

**“Three Cases of Identity (re)Construction Through Art Interventions:
the Redistribution of the ‘Sensible’.”**

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Warning: What follows is a classical paper format, while our presentation will use a more creative setting, and let the audience experience a participative and artistic performance where to discuss the proposed hypothesis.

Introduction and main argument

• *The ongoing, dialogic process of identity construction* — Identity construction cannot be reduced to discourses nor to individual responsibility. The latter has been criticized as a mean to exert pressure on employees (Boltanski & Chiapello 1999), installing ‘cages of subjectivities’ (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004) and making work identity uneasy to secure because of the difficulty to demonstrate competences and performance (Alvesson, 2001). The importance of class identity, social positions or functions in the labor process is complemented with experience factors, among them narratives and conversations (Watson, 2009; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001). Identity construction (IC) is now seen as a set of

fundamentally interactive processes (Beech, 2008). Alvesson & Wilmott (2002) suggest two main processes: identity regulation (IR, the discursive practices of identity definition) and identity work (IW, the interpretive activities involved in reproduction of self-identity). In other words, identity regulation is « an ongoing process in which the individual negotiates the ‘Who am I?’ question amidst social ‘This is who we are’ messages » (Kreiner & al., 2006). IR can be either a deliberate, strategic action or a kind of indirect, non voluntary effect (“a by-product”) of more or less visible activities, day-to-day interactions or arrangements (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). It is sourced in managerial practices, in cultural/communitarian groundings and in the multiple heterogeneous discourses in the organization. It exerts a form of control on identities and the ‘insides’ of people. Individuals can more or less actively react to IR discourses or actions, enact them, receive them, (re-)interpret them or even resist them. This reaction process is enacted in the notion of IW. Snow and Anderson (1987) first contributed to define IW as the “range of activities that individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept”. Thus, antagonist forces or ideals drive IC (Wieland 2010; Clarke & al. 2009), and IC is better understood by considering it as a dialogic process between IR and IW (Beech 2008), aimed at giving meaning to doubleness and multiple identities (Learmont & Humphreys, 2012). More precisely, Beech (2008) argues that the dialogic process is made of 1. a series of stimuli (either utterances of others or contextual discourses), which lead to 2. a range of possible responses (from mere acceptance or assimilation to disagreement or conflict, with intermediate positions) and finally have 3. an impact on IC (reinforcement, refinement, reflexivity/significant refinement or rejection).

Based on this dialogic conception of IC, we wonder whether artistic interventions could play a significant role in the IC process, especially through its ability to address the sensible, emotional, dialogical and affective dimensions. In other words, our paper intends to better understand the role of the mutuality of emotions (Simpson & Marshall, 2010), of experience and the embodiment of sensemaking (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012) and, more generally of the dimension of the “sensible”, in the dialogic process of identity construction. In this perspective, we will focus on cases where art interventions take place in working situations at some crucial moments of IC.

- *Art and the dimension of ‘the sensible’* — It is recognized that art empowers affects and allows the uncovering of subtle, invisible and transient signals that are nevertheless critical (Abrir, 2012; Berthoin-Antal et al., 2011; Strati, 2000). It increases awareness of what moves and prompts us into action (Carr and Hancock 2003). Art also addresses the dimension of ‘the

sensible'. Beyond the affective turn that enables to re-humanize organizations, 'the sensible' characterizes the materiality of daily life in organizations. Beyond the sensorial perceptions taken as such, it refers to the experience of subjects within organizations. From a phenomenological and critical standpoint, it is knowledge (Strati, 2007; Carr and Hancock, 2003), explored since the end of the 1990s. Exploring the dimension of the sensible allows to better grasp how collective understanding of organizations and their transformations hinge on subjectivity (Begon Saint-Genis & Mairesse, 2012). The dimension of the sensible is characterized by its subjectification power and by its value sharing (the role of emotions and affects, the construction of subjectivity). In addition, it can also reconfigure knowledge and capacity for action, representing the political dimension of the "distribution of the sensible" visible in the distribution of participation in collective action (Rancière, 2001). From this perspective, the notion of affect is taken in the active sense of "to affect" or "to be affected", referring to the ability for a body to take action and engage in a relationship (Clough & Halley, 2007).

Our argument is that art, by moving, prompting into action, and changing the ability of bodies to express themselves, enacts – in ways we strive at investigating – a collective and dialogic process between IR and IW.

Empirical research

• *Context and methodological approach* — The empirical part of our paper will draw on three case studies where artistic interventions in an organizational setting had an effect on IC by affecting the ability to take part in collective processes. The two first cases come from a 2012 research project "Arts and Restructuring¹", which was conceived of as an innovative methodology for art-based research, leading to a new kind of knowledge about restructuring². A rich material emerged from this research, among which we selected two different art interventions: one with photography takes place during strike against the closure of a plant (CHAFFOTEAUX), the other uses theater to rebuild identities after job-loss (501 BLUES). In order to broaden the scope of this study, we added a complementary case (CREAFIBRES) where collaborative visual arts and performance aim at re-inserting unemployed women on the job market. In order to document these cases, we performed a series of interviews with the main protagonists, combined with documentary analysis and ethnographic observations. We

¹ Led by the laboratory GREGOR (IAE Paris), together with LENTIC (Liege, Belgium) and WLRI (London). The project was funded by the European Commission.

² ABRIR, « An Art-Based, Collective and Dialogic Ethnographic method – Unveiling corporate restructuring practices », Egos 2012, sub-theme 22.

will first describe in detail in each case how the artistic intervention was conducted and what were the effects on IC. We will then discuss the general outputs one can draw from the cases. The three cases cover a range of critical situations where professional and personal identities need help, and where identity is not only a personal matter but also a collective concern (Table 1).

Case	CHAFFOTEAUX	501 BLUES	CREAFIBRES
<i>Context</i>	Work conflict	Job Loss	Job Entering
<i>Initial identity situation</i>	Identity in danger	Identity disruption	Identity construction
<i>Art intervention</i>	Photography	Theater	Collaborative Arts
<i>Degree of workers' collaboration in the artwork</i>	passive	contributor	author

Table 1: Three cases of artistic interventions

- *Case one “CHAFFOTEAUX”*: *Photography during a downsizing process* — A photographer witnessed a social conflict between workers and their employers. He printed his photographs, displayed them in the hall of the trade unions, posted the pictures to a blog, and also printed out some postcards that were sent across Europe. The pictures provide a non-conventional view of a social conflict, unveiling quite delicate dimensions in a sense that they remain difficult to admit by outsider observers: the joy, cheerfulness, conviviality of a besides dramatic situation. What the workers on strike express in their own words is “they look beautiful” on the pictures. Feeling beautiful contribute to the construction of one’s identity, and corresponds to the pride of being a valuable person in the eye of others. Rather than their social identity as workers, unionists, strikers or even wives, husbands or parents, the employees appreciate to be portrayed as singular and “beautiful” persons: their damaged self-image is re-built through artwork. Besides, the photographic intervention plays a part in repairing the professional identity. By picturing the workplace with workers choosing the spots, machines or tools, a re-appropriation of the productive tool may be achieved and symbolically enacts the re-appropriation of workers’ professional identity.

- *Case two “501 BLUES “*: *a post-closure description of work and identities* — In 1999, the last French manufacturing Levi’s plant is closed and 541 employees are laid off, mainly women. A theater director, Bruno Lajara, offers to create a theater play with five of the ex-workers. The play « 501 Blues » is successfully performed for years, largely relayed by press coverage. It emphasizes the trauma felt by the workers following the plant closure announcement and exemplifies the ability of theater to account for identity disruption in its psychological dimensions (loss of meaning, loss of values,...) and its physical or material dimensions (a radical change in body rhythms). The play evokes the identity-related disruptions concerning all the laid-off workers. The first scene portrays Linda who fell sick

and engages in a monologue talk that can be summed up by the sentences « Nobody needs me anymore » and « No one tells me a thing anymore », as if what was at stake was not only the loss of pleasant moments, but also of the social and family usefulness. Identity is related to the attention of others, through talk rather than look, words rather than image. One of the ex-workers became afterward an actress for several years; the others found new jobs more easily than their colleagues. The story describes how those women give meaning to their workers' identity and how it is embedded in their personal body and characters. But the artistic process is also the story of how a new identity and personality is built for the five actresses.

- *Case three "CREAFIBRES": repairing identity through work* — Creafibres is a socio-professional insertion workshop based on sewing activities. In recycling and customizing old clothes, doing repairing work or answering orders from local firms, the women not only learn a technical skill, but mainly acquire motivation for work, ability to cooperate, self-organize and be responsible. The intervening artist, after a long period of unemployment, has developed her artwork as a performance: she plays a text telling the story of her own quest for a job. Her demand is the following: "could you create for me a performing suit, with which to present myself, in the same way one present oneself for a job interview?" The women, together with the artist, created and realized a suit the artist wore on the annual defile. The creation process lasted for four months and was highly collaborative.

Cases analysis

Each case can be analyzed in terms of how art intervention takes part in the dialogic process linking IR and IW.

- *In the "Chaffoteaux" case*, re-narcissizing people was an important step towards a reconstruction or preservation of identities: the artistic work contributed to IW to rebuild workers' damaged self-image. The workers claimed having slowly been dispossessed from their professional skills and recognition. The former management practices are described in interviews as having stolen their production tool and killed their capacity to innovate. Through the pictures and their making-of, people could re-proclaim and assume their social identity and its meaning in the production process – assuming its ending when they pose in the emptied factory. By doing so, they reconnect the reality of the work (or of the end of work) with the abstract discourses and decisions. The effect of this art intervention can be understood as *a counter-regulation* against the destructive effects of IR processes (Alvesson & Wilmott 2002): managerial discursive practices, decisions about the working tools, the denial of their existence. Identity is a question of gaze (Howarth 2002). Here the artist played

a role in re-directing the gaze towards people lacking recognition, first privately, then publicly through media-coverage, where a three-step process occurs: first bringing in the “official” gaze of a professional viewer, second bracketing it behind the affective gaze of someone among others, third re-giving the “clichés” to the outside media (a blog, postcards, a calendar, all being widely displayed). It results in kind of an ‘externalized IW’ compensating IR effects.

- “*501 Blues*” is an example of how to reconstruct identities once they have been disrupted: in this situation, IW is facing an extremely damaging effect of IR. It reveals the destruction provoked by the abrupt plant closure. It also reveals how the controlling of the workers’ insides (Alvesson & Wilmott 2002) is total: all what made their activity meaningful and part of their identity is suddenly cut off. The art intervention is deliberately aimed at giving a voice to the loss of the workers’ identities and insists on showing that disruption is not only professional, but touches on all the other social, family, friendly and intimate spheres. This is the first effect of the play: it emphasizes the seriousness of the disruption in IC, provoked by an extreme (de)regulation. The second effect of the play is the transformation of identities. The fact that the actresses are the workers pictured in the play themselves introduces a possibility of identity reconstruction by a two-sided process: on the one hand, the rehearsal and the telling of the story helped them to recover; on the other hand, a reflexive loop occurs between the actresses, their character and their previous identity as workers. This distance / closeness to oneself is part of IW: it is a key for a successful performance, and a key for liberating oneself from the old identity and acquiring a new one (IC, identity re-construction). Last, the play is performed in public. Other workers or spectators are given a view on the double process (regulation and work) in a complex and sensitive way. We can infer from reactions of the audience (the five workers-actresses are their own first audience) that it gives them a grip on the whole dialogic process of IC. Art and its representational power give access to the dialogic process and consequently emphasize it.

- *In the third case, “Creafibres”*, IC results from three processes: the realization of the artwork (productive process: answering the demand), the art-making itself (creation process) and the interactions (dialogic process). The central role of the workers in conceiving and realizing the piece of cloth (the artwork) recognized their ability to create and to meet high quality standards, what secured their identity feeling. The process let them participate to the decision-making and the organizing, occasionally countering the manager or the artist’ ideas, what was a locus for identity reinforcement. Dialogue in this process was significantly reported as central, in the full sense of duo-logical relations allowing different motivations to co-exist and collaborate respectfully one of another. Identity here is a complex process of re-

assessing the ability to act and to produce according to one's own motivations, by openly and collectively balancing the organization motives and the persons' ones. In this case, thanks to collaborative art-making and involvement of the artist, producing a result according to the 'authority' assignments (regulation) is integrated by the workers who turn this outward flow into an inside work on themselves (with the help of the artist) and send it back to the outside (the authorities, the management, the client) (Beech, 2008).

Discussion and Conclusion

We will conclude by drawing on some hypotheses about the core favorable factors that art intervention brings into the dialogic process of IC, between IR and IW. In the three cases, the role of experience is crucial. Art experience is dual — producing and presenting—, which seems adequate to foster and to reveal the dialogic process of IC. By approaching, experiencing and practicing art-making the workers became aware of IC double process: controlling (regulation) and building (interpretive and making-sense). This experience is fundamentally realized through two 'agents'— the artist's person and the artifacts, and one action— the redistribution of the sensible.

- *The artifacts' role* — In the three cases, the artifacts play different roles. In case one, photographs literally represent the others' look, the person's idea of herself, and metaphorically the abstract discourses on work and identities. They fully participate to the IC process, almost as a person – the person(s) who, in that case, is(are) not caring. The image compensates the absent gaze onto the workers by exhibiting a respectful and public attention. The image and its immateriality could also be understood as connecting the abstraction of the 'prescribed' work and imposed (loss of) identity with the concrete reality of the real work and identity (Fraix, 2012), by creating a dialogic relation between people and image (Clot, 2001). In case two, theater enacts the deep rooting of identity into rhythm and history, and the part of words and talks in IC. The theatrical artifacts provide an artificial situation replacing the lost organization and the disruption it engendered, where a reflexive take occurs. In case three, collaborative art-making acts as an outside focus point for everybody, enabling symbolization about how individual identities are constructed through interactions and sharing; the artifacts also exemplify the relation to the management. The artifacts here functions as the outsider object, the Other, without whom identities collapse. We will thus suggest to consider artifacts as commodities for replacing the absent partner in IC, be it a person, a situation or the Other, whose presence allow the circulation between IR and IW to happen fruitfully.

• *The artist’s personality and involvement* — In each case, the artist enacts a double-sided personality. In case one, the photographer moderates his professionalism with his personal involvement, essential to the production of “good” images, that is, pictures where people feel respected and “look beautiful”. The “beauty” of the images overcoming the “beauty” of the people is nonetheless a risk, directly linked to the artist’ professionalism, intentions and career, that cannot be escaped. One could interpret the conflict that happened around the use of the money resulting from the sale of the images, as revealing the conflicting dimensions of the artwork and of the artist. In case two, the theater director is both a director and a coach, for these non-professional actors cannot just follow instructions: they crucially need support and help. Playing a directing role he is also a companion in the work of constructing the workers’ self-recognition. In case three the artist is client and collaborator, leader and listener, author and spectator. By so doing she questions and redefines the relation management-employees, fostering the permissive role of management besides its controlling one. The empirical studies show how this double-sided identity enabled dialogical relationships between management discourses (IR) and workers experience (IW). We suggest that it allows people to enact their own dialogic identity based on two ideal selves: the productive one and the well-being other (Wieland, 2010).

• *The dimension of the sensible* — The (re-)distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2001) in each of the case is activated through the art-making, the artifacts and the role of the artist, all together building a quality of experience allowing for a necessary reflexivity and a dialogic process building on both IR and IW. Our paper underlines how this redistribution is achieved by redirecting the gaze (case one), re-acting the sensible dimension of the situation (case two) and creating a different configuration of authority and executants (case three). Our concluding hypothesis suggests a graduated role of art enabling IC by “re-distributing the sensible” from countering IR dominancy to redefining the dialogue between IR and IW (Table 2).

Case	CHAFFOTEAUX	501 BLUES	CREAFIBRES
<i>Context</i>	Work conflict	Job Loss	Job Entering
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<i>Art intervention</i>	Photography	Theater	Collaborative Arts
<i>Degree of workers’ collaboration in the artwork</i>	Passive model	Contributor	Author
<i>Impact of art intervention on the IC process</i>	Countering IR	Re-activating IW	Re-defining the dialogue IR-IW

Table 2 : Artistic interventions and identity construction

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