (*Evernote*) and to organize the data before continuing (Jeffrey and Troman, 2013). In addition, archival data from Enspiral's website and *Medium* blog and the pages of its associated ventures and projects were

documented. This process facilitated a deeper understanding of the language used, cultural scripts, and the organizational context. External sources that helped to gauge the organization's positioning and reputation included newspaper articles, blogs, and websites.

The analysis proceeded in three iterative steps. *First*, I chose to focus on relational practices, scrutinizing the constitution of 'personal identity relationships' highlighted in the literature (Reedy, 2014) and implied in my discursive analysis. After an initial period of observation and colloquial interviewing, a short paper outlining the relational practices that I had noticed so far served as a provocation for ten qualitative interviews. They elicited related stories, while the associative leaps of the interviewees also expanded the set of practices. In the *second* phase, I wanted to repeat this approach on the level of first and second order analysis but encountered a breakdown. After I had written out some key episodes and categories, three groups of practices – *weaving, sharing*, and *caring* – gradually emerged in an abductive process. I created a blog post as a hook for a reflective storytelling workshop, but it failed due to a lack of participation. Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) encourage to see breakdowns as a chance for reconceptualization, self-reflexivity, and the redevelopment of the initial problematization. *Thirdly* and grudgingly, I reconsidered the themes that came up strongly in my empirical material: guilt, over-investment, and burnout, but also leadership and gender issues. Rethinking previous conceptions entailed a creative process of theorizing, and I arrived at an aggregate conceptual dimension ('ethico-politics of incompleteness'). To maintain a less hierarchical, co-creative, and ethical research practice, I subsequently tested the conceptualization with senior researchers, and a group of Enspiral members, and presented earlier versions of this paper at a conference and a workshop.

Retrospectively, a close feedback relationship and regular meeting cycle between my supervisor and a cohort of fellow Ph.D. students enabled me to understand the relationships and frictions between the practices better. While I experienced the affective intensities and relational struggles first-hand, the group functioned as a sounding board. They could play the role of devil's advocate, testing the perceptions following an intense 18 months ethnographic study in New Zealand, where I frequently felt torn between participating/belonging and observing/disentangling. In this section, I

have situated my case study, described the research methodology, and outlined the specific methods used for data generation and analysis. I will now go on to present my empirical findings.

5.3.5 Results

To survey the ethico-politics of collective freelancing at Enspiral, I will follow a 'dialectical approach' to the study of practices (Nicolini and Monteiro, 2016). Within this framework, I am able to highlight how the practice of collective freelancing is established in the "co-evolution, conflict, interference" (p.116) between the relational practices of *'weaving,' 'sharing,'* and *'caring.'* Because collective freelancing is constituted through the association between these practices, it is important to inquire into their effects in the form of emerging discrepancies and frictions for organizational members. I will thus discuss these ramifications in relation to the ambivalence between feelings of belonging and guilt. In this sense, the presentation of results will start with answering the second research question regarding how affective intensities that imbue the relational practices entail ethico-political effects. Only then will I inquire into the fraught composition of collective freelancing through the three relational practices. This choice is predicated upon the powerful presence and structuring role of the affective tension that I have witnessed in the field.

5.3.5.1 *Ambivalent affects and their ethico-political effects*

The omnipresent affective intensity that imbued all practices within Enspiral was characterized by a desire to belong to the network or its work-families on the one hand, and nagging guilt of not contributing enough on the other. But why do people long to belong? The appeal of this community is illustrated by a typical workshop setting at a retreat, where the inner group of members met.

> The day had been framed by a morning check-in circle and a sharing circle in the evening. The time in between had been reserved for three consecutive one-and-a-half-hour open space sessions and a shared lunch. Everyone could propose a workshop, but teams of two usually registered on a roster on a whiteboard. In the first round, I joined a workshop, in which I was stunned by a range of impressive co-facilitative moments. While one of the workshop-callers graphically conflated critical points on three flipcharts, little cues and comments, such as "speak more

from the I," "time," "how can I say this non-judgmentally?", "you've said nothing so far" or "thanks for sharing" were deployed flexibly by various individuals. Moreover, I witnessed various unobtrusive gestures: After someone had started raising a hand, all the hands went up to signal silence. At the same time, wriggling one's fingers served as inaudible clapping. At one point, the facilitator said, "Show me on one hand how many minutes you need." "People who drink the Enspiral Kool-Aid over some years turn into facilitation monsters," an Enspiral member jokingly remarked at a later point. Indeed, I witnessed people being strikingly adaptive to bodily needs in the room. They were offering backrubs and little signs of affirmation, silently opening the door to let in fresh air or offering an older member a chair to sit on. I became entangled with one of those tacit embodied circuits when I observed someone carrying an insect out of the workshop space. Later, when we were sitting outside another person played gently with a rainworm. Suddenly, I found myself anxiously looking around, because I had casually ripped out (and therefore 'killed') some grass, fidgeting with it. (Vignette, February 2017)

In this fragment, the atmosphere in the room centers around a benevolent, caring, and attentive feeling. People were sitting in a relaxed circle, some on the floor, others on chairs, or in beanie bags. Everyone was greeted with a hug, one member kept knitting, and, during a hiatus, a pregnant participant received a casual massage. This was all the more surprising and unusual because not all of the people in the room worked together or knew each other particularly well. The small comments and practices of co-facilitating a discussion led to minuscule attention to events of diversity, equivalence of voice, and distribution of power. The most widely used rhetorical figure could be called 'looping.' With utterances such as, "I heard you saying…," people were consciously paraphrasing and calibrating their understanding of the conversation. However, more than that, the knowledge to 'talk about the how of communication,' how comments resonated with others, how they triggered feelings and influenced the flow of the exchange was also situated in their bodies. The participants were attuned to sensing the physical and emotional well-being of others as they embodied an unusual comfort with intimacy in a work setting. This was strengthened by the material choices: people were casually dressed, and they were sitting in a loose circle with a velvet spiral instead of a table in the middle, which allowed for group discussions and spontaneous breakout sessions. Everybody could choose an individual sitting position, and individuals were encouraged to leave the room and join a parallel workshop at any point in time.

Facilitation materials such as flipcharts, post-its, and colorful markers allowed for collaborative work by jointly mapping summaries and overviews. People drew excitement and confidence from these permanent processes of reflection and their maneuvering of flexible but trusted structures.

Nevertheless, even if these embodied processes of knowing and collaborating came with a tacit value agreement to respect all human and non-human life equally, it also produced its own excesses in the form of 'hyperpolitical correctness.' Beneath the surface, the autonomy that the participants displayed seemed to be channeled within a tight value system, as the rainworm/grass episode exemplifies. In another workshop later that day, people self-critically assessed Enspiral's culture. They recognized a strong set of values that implied that they were not prone to welcoming everyone, which paradoxically enough, they also affirmed it as a prerequisite for their intimate form of organizing. As a counterpoint, they insisted on not creating a single vision for the organization. Instead, they emphasized that a multiplicity of missions and conscious responsiveness – what some called 'delightful difference' – should oppose the limiting trajectory of exclusivity. One could say that Enspiral's collaborative ethics were infused by 'positive psychology-thinking' that increasingly comes with an organizational development paradigm and became materialized through facilitation practices, enacting a culture of co-facilitation. Several people told me that they experienced the affective intensity of autonomy, self-efficacy, and care for relational and bodily wellness as both enticing and overwhelming. For many Enspiral members, modeling and spreading this form of association had become the core purpose of the organization. However, the shadowy side of this wallowing in belonging is illustrated by the following vignette:

> During a workshop day at the countryside house of an Enspiral member, people were invited to work on operational and strategic issues in the network. After a busy morning, they decided to engage in a small improvisation exercise that would get everyone 'back from our minds into our bodies.' At the end of the exercise, the atmosphere felt lighter, released, and more playful. Now, while everyone was still randomly standing in the room, each committed to one working group in the afternoon. Some people, however, chose to work on their own. When it was Yvonne's turn, her voice collapsed, and she burst into tears: "It is not your fault, but I feel totally wrong here," she sobbed, "things are overwhelming me. I think I just want to go home." As she was offered a lift to get home, people continued as usual and finished the round of commitments.

Only then, two people hugged her. The group started to dissolve into the break, where the incident was commented on. For instance, Timon remarked: "Enspiral is still very bad at addressing emotional issues: continuing with our work, while someone has an emotional breakdown…This is a clear sign that there is something wrong with the network." (Vignette, July 2017)

Yvonne had expected to be in a space of easy and trustful connections, but she ended up being part of a demanding workshop day. Although others also opted out of the afternoon session, a wave of guilt overwhelmed her. She could not mobilize the necessary resources to help in the governance of the organization, although she desired to do so. Thus, she probably felt unworthy and inadequate. It is also interesting to note how people seemed so struck by her emotional outburst that it turned into a meltdown of the group that could not immediately respond in a caring way. At this moment, the whole group seemed to be entangled in a co-subjective circuit that affected them with the looming fear of leaving one's work-family and losing it all. However, the guilt of not being able to contribute enough to the essentially voluntary organization of the network was something that I witnessed on countless occasions. Sometimes it was expressed less impulsively: Before or after meetings or when bumping into each other on the train home, the affect reverberated as people uttered their shame about not having enough time. Indeed, they alluded to a 'culture of busy' and 'over-responsibility.' The composite archetype they lost their grip on was this figure who worked from a coworking space, had his or her hands in multiple projects, and lived in shared housing, having the closest friendship ties within the network. It seemed that members who had entangled all spheres of their lives with the organization accumulated the most social capital and that both extremes of the affective resonance led to ambiguous outcomes. Hence, what I interpret as the hybrid affectivity of belonging and guilt also mediated feelings regarding the relational practices they used and even promoted as core to the practice of collective freelancing: the tension between busy doing and simple being led to several ethico-political effects of inequality, unbalanced gender relations, and feelings of exhaustion.

5.3.5.2 *Collective freelancing as an association of practices*

Now I will illustrate how collective freelancing is composed in the interplay of the relational practices of 'weaving,' 'sharing,' and 'caring,' and expand on how the

positive-psychological intent changes in the wake of the ambiguous affective intensities and moral demands. Table 5 provides a descriptive overview of the relational practices and their main activities.

Relational Practices		Activities	Description
WEAVING	consent and advice	off- and online facilitation	facilitation as an ongoing process: events, small groups, one-on-one, online
	tools and infrastructure	co-facilitation	facilitation permeating the culture; little cues and comments from all participants
SHARING	gentle sharing radical sharing	check-in and out	everyday listening circle to symbolically start and end gatherings
		sharing circles	big whole group gathering at a retreat, where people share personal stories
		home groups	small, randomly selected groups of people repeatedly meeting during retreats
↕		stewarding	reciprocal amateur coaching and counseling relationships
CARING	decentralized care structures	positive gossip	passing on private information one-on-one with well-meaning intent to help
		thank you, celebration, and gifts	expressing recognition, support, and gratitude with small gestures
		touch	becoming comfortable: hello kisses, hugs, appreciative back rubs, massages

(Left vertical label: THE PRACTICE OF COLLECTIVE FREELANCING)

Table 5: Overview: The constitution of collective freelancing through relational practices

Weaving. The activities that comprise the practice of 'weaving' bring people, ideas, and projects together within the organization. It is important to describe the wider canvas of (1) spaces, (2) decision-making tools, and (3) infrastructures on which this practice is recursively enacted. *Firstly*, there has never been only one Enspiral space, but rather an intersecting multiplicity of coworking spaces, enterprise offices, meet-up groups, and biannual network-wide retreats. In addition, many people lived together in shared housing, and they shared shelter and transportation while traveling. The boundaries between private, work, and community spaces were therefore blurred because members were creating, scheming, cooking, and relaxing together, even sleeping under one roof. *Secondly*, people emphasized their openness to copying organizing practices from many corners of society: participatory-democratic ones, such as consent and advice from alternative organizations; agile mindsets and tools such as *'Trello,' 'Asana,'* and *'Slack'* from software development and design thinking; and facilitation techniques from

spiritual groups. One of their key social innovations was to ask: Why are we always taking our decisions in meetings? Subsequently, a group came together to build *'Loomio,'* an open-source software for collaborative decision-making, allowing for online deliberation, consent-decisions, polls, and scheduling. Consequently, online communication became central for Enspiral. While everyday chatting and posting were situated on *Slack*, initiatives and proposals were discussed extensively on *Loomio*. *Thirdly*, the Enspiral team set up common financial and legal infrastructures. Most notably, *'Cobudget,'* an online environment for collaborative finances, allowed everyone to create decentrally funded 'buckets.' Moreover, a group of accountants and lawyers who specialized in social enterprise, non-profit, and cooperative issues built structural templates that could be adapted without much effort for new ventures. Furthermore, due to the high mobility and internationality of the members, video conferencing solutions were everyday practices.

When pushing a significant issue through the network, facilitating activities had to be maintained in and between different off- and online spaces. I will now juxtapose selected passages from interviews with two Enspiral members who had driven the so-called 'stewardship agreement' (one of six major policies within the organization at that time). Their accounts illustrate the a/synchronous activities of movement building, communication, and emotional work performed in a successful process of policy-making. The term 'stewardship' refers to a network of amateur coaching and counseling relationships that had been established as a response to the increasing burnout of the organization's strong female leadership.

> "We addressed the problem of leading figures burning out in a winter's retreat. It was a small retreat. We read texts about stewardship and Michael [an experienced facilitator] facilitated. So, we could go deeply into that topic. We said: 'Something is going on. People are exhausted; they are leaving the network. We need to be able to take care of one another before such things happen.' After the retreat, this group proposed a stewardship agreement." (Christina, a member of the stewardship working group)

A working group then developed the idea further. One member of the working group facilitated an online debate and the consent-process around the agreement:

> "The facilitation was like holding different spaces, so we had a retreat, a couple of one-hour meetings that you can participate in, physically or remotely. We're

gonna share all of our notes and review this long ongoing debate together and summarize the concerns. I think summarizing work is one of the main ingredients of facilitation." (Ben, principle facilitator of the stewardship agreement)

The second 'ingredient' that Ben emphasized was inviting everyone to dissent. He went around talking to people who he knew would have strong opinions and good positions to disagree with him, but he would also speak to newcomers, checking whether the communication was clear and encouraging them to share. At the same time, the working group members started a phone tree of one-on-one conversations. The resulting debate, which he framed with a clear process and deadline, ran for a couple of weeks:

> "Not only was Ben able to deal with the disagreements, but after a week it was quiet. We said: 'OK, now it's good.' Then he started tagging all the people that he knew: 'Strange that they are quiet; something should be going on!' And he started tagging everyone saying: 'Why are you quiet? This is an important agreement; it will change our handbook! We need to make sure you understand.' And then the real disagreements started to happen, even the block. He sent a message to the working group saying, 'Please, you know that people are starting to disagree. I know you want to kill them, but please don't say anything.'" (Christina)

> "At that point, it was really good having co-facilitators, because it was difficult for me to be both a facilitator and the person putting forth the proposal that had just been blocked. So, I consulted with my co-facilitators, and they helped me see through the emotions and get to the content of the disagreement and then compose a positive response, which was like, 'Thank you for your contribution, and I see how it could be better.' Whereas, if you just receive a block on your own, then it's really easy just to get upset and go like: 'Oh, why is this person interrupting the good momentum that we are making?'" (Ben)

Distributing facilitation activities helped them to support each other in their emotional work. People needed to develop a sensitivity regarding which feelings to express where and when. In intimately clustered offline groups, it was easier to contextualize emotional outbursts, whereas large-scale online communications demanded restraint. The following excerpt of the *Loomio* debate directly after the block of the stewardship agreement shows how the principal facilitator defended his work, while he invited dissenters to develop it further, holding back his agitation. Others also jumped in to calm down the underlying emotions.
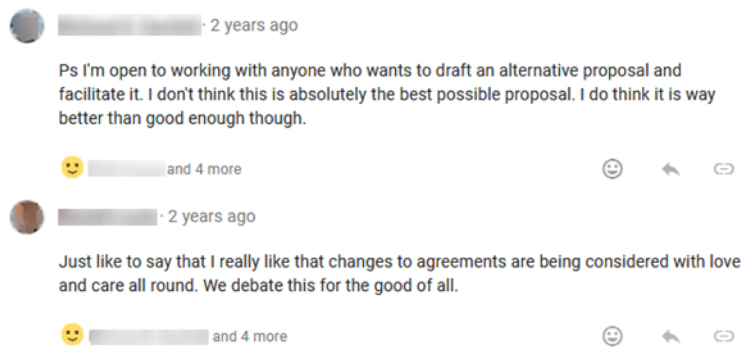
Figure 7: Fragment of the 'Loomio' thread after the stewardship agreement had been blocked

In stark contrast to notoriously 'ranting' debates on other social media platforms, the consent-based design behind *Loomio* seemed to engender a more thoughtful exchange. During major decisions, many members took their time to formulate well thought out posts and acknowledged the hard work and benevolent intent of the main instigators. The online tool served as a space to include diverse and partially remote voices in a powerful way. People got the feeling that they were heard. Then again, following the voluminous discussion was a time-intense endeavor, and facilitators/proposers constantly struggled to increase participation. Consequently, more peripheral organizational members often ignored these communication channels. In this instance, people that had blocked the agreement finally said: *"Ok, these are my concerns, but I can see you've put a lot of thought into it, so I'm comfortable to at least try" (*Christina). In the end, facilitating consent demanded many resources to overcome inertia, as well as the social standing to convince a significant number of people. Social capital acted as a symbolic currency when it came to telling compelling stories, designing a project, motivating people, or issuing warnings. Some people emphasized that in Enspiral's early years, a narrative of 'we are all equal here,' hindered the participation of less confident people. They felt that some were 'more equal than others.' Status emerged due to activity, experience, and personal networks, but remained unnamed. As some members embodied the collective identity more than others did, the pressure to conform grew. On the other end of the spectrum, people who contributed a lot felt that the status taboo gave too much voice to members who dissented vocally but committed to less. Increasingly, the narrative had begun to shift to one of 'celebrating members who give and build' and 'unveiling hidden hierarchies' since they were perceived to be more dangerous than formal ones. Enspiral's practice of weaving, comprised of the embodied

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and sensual knowledge of on-site co-facilitation, but also of shared movement building across a range of on- and offline spaces, necessitated close personal bonds. Participants had to be able to speak confidently in front of groups on both topical and emotionally sensitive issues and be able to listen attentively. They had to become aware of their own and other's emotions to channel them according to the material requirements of different communication spaces. These skills were practiced in the course of various activities that constituted the relational practice of 'sharing.'

Sharing. Back at the annual members' retreat, a workshop session homed in on the issue of how to facilitate rhythms between more and less engaged people in the network:

> In a fast-paced discussion on different high-level dynamics and network roles, the participants were weighing solutions. At one point, the process stalled. A member tried to condense the exchange by using a metaphor, which triggered a competition with other metaphors: the problem became pictured in images as varied as interrelating cogs, orbiting planets, or as rivers and glaciers. They stopped only when one participant explicitly addressed this dead-end dynamic. Then, suddenly, one of the members said: "I feel awful right now, and this has been lingering within me since the morning circle. The way you've met my proposal frustrated me. Considering all the work I've put into it, you disregarded it just like this." Another member stepped up to explain his viewpoint: "The proposal is already so detailed that some fear that it might be 'rolled out' on them." (Vignette, February 2017)

In Enspiral's jargon, this activity was called 'radical sharing.' By disclosing difficult emotions, sharing triggered a collective experience that helped to expose an atmospheric undercurrent. Because the group valued close personal relationships, the reaction was not awkward silence but honest response. *"Throwing myself off the emotional cliff,"* as one member described it, enabled them to see and feel each other's perspective, 'lifting a lid' and moving the conversation to another level. However, sharing often happened in a much lighter and less emotional way. Many meetings began with a 'check-in,' a symbolical start, where everyone was encouraged to briefly talk about a feeling, a reflection from the previous day or an attitude they brought into the room. Usually, participants sat in a circle, going through a round of speaking without replies. The intention was for people to become present and to be heard, while others understood the vibe of each person. This practice can be illustrated with a story of a whole-team meeting of an Enspiral venture, as told in an interview:

"I remember someone expressing a very inarticulate and vague kind of unease, just saying: 'Aaaat' [makes a trumpeting noise]. 'You know, I am not really super engaged.' And then an expression in the circle kind of echoed that feeling, then a third person did as well. And each successive person added just a little bit more color to that feeling. What was immediately obvious was that the whole team wasn't feeling great. So, we basically threw the agenda out and said: 'Hey, what's going on here? Let's explore this a bit more. Because usually when we are working on the right thing, we feel good. So, what's going wrong here?' So, over the course of that meeting, we discovered that actually none of us was very confident with the six-month plan that we had recently made for ourselves at a retreat. And so, we went through a really significant re-planning process, and it was just like totally disciplined and non-traumatic, and it took an hour from start to finish. Rather than the alternative, if we hadn't been honest about our feelings or if we hadn't had this expectation that we should be pretty good most days, we would just have taken the plan through all the way to the end and then looked back: 'Oh that wasn't very good.'"

Thus, a vague sense of unease led to a spontaneous strategic reorganization. In a mood of personal connection and appreciation, it felt easy for the team to reframe the planning. Check-ins and other practices of sharing served as a training ground for actors to speak their truth in groups and to listen actively. They offered an everyday opportunity to practice empathy, to learn from the experiences of others, and to help people to care more about each other. They made sure that everyone was in the room for the right reasons and could support an individual's standing in the group by revealing relevant background. Mutual disclosing helped people to witness others more kindly with fewer prejudices and at the same time to be more patient about their own shortcomings.

Notwithstanding, sharing depended on a particular kind of maturity, knowing what to share and when, or, as one member framed it: *"I've hosted a lot of circles, where you see someone who is busy processing something that just really should stay inside, but because it is suddenly like: 'Oh, let's share this and that,' they just vomit it. They are not doing it with a sense of the whole."* Drama professionals would call this behavior 'expressing,' acting without concern for the audience. Furthermore, sharing could become excessive and time-consuming, as the following vignette of a team meeting exemplifies:

It was the weekly meeting of an early entrepreneurial project. Four people were present, and everybody was checking in with stories about inspiring meetings,

professional development, and private issues. Half an hour went by quickly. Unexpectedly, one of the participants interrupted the flow of personal relating: "I'm suffering! I like personal relationships, but we need form. We need to finish that document and nail that contract. There has been half an hour of check-ins, and I have not even said anything. We need to get productive and onto work!" (Vignette, March 2017)

Practices of sharing are not easily translatable across contexts; they need exercise. The facilitators emphasized that it was hard for them to tell someone that he or she was taking up too much space. After all, openness is the purpose of the process. Sitting in a check-in circle often made people nervous. I experienced this challenge myself, and others echoed it. Especially when sitting in a check-in circle with people I did not know, I was unable to relax or listen fully, because I was either too occupied with the funny or smart thing that I was going to say or too busy comparing myself with others. People tried different strategies to address these issues. For example, they set time limits or posed a narrower question, but over time, heartfelt and authentic modeling seemed to work best. Longstanding groups within Enspiral claimed that they had reached a stage of maturity, focusing on interdependence rather than depending on self-healing through sharing.

The overarching background assumption in which sharing was embedded was that 'relationships are everything.' Teams were shifting operational exchanges online (with tools such as *Slack*, *Google docs*, and *Loomio*) to make time for it in physical meetings. Supported by the indigenous Māori notion of '*whanaungatanga*' people started their work relationships with getting to know each other and creating a sense of belonging through shared experiences. *"Let's figure out who you are, who I am, and from there do the work,"* as I recorded in one interview. People emphasized that sharing activities nurtured psychological safety and resulted in a growing capability to navigate more emotionally nuanced environments. It becomes evident why people felt the desire to belong to this organization – because it enabled them to show up with their intimate personalities at work. At the same time, people spoke less about the fact that participation in the practice of sharing also demanded a readiness to open up. This would include exposing something shameful that might have otherwise been a secret. In addition, people applied the highest moral standards to themselves, and the embodiment of an ethical mindset was peer-controlled. Some people admitted that they inadvertently resorted to impression management and were unable to adhere to the espoused skills of

honest sharing and active listening. Furthermore, in this process, some participants had to develop more personal accountability, keeping deep-rooted struggles to themselves, while others had to restrain their urge to help everyone. The practice of care thus came with its own ambivalent affective responses.

Caring. Small acts of care and appreciation permeated Enspiral's everyday culture, as the following vignette illustrates:

> Zelma and I were sitting on a couch in a remote corner of a network-run coworking space/coding boot camp to record an interview. Next to us, I spotted a skillfully handcrafted wall tattoo embellished with traditional Māori symbols, stating bilingually: "Clear the undergrowth so the new shoots of the flax will grow." "I think within Enspiral there is a suite of languages of appreciation that people use to feel a part of it," Zelma said. She had been outlining five of these languages: touch, spending time, giving gifts, words of affirmation, and acts of service. At this instant, Tim passed by, forming a heart with his fingers in our direction, and then giving one of the software development teachers an affirmative backrub. "There you go," Zelma continued, "languages of appreciation; as a concept, this really helps you to understand: Hang on, how do I feel appreciated? For Sean, hugging him is how I show my appreciation. For someone else, it may be publicly acknowledging him on the 'thanks' channel [on Slack]. For Timothy's birthday, we have just organized a carved green-stone. For other people … like, I'm going out for lunch tomorrow with Micah." (Vignette, May 2017)

This vignette shows how the organizational members appear to be extremely attentive to the efforts, needs, energy, and intentions of themselves and others in the room, and in the wider organization. In meetings, they tried to make sure that everyone was given the right context so that they could follow the discussion, and frequently, conversations turned to consider how to approach others so that no feelings were hurt. Moreover, they cultivated an expression of gratitude, for example by establishing an online 'thanks' channel on *Slack*, intended as a place to acknowledge the little things that people did to help each other out. A member told me that the mundane culture of care he perceived as most alive was what he called 'caring swarms.' *"During the last month I have witnessed four to five collections for birthday presents or gifts for people to recognize something they have done,"* he recalled. Similarly, spending time together in a convivial way was one of the central pillars of the development of Enspiral. The co-working space, for

example, served as a location for Friday drinks, Tuesday afternoon teas (for which people used to dress up), hacker meet-up groups or parties. In the context of care, these casual gatherings strengthened trusting relationships and were an opportunity to let go of tensions.

The sociable atmosphere and familiarization with intimate conversations also led to a loosening of the taboo of touch in professional contexts. Hugs were an accepted form of greeting, small back rubs or massages common, but beneath the surface, touch was the most controversial expression of care. In a conversation, one Enspiral member underlined its importance: *"When I came to Enspiral for the first time, I was greeted with a hug. That made all the difference."* He immediately felt and experienced a different culture, which suggested, *"I want your body to feel good."* Enspiral as an organization recognized and cared for brains and bodies, or simply, *"People become very comfortable in each other's presence; this enables better outcomes,"* as another Enspiral member put it in an interview. Other people were more careful concerning touch because there was a wide gap between people who were not comfortable with it at all and others who organized 'cuddle puddles' at retreats.

However, the activity of 'positive gossiping' crystallized the major problems of decentralizing formal care structures: over-investment and burnout, unequal gender dynamics, and ethical grey zones. A story retold in one of my interviews depicts how an explicit mandate can authorize gossiping:

> "One of the members, they had a really difficult situation, where a family member had died, and they knew that everyone was gonna want to know about it. So, through just asking if I could offer any help, what we concluded was that it would be great if I would be the gossiper. My job was, I'll handle all the requests, and they had just to talk to one person. I would reach out every couple of days and relay the information back out."

It was usually more tacit than that. There was much good intent in the network, and people wanted to take collective action to help others going through hardship. Instead of conventional gossip – feeling better about oneself by looking down on others – positive gossip meant organizing help, for example, by financing a gardener or cooking a meal. Enspiral's culture was *"open by default,"* as some members pointed out. Thus, the high level of trust granted discretionary judgment to pass on confidential content one

person at a time. Positive gossip was also an accepted way to share sensitive lessons that could not be broadcasted to all. In Enspiral's early years, a so-called 'support group' had been responsible for the work on the network and thus also for keeping up various care activities. As soon as the organization got rid of this more formal management structure, they realized that they had removed a formal care structure as well. Subsequently, relying on informal care relations proved tricky. Most of the community care work clustered around a handful of female leadership figures. Over time, they became overwhelmed by the sheer amount of emotional labor, and worse, their work largely remained hidden and unacknowledged. They burned out, some of them loosened their relationships with the network, and others left. These gender inequalities around caring activities illustrate that care is not a fundamental human capability, a quality that can be added to work processes, but an 'organizational competence,' a situated collective doing that has to be enacted (Gherardi and Rodeschini, 2016). In this case, the female leadership cohort was well acquainted with the practice and wove it successfully into the affective and sociomaterial canvas of the organization. However, there was no one to care for the group of active caregivers; no activity in place to acknowledge and mediate its importance in the web of relational practices or to socialize newcomers (especially men) into it.

One reaction to this situation was the aforementioned introduction of 'stewarding.' By weaving a net of reciprocal amateur coaching relationships, the members of the organization tried to ensure a decentralized rhythm of caring conversations. In practice, every member of the network stewarded someone and was stewarded by someone else. The dyads were encouraged to meet at least once a month, asking: How are you at the moment, and how can I help you? Stewarding normalized the psychotherapeutic practice of having repeated reflective conversations. In an interview, a member commented on the counseling aspect of these dialogues: *"The idea is to have less dysfunctional antisocial behavior in the group by reflecting back to people if they are acting from negative emotions."* Critical voices suggested that they were unsure whether stewarding was maintained well. They observed a downward trend of the intended meeting rhythm, and it seemed hard to assess the quality of these private interactions.
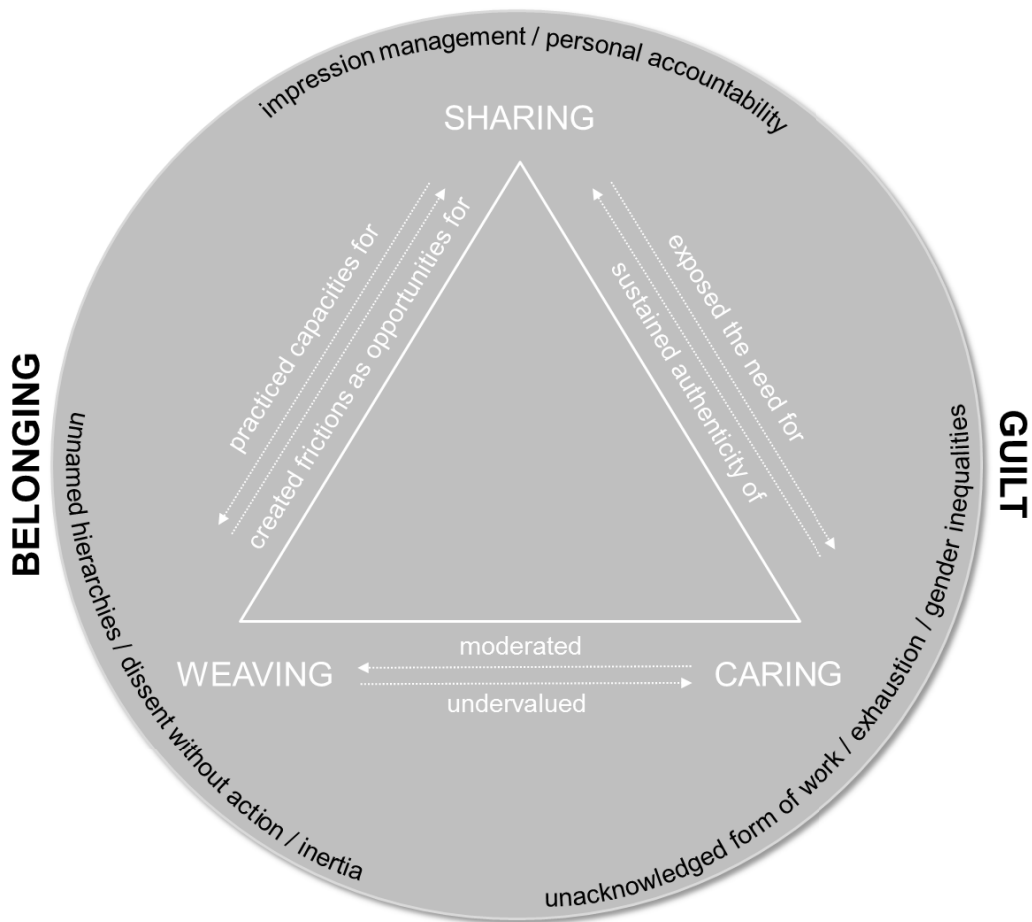
Figure 8: Interplay of affect and relational practices in collective freelancing and its ethico-political effects

At the end of this results section, figure 8 summarizes the interplay between relational practices and their entanglement with ambivalent affectivity, which resulted in problematic ethico-political effects. *Firstly*, the practice of sharing developed the necessary relational capabilities for the aspired radically-democratic governance between consent and direct action. In everyday sharing activities participants witnessed that everyone struggles and learned to speak confidentially in front of groups. Sharing enacted an expanded emotional repertoire in the organization and facilitated generative relationships through shared experiences. Imbued by the desire to belong and the guilt of not being good enough, normative peer control thrived. In sharing, people got affected by the fear of exposing something shameful, of not living up to the high ethical standards of the group. The affirmative practice was thus continuously endangered to turn into impression management. At the same time, sharing exposed the need for caring activities, as people struggled with their accountability. *Secondly*, decentralized care

activities were enacted to nurture attentiveness to bodily wellbeing and emotional needs. Thereby, the practice of care sustained the authenticity of sharing activities and moderated emotional swings in the practice of weaving that built up due to dissenting opinions and interpersonal frictions. However, this form of labor was devalued in comparison to other activities (e.g., programming, entrepreneuring or facilitating) and operated without proper processes. Care work clustered informally around Enspiral's strong female leadership, which became smothered by the weight of the interpersonal responsibility. *Thirdly*, weaving together the organization in a radically-democratic way depended upon relational bonds and sensible capabilities practiced in sharing and caring activities. They maintained a fundament of trust to assemble projects and facilitate consent-decisions in Enspiral's fragmented physical-virtual landscape. In turn, weaving created frictions that made space for sharing activities. Still, practitioners struggled with overcoming inertia, inspiring dissent, and accumulating enough momentum to convince. Amidst the ambiguous affectivity, people had to learn to overcome their desire for flat structures. As social capital amassed unhealthily under the veil of hidden and tabooed hierarchies, they had to abandon their fantasy of radical equality, and reconstruct status differences in non-authoritative and non-patriarchal ways.

5.3.6 Discussion

In this section, I examined how ethically motivated freelancers and entrepreneurs banded together to counter increasing precariousness and atomization in the emerging platform economy. In what follows, I will *first* discuss the constitution of collective freelancing in the interplay of relational practices and ambiguous affects. *Secondly*, I will show how the appreciation of sensible knowledge mobilizes an *'ethico-politics of incompleteness'* that is able to counter the negative effects of excessive desires and normative control by infusing transgressive encounters with difference.

5.3.6.1 *An ambiguous affectivity and its ethico-political effects*

In an initial contribution, I emphasized that alternative organizing, as in the practice of collective freelancing, comes with ambivalent affectivity, raising an ethico-political struggle. On paper, Enspiral's alternative organizing is about the desire to belong to the organization, its network of interpersonal relations and its vision of working on social

and environmental issues while earning a stable livelihood for everyone. Collective freelancing at Enspiral is rooted in positive psychology; it mobilizes the relational practices of sharing, caring, and weaving to show appreciation for the coworker's holistic personhood, to care for their physical and mental wellness, and to stimulate learning and growth in a dynamic and reflective environment. At the same time, the analysis highlights that Enspiral's script comes with its own discrepancies and frictions. For instance, autonomy and recognition were kept in place by a closely peer-monitored set of internalized values. Normative control mingled with the shadowy side of passionate belonging: the guilt of not being able to contribute enough and the underlying fear of leaving the work-family and losing a major part of one's social network. Both ends of the affective resonance – belonging and guilt – caused people to neglect their own needs and to extend themselves beyond their boundaries. Excessive contribution could thus stem from either feelings of generosity and a genuine desire to share to the network-commons or the subconscious longing for external validation and world-changing workaholism demanded from contemporary 'entrepreneurial selves' (Bröckling, 2015). Comparably, Bjerg and Staunæs (2011) analyzed how affect mediated practices (Thompson and Willmott, 2016) in their study of self-fulfillment and shame in an affirmative school context. They showed that negative affectivity was extremely powerful in catalyzing self-improving efforts and became vital in self-organized settings. It turns out that when one attempts to design affective resonances, one has to accept its erratic and emergent nature (Michels and Steyaert, 2017) and that both appreciative and shameful affects are ambiguous because they trigger both positive and negative outcomes.

As this 'cloudy affectivity' kept turning the practices around, power dynamics in their relationship became visible. Understanding power as the ability to act with effect (Watson, 2017) helps to "grasp how arrangements and associations of practices and the heterogeneous flows they are bound with are produced through and reproduce, systematic inequities in capacities to act" (p. 179). For instance, 'weaving,' aspired as the peaceful assembling of fabric from loose threads converted at times into hurtful stitching together under paradoxical conditions. As people who were overly invested and conveyed busyness acquired status, the organization had to learn to let go of an idealized 'flatness' to counter the dangers of unnamed hierarchies. Social capital tended to accumulate as the weaving-practice could resort to materialized and rule-based

procedures that contributed to its proto-institutionalization. Digital organizing on Slack and decisions on Loomio as well as their physical complements in open spaces and co-facilitated workshops can be seen as codified 'technologies of governing' (Watson, 2017). Hence, weaving held an incommensurate capacity for shaping action across the practices. To equally maintain dissent and consent, weaving depended on trust and psychological safety that were held up by practices of sharing and caring. However, it provided the space and determined the possibilities for sharing, while it devalued practices of caring by under-appreciating them. Sharing asserted itself in the relational power play, as its repeated performance had materialized in codified activities, like check-ins, sharing circles or regular leisure gatherings. The practice could hardly be translated into digital spaces, though. Fueled by a desire to open up and being received as a whole person, sharing shifted to the anxiety of being exposed or exposing too much in front of the group. As shame and guilt were exercising affective control, people struggled to relinquish impression management. In practicing sharing, it became clear that some people needed support. But who cares, if there is no assigned role? These were mostly female leadership figures, who had already practiced listening without offering immediate solutions, to stay with the trouble, and to quietly organize help. Desires around belonging and guilt tempted them to neglect their boundaries, resulting in a self-sacrificial readiness to help. In addition, the relational practice was only scarcely materialized and informally regulated. Although both sharing and weaving heavily depended on its conduct, they neither acknowledged care activities, nor did they facilitate their institutionalization by generating roles, rules, or materializations. Thus, practicing care, mutual support through rough times, left proficient caregivers invisible and strangulated by the weight of self-afflicted over-responsibility and informal centralization. The network sought to address this gender-biased exhaustion by introducing decentralized but more formalized activities of care. Moreover, an online 'thanks channel' and the discourse of 'deliberately developmental organizations' (Kegan and Lahey, 2016) was embraced to signify the central importance of caring relations.

5.3.6.2 An ethico-politics of incompleteness

In a second contribution (and responding to the second research question; see chapter 4.2), I focused on the ethico-political effects of collective freelancing understood as a tension between two subject positions delineated earlier in the discursive analysis (subchapter 5.1.3). On the one hand, we have the *'entrepreneurial commoner,'* who is engaged in multiple projects and networks and contributes to the networked commons out of a sense of belonging, generosity, and post-capitalist activism. People who identify strongly with this subject position are tempted to entangle their work-, private-, and community-lives with Enspiral, drawing satisfaction from the resulting social capital and self-efficacy in the organization and beyond. On the other hand, the *'mindful steward'* signifies an ethical subjectification that is attentive to his or her own boundaries and the needs of others. This subject position favors identity constructions that move away from the ideal of the mostly male heroic entrepreneur and changemaker and seeks to advance collectively sustainable livelihoods above entrepreneurial success and social impact. In my analysis, I indicated the constant struggles that come with the idealization of both subject positions that is generated by the ambivalent affectivity that permeates the relational practices of weaving, sharing, and caring.

In my interpretation, alternative organizing comes with its own struggles, which make room for the negotiation of what I would call incompleteness, incoherence, and impermanence as desirable values. Dealing with ambivalent affectivity requires the appreciation of 'sensible knowledge' (Gherardi, 2009; Strati, 2007), emotions and bodily sensing as messy and often inarticulate but simultaneously legitimate sources of information for organizing that are conveyed in narrative form. With stories, it is not only possible to build connections and bridge divisive categories but also to experience dissent, conflict, and emotional dissonance as challenging but effective means of organizing. Consequently, this paper extends Chen's (2016) analysis of storytelling in participatory-democratic organizing as contributing to coherence and accountability. At Enspiral, this is called, paradoxically, a 'delightful difference,' a way of relating that does not come easily, because it entails the disclosure of personal weakness, of opening up to be affected by Otherness and grudgingly considering dissent. Accordingly, Strati (2014) argues that research into participatory-democratic forms of organizing has to affirm bodily and affective ways of knowing:

"The aesthetic study of organisations brings into light how organisational citizenship and democracy can be shaped in the everyday routine work, since it investigates how individuals and groups operate by listening to their feelings, desires, tastes, talents and passions, and by negotiating them—achieving success or failure—in interactions where they deploy their organisational expertise, which is not merely mental, but on the contrary rooted in the corporeality of sensible knowledge" (p. 128).

Barad (2012) added that sensible knowing enables one to grasp the entangled nature of reality. She points to the indeterminate but relational world of particles containing infinite alterity "so that touching the Other is touching all Others, including the "self," and touching the "self" entails touching the strangers within" (p. 214). Sharing sensibly mediated concerns engenders more than empathy. Instead of understanding the feelings of another from one's own perspective, people admit other worlds into themselves to experience their own selves anew. Practicing an *'ethico-politics of incompleteness'* is, therefore, an invitation to blend individual interests with those of the group, moving the focus from self (or group) interest and problem-solving to the immediate question: What makes sense here? Consequently, it fosters collaborative ethics, neither reaching for competitive arguments nor compromise, but for creative reconciliation: more generative designs that no single person could have imagined. In 'The Logic of Sense' (1993) Deleuze cites Novalis: "Novalis sometimes says that there are two courses of events, one of them is ideal, the other real and imperfect" (p. 439). In this way, the imperfect and incomplete can become the place of freedom and ethics if other and different feelings and affects remain possible when an ideal script of organizing is effectuated.

5.3.7 Belonging through difference

In this section, I traced the *agencement* of practices and affects that territorialized 'collective freelancing' in a socio-entrepreneurial network. The practice, embedded in the new organizational forms of 'organized networks' (Rossiter, 2006) and 'work-families,' is a form of dissent against increasingly precarious individualization in the emerging platform economy. Discourses around social (Dey and Steyaert, 2010) and post-capitalist (Cohen, 2017) entrepreneurship, as well as on decentralized urban coworking and cooperating (Gandini, 2015; Pazaitis et al., 2017), are entangled within this constellation. Crucially, I found ambiguous affectivity oscillating between

belonging and guilt that fueled desires to experiment with new forms of association, but hidden inequalities at the same time. In Enspiral's case, the primary challenge was to counteract a culture of busyness and over-investment, in order to reconstruct status in a non-hierarchical and non-patriarchal way instead of denying it.

This analysis contributes to the literature on radical democratic organizing by tracing the fraught interplay between relational practices (weaving, sharing, and caring) and a cloudy affectivity. Conceptually, it introduces an 'ethico-politics of incompleteness,' a Deleuzian, minor politics that seeks to unsettle hegemonic meta-discourses on planning and predictability in business (Willmott, 2005). The *agencement* of practices becomes deterritorialized by a desire for a convivial belonging that replaces the modernist fixation on structure and reason with an appreciation of sensible knowing. 'Risky elements' such as dissent, bodily concerns, vulnerabilities, emotions, hospitality, and Otherness are employed to organize with the help of transgression and disorder (Farias, 2017b). Thereby, it undermines the hegemony of boundary-setting in group formation. Materialities that allow for flexible and global participation between deliberation and agonistics such as coworking spaces and collaborative software, as well as the open sourcing of organizing structures, supported the performance of "socialities that are not attached to concrete spaces or places, [but] emerge through the constant flows of [affect and un/human] actors" (Daskalaki and Kokkinidis, 2017: 1318).

Embodying personal and organizational incompleteness points to an ethical form of organizing that undermines the fantasmatic idealization of alternative organizations, by putting Otherness at its center. It territorializes a collectivity that creates its togetherness around contradictory practices instead of in-group/out-group dynamics. By creating a "culture of exchanges based on interpersonal ties and equality" (Farias, 2017b: 790), by rediscovering hospitality, sensible knowing, and the commons, people get accustomed to touching Otherness (in themselves). The paradoxical liaison between togetherness and difference contests the aesthetic order of modernity: individualization, massification, and anonymity as prerequisites for societal spaces of indifference and exchange relations (Farias, 2017a). In contrast, the ethico-political stance of incompleteness engenders the convivial generation of an unpredictable multiplicity of desires to 'belong through difference' (Gagnon and Collinson, 2017), that is, nurturing collaborative ethics, reaching for creative reconciliation.

6 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

By interdigitating multiple sources of empirical data, theoretical perspectives, and thematic literature, in this dissertation, I have been able to trace the unfoldings of the management trend around bossless work, from its 'large' socio-economic repercussions to 'small' relational becomings. Figuratively speaking, in this closing chapter, I will create a collage of the three-part analysis that highlights the connections across several levels. I will then juxtapose it with the historical context and main questions that came up in the problematization to converge towards a set of conceptual and methodological contributions. I will end by summarizing the limitations of this study and suggesting avenues for further research.

The unbossing discourse promoted the systematic decentralization of authority in work organizations. It tempted people to eliminate formal hierarchies, ranked job titles, and the reporting relationship between managers and their subordinates. By conducting a post-foundational discourse analysis, I found four discursive articulations that were clustered around specific nodal points – *self-organization*, *commons*, *self-management*, and *democracy*. I crystallized how the proponents of the discourse excessively alluded to those terms, thus emptying them of meaning. Due to their vagueness and ambiguity, these empty signifiers were able to epitomize particular signifying strategies, which suffused floating signifiers – the *firm*, *work*, and *leadership* – with meaning and connected them into compelling discursive threads. Taken together, I situated this struggle over signification as four attempts to unsettle the hegemony of managerialism. None of them was able to unfurl enough interpretative authority to establish a new hegemonic consensus. Nevertheless, in discussing the results in relation to Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) framework of the 'new spirit of capitalism,' I argued that two articulations were sustaining a renewed critique against this prevailing capitalist ideology, while the other two were contributing to its incorporation into the spirit.

I depicted how the chains of signification established by the articulations *self-organizing systems* and *networked commons* amalgamated to portray firms as naturally and harmoniously emerging complex systems, as communities or peer networks, where people were supporting each other towards more purposeful and conscious life

trajectories. In a social-entrepreneurial perspective, they would engage in societally meaningful endeavors, acting at eye-level with all stakeholders or even embrace commons-based structures side by side with markets. This potpourri sustained the appeal of *collective freelancing*, emerging modes of production in organized networks and communal work-families that challenge a core feature of modern-bureaucratic organizing: the 'modular man' (Gellner, 1994). Nested in the broader context of 'post-capitalist' and 'sharing economy' activism, of new urban spaces and coliving projects, collective freelancer organizations experiment with overcoming the non-inclusive constitution of subjectivities. They seek to revive convivial spaces between the individual and mass institutions, reuniting the social domains of work-, private-, and community-life in more close-knit groups. In this process of banding together in self-proclaimed 'neo-tribes' and 'non-territorial nations,' in which people attempt to cope with the increasing precariousness of the emerging platform economy, the analysis emphasized a fundamental challenge. Will people, as they embrace the discursively provided subject positions of the *entrepreneurial commoner* and *mindful steward*, be able to form their identities and communities in an open, inclusive, and networked way, or does this development point to a fractured society of adverse clubs and opaque societies comparable to the 18th and 19th centuries?

The remaining two discursive articulations, *self-managed disruption* and *democratizing work*, were found to be geared towards the corporate mainstream. Their signification strategies were built around the need for constant innovation to stay competitive in a technologically driven economy. Hence, workers were encouraged to pursue an authentic career path, along which they could engage in self-directed activities. One of the two privileged subject positions, the *collaborative intrapreneur*, thrives on a narrative of autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and direct action. At the same time, the team becomes the central working unit in the organization and is assessed against its achievements collectively. The analysis revealed the ideal-type of the *decentralized firm*, which discards its caste of managers and departmental boundaries to become a breeding ground for innovation. It moves the heart of its operations to collaborative teams that interact in more reflective, facilitative, and emotive ways. Leadership is perceived as either evolving in a market-based decentralized manner or – as the *organizational citizen* subject position suggests – as a democratically elected and changing management structure. While decentralized firms put the design, execution,

and monitoring of work into the hands of individuals and teams, central strategy and ownership remain a prerogative of the few (Lee and Edmondson, 2017). In this light, the discursive articulations can be seen as contributing to the reinvigoration of the new spirit of capitalism, whose energies were waning due to the 'thorny problem of central control' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) and the dominance of work over all other domains of life. The decentralized firm adhered to this constellation. It prescribed the development of a whole, non-modular subjectivity within the hegemonic confines of the work-module but tried to increase the leeway for its realization. In addition, it transferred 'missing elements' from other domains, such as an embedding in a peer-community in the work-sphere.

The two connective elements between all four articulations are their embrace of radically democratic practices from alternative organizations and their emphasis on purpose. Work life is reframed into a quest for making a difference in the world while developing an authentic self. Moreover, from this perspective, doing business means not only profit making but also creating social value. The critique aims at the 'queering of capitalism' (Gibson-Graham, 1996; 2006), acknowledging other forms of economic activity on an equal footing with capitalistic ones. Collective freelancing organizations experiment with networked production under shared ownership and within collective contractual relations instead of employment. The assimilation into the new spirit, in turn, safeguards traditional ownership structures and the employment relation. It channels the pursuit of authenticity within the boundaries of the employability paradigm. The model of the decentralized firm accommodates the call for organizational purpose and implements a triple bottom line of economic, environmental, and social concerns. Nevertheless, it tends to perpetuate the neoliberal trajectory, distributing the larger proportion of productivity gains to shareholders, whereas employees – individualized and fearful of falling out of the system – cede to more work instead of less amidst unparalleled automation. In light of green capitalism or CSR as an emerging spirit, I also discussed how the decentralized firm could mitigate the deficiencies of this ideology with regard to gains for the workers. In return, this trajectory of assimilation could lead to a new capitalist paradigm that places businesses as corporate citizens at its center.

Comparing the contemporary management trend with historical waves of decentralized organizing, I characterized it as pursuing a more individualistic orientation, focusing on authentic and autonomous self-fulfillment instead of a collective logic related to the empowerment of the working classes through industrial and economic democracy. At the same time, one could say that its direction is fundamentally collective because work is seen to spring from communal activities. Its critical faction tackles the deep-rooted modular constitution of bureaucratic life-worlds, while it tries to re-establish integrated subjectivations and socialities beyond the modern dichotomy between individuals and mass organizations. The simultaneous assimilation of the criticism takes the promise of a whole subjectivity and contains it in the domineering realm of work. These paradoxical reshufflings between autonomy and collectivity arouse all kinds of desires that make the management trend extremely appealing to a wide range of social strata. They point to the heart of my findings in this dissertation, namely how organizational control in bossless organizations is affectively maintained.

In the second part of the analysis, the post-foundational thought of Jacques Lacan, who carried psychoanalysis through the linguistic turn, enabled me to move the discursive lens to the organizational level. In this view, the subconscious does not wholly reside within the individual; it is structured by the symbolic. As the human condition is seen as fundamentally fragmented, discourses are built around gaps, and they promise a state that they cannot deliver, namely wholeness. People react to the discursive assertion with subconscious fantasies that locate the irretrievable wholeness in some idealized future. I found that the unbossing discourse triggered three fantasies that sustained its affective appeal: *collaborative disruption*, *self-organized harmony*, and *postcapitalist entrepreneurship*. Each fantasy can be seen as a reaction to the void that is looming beneath the discourse of bossless work. In the absence of God, modernity has put the self at the center of its cosmic order (Costea et al., 2008). Hence, individuals have to work continuously, both ideationally and materially, to justify their being ("self-assertion through labor;" p. 680). The established 'bureaucratic' construction that guided this process through the non-inclusive constitution of the self has been challenged. Capitalism's newest entrepreneurial spirit tempts people to invest themselves in their work as whole subjectivities, pursuing self-actualization under the dictum of employability and in inconsistent post-bureaucratic realities. With the help of Homer's *Iliad*, I argued that people reacted to this takeover of the domain of work, this

breach of the modern social contract that tends to deprive them of subjectivation in community and privacy, with '*mênis*.' Under neoliberal pressures, they have to swallow their anger, but deep down it seethes. This leads to fatalistic absence or burnout due to their inability to realize discernible potentialities at work. Homer's epic teaches that sharing grief has the potential to bind ruptured societies together. In accord with this insight, the discourse of bossless work draws parts of its affective appeal from generating spaces in which people can address their boiling anger and experience friendship.

Having examined these conversations, the findings of this study warn against exaggerated expectations for a flatland to come. The discourse of unbossing evokes three mutually reinforcing 'desires of the Other' that intrigue people to pursue excessive passions or their '*jouissance*' in *growth*, *wholeness*, and *belonging*. *Firstly*, the fantasy of *collaborative disruption* and its *jouissance* in growth is most likely to be prevalent in decentralized firms that promote an authentic work life in a co-entrepreneurial corporate context. A fantasmatic involvement in the desire to grow as an organization and individually suggests that people will make mutually excessive demands for recognition. Similarly, research has shown (Ekman, 2013b) that the most vulnerable people, who cannot shield themselves from over-investment in their work or who are dependent on external validation, are those who thrive the most in these organizations. *Secondly*, the fantasy of *self-organized harmony* invites one to indulge in a *jouissance* in wholeness. It feeds on longings for a purposeful life in accord with wider society and nature that puts purpose before profit. Self-organization is depicted as a peaceful and natural way of organizing, characterized by collective intelligence and collaboration. In Lacan's terms, striving for wholeness is the most primal imaginary longing of humans, whose being is inevitably fragmented, paradoxical, and torn. In the analysis, I discussed how a seductive narrative of love and harmony can lead to more insidious power relations and how complexity theory as a political ideal may naturalize or taboo exclusion and power-concentration. Similarly, the conviction to be part of a group with a seemingly higher consciousness can lead to elitist and self-referential behavior that is internally tied together by 'aspirational control' (Costas and Kärreman, 2013). *Thirdly*, a *jouissance* in belonging is nurtured by the fantasy about *postcapitalist entrepreneurship*. It bears the promise of merging into communities of work-families that reorganize the political economy into networked value chains, built on shared

ownership, collective contract relations, and mixing commons with market-based structures. The desire to belong revolves around visions of integral intentional communities, shared livelihoods (above profits), and the experience of both activist-entrepreneurial autonomy and solidarity. I discussed that plunging into the desire for belonging will lead to overinvestment due to intense feelings of recognition. However, it will also be sustained by the shame of not being worthy, the guilt of not contributing enough, or a fear of losing one's entire social network if one leaves. It is likely that positive and negative affectivity are working together to keep these organizations in check (Bjerg and Staunæs, 2011). In this sense, research has also pointed to the futile quest for a balanced work life (Bloom, 2016) or overcoming stress (Bicknell and Liefooghe, 2010), because, paradoxically, it is the struggle and striving that bring passion into work.

In the end, this analysis of fantasies and passions in discourses of bossless work exposed that, regardless of its context – activist collective freelancing or decentralized corporate firms – the desired flatland can be seen as a labyrinth of power. An intense fantasmatic involvement in any of these desires of the symbolic register will lead to mutual dependence, vulnerabilities, and exploitation. Lacan suggests aspiring to an 'ethical logic' that acknowledges the contingency of all discursive constellations. Such a viewpoint accepts the self as non-linearly progressing, contradictory, and fragmented. Therefore, no form of organizing or individual consciousness can be seen as ideal or final. Following an ethical logic means to stay open to challenging, unplanned encounters and experiences that open up to emergent possibilities. Ultimately, it enables productive desires that emerge in the reflective conversational interplay between people.

In the third part of the analysis, I honed in on the relational level of bossless work. I examined the practice of collective freelancing in a participatory-democratic social-entrepreneurial network. The praxiographic field study revealed an ambiguous affectivity between the desire to belong and the guilt of not contributing enough, which fueled the interplay between the relational practices of – *weaving*, *sharing*, and *caring*. The affective intensity underpinned normative expectations that continuously turned the affirmative practices around, leading to negative ethico-political effects. The practice of (1) weaving was intended to cultivate radical democratic consent decision-making accompanied by a culture of direct action. Situated in hybrid digital and physical

materialities, it set a low threshold for impact and recognition by encouraging dissent and practicing facilitation across offline circle-settings and online participation tools. The governance of the network commons thus required proficient movement building skills. Those people who were the most devoted to their desire to belong to the community of work-families and who therefore intertwined all the spheres of their lives with the organization and conveyed busyness in multiple projects acquired social capital. At the same time, vocal dissenters who were not ready to work on solutions drained the energies of active contributors. The organization had to let go of the ideal of being a flat organization to counter hidden hierarchies that stifled participation. The practice of (2) sharing was intended to exercise speaking and listening, to learn to witness others and lower one's prejudices, as well as to reflect upon individual and collective emotions. It created psychological safety and trust, expanding the emotional repertoire of the organization. For some people, the desire to be accepted as a whole person went hand in hand with the anxiety of being exposed or exposing too much in front of the group. This tension quickly turned sharing into impression management. Others simply expressed too much without considering the needs of the group, while some had to let go of their urge to help everyone. In sum, groups had to learn to balance sharing activities with operational needs. The practice of (3) care exposed that it was mostly the women who practiced this skill well. A strong female leadership cohort in the organization developed a range of informal and decentralized care activities, but their work largely remained hidden and unacknowledged. A consequence of this devaluation of caring labor over and above other forms of work was that these heavily invested leadership figures burned out, scaled down their engagement or left. The organization tried to address this problem with the introduction of a more formalized but still decentralized activity of care (stewarding) that raised awareness about gender and labor inequalities.

The field study demonstrated that the affirmative relational practices intended to ferment a 'deliberately developmental' (Kegan and Lahey, 2016) and radically democratic organizational culture regularly collapsed under the influence of ambiguous affective resonances and normative demands. They held the practices in a tension-fraught relationship that marginalized some of them, although they contributed essential activities to the functioning of the organized network. Nevertheless, the organizational members repeatedly managed to recognize negative effects and countered them by

keeping up an *ethico-politics of incompleteness*. They embraced 'sensible knowledge' (Strati, 2007) and therewith vulnerabilities, emotions, hospitality, difference, and Otherness as productive forces of organizing. This 'transrational' (Dietrich, 2008) mode of collaboration supplied recurring infusions of transgression and disorder that unsettled cherished practices and beliefs. Therefore, the relational practices also contained a precarious countermovement that framed organizing as emergent, polycentric, and non-institutional. It triggered collective reflection, addressed inequalities, and unleashed social innovation. Ultimately, this ethico-politics led to a series of moments in which difference could be perceived and experienced as 'delightful' (in the jargon of the organizational members), instead of frightening, jarring, and a cause for delimiting boundaries. Relating to each other via sensible knowing goes beyond empathy. While the latter refers to projecting the experience of the Other into one's own cosmos, the former enables the corporeal and sensual co-experience of a world that cannot be yours. It helps one to touch the Other (in oneself). If one muddles through this disquieting process, it becomes conceivable how difference can enrich one's own world.

Zooming out to the organizational level, the ethico-politics of incompleteness is closely related to Lacan's ethical logic. Both concepts signify the fundamental contingency of discourses and practices. From this perspective, they are continuously performed in a pulsating relational web of mutual entanglements that create hegemonic *agencements* without final foundations. Consequently, bossless organizing that keeps the 'iron threat of oligarchy' (Diefenbach, 2018) at bay cannot be thought of in terms of specific models or cultural patterns. It is dependent on a worldview that tries to minimize fantasmatic involvement with the symbolic by being mindful about the incompleteness of all ideas, but also about the impermanent nature of practices and the incoherence of organizing as becoming (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). This stance implies stepping away from modernity's singular ontology and into a multiplicity of onto-epistemologies (Barad, 2007). It lays the ground to hedge productive desires of ameliorating familiar worlds through intimate encounters with the Other. On the societal level, these conclusions indicate that an efficacious critique of the new spirit of capitalism is not only tied to the reorganization of the political economy. Radical organizational democracy and the queering of capitalism have to be grounded in the re-establishment of 'convivial spaces' (Illich, 1973), in which "autonomous and creative intercourse among persons and the intercourse of persons with their environment" (p. 11) is rendered possible. This means

struggling for spaces that deter the governmental constitution of society to fill the void between individualization and mass institutionalization. Hence, the trajectory of collective freelancing would be geared towards spaces for autonomous world making in orgnets that are made up of open tribes, striving for belonging through difference. I will now proceed to depict the conceptual and methodological contributions of this thesis.

6.1 Contributions

On a conceptual level, this study has contributed to the analysis of (1) psychosocial modes of organizational control in decentralized work, (2) the mutual constitution of affect and practice, (3) the role of sensible knowledge in participatory-democratic organizing, and (4) contemporary developments in the new spirit of capitalism. The methodological approach, in turn, has contributed to (5) a more comprehensive analysis of management trends by interweaving various sources and methods of data creation. I will now summarize each of these contributions.

Firstly, in the post-foundational discourse analysis of the management trend around bossless work, I empirically distinguished three interconnected 'patterns of *jouissance*' (referring to a relentless quest for desire, an enjoyment that has been taken too far and causes pain) in relation to (a) growth, (b) wholeness, and (c) belonging. I illustrated how an intense involvement in three related shared fantasies, which were caused by exaggerated discursive claims, stimulated these passions. Thus, I discussed how subjects become vulnerable through their affective investment in the 'desire of the Other' (bossless work) and became entangled in different forms of co-dependency. These findings contribute to the literature on psychosocial and affective modes of organizational control (see Arnaud and Vidaillet, 2018; Bjerg and Staunæs, 2011; Kenny and Fotaki, 2014; Styhre, 2008), by creating a map of predictable adverse ethico-political effects of bossless work and inviting more in-depth examination. The investigation showed that a belief in flat hierarchies, regardless of the organizational context (corporate or alternative), would lead to subconscious, hidden, and taboo forms of mutual exploitation.

Secondly, in the 'praxiographic' field study (Czarniawska, 2014) of maintaining peer collaboration in a radical democratic collective freelancer organization, I zoomed in on a setting that was dominated by the *jouissance* of belonging. By observing everyday

relational practices, I traced the structuring role of affect in organizational practice (Gherardi 2016; 2017; Thompson and Willmott, 2016). The analysis disclosed how the affective tension between a desire to belong and the guilt of not contributing enough acted as a powerful force of psychosocial control (Bjerg and Staunæs, 2011). It represented a case in which an ambiguous and thus 'cloudy affectivity' did not simply act as a spurious relation of exteriority (Müller, 2015). Instead, positive and negative affects simultaneously contributed to the de- and reterritorialization of the *agencement*, and both led to ambiguous effects. The affective resonance permeated everyday practices of 'weaving,' 'sharing,' and 'caring,' and held them in troubled relations. Consequently, the idealistic ambitions of the network members were confronted with emerging hierarchies, impression management, gender inequalities, over-investment, and exhaustion. In this vein, alternative organizing does not only struggle against external neoliberal and managerial forces but also with its own intrinsic ethico-political effects caused by the interplay of affect and practice.

Thirdly, the field study disclosed how a precarious 'ethico-politics of incompleteness' was enacted to counter the negative effects of affect that kept turning the affirmative relational practices around. Through embracing 'sensible knowledge' (Strati, 2007) – emotional, bodily, and aesthetic perceptions – and thus by embracing incompleteness, incoherence, and impermanence, the organization managed to acknowledge and address emergent inequalities and exploitation. The organizational members practiced sharing their emotional and sensual-aesthetic concerns with the help of storytelling, digital tools, and co-facilitated discussions. In shared experiences with others, people could regularly touch Otherness and grasp it as part of their own Otherness within. They practiced appreciating the 'delightful' aspects of difference that shined through once they had accepted the contingent incompleteness of their individual onto-epistemological horizons. In this sense, togetherness tending towards exclusion was routinely disturbed by transgressive encounters with the Other (Farias, 2017b) to nurture equality and social innovation. Building on the literature on participatory-democratic organizing, the analysis supported the need for an experimental culture of continuous participatory change that would facilitate the combination of consent governance and direct action (Leach, 2016). Simultaneously, it highlighted the need for 'deliberative' and 'agonistic' practices (Kokkinidis, 2012; Mouffe, 2013). Most importantly, it depicted practices that foster the exchange of sensible knowledge as crucial for sustaining decentralized

organizing as they balance coherence with disruption. They join the practice of friendship as hospitality towards the Other (Farias, 2017a) and neutralizing practices of threats (Farias, 2017b) in forestalling a closed and entitative understanding of organizing.

Fourthly, the post-foundational study clarified how two of the discursive articulations in the unbossing trend mobilized specific bodies of knowledge and signification strategies that bolstered a renewed 'social libertarian' and 'artistic critique' of the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005), while the other two contributed to their assimilation. I conceptualized how the critics experimented with 'collective freelancing' to establish novel organizational forms and work relations. I also fleshed out the corporate answer of the 'decentralized firm' that promoted collaborative innovation without hierarchical management and departmental boundaries. This discussion extended the literature on contemporary developments in the spirit framework (Chiapello, 2013). On the critical side, I fathomed possible alliances with environmental critique and discussed the emergence of cosmo-local economies (Felber, 2015; Parker, 2017). The decentralized firm, on the other hand, was pictured as either a revitalizing force for the floundering new spirit or a missing piece for corporate social responsibility (Kazmi et al., 2016) to ascend as the next spirit of capitalism. Its paradoxical individualistic-collective orientation towards team-communities as autonomous driving forces for organizational development could bolster the underdeveloped 'security dimension' of CSR or otherwise import communal experiences in the rampant domain of work. Cross-linking to the findings on the organizational and relational levels, the findings of this research indicate that if critique is to be successful, one should not strive only for the end of employment relations in radical democratic organizations and a queer post-capitalism that fosters the commons and values different forms of labor. It will have to also engage with the modular constitution of modern societies and selves to create networked forms of convivial organizing that are constituted in the conflictual interplay between sameness and difference.

Fifthly, in methodological terms, the dissertation expanded on previous critical studies of management trends. These authors merely picked selected popular texts to illustrate their reasoning (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2016), or to pursue thematic and

lexicographical analyses (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) and critical discursive investigations (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002). By constructing empirical material from three different sources – qualitative interviews, management books, and participant observation at events – in the analysis was I able to trace different vectors of promotion and affective arousal. The events heavily impacted the analysis of the affective dimension. Their hosts were either selling a specific model of bossless work or establishing a community of practice. While the former leaned towards trying to create a 'revolutionary' momentum through agitation and movement building, the latter attempted to establish innocuous atmospheres to experience the aesthetics of consensus in sharing grievances and non-judgmental listening. The practitioner-oriented books shared case examples and best practices. This format was employed to develop coherent narratives and organizational models, to instigate movements by fleshing out common grammars of use. The interviews, resembling one-on-one conversations (with apparent limitations), related to personal experience. They opened up a space to listen to mundane successes and failures. The interview partners disclosed personal struggles, organizational ambiguities, and compromises, which relativized the excessive claims of authors and consultants. Altogether, these sources enabled me to form a cohesive picture of how different communities of practice made use of a range of traveling ideas, communication formats, and spaces to ignite the affective appeal of their discursive articulations. The multifaceted dataset facilitated an inside view into individual lifeworlds and communities. Against this background, I was able to perform an exemplary, ethnographically inspired field study to bridge the 'text-practice gap' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011), in which a discourse looks potent in the textual material but fails to influence the subjectivity of actors.

6.2 Limitations and further research

Following a vast management trend spanning multiple countries, languages, social milieus, communities, and communication platforms in a single-person dissertation project came with apparent limitations. I chose to focus on varied sources for data creation, juxtaposing textual material with 'real-life' interviews and observations. I could have gone more deeply into the textual material, systematically including blogs and community publications into the data set, while also analyzing a bigger sample of

management books. I could have even left out the field study, concentrating on the discursive investigation alone. Otherwise, it would have been possible to skip the management trend altogether, exploring a set of comparative case studies. In the spirit of process organization studies, I have chosen to start in the middle, walking the tightrope between different materials, methods, literary works, and concepts. I am convinced that the most valuable insights are to be found at the boundaries, in the relationship between perspectives. I have tried 'to make the multiple' (Steyaert, 2012) by pursuing a performative mode of theorizing that is attentive to materiality, embodiment, and affect. I see my research as relationally entangled with its surroundings, embracing a few of the possible connections. In surveying paradox, passion, and power in bossless work, I wanted to create a transformative map of the attached *agencements*, allowing me to magnify small everyday dynamics while being able to zoom out to large socio-economic and historical landscapes. In this sense, the setup permitted a critical and affirmative study that did not explain one causal relation but listened to multiplicity "in search of a people to come" (Steyaert, 2012: 167).

The biggest question that always came up at the events that I had observed and during conversations about my research phenomenon was: How does bossless work scale? Can it work in 'real organizations' such as multinational corporations? In line with the ethico-political orientation of this dissertation, I am not primarily interested in exploring the growth potential of the 'decentralized firm,' but rather in the conditions for the expansion of critique. Nevertheless, the most prominent examples mentioned in popular literature (Hamel, 2012; Laloux, 2014; Lee and Edmondson, 2017) provide some ground for generalization. *Firstly*, bossless work functions in larger organizations that depend on the coordination of parallel teams. Examples span various industries from creative design (computer game producer Valve), over consulting (strategy, design, and engineering company Reaktor), to care work (neighborhood nursing firm Buurtzorg), and some manufacturing (automotive supplier *Favi*). *Secondly*, complex coordination in manufacturing organizations has been successfully unbossed by establishing a web of individual contract relations. Coworkers pledge themselves to specific tasks, while committees perform sensible functions such as salary allocation (food processing company Morning Star or Gore-Tex fabricant W.L. Gore). The example of 'teaming' (employed at General Electric; Edmondson and Harvey, 2017) suggests that these practices can easily be adapted to function in settings, in which self-managed teams

operate together with an executive layer, thus merely cutting out middle management. *Thirdly*, systematic unbossing approaches such as 'holacracy' (Robertson, 2015) are attempts to establish governance structures that are composed of nested teams to experiment with unbossing in large integrated corporations. Overall, Lee and Edmondson's (2017) research has shown that in a sample of well-known decentralized firms, core functions such as 'strategy formulation' and 'personnel/performance management' remained in the hands of the CEO. My field experience and blog posts support these findings. Many bossless organizations – CEO-led and shareholder-owned decentralized firms as well as collectively owned cooperatives – struggle with the presence of strong founding figures. These 'enlightened monarchs' have ousted themselves from their thrones, but many activities are still centered on them. *Finally*, scaling collective freelancing is largely unchartered territory. Practitioners envision large open source projects as a shared commons between various work-family orgnets around which commercial offers can grow. Another route is shared templates for specific business models (e.g., platform cooperatives) that enable the creation of similar and loosely connected organizations (e.g., a network of city-based taxi platforms owned by the drivers). Surpluses could be pooled to fund upstarts in new cities. These ideas point to scaling beyond unitary entities, more akin to the growth of independent cells that unfold into changing networked arrangements. Future researchers could support this movement by synthesizing the literature on decentralized networks, such as criminal (mafia, terror networks), religious groupings (Jesuits), and digital organizing (Anonymous), or social movements. A central line of inquiry could be the question of how coherence and processes can be maintained without depending solely on written agreements.

I will now outline other avenues for further research that emerged from the tripartite analysis of this dissertation. The three excessive passions (patterns of *jouissance*) relating to growth, wholeness, and belonging outlined in subchapter 5.2 and the field study in subchapter 5.3 that dug deeper into an environment in which organizational control was dominated by paradoxical desires to belong, can serve as a template for further studies. It would be interesting to see how these affectivities mingle with normative modes of organizational control in settings in which the desires for growth and wholeness dominate, or where two of the desires turn out to be equally important.

Another issue that came up strongly during my research was the role of technology in facilitating bossless work. My case study organization had developed software for decentralized decision-making and budgeting, while video chat had become a means of mundane organizing. In my interviews, I heard that many organizations had built similar tools (e.g., task markets, mutual feedback, etc.). The praxiographic approach to the field study taken in this dissertation enabled me to consider the role of materiality while focusing on the analysis of relational practices. It would be worthwhile to conduct research that focuses on the role of information technology (e.g., within an Actor-Network Theory framework) and the interactions of actants with actors. Moreover, decision-making, conflict, and crisis are important research areas. How do strategic discussions, strategy formulation, and implementation play out and how are frictions dealt with? Considering my findings on the ambiguous ethico-political effects resulting from the desires that emanate from bossless work, it also seems critical to delve into the impacts on individual and collective wellbeing in different unbossed organizations.

Related to that, the questions of who strives and who struggles in these organizations needs serious attention. Character traits such as sociability, empathy, and the capacity for movement building are in high demand, but what roles can timid, less articulate or handicapped coworkers play? People who depend to a certain degree on being organized by others did not feature prominently in any of the discursive articulations. This raises the question of how a culture of mutual responsibility and care is in a frictional relationship with the call for perpetual reinvention, creative experimentation, and commodification under frequently precarious conditions. I would also be very interested to learn more about further mechanisms that could alleviate sedimenting hierarchies and negative ethico-political effects (alongside sensible knowledge, as discussed in this thesis). Another problem that bossless organizations are encountering is how to organize career progression in the absence of hierarchical ladders. How can new members be shepherded into leadership functions; how can existing leadership figures be appreciated; and what happens to leaders who want to decrease their involvement? Finally, in terms of following emerging freelancer organizing, it would be interesting to expand the scheme of forms of association and work relations in collective freelancing that was developed in this dissertation. Countless research questions are waiting to be answered in this contested domain of work that oscillates between self-realization and

self-exploitation, where the struggle for sustainable livelihoods meets rising precariousness.

EPILOGUE

All our knowledge begins with the senses, proceeds then to the understanding, and ends with reason. There is nothing higher than reason.

— Immanuel Kant,
Critique of Pure Reason

Has this dissertation project, these four and a half years of wrestling with bossless work, provided an answer to my original question of hierarchy? Is there a way to organize beyond the patriarchal, authoritative, and stratified means that we have become so used to that they appear natural? Well, I think the research journey has enriched my understanding in the most unexpected and marvelous ways, but I did not find the sort of answers a researcher secretly desires to receive. I could not disclose any prescriptive patterns or models that organizations could pick off the shelf or be trained in; no highest reason as idealized in Kant's above quotation.

Nevertheless, in line with Rancière's post-foundational and aesthetic conception of the political, I found that no sociality can ever be based upon radical equality. Instead, it has to be continuously affirmed and hard-won in singular events (Lievens, 2014). "What thus characterizes a democracy is pure chance or the complete absence of qualifications for governing. Democracy is that state of exception where no oppositions can function, where there is no pre-determined principle of role allocation" (Rancière, 2010: paragraph 10). Even more, the desire to establish flat social relations increases pernicious disparities, since emerging hierarchies become a taboo. Radical democratic organizing has to deal with its homespun ethico-political consequences.

Rancière (2010: paragraph 1) clarified that "politics is not the exercise of power," but refers to the contestation of 'the sensible.' What we are able to say, see, hear, taste, or feel is already regulated; the sensible has been modulated in a certain way. A certain configuration of the impressions that can be gathered by our senses is the most basic

system of classification in any group. It simultaneously establishes a community and separates those who are welcome to have a part in it from those who are not. What Rancière calls a 'police order,' the established governmentality, does not work through disciplinary means only; it regulates the ability of bodies to appear and to take on an occupation in a given society. Conflict is fenced and depoliticized under the guise of naturalization. 'Politics,' in turn, asks if there is a group of people that has not been accounted for in the current order through its usual measurements, such as class, gender, or race. Whenever a group that was previously not visible as a group occupies a space, it creates a rupture in the sensible. "The part of those who have no part" (Rancière, 2010: paragraph 14) splits the measured world in two and reopens the political space.

In this light, any such dissensual democratic confrontation is an attempt to establish a redistribution of the sensible; it needs to build a new logic of representations. "Rancière shifts the focus from the relation between representative and represented to the relation between the distribution of the sensible as a space of representability and its disruption or contestation" (Lievens, 2014: 5). Therefore, he expects the becoming of a collective subjectification that actively creates its political subjectivity through engagement. People have to reject their place in a police order to emerge as a political subject. "By subjectification, I mean the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of experience" (Rancière, 1999 in Beyes and Volkmann, 2010: 665). In this process, the contingency and fundamental emptiness of every social order become palpable. In 'political' events, people are able to grasp that subjects are not really real. We are all equal, equipped with the capability to create a meaningful life alongside others. Consequently, equality turns from a debt (e.g., that institutions owe to their members) into a wellspring for political action. "The essence of equality," Rancière notes, "is in fact not so much to unify as to declassify, to undo the supposed naturalness of orders and replace it with the controversial figures of division" (May, 2009: 109).

Applied to decentralized organizing, this line of thought suggests that the only way to maintain equal relations is to disrupt the established order of the organization periodically. Rancière gives no concrete instructions as to "how the representations within a police order can be partly or gradually rendered contingent (and more

democratic)" (Lievens, 2014: 16). However, he speaks about the postulation of an 'affirmation of equality.' Lievens uses the example of Rosa Parks, who simply assumed equality when she did not give up her seat on the bus and thus opened a space for new possibilities to arise. In this sense, a theatrical staging seems more important than a well-formulated program. Regarding bossless work, this perspective implies that organizations could go further than continuously questioning and developing their emerging structures in 'retrospectives' or 'governance meetings.' The anthropological example suggests that contemporary organizations should borrow from the 'Paleolithic politics' of our forebears (see chapter 2.3) to experiment with 'multiple morphologies,' different social structures, performative interventions, and carnivalesque staging. The more or less playful manifestation of alternative modulations of the sensible could bring about unexpected desires or effects and sensitize people to the possibility of lingering becomings. Looking at the strong affective attraction of the unbossing discourse, reflective spaces to talk about overly passionate involvement in certain aspects of individual work lives could be used to practice a Lacanian 'ethical logic.' In these exchanges, people could get acquainted with the indeterminate and contingent nature of their preferred 'desires of the Other.'

Finally, turning to the possibilities of critique against the spirits of capitalism, the ultimate goal would then be to aspire to a 'rupture in the sensible' that maintains the socio-economic setup of modernity. Collective freelancer organizing has started to enact a configuration of the sensible in an attempt to overcome the aesthetic order of modern organizing. Bureaucracy has been characterized by splits: (1) the division of whole human beings into sets of non-inclusive role modules and the separation of society into distinct domains; (2) the decoupling of rational from emotional and bodily thought; (3) the detachment of productivity and profit as the primary objectives of economic activity; and (4) the estrangement from convivial forms of association through the construction of a society of strangers in the void between massification and individualism.

Embedded in organized networks, work-families, and networked value chains around platform cooperatives, open design communities and localized manufacturing, the practice of collective freelancing does not build an alternative counter-economy but wants to 're-socialize' (Farias, 2017b) and 'queer' (Gibson-Graham, 2006) the capitalist economy. By embracing sensible knowledge and friendship as hospitality, critics seek

to reframe the relationship between autonomy and collectivity. In this process, human difference is recognized and deployed to create a convivial togetherness in neo-tribal associations that keep their in-group/out-group dynamics in check through transgressive encounters with the Other. As the boundaries between work and other domains of life crumble, and different modes of economic production (commons, care work, informal labor) are placed on an equal footing with capitalistic ones, integrated work-life spaces facilitate subjectifications that balance rational, emotional, and bodily concerns. Similarly, to modernity, in which radically new institutions, groups, and subjectivities were created, the nascent critique against the platform economy opens a window for the reorganization of society. The company of the near future might resemble an 'organized network' (Rossiter, 2006) rooted in coworking spaces and translocal communities, in which flexible, partly overlapping organizations weave communitarian and market-related concerns equally into the flexible contractual constellation. Owners might turn into stewards, bourgeois bohemians into changemakers, and managers into sensates. Pushing this line of argument, the grand vision would be to supersede the disciplinary society and mass-institutionalization gradually, as 'networked convivialities' begin to enact a multiplicity of local subjectivities, building belonging through difference. Harnessing Rancière's strategic advice, a big theatrical rupture of the sensible could be the first declaration of independence of a non-territorial nation, whose appeal rests on a togetherness that emerges from 'being' rather than from 'doing.'

After all, Kant was right, "all our knowledge begins with the senses." Unfortunately, he buried this insight under the modern fetish for reason. Decentralized organizing requires a reconfiguration of the sensible, enabling us to recognize the unseen, unheard, and only subconsciously felt nexuses of sensible knowledge. It starts by tasting a world of interrelations that has always been there, right in front of our senses.

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APPENDIX I: Documentation of interviews and event visits

Name	Function	Type	Articulation	Field of Activity	Length	Gender
Aaron	psychologist at a computer game studio	practitioner	self-management	runs psychological experiments to create better computer games	27:21	♂
Alfred	co-founder and chairman of a software firm	author practitioner	democracy	former CEO of a democratically organized software company	51:42	♂
Ben	creative director, in a social-entrepreneurial co-working space	practitioner	self-organization commons	implementing a self-organizing governance structure	60:05	♂
Barbara	professor for leadership	academic	self-management	expert on leaderless organizing	23:30	♀
Christian	CEO of a medical association	practitioner	self-organization	working with participatory facilitation for 15 years	55:33	♂
Finn	independent consultant	consultant	democracy self-management	introduced self-management in the computer game industry, consultant and speaker	76:44	♂
Hugo	documentary filmmaker and activist	author	self-organization democracy	co-created a documentary and event series	77:55	♂
Helmut	head of a governmental office for participatory processes	consultant	self-organization democracy	practicing participatory democracy for 25 years	47:59	♂
Keith	author and member of an industrial firm	author practitioner	self-management self-organization	founding member of a long-standing self-managed firm	39:51	♂
Kurt	CEO of a software company	practitioner	self-management	co-founder of an IT-consultancy that is running Holacracy	74:54	♂
Katharina	head of marketing of a leadership institute	consultant	self-management self-organization	organizer of an event series	48:30	♀
Kyla	co-founder of a software cooperative	practitioner	commons	member of a network around cooperative entrepreneurship	48:30	♀
Lasse	director of a software company	practitioner	self-management	organizational developer in a software consultancy	84:50	♂
Mats	co-founder of a participatory facilitation technique	consultant	self-organization	travels the world as facilitator of self-organized processes	92:43	♂
Nora	professor for public participation	academic	self-organization	runs and investigates into public participation projects,	31:01	♀
Stephan	former board member of a German multinational	author	democracy	advocate of corporate democracy	56:22	♂
Sabrina	organizational developer in a multinational	practitioner	self-management	responsible for implementing parts of Holacracy into TNC	70:42	♀
Sarah Wilma	co-founders of a consultancy	consultants	self-organization commons	HR and organizational development consultants	50:24	♀
Zoe	member of a cooperative consultancy	practitioner	commons	design thinking consultancy that is jointly run by over 30 people	56:48	♀

Table: List of interviews (the names and organizations of the interviewees have been anonymized)

Event	Description	Date
Art of Hosting Practitioner Training, Monastery St. Gerold	Participatory facilitation training with 120 participants organized by the province administration of Vorarlberg, Austria	June 3-6, 2014
Holacracy Brown Bag Lunch, Zürich	Discussion with a Holacracy certified consultant at the Impact Hub Zürich, a social entrepreneurial co-working space	October 26, 2015
Future Lab Next Organizing, Vienna	Conference with Brian Robertson (founder of Holacracy) as keynote speaker, established businesses exploring bossless work	November 12, 2015
Ouishare Fest 2016, Paris	Gathering of creatives, entrepreneurs, movement builders, purpose-driven organizations and communities to discuss the commons and sharing economy	May 18-21, 2016
Enspiral Summer Fest 2017	4-day annual retreat of the Enspiral Network, 100 participants (mix of newcomers and members). Organized around open space workshops and various sharing formats	February 16-19, 2017

Table: Sites of participant observation

APPENDIX II: Interview guide (revised version)

OPENING

1. There are so many catchwords flying around in the media: »self-management«, »workplace democracy«, »corporate democracy«, »work 4.0«, »new work«, »leaderless-organization«
So first, why are you interested in that topic?

1.1. How did this start for you, and what are your main organizational practices?

2. What's the main argument driving a call for self-organization/corporate democracy?

3. Why is it not more widespread a.k.a. "the norm" in the business world?

SUCCESS FACTORS

4. How do you enter a company? How do you convince your clients to follow your ideas? How did you convince the people in your organization to start experimenting?

4.1. What do you reply to doubters?

5. What are in your view the prerequisites for successful participatory processes?

6. How would you describe the most important points of the organizational culture that is needed for self-organization to work?

7. All my interviewees highlighted the importance of collective purpose. How do you address this topic?

7.1. How do you perceive the interplay of collective and individual purpose? How to negotiate different individual needs, goals, and dreams into a collective purpose?

8. How do you speak about tensions and conflicts? Is it a more personal and emotional way of working?

8.1. How do you channel eruptive emotions into a constructive stance?

9. How do buildings, rooms, equipment – materiality – interfere? Do you have noteworthy examples?

9.1. What's the role of new communication technologies like social networks in it?

LEADERSHIP \ HIERARCHY

10. How do you come to decisions? Votes, unanimity, …

10.1. How do you prevent endless discussions?

11. Do you need project management in self-organizing processes?

11.1. What's its role? How do you establish it?

12. Hierarchy and bureaucracy lend stability and security. Most people love clear boundaries. Do you think that self-organization is for everyone?

12.1. Character: Some are more outgoing, others more introvert – social skills become even more important – How do you deal with those differences?

13. Holacracy claims that it eliminates politics? Is this true in your opinion?

13.1. How do you perceive politicking or different fractions competing for a decision?

13.2. Are (informal) hierarchies of expertise or friendship a problem?

13.3. Are there new, unexpected arenas of politics?

14. Would you say that self-organization is a democratic way of working together?

OBSTACLES / QUESTIONS

15. In terms of daily practices, challenges, and hurdles - Which questions are central to you concerning the realization of self-organized work?

15.1. Wholeness: It is often emphasized that you have to bring more of your personality to work. Do you experience more personal and intimate relationships at work? Practices?

15.2. Consciousness: Did you develop any practices to develop a reflexive stance on yourself and organization?

16. Let me compare self-organized companies to political movements: After the first energetic and enthusiastic phase, they tend to calm down and die out. Can a company as a movement work for a prolonged period?

17. Which common obstacles or failures do you experience in your daily practice?

EXAMPLES/CASES

18. Would you name me some of the most fascinating examples of self-managed companies or other organizations in that respect?

19. Why are they so interesting or innovative?

Is there anything else we haven't touched upon during the interview that you would still feel worth mentioning? Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your insights.

APPENDIX III: Preparatory documents for field study interviews

Relational Practices @Enspiral
Bernhard Resch | 03.04.2017

Background
In my research I'm interested in how control is maintained in organizations that work without hierarchical management. I'm looking at interpersonal relationships and the affective/ emotional dynamics that emerge from them. During my first weeks with Enspiral I've been visiting the members retreat and the summer festival, I've followed the meetings of the catalysts and those of the member circles working group. Moreover, I've been involved in the work of the Human Methods Lab. I've observed a number of recurring relational practices, which I think are important building blocks and hotspots of Enspiral's relational landscape.

I'm bothering you with this, because I would love to hear about your perception of and experiences with those practices and also some memorable stories along those lines. Of course I'd also like to hear what I've missed or misinterpreted!

Radical sharing
To me the most powerful experience on the retreats were several instances of what has been explained to me by a member as radical sharing. Expressing very personal feelings of uneasiness or revealing some kind of weakness broke a tension and helped to bring group discussions onto another level. Personally I quickly felt the contagious power of this practice to dissolve prejudices and thereby to encourage a culture of active listening. I'm inclined to say that honest and well dosed sharing of feelings and emotions is used as a practice to meet a diverse group of people professionally on equal footage and with a general openness to the other.
→ It's of course relatively easy to share emotions and intimate stories on a 'magical event', where people meet to get inspired, but I am asking myself how this practice plays out in conflictual or existential situations.

Check-in & check-out
A practice to symbolically start and end a gathering collaboratively and to gain focus. In a quick round everyone is encouraged to share a feeling, a reflection from the previous day, or an attitude they bring with them. Individuals get a chance to become present and to be heard, while the others understand the present vibe of the person. Checking-out emphasizes reflection and intentions. How do you strike a balance between endless check-ins that eat up a meeting and shallow reiterations of experiences without emotional depth?

Organic facilitation
On many instances I've seen impressive skills of co-facilitating a workshop. While it seems to be important to have a formal facilitator, little cues and comments, like 'speak more from the I', 'time', or 'thanks for sharing' (after an emotionally open statement) are deployed flexibly

Silvia Zuur · 5 Apr 2017
This is an interesting one to see first. I would probably add "Mature Radical sharing" As I have been in groups when it feels like the sharing is immature, or an over share and thus brings too much emotional baggage into the room. I think many people in Enspiral have learnt how much and when to radically share.

Bernhard Resch · 5 Apr 2017
Andre: My observation is that in terms of radical sharing, we do more of it at Enspiral events, when we're working together in day to day business, we do more of it than most workplace environments (treating people as people, rather than just work resources), however we're still getting better at dealing with conflict. We're starting to talk about conflict now more than we did a few years back. There are a number of cases where people in Enspiral have had unresolved conflicts with each other. So there's some really positive sharing at retreats, some generally positive openness in working together, and also some difficult and not always/often resolved conflicts between some people too.

by different individuals. I also recognized the frequent use of metaphors – used to sum up a discussion and to carry it on.

Rhythms and emergence
It seems to be common sense to perceive the retreat as well as the Enspiral organization as a whole in a permanent process of emergence ('beta' or 'emergent organization'). At the summer festival this translated into an ideal of attentiveness to serendipitous moments that might occur at anytime. Related to this idea, the synchronization or alignment of rhythms is discussed as a central challenge in terms of organizational control. Which practices might align faster moving individuals and groups that are holding more context, connections and leadership with slower ones? ('sprinting out loud' trial of the catalysts).
Also, which rhythmic practices are needed in a project, pod or venture?
→ retros: holding yourself accountable to your own goals in front of the group.
→ rotating org tasks: I'll help you with the unloved jobs, because I'll be in your shoes soon.

Rituals
Another interesting aspect at the retreats was the use of rituals, particularly to welcome people, as well as to open and close spaces. Be it a ceremonial welcome, a constellation, a food blessing, or the writing of a letter to the future self. I think they served different intents: (1) A planned and orchestrated opportunity to meet so that everyone feels connected, welcome and safe. (2) Create spaces that encourage self-reflection (3) as well as gratitude and humility.

Touch
Breaking the taboo of touching each other in professional contexts, I've been told, is of major importance in the relational context of professional intimacy. I would like to develop a more nuanced view on which practices encourage touch.

Thank you
I've experienced people as extremely attentive to the efforts, needs, energy and intentions of themselves as well as of others (in the room or beyond). People try to cultivate an attentiveness to thanking and they make sure that everyone gets the right context to follow a discussion. There seem to be low barriers to speak about (possible) interpersonal problems and how to approach everyone so that no feelings are hurt. I can't pin this attitude down to certain repeated practices yet, and the title seems half-baked, but it's definitely important.
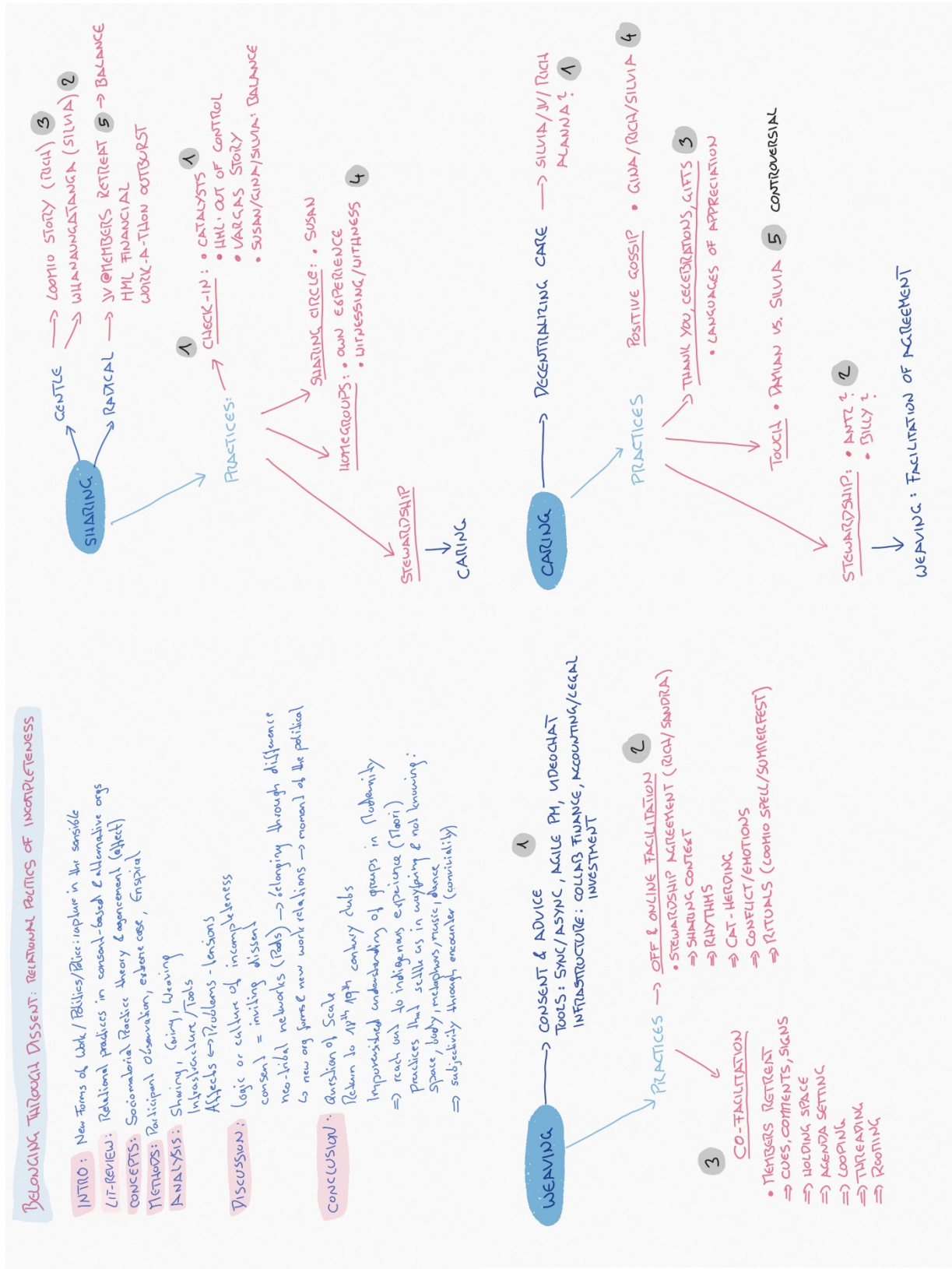
Richard Bartlett · 4 Apr 2017
To my mind, retros are more about inventing new structures to try next time, like this:
http://www.livingneighborhoods.org /ht-0/whatisanunfolding.htm

Bernhard Resch · 4 Apr 2017
very interesting this distinction between pattern and unfolding! thanks!

Richard Bartlett · 4 Apr 2017
and (3) co-creating collective experiences generates collective identity

Richard Bartlett · 4 Apr 2017
Lately I've been shaking people's hand first, and mid-shake, asking if they prefer a hug. Makes it easy to decline, and easy to accept.

RELATIONAL PRACTICES @ENSPIRAL

Guiding Questions (story elicitation)

1. Which regular practices at Enspiral have you experienced as most powerful in facilitating healthy interpersonal relations?

RADICAL SHARING

I've experienced two instances of what might be called radical sharing at the retreats (JVs expression of frustration and homegroup story).

2. Do you have any memorable experiences or stories where this practice had a positive impact?

3. How did radical sharing come into being and got its name?

4. Have you experienced any problematic instances (e.g., too much emotional baggage into the room)?

mature/immature radical sharing → what is appropriate?

5. Easy to share on a magical event, but how do you experience this practice in conflictual situations?

Stories of past experiences with unresolved conflict at Enspiral (where radical sharing failed)

CHECK-IN and CHECK-OUT

Seems to me like a less radical, minor form of sharing one's present feelings, a reflection from the previous day, or an attitude. Kind of perpetual acknowledging that we are all humans in the room.

6. Why do you think this practice is important? When do you think it should be used?

7. I've experienced helpful check-ins but also very shallow (non-emotional) ones or at the other end of the spectrum: half an hour of relating and storytelling. What makes for a good check-in round?

ORGANIC FACILITATION

On instances at the retreats but also in meetings I've seen impressive skills of co-facilitating a workshop. Small cues and comments, like 'speak more from the I', 'time', or 'thanks for sharing' (after an emotionally open statement) were deployed flexibly by different individuals. I also recognized the frequent use of metaphors – used to sum up a discussion and to carry it on.

8. Which facilitation practices do you perceive as crucial and why? (bringing a discussion to an action point or next level)

9. How did you as a group get so skilled? Intentional attempts?

10. I've witnessed how difficult it is to establish little practices, like facilitation, note-taking or scheduling in a working group: Can you recall any successful instances of how such flexible 'mini-leadership flows' were being developed?

RHYTHMS AND EMERGENCE

I've seen different rhythms or attempts to synchronize rhythm ('sprinting out loud' trial of the catalysts, but also rotating responsibilities).

11. Why do you think rhythms are so important?

12. Which rhythms are important to you in the context of your work with Enspiral?

13. Do you have any experiences of practices that facilitated a rhythmic cohesion between groups?

14. How does the idea of Enspiral as a 'beta' or 'emergent organization' translate into everyday practice? (attentiveness to serendipitous moments)

RITUALS

Another interesting aspect at the retreats was the use of rituals, particularly to welcome people, as well as to open and close spaces. Be it a ceremonial welcome, a constellation, a food blessing, or the writing of a letter to the future self.

15. Which rituals had a special meaning for you, left a mark?

TOUCH

Breaking the taboo of touching each other in professional contexts, I've been told, is of major importance in the relational context of professional intimacy.

16. How do you feel about the open culture of touch at Enspiral?

THANK YOU

I've experienced people as extremely attentive to the efforts, needs, energy, and intentions of themselves as well as of others (in the room or beyond). People try to cultivate an attentiveness to thanking, and they make sure that everyone gets the right context to follow a discussion. There seem to be low barriers to speak about (possible) interpersonal problems and how to approach everyone so that no feelings are hurt. I can't pin this attitude down to certain repeated practices yet, and the title seems half-baked, but it's definitely important.

17. What are your most important channels of saying thank you at Enspiral?

18. What helps you to stay attentive to the needs of others?

19. Which practices help you to get into a state where you can be open to the experience of "delightful difference"?

20. Why are retreats important? What is for you the magical at retreats?

APPENDIX IV: Mind map of relational practices

BELONGING THROUGH DISSENT: RELATIONAL POLITICS OF INCOMPLETENESS

INTRO: New forms of Work / Politics / Place: rupture in the sensible

LIT-REVIEW: Relational practices in consent-based & alternative orgs

CONCEPTS: Sociomaterial Practice theory & agencement (object)

METHODS: Participant Observation, extreme case, Empirica

ANALYSIS: Sharing, Caring, Weaving
Infrastructure / Tools
Affects <-> Problems - tensions

DISCUSSION: Logic or culture of incompleteness
consent = inviting dissent
Non-tribal networks (Rods) -> belonging through difference
to new org forms & new work relations -> moment of the political

CONCLUSION: Question of Scale
Return to 19th, 19th century clubs
Impoverished understanding of groups in Modernity
=> reach out to indigenous experience (Maori)
practices that settle us in wayfinding & not knowing:
Space, body, metaphors / music / dance
=> subjectivity through encounter (conviviality)

WEAVING -> CONSENT & ADVICE
TOOLS: SYNC / ASYNC, AGILE PM, VIDEOCHAT
INFRASTRUCTURE: COLLAB FINANCE, ACCOUNTING / LEGAL INVESTMENT
PRACTICES -> OFF & ONLINE FACILITATION (RICH / SANDRA) [2]
• STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT
• SHARING CONTEXT
=> RHYTHMS
=> CAT-HERDING
=> CONFLICT / EMOTIONS
=> RITUALS (LOOMIO SPELL / SUMMERFEST)   [1]

CO-FACILITATION   [3]
• MEMBERS RETREAT
=> CUES, COMMENTS, SIGNS
=> HOLDING SPACE
=> AGENDA SETTING
=> LOOPING
=> THREADING
=> ROOTING

SHARING
-> GENTLE -> LOOMIO STORY (RICH) [3]
          -> WHANAUNGATANGA (SILVIA) [2]
-> RADICAL -> JV @ MEMBERS RETREAT [5] -> BALANCE
   HML FINANCIAL
   WORK-A-THON OUTBURST

PRACTICES: [1]
-> CHECK-IN: • CATALYSTS
             • HML OUT OF CONTROL
             • VARGAS STORY
             • SUSAN / GUNA / SILVIA: BALANCE

SHARING CIRCLE • SUSAN
HOMEGROUPS: • OWN EXPERIENCE
            • WITNESSING / WITNESS [4]

STEWARDSHIP -> CARING

CARING -> DECENTRALIZING CARE -> SILVIA / JV / RICH PLANNA? [1]

PRACTICES
-> POSITIVE GOSSIP • GUNA / RICH / SILVIA [4]
-> THANK YOU, CELEBRATIONS, GIFTS [3]
   • LANGUAGES OF APPRECIATION

TOUCH • DAMIAN VS. SILVIA [5] CONTROVERSIAL

STEWARDSHIP: • ANTE? [2]
             • BILLY?

WEAVING: FACILITATION OF AGREEMENT

APPENDIX V: Example of literature review short summaries

Nicollini & Monteiro (2016): Practice Approach

organizing – real-time accomplishment of ordinary activities
(1) sub-components (2) flow towards end (3) activities not entities (4) exist in networks/assemblages (5) collective & normative (6) material & embodied (7) tensions & inconsistencies (8) history & every time new (9) individuals carrying & carrying out practices (10) uneven power but room for agency
micro & macro = same stuff
Dialectical approach: conflict between two or more practices
offer findings to practitioners
– who is (dis)empowered
– subject positions & forms of agency are made available
– alternatives
– are practices aligned in same direction
– emergent vs. intended object (practiced vs. desired identity)

Feldman & Orlikowski (2011): Theorizing practice

social life ongoing production – recurrent actions/mundane bring dynamics, relations, enactment world into being
(1) empirical (2) theoretical (3) philosophical approaches
⇒ foregrounding human and non-human agency
⇒ rejection of dualisms
⇒ relationality of mutual constitution – ongoing accomplishment
power – asymmetrical capacities for action, constraining-enabling
not ontology of separate things, but interrelated, situated sociomaterial practices

Gherardi (2016): To start practice theorizing anew

explaining different streams & philosophical roots
practice: sociomaterial, post-human, discourse and materiality co-emerge, distributed agency, relational
'knowing subject and known object emerge in ongoing interaction'
⇒ language missing for relational world-view: 'agencement' (good discussion)
'becoming' only when there is an assemblage – org as enactments
critical: encounter of multiple rationalities – making visible knowledgeability
practicing: agencement – activity of establishing connections = becoming, perpetual (de)territorializing
agency = outcome of process of associations
sensibleness: form emerges from matter (knowing invented while doing) & active process of agencement → entanglements produce effects & affects

Gherardi (2017): One turn … and now another

- practice no only as empirical phenomenon (routine) but epistemology decenter subject (posthuman) & overcome dichotomies
- body as site of knowing (sensible knowing, aesthetics)
- sociomaterial (nature & culture entangled
- process orientation
- ethnography, participatory research, ethics

Affect: affected & to be affected – flow of invisible entangled forces – outside of narrative – processual & relational
affect vs. emotion – decentering human subject linking social and natural
atmosphere
↳ post-qualitative research methods: more than representational
commonalities • epistemological sensibility: relational becoming
• body: senses/aesthetic knowledge & affect/be affected
• material discursive – sociomateriality
theory vs. methodologically complementary, could enrich

Alcadipani & Ladha (2017): Phrase particle

ethical intervention (Barad)
ethics open up radical spaces of possibilities by accepting onto-knowing onto-epistemology: reality is indeterminate (like particle world)
Bohr/Grokin: quantum physics onto indeterminacy
entanglement not intertwinings of separate entities – irreducible relations of responsibility
McKenna: Slimed Ape Theory, mycelial network

Gherardi & Rodeschini (2016): Caring as collective

Heidegger: taking care of vs. solicitous care
→ what is just → how to respond
sociomaterial, situated, emergent accomplishment
affect & embodied, sensible knowledge
common orientation / sensed incident (emotions, context) / backstage

Shotter (2006): Withness Thinking

responsive thinking, acting and talking
→ action guiding feelings / own bodily felt exp.
→ attention to things seen continually but unnoticed
relationally-responsive (vs) representational-referential
open-ended dialogue
examples of senses working together in a whole that isn't – senses situating us in the world
Aboutness: get across theoretical pictures – pictures
withness: reflective interactions, touching or moving differences, new shapes of experience & possibilities moved towards possibilities when flesh rubs against each other: result isn't visible seeing or representation, but more than a feeling → possib. for responsive action in relation to placement in momentary interaction

Singh (2017): Becoming a commoner

Intro: Reviewing commons – classic Ostrom critique works within rationalist paradigm – today revival classical environment & knowledge commons
Illich: 18th century not only physical takeover but nature now seen as resource instead of shared care
commons as 'affective socio-nature relations' – commons and commoners co-constituted → forests become sites of constituting social relations
collective subjectivities: emerging from affective ecologies of nature, society & self
Simondon: never complete between pre-individual elements & individuated characteristics + collective experience terrain of more radical individuation
→ subjectivation: turning passive condition into active process – multiple subjectivities – commoning as world-making
COMMONS/CARE

Farias (2017): That's what friends are for

friendship not as external cause, but force in its own right, not only strong and exclusive bonds but heis: hospitable and virtuous towards others
affective side important, but it can hinder democracy spreading exclusivity & homogeinity
→ way of relating rather than a passion – inscribed in the body (habitus) – confronting stranger in its otherness protects against massification & anonymity in society of strangers – different view of the other
Rituals & hospitality = also violent through asymmetry – intentional porosity of boundaries helps to stay dynamic – emotional bonds main criterion for structuring activities
→ person & its otherness at the center of org.
→ balance between homogeinity & difference
otherness = complex equality (Haraway)
→ togetherness constructed within contradict. practices rather than unified ideology
→ accepting disagreement & difference instead of striving for unity (also ambiguity)
→ permanent reflection & questioning through hospitality → fostering social creativity
FRIENDSHIP/HOSPITALITY

Gagnon & Collinson (2017): Resistance through diff.

Co-constitution of resistance and inclusion of difference collective processes rejecting normative control & drawing on difference within the team positively
→ group bonds
→ dissent & inclusion
→ not marginalizing oppositional subjectivities
difference as productive

Farias (2017): Money is the root of all evil

boundaries not only through in/exclusion but see how porous nature is maintained in practices
Longo Mai: everyday neutralizing practices to deal with threats from money: (1) distancing, (2) re-appropriating
money as a dirty object that is constantly transgressing organizational boundaries → positive response: heterogeneous forces innovate
→ stressing beneficial power of dangerous elements and of disorder – creating culture out of threats in an organization in becoming (not fully realized structure)
→ re-creating a culture of exchanges based on interpersonal ties and equality – 're-socializing the economy'
TRANSGRESSION
ORDER THROUGH DISORDER

Daskalaki & Kokkinidis (2017): Socio-spatial resistance

Resistance not situated struggle but transformative force distributed across space and times – new ways of being in the world. → local & translocal practices
- performing transient socio-spatialities (interplay of fixities & mobilities)
- powerful bodies to draw distant others within close reach

Lefebvre 'autogestion': geographical project of the ways we resist homogenization
→ socialities that are not attached to spaces but emerge through a flow of actors → transformed relational(ities)
→ spaces of agency: entanglement of practices and spaces
→ resistance as a creative process shaping subjectivities and social transformation

Cruz et al. (2017): Alternatives to Capitalism

3 strands on researching alternatives:
(1) Organizational Forms & Business Models
→ balancing social & financial / hybrid organizations / worker cooperatives
(2) Creation & development
↻ Ideation / Incubation / Acceleration or Alternative economies
(3) Objectives & Impact: Indicators / Power relations / democratic and collective grassroots
Gap: Relation with societal actors:
Government: global South – solidarity economy
Universities: broadening impact perspective scholars & teaching not as observers but activist
Investors: alternative finance
Civil Society: cooperatives & social movements

Pazaitis et al. (2017): Open cooperativism

Good intro about platform capitalism
Collusion of: P2P & Cooperatives →
open cooperatives: aggregate and connect coops – commons-oriented counter economy
Question: Livelihoods
→ transitional post-corporate form
Empirical: • structure
• history
• governance & operation
→ outdated & too detailed, some quotes

Parker (2017): Local economies and social justice

policy changes for alternative businesses to grow economy for the common good

Schumacher: gigantism
→ Resilience: regional economies, diverse sectors & business models – cope with vulnerability
cosmo-localisation (Fournier 2013): knowledge commons – local production
economics of scale to be replaced by location & requisite variety → resilience
workplace democracy & ownership: networks, finance instruments, tax cuts, encourage take-overs
'low carbon variety of capitalism' & commons-based post-capitalism → no romanticism of the local

Lee & Edmondson (2017): Self-managing orgs

+/- hierarchy / societal trends / trad. approaches to less hierarchical organizing & recent experiments
• bringing together streams of research & distinction incremental vs. radical
→ post-bureaucratic: community control
Burns & Stalker: organic, responsive, innovative
→ humanistic: participatory, empowerment
McGregor: Theory X/Y
→ democracy: community control, no space for autonomy (I have to address this critique)
radical → eliminate hierarchical reporting relationships decentralize authority on org level – systematic and formal
Further Research: complex emergent org. at scale, conflict & crisis, individual wellbeing & who thrives
Org Models: Market, Community, Democracy

Battilana & Lee (2014): Hybrid organizing

boundaries between private, public, non-profit blurred segregating processes overcome by counteracting mechanisms → orgs combine multiple forms → hybrid organizing: org forms (+ identities & inst. logics) internal (culture, design, etc.) & external (environment)
Social enterprises as prime example: has to balance different logics → may become form of its own. Main tension: differentiation – integration of business and charitable aspects
→ greater opportunities for change, creativity, but dependent on activities, workforce, org design, inter-org relationships, culture
→ Social enterprises as hybrid but also step towards more integrated vision of capitalism

CURRICULUM VITAE

| PERSONAL DETAILS

date of birth   19 May 1981
place of birth   Vienna, Austria
family status   married | two boys
email   bernhard.resch@yahoo.de

| EDUCATION

01/2014 – 02/2019
Doctorate in Organization Studies and Cultural Theory (DOK) at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

2001 – 2008
Magister in Political Science with a focus on global political economy, organization studies and policy analysis at the University of Vienna, Austria

| GRANTS

12/2018
Herbert and Valmae Freilich Project
Early Career Research Grant

01/2017 – 06/2018
Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)
Doc Mobility Fellowship to Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

| TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Ph.D. level: Affect and Emotion in Organizations
- MBA level: Creativity, Innovation and Business
- MBA level: Critical Thinking and Thought Leadership
- MA level: Entrepreneurship and Creativity
- MA level: Organizational Behavior and Change
- MA level: Cities and Creativity
- MA level: Organizing Museums in the Entrepreneurial City
- BA level: Leading Creative Solutions: Ideas

| PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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University of Sydney Business School | Australia
Lecturer in Strategy, Entrepreneurship and Innovation

01/2017 – 06/2018
Victoria University of Wellington | New Zealand
Visiting Scholar, School of Management

01/2014 – 12/2016
University of St. Gallen | Switzerland
Research Assistant, Research Institute for Organizational Psychology, School of Management

03/2012 – 12/2013
Zeppelin University | Friedrichshafen, Germany
Deputy Head of Events & Training

07/2010 – 02/2012
Create Connections Networking & Lobbying | Vienna, Austria
Public Affairs Consultant

04/2009 – 07/2010
Freelance journalist, radio news editor and anchor | Austria
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