Liberation and alienation in post-bureaucratic management systems: A case study of COOKIZ, the factory "with no chiefs"

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Abstract:

This article, based on a case study, develops a psychoanalytical understanding of workers' contradictory psychodynamics in post-bureaucratic organizations. While the managerial language in our case insists on "freedom and happiness" at work, "liberation of energies", critical perspectives on such organizational trends insist on individuals' seduction, subjectification and subjugation, or work intensification. To tease out such dichotomy, we draw on a Lacanian framework to offer a more nuanced account of the ambivalent interplay between managerial language, post bureaucratic organizing and psychodynamics. Particularly, workers experience both the contradictory psychodynamics of enthusiastic engagement and disarray. We suggest a possible interpretation with the notion of "fantasy" as developed by Žižek (1989, 1997) after Lacan. Fantasy allows accounting for how individuals invest enthusiastically in such a managerial language of "freedom, liberation of energies and happiness at work", and it also unveils how such psychodynamics lead to disarray. We also link these effects to the weakening of the symbolic order (Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015).

Mots-clés : Liberation management, Lacan, Symbolic, Fantasy, Žižek

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 80's there is a debate about more flexible organizational forms which place autonomy at work, power sharing and collective decision-making, at the heart of their design. These have been so far studied as new managerial regimes (in sociological studies), as post-bureaucracies, culture management models and more recently as sociocraties or holacracies (in organization and management studies). Recently, this debate features three distinct positions. Firstly, let us have a look at mainstream literature, including practitioner-oriented works, which take prominent companies as examples of the potential for managerial innovation (Birkinshaw, Hamel & Mol, 2008), as is the case in the case studies of Zappos's holacracy (Petriglieri, 2015), Morning Star's self-management (Hamel, 2011). Such managerialist literature goes as far as affirming that 'fir[ing] all the managers' and distributing their authority equally among self-managed workers (Hamel, 2011) primarily responds to humanistic aspirations such as freedom and a break from the pain and boredom of work (Getz, 2011; Getz & Carney, 2009; Semler, 1993), while turning quickly into more 'agile', innovative and profitable organizations (Getz, 2009; Getz & Carney, 2009).

At the opposite end of the (academic) spectrum, critical views on such organizational trends follow up on seminal studies of contemporary employees' alienation through seduction, subjectification and sub-jugation (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992), and on the colonization of 'the affective domain […] of employees' souls' (Willmott, 1993, p. 517). While the founding critical perspectives have lifted the veil on the meaning of so-called 'teamwork' (Barker, 1993; Casey, 1999), more recent studies have analysed how current managerial language of humanism, authenticity and "liberation" may in fact reinforce exploitation through work intensification or neo-normative forms of control (Fleming, 2009).

Nevertheless, we are interested in a third avenue in this debate, which is suggested by several researchers (Dey & Lehner, 2017; Maravelias, 2003; Vallas, 2006) who argue that

such "managerialist vs. critical" dichotomy of perspective may not be experienced in the workplace due to worker's agency and reflexive capacities. In other terms, the effects of post-bureaucratic and new participative models may involve the coexistence of ambivalent terms, such as the imbrication of increased freedom and reinforced control. Then, we suggest that there is a need to understand the implications of current post-bureaucratic organization, by looking into singular, localized and lived practices. We do so by using a psychoanalytically informed perspective through which we will show and interpret the ambivalent interplay between managerial language, new organizational settings and various workers' psychodynamics. Particularly we will study the case of an organization where managerial language puts the emphasis on "freedom" and "happiness at work" as the new managerial rule. In the remainder of the paper, we first unpack the dichotomy of perspectives around post-bureaucratic organizations and we explore a third position, which rejects such dichotomy by emphasising workers' agency. We follow by setting the Lacanian framework through which the various psychodynamics observed in the case study will be interpreted. Our case study then offers a broader account of the interplay between managerial language, new post bureaucratic organization implementation and workers psychodynamics. A discussion will underline how the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy and the effects of a disrupted symbolic order is useful to make sense of the ambivalent psychodynamics observed in the case study.

1. LITERATURE: THREE PERSPECTIVES

Flexible organizational forms which place autonomy at work, power sharing and collective decision-making, as well as humanistic managerial language at the heart of their design have been so far studied as new managerial regimes (in sociological studies: Vallas, 2006), as post-bureaucracies (Heckscher & Donellon) and democratic organizations (Romme, 2004), culture management models (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Willmott, 1993) and more recently as holacracies (Petriglieri, 2015; Robertson, 2015) (in organization and management studies).

1.1. PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES.

On the one hand, contemporary managerial discourses legitimize the development of such new organizational forms by using a humanistic neo-liberal and/or democratic vocabulary.

Current versions of this discourse rely on a tradition that we may date back to Mayo's promotion of "'Human Relations" (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939) later declined in the participatory 'learning organization" (Senge, 1990), the ideal of "corporate culture" sharing

(Peters & Waterman, 1982) and employees' empowerment (Spreitzer, 2008). Following the same trend, Tom Peters (1992) coined the phrase "liberation management" to promote "adhocratic", flexible and network-based organizational forms; a phrase which made its big comeback in Getz & Carney's opus, *Freedom Inc.* (2009) which popularized the terms 'liberated company' and 'liberating management'. While Getz's active promotion of the language of "liberation" as the new guiding principle for 21st century post-bureaucratic management has mostly influenced French debates (cf. Arnaud et al., 2016; and the special issue edited by Landivar & Trouvé, 2017) close ideas have been met with equal popularity in English-speaking countries, such as holacracies (Robertson, 2015) and sociocraties (Romme, 2004). To make this point, management literature takes prominent companies as examples, as in the case of Zappos's holacracy (Petriglieri, 2015), Morning Star's self-management (Hamel, 2011), or Semco's "no-manager" management (Semler, 1993). The general idea is that flexible organizational forms require distributing managers' authority equally among self-managed workers, and is a way to respond to humanistic aspirations such as freedom, meaningful work and a break from the pain and boredom of work, while also turning companies into more 'agile', innovative and profitable organizations (Getz & Carney, 2009).

1.2. CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

In turn, critical management studies (CMS) perspectives argues that corporate culturism and 'managerially-driven' empowerment are ways in which organization hold is structured (Pagès et al., 1979) while "[t]he basic philosophy of pseudo managerial humanism continues to be invoked" (Willmott, 2003, p. 580). It is therefore useful to go back to earlier critical analyses of 'pseudo managerial humanism' in postmodern organizations.

Firstly, using Guattari and Deleuze, Pagès et al. (1979) underline the socio-mental system through which hyper modern organizations mask contradictions and exercise a soft violence. Using Foucauldian frameworks, Rose (1989) and Willmott (1993) have focused on the ways in which management discourse tends to 'coloniz[e] the affective domain […] of employees' souls' (Willmott, 1993, p. 517), demonstrating an extension and a tightening of management control. Secondly, such critical perspectives have lifted the veil on the actual meaning of 'teamwork' (Barker, 1993) and metaphors such as 'team' and 'family' (Casey, 1999). In this regard, Kunda (1991) shows that employees' identification with managerially provided images can be nothing more than 'make believe'. More recently, critical

management scholars have pursued this line of argument regarding contemporary discourses that 'revive' the basic tenets of such 'pseudo-humanism' in managerial texts and emerging 'models' (Linhart, 2015; Willmott, 2003).

In short, this stream of research highlights how subjectivities are shaped and disciplined in a much deeper way than with previous, more direct forms of control (e.g. Burawoy, 1979). Contrary to their empowering claims, the alienating "true" nature of humanistic and participatory modes of management is unveiled (Fleming, 2009). The result of these CMS perspectives is a somewhat "totalitarian" (Maravelias, 2003) understanding of the effect of managerial will on employees' subjective experience and sense of self.

1.3. THE LIMITS OF SUCH DICHOTOMY

Several researchers show, by contrast, the limits of dichotomizing managerial and critical views about post bureaucracy. Vallas (2006) underlines the lack of empirical works in both streams, which limits our comprehension of how workers respond to new managerial regime. Through five ethnographic studies of the implementation of "empowerment" methods in industrial plants, he demonstrates that workers' responses affect workplace transformation, sometimes by reproducing previous subordinate positions or, in other cases, by renegotiating managerial prerogatives and reclaiming agency.

Drawing on a case study of an insurance service, Maravelias (2003) shows that post-bureaucracy is rather an "extension of bureaucracy" (ibid.: 553) in which the responsibility for defining the content and the contours of the "work roles" is no longer that of the organization but rather that of individuals, who are expected to activate both professional *and* personal aspects of their life (e.g. personality, affects) depending of what is deemed "valuable" for the organization's activities at a given time. Nevertheless, by seeking to include larger "spheres" of individual lives, it may also remain open to "otherness" and produce "a continuous lack of identity" (ibid.: 562) with which individuals may play with, and not constantly or totally be trapped within.

Similarly Dey and Lehner (2017) study the discourse of a website promoting social entrepreneurship. They find that becoming a social entrepreneur is conveyed as a new ideal, and also portrayed as a matter of 'having fun' and enjoying more than in "traditional" businesses. While the authors argue that this "ideal subject" of social entrepreneurship may stimulate imagination of alternatives to the dominant shareholder ideology, to fuel the

necessary "willingness to perform" such prefigurative experiments (ibid: 762), they also unpack the risk that such ideological attachments and the focus on (individualistic) enjoyment tend to "deprive would be social entrepreneurs of any sense of the ethical and political urgencies" of our times (ibid: 763).

Thus, these different researchers suggest ways to think beyond the dichotomous opposition between the neo-humanistic and the totalitarian perspectives on post-bureaucracy and on new identities at work (the empowered worker, the social entrepreneur). While acknowledging the persistence (and continuity) of power-control effects, they underline how employees may find new resources for agency, via negotiating prerogatives (Vallas, 2006) or via playing with the open-endedness or perhaps even the lack that is included in identity-shaping processes that fall back on the individual (Maravelias, 2003). The emerging "ideals" do indeed rely on ideological dynamics (Dey & Lehner, 2017), but – without falling back on the "moral superiority" argument of managerial perspectives – it is possible to see how new ideals may challenge established identifications, by opening up lack in subjects' sense of self (Driver, 2009).

Let's now introduce the Lacanian framework through which the case study will be interpreted. Indeed, a Lacanian perspective may contribute to these nuanced reflections on the lived effects of post-bureaucracies in our time, especially by approaching neo-humanistic and post-bureaucratic discourses or language insofar as they refer to unconscious dynamics and conflicts, which may or may not be successfully symbolized in the "new organization".

2. KEY ELEMENTS OF A LACANIAN APPROACH FOR UNDERSTANDING AMBIVALENT PSYCHODYNAMICS

As exposed by Gilles Arnaud and Bénédicte Vidaillet in their recent mapping of Lacanian studies of organization (2017), Lacanian approaches focus on the structuring of power relations between desiring subjects through language. What is more, such perspectives take into consideration how the unconscious forces may drive the divided subjects at some points. Thus, they may help understand how managerial discourse could arouse libidinal investment and passionate attachment (Stavrakakis, 2008) through signifiers imbued with affective meaning of wholeness such as opportunity or success. Moreover, a Lacanian approach of discourse pays attention to how it is structured around "empty signifiers" such as the entrepreneur (Jones & Spicer, 2005) or social responsibility (Driver, 2006). Indeed these

discourses, because they operate around an unsymbolizable element, may produce a flow of discourses due to the fundamental lack. Furthermore by looking how signifying chains circulate, a Lacanian approach may shed light at the dynamics of agency, alienation and emancipation, particularly in the context of organizations, our focus. Besides, Lacan's concepts of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, which constitute the main psychic registers (Lacan, 2006; Roberts, 2005; Stavrakakis, 2008), are particularly helpful for understanding the subtle power dynamics that suppose the 'complicity' of subjects (Stavrakakis, 2008), the apparent 'irrationality' of voluntary servitude, or status-quo-reinforcing behaviours that seem like resistance (Contu, 2008; Fleming & Spicer, 2003).

2.1. THE "LIBERATED" SUBJECT AND THE ALIENATING EFFECTS OF THE IMAGINARY

Drawing on Lacan's early conceptualization of identity construction (Lacan, 2006, pp. 75-82), researchers have explored some key psychic processes that are on the side of the Imaginary in organizational contexts (Kenny, 2012; Roberts, 2005; Vidaillet, 2007). In Lacan's work, the Imaginary position indicates the early emergence of the subject when it identifies with the image it sees in the mirror and later, with the other, confusingly supposed to reflect his/her own image and identity. Then, disciplining at work may be achieved through the quest for narcissistic recognition of the "autonomous" self (Roberts, 2005, p. 636) identifying with managerial discourses or expectations, managerial calls to 'Be yourself!' (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011) and the pursuit of management recognition (Spicer & Cederström, 2010). Moreover the imaginary position may be identified when subjects dream the illusion of non-lacking through a promise of wholeness (Dashtipour, 2009).

2.2. THE "LIBERATED" SUBJECT ENSNARED OR SUBJECTIVIZED IN THE SYMBOLIC?

If in the mirror stage the imaginary position is raised, Lacan nevertheless introduces the presence of a third party that names the subject's image, allowing for his/her detachment from the fascinating image. This moment marks the entry of the subject in the second register, the Symbolic, and fosters the subject's identification with the structured organization of signifiers in a language. Thus, the Symbolic is the domain of language, including the unconscious locus where the subject's speech is constituted, which we refer to, following Lacan, as the big "Other". Thus, in studying how language is shaped, used and drawn upon by people in their worklife, organizational researchers identify core organizational signifiers, 'master signifiers',

such as 'performance' (Hoedemakers & Keegan, 2010) to identify the hold the organizational other has on its members (Naulleau, 2013). Therefore, organizational researchers have highlighted such hold in a twofold manner. On the one hand, psychoanalytically-inspirer works have allowed to show that the Symbolic gives individuals the opportunity to find their place as 'subject[s] of the organization' (Driver, 2006). But on the other hand, researchers have emphasized the alienating effects of an overwhelming symbolic order of the organization (Arnaud, 2002; Arnaud & Vanheule, 2013; Stavrakakis, 2008).

Besides, several authors describe the destabilizing effects of a weakening of Symbolic law in contemporary work contexts,, observable in the constant flexibility of employment positions (Owens, 2010) or the impossibility of locating any embodiment of the symbolic father in 'floating' managerial statements (Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015). Such weakening may lead to an overtaking of imaginary dimensions at the socio-organizational and subjective levels, which may plunge subjects into violent experiences of disarray or overwhelming guilt about organizational ideals (Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015), and block the elaboration of counter-discourses of resistance (Stavrakakis, 2008).

2.3. ENCOUNTERING THE REAL

In Lacan the Real, the third psychic register, "refers first and foremost to a fundamental impossibility: it is what is impossible to imagine, represent and integrate" (Arnaud & Vidaillet, 2017). Thus confronting the Real involves for subjects a confrontation with negativity, with lack, and an observation to the ways in which a discourse is built around such lack while observing the affective forces and libidinal investment that such discourses built around a lack may generate (i. e. the passionate attachment to entrepreneurship: Jones & Spicer, 2005; and leadership: Driver, 2013).

3. METHODS

3.1. A SINGLE, IN-DEPTH CASE STUDY

This research draws on a single case study (Yin, 2014) of the COOKIZ industrial group, including its headquarters and four of its industrial plants based in France. Nuancing Yin's positivist understanding of case study research, we have adopted an interpretative perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Schwandt, 1994) that takes into account the

perspectives of the people under observation, our own interpretive activity and the interaction between the research team and the field.

Our choice of COOKIZ as the focus of our study is motivated by the view that it is a critical case (Yin, 2014, p. 51) enabling us to revisit and extend the existing CMS body of work on pseudo-humanistic and post-bureaucratic managerial models. Our choice of this case is also partly opportunistic, since we gained wide access to this company in 2013, when the COOKIZ experimentation of 'liberation' had just started to attract media attention[2] and the company was still in the process of 'transforming' the organization of its industrial plants. The case therefore had, in our view, a number of important qualities that sparked our interest: it was contemporaneous and on-going; presented as 'exemplary' by stakeholders and gurus; and the company welcomed research teams on its premises, in meetings and in informal gatherings, allowing access for significant periods of time and encounters with a large number of diverse players. Furthermore, our choices of a single case study and an interpretative approach are congruent with our psychoanalytic lens, given the well-established tradition of using clinical cases both in Freud's classic seminal studies (e.g. Little Hans, Wolf Man, Rat Man) and in psychoanalytic organizational research (see, for instance, Arnaud, 2002; Gabriel, 2012; Vidaillet, 2007).

3.2. CASE DESCRIPTION

The study was carried out at COOKIZ, a leading French food company, which at the time of our study comprised five industrial plants in France, employing about 750 people, including a large majority of specialized workers (bakers, oven operators, etc.), as well as mechanical technicians, engineers, administrative assistants and managing executives. Between 2000 and 2013, the company underwent some major changes, going from a single-plant, family-owned, local business, to a multiple-plant industrial group after it was sold to an investment fund in 2000, which then proceeded to acquire competitors in two major buyouts in 2006 (the Kingsea plant) and 2009 (the Rivertown plant). Following decreasing results, the original plant in Sunnyville was downsized in 2002. This decision sparked violent confrontations between the local unions and the newly appointed CEO. Thus, when faced with decreasing performance again in 2006, the CEO decided to try out a more "liberated" approach, promoted by consultants inspired by the writing of Tom Peters, and more recently, of Isaac Getz on "liberation management" (interview with the CEO, 2013). The Sunnyville plant

therefore underwent an organizational change in which line workers moved from permanent direct supervision to self-organization. Deemed a success (shown in improving financial results), the transformation of the Sunnyville plant into a "liberated factory", composed of autonomous production units and operated as a quasi-"manager less" system, was proudly advertised in the press and TV interviews as part of the "liberated companies" movement (Meissonnier, 2014). The same organizational model was later implemented at the other plants from 2009 on, first at the Kingsea plant and, a year later, at the Rivertown plant, and COOKIZ boasted its changeover into a "liberated company", adapting as well core processes such as recruitment and innovation to favour collaborative and participative decision-making methods.

3.3. DATA COLLECTION

After attending a public conference in which the then head of innovation at COOKIZ presented the experience of the Sunnyville plant, one of us arranged an exploratory visit to the headquarters and the Sunnyville plant in July 2013, meeting with a first group of self-identified stakeholders in the project, at management and shopfloor levels. Three more visits, of about one week at each time, were organized at the Rivertown, Kingsea and Sunnyville plants, allowing for variation in plant size and local experience of the changes.

Most of the data were thus collected from July 2013 to December 2013, during which the first author conducted a total of 72 in-depth interviews with line and technical workers, as well as top and middle management (about 20 at each of the three industrial sites and 12 at the headquarters, of an average duration of 1,5 hour).The interviews were loosely structured around a few themes such as the notion of 'transforming the organization', 'the concrete and practical effects of the changes', 'work relations and atmosphere' and 'perceptions and affective experiences of the new organization'. 'Naturally occurring' data (Silverman, 2007) were also collected via non-participant observation, local documentation, newspaper articles and documentary film extracts, and were analysed as part of the discursive productions by COOKIZ's players (see Table 1 for a summary of the data collection strategy).

------------ Insert Table 1 Data Collection about here ------------

3.4. INTERPRETIVE PROCESS

Returning from the field, both authors then worked as a community of researchers (Kvale, 1996), discussing each other's reading of the stories gathered. Our intention was to understand how the management's 'pseudo–humanist' managerial language was appropriated and reinforced by the workers' apparently strong adherence, but also to unearth the tensions it created. Our interpretive analysis followed an inductive process involving a lot of back-and-forth between data and theory (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Our ongoing interpretations were also shared informally with colleagues, as well as with some stakeholders in the field (during interviews, by email or over lunch breaks) (Kvale, 1996).

In addition, our decision to refer to Lacanian concepts had implications in terms of the way we conducted our interpretative analysis of the various discursive productions collected (Parker, 2005). Indeed, a Lacanian approach has implications for the way we approach text in research, perhaps in contrast with other kinds of discourse analysis in social sciences (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000), and perhaps especially with post-structuralists (e.g. Foucaudian) perspectives that aim to study how language shapes social reality, or how social life, but also the subjectivity of social beings, are "discursively constructed" (e.g. Clegg, 1989; Boje, Oswick & Ford, 2004), at the risk of failing to capture the materiality of such discourse, and its underlying structure (Arnaud & Vidaillet, 2017: 9-10).

Psychoanalysis calls for attention to text and language insofar as it refers to the immerged, unconscious "games of power and desire in the organization" (Enriquez, 1997), which structure the way people engage with changes, with affects, and with the life of the organization under study. What is more, a Lacanian approach considers that such unconscious "games" are far from illogical, and that their "rules", so to speak, can be interpreted by paying attention to the structure of language itself (the chains of signifiers, cf. Arnaud, 2002) – but also, importantly, to the Real elements of social reality, those which "resists symbolization absolutely". Trying to locate this impossibility, this "negativity [around which] 'the social' and 'the organization' are reproduced" (Arnaud & Vidaillet, 2017:11) is thus a primary task for researchers working with a Lacanian epistemology.

With this in mind, we firstly looked for any fixed points around which the (individual and shared) representations might be anchored – such as repeated signifiers whereby speakers attempt to fix the meaning of their experience (Parker, 2005, p. 169). Secondly, we looked for the "gaps and holes" in people's speech (Kenny, 2012) – with the aim to locate unspoken issues, taboo or "nonsensical" elements (Parker, 2005, p. 168) – i.e., the place from where

one's speech is "caused" (Lacan, 2006). This is linked to the notion that a key component of the lived experience of a subject (a worker, a manager, a leader) is structured by the experience of lack: therefore, unpacking such experiences to convey the truth of a phenomenon involves for the researcher to look for such gaps, within and across texts, rather than looking to provide a unified, unproblematic narrative of said phenomenon (Harding, 2007). Finally, we paid specific attention to the structure of the text (Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015), trying to highlight its formal qualities, especially to illuminate patterns and, more critically, disruptions within a text or between texts from our corpus.

As a result, we identified key tensions in our analysis, around two main dynamics. At a first level, we examine the language of the "liberation" promises and the claims of a change in "culture", and we unpack their effects on workers' active engagement in the new managerial regime. We unveil the rise of an ideal "autonomous worker" at the centre of imaginary processes of identification. At a second level, we pay attention to darker sides of the change, as we unpack the recurrence of a paranoid image of colleagues as "saboteurs", potential threats, which may in turn justify apparent breaches in the humanistic ideal (such as violence or self-blame), to protect the collective against failure or the loss of fulfilment. Below, we present the case narrative according to these two main analytical levels, presenting the analytical categories and structure in Table 2.

--------- Insert Table 2 about here --------

4. FINDINGS

4.1. THE PROMISES OF LIBERATION: A "TRANSFORMATIVE" CHANGE PROCESS

The managerial language at COOKIZ drew on two main signifying chains for the narrative of organizational change. On the one hand, on the idea of a change located at the level of "culture" and the aim of forging a "shared vision" (symbols, collective understandings); and on the other hand, on the notion of breaking from the past, and operating in a future-driven, "constantly innovative" workplace.

4.1.1. *A new "culture of liberation".* In 2006, COOKIZ had already undergone two decades of important evolutions, including changes in the means of production (such the systematic introduction of machines and the intensification of production rates), a major downsizing (at the Sunnyville plant in 2001) and external growth plans (buying out the Kingsea, and soon after, the Riverport plant). Yet, we noticed that when speaking of the choice to implement

"liberation management" at COOKIZ, many persons from the management repeatedly used language that expressed the changes that occurred in terms of "culture", which may evoke a depth and a lasting quality to distinguish this change process from former ones.

At a first level, the signifier "culture" is mobilized as a means to share objectives and push a "new culture of performance", which the following quote expresses:

> "*We have pushed forward <u>the performance</u> <u>culture</u>, saying that performance <u>for all of us</u> means continuous improvement, so whenever we can do better we do so, but it's up to <u>each of us</u> to objectify [quantify] this, meaning it's not necessarily short term at all costs. [...] But one sees, obviously, this means <u>very significant</u> [important] changes... basically, we're <u>breaking the system's spine</u>...!"* (Pablo, Deputy-CEO/VP of Finance)

Pablo's vivid metaphor (*breaking the spine of the [former] system*) expresses the novelty of this new culture where a multidimensional understanding of performance is shared by everyone, while it also evokes a more violent side (which we will come back to). Such "shared vision" of performance – a phrase used numerous times by the CEO, Martin Knox, in our interview and in public statements – is also conveyed in the numerous charts displayed in the shopfloor. The new "culture of performance" operates as a key signifier within the COOKIZ managerial language, which refers to expected behaviours of commitment to "continuous improvement". Moreover, members of COOKIZ management refer the expectation of a "shared" culture to the context of recent external growth and buyouts of competitors (both Kingsea and Riverport plants):

> "*So Martin [the CEO] set up, around 2006, some steering committees aimed to depict a vision, describe the corporate values, to make sure that these are common and shared [...], so as to create a new culture for a newly constituted company, and what I just told you about humility, pride, etc.*" (Phil, VP Marketing)

In Phil's quote, culture appears to be understood as a list of "values" which can be objectified, even by compiling contradictory terms ("*humility, pride, etc.*"). All employees thus should identify with the seemingly unified representation that the steering committees offer and control ("*make sure... are common and shared*"). Indeed, employees' adherence to the culture resonates in their day-to-day work life. For instance Catherine, a senior marketing executive who joined COOKIZ after working at one of the largest food manufacturers, emphazises the strength of the "COOKIZ culture":

> "*If you have further questions, don't hesitate because I don't... after, <u>when we are imbued with the COOKIZ culture</u>, we <u>don't know what we used to do</u> before but it may come back to me, differences let's say between traditional companies and how we do at COOKIZ.*"

Indeed, Catherine feels "imbued", as if soaked in values which almost erase, or make difficult to remember anything "different", anything lived "before" the introduction of changes.

4.1.2. *Future-driven and innovative: the new language of work and organization.* In fact, this idea of a strong contrast between "before", a dull or dark past, and an ideal experience of work in the "new COOKIZ" can be further unpacked. A common phrase used as an introduction for the consultative workshops on the new organization was to "imagine *the plant of tomorrow*". A similar phrase used by members of management is "*the COOKIZ of tomorrow*" – for instance uttered three times by the CEO, Martin in a lengthy tirade we reproduce below:

> "*We are, in a way, building the <u>COOKIZ of tomorrow</u>! [...] Always keeping in mind the <u>COOKIZ of tomorrow</u>, and I think that is for the good of the company [...] Thinking about the <u>COOKIZ of tomorrow</u> [...] the bet I make is that it's possible to do <u>totally otherwise</u> than the management rules in place for the past 150 years ... our goal is to do <u>totally otherwise</u> and do it together! [...] We were <u>totally</u> <u>shifting</u> paradigms and that's complicated... we are tipping over in <u>a new world</u>, in which they [middle managers] have a <u>totally other</u> role.*"

The quote captures how "liberation management" is narrated as a complete antithesis from the former hierarchical, bureaucratic organizational form, with Martin insisting on the "total" character of the changes. Such contrast between a grim past and a flourishing present and future is also very present in workers' utterances:

> "*Before, it used to be 'you sink or swim', I don't know... Now we are consulted, whereas before, no, we had to keep our head down, say nothing, don't leave your post... now we are invited, « come and participate with us!*" (Claire, Kingsea)

> *You came in, did what you were asked. [...] So much so that back then, we were kind of like, what I always say, we were like robots. (Cesar, Sunnyville)*

The former life in the factory is evoked as deprived of recognition ('you sink or swim', 'we were like robots'), as a state of direct oppression ('keep your head down'). Being invited to the participation groups is, by contrast, expressed as a dignifying moment, in which one's subjective speech – as living being – is valued.

What is more, renewing work identities by shaping "totally other role[s]", both for workers and for managers, opens the possibility to have one's skills or creativity recognized in ways not possible previously. New units and business outlets, including a partnership program with startups and an in-house business incubator, materialize this vision of a radically transformed future where people can find unprecedented fulfilment. For example, many members told us about the first project selected by the incubator: a food truck for selling locally-grown, organic vegetables, that is to say almost the exact opposite of the trucks loaded with sugary, oily biscuits that leave COOKIZ factories daily.

Such insistence on the temporality of the future is particularly central to the idealizing narrative of change at COOKIZ. The future of the "liberated" company is thus proposed as a universe that could be detached from the current (and historical) business, core activity and clients. Many workers quoted to us a striking comment by their CEO: "*Who knows? One day we may not even make biscuits anymore!*", which was reported by the press (a clipping of this article was displayed in one of the technicians' office at Sunnyville plant). It is as if everything was possible in the "COOKIZ of tomorrow", a new virgin territory to explore.

To summarize this section, the manufacturing of a new culture and the focus on future jointly suggest a surge of imaginary dynamics, with material effects on the language, interactions and daily work of COOKIZ employees.

4.2. THE RISE OF DEMOCRACY AND AUTONOMOUS WORKERS AS IDEAL IMAGE

Now we want to focus on how workers embark on the managerial vision (imaginary) through their own signifying chains. Indeed, workers are presented as the "main beneficiaries" (CEO) of the new model of management. Their adherence to the promises of "liberating" the workplace comes in sharp contrast to the tense relationship that prevailed between management and workers' representatives in earlier reorganizations, such as the one of 2001 at Sunnyville that culminated with the "boss-napping" of the CEO. Two recurrent signifying chains seem to help entrench the perception of a "win-win" change from which workers can equally benefit. First, the primacy given to workers' voices and autonomy; and second, the recognition and narcissistic benefits that one can draw from taking on the role of the "liberated worker".

4.2.1. *Workers' voice.* With the Forum (the day-long consultative assembly), COOKIZ management opted for a participative method to formalize its new organizational structure. In turn, the new structure relies importantly on participative practices, thus involving a learning process that associated "a shift in the culture of production" and doing away with the "constraining" hierarchy (interviews).

At the collective level, the "democratized" and "flattened" structure (CEO) is thus framed in the recurrent terms of "coming from people" ("people" referring to lay workers and employees). Carole, a line worker who volunteered to be part of the steering committee for this first participative experience in COOKIZ, recalls how it was experience as "coming from people" within the workers' collective:

[…] we absolutely, absolutely, wanted the new ideas and new ways of doing things to come, come from people. We didn't want to impose anything on them; we wanted everyone, each and every one of us equally, to try to work like each person wished to work. We didn't want to give a blueprint. It had to come from the shop floor, this new way of doing things. (Carole)

Carole uses repetitive forms to evoke the collective body of participants: "everyone, each and every one of us", referring to an image of completeness. The group is made up of "equal[s]" with no hierarchical or apparent power differences. What is more, the new organization of work "had to come from the shop floor… depending on people's wishes". We uncover here a seductive promise: they will now make the rules themselves, with no intermediary: "coming from" their wishes.

Following this "bottom up" reorganization, many participatory groups were actually, materially created at different levels and to various ends: weekly 'team' meetings for each 'autonomous production unit', product innovation groups, and collective management groups (on recruitment, investment, and on the 'culture and values to maintain'). Moreover, most workers confirmed the transformations that stemmed out of such enlarged freedom to speak, to act and to make the rules, by referring to the impact of their participation in committees:

"It all started with the plenary meetings, to see how to do to fix the work conditions, improve the [selection of] raw material, machines, or a given dispositive, so that it becomes easier back at our work station." (Brian)

Indeed, participation is valued because it contributes to the performance, insofar as participatory meetings have an instrumental dimension, which we can decipher in the recurrence of operative signifiers: 'raw material', 'machine', 'dispositive', and the finalities focused on work conditions.

To summarize, the opening-up of decision-making to all, starting with the process of co-constructing the new organizational structure and continuing with participation to the innovation groups for instance, thus supports an early investment in the ideal of a 'liberated' future perfect.

4.2.2. *Incarnating the 'liberated worker' and fixing ideological meanings*. At the same time, such opening to workers voice also had the radical consequence that the positions of supervisors and foremen were eliminated from each assembly line, and workers could volunteer to take up the new duties of 'coordination', 'support' and 'technical expertise'. What are the implications of such changes at the individual level of workers?

We can highlight a double characteristic of participation in the new COOKIZ: freedom to speak up and act goes together with "responsibility" and "opportunities" two signifiers

often associated in interviewees' speech (Pablo, Phil), as well as in corporate posters displayed in the plant (such as the "SPAC" poster symbolizing the "continuous improvement system" in the drawing of a house, summarizing COOKIZ key values). Yves, a line worker who works in the Sunnyville factory, speaks of the benefits of autonomy:

> *"Well, it's nice because autonomy, it's a way to make one accountable there are certain persons who were not used to such a system, it allows them to speak up too, I think."*

Here, "speaking up" and "autonomy" are closely intertwined with expectations to "make one accountable". Indeed, the "accountability" signifier is found in a number of other interviews (Cesar, Ivan), which leads us to interpret this recurrence as an impact of the managerial language on assembly-line workers. Such adherence echoes the previous quote from Catherine who felt "imbued" with the culture. It occurs in language, as an appropriation of vocabulary, which supports affirmations of the consensual nature of changes, but also has deeper effects on workers' identification processes.

Even more so, we observe several first-person accounts of "opportunities", which are presented as resonating with long-standing aspirations of individuals. Indeed, accounts such as that of Bill highlight such effects, framed in terms of personal benefits by the worker:

> *"I think that in terms of identity, I can relate to it more and I thrive more, with the working style that we have now. I find that before it was a bit constrained, each unit to its own, now I find that fences are more opened-up, for me that a lot more interesting. [...] so for sure we have an opinion on [new projects] and from the beginning I thought it was interesting to get involved in the Kendo project, and I had the opportunity after a few trials to get into this unit, so..."*

What is more, many workers who take part in "opportunities" such as the participatory circles focused on innovation, known as the "product families" share their excitement to be part of something special that is outside ordinary day-to-day work. Carla, who takes pride in being active in many of those circles, contrasts it with other colleagues' more withdrawn positions:

> *Personally, I'm ambitious. I always strive to advance. It's not always well looked upon by everyone here. Yes, I get criticized, but it's always by people who aren't as committed. Every worker really is autonomous; you have to give it 100%, show that you love your work. (Carla)*

These expressions of enthusiasm, of enjoyment support the investment of workers in the "new COOKIZ", as exciting projects help sustain the interest of work. But such enjoyment also comes with a dimension of competition, as Carla's quote conveys, as it creates a distinction between employees who find that they "benefit" from their identification to the ideal of the self-managed worker, from others who might not be "as committed" (Carla).

We have thus unveiled the effects of the participatory system at COOKIZ, especially insofar as it reshapes the repertoire of imaginary identifications, with the rise of the ideal

figure of the "liberated" worker through recurrent signifiers such as "responsibility" and "opportunity". But we have also started to unpack darker sides, as we have evoked the elimination of chiefs and a distinction between highly committed and less committed workers. What does this distinction create, within the collective and for individual subjects?

4.3. THE 'SLACKING COLLEAGUE' AS FREELOADER AND SABOTEUR

Contrasting with the ideal vision of the "liberated" COOKIZ, descriptions of day-to-day life on the assembly line seem to cast a shadow on the ideal narrative: words indicating tensions, disappointment and lack of engagement are uttered both by line workers and management. However, the 'transformation' that took place remains proudly promoted to external audiences as well as to all COOKIZ plants. How does the (illusion of) wholeness in the 'liberated company' appears despite such ambiguities? In fact, many workers and supervisors express their disappointment with their peers: they report a decrease in quality and in the attention given to the accomplishment of tasks due to anonymous others we call the "slacking others". These remarks focus in particular on the link between the perceived deterioration and the 'objective' consequences for the 'business', for the profitability of operations:

> *All I can say, personally, is that we never, ever used to send bad biscuits out as pet food. And today it's three trucks a week that are downgraded and go out as pet food [...] and no one gives a damn, because, that's the way it is nowadays: no one gives a damn!* (SW61)

What the interview highlights, is the imaginary presence of a bothersome person who is annoying and who jeopardizes the survival of the business, and hence, the survival of the safe "happy" organization. This character is the colleague who cannot be held accountable since s/he doesn't 'give a damn' (SW61) and, as such, goes against the collective endeavour. S/he appears to be a destabilizing threat to the survival of the organization and, especially, to the 'liberated' organization, through her/his insufficient commitment.

The presence of slackers, of disengaged workers, is an obstacle to the very existence of the 'people-focused' organization, which depends on the continued performance of the COOKIZ group, particularly in terms of monetary 'benefits' and client satisfaction. Yet, the risk of having disengaged employees, who are "not as committed" as those who adhere to the ideal of "liberation" (cf. Carla), is also increased by the enlarged autonomy that is granted in the new managerial system. A paradox that is captured in the following quote:

> *"We have been taught so much that there were no more chiefs, no more this, no more that... that there are some who, who've taken it a bit too literally. To them, no more chief means they do what they want... So then that's a kind of abusive, a small abuse here, a small one there, no*

big deal, sure but it's the same persons who are all the time, who are repeating the same kind of abuse, bothering colleagues, people around them get a bit fed up…" (Ivan)

Autonomy is revealed as both a "good" thing, an aspirational ideal; and as a threat, because everyone is offered the same freedom while some may use it in an "abusive" way, actually "doing what they want". This becomes a constant source of worry and disarray for workers such as Joseph:

> *"This, this bothers me a lot. We've changed perspective. […] Some people just won't come over if there's a problem on another machine. They're not interested; they don't feel like it."*

This is also echoed by Michel, an experienced coordinator who work on another assembly line: *"When we have people scattered around the lines, but don't do production work that's not OK."*

Let us note, in this quote as in the previous one, how references to troublesome colleagues are refereed with general designations, plural pronouns: "they", "some people". "They" are a present, but seemingly fleeting, impossible to address directly. Such distrust impacts the daily interactions. Other line workers report problems in sharing daily tasks within the autonomous production units, especially when it comes to the more unpleasant or routine aspects of work:

> *"I know that some people choose the stations where they want to work, or the teams they want to work with. […] This, these are people who take advantage of autonomy, but not necessarily in the right way, actually..*" (Camille)

Again, this slacking colleague is never named, but referred to in generic terms ('no one'), which suggests that we are here dealing with an imaginary object. Specifically, we can identify in the 'slacking colleague' and irresponsible worker a central obstacle in the liberation imaginary. To summarize this part, we illuminate here the ambivalent consequences of a working life without hierarchy, 'liberated' from constraining rules, which give way to suspicion and anxiety among workers

4.4. 'ELIMINATING' THE BOSSES: PURIFYING IN SEARCH OF (ILLUSORY) HARMONY

We now further our exploration of such ambivalent dynamics, in exploring in this final section the consequences of the suppression of hierarchical / supervisors' positions.

4.4.1. *"Getting rid" of supervisors*

In order to create new functions to split the supervisors' tasks among workers, the reorganization 'eliminated' the former supervisors' positions. However, this 'elimination' occurred in a covert manner, as none of the original 27 supervisors was fired. In coherence with the ideal of autonomy, these former supervisors were 'free' either to return to a 'mere worker' position or to apply to a recruiting committee for one of a dozen leadership jobs

created. This alternative nonetheless seemed ambiguous, as our interviews revealed that the treatment of former supervisors was felt by many – including workers – to be brutal and sudden, yet silent.

Some highly evocative metaphors were repeatedly encountered in the interviews: the supervisors 'disappeared'; they were 'eliminated':

> *'Well, it [the liberation] started when they eliminated the supervisors. When it really, really was being implemented, that is when, after that, the supervisors started disappearing' (Tobias)*
> *'Overnight, they eliminated the supervisors. With them, know-how acquired through time and an overall sense of the line were gone' (Raymond).*

As highlighted in the first quote, the 'disappearance' of supervisors is linked to the signifier 'liberation' and to the proclamation of the new order by a remote and disincarnated top management ('they'). There is the sense of a deadly annihilation that specifically targets the 'supervisors' (referring to line management positions only). Based on different interviews, at least 18 supervisors left Sunnyville between 2006 and 2013. These departures are described as 'of their own free will', not to work in the 'liberated' system, not to adapt to the anti-authoritarian roles of 'experts'. The following quote by the plant manager (now called 'plant facilitator') encapsulates such a narrative:

> *Few people expressed their interest in the expert positions in each unit. There were only a few openings. And it's true that the vast majority of the supervisors had trouble adjusting. [...] Anyway, we had many supervisors and some had to go. So people could leave in a natural way, and as long as they chose to leave happily, all the better. The organization was not meant to cause any redundancies. (Felix)*

Nevertheless, supervisors' attack is also recognized as *euphoric*:

> *In the beginning, [the feeling was] euphoria, like 'great, we won't have supervisors anymore; it will work: we'll be in charge'. So the idea was to show we could make it without a supervisor. That was motivation for people, a small pleasure: we'll have it our way. (Augustin)*

4.4.2. "Responsibilities aren't meant for me"

Some workers, over the years, come to exclude themselves from the ideal of 'full' liberation. As a result of supervisor's suppression, in some teams, self-organization is restricted to a minimum, and workers find it difficult to take part in meetings dedicated to solving work issues. In such teams, feelings of isolation and uncertainty about the work organization are growing. Working without being able to talk about what is going on in the process affects workers and threatens their ability to produce good work:

Well, there are the line meetings, but it's kind of in standby mode now because there are big ongoing projects that are quite time-consuming. What annoys me the most, though, is those people who do their own thing on the side and don't tell me about it. (Michel)

As a consequence, some workers, have begun to express painful feelings that they never 'do enough', thus choosing to exclude themselves from the ideal of 'full' liberation. For example, Joseph explains that even though he is one of the most experienced workers in the factory, he has given up the 'opportunity' of being promoted to facilitator after a few weeks in the job:

"But I realized I'm at an age now where I should recognize that responsibilities aren't meant for me. [...] That's also why, even though I was asked to be part of a [recruitment] panel, I haven't accepted yet. I just don't... feel comfortable, or capable. In the end, it's the issue of responsibility: being responsible for such a decision bothers me."

In Joseph's account, there are repetitions of the signifier 'responsibility' which loses it liberating side and appears as a heavy burden.

5. INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

First, what our case study shows is that the change process is conveyed through several recurrent central signifiers in managerial language: "breaking from the past", "culture change", "shared enlarged vision" of performance in a future-driven, and "constantly innovative" workplace. All this conveys the CEO notion of entering in a new world, of making present the Cookiz of the future. Furthermore, this contrast with the past is also present in worker's utterances. Those workers indicate how, through some participatory groups, their subjective voice is now valued, as news ideas and new ways of working "come from people". This new democratic culture conveys positive values such as: equality among all employees, freedom to speak, in spite of old hierarchical power differences. It supports and requires their "responsible" investment not only to achieve increased performance, but to actually *enjoy* catching "opportunities" and making present the "liberated company", the "people focused organization", the imaginary ideal and flourishing future for Cookiz.

Along this shining, **beatific**, side of the coin appears a darker side, in which we uncover competition. Even more so, we shed light on the floating signifier of the "slacking colleague", saboteur, and irresponsible threat to the collective happiness. This slacking colleague not only blocks the culture of enlarged performance but also becomes an obstacle for implementing the imaginary ideal and flourishing future of Cookiz. Although managerial discourses and workers discourses insist on the beatific achievements of the liberated company, our research uncovers in the slacking colleague a darker, **horrific** side of the

imaginary ideal "liberated company" which is generally silenced. Besides, we would like to underline that "liberation" occurred through the euphemized process of eliminating, "killing" the line supervisors with a silenced feeling of euphoria, enjoyment or small pleasure. In that occurred a **transgression** of the promoted ideal of democracy and participation where all could find their place in the flourishing future. But ultimately is not this "original sin" of the "liberated company" affecting workers' morale, as they, for many reasons, may feel guilty of not achieving the ego-ideal of the responsible-committed-opportunities-catching-worker?

We interpret these findings through two key notions, developed in organizations studies by Lacanian inspired authors. To overcome the dichotomy of popular mainstream literature versus critical management studies, we turn to Žižek's concept of fantasy (1989, 1997) after Lacan, to enrich current organizational discussions of fantasy at work which draw on the Žižekian notion (Bloom & Cederström, 2009; Glynos, 2001, 2008; Stavrakakis, 2008). We then link the consequences of the intensified fantasy dynamics to a weakening of symbolic authority in the post-bureaucratic organization, engaging as well with critical psychoanalytic studies of management (Costas & Taheri, 2012; Vidaillet & Gamot 2015)

5.1. FANTASY AT WORK AND THE WORK OF FANTASY

On the one hand, we connect the changes in managerial language and in workers' attitude towards those changes to an ideological fantasy structure, especially to highlight how the management, through the Forum, encourages employees to co-construct the new discourses and, in that sense, contribute to the fantasy they are invested in, as they soon adopt the promoted ideal. Our interpretation delves deeper into the imaginary psychodynamics of fantasy, which integrates ambivalence and exclusion, in its beatific and horrific sides and in its secret transgression. Indeed, our study illuminates how beatific (Ideal) and horrific (obstacle) narratives are incorporated into the day-to-day, beyond the initial change.

The interlocking of the fantasy narrative with participatory initiatives such as the Forum and co-construction processes, as well as innovation groups, actually contributes to "fixing" the meanings of the future organization, as workers make the managerially-promoted language their own. Hence, employees' investment in the fantasy contributes to a consensus that seems to repress power imbalances. This aspect allows us to revisit the argument of Voluntary Servitude (La Boétie, 1975) by showing how workers, from the early days of the 'liberation', actually build the foundations of their over-investment in the fantasy.

Nevertheless, we also highlight apparent "benefits" of workers' enjoyment and increased identification with the ideal of the "liberated worker". This may explain how some employees may find positive experiences in "liberation management", as it helps repress the anxiety of economic precariousness and dehumanizing work in their former organization.

5.2. VIOLENCE AT THE HEART OF THE IDEAL OF LIBERATION

In addition, our findings on the horrific side of fantasy help us to discuss the (theoretical) account of "empty transgression" (Bloom & Cederström, 2009), which "encourag[es] the employee to promote a radical edge" while remaining in line with corporate goals. Firstly, we have uncovered the transgressive function of attack on the supervisors (scapegoats for the negative fantasy of the older organization). Moreoever, we have identified, in the slacking colleague and the imperative of accountability, a horrific side of the fantasy that goes beyond and deeper than the negative image of the "older organization that seeks to 'regulate' and 'control'" (2009, p. 171). In the post-bureaucratic fantasy, the obstacles or threats to the ideal of autonomy are located in daily work life as the supervisors, and then the slacking colleagues. As a consequence, a form of day-to-day control is integrated into the work routine, not without implications for workers' feelings for one another.

As we have underlined, suspicion and panoptic control supersede the role previously held by supervisors on the assembly line, and trigger processes of exclusion and isolation, notably for some of the workers who feel that they "never do enough", because investment in the fantasy appears to be a condition for closer cooperation, inclusion and recognition. This situation shows the persistence of hidden transgression (the 'dirty little secret'), as emphasized by Žižek. We have thus developed an interpretation of the dark side – what Žižek would call the "obscene underbelly" (2009) – in the people-centric ideology of "liberating management". Our study, therefore, may also contribute to our understanding of the "violence" (Žižek, 2009) at play in post-bureaucratic organizing, and as an aspect inherent to organizational life even in – or perhaps especially in – so-called "positive management" models (Vince & Mazen, 2014).

5.3. RELATING AMBIVALENT CONSEQUENCES OF LIBERATION TO THE WEAKENING OF SYMBOLIC AUTHORITY

On the other hand, we highlight the return of a persecuting super-ego, linked to the weakening of the symbolic authority in the "flat", post-bureaucratic structure (Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015). We have shown in the COOKIZ case that, by affirming that supervisors have been removed, the company's top management prevents any possible embodiment (or 'representation') of symbolic authority (Arnaud, 2002, p. 700). This is evident in the affirmation that no one can exercise authority or hierarchical power any more, and everyone is now autonomous *and* accountable. Paradoxically, following the weakening of symbolic structure, the influence of the superego and its injunction to 'enjoy' (*jouir*) has been released upon subjects (Vidaillet & Gamot, 2015; Žižek, 2009), which explains not only the requirement that workers experience intense enjoyment in catching enlarged opportunities, but also the occurrence of guilt and anxiety among workers (who doubt that they "ever do enough"), as we have underlined.

As a result, the ideal of autonomy (at the heart of the so-called 'liberation') rises to replace symbolic authority by an injunction to enjoy, typical of the superego's reign. This shift is also underlined in Vidaillet and Gamot's study (2015). Our research complements theirs by offering a distinct empirical example of such a post-bureaucratic contemporary case.

CONCLUSION

Observing psychodynamics at play among workers in the so-called "liberated" factory, allows us to overcome the binary debate around post-bureaucratic organization, by showing tensions around, on the one hand, the effects in terms of well-being and anxiety; and on the other hand, the ambivalence of participation and autonomy in the absence of authority.

In sum, our study points to the fantasy of liberation as an effective way to contain anxiety about external pressures, competition, shareholders' demands and the "bottom line", which may in part explain the attractiveness of these new managerial regimes, not only for managers but also for employees who do draw some enjoyment from it, nuancing the critical "oppression" argument. However, as we have underlined the intensification of imaginary dynamics and the features of the ideological fantasy at work in the COOKIZ factory, we illuminate how post-bureaucratic promises may backfire to hamper emancipative possibilities, and in fact lead to a return of anxiety at the individual level.

More emancipatory resources, however, may be found in the opening of participatory spaces and the materialization of voice for workers. Nevertheless, in the current state of "liberation management" practices, the egalitarian and anti-authoritarian understanding of "democracy"

lead to confusion and competition, due to the weakening of the symbolic order (after the suppression of chiefs, and without mediating roles). This study therefore offers a fresh starting point to re-open debates on the future of post-bureaucratic and alternative organizations.

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Table 1. Data sources

SOURCE	TYPE OF DATA	USE IN THE ANALYSIS

Interviews (Total: 72)	1) Exploratory interview, in April 2013, with the Head of Innovation Followed by 2) Four rounds of interviews on site - July 2013: three days, at the Headquarters (interviews with …) and Sunnyville (…) - September 2013: four days at the Kingsea plant (with…) - November 2013: three day at the Riverport plant (with - December 2013: four days at the Headquarters (interviews with…) and Sunnvyille plant (with…) 3) Complementary interviews with: - CEO in February 2014 - Plant manager in March 2014	Confirm the interest of the case and begin identifying the main features of the new managerial regime: key practices, language, objectives given. • Refine our understanding of the case by comparing middle management, workers, engineers and admins perspectives and language. • Focus on the lived experiences of people, and the affective, emotional dynamics expressed. • Reframe our research question by zooming in on the "dark sides" that surfaced in these sessions: suffering, unease, disarray. Tease out the tensions between the language of transformation promoted by the new regime, and the difficult, painful experiences gathered on the shopfloor.
Observations	Observations conducted during the days spent on site to do interviews: - Tours of the production plants - Sharing lunches/dinners and breaks with participants	Get a sense of the day-to-day conditions of autonomous work, of participatory meetings: noise, distance, means of communication. Understand the degree of adoption of the managerial language of transformation by lay workers and employees.
External archival data	- Specialized press articles and TV documentaries on "liberated companies" featuring the CEO, some executives, some workers and the plant manager of the "Sunnyville" plant	Triangulate facts and observations made from internal data (interviews and observations) Contextualize the meaning of the case by noting the recurrence of certain dimensions…

Table 2. Data analysis structure

• Claims of "**culture**" change: the return of managerial newspeak (novlangue) • **Future**-driven innovation: breaking from the past	Emphasizing the "transformation" and the changes	The promises of liberation: the [beatific] ideal of autonomy for workers
• **Voice and autonomy**: workers put in first place • **Incarnating** a new ideal • Striving to be **the best**	Enrolling workers: a win-win endeavour	

• **Blaming** (unnamed) "others" • Disengagement as **taking advantage**	The slacking colleague as saboteur	Insiders' threats: the [horrific] menace of failure
• Suppressing the "chiefs": **violence and envjoyment** • Feeling of **inadequacy**, self blame	Transgressing the ideal: attacking and excluding	