The frantic gesture of interpassivity: Maintaining the separation between the corporate and authentic self

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The frantic gesture of interpassivity

Maintaining the separation between the corporate and authentic self

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Abstract

Purpose – With the help of Slavoj Žižek's concept of interpassivity, this paper seeks to illustrate the frantic activities performed by employees to maintain a separation between the idea of an authentic self and the idea of a corporate self. Furthermore, this paper aims to illustrate these activities empirically.

Design/methodology/approach – The empirical example is based on a case study of three of the largest international consultancy firms. About 50 consultants were interviewed in this study, but this paper primarily focuses on the experiences of one of these consultants, and goes into depth with his experiences to illustrate the frantic mechanisms of interpassivity.

Findings – The paper shows how the maintenance of an "authentic self" outside of the corporate culture demands a distinct and frantic activity; that this activity can best be understood as interpassive in the sense that it involves taking over the passive acknowledgement for which someone else is responsible; and how the separation of an authentic from a corporate self, rather than resist the demand to enjoy one's work – prescribed by contemporary management programs – nourishes it.

Originality/value – The paper builds on recent literature on cynicism and normative control in organisations. It introduces interpassivity to this discussion.

Keywords Žižek, Cynicism, Interpassivity, Consultants, Authenticity, Fantasy

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

With the formula "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it", Slavoj Žižek (1989, p. 28) identifies an all-pervasive cynical gesture in contemporary Western societies that lands any classical idea of a critical-ideological procedure in considerable trouble. It is in Sloterdijk's work *Critique of Cynical Reason*, where Sloterdijk traces what he calls the enlightened false consciousness or modern cynicism (Sloterdijk, 1988), that Žižek finds his inspiration. Paradoxical as it may sound – for how can any "enlightened" consciousness remain "false" – Sloterdijk is aiming to

describe a universal, diffuse cynicism that defines the social and existential limits of enlightenment. Sloterdijk draws on the suggestion that "to be dumb and have a job, that's happiness" (Sloterdijk, 1988, p. 7). This obverse reformulation of Marx' famous claim that "they do not know it, but they are doing it" also inspires Žižek's theoretical gesture. What if, he seems to be asking, there is no alienation? What if we very well know and still carry on acting?

The classical idea of estrangement depicts ideology as a misjudgement about our presuppositions of the world. It claims that there is a contradiction between the real nature of our actions and what we think about these actions (Žižek, 1989, pp. 28-30). In fact, we are prisoners of ideology in so far as our thoughts are distorted by other interest. But if ideology works in a cynical manner, as Žižek (1989, pp. 30-3) suggests, ideology does not work on the level of thinking, but of actions. Indeed, as cynics we know that what we do is not true, but do it anyhow.

Most of Slavoj Žižek's work is based on this assumption of such a cynical reasoning in contemporary Western societies and the consequent conscious or unconscious ideological practice of "living a lie". To organisation theory, which has often relied on the validity of the classical critical gesture (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006, p. 260), the assumption of Žižek's standpoint has great implications. In the following, we will focus on one particular aspect of this: cynicism in organisations and its relation to what Žižek's calls interpassivity. As we will see, the former describes a disregard among employees towards accounts of the world embedded in management initiatives such as corporate culture programs. The cynic employees recognise the power interests behind the injunction to self-actualize at work and enjoy work. Interpassivity, on its hand refers to the activity of deferring the passive reaction, e.g. the person that laughs at his own tasteless joke thus acting out the expected reaction of the audience (Žižek, 1999b, p. 105).

Within organisation studies we have recently witnessed a discussion of cynicism both as a form of resistance against managerial effort to colonise the self of employees and as a mode of power that intensifies this colonisation. In this paper we are particularly interested in the work that goes into a cynical attitude, i.e. how employees posit a distinction between a corporate self that complies with the organisational norm and an authentic self that is always considered something more than what is colonised by the organisation. As recent work by Contu (2008) has illustrated, the authentic self assumed by the cynical attitude in fact serves as a fantasy nourishing the managerial effort to colonise the self. We will focus on the concept of interpassivity to highlight certain mechanisms in this discussion, namely:

- The frantic work employees put into the aforementioned separation.
- How this separation nourishes rather than disputes the normative injunction "to enjoy one's work" prescribed by contemporary management programs.

We end up with an empirical illustration of this mechanism focussing primarily on how the interviewed subject used the aforementioned separation in an effort to recognise and acknowledge himself as a successful employee. However, before fleshing out this notion of interpassivity we will dwell a bit on cynicism in organisations and in what way a cynical attitude among employees relies on a distinction between a corporate and an authentic self.

Cynicism as a way of distinguishing between corporate and authentic selves

Recently, a growing amount of organisation research has been conducted into the phenomenon of cynicism. Cynicism is viewed as an employee response to culture management and other management practices, which target the subjectivities of employees through a normative injunction (Kunda, 1992; Casey, 1995; Fleming, 2005; Fleming and Spicer, 2003, 2007; Contu, 2008).

In his now classic study of the company Tech, Kunda (1992) illustrated how a designed corporate culture performed what he termed normative control of its employees. The culture program consisted of a collection of concrete techniques "designed to induce others to accept – indeed to become – what the company would like them to be" (Kunda, 1992, p. 7): active, participating and self-managing employees. The implicit assumption in these programs is that if only employees enjoy themselves at work – and are provided with space for self-determination – they will perform their work-tasks better and become emotionally committed to their place of work. For Kunda, however, this culture is not just a collection of techniques and rules designed to win the hearts and minds of the employees. It is also the vehicle through which employees "influence the behaviour and experiences of others" (Kunda, 1992, p. 7). The culture program in Tech was simultaneously an instrument that produced "what appears to be a well-defined [. . .] member role" (Kunda, 1992, p. 7) and a control-mechanism designed to determine how well this role of a corporate self was performed, i.e. it performed an indirect normative control of what to belief, think and feel.

In this way, employees are expected and encouraged to embrace what we will call a "corporate self" that has been designed for them. However, this embracement of a corporate self also provokes cynicism, a kind of distancing from this self, in the effort "to maintain a private reserve that was truly theirs and beyond the corporate collective" (Fleming and Sturdy, 2007, p. 5). The result of this kind of cynical behaviour is that "the emotions experienced as part of the organisational self are presented as distinct from other aspects of emotional life and at some remove from one's 'authentic' sense of self" (Kunda, 1992, p. 183). In Kunda's study, then, cynicism is more than an introspective flight into solitude; it is a way for employees to see through the culture program and to protect what they consider their "authentic self".

The fantasy of the authentic self

Recently, it has been argued that cynicism is much more than a way of coping with the burden of the role as an active and participating employee (Fleming and Spicer, 2007, p. 74). In other words, cynicism is more than a mental safety valve protecting the sense of selfhood against the sometimes emotional overwhelming ideal of incorporating corporate values. Indeed, some have argued that employee cynicism provides a form of resistance against the normative control performed by culture programs and its likes (Casey, 1995; Sturdy and Fineman, 2001; Fleming and Spicer, 2003). Cynicism, the assumption goes, is an indirect way of disregarding the account of the world offered by management technologies such as culture programs. Others, with direct inspiration from Žižek, have argued the exact opposite. Cynicism serves as a conservative force (Fleming and Spicer, 2007) and rather than presenting a resistance to the normative gestures in contemporary work-settings, it in fact sustains these gestures (Contu, 2008).

Drawing on Žižek's notion of ideology, Fleming and Spicer (2003, 2007) seem to understand the normative gestures in contemporary management programs in two interrelated ways:

(1) That the ideological dictum of post-Taylorist management programs is not the demand to "do as you are told, like it or not", but rather "like it or not, enjoy yourself at work".

(2) This injunction is not something that primarily takes place at a conscious level; rather, it is embedded in the practices of our everyday life and habits.

While employees might refuse to engage with and embrace these cultural programs at a conscious level, distrusting their account of the world, they still perform the practices surrounding these programs. Indeed, as Fleming and Spicer (2007, pp. 72-3) maintain, the conscious awareness of the injunction of these culture programs, might be what sustains the normative control of these programs all the better. By not believing too much in them, employees, not only give the impression that they are in fact authentic selves irreducible to the corporate culture, they paradoxically also consolidate this corporate self. What Fleming and Spicer argue, then, is that cynicism is conservative as it gives the impression that employees are "autonomous agents", but nevertheless they "still practise the corporate rituals" (Fleming and Spicer, 2003, p. 160). So even if the employees are aware of the ideological production of a corporate self, taking place in the corporate culture programs, it does not change the fact that these "enlightened" employees still play the role of the corporate self they don't believe in. Furthermore, as both Fleming and Spicer (2007) and Contu (2008) suggest, the right to disagree with the corporate culture might even make the employees perform cultural practices as well as their jobs even better.

In fact, according to Contu (2008), the enlightened nature of cynicism is the very force that in the end sustains the normative gesture in something like culture management. Indeed, cynicism and other acts of cognitive transgressions of the corporate self (irony, giving an impression, etc.) guarantees the ideology of contemporary work settings. Indeed, following Contu's analysis of cynicism, "liberal workplaces" come to rely on a fantasy of something authentic outside the workplace's grip of power (Contu, 2008, p. 369). That is, a fantasy of being an authentic human being made of flesh and blood with "wishes, desires, and aspirations that are proper, specific to me" (Contu, 2008, p. 372). For Contu, it is exactly this fantasy that serves as the "trans-ideological kernel" (Žižek, 1997, p. 21) and makes the ideology of liberal workplaces workable.

Cynicism and other acts of cognitive transgression, then, involve a distinction between the corporate self – tainted by ideology – and the fantasy of an authentic self untouched by the normative gestures of the workplace. But as Žižek makes clear, such a split in the subject is not a mere sign of the imperfection of the normative gesture of an ideology, indeed "this splitting is necessary for its exercise" (Žižek, 2005, p. 287). So rather than actually disturbing and subverting organisational practices that target and regulate employee subjectivity, the fantasy of authenticity supports it. Or as Contu (2008, p. 372) suggests, the fantasy of something "more" – something authentic beyond the different ways the employee is subjectified as a corporate self – is in the end what guarantees this subjectification. For Contu, then, cynicism is nothing but "decaf resistance". Decaf, because it – just like decaf coffee – can be enjoyed without the risk

and cost involved (Contu, 2008, p. 374). In cynicism, employees do not run the risk of transforming the subjects they are and the way they live their lives and perform their jobs. However, sustaining this decaf resistance – and the distinction between corporate and authentic parts it provides – is an act that takes up a whole lot of activity. It is at this level that the concept of interpassivity can provide us with valuable insight, as it not only explains how the duty to enjoy is transferred onto something else (e.g. from my corporate to my authentic self), but also how this transfer demands a frantic activity that in a paradoxical way retains the injunction to enjoy one's work.

Žižek's concept of interpassivity
Although Žižek's interpretation of the phenomenon interpassivity is original, he borrows the term from Pfaller. In Pfaller's sense of the term, interpassivity designates the practice of delegating personal actions to exterior objects (Pfaller, 2000). To Žižek, interpassivity implies this as well, but has a somewhat broader and more complex meaning.

According to what Žižek (1996) calls a well-known anthropological anecdote, when so-called primitives are directly asked about their "superstitious beliefs", they sometimes answer that "some people believe [...]" thereby immediately displacing their beliefs onto an Other, who believes instead of them. The mode of action involved in this gesture transfers my action to someone else, who "acts" in my place and takes over the task of completing what I cannot do on my own. The point is that the subject, who directly believes, does not need to exist in order for the belief to operate as long as it is merely presupposed. This transfer can take different forms. I can transfer my beliefs to someone "that does it for me" independently of this subject's existence (Žižek, 1999a, p. 5), e.g. "I don't really believe in the designed corporate culture; only my colleagues are that dumb", or I can invest the functionality of believing at a distance in some thing, and have it do it for me – like spinning a Tibetan prayer-wheel to have it pray for me.

But the relationship of substitution is not restricted to transferring beliefs or actions. As Žižek points out, the same goes for the subject's innermost feelings (Žižek, 1999a, p. 7). Even responsive actions like crying and laughter can be displaced onto another person or object. Žižek's typical example is hiring weeping women to take care of the mourning at a funeral or by "canned laughter" of sitcoms that laughs in my place when a joke is cracked.

To better understand this third form of substitution we must understand the distinction Žižek makes when he calls interpassivity "a phenomenon that is the exact obverse of 'interactivity'" (Žižek, 1999b, p. 104). For Žižek, interactivity is not primarily "interacting with the medium, that is, not being just a passive consumer", rather it refers to the activity of "acting through another agent, so that my job is done, while I sit back and remain passive, just observing the game" (Žižek, 1999b, p. 105).

If interactivity is related to the act of transferring my action to an Other so I am free to breathe while the Other works for me, then the "passivity" in interpassivity must be understood in a grammatical sense. A passive subject, is a subject something is being done to, e.g. it enjoys something, it mourns something, or it acknowledges something. Inter-passivity, then, is the act of leaving it to someone or something else to externalise emotions. However, this does not imply that the subject does not act, but that the action is a response to emotions.

Two sorts of interpassive actions
On this background, Žižek makes an important distinction between two sorts of interpassive actions. First, there is interpassivity as we have described it above, where something or someone takes over the passive spectators' feelings. In this sense, interpassivity sets the subject free to do something else; the ritual of praying "relieved of my duty and finally free to really have fun, really relax and enjoy[...]" (Žižek, 1999a, p. 14). E.g. Kunda's cynic employees that discern between a corporate self as the mask that perform the corporate rituals and an authentic self that doesn't believe in "such California bathtub crap" (Kunda, 1992, p. 185). The other, and for us more interesting action, involves a reversal of the very act of acting through a medium, and not just a reversal of the mere interaction with a medium. In interpassivity, "the subject is incessantly – frenetically even – active, while displacing on to another the fundamental passivity of his or her being" (Žižek, 1999b, p. 106).

A good example of this activity, according to Žižek, is the character who laughs at his own joke. When no one around him finds what he says funny, he himself bursts into laughter. The agent himself, who actively tells the joke, also assumes the passive role and laughs instead of his audience (Žižek, 1996). The narrator of the joke sees to, and frantically insists on, the recognition which ought to come from the audience and thus on his own ensures the inscription of his act into the "big Other", i.e. the symbolic and social order.

What Žižek highlights by this example is among other things that every time we can locate a sense of yearning that needs to be expressed – but yet surpasses full linguistic expression – we also find a gap (however minimal it may be) between the "authentic" passive feeling and its externalised form in the socio-symbolic order. This gap, between the passive feeling and its expression in a recognisable socially codified practice, is important for Žižek as it not only opens up the possibility of faking authentic feelings, but also of inducing them, by submitting to their ritualised expression (Žižek, 1999b, p. 106). Indeed, the very mobilisation of a gap between the "inner" authentic depth and the "outer" mask of the subject relays a way to make real that which started as a "fake".

Here, however, we have to be careful. By distinguishing between "fake" and "authentic" feelings, Žižek does not consider the latter an immediate spontaneous state, but exactly a fantasy, which is sustained by the superego imperative: "to enjoy". In fact, it is important to understand that interpassivity does not defer enjoyment as something more authentic, rather it delays the very duty to enjoy. So while the transferral of enjoyment from me to something else involves a passive action (e.g. enjoying my own joke or acknowledging my work), it also postpones this passivity. I defer enjoyment to another who passively endures it, even if the Other takes the form of a fantasy of my authentic self.

If we connect these discussions on interpassivity with the cynical distinction between authentic and corporate selves, we can locate these two ways of performing such acts of interpassivity:

(1) I defer the "fake" feelings expected of my corporate self onto organisational practices, while creating a zone of authenticity able to do something else.

(2) I defer the injunction to enjoy my work onto an authentic self that enjoys and even recognises the activity of my corporate self. In doing this, I create

something authentic in me that acknowledges and enjoys the activities in my work, which I otherwise might find unenjoyable.

I laugh at my own jokes so to speak. Here, interpassivity acts as a defence against the injunction to enjoy my work, but it also reproduces this injunction in so far as the authentic comes to sustain the injunction. I try to enjoy my corporate self through the use of my authentic self, but this initial defence becomes of a "decaf" nature. It is this second form of interpassivity we will now illustrate empirically.

Interpassivity in cynicism: an empirical illustration

The current case is a small part of a larger study of three consultancy firms, where about 50 interviews as well as observations were made. The empirical discussion in this paper is thus based on a large empirical study, however the particular empirical illustration we wish to highlight here is focused on several interviews with one consultant (from now on called N) about his experiences – both work-related and private. Like Sveningsson and Alvesson (2004), we will focus in depth on one person's experiences instead of seeking to generalise based on the experiences of several individuals. We have chosen this approach especially because we want to show how the separation between a corporate and an authentic self of an individual is perceived and maintained. These mechanisms are highly personal and investigating into them demands in depth knowledge about one person's experiences. N was chosen among the many interviewees because his story illustrates the mechanisms of interpassivity most clearly. N's story, however, is by no means unique; his experiences, joys and frustrations about his work and personal life very well reflects what has been explained more generally by other consultants. As a consequence, general perceptions of the work as a consultant found in other interviews and observations are also important to understanding N's actions, and are therefore elaborated when appropriate. N's story could in this way fit many of the life stories we have heard among the consultants. The reason why N is singled out is therefore due to a wish to illustrate a nuanced example rather than to point to a unique situation. N could be anyone.

As most consultants, N has worked with business consultancy since he graduated from university. He now works in one of the largest international consultancy firms, well-known for its ability to attract the best and the brightest. As it is commonly known within the firm (and as all the consultancy firms claim) they hire from the 10 percent best candidates – constantly. The employees are therefore people used to being top students, who have continued "being the best of the best" by working in consultancy. Being among the best is something every single consultant mentions in the interviews. It is important for their self-identification and development that they are good enough to be among the best. But as many of the consultants also note; to be a top performer among top performers demands something extra. In university they were used to being the best without displaying particular effort, but now they are only among the best, which makes it much more difficult. The internal competition for promotion is tough, only those who perform a little better than good enough get promoted. It is in this way not enough to perform as expected of you; you always have to prove that you can add that little extra to deserve your promotion. In this line of business it is not possible to perform averagely and stay at a hierarchical level. It is an

"up or out" culture where you either advance or leave. It is not enough to think of the work as a job that has to be performed well, it is rather a lifestyle that demands that the job is put first. As our study clearly showed, it demands that the employees are always available. They are expected to be available at all times a day to make client calls across the globe if necessary. They are therefore constantly logged on to the company's system – also at night. Many of them even tell of managers who contact them in the middle of the night to prepare something for a morning meeting.

This intense struggle to over-perform is bound up in constant evaluations and performance measurement. Every sixth months both subordinates and superiors evaluate all consultants. Based on these evaluations, everyone is then prioritised and ranked within their respective peer groups and promotion decisions are then based on these evaluations. Poor evaluations are discussed with the consultants in question and they can be encouraged to leave. As they all say, they rarely have to fire people. People quickly find out whether they belong to the culture or not. They are proud and vain over-performers. So if they cannot perform, they quickly find other ways, they are too vain to stay as "an average performer". The employees are therefore corporate selves that have not only to over-perform to belong and be constantly measured and evaluated in the struggle for promotions. The employees also have to do it because they enjoy it, find it challenging, and thrive with competition.

Background information on N
N is a typical management consultant in the sense that he was a top student, and applied for the consultancy job because he wanted a challenging job and a chance to prove to himself that he was able to work among the best. N is well thought of – both personally and professionally, and he gets good evaluations. He has climbed the hierarchical ladder as expected and has now reached a serious "management" level, which implies that he is highly trusted and counted on to be "partner material". N's story, however, also has a dark side. Like so many others in this business, he has recently been diagnosed with stress. He was on sick leave for a short period, but with the help of continued therapy, he managed to get back to work. The way he describes his period of stress and how he overcame it and found his "authentic self" illustrates very well the interpassive mechanisms at stake in maintaining not only an authentic self, but also how the latter comes to sustain the injunction to enjoy his corporate self.

N's selves
During his period with stress N discovered that he the last many years (un)consciously had put work first; before family, friends, leisure activities and even before the care for "himself". This realisation was very difficult for him and our empirical illustration in this paper is centred on his attempts to find "himself" again – both at work and privately. N is interpassive in the sense that he actively takes over the responsibility to acknowledge his own efforts to maintain a self, his life and his body outside of work. He is in this sense active in order to secure the passive gesture of the Other, which is substituted for him: his authentic self that relaxes, enjoys and has fun when his corporate self is unacknowledged, swamped with work and finding it hard to enjoy work. He thereby assumes the responsibility to disengage the authentic self from the corporate self and give room for its passivity. This gesture is especially evident in a passage where he explains how he started therapy. Here, where N talks about the

reasons for his stress problems, the authentic self not only took over the burdens of enjoyment, but also of the feeling of insufficiency:

Interviewer: Was it work related or personal problems?

N: It was personal problems, which affected how I was able to do my job. It was for example really difficult to identify when my work was good enough. I was striving towards the perfect, and had trouble with prioritising myself. I prioritised my job and not myself. And that caused me to be bad at handling myself and therefore bad at handling my job.

The interesting in N's actions is that he goes to therapy to learn more about feeling and handling himself; a self, he has to disengage from work. Despite wanting to prioritise himself over work, it becomes very clear that this disengagement is still subordinated his work. "I didn't trust my own intuition, I didn't trust my ability to communicate with the client". Personal problems affected his ability to do his job well. Every time he was asked about personal problems, work was not only mentioned, but insufficiency and frustrations regarding work was deferred onto his authentic self. Indeed, a common argument all through the interview was that he takes time off, when he is off work – in order to be better at his work.

Different frantic activities

The problem, which is described in this deferral, is that the gap between the corporate self and the authentic self is constantly about to break down. One of N's frantic activities to maintain this separation is thus his focus on hard physical exercise. It is in this way necessary for N to constantly maintain his hard physical exercise, which can make the separation for him. N's actions are here very similar to the person, who laughs at his or her own joke, recognises him or herself (acts passively) on behalf of another (the audience). He directly says that this is what he does, as it is himself, who holds the responsibility for his own recognition of his ability to enjoy both his work and non-work activities:

N: If I receive a phone call, which I get caught up in; it might mean that I do not have the time to run for an hour. Then, it is all about not just skipping the whole exercise, but to go running for half an hour or 45 min or whatever there is time for. And remember to praise myself for getting it done.

Interviewer: Are you able to do that?

N: Yes, but it is difficult. I can acknowledge myself.

Interviewer: What do you do then, what is it you acknowledge?

N: I acknowledge myself by visualising. That is, visualise that I in fact do keep my appointments, that I do exercise and that I do stick to an exercise plan.

Interviewer: Have you been bad at acknowledging yourself?

N: Yes, very. When I have received appraisals, I have in reality not listened. I haven't recognised it. As an example, I got the assignment the first week of my therapy to make people tell what they liked about me. And to hear people say all these good things about me, was a major boost and helped me believe that I would get through it.

Through an array of therapeutic activities, N seems to do everything in his power to maintain the idea of an authentic self beyond the work sphere. He strives to separate this authentic self from normative gestures of the workplace. Yet still this activity, the goals he sets for himself, seem to have the overall purpose of becoming a better consultant, of winning the promotion race, being recognised as among the best, etc. Paradoxically his efforts to maintain an authentic self beyond the work sphere, comes to be about the corporate self and he must continuously struggle not to see the separation collapse. The therapeutic activities that are directed at the enjoyment of his authentic self seem subjected to empowering the corporate self, whose influence they were meant to diminish.

But in another sense the authentic self is what relieves him of his duty to enjoy himself at work. His corporate self is in this sense frantically active, while he displaces on to his authentic self the fundamental passivity of his being: his enjoyment of exercise, reading, spending time with his girlfriend, etc. And the only way he can do this is by deferring the duty to enjoy himself onto his authentic self. The authentic self outside the corporate world sustains and nourishes his corporate world:

> N: It was difficult, really, really difficult. The acknowledgement that I had to push my work aside to focus on myself without being able to say whether it would be for two weeks or several months, that was difficult. But, I received encouragement [from management] all the way through. It was a positive experience, which gave me the feeling of security to actually manage to let go of my work [...] I acted as authentically as I could and was respected for that. My superiors, both on the project and at the firm, acknowledged it.

He very proudly explained to us how he worked so well with himself, that he was able to return to work earlier than expected, and therefore did not have to use all of the sick leave. He was encouraged from both the company and his therapist to take the whole leave (he was even on full pay in that period), but still he returned earlier. The entire purpose with working with himself was to get back to work before time, before he was expected to, to once again prove that he over-performs at work. In this way, he believes that he managed to find his authentic self, but more precisely perhaps what he obtained in therapy was to strengthen his corporate self.

Interpassivity and the duty to enjoy your work – concluding remarks

We have in this paper tried to discuss and illustrate the frantic activities of maintaining the separation between a corporate and authentic self that modern work demands of the employee. In the case study we illustrated the frantic activity involved in constantly maintaining the separation of two selves that are both subjected to measures of productivity, when N took on the task to acknowledge himself through various activities. If the authentic self is subordinated measures of productivity, as in N's case, the separation of it from a corporate self itself becomes work – in the guise of interpassive action. Whether it is physical exercise, climbing mountains, having a love life or taking part in therapy, the goals turns out to be to make one a more productive employee.

Žižek's concept of interpassivity helps us to identify an aspect of acknowledgement that we find in the "decaf" resistance to being crushed by the job's injunction to enjoy. Other authors have identified this decaf resistance as well (Contu, 2008; Fleming, 2005; Fleming and Spicer, 2003, 2007). The maintenance of an authentic self is centred on acknowledgement of the ability to enjoy life as a corporate self. In N's case, it is

precisely acknowledgement that makes him work better, and acknowledgement thus turns out not to be a goal in itself – although he tries to believe so.

The concept of interpassivity offers us a valuable insight. It not only explains how the duty to enjoy is transferred onto something else (e.g. from my corporate to my authentic self), but also shows how this transfer demands a frantic activity that in a paradoxical way retains the injunction to enjoy one's work. What makes N a cynical worker is not that he doesn't believe in his job; indeed, he seems to love it. But for him to believe in it in the long run, he must split himself into an authentic and a corporate self, making the former acknowledge the latter, recognising his own performances. What makes N sustain the duty to enjoy his work through these interpassive gestures is therefore not just the mere fact that he still practices the ritualized corporate practices and performances. He mainly nourishes the duty by manifesting his authentic self spending time with his girlfriend, enjoying his sports, etc. Indeed, to be a productive corporate self, N needs to be more than this self. As Žižek would put it, N is active in order to assure the passivity of an authentic self who stands for N's true place. But this also implies that N can remain frantically active as a corporate self while being passive through another, namely, his authentic self. This is the insight of the gesture of interpassivity in organisational life: it makes us submit both our working and non-working life to the infinite demand to enjoy our work.

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