

# No Zoo

Ethnic Civility and its Cultural Regulation  
Among the Staff of a Finnish High-Tech Company

HELSINGIN KAUPPAKORKEAKOULU  
HELSINKI SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS



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for

Ogechukwu Eneh

friend

colleague

compatriot



## Abstract

Workplaces in the present interconnected world face the challenge of increasingly multiethnic personnel. Managerial reactions to this situation have shifted from the anti-discrimination of the North American affirmative action campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s to *diversity management* initiatives promising profitability and a better fit to the economic megadiscourse prevailing so far.

However, the realisation of the promised gains in terms of both profit and equality remains ambiguous. Furthermore, critical organisational studies have pointed out problems with the outcomes of diversity campaigns, ranging from the essentialising of identities and masking control, to displacing the goal from equality to economic profit.

Although critical research has gained some visibility in recent years, it still remains scarce compared to the mainstream, and is often dismissed as a form of cynical complaint. Meanwhile, diversity campaigns have progressed from North America to all sites of globally linked production, and from the business to the public sector.

Ethnography as *cultural critique* offers an escape from such impasses by allowing a reconceptualisation of the issue. By contrasting alternative/dissident notions and practices to the understandings that presently prevail, the latter can be re-instituted in their artificial, non-self-evident status, and opened up to dialogue so that practitioners can better resist them, and have better chances to create their own approaches.

The study takes the form of a workplace *ethnography* in a Finnish organisation, where the members appeared to be remarkably content in their transnational environment and enjoy good relations with colleagues. Their notions of *ethnicity* were the first target of attention, to uncover why they treated each other with *civility* despite the fact that no diversity campaigns had taken place in their organisation. I conducted research among the full-heartedly *cosmopolitan*, but passionately anti-diversity-minded employees of a Finnish-based high-tech company in its Helsinki headquarters and the somewhat less easy-going employees in a sales office in San Jose (CA), through a period of boom and downturn of 1999-2004.

I found that the main alternative to diversity management was *organisational democracy*. An exceptionally participatory management style offered the employees avenues to defend their rights and develop a 'voice' in the organisation, rendering any specific diversity programmes mostly unnecessary. Yet there were issues to deal with. 'Normal' *pragmatism* and several uncritically upheld iconic ideas about Finnishness need to be reconsidered to avoid the possible marginalisation of non-Finnish staff. This probably also holds in other Finnish organisations. The cultural critique now produced suggests vocabulary and interpretations as material for such reconsideration.

Key words:

ethnography – ethnicity – cultural critique – diversity management – cosmopolitan – civility – organisational democracy – 'voice' – pragmatism

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Starting with doctoral studies on the subject of Organisation and Management in the (then) Helsinki School of Economics I was surprised by the supportiveness and non-defensive character of collegial encounters – a virtue not too common in the academic world. I have benefitted from insights, experience, support, criticism, shared interests and misunderstandings with that community. I gained from my supervisor Keijo Räsänen's unwavering support and wide scholarship. Janne Tienari and Susan Meriläinen helped with gender studies and Marja-Liisa Kakkuri-Knuuttila gave a clue to the philosophy of intersubjectivity. Risto Tainio helped me to publish a spin-off. Doctoral studies in the wider context of a business school opened an informative window into those practices and moral orders that are also influential among the people I studied in the field.

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## Introducing the puzzle

As you will know, amid the whirlpools of economic and ecological transformations, metamorphosing organisations and new forms of work and opportunity structure, people still earn their living, picking their paths this way and that in workplace realities that frequently include a *transnational social space*. Terrans of many origins have come to live next door to each other, or to occupy the neighbouring cubicle. Much has been said about the downfall of the modern era supposedly dragging universalism to its grave, and the rise of the post-modern, with its concomitant emphasis on distinct identities and private life-projects to construct such identities. I do not see so much a rupture in aspirations as a disappointment in the failure of promises made in the name of modernity – notably the progress and equality longed for by millions, but attained by few. In any case, and whether by aspiration or outcome, demographic attributes such as ethnicity, ‘race’ and gender have become more prominent as devices of identity construction in the past thirty years. The matter has also become increasingly contested and political.

This is also the case in a Northern country of five million inhabitants. Take your Google Earth and zoom in to the margins of the European Union, between Sweden and Russia, on the north-eastern shores of the Baltic Sea. There you have it: Finland. Globalisation has been seen here. Many factories have closed down or even shipped their machines to foreign parts, and other organisations have settled in, but with dealings directed more toward distant centres than to surrounding neighbourhoods. Immigration here means roughly two things: it is a promise of labour, to patch a bad hole in a dangerously ageing population. Yet it is also a feared sign of vulnerability in a landscape where local history complicates things. For two generations, that is, almost the entire history of the independent Finnish nation-state, the country remained virtually closed to immigration. A sudden reorientation of practices and attitudes is presently called for, to embrace the era of globalism in society and at work. Such a leap from a remote, provincial source of migration to a late modern immigration mosaic means a radical change. There’s no doubt that organisations need good counsel in facing this challenge. The main solution marketed so far is a business doctrine often called *diversity management* (DM).

Diversity management has been recommended by the European Union, several Finnish public authorities and campaigns, civil organisations, and a number of

consultants. The adherents proclaim that *equality* of genders and ‘races’, sexual orientations, degrees of ableness (and other such sociodemographic categories) is not important, only the improvement of organisational or business *profit* supposedly achieved through the implementation of diversity campaigns. *Diversity pays*. The argument is built on the present workforce, including many groups previously neglected or shunned, and on diversifying consumer markets where these same groups are present. Competitive advantage is sought through a more effective use of workforce and through better service to customers. This is a business imperative, not altruism or obedience to the law, proclaim the champions.

Despite all the sunshine images of win-win solutions, many Finnish employers seem to hesitate. They find this argument less than convincing, and perhaps also cannot quite identify themselves in the picture presenting an ideally diverse organisation. There seems to be a fairly high threshold for discussion of the sociodemographic qualities of employees. Quite often one hears the objection: *There are no men or women, or Finns or foreigners, or gays or straights in our workplace, only workers. We are all individuals*. I would ask you to consider this reaction. Are these employers (and employees, because you hear it from both) examples of provincial actors lagging behind their times, not yet absorbed in the new fashion of business world? Or are they covert racists, hiding their discriminatory tendency in a discourse of neutrality? Or ... what if they are right? Although all reasons may be overlapping, I have a case that has made me consider the last one, but not without a fair amount of wondering.

The present report is based on ethnographic fieldwork among the members of one organisation. My theoretical framework consists mostly of ideas presented in cultural and social anthropology, although I refer to many scholars in many fields. The choice of theory reflects my scholarly journey, which has been that of a disciplinary transmigrant, from psychology via cultural anthropology to organisational studies. As for the geographical transmigrant, there is no homecoming for me. I operate in the borderlands between disciplines, where one must often pay for eclectic freedom with the lack of institutional shelter and miscommunication one easily gets exposed to. However, for a study of the changing, unexpected combinations and fluid situations in late modern identity work, it may be a good position, who knows? In any case, I stick to the tradition in anthropology of bringing the framing theories in such close contact to the ideas emerging from fieldwork, as to be able to reflect critically back upon them within the research process itself.

Another basic orientation in my work refers to cultural anthropology: I study culture. Most of this enquiry deals with ethnicity (the ways in which people

build identity drawing borderlines between born-in-groups of *us* and *them*). A lot of it has to do with other forms of identity construction and power relations as well. My gaze, however, is not the gaze of a sociologist seeking yet another example of these eternal characteristics of human life. It is that of a cultural commentator drawing your attention to the particular semiotic resources enacted to make possible the particular moves in identity construction, ethnicising and the power struggle at hand. Such enactment is not a simple act. Not just anything fits easily with just anything else. Forms of culture also have their own history and connections that bring forth further forms, intentionally or unintentionally. The difference to my sociologist colleagues here is one of degree. Much of the studies of social divides nowadays treat the questions of culture and power as interwoven. I simply pay a little more attention to the semiotic side.

I do have the ultimate motivation (and personal history) of a social activist, interested in seeking new pathways towards a world where the human rights of all people are respected. That goal has not *directly* informed the turns taken in this research. This subject, if any, is such as to warn us all against hasty conclusions, even in the name of progressive goals and just ends. Still, science is not value-free, as you may see in my choice of topic, for instance. I do not see a contradiction in pursuing one's ultimate goals through an epistemologically sound enquiry, as long as there is a sufficiently open discussion about them. It seems that morals is a difficult topic for the people of our time. Nevertheless, I will try to be explicit about the moral goods I seek and the political level turns I take while seeking them. The first purpose of this study (one level down from human rights) is to complicate the advancement of a late modern cultural current, diversity management, at least in its most managerial-instrumentalist forms. I pursue this goal by showing that not even those people that are supposedly most tolerant and well seated in the wagon of the global economy follow the tenets of diversity management. There are dissidents in the workplaces of global high-tech industry. My aim is to show that other options remain besides either taking on the tight, ascribed identities offered by diversity managers, or else stooping to discrimination. If diversity management is not good enough for the transnational middle-class, why should others comply with it? If the first prefer organisational democracy to get their share of power, why should others come along without it? The ultimate good I seek is the right of all workers and organisational members to be who they are and to become what they want to be, at work and beyond, without fear or loss of opportunities, irrespective of class, immigration history, occupation, employer or country of settlement.

Although the ultimate good may not invite many counterarguments, I expect goals in the middle range to do so. The questions of identity and culture in an interconnected world are not easy. They raise both theoretical and political controversy, and imply several distinct debates failing to connect to each other. Yet the questions are important. In terms of learning to live in the present world as active, responsible agents, we must make better sense of them. In other words, we must get from A to B. Because these are tricky waters and the wind is unfavourable, this means that we must tack. I hope that you will appreciate the tacking moves of this study for what they are: attempts to advance by moving away from existing structures, discourses and habitual mind maps. Paradoxically, in order to find our way, we must get rid of old maps. Unlike the stereotype of the academic critic, I promise not to leave you with cynicism and further questions, however. I will produce some suggestions at the end. If I do not present ready-made solutions for managers, I should be able to arm all and any organisational member(s) with better visibility. As you know, that helps navigation a great deal. I wish to present my contribution as a foothold that further tackers may use to advance beyond my present understanding. Of course, no research can hope for more. If I could instigate dialogue among the practitioners in organisations, and among the scholars in distinct domains, I would be happy indeed. But first, let's discuss the moves of this study.

### **The tacking moves**

We will begin by enriching a little the story of diversity management. In chapter 1, I will present more information about the origins and development of this dominant cultural form and the serious, but largely undermined, critiques directed against it. I will establish the need for an alternative vocabulary and images in order to present a serious attempt at challenging the form's immunity and changing its course. These alternatives will be sought with the help of two moves: first by reviewing a selection of literature on culture and social identity, and thereafter by presenting an ethnographic example. The literature, reviewed in chapter 2, enables an alternative approach to the issue of identity, one so far not found in either mainstream diversity management studies or their predominantly Foucauldian critiques.

With the new conceptual tools in hand, I will take you to a Finnish high-tech workplace in Helsinki, and the same organisation's subsidiary in San Jose (CA). There you can become acquainted with the ideas and practices of software engineers and other professionals working for global markets, while you follow my footprints on the trajectory of a multi-sited ethnography, begun

in chapters 3 and 4. With this overall move I hope to contribute to the creation of alternatives to diversity management. I do not, of course, suggest that all workplaces are or could be similar to the one I studied. The dynamics by which social divides operate are different in different settings. Nevertheless, together with the theoretical move mentioned above, ethnographic evidence read as a *cultural critique* can help to juxtapose unexpected/dissident notions of ethnicity and difference with the prevailing ones, and thus re-institute the latter in their artificial, non-self-evident status. This, I hope, may open the way both for fresh research approaches as well as better chances for practitioners to resist widely distributed dominant forms, and to create their own practices instead. The notions I found were dissident indeed, but more about them later.

Intersecting with the narrative about computer experts, I will elucidate the way this study was created: why did I turn to ethnography (beyond the above reason), and the sort of ethnography it became. This is the kind of text you often read beneath the heading *method*. I too use that conventional label for chapter 5. With a fuller understanding of my aims and means, you are then led to the analysis of some of the key forms applied by the informants to make sense of their work, identity and ethnicity in Helsinki (chapter 6). In other words, since the informants passionately dismissed all implementations of diversity management, or the like, campaigns at work, I will describe what it is instead, that they hold important. The analysis shows, however, that while these locally produced/reproduced forms can serve as powerful glue to social cohesion at work, they too are problematic from the point of view of equality and multiethnic cooperation.

At this point another turn of fieldwork will come to our rescue, offering new reflections upon the notions of Finnish experts. I will present some insightful accounts of immigrants that work as colleagues of the Finns in the same workplace in Helsinki, and also those of others working for the organisation in San Jose. In order to fully understand how this procedure works, I will give you a concise account of my exploration of the philosophy and research of intersubjectivity in chapter 7. Armed with this concept, I hope you will find it easy to follow my somewhat surrealistic journey, in chapters 8 and 9, into several, mutually reflecting views of people and their work presented by the informants. They were making sense of themselves and each other, but not directly. Ironically, at their most reflective moments they continued to speak past one another. Further oddity was added by the ethnic and power landscapes that I found to be upside down relative to conventional pictures of centre-periphery relations. I will end the journey by a return to Helsinki (chapter 10)

that will not, hopefully, bring you back to where we started, in terms of knowledge.

Then it will be time to wrap up some lessons from the enquiry. This entails some discussion of the political implications of the study in chapter 11. Should discrimination be countered within the same essentialist terminology used by the discriminators, as suggested by diversity management, or, would it be better to free organisational (and societal) members from such straightjackets, as the IT-experts demand? What are likely to be the consequences of the latter option? From the perspective of equality, which is better, ethno-blind treatment of employees or an ethno-sensitive approach? I will come up with a moderate alternative suggestion of combined but different efforts, for both political actors at the state level, and organisational actors at the level of management and of collegial encounters.

After the brief step within the political and moral dimensions of the study, we still have a way to go, in order to set the ethnographic data in its proper context in terms of history, larger figures of power relations and present global trends. This will be attempted in chapter 12. As an alternative to the captivating discourse of diversity management, I present the terms *cosmopolitanisms* – in plural – and *civility*, hoping that these more open concepts might show the direction for crafting better coexistence, while insisting that readers keep their agency and go on crafting it. For the same reason, I have not included the term *diversity* in the title of this book. The contextualising chapter is also aimed at an opportunity for you to use the newly acquired insights in looking at any or at your best known (Finnish) organisation in such wider context. I argue that the large issues I present are seen and felt in everyday work and they affect the ways ethnicity can be understood.

As a final move, in chapter 13, I return to the misunderstandings concerning the status and use of the concept of culture. The perspective with which I end my discussion is one of a citizen of our time looking for cooperation and understanding, while daunted by the massive inequalities and deep divides between nations and sociodemographic positions. I will wish to hand over some degree of insight I myself have found helpful. It may serve as part of the refigured tools needed in order to navigate in the changed and changing world.

The last chapter, chapter 14, is a reflective overview to our journey and its lessons. I will look back at the research carried out and name successfully gained footholds as well as weak positions, and imagine what might be done next.



## 1 Diversity management – varieties under control?

Before diversity management (DM) became a watchword, there had been a long search for equality in organisations. In the Nordic countries the vigilance concentrated around the gender issue, in North America it also centred on the issue of ‘racial’ or ethnic equality under such rubrics as *affirmative action* and *equal employment opportunities*. These were political campaigns on the societal level, and their central pillar was legislative support for eliminating abusive and discriminative practices, and for repairing the damage caused by past abuses, such as the historical trauma of slavery. These campaigns were part of the larger internal political debate in the United States concentrating around the civil rights movement. Organisations had, at best, a supporting role in that drama.

Chroniclers (see e.g. Lorbiecki and Jack 2000) set the birth of DM to the population change in the 1980s, and to the publication that brought that change to the consciousness of political and corporate elites, namely the Workforce 2000 report published by the Hudson Institute in 1987. The report stated that white males would soon no longer make up the majority of new entrants into the labour force in the United States. This was the immediate reason for action, but equally important was the neoconservative ideological turn in the 1980s, when earlier politics were marginalised. It was no longer fashionable to talk about equality or justice, but these goals were wrapped in a language of business assets and the central pillar was removed from legislation to corporate leaders’ strategic decision making, which resulted in an outsourcing of political struggle from the public to the private actors. Many of those who had previously worked as tutors in equal opportunities campaigns – funding removed – found new employment as diversity consultants (Litvin 2006). Towards the end of the millennium, as critical reports started accumulating, counter-critics defended the DM approach, appealing to researchers that they should not, through their *leftist* critiques endanger the politically liberal diversity project, which was trying to salvage the ideal of the civil rights movement from the right-wing conservatives who would gladly have returned to outright discriminatory policies (Litvin 1997, 207; see also Eastman 1999).

As an aside, at that time Finns pursued their own goals of gender equality, in a work market expanded by the post WW2-industrialisation and bureaucratisation process, but markedly closed from immigration. Workplaces

received some diversity in the form of internal immigration and of social mobility by education, but they remained segregated along gender lines. An issue we shall return to later.

Despite all its business rhetorics, DM is a direct descendant of the political project of multiculturalism. Both give up the melting pot ideology, and suggest all groups should thrive side by side. In this respect they may well be labelled post-modern ideologies (cf. Sintonen 2008). In North America, diversity management became one of the most prominent fields of the 1990s consulting industry, and has expanded its influence from the private to the public sector, and from such immigrant nations<sup>1</sup> as the United States, Canada, Brazil, and New Zealand; to become an issue in Europe, Asia and the Middle East as well (Prasad; Pringle and Konrad 2006, 1). As globalisation has advanced, DM seems to have come at its heels. And perhaps the position within the aquaria of late capitalist organisations has sheltered it so that it seems to have avoided the critique directed at its societal parent, multiculturalism. Multiculturalist programmes have been criticised in the *western* immigrant receiving nations for particularism and loss of standards (Robbins 1998), as well as cultural racism and neo-apartheid (Ålund and Schierup 1991). Can just anybody move in and pursue whatever ends? What will happen to democracy and equality, if we must tolerate those who dismiss them? Who says who belongs to which group? Who sets the standards? Although much of the perceived problems, such as suburban decline and restless youth, may be due to failed promises (that is, multiculturalism never installed), still for these reasons and within a darkening economic situation, multiculturalism has suffered a loss of adherents. It remains to be seen, whether organisational diversity management will follow the same way. If so, it would be wise to have some alternatives in stock, other than the standard – backlash type of – recourse to ethnocentrism.

Despite the fact that varying stakeholders around the theme of organisational diversity (consultants, managers, mainstream and critical researchers, activists and unions) have had a poor dialogue with each other, the search for less anachronistic and less frustrating solutions continues. For instance, new terms have been sought to add to or replace *diversity*, such as *inclusion*. Roberson (2006) differentiates *diversity*, concentrating on organisational demography, from *inclusion*, that turns attention to those organisational barriers that impede full participation and contribution of all members. Pelled, Ledford and Mohrman (1999) have suggested that *inclusion* might be an indicator of how

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<sup>1</sup> These are not necessarily the biggest or only receivers, but they are nation-states that have chosen immigration as one of their root metaphors.

much a member feels accepted and taken as an insider by other actors at work. Redirecting attention from the worker to the organisation appears promising, but experience from the general debate concerning multiculturalism at the societal level shows the limits of concepts like *inclusion* or *integration*: we must not forget to ask where (e.g. in which positions of hierarchy) and on what conditions people integrate.

*Diversity* is also an internally diverse notion. It is about many sociodemographic dimensions, each bringing up different problems, material realities and social and cultural fields. The most often discerned dimensions include gender, 'race', ethnicity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability and age. My approach to the theme only concerns ethnicity. This is an important limitation to the present account. While it may limit the value of my work as an all-in-one account of diversity, it may give me the opportunity to concentrate on issues pertaining to ethnicity in a more detailed way. Although many social divides operate in the same social environments in intersecting ways, they also involve different dimensions and need different research strategies to be discerned in their own right and given full attention. For instance, 'race' is a visible quality, and thus, ascribed differently upon people than sexual orientation, the social presentation of which often turns around issues of knowledge regulation. Some of the identity groups are larger and more ubiquitous in human populations than others. While women, for instance, still struggle to get their share of power as *half of humanity* admitted, some disability groups struggle to become even known. Limiting my enquiry to ethnicity does not mean, however, that I would have closed eyes on other dimensions. Rather, those dimensions offered little to report. Despite attempts to generate data on gender and age, the only other dimension that I found to be somehow intersecting with ethnicity in the case organisation, was professional identity. It is possible that in this matter different results would be found in another trial.

Of late, the diversity literature has been reviewed by several widely learned teams, resulting in at least two informative handbooks and classifications of approaches (see e.g. Foldy 2002; Prasad et al. 2006). These reviews have, however, dropped almost entirely the most voluminous of literatures concerning diversity: texts written by consultants and practitioners. Although this literature has provided little theoretical contribution, its omission fails to pay attention to the one most important reason why, and the path through which, organisations involve themselves in diversity campaigns: the Business Case argument. Susanna Bairoh has attempted to fill the gap in her review (2007). Instead of going through all schools and sub schools around research-guiding theories (she does mention many of these), the main foci are divided

into three. The diversity literature, seen in its most comprehensive whole, seems to fall into three main categories according to the position and agenda of the writer: the consultant approach, the mainstream approach and the critical approach. This classification seems helpful, because it answers the question *who is speaking?* In the following, I summarise this literature according to the classification offered by Bairoh.

### **The win-win world**

One of the best known texts in the diversity literature is Thomas and Ely's (1996) classification of diversity approaches. It involves a three-step continuum from the *discrimination-and-fairness paradigm*, through the *access-and-legitimacy paradigm*, to the *learning-and-effectiveness paradigm*. Despite its quotedness, the classification does not tie its conclusions to any existing organisational or social science theory, rather, being based on the writers' observations in a number of organisations. Thus, Bairoh (2007) counts it among the literature aimed at consultants and industrial leaders. Another example is Trevor Wilson's (1997) *Equity continuum*. This model of six steps is less well known than Thomas and Ely's continuum, but it has been used in Finland, for instance in some programmes initiated by the Ministry of Labour. It has more detail than Thomas and Ely, but the basic logic is the same: Organisations should move from a zero level, where diversity is hardly recognised, toward embracing diversity and finally learning from it. Teaching the right steps is the core message in consultant literature. The writers appeal to the readers' *common sense*, and tell anecdotes to support their claims, shunning too much *theory*. Generally, they argue for diversity management, because it has positive effects on work outcomes and productivity.

Business Case; the rationale for DM, is today so established a discourse that it may be taken as a part of the Anglophone managerial lay understanding, as Bairoh (2007, 19) suggests. The list of benefits associated with DM includes at least:

- DM furthers understanding of customers (because they too are diverse)
- It promotes creativity and innovations, because different perspectives are brought up
- It intensifies the utilisation of the entire personnel's abilities
- It evokes interest toward the employer from capable job applicants
- It strengthens commitment among workers and reduces turn-over

- It improves the image of the organisation among various stakeholders

Obviously, from the point of view of the consultant literature, DM is good as much for the organisation and the business as it is for the employees. Diversity is increasingly framed so that everyone may feel included in it (stretching its scope from the original counter-discriminative cases of gender, 'race', ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and disability, on to parenthood, to the care of elderly parents, or to minor health problems, personality or values). The diversity among managers is, however, seldom discussed. Instead, the management has an important role as the main agent in implementing DM. It is indicative of the consultant literature's spirit, that potentially disturbing or threatening issues (such as sexism, racism or class) are discussed, but wrapped in a more acceptable language – such as productivity or utilisation of competencies. In sum, the consultant literature regards DM as a useful and central concept for when the organisational world encounters the challenge of a more diverse workforce.

### **To management, with science**

According to Robin Ely (2006) the frame that dominates an overwhelming part of the academic enquiry into diversity in the United States can be named a *difference framing*. Within this approach diversity is understood as the degree of heterogeneity among group members on specified demographic dimensions. The research question is typically set on finding out how heterogeneity affects group processes and performance. An important underlying assumption holds that difference is a source of conflict. Members' experience of differentness must thus be minimised. What matters is whether and on how many dimensions people differ from one another. A group member is only *different* or *the same* as others. Differences are often aggregated across social identity dimensions to form a single diversity index. These premises are based on the most commonly used theories, social identity theory and social categorisation (or self-categorisation) theory (see Tajfel 1982; Korte 2007; Tajfel and Turner 1986).

Much of this literature concentrates on research of diversity at the macro or organisational level (Diez and Petersen 2006). Here the focus is on the role of DM as a regulator of the relationship of diversity to productivity. The better the management the greater the profit (or the smaller the negative effects on productivity). In Finland, Sippola (2007) has studied diversity from the perspective of human resource management. Problems in the organisational level research have included the difficulty of translating these rather broad concepts into exact operationalised research designs, according to the demands

of the positivist paradigm dominating mainstream research. (See Bairoh 2007; Diez and Petersen 2006.)

At the micro level, mainstream research involves understanding and governing stereotypes and prejudices. In much of the *western* world today, *subtle* or *modern* prejudice has replaced earlier generations' more blatant, openly discriminatory behaviour. Diez and Petersen suggest that more diversity research should direct its efforts to counter simultaneously negative stereotypes or prejudices, justificatory or rationalising pretexts used in *subtle* prejudice, and open discrimination. In addition, counter-discourse to prejudice might be developed. In a recent Finnish study Lämsä and Sintonen (2006) suggest deconstructing and reconstructing narratives related to prejudiced thinking in a way that follows the advice of Diez and Petersen, but otherwise linking this with a more critical theory.

There are those within the mainstream (Jackson, Joshi and Erhardt 2003) who remind us that in life, all *diversity dimensions* flow together, forming a complex confluence. But it is hard to see how this could be taken into account within quantitative research designs, which must assume all *factors* to be independent from one another. Not that the question of intersectionality has been much easier among qualitative studies, judging by its late and awkward appearance in feminist organisational studies (Holvino 2008). This may have to do with more than just computational difficulties. The true complexity of human life is such that it seems to escape even the best academic attempts at description. Here I can't but admit the limitations of my own work as well. Even though I didn't try to reach for more than one *dimension*, ethnicity, the mere contextualisation of it in a real world case with more rounded sorts of individual vignettes almost overwhelmed my capacity. Yet I look hopefully at ethnography as a method that may reveal, if not life itself, at least a drop of its complexity.

Another source of debate within the mainstream literature has concerned the concept of *identity*, one of the most contested among social sciences. According to Korte (2007; cited in Bairoh 2007) there is no agreement on its semantics (what it is) or its disciplinary ownership (where it is). The key question revolves around the reification of group-level phenomena. While theories of identity have proliferated, many researchers have failed to keep count of the level, individual or group, of their analysis.

The problems encountered in practical diversity campaigns have also been discussed among mainstream researchers. We have been reminded that badly organised programmes may easily turn against all parties involved (Von

Bergen et al. 2002). Colleagues seen as culturally different may suffer a loss of appreciation, majority members may encounter reverse discrimination, work morale may weaken, stereotypes strengthen and legal risks increase.

In Bairoh's review (2007), the mainstream literature appears as a message from science to management on how to operate in order to maximise gains and minimise losses through organisational diversity, where diversity is operationalised as membership of distinct identity groups. In this mainstream literature, diversity management is, in the last analysis, good for organisations and business, but linkages and intervening variables require more research. It is also possibly good for employees, although some resist it; and there can be a backlash. It can be made into a useful tool, but more work is still required.

### **It's all about power**

The third approach, defined by Bairoh (2007) as the *critical approach*, is really a cluster of multiple approaches, more heterogeneous than the previous two. These approaches lack a coherent theoretical base. Nevertheless, they have gained some volume and visibility since the late 1990s.

Bairoh (2007) differentiates between four different strands of critical approaches stemming from or inspired by 1) discursive approaches, 2) postcolonial theory, 3) Critical (race) theory and 4) gender theories. These strands are, however, so close to each other, and indeed often involve contributions from the same researchers over time, that I believe them to be better taken as non-school-like contributing viewpoints, that have all been used to critically inspect the diversity industry and the mainstream research. Since discursive approaches are prominent, many researchers have been inspired by the ideas of Foucault, Fairclough and other discourse theorists. Other theoretical sources include psychoanalytic, radical and socialist varieties of feminist theories, European tradition of institutional theory, and post-structuralism.

Dick and Cassell (2002) suggest the whole area of diversity management ought to be scrutinised in order to problematise the central concepts and values in the programmes. One key focus that has been largely neglected in the literature reviewed by critical scholars is that of resistance to diversity initiatives. This is understandable because managing diversity is promoted by the Business Case discourse as been in the interest of all groups. In the following, I will discuss the main concerns of the critical scholars that are encountered most often in literature.

The first target of criticism is – as may be guessed – the essentialist assumptions of the mainstream theories. The term ‘diversity’ in diversity management was adopted from the plant and animal taxonomy, and carries burdens already recognised in these biophysical disciplines. The term ‘species’ has proved to be extremely difficult to specify in biology. It is sometimes called a psychological fiction, a bold if somewhat desperate attempt to cast a semiotic net upon the endlessly modifying, fluid reality of life. It overemphasises species-internal consistency and continuity and underemphasises consistency that overrides species. There’s no doubt that such taxonomy, if closely observed artificial, is of practical use to humans. Transported to the context of contemporary workplaces, the term offers a picture of differences among employees as clearly delineated categories of group membership. Still it is important to bear in mind that taxonomies – cultural items – tell as much about the classifier as they do about things classified. This becomes especially consequential, when the classifying gaze turns from other forms of life to fellow human beings. Well-meaning managers may find themselves setting up a zoo in the workplace.

When analysis focuses on group membership, individual creativity or interests that transcend group boundaries are given scant attention. This increases the distance between employees. In diversity management training, demographically diverse co-workers are encouraged to think of each other as essentially different from one’s self, as exotic (Litvin 1997, 204). Perhaps the most serious criticism is this: when socially constructed demographic categories of people are presented as something obvious, natural and unchanging, this way of thinking precludes possible mechanisms for change (ibid, 207). It has also been pointed out, that DM discourse creates two distinct groups: those who manage, and those who are diverse. Masking out the diversity of those who manage is also a control mechanism, because it serves to erase any questionable human differences within this powerful group. (See Lorbiecki and Jack 2000.) When visiting a zoo, we seldom get the chance to observe the zoologist in one of the cages.

The *Business Case* arguments are another obvious target of criticism. According to Lorbiecki and Jack (2000), turning DM into an economic concern legitimises organisational scrutiny of employees’ responses to difference, and suggests that they could be *engineered* if deemed improper. Thus diversity has become programmable, and it can be incorporated into the procedures of human resource management. The price of this development is goal transfer. The case of tolerance is *sold* to the business elites so well that it becomes unrecognisable. Deborah Litvin has expressed the view that the employment of



the Business Case has turned human beings into the means, and the achievement of organisational goals the end, the terminal value. This is because the Business Case discourse derives its strength and position from the Economical Megadiscourse that “*enshrines the achievement of organisational economic goals as the ultimate guiding principle and explanatory device for people in organisations*” (Litvin 2006a, 85–86). You may ask what news is this since organisations have used people as their workforce for a while now without necessarily any dramatic consequences. My answer is that sometimes there are quite dramatic consequences, especially where democratic vigilance and legislative support fail, as in the maquilladoras and laogais of our time. Furthermore, the issue of demographic differences /identity groups combined with the driving motivation of exploitation is a combination one might wish never again to see realised with industrial efficiency. Europeans at least have had sufficient experience of it in the 20th century, as have the people in Congo, for instance.

But even under fairly democratic conditions, dealing with discrimination in the workplace is painful for those in dominant positions. Few people want to give up their privileges obtained passively, only by virtue of group membership. If questioned as to how deserving they are of their positions, they become defensive. (See e.g. Jacques 1997; Elmes and Connelley 1997.) Perhaps, in the end, it would be easier to approach the subject by openly acknowledging and recognising conflicting interests from a moral standpoint, as has been proposed. Deborah Litvin has expressed a doubt that thoroughly implemented diversity management – reaching inside the organisation’s structures and altering them – is not profitable from a business perspective, or at least that it is not measurable or verifiable. Thus, companies logically only implement the easy, fast and image-enhancing parts of the project, and leave the structures and the deeper layers of company culture untouched (Litvin 2000).

However that might be, organisations do not always pursue economic profit to its logical conclusion. When the managerial class's own privileges are questioned, the quest for maximum profits may be put aside. Many things are done that are *bad for business*, overlooking the talent of women and minorities figure as one of the most (in)famous. What then is decisive? Many critical scholars (e.g. Prasad et al. 2006; Hearn and Collinson 2006; Wrench 2005; Linnehan and Konrad 1999) insist that *power* is a significantly absent issue in the mainstream literature. Foldy (2002) suggests that what DM programmes are managing is not so much diversity, as identity; and by commenting on and classifying the identities of the personnel, they inescapably end up reproducing existing power relations. The employer tells the employees who they are.

A fourth focus of criticism touched upon by critical research has been social *context*. Prasad et al. (2006) have remarked that the societal (macro) environment has a direct influence on which diversity questions become salient. The researchers underline the importance of the unique history behind any present situation of each of the oppressed groups, and the varying conditions where, and means by which, they have been oppressed. It is also important to take into account the different legislative environments concerning rights to education and health care, the human rights situation in general, and the varying positions occupied by the different groups in society. Diversity issues also alter and their meaning shifts as time passes and they become affected by activism, both internationally and locally (Prasad et al. 2006, 10).

Consequently, many European scholars have asked whether the Anglo-American notion of diversity is applicable in their countries. For instance, in Denmark Risberg and Söderberg (2004) conclude that there might be more tolerance and diversity might be higher valued in what they perceive as multicultural societies (or nations drawing on immigration as a central root metaphor) such as the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Australia. In Denmark diversity is not yet (in 2004) a positively valued thing. Although one might suspect that Risberg and Söderberg's picture of *multicultural nations* may be slightly idealised, there is no doubt that within the presently dominant discourses in the Anglo-Saxon business world, the above described *Business Case for Diversity* is much more prominent than in Finland, or even Denmark. But are the Nordic countries not workers' paradises in general? Prasad et al. (2006, 12) suspect that in ordinary working life, countries like Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden, may have fallen from their own ideals and good reputation, becoming increasingly "*sites of marginalisation and discrimination toward non-white immigrants*". Clearly, resting with the gold medals of past achievements, head in the sand, is dangerous in these times of globalisation. But what would be learned, if a study would actually be conducted into such qualitative differences assumed to exist between the Anglo-American notion of diversity and other possible notions?

Similar worries about abusive treatment of immigrants have been voiced in Finland. Research findings are contradictory, but there are reports of discrimination and harassment in recruitment as well as at work, especially towards certain non-white groups of immigrants that even beyond work are often the target of disregard in society (see Jaakkola 2000; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2002; Sutela 2005; Lepola and Villa 2006; Perhoniemi and Jasinskaja-Lahti 2006). Juuti (2005) and Söderqvist (2005) report that cultural diversity is

seldom respected in everyday organisational practices. Finnish organisations seek to assimilate their *different* personnel – those with a foreign, immigrant or ethnic minority background. They are expected to adopt the prevailing Finnish organisational culture. However, at the interpersonal level at least, some workplaces seem to offer immigrants a more flexible welcome (Vartia et al. 2007). I have some experience from the cleaning industry that joins the concerns, at least for exploitation, if not for assimilation (Trux 2000). On the other hand, it seems that at least in one case – the present case – cultural differences and ethnicity were downplayed for reasons other than discrimination. I suggest that the way I collected my data enables me to make this claim. Some of my informants' answers might have looked bad in a survey conducted without contextualising it within the kind of industry and specific habitus of the participants, straightforwardly using their answers to interpret a factor analysis glossing over discrimination reports from several units and organisations.

The fifth concern raised by critical scholars, and the last one I will discuss here, has been the lingering colonial tone of many well-meaning programmes and discourses. For example, neo-colonial and neo-imperial discourses have been identified in programmes destined to increase intercultural understanding and acceptance. Examples of such programmes, described by Prasad and Prasad (2002), were designed in the US for improving sensitivity to cultural differences, for training expatriate leaders in intercultural interactions and for educating non-*western* (East-European and South Asian) managers about *western* management. Despite the apparent progressive targets of the programmes, they nevertheless reinforced out-dated imperial-style relations and images, because they encouraged seeing ethnic minorities, women and East-European managers systematically as exotic, inadequate or underdeveloped others, who need help, tolerance and acceptance from the dominant majority.

Although globalisation has brought the planet's peoples in contact with each other, it has not removed the hierarchical distance between them. Today old forms of identity, such as the *First world* and the *Third world*, appear side by side with new forms of identity such as *software designers* and *maquilladora workers*. Sometimes the new blends with the old. But all forms are constantly overshadowed by dominant structures and discourses (such as the Economic Megadiscourse). Different types of resistance are common. Regarding this situation, Prasad and Prasad suggest that organisational scholars might understand 'Otherness' by paying attention to "*the nexus of shifting identities and alignments that are brought together in the process of constituting the*

'other', and the current geopolitical realities and global hegemonies that mediate the formation of identity spaces in organisational and institutional locations" (ibid, 59).

Lorbiecki and Jack (2000) also suggest that this approach, called *post-colonial theory*, might show the way out from stagnated identity group thinking, by drawing attention to the way *western* imaginative construction fathoms the 'Other' as stereotypically subordinate. The way people actually identify themselves is intersectional, dynamic, and relative to historical imbalances and inequalities. I have endeavoured to apply something like an interpretation in these lines in the description of the national and cultural context of my case organisation (see the section "Ethnic presentation of Finnishness: exposure, language and power" in chapter 12).

The weakness of the post-colonial approach has been that it is not sufficient to replace one existing dichotomy (such as the famous *West and the rest*) with another one, or merely turn it upside down, giving priority to the formerly oppressed. If this dichotomy is to be abolished, alternative images are needed. This implies a labourious analysis of all relevant data concerning the actual history, economy, geographical position, population factors, popular movements and cultural currents etc., that may restrict or invite people to construct their identity. Reality is more complicated than stereotypes. If the goal is to correct stereotypes, then we can't but face the complexity.

Although critical approaches to diversity management are very scattered in their theoretical stance, Bairoh (2007) does offer some summarised views about them. As to the question of what diversity is all about and who are diverse, these approaches seem most unified (surprisingly). All differences may matter, according to them, but some are more salient or critical, due to historical exclusion and present context. Whether DM is good for business or the organisation, is questionable; here views vary. If it's good for the employees is more questionable yet – there are possibly negative consequences. Although views vary, the overall appreciation of DM is far less encouraging than among the consultants and the mainstream: it may not necessarily be a useful tool for organisations.

## 2 Alternative conceptualisations of culture, identity and agency

Anyone who has followed the debates concerning culture and multiculturalism over the past twenty years could hardly have been spared from frustration in the face of their deep paradigm gaps, sloppy misreadings and reappearance of questions already settled in one or another of the multidisciplinary niches, but ignored by some other participants. Ironically, like the multicultural society they attempt to describe, the debates demonstrate how difficult it is to understand. We participate in exchanges of words, but we do not listen. I do not believe, however, that scholars in the social and human sciences engaged in the debates represent a sample of low-quality academics, but rather that they have undertaken a formidable task. No one discipline has the keys to unravelling these phenomena – the old disciplinary borderlines are breaking and yielding under the pressure. New interdisciplinary schools emerge. The questions go right to the heart of late modern society: What is happening to us? Who are we? Yet interdisciplinary efforts set a tremendous task of learning upon individual researchers; it isn't possible to be fully literate and updated in all of the strands involved and interlinked in emerging ways.

As globalisation has advanced, global inequalities have become acute and people who should cooperate to save the planet's ecosystem have continued to nurse hatred for each other. The need for human understanding across genders, nations, categories, identities and convictions is greater than ever. In the meanwhile, we academics have gone on limping, dragging our misunderstandings and blind spots behind us, worried and quarrelling. Not entirely lost, however. I believe some lessons have been drawn by now, that might prove helpful. Setting my hope in what I have found, I have produced the present work as one attempt among others to make some sense of the world around us. I do not try to make a violent criticism of any other approach, but rather construct my own by leaning against some others (an operation for which I must be grateful to them), and supporting my case by anchoring it in the social reality of one organisation.

So far I have intended to convince you that diversity management is not perhaps quite as ingenious a solution to the *problem* of how to deal with so many different kinds of people in the workplace, as is currently suggested by many commentators. If I have been as successful in this as most of the critical

scholars I quoted, I will have produced what I myself despise as academic *lateral damage*. I have left you with cynicism and further questions.

But I will not leave you yet (unless you decide to close the book here). It is now my turn to tell, what instead, these things are all about, and how we might best conceptualise them to enable a better understanding of workplace realities and better chances to combat discrimination. First, to do this, I must re-evaluate some features of the critical studies.

The recognition of power structures, which is missing in DM, is dominant in the critical studies – to the degree, sometimes, of stripping other elements in the procedure of research. Many studies in the inspiration of the classical texts of Foucault or Said, for example, call themselves cultural, and dig into the ways in which gender or ethnicity are constructed as subject positions in the illusory universalism of man (white men) (see Ortner 2005). While this has been a stimulant to insightful analyses of organisational attempts at shaping identities, it has paradoxically tended to produce its own deterministic orthodoxy that sees little, if any, scope for resistance or social change (Webb 2006, 7–8). Similar concerns have been presented lately by Zanoni and Janssens (2007), who have undertaken to study how workers actively resist and/or comply with the DM campaigns run at their workplace.

In sociological criticism of the radical Foucauldian position (that there is no subject outside the regime of power), such as Janette Webb's balanced account, the postmodern turn to culture and discourse is often seen as highlighting the “*cultural and performative dimensions of identities*” as against “*the material and practical dimensions*” (Webb 2006, 9). Rather than seeking a way ahead from determinism by reassuring the old dichotomy – culture-nature – I try to stick to the idea that culture is not a separate realm, but a dimension of the whole of life, both its performative aspects (rituals?) and the more *rational* sort of practices as well as the myriads of material environments, productions and structures that are human made, and therefore carriers of so much culture. Material is important, but it is not a counterpoint to culture.

At worst, critical research has brought us to the other extreme from diversity management's naive managerialism. Now culture diminishes into a screen in front of power, an ideology entirely owned and managed by the powerful, something close to the traditional Marxist *superstructure*. A fake ethnicity, a gender that is a plot. Such a concept of culture leaves no place for agency of the subordinated, not to mention subjectivity. Instead we are introduced to a caricature of a Foucauldian society (or organisation), governed to the point where no leaf falls, no thought is formed beyond the panoptic control and iron

determination of power structures. It may not even reflect any human agency by the managerial elites, rather, all agency is *unnecessary hypothesis* in such truly immobile accounts. The eternal *status quo* reproduces itself.

As an alternative, I have found no better recourse than the old idea of humans as victims of their own cultural constructions. The most well-known image of it, “*spiders caught in their own webs*”, is associated with Clifford Geertz (1973, 5) and, through him, Max Weber. This view sticks to the idea of culture as the notion of semiotic mediatedness, but it does *not* preclude power. Some spiders are bigger than others, and have far better material means for cultural production. Yet even they are often caught, failing to get what was theirs by size and audacity. Smaller players may sometimes get unexpected chances. History is open, struggle goes on.

I am aware of a symmetrical criticism directed against the Geertzian concept of culture for belittling the agency of people and over-emphasising the determination of action by cultural structures. It has been ironically noted, that in a Geertzian description one can “*see webs everywhere but never the spider at work*” (Obeyesekere 1990, 285). That, I believe, has been a consequence of the old, amputating decision to hold apart the study of the social and public from the study of the individual and subjective. For a long time it was not proper for an anthropologist or a sociologist, to delve too deeply into matters assigned to psychologists (Cohen and Rapport, 1995).<sup>2</sup> Still they produced some of their most celebrated works describing and translating to their audiences *the natives’ point of view* and giving consciousness-widening accounts of other people’s life-struggles, hopes and convictions. All such works had to be presented as if they would only imply the public and collective spheres of life, thus often leading to the misconception of *culture* as a totalising account, covering the experience of all its *members* as a homogenous carpet. This unfortunate borderline seems to be finally yielding. I refer to the renewed interest in psychological anthropology (which has been there since the beginning of anthropology, but has seen many periods with widely varying schools of thought), and especially explicit discussion of the individual informants’ role in anthropology. Thus recent years have seen the notions of *consciousness* and *subjectivity* studied from many perspectives (see, e.g. Cohen and Rapport 1995; Rapport 2000). New varieties of ethnography have been developed, that no longer seek to look through the informants into the *culture*, but to treat the individual informants in their own right. Practices are in use that

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<sup>2</sup> The old split and its consequences are discussed in more detail in the chapter “Intersubjectivity”.

study the slippage between representational environment and personal meaning-making, aware of the indeterminacy inherent in any interpretive account (see e.g. Linger 2001; Fernandez 1995).

Is there any concept – like the culture concept – that can go off to so widely distinct directions? As one who had learnt my anthropology during the history-turn and breakthrough of postmodern concerns in the 1980s to 1990s, and been away from the business a few years for work and family reasons, it took me aback quite a lot to realise that in the fields of ethnic and migration studies, cultural studies and organisation studies, many scholars believed that terms like variation, change, construction and dispute were unknown in anthropology. Indeed, the image of anthropology had suffered a kind of inflationary process, from the heights of the 1980s' transdisciplinary interest in Geertzian interpretation to the stigmatisation at the turn of millennium as a *land of totalising accounts*. No matter how sophisticated a concept of culture one might apply in the work, it was no longer a good move to present oneself as a scholar coming from that land.

When I was introduced to anthropology, I came in the midst of an epistemological turmoil and ethical self-inspection. The very foundations of the discipline were questioned: What was the legacy of ethnography? Who was anthropology for? Seeing this as improvement from my original discipline, psychology, I was merely happy and enjoyed the fruits of what I perceived as a creative moment. What I didn't realise was that beyond anthropology, the ripples of the upheaval might reach far, and the outcomes remain unknown. At that time I studied the relationship of psyche and culture, wading through the quagmires of that history of thought, and looked for ways to understand subjectivity. Maybe this is why I didn't realise for a long time that the militants opposing popular usage of the concept of culture were very serious and saw it as a real threat. From my niche of *psychological anthropology*, the theoretical quality of the concept was all too obvious.

The historian William Sewell (1999) has distinguished two basic ways to approach *culture*: the first presents a theoretical, abstract understanding of an ubiquitous quality of human life, a universal capacity (and need) of humans to seek and make meaning in their lives. The second is a comparative perspective, where *cultures* appear in plural, as thing-like real-world entities and the *assignment* of individuals *into* cultural groups is the first step on a rapidly descending spiral of problematic assumptions. My perspective was the first one. From that theoretical stance it was self-evident that culture merely offered the chessboard, or the play marks, that real people, flesh and bone, used in their social life – notably as a weapon in power games. Of course cultural borders



were a matter of definition, of course things came in many variations and were shaped and reshaped, abandoned and picked up again by this or that individual or group. It was not the people that commanded culture, but neither was it culture that enslaved people. I did not realise that the concept could be used – that it was actually at that time already used – in just such homogenising and essentialising way. I didn't understand the full meaning of the developments in multiculturalism.

Perhaps it was the fact that multiculturalists were for the most part practitioners, and that anthropologists failed their responsibility as scientific guides, or simply the matter that questions of immigration and minorities involved powerful political agendas. In any case, the over-expanded, light-minded use of the concept of culture in explaining people's behaviour and in organising societal functions hid against the wall. The *one culture per society* (or ethnic group) approach proved to be hopelessly at odds with the late industrial environment, and worse still, became a moral hazard – e.g. in feeding material for demonising stereotypic images, and in the case of overlooking conflicting interests among the *culturally different* minority members, such as the oppression of women and children. Since then, ethnicity in multicultural society (descriptive meaning) has become a thoroughly politicised realm and multiculturalism (ideational meaning) has indeed suffered a loss of adherents. The tide of academic fashion seems to be flowing away from cultural explanations towards *hard* facts concerning material and social conditions (as a polarised opposition to *culture*) – but I wonder. It's not a uniform tide. At least renewed interest in subjectivity is to be discerned as a counter current.

Next I will present the ideas of Sherry Ortner and Dorothy Holland and colleagues, who provide an account of both the spiders and the webs, or better put, in the words of these scholars, of human beings as meaning-makers in their own right.

### **Sherry Ortner and the call for agency**

The American anthropologist Sherry Ortner has argued since the 1980s for taking up *agency* as the pivotal point between cultural (semiotic) and social (power relations) forces or structures (Ortner 1984; 1999; 2005). Building on the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Marshal Sahlins, Clifford Geertz and William Sewell, who each in their distinct ways have tried to reintroduce agency into the heart of social theory, Ortner offers a picture of the individual's (or a group's) unique, historical existence, struggle for survival and a meaningful life. Her aim is to avoid both the danger of conceiving human subjects as blind carriers of tradition, and the opposite danger of seeing them as

nameless marionettes of power structures. In her approach they have partial freedom, limited by fears, passions, hopes, restrictions and bonds of all kinds. Ortner is seeking a way to look at life from the subordinates' position: as a struggle for a foothold, however small. Thus her ideas lend theoretical support to many current ethnographies describing the problematic or narrow, even marginal life-spaces of various powerless groups in late modern societies – including immigrants and other inhabitants of transnational social places. As an extension, it may be adapted to accounts of the stratified and unstable life-spaces of employees in high-tech companies, like the one I will come to later. Substantially wealthier than marginal immigrants as they are, their lives are still profoundly marked by the power differentials present in their own organisation and the encompassing business ecology.

In her article *Subjectivity and cultural critique* (2005), Ortner further develops the concept of agency by elaborating its psychology to some extent. Returning to the works of Clifford Geertz and Max Weber, she picks up the long-standing concern in *western* philosophy and social theory for historically and socially embedded subjectivity. Following Raymond Williams, she calls the object of her interest "structures of feeling".

The Geertzian method of interpreting public cultural forms to get at the *conscience collective* is still visible, but – it has taken what might be called the Raymond Williams turn – from the interpretation of culture to cultural critique. There is in fact a certain irony here, namely, that while Geertz's 'culturalism' has been increasingly cast as conservative, yet it has been the basis for a radical approach to cultural studies. Raymond Williams cross-fertilized a recognizably Geertzian version of the American culture concept with a Marxist conception of ideology to try to understand the ways in which culture forms and deforms subjectivities – what he called 'structures of feeling' – in specific historical contexts of power, inequality, commodification, and the like. (2005, 40)

Following cultural psychologists such as Richard Shweder (1991: 97), I understand that subjectivity is where intrapsychic processes and cultural and social formations (somehow or other) create each other in an unending process. A discussion of this process must move back and forth between *the inner world* and *the outer world*, as Ortner does in her article. Nevertheless, her account remains at a relatively robust level, not venturing into greater detail concerning the inner world, the psychic life.

Instead Ortner presents two readings of *postmodern consciousness*: Fredric Jameson (Ortner 2005, 41–42) and Richard Sennett (*ibid*, 43–44). Jameson was much criticised in the 1980s. His account appeared then as somewhat fancy, over-dramatised and socially ungrounded. But the 2000s have shown us how postmodernism can strike. In Sennett's description of work under the *new*

*capitalism*, futurological visions have become a reality, albeit a rather ugly one. According to Ortner, the two are talking about same things (see table 1).

**Table 1. Comparison of Jameson's and Sennett's analyses of postmodernism according to Ortner.**

Jameson:	Sennett:
waning of affect, depthlessness	indifferent work ("just a job"), masks of cooperativeness by the bosses
spatial disorientation	temporal disorientation ("no long term")

Both are pointing to the need to restore meaning and orientation in the postmodern world, which has become uninterpretable and illegible. We must learn to read our world and show others how to read it, says Ortner (*ibid.*, 44–46). Counter currents of subjectivity exist just as counter currents of culture do. According to Ortner, subjectivities are complex and reflexive: while few people fully embody the dominant culture, and some are totally subjected by it, most are, nevertheless, partial misfits. They partially internalise, partially reflect upon and react against it (*ibid.*, 45).

In Ortner's account, the multi-layered and reflexive cultural consciousness provides the grounds for questioning the dominant culture. I would compare this to the historian William Sewell's theorising on misfits between cultural model and reality that provide the grounds for cultural change and transformative/alternative movements. (See Sewell 1999.)

Whatever may be Ortner's contribution for theories of subjectivity, one of profound importance for resistance is immediately visible. It concerns the assumed objects of cultural interpretation /cultural critique. Are cultural enquiries about the traditional and exotic ways of faraway people, minorities and other subalterns, or perhaps the stratified remnants of *our* unconsciously held assumptions, pointing back to the times of our ancestors? They might be, according to Ortner. But that is not all they might be. Equally well, the interpretative lens can and should be turned to present, dominant forms, distributed by powerful agents. It is the combination of such analysis with the more marginal forms that has the power to strip the dominant forms of their aura of influence, which all too often appears as normality, natural obviousness and unquestionable truthfulness. A direct attack upon powerful forms on their own terms is immediately turned into a contest on evidence and numbers, where the winner is likely to be the one holding the more muscled research organisation, if any winner is found. (Consider the apparently endless debate

on whether or not DM is profitable.) On the contrary, a refiguring of the status of powerful forms from scientifically (or by page volume) proven truths into cultural conceptions is more difficult to dismiss.

In the case of workplace diversity there are many targets to be drawn down to a common level of analysis. What about *diversity management* itself? Whose cultural heritage is that? What is the history of this form? How did it come just here just now? What is it made of? Managerialism? Market fundamentalism? Multiculturalism? Liberalism? Such autopsy always shows varying ingredients, among which some may be revealed more acceptable than others. Equally, the history of any cultural current is a tale of many turns and crossroads, which when broad under inspection, offer alternative possibilities for what the present form is, and how it might be reshaped. People are not stupid, but how could they choose if they do not perceive any alternatives? Ortner is pointing at the academics' role in helping to de-monopolise the cultural landscape. That we can do, if we haven't tied our hands with the paralysing notion of the *status quo* that somehow inevitably will reproduce itself anyway.

Now I hope to have positioned myself relative to at least a part of the haunting questions. But I have so far not really touched the question of identity. If it is not what diversity industry claims (a group membership), neither is it what the Foucauldians would hold (a trap), then what is it?

### **A social practice theory of identity**

In the aftermath of the *culture wars*, the theory presented by Dorothy Holland and her colleagues (Holland et al. 1998) is everything a frustrated and deprived scholar might hope for. It is a balanced and consistent theory of subjectivity (in both individual and collective manifestations) that takes both the semiotic and power dimensions into its fabric. Agency is crafted in the transition between these two aspects. Holland et al. show us, step-by-step, how this happens.

The writers explicitly and systematically set themselves on the shoulders of Pierre Bourdieu, Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin, thus on cultural-historical and practice theories. None of these classics is taken entirely however, or without processing, but their ideas are reconsidered and arranged so that they compensate each other in the creation of the theoretical edifice. Furthermore, the extensive ethnographic experience of the writers (reaching from American Alcoholics Anonymous, via college students' romances and mental patients' struggles to Nepalese women's movement) is used to give inside and a fuller understanding of various aspects of the theory. Much of the literature on *identity*, instead, is cast aside, which makes the present account an *alternative*

one. Yet I do not perceive it in striking contradiction to contemporary accounts of identity, such as Webb's (2006) sociological approach.

Holland et al.'s steps might best be explained in the four contexts of identity given in *Identity and Agency*.

### 1) Figured worlds

The frames of meaning in which interpretations of human actions are negotiated. (*Cultural worlds, imaginary worlds* etc.) In addition to the traditional Saussurean meaning of meaning (that, in essence, things are related to each other) the writers add the Bakhtinian meaning of meaning, namely the fact that all messages carry disposition, social identification, and even personification. Social and cultural work take shape in the same action. Thus we *place ourselves* in social fields (Bourdieu), in degrees of relation to – affiliation with, opposition to, and distance from – identifiable others (ibid, 271).

### 2) Positionality

The twin-sister of figuration. It is all about power, status and rank; with entitlement to social and material resources. So it is about the “*higher deference, respect, and legitimacy accorded to those genders, ‘races’, ethnic groups, castes and sexualities privileged by society*” (ibid, 271). This is the constructivist point. But Holland et al. refer back from it, to the first of the twin-sisters, the *cultural* lie of the land. While people always inhabit several figured worlds at the same time; and the most enduring divisions (‘race’, gender, ethnicity, class) are probably features of all worlds, they are more prominent in some than in others, and “*figured differentially in terms of the symbolic capitals particular to each world*” (ibid, 272).

### 3) Space of authoring

Persons and collectives must *answer the world* that is continuously *addressing* them, but the form of the answer can vary from automatic and authoritarian (*monology*) discourses and practices to most variant and creative forms. Authorship is a kind of orchestration: “*arranging the identifiable social discourses/practices that are one’s resources*” (Bakhtinian ‘voices’) “*in order to craft a response in a time and space defined by others’ standpoints in activity, that is, in a social field*

*conceived as the ground of responsiveness” (ibid, 272). The voices of others are thus brought together, compared, rearranged, and used to give birth to one’s own voice, the inner persuasive voice (using Vygotsky’s *inner speech*) – which in turn must be translated from one’s own words into the others’ words so that it may be flung back to the world, in the process of addressing and being addressed, in the unending social exchange. Agency comes through this improvisation.*

*“The ‘voices’ that make up the heteroglossia at a space of authoring are to an ‘author’ as Vygotsky’s instructing adults are to a neophyte: they do not so much compel rote action as extend, through their support, the competencies, the ‘answerability’, of persons to operate in such a diverse yet powerful social universe” (ibid, 272). Although – and here the writers correct a blind spot in Vygotsky’s theory – others can also act as forbidding, restricting and punishing powers, whose words may become engraved in a person’s memory somewhat like scars on the skin. The histories of authoring are both personal and public, as well as compulsory and liberatory, to very varying degrees.*

#### 4) Making worlds

*This is what the authors call *serious play*. “Just as children’s play is instrumental in building their symbolic competencies - - so too social play – the activities of ‘free expression’, the arts and rituals created on the margins of regulated space and time – develops new social competencies in newly imagined communities. These new ‘imaginaries’ build in their rehearsal a structure of disposition, a habitus, that comes to imbue the cultural media, the means of expression, that are their legacy” (ibid, 272).*

If powerful and longstanding hegemonies, moral and social orders, political and religious regimes, deeply rooted traditions, and so on – seem to dominate the landscape, still here and there unexpected moments and zones of experiment and freedom open up to some people, by struggle and effort, or by mere chance. In these niches various cultural and material elements are brought to contact, and there novel combinations and creations can be experimented socially. Holland et al.’s examples include the

invention of courtly love in medieval France and the creation of a women's movement in the Nepalese countryside.

It is easy to extend the idea to the creation of many of the modern technical inventions in the margins of organised work (an idea many times repeated, but its importance often forgotten). Also, I think of the creation of a new professional subculture of *hackers* in the 1960s, in California, under the influence of the hippy movement, the military interest in research of computing and the anti-government and entrepreneurial mentality of the American *frontiers*. Finally, to look for some de-romanticising examples, were not some corners of the Weimar Republic a nursery for Hitler's version of totalitarianism, and what about the present-day school shooters – aren't they developing their identity in the virtual niches of the Internet?

New identities are often made in odd marriages of unlikely partners, and so the seeds for future quarrels are planted. Neither is the future of any such new form secured at its birth, (re)creations will continue, divisions and resistance will complicate the story from the beginning, and often the forms are turned against their original ideals. Some of these forms last a fashion time, others a generation, while some outlast many of the political and military regimes in power at the time of their birth. As they grow in publicity and gain followers, new divisions appear at the folds of their extending hems, and so the circle begins again.

Why do I like this theory, although it is not among the most widely known, and certainly not among those you are likely to find in handbooks on *diversity*? Because in it I have found again the spirit in which I learned anthropology. When I look at the vista that opens up in Holland et al.'s description of the vicissitudes of courtly love from southern France to the renaissance ideals and literature in Italy, Germany and England, over the Atlantic to the American ideals of romantic love, transformed on the way and through the centuries in various genres – retold, recreated, *spectacularised*, filmatised, commoditised – into the present public understanding of a game, a *sexual auction block*, as they call it, I find it more reminiscent of an annalistic account of history than of any *totalising account of culture*. Sherry Ortner (2005, 36) suspected that some critics of the concept of culture were committing a *category mistake*. *Identity and Agency* helps us to see exactly where this mistake is made.

In their account of an incident in Nepal, “*The woman who climbed up the house*”, the writers reveal the micro-level source of the category mistake (Holland et al. 1998, 273–275). It lies in oscillation between ideological constructions (Gyanumaya, a female participant, climbed up the outside of a

house to the balcony where she was to meet the fieldworker, because she avoided trespassing and so polluting the higher-caste kitchen with her presence) on the one hand, and *tactical* social reckoning (what it would cost her to refuse the caste position afforded her), on the other. Both the culturalist view (the former above) and the constructivist view (the latter) make too little of agency, say Holland et al. They both overlook the creative action by which people manage to circumvent obstacles to their goals. “*By focusing only on the social constraints, we would have missed the significance of her improvised departure from a routine path. By ignoring the constraints, we would have missed the forces that made the path obligatory and the pointedness of her deviation*” (ibid, 275).

In another example, medicalised discourses and the scientific project have contributed to a constructed behavioural normality, and the modern impetus to discipline those who deviate from this norm (the Foucauldian point). But Holland et al. remind us that people like Roger, the *borderline case*, manage to *twist* the categories applied to them. He used what the medical personnel told him, together with popular texts, and interpreted and organised his life and his several identities for himself. So understood, self-help groups, popular psycho-literature and televised talk shows are *both* the medicalisation of everyday life *and* an opportunity for transfiguration of the properly medical, for the carnivalisation of authoritative discourse (ibid, 212). Summarising the message of the theory: “*The same semiotic mediators may work for both construction/reinforcement of power relations as well as potential for liberation*” (ibid, 143).

Holland et al. also have an account for the continuum, imagination – unreflected action. These situations are convertible historically and life-historically, collectively and individually. The Vygotskian notion of *fossilisation* is used to account for the fact that many culturally defined beliefs and choices fall from consciousness and become self-evident *facts* of the world, quite as habitual actions become routine.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand ruptures of the taken-for-granted may lead to automatic performance become recognised and open to commentary and re-cognition (ibid, 141). This is a proper, broadly elaborated theoretical account for the multi-layered nature of consciousness that Ortner was speaking for.

Another useful feature of the theory is its account of the process nature of living the figured worlds. Unlike in some *latest fashion* macro accounts of

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<sup>3</sup> This point is, in present-day research, often approached by the help of more sociologically oriented ideas, such as Berger and Luckmann’s (1994) constructionism.



transforming mentalities, in Holland et al.'s account people do not change shape over night. Instead there's learning, enculturation, becoming (expert) member, and identification. It all takes time, and it involves struggle. No voice is innocent, no power nameless. Sorting out voices is much more than sorting out neutral perspectives. The voices are associated with socially ranked groups and potent individuals. Where a neophyte is "*given over to a voice of authority*", an experienced person is rearranging, rewording, rephrasing, re-orchestrating different voices (ibid, 181–183).

Holland et al. have an easy-looking way to combine the individual and collective elaborations of the same theoretical positions. Have I overlooked some intrinsic fault in it, or why does it seem so intuitively comprehensible? The Bakhtinian metaphor of voices is somehow concrete enough, manipulable mentally, so that it can take the weight of the edifice. That is hardly a sin. I don't see any danger of mixing up the levels of analysis, because here we are not looking at human action outside-in, from the scientific third-person perspective, as in the social psychology of mainstream literature on DM. This is an account of the intersubjective construction of human identity, its perspectives are predominantly the first-person and the second-person, although the third region, the world, is never out of sight. (See chapter 7, headed "Intersubjectivity".)

Furthermore, prioritising the field of language that is common to Bakhtin and Vygotsky may actually fit a truly focal point in making sense of human activity. Language is a medium that runs through both individual minds and collective communication. It can rest in variously recorded texts for millennia, to hop out again in the thoughts and speech of people. (Given that the texts will not have been lost or censored by some tyrant regime in the meanwhile: the restrictions under which agency has still been able to work.)

Here is a theory of identity that is very life-like. Organisational scholars may be interested in my view that it might have popularising potential for non-academics. Would not this be a better conceptual tool for sense-making in transnational workplaces, for instance, than the present-day popular images of *cultures* as containing people – the ones propagated by the DM spokespersons and resisted by workers defending their individual agency and denying the very existence of *culture*? I believe it could hardly be worse. In fact I have sometimes experimented with it, offering mixed audiences the idea of diversity as composed of *voices*, and equality as the right to get one's *voice* heard. It seems to have resonance with everyday popular images, as well as late modern sensibilities resisting the idea of collective, ascribed identity. People hate to be

treated as cattle, with an identifying label or brand mark given by someone else.

If there's anything I should like to add as conditioning information, it would be an account, even passing, of the scandalous, extra-ordinary fate of the persons and works of the Russian classics Bakhtin and Vygotsky, who had the privilege to be living in an avant-garde moment (a zone of freedom indeed) for artists and academics, but also the disaster of its early break under the iron boots of totalitarianism. Since at least the works of Vygotsky have undergone a considerable posthumous history of reformulation, it would have been polite and wise to situate the versions taken as building material for the present theory in the context of that history.<sup>4</sup> I judge that at least the ideas of Lev Vygotsky incorporated in *Identity and Agency* are closer to the original cultural-historical school, than to the later formulations of Alexei Leontjev, the Kharkovites or the version known and further developed in the *West* as activity theory – despite the fact that the writers elaborate on the concept of activity as well. All three Vygotskian mediators are present: signs and symbols, individual activities and interpersonal relations. Rather than eliminating some of them, Holland et al. craft a credible theory of the relationships between them, with the help of the insights of Bakhtin and Bourdieu. The result bears a striking resemblance to the psychodynamic theory of Fyodor Vasilyuk (discussed in Kozulin 1990, 264–267), a descendant of Vygotsky and Bakhtin in the humanistic tradition of Russian psychology. For Vasilyuk, as for Holland et al., the prototype of *psychological* work is not the working of natural forces or power structures (capitalist, socialist or Brahmanical, for instance) but creative activity in literature and art.

In this chapter, it has been my aim to shed light on how exactly culture is woven into social life, including the social life at workplace. According to Dorothy Holland et al. (1998), cultural forms are the tools of self-management (or self-authoring) as much as managing others. They are the currency of all social fields. The theoretical edifice presented above takes on the duty of explaining the intricacies of learning to live one's identity – or identities. The account of *heteroglossia* is useful for understanding the present conditions under which people attempt to form their *voice* out of a multitude of different and differently positioned *voices* of others (ibid, 181–183).

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<sup>4</sup> Even now, two decades after the end of the Cold War, some prejudices linger about *red* theories, celebrated or dismissed according to the political stance of the evaluator and often equally erroneously. For an illuminating account of the intellectual history concerning *the Mozart of psychology*, see Alex Kozulin's (1990) biography of Vygotsky, a story that does not, indeed, stop at the physical death of its protagonist.

But as Ortner reminds us, under the late modern conditions, most fields are shifting because people and institutions move around the globe, time spans have shortened, and media and digital environments circulate an overflow of simultaneous data. George Marcus (1998) has also written on the potential of simultaneity to undermine linearity and the construction of transparent reciprocity, creating more or less formidable obstacles to intersubjectivity, as understood by Bakhtin and other modernist accounts. It is not always clear, who is the speaker, and there is often no time to wait for one's turn in the exchange of *utterances*. Thus, we speak past one another. People of the planet many have come close to each other, but the ephemeral and coincidental nature of most of their encounters results in the paradoxical experience of remaining worlds apart. Therefore, many *voices* remain uncertain and are increasingly hard to identify. Images and excerpts of discourse circulate so accelerated that no ultimate *speaker* can be readily discerned. As *spaces of authoring*, workplaces like the one I describe are difficult to outline, marked by uneven power positions, insecure and changing. But they are not beyond human bricolage and not immune to countercultural offensives and dialogisation. Accounting for the process of authoring enables us to understand the struggle involved and the time and effort it takes. Late modern conditions set challenges to people who struggle to get their position mapped and their identity bearably coherent. They also set challenges to researchers struggling to keep count of cultural currents and their uses, and so help people in reading their world. Nevertheless, I don't see any other way but to keep struggling, as suggested by Ortner. What I at least intend to do, is to refrain from adding further ambiguously identified layers of discourse, such as DM categorisations and legends of managing diversity. (Let's see if an academic can avoid doing that.) Instead, I try to offer all light I can possibly shed on existing cultural currents already out there, to assist people in their own efforts of bricolage and dialogisation.

After these preparative positionings I will next start zooming in to the case at hand. But I will return to the more theoretical issues in the chapters on "method" (chapter 5) and "intersubjectivity" (chapter 7).

### 3 Zooming in

There are still a few more words to say about intersubjectivity and the reasons for choosing ethnography and not some other means of enquiry, and the kind of ethnography it became. But I fear that if I will not soon present some concrete description of my case, I may lose a good part of the audience to any further musings. Some other place must be found for them. Therefore I will begin zooming in from where I left you, hovering above the Baltic Sea.

#### Finland – a new immigration country

During the period following World War II in *western* nations, the construction sector and industry in general needed a large workforce. To supply the demand, workers were invited and brought in from abroad to work in the growing economies of Western Europe. At this point in economic history, Finland was a source of labour – the massive migration from Finland to Sweden has been especially well documented. At that point, there was a special demand for low-educated workers who were taken into jobs directly to perform tasks *on the assembly line*, without much investment in their language skills or professional training. Gradually, the immigrants settled down. They were joined by their families; and almost unnoticed were born the suburban communities and ethnic minorities of immigrants, whose consistency loosely emulates the historical, colonial and trade relations in each *western* nation (see e.g. Stalker 2000; Sassen 1999). Such minorities did not emerge within Finland.

It was not until the 1980s, that increasing numbers of immigrants started to arrive in Finland for the first time since the refugees of the Russian revolution in the 1920s. The new immigrants included refugees (notable groups from Vietnam, Somalia, and what the people themselves call Kurdistan) and asylum seekers (from a very scattered array of origins) together with people married to a Finnish citizen (here again you find many origins). To put it simply, *war* and *love* have been the main reasons for settling in Finland. The immigration policy has been rather tight, keeping the number of immigrants low (along with the fact that Finland is still not well known). A restrictive general attitude of the state machinery is hardly a surprise against the fact that these arrivals took place without the state's initiative, and that at that time the *western* world woke up to the challenges of adaptation and integration that immigrants faced. The public discourse concerning immigration portrayed immigrants as people in

need, further burdens to the welfare state. Only at the beginning of 2000s did the state show interest in inviting immigration, mainly as a consequence of warnings that supporting the ageing population demands more people of working age as tax payers and to keep the wheels of the economy turning.<sup>5</sup>

Traditional factory industry has declined and to a sizable degree been replaced by high-skilled jobs and the service industry. It does not come as a surprise that poorly educated immigrants do not find high-skilled jobs, but even services are becoming more specialised. Today, service tasks that used to be considered easy involve highly differentiated customer services, a command of technology and materials, spoken and verbal communication skills, and education. Much of the recent research in Finland and other countries concerning immigrants, has pondered their poor labour market position and the relative weight of the structural reasons for it, against racism and ethnic discrimination (Broomé et al. 1996; Jaakkola 2000; Forsander 2003; Forsander 2001; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2002; Joronen 2005; Sutela 2005). A few studies have taken a look at the inside of workplaces, once immigrants have made their way into them. According to Pauli Juuti (2005), an assimilative attitude towards immigrants is common at Finnish workplaces. In this attitude Finns suppose immigrant workers must learn Finnish and accommodate themselves to local habits (see also Söderqvist 2005; Pitkänen 2008). Juuti associates the attitude to a weak identity and defensiveness towards ‘Otherness’. Some studies indicate a more flexible welcome by the Finns, at least in some workplaces (Vartia et al. 2007). According to a recent study in the public sector (Laurén and Wrede 2008), Finnish co-workers do not hesitate to create an unofficial hierarchy of tasks for their own benefit, where management fails to prevent it. Overall, the story of immigration in Finland is a struggle to get in and gain a foothold. In contrast, immigration into the service of high-tech industry has taken somewhat different turns.

### **Nomads or settlers?**

The situation of experts is different from low wage service workers. The position in the labour market, and in part the overall social position, is more secure and the challenges connected to adapting are thus smaller. In Finland, adaptation is further facilitated by the fact that the most prominent companies recruiting foreign workers (mostly in the high-tech sector) have chosen English as their corporate language. This makes it possible to seek employees directly from the largely English-speaking *talent pools* of the global economy. Unlike

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<sup>5</sup> For a good concise account of the development of immigration in Finland, see Forsander (2000).

in some other industrialised countries, in Finland the trend immediately took off in the direction of creating English-speaking workplaces, as enclaves of the global work market. Adapting to these *islands* is, in a way, much easier than working in the kinds of service professions which require contact with the local population.

During the boom time, it was observed that many foreign specialists did not come to a country to settle permanently. Instead, they were moving from country to country and employer to employer in short periods of typically 2–5 years. This group was labelled the *nomads* of global economy or the *creative class* – people who are not anchored to any one nation, and whose identity may be a constellation of various group affiliations. (Forsander et al. 2004; Raunio 2005; Florida 2002.)

Not all people move around in a nomadic fashion, however. Some of my informants have emigrated because of family relationships, which made Finland a potential home country. Instead of *nomads*, such people might be more aptly called semi-sedentary. Their world is characterised above all by bipolarity, in accordance with the country of origin of each spouse. A family may live alternately in each country, or live in one for work purposes and spend vacations in the other. After the downturn of 2001-2002, the movement between jobs and countries settled down, although there are signs of new comings and goings. In any case, immigrants have not stopped moving in. They are more numerous at the case organisation than before.

In Finland, Russians form a special group. For Russians Finland provides an environment with a high standard of living and social security, which is nevertheless geographically near, offering the possibility of frequent visits back home to relatives. Sometimes Russians (like Wierzbowsky<sup>6</sup> and Mark in the case company) also emphasise the relative shortness of cultural distance between Finland and Russia, compared for example with North America.

Unlike for many low-paid immigrants, who leave their children and other family members behind, the cost of living poses no barrier to well-paid IT-professionals. Many bring their families or have children in the new country, who are then socialised to become part of the local way of life. This often occurs without the parents' full awareness. The psycho-social situation of such families frequently resembles that of many refugee families. They also have parents who *never unpack their bags*, while the young people set roots in the new country. The depth of the newcomers' commitment, then, varies on a large

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout the report I refer to individual informants with pseudonyms they each invented for themselves.

scale. At the more transient end are temporary employment agreements, road stops on the way of an itinerant career. At the permanent end of the scale are decisions to learn the vernacular (or the second official language, Swedish), buy a house or apartment and apply for citizenship (Trux 2000).

### **A turn of cycle in Finnish ICT industry**

When I first visited F-Secure<sup>7</sup>, in fall 1999, the Finnish IT-industry was at the top of the boom. Not long before, my case company had been listed at the (then) Helsinki Exchange, with the result that long lines of popular investors gathered in the street in front the exchange office. The internal media officer advised the employees not to provide many interviews to the press, because of the danger of appearing too wealthy and drawing envious attention to such corporate compensation policies as stock options. A 5000 Finnish marks<sup>8</sup> bonus was promised even to me at my first visit, if I should manage to invite a new recruit. All over the sector, competition for the workforce set the agenda, and investors poured in money for the best *story* as it appeared, of future promises. At that time investors were called *business angels*.

According to a review of management practices (Ruohonen, 2004), after the cycle turned down business has come to dominate technology with the consequence that product-focused organisations have turned to service, and all employees must now learn to deal with customers.

Layoffs, fusions and re-engineering have created insecurity, which in turn has led the workers to unionise and join unemployment funds. Unionisation is at a high level in Finland, as it is in the other Nordic countries, and extensive (post WW2) legislation and political culture has tied the triangle of unions, employers and state authorities together, although not without tension.<sup>9</sup> The IT-sector however, has been a notable exception, for reasons probably linked to its short and wealthy history and its (American) ideational roots in extreme

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<sup>7</sup> I have published preliminary reports both in Finnish and in English using the company's true name. Trying to cover its identity would have been hard and probably futile in a context like Finland. They have so far never protested. The findings of course are predominantly positive, but I have also seen the term "wretched" in the press. Maybe tolerance is a measure of sincerity. In any case, all conclusions drawn here are my own, and the picture I draw dates from the time of fieldwork; only occasionally I have gathered some follow-up data. If no other indication is given, the present tense refers to the year 2004 when I carried out the last interviews. Since then, many of the workers have changed, as have the HR manager and the CEO.

<sup>8</sup> At the 2002 conversion rate this would have been about 830 euros.

<sup>9</sup> Of late, there have been serious attempts by the employers' representatives to break out of this triangle.

individuality – including neo-liberal tenets of economic individuality (Gere 2006, 138). The downturn profoundly shook this constellation, causing a rush to more *Nordic* forms of industrial relations. At F-Secure, unionisation also reached a level that, according to Finnish legislation, required the appointment of a company-level representative of the high-tech workers' union from among the workers.

In Finnish ICT-companies, work pace and quality demands have increased (Ruohonen 2004). Global outsourcing means that software development is no longer the best source of income<sup>10</sup>; companies earn more through continuous service contracts. Big software development projects are risky because margins have narrowed, and only a few Finnish companies have succeeded with them. Most companies look forward to the roles of service provider and partner in a knowledge network, although not all. Because of its products, F-Secure for instance remains oriented towards program development, and its service provision is tied to its products.

Business development has had its counterpart in management culture. The unofficial, spoken agreement type of management “by the kitchen table” with generous economic benefits was commonly used during the hype time to attract skilled workforce – a rather mobile workforce (ibid, 27). Now the companies appreciate somewhat more formal methods such as hierarchy, departments, guidelines and job descriptions. Workers pay attention to *sensible* things like attractive and meaningful jobs, a healthy workplace atmosphere, organisational culture, management methods and an interesting substance (ibid, 28). In sum, the fancy has turned into the normal, solid and sensible. This picture applies fairly well to the managerial culture at F-Secure, with the exception that solid and sensible things were always at the top of the list, even at the time of the hype.

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<sup>10</sup> Nokia was not among the surveyed companies. Ruohonen's conclusions are based on findings in small and middle-sized IT-service providers and multimedia companies.



## 4 The case

Following from the theme of this study, readers are likely to be mixed. Those introduced to non-managerial organisational studies, for instance the kinds undertaken in my subject at Helsinki School of Economics<sup>11</sup>, would need no orientation to locate my kind of approach to the reality in a profit seeking organisation. Perhaps for some readers, however, it may be useful to mention that this account contains several perspectives on the kinds of work that take place at F-Secure. But they are not the management's perspectives. This is an enquiry into the issue of ethnicity and cultural differences at work, but it does not proceed straightforwardly from identifying the managerial needs to providing tools for managers. Although some of the people I met were holding a managerial position, their understanding is taken as a personal, embodied view. There are a number of reasons. Firstly, I don't know what a workplace ethnography would otherwise contain, if not some access to the reality of work.

Secondly, I approached the discussion of diversity within a more general discussion of work, postponing its explicit discussion, to see if people might pick it up spontaneously, and first get acquainted through topics that are less sensitive and more appreciative. In my experience, most people like to talk about their work. If you ask them with the sincerity of a neophyte to tell you about their work, they will tell you all you might wish and more. You learn what their work, their colleagues, their bosses and the organisation is like – what they believe it is like, what they would wish it to be like, what they believe it was like before and what they expect from the future. The frame of work also easily includes the organisation, its model of business (or income), the institutional and market environment, and so on.

But since it was not the work as activity that was the main target of my interest, but the people as performers – this is the third point – I took no systematic approach to the factual activities, but rather followed the clues of my interviewees' stated motives, meanings and appreciations regarding their work. I learned about those aspects of work that they felt were crucial, or worth, or proper to take up for "workplace research". If I'm now correctly guessing what

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<sup>11</sup> At Helsinki School of Economics, the subject Organisation and Management has hosted a multitude of very varying grassroots approaches. The themes studied cover, among others, consumer and environmental issues, gender, higher education, career construction, professional identity, work, agricultural entrepreneurs and various bottom-up processes.

some readers might expect, this description may at first look like a bundle of descriptions of separate companies. If that is so, I may comfort you by assuring that it is so with all social fields: participants' perspectives veer away from each other, coincide and cross. Tackling the apparent mess (which I no longer see messy at all) can, however, be most informative for grasping issues like diversity. So, there are no global maps to expect, here. No company strategies are discussed from mainstream business studies' usual bird's eye perspective. You will not be able to see the railroad map, but you will be crossing rails, as they appear on the personal pathways of the *spiders*, at the grassroots level. Like many other scholars in critical business studies, I believe there are things worth learning there. For, how can you know how to manage, if you don't know who it is you're managing? It is safe to assert – even from high above – that the employees are diverse, but it does not really satisfy one's wish to know *who* they are.

Having said that, I still think you need some general introduction to begin with.

### **F-Secure**

F-Secure Corporation provides protection for individuals and businesses against computer viruses and other threats spreading through the Internet and mobile networks. Its products include antivirus, network encryption, desktop firewall with intrusion prevention, anti-spam and parental control. A constant vigil is kept at the company headquarters in Helsinki against any new *malware*. Founded in 1988, F-Secure was listed on the (then) Helsinki Exchanges in 1999. In addition to Finland, the company has offices in the USA, Sweden, Norway, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, The United Kingdom, India, Singapore and Japan.

F-Secure's retailers and distributors have expanded to more than 60 countries. As its products are, to an important degree, distributed through Internet service providers and mobile operators, large scale public marketing is less important than in those companies directly involved with individual consumers. In the Finnish context, F-Secure is a middle-sized organisation. Its personnel doubled from 200 to 400 during the boom (1999–2000), and towards the end of this research (2004) had come down to an intermediate level of approximately 300.<sup>12</sup> In Finland the firm is well known as one of the flagships of the turn-of-millennium technology. At the time of writing this text (2009) it has a more consolidated reputation, at times a quasi-official position as the favourite

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<sup>12</sup> At the time of writing, the number of personnel had grown again and is now (in summer 2009) higher than at the first peak.

source for journalists wanting to ask anything related to Internet threats. According to their management, F-Secure is well known in the Nordic countries, somewhat known in Europe, but scarcely known in the United States. Indeed, as I talked to the American employees, many of them started with reflections on working for a *small* company, overshadowed by large competitors.

At my first visit to F-Secure, I was given a list of the company's values. The HR manager took care to explain them to me, as they were – according to him – the basis of the attractiveness of F-Secure as an employer, both nationally and internationally.

**Table 2. F-Secure's company values, as stated in 1999.**

Value	Explanation
1. People	Both <i>fellows</i> (refers to all organisational members) and customers are important.
2. Innovation	Mistakes are allowed. "There can be no learning if we fear mistakes."
3. Integrity	Legality, justice, openness. "We go beyond that stipulated by law in order to treat people well, and to protect the environment."
4. Building clocks	"When somebody makes an innovation at work, it must be put on the wall like a clock, so that others can use it too."
5. Fun and joy	"Working must also be fun."

While interviewing the workers, I asked their opinion of the values. Most agreed that they were both the right values for the business and principles that were observed in everyday life. Some had reservations concerning the best ways to realise the values, and their relative weight. One employee (from the US) said that *integrity* was a very Nordic value, a "social-democratic" feature of organisational life.

F-Secure was no longer a start up when the bubble burst and the IT-sector began its downturn. Crisis management apparently took over, and management of creativity was set aside. In addition to cutting all extravagant benefits (and some rather modest ones), people were laid off. Those with temporary contracts were the first to go in Helsinki. The remaining employees were still recovering from this experience when I returned in 2002. I found no

widespread use of temps as a regular means of *enhancing productivity*. It seems that people were first taken on as temps. Later, their contracts were made permanent. At the downturn those who “had not regularised their contracts” faced the greatest risk of being laid off. It remains unclear whether this tendency to avoid hosts of half-outsiders within the company is related to a communitarian management style or to the demands of risk management in the digital security industry (many workers told me that their backgrounds had been studied by the Finnish Security Police at the request of the company). Risk management has in any case not precluded the use of subcontractors, for instance the programming workforce in St. Petersburg.

According to the Americas manager, the company had intended to be listed on Nasdaq, but this was dropped when the downturn hit.<sup>13</sup> Its founder and long-term CEO is still the principal owner.

### **Knowledge work for the global software industry**

As far as I can tell from the glimpses offered in the interviews<sup>14</sup>, work at F-Secure presents a fairly typical array of duties in the product-centred IT-sector. The pivotal function seems to be the anti-virus laboratory with its researchers, and the large number of people in *development teams* producing the programs destined to customers. Other works consist of supporting scientific expertise (a mathematician), localising, pre and post sales support, sales, marketing, managerial work, secretarial work, legal assistance, HR, communications etc. According to the HR manager, the requirements for recruiting anti-virus analysts are extensive. They include, for example, familiarity with “old fashioned” programming languages, nowadays less common among *western* IT-professionals. Recruitment is extremely focused, sometimes causing long delays in filling vacant positions, because appropriate applicants are rare even among the global workforce. Michael, a Spanish expert, had been recruited in 2002 in the midst of the toughest downturn when unemployment offices received a wave of IT-professionals as client. There had been a search of six months for a suitable applicant.

Despite his young age and only two years at F-Secure, Michael gives a typical expert professional’s account of his work. To him, the work essence is the centre of identity and what matters most to him. He divides the tasks into two

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<sup>13</sup> Successive acquisitions have since brought the former Helsinki Exchange under the same ownership as Nasdaq.

<sup>14</sup> See the discussion of the fieldwork.

categories as “interesting cases”, when there are some particularly evil viruses or something new technically, such as

...cases where you really need to put a lot of time but that are interesting. And I even continue doing it at home, because it’s like I have to find out what this does.<sup>1</sup>

and as “routine cases” when

...there is a lot of very simple viruses like created by the teenager that need *réclame* from the internet, that put it together and put some insulting stuff inside it. ... That is never going to make it anywhere, maybe to something like a hundred computers and that’s all. ... So here I see a lot of those. Sometimes I spend like four weeks analysing these like shit. And some of these are not even proper viruses, some of them don’t even work well. ... We still have to check what they do, because we do good work. And we don’t if we don’t check them. ... So it’s kind of a monotonous kind of work sometimes, looking at another one and another one, and another one. (Same source.)

I have heard a popular opinion about anti-virus researchers, asserting their proximity to the *hackers* disseminating the viruses. While this can be understood from the perspective of the security industry (policemen and criminals; inspectors and stock speculators), as a wry sort of appreciation for the virtuoso criminal, I would not forget the more general tendency of any expert professionals to identify with their work, to require a level of challenge matching or extending their capacities, to learn new things and to expect due appreciation. Michael also likes the media appearance, being interviewed by newspapers for instance, concerning special cases that attract public attention. Is he any different from the university researcher dreaming of public attention and a solid reputation among fellow scientists?<sup>15</sup>

The anti-virus research is based on constant vigil, and workers like Michael are bound during their free time to come to work within two hours in case of need. This is a feature he has come to “hate”, something that casts a stressful shadow over all free time activities.

I never got woken up actually in the middle of the night. I’ve had to stay up to three or four at night, and I have woken up at seven. But nothing like four o’clock at night I haven’t had to come to work at that time. ... But still having to stay in the office and work... Once it was my birthday and a Sunday, and I stayed the whole day in the office. There are those kinds of things. (Same source.)

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<sup>15</sup> Since the completion of the fieldwork, I have learned that new trends in Internet crime are replacing the individual “hacker” with more organised structures capable of gaining a good income and of investing in professionalised R&D activity. As a result, *malware* spreading through the Internet and mobile networks is of an increasingly high quality, thus presenting greater challenges for the anti-virus companies. See for instance F-Secure’s chief research officer Mikko Hyppönen’s presentation at Youtube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyJ4KM\\_bv84](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyJ4KM_bv84), viewed on 10.6.2009.

Michael doesn't have children, but some colleagues do, and their tightrope walk between the urgencies of home and work make Michael think twice about having children.

### **Why this case?**

Why did I choose such a workplace for studying diversity? Wouldn't there have been better – or worse – cases with immigrant workforce, or organisations that act as standard bearers of diversity management? Originally I became interested in F-Secure in 1999 while I was compiling evidence of multiethnic workplaces. As the phenomenon was new in Finland, there were not many of such organisations around. In the case of Finland, we actually have been watching the introduction of ethnically different population into a country that had been relatively closed over two generations. I decided to combine the white collars at F-Secure with the far more precarious workers of a cleaning company. Both had over 10 % of foreign nationals in their work force, which was a lot at that time. Last time I checked this; in 2005 F-Secure employed an estimated 20 % of foreign workers at its Helsinki headquarters. This is no longer a small proportion even in a European comparison. The trend has been steadily rising: although, I would be careful with numerical comparisons with other organisations. Nationality offered a useful estimate for multiethnicity in this organisation during my study, as the number of immigrants who had received Finnish nationality was low. Still, at my request the HR secretary did count this for me by hand – counting people who had come in as immigrants. They had no such follow-up statistics ready to hand over to me. The law in Finland, as in many other continental European countries, forbids records based on ethnic identity, which is why researchers are increasingly turning to mother tongue as an estimate of ethnic 'Otherness'. One of the paradoxes of ethnicity is that the bans that were introduced to protect minorities and preclude undue categorisation, also hinder the study of discrimination that is nevertheless practiced in society along the lines of such categorisation.

Avoiding ethnicity is problematic, but so is using it. At a closer look, nuances surface, and classifying people for statistical interests becomes messy work. How to classify such people, for instance, among the interviewees, who already had a double identity before they came to Finland, would that be glossed over? When they married a Finn and as a result got Finnish nationality as well, would they then turn to Finns? What about Finns who had lived for a long period abroad, and were hired for that very reason? What about Noah, who was married to a Swedish-speaking Finn, and himself fluent in this second official language, should he nevertheless count as a foreigner? I am glad to leave those

decisions to people who take on the quixotic task to render various human dimensions of immigration into statistics. Throughout this report, I use the term *ethnicity* to refer to such differences as people perceive between *us* and *them*, on the bases of groups with a native membership. Professional identity for instance is acquired and thus is not like ethnicity. At the heart of ethnicity lies the activity of drawing borders that cut out groups with the power of containing people beyond escape. It is therefore inevitably always a delicate matter, and one for which people are likely to find embellishing terms. My interviewees never used the term ethnicity; it was not their vocabulary. It is my academic conclusion to describe what I think they meant, even when talking about *nationality* or *foreigners*, for instance. Since *foreigners* apparently do not get fully embraced as fellow Finns at the moment of their naturalisation, the grounds of such discourse must be other than legality: a felt and perhaps needed difference, ‘Otherness’ – as I conclude, ethnicity.<sup>16</sup>

At the turn of millennium, immigrants had only just started to get a hold on two opposite ends of the work market: as experts directly recruited from abroad and as low-paid service workers. The first study is thus comprised of two cases (Trux, 2000). Despite their many commonalities, the social reality at work was, as one may expect, sharply different. Results suggested that although the beginnings of ethnic hierarchy were plain to see, the cleaning workers’ high turnover and poor satisfaction were connected to their low salaries and unsatisfactory work conditions more than any discrimination along ethnic lines. As for F-Secure, high satisfaction was associated with “democratic” and participatory management. The interviewees shunned the discourse of diversity and underlined individuality.

I returned to F-Secure, because the first results were surprising and controversial. Of course the situation in the service sector also does merit attention, especially since the last years have witnessed a polarisation development, and we may fear that a new and frustrated underclass is forming along ethnic lines. But the IT-people were strange. They refused, unanimously, to accept any classification like those deployed by the diversity consultants. And they seemed to get along with each other fine without any such things.

Was it after all so that diversity management was just an inadequate piece of plaster upon a nasty wound? If the problems in the cleaning sector were not due to immigrants – if they just served as scapegoats to more structural reasons

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<sup>16</sup> I will discuss these themes in more contextualising perspective in the chapter “Zooming out” since I do not think that identifying oneself or labelling another in ethnic terms is exactly the same procedure or carries the same meaning regardless of place and time.

– should not those reasons be treated? Whereas in the IT-sector DM programmes might be dropped as unnecessary? No exploitation, no problems? Well, I wasn't quite sure, and soon after the first enquiry the IT-sector went dramatically down a deep cycle. Were they still getting along fine with each other? I wanted to know more about the way(s) they understood ethnicity. If they possessed some kind of a rare wisdom, it would merit presentation to the world. After the tremendous (and unexpected) success and fame of the Finnish comprehensive school<sup>17</sup>, we might soon astonish the world audience with the case of the amazing Finnish multiethnicity...

### **"Finnish management is wonderful"**

But I'm getting ahead of the story. The first round of my enquiry in winter and spring 1999–2000 yielded as I mentioned, surprising results. To my unbelieving ears the foreign interviewees *all* insisted that they were exceedingly happy about what they called "Finnish management". In spite of differences in job titles, gender and country of origin, all related spontaneously that they greatly appreciated the company culture and operating methods.

Management is really good here. Thwarting innovation wouldn't work in this business anyway. This is a good model, no matter where you are from. It is wonderful to see that you are getting respect.<sup>ii</sup>

If there was any difference, *westerners* in particular admired the flexibility and efficiency of "Finnish management methods". People from Russia and Asia emphasised freedom and respect for individuals. But even these differences were slight. The foreigners gave a consistent picture of what the company was like. Table 3 presents the recurrent topics in this talk, as much in their words as possible.

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<sup>17</sup> I refer to the success of Finnish school children in the PISA-surveys of the OECD. See e.g. [http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,2987,en\\_32252351\\_32235731\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pages/0,2987,en_32252351_32235731_1_1_1_1_1,00.html) or <http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2009/liitteet/opm46.pdf?lang=en> .



**Table 3. Foreign employees' perception of management methods at the boom time.**

Flow of information	Operations	Treatment of employees	Organisation
Openness, no secrets (but one has to ask for information)	Efficiency; the organisation is able to react quickly, action is taken following a decision  The culture is sensible and looks for practical solutions  The culture is flexible, not bound by formalities  Oral agreements	Individual employees and their time are respected, and employees are listened to and trusted  Mutual support among colleagues, supervisors offer help	Organisation is flat and feels democratic

Could the foreign employees' happiness be explained in terms of the workers being so lucky at the height of boom, soon after arrival in a new country? No doubt that is a major reason. What, however, merits attention is the focus of their content. The most welcome among benefits were not the stock options or the company sponsored holiday trips abroad, but the more sustainable traits in management style: investment in education, respect for personal autonomy, listening to the workers etc.

Finns were somewhat less excited, mostly noting that the workplace had "filled expectations". Some even criticised the company for overdoing it:

Sometimes informality and spoken agreements lead to ambiguity about who is going to do what.<sup>iii</sup>

As a fresh student of organisations, I was very puzzled by the praise. I have myself worked in many Finnish organisations, and some have been almost like this, but most have been much more authoritarian and controlling. Now I think that the firm really is exceptional. But in *general management culture*, not in the absence of diversity management. DM-practices are only now beginning to take foot in Finnish organisations, and mostly through the initiative of public authorities. At the turn of millennium, they were virtually non-existing in all Finland. In this desert, I had found an oasis full of contented foreigners. So, as stated above, I started wondering: does the generally "democratic" and participatory management substitute for diversity management? Full of questions, I returned to this peculiar place.

### The cape of dreams

David Kaplan's bestseller book on Silicon Valley is titled *The silicon boys and their valley of dreams* (2000). Together with the MIT and the rising centres of India and China, Silicon Valley is held to be the most important economic and cultural centre of the digital industry, much copied around the world (see e.g. English-Lueck 2002). However, Silicon Places are very different from one another. Once again it has been proved that the exact copying of entire social and cultural environments is impossible, no matter how strong a political urge may be put to it by state authorities, and how much money.

I was born in the Helsinki metropolitan area. I remember the time Aki Kaurismäki used to make some of his early films in the grass-growing backyards of the commercial port. Today that is the *silicon quarter* Ruoholahti, Helsinki's pride, where Nokia has its Research Centre and many smaller ICT-companies have clustered among the residential blocks of the 1990s. This is where F-Secure moved to shortly after the first round of interviews. The previous premises in the suburbs had become too tight for the growing, bustling organisation. The present headquarters occupy one part of a four-partite late-modern building, named after the ships of Christopher Columbus and placed right on the Baltic waterline, between a local power plant and Nokia's ex-cable-factory, which is now housing a multitude of theatres, artists and artisans.



*Ruoholahti seen from a high building. F-Secure's offices, partly constructed upon red iron supports, can be discerned in the back, behind the double pipe of the power plant. The day I took this picture was a cold winter day with sunshine on snow.*

The Ruoholahti cape is not without some traces of local history of its own, unlike some other silicon imitations around the world, but the courage to preserve a local look has failed at least in one sense. Climate is difficult to imitate. The shining steel and glass -buildings might indeed look cool beneath

the Californian sun. Here, where “*months may pass without a patch of blue sky*”, as Michael, the Spaniard noted, they take on a bit forlorn look, most of the year. Sea-wind howls between the blocks. “*They might as well work in a ship*”, I thought a number of times trying to open the front door held back by the wind.

### **Professional experts of the digital era**

Most of the employees are middle-class people, sons and daughters of *good families*, aged between their twenties and forties. Hence I felt deceivingly at home with them, as they talked about their studies and travels and experiences at settling and forming a family. Among the foreigners interviewed were people from Australia, the United States, India, Switzerland, Norway, France, Portugal, Spain, Denmark and Russia. Most of them could not be described as *visible minorities*. The Russians, however, do suffer a collective stigma in Finland, related to national history. There is a special derogatory reference to Russians, one that Wierzbowsky – one of the virus researchers – said was used on him by a customer, but never by a fellow colleague. It was as if they had invented a firewall to keep out all the discrimination, competition, neo-nationalism and ethnicising evils of our time.

They were also pretty well off financially. The first round took place at the height of hype. The young men (there were some women, but the male ‘*voice*’ dominated, which is hardly a surprise) not only had stable incomes, but they all benefitted from stock options, a new phenomenon invested with many personal life prospects and hopes of a bright future. Perhaps even more importantly, the boom time atmosphere seemed to offer boundless opportunities for personal development, social and geographical mobility, and even social heroism for the avant-garde of high technology. At that time (1999-2000) most were adherents of the *fresh page doctrine* (in Richard Sennett's terms) stating that human creativity would be liberated from the *iron cage* of military-like bureaucracies<sup>18</sup>, work would become play, and new inventions, such as the Internet, would liberate the rest of human kind to a new dawn. I welcome any doubtful readers to review some of the boom time books and financial magazines for a reminder of the social context of my informants' comments that may look naive in retrospect.

The following is another example of the atmosphere of avant-gardism: The HR manager was visibly pleased with himself, as he explained to me how the

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<sup>18</sup> Compare this observation to the kinds of positive evaluations the foreign employees made of their Finnish workplace (table 3).

company's new logo was reminiscent of Superman's badge. It was only half a joke, since in fact their job is to protect not only businesses, but also public organisations such as hospitals, municipalities and schools - and in the end individual consumers - against various digital threats. The avant-gardism in F-Secure seems to follow closely the model set by such iconic and well-documented cases in digital industry as Apple (see Garsten 1994).

A further factor overcoming sociodemographic differences is professional identity. Most of the employees are IT-professionals, but many of them vigorously reject the term 'nerd', since it has indeed been used as a stereotypic and degrading label within and beyond the digital professions. In my reading, 'nerds' are not those clinically introvert Aspergerians the general prejudice would imagine, spending days literally glued to their keyboards with fingers sticky from the grease of chips and the sugar of soft drinks. The offices of these professionals are not littered with scattered papers, pizza boxes and empty bottles. In my limited knowledge, they are decent, if somewhat arid offices where more or less social persons work alone, in pairs and in teams. Teamwork, sequentially organised into projects, is their bread and butter, and social skills a topic frequently coming up in their talk. Some have a room of their own, others share rooms. To my knowledge there are no open-plan offices, but there are lobbies for coffee breaks. According to Michael "we hang around in the lobby and talk and brain-storm, and things like that". Others, like Mark, the scientific advisor, have a lonelier sort of position. Some of the foreigners suggest that they may at times refrain from joining a social gathering because, as Bharat, the Indian localiser said, "just because of me they have to talk in English".

Some of them are close friends, and they participate in outdoor days and company parties like any Finnish workers. The most striking thing I observed happened in the first of the two Christmas parties that I attended. Contrary to the custom in Finland, where Christmas parties are routinely an organisation event, spouses were invited. This had almost the same effect as bringing parents to an adolescents' party; there were no drunkards under the tables. The party was lively; people danced, but remained almost sober. In the second party, I found myself in the midst of a yelling and singing audience to a rap group formed among the employees and cutting some dash even beyond the organisation, I was told. In both cases, foreigners were present and mixing with Finns.

While the general prejudice has concentrated on personality issues, I find the moral dimensions of professional identity more interesting. It is difficult to find a reference word that is fitting and acceptable to all professionals in the digital

sector. Some prefer this and others that, and any enquiry is likely to lead to lengthy discussions with multiple and controversial recommendations. Perhaps I developed a slight preference to 'nerd' over *hacker* because the latter uncomfortably seemed also to refer to my informants' professional antagonists in this particular sub-industry: the producers and disseminators of computer viruses. I understand a different preference, and apologise for possibly hurting somebody's professional or subcultural identity.

Computer experts are, to a varying degree, participants in a truly global network of fellow professionals. They have their own role models and their own Mecca, Silicon Valley. While most programmers never make a pilgrimage to California, and not everybody share the ideas of the most radical bearded gurus, their existence lends to the whole professional current the required grounding mythology, together with some aura of expertise, innovativeness and potential for social consequences – hence, moral importance. And the most obvious quality of this identity is its transnational nature. Through the 1960s to the very recent past, the 'nerds' formed one of the natural audiences, and gave birth for their part, to the still innocent and emancipatory *fresh page* discourse, in the variation that has been called "hacker ethics" (Gere 2006; Himanen 2001; see also Kaplan 2000). *They* had broken the power of central computers and distributed computing to each one's desk, *they* were teaching IT-skills to all, *they* were providing everyman with CIA-proof encrypting programs, *they* had stunned the business elites with open source code – the fruit of *their* transnational communities.<sup>19</sup> Asking about the role of ethnicity at work, I heard a dozen variations on the idea: borders are absurd, distances can be overcome.<sup>20</sup> If these people would lower themselves to the petty game of ethnic distinctions, would they not betray, among other things, their professional identity?

### Consumers of culture

"At the very beginning", Delphine said, "I had the feeling that I was walking with the French flag attached to my back." But that had ceased by the time of

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<sup>19</sup> See Gere 2006 for an account of the role of countercultural movements in democratising and demilitarising the digital technologies after the Second World War, and Garsten 1994 for an account on how these cultural currents were involved in the birth of Apple.

<sup>20</sup> These were in fact words of Maria Cecilia Duffau Echevarren, an Uruguayan ex-prisoner of conscience, in her letter of thanks to Amnesty International: "*The most important thing is that ... between us, human beings, it has been proved that borders are absurd, languages are surmountable, that distances can be overcome, because the heart is big...and people like you keep the hope of a new dawn alight.*"

the preliminary study, to her great release. Happy of leaving behind the ascribed identity, she told how she was just Delphine, not even typically French, because she was born in Germany. All the foreigners said they represent only themselves at work and feel that they are taken as individuals. Hans, the Swiss engineer, went so far as to say: *"The feeling of being a foreigner soon disappears because we speak English here and because of the multinational atmosphere in the company"*.

Nevertheless, the serving of *national lunch* on corresponding national days at the company cafeteria was valued very highly by the interviewees. This regards both one's own nationality (*"on those days I feel at home"*) as well as others' (*"it's good that the cultures are kept present"*). Together with national lunches, the idea of all kinds of little breaks and cultural events was unanimously supported. These were thought to be nice and refreshing, and were said to bring colleagues closer to each other, and to give information and background to the people. *"It's always good to learn new things"*, said Wierzbowsky. At the same, the reservation was made, that the celebration of cultures should not become too personal, that people should not be labelled. In the words of the Australian engineer Bruce: *"To individuals I would grant the right to be what they want."* As before, the workers appear more like consumers of culture than its carriers. Cultural programmes were thought to prompt conversation among the employees. They would offer opportunities to get acquainted with each other without setting people in the straightjacket of clearly delineated groups. To my enquiry of whether cultural differences might actually come up in the social talk, Matti – a Finnish engineer – answered: *"Yes, we talk [with the foreigners] about different ways of thinking, you learn that way. But fellow workers are individuals."*

These organisational practices must be seen in the context of boom time career expectations. They offered the employees forums, where people could build the kind of social capital needed in the global business. They could learn from each other details of life and work in various countries. Matti referred to this when he said: *"I'm glad that there are foreigners at work. It opens up your perspective. It gives you practice in English... this is global activity... I might myself go working abroad at some point."* Although the employees might be criticised for taking on an over-voluntaristic approach – seeing culture as a bundle of goods to consume and exchange – their discourse had also a kind of civilising dimension: *"It's always good to learn new things"*. In any case it was markedly different from the kind of identity politics typical to Anglo-American diversity literature.

But was it not after all a case of covert discrimination? In addition to the diversity studies mentioned above, studies of gender equality, for instance, pay attention to the fact that overtly neutral attitudes may hide a tendency to passive discrimination brought about by structural arrangements and gendered practices that continue to favour men, while official discourse praises gender blindness (Korvajärvi 1996; see also Laurén and Wrede, forthcoming). Were Finns de facto favoured at F-Secure? What did the workers really mean with the terms I have picked up from their discourse? Have I misunderstood or misrepresented something? How was that picture of organisational life obtained in the first place? These and related questions will be discussed in the next chapter.

## 5 The method

There is no good place for the discussion of methods. If it's before the descriptive data, it may not open up, but rather might appear unnecessary hair-splitting. If it's after, it will come too late to rescue a description already condemned as ungrounded and misinterpreted. So, this is a Solomon's decision. I put it in the middle, hoping that the first doses of data have stirred enough questions to make a discussion of methods meaningful, for which purpose the boom era evidence may serve. The story of F-Secure continues in the next chapter after this one. But I will try to win my readers' appreciation before I present the downturn data, if I can.

### A call for ethnographies

Recently, there has been renewed interest in organisational ethnography. An influential appeal for ethnography was made by Stephen Barley and Gideon Kunda (2001), both well-established ethnographers. They certainly make a point. If it is true as they say that much of what is being discussed about the changing nature of work (erosion of bureaucratically organised wage labour) – new forms of organisation, work contracts, careers, working hours and modes of performance – is based on merely “*inverting concepts to sharpen contrasts between the present and the past and the tendency to explain changes solely in terms of environmental forces*” (ibid, 77), we need better than that. In periods of turbulent change and ambiguous data, we need to go and take a look at things where the work is done. According to Barley and Kunda, especially needed would be studies shedding light on the work of occupations such as managers, engineers, technicians, sales personnel and service workers – modes that have come to dominate the occupational structure in the richer part of the world. In this respect the present ethnography was at least conducted in the right place, although its primary focus was not in work but in the people who perform it.

The call back to the rough ground is, however, easier made than answered. According to Barley and Kunda, what is needed is qualitative fieldwork with more stress on the *etic* constructs /perspectives with the related practice of observation, than on the *emic* constructs /perspectives with the related promise of access to the subjective meanings and sense-making of the workers. If there has been a general shift of balance towards the latter, and it seems indeed to



have happened in the social sciences with the discursive turn, countermeasures would probably do good. But the wording of Barley and Kunda seems to betray some degree of contemptuous attitude towards the “*champions of participant observation*” (ibid, 84). Why? Are they frustrated by the past twenty years or so of relentless critic and self-inspection in ethnography?

I agree that we must *be there* to have a chance at least to notice how work is being performed, the ways that workers often are unable to explain in the absence of concrete situations. Also, a worker might lack the wider perspective (supposedly) held by the observer who *has been* to so many different locations, interconnected and influencing the present one. I would draw attention to two aspects of this situation, however, one more obviously political and the other about the subtle but persistent politics of learning and knowing. The first one concerns access.

Just as the call is to go observe those occupations that lead the change within the post-bureaucratic, late capitalist work environments, these are conspicuously the ones who close themselves from outside observers, within the confines of high position, expertise and confidentiality. If I did not hang around much at F-Secure, it was because I wasn't allowed to. Access is a big problem except in low paid service work, where the workers are in more subordinate situation, and the duties themselves can be undertaken by the fieldworker.<sup>21</sup> But in high tech or other expertise environments, the pay off is sharp between compromising one's impartiality for the trust of the employer /entrepreneur /power holder for the access to the locations and the data; or else remaining on the outskirts and relying on discursive material. I cannot imagine ever being given access to what Barley and Kunda suggest should be done to document work on computer: videotaping work sessions and developing software programs that log activities at a computer's interface (ibid, 85). To bring my software in the anti-virus company? If a researcher actually accedes to take such measures for thorough real time analysis, it is likely, in present-day organisations that the research project has turned into a consulting project and the means and ends of research and management have merged. I would be delighted to be presented with a positive counterexample. But I remain very sceptical after my own experience at F-Secure, which despite all its casualty and occasional high level of trust still resembled tightrope walking.

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<sup>21</sup> Sensitive issues such as exploitation and discrimination have been studied by journalist-fieldworkers with the method of covered participation. See, for instance, Ehrenreich 2001, Wallraf 1985. These approaches, of course, present formidable ethical challenges.

Tight security rules in the headquarters restricted my presence at the premises. I mostly met with the workers in little negotiation rooms, and a few times (against the rules) in their offices. I was able to do participant observation in the headquarters' Christmas parties twice, and in some meetings and conferences. The main source of evidence is the interviews – thematic, but very open structured – with the workers and managers.

### **Reflexivity**

The second aspect to which I wish to draw attention, entails an account on the reflexivity of fieldwork. Whether Barley and Kunda find themselves tired with this state of affairs or not, the undertaking of participant observation and the subsequent production of a written account are a method that balances its great power of understanding with a number of questions that cannot be overlooked, lest one ends up producing naive accounts bypassing interesting issues and reinforcing existing stereotypes – or even offering tools for straightforward exploitation. The ethnographer must remain alert, on many dimensions simultaneously. This also has a bearing on the goal which was to shed light on new things, the forms of which are yet unknown.

Unless we contempt ourselves with simple mechanistically conceived descriptions of *working bodies*, the intersubjective and multivocal nature of fieldwork experience must be taken into consideration. Even the most perceptive fieldworker aided by a host of colleagues and software cannot be everywhere at one time to witness all things potentially interesting. Selection takes place, and as we by now well know, selection is never innocent. Selective decisions (including unconscious preferences) are made in fieldwork partly informed by pre-existing research questions, partly by the flow of events and many times compromised by contrasting interests of fieldworkers, participants, gatekeepers, financiers, academics and other relations. Far from Malinowskian images of lone heroism, fieldwork is a crowded affair.

The quest for finding novel phenomena demands that people be taken as more rounded kind of beings, with all human dimensions welcomed to understand their behaviour, beside the more strictly work related or *rational* actions. This in turn will lead us to making sense of the intersubjective space, where ethnographic experience is created, in reciprocal moves in the human encounter that is as much part of the fieldworker's autobiography as it is that of the participants (Okely 1992, Hastrup 1992). Learning things about other people is to review assumptions held by oneself. As James Clifford (1988) illuminatingly pointed out, one of the most important legacies of ethnography from very early on, has been to offer a disturbing and potentially subversive

source of counterexamples, juxtapositions and images that force the established *bourgeois* reader to set the limits of the possible and the human far wider than conventional. Ethnography continues to have a powerful capacity to unsettle dominant understandings and popular pictures, but it requires that sensitive channels be left open to the more embodied or personally felt experience. For a more obvious example, consider the invention of *emotional labour* that Barley and Kunda present as a fruit of participant observation. Such a reframing of a *job's* contents must have demanded at least some measure of psychic capacity to empathically read the emotional life of the observed workers.

Writing the account of fieldwork is, as Barley and Kunda well know, much more than simply reporting the *results*. While I believe that Kirsten Hastrup has a point in saying that “*the utopia of plural authorship which grants the informants the status of writers, posits the anthropologist[ethnographer] in an authenticity trap no different from the one inherent in the visualist rhetoric of realism*”, I still believe that experiments with the shifting positions of observer/observed and writer/figure may be useful tools in ethnography, as can experiments with various modes of presence and documentation.<sup>22</sup>

I am tempted to follow James Clifford (1988) in the more general epistemological argument that the credibility of any attempt at reality description in modern times – or under the influence of metaculture of newness, as Greg Urban (2001) would put it – requires a displacement of the confident authorship. As the narrators of modern novels have increasingly turned from sovereign, panoptic and self-concealing positions towards more human, erroneous and fragile figures whose authority is in many ways limited, so also must ethnographers admit that their activity is open-ended, forever pointing at things left out or written over. I do not call for any belated mode of post-modern *self-imposed dysphasia*, but simply remind that it may be wise to leave visible some of the seams that show how the ethnographic account was patched together from the pieces of information and impression offered by fieldwork (cf. Eriksen 2006, 25). Such humbleness is not a sign of a weak method, quite the contrary. Ethnography is worthwhile, because the knowledge

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<sup>22</sup> One such “recent” experiment concerns the option of surrendering necessary equipment of documentation to the participants themselves, so that they may photograph, record, videotape etc. their own lives and surroundings. This option is taken for the greater authority of, but also for a greater commitment to the study by the participants, and for access to sectors of life and locations otherwise closed to the ethnographer. Further processing of the material allows observing the reflections and reactions of participants upon the material so initiated. Other avenues include joint ethnography by several equally positioned colleagues and return to the field, which is believed to reduce the bias of personal impression of a single moment isolated from historical contingencies (Burawoy, 2003).

it produces is in all its limitedness still of a unique kind among all practiced social science methods, and therefore replaced by others with difficulty. It is no small goal to reach out of one's conventional world view, to try to grasp a different or novel form. If such widening of consciousness cannot be attained in an exhaustive manner, it is no disrepute to attain it partially, marking the territory crossed and paths cleared as well as doublings, insecurities and dead ends.

Our time is brimming with the kind of practices of *scientism*, which produce seeming accuracy and dumb data, leaving the reader to bring the point home on her own, at worst relying on unchecked historical consciousness and popular prejudices. There's no need for more of that. Furthermore, as a source of understanding, the humanist epistemology underlying reflexive ethnography is probably under a greater pressure in the world of work and organisations, where economic and technocratic accounts tend to set the agenda, than it ever was in studies of more traditional subjects, typically the powerless and exotic groups in the margins of, or far away from economic centres. Hence, the more reason to claim the right to be reflexive.

### **Multisited ethnography in multisited economy – who studies whom?**

In discussions concerning ethnographic fieldwork in the present interconnected world the term *multisited ethnography* has emerged (Marcus 1995). Discontinuity and interpenetration in cultural formations today is setting different conditions for the mise-en-scène of fieldwork than was the case in the post-WW2 period, when the since-then-much-criticised, many-times-reformed and nevertheless still-widely-held image of anthropological fieldwork was consolidated. George Marcus writes: "*If we wish to get at the full mapping of a cultural formation and discover its contours, the object of our study is both 'here' and 'there'*" (1999, 97). I'm not sure if the *contours* exist, but still hold with Marcus that we must look for connections. If *full mappings* are somewhat imagined, simple mappings can be of great value, and they would often involve undertaking studies in several physical locations.

My fieldwork comprised a trip to F-Secure's sales office in San Jose, California. The business and professional model of Silicon Valley was so obvious from the beginning that I understood I should go there. Recalling my grounds at the time, I thought that among the overseas departments, the Silicon Valley/American site was the one most pointed at, admired and problematic to the people in the Helsinki headquarters. San Jose seemed to be the address of their ambivalent 'Other', one I wanted to meet. Other overseas units were also suggested to me by the company's representatives, but budgetary limits forced

a choice to be made. If I could have continued the study, next I should perhaps have followed the subcontracting tie to St. Petersburg...

What is the engine that sets the multisited ethnography in motion? Economic, political and cognitive or ideological connections bind the world together. They can be used to triangulate the ethnographer and the subjects with absent others – and this pushes the ethnography elsewhere (Marcus 1995). The ethnographer may choose to follow people, things, metaphors or plots, stories or allegories found in the field. Also life histories and public conflicts can reveal interesting connections. *The elsewhere* may manifest itself in a single site ethnography through a sensed, perhaps only partially articulated, system-awareness or discourse borrowing in the everyday consciousness and actions of the subjects (ibid). Why organisational researchers should listen to Marcus is because he argues for conceptualising the *global* in terms of related localities on the surface of the planet rather than “*something monolithic or external to them*” (ibid, 102). As an ethnographic inspiration, this can be an important antidote to current fashionable discourses on *global actors*. There are not that many space stations in orbit, yet.

At one time the generally accepted ideal of anthropological fieldwork was *rapport* between the informant(s) and the ethnographer(s). Marcus suggests we replace that concept with *complicity*. In the times of *generalised ethnography*, existential doubleness no longer concerns only the ethnographer, but both parties. Both are simultaneously inside and outside of the cultural formations studied. Both are also subject to the powerful flows of our time, thus tied to things elsewhere, albeit often in hidden ways. This is why Marcus suggests the ethnographer should rather remain on the border and never (try to) elide her outsideness. The issue of *rapport* has so far been predominantly a matter of professional and scientific ethics. Now, says Marcus, we ought to see it as a cognitive appraisal as well. The ethnographer is an actualisation of the *elsewhere* (1999).

Indeed, as I study Bharat in Helsinki, he studies Finnishness. It is his *profession*, as a localiser (a new job of globalisation), to study “cultures and languages” and prepare to translate technologies from some of them into others. It is he, not me, who is alone among *natives*, passing his lonely weekends writing accounts of Finland for Indian audiences... To him, I must be

one of the *natives*. But are we on the same field?<sup>23</sup> Academic ethnographers are indeed not the only people going places and asking questions. I have been worried about not getting in, but perhaps that *inside* is not so stable a place either. Maybe the employees of the case company are themselves more or less standing on the thresholds. Moved as pawns by the employer or travelling of their own will, navigating and climbing the everchanging webs of digital, late capitalist production. It may be hasty to say that all relations are now ephemeral, but there is much of it. Each time I returned to the company, things and people had changed. When I went to San Jose, I was introduced to the staff as one coming "from Helsinki" – with all the undertones of corporate agent in it. At times I found myself chatting with the informants about "those in Helsinki", "those in America", "the management" or "the workers". Always the absent ones. Sometimes they did this with anxiety or even fear, sometimes with amusement or contempt. To be honest, I was puzzled as to whose side I should be taking, and mostly echoed the person presently engaged with. Yet often I confronted them with other people's words and deeds, lending perhaps that way my person for them to actualise the *elsewhere* within.

Discourses do not flow entirely disconnected from people, material forms and locations (Holland et al. 1998; Urban 2001), although the connection is far from perfect, as recent social science has shown. Rather, we might look for the way in which discursive formations travel between places and people, and get altered on the way. Marcus picks up the concept of *illicit discourse* introduced by Douglas Holmes concerning his ethnography among European extreme right politicians (Marcus 1999, 103–105). It means that "*fragments of local discourses have their origins elsewhere without the relationship to that elsewhere being clear*". Such a state of affairs produces anxiety, wonder and insecurity in both the ethnographer and her subjects. We must recognise this common predicament, says Marcus (ibid). This is most obvious concerning the dominant late modern ideologies /cultural forms that circulate in society and especially in the workplaces (e.g. the dominant call for flexibility and the managerial call for diversity management). While dutiful observation may

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<sup>23</sup> Let me guess what you are thinking: what of his texts, could they not be included in this report, or otherwise referred to? Would not that have provided "experimentation with shifting positions of writer and figure"? Alas! I waited too long. Before I realised it was no matter if they were written in Indian languages, excerpts could be translated, and before I was ready to present my informants some kind of preliminary text to comment upon (if they wanted), he was no longer among the employees. My writing process proved hopelessly out of pace with the speedy careers of global economy. When I tried to find him, his traces in the Internet were already cold. Bharat, if you should somehow reach this report, and find it worth the effort and risk of leaving your pseudonym, please contact me. Something may still be contrived.

reveal important insights about work, concomitant study of discourses may help to see what it may be related to, and thus, where to go next.

### **Where have all the subalterns gone? On the minefield of power relations**

What Marcus means by *complicity* is not what has been the focus of the critics of anthropology's complicities with colonial and postcolonial powers. His is a matter between the ethnographer and her subjects (1999). Where the ethnographer has often been seen as solely engaged in telling the story of the powerless, Marcus argues for a more multisided account of the "shifting power valences" of fieldwork relationships. Elites and subalterns, e.g., may not know each other, but still be connected and influence each other's lives. Unequal power relations are no longer always in favour of the ethnographer in multisited ethnography. Both may be middle class, or the informants may be more powerful.

One of my peer anthropologist readers said she first thought I was ironic about my informants, but later in my text found proof for my sincere sympathy towards them. While this may be a matter of style (indeed she said changing one word corrected the impression), I think she touched a problematic point in my work. On whose side should I be? There are no real subalterns around. Even the management is at times in such a pinch that it deserves some sympathy. But leaving them aside, I still can't choose between the remaining groups: foreigners in Helsinki, Finns in Helsinki, expatriate Finns in San Jose, immigrant locals in San Jose and non-immigrant locals there. And this is but a rough categorisation. They all use power and simultaneously are subjected to somebody else's power. And the positions shift: the situation at boom and after it was markedly different. In this respect I found myself adjusting to an ever-changing minefield of open and hidden power relations as I proceeded from one interview to another. I seldom knew where I was with them. Typical of organisations? No doubt, but also of the triangular situation of multiethnic organisations: management + locals/majority + newcomers/minority. And this is very consequential to the aim of combating discrimination and furthering social justice. Earnestly, I don't think there are any *good guys* or *bad guys* to be identified; for the purposes of the present study at least, I would see everybody's responsibility in relation to their present power without taking fixed sides with anybody. And this despite the fact that, for one moment in the field, wiping tears of anger, I had no difficulty knowing on whose side I was not.

### Sensitivity trap

According to Marcus, where the post-war critical anthropology considered ethics in terms of broad world historical forces (colonialism, capitalism), recently ethnographers have become faced with concrete forms of activism to be engaged with or rejected by them. Shall the ethnographer join her subjects in ecological movements, women's movements, neo-traditional, separatist, religious, labour movements etc.? In such moments of choice Marcus (1999) sees an affinity, a marking equivalence between fieldworker and informants, their shared imagination.

Returning to my present work, there is in fact one concern that unites my informants and me. We seem to be equally baffled and taken aback by the fact that as world-citizens of the late capitalist era, as fellow humans encountering each other, we are suddenly at a loss. How are we to deal with dividing issues of language, culture, religion and ethnicity? Shall we pay dutiful attention to any possible differences between us, out of politeness? Or would that seem too categorising, a kind of multiculturalist racism? Would it be better to ignore any differences – or is that in turn impolite, insensitive and discriminating? Suppose I have lunch with a North African visiting colleague, should I ask if she wants her meal without pork, or is that imposing an Islamic identity upon her? What if she's actually Jewish, and would in fact like to avoid shellfish as well as pork? Or if she's of a fiercely anti-religious conviction, condemning all such suggestions as regressive and paternalistic? Asking first about her conviction seems no less intruding.<sup>24</sup>

Without joining a right wing anti-multicultural discourse, we must admit, that it's no easy thing to tackle our differences in today's world. Not even between equality-minded, mutually appreciative colleagues. Ironically, our *backgrounds* have become too obscure and multitudinous to permit a treatment fitting to our demands of equality and personal integrity. I think it behoves us not to blame this situation to anyone too hastily. We might rather use our shared imagination to solve it or at least to learn to live in it with minimal damages. In this regard I

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<sup>24</sup> If this example seems little trouble, consider what it means to tackle less conscious aspects of cultural thought, such as the premises of interpersonal interaction. How to tell your colleague for instance, that she has based her actions on an assumption alien to you? This assumption, you think, she has internalised so fully she's no longer aware of it, if indeed she ever was. Most people are not flattered by hints of not governing their own behaviour. It may or may not help if you open up your own cultural thinking at the same time, but in any case such self-reflexive knowledge is hard to give for the simple reason that it's hard to gain. In the lack of respectful and competent explanations for perceived differences, both parties hover at the brink of using essentialising stereotypic images, and often fall.



find myself arguing as a fellow contemporary rather than as an academic endowed with deeper knowledge. There would be little trouble in solving such puzzles alongside getting acquainted, but for the ephemeralisation of relationships and the persisting shadows of inequality and cynical doubt, both ubiquitous in present-day societies. So we enter into the ghost-dance of avoiding potentially troublesome issues; in professional relations, at job interviews, in the workplace. I came to make an academic enquiry into transnational encounters, not expecting to find my informants and I sitting together in this sensitivity trap. There is doubtless a profound irony in the fact that, as humanity at last has come together under the sign of globalisation, the Kantian promise of cosmopolitan communication is betrayed by continuing gross inequality, exploitation, competition and distrust. Did we come all this way to fail at a hands reach from each other? Will we lose the precious moment for contact before the tide turns, and ecological forces overcome economic ones and push everyone back to separate holes again?

### **The strange and the familiar**

When ethnographers undertake fieldwork within their familiar settings, home towns and family networks, using their mother tongue and minding their personal affairs intermittently with their field activities, the boundaries between *home* and *field* become blurred and the distinction proves to be a socially and culturally constructed category (Amit 2000). Until very lately, anthropologists tended to confuse the movement to other forms of life as both cognitive and physical. The fieldworker would *go there* to be *among* the natives. In the present world this no longer convinces. Other forms of life are all over in the urban archipelagos, and the securely familiar (e.g. the bureaucratic organisation of work) turns into novel forms poorly understood. Ample opportunities for research are available around the corner. But grasping them, the status and location of the field must be negotiated over and over again during the research process and even after it, as the ethnographer will continue to live within the same urban and institutional landscape as her once-informants, and is likely to keep contact (see e.g. Pink 2000). Also, where observation begins and ends is to be negotiated, as the same kinds of phenomena that preoccupy the ethnographer in the more confined (work)place under study also appear beyond it. The move from autobiographical participation to fieldwork is not necessarily a physical one, but always a cognitive one. The ethnographer will construct her field and her informants out of the flow of everyday public and private life, whereby institutions turn to *cases*, locations to *sites* and friends and acquaintances into *informants*. Therefore it is suggested that the ethnographic

text include some kind of explicit admission of the processes by which ‘Otherness’ is apprehended (Rapport 2000, 73).

But it appears that this border analysis must always be carried out, not just in special cases. Rapport himself wrote with Cohen (Cohen and Rapport 1995) that anthropologists are never *at home*, for their job is to make distance and *Verfremdung*. Doing ethnography in one’s own nation-state and mother tongue only reveals the inexhaustible, subtle differences of class, region, profession, gender, neo-tribe etc.; more strikingly. People speaking the same language attach different meanings to the words they share. “*There is an inescapable distinction between communication (a social act) and interpretation (an individuated act)*” (ibid, 11). This translates fairly well to the Vygotskian-Bakhtinian distinction made by Holland et al. (1998) between the *words of the others* and the *inner words*. And it is so everywhere among representatives of our species. It is not only some arbitrarily defined subcategory of *anthropology at home* as should take that slippage into account, say Cohen and Rapport, but the discipline as a whole. Yes. I would add that the same holds for any disciplinary label under which one might be undertaking ethnographic fieldwork. There is no limit to how small a difference can make an ‘Other’, yet ‘Otherness’ is what one has set out to learn from.

Now what would that mean in a study like the present one? That it wasn’t only the San Jose people that we might take as ‘Other’, but strange and unfamiliar forms might lurk in just about anybody’s behaviour and ideas. Of course! That’s half the joy in making ethnography anyway. (The other half is the chance to show sometimes how boringly – or alarmingly – familiar are the ideas of some of the most exotic and marginal, even demonised people.) But either my fieldwork was particularly twisted or else these questions have lost a part of their weight lately. I no longer know to whom I’m writing: the Finns (supposedly uniform *home audience*); the foreign personnel at F-Secure (I hoped they would *write back*, but interest seems minimal); their Finnish colleagues (no better reaction); the *research community* abroad (at least one careless colleague promised to act as opponent, if that counts as an audience); non-Finnish-speaking colleagues and friends in Finland – or some other, unspecified audience somewhere on this planet? Oh, it’s so hopeless that I have stopped worrying. And if you still don’t believe that it’s all gone awry, what about this: I conducted 11 out of 35 interviews in Finnish, my mother tongue, the rest were made in what we between us called English. Now, I’m writing this account in what I dear call English. Of all the moments in the journey this is the most confusing one. Things that become exotic when said in English are not the same that would do so in Finnish. I would be lying if I claimed I govern

somehow that process. Rather than a grand translation of the ideas and practices of one 'Other', I find myself crafting a collection of intersecting translations. Some people may need to know what *salmiakki* is, while others might benefit from insights into selling the American way – and yet others would find it insightful to think of the varieties in pragmatist reasoning. I try to hold up a tray with the drops of complexity I have found for you, dear readers. But I am abroad in a foreign linguistic environment with only vague ideas of your needs – it is foggy.

### **Between field and story**

Having said so much about open-endedness and displacement of confident authorship, I must recognise the productive and needful role of data analysing methods intervening between fieldwork and its report. As fields and fieldworks vary, so do methods of analysis. I fully agree that it is a virtue in a report to lead the reader *by the hand* through the steps of the qualitative analysis so that he/she can have a clear understanding of how exactly the conclusions were reached. (The same of course holds for statistical analysis, where assumptions concerning the nature of the data are crucial.) My present reader may judge to what extent I have achieved these ideals. The following is an attempt to account for what happened in the often mystified gap between withdrawal from field and appearance with a story.

What all kinds of documents did I use? Following from the discursive bias of my fieldwork, the material is dominated by interviews. I officially interviewed 30 people altogether, six of them twice. The original nine interviews of the pilot study were written up by hand, I made the notes during and immediately after the meetings. The later interviews were digitally recorded, with the exception of Eddie and John, whom I interviewed the day I had forgotten my recorder. Of the pilot informants two had left the organisation between the research turns, and one was not reached. One recorded interview was technically damaged beyond repair. One of the possible interviewees I contacted refused to participate, referring to her workload as a head of department.

Beyond the interviews I, of course, talked with a number of people. Most importantly, my first contact was the then HR manager who gave much of the information I rely on as *the company view* or *official version*. To my disrepute, these talks were not recorded. I had, however, the possibility to check and complete my memorised ideas with the help of company documents such as annual reports and public website as well as the kind help of the HR secretaries, the first of whom also figured among interviewees. The company

Christmas parties were opportunities for casual exchange with the occupational safety delegate (työsuojeluvaltuutettu), among others. In San Jose I had more informal relationships including – beyond the help-deskers – a young female employee of Vietnamese origin, with whom I visited some *ethnic* Vietnamese restaurants and malls during the lunch hours and on the weekend, and the spouse of one of the Finnish expats who took me to San Francisco and related much of what I know about the human side of expatriate life, which I have not directly included in this report, however, for ethical reasons. I also met with scholars, such as J.A. English-Lueck, in the region. These talks gave both what I consider ethnographic material and intellectual means for making sense of it.

While I visited the Helsinki headquarters, the idea of bringing in a camera to document the physical surroundings did cross my mind to be quickly chased away by the forbidding regulations of access. In San Jose, however, I took a number of photographs, some of which appear in this report. I also include some photography and remarks concerning locality and ethnoscape in each location, beyond the company's confines. The short duration of my trip to San Jose give much of my material the unfortunate flavour of tourist souvenir. However, I took along what I could, for instance a full series of articles fortuitously published during my stay in the San Jose Mercury News on the various aspects of the downturn in the Valley. During those days I also wrote the most detailed field notes of the entire research endeavour.

In Helsinki, I collected newspaper clippings before and during this research, pertaining to the issues of immigration, Finnishness and modern work. Perhaps I just added more interest on the issues of high tech-work and any appearance of F-Secure (which are more than accidental in the Finnish context). I also participated in many public and professional seminars and occasions, at times in the role of observer and at other times as lecturer, as much to keep up with developments in diversity/immigration issues as to influence them and disseminate my own findings.

The most rigorous analytic treatment was given to the main bulk of material, the interviews. While I still had something left of my grants, I made the decision to have a professional subcontractor write down the recordings. It was as much a way to save time for family as it was a way to have someone else intervene in the (in my mind, dangerously) intimate chain of one-to-one conversation turned into my textual account of it, and on into the present textual commentary of it. I am aware of opposite opinions stating that the ethnographer will not gain intimate enough knowledge of her material, unless she plays and replays the recordings sufficiently to learn them by heart. In this case, however, I deemed the first reasons more important.

The way I obtained my texts enabled me to base the conversational analysis on a merciless text that revealed all my own mistakes, interrupting the informant, missing her/his point etc. without the slightest possibility to embellish the written version to my own benefit. I do not of course accuse any colleagues of consciously embellishing their recordings, but having had a basic education in cognitive psychology has made me wary of unintended tendencies in that direction – and maybe it was a slight support for the bulk of data having to do for *evidence* in the quasi absence of observation. The trade-off is that this way I may have fallen victim of the subcontractor's tendencies or mistakes. As a matter of fact using her services did not liberate me from listening through all the discs, and correcting several details she could not have known, such as proper names and technical terms.

The textualised interviews were further processed in a content or semantic analysis, with an eye on the conversational aspects. I am aware of the laden nature of concepts such as ethnicity, nationality or cultural differences. Therefore, as told above, I proceeded in the interviews from general work and job topics (tell me about your work, what are your duties?), through more evaluative and personal aspects (what are the pluses and minuses in your work?) to the first mentioned, presumably sensitive issues. All these themes were phrased a little differently according to the situation, and I allowed for considerable side tracks, if it seemed to be important and meaningful for the interviewee. Of course, my informants were aware from the first contact (by e-mail) about my general topic. (See Appendix 1.) But I thought it would be better not to overdose ethnicity discourse, but rather see where and how they would embark themselves on it. As it proved, they did so very rarely.

The semantic analysis proceeded by first making right-margin-marks on themes and subjects of talk such as *family*, *visas*, *boss* or *salary*. Next I categorised these into roughly explicit and implicit themes. Explicit themes in this respect referred to those accounts by the interviewees that could at least in principle be counterchecked against other informants' accounts. It was basically talk that lingered on the mundane daily activities and the organisation and business environment. The implicit category, in contrast was what I did not directly quote, but had to construct from between the lines of my informants' talk. It was what I believed they must assume in order to say what they said. Having gone through an entire interview in this manner, I made some synthesis of it, drawing also on related field notes. I tried to recollect the situation and my own feelings towards it. I looked at any possible favoured ideas the informant would keep returning to, what seemed to be most important to her/him, what was her/his angle at looking into the topics, in which ways

she/he departed from and invalidated my frames.<sup>25</sup> I made between-subjects-comparisons in terms of several thematic topics, such as ethnicity and cultural differences, and – as my understanding grew – pragmatism and related forms of flexibility. These are written into the accounts pertinent to the relative chapters of this report. For the interest of the reader, I include a *raw* quotation of one interview playing a prominent role in the report. It may be interesting to estimate the degree to which editorial demands and readability cause changes in the seemingly quoted nature of the informants' words. (Appendix 2.)

Asking about work in general was not only a way to postpone ethnicity, but I thought that I could 1) have at least a discursive reflection on the actuality of work I wasn't allowed to observe 2) use the evaluative account of work as a double mirror of what the employees believed their work was like and what it ought to be like, in their mind. Having such an access to their work-related world views would, I concluded, make it possible to compare their relative understandings, and see if there were obvious mismatches. Such mismatches would be, at least, potential causes for cultural friction at work. This proved to be an even better idea than I had thought. I perceived not only many potential sources of misunderstanding, but also a cultural context that renders understandable, why the Anglo-American style diversity discourse is disapproved by an overwhelming majority of my informants.

At the time of publishing my first work-in-progress results (Trux 2005) I had done this much. I had not written anything about the San Jose material. For some reason I felt it was out of fit with the method so far. Maybe the San Jose data was a too densely tangled experiential cluster of interviews, accounts and highly personal memories, all crowded into a short period in my autobiography and also a short period in the organisational life of the unit. Compared to the easygoing Helsinki material, a calm experience of low dose exposure to organisational life, a mere dimension of my overall Helsinki life, San Jose was too disjunctive to be dealt with in the same manner. I feared that I was imposing an analytic device upon it, a device I had developed for the substantially different material in Helsinki. As some of the memories were also sensitive, I struggled to tell about them in a way that was at once honest and respectful.

This was the moment I started writing narratives. First, I returned to my own story as a disciplinary transmigrant, which I had written some time ago, more for my own sanity than for any audience. Chiselling off the more therapeutic

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<sup>25</sup> These moves are discussed in a more detailed philosophical context in the chapter "Intersubjectivity".

dimensions, I noticed it was a way to lead the reader to the subject matter under discussion. After that, I composed a skeleton of a story from the 2005 account of organisational life in Helsinki, adding new vignettes and personal stories of the foreigners' in Helsinki and the people in San Jose. These were not analysed by the same procedures as the Finns' views in Helsinki. Rather, the other data provided reflections and commentaries upon the *Finnish ideas*. It is Finland, after all, that I know best. I do not have the same richness of familiarity and detail about the United States, or California, or Silicon Valley – one does *not* make ethnographic fieldwork in two weeks. But since the idea was to shed light on Finnish ways, and how they may inadvertently discourage full cooperation or participation across ethnic boundaries, I judged the situation to be favourable. The foreigners were doing just that: dissenting, misreading, problematising what the Finns thought were most obvious facts. So I collected the testimonies and used the eyes of the foreigners to relativise the Finnish version of workplace reality, analysed previously. This is how the first version of the present text was constructed, as a conference paper presented in 2006. Since then I have been adding more flesh around the bones, writing ideas out large.

There was a discontinuity, a juncture where the method had to be changed, although the reasons are still less than clear. They may have to do with the multisited nature of the enquiry, or the multicultural setting at any of the sites. It is not the first ethnography (or ethnographic dissertation) that can't be presented as a smooth exercise of a tried-out method, self-evidently following the command of its author. Ethnography is a non-methodical method: it teases out reality's capacity to surprise us, and that is just what it is good for. It can tell us something new. I trust that if I can tell a story based on other people's experiences, a story that has the power to move at least some cognitive-emotional chunks in the minds of my readers, I have not failed. Yes, the endeavour lies somewhere between the social scientist's and the novelist's. Its weakness – and risk – is that a contract between reader and writer is needed, that is of a genre of its own – somewhere between a fictional novel and a positivist report. All readers interested in the theme of multiethnic workplace may not be familiar with such a contract, despite its long tradition in anthropology and the recent spread of ethnography to related fields.

In this chapter I have discussed some aspects of ethnography, more than was wise perhaps, but hopefully enough to make clear that there are some subtleties one might better be aware of. Considering the position and established reputation as ethnographers of Stephen Barley and Gideon Kunda, I can only read their call for simple *recordings* of social life in work settings as a shortcut,

an urgent exit from theoretical deprivation created by a rapidly metamorphosing economy. Regarding the redundant discussion of the *subtleties* over the past decades, I understand frustration. Before regiments of young scholars are sent to the survival test, however, we might do fair to share some of the existing experience of the method. Scholars in the loosely defined field of organisation studies benefit from the relatively permissive norms for what counts as a contribution in terms of methods, subjects and location. Unlike many anthropologists, they do not need to apologise for not sailing overseas, indeed not necessarily looking beyond the very setting where they themselves have been working so far. But in undertaking ethnographic enquiry they will soon find the need for a more reflexive account of what is involved in that activity: who studies whom, where and why.

### **Ethics**

I have obtained the informed consent of the interviewees by first presenting the aims of the study in e-mail invitation, and upon meeting, in oral description. I suggested they should invent pseudonyms for themselves in case I should like to use direct quotations of their words. Some chose a pseudonym characterising themselves as neatly as possible, so that their gender and ethnicity would show, while a few explicitly opted for covering their ethnicity, in which case I have not provided it. It is obvious that some of them are easy to identify by close workmates of the time. I have not *altered* other personal information, however, in order to intensify their protection, because I didn't see the need of it. Instead, on some occasions I have omitted revealing data that was not necessary for conveying the findings.

A persistent problem in cooperation with the informants is the speedy careers of the global economy. Many of the quoted individuals could no longer be reached at the organisation when I had a manuscript ready for reading and commenting upon. This is ironic in the present conditions of global networking, but it could not be helped. The employer is not able or entitled to give me their addresses other than the e-mail, which of course no longer responds after the employment is terminated. Searching the Internet may and may not yield results. A few traces may be left for a while after changing employer, but most of my informants have learned to cover their contact information from public access. The present text may thus for some be the first feedback from their contribution they might eventually encounter, which is of course undesirable. A lesson for all ethnographers involved with late modern environments is that while our respondents may feel near and accessible, an absolute counter case to the *natives* of old times in inaccessible remoteness,



they may not be that for very long. In fact they may vanish beyond reach just about anytime, for which reason timely solidification of relationships with exchange of personal information with at least some subset of key informants might be recommended.

The company's identity is here given openly, as I have already mentioned. In some previous publications I have used a pseudonym, but open versions have also been published in both Finland and the USA. I have kept contact with the human resource managers at the event of each publication in order to reach good mutual understanding and acceptance, while still retaining the right to academic independence. As stated before, all conclusions and descriptions presented here are my own, and the picture given refers to the period of fieldwork, 1999–2004, with only a few, marked exceptions. I have never been employed by or received any remuneration from the company. Especially, there has been no consultancy relationship. Financially, the research was supported by previous employment at the Finnish Innovation Fund (during the preliminary study) and subsequent grants from the Finnish Work Environment Fund, Foundation for Economic Education and the Finnish Ministry of Labour.

## 6 Downturn

When I visited F-Secure for the last time in spring 2000, the Nasdaq and other relevant indexes had already started to sink, but the consequences were not yet felt by their workers. The last one I talked to that spring, was Matti. It was he who said, *"I'm glad that there are foreigners at work. It opens up your perspective. It gives you practice in English... this is global activity... I might myself go working abroad at some point."*

When I met Matti again, it was in summer 2002 in the new headquarters building. He had not gone to work abroad. And it wasn't the only hope that had evaporated. He would have considered post-graduate studies, doing research, if it were financially possible for him. But it wasn't. Although his work was all right, it wasn't exciting in the way it had been two years earlier. He had received his degree a year before, and he might have changed employer, if he would have come across anything interesting in the Internet. He would still have liked to go abroad.

Matti: If my friends have talked about some company or anything, so then I have looked a bit, what they have to offer.

Researcher: Right. When you think of sort of other alternatives, so, do you think about Finland or other countries? Does it matter to you where...?

Matti: Actually anywhere. Maybe if I could get abroad, it wouldn't need to be necessarily so terribly interesting a job... if anything comes across, if I get an opportunity, let's say so.

Researcher: Yeah. So, you mean, it would not need to be interesting, or that it would precisely need to be very interesting, or which way?

Matti: No, no it would not need to be interesting, if I could go abroad.

Researcher: Aha, it would be rewarding as such, that you could have that experience of...

Matti: It would, yes. Exactly.<sup>iv</sup>

When asked what the international character of his workplace in Helsinki meant to him, Matti started neutrally mentioning the use of the English language. Then he went on to the travelling, which posed "timetable problems" to him. This took some planning or considering, but otherwise it wasn't a big deal to him. As I gave no further hint than an "mmm" between his talking, Matti then took up the issue of multiethnic workplace. He had workmates from

different countries. And sometimes it made him think what it would be like to work in an organisation of Finns only. I got the impression that this matter was for him just another burden of life: not overwhelming, he could handle it (*"I'm used to it."*). But it certainly was no resource to him. I looked at the grave young man in front of me. It was the same person I had talked to previously. Where was all the learning and curiosity? What had happened? Why was working abroad rewarding, if having the foreign colleagues at home was a burden?

In all the new interviews, it was very visible that work ethos had suffered a blow. This is perhaps not so obvious considering that general conditions at F-Secure were still very participatory. The workers' perception of "democracy" does not seem ungrounded in the light of the fact that like many high tech companies, F-Secure is a young organisation founded by a handful of friends. The founder-CEO was photographed sitting on the floor when they ran out of chairs in a monthly meeting.<sup>26</sup> That no longer happens, but more established forms of "democracy" flourish; in addition to the monthly meetings, an advisory workers' council with elected representatives and top management offers a regular forum for a two-way flow of information. This is in fact a mandatory body in all Finnish organisations of a certain size. The recent general opinion much regretted the fact that these *cooperative councils* (*yt-neuvottelukunta*) only meet to handle the strictly stipulated matters involved in layoffs. The letter of the law is thus observed, while its spirit is neglected. In this matter F-Secure follows its own path.

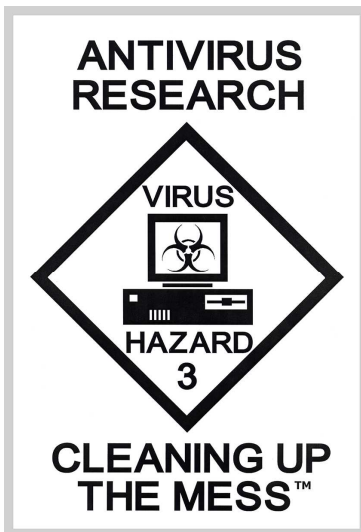
Burnout counter-offensives were already taken at the boom time to discredit the self-imposed image of the tireless programmer. At the downturn, the bulk of the workforce had attained a family founding age, and family-values now rule, making it legitimate to avoid travelling, for instance. Extra hours are counted. In spite of this, the distance between the workers and the management has grown most noticeably since the layoffs, and more subtly by the growth of the personnel, and by postmodern demands for consumer service and shareholder impression management.

If 'nerds' were culturally dominant during the boom, now the pace is set by economists. Research programmes with a large investment of work and human commitment are abandoned because of managerial strategies based on the market situation. *"The boys must stop polishing their products forever and adding extra features,"* the HR manager said, *"because consumers just want*

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<sup>26</sup> Such a photograph was published in the Helsingin Sanomat monthly supplement, dating from spring 2000.

*the basic, inexpensive, and easy-to-use."* It is difficult to imagine a worse blow to the professional heirs of the Promised Land once called the knowledge society. Wierzbowsky, as one of the employees who must keep watch over the Internet, described his job after the downfall: "*Something between janitor and medical*". His irony hardly covered the disillusionment.



*Wierzbowsky showed me a T-shirt, with this printing on the back, designed by a group of colleagues. The shirt itself was red, with black print.*

As an organisation, F-Secure seems to rely on what the Finnish sociologists Juha Antila and Pekka Ylöstalo (2002) have termed the *proactive mode*, allowing workers to influence both the products and the working conditions in exchange for the expectation that they bear responsibility and take initiative in the flow of events. Product design and marketing are coupled, and the mode also includes cooperation with various stakeholders. In the case of F-Secure, sustainability as a related idea is visible in efforts to shrink the ecological footprint by using green energy and by joining a corporate responsibility network.

“Democratic” management in a *sustainable* organisation? I admit that the description may seem naive. Have I simply overlooked the clever workings of managerial exploitation? To the extent that the workers themselves may be doing so, this may be true. But the workers were not uncritical; they openly criticised the industry, the customers and the management. Also, from the management’s part, it was a very different discourse from that outlined for instance by Gideon Kunda in *Engineering Culture* (1992). One of my

informants with experience of organisations in Russia and the US said he appreciated the fact that problems can be acknowledged and conflicting interests negotiated instead of pretending that there is always a win-win situation. Of course the management is not bound to its subordinates' views; there is only a kind of enlightened autocracy, not real democracy. Does the management after all hear the bottom-up flow of wisdom? The company does not escape the basic tension of any centrally led organisation, and it is part of late modern capitalism. Something still seems to alleviate the worst pain that might be caused by these pressures. I have, however, only the workers' understandings of what that something might be. My material points at what they consider the sources of their feeling of an "air of democracy" and the varying ways in which they engage themselves in its defence.

### **Not from material alone**

From a labour market perspective, the employees have come down from expectations of social mobility. Rather than making the companies compete for their workforce, they must now be content if they have a workplace with some continuity. Below the higher ranks of management, the value of stock options has melted away. Fearing loss of economic control over the company, management cut off all boom era luxury benefits and some more common ones as well. Some workers strongly criticised this, as further proof of the management's inaccurate understanding of the situation, exaggeration of danger and undervaluation of the comfortable conditions necessary for innovative work. One of them was Noam. I met Noam in the autumn of 2003. When I had asked about "democracy" and the bottom-up flow of information in the company, the HR manager had mentioned him. According to the manager, the employees do use the chance to debate in the monthly meetings. "When Noam brings out his checked notebook, we can be sure that tough questions will follow."

Noam is an engineer, calling himself "a nerd", and a project manager. Although he is officially part of management, he works directly with products and near his team members when teams are small; and at F-Secure they often are. For him, the project manager is *"the guy that does everything that the others don't do"* and *"the 911"*. He reflected on his stressful position and my comment on his light tone by stressing commitment to quality and learning and respect for deadlines. He took a retrospective look at his company to tell me how he has come to where he is now, professionally.

So, last project for instance we had a 12 per cent delay, in a project which was the biggest so far in this company. So, things are going more or less ok. ... I think one of

the things that is important for this... Not just for me but the whole R&D organisation where I work, was we had a manager that had a vision ... for the department, and he was able to implement that. So we were able to improve all the time and become I would say much more professional now than we were last time when you were here in 2000. <sup>v</sup>

Among all the casual, easy-to-talk-to F-Securians, Noam was one of the most open. Or did I simply feel that we had a common moral stand, which made me sympathise with him? I only know that we ended our conversation in *joint imagination* on the future of capitalism and on Brazilian culture.

Aside from passionate ideas about his profession and the organisation in which he works, Noam also showed a markedly balanced approach, bringing up various perspectives and considering the limitations of his information. He had come to F-Secure in typical boom-era fashion, by publishing one of his university projects on the Internet while he was finishing his studies in his native country in southern Europe. Somebody at F-Secure saw it and he soon had an invitation to a job interview.

And so basically I finished the project that I published on the internet. Then I was contacted to come here. Then I came here and talked to the people and what convinced me was talking to the actual people who were doing the actual work, not really the management - - But it was really seeing the people and how happy they were and the relationship they had with each other which was very close and friendly. And so that convinced me basically to try it, try it out. I always wanted to work abroad anyway, so it was a good first step. (Same source.)

Noam lamented the disappearance of "vision" from the company. He felt himself very much at odds with the downturn atmosphere of disillusionment. In his view, the 'nerds' do not live by salary alone. In addition they want to change the world and serve larger society.

So my point or my... The perfect workplace is where there is always this vision. Of course for that you have a how should I say, a non-materialistic approach, or not just a materialistic approach. - - To the work. - - So you have to have a notion of what are then things that keep the people together. - - This was one of the things that I said once to [the CEO's first name] when we had this... Had this traditional talking to people as they came into the company, when the company was still small enough. It was in -98. - - And I told him that why are we going public, because there is more important things to do. A company has its responsibility towards its environment and especially to its people, because the company only exists... the capitalist way of looking at this is that companies exist to make profit... My way of looking at this is that the company exists to make profit so that it can invest in the society where it is. So that the society can grow and it can grow with the society. And I think that when we get to the point where the company is to make profit, that's where the pleasure ends. - - Because [then] profit is what drives you. And profit is not a vision. It's a number. (Same source.)

Noam draws a line from this thought to the way the workers are treated. According to him, investing in people is no longer important for the company. Everything is sacrificed to economise, which is also ridiculous, since the resulting cost cuts are small, while the entire productivity of the company rests on human input. The latest on the list for cuts was removing all plants from the offices, a decision that very much unnerved him. While many of his colleagues had left the organisation, Noam was still there. The reason he gives is not solidarity towards the company, but solidarity towards old friendships. He would not like to leave his colleagues. Describing an ideal job or ideal work he would like to do, Noam vigorously defends his view of professional pride and craftsmanship against what he perceives as a financial shift in values.

So obviously knowledge was more important than money there. And the fact that I was finding a company in the capitalist world that was trying to do the things that I thought were important was something special. And I said ok that it's clear that I want to be in this company. I don't want to be in an open office where everybody wears a suit and everything we do is to work the day for making the money day after day and that's it - - Then the work is over. That's not what I was looking for. That's one of the reasons why I liked F-Secure, at that time: Data Fellows. Maybe the name change is also something telling about the company, because we changed the name because of the marketing value of 'F-Secure'. - - So the perfect work, again to go back to the initial question is where you can fulfil yourself, not by feeling happy for being at work but being proud of what you do. - - And not necessarily being proud, you know, you're doing a big piece of money, nobody loves that. You don't need to do that to be proud. You can do a chair and be proud. - - Because you can see that you have done it perfectly. - - And it works and it fulfils its cause. - - And you feel that you have done it better than the previous chair. (Same source.)

The situation might be described from Richard Sennett's (1998; 2006) point of view as a workforce struggling beneath an imposed order of new capitalism and that would not be far from the truth. The recent changes had indeed hollowed out the self-confidence of the people I had met three years earlier, self-confidence that had made an impression on me (see chapter 4). Now their efforts to explain and get a hold on the situation ran in many directions, incoherent. But that is only one part of the story. In 2000 many praised flexibility, innovativeness, risk and irreversible change. At that time these values were still framed within the hacker ethics and the workers believing in them were supported by a sense of economic security and social status. Work was "exciting". It was the ethos Sennett calls fresh page thesis, the predecessor of neo-liberal thought, as we would now call it. Those who do not admit that these values can do harm still tend to perceive them in that innocent light (including both managers and workers). Following Sherry Ortner, here we might distinguish between varying degrees of reflexivity toward the dominant forms, from total incorporation to becoming aware and turning against them.

This process may be especially difficult for high-tech professionals because they had previously anchored their professional identity in good part in the same values now imposed upon them in a new merciless tone. Flexibility is not what it used to be. Only a few years earlier people like them wanted to be flexible, yearned for flexibility – now they have no choice but to be flexible. It is expected, demanded from them.

Elsewhere, I have drawn attention to the image of *flexibility* as a contested and slippery cultural tool of self-management (see Trux 2008), one that has many meanings according to whose particular cultural world it is seen through (Holland et al. 1998) – like a key that opens many doors to different rooms. Concerning flexibility, a further irony can be observed; anti-virus work is yet another *mise en scène* of the flexible citizen, pointing to the older version of this cultural image: the human body equipped with an intelligent, adaptable defence system (see Martin 1994). Anti-virus products for the personal computer can thus be compared with anti-germ (typically lactobacillus, vitamins or vaccinations) products destined to the consumer as a biological organism. In this setting, the virus researchers are given the role of *flexibility champions* to help us all improve our flexibility.

A keen observer of work ethos, what would Noam think about ethnicity and cultural differences? Was he content at his position as a foreign worker in Helsinki?

Researcher: - - So, are you happy about the way that this firm addresses diversity among employees?

Noam: It doesn't address it in any way.

Researcher: Are you happy about that?

Noam: Yeah, I mean because I don't feel that I'm diverse.

Researcher: (laughs) Good.

Noam: I feel that we are all the same. I mean Finns of course are a culture but so are the Swedish, and the Swiss and alike. ... Cultures are different, but then people are different. Why concentrate on the culture, why not concentrate on the person? ... The person is different, not the culture. (Same source.)

There is no reason for drawing attention to the cultural differences, in Noam's opinion. Many academic critics of DM might feel happy about this. Free from the stigma of being *diverse*, Noam repeated what everybody else in Helsinki said, that individuals matter, not (their) cultures. It is noteworthy, that the idea of *culture* in this context seems to follow the second type in Sewell's account, the plurality of distinct entities – multiculturalism's claim that cultures *contain* people. That is what he seems to believe is true, although he rejects the use of



such taxonomies at work. But he seems to be lost among concepts (not much worse than the ethnographer), the deeps of which he is not used to exploring. There is merely the gut feeling that he wants no flags in his back.

### **Coping, not scapegoating**

I also talked to Noah, the first foreigner on the executive team, a man with a long career in international humanitarian organisations, whose many responsibilities at F-Secure turned around the issues of customer service. From his perspective it seemed that the downturn had made the Finns at F-Secure return to their "safety nets", well learned cultural habits, in contrast to the more international style of the boom time.

So until an organisation becomes extremely large and institutionalised like Nokia or something like that, then the safety net is processes and functions rather than people and culture. So I think that F-Secure still can a little bit fall back on its culture. I hear that from country offices mostly is that... You know now it's becoming a little bit quote and quote too Finnish or whatever. But that's because companies have those safety nets. But I think when we get to be a little bit bigger, say five or six hundred persons' organisation, most of the people are working out in the field rather than here in Finland. Then I think it will go to another uphill culturally or of diversity, because at the moment it is a Finnish management team, it is a Finnish-like company.<sup>vi</sup>

Liisa had retired on a part-time pension. According to her own words, she had been recruited years ago for her "organising skills and fluent English". Now she wanted to get a new intranet system established as a "thumb print" before she would retire altogether. She characterised the changes in the company as becoming "an ordinary firm". No more sitting up at work nights after night. She saw the change as both good and bad. At least people would not jeopardise their health. On the other hand, personnel no longer appeared to be the number one thing for the management, and the work itself seemed to lack the "pioneering spirit".

Researcher: Well, what is the pioneering spirit?

Liisa: Well, it's that (pause). How should I say...? Firstly that we were very excited and of course we worked even too much, but everybody was with. It was like kind of *talkoo-work*<sup>27</sup> ... bit like we didn't count the hours. ... Like I said it was both good and

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<sup>27</sup> If you are not familiar with this term, you may consult Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talkoot>. As a person born and raised in Finland, I find the description offered therein (accessed on 24.6.2009) quite accurate and sufficient for the present need. Liisa makes reference to this traditional form of work, I would say, in order to underline the importance of social and symbolic ownership of the workers to their work, equalling or surpassing its nature as a wage labour.

bad. ... It's good that people will keep in better health now maybe. And bad side is that somehow the work has lost its taste.

Researcher: Yes. Do you think that there's something concerning the contents of the work? Like when the technology was new. Wasn't it a little bit like "now we are going to change the world, make the future and...?"

Liisa: Possibly there was that too. What should I say of that? ... But for instance just the thing that at the moment when people started ... or was it at the same time as the benefits were cut, as the personnel started asking compensation for extra hours.

Researcher: Right, yes. They coincided.

Liisa: Yes, they about coincided.<sup>vii</sup>

Noam's, Noah's and Liisa's comments are good examples of the kinds of reflections and worries instigated by the topic of downturn. The employees were concerned about, and some even sorry for the change of atmosphere, but they found other means to cope with their troubles than the standard recourse to ethnic scapegoats I had feared. Much of the public discourse on immigration and organisational diversity seems to expect that while discrimination at good times is common, at bad times society is doomed to it. Ethnic 'Others' are the easy scapegoats to carry whatever sins may be at hand. In the conditions of internationalised economy this interpretation fits irresistibly well: are not those foreigners walking remainders of the global forces that threaten our work, income and life-style? To my lasting wonder and respect, none of that was to be heard at F-Secure in Helsinki. Apart from the little reminders that F-Secure was a Finnish-like company, nobody gave me even half a reason to suspect that they might be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity. Disillusionment and fear for jobs had become part of the employees' experience, but these evils were not ethnicised. This is remarkable in the context of the steep economic cycle they had gone through, and the fact that no special attention had been directed to diversity by the management. Even the ethnic lunches had stopped because in the new building there was no restaurant, and the catering contract had been transferred to a joint provider for the whole business complex. In the old building, it had been the catering company's idea all along, not F-Secure's. So, ethnicity – in their words “nationality” or “foreignness” – that was never an issue for the management and certainly did not appear in the official vocabulary of the company, had now disappeared or become very low profile in the discourse of the employees as well.

### **Low profile ethnicity**

If the data collected at boom time presented ethnicity as something apart from individuals, by my return to field, it had turned into an invisible thing,

something to be passed by and looked through. This had happened especially in Helsinki. The Finns talked about work as an activity that unites people. Internationality is an integral part of that activity, not something you could evaluate apart from it.

Niilo: It doesn't mean anything special, at least nothing negative. Rather positive... They are colleagues like all the rest. And in the end we all speak English, even among Finns sometimes or mostly. And this foreign workforce that is in the firm, they are rather a positive add: It's nice to meet them even after work. Almost without exception these are also really social and friendly people, and it's a pleasure to come along with them.

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Niilo: (Talking about cooperation with overseas units.) Usually there is... they are almost... should we say, half the country offices have at least one Finn working there, but there are not always Finns.

Researcher: Yes.

Niilo: Yes, but we precisely don't pay attention to such things. It's quite the same if I call a Finnish or a foreign guy<sup>28</sup>. If she/he<sup>29</sup> works in this company, well, then nobody looks at that.<sup>viii</sup>

Kati: -- And if we think about this matter as a whole, so I can't think of it as if... or that this is an international company, or that there are a lot of foreigners around, so I can't think it like as a value in itself or take it apart from this activity.<sup>ix</sup>

There is nothing special in the fact that the workplace is transnational. The foreign workmates are just workmates. As if the whole issue didn't exist. Niilo has an interesting perspective to this fairly intensive denial of ethnicity. He spoke long about this and from a perspective more akin to the management or to the whole organisation's benefit, than his own or the employees' (my emphasis).

Niilo: -- We still try to communicate continuously and kind of avoid situations, *where ordinary work would be delayed or hampered by this sort of multicultural bureaucracy*. If I talk [on the phone] for instance with our country office or with some customer, there neighbours there in the same building, so then I feel like our office could be downstairs here or next door. -- And when I talk to the customer, then all these local customs and mentality and these things appear. -- So in our way at F-Secure we try to keep it like one family. Consensus and... -- Mostly it's unconscious, but very functional. So nobody thinks that let's communicate like this and make

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<sup>28</sup> Niilo uses the Finnish word 'kaveri', which translates as friend, pal or comrade among children, but among adults, bears a distinct male overtone, which is why I have translated it here as 'guy'.

<sup>29</sup> Personal pronouns in Finnish are neutral as to the gender of the subject.

decisions like this together and so on, so we can foster our company culture. Instead, we all focus on the end result that things work and the customer is content.

Researcher: Yes, of course. Right. It's a by-product.

Niilo: Yes, it's a by-product that is born there at the same. (Same source as above for Niilo.)

Who cares for cultures or ethnic groups - let's just do the job and keep the customers happy... This practical attitude will give birth to the joint corporate culture that will in turn smooth out the differences between the country offices or employees of different origin.

Niilo connects his pragmatist approach to a discourse of human relations management stressing interaction, group cohesion and communication. This in turn is related to a kind of *fresh page* approach valorising post-industrial knowledge work and taking a distance from an *assembly line culture*. Employees must be independent and develop themselves, and the organisation must be transparent.

Niilo: I think the workers should be very autonomous, that has even been one of our recruitment criteria. If you compare with other companies in the industry, we have absolutely the top quality workers here. From the bottom up right into the management (laughs) of course employees have room for autonomous work and they can vary their work. They are well-educated and capable people, professionals in their own field. So they can mostly do such things and projects that go beyond their actual job assignment. I think it's in a way good that those tasks are being handed to people because it motivates and helps you to advance in your career and brings some change in your daily work. - - I'm absolutely for it.

Researcher: Yes. This is a question that is to some degree connected to cultural differences, because there's a lot of the kind of work culture in the world, where the workers are clearly less autonomous than in Finland. It's like...

Niilo: That's quite true. We have also tried to get pretty far rid of this kind of assembly line culture in this company.

Researcher: Quite, yes. But how might that happen so, that everybody would be kept informed so, that there wouldn't be any misunderstandings. Like easily there might be the feeling that "I have been abandoned". That "the boss hasn't even turned around to chat for a long time" (laughs). Or like "that one must be preparing something nasty against me, since..."

Niilo: Yes, it's quite understandable... precisely this communication among everybody is what we are looking for, so that no one would ever have these impressions. (Same source as above for Niilo.)

Counter values to *assembly line culture* were much present in the HR management's talk as well. The message is the same. However, in the wording of Niilo these values achieve a form that opens up in everyday language. The

way he commits to them is sincerely optimistic. He indorses them unambiguously, at the expense of a cultural relativist perspective. If all have not yet internalised the ideals of autonomy, the problem can be corrected by communication.

### **Culture is elsewhere**

At this point I needed to de-familiarise myself with the discourse of pragmatic invisible ethnicity. So, in line with textbooks on qualitative methods (such as Alasuutari 1993), I looked for potential, logical or actually occurring events or matters that the discourse would not take into account. Potentially, such blind areas might involve the unintentional impact of cultural differences on people, especially friction caused by discrepant frames. Another blind area might concern the differences between people that were linked to power relations – in other words the role of ethnic identity at the workplace. There are remarkably few references to these things in the material from Helsinki. The only admittedly consequential type of difference is language. All Finns mention the use of English in contemplating what it means to them that their workplace is international.

A notion of internationality shrunken into the simple use of English language seems rather narrow. Can a corporation participate in the global economy so that its personnel never need to talk about cultural differences or ethnicity? Of course not. Finns do actually talk about these things too, but almost exclusively concerning country offices abroad, travels and expatriation. Lasse, the other board member I interviewed, had a long discussion with me concerning the personnel in California. Lasse had been assigned there before and liked to compare his impressions with mine. He was very perceptive of the (late)modern nuances in their ethnic identity. A Nordic employee would seem to the Americans as a member of the *Finnish* clique. On the other hand, the local workforce was divided into many sections of various kinds of national and transnational immigrants and their offspring.

Meanwhile in Helsinki everybody wanted to be *just colleagues*. Why this limitation? What other things would be connected to transnational activity, for instance to the assignments abroad? Indeed, as Matti had said, expatriation was considered mostly rewarding, or at least the rewarding side outweighed the negative one. This was so for both those who already had been on an assignment and those who had so far not managed to "get there".

Lasse: But I wouldn't say it would be so bad out there with a family. Especially now that winter comes and one has to put many layers of clothes on, it would not bother me to be in California.

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Lasse: We had of course... the time we spent was enough to get friends. And there were families with young children and so on. -- In a way there would also have been a community easy to live in. So I don't know if it's a good rule to say that only young non-parents can go on an assignment.<sup>x</sup>

As noted, the only consequence of cultural differences that the interviewees in Finland admitted was the use of English language. But outside Finland they did recognise more consequences. Some only mentioned them regarding the customers; others would see them also in overseas units. Ethnicity also seemed to be neutralised and swept out of Finland to the country offices and world markets. The only exception to this appears in a passing remark, that the presence of foreigners in Helsinki offers a kind of practice for travels and assignments. During the boom this argument was prevalent, stressed for instance by Matti. Now I only heard it from Lasse (who had recently returned from an assignment).

To understand what this is all about, let's take a closer look at *how* the people talk about cultural differences. Most move to the issue only when asked and even then keep on a general level, mentioning no concrete examples. It remains unclear, whether they believe that culture has anything to do with their work, and if it does, whether its consequences are positive or negative for them.

Lasse: -- I do have some experience [of transnational work]. -- And today... of course it was a long assignment to the US -- But now I work with our offices in Sweden, Germany, Britain, Finland and Japan. So you get to see daily these cultural differences. -- Like in the different countries. And there are a lot of differences in how decisions are made and kind of how things are communicated. (Same source.)

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Liisa: What should I say? I can't compare these two things [Finland and the US, countries of residence in her life]. (Hesitates.) I have the understanding that although the Americans are for instance much more open and spontaneous and so on, they still have more of the kind of respect for authorities than in Finland. So... -- Somehow I feel that here people dare say a bit more assertively what they think and so on, than there. (Same source as above for Liisa.)

The subject may of course be sensitive, and also one of which the employees don't have enough information. It is wise to avoid repeating the stereotypes current in the public discourse if one has no experience of one's own or if one doesn't know how to analyse it. Many still ventured to mention that the foreigners had brought some colour in, for instance the food culture or other party programmes, or to the spoken culture at meetings.

The interviewees spoke with tact and skill when it came to internationality, going round any possible rocks in these dangerous waters, anticipating possible frames in which their talk might be interpreted.

Kati: But they all are to me in the way colleagues like everybody in this firm. So I don't... I don't think like wow, the person is from our American office, that's fancy. Or like from our British office, how fancy to have dealings with her/him. They are to me like... There's nothing like that... It's just a given. (Same source as above for Kati.)

Kati seemed to make the assumption that the researcher or other people in the social environment made use of a xenophilic frame, from which the speaker took distance. There was nothing "fancy" about working with foreigners.

### **Pragmatism**

Niilo made a very interesting observation; he said that the *company way* arises from avoiding "multicultural bureaucracy" – by simply doing the job and keeping the customer happy. His organisational ideal concentrates on the main goal and how to achieve it by concrete action. On the one hand, it coincides with the observation that joint action brings people together despite all divisions. On the other hand, it speaks for a pragmatic approach elevated to the degree of a value in itself. *Away with all bureaucracy, the main thing is that ordinary work gets done.* This is a tradition that has greatly shaped work and administration in Finland. Researchers have drawn attention to it as both a peasant tradition with a history of self-reliant, marginal subsistence agriculture (Apo 1996a; 1996b) – peasant pragmatism – and as a part of national self-understanding, an ideal image of *the pragmatic Finn* as a naive but faithful underclass (Lehtonen et al. 2004).

At F-Secure, pragmatist reasoning was a ubiquitous, unquestioned value that people like Niilo fully embodied without any awareness or reflection on its peculiarity or national symbolism. Other data also supports the view that pragmatist values prevail in the workplace. "Bureaucracy" was the belittling term applied to anything that would come between the people and their practical tasks. This is what the foreign workers praised as "Finnish management" or an "efficient way to work": cutting out ceremonies and time-consuming formalities, being brief, taking the initiative (see table 3 in chapter 4). This is also a common self-complacent discourse among Finnish business elites. Nevertheless it has some truth in it. It can be a way to a very flexible order, giving priority to *the real work*. Its downside is that it sometimes becomes a straightforwardly advancing bulldozer, ignoring and pushing aside all questions and alternatives.

Since there may be readers for whom this variant of pragmatism is unfamiliar, let me linger about it for a while. There is great power in pragmatism; it doubtless supports organisational cohesion. Following Weber, the religious roots of capitalism are most often located somewhere among the *Protestants*, though more specifically among *Calvinists*. Finns made no protests, but became Protestants by their king's decision in Stockholm, and the form to which they were converted was Lutheran. Being no historian of religions, I content myself with noting that the idea of *providence*, legitimating overt celebration of one's riches in front of others, is still fundamentally against the grain here; witness the regrets of high ranking business observers that it is very difficult to instil an entrepreneurial spirit in Finland, because people are "envious of each other's success". The reference in such comments is usually North American. Whether the egalitarian strands were introduced by Lutheran ethics and/or had some older source, ultimately in pre-Christian values, is beyond the topic here. See however Roberts (1989) for the delicate balancing of egalitarian and individualist values in Finnish rural life of the 1970s.

Although I present it here as a local culture, variations of pragmatism are numerous also elsewhere. The protestant work culture described by Max Weber is the classic (compare with Prasad 1997), but the *fresh page* endorsed by the boom-era utopians was another (*finally we are free to do 'the real work'*), and so is the present postmodern ethos of flexibility (*you shall be paid only for 'the real work'*). These forms are not completely reducible to each other, however. Instead they lead in different directions and imply varying frames.

The peasant work ethic used to impose extreme persistence – to a degree of work cult, with delayed gratification. But unlike in most forms of capitalism, the delay is not understood to be life-long. Rather, a proper rhythm of work and leisure is expected. Neither is compensation expected to reach beyond the median level of one's reference group, but continuity and respect at work are crucial. The logic is of a bonding type, very different from the promiscuous indifference characteristic of the *new capitalism* (cf. Sennett 2006). What may remain unclear to the workers, and indeed to their managers as well, is that while, according to the peasant pragmatism, belt tightening promises a better fate in the next phase of the productive cycle, or by the next harvest, the same abstinent behaviour under the efficiency demands of late capitalism will not bring a reward, only greater demands, based on the logic of constantly intensifying competition. In the workplace context, this is both convenient and confusing. For instance, the workers may come to take sides with the management, in the way Niilo was suggesting, as far as peasant pragmatism is



glossed over with capitalist ideas of efficiency, and this would be consistent with a more entrepreneurial strand of the professional culture. On the other hand, they may also come to question the company's goals (what is it that it is practical for), like Noam. This approach would find support in the professional culture's countercultural strands.

Why would any workers take Niilo's stand? In contrast to the recent demands for continuously growing productivity, the description by Antila and Ylöstalo (2002) of the *proactive mode* of business organisation can be read as a description of an ideal form of management under Finnish-like pragmatism (the peasant form or some derivative of it). The idea that the workers are allowed to influence products and working conditions in exchange for the expectation that they bear responsibility and take initiative is proof of the assumptions that 1) they are believed to have the capacity to do so, and 2) that the employer is compelled or propelled to surrender her power to some extent. The first assumption obviously connotes the view that all wisdom is not located in the boardroom, but workers are an intellectual resource concerning business organisation. The second assumption has often been linked to the moderating tension introduced by the former socialist bloc as a potential threat to *western* market economy. I would suggest that a longer perspective be used here.

While some companies today certainly dispose of their workers easily and relocate production to sites where the workforce is replaceable, voiceless and docile, others like F-Secure employ *empowering* measures to keep the people they need. Employees have not always been plentiful and exchangeable, and rarely were at Finnish latitudes during pre-industrial times. Whenever people have been exploited (and indeed they have been) and disposed of readily, the consequences have been hard for the local rulers, who themselves could not escape the physical environment. This condition of course did not hinder more distant rulers, kings and czars, from slave taking and other exploitative measures, leaving whole areas devastated for years.

For the local population, going through the capricious annual cycles in the world's northernmost agricultural regions for centuries introduced an imperative as great or greater than the two generations of socialist neighbours: absolute poverty and lack of surplus. Workers were simply too scarce and precious to waste – and they knew how to survive better than their elite rulers. Exploitative forms of bossing no doubt got a firmer foothold by the end of self-sufficient production and introduction of the world economy. Still, something remains that points back to past realities. Taking into consideration that the present rulers – business managers in new occupations such as the digital industry offers – are in large part from modest, often rural families with that

history galvanised by only two or three generations, even a simple carrying over of the peasant current would not be surprising, but we need not assume it. Things can also be reinvented. Moreover, in the face of growing ecological and other global imperatives for drastic changes in the industrial-capitalist process, is a preoccupation with *survival* a matter of the past or of the future?

Pragmatism need not remain linked to rural forms. Urban forms of pragmatism embrace cultural items, from impermeable use-and-rinse children's trousers for playing outdoors and economical combined generation of heat and electricity, to handy Nordic kitchens with hang-up-to-dry cupboards liberating spouses from drying the dishes, not to mention electronic equipment destined for modern consumers. In effect it says: *Save time and energy, find new intriguing technologies to liberate yourself!* In the proactive mode, the tension between employers and employees does not disappear, but is joined by the powerful quest to survive. This quest is seldom presented as such, but cut down to countless local innovations, nice and handy ways to cope with all of (working) life's small to middle-sized puzzles. There is a latent, tacit expectation of a certain kind of ideal attitude by the managers from the workers, and vice versa, where one doesn't hinder the other. Pleasurable work "*proceeds smoothly*", as the Finnish engineer Matti put it.

This is not to say that this kind of pragmatism is a cultural phenomenon found only in Finland. The precise combination of present-day features and frames is probably unique, but similar strands are most certainly to be found elsewhere, with a historical connection to this form or without. Neither is the description an argument for the absolute prevalence of the form within the territory of the Finnish nation-state (there are competing ideals) or of the certainty of its being carried over to the future. Judging by its wide circulation in present-day society, and its speedy conversion into ever new interpretations in new fields of activity, I am tempted to predict that it will not slow down very soon or in the face of only moderate contesting forms. The fact that the idea of survival has also repeatedly offered an easy *hook* by which to rally all social classes to the rescue of the nation-state – including the elites' privileges – is no disproof of its existence or a warrant for any dismissive reduction to *superstructure*.

There have been some enquiries into the way pragmatist attitudes mark the professional subculture of economists in Finland (the second important professional group at F-Secure). According to Leppälä and Pääviö (2001), mainstream business students believe in the primacy of the working life and do not involve themselves too deeply in theoretical elaborations. They prepare themselves for business activity in which one must advance continuously and keep ahead of competitors, without hesitation or reflection. The relative roles

of variations of pragmatism in this discourse fall beyond the scope of the present study. If its development has been anything akin to the vicissitudes of other professional cultures in Finland, however, it seems likely that at least peasant pragmatism alongside more generally *western* (American?) capitalistic pragmatisms would be amalgamating in such attitudes; once again, the consequences are both convenient and confusing.

### **Apart from the world**

How to conceive of the sweeping operation, by which the employees seemed to push both ethnicity and culture with their good and bad consequences abroad, while the headquarters in Helsinki became neutral? In this protected zone workmates without ethnic identity performed their duties relying on a general intellect purified of culture. This tendency may be related to another discourse concerning national self-portrait. In this discourse *Finland* is one of the poles of a dichotomy, while the other one is *the world*. Anything or anybody residing in Finland is not in the world, and vice versa.<sup>30</sup>

In this view international encounters take place in international arenas – thus not in Finland. As a consequence, Finns may travel abroad to get *internationalised*, but a foreigner arriving to Finland is in a *wrong place* – and social interaction with that foreigner will not internationalise anybody. So conceived, ethnicity and cultural differences with their pros and cons are located abroad. I'm tempted to say that this is why most of the Finns could only see the work in Finland as purified from the above mentioned dimensions, as a factual activity. It would of course be possible to conceive of Finland as a more integral part of the world. This might be reflected in a greater number of images like *practicing for travels* or *springboard to assignment*. Above all, that would mean giving up the idea of invisible ethnicity: if Finland is part of the world, then cultural differences and ethnic identities must be taken as reality even here.

National self-presentation in Finland has been suggested to carry a peculiar self-criticising and depreciating discourse. This ethos, termed by Satu Apo (1998) as strongly as self-imposed racism, is rooted in the history of nation building. The elites, ethnically and linguistically differentiated from the masses, sought to mould a nation out of a host of regional and class identities. A lot of pedagogic discourse was needed for the quest of enlightening the masses and raising the Finnish people up among the civilised nations of

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<sup>30</sup> Compare to e.g. the description given in Lehtonen et al. (2004, 175) of the Finnish self-portrait as an "autotypic" land.

Europe. Pedagogic overtone remained a prevailing style in home politics and a cultural critique for several generations, and according to Apo it is still influencing the way Finns construct their self-image.

Even today many speakers adopt as if an outer position, from which they evaluate various traits in Finnishness as *underdeveloped*, *deficient* or *backward*. The people have not heard of the latest ideas, taste is not developed enough, social interaction is not as refined and the drinking habits are not as civilised as *in Europe* or *among the civilised nations*. It seems likely that something like this Fennophobic or xenophilic discourse was the target of Kati's objection as she underlined that there is nothing "fancy" in the internationality. On the other hand, neither did she or anybody else resort to a Fennophilic discourse, something that would idealise Finnishness, stressing, for instance, a remarkable (and imagined) punctuality, earnestness or diligence among the Finns. Her solution was rather to keep outside these discourses, frequent as they are in the society.

### **No wonder they disliked DM**

Both managers and employees at F-Secure avoided talking about differences. The HR manager gave as a reason the fear of starting Anglo-American -style identity politics and clique formation at work. Unfortunately, the Finnish members believed they could go on doing the *normal* work without bothering themselves with whatever understandings of normality other people might have. They went as far as to explaining away all misunderstandings and friction, pretending they did not exist. This last observation of course I find less than satisfactory. Can an organisation do quite without any official policies regarding ethnic diversity, while participating in global business? Stipulating English as a corporate language and leaving matters there? Well... this example shows that they went a long way, but not all the way home.

I have come to the following answer for *why did they refuse diversity campaigns?*

#### 1) Pragmatism

Remember how Matti said that they "*prefer to save the ordinary work practices from being delayed or hindered by multicultural bureaucracy.*" The unreflected, constitutive form of (peasant) pragmatism is very influential as much in the organisation as beyond it, being part of the favourite national images in Finland. Reflection of this can be seen in the description of "Finnish management" given by the

foreign workers (table 3). Diversity management fits poorly into this cultural trend. Emphasising the pragmatic dimensions tends to dwarf the significance of matters pertaining to identity and symbolism. A human resource issue running alongside the concrete work tasks will easily be branded with the mark of “bureaucracy”. Although pragmatism itself has a power to produce cohesion, unfortunately it does not encourage critical reflection upon one’s own workplace. “Ordinary work” attracts all the attention. Also, this form is often cultivated together with the assumption that there is only one pragmatic way of doing the job, and all questions and alternatives are mere obstacles to be pushed aside to make way for an effective procedure, not chances to learn yet more effective ways. There’s a close link to point 2.

## 2) Provincialism

Above, I concluded that the Finnish employees were systematically locating cultural and ethnic phenomena beyond the borders of the Finnish nation-state, while the headquarters in Helsinki became neutral. I associated this tendency with another discourse concerning national self-image, the provincial discourse (or *impivaaralainen diskurssi*, as I have called it in Finnish, referring to a key novel in the history of Finnish literature). In this discourse *Finland* is one of the poles of a dichotomy, while the other one is *the world*. Thus, Finland is not a part of the world, and *Wide World* phenomena cannot be found in Finland, be they positive or negative. So conceived, ethnicity and cultural differences with their pros and cons are located abroad. Therefore *culture*, a thing of the world, cannot be found in the Finnish workplace, where work is only factual activity. If there is no culture, how could there be multiculturalism? Note the link to point 1: The *factual* activities are also conceived of as being *practical*, a positive evaluation.

## 3) Professional culture

As explained earlier, the computer experts are members of a truly global network of fellow professionals. Although this subculture is very heterogeneous in its constitutive ingredients, and has been under severe pressure since the downturn shook its previously sheltered position, it is still very strong – to be compared with such historical middle-class professions as doctors and lawyers. Against its deeply built cosmopolitanism and cherished individualism (both enlightenment values), the late modern call for ethnic distinctions appears as a

betrayal. In this cultural world people also aspire to solidarity, but by surmounting ethnic distinctions rather than by paying attention to them.

#### 4) Local forms of self-presentation

Whether we call it “coldness” as Delphine in chapter 8, or culturally constituted premises for self-presentation, it is a factual phenomenon that many foreigners find troublesome or labourious to cope with in Finland. Withdrawal may be due to politeness, timidity, meditative serenity or passive discrimination, but it is extremely difficult to confront in the name of multicultural encounters. The archetypal, somewhat male flavoured interaction style that operates on silence and reservation is not an ideal base for explicit discussion of whatsoever (save things perceived as *pragmatic*), and is especially ill-disposed to deal with human qualities, including efforts to make itself an explicit target of attention. Where implicitness is the hallmark of (male) interpersonal credibility, cross-culturalists despair.

#### 5) Postmodern identities

The way people in Helsinki shunned group identification with ethnic labels (more about this in later chapters) seems at times also to be indicative of their situation as late modern citizens with multiple affiliations. It has been noted that many of us late modern people have only routes instead of roots. Besides been a factual condition, it is also a favoured ideal. One is supposed to be able to choose which affiliations to pick up – not to be told by someone else, which barrack to dwell in. *OK, I'm a Finn, a woman etc., but it's my own business to evaluate what that means to me...* Identity is a fluid thing; and a free person, a full-fledged political subject, expects to have room around him/herself for personal growth; air, oxygen. These kinds of growing subjects need a lot of tact from each other. (Compare to *sensitivity trap* discussed above.) Diversity management programmes simply look clumsy, intruding and out of fashion in this perspective.

#### 6) “Democracy”

Last but not least, DM was maybe not needed. Why would anyone back into an identity like a straightjacket, or voluntarily enter a cage in a diversity-zoo, unless pushed in by threats even greater? I can conceive of minority workers, subjected to the evils of discrimination, calling for DM as a defence tool. But if they feel comfortable, have existing channels to make their *voice* heard and do not fear to use it, they can

mould a position for themselves at the organisation. More: they can actually participate in the overall development of the organisation. The other way round: discrimination is often just another name for exploitation. Structural injustices removed, identities can thrive side by side supported by the people themselves.

It is becoming evident that the people at F-Secure had multiple good reasons for not accepting a diversity management -type of discourse. It is worth considering: they went through a steep cycle without ethnicising, holding to their universalist and individual ideals. Why? I believe the main reason was that they had a “democratic”, participatory workplace. That is the necessary if not sufficient cornerstone of their easy ethnic relations. I will go on discussing those aspects that escaped their *approach*, that remained as a stone in the shoe, like the ways foreign workers experienced the attitudes of the Finns. Although these were not big concerns in my perception, they might aggravate in unfavourable conditions, and most importantly, they point beyond F-Secure to other Finnish organisations. If we are not to end the present enquiry with a condemnation of diversity management and a naïve celebration of *Finnish ways*, a further tacking move is needed: we must turn the evaluative lens to these local forms, cherished by many Finns, to see what in them may potentially impede cooperation and equality – and, by extension, how to reinterpret them to better fit with the present world. In order to do that, I turned to the experiences of the foreigners at F-Secure.

Before indulging into a more interpretative person-centred description, however, a third and hopefully complementing round of theory will be presented. This time, that of intersubjectivity.

## 7 Intersubjectivity

Anthropologists have often been accused of attempting to “go inside the heads of other people”; something understood to be ultimately futile, but detrimental as an attempt. I also heard this at an early stage of my present research. It was better, I was recommended, that while writing the ethnography I would keep from guessing my informants’ motives altogether. Specifically, the way I read Matti’s preference of encountering the foreign life forms on foreign assignment rather than in Helsinki, was, apparently too far ventured. At the time I could not give any polished answer to such criticism, although I felt it was unfair and dubious. Moreover, since I have started my academic journey in the disciplinary field of psychology, I was left wondering how was it that such an accusation was not extended against psychologists, the principal traders in *insights*. But taking the challenge seriously, under whichever disciplinary label, how could one tell apart one’s own projections from the moves in other people’s minds – ones the game of interpretation would be ventured in?

I have since then made some modest enquiries into the matter of *mind reading*, which have led me to a new, interdisciplinary field of study into the questions of consciousness and intersubjectivity, and to some contributions in the more psychologically oriented strands of anthropology. Although among the intersubjectivity researchers there seems to be more philosophers, neurologists, psychologists and psychiatrists than anthropologists, it offers strikingly direct links that could be worked out to see how they fit in with anthropological views about human consciousness and the ethnographic method. At stake is both what is known about people and how it is known.

### Sociological behaviourism

This story might be started from the earliest written records in the *western* popular conceptions and philosophies of subjectivity, but for present purposes I will begin at the Great Division, when, towards the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the academic fields that have come to be known as social and human sciences broke free from philosophy. The great classics of these fields, for instance Émile Durkheim, saw it necessary to guarantee the separate identity and full legacy of each of their domains, for which purpose it became necessary to demarcate clearly the subject matters. This set the board for generations of scholars, and reinforced the cutting of the social drama of



human life into the individual and the collective, the subjective and the manifest, the mind and the society. As a result, there seems to be no place where to put the ‘Other’. This has gone hand-in-hand with a development the philosopher Shaun Gallagher calls “philosophical autism”. The knower is made certain by a privileged first-person perspective; the world can be accessed by scientific third-person knowledge – but the second-person remains a problem. “*The other person is another subjectivity that refuses to be captured by the epistemic perspectives available to the self-sufficient ego*” (Gallagher 2000, 1).

According to Gallagher, *western* philosophy for more than a century has been punctuated, maybe even permeated, by considerations that touch on the problems of ipseity and alterity – the problems of first-person identity and our relation with others, the problems of *the same* and *the other*. In the so-called continental tradition such problems can be traced from post-Kantian philosophy to Scheler, from Husserl through Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre on to Lévinas and Derrida. It can thus not be dismissed as a side track, but must be understood as a haunting question of *western* philosophy, psychology, and all the human sciences. So even anthropologists who took on the task of understanding and translating the other forms of human life are contented to study the empirically manifest, and treat anything else as either a matter for imagination (fiction, philosophy) or specialised investigation (psychology).

Both those schools that claim determination by power structures and those that would see it in cultural structures have strong roots in the same soil, but the potential for supporting understanding has decreased in that soil. Or so I read the call for more encompassing approaches by Anthony Cohen and Nigel Rapport, the editors of an important volume into the questions of consciousness in anthropology:

Those whom we used to see and describe as role-players – realizing scripts written by a social *deus ex machina* – are now recognized as intentional, interpreting, imaginative, conscious agents. If this change of approach brings the self more squarely into the frame than previously, it is not because anthropology’s object has shifted from society to the individual, but because we can no longer rest content with nineteenth century assumptions that social behaviour originates in social and historical forces beyond and ‘outside’ the individual. By the same token, we can no longer simply derive consciousness-driven behaviour from the social categories to which we analytically consign its individual perpetrators. (Cohen and Rapport 1995, 3–4.)

### **Rediscovering intersubjectivity**

There are now approaches in anthropology, interested in repairing the old split and taking creative individuals back into the fabric of anthropological accounts

of culture. Recovering from sociological behaviourism, anthropology has come to acknowledge the problematic complement of culture: the mind. Anthropologists cannot know other cultures without understanding other minds. “*Whatever else we may have learned from our tortured debates about reflexivity, autobiography and anthropological writing, we do now know that knowledge of our own minds and cultures is implicated in our knowledge of other peoples’.*” (Cohen and Rapport 1995, 4).

These efforts seem to have two kinds of bearings: more directly applied, they seem to yield fresh conceptualisations of social life, such as the extraordinarily dynamic and situated account of emotions by Bruce Kapferer (1995). Less directly applied, they encourage taking another look at the ethnographic encounter. Various ways have emerged to take the individual informant’s ideas and life courses into relief with the more broadly elaborated cultural and social landscapes and *ethnoscapes*, and these ways gradually become more usual. Some researchers speak of “person-centred ethnography” (Linger 2001), others take interest in life-narratives (Rapport 2000). Especially informative for the present search of understanding might be the ideas of James Fernandez (1995).

Fernandez illustrates his theory of *meaning deficit* and *revitalisation* by presenting five short vignettes that characterise five individuals he had encountered in fieldwork – and their respective life struggles. Apologising for the shortness of his descriptions, he says: “*Character is not the same as individual. No written space is enough to do justice to the complexity of their consciousnesses qua individuals.*” Furthermore, the brief narratives are not in any sense master narratives but only *partial truths* of the personages arising in the peculiarities of the ethnographer’s interaction with them, and produced from a focus (in his case meaning deficit, in my case ethnicity). Referring to his task as a conference speaker, he wishes: “*I can only try and characterize their contrasting consciousnesses in the terms I believe pertinent to our colloquium without caricaturing them*” (ibid, 28). I cannot hope for anything else, pertinent to this book, and its aim of making sense of ethnicity at work.

What Fernandez has to offer for us is an epistemology of human encounters with implications to the ethnographic method. On knowing other minds, he says: “*We may not be able to truly know other minds, but we can surely learn from them -- we can admire their myriad and creative ways of practising their being in the world*” (ibid, 26). For Fernandez, ethnographic *rapprochement* to other minds is not a way to get “deepest insights into ‘Otherness’”, but a state of perpetual learning from, and admiration for, the work of other minds in the world. How close we can come to capturing the other’s imagination – either the local collaborators or the readers of ethnography? “*We can listen to or elicit*

*some of the key images that, if not actually present in these minds, are at least, put forth by them and/or put into practice by them. But, in doing this, we expose our own minds to the others' influence, and so have our own imagination captured by them"* (ibid, 27).

It is of course no accident that the same seems to hold for ethnography as for ordinary intersubjectivity. That is so because ethnography uses the full-life approach where researcher and researched alike appear as more rounded sorts of characters, with all or any of their human dimensions potentially relevant to the enquiry. This leads to interaction using the same channels and methods as in everyday life. The embarrassing fact is that as there is no agreement on how ordinary intersubjectivity is possible (even though it manifestly is the basis of communication and social life), no such understanding is available for ethnography either. The method has come to incorporate this debate into its core.

The question of intersubjectivity is drawn on the present enquiry for at least three reasons: First, to heal or overcome the problem of split or division in the human sciences, resulting in persisting debates on determination, power/culture and agency. Second, intersubjectivity is implied in attempts to contrive modes of ethnography that would be transparent as to the relative weight of researcher and researched in the product, modes that would not forsake the aim of conveying something from the informant to the audience, while still keeping account of the open-endedness of the process. The third way in which intersubjectivity matters is an obvious one: diversity is all about the 'Other'.

Therefore I will present what my limited enquiry yielded as an extract of more recent philosophical discussions of intersubjectivity, in the hope that it may clarify some of the more entangled disagreements.

### **Balancing on phenomenological 'takes'**

The phenomenologist writer Dan Zahavi (2001) provides a reading of several philosophers (including Scheler, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Husserl and Sartre), and presents four different phenomenological *takes* on the problem of intersubjectivity (Zahavi 2001, 164–165):

1. Scheler has studied empathy and its difference from other forms of intentionality, such as perception, imagination and recollection. Scheler rejects the argument from analogy (theory of accessing the 'Other's' feelings by imitation of one's own feelings), because it underestimates the difficulties involved in self-experience and overestimates the difficulties involved in the experience of others

(Scheler 1973; reported in Zahavi 2001). The other can be experienced without feeling exactly the same. But this line of investigation is able to account for only one of the aspects of intersubjectivity, and according to Zahavi it is debatable, whether this aspect is the most crucial one. More may be needed to construct a base and a centre for a theory of intersubjectivity.

2. Another approach consists of stating that our ability to encounter others is conditioned by a form of alterity internal to the embodied self. Since the possibility of intersubjectivity is taken to be rooted in the bodily constitution of the self, reluctance appears to simply equate intersubjectivity with the factual and concrete face-to-face encounter. This approach finds support from studies with infants.
3. The third perspective goes one step further by explicitly denying that intersubjectivity can be reduced to a factual encounter between two individuals. A more fundamental kind of intersubjectivity is seen as rooted in the very relationship between subjectivity and the world. Our life-worlds with their tools and objects, the very words with which we can form conscious thoughts in our subjective minds are already carrying the influence of others. This approach has its weakness in belittling the transcendence of the 'Other'. By stretching the importance of the unifying cultural and social ties, we may come to domesticate the difference of the other, the fact that she is another subject, capable of resisting my classifications and even to counter-classify me.
4. The fourth approach seeks to overcome that failure. It emphasises the confrontation with radical 'Otherness' as a crucial aspect of intersubjectivity. Sometimes, however, it emphasises the transcendence and elusiveness of the 'Other' to the extent that it not only denies the existence of a functioning co-subjectivity, but also the a priori status of intersubjectivity. As a result the encounter with the 'Other' is turned into a mystery.

These takes approach the issue of intersubjectivity from different directions. Although they all offer good wisdom, they need each other to balance out any exaggerating tendencies. I agree with number two, stating that before we become subjects, we are intersubjects. Or perhaps it is achieved in the same making? The third observation on the life-world constituting character of intersubjectivity fits neatly with the Vygotsky-Bakhtin-Bourdieu -axis of Dorothy Holland and colleagues (1998) I have been so impressed by. But now

comes the learning moment: that is still unsatisfactory. That point needs to be illuminated by the fourth point on transcendence, lest it become domesticative – and the fourth in turn needs the others to avoid mysticism.

This is where Fernandez climbs onto the stage. He reminds us that ethnographers expose their own minds to the others' influence. His *rapprochement* is a delicate balance of the third and fourth takes, and a rare one. The whole issue is routinely and vulgarly ignored by all those who think they can unilaterally, off-hand-like take a look at the 'Other' and perceive what she's like. In truth it's not so easy; it has to be a two-way process. The pay-off for true knowledge concerning cultural difference is change, self-reflection, and self-criticism. Forget this and you end up categorising others top-down. All you will learn that way is an image of your own mind's stuff, a copy of your own initial presumptions. Those who are in a position to proceed in such top-down manner, (the *stronger spiders*), do two things: they violently impose categories upon others, *and* they imprison themselves within their own thought. Power renders blind.

There would be much, even for the critical scholars, to learn from these balancing moves. But Zahavi looks ahead. He shows at least three pathways that investigation might follow (2001, 166):

1. Phenomenologists have often concentrated on pre- or extra-linguistic forms of intersubjectivity (perception, tool-use, emotions, drives, body-awareness etc.). Here is a difference between them and for instance Habermas, who argues that language is the foundation of intersubjectivity. [And, of course, the Russian scholars mentioned above.] Since phenomenologists do not, according to Zahavi, deny the eminently intersubjective character of language, bridge-building might have good chances here.
2. From the point of view(s) of phenomenologists, intersubjectivity should not be taken as a refutation of the philosophy of subjectivity. Far from being competing alternatives, subjectivity and intersubjectivity are in fact complementing and mutually interdependent notions.
3. The three regions, 'self', 'Other' and 'world' belong together; they reciprocally illuminate one another, and can only be understood in their interconnection. It doesn't matter which of the three one takes as a starting point, for one will still inevitably be led to the other two: the subjectivity that is related to the world only gains its full relation to itself, and to the world, in relation to the other.

Intersubjectivity only exists and develops in the mutual interrelationship between subjects that are related to the world; and the world is only brought to articulation in the relationship between subjects.

The first note is important, since much attention has been given in the social sciences, including anthropology, to the *narrative* mode of intersubjectivity. Without venturing further into a side track, let me briefly mention an attractive theory elaborating that mode, The Narrative Practice Hypothesis (Hutto 2007). While I agree with Zahavi (2007) that not all in human life and intersubjectivity operates in the narrative mode, still it is a central pathway between subjects, especially those autobiographical selves that (according to Zahavi's description) are responsible for the kinds of experiences one would like to have access to as an ethnographer.

The last note is also very inviting to anthropological contributions. From my perspective at least, there's no doubt that the trio self-other-world must go together, in theorising about social life as well as in analysing what happens in fieldwork. And this piece of wisdom is also backed by psychophysiology: it wouldn't matter which kind of illusion our brains created us of the world we inhabit – many versions would be coincident enough with the physical world to allow us to live on successfully – but for the fact that others might have different illusions (see Frith 2007). It is only my referees that have the power to correct my theories; only the *stranger* can set a group of *us* free from the prison of our firm convictions.

Looking back from this point, it should be obvious what is the matter with the managerially oriented *diversity management*. Instead of telling the *diverse* employees what is good for them, their managers might learn to listen to what they say. Also, co-workers might one day grasp the potentiality of being led beyond the narrow confines of the *normal*. But the way is blocked so far as we hamper even academic endeavours to understand what is at stake in such rich, multi-layered and complicated social life by out-dated timidity in the face of the intersubjective reality that constitutes as much the contents of such life as the means to its study.

Alerted, but hopefully also comforted by these attempted disentanglements (or at least better informed of the exact nature of my transgression), I now lead you on to some further glimpses into the meaningful experiences of my informants. In the light of preceding discussions, I trust that you will receive the following narratives as vignettes, not as master narratives. I hope, nevertheless, that they will manage to convey aspects worth knowing about these individual,

contrasting experiences, and will thus open various perspectives to one organisation. I have chosen and written the vignettes in the following three chapters from the mass of interview material, in order to give – within limits of readability – a multidimensional, and at points contested, picture of that organisation, out of the focus of ethnicity and cultural differences. Please forgive a slight change of register, as I must now move from the wordy academic style to a kind of prose for telling these stories.

## 8 Foreigners' perspectives in Helsinki - the uncertainty of the non-Finn

At the time of his arrival to Finland, Bharat thought his relatively low wage would soon rise, as he would "climb the ladder" in the organisation. It took some time before he started to realise what the local combination of a flat hierarchy, small variation in incomes and high taxation actually meant to him. By that time his wife had arrived (who was not employed) and the growing family needed a larger home...

Many Finnish workers are less keen on promotion. They describe an Anglo-American "up or out"-type of organisational order, based on the combination of competition and promotion, as a stressful requirement. They hesitate before the demand of human relations expertise and other qualities they believe they would need as a boss. Cherishing their craftsmanship, they would not sacrifice the technical profession – especially as they know that they would not be that much better off financially.

For Bharat, however, just such a vision of upward mobility would have been emancipating. According to him, one needs "scope to go" in order to not feel in a dead end. Pre-existing assumptions thus guide people to interpret the same conditions as either empowering or suffocating. Career choices thousands of miles away are made with inadequate information. Vital information in this case would have included the fact that wages in Finland typically do not increase as steeply as in the countries of reference (South and South East Asia), and most Finnish families win their bread through the double income model, encouraged by the separate taxation of spouses.

What he was looking for was an acknowledged or respectable position, rising salary, friends at work and personal satisfaction in his own results. As three years earlier, he nursed some worries about the fairness of his company; such as the question of whether or not he had hit the *glass ceiling* because of his nationality and whether or not the recent lay-offs were influenced by Finnish ethnocentrism. His attitude towards these questions was ambivalent: such things happen in the world, they are natural albeit ugly. Although he was irritated by the situation, he assumed he had to swallow it. There was no way to change the world. On the positive side, he said he still hoped to penetrate the



glass ceiling. He was going to wait and see. His strategy was to convince the Finns of his indispensability by his high performance.

He had a cynical view of the smaller Finnish IT-companies that recruited at the boom time engineers from India with "faces that are different" just to impress customers and investors. He said this was both because it gave a global look, and also because of the good reputation of Indian engineers. When I directly asked him, whether he thought this also concerned him, he denied it and referred to his specialised field. He was recruited for a job that demanded the kind of specialised cultural knowledge he possessed. Thus, there was a business reason for his person to be there, not just an image reason. Still, he was hurt. The treatment of his countrymen affected himself as well.

Talking to Bharat I found an echo to my own outsider position regarding the double world of the 'nerds' and the economists at F-Secure. Bharat is a representative of the new profession, *localisers*, that translates the products and services of high-tech companies to other languages and work on the needed cultural adaptation. His specialty was Japanese language and culture, but he had also worked in other Asian countries, such as Singapore. "*After that I wanted experience in some western country in Europe, Australia or the US.*" He had found F-Secure on the Internet.

It was the situation of Bharat more than anybody else that I came to know in Helsinki and which I thought was unsatisfactory. His wife had gone to India for the birth of their first child, and he had not seen her or the child for months, because of long delays in the visa process. He spent most of his weekends alone, writing articles for professional journals or writing poems. He had written some stories for Indian papers describing Finland as a place to live. At work he said, like everybody else, that his communicative needs were fulfilled. Yet I got the impression that he was lonely.

Bharat: Daily work? It goes up smoothly. It happens sometimes you don't have those social talks when you have those coffee breaks. I mean it's mostly I who... me who initiates the talk with somebody who I want to talk to. It's not like you sit at the coffee tables and just enter the conversation. There are two reasons. One reason, like you feel that ok let's not go over, because just because of me they have to talk in English. So you feel like ok, let's not disturb them. And on the other way you think that ok, I cannot go to talk to them, because I cannot talk in Finnish. Just like that. - - But I mean there is never a feeling like they are talking about me.

Researcher: Aha, ok.

Bharat: There is no feeling like that. But just that during your relaxing time you need somebody to talk and...<sup>xi</sup>

In his free-time solitude, social barriers, and lingering fears about discrimination, Bharat had to face a state of uncertainty concerning both his profession as a small fraction among the main *tribes* in the company; and his foreignness, his unfamiliarity with Finnish regulations and customs. As I discussed above in the chapter “Method”, if there was one of us doing *fieldwork*, it was Bharat.

### **Cold people in a cold country?**

As a European, Delphine had no trouble with visas or work permits. Instead she hit the emotional brick wall, or the *culturally constituted premises for self-presentation*, or simply put, the terrible "coldness" of Finns. When we met for the first time, she said she was going to change workplace to some of F-Secure's country offices outside Finland. She needed a different life-style: something more energetic, more social. It would be easy to dismiss her criticism as just another spoilt Central European. But she also said that if she had not been able to talk about her impressions with other foreigners at work, she would have gone crazy.

Since I have long worked with foreigners in Finland, I'm not tended to dismiss her impression. For some reason this is the way many people experience Finns and Finland: a cold country and cold inhabitants. At least for the first period, before they get to know some of the locals more closely. Or when they feel that they are accepted: the refugees, for instance, might experience a marked warming of their environment by the time they get their permit, and again, when they get their first job. Many foreigners have noticed that in summer, the weather is not the only thing that grows warmer, but the people seem to be transformed too. A totally different mentality! Outgoing, smiling... Of those who first come to Finland in summertime, many leave during their first winter. I have heard people count the time they have spent in Finland in winters, like: *Let's see now – how many winters have I survived?*

Tackling the issue of *coldness*, the danger is close to endorsing a stereotypic picture of *Finnish culture*, even a demonising image – and in line with self-imposed racism. Nevertheless, I will venture. I hope to go around. For the most part I think these experiences, as tough as they are, are based on misunderstanding. Firstly, social psychologists remind us that all sojourners everywhere get at least a passing feeling that they are rejected by the locals. This is based on the fact that the locals, who have not moved, are well joined in their established networks, and do not need new friends; at least not as badly as the newcomers (see e.g. Brislin et al. 1986). But in this case there's more to it than that.

The second source of misunderstanding comes with the clash of discrepant rules for social interaction. Such rules are mostly implicit, which makes the situation equally confusing for both (or all) parties. It may be hard to believe, but very often the Finn thought to be *cold* is in fact trying to behave politely, following the social imperative of non-interference and modesty. (See e.g. Roberts 1989.) Better not join the conversation or start one, for fear of intrusion. Also, sometimes it might seem like I take myself for the most important person present, if *I* go to talk to the newcomer. *Let somebody else begin*. A French woman said to me years ago, that she'd learned to be always the one breaking the ice. Then Finns will answer, and they are actually quite nice. The outsider just has to be the one who gathers an extra portion of energy, smiles and starts the conversation. When I had my first child, and travelled around Helsinki in trams and buses, I thought to try her trick. Unlike my fellow young mothers who complained about never being offered help to get in and out of the vehicles, I took to the habit of screening for potential able-bodied citizens each time the tram doors opened, and directing my words to one of them, asking with a radiant smile: "*Can you help me lift the pram, please?*" In all the years when I needed this help, only one woman excused herself for not been able to lift anything, because she'd recently had an operation on her back.

But as I said before, culture is only the chessboard. Growing up in this kind of social environment, one learns to navigate it and to use the opportunities it offers. How can you know what's wrong when people don't talk to you - whether they refrain out of politeness or timidity, or out of animosity? Retaining and doling out information in frustrating portions is unfortunately a very widespread variety of interpersonal power game around here. If an unfriendly Finn wishes to subject a foreigner to this kind of passive discrimination, he/she will find many opportunities for doing so – all under the banner of *timidity*. Hence the line between politeness and actual coldness is thin, and leaves the foreigner, again, in a state of uncertainty.

Upon my return to F-Secure, Delphine was still there. Actually, I met her in a café because she was on maternity leave. She had married one of her Finnish colleagues and forgot about escaping the *coldness*.

Bharat's and Delphin's stories are only two brief glimpses into experiencing Finland as a newcomer. Despite their brevity, these vignettes contain notions and details that are already moving us away from the idyllic picture drawn by the Finns at F-Secure of a cheerful and uncomplicated welcome. I chose two very different examples for the benefit of contrast. Yet they share a dimension that I have met frequently whenever working or talking with foreign-born residents in Finland: the psychological state of uncertainty imposed upon the

newcomer and aggravated by Finnish life-style and attitudes towards newcomers. Seen through their eyes, the approach of *neutrality* does not seem to lead to the kind of smooth cooperation Finns believe it does. Neither does it look neutral any more: Finns appear to have their own cultural qualities as well as anybody, and Finland is a very exotic place. What comes to the workplace, there's no such thing as factual work. All work is done within some kind of frames – whether one is aware of them or not.

## 9 San Jose

The man across the aisle had done it for years. He travelled up and down North America, checking out potential partners for Finns: American companies that might be interesting business partners for Finnish companies, if the latter ventured to make deals with them. But, according to him, that was difficult. The Finns didn't dare to demand that American counterparts prove their viability in the form of documented figures. He didn't mind to do so, and as a son of immigrants – he has grown up in the US – he knew that Americans didn't either. The fault of the Finns was that they thought it would offend not to trust a spoken version of a firm's reality. But they didn't trust the Americans anyway. So, that was where he was needed.

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Much has been written about Silicon Valley, and the success story of the high-tech industry, so I need not repeat it here. Since the stories had prepared me for grand things, I was a little disappointed at the unexciting, rather insipid character of everyday life in that marvel valley. Of course it was a downturn (or even *recession*, although people didn't like to use that word). Maybe that explained the vacant businesses, run-down buildings right in the centre of San Jose and the shockingly ordinary look of people. It didn't explain the groups of homeless people in the parks, I was told, since they were unfortunately always there. It was October 2002.



*Downtown San Jose.*

What I mean with shocking ordinariness, perhaps finds its explanation in the pervasive power of virtual images representing the United States and its lifestyles. Most people on this planet sooner or later have their lives soaked with the influence of mass media versions of all things American. This virtual America, however, is not the real United States that exists on the continent of North America. I only realised this when, one night, falling asleep by television in my hotel room, I suddenly woke up startled by the observation: *Now they've let in one of the real ones into the broadcast!* It was a talk show that had invited Michael Moore as a guest. Transgressing the Hollywood norms of beauty, fitness and action, he is one of those who inject a portion of reality into the virtual, quite like the experience of travelling to the US and talking to ordinary people does to one of us accustomed consumers of media. That's what had been bothering me ever since I set foot on the ground beyond the Atlantic, although it took me a while to articulate it.

It is of course a very basic insight to make the difference between reality and fiction, but I like to bring it up here just to remind you that many Western European visitors to Silicon Valley – students, business people and government officials – never leave the dream-zone, so to speak. They either come in at

times of great economic hype or else remain within the elite circles of universities and cutting-edge organisations, home of the *creative class*. Stepping out of that zone into the life-zones of more ordinary people, even Silicon Valley starts to look like just another place on Earth. Less privileged organisations cluster around the big ones, looking for deals, employing ordinary middle-class people, and in turn, giving employment to yet lower classes: the waiters, drivers, nurses and janitors. And finally – there are the parks. In order to see social reality beyond the massive power of global media production, one needs to work one's way upstream against that production in all its genres. Expectations have a great power to steer one's impressions in social situations, unless they are consciously brought under analysis. I cannot claim to have but started that work during my brief visit to Silicon Valley.

In case somebody finds it irritating, a few words about the use of the term 'American'. Yes, for me too it is biased and misleading. My own mental framework on arrival to the US was closer to the Uruguayan journalist and historian Eduardo Galeano's double continent version of *American* than the prevailing Western European sloppy usage of *American*, but in the end I had to yield, for lack of alternatives. If I was writing in some other language, I could use words like the Finnish word 'yhdyksvaltalainen' or 'estadounidense' – the polite end of Latin American vocabulary referring to the United States. But this time we are in San Jose, California – not San José, Costa Rica.

Not that Hispanic layers were missing even in so short a visit as mine. Language, especially the prominent role of Spanish, seemed to be one of the real test items of diversity for the people I met. It comes home to the middle-class Anglophone people that diversity also costs them something, and demands time and dedication, when their own children must learn Spanish at school. Not as a curiosity, but as a true life requirement, for a society that is becoming multi-lingual. In Finland, most people perceive the United States as a vanguard of ethnic diversity – and it may be so in some other respects – but language is not a minor issue in diversity. In this regard, Finland is curiously ahead of many others, with its historically generous policy of bilingualism. Although, perhaps that policy is now under attack from the pressure of globalisation and the English language.



*Multilingualism the Californian way. The local light rail service offers its tickets in three languages: English, Spanish and – Vietnamese. Professor English-Lueck at the Anthropology Department of San Jose State University gently corrected my misconception that there were now three official languages in California. The Vietnamese were probably the group that had arrived latest and were using the urban rail a lot. Thus, it was just the VTA's (Valley Transportation Authority) way of serving its customers. In Finland, I'm used to such public services being a matter of lengthy political debates and minute regulations. It's all about the official languages, and the proportion of Finnish and Swedish speakers at the county level.*

### Working for Finns

However unimpressive the general environment in Silicon Valley may have appeared, at F-Secure I was given cordial attention. At the headquarters I had scarcely managed to slip into the visitors' zone, and was only grudgingly allowed to participate in company gatherings. Here I was given the access card to the company premises, a local mobile phone and a cubicle with computer and Internet connection. The HR manager also saw to it, that a bagful of company marketing items was given to me, and a hotel reservation was made for me, although I had only asked for recommendations.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> I paid for all but the phone myself, however, and even that was for local calls only.



Soon I began to suspect that many of the local employees must have taken me for some kind of *corporate spy* sneaking around and reporting to Helsinki. Very uncomfortable situations repeatedly arose when Mary, the local HR manager and my contact person, introduced me to one employee after another: "...and here is Ms. Trux – from Helsinki. She will wish to have an interview with you..." Never had I thought that the name of my home town, the remote little northern place without much capital or fame – Helsinki – the name that was frequently misspelled by *westerners* as *Helsinsky* (was that in some ex-communist country or so?) would mean anything to these people. I was grossly wrong.

The building where F-Secure's offices were housed in San Jose was carefully reinforced for earthquakes. But the iron supports could do nothing against the shaky business. The downturn in the IT-sector had hit this unit badly. A large amount of the work force, nearly half, had been laid off during the preceding year. The offices had occupied two floors in the tower, now there was only one. The remaining people were worried, anxiously looking for signs of possible new disasters. Rumours ran wild, and many intersecting cliques seemed to be forming and dissolving among the personnel. Many of the workers complained about the "politics" going on among themselves. One of them used the term "soap opera" to describe the situation. The workplace was "*every day coming to a new episode*". At the time I took this to be simply an after-effect of the layoffs. Later I learned however, that the managerial guidance had still been somewhat unclear, and people had been left in a situation where they didn't know their exact targets. That is of course extremely stressful, especially combined with fears about job security.

I was told many versions of the glorious (or lavish, depending on the teller) past of the unit. At one time, towards the top of the boom when all eyes were on Silicon Valley, they had enjoyed the title of the organisation's second headquarters. There had been American directors. Helsinki had given San Jose quite a lot of freedom to help create the success story they all expected. The budget was large. After the bubble had burst, and money was quickly running out, Helsinki tightened the reins. The local director was dismissed and a Finn was appointed from Helsinki in his place. There had been Finns before, but more were sent now, and they all took leading positions.

The most important divide was that between sales and technical support. As a sales unit, San Jose didn't have any development functions, but there were many 'nerds' employed for customer service. The offices consisted of two open spaces, housing these two functions – and the corresponding professional tribes, more or less. Some of the directors had individual offices, but most

people were confined to cubicles that were by Finnish standards inadequately small and sombre. The cubicle surrendered to my use was on the *tech side*, where I had some more unofficial talks with the workers.

I was perhaps taken for a spy, but instead of a silent suspect that seemed to prompt a tide of enquiries and appeals, especially since I volunteered for taking messages. "*Can you tell them, that we need information here*" ... "*I can't get answers to technical questions.*" ... "*We've got the customers on our necks can't they see it?*" ... "*How can it be a trade secret, if we're the same company?*" ... "*You can't make American customers wait over 24 hours.*" ... "*Please tell them, that we're already down to the minimum and below it, there's nothing left to cut.*" ... I could see myself only too well, that the power check from Helsinki had already succeeded in stopping the extravagant spending and much more. No more lessons were needed to teach them who was in control. Upon return I actually wrote a one page report for the management, stating more or less just that, with a couple of more detailed pleas charged on me by the Californians.

If the personnel in Helsinki went through the downturn without ethnicising, the same cannot be said of San Jose. Not that they would have looked for scapegoats from among themselves. It was ethnicising upwards, and there were only two categories in that taxonomy: Finns and the others. While the whole of Silicon Valley – and the whole of global IT-sector – dived down and all neighbouring companies had the same troubles, still the American employees behaved as if all their difficulties were caused by the Finns. If only they knew enough about them, maybe they would learn to handle them. Dealing with a powerful 'Other' is always a delicate matter, but this had surrealist overtones, at least to me. That citizens of the world's only superpower, people from the financial and symbolic centre of the industry, on the mythical soil of Silicon Valley, would come asking me "*more about Finnish culture*", "*what was Helsinki like*", "*what was salmiakki<sup>32</sup> made of*" and so on; telling how much they "*would have wanted to travel there*". It seemed unreal, until I realised that that was only because I had looked at them with a frame of my own, assuming

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<sup>32</sup> I became even more embarrassed when the HR manager ordered by Internet a sturdy amount of these Nordic candies to be served at my presentation on *Finnish culture*. This peculiar confectionery is an acquired taste in the North of Europe. (See for instance <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salmiakki>.) Uninitiated people, to whom I've served these candies, have usually spat them out, with comments like: "*Are you trying to poison me?*" Maybe some of the poor F-Securians actually liked them, but I'm not sure about all the brave faces. Comments like "*I've tasted these before, I'm kind of used to them. Your first time?*" seemed to take on an ugly second meaning of proving one fits in the company run by Finns.

that Finnishness was close to an antithesis of colonialism, that Finns were a minority tribe among the nations of the world. It might be so elsewhere in the financial and political centres, but at F-Secure this world order was standing on its head.

### **The man who calls himself “ugly”**

Jackson is a family man. He is rather shy, or so he says, beneath the sales manager’s tie and second personality. Why would he then have chosen a career like the one he is presently pursuing? To protect his family and provide his children a carefree youth. “*Poverty scares me*”, he relates. So, he climbs sometimes on the stage to make a presentation before an audience of hundreds, dumping his timidity, forcing himself to think about his house and his children’s preschool fairs.

Most of his work consists of phone calls and e-mails, and even when he travels, he tries to group his meetings so as to hit several of them with one flight. That way he can spend his weekends at home. Despite all the modern equipment allowing people to work from home, Jackson likes to commute to the office, because there he can benefit from casual encounters with colleagues providing the indispensable informal information with which he has created some of his sales arguments.

F-Secure is not his first Finnish employer, he became involved with Finns when the local telephone company, his long-time employer, gave him the opportunity to specialise in wireless technology. At that time Jackson had run out of motivation to continue what he describes as a compulsive race at career building, starting at school, where middle-class students concentrate on gathering a good résumé rather than knowledge. Next they move on to organisational ladder climbing, with stress increased at each level on the way to the vice president’s post... Five years back, he realised that what he needed was enough money to make a living; that was all. Career was for family, not the other way round. So he jumped out of the race, started taking on independent sorts of posts. The first was in a Finnish telecommunications company, next came a start-up, and then F-Secure.

The problem for Jackson is that the top management doesn’t support his efforts to sell such products among the array of F-Secure, as Jackson knows would be interesting for his potential customers. Instead, he is driven by the company to sell products that face an established market and very big competitors. At the time of the interview, anti-virus programs are selling well in Europe, and because of a legal problem related to encryption products, the company has put

a general emphasis on anti-virus. In the United States, however, that market is already saturated. What Jackson would need would be free choice of focus or at least a proper marketing process to support his efforts, including the technical details he would need to prove the superiority of F-Secure's products compared to the competitors. This is because, Jackson says, the Finns still have a lot to learn about the American way of doing business.

Jackson: - - how Americans think is being a good marketer is very, is a different mind-set. You have to look at more than, is a glass half full or half empty. It is what our glass is, it's a crystal glass. (laughing) - - Or hey, look at the shape of my glass, or different aspects, like our water is distilled. It might be half empty but you know, that's great water. - - Or hey, there's a pink tone to our water. Or whatever the thing is going to be. And inherently, I haven't seen that from this company yet, is you look at it from the business perspective, is when you compare my product with the competitors.<sup>xii</sup>

I struggle to understand why *they* in Helsinki don't provide him with what he needs, forcing him to sell what is most difficult while for other products there would be demand. And he keeps telling me he's on a tight leash with little room to rebel or campaign for his views internally, because his pay is tied to the numbers he will sell each month. If he would spend time "*hitting his head against the wall*", he would then not be selling.

Jackson: - - I don't care if they are not going to support what I need for whatever reason, then...

Researcher: You don't care?

Jackson: I don't care to know the reasons why.

Researcher: Oh. But don't you think the reasons why would lead to overcome the trouble, to make them support you? If you knew what's the trouble, maybe you could fix it.

Jackson: Mmm, my job's to sell.

Researcher: Again.

Jackson: I've told [one of the Finnish bosses] what I need. I tell [the Finnish head of the unit] what I need. And if they can provide it, they'll provide it, and if they can't, I don't care why. - - You know, the rest is just a detail to me, because I asked and if they don't do it, they don't. You never ask... "If you don't have this, you won't sell", no, that's not an option. You know, I don't care why Finland chooses not to provide... I don't care why.

Researcher: Oh.

Jackson: I mean it sounds bizarre, but if you put yourself in my situation of understanding what drives me, and what drives me is to sell. - - And nobody's ever said: "Well you tried, and you just didn't make the numbers. And that's ok, because Finland didn't really give us any support", or: "Finland wouldn't return an e-mail", or:

“this contract was stuck in Finland for a month”, or whatever, who cares?. “Did you do it?”, that’s enough. - - What’s the truth here? They want the truth, the numbers. (laughing)

Researcher: Yeah. But what if it *has* an account on the numbers?

Jackson: Yeah, it...

Researcher: They don’t care? They never look that far?

Jackson: Yeah, nobody cares for the reason why you don’t sell. Nobody cares. That’s inherently on sales, that’s the risk I take. (Same source.)

Jackson had been thinking about *trust*, especially since he attended my presentation in San Jose about *Finnish culture*. He has a chilling tale to tell from his side of the Finno-American contact.

Jackson: - - But your analysis did on, a lot on the trust factor. I’ve found... I don’t even expect to have a Finn trust me, ever.

Researcher: Oh, but come on.

Jackson: No, that’s not necessarily a bad thing, because I understand that in my personality, and in the way I am... everything opposite in a lot of ways that the Finnish people are. And they look at me and they just back away, and I can tell from their body language: I’m a sales guy. (laughs) They are all poker face, but, you can tell.

Researcher: (laughing) Do you think that I’m trusting you now?

Jackson: No, what I’ve learned is... In this company as well is, you know, the American opinion doesn’t matter. And that’s fine.

Researcher: No, it’s not fine.

Jackson: If you had an American company working in Finland, I’d expect... I mean would it be different, no. (Same source.)

I rather desperately try to appeal for building mutual understanding, but Jackson remains in his hard-boiled position, referring to the product focuses in the European and American units that, undoubtedly, make a perfect mismatch. Beyond that, there’s the cultural difference, which Jackson has understood has been the reason why he has been hired to do the selling for the Finns.

Jackson: - - I read body language a great deal in people’s eyes or so, and I can tell if they’re buying me or not (laughing).

Researcher: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

Jackson: And their reaction to that is very interesting.

Researcher: I have been... during our conversation I have been probably appearing a little bit like... Maybe you think that I’m not buying you, but the truth is that I’m trying hard to *follow* you. Because I’m not so familiar with American health-security system and all your products and things like that.

Jackson: Right. Oh, it's... It's hard, I know that.

Researcher: So if I'm kind of looking like this (stares across frowningly) it's because...

Jackson: Right that's ok. It's because most Finns usually look at me like that, because I'm truly, I'm the Anti-Christ to Finns, I am, yeah. - - Yeah, but again, the one thing that I do respect about Finns is that they are good business people. They inherently want to do the right thing. - - They inherently want to see sales.

Researcher: Of course.

Jackson: And they know that they have to deal with people like me if they wanna be in the US. - - And I understand that I am not pleasant to meet with, I understand. (laughing)

Researcher: Of course you are pleasant to deal with, come on!

Jackson: Yeah, ok, but I mean culturally, I mean that when they define the term ugly American, there's my picture. (Same source.)

Despite the problems, Jackson is content with his present work. He gives detailed praise of F-Secure as an employer, for its family-friendly policy, for the health-care arrangements and flexibility allowing the workers to use their hours as they will, controlling only that targets are met. Recently, a time clock was installed in the premises because a small number of the employees needed to have it for US regulations, and the management didn't want to single them out before all others. So, for the sake of discretion, everybody uses the clock. Jackson says even here Finns don't know how to take full advantage of their own virtues. They have great management, but they don't market it, so many workers believe that the clock is there for control. Equally, many ignore that the company paid a margin, so that a change in health-care programme didn't make the workers suffer anything in their pocket. *"This company treats me right"*, he says, *"They give me the number to hit. No tools to do it, but I find a way. That's why they pay me a big money to find the tool."*



US work regulations hanging on the wall of the staff's break room /kitchen.

## Managing Americans

Ville was appointed to a managerial position after he'd already been in San Jose for about a year. He takes care to make it clear that it was never his goal, and he did not supplant any of the locals. Not that he'd be a beginner in managerial work: it was his job for years in Finland, before he came to F-Secure, seeking a foreign assignment.

His version of *ideal boss* echoes his excuses: much in line with prevailing Finnish (idealistically democratic) images, he states that a good boss is a friend and a helper, rather than a governor. It is what he himself tries to be: to remain close to his subordinates, to accept their problems as reality, to provide expertise, to give equal treatment to all and never to contrive anything behind people's backs. To be trustworthy, honest and candid... Ville's vocabulary in Finnish (*suoraviivainen rehtiys, rehellinen, tasapuolinen, suorasekäinen, ei puukota selkään*) follows closely the deeply imprinted public images of *Finnish virtues*, those that have come up in the process of nation-building and continue setting goals and ideals for many people in a working life that most often blatantly fails any such high standards. Here I would draw attention not so much to the question of whether or not he lives up to his standards, but on their quality: why just these and not some other goals, such as the neo-liberal goals of reaching business targets, and assigning and moving around the

workforce as a production asset in order to achieve those goals? If anything, Ville's discourse is peasant pragmatism, not late modern flexibility.

When I had listened to Jackson, the idea that the salesman was exaggerating things took hold of me: no one could really brand him with such a demonising image. But listening to Ville, I started to wonder if it might indeed be some sort of unfortunate outcome of the way Finns picture themselves. The negative projections and left-over pieces of *the ideal Finn* would be, if not systematically imposed upon, at least all too easily available for anyone who would come to cross his or her interests with some dimensions of the *Finnish* company.

Ville: Working with customers, I prefer the kind of sales type of work where you create this kind of trustful relationship with your customer. My character is not that of a 'sales cannon' (*myyntitykki*). I'm not prepared to lie to advance things. I am candid, honest. And I usually try to converse with the customer in a very transparent, trust evoking way... a way where both parties understand the other as well as possible. - - In a way it works also for sales. And on a certain level... But I'm not exactly sales spirited. I'm more sort of provoking sales. So, this sales engineer kind of job was very fitting for me, in that sense an ideal job.<sup>xiii</sup>

It may be that beyond the best intentions of all those involved, the formation of stereotypic images with their counter-parts in a subordinate 'Other' (slightly subordinate, but anyway) advances along the lines of a limited set of images as building blocks of identity. Attempts at steering that development away from its polarising course, might draw from cultural resources available but seldom reached by people currently undergoing such development. To give an idea of what I mean, I present some search results I found in the Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary<sup>33</sup>, when attempting to translate Ville's ideals.

The main entry was the adjective 'candid'. It is given 4 different meanings:

- 1: white <candid flames>
- 2: free from bias, prejudice, or malice : fair <a candid observer>
- 3:
  - a) marked by honest sincere expression <a candid discussion>
  - b) indicating or suggesting sincere honesty and absence of deception  
<her candid face>
  - c) disposed to criticize severely : blunt <candid critics>
- 4: relating to or being photography of subjects acting naturally or spontaneously without being posed

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com>. Accessed on 29.6.2009.



For synonyms, the dictionary offers a link to the word frank. That is a good translation for ‘rehti’ and ‘suoraselkäinen’, as good as ‘sincere’ and ‘honest’. But what about ‘blunt’? I found three meanings for this adjective.

- 1:       a) slow or deficient in feeling : insensitive  
          b) obtuse in understanding or discernment : dull
- 2: having an edge or point that is not sharp <a blunt instrument>
- 3:       a) abrupt in speech or manner  
          b) being straight to the point : direct

As synonyms, link is given to dull and bluff.

Before I travelled to California the HR manager in Helsinki had told me that the Americans were very strange, that Finns had to struggle to get themselves understood, and that they had adopted the self-referential advice when communicating with Americans: “*Please, you must take us literally, we are brutally honest.*” Was that like being ‘blunt’ in the third sense above? So it seems to me. I also think that it is close to what Ville means with ‘suoraviivainen rehtiys’.

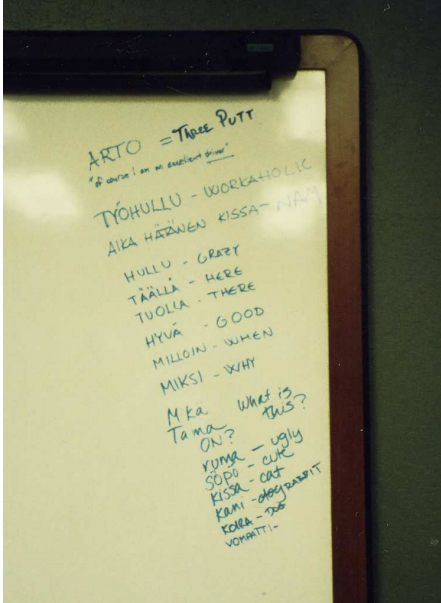
But unfortunately all attempts end in a frustrating slippage. There is no direct translation, because the semantic worlds are not absolute and they do not quite coincide. We are led to evaluate flavours and nuances, but these flavours and nuances are not insignificant. To the contrary, they have a ground setting importance to who one is at work, and who are the others. The meanings given by Merriam Webster for ‘honest’ were for the most part what I thought Ville was referring to. But there were already some hints of ‘innocent’ and ‘simple’ among them. Further, as I looked at ‘candid’, as explained above, it also served as a good translation, but with the obvious side track: ‘blunt’, in the first sense. Truth-speaking is sometimes insensitive. You may be so faithful to your own true message that you fail to perceive other messages or nuances in your environment. An absurdly sincere person can appear to others a little child-like: acting with abrupt manners, but so simple as to be easily fooled.

What is it, I’m suggesting now? That we return to 19th century stereotypes of the Finns as a half-developed race, loyal in their naive way, but hopelessly rustic? Say rather, that looking at more nuances, and more sides to the dice, we come to perceive that nobody has only one quality, and no quality is without its downside. Jackson never said he was lying to the customers, did he? There is an entire area of interpersonal tactics hardly touched upon by usual Finnish discussions: lateral or second meanings, personified connotations (who is speaking), irony, puns etc. They are not immediately a sign of insincerity, or nonsense bubbling, as is often concluded by Finns. Communication can have

many channels open at once, equally important. This kind of relaxing of the tightly depicted cultural ideals (in this case, of *truth*, and *sincerity*) may do good. It may enable the Finns to learn from the 'Other', rather than just listing to the ways in which *the 'Other'* is different from *me*. I'm of course not suggesting I could tell where such learning should lead. Many personal outcomes are possible during a history of *self-authoring*. The same holds for the 'Other', who is also a subject. Jackson might also benefit from more ingredients in his respective process. We all could (including the present writer).

Imagine a workplace where people discuss at times how they perceive themselves, or what they hold as an ideal way of doing their work. Imagine they misunderstand and re-communicate, correcting one another's conceptions. Imagine that they disagree and negotiate, hold opinions, occupy footsteps and allow the same for others. Imagine that they are knowledgeable about national and social stereotypes (or any stereotypes) but rather than remaining prisoners of these, or assigning others to be prisoners, they open up such categories and play with the ingredients. A full-blown postmodern workplace, just like they seem to expect it. Only, in this dream, people would talk to each other.

But the best attempts at intercultural learning will wreck if fear overcomes curiosity. That, unfortunately, is common when structural problems related to the way organisation's wheels are turning and misturning, press on people. Anything can be ethnicised.



A Finnish-English dictionary, concise edition. This piece of workplace creativity remained on the whiteboard for at least the time of my visit.

It appears at various points of my conversation with Ville, that there were actually several organisational problems embedded in the general claim by the Americans, that “Helsinki is a black hole”, that they do not get information from the headquarters as much and as quickly as they need. First, there are the time zones. There is no perfect solution to that. When working hours do not overlap at all, direct conversation is possible only if both parties consent to staying late in the evening or coming in early in the morning. Communication via e-mail has its own shortcomings. Ville’s assignment to San Jose was originally an attempt to solve this problem: to have at least one person in San Jose who knows who is who in Helsinki, how to formulate questions etc. Secondly, he had also tried to distribute his social capital to the employees in San Jose, to build better Finno-American communication. But the Americans don’t stay in a company long enough, which prevented the fruits of his efforts from cumulating. Thirdly, it appears that among the four Finns in San Jose, he was the only one with a technical education. This might be understandable in a sales unit, but F-Secure’s products are of a very delicate kind of technology. “A technical problem need not be very big to come to a point. It just swells through the whole organisation. So you have to find an answer quickly, even to a small question”, he explains. Finally, there are internal security regulations, due to the nature of the digital security business, that inevitably further hamper

the flow of information. To some databases, not even Ville has access. That means, when they can't contact Helsinki, they must survive on their own.

Perceiving how ethnicised issues are fuelled by structural ones is an indispensable part of understanding workplace diversity. It's the counter case of what I've been telling about Helsinki: that there was no call for DM, because there was nothing to be ethnicised. But it would not help much to look at cases where people *have* started ethnicising and simply condemn it as *false consciousness*. Even in their most outwardly stupid decisions, people cleave to their agency. They act for reasons. Beyond extinguishing the structural fires, we might be able to understand their reasons if we looked at the employees' situation economically, socially and morally. Which options lie open to them and which are closed? What are their fears and hopes? What do they see when they look back at where they have come from and look to the future, where they are heading? How much is certain to them and how much is blurred? What is their order of priority?

### **In search of trust**

According to the worst popular European stereotype, Americans from the US are ruthless businessmen and ignorant imperialists. I didn't see any such people at F-Secure. Instead, I had talks with ordinary wage labourers, people who had their credit card limits and house mortgages to mind. I also realised that they had to mind things that I as a Finn had never bothered about: they needed to save for their children's college expenses, a costly thing that not all could afford. If they couldn't afford it, then their children had to do without higher education, as the young men next to my cubicle were doing. They had grown up in Silicon Valley and thus with computers. They could manipulate them well enough without formal degrees. You could always get a job even without a degree. But you could not advance your career. They were stuck in positions like their current help-desk duties. No hope of social mobility without a degree, no hope of a degree without money. They took this absurd and cruel order as a matter of fact, eagerly collecting bits and pieces of knowledge where ever they could find them.

When I gave the personnel my lecture on *Finnish culture*, the help-deskers were not in the audience. Afterwards I found them on the *tech side*, by the phones they could not abandon. Their gratefulness when I gave them a résumé by the phone side was heart-breaking. Far away things came to my mind that evening. First I thought about the women I had taught knitting - up in hills of Central America, in my youth, on a development travel. They had had the same, unsatisfiable (and uncritical) thirst for knowledge. Then I thought about

my father, the self-made technician who was born in 1925, well before the welfare state and free education.

Several people presented me with a very confusing question, to which I had no answer. They begged me to tell them, how they could make the Finns trust them. But as I talked to the assigned Finns in San Jose, they did not seem to be especially distrustful of the local workforce. Apart from teaching the lesson of belt-tightening, they had little to say about the local workforce. Actually, the business school educated Finns in their managerial position were not that concerned about the staff at all. Their talk lingered on the "big deals" they were about to make, and how exciting it was to be out there on the world market doing the kind of business they had learned about in Finland. Mary complained that she'd said several times to the head of the unit he might use just a little more time socialising with the people. Slipping into his office like that would make the Americans think he had something against them. Although, personally she had nothing to complain about, the staff was just over reacting. If they had ever worked for an Asian company...

What did the employees mean when they asked how they could make the Finns trust them? What kind of trust were they referring to? Reading accounts like English-Lueck's *Cultures@SiliconValley* (2002) on the deliberate measures the *tech people* use for creating and assuring their indispensable networks – or even the kind of descriptions of American business culture Prasad (1997) gives, stressing the role of *frontier values* (familiar to many Europeans from the fiction genre of *Wild West*) – I'm tempted to believe that whatever place *trust* exactly held in their world, it was something markedly more deliberate than what it was to the Finns present, or to me. It was as if there were, in principle, two opposing ways to trust: one assuming a general animosity, that needs to be settled or tamed to create a haven of trust; the other starting with trust as a default status, that may be broken if any reason appears. That made sense. It fit well to what I later heard from Noah, the Helsinki-based American who had also recently visited the unit in San Jose. Noah said that the targets being open resulted that the workers were lacking a concrete "yardstick" to measure their productivity and thus the keeping of their part of the deal with the company – an indispensable tool for an American to estimate whether he or she is in danger of being laid off. Brrr. What a cold world it was. Hearing him, I remembered my homesickness in San Jose for the cosy old Finland where people concentrated on work, and on survival – and never needed to stress themselves with *transaction costs*. Instead of first spending an hour or a week on calculating the risks involved in a commitment, you would just go for it.

The sad thing still was, Finnish managers and other people in powerful positions would not of course go out and trust the whole world like that until proven the reason to do otherwise. Rather, they would follow the received wisdom of trusting first the people of their like, their countrymen, fellow professionals, their own gender and generation, those who would have gone to the same schools and so on. This would leave the people beyond the barriers of ethnicity, gender etc. with little means of getting in.<sup>34</sup>

In retrospect it is obvious that the picture I obtained of the unit in San Jose was heavily influenced by the particular moment I managed to witness. The workplace was in turmoil, to say the least, but so was the business. I heard stories that were much worse from academic Finns residing at Stanford. According to these eyewitnesses, another company had a sauna built in its premises, and a handwritten note on the thermostat: "*Finns only allowed to manipulate this*". I don't think that the Finns at F-Secure were using a deliberately malevolent power over the locals, apart from a mistimed lay-off. It was rather my own morale as a researcher of diversity that suffered a blow.

I had a meeting with David, the technical support engineer appointed for 1.00 pm. The management rescheduled it earlier, but that was fine for me. I would spend the afternoon exploring the town instead. David was one of the more experienced help-deskers, with a true psychological strategy of calming down upset customers before he got to sort out their problems. No longer a young man, he was father of two children. But he felt he wasn't getting his loyalty back from the company.

David: Well, I'm very loyal. I'll stand by you until I can't stand anymore. Once I make you either part of my family or my friend. And that's my way for work, too. My last job... I worked both at this job and my last job full time for over a month, because I didn't want to leave, because I was so loyal to that company. - - Because I wanted to help them out and make sure that it was good to go. But they couldn't afford to pay me anymore, so of course I had to leave but... Then I don't feel that this company is overly loyal to me. I feel that... The reason I feel that way is other people who have been laid off because of the economic downturn – or at least it was said that was the reason they were laid off – they were all very loyal.

Researcher: Yeah.

David: And I feel that they were not... Their loyalty was not returned.<sup>xiv</sup>

I don't know what he had been told about work costs in Finland, but he was also worried for his personal economy, if he was laid off.

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<sup>34</sup> Compare to Forsander's (2004) account of residue *lack of Finnishness* on ethnic work market in Finland.

David: So you could actually run support in Finland just 24 hours a day.

Researcher: Yeah, you need people who work at night.

David: Yeah, at nights in Finland. If it's cheap, you know, labour.

Researcher: Yeah, is it cheaper? Really?

David: That's what we have been... That's what we are told.

Researcher: Aha, aha.

David: I know that I'm currently below poverty level in the United States.

Researcher: You what... Sorry, poverty level?

David: So those, In the US we have levels, you know. - - You can be super-rich basically, you can be middle-class. And then you've got people who live in poverty, you know. - - And normally these are... I'm at pretty high level of poverty, but... So I can pay my bills, but I live from pay cheque to pay cheque kind of...

Researcher: Really...?

David: Being terminated I would have to move away in twelve days or so. (Same source.)

When I came back at the offices to read my mail, there was David's friend, the help-desk worker telling me David had been laid off just after the interview. We called him with his friend's cell phone from the parking lot, out of company ears. I offered a second meeting, but he refused, although he didn't seem angry to me. I realised I had no way to actually prove I was independent from the company. The top of the irony for the research was that David was the only African American in the unit. Had the Finns learned to do it the American way, with the more grim tones included? I never got to know the reasons for this layoff. If they were generally economic, the timing is strange. David's wording seems to hint at his being aware or guessing what was coming. But who would choose to lay off a worker immediately after a research interview? At least not an employer who carefully upholds the image of a fair player in the eyes of both its own staff and outsiders. But was this yet another instance of lacking image management, rather than lacking morals? I have no way to know. At least the episode was a sharp reminder, that an organisational ethnographer can't walk in the doors of a workplace heedless of the dark side of the local reality, assuming that dramatic turns will be heard, not witnessed, and that they will not put the fieldworker's morals in doubt.

Overall, the trip to San Jose, that I expected to be too short for anything to be learned, proved a staggering experience of a workplace in times of trouble. Lack of familiarity and redundancy, due to short exposure, limits the reliability of my observations. Nevertheless, the stories heard in San Jose have the power

to add some further question marks on the image of uncomplicated neutral cooperation originally evoked in prosperous times by the headquarters' staff. In Helsinki, it was the foreigners' lot to be lost in a state of uncertainty. In San Jose, nobody seemed to know where they were with each other. They spoke past one another, by a wide margin. With the best of my compassionate efforts, I cannot call it a successful spontaneous alternative to organised and orchestrated diversity management. Although people like Ville put in a heroic endeavour, their struggles remain individual, without the power to open joint imagination or to raise issues on a collective level. As much as I sympathised with the nerds' opposition to organised diversity, I returned to Helsinki more sceptical than ever about the potential of "Finnish management".



## 10 Back to Helsinki

As I continued the interviews in Helsinki, I realised that there were many people who had experience of working in the US. I rushed to take the opportunity of confronting them with the *voices* from San Jose. One of these people was Mark.

Mark is a settled man, no longer in his thirties. His background is academic, he had worked as a university professor in Russia, prior to immigrating to Texas, where he worked for an IT-company as a developer. Then he found F-Secure on the net, took it for an American company, and was pleasantly surprised to be offered a post in Helsinki.

Here he took on duties that seem to please him, as a backstage sort of internal consultant helping the developers and anyone with mathematical problems. He says it's nearly 100% research (as opposed to only 20% in Texas). His team is called "corporate research". It's a rather loose structure. Most of his time passes with little face-to-face contact with colleagues. Regarding that, Mark is well informed about what goes on in the company.

Thinking of ideal work, he would like to work for a start-up, a workplace where research motivation coincides with business motivation, as when a new innovation is brought to the market. (He prefers this to purely business-oriented start-ups, which focus on new market niches for existing technologies.) He would be willing to work hard, if the work would be sufficiently interesting. His dream is a researcher's dream like Michael's, for instance, but more explicit and reflexive. If he considers an alternative employer beyond F-secure, it would be some university rather than another commercial company.

Researcher: - - You sound like you are very happy with your work.

Mark: (hesitantly) Yeah, I mean you are never happy.

Researcher: Yeah, what about the minuses?

Mark: The minuses? Those are not minuses related to work at F-Secure. If I put it this way, it's the drawbacks of working at a commercial company. - - You know again three or four years back, when the economic situation was excellent, and companies were very generous, I'd say I was loose with the research room. - - I got chance to use much of my time with expensive things. I could pick up a topic that was absolutely unrelated to what our company does and... - - You know they let me work for a long time and whatever basically I wanted to do with university researchers. - - It's not the case any more. And well, I do like it... often. (laughs) But that's really the truth.

Researcher: Yeah.

Mark: Whether you work in university with respective problems or you work in a commercial company, so. So I think this is something which... Which is unavoidable.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. So I see that actually you have a training in [his subject] and if there is an alternative, for you it's this academic world.

Mark: Yes, perhaps.

Researcher: Rather than looking towards other companies or...?

Mark: Yeah.<sup>xv</sup>

The shift from development to business focus has hit Mark as much as the others, but he has another version of disillusionment to tell. If Noam, for instance, was frustrated and even angered, Mark is only sort of melancholy, knowing he is fortunate to have this much.

His professional identity seems to be distinctively academic, but he has experience of companies and many dimensions of the high-tech business. He is very well informed, critical but balanced. While we talked he was calm, even quiet – very reflexive, but not withdrawing. There was much shared laughter, smiles and playful wording. He doesn't follow my suggestions, but confirms and disconfirms them according to his own understanding. But there's no tension to be felt. Most of the time the light of understanding twinkles in both pairs of eyes simultaneously.

Mark presents a lucid understanding of how his dream escapes him...

Mark: - - I do believe in the current economic situations you are not going to see that many companies like that. [Companies that give ample room for research.]

Researcher: Yeah, yeah that's right.

Mark: People are very careful about, from the start-ups, and doing great things at this point of time. So that would be a sort of ideal company. But again, it's a very temporary thing. You have it for some time, but then... (cliques his fingers)

...and some nostalgia for the old times in his current organisation:

Mark: I, I think in a way F-Secure... early it wasn't a big company at that time - -. Perhaps it was like that in a way. The research direction was started with this idea of the anti-virus... It's of course very far from what I'm interested in. But still... I would say those are the best times [for] people who like research. When the company is very young and basically all you do is research. That should be very interesting. (Same source.)

The predicament of academic knowledge in the late capitalist environment comes up in sharp contrast when he muses upon where to fit in the present work opportunity structure. Either he will (if he can, economically) delve into

the questions that satisfy his own passion for learning – which will alienate the market and the management from him...

Researcher: So your dream is to be able to reconcile the demands of the market and the demands of your passion in research.

Mark: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That would be really interesting, because in my life I've really had times when I was sort of... I had a lot of freedom but I had a constant feeling that what I'm doing really nobody cares so much except for some other research people who are interested in exactly the same subject.

... or, on the other hand, he may give in to management/market pressures and take on work proposed by them. That will, however, lead to boring, routine tasks undermining his true capacity.

Mark: Well, there were other times when I was sort of doing a very ground work, very practical things, which are interesting for ten percent of time, but the rest is routine and... (Same source.)

What Mark considers as prerequisites of excellence in a work like his, are good education together with sufficient initiation into the business and technology under question. On the personality side, one should be able to provide help to others, even pushing aside own work. Mark's ideal worker has a flexible focus, changing needs do not disturb him.

His ideas about an ideal boss show that he is well aware of the paradoxes of control in knowledge work. Workers will be as informed and – for some parts of the field – more informed than their boss. Managers must thus hit a balance somewhere regarding the dilemma of trusting the workers while still being able to control them.

When it comes to organisational approaches, he has a good general impression of F-Secure.

Mark: I can't really claim I'm able to relate F-Secure is not a good employer. To me it looks like a good company. - - That's really... At least I know of companies which seem to be much worse in how they manage people, in how they organise work processes. All those things... It's definitely not the worst one.

Apparently, he is not easily taken by the dominant discourses related to a communitarian organisational culture that used to be common especially in the high-tech field.

Researcher: - - Well, you know these modern talks about companies being like families to their members.

Mark: Mmm...

Researcher: ...“We all like each other so much and we care about each other” and so on. Do you agree with that as a goal or...?

Mark: I, I mean...

Researcher: Or should work be just a place to go and mind your own project and that's all?

Mark: You know those things might be the case at least potentially for small companies. A company with 300 people, if the company claims something like that... I don't believe this is sort of quite true. (Both laugh.) (Same source.)

His non-managerial perspective is also reflected in the way he speaks about the workers. According to Mark, they are divided in how they relate to top-down image production. While some eagerly embrace *corporate ways*, others don't. So the widespread discourse, endorsed by many high-tech companies, of a *big happy family* glosses over what is really a contested, multi-vocal array of responses. Mark gives examples of some of his friends working at a market-leader, one of the iconic multinational companies.

### **“I frankly don't see the problems”**

Mark agrees that there's a significant ethnic or inter-national mix among the personnel. Communication problems do appear. But it seems that such cross-cultural friction doesn't turn into ethnicity because it is not interpreted in ethnic terms.

Researcher: - - Well, tell me what does it mean to you to work here in Finland among these people who have come from different countries? You have others but Russians here... it's a little bit of a mix.

Mark: Well, it's a significant mix... I don't really think... At least personally I've never experienced any serious problems because of that. You know, there are some like very indicative things when someone tells you about someone else. “Well, you know he is this typical American”, (both laugh) or something like that. I never hear things like that here. I mean everybody has its own you know, problems and difficulties in communicating a need and you know, peculiarities. But I've never really heard that people would be complaining about a particular guy ... You know, because he is Finnish or he is American or he is Russian. I... I think people get together with each other quite nicely. (Same source.)

When I enquire into possible remorseful gossip or sentiments among the foreign workers about the management being almost entirely in the hands of the Finns, Mark confirms the existence of gossip as resistance (which he considers a healthy thing: “*You have a right to question.*” But this resistance is directed against the management as an operative power, not as an ethnic group.

Mark: So I don't think it has anything to do with nationality. You know, on the other hand, most of the people, at least those who try to think... They clearly realise... the last years, they were very difficult for anybody. You pick up any company, you see a lot of stupid mistakes the management did.

Researcher: Yes.

Mark: And the truth is you know when you look back you understand many things, yeah but when you look forward... Then it's very hard to do right things... when you don't know what's gonna happen. So of course I hear a lot of criticism to management, and all that, but I would say it's a healthy one.

He seems to restore the earlier understanding, shaken by experiences in San Jose, that there is no need for management regarding diversity.

Researcher: - - Are you happy with the ways that this firm addresses the diversity of the different nationalities and different kinds of people? Do you think that everybody has a fair chance and everybody can feel relaxed and so on? Is there anything you would change if you were the CEO?

Mark: (long pause) With respect to the multinational environment?

Researcher: multinational, yeah, yeah.

Mark: (pause) I can't think that that would be sensible. Or to be quite frank, I don't have the feeling... I'm not sure if this is the case or not... I don't have the feeling that company management *does* anything specific to solve these problems. - - Perhaps because it's almost unnecessary. I hardly see anything that could really... could be done to dramatically improve the situation. And that...

Researcher: But do you think that they have no vision of this, that things are just happening like they happen, and nobody is kind of steering the boat?

Mark: What are then the problems? I frankly don't see those. I would be rather surprised... I can imagine but would be rather surprised if someone... Well, at least here in Helsinki, I don't know about San Jose. - - That someone complains that the nationalities... is a problem or creates a problem. (Same source.)

Mark is very firmly set against the idea of ethnicising. He doesn't believe it would happen even in the US (based on his own experience), until I confront him with my tale about the San Jose unit. Then he is very surprised, even a little upset about it. Together we negotiate an explanation for it: Mark assumes that since old-timers are more likely to identify with the company, and in San Jose there's a high turnover, people might tend to identify with their own ethnic group /nationality and thus feel more resentment of ethnic domination. I add that his American experiences and mine may reflect a very different emotional and work market disposition: during the boom and after it.

While all the explanations make perfect sense, and I'm grateful to Mark for his insights, still I wonder why he was so keen to find them. Maybe that is just his personality, or some deep-embedded academic habit to look for possible hypothesis and explanations, but... I'm not sure. When I re-read the interview, I realise that he speaks consistently and systematically against any hint of influence of ethnicity or nationality. I don't disbelieve him. He only confirmed

what his colleagues in Ruoholahti had said all along: *none of that at F-Secure*. This was especially prominent when I told him about the subtleties of language use in San Jose.

Researcher: They [the Anglophone people in San Jose] were rather worried that Finns speak Finnish in front of them. Ah... because: "How can we know what they are speaking?"

Mark: Does this... Does this really happen?

Researcher: Yes, they were worried about this.

Mark: Worried?

Researcher: And it happened yes, that they speak Finnish. Because now there are more Finns. So of course they will want to exchange a couple of words and when they are in the room...

Mark: But I mean in presence of non-Finnish-speaking people? Does it really?

Researcher: Sometimes and occasionally, on the corridor. But mostly not...not in a meeting, if you have a discussion, then they would switch.

Mark: Well, I think it's a bit silly to worry what people talk about in the corridors. I mean if I... I don't care what they talk about at homes, right. Or you may care about, but that's normal.

Researcher: yeah, yeah.

Mark: That's a bit strange. I know of the cases when people speak in their own native language in front of, you know, people who don't understand.

Researcher: Yeah.

Mark: That's simply impolite.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Mark: I mean it's again not a national problem. It's a problem of particular individuals who don't really think much about people around. (Same source.)

While I tend to take sides with Mark, it remains possible that in Helsinki ethnicity has a low profile because it is kept at a low profile. Other discourses – the professional subculture and the democratic organisational currents and their concomitant values – are preferred at the expense of the late modern issue of ethnicity. Like many other employees in Ruoholahti, Mark also seems to be brandishing the standard of Enlightenment: *Let us go together towards progress and innovation, united in the name of professional pride and participatory management!* If some organisational members present doubts and worries based on demographic differences, they are making a false issue about mere personal misbehaviour.

Following the key of Enlightenment I found a possible interpretation for another theme that our conversation touched: the question of integration for his family in Finland, and in particular the choice of school and languages for his children. Aside from the question of combining research interests with the business, this was what he named as a matter of high importance to him. What would the future offer his children? Would they be able to pass for a native speaking Finn? Would they be as fluent in Russian? Would they learn a third language equally “at a very serious level”, as he hoped? Mark said in passing that while he wasn’t at all bothered about his relatively lonesome position at F-Secure, he missed his real friends. They were scattered around the globe – and e-mail is a poor substitute to actual meeting. As one who had emigrated from Russia in search of work and life opportunities, seen two countries, and finally satisfactorily settled in one – “sadly” not considering a return to Russia – he would like to offer his children what he apparently considered to be among the most useful skills in the globalised world: linguistic skills enabling as cosmopolitan a life course as possible. You never know, where you may have to go... but languages can be learnt (give praise to Finnish schools and day-care centres), and distances overcome.

### **Comparing perspectives**

Mark in his cosmopolitics seems to have ruled out the possibility that something in the encounter might go wrong and the dark side of globalisation might turn up with distrust, discrimination, clique formation and gossip – to mention but a few of the ills that plague many workplaces in the multicultural, urban archipelagos of our time. A huge difference in this sense seems to exist between Helsinki and San Jose. Is it a class divide? In the digital industry, those places where research and development functions are located tend to take a higher social position than those with only sales and support functions. San Jose employees had been graded down on this ladder with the loss of status as the second headquarters. Maybe the easygoing Helsinki employees were a privileged class, even within their own organisation...?

I have called to my ‘orchestra’ a number of employees that have very different tales to tell. First I gave voice to the enthusiastic immigrants and their young hosts in a moment of great professional pride and a sense of power. You heard praise for Finnishness. They rejected diversity management, and relied instead on their professional culture and participatory management, among a handful of other cultural forms. This was the counter-example I wanted to present, even if I began to wonder if that was the whole truth and whether their notions of Finnishness were slightly idealised. Next came a cold shower. Downturn

robbed the young heroes of their status as the vanguard of digitalised society. This time I was in awe, and maybe you too, for the quality of their response. Confused, complaining, angry or just stoically facing the new reality, they would not stoop, not a bit, to ethnicising their problems, to loading the burden upon any weaker member to carry.

But you know as well as I that nobody is perfect, and life in a real workplace is never without problem. Therefore, I turned to the personal experiences of some of the non-Finnish employees, first in Helsinki – with the result that some cracks appeared on the surface of the image of happy camaraderie – and then in San Jose, where the reality was so much darker that the image gave way altogether. I presented three voices out of the whirlpool, to give examples of how things may look like to people at a hard pinch. Even there, some employees struggled to overcome an ethnicising tendency, but structural forces were too strong to be matched by individual efforts, and people like Ville lacked suitable tools. Last, I returned to Helsinki and found the reality as serene as I had left it. I chose Mark as a final voice to draw together some of the themes left open in earlier vignettes. Forgiving the mistakes made by Finns in the management, his solo takes on the colour of insistent cosmopolitanism.

In this way, I hope to be able to draw a picture of people in an organisation, facing the transnational reality and coming to terms with each other *in situ*, in actual places at actual historical moments, without the interference of any top-down programmes to manage their ethnic differences. In the rest of the book, I will try to make sense of this journey and draw some lessons from it, if possible. You may have already noticed, that the musicians in my orchestra sometimes play in accord, but often also in discord with each other. I have chosen these particular vignettes not just for the availability and outspokenness of the interviewees in question (for that too), but because I find them to ‘debate’ with each other, to take contrasting stances and/or to pick up complementary themes. I have already pointed at some of these ‘debates’. Bharat and Delphine, for instance, embarrassed in two short vignettes all the self-congratulatory accounts given by Niilo and his fellows of opinion of an organisation where ethnicity doesn’t matter and cultural differences do not appear. Finns at F-Secure are no exception to the rule that one’s cultural storage shows better outside than inside. More of such *outsider* perspective was given by Jackson and David, with more grim tones in it. Jackson and Ville sadly spoke past one another, although both had done a respectable amount of contemplative work in their individual struggles to get a grasp of the ‘Other’. Mark answers both Noam and the Americans in his forgiveness of the managerial mistakes and in his sticking to Enlightenment values.



The rest of such 'debate' or mutual tension and drama, I leave for you to discover. These are complicated issues, so I hope a storytelling format is best suited to convey at least some access to the rich tissue of organisational reality. It's a strange thing, that to grasp the most complex matters, thirty pages of simple narrative with human characters in it can be more efficient than a hundred pages of academic prose of the on-the-one-and-on-the-other-hand kind. Despite that, for academic demands, I must in the following chapters take just such an abstract turn.

## 11 Alternatives to the zoo

I have so far criticised diversity management approaches to multiethnicity at the workplace both from a theoretical perspective and through my interviewees' stories. Thus far I have not presented any alternative political implications, beyond vague guesses that may be worked out of the theoretical framework in use. Is my suggestion then, that nothing should be done?

Thinking about the Helsinki example, that suggestion comes very close. The employees are in fact in such a privileged organisational situation, that official discussions of *identity groups* at the least might do more harm than good, quite as the HR manager believed. An organisation dedicated – for the present – to participatory management seems to have already accomplished the most demanding prerequisite of inclusiveness, at least from the power relations point of view.

Furthermore, there is an aspect that has not yet fully come out. The way diversity management, at least in its Business Case variant, has advanced at the heels of the late capitalist global economy, has had the effect of pushing aside pre-existing approaches to diversity, such as the *affirmative action* and *equal opportunities* models in the US. Recently, some scholars have voiced concern that it may come to overshadow the *gender equality* approach, so far prevailing in the Nordic countries (Meriläinen et al., forthcoming). What is common to all those other forms? That they are not business cases, of course. Rather, they are politically negotiated programmes that pursue their goals by legislation and educative campaigns. No economic profits are necessarily promised. It's all about human rights. What would then be so wrong about gaining a little aside the good matter? Nothing, unless the legislation and its monitoring organs are left to dwindle in the faith that companies will do it by themselves. From the point of view of the workforce and of society, that is a risky decision. The present polarisation of the work market must be kept in mind. Some companies, sometimes, will gladly comply with high ideals, while others at other moments will seek to use the new discourse as a decoration, hiding behind it exploitation of a cheap immigrant workforce, for instance. Companies are very different from one another and may change their moral stance at any time. They cannot be trusted with both executive and controlling power.

Moreover, all organisations striving towards equality are not profit seeking private companies. Public sector and voluntary organisations both embrace other (and more fundamental) goals than economic viability. Thinking of this, it is well to keep in mind the possibility that the anchoring of the Business Case in neo-liberal tenets was itself perhaps a passing episode, losing its credibility together with the Economic Megadiscourse. In the present historical moment, is it really necessary to embrace economic values at whatever cost to the original goal, equality? I think not. Rather than more varieties of instrumentalist programmes, we need the equality work of the *good old times*.

But it's not that simple. The old times were also bad, because they tended to reinforce the discriminatory categories by shaping the equality campaigns according to the same rigid classifications as the discriminators. Here's one of the most vicious and enduring paradoxes of social identity. We can't keep silent about gender, 'race', ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability, because they are major obstacles in many people's lives (see Prasad et al. 2006). We must talk about the *real issues* that hurt. But so doing, we may allow them more reality than they deserve. Where is the way out of this dead end? My suggestion is a two-fold approach.

Firstly, I think we might replace the *Business Case for Diversity* with a *Public Case for Equality*. The instrumental use of employees is not a value in itself, whereas equality is. However, it is not a business goal, but a political one. Thus, it must be sought through political means. These could well include procedures undertaken by organisations, such as follow-up of career development and remuneration policies of all demographic groups. But they would not be left entirely to voluntary programmes, and hopefully would be accompanied with other measures, such as combating exploitation in general, and fostering participatory management. If society offers a quality check to organisations (forcing them to advance towards equality and organisational democracy, and taking on blame for contested measures such as reverse discrimination and eventual quotas), organisations can more easily tackle the more fluid, locally and idiosyncratically constructed, side of identities – that which is often referred to in discussions of diversity, as *cultural inclusiveness*.

With this distinction in mind, how could the more fluid side of diversity be tackled? Choosing a target organisation such as F-Secure, I wanted to see just how far one could get by simply treating people well, by a general "air of democracy" and other organisational virtues. I noticed that they got pretty far, but not all is well even there; how could that be? There's a residue of cultural friction, as in all places where people meet. So, as a second part of my suggestion, we must also talk about culture and cultural differences, but not

within a classificatory framework. Organisational members need updated conceptual tools to be able to talk about culture at work in a constructive and emancipatory way. I will return to this issue in the chapter “About culture”.

Rather than declaring a new managerial strategy, a *Trux approach to diversity*, I take the option to imagine a hypothetical intervention in the form of a cultural critique, simply to concretise a departure from the redundant and captivating discourse of diversity management. This option welcomes all variants and departures that readers might contrive. As I outlined in chapter 2, rather than adding further discursive layers, it has been my task all along to empower readers with new conceptual tools and new insights into existing cultural forms – and more nerve to create their own interventions.

I think sufficient evidence has been brought up in the present work, based on the experiences at F-Secure, for outlining some alternative images and vocabulary as conceptual tools. Let’s take a look at the reasons, listed under the rubric “No wonder they disliked DM”, which according to the present claim make such a rejection understandable. The reasons were: 1) pragmatism, 2) provincialism, 3) professional culture, 4) local forms of self-presentation, 5) post-modern identities and 6) “democracy”. Amongst these cultural currents, and within such an ethnoscape as the headquarters in Helsinki provide, how to proceed towards better multiethnic dialogue? How to seduce the stubborn pragmatists to talk about these issues?

So, to get to my *recipe*... Any discussion of diversity in an organisational environment like F-Secure might benefit from embracing, at least at the beginning, the prevalent, constitutive form of (peasant) pragmatism. Even cultural differences might be seen as having to do with ordinary work practices, on how to find ever more clever (and human) ways to get work done and keep the customer happy. This would be a way to speak to the people in their own language. At least the Finnish workers are bound to recognise the discourse, probably also to comply with it. Many others also find pragmatic approaches appealing, as we have seen at F-Secure. The idea of *multiple good solutions* might be presented. The foreign, female or professionally alien colleague might actually have some brilliant pragmatic innovations in stock, which means that the currently *normal* way is not the only one possible, not even considered within one’s own values. However, at length a serious treatment of different ways of working will come to a point where pragmatism itself must be critically inspected. There are other goals in life besides the pragmatic ones, such as beauty, justice or discretion. Compared to Anglo-American diversity approaches, this approach would keep from staring at people’s civil qualities. Eyes would be directed to the work, but ears kept open

for the ‘*voices*’ of the workers. Thus, instead of a classificatory gaze, there might be dialogue.

Another move would seek to overcome the burden of provincialist thinking or *apart-from-the-worldism*. Isolationist national assumptions and minority attitudes should receive a critical side-light, while alternative ways of constructing Finnishness would need ingredients and models. How to see the workplace, Helsinki and Finland as places in the world? I will return to this question in the next chapter.

Professional culture in this case seems to be pointing mostly at the software developers’ cultural world. It carries strong universalist and individualist ideals that will not sit with the hegemonic late modern versions of cultural diversity, found in DM. Instead, they have another solution: *cosmopolitanism* and the related idea of *civility*. I will also present them more closely in the next chapter. If something could be worked out from them, the attempt would find support from the ‘nerds’, by all present evidence. Of course, there were more than just the ‘nerds’ at F-Secure and here is a limitation to leaning too strongly on any professional form.

Finally, the most obvious thing, and already discussed above: solutions for reducing cultural friction cannot bypass issues of power. Rather, those issues should ideally be tackled first. Only thereafter will any realist perception of *residue problems* be possible. Participatory forms of management are the necessity for hearing all ‘*voices*’. Relying on them, it may be possible to estimate the more delicate processes of understanding and misunderstanding, debating and speaking past, trusting and distrusting. Little of this can be learnt from a hierarchical distance. Also, issues of learning from the ‘Other’ cannot be outsourced to some expert consultant, at least not at the core of the matter. It is not a question of learning some technical-like information, it is a question of entering into a human relationship. At both individual and organisational levels, the ‘self’ or the ‘we’ must be there to encounter the ‘Other’. Stated plainly: you should engage yourself personally and be able to take some criticism of yourself and your organisation.

This much I venture to say, based on my experiences at F-Secure. An ethnographic account cannot be directly generalised over the wide range of organisational realities found in Finland, not to mention the rest of the world. The division of labour is such that *generalisation* is the job of the reader. Only you know your own workplace, or other organisational realities that are your expertise, sufficiently to be able to say if my account bears any resemblance to them. At least I should have given you a sufficiently vivid picture of what you

are looking for. More importantly, you may see some significant departures, where you are welcome to use my description as a point of reference to help you fathom out what you have encountered instead.

F-Secure is a peculiar organisation in many respects. Its value as a case was not in typicality, as discussed, but rather in deviation. In positivist terms, I hope to have proved that there is at least one organisation in which the mixed workforce left on its own – in complete absence of diversity campaigns – did not stoop to ethnic hatred and was not even paralysed by the fear of the ‘Other’.

Other organisations follow different paths, but something is also always common. I will come along with you a part of the way towards those other cases. It is time to zoom out, by giving some contextual information.

## 12 Zooming out

How might the two workplaces I had visited be understood? As enclaves of global economy? Where are the immigrants, when they work at F-Secure's headquarters for instance? What sort of locality can be expected in such a place? In his well known essay *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, Arjun Appadurai introduced the term *translocality* to describe locations in which

[- -] ties of marriage, work, business and leisure weave together various circulating populations with kinds of locals to create neighbourhoods that belong in one sense to particular nation-states, but that are from another point of view what we might call *translocations*. The challenge to produce neighbourhood in these settings derives from the inherent instability of social relationships, the powerful tendency for local subjectivity itself to be commoditized, and the tendencies for nation-states, which sometimes obtain significant revenues from such sites, to erase internal, local dynamics through externally imposed modes of regulation, credentialization, and image production. (Appadurai 1996, 192)

Certainly, *community* at the headquarters of F-Secure is a very fragile product, if such can be said to exist. Social reproduction does not truly exist, as recruitment is in the hands of the management – which is why I follow those who remain suspicious of the idea of a company as *community* carrying *culture* in any holistic sense. (See Kunda 1992.)

In addition to the formidable difficulties described by Appadurai, that fall on and implode in any attempt at *neighbourhood* construction in the present world (and of which he accuses mainly the nation-states along with deterritorialisation and electronic mediation), my informants face the powerful tendency of their own *corporation* – and through it, of the late capitalist process – to erase whatever internal, spontaneous dynamics might appear, and to replace these by boardroom regulations and top-down image production. It happens almost before a feeling of locality is born in anybody: some seem to feel company feelings and speak with a company mouth. Others resist – resistance talk is common. But if there is any place of their own in which they might develop some symbolic ownership, spatial or virtual, it must be very narrow. Maybe there was a zone of freedom. Perhaps the first virtual community that was born on the Internet – the *nation* of the computer specialists – was such a zone. In a way it still is, but ever since the downturn, a feeling of disillusionment has made its former citizens (the cosmopolitan *elite*

of skilled workers) less cheerful wanderers suddenly vulnerable to the demands and whims of both nation-states and corporations. Most of them were not on the move while this happened; only they know that the chance to choose own jobs, and with that everything in their self-confidence, is a fraction of what it used to be.

In San Jose, the employees did try to develop a sense of locality, and this locality relied heavily against others, particularly one existing and perceived locality: Helsinki. Their self-presentations were figured against that background. Beyond the fact that the researcher came from Helsinki, this must be commonplace in all dispersed organisations, the very typical case of *subsidiary syndrome* (see e.g. Goodall and Roberts 2003). It is perhaps not such a wonder after all, rather a healthy reaction from the people in San Jose, in the aftermath of huge downsizing and the replacement of local managers with expat Finns. Of course Helsinki was the source of both fears and hopes. They saw themselves very much apart from it, anxiously looking for strategies to deal with this powerful 'Other'. It is the nature of locality in the headquarters in Helsinki itself that poses problems for the analysis. What goes on in there?

It might be a *translocality*, in as much as there is any production of locality at all. Not a community. There is too much of the transient in its social life, as people come and go. They are today more than ever just drifting along the powerful currents of capitalism. The Russians make a good example. They immigrated to Finland, some from Russia, others via the US or other places – at one time forming the biggest group of foreigners at the headquarters. Just to be made much less necessary by the growth in importance of the subcontract partners in St. Petersburg. They are no longer the biggest group among foreign workers. All in a time span of four years. Of the total of 31 people I interviewed, 18 had left the company by August 2005. Of the remaining, three had changed country office. The Helsinki headquarters is at best a meeting place, a *working room*, such as the waiting rooms at airports and railway stations. Not entirely in Finland (although taxes are paid and visas applied for), neither in Helsinki (although housed in the Ruoholahti district). The only certain connection is its belonging to the global digital industry network, the late capitalist process. And a building that leans over the Baltic Sea.

### **Finns and Finnishness in today's world**

Let's consider Appadurai's terminology concerning the dimensions of global cultural flows. The *ethnoscape* in Helsinki is a recently opened, rather closely interlinked national network of kinship, friendship, work, leisure, birth,



residence, language and religion. As has been pointed out, the social cohesion of Nordic welfare states is so high and the society so tightly interwoven, that newcomers hardly ever fit into its networks (Forsander 2004). No matter how well one may have adjusted to local ways and learned the vernacular, there's always a residual *lack of Finnishness*. Finnishness seems to be a category forever escaping the newcomer (Lepola 2000).

To understand why this is so, we need to look back. During the last two centuries, an *imagined community* was created by the Finnish nation building process, led by local elites, and using print capitalism (see Anderson 1991). This process succeeded in moulding an exemplar case of the hyphen between nation and state, producing a nation-state with all the usual primordials: ethnicity, kinship, language, religion and state; that seem to fall in with one another remarkably well. This, I believe, makes it understandable that my informants seemed to slip into ethnicity while they were talking about nationalities and foreigners. Indeed, these terms are still, to a high degree, conflated. During the 1980s and 1990s, as a Finnish student, I used to wonder, what the English-speaking theorists of ethnicity actually meant with *communities*. I found no corresponding term or category in Finnish terminology, until I realised that the whole nation in Finland was regularly presented as community-like. It filled so much of the nation's imagination that those left out – and there were some – had little hope to erect communities of their own, at least not with much symbolic importance within the framework of the nation. For the majority of its citizens, Finland appears indeed a *home of the Finns* - cosy, homely, trustworthy and ethnically homogenous – or so it seemed at least during the post WW2 period, until very recently. Unless one ventured by birth, misfortune or bad choice beyond the white, Lutheran, and Finnish speaking ranks of citizens. Yet no nation's cohesion is perfect. The history of Finland is no less bloody than any other European region. It is now more than ninety years since the last truly big rending of the society's fabric: the civil war of 1918.

Since I have already pointed to Finnish bilingualism, I must shortly discuss the fate of Swedish speakers. This makes an exception to the rule above. Their good position is often marvelled and presented as a yardstick of ethnic policy for other countries. The reason for the present good situation has however, historical roots: part of this minority used to form the upper classes of pre-independence Finland. Among them were the representatives of the kings, and the elites remained ethnically and culturally distinct from the Finnish speaking masses. For a long time, Swedish was the administrative and literary language. Socially mobile Finnish-speakers often changed their name and language, thus

integrating into the elites, as did many upper class immigrants. A change of government from Stockholm to St. Petersburg, at the annexation of Finland to imperial Russia in 1809, gave momentum to a new alliance between the elites and the masses. National identity was forged out of the Finno-Ugric cultural heritage (including the folklore of *Kalevala*), and many members of prominent families translated their names into Finnish and switched to the Finnish language. After independence, in the 1920s and 1930s there was something of a struggle as to the relative rights of each language group. Today all schoolchildren must learn both official languages.

Despite the existing practice of bilingualism, and other evidence of multiculturalism kept in the margins, the present Finnish ethnoscape gives at first glance a remarkably homogenous appearance. The image (or 'myth') of ethnically homogenous Finland offers comfortable grounds for a majority member (say, a Finnish-speaking male engineer) to feel himself confidently a master in his own country. A closer look, such as that social scientists and historians might undertake, however, will refine the picture by specifying that there *are* minorities, and have been throughout known history. It reveals, as discussed above, that the country has two official languages (Finnish and Swedish), and furthermore, that there are indigenous (Sámi) populations, Roma people (for some 500 years), Greek Orthodox (with a history going back to the millennial position of Finland as a borderland between East and West), Jews and Tatars (both for about 150 years), not to forget the latest arrivals of refugees and immigrants from the 1980s onward. Scholars have also reminded us that the process of nation building did not happen without cutting and leftovers: resident Russians were forced out in large numbers after Finland had separated from the no-longer-imperial Russia in 1917 (Korhonen 2005, 199–201)<sup>35</sup>, and poorer minorities, such as the Roma and the Sámi faced longstanding homogenisation through various techniques imposed upon them by the new state (Pulma 2005a; Mattila 2005; Pulma 2005b, 459–465). In fact, Finland is no exception to Appadurai's motto: "*One man's imagined community is another man's political prison*". Yet it comes easily to most of my informants to know who is a Finn and what is Finnishness. Despite the late modern cultural flows under which we live today, the image of Finland as a homogenous nation is still not much problematised by most people, rather, it is taken as groundwork from which modern Finns may spring to new global aspirations. As if they knew what it means to be a Finn, assuming their compatriots know it too – unambiguously.

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<sup>35</sup> Actually, this took place in 1918, in the aftermath of the civil war.

Lest my countrymen and women appear naive in their trust in the nation-state, let me remind you that generations living now have mostly known a soft face of the state. Techniques of homogenisation have shifted from the violent to the supportive. People have come to benefit from public health care, free education, cultural services and social security in the manner of Nordic welfare states – if not quite as prosperous as the Scandinavian cousins, security enough anyway. Most modern Finns, even those issuing from land owning peasants, but especially those whose ancestors were landless, have their family's history soaked in hunger and hard work, separated from themselves by only a generation or two. It is thanks to the immense integrative operation of the welfare state that they are now where they are. Such benefits have helped a good deal to fortify the faith in the nation-state and unify the ways of life, *en douceur*. In fact, identification with the state might be further reinforced in a context of what is generally perceived as the global economy threatening the achievements of the welfare state. The villain of the story, these days, is most often not (or no longer) the state, but the *faceless powers* of international capital.

### **Ethnic presentation of Finnishness: exposure, language and power**

As is often the case, softening internal relations meant hardening external ones. Finland remained virtually closed to immigration during two generations. Cautious opening has taken place only since the 1980s and 1990s. In their relations to the outside world, the Finns often seem to take a *minority position*. They are acutely aware of the rareness of their language for instance, assuming routinely that they must learn other languages and switch to them when dealing with foreigners. Thus, speaking English with their colleagues at work is no greater venture to the Finns of F-Secure than speaking English to a foreign chance meeting on public transport. Indeed, resident foreigners in Finland repeatedly report that they get answered in English even when they open a conversation in Finnish.

While *outlandish* suits international encounters, Finnish remains a parochial dialect, a sort of secret code, for efficient communication among members of the ethno-national-language-club. Much harder – in terms of accommodating one's world view – is to engage in conversation with Finnish as a halting *lingua franca* between people of various mother tongues. At such moments there is a feeling of penetration beyond anything the workplaces in the Anglo-global businesses might produce, a true encounter, an intimacy betrayed. Such as the encounter of immigrant cleaners, bus drivers and medical doctors with their Finnish-speaking customers. Compared to those workplaces, from a linguistic

point of view, the Finns at F-Secure experience a soft version of transnational contact. At the surface it would of course be easier to keep to one's mother tongue, but there is this deeper sense to it, running counter to the obvious. In addition to ambivalent feelings of penetration, the absence of a tradition of inward international encounters means that people are simply unaccustomed to hearing their language in various broken accents and recoding their own speech so as to be understood by non-native speakers.

Against this background, the complaint presented by the local employees in San Jose, about Finns speaking Finnish in front of them, seems peculiar. It runs counter to the general tendency of Finns to switch out of Finnish. On the other hand, San Jose is located out of Finland, in the *Wide World*. Finns may have tried to reinforce their ethnic cohesion by linguistic means, to set up an ethno-national-language-club – with whatever consequences to workplace dynamics – besides simply being impolite, as Mark suggested. In the lack of sufficient observation, this issue must be left open.

Beside the linguistic dimension, minority attitudes can be discerned in discourses concerning the place and relations of the Finnish nation-state in the world. Throughout the national project, Finns have told themselves: "Our country is small," (while not particularly small in area), "poor" (while not of the third world) "and remote" (while in Europe). This image made sense in 1860s when one of the last large scale famine catastrophes in Europe took place in Finland, but it goes wide of the mark now. Yet the question, well learnt by Finns, is repeatedly opened at every moment with national implications – at the arenas of sport, culture and politics: *Do we have a place among other, more powerful nations?* While I agree to some extent with Appadurai that "the new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models" (1996, 32) – or at least the figuration of centres and peripheries is more paradoxical and capricious today than say in the 1980s – the Finnish case calls for a term of Immanuel Wallerstein: the *semiperiphery* (see e.g. Wallerstein 1974, 349–350). Minds mix past with present, and the ambivalent semiperipheral position is very apparent here and there in the relations of Finns with others.

This is what I referred to when I made qualifications to the use of a post-colonial framework (see above, under the rubric "It's all about power"). In the case of Finnish workplaces such treatment tends to simplify the historical context: instead of a world cut in two – the colonisers and the colonised – it might be more fitting to see the present Finnish hosts of immigrants as the former semiperipheral citizens, anxious to raise their position, to cooperate

with the colonial centres when possible, and to keep a distance to those perceived as inferior. A recent volume about the colonial compliances of the Nordic nations has in fact undertaken the ambitious goal of tracing the history, economy, population factors, popular movements and cultural currents pertaining to the role of the Nordic nations in a world of centres and peripheries (Keskinen et al. 2009).

In their semiperipheral position, Finns might be expected to stoop to discrimination too, but with a different tone to it. What is missing, is the confident arrogance of the self-sufficient colonial centre, such as appears in the well-documented case of managerial classification, casting the powerless ‘Others’ in neat lists and varieties. What might be expected – and has been documented in Finland – is a more blunt xenophobic reaction towards those perceived as trespassing the intimate national space. Anti-immigration talk tends to linger on topics such as *more mouths to feed*, and possible *invasions of free riders* to the welfare state.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, I would be careful to state that Finns could not adopt more arrogant attitudes as well. Many racist forms circulate in the late modern world, and they can be picked up and used, ignoring the apparent misfit between their origin and the history of the new practitioners.

What about Finnish managers and workers in international business, what directions would they take with these inherited attitudes? Or would they simply discard them altogether, adopting entirely new manners and beliefs? My data supports both alternatives, sometimes minority attitudes are very open, and at other times more confident, even rude use of power seems to have taken over. It would be too early to say anything general about this, and maybe false too, since the world really is in such a motion, that identities, strategies and attitudes appear sooner than any study might report. I still find interesting what the Silicon Valley workers told me about their Finnish bosses after I had given them the workshop on traditional codes of self-presentation in Finland (concentrating on such iconic values as *truth* and *modesty*): that the picture is definitely *not* what they have seen. After that I listened with warned ears to the accounts of the Finns of their economic success story, participation in “*big deals*” and “*getting rid*” of boom time workers with overboosted egos.<sup>37</sup> Would they perceive themselves as wielding a great power over the lives of their workers? Or would they continue undervaluing their own influence in the

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<sup>36</sup> See Lepola 2000, 155–166, for a sample of parliamentary debates that reveal this trend very clearly.

<sup>37</sup> These remarks were made by interviewees that do not figure with a pseudonym in this text.

world? Would they learn to balance a sense of responsibility with the actuality of power?

Given both the self-limiting tendency of the economic imagination (consider the fact that an important part of mainstream economists actually call themselves *orthodox*), and the tendency of the Finns to revert to an isolationist, provincial sort of nationalism, the danger of *tunnel vision* is close. So much information may be left out from attention, that any reasonable understanding of the personnel and other relevant human actors may be seriously impaired. Organisations need to be reminded, that participating in the fashionably termed *global economy* means, literally, that any developments actually occurring in the world today, such as it is, may be relevant to the work at hand, not only developments specifically labelled *economic*. Also, they need images and discourses that help to see Finland as a place on Earth, among others, and connected in myriads of ways to those other places. I believe that we all reside in the *Wide World*. Wide, because people are more different from one another than the diversity managers can imagine, and the ideas and practices in their countless different life-styles are more variable than the wildest options in the schemes of orthodox *decision makers*. So, the world is a big and strange place. It is also our home, an interconnected one. A dose of realist, solidary world citizenship thinking might refresh the present Finnish imagery that I referred to as apart-from-the-worldism.

Yet I do not call for an end to *Finnishness* or national identity. Rather, present-day Finns need more relaxed narratives, images and ideas about *Finnishness*. Many of the forms discussed above, that have a local connection to *Finnishness*, such as pragmatism and self-presentational culture, among all their problems, hold potentiality for intriguing and laudatory practices. I have heard many commentators, for instance, praise the social sordino of *Finnish-type* self-presentation as wonderfully “serene” or “Zen”. In particular, I remember one Tibetan guest (his profession was tourist guide), who, after two days in Finland, voted Finns the best behaving European nation, far above for instance Italians, who impolitely rob each other’s turn in conversation (as he said it).

No form is *good* or *bad* in itself, of course. Social outcomes are all about social uses, into which the cultural forms are put. For instance, it has been noted that the idealised images of Finns concerning Finnish workplaces as *democratic* may in some material conditions turn to a disadvantage for immigrants. In the study of elderly health and home care, that I have already referred to, Laurén and Wrede (2008) found that a dispersed work environment with new, fairly precarious occupational positions, combined with an absent or lacking presence

of managerial direction – celebrated as delegation and *democracy* – allowed an unofficial take-over of control by the majority workers with resulting hierarchical division of tasks in favour of that majority. Thus, the same cultural currents, that at F-Secure receive much praise from immigrants, can cause harm to other immigrants in other conditions.

Therefore, more information is needed about the most influential cultural forms in circulation. It is crucial, as both Ortner (2005) and Holland et al. (1998) claim, to identify both their liberatory potential as well as the potential to reinforce existing subordination. Enquiries into culture are very soon transformed into *making* culture, as we, by now, well know. If that lesson has at times been an embarrassment to cultural studies, it is a rescue to all stakeholders seeking non-discriminatory practices. New enlightened interpretations and new uses may yield new imaginative and humane outcomes. It has been a while since Finnish national identity was subjected to a thorough scrutiny; perhaps it has not happened in any serious sense ever since the *founding fathers* laid the bases some 150 years ago. Ideally, the work would now be revised, this time with the joint venture of all the population in question, including all those previously too marginal and powerless to be heard. This time, advice might also come from those who are not yet quite Finns, or who used to be Finns, or who have some other, partial claim on *Finnishness*. This might also be a way to relax the conflation of ethnicity with nationality.

### **Translocal grassroots perspective**

My account of the multitude of cultural forms actively and passively applied to grasp the transnational reality in Helsinki was a way to understand the informants' reluctance to adopt, and even resistance to, diversity management. Simultaneously, it was an attempt to make an inventory of *Finnishness* at F-Secure, in order to help the navigation of anyone entering that scene. Let's take one more look at this landscape. There is the pragmatism in its peasant and less peasant varieties; there's the peculiar provincialism that seems to assume Finland is some place outside the planet; there's a lot of professional 'nerd' culture, with all its discrepant ingredients (I count that too as part of *Finnishness*, since it's cultivated in present-day Finland), and I also talked much about "*democracy*" or a participatory management culture. Furthermore, as forms of *Finnishness*, I have discussed the "*cold*" self-presentational style and its consequence of isolation felt by outsiders *vis à vis* the Finns. Finally, post-modern reluctance to enter any collective, ascribed identities was observed to be very strong among the participants.

It should be becoming obvious, that there's more than just multi-ethnic multitude in translocalities such as F-Secure. There is identity work – in the manner of Holland et al. – taking shape while we watch. People take sides with various forms of shifting alliances. Moreover, tension is introduced through historical change. This is because many of the forms people may already be carrying (e.g. pragmatism) have their meaning eroded by new forms introduced to the field by powerful distributors (such as the late modern call for *flexibility*). I have discussed elsewhere the simultaneously convenient and confusing consequences of such blurring of forms, in which the heteroglossia becomes foggy or under defined, and people may come to build their identity and speak with *voices* they never quite meant (Trux 2008).

The *Finnishness* that newcomers encounter in Ruoholahti is thus really a complicated field with many historical layers; infused by tensions; and only partly articulated. Simple categorisations, such as gender /'race' /ethnicity /age /sexual orientation /physical ability, belong to the world of governing. They have been used through history as the basis of top-down management, everyday discrimination and occasionally genocide. They must obviously be further used as the basis of counter-discrimination and political struggle as concluded in the previous chapter. But the world of governing has a bird's perspective on identity. The perspective each of us takes daily is both more limited and endlessly richer. It is the grassroots perspective of a *self* encountering 'Others' in the *world*. In that perspective large-scale overviews are often hard to gain, but near-at-hand phenomena can be perceived in all their nuances and multitude of meanings. Bigger-than-me agents may loom large, yet I struggle to have a 'voice', to define who I am, and to keep a part of that definition open for growth. Societal, and increasingly, transnational forces and forms intrude into this zone of self-making, and people as emerging consciousnesses are hard put to having to establish an original relationship with them. Yet there are ways to help that process. Enquiries like the one I have undertaken do not speak only to governors and legislators, they speak to workers directly. And perhaps to managers as well, at least in their capacity as vulnerable human selves. I stick to this perspective even while zooming further out of Finland.

### **Discrepant cosmopolitanisms**

Now, let's see what I have found to make sense of the insistent sticking to cosmopolitan stances by my informants in Helsinki. Apparently, they are not alone in their choice. As a response to the out-dated locality of past anthropological practices of fieldwork, and as a remedy to the present crisis of



multiculturalism, James Clifford and Bruce Robbins have suggested a reconceived version of the old term *cosmopolitanism*. Attempting to discard long-standing elitist flavours and generalising utopian (or dystopian) projections, these writers set the new term in the plural, as *cosmopolitanisms*, to describe the actuality of contact, contamination, conflict and negotiation as on-going processes in the present interconnected world, and as taking place between people of wildly varying positions, and expectations and with different agendas. It is not only about the *frequent flyers*, not even presupposing that people have moved, as global or regional influences will find a growing number of people where they are. Cosmopolitanisms are *discrepant* because people do not have an easy neutral zone to meet, but rather must tackle the encounters in uneven and insecure conditions, relying on contradictory perspectives and massive miscommunication. Kantian notions of world peace are, in this view, set behind the reality of the front scene, where both ethnocentric and tolerant contacts take place. Against critics of apolitical, free-floating transcendence, Clifford writes:

Discrepant cosmopolitanisms guarantee nothing politically. They offer no release from mixed feelings, from utopic/dystopic tensions. They do, however, name and make more visible a complex range of intercultural experiences, sites of appropriation and exchange. The cosmopolitical contact zones are traversed by new social movements and global corporations, tribal activists and cultural tourists, migrant worker remittances and e-mail. Nothing is guaranteed, except contamination, messy politics and more translation. (Clifford 1998, 369.)

If the new cosmopolitanism(s) cannot deliver an explicitly and directly political programme, at least it answers the charges of *particularism* and *loss of standards* raised against multiculturalism. It does this, according to Robbins, by tracing the actual attempts of negotiation and by offering a normative edge against which the inclusiveness and diversity of multiculturalism can lean (Robbins 1998). It also seems to offer arguments against the neutralising tendency apparent at F-Secure and other organisations without having recourse to the DM-style notion of *cultures* as a zoo-like taxonomy. Hear this, F-Securians:

Whatever the ultimate value of the term *cosmopolitan*, pluralized to account for a range of uneven affiliations, it points, at least, toward alternative notions of 'cultural' identity. It undermines the 'naturalness' of ethnic absolutisms, whether articulated at the nation-state, tribal, or minority level. Discrepant cosmopolitanisms begin and end with historical interconnection and often violent attachment. Cultural separation and claims for ethnic purity appear as strategies within this historical context, moments, not ends. Such a perspective opens up a more complex, humane understanding of hybrid realities. For example, it makes room for immigration policies that do not presume all-or-nothing assimilation. 'English only' legislation, in this view, appears

not as a reestablishment of something normal or natural but rather as a violent, probably futile, attempt to create and police an area of cultural homogeneity. ... It gives us a way of perceiving, and valuing, different forms of encounter, negotiation, and multiple affiliation rather than simply different 'cultures' or 'identities'. (Clifford 1998, 365.)

As Terence Turner already noted in 1993, multiculturalism can be build either as an unconvincing celebration of differences, what he names *difference multiculturalism* – or, as a more labourious but sustainable process, by critical dialogue. Here Turner speaks of *critical multiculturalism*. The latter requires that all parties are heard and everybody's aims and deeds are inspected critically. There is a political dimension to it, lacking in all managerial approaches.

In the Robbins and Clifford argument I also find an echo to the call made by Sherry Ortner for socially embedded descriptions deciphering the actual whereabouts of people as subjects in the confusing multiplicity and change that has become our daily environment. Both the *ethnically* different forms (such as peasant pragmatism) and the forms identified (or identifiable) to *hegemonic distributors* (such as diversity management) and their resistance (such as labelling DM "bureaucratic") appear as ingredients in the late modern environment. Here the management, the (different) employees and the researcher alike hover between different forms, only partially aware of their connotations and links. More than anything, we need maps, no matter how broken the cultural territory is. And perhaps in that case even more desperately.

At the same time, we may hope for more moments of joined imagination among the employees, such as may serve their agency – and to the degree it may serve it. The animals must help each other out of the cages of diversity management's zoo, and start genuine negotiation, turning their physical coexistence into a conscious encounter and making sense of each other's cosmopolitanisms. Even where such a zoo was never constructed, like at F-Secure, people need to know that there are other ways for talking about culture than the one leading to it. This goal may appear utopian, but it has been set before by other scholars. Discussing social relations in South and Southeast Asia, anthropologists Alberto Gomes, Timo Kaartinen and Timo Kortteinen (2007) draw attention to forms of spontaneous grassroots tolerance and even protection of ethnic and religious 'Others', and practices of negotiation beyond the support of governments or international organisations. The writers name these forms of tolerance *civility*. Where *discrepant cosmopolitanisms* refer to any lateral encounters with inconsequential, laudatory or disastrous social outcomes, *civility* is a term for the desirable outcomes. People do not always

show civility towards each other, which is when the active intervention of government or managerial authority is needed. But when they do, their attempts should not be overridden by top-down procedures. What scholars can do to help people in late modern workplaces is to offer them information about non-essentialising approaches to culture, and the necessary words and alternative conceptualisations, as tools for their own attempts at civility. Management's trial is to recognise and cope with its double position as the key holder regarding dominant structures and caged animal regarding its own identity.

In this chapter I attempted to show how the case of F-Secure relates to its context historically and geographically. Perhaps you have a better grasp now at the meaning of *Finnishness*, and why my interviewees so easily talked about it as a counterpoint to being “foreign”. I conclude that ethnic ‘Otherness’ is what they see when they look at a “foreigner”. As we have learned, it hardly changes their perception if the “foreigner” has acquired a Finnish passport. I drew a picture of the issue that reaches outside the workplace; with its veins that go a long way into history and the world of today. As an alternative route to learning – having disregarded classificatory routes – I took up two notions that approach the issue in a more contextualised way, *cosmopolitanisms* to gain realism, and *civility* to recognise the goal.

I fear that for part of the readers all this is foreign language. But I’m actually looking for something much more concrete and everyday like than most of the identity discussions in DM-approaches. There’s a *discrepant cosmopolitanisms* approach to be taken here. Rather than telling the ‘Others’ *what ‘we’ are like* ‘we’ might make better explicit account of our assumptions and values at each of the moments of encounter, relative to such themes as are at stake just then. If you don’t think it’s worth it or proper manners to marketise your worker-friendly policy, for instance, but some others think it is, and keeping silent turns against you, wouldn’t that be an opportunity to talk the issue through, irrespective of ethnic labels? There would be so much concrete negotiation work to be done, if people didn’t shun *cultural issues*. In the next chapter, I will discuss that avoidance, and how it could be relaxed.

## 13 About culture

In business schools, where most organisational scholars hold posts, the concept of *culture* has a history of its own. Mainstream research has used it in theories aligned along tenets of the positivist paradigm, where it has been given the role of *independent variable*. Countless studies have aimed at measuring things like the efficiency of marketing strategy X in a) Finland, b) Sweden, c) Germany and d) Japan. This research tradition, inspired by the work of Geert Hofstede (see e.g. 1980) and cross-cultural studies more generally, bears the same mistake already identified in *diversity management* and *difference multiculturalism*. It assumes that *cultures* are comparable along the same, given dimensions. Who can say which dimensions matter? Who gives the standards? A neutralised and pasteurised *any rational someone* observing the developments of the planet from the outside? A super manager? As already concluded in the section “Intersubjectivity”, we do not have access to such a privileged position, nobody has. All we have is partial observations, made by various situated observers each through her own lens. There is a certain humbleness missing in the cross-cultural tradition, and people at workplaces like F-Secure pay a high price for that mistake.

In addition, the cutting of cultural entities along the borders of nation-states is of course an extremely clumsy, almost desperate attempt to grasp cultural differences. Culture is too unruly for such containers. Sometimes it may continue rigidly through the rise and fall of empires, while at other times it may spread across frontiers with amazing speed. There are tiny subcultures and great world ideologies. Tribal traditions and latest fashions. Religions and political ideologies, as well as inarticulate practices. Borrowings, counterfeits and combinations. Culture provides both the basis for life order and the objects for violent contests. It is the source of creativity as well as a prison of thought. All *a priori* standards yield beneath its true power. The question of the possible effects of a particular marketing strategy in a certain place amid certain audiences is an empirical question. But answering it requires an open-ended case-by-case enquiry with socially situated observation, keeping in mind that the *carriers* of culture also have their agency. No *software of the mind* is perfect.

### **The long shadow of Hofstede**

The main reason for the bad reputation of *culture* among the more critically oriented organisational scholars (as well as a lot of the updated late modern citizens, including many at F-Secure) is, I think, the long shadow of Hofstede. *Culture* has gone out of fashion, because the only models people know are poor. Civilised people who beware of stereotypes have come to perceive the essentialism in such categorisations. But if old models are unsatisfactory, new ones should perhaps be outlined, instead of denying the whole issue and closing one's eyes to a large quantity of everyday phenomena, indeed a dimension that runs through all everyday phenomena. Better models for making sense of *culture* and cultural differences are necessary not just for academics, but most urgently for us all.

First of all, culture might be perceived as not only a potential source of schism and friction, but in its primary role, as a tool for agency on its journey through life. If the interest that stirred among the F-Securians at the boom era would have continued further, they might have gradually realised that culture was not just about *ethnic cuisines* and accommodation hints about somewhere else, but it might include notions of – for instance – work, management, incomes, honour, satisfaction, friendship, communication, helping, responsibility, customers, subsidiaries, the Internet, 'nerds', economists, localisers, secretaries, men, women, winter, light, rap-artists, wages, overtime pay, layoffs, markets, money, power and justice. Culture would no longer be conceptualised as some specialised region beyond those things of life, but as a dimension within them.

### **The new Babel**

The question of who *represents* which cultural notion is of course crucial in the game that takes place on social fields. Workers with varying histories of immigration probably differ from each other regarding some notions, but this is only one possible division between people, and not always the most significant. Depending on the question, alliances may be constructed around, for example, profession, gender or hierarchical position. The game is about social positions, but its currency is cultural symbols. Irrespective of one's role as a worker, manager, customer or investor, it would be good to know the currency, in one's own interest. If that sounds like Machiavellism, consider this: If you want to create solidarity among your colleagues and widen the space of your joint agency, you must get acquainted with each other as well as with the tensions in your symbolic environment. The first requirement of resistance is to know the dominant ideology, after which it can be stripped of veils of *naturalness* and

identified as a human artefact open to criticism and change. Noam, for instance, did just that when he criticised the transfer of the goals of work from craftsmanship to company profit. But he had no notion of the fact that he was engaged in cultural criticism. It was in association with demographic diversity, that he mentioned *cultures* – along Hofstedeian lines as nationalities – and shrank from discussing them.

Why should we be so interested in all kinds of notions, ways of thinking and ideologies? What's the point here? Capitalism's relentless movement to ever new market niches on the planet is not actually news. Transnationalism was already the trend in the gold standard era, barred subsequently by nationalising, socialising and military projects (see e.g. Webb 2006). Migration also reached quite large volumes at that time, as can be comprehended from, for example, Saskia Sassen's account (1999). But not as large as today. The scale of these phenomena is the new thing, and the interconnectedness of the world through modern media. The lives of countless contemporary people have come to be marked by changing places, crossing borders and mixing cultures. Together these developments allow a substantial part of the planet's population to be knowledgeable, and keep in touch with others far and near. *Transmigrants* is a new term for those who, although physically re-settled far from their origins, do not grow particularly rooted, but keep partly aloof with the help of connections to where they came from and to where their relatives and other relations reside.

Instead of *roots* many now say they have a *story*, a story that reflects their itinerary in the world and counts the connections to different places (physical and virtual), ideologies and other stories. These stories often reflect their own choice as in the case of expatriates, tourists, development agents, members of NGOs, terrorists, Internet acquaintances and adoptive parents. But they may as well be the product of greater forces as in the case of refugees, exiles, the laid-off, the occupied, the trafficked, the passportless, the adopted and the children of expats. The amount of such crossing travel and interconnectedness is something not known to have happened ever before in history – and if weak signals (of which many are no longer very weak) are correctly interpreted, it may not continue for much longer. Therefore this is a decisive moment, marked by contact and what has been called *generalised ethnography* (see Clifford 1988). Against a widespread deception in the grossly unjust and cynical conditions where the contacts are taking place we must recognise that this is the time to make sense of each other, to learn from each other, rather than drift along towards the hazards of ethnicity and conflict.

### One more conceptual tool

There's one more conceptual tool I would give you, if you haven't heard of it before. One source of misunderstanding in the debates about *culture* has been the complicated interplay of intentional and unintentional modes. The notion of *carrying culture* refers to unconscious, unreflective reproduction, as in the case of learning one's mother tongue by mere exposure to narrative practices, or in the case of acquiring an interpersonal style (like "coldness") as a by-product of interaction. Notions of *supporting*, *creating* or *making* culture, on the contrary, refer to conscious action that creates *new forms*, and in the same move, gives birth to the modern subject. Here examples might include all those cases studied by Holland et al. (1998); and among the present materials, the creation of the computer experts' professional subculture. The point is, that both kinds of processes are going on all the time, but in the modern (and late modern) world, the latter is distinctively more interesting and dear to people (see Urban 2001).

The strong bias towards newness may well be responsible for the resistance evoked in modern people against any idea of reproduction that might bypass conscious consideration. Nobody (if you don't count the last surviving carriers of oral epics) wishes to be exposed as a transit station of flows larger and older than oneself. It is embarrassing. Instead we seek and build ever new forms, adding, removing, reforming and reinterpreting the existing ones. A *fresh combination* is welcomed with celebrations in arts, politics and science. At the same time, we strengthen the feeling of life control and agency. New cultural worlds are created among similarly minded people, as Holland et al. (1998) explain. The capitalist process also creates new (more or less unconnected) goods, services and experiences. Fashion has become a normal power, science moves along its bifurcating paths, industry desires *innovations* and organisations are re-engineered. Who would care to learn stories by heart – as in oral tradition – since, there they are on the shelf, to be read and re-stored. What is expected from a writer is a new scenario, because: *really, we have already heard that one.*

Under such conditions, it is understandable that referring to the possibility that some forms might be *carried* is merely an insult. The generally held assumption that these modes of cultural production/movement are mutually exclusive provokes further resentment. As if I would be condemned to lifelong and all-encompassing lack of willpower by once having *carried* something. Contrary to popular beliefs, however, these regions are connected. *Carrying* may turn to *support* – or *resistance*, by the grace of becoming aware (Ortner 2005; Holland et al. 1998). A passing feeling of embarrassment is a small price

to pay for the power of such knowledge. If cultural critique points at underlying or weakly realised assumptions, its aim is not to tie people into tradition, but to liberate them so that they can decide what they want to do with it. In this way it joins those progressive and even rebellious projects, which shake the routines and point at the relativity of many *self-evident* truths.

It may also happen, though, that the speed of mass production and novelty construction rises above a tolerance level. In this case, people (especially the losers of globalisation) may be weary of questioning, and turn to seek stability and security in traditional, unquestioned truths. In this connection, it has become usual to refer to the neo-conservative movements of our time claiming religious, ethnic and political purity. I don't believe that it is possible to return in time, however. Rather, these endeavours betray a paradoxical relationship between the conservative content and the change-demanding method, the reformist movement. Even a return to tradition is for the (late)modern subject but one among her choices.

Happily, cultural critique can be applied to ends beyond shocking established orders and digging up power abuses hidden in routines. It can also be used to reconstruct forgotten histories and demonstrate connections and combinations that yield more alternatives beside those that have run out of appeal, and those impressed on the public by force. Cultural enquiry is not a threat to agency, but a service. With the help of the stories from F-Secure, I have tried to do that service. I have delved into the open and hidden meanings of discourses, practices and cultural images. I have come up with suggestions for cultural forms identified at work, their histories and connections, so that readers could grasp the potentialities of cultural mapping and gain a better ability to navigate in the transnational moment we live.



## 14 At the end of tacking, so far

My aim has been to offer a critique of *diversity management*, both as a managerial programme and a late modern cultural form, circulating in the organisational world with the mutual support and in symbiosis with the global economy and mainstream economics. These powerful tutors, as I discussed in chapter 2, provide diversity management with such a strong immunity from direct attacks that repetitive, well-grounded criticisms have gone without the serious attention they merit. This work was thus initially motivated by frustration.

I wanted to direct attention to alternative conceptualisations of the transnational reality in today's workplaces. Rather than essentialising notions of culture and identity, and instrumentalist approaches playing with the fire of social divides; I introduced in chapter 3 some alternative theories of identity that allow agency, process and power to be articulated.

But why would readers be interested in my alternatives? How could I seduce as many as possible to believe, that these are real alternatives, to be taken seriously? The second motivation of my study was the fortunate discovery I made in one Finnish-based IT-company: the software engineers that preferred to relate to each other on the basis of their professional values, 'demographic' management and cosmopolitan stances. They had a strong, explicit aversion to any essentialising discourse like diversity management. I had found my standard bearers. The edge of my findings, against which I hope to grind the diversity machine, is that I can hereby present a gang of dissidents within the glorified field of the global economy itself, even among its digital avant-garde. The avant-garde workers do not accept the clothes prepared for them by the serving army of consultants. They look at the fine new robes and note that they are straightjackets. Making a move suggested by George Marcus (1998), I took advantage of the critical edge they offered to my study, rooting my criticism in this existing fissure in the home field of the dominant forms themselves.

In order to realise that overall 'tack', I carried out an organisational ethnography among the dissidents. Therefore, I landed you in Finland, zooming in, in chapter 3, to the kind of organisational environment and the kind of people to be investigated. For reasons of readability, I left some of the contextualisation to be given at zooming out of the ethnographic case in

chapter 12. Then I started unfolding their ideas, taking care to keep the ideas about ethnicity and cultural differences situated – in touch with the historical moment and the particular kind of work they do. Here the story took the form of contrast between boom (chapter 4) and downturn (chapter 6), which certainly was none of my contriving; I simply took advantage of the way things turned out, and reported what I observed. As already discussed, I decided to place the presentation and evaluation of my methodical choices between these descriptive chapters, in chapter 5.

I found counter evidence to the idea that managed diversity is the only way to overcome ethnic friction and discrimination. My informants were spontaneously civil to each other, and stick to this civility stubbornly, despite the fact that they had every excuse to ethnicise the real and disturbing troubles they suddenly faced. This, I believe, is the main finding of my study. In my interpretation, the people at F-Secure relied on alternative cultural forms, including pragmatism, provincialism, professional culture, local forms of self-presentation, post-modern identities and ‘democracy’. Some of these forms were more locally Finnish – more or less – while others had far more transnational stock in their package. A summary of these forms is presented in the end section of chapter 6.

Why does the story continue thereafter so long with all kinds of other findings? Well, people seldom act the way they do for only one reason, and hardly ever in perfect unison with each other. To make an account convincing, it is better to search their reasons more closely, and present a richer and more nuanced picture of the situation from their point of view. Therefore, I undertook another series of consecutive ‘tacks’, qualifying the first findings with the option of changing points of view. As a preparation for the person-centred vignettes to follow, and for a sharpening of the perspective on difference, I offered some ideas on intersubjectivity in chapter 7.

I presented to you organisational life through the discrepant experiences of the foreign workers in Helsinki (chapter 8), Finns and non-Finns in San Jose (chapter 9), and finally one more foreigner in Helsinki (chapter 10). In this way, I at least was convinced that the main finding holds despite being qualified. The civility was real and sincere, although perhaps it was clumsy. The Finns would mostly not know what their actions looked like in the eyes of others, and while pursuing equality and integrity, they would not always be so understood, or the outcome might escape their intentions. At some point also, I had to ask, if the higher ranking ones had accepted the responsibility that goes with power over others. In addition to Finns, it seemed that all organisational members in the transnational setting were in dire need of a better mapping of

their environment and better awareness of the ingredients for personal, professional and local identity building – indeed of the whole process of self-authoring in its cultural, political and moral dimensions. This way qualified, my heroes look like human characters, an inspiring example to follow, while at the same time also a reminder of the problems that call for reflexivity. I reminded you, following Holland et al., that the very same cultural forms, (such as ‘democracy’ and pragmatism), can have both liberating and discriminatory potential, depending on their social use in varying situations.

At the beginning of this book, I promised that I should come up with more substantial suggestions than the proverbial academic cynicism and further questions. With a subject like the present one, there is no such option as to walk out and leave the moral pinch for others. Rightly or wrongly, I believe that my help is needed and I offer it. The best help to confused or frustrated people in today’s transnational workplaces in Finland or elsewhere – and whether covered by managerial programmes on diversity or not – is mapping their whereabouts. That is why I took the trouble to outline layer after layer and notion after notion the cultural and power landscape surrounding the issue of ethnicity in this particular present-day Finnish workplace. If there is any chance that some readers may recognise some elements and be able to use my mapping for their own benefit, the work was worth it. For that purpose I placed the latter part of the contextualising discussion after the ethnographic case proper, in chapter 12. In addition, and to avoid misunderstandings, I give my informed opinion on the larger issue of counter discrimination policies, in chapter 11.

At that point it might appear that the story was finished and the tacking navigator had finally arrived at her destination. But no, one more treacherous, water covered reef menaced the undertaking, and therefore I had to make a last manoeuvre. An attentive reader has noticed, that I have been all along talking about the issue at hand in somewhat slippery terms. It was either *ethnicity* or *cultural differences*, or both, or *culture* in its various *forms* and *currents*. This is fine for an entry to ethnographic fieldwork. But coming out of the field, and making sense of the experience, at the latest, one should draw conclusions on what was the issue, out there. I have already concluded that what the workers perceived in one another was ethnicity, although they did not use that word. A word they recognised, but were mostly reluctant to use, was *culture*. What did they understand as *culture*? The meaning they seemed to shun was a Hofstedeian, essentialising notion of *cultures* as clearly delineated containers of people, with geographically demarcable national homelands, and compulsive *software of the mind*. In their repulsive reaction to this naïve notion, my

informants preferred to deny cultural differences and even the existence of a cultural or semiotic dimension of everyday life, with, of course, limiting consequences on their ability to consciously navigate the culturally complex environment. It seems that they were in trouble because they lacked conceptual tools. That is why I try, in chapter 13, to outline alternative ways to look at culture. These ways have already been developed in cultural and social anthropology for quite a while, but apparently they have not made their way into wider public use, despite the dire need. Thus, in this book the discussion of culture is the last piece of the puzzle, intended to complete the set of tools with which navigation in late modern, transnational, organisational environments should be made easier. It ties together the criticism of essentialist difference management with the alternative idea of people as active agents, with an incomplete but possible access to reinterpreting and remaking their cultural environment. It also completes the picture of self-authoring or identity construction in late modern, complex environments, where influential ‘Others’ are not always present and identifiable, although they may be powerful. An updated notion of culture, so I hope, helps you trace your route even if you lack roots, and to hold together an identity even if you must find its ingredients piecemeal. What is more, it should help you to protect your self-authoring from intrusive and dictatorial ‘Others’. This is a chance for personal growth. Those who take hold of it will, at the least, be able – should they show civility – to grant it to others as well.

### **Weaknesses of the present study**

Despite the fact that it is a doctoral dissertation, this book was written for *use* by either academics or practitioners, rather than as a ‘proof’ of my knowledge. It is therefore a little awkward to make a self-evaluation of the successes and failures of the study reported within it. From my frustration with essentialism, to my observations of civility among the ‘nerds’, the study undertaken, and the writing of the report, to its reading and eventual actions by my readers, there is a process. It is that process I wish would succeed, not some artificially cut off part of it. It feels premature to fulfil academic requirements by turning around now and looking back, as if we already were home in any sense.

How could the report be used by other academics? That is a potential motivation for evaluation at this point, because other researchers might like to follow me in the topic or the method; to take distance from or make a contribution to anything that I took up here.

I think the original idea to pick up this type of workplace in the IT-sector was good. It is a fresh approach to the questions of immigration and diversity, so

often handled as problems of the weak. Also, the perspective that the software engineers offered goes straight to the heart of dominant images of ideal workers in streamlined cutting-edge organisations. It matters to many people, what the *expert professionals* say. Therefore, it is also more embarrassing to mainstream diversity management programmes.

However, there was a price to this Marcusian critical edge. Cutting-edge organisations and leading technology professions are reluctant targets of fieldwork. I have discussed above, in chapter 5, the problems caused by limited access to observe everyday activity at F-Secure. The people I presented to you in more detail, and with a pseudonym, were chosen to represent the particular kind of mixture or collection of stances and ‘voices’ I encountered among all my interviewees. For reasons of readability, I did not make you wade through all of them. This of course, is a choice to present certain qualities and nuances and it overwrites some other qualities and nuances, because I chose characters whose ideas were in *debate* with each other. But I do not estimate that bias to be an important one. More likely, in hindsight, I would have a different picture, if I had originally interviewed a different set of people. Also, had I entered the organisation at a different point in history, the picture would be different. The only defence of ethnography in the face of such doubts is the richness of the picture given of the people that *were* met and the moment that *was* witnessed. Even here I could have done better, perhaps. If I had been clever, I would have taken the risk to strain the relationships with gatekeepers, and insisted more on access. Perhaps that way, I would have gained more ground to hang around. Also – and this is a good hint to emerging colleagues – I should of course have collected more of the managerial and public material on the company, its history of growth, development of personnel, economic choices, technology etc. I have some such material. But a fuller picture, telling *the story of F-Secure*, would have been informative, especially to those readers to whom this organisation is unknown beforehand.

In addition to questions of access, there has been another enduring ache in this research process. My aim – that will be accomplished if it will, only with the help of readers – was to give a fresh perspective to scholars involved with workplace demographics or multicultural society, and to assist all citizens of our time to cope with issues of identity in organisations. I have done my best, but the job is, well, demanding. One of the biggest problems is, as I have mentioned, that the many debates and respective disciplines, not to mention interested stakeholders outside academia, do not connect to each other. I am not the only one suffering from that situation, but clearly, in its multidisciplinary and half-academic-half-political character, this is not an area

where easy academic accomplishments could be gained. I have done my best to cover the terrain, but some lacunae still remain. One I now perceive is the field of workplace ethnographies in general. A carefully designed study would have situated itself more firmly in that respect as well.

The terrain is exhaustingly wide, and also broken. In trying to bridge separate debates, one may become a victim of their separateness, instead. At times it has been very labourious to hold the story together, and set my words so as to be understood by many different readers. I am not in the position even to guess how well I may have succeeded in that.

Having discussed some of the weaknesses let me still make one more attempt to summarise the *why* and the *how* of this study. The *why* grows out of my disappointment in noticing that the already abandoned ideas of pure cultural forms and clearly delineated social groups to carry them, have returned in the form of diversity management, distributed by business consultants and well-meaning activists. I fear that the proclaimed moral good of equality cannot be attained by this road, taking a fatal short cut by the goal displacement, and ignoring the true complexity of the subject matter. I am frustrated watching how the detailed warnings by critical scholars go unheeded.

The *how* of the study thus grows out of the fear and the frustration, as a bold effort, probably overestimating my capacity, to unmask the false philanthropists and wrench the discursive initiative from their hands, setting an alternative agenda with an alternative vocabulary – with the idea of working with local agency and leaving room for bottom-up inventions. No doubt it is too much to ask from a mere dissertation, but I did what I could with the means available. Researchers are *bricoleurs* like the rest of humankind.

### **What next?**

Although organisational ethnographies are not a new phenomenon, their recently growing number promises to widen the general public's understanding of work related issues, as well as that of the academic community. With regard to ethnicity and immigration, the prospect is much the same. We are gaining in spotlighted settings here and there, to enlighten our world view and help us read the more abstract information given by other types of research. None too early, because of the pace with which the world is changing.

It is a widespread misunderstanding that scholars dedicated to qualitative methods dismiss quantitative ones. Let me disperse that impression from my own part: I believe that these sources of epistemic gain compliment each other. Thinking of the setting of this study, for instance – the growing multiethnicity

at Finnish workplaces – both kinds of enquiries are urgently needed. We need to be able to follow the numbers of immigrant workers in various sectors, as well as their situation regarding unemployment, remuneration, promotion and other generally monitored working life indicators. At the same time, we need live pictures of what the indicated developments mean to the people at work.

I have suggested that my readers can extrapolate from the present case to those cases that they themselves know closely. This should not prove very difficult, as many of the findings have to do with cultural forms in wide circulation in Finland and even elsewhere. Nevertheless, a fuller mapping can be constructed and errors corrected with more studies. From the present perspective, it seems that other social divides besides ethnicity would need to be included in the same studies. That might give a more full life sort of approach, or in more fashionable terms, an intersectional perspective. I must note, as discussed, that I tried to set out some nets to catch fish of the *gender* kind, but this had disappointingly meagre results. Another attempt is waiting to be initiated.

Different industries are an obvious next venture as well. As I have mentioned, some studies have already been carried out, but more are needed. The class divide between middle-class experts and low paid workers has potentially much to teach us about how ethnicity works in today's organisations.

The digital industry with its characteristic cultural landscape is also a promising target for cross-national or cross-organisational analysis. I have referred to some earlier studies in that field, but it might be interesting to look at ethnicity in that perspective. My example was a peculiarly Finnish approach – or was it, in cross-examination?

For further studies, a target that may prove significantly different in regard to the software industry might be found in other highly educated sectors. What kind of discrepant cosmopolitanisms can be identified among immigrant medical doctors and their local colleagues and patients, for example?

Whatever the divides and dimensions under inspection, it would be important to be able to keep in touch with both the changing character of the demography at work and the changing character of the work itself; both are undergoing profound changes while we watch.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1.

Mail title: Workplace research

Hi,

I'm a researcher in psychology and cultural anthropology. I conducted a series of interviews on multiethnicity at F-Secure Finland in spring 2000. The report was published in your intranet in fall 2000. This time I have convinced [the HR manager], that a further study replicating the enquiry with some more context and depth as well as comparison with overseas units might give us all useful bits of knowledge.

My idea - why I'm doing this - is that last time I found a surprisingly functional way to deal with cultural and/or ethnic heterogeneity at your workplace. To find out what actually may have caused such a degree of work satisfaction, and whether it still is there, I shall return to your workplace begging for an hour of your time. In addition to those whom I interviewed last time (both Finns and others), new people are included. The study has a working title "Cross-cultural and multicultural: A study of work communities and cultural crossings in a Finnish-based information technology company", and is enlisted in the doctoral programme at the Helsinki School of Economics.

Why should you participate?

- 1) It's a chance to have your say on company life.
- 2) There has been some concern on internal communication. Now we might find out together, where the blocks are and how to undo them.
- 3) Nobody wants quarrels or tension at work. Even if things are fine for you now, they might not be so always. Relations between nationalities/national

units/ethnicities are a difficult but indispensable aspect of your kind of business. It's as much for your own future as for that of the company.

4) As a foreigner, you may gain insights about how to deal with the Finns.

What does it mean in practice?

1) With your permission, I'll have a one-hour-interview with you – either at F-Secure or on "neutral ground" (cafés etc.).

2) You're free to give any other contribution you might have in mind, before or after your interview.

3) You can express your views in your own words. No forms to fill.

4) The conversations are recorded but remain confidential. Individual responses are not revealed to your employer or colleagues and quotations in my report will appear under pseudonyms.

Please, can you take a look at your agenda and let me know if you can have this meeting sometime in the near weeks...?

Best regards,

Marja-Liisa Trux

## Appendix 2.

From the interview with Noam (Chapter 6). Quoted words highlighted.

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N: Is this interesting to you?

M: Yes, that is very good. So tell me your understanding of a good work and a good workplace. Your ideal, what would it be?

N: my ideal is that the people like to work with each other and they have a vision. And the vision is what keeps them together. Like when you have... Take an example, something like... When you have a family that reaches a land... For example American pioneers is a good example. You reach a land because you want to search a new life. What do you have? You have your family.

M: Mmm, mm.

N: What keeps you together? It's the desire to survive and prosper. And what they do then they build own... They build their first small tent and then a bigger house and then a bigger house and then a huge farm.

M: Yes.

And that stops and the family breaks away.

M: Mmm.

N: **So my point or my... The perfect workplace is where there is always this vision. Of course for that you have a how should I say, a non-materialistic approach, or not just a materialistic approach.**

M: Yes, yeah.

N: **To the work.**

M: Yeah, yeah.

N: **So you have to have a notion of what are then things that keep the people together.**

M: Yeah, right.

N: **This was one of the things that I said once to [the CEO's first name] when we had this... Had this traditional talking to people and they came into the company, when the company was still small enough. It was in -98.**

M: Yeah, yeah.

N: **And I told him that why are we going public, because there is more important things to do. A company has its responsibility towards its environment and especially to its people, because the company only exists... the capitalist way of looking at this is that companies exist to make profit, period.**

M: Mmm, mmm.

N: **My way of looking at this is that the company exists to make profit so that it can invest in the society where it is. So that the society can grow and it can grow with the society**

**And I think that when we get to the point where the company is to make profit, period, that's where the pleasure ends.**

M: Mmm, yeah, yeah.

N: **Because profit is what drives you. And profit is not a vision. It's a number.** How can you really... Would any American soldier go to Iraq if you would tell them that you will go to Iraq because we will make ten billion dollars more revenues selling that oil.

M: yeah, yeah.

N: This is the truth. But this is not why they went there.

M: yeah.

N. They went because they believed that they are saving the world from the evil empire with terrorists.

M: Yeah.

N: This was the same against the Soviet Union by talking about the evil empire of the Soviet. This is what drives people, this is the vision. So the... Something that you can sentimentally connect to and can drive your work.

M: Mmm, mmm.

N: And this in a company would instil ever-lasting improvement. We had a word in -98... This comes back to the point why I like the company. They had this word in the values that was "kai san" the Japanese word for continuous improvement.

M: Mmm, mmm.

N: So this was one of the things that attracted me because I really believed in that. I... Of course I was just coming from an academy.

M: Yes.

N: **So obviously knowledge was more important than money there. And the fact that I was finding a company in the capitalist world that was trying to do the things that I thought were important was something special. And I said ok that it's clear that I want to be in this company. I don't want to be in an open office where everybody wears a suit and everything we do is to (perhaps) work the day for making the money day after day and that's it, period. Then the work is over. That's not what I was looking for. That's one of the reasons why I liked F-Secure, at that time Datafellows. Maybe the name change is also something telling about the company, because we changed the name because of the marketing value of F-Secure.**

M: Mmm, mmm.

N: **So the perfect work, again to go back to the initial question is where you can fulfil yourself, not by feeling happy for being at work but being proud of what you do.**

M: Mmm, mmm.

N: **And not necessarily being proud, you know, you're doing a big piece of money, nobody loves that. You don't need to do that to be proud. You can do a chair and be proud.**

M: Yes.

N: **Because you can see that you have done it perfectly.**

M: yeah, yes.

N: **And it works and it fulfils its cause.**

M: Yeah.

N: **And you feel that you have done it better than the previous chair.**

M: Oh, your vision would have been like making the products work better in the world that changes – all these threats of viruses to be removed in that development – and make good products.

N. Actually to do new things. Because when I came to the company, then we were just producing something which we called the framework and now... Basically one of the basic stuff that we sell today. If... Something that was new at the time no other company producing the same thing. That was also something that helped me to understand that ok this is where I want to work, we are trying to do something different.

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## Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> Michael, virus researcher, interview on 16.3.2004.
- <sup>ii</sup> Wierzbowsky, a virus researcher, interview on 29.2.2000.
- <sup>iii</sup> Matti, software engineer, interview on 19.5.2000. Translated from Finnish by the author.
- <sup>iv</sup> Matti, software engineer, interview on 25.7.2002. Translated from Finnish by the researcher.
- <sup>v</sup> Noam, software engineer, interview on 23.9.2003.
- <sup>vi</sup> Noah, director, interview on 24.2.2003.
- <sup>vii</sup> Liisa, communications secretary, interview on 6.8.2002. Translated from Finnish by the researcher.
- <sup>viii</sup> Niilo, technical support, interview on 12.3.2004. Translated from Finnish by the researcher.
- <sup>ix</sup> Kati, human resources coordinator, interview on 25.3.2003. Translated from Finnish by the researcher.
- x Lasse, director, interview on 6.11.2002. Translated from Finnish by the researcher.
- xi Bharat, localiser, interview on 13.2.2003.
- xii Jackson, territory sales manager, interview on 22.10.2002.
- xiii Ville, engineer, interview on 24.10.2002. Translated from Finnish by the researcher.
- xiv David, tech support engineer, interview on 17.10.2002.
- <sup>xv</sup> Mark, senior software engineer, interview on 20.3.2003.



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