Real Numbers, Imaginary Guests, and
Fantastic Experiences:
The Grand Seaside Hotel and the discursive
construction of customer service

by

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PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

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The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Dirk Bunzel
19 November 2000
This thesis is dedicated to my wife Andrea Bunzel and to my parents
Marianne and Dietmar Bunzel
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Glasgow, November 2000
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Abstract

Based on a fourteen-month period of ethnographic research conducted in an Australian Coastal hotel, this thesis explores the issue of management in a flexible organization. Using a textual approach to the study of organizations, the thesis focusses on the customer service discourse, its constituents, and the processes of its symbolic (re-)production in the hotel studied. Using a variety of textual data – among them academic publications from authors as diverse as Foucault, Clegg, Haugaard, Ritzer, and Castoriadis; various forms of fieldnotes; and detailed descriptions of ritual and ceremonial events – the thesis not only provides a vivid account of organizational life at the hotel, it also identifies aspects of the latter such as meetings, training and reward programmes, and customer response schemes, as disciplinary technologies applied to govern both employees and customers.

Extending the considerations about the disciplinary qualities of the customer service discourse and linking them with the issue of new forms of control as recently debated in the larger field of organization studies, the thesis will identify the processes of imaginization, normalization, and subjugation as central to the establishment of a new management doctrine: corporate culturism. This discussion will also reveal the essentially hybrid nature of control under this new doctrine and it will expose the process of managing meaning as fundamental to its constitution and endurance.

Respectively, the thesis will identify the hotel studied as an organization that thrives on corporate culturism. As the thesis represents a contribution to the field of (organizational) ethnography, it will – by recurrently reflecting on some of the contemporary debates in the field – implicitly address status and practicability of empirical (ethnographic) research in a postmodern world.
1 Setting the Scene

1.1 Introduction

This thesis, which is based on fourteen months of ethnographic research conducted in a hotel on the Australian East Coast, represents a contribution to the field of organization studies in general and to the genre of organizational ethnography in particular. Emanating from a concern with the management of flexible (service) organizations, the thesis addresses issues of power, identity, and the discursive construction of (organizational) reality. It does this by establishing the focal position of the customer service discourse, a system of disciplinary power that guides, if not governs, the (re-) production of normal service encounters within the hotel.

Discussing new modes of control, the thesis elaborates how, in an era of increased customization of service, this discourse extends both control and commitment into a new, virtual (imagined) dimension – thereby shaping (while not determining) the behaviour of the individuals it governs.

Overall, the thesis provides an account that demonstrates how customer service, as a meaningful concept, is constituted within everyday organizational life. It does this, further, by reflecting on the process of ethnographic research (reading/writing) that produced this account. For that purpose, except for the first two chapters, the chapters are ordered chronologically. This means that the chapters appear in the thesis in the temporal order of their production during the research. This is to give the reader an impression of the unfolding of the reading/writing process that made up the ethnography and to make transparent – or better, to contextualize – some of the conceptual choices the author has made over time.

Chapter 1 offers a prelude to the thesis. The account of a meeting of managers, as it regularly happens twice a week in the hotel, is used to familiarize the reader with the
locality and the main characters of the research narrative – setting the scene for the story that unfolds through the following chapters.

Chapter 2 reflects on recent discussions in the field of (organizational) ethnography, mostly from an epistemological or methodological focus, highlighting their relevance to the practical conduct of research. The focus of discussion is on current critical issues, such as the crisis of representation (Marcus and Fischer, 1986), and the status of fact and fiction in ethnographic writing. These are some of the central issues for the project of writing ethnography in a postmodern world. Most significantly, this chapter will elaborate on the need to contextualize the process of reading/writing research, outlining a textual perspective to do so (Czarniawska, 1997). There are two main strategies in constructing this perspective, both of which aim at a level of reflexivity adequate to contemporary ethnography. These strategies are those of 'historicizing' and 'signing'.

Chapter 3 provides an account of some of the theoretical discussion that shaped the pre-conceptions and expectations that I, as a researcher, carried to the field. Emanating from past discussion on (labour) flexibility and flexible organizations, the chapter describes the search for a way of conceptualizing flexible organizations in a postmodern era. This era is characterized not only by changing market constellations such as hyper-competition (D'Aveni, 1994) and a decay of the internal system of employment (Capelli, 1997). Also it is evident in diverse and non-traditional organizational responses – it is, in short, an era of French bread, Italian fashion, and East-Asian enterprise (Clegg, 1990). The chapter also reveals that discussions of flexible organizations in terms of New Organizational Forms (e.g. Sauer and Doehl, 1994), in spite of having the virtue of addressing the issue of power, show some limitations. Most notably, because of their uncritical and predominantly functional conceptualization of such forms, many discussions remain either ignorant of, or analytically separate from, issues of power and language. In contrast, recent discussions that address the issues of power, language, and the discursive construction of reality, inspired by the work of Foucault, suggestively address the symbolic side of flexible organizations. In particular, the concept of organizational culture not only seems capable of accounting for the complex interplay of power and
meaning but also shows close affinity with the ethnographic mode of research. Therefore, when I entered the field, I was determined to focus on those aspects of power that manifested themselves in struggles over meaning – struggles, in which a view of the (organizational) world is (discursively) produced and reproduced as ‘legitimate’.

Overall, the first three chapters contextualize the research by reflecting on the setting, describing the organization and representing some of its members, while positioning its author in the field. The latter involves articulating pre-conceptions the researcher bore prior to immersion in the research site. The decision to focus on the production of the discourse of customer service, despite its conceptual relevance, evolved mainly from the field and was influenced by a variety of practical and conceptual considerations that will be outlined further below. The concern with customer service and the provision of service excellence was prominent in the culture of the hotel: my attention became directed towards those processes during which the meaning of customer service was established and contested. Further, my role as a researcher in the field was considerably shaped by the reflexivity that the research subjects applied to my research role. The reflexive context was one of a restructuring process that the employees of the hotel had just been through. I did not witness most of the events occurring during the restructuring nor was I formally affected by any of the decisions taken and strategies implemented. However, the restructuring, ironically, had an impact on my role as a researcher – if only retrospectively and via the behaviour and expectations of the people I studied. One result was that I focused on certain rather than all groups, explored some issues in more depth, and chose certain sites and occasions for my research.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide an account of the production of the discourse of customer service in the Grand Seaside Hotel. Discourse here is understood in a Foucauldian sense to entail talk and action: a position that is only consequential from a radical constructivist or radical textual position (e.g. Czarniawska, 1997). Both chapters identify the constituents of the discourse (meetings, training, awards, ceremonies, and guest questionnaires) as well as the major participants and their roles in its production. They also show how these discursive practices contribute to the
constitution of a particular (collective) form of identity: The Grand Seaside Family — a bond that normalizes and subjugates those subjected to it, as we shall see later on. Overall, this part of the thesis aims at giving the reader a vivid impression of life at the Grand Seaside Hotel.

Chapter 6 analyses the discourse of customer service as constituting what Foucault (1979) termed a 'disciplinary' system of practices. Guest questionnaires, training events, and meetings, are practices for rewarding and punishing employees, normalizing the expectations and behaviour of both employees and customers, contributing to the constitution of a system of surveillance based on mutual observation by management, customers, and peers. The end of the chapter elaborates how, with the introduction of imaginary customers and service encounters, these disciplinary techniques culminate in a Panoptic system of power and surveillance.

Extending the considerations of the previous chapter, Chapter 7 addresses the issue of new forms of control, as recently debated in the larger field of organization studies. It identifies processes of imaginization, normalization, and subjugation, which, it argues, are central to the establishment of the new management doctrine of corporate culturism. The chapter not only reveals the essentially hybrid nature of control under this new doctrine but also shows how the process of managing meaning is fundamental to its constitution and endurance. The Grand Seaside Hotel is an organization that thrives on corporate culturism.

Chapter 8 provides some overall comments about the customer service discourse, its constituents, its reach and limitations. It concludes by addressing the implications of this research for the further study of postmodern (service) organizations.

Finally, the thesis as a whole represents an attempt to come to terms with some the problems arising from poststructuralist or radical constructivist insights into issues of ontology/epistemology when these are applied — or better — translated, into empirical research. In other words, the thesis addresses the status and practice of empirical (ethnographic) research in a postmodern world.
1.2 Prelude: Welcome to the Grand Seaside Hotel

1.2.1 Approaching the hotel

I had to get up quite early this morning. The meeting I was going to attend was supposed to start at 9:15 in the morning. Laguna Bay, the small town in which the hotel was located, was about one and a half hours drive north of Boomtown, a major metropolitan city on the Australian East-Coast. To go there, I had to cross Boomtown from the South. In order to avoid the bulk of the morning traffic, I had to get to the motorway access at Waatooba, north of Boomtown, at latest by 7 am. From there it was only another hours drive, as I knew from a previous visit to the region.

I managed to get to Waatooba without difficulties. The traffic had already started to get quite heavy in the other direction. As usual, people living North of Boomtown, around the National Park or further up at the Laguna Coast, were commuting to work. Fortunately, there was hardly any traffic on my side of the road.

While I was driving along on the motorway, I remembered my first conversation with Tim, the General Manager of the hotel. Actually, it was quite fortunate that I had come across this hotel, located in a small town that I never had heard about. Two weeks ago I was still struggling to find a property that would grant me access and would allow me to conduct a detailed case study lasting a few months. To overcome that hurdle, I took advice from my supervisors, who recommended designing a letter that elaborated rationales and details of my research project and that, while pointing to potential benefits for the organization, asked the General Manager of the property to grant me access. I started developing a list of hotels in and around Boomtown, out of different travel guides and the very comprehensive list of the National Automobile Club. I ended up with about 25 properties on that list that I thought would, according to the descriptions given in the guides, suit the purposes of my research. I was assured by experienced researchers in the hospitality industry, that, normally, the secretary would open my letter first, before handing it
over to the GM, as the position of General Manager is referred to in the industry jargon. Hence, in order to avoid my letter being treated as ‘just another piece of junk mail’, I decided to ring the secretaries of all the properties on the list to inform them before hand about the seriousness and importance of my research.

I had already talked to the secretaries of about 15 properties. The responses so far had been rather indifferent. Most secretaries listened to my 2 minutes standard description of the project without either indicating interest in the project or rejecting my request straight away. Most of them responded in a professionally polite manner that my project sounded “somehow interesting” and they assured me that my letter would be transferred to the General Manager. Actually, that was all that I expected. Eventually, I called the number of the Grand Seaside Hotel in Laguna Bay and was transferred to the secretary. After describing my project in a nutshell, perhaps for the 16th time, I was going to finish my routine request, that they “should, please, make sure that the GM would receive my letter”. Prepared for the standard polite response, I was close to hanging up when the secretary said: “Well that sounds extremely interesting. You know, we are just having a major restructuring of our hotel, so I think . . . You know what? I think you should talk directly to our General Manager. Just wait, I’ll put you through.”

A second later I was wide-awake. That had not happened before. I was transferred directly to the GM! What should I tell him? Just my standard description? Should I mention that I wanted to conduct an ethnography? That I was interested in issues of power? Better not be so blunt as an opening gambit. While I was waiting, I started to get a bit nervous. Eventually, I heard the voice of the GM asking for my name. After I responded he said: “I just heard from my secretary that you want to study flexible organizations; outsourcing, subcontracting, and these things. You know, we just done a major restructuring here, which involved a lot of subcontracting and we have even outsourced parts of our business. At the moment, I am trying to implement a new customer service program. So, I would be happy to get someone in here who monitors the whole process and could give us some feedback as well.” I was stunned. That sounded too good to be true. “I tell you what. Why don’t you send me a description of your project and we then can discuss further details.” I
responded “Yes, of course. I could even bring it to your hotel. Maybe we could have a brief chat and you could tell me some more about the restructuring.” “Sounds good. When?” “Whenever it suits you. Preferably rather sooner than later.” “Let me have a look in my diary . . . (moment of silence) . . . What about Wednesday? I’ve got someone for lunch. But what about 2 p.m.?” “Fine with me.” “Okay, so see you then.”

Here I was, I had not only received the chance for a promising interview – I was even invited to do research. I did not even know where that place was – Laguna Bay – but it did not really matter. I would have access to a research site that seemed to make an ideal case study, according to the GM’s description. I went straight to the office of my supervisor and told him the story. “Go for it!” was his response.

After that meeting with Tim, during which he talked about the restructuring of the hotel and his vision of a modern hotel business, I was even more convinced that the Grand Seaside would constitute an ideal object for my research. Only a week later, I started my research. I familiarized myself with the hotel and its localities. I was introduced to the members of the management team – a nice bunch of people, as I felt. And, I started to attend meetings at management and supervisory level. In other words, I was already known to many of the managers in the organization and, overall, the research seemed to be coming along nicely.

Today, I am on my way to one of those meetings, a Morning Briefing, as this type of meeting is officially called. These briefings take place on a weekly basis and are scheduled to start at nine-fifteen in the morning.1 Meanwhile, I have left the motorway and I am already approaching Laguna Bay. When my car reaches the top of that small hill that one has to pass before the road went down into the town, I enjoy, once more, a glimpse of that breathtaking view. Just in front of me, half to my left, is Laguna Beach – a few hundred metres of white beachfront surrounded by a small promenade. As this is late October and very early in the season, not many people are around. As always, a few surfers are out there, lying on their boards, and waiting for a good wave. From afar, they look like seals with their black diving suits. The shops and small Cafes opposite to the promenade and divided by the main
road, are not yet open. They are built in the same bungalow style manner as the small houses that filled the valley of Laguna Bay.

The only thing that does not fit into this small town image is the Grand Seaside Hotel. Twelve levels high, its monumental facade towers above the rest of the buildings. Palms and stone pines surround its reddish sandstone facade, exposed to the already dazzling sunlight. Like a huge pink cathedral, this building cuts into the small-scale idyllic scenery of Laguna Bay.

After passing the shops, I turn left into Palm Road, passing the garden cafes and shops in the Arcades that surround the hotel. I make another two turns to the left and arrive at the car park, facing the West-front of the hotel. Leaving the car park, I approach the main entry of the hotel on its West side. Normally, one would expect the main entry of the hotel to face the beach. So, when I first arrived at the hotel, I was surprised to find the entry on the opposite side. In fact, I circled twice around the hotel, as I could not believe that what I saw, a rather dull scene with a typical hotel driveway facing a rather ugly car park, was really the main entry. Anyway, I walk through the big revolving glass door that marks the entry to the Grand Seaside.

1.2.2 Waiting for the meeting to commence

When I enter the main entry hall of the Grand Seaside, the air-conditioned climate feels somewhat sterile. As usual, I have arrived fifteen minutes prior to the scheduled meeting time, which allows me to observe the arrival of the participants, to monitor the ways in which they find and take “their” seats, and to listen to their conversations prior to the meeting. The venue for the meeting is usually a small meeting room on the ground level near the reception. This room is one of the regular meeting rooms the hotel rents to guests and conference participants. On occasions when the room is rented out, the Morning Briefing takes place in other venues in the hotel.
The Lobby in which I wait has the character of a large hall. Opposite the door of the meeting room is the main entrance of the hotel. Guests enter or exit the hotel through a large revolving door. This door is made of glass similar to the adjacent large windows. Looking out from the hall, the hotel reveals the view to the street and the roofed driveway, marked by large palms. It takes about ten steps to pass through this narrow section of hall and to the front of the reception desk, a dark-brown timber frontage about 10 metres long, which in hotel jargon is referred to as the frontdesk. Behind the desk is the receptionists' area, located in a niche that is about two metres deep and as long as the frontdesk. On the left wall of the receptionists' area, painted the same pale yellow colour as the rest of the hall, is a board which shows the current exchange rates for the US Dollar, Japanese Yen, and Deutsche Mark. These rates apply when one wants to exchange money at the reception desk. Also to the left side of the frontdesk is a small door though which staff can enter or leave the receptionists' area from the hall. At first sight, this door is not visible. One has the impression that the receptionists' area is somehow separate from the (public) hall. A larger door in the rear wall of the receptionists' area leads to the 'back of house' area of the hotel. In here is the communication area, where equipment for telecommunications is installed, and receptionists answer or connect phone calls and receive or send faxes.

There is a small desk for concierge staff approximately three metres to the left of the front-desk. Here concierge staff wait for guests, whom they can see approaching the hotel through the large revolving door or the adjacent windows. They are expected to approach guests and inquire if they need any help with their luggage. Additionally, concierge staff answer questions or hand out brochures to guests who seek information about the hotel, travel connections, or the local surroundings. Three metres left of the desk, at the outer end of the hall, is a wooden door. This door leads also into the backstage area of the hotel, more precisely into the management offices. A lock with a number code prevents unauthorized access to that area.

The other side of the hall is marked by a huge glass door behind which a large marble staircase leads up to the major conference and meeting facilities on the
second level of the hotel. The stairs are made of the same kind of white and grey marble that covers the whole floor of the entire hall. The middle of the hall is arranged as a lounge area, represented by a few sofas and chairs of dark-green leather, with wooden coffee tables. Here guests can meet, or greet other guests before going out, or simply read the morning papers. Next to the lounge area, between the revolving door and the marble stairs, are the guest lifts to the upper levels of the hotel. Finally, on the left-hand side, between the marble stairs and the door to the meeting room (where I position myself to describe this picture) sweeps a large staircase that leads up to the hotel’s restaurants and the health club on the second level. Many guests use this staircase, as do local residents who make use of the hotel’s facilities.

Directly to my left, underneath the sweep of the staircase, there opens up a space of about twenty square metres. Farthest removed from the bright daylight streaming in through the large windows at the entry-side, although artificially lit with small halogen-lamps, it appears as a dark corner of the hall. Normally, this corner contains additional chairs and coffee tables and is used as an additional (side-) lounge for guests. On special occasions, though, this corner is used for decorative purposes. At Christmas, for instance, the corner area accommodates a large Christmas tree. Then, the floor surrounding the tree is covered by numerous decorative (and empty) Christmas parcels, wrapped in red, blue, green, and yellow glazing paper. The primary purpose seems not to be “selling” Christmas but to adapt the hotel so that it is seen to constitute and conform to the overall socio-cultural mood prevailing at that time of the year.” Yet, this form of decoration is part of marketing the hotel, not only because it links the hotel as a locality to the potential market for Christmas parties.

The Christmas atmosphere is an intangible part of the hotel product. The qualitative features of the time-space in which the hotel service is provided – that is, where services (encounters) are produced and (simultaneously) consumed – is an intrinsic component of the product (service) that is sold. In this respect, creating an atmosphere is a strategy that seeks to appropriate and position the (most) intangible aspect of the hotel as a product. The artefactual composition of the hotel (that is, how it looks, smells, sounds, or feels) is served up, ready for consumption by the
customers' gaze. In other words, the hotel is provided as a tasty sensual “dish”; a locality artificially created for tourists consuming places (Urry, 1995).

Fitting the artefactual composition of the hotel into the larger socio-cultural context means, therefore, adapting it to the hotel managers’ sense of the customers’ taste for authenticity. Yet, not all customers seek to consume dishes that comply with the external socio-cultural world. Theme dinners or events have become increasingly popular; events that seek to break with the parallelism of everyday life and the hotel world. Many of these themes, for instance ‘Phantom of the Opera’, try to capture the extraordinary, the non-authentic; the hotel-experience represents an escape from everyday time and space. Hence, in another sense, (parts of) the hotel moves ‘out of (ordinary) space’. For one evening one may be on a Safari in Africa, or on a Cowboy range in the Midwest of the USA. In any event, the hotel as an experience is not fixed in time and space. It can fall into the rhythm of socio-cultural temporal frames, or, alternatively, it can dislocate from the latter and provide a point and a place beyond experiences rooted in everyday time and space. Most often, though, a hotel has to be both dislocated from, and rooted in, everyday time and space. Although to most customers, the hotel-experience represents something extraordinary, often a welcome break with everyday routines, such a break ought not to be so radical, however, as to endanger the usual zones of familiarity and comfort. The art of hotel management is as much about balancing these two contradictory demands as it is any of the more mundane service aspects.

As it is close to November, the dark corner of the hall is used for decorative purposes. The area is crowded with artifacts that relate to an upcoming major event in Australian (sporting) life: ‘The Melbourne Cup’. Each first Tuesday in November is Melbourne Cup Day, the day when the most important horse race of the Southern Hemisphere takes place. It is hard to overestimate the significance of this event for Australians. By the time the race starts, at about 3:30 in the afternoon, the whole country has come virtually to a standstill. Just about everybody finds themself in
front of a TV either at home, at work, in a TAB* bureau, or in one of the (by this point in time) overcrowded bars.

The Grand Seaside hotel holds a special Melbourne Cup Day function every year. The conference and meeting rooms become betting-offices, all the bars and restaurants are open, and guests are served by waiters and waitresses dressed as if they were jockeys, irrespective of their likely physique for the task! Dozens of TVs are positioned in virtually every corner of the hotel. From about noon until late in the evening the hotel is crowded with people. Many of the female guests will carry somewhat bizarre artifacts on their head, (as the wearing of strange hats is an aspect of the ‘carnival’ atmosphere); some males will appear in black ties, while other people will simply wear a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. In short, the hotel will have an atmosphere that seems to be somewhere between peak-hour in a shopping mall and the liminal space of a carnival.

In preparation for Melbourne Cup Day, the hotel management has decided to decorate the area underneath the spiral staircase following the horseracing theme. The decorative items constituting that theme all relate to the sport. Various bundles of straw have been deposited; decorated pictures of former Melbourne Cup winners are displayed. A colourful jockey-suit is exhibited, as is a large dark-brown stockman’s coat. The centre of the scene is marked by a master-crafted leather-saddle and some equally expensive stockman’s boots all resting on a wooden trestle. On the outer left stands a small TV that displays continuous images of former Melbourne Cup races and their surrounding events. This display serves to reinforce for the observer the significance of the race, recalling its past and present heroes and glorious events.
1.2.3 The meeting participants arrive

While I was observing the scenery, the first participants in the meeting had arrived. Suddenly, Lisa, the manager responsible for housekeeping, stands beside me, gazing at the Melbourne Cup scenery, and says: "It’s nice, isn’t it?" I agree, and we exchange some thoughts about the upcoming race and the prospect that it will be a busy day again at the hotel. Lisa is a woman in her 40s with short blond hair, wearing a pale-green dress. She is usually rather reserved during the meetings, rarely taking a leading role in conversations. Often, she is the first to appear for the meeting, usually carrying a leather notice book under her arm. She looks through the peephole in the door of the meeting room and then returns to stand beside me, facing the inside of the hall, which is the direction from which one would expect other participants to come. Lisa does not seem to have a key for the room. While it would be possible to walk ten metres to the front desk and ask one of the receptionists to unlock the door, or hand over the key, as some people in similar situations might do, I have never seen Lisa do so. She waits until another participant with a key arrives and opens the door.

Several other participants then appear simultaneously. From the left Bill appears. He is the manager responsible for maintenance and equipment. His duties are executing or overseeing tasks as diverse as changing light bulbs, repairing dripping water taps, painting walls and doors, repairing electrical appliances, or adjusting the air conditioning. He is in his 50s, and, although he is not very tall, being fairly stocky, with a small belly, physically he appears to be quite sturdy. His habit is always to wear trousers and a shirt without a jacket (I cannot remember having ever seen him in or even carrying a jacket) and to roll up the sleeves of his shirts, despite that he is wearing a tie. The net effect is one of slight incongruity: the accoutrements of management in dress terms (or at least some of them) without the style that knows how to put them together as an orthodox dress code. In sum, although he is part of the management, his appearance is still that of a handyman. In general, Bill’s mood is very calm and caring, and he is almost paternalistic towards his colleagues throughout the meetings. Whenever, for instance, someone comes late and cannot find a seat, Bill will immediately jump up and organize a seat or offer his own
instead. In short, Bill is a very likeable character. It is his character and paternalistic attitude, as well as the long service he has contributed to the hotel that grants him high status among the hotel managers. It is a status that does not derive primarily from his formal function (which is not as important as that of the controller, for instance). In fact, his informal senior status was epitomized by an incident (which I will report later) when, during one of the meetings, he confronted Tim, the General Manager, openly. It was the only time I ever witnessed someone confronting Tim in that manner.

"How are ya mate?" Bill shakes my hand while his other hand rests on my shoulder for a moment. He has a big smile and his eyes glance cheerfully through his glasses.

Meanwhile, Kyle and Elsa have arrived. Kyle is in her 40s and is responsible for the organization of special events such as Christmas Parties or the annual October Fest. Apart from the organization of those events, she seems to assist wherever additional help is required. During the meeting, she is rather quiet, confining her contributions mainly to formal issues. Elsa is the secretary of Tim, the General Manager. She is in her 50s, and, besides Bill, probably the oldest member of the management team. She has blond hair, wears gold-framed glasses, and dresses in dark trousers combined with a red jacket. She greets everybody very warmly and starts a conversation with Bill about the upcoming Melbourne Cup. Like most of the other participants in the meeting, she is carrying one of the common leather notice books. Although Elsa's position is not that of a manager as such, she attends the Morning Briefings regularly. Ceremonially, she always reads the comments from the guest-questionnaires, which is an important ritual component of the meetings and she often acts as the "GM's voice" on those occasions when he cannot attend the meeting. On such occasions, she will make formal announcements on Tim's behalf. In fact, her seniority status, which is somewhat similar to that of Bill, occasionally allows her to chair the meetings informally – that is, to allocate the rights to speak to respective managers – although the latter is more likely to occur in the absence of the top managers.

Meanwhile Bill has opened the door to the meeting room and switched on the halogen lights integrated into the ceiling. The meeting room is about ten metres long
and six metres wide and has a small niche (two by two metres) attached to its right side, in which additional chairs or tables can be stored. Half way along the left wall is a door that leads to separate lavatories. In the centre of the room one finds several tables combined to create a six by three metres table surrounded by several chairs. Three of the walls are decorated with timber up to the height of about one metre, while the rest are painted pale yellow. The wall opposite the entrance is covered by large mirrors with a cupboard underneath, on which stand a telephone and a few cups and glasses. The latter give this section of the room a character somewhat like a bar. To the right, close to the niche, stands a portable white-board, which was probably left over from a recent meeting of guests. The various glasses and plates that still cover the table belong to the same category of residues. While Bill is phoning for one of the waitresses to collect these items, I join the other in cleaning the table and putting the dishes onto the cupboard.

I have taken my usual seat at the right lower end of the table facing Elsa and Jill, just across the table from them. While Bill is temporarily leaving the room, others arrive. Sascha arrives, the manager responsible for the Conference Department. She is only in her twenties and has just taken over this position after her predecessor left to join her husband in another city. Like most female managers she is wearing a suit (black) and greets everyone with a very friendly “Hello everybody” as she is sitting herself down next to Elsa.

Brett and Nigel enter the room chatting with each other, followed by Matilda. Brett is the Executive Chef of the hotel, the highest position in the hierarchy of chefs. As always for the meetings, he wears his kitchen uniform. After he has taken the seat next to the place where Bill has left his notice book, he puts his kitchen-hat on his thigh, glances around the table, and says “G’day”. Brett is in his 40s and, because of his long service, is one of the senior members of the management team but does not attend the meetings regularly. Quite often one of the Sous-chefs, most often Alex, will take part on his behalf. Nevertheless, he holds quite an influential position in the hotel. All coordination involving the service of either food or beverages (in the hotel jargon referred to as F&B) requires his direct or indirect involvement. All selling as well as purchasing of food and beverages, and hence, the provision of the
menus in the restaurants and at conferences, as well as the provision of food through room service, depend on his prior coordination. He is a tall, sturdy person, with a rather calm attitude, and often seeks to settle conflicts during these meetings. He is not very outspoken, but, whenever he makes a statement, it is likely to meet with respect from his fellow managers.

Nigel, who entered the room together with Brett, is supervisor of the concierges. Although he is only in his late 20s, his hair is already balding. He is wearing the concierge’s uniform of dark-blue trousers and a pale-blue shirt, and sits down to be greeted by his immediate neighbours, Sascha and I. Although he is rather quiet during the meetings, he loves to lead conversations over lunch, where he appears quite talkative. A representative of the concierges is not present at every meeting. More often, Larry, (who appears right now), and who is the head of the reservations, reception and concierge staff, will attend the meetings. He plays an important part in the meeting as he announces part of the “numbers”, more precisely, those representing the occupancy rates of the hotel’s guestrooms. He is in his early 30s and has “started from scratch” at the hotel, previously working as a receptionist.

Matilda is the newly appointed Director for Human Resources. She took over her position just a few months ago, previously heading a nursing home in Tasmania. Her position had been specially created under Tim’s strategy to get “people with degrees” into top-management positions. After being rather reserved in the beginning, in recent weeks she has increasingly tried to become recognized as part of the top-management team. Matilda is about 40 years old, confident and articulate, a sophisticated person.

Finally, Gerald, the “duty manager”, arrives, carrying the “Logbook” under his arm. Duty managers are responsible for security in the building. They have to secure the safety and comfort of customers, which requires, apart from regular “patrols”, noting guests’ complaints, administering emergency help and first aid, or calming down “trouble makers” at the hotel bar. Securing the safety of guests and staff is a 24-hour job. At least one of these managers will always be on duty, which requires them, therefore, to work in shifts. To keep up to date with the events in the hotel, notable
incidents are recorded in a “Logbook” that is passed on from one shift to another. Whomsoever of the duty managers is on duty the morning of the meeting will attend and report from the book all those incidents that have been noted.

1.2.4 The meeting commences

Gerald takes his place and opens the Logbook in front of him and appears ready to start the meeting. He looks around as if to see whether all the expected participants are present and “ready to go”. Most people are still engaged in casual conversations and do not give any indications that they want the meeting to commence.

Elsa looks around and asks who is missing. She adds immediately: “Are there any chairs missing?” Most people do not stop chatting and only Kylie responds: “What about Madeleine?” Elsa does not reply and starts turning pages in her notice book.

Although it is now 9:19, several people are still missing. Bill had left the room a while ago and has not returned yet. Occasionally, Bill will be called out of one of the meetings or leave earlier in case there are any (technical) problems, troubles, or breakdowns. The fact that he left his notice book open at the table, suggests that his absence will only be short-term.

Tim has not arrived yet either. Although he attends most of the morning briefings, it is common that he appears late, while the meeting is already well under way. Occasionally, he does not attend at all. On such occasions, when he might be on a business trip or a meeting at corporate level of the company, he will normally send his apologies through Elsa. In this respect, meetings will often start and proceed without waiting for Tim to arrive.

However, there is also another person missing, whose presence is (normally) obligatory for the meeting to commence. Madeleine, the controller, is “the most important person in the hotel”, at least according to some managers. This comment
was always made with an ironic undertone that referred to a perception of the Grand Seaside Hotel as “a very number-driven organization”; a perception that is common among managers. She did a university degree in finance before joining the hotel a few years ago. She started as an accountant and when the current general manager, Tim, took over his position, she replaced him as controller. Despite her youth, Madeleine holds one of the key positions in the hotel. She is not only responsible for the budget and controls the financial performance of each department, Madeleine has also become something like the GM’s right hand after the position of Assistant General Manager became a victim of the recent restructuring in the hotel.

As the thesis will later show, Madeleine’s position is also highly relevant in the constitution of managerial discourse. By controlling the numbers, Madeleine controls an important element of managerial language, constitutive of organizational reality. Hence, she occupies, consciously or not, the position of a gatekeeper for organizational meaning. To most managers and employees, however, her role appears vital because in it she “embodies” the demands the hotel addresses to its members. As one manager put it: “Everything has to be justified in terms of numbers here”. This position, however, leaves Madeleine in a rather ambivalent position. While having been an ordinary accountant until recently, she has made it to the small number of top executives in a very short time. Being the boss to some of her former colleagues does not seem to be an easy task. In addition, being the controller means to some extent “being feared rather than well liked”. This ambivalence can be seen, in part, in response to her appearance. Madeleine, in her late 20s, is tall, with long dark blond hair and is attractive and well spoken. Still, she appears rather shy and seems less than comfortable when she has to give orders to other managers. Most of the time she will lead conversations in a rather matter-of-fact way, keeping conversations quite formal. In sum, she still seems to be coming to terms with her new position and the authority attached to it.

When Madeleine arrives, chatting with Bill, she sits down to my right at the utmost right corner of the room. Next to her, on the side of the table opposite to the door sit Nigel and Sascha. On the side of the table opposite to my place sit Elsa, Kyle, and
Lisa, whereas Gerald and Brett sit with the door to their back. Finally, Bill has taken the place to my left.

Most people seem to have noticed that the round of meeting participants is complete, as the chatting ceases. Gerald looks around again, waits for a moment of silence and then starts reading from the Logbook.

Gerald: Yes, we had three power breakdowns, which also affected the gas system. And then, of course, there was the fire alarm on Saturday.

Bill: Stop it! That's my story. (He is laughing)

Gerald: Apart from that: not much to report actually. It was a quite busy weekend with the large X-company conference. But, surprisingly, no major problems.

Short pause.

Gerald: There has been a problem with the warm water in room 605. The water was only lukewarm.

Gerald looks at Bill.

Bill: Well, that's surprising. I mean, we had problems before, but that's actually fixed. The water system is designed in such a way that it runs in a cycle up to the roof where it will be recycled into the system. (Bill uses his pen to draw an imaginary blueprint of the water system on the table.) So, there is constantly a circulation of all the hot water. So, if they tell me that the water is lukewarm only in one room, that's virtually impossible. It will affect either all or none.

Gerald: Well, I checked, and they are right. But, maybe it's something with the taps or so.

Bill: Yeah, may be. I'll look into it. (He writes something in his notebook.)
Gerald: So, but that's about it. As I said, no major problems.

Gerald has hardly finished his last sentence when Madeleine takes over and starts to announce the numbers. As usual, she talks very fast, almost bombarding the people with numbers. I try to jot down the numbers but I can hardly keep up with her pace.

Madeleine: We were fully booked again on Friday. We have an average rate of 220. 45 per cent on Sunday. Monday on 33. So, we are pretty good so far. The October-Fest seems to be really working well.

Gerald: Yeah, they were quite busy the whole weekend in the bar. It's going extremely well.

Elsa: Maybe we should also have a November- and January-Fest. (Most people laugh.)

Madeleine: So, we are doing extremely well for this time of the year. Only the functions-revenue is still a bit behind budget, but they will certainly make that up with the incoming conferences now. (Madeleine looks to Sascha who nods her head.) All the other departments are above budget.

Madeleine puts the first page, from which she has just read the numbers aside. She looks at the second page in front of her and after a brief pause she continues talking.

Madeleine: Another thing is the new superannuating legislation. There are first of all changes for people with higher income due to come. Those earning over 70,000 pay an extra six per cent as tax. Also, according to the government we have to offer each new employee the choice of five different superannuating providers. As you now, so far we've got the relation with XXX-Insurance for all staff. From now on, we have to offer five different ones with no recommendations to be made. There are problems involved of course. It requires changes in software, for instance, as our current system is only designed for one scheme. And we also have to do a bit of research in finding five reasonable companies. And Debra (an accountant, working in the
hotel, DB), who looks after superannuation, is more than busy with
the one scheme already. So, it will bring about some problems.

Brett: Why are they doing this? I mean, do we have to offer this to each new
employee?

Madeleine: Well, I don't really know why they do this, where the government is
coming from. Maybe it's a retirement issue that they want people to
take more responsibility for their pensions and so on and that they
plan for themselves. Maybe it's also because they want to have more
variety and offer more choices to employees. But I mean we already
had actually different programs with only having the contract with
XXX, so there was already a choice available. Anyway, according to
the law we have to offer it to new employees and from July next year
the existing employees also have to get the choice between the five.

Sascha: But they could, for instance, all decide to stay with XXX?

Madeleine: Theoretically. But there is the thing that we are not supposed to give
any recommendations. So we have to advertise for all of them.

Bill: Is it also possible that one could choose another company not
belonging to the five?

Madeleine: As I understand it we are not required to accommodate for the specific
wishes of the individual employee. I think that's not the case. We
only have to offer the choice out of five.

Madeleine sorts out the pages she has in front of her. After another short pause she
goes on by talking again about the numbers.

Madeleine: As I said. We are going OK so far. We have started this month very
well, so that I expect us, actually, to end even further ahead of budget.
Currently, we are just 50 ahead of budget. But, with this result we are
just over last year's result. Last year we had been behind by this time.
Remember, last year we were behind almost until February by about
250. Somehow, we were still able to catch up and finish 250 ahead of
budget.
Bill: That was quite amazing. I mean, this was actually after the boom period. And we still caught up and finished ahead. (Many people nod their heads, which seems to suggest concurrence.)

Madeleine: Yes, surprisingly, we picked all that up after the high season.

Bill: So, we didn’t make money when we were supposed to, and instead we made the money afterwards.

Madeleine: Yes, it’s funny. We were picking up almost two percent per day at that time. But again, I don’t want us to have to achieve such a miracle again. So, there is still a lot to do to not fall behind again. (She sorts out some of her pages, and continues to read from those pages.)

Madeleine: November looks above budget so far, but also not really great. December is a little bit softer. January and February sitting well so far. But as I said, we are not that well ahead, so we really have to be on top of the cost this time, from day one on. (She looks up.) So, that’s it.

As soon as Madeleine has closed, Elsa takes over.

Elsa: The questionnaires. Well, there is again a problem with families and kids in The Ocean. Did they let kids into The Ocean again?

Gerald: Yes. I’ve talk to Leo (the manager of The Ocean, DB). Basically, he wants to have a clear policy at hand, and he thinks that such a policy should be developed for this issue.

Madeleine: But we have got the policies. It’s clear that kids cause major problems in there. I know it’s a sensitive issue. I mean, we cannot possibly discriminate on the basis of age. There was just such a court decision to that matter.

Gerald: Well, he feels he wants to have a clear decision to be made whether kids are allowed in there or not.

Elsa: Well, that decision has been made!

Elsa looks to Madeleine who nods her head. Elsa continues to read form the next guest questionnaire.
Elsa: Tea bags don't live up to the level that one should expect on the fifth floor.\textsuperscript{vi}

Elsa looks at Lisa.

Elsa: What's wrong with those tea bags? We never had any complaints before.

Lisa: I don't know. They are all the same on the whole floor.

Both look at each other. They raise their shoulders and looking as in disbelief at this complaint. Then Elsa continues.

Elsa: The health club's facilities are excellent. (Takes this card away and reads from the next.) Enjoyed our stay. (She takes the next card and spends a short moment reading it.)

Elsa: The Garden Terrace\textsuperscript{vii} was not worth the money. The staff was unfriendly and the menu was poor. (She suspends reading for a moment and looks at the other people.) Maybe we should send out an apology?

Gerald: That's already been done Elsa puts away this card and starts reading from the next.)

Elsa: Pleasant stay. (She stops reading for a moment, raises her head and looks at the other people) Maybe, we should give them a category 'above average' or so? I think we had this before. Some guests feel that service might be above average but not really excellent. So may be we should give them an additional choice?

Elsa does not wait for any response and continues reading the questionnaires.

Elsa: Whether we could offer them check out at 4 p.m.?
She shakes her head as in disbelief. Many of the other participants make similar gestures, some utter even disfavouring comments about this complaint. Elsa continues reading.

Elsa: Service was poor. Well hang on. This was in The Ocean. I don't know what was wrong there. (Looks up to the other people.)

Gerald: Maybe this was because of the noise from those kids.

Elsa does not wait for any further comments and continues reading.

Elsa: Breakfast was very good in The Breakfast Garden.

She puts this card away and continues reading without pausing.

Elsa: Time enjoyed. (Takes next card.)

Elsa: Service and hotel facilities are excellent. (Takes next card.)

Elsa: The coffee in The Garden Terrace is bad. (Short pause) So, that's it. (Elsa looks at Kyle who sits to her right.)

As soon as Elsa has finished, Matilda takes over by simply starting to talk. Some people look a bit surprised at her, as she takes over in a way that does not comply with the order of seating.

Matilda: Not much from me, actually. Just a reminder that the All Staff Meeting is on the 28th. But, that's it. (She looks at Kyle at her left.)

Kyle: Well, we had a quiet Saturday, but we had super comments about the Spring-Bowl. The whole event was super and especially the theming was excellent.

Bill: Yes. I think this was really super-duper. The boys and girls up there did a terrific job. The band was brilliant. I mean, they really got into it and people were dancing like mad. And all the people were very elegantly dressed. I'd say 80 per cent of the men had dinner suits.
Kyle: Yes, we had one guy who came in jeans and a T-shirt. At first, we were almost going to say something. But, you did not have to say anything. You could simply see how embarrassed that guy was and that he felt very uncomfortable. He also complained to his girlfriend, who apparently didn't inform him that he was supposed to wear a suit.

Elsa: But I mean, what did he expect? (She shakes her head as in disbelief.)

Bill is laughing.

Bill: Well, and some of the blokes up there made funny comments: "Nice suit, mate!" and so on. (Bill is shaking in laughter, many others laugh too.)

Kyle: So, we did not have to say anything, you could really see he felt uncomfortable and embarrassed.

Kyle: So, that was all from me. (She looks to her right and Lisa takes over.)

Meanwhile the door has opened and Tim has arrived. Without saying anything, he sits down in the last empty chair to Bill's left.

Lisa: Not much from me; just busy. (Looks to her right where Brett sits.)

Tim: Did you tell about the beds?

Lisa: Oh, yeah . . . we will start our bed-sale on the 26th. We will sell all the old beds and they'll be advertised.

Bill: Just make sure that you will get the money. Don't give anything out before they have paid, like you did it last time. Then you are just chasing around to get the money. (Lisa nods her head.)

Madeleine: No, nothing goes out without payment. They have to go to finance first, pay the money, and then they go with their receipt to Lisa and get their beds. There won't be any chasing up of money.

Tim: There are still some problems with housekeeping. The bar area was repeatedly the source of complaints. (He looks at Lisa.) You know how seriously I take customer service, so make sure that it will be cleaned properly in the future. (His voice was determined but not
rude. Lisa mumbles something like “Yes, of course” and writes something in her notebook.)

After a short moment of silence, Brett takes over.

Brett: It was a pretty busy weekend. Pretty busy, but good. No major problems. We are still organizing the veal. So, we are gearing up for the Melbourne Cup. But otherwise, no major problems. Just very busy.

Brett seems to have almost finished when he turns to Lisa.

Brett: Oh yeah, just one thing. We had this conference in on Thursday and with it a lot of kids. And when they come from the Beach they'll leave all the sand in the lift. It's not a big thing, I know. It's just that I realized all the sand in the lift and it may put off some people.

Bill: No, that's a very good hint I think. It's very reasonable. I realized this too.

Lisa: (nods her head and notes something down): OK.

Tim: I agree. You know that customer service is the most crucial part of the business. I always accept apologies, but not when it comes to customer service. Last night I saw a report on TV about a hotel in Japan. You know what they do? They give all the guests a choice of pillows. You know, some people like soft pillows, others sleep rather hard. So, they give you the choice what kind of pillow you would like. (Looks again at Lisa.) So, maybe you could look into this. Maybe we could do the same. (Lisa nods again with her head while making notes.)

Tim looks at Bill so as to hand over to him.

Bill: Yes, we had three power cut-downs on Friday with the storm, and each time it affected our gas supply as well. Yes, and there was the fire. We were actually very lucky. The sprinkler put out the fire, but
it flooded the room and the stairs completely. So, we have to replace
the carpets, etc. The staff reacted terrifically and did everything
absolutely correctly. Everybody did what they were suppose to do,
there was no panic, no running around. Everything as it should have
been. (Makes a short pause.). In that respect, I'm also considering
taking away the straw from the decoration out there (he is referring to
the Melbourne Cup decoration). For security reasons.

Kyle: But it looks so nice.

Bill: It's right under the stairs, and if somebody drops a cigarette from
above or so, we have a major problem and I will probably go to jail.

Elsa: We have to rethink the decoration anyway. Yesterday, one of the
concierge staff found a guy who was about to steal the leather boots
out there and another tried to put the Akubra™ on his head.

Gerald: Sometimes you wonder where these guys come from.

Elsa: So maybe we put only the left shoe out like in a shoe shop. It's silly, I
know, but . . .

Tim takes over and says, "Nigel!"

Nigel: Nothing from me actually just busy.

Tim to Nigel: Just a reminder to you that the frontdesk is a public area for customer
service and not for socializing of staff; even if they are not busy with a
guest at that moment. Sometimes when you pass by there, the guys
from concierge are chatting with each other or hanging around. This
does not lead to a good impression, if guests are passing by. This
morning I saw even Celine (an administrative assistant, DB) standing
around there having a chat with some of the guys. I mean, she is not
even from reservations; so what does she have to do there? So, please
inform your staff: The frontdesk is not a staff room! It's not a chatting
area!

Nigel: Okay.
After a moment of silence, Tim as well as some others look at Sascha who is sitting to Nigel's right. Sascha suddenly becomes aware that it is her turn and she begins.

Sascha: Right. We had a very good weekend. The Spring Ball went fantastically.

Bill interrupts her.

Bill: Yes, I'd like to add to this. The guys and girls up there really did a fantastic job. Everybody was extremely busy, and you could see that they were really busy, and still they managed everything just like that. (He snaps with his fingers. Mumbling and head nodding occurs around the table, which indicates general concurrence.)

Bill is looking to Brett.

Bill: Tell your guys that they did a terrific job and that we really enjoyed the evening. They really made it something special. (Brett nods his head.)

Bill: I mean, some of these guys stayed there until 4 a.m. to clean up everything. So, I'd really like to see something happening there; we should give them some reward. (Bill looks at Tim and then at Elsa who nods her head and makes some notes.)

After a moment of silence, Sascha takes over again.

Sascha: It's going to be a quiet week until Thursday, many small business meetings. On Thursday, X-Company comes in. This is going to be a large one, with about 300 people. They'll have a Phantom of the Opera theme on Friday night. (Sascha looks at Brett who is jotting down some notes.) Y-Company is still in and they'll stay until Tuesday. They've got the Victoria-Lobby on Saturday. They were actually supposed to have the Ocean-Terrace for a Barbecue, but they have predicted some rain and the Victoria-Lobby is the only wet-
weather place where we could put them. So, there won't be a seafood-buffet this time. (Sascha looks somewhat apologetic to Tim.)

Tim: Why is that? (He looks at Sascha.)

Brett answers instead.

Brett: It's because we would be losing too many seats; so, we lose out.
Tim: But we've got 150 places in there; you won't fill them all.
Lisa: But on Saturday night!
Brett: Well, on Saturday 130 or 140 is quite normal.
Tim: But why did you cancel the buffet?
Brett: It's because we make more money with the menus.
Tim: Yes, but you can't simply cancel the buffet. We promised it and advertised it to the guests. That's a very short-term view. You can't risk upsetting your customers for a little financial gain. You have to think more about the long-term effects.
Brett: Yes but, it's just that we thought . . . (He seeks eye contact with Sascha) . . . but OK.

Tim: Next time you'll know. It's my policy . . . or better, it's not my policy but this is what we owe to our customers.

A moment of silence.

Tim is looking at Sascha.

Tim: Just another point. It would be nice if we could get a bit more decent paper for the board at the concierge.

Sascha: Yes OK. It was just that we had so many conferences that the normal board was already full. So, we had to hang some paper out to inform the people.

Madeleine: Why don't you simply borrow another board for such occasions.
Tim: Yes, you should do that. You see, it's just that the concierge lobby is the first place that every customer passes through when he enters the
hotel. So it’s a sort of a symbol for the service you can expect here and that’s why it has to look tops. OK?

Sascha nods her head.

Sascha: Yeah well, the local City council comes in as well. On Saturday. But they are just in for that day. So, that’s all.

According to the table order, Sascha was actually the last person to speak. Most people look around to see whether somebody has still anything to say or whether the meeting will be closed. Suddenly, Matilda takes over again.

Matilda looks at Tim.

Matilda: It’s just because you are here. I am still organizing our ‘A Night Away Dinner.

Tim: Still?

Matilda: There are still some controversies about the date. It’s hard to get all the members of the management team together on one evening. Currently, it looks like it’s going to be on a Monday in the second week of December.

Elsa is laughing.

Elsa: That’s when Tim is away. (Many people are laughing.)

Gerald: That’s his golf-day. (More laughter.)

Tim is smiling.

Tim: No, No, No! You just go ahead with your planning. But tell me soon enough what night it’s going to be on and I will schedule my holidays around it.

Again, a moment of silence and people look at each other and around the table.
Tim: Anything else? . . . (Looks around the table and waits a few seconds.)
. . . Well, that's it.

People get up and start to go out, many of them chatting in pairs or small groups.

After having experienced a typical Morning Briefing and after having met most members of the management team, we will leave, for now, the scene of the meeting only to return to some sequences at a later stage in the thesis. In other words, having set the scene for the construction of the (research) narrative that will gradually develop over the following chapters, we will now address some conceptual issues relating to the nature of this construction. The next chapter, therefore, will address epistemological and methodological discussions relating to the process/product of ethnographic research. It will do this by drawing attention to some of the implications of reading/writing ethnography in a postmodern world.
2 Writing an ethnographic thesis in a postmodern world: Some methodological remarks

The research I conducted for this thesis centred on a fourteen-month organizational ethnography exploring the restructuring of a large five-star hotel in an Australian coastal town; the "Grand Seaside Hotel" as I have decided to call it in the thesis. During the fourteen-month research period, I conducted formal and informal interviews with management and staff in the hotel, worked together with, or followed, managers in the conduct of their everyday routines, and attended regular meetings by management as well as training courses and other social events. Additionally, I interviewed stakeholders in the industry, among them representatives from industrial associations, unions, and private businesses, such as Professional Conference Organizers.

At the outset I chose ethnography as the primary method of research most appropriate for studying a 'flexible organization'. There were several reasons for turning to ethnography. First, ethnography represents a mode of social research that seeks to explore the nature of social phenomena in depth, using a small number of cases, often only a single one. Second, it (usually) does not apply predefined concepts (hypotheses) to the research field in an attempt to test their validity, as in positivist research; instead, it proceeds inductively, building research accounts from the field studied and, in doing so, transposing a sense of the research field for readers. A considerable part of the thesis, therefore, will comprise thick description (Geertz, 1973) of everyday life in the organization, most notably, of ritual events such as meetings and ceremonies. Such thick description will be used to provide a selective, yet detailed, account of everyday life in the organization. Third, since its beginnings (and increasingly in recent years), ethnography has been concerned with the issue of meaning, focussing on the interpretation/translation of human behaviour as meaningful social action (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1996). Because of this
tendency, ethnography may be regarded as being closely associated with
developments in organization studies, such as the ‘turn to language’ (Clegg, 1975
and 1987; Astley and Zammuto, 1992), which have considerably altered the
understanding of theory and research proper. In short, in ethnography there is a long
tradition of acknowledging the symbolic nature of social reality. Hence,
ethnography seems ideally suited to explore issues of knowledge, power, and
meaning in the context of flexible organizations, particularly, since issues of
meaning and symbolism, as I will argue below, have not been sufficiently
acknowledged in discussions of flexibility.

For more than a decade ethnographic approaches have been the subject of intense
discussion among academics from various fields. The inspiration for this discussion
derives from social anthropology and interpretive sociology (Clifford, 1988; Clifford
and Marcus, 1986; Denzin 1997; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Hammersley, 1992;
Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Rosaldo, 1989; Rosen, 1991). Authors from the field of
organization studies (Alvesson, 1993; Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Clegg, 1975 and
1989; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Czarniawska, 1997; Jeffcutt, 1993; Knights and
Willmott, 1989; Linstead, 1993 and 1994) have also contributed to this discussion,
often calling for a paradigmatic change in the analysis of organizations. In
particular, postmodern approaches to management and organization studies (Boje,
1996; Boje et al. 1996; Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Gergen, 1992; Jeffcutt, 1993;
Linstead, 1998 and 2000; Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992) have broken with
previous contra-paradigms, such as structuralism (Lévi-Strauss, 1967), symbolic
interactionism (Blumer, 1969), and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1965). These had
dominated, or at least influenced, ethnographic methodology for decades.
Meanwhile, a more radical assault has been launched on ‘traditional’ modes of
organizational analysis, questioning the status of reality, knowledge, and truth as
guiding principles and as criteria for the adequacy of social analysis. Postmodern
organizational analysis marks the transition from a focus on interpretation to a
concern for representation; a process during which "reality" or "truth" becomes an
effect and not an absolute position, an outcome of a particular reading of the
privileged orderings of a text by an author" as Jeffcutt (1993: 27) expresses it.
In the following section I will review, briefly, some of the recent debates in the field of ethnography as far as they are relevant to the context of this thesis. Most importantly, I will draw attention to the recently proclaimed crisis of representation (Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Denzin, 1997) and its consequences for ethnographic research.

2.2. Ethnography and the crisis of interpretation/representation

When exploring the issue of ethnographic research, we may start by asking what is it that we actually do when we are doing ethnographic research? Various answers to this question have emerged since the early days of ethnography (which could be traced back at least to the turn of the last century century). Meanwhile, the field of ethnographic research has undergone several transformations and processes of redefinition. Following Denzin (1997) we can identify a traditional period during which ‘lone ethnographers’ (Rosaldo, 1989) studied remote and exotic places to write ‘objective’ and colonizing accounts about the cultures encountered. We can distinguish this period, which was linked with the names of Boas, Frazer, Malinowski, Mead, Readcliffe-Brown, and others, from a modernist era, which commenced after the Second World War. Modernist ethnography was mainly concerned with raising the ‘scientific’ status of ethnography by developing a canon of rigorous (often quasi-quantitative) methods, as in Grounded Theory, for example (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

At the centre of the third phase, that of blurred genres, was the seminal contribution of Clifford Geertz (1973 and 1983). This era marked a shift from the objective observer perspective of positivist forms of ethnography towards a stronger focus on the subjects’ points of view – a shift that had been anticipated by the Chicago School of the 1930s (Denzin, 1997; Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Geertz rejected what he saw as the totalizing claims to truth, objectivity, and reliability of positivism – for him cultural theory is diagnostic not predictive (1973). Instead, he called for a focus on
the meanings of cultural practices and artifacts, for the use of *thick description* in an attempt to unveil "the object of ethnography: a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures" (Geertz, 1973: 6).

Yet, Geertz' turn to meaning also implied a fundamental break with the earlier tradition of ethnography by allocating a new role to the researcher. Replacing the 'lone ethnographer' – who was lionized, as a super-human, all-knowing, and all-comprehending expert of other cultures (Denzin, 1998) – was a more moderate identity. The modesty of the new identity struggled with the seemingly inextricable riddle of other peoples' states of minds: their intuited meanings, intentions, and feelings. At best those who seemed to make problematic what was self-evident to the members of the cultures being researched constituted themselves as a "harmless idiot" by those studied (Barley, 1983). In the face of what it saw as the irresolvable indexicality of meaning, this more moderate and innovative attitude to the study of culture asked researchers to abstain from grand-theorizing and to focus on local contexts and the production of local knowledge instead (Geertz, 1983). The new role granted to researchers implied, further, that the products of the researcher's preoccupation with the field became problematic.

[In the study of culture, analysis penetrates into the very body of the object – that is, we begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematize those ...] with the result that] anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot (Geertz, 1973: 15, insertion and emphasis. DB).

This means "the line between mode of representation and substantive content is undrawable in cultural analysis as it is in painting" (Geertz, 1973: 16). Somewhat emphatically expressed: Ethnography is inscription! The attempt to fix meaning, to rescue the said from the saying (Geertz, 1983). The ethnographer does not 'discover' social reality, she or he *inscribes* it, writes it down (Geertz, 1973: 19). As Denzin puts it: "There is, in the final analysis, no difference between writing and fieldwork" (1998: 21, emphasis DB).
The fourth period in the history of ethnography constitutes, according to Denzin (1997 and 1998), a crisis of representation. Authors such as Clifford (1988), Clifford and Marcus (1986), Marcus and Fischer (1986), and Rosaldo (1989) extended Geertz’ critiques by overtly questioning past practices and criteria of research such as objectivity, validity, or reliability. New forms of writing were sought that acknowledge multiple perspectives and provided a medium that allowed different voices to be heard (van Maanen, 1988). New criteria for research were established (Altheide and Johnson, 1998; Denzin, 1997; Hammersley, 1992). Simultaneously, these authors called for greater (self-) reflexivity in the conduct and writing of ethnographic research, situating the researcher/writer in his or her social context.

Yet, suggestions for a new form of writing did not go unchallenged. By launching a fifth historical period, standpoint epistemologists (e.g. Clough, 1994; Trinh, 1989 and 1992), questioned the virtue of new forms of writing. They did so by pointing to the essentially socially constructed (and, hence, socially constituted) nature of ethnographic research, which implies that ethnographic texts cannot be separated from the social constituents (gender, ethnicity, age) of their producers. Hence, experiments with literary criticism, New Journalism, and performance art, as reference points for ethnographic inquiry and expression, have emerged. These aim at extending the scope of as well as breaking down traditionally established academic borders (see Denzin 1997 for an overview).

In sum, the current stage of ethnography is characterized as much by a crisis of representation as it is by a crisis of legitimation – at least to those for whom the definition of a shared canon of methods and principles represents the foundation of any scientific field. What is proposed, at present, is a new mode of thinking, writing, and researching; perhaps, one that is more aesthetic and poetic than (traditionally) scientific and that opens up a space for saying the unsayable (Linstead, 1998 and 2000). This situation, however, makes it more difficult for researchers to find their way through the field and to justify (legitimize) what they produce in and from the research field as ethnography. This holds true, particularly, when ethnographic research provides the foundation for an academic thesis – a form of writing that
traditionally strives to be expressive, representationally, of what passes for academic rigour in any epoch. In what follows, the ethnographic approach used in this thesis is introduced and legitimised.

2.2 Bricolage and bricolating: Ethnography as product and process

2.2.1 Ethnography as bricolage

What is it that we actually do when we are doing ethnographic research? The metaphor that I find most illuminative in describing the process and product of ethnographic research can be traced back to Lévi-Strauss (1966) and has recently been advocated by a number of authors (Denzin, 1998; Linstead 1996; Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1990). To Denzin, ethnography resembles a *bricolage*:

> a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation that changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques are added to the puzzle (1998: 3).

What is noteworthy in Denzin's characterization of ethnography as bricolage is his emphasis on the socially constructed nature of the research object.

> The product of the bricoleur's labor is a bricolage, a complex, dense, reflexive, collagelike creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis (1998: 4).

Denzin here points to an important issue: the ethnographic account provided by a researcher is, and always remains, a representation of his or her own understanding of what is going on in the field. Hence, there is no unfiltered way of directly representing the experiences of those studied. This insight counteracts the intentions of those interpretive ethnographers who see the aim of ethnography as being the true, accurate, and reliable representation of the meanings and intentions of the people studied in the field. Drawing on the work of Dilthey, Bruner summarizes the consequences of this post-positivist and, arguably, post-realist condition as follows:
The critical distinction here is between reality (what is really out there, whatever that may be), experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness), and expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated). In a life history . . . the distinction is between life as lived (reality), life as experienced (experience), and life as told (expressions). Only a naïve positivist would believe that expressions are equivalent to reality . . . there are inevitable gaps between reality, experiences, and expressions (Bruner, 1986: 6f.; emphasis DB).

In other words, there is no ethnographic account that is ‘thick’ enough to bridge the ultimate gap between meaning and representation (Bruner, 1986). This holds true in principle, although some realists stress an equivocation with this thesis in noting that

[O]ne is not logically driven to accept solipsism simply because research and reason indicate that “bedrock objectivity” is unattainable when human beings driven by meanings and perspective – science – attempt to study systematically the activities and meanings of fellow humans (Altheide and Johnson, 1998).

2.2.2 Ethnography and (radical) constructivism

Taking up Denzin’s insight that ethnographic accounts are ethnographers’ creations, we may go one step further in suggesting that there is not even a research field or object to be studied, unless it is one constructed by the researcher. In other words, one of the aims of this thesis is to use ethnographic methods to construct an account of an Australian Coastal Hotel – more precisely, of the culture of that hotel – as an object of research. Hence, I will attempt to (authentically) represent the hotel ‘out there’. The Grand Seaside Hotel is a social construction: mine no less than of those who work there (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; von Glasersfeld, 1995; Maturana and Varela, 1980 and 1992).

Researchers construct the object of their study instead of discovering or representing it as it is ‘out there’. This insight constitutes a centrepiece of social constructivism. It is shared by constructivists across a range of academic disciplines as diverse as biology (Maturana and Varela, 1980 and 1992), neurophysiology (Roth, 1991, 1992 and 1997), cognitive science (von Foerster, 1987 and 1991), philosophy and
psychology (Gergen, 1991 and 1999; Roth, 1991, 1992 and 1997; Schmidt, 1987; Varela and Thompson, 1992; von Glasersfeld, 1995), or sociology (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Luhmann, 1987). What the authors mentioned have in common is a mode of conceptualizing human behaviour and knowledge that can be labelled (radical) constructivist.\textsuperscript{xy}

As this thesis will not discuss issues of epistemological constructivism in depth (see the various contributions in Schmidt, 1987 and 1992 for a comprehensive discussion), I will only summarize a few core assumptions that are relevant for the context of this thesis and the research conducted for that purpose. First, perception is not representation (Abbildung) of an objective reality but a process of construction through the human brain (Roth, 1991 and 1997). Second, individuals (as human systems) perceive by drawing differences – the ultimate difference being the one between them (as system) and their environment (ibid.). Hence, identification of something happens, as a result of the process of applying a difference – of identifying what something is not (ibid.). This process is selective and, simultaneously, a process of creating/apply meaning (by identifying what something is not). This means, third, that perception (Wahrnehmung) is interpretation (Schmidt, 1987).

From such a perspective, the seemingly puzzling suggestion that the Grand Seaside is a social construction becomes less alienating, once we look closer at the actual process of conducting the research. There is nothing given that constitutes the hotel as such. The hotel has no essence. Even those temporal spatial artifacts, such as walls, windows, doors, etc., that constitute the hotel as a building, do not provide markers for an outside and inside, as the thesis will later show. Space, for instance, is something that is socially (and temporally) defined at the Grand Seaside – and its definition is often contested. Nor can we unreflectively assume that the hotel, as a social construct, exists as a temporally and spatially fixed entity. Again, I will provide an elaboration on this assertion in a later part of the thesis.

The process of researching (and in doing so constructing the research object) is, of course, selective. This selection commences with the decision of what should be the
‘object’ of the study. During the 14 months of my field research, I focussed on several aspects of everyday life in the organization. I had to abandon my initial intention to ‘capture’ the hotel as a totality, that is, to give an almost all-embracing description of life in the hotel. The size of the hotel, the number of staff and guests, and the complexity of the operations urged me, in the face of limited resources, to be very selective indeed. Because of the sheer facticity of spatial and temporal constraints, I concentrated on studying the conference department and regular management meetings rather than explore other events or sites. Hence, the research account is not only (necessarily) incomplete but is also heavily influenced by the experiences encountered and constituted during the research.

Selectivity, however, does not inevitably imply that one is at a disadvantage. When we step beyond the modernist approach to ethnography and its commitment to reproduction of research objects – measured against parameters such as validity, reliability, authenticity, etc. – we may admit that different forms of representation grant access to different realities, without one being intrinsically superior to the other. As Geertz (1973 and 1983) has noted, the objects studied in social (ethnographic) research are not ‘read off from the field’. Ethnographic accounts do not simply mirror the object studied (e.g. a particular culture or corporation), let alone are they capable of representing the meanings of those studied in an unfiltered way.

_Ethnographic description, however, is not to be confused with recounting that would be provided by the actors in the social setting. It is, instead, a construction cast in the theory and language of the describer and his or her audience_ (Rosen, 1991: 12, emphasis DB).

What do we do when we construct (inscribe) reality and what sort of product does this process produce? The answer I will provide owes much to writers who have been leading proponents in what we could call the ‘textual approach’ in organization studies and ethnography (Astley and Zammuto, 1992; Clegg, 1975 and 1987; Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux, P., 1994; Czarniawska, 1997; Deetz, 1992 and 1998; Denzin, 1998; Geertz, 1973 and 1983; Linstead 1996). It is also
heavily influenced by contributions of radical constructivists to matters of cognition and knowledge, as mentioned above. In short, I will claim that ethnographic research can be described as a process of recursive writing and reading — or inscribing and interpreting, if one prefers. What is read/written are texts, which provide the 'matter' for ethnographic research.

According to Rosen, ethnography is concerned with the deciphering of meaning and is, as such, “largely an act of sensemaking, the translation from one context to another of action in relation to meaning and meaning in relation to action” (1991: 12). Czarniawska goes one step further in identifying the process and product of social research as radically textual (narrative). When following Czarniawska’s doctrine that any “meaningful action is to be considered as a text, and vice versa” (1997: 13), we may concur that “conversations in particular and human actions in general are enacted narratives” (ibid.; emphasis in original).

“In the social science there is only interpretation”, as Denzin reminds us (1998: 313, emphasis DB). In the social sciences we are always dealing with signs or arrangements of signs such as texts. The texts that constitute the object of social research, however, appear in various forms. According to Denzin, such texts can take on the form of “ordinary talk and speech, inscriptions of that speech in the form of transcriptions, written interpretations based on talk and its inscriptions, and performances of those texts” (1997: xiii, emphasis DB). We may add, in reference to Czarniawska (1997), a fifth form: the enactment of texts as in observable social action. The sixth form is that of manifested or corporeal texts as in the case of social artifacts (e.g. architecture or art). In other words, what we encounter during ethnographic research are different forms of field texts, “constructed representations of experience” (Clandinin and Conelly, 1997: 169). These texts are constructed, as we shall see soon, in an interactive relationship between researcher, those studied, and an (assumed) audience, a reader/listener to the texts.
2.2.3 Ethnography, texts, and stories

Let me recapitulate, briefly, the discussion so far. The ‘matter’, or if one prefers the ‘product’, of ethnographic research is various forms of texts. Such texts are representations of experience as constructed either by those studied (what we could call ‘raw-data’) or, more commonly, they are filtered through the ethnographer. Frequently, individuals tend to record their experiences in the form of stories; most notably, because stories represent the most common and persuasive way of communicating experiences (Clandinin and Conelly, 1997). Hence, ethnographers will most likely have to concern themselves with stories in and about the field – tales of the field to use van Maanen’s (1988) expression. This is why “ethnography is a storytelling institution” (van Maanen, 1995: 3).

A number of writers have stressed the importance of stories for organizational studies (Boje, 1991; Gabriel, 1998; Clandinin and Conelly, 1997; Mumby, 1988). Most of these writers seem also to agree that stories are a particular mode of structuring experience, rather than a form of representing reality. As Gabriel puts it:

*Stories are emotionally and symbolically charged narratives; they do not present information or facts about ‘events’, but they enrich, enhance, and infuse facts with meaning* (1998: 13, emphasis DB).

I would add that Gabriel’s definition could be extended to all forms of representation. There are no ‘facts’ beyond processes of interpretation: perception (Wahrnehmung) is interpretation (Schmidt, 1987). To perceive an event as a fact, to even constitute an entity as such against the background of its environment, requires an act of interpretation; it is already a constructive accomplishment and presupposes a certain abstraction on the side of the observer (Maturana, 1987). Of course, stories represent a particularly illuminative and illustrative genre to convey and store the facts constructed (and this characteristic of stories may vary across cultures); yet, this does not mean that there are ways to represent facts ‘non-infused’ by meaning. Stories do not distort facts by infusing them with meaning. They create those facts by providing the horizon of meaning against which we construct (interpret) ‘events’ as facts. As Holstein and Gubrium (1998) remind us, meaning is fundamentally *indexical* in the sense that meaning and its context are mutually constitutive.
[The circumstances that provide the context for meaning are themselves self-generating. Interpretive activities are simultaneously in and about the settings to which they orient, and that they describe. Socially accomplished realities are thus reflexive; descriptive settings give shape to those settings while simultaneously being shaped by the settings they constitute (Holstein and Gubrium, 1998: 142ff.; emphasis original).

Therefore, when Denzin (1997: xv) contends that “(t)rust and facts are socially constructed, and people build stories around the meaning of facts” one needs to add “and vice versa”. The narrative (genre) that provides the context for meaning determines what is regarded to be a fact. What is considered a fact in an epic narrative or saga does not necessarily constitute a fact in a (positivist) scientific context. In this respect, the quotes of both Denzin and Gabriel are at risk of suggesting that there is a fact prior to narrative (meaning) that will subsequently be infused with meaning – facts used as raw material for building stories, so to speak. Instead, with radical constructivism we should consider fact and narrative (meaning) as mutually constitutive – bearing in mind, however, that in the context of certain genres (e.g. fictional novels or dreams), facts may be of rather limited relevance.]

2.2.4 Contextualizing ethnographic research: Historicization

Having said that the ‘matter’ of ethnographic research is text, most often encountered in the form of stories, this insight requires further qualification. If fact and meaning are mutually constitutive, then text in general, and narrative (story) in particular, is not only the object of ethnographic research, but is also constitutive of the process of inquiry itself. In other words, text (narrative) is both object and method in ethnographic research.

Story is, therefore, neither raw sensation nor cultural form; it is both and neither. 

.. Experience, in this view, is the stories people live (Clandinin and Connelly, 1997: 154f).

As proponents of radical constructivism have shown, every process of cognition has a past – it resembles remembering rather than discovery (Schmidt, 1987; Roth 1986
and 1995). Hence, each experience – and with it its narrative representations – has a history.

In the construction of narratives of experience, there is reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story (Clandinin and Connelly, 1997: 160).

In other words, texts, as the representation of experience, are always historical. This does not mean however that history signifies only the relationship of a text to its past (or future). Texts derive meaning from what they are not, that is, from other texts; which points to the issue of intertextuality\textsuperscript{MX} (Kristeva, 1986). The same holds true for ethnography as a textual form, as a particular mode of reading/writing. Not only does any instance of ethnography have a history; it is also inextricably linked with it. Ethnography is lived experience as much as it records such experience. For the context of this thesis, this means that what is required is a certain historization of my ethnographic research. As ethnography unfolds over time, nothing could be less appropriate and more obscuring then representing an ethnographic account in an a-historical, static manner.

I understand the process of historicizing ethnographic writing, that is, to contextualize it, as a part of a quest for meaning; a textual orientation to social research in general and ethnography in particular; an ethnography of ethnography that provides something of an ironic twist to the fashionable idea that culture can be studied “as if” it were a text by suggesting that culture might not amount to much more than a text in the first place (van Maanen, 1995: 18).

Such self-reflexive textual orientation should help us understanding the texts produced by ethnographic researchers as complex networks of meaning.

\textit{\textsuperscript{E}very writer presumes some version of a “generalized other” for whom the account is intended . . . Because perception is active and thereby contributes to any experience, each reader will bring a context of meaning and interpretation to an account, or text, and will interpret it accordingly. This interpretation or
“reading” may or may not be commensurate with what the writer invented

Altheide and Johnson point to the issue of generating understanding among readers and author – an issue that is characterized by a fundamental gap of meaning, as we have seen above; yet, one that, nevertheless, requires practical mastery in the conduct of everyday life. In reference to Bakhtin (1981 and 1986), we could describe the production of ethnographic accounts as an interactive accomplishment involving, at least, the writer, his/her reader(s) and the super-addressee, that is some sort of Generalized Other or third party, who is assumed to understand the meaning of the text. Contextualization is then an attempt to create understanding, to bridge the gap (however incomplete as this attempt may be) between meaning and representation by providing conceptual clues for addressees. This is of particular importance in situations, as in the context of this thesis, where the addressees are unknown to the author and he can only rely on more or less accurate expectations about the super-addressee, the scientific community. Given this ultimate gap, perhaps all a writer can do is to explicate the context of the generation of his or her text and expose the context of meaning generation/representation (which is itself, of course, only accessible as another form of meaning).

2.2.5 Contextualizing ethnographic research: Signature

The contextualization of ethnographic research requires one to address another issue: that of signature (Clandinin and Connelly, 1998). The latter designates the visibility of the author in the text; the way in which he or she represents an account as either his or her own construction or as a purely objective reproduction of reality, to take the perhaps most extreme positions along a continuum. Signing is also an exercise in self-reflexivity, which “in ethnography is no longer a luxury” (Denzin, 1997: XIII). Some authors even suggest that signing qualify the ethnographic (or anthropological) enterprise and its producers.

Reflexivity is critical in this enterprise, for we take the expressions as objects of study and we become “conscious of our self-consciousness” of these objects.

We become aware of our own awareness; reflect on our reflections.
Anthropologists of experience take others experiences, as well as their own, as an object (Bruner, 1986: 22f.)

We insist that what separates ethnographers from the others is not so much the objective truth of what is being stated as it is the process or way of knowing. We should continue to be concerned with producing texts that explicate how we claim to know what we know (Altheide and Johnson, 1998: 306; emphasis original).

Although ethnographers of various types may still recognize “being there in the field” as a commonly shared doctrine of ethnographic research**, it is fair to say that they are less than unanimous when addressing the issue of “being there in the text” (Geertz, 1988). Given the theoretical position outlined so far, I certainly concur with those who claim that “(g)ood ethnographies show the hand of the ethnographer” (Altheide and Johnson, 1998: 301). Yet, things are not quite as easy as this quote may suggest when we try to transform field texts into research texts. Signing implies a struggle; a struggle for research voice that

is captured by the analogy of living on a knife edge as one struggles to express one’s own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to capture the participants' experience and represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience’s voices (Clandinin and Connelly, 1998: 172).

Yet, signing is also a matter of degree. Signing requires balance between the expression of subjective states of mind and the enunciation of extra-subjective states of affairs; between subject and object of knowledge, between process and product of research, between the emic and etic.

Too vivid a signature runs the risk of obscuring the field and its participants; too subtle a signature runs the risk of the deception that the research text speaks from the point of view of the participant (Clandinin and Connelly, 1998: 173).

Clearly, there are affinities between certain genres and the livelihood of the signature. Realist tales will in all likelihood carry a rather subtle signature, whereas in confessional tales the author’s “being in the text” is at risk of drifting towards splendid isolation — a Sartrean being-for-itself in the text. If we perceive a certain
genre of Ph.D. thesis as dominant, its trend has been to sign in a rather subtle manner, as traditional standards of scientific rigour would seem to suggest. Hence, explicating the process of writing/reading ethnographic research and exploring its subject (the author as representational agency) represents an attempt to balance the object-centred perspective implied by the genre of the Doctoral thesis. Finding a balanced signature means adapting van Maanen’s (1995) call to do an ethnography of ethnography; in this context doing an ethnography of this thesis as an ethnography. Of course, this not literally possible; there is no closure, as would be required, to the reflexivity and levels of indexicality of such a Quixotic venture. To signal my intent in a balanced way, therefore, I have to mediate between two different perspectives: ethnography as a thesis and the thesis as ethnography, evoking and adapting to the case at hand Norman Mailer’s (1968/1994) famous dictum of ‘history as a novel and the novel as history’. I strive for such a balanced signature; one that does not obscure the processes of researching and writing while restraining from the narcissistic tendencies that are ever-present in any reflexive act.

2.3 ‘What’s truth got to do with it?’ – Fact, fiction, and truth in ethnographic research

After these more general considerations about the contemporary ethnographic condition, let me add a few remarks that relate more specifically to the context of this thesis. Throughout the thesis (particularly in chapters 1, 4, and 5) I will describe (or draw on) events that I regard as relevant to the life at the Grand Seaside Hotel. I will do so by presenting different texts (narratives) that I produced as a result of my experiences in the research field. These narratives will not only address different subjects; they are also derived from different sources and represented in different modes (genres). Some of the texts will deal with events that I personally witnessed and experienced during my research, others are derived from reports by members of the organization, who’s impressions and interpretations I represent ‘second hand’, so to speak. Some texts are, therefore, presented as direct reflections of my personal experiences, as the part about the Morning Briefing or the All-Staff-Meeting for
instance. Here, I position myself explicitly as the author of the text—a genre that van Maanen (1988) might characterize as a *confessional tale*. On other occasions, I hide my voice behind an impersonal or *reportage* style of writing, as for instance during my recollection and reconstruction of the events during the restructuring of the hotel. As large parts of this restructuring happened prior to my arrival at the hotel, I preferred not to position myself as primary author of the narrative in an attempt to signal the second hand status of my impressions. This style of representation, perhaps closest to van Maanen’s (1988) *realist tales*, has the advantage of developing a stronger narrative line, while, on the other hand, it tends to conceal the voice of the author behind an apparent façade of neutrality and facticity. Against recommendations by some postmodern ethnographers, for whom Denzin (1997) may here stand for a whole number of authors, I decided in favour of a stronger narrative line. On most occasions I accounted only for one (that is, my) dominant point of view, instead of representing multiple accounts—a strategy that I will justify below. However, to demonstrate the kind of difficulties ethnographers face when they have to select aspects of organizational reality for representation—e.g., What should they include into their account? Whose view of events should they represent? Whom ought they to believe?—I accounted for several, conflicting versions of the hotel’s restructuring program.

My rationale for presenting different forms of organizational texts is to draw a more multifaceted picture of life at the Grand Seaside hotel. Hence, the descriptions offered in chapters 1, 4, and 5 introduce some of the employees working at the hotel, report on events that constitute important aspects of the hotel’s culture and, over all, allow “readers to imaginatively feel their way into the experiences that are being described by the author” (Denzin, 1997: 12). These chapters are also designed to reflect on the process of ethnographic research as one of social praxis that, as such, implies limitations to the ethnographic project of very practical but also theoretical nature.

Both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 are concerned with attempts by hotel management to implement a new business philosophy that centres on excellence in customer service and continuous improvement. While Chapter 4 will elaborate on the restructuring of
the hotel and its reward and training programs, Chapter 5 will describe management’s efforts to create a common sense of belonging among staff, epitomized by the attempted creation of a *Grand Seaside Hotel Family*.

The description of the Morning Briefing, as presented in Chapter 1, is of significant importance to the customer service discourse, as later analysis will demonstrate. Although, from my epistemological position, all representations of events, such as meetings, are (social) constructions, I should stress that the meeting in Chapter 1 was constructed in a particular way. There are a number of events, for instance the All-Staff-Meeting described in Chapter 5, that I personally witnessed and subsequently attempted (in a rather realist manner) to represent as close to (the order of) my original experiences as possible. In contrast, I did not experience the Morning Briefing as described in Chapter 1, but its representation is based on a peculiarly selective reconstruction. I witnessed indeed thirty-seven of these briefings during my research; yet, I did not experience the one that I reconstructed for the purpose of this thesis in the sequential order described. Instead, I used sequences adopted from several meetings to construct an imagined, *ideal-type* of meeting that is, according to Weber (1948), supposed to represent fundamental characteristics of this regular event without claiming empirical validity. My reasons for this strategy derive from my attempt to represent the event as (ideal-) typically as possible. This meant, for instance, having to attend to *all* the people I considered relevant to one particular meeting, which, during the meetings I observed, never happened. It also allowed me to include sequences that I considered important or typical that occurred over a range of meetings rather than in the temporal and spatial confines of one particular event.

Realist and positivist ethnographers may refer to this form of representation as *fictive* (at least in form) as opposed to a *factual* reproduction of the meeting as it really happened. Simultaneously, they might question or even overtly reject the use of fiction in ethnography, trying to preserve the boundary between science and literature. However, recent debates in the field of ethnography, which have been inspired by postmodern approaches to knowledge and have partly gained access to the field of organization studies, have questioned the status of realist *conceptions of fact and fiction*. The following sections (2.3.1 to 2.3.3), therefore, address some of
the practical problems I encountered during my field research, linking them to current debates about methodological issues in the wider context of (organizational) ethnography. In the first two sections, I will show that we can no longer uncritically accept positivist and realist understandings of fact and fiction, nor should we try to commit ethnographers to the role of mere eyewitnesses. The last section, then, will explore some of the difficulties that I faced when confronted with divergent accounts about the hotel’s restructuring program.

2.3.1 Non-subversive fiction and the contract of veridicality

Inside a positivist paradigm there is a clear division between fact and fiction, science and literature, researching and writing. Once we question or leave this paradigm, though, such divisions seem arbitrary at best. Among others (Czarniawska-Joerges and De Maulreux, 1994; Barry and Elmes, 1997a, b, c; Ireland and Hitt, 1997), Phillips (1995) has recently taken up the issue of fiction and its status in organization studies. He notes that, contrary to the positivist doctrine:

we find that social scientists often do what writers do: they create rather than discover, they focus on the unique and individual, and they use illusion and rhetoric in an effort to make their case . . . [Consequently, DB] there is no specific place where social science ends and narrative fiction begins (1995: 626f.; emphasis DB).

The fictive element as immanent to all social science does not only apply to the construction of theories, which are, essentially, fictions (Astley and Zammuto, 1992). It also applies, according to Phillips, to so-called non-narrative non-fiction such as survey data: “By the time we statistically generate an average person, it describes no one. It is a fiction” (1995: 632). Besides what he calls non-narrative non-fiction (data), non-narrative fiction (theories), and narrative non-fiction (e.g. positivist, naturalistic, and realist ethnography), Phillips reserves a special place for narrative fiction (stories) in organization studies. Such stories, as he explains with reference to Thompson (1990), evolve around a plot, introducing characters and staging events in such a way as to allow the reader “to live vicariously in the world of the narrative’s characters” (Phillips, 1995: 634).
According to Phillips, narrative fictions deserve their place in organization studies because they allow for emphatically living in an organization "that no longer exists or to which researchers cannot get access for practical or ethical reasons" (1995: 639). A typical example for studies that could draw on this form of legitimation is Steiner’s (1994) compelling description of the last months of the Nazi extermination camp, Treblinka. Steiner, who was not among those incarcerated in Treblinka, had to build his narrative exclusively around interviews with survivors, since the camp and all documentation were destroyed in the aftermath of a rebellion that resulted in the escape of 600 inmates. Under circumstances like these, narrative fiction can also draw on an ethical legitimation; one that honours the generation of solidarity with people in situations that are unfamiliar (fictive) to us (Phillips, 1995; Richardson, 1995).

The aspect of unfamiliarity leads us to an issue that is also relevant for the discussion of fiction: creditability. Given that Phillips sees narrative fiction legitimized by its capability to help us in generating meaningful accounts of an alien context, it may not surprise us that he expects such forms of writing to be plausible and believable. Although narrative fiction may deal with exotic, alien, or bygone contexts: it ought to do so in terms of our local, familiar, and domestic systems of meaning. Hence, following Phillips argument, the rational for narrative fiction in organization studies is that of a translation of meaning for the purpose of familiarization. Under these obligations, narrative fiction may well stretch the boundaries of our imagination; however, it does so at the cost of reaffirming deep roots of our self-understanding. The purpose is to stretch, not to question or subvert our point of view.

Other writers, for example in the field of ethnography, have discussed the issue of creditability in more ontological terms as evolving around the fact/fiction divide. To Agar, new ethnographic styles of writing such as New Journalism, Literary Non-fiction, or Creative Non-fiction tend to separate the process of research from its product; they are "fiction in form but factual in content" (Agar, 1995: 117, emphasis
DB). In paraphrasing (Hellman 1981), he reminds us that “(t)he contract with the reader is that all this actually happened” (ibid., emphasis original). Bound to this contract, we can, of course, structure our facts around plots in order to create dramatic tension. We can also draw on stylistic means such as scenic reconstruction, interior monologues, or temporal flashbacks to make the account more vivid and vicarious. We may even position ourselves as authors quite differently in the text – as the likes of Mailer (1968/1994), Didion (1977/1995), or Wolfe (1973/1990) did – which allows readers to view the world from disparate angles. However, what we ought not to do, according to this contract of veridicality, is to cross the threshold between what (we believe) did really happen – that is, what we experienced ourselves or what others veritably reported to be true – and what is the product of our imagination (fictive) only. The trouble with the contract suggested is that it is founded in a naïve version of realism that presupposes that we can objectively and unequivocally tell fact from fiction, truth from lies, reality from imagination. Such a belief in the fundamental dichotomy in discrimination of fact and fiction, however, is unwarranted as postmodern and constructivist theorists have convincingly argued. In the following section, I will take up some of these arguments as they apply to the field of ethnography.

2.3.2 Rethinking the status of fact and fiction in ethnography

Recently, Denzin (1997) has provided a comprehensive discussion of new trends in ethnography that repeatedly touches on the issue of fiction. Drawing on postmodern approaches to knowledge and their application in new modes of (ethnographic) writing, Denzin argues for a critical dialogue with genres such as Standpoint Epistemologies, New Journalism, or Performance Texts, for example.

Relevant for the context of our argument here is Denzin’s qualification that in postmodern ethnographic accounts “writers locate reality not in facts or events but in the experience of the text” (1997: 165, emphasis DB). Denzin, who proceeds from the assumption that one can approach reality in a textual manner, here denies realist
accounts, which claim to be based on ‘facts’, a qualitatively different status from those accounts entailing elements of ‘fiction’. Both forms of writing neither create nor relate to distinctive realities. Where realist and postmodern ethnographies differ is only with respect to their chosen genre, that is, their style of representing experience. As Denzin, paraphrasing Zavargadeh (1976), describes it, “the nonfiction text is written not about facts, but in facticities” (1997: 156; emphasis original).

With the identification of fact and fiction as attributes of the text and not as qualifiers for the degree of correspondence between representation and (an objective) reality, Denzin defines the problem of fact and fiction as one of representation, of different modes of writing. Modernist writing, as displayed by ethnographic realists, searches for an “underlying reality or cultural logic” when attempting to pin down the cultures and meanings studied (1997: 139). Their ocular epistemology seeks truth in the visual and, in doing so, inevitably separates the author from those studied, the observer from the observed. Finally, realist writers “have faith in the reporting process, believing that stories are out there waiting to be told” (1997: 140). The positions just described contrast with the postmodern perspective, as applied, for instance, by cultural phenomenologists (e.g. Didion, 1977/1995; Maier 1968/1994). The latter neither separate representation from reality nor believe that writing leaves untouched those written about and subjected to it. Writing is social interaction, with often ambiguous and non-intended consequences. Hence, the position of detached observer, despite being unachievable in practice, is desirable only to writers, supposedly, eschewing responsibility for their products. Finally, postmodern writers are more conscious of and sceptical about the way they produce their accounts. To put it metaphorically, postmodern writers do not see themselves as conquerors; they do not discover the cultures they study, taking home stories as relics and reminiscences readily found in the field. They are more like architects or sculptors, constructing and materializing their experiences and emotions. This means that

[s]tories are not waiting to be told; they are constructed by the writer who attempts to impose order on perceived events (Denzin, 1997: 140f.).
The advancement of new forms of postmodern writing reverberates, therefore, with Doctorow’s emphatic assertion that “(t)here is no longer any such things as fiction and nonfiction, there is only narrative” (Doctorow as quoted in Denzin, 1997: 130; emphasis, DB).

A number of writers from diverse backgrounds have provided arguments, directly or indirectly supporting the postmodern position by reasserting the \textit{fictive elements immanent to both process and product of ethnography}. Clifford, for instance, identifies culture as a \textit{collective fiction}, which provides the “ground for individual identity and freedom” (Clifford, 1988: 107) – a thought that echoes Anderson’s (1983) \textit{Imagined Communities} or Castoriadis’ (1997) \textit{Imaginary Institution of Society}. Castoriadis, in particular, sees imagination (which is only another term for fiction) as constitutive of any sense of individual as well collective identity. He follows at this point the tradition of \textit{Psychoanalysis} as well as that of \textit{Symbolic Interactionism}. Both the Freudian \textit{Super-Ego} as well as Mead’s \textit{Generalized Other} represent imaginative constructions of the subject.

Others have focussed more on \textit{the fictive aspects of the process of ethnographic research}. Marcus contends that “(t)he grounding act of fiction in any project of ethnographic writing is the construction of a whole that guarantees the facticity of the “fact” ” (Marcus, 1998: 33). Ethnography is ultimately an enterprise that seeks to constitute and synthesize diverse and disassociated ‘facts’ into some coherent whole.

The most common construction of holism in contemporary realist ethnography . . . is the situating of the ethnographic subject and scene as a knowable, fully probed micro-world with reference to an encompassing world – “the system” – which, presumably, is not knowable or describable in the same terms that the local world of an ethnographic subject can be (Marcus, 1998: 13).

Marcus’ considerations about the fictive aspects of any synthesizing process show close affinities to constructivist understanding of cognition, perception, and communication, which constitute foundations of any ethnographic project (see von Glasersfeld, 1995; Roth, 1987 and 1991). In a similar manner, Linstead argues that –
because all research is inevitably based on memory – "processes of fictionalization are endemic to the interpretation of data and the production of research accounts" (1994: 1321).

The recent debates about fact and fiction and their relationship to social research had a considerable influence on the way I conducted and represented the research. In particular, Linstead's argument about the endemically fictive nature of research seems relevant to the status of the research account provided in this thesis. During the fourteen months of my research in the hotel, I produced approximately six hundred pages of fieldnotes – the majority of them being notes and descriptions of regular meetings and special events. Most of the fieldnotes were written down retrospectively, either immediately after an event or on the same evening/following day. In any case, the accounts produced are based on my experience in the field and had to be created from memory. As all reflection – and hence all modes of recording experience that provide the basis for the process we call research – are based on memory, all research implies fictive elements. As Linstead puts it:

> We cannot escape from memory, for we cannot experience and account for or give meaning to and interpret events simultaneously (Linstead, 1994: 1331).

With respect to the representation of (ethnographic) experience, this means that the *ultimate gap between reality and representation* (Bruner, 1986) is partially based on the mediating role of memory.

> 'Experience' is always something different than the data which represent it, but is only knowable and accountable through some form of memory (Linstead, 1994: 1332).

That all (research) accounts are based on memory and, to that extent, are endemically fictitious does not necessarily mean that the temporal connection between an experience and its recording is irrelevant. Experience is filtered by memory, but it is filtered in different ways. Fundamentally, remembering is *non-reversible*. Once we have remembered an event for the first time, this experience becomes the 'original' for the respective subsequent act of remembering. In effect this means that we do not remember events but (progressively) memories of events: there is no way back to the original experience (Roth, 1991; Rusch, 1991; Schmidt, 1991). Since even the (primary) act of cognition resembles remembering rather than discovery (Schmidt, 1987; Roth 1986 and 1995), we could claim that all our access to reality, be it in
(primary) experience or its reproductions, is filtered by memory. Hence, all forms of representation, in so far as they claim to account for reality, not only entail elements of fiction; they are simulacra – that is, copies without an original proper (Baudrillard, 1994).

In empirical research and, when writing our accounts, we remember experiences in different ways. One form of remembering an experience is the ‘at situ’ recalling of an event. This form of remembering is quite common and happens immediately after ‘living’ through an experience. Often, it is some form of surprise about what just happened that will trigger such ‘reinvestment’ of the (just) past: ‘What was she just saying? ‘Did I get this right?’ ‘I must have been dreaming’ are examples of the internal monologue that followed such surprise and provoked me to switch from the disinterested practical to the detached analytical perspective (Garfinkel, 1967). On other occasions, I took notes while participating in (or observing) a meeting – notes that I later transformed into proper field notes – reflecting on what I had jotted down earlier. Sometimes, I did not have the chance to write any notes in the field at all, and was forced to re-evoke and reconstruct events later at home in front of my computer. Finally, in some cases, writing up research data and integrating them into the research report (thesis) triggered memories of events that I had forgotten about.

In some cases, such memories provoked me to reconstruct events considerably detached in time and space purely from memory. Alternatively, such memories led me to question some of the representations/interpretations I had written down earlier, allowing me, suddenly, to see things from a different angle and, by the same token, doubling the filtering of experience through memory.

In the conduct of research, we may, according to the criteria we apply, favour one or the other way of re-evoking and recording research experiences. In line with what has been said earlier, I would question that any form is intrinsically superior to the others. Of course, if the ‘ultima ratio’ of one’s research was authenticity, one may argue that any reproduction considerably deferred in time and space would detach us from our original experience and, hence, undermine the aim of the research. In fact, I felt that it was more easy reproducing sequences of a meeting, for example, either shortly after the event or aided by notes taken on the spot. However, as the aim of my research was not primarily reproduction but the creation of vicarious experience, some (temporal and sometimes spatial) distance from the events described proved quite useful in offering different perspectives to the ‘data’ and allowing for alternative interpretations and insights. Again, outside a positivist paradigm, such re-creation and reinterpretation of experience are legitimate strategies (Denzin, 1997)
and the distancing form the ‘original’ experience does not represent the crossing of a qualitative threshold but becomes a matter of degree according to evocative intentions of the author and the genre chosen.

In sum, when taking seriously postmodern arguments, we have to acknowledge that the line between fact and fiction is a rather blurred and disputable one. Both process and product of ethnographic inquiry imply a strong fictive (imaginary) element. Admittedly, while acknowledging postmodern critiques of positivist and realist understandings of fact and fiction, I am unable to offer an alternative view in form of a coherent and conclusive concept incorporating all those critiques. However, following the suggestion that fact and fiction are attributes of the text, markers of certain genres of representation, and do not qualify the text’s correspondence with an external reality, means that we have to reconsider two established premises of (realist) ethnography. One of these premises, which has almost become a truism, seeks to bind the enterprise of ethnography to the (corporeal) presence of the researcher in the field. The other uncritically identifies fiction with non-correspondence to some external reality.

First, we cannot any longer uncritically assume that “being there” in the field constitutes a fundamental doctrine of ethnography. If ethnographers are not ‘conquerors’, there is no reason why they ought to be doomed collecting their relics first hand. As sculptors, they do not necessarily have to produce the marble blocks they subsequently form into sculptures – although, for various reasons, sculptors may prefer to do so. In the case of Steiner’s study, for instance, neither the fact that he “was not there” nor the imaginative (fictive) leaps he had to pursue to render the multiple and fragmented accounts collected into a coherent story diminish, in my view, the creditability of his account. Perhaps we should simply abandon a notion of ethnography that confines us to a study of culture in the present tense and that seeks to delimit our scope when encapsulating researching in the now and here. This is why I think the following remark from Geertz is misleading:
The locus of study is not the object of study. Anthropologists don’t study villages (tribes, towns, neighborhoods . . .); they study in villages (Geertz, 1973: 22, emphasis original).

As explained above, ethnographers do not discover but construct the objects (and locus) of their studies. The fact that I studied in the Grand Seaside Hotel presupposed that I defined the boundaries of what constitutes the hotel and, in doing so, constructed it as an object of my research. In this sense, all ethnographies entail fictive elements in that they are pointing to contexts beyond themselves, which may be accessible only second hand to the researcher. If we, as described above, employ a radical constructivist or textual approach to social sciences, then we are dealing here with an issue of intertextuality (Kristeva, 1986). As all texts receive meaning in relation to other texts, all cultures (as texts) receive their meaning from other cultures – deferred to in time and/or space. In other words, when creating meaningful descriptions of a culture, we have to rely on contexts that we can only imagine, as we have not experienced them ourselves. In the context of this thesis, this applies not only to the description of the Morning Briefing, but also, for instance, to the organizational reconstruction of the hotel as described in Chapter 4. Against the ethnographic dogma of “being there”, we may note that releasing ethnographers from their status as eyewitnesses would not conflict with the (earlier) tradition of ethnography. “It was not until the early twentieth century that ethnographers began to enter and stay for more than brief periods in the worlds of those of whom they wrote”, as van Maanen (1995: 5f.) reminds us. Of course, this implies that we blur even further the boundaries between ethnography and historic or literary writing – a move that many postmodern ethnographers approve. In fact, by remembering its early roots, ethnographic writing seems to approximate other genres rather than integrating them. Denzin, therefore, concludes that

[p]ostmodern detective writing, not ethnography, has become the superordinate discourse to which all other discourses should now be compared (1997: 164).

Second, we have to reconsider an identification of fact and fiction as (not) corresponding to some external reality. Fact and fiction are not dichotomous concepts.

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“The opposite of fact isn’t fiction but something like error. The opposite of fiction isn’t truth but something like objectivity or actuality” (Banks and Banks, 1998: 13).

From a constructivist position, we simply have to abandon issues of correspondence as speculative and principally undecidable – as unconvincing as this may appear, in particular, to realists. This does not mean, however, that anything goes. While we do not construct our world in a social vacuum neither do we do so according to our will. In the process of constructing our reality (Wirklichkeit), which is, and inescapably remains, our reality, we are constrained by biological, historical, and cultural determinants, which means that such construction is hardly ever intentional and is rather something that happens to us (Schmidt, 1987 and 1992). Of course, since humans must be able to communicate about the worlds they construct, they will establish, under the constraints mentioned, criteria as to what counts (inter-subjectively) as real, true, or likely. Yet, those criteria are always tentative, incomplete, and open to challenge and, most importantly, they are indexical, confined to particular discourses.

With respect to the issue of fiction in ethnography, this means that we may have to live with a multitude of definitions of what counts as fact or fiction. Some of them may appear more or less convincing to us, more or less suitable for guiding the ethnographic enterprise; yet, from a constructivist point of view, they are, ultimately, neither right nor wrong. This holds true although, as, for instance, Mitterer (1992) and Schmidt (1994) have pointed out, constructivism seems founded on a paradox; a non-constructivist presupposition of constructivism: that constructivism is true. In other words, I cannot ground my preference for postmodern (or constructivist) conceptions of fiction, for instance, in anything else than language. No correspondence to reality, as synonymous of truth, will hold. In paraphrasing Schmidt (1994), I could say that: “If I (as a constructivist) am right, I cannot any longer claim to be right”. However, as Chapter 3 will show, in the process of research we cannot help but establishing and employing criteria for what we believe to be real, true, etc. In the next section, I will, therefore, concern the reader with one
such criterion, verisimilitude, which has been influential in the recent discussions of ethnography.

2.3.3 Whose verisimilitude? – Legitimizing ethnographic accounts

Verisimilitude, as Denzin (1997) points out, in reference to Todorov (1977), usually carries three meanings. In a naïve realist version, it “describes a text’s relationship to reality” (Denzin, 1997: 10) and, as such, is tantamount to veridicality (Banks and Banks, 1998). It can also refer to a value or concept (e.g. validity) commonly shared by a certain community. Finally, verisimilitude designates a text’s “ability to allow for naturalistic generalization” (ibid.). In my view, the second and third meanings are most useful to describe verisimilitude from a constructivist point of view. A text’s ability to produce naturalistic generalizations is determined by the socially constructed measures or rules that allow for such generalizations. These rules, however, will differ across certain genres (discourses).

Verisimilitude can be described as the mask a text assumes as it convinces the reader it has conformed to the laws of its genre; in doing so, it has produced reality in accordance with those rules (Denzin, 1997: 11).

It is important to note that truth and verisimilitude are not identical, although they may or may not coincide. Denzin (again in reference to Todorov) presents the example of the murder mystery. Inside this genre, the guilty person has to appear innocent at the beginning of the story, which generates an infinite distance between truth and verisimilitude; indeed it renders them into opposites. Only slowly and gradually will the gap separating the two diminish to eventually disappear completely once the apparently innocent person is revealed as being the truly guilty party in the story. Denzin concludes, therefore, that

(he truth of a text cannot be established by its verisimilitude. Verisimilitude can always be challenged. Hence, a text can be believed to be true while lacking verisimilitude. (The opposite holds as well.) (Denzin, 1997: 12).
In other words, both truth and verisimilitude belong to different dimensions. Most notably, the role that authors have in establishing either of them is rather limited, as the ultimate authority lies with the reader.

Truth is political, and verisimilitude is textual. The meaning of each of these terms is not in the text but brought to it by the reader. Here is the dilemma. Ethnographers can only produce messy texts that have some degree of verisimilitude; that is, that allow readers to imaginatively feel their way into the experiences that are being described by the author. If these texts permit a version of Stake’s (1994) naturalistic generalization (the production of vicarious experience), then the writer has succeeded in bringing the “felt” news from one world to another. Little more can be sought (Denzin, 1997: 12f.; emphasis DB).

The relationship between author and reader in ethnography is only a concretization of a general feature of communication. It is always the receiver, not the sender, who decides about the meaning of a message. The same counts for the case of social action, where it is not the person acting but those observing him or her who ultimately decide whether the behaviour they face constitutes socially meaningful action and what the meaning of that action is (Luckmann, 1986). Hence, social relationships are not reciprocal with respect to the constitution of meaning but show always a bias towards the observer (or reader, or listener), towards the one that decodes (interprets) the message. Hence, verisimilitude is always established by the observer/reader and not by the sender/writer.

This bias towards the receiver that any form of communication shows, places the sender in a difficult position. In order to exercise his or her authoritative power that aspires to determining the interpretation of the message send, he or she has to attempt the impossible: the fixation of meaning. As explained above, one strategy of power employed for that purpose is contextualization in its two forms, historicizing and signing. Both strategies of contextualization, however, do not only aim at avoiding misinterpretation; they also attempt, according to their specific genre, to convince the reader of the truth, authenticity, beauty, etc. of the message. In other words, contextualization also aspires to verisimilitude in an attempt to legitimize both the text and its author.
In the context of my research in the Grand Seaside Hotel, the problem of verisimilitude became apparent when I was faced with different accounts of the organizational restructuring of the hotel, which I will report on in Chapter 3. Since, to a large extent, the restructuring happened prior to my arrival at of the Grand Seaside, I had to reconstruct the sense of these events purely from ‘second hand’ accounts of members of the organization. That the accounts I collected differed considerably with respect to the order of events, the assumed rationales for the restructuring, and the perceived agencies responsible for design and implementation of the latter, did not make the task easier.

One is faced with the problem that the verisimilitude I established as a reader of texts situated in the practice of the organization as I interpreted it, is not the same as that which the reader of this thesis will apply to my text. In one situation, I could have merely juxtaposed the various accounts of the restructuring while withholding any comments about their meaningfulness and verisimilitude for me. This is, perhaps, what some postmodernist ethnographers would have preferred. Providing multiple accounts of events may also be closest to Denzin’s suggestion for the production of “multiple versions of the real, showing how each version impinges on and shapes the phenomenon being studied” (Denzin, 1997: 13). The texts thus produced would carry what Denzin calls reconstructive verisimilitude.

I have to admit, however, that in this thesis I will present, by and large, those accounts that seemed to carry the highest degree of verisimilitude to me. I will do so, however, without withholding alternative versions from the readers of this thesis, at least as far as I was aware of such alternative readings. My choice to mainly favour a single narrative line constituted by one dominant view of events derived largely from pragmatic considerations. Given the limited time and resources and the constraints of the genre (Ph.D. thesis), I was faced with the alternatives of either producing many versions of a small number of events or, alternatively, reflecting on a whole variety of experiences from a rather unitary (and somewhat colonializing) perspective. Under these circumstances, giving primacy to the number of
experiences and events represented seemed to me more appropriate for the rationale of the thesis.

I will stop these considerations here. However, in due course of the thesis, I will continue pointing to difficulties in pursuing ethnographic research in a postmodern world. Ethnographic research is, after all, a process of social praxis; and although it attempts to bracket the cultures it studies, it constantly makes use of and is limited by its own mode of common sense. It seems then, that conducting an ethnography of ethnography must inevitably remain an incomplete process – while we are acting as ethnographers, we cannot possibly analyze ourselves as acting ethnographers. As observers – and also as observers of observers of observers – we will inevitably produce blind spots that can only be perceived at the next higher level of observation (von Foerster, 1993). It seems to me that the restructuring of the hotel represents an illustrative example for those choices that we (ethnographers) continuously make in the field – most fundamentally, the choice of what we consider to be relevant and worth mentioning. We always repress, inevitably, certain aspects of reality. My report on other, alternative accounts, as in the case of the restructuring of the hotel, does not transcend this problem – if only because, on further investigation, I may have found another version.

2.4 Inscribing culture: Creating an image of the Grand Seaside Hotel

One may cite Tanner’s neat metaphor that “when we send out our lines and nets of language into the world all we bring back is language” (Tanner, 1971: 23) to characterize the (contemporary) condition of ethnography, seen from certain perspectives. The fishermen ethnographer, then, when fishing for culture, are dependent on and limited by the symbolic (linguistic) composition of their lines and nets – as we have it, their methods of reading and writing. And yet, all they will ever ‘carry home’ from the open sea of language is the more or less broken echo of their own questioning and reasoning. As Linstead puts it:
...there is little point in attempting to "catch" reality; we set out with the lines and nets of method/language and what we come back with are still the same lines and nets, rearranged, perhaps bent and battered, with the holes maybe a little more visible. In fact, language and methods are means, just like nets are, of creating a hole—a hole that is not bounded, after all, is not a hole, its just space. Researchers may well realize that they crochet their own nets, and reflexive modernism has a lot to say about this process, but still behaves as though there were some sort of fish in there at the end of the exercise (Linstead, 1998: 242; emphasis original).

Perhaps Tanner's metaphor is less helpful than it might appear initially with respect to the process of research and its subjects: fishing is still a form of 'catching' and fishermen, for their part, are still 'conquerors'. As explained above, ethnographers may act much more like sculptors: using different tools (for reading/writing) they create sculptures (that they call "culture") from blocks carved out of a symbolic universe. Thus, the creative process of reading/writing ethnography resembles acts of picking out and carving, of linking and moulding, of ordering and (re-)arranging (textual) segments into a specific form—a Gestalt. As such, ethnography is an artistic enterprise; one that combines, as in performance art, both process and product.

We have said that ethnography is concerned with the production and interpretation of (social reality as) texts. It is a process of recursive reading and writing, one that constructs and represents its object—inscribes it, so to speak. This process, however, is rather more messy than rigorous: ethnographic inquiry is pragmatic, fragmented, imaginative, and largely provisional. It involves distancing from the object, switching between different perspectives (e.g. emic and etic), as when an artist steps back from his or her work to perceive it from different angles. Inscribing, as process of generating meaning, is indexical, as is the meaning generated from it. Therefore, ethnographic knowledge is always local\textsuperscript{1} and ethnographic analysis diagnostic rather than predictive. Inscribing is also reflective, directed to an assumed audience. For this audience to understand the intended meanings in the ethnographic account, it needs to know about the context of meaning generation. Hence, ethnographic researchers ought to be self-reflexive; they ought to contextualize their accounts by historicizing and signing them. The latter practices, however, which
carry claims to understanding and verisimilitude, represent strategies (of power) that not only aim at balancing the (communicative) bias toward the reader; they also attempt to establish the legitimacy of both text and author. That, such legitimacy can no longer be grounded in the apparent self-evidence of truth, authenticity, or rigour does not ease the burden of authorship (Geertz, 1983) – arguably, this counts particularly for a genre such as Ph.D. thesis.

In inscribing culture, in creating an image of the Grand Seaside Hotel, the thesis seeks to deliberately cross margins: between modern and postmodern ethnography; between 'interpretation' and 'representation'; between the search for underlying structures and the discovery of binary oppositions, between the yearning for presence and the free play of differences. I concur with Bourdieu (1990a: 49) that the tendency to make and use such classifications as Marxian, Weberian, or, in the case at hand, postmodern is not scientific but religious. Instead of adhering to one or the other (quasi-) religion, I will try to avoid the confessional. Such an approach refutes classificatory demarcations as restraining, rather than fostering devices, devices for representations of organizational reality that will be put to one side in favour of applying a multiplicity of perspectives to the field. Consequently, the texts studied in this thesis are far from being homogeneous. They comprise writings deliberately produced as 'texts', in the conventional sense, such as academic publications, or they may be the texts of everyday life that one encounters and constitutes in researching a flexible organization, such as observation-notes taken of department meetings which are already another form of text. The difference between the two texts is gradual rather than radical. Despite the claims of more positivistically inclined social scientists to distinguish theory reports from raw-data, one deals in both cases with representations. Although the narrative codes, dramaturgical rules, and genre differ significantly for each, one may still suggest that they constitute performances. Hence, no intrinsic privilege attaches to 'raw-data' as a primary representation of reality. In fact, given the transformation into ordinal values that many representations undergo before being defined as raw-data, one may note that the anthropological distinction between the raw and the cooked in many organization
studies offers material aplenty for any contemporary Lévi-Strauss (1969) to enjoy. To express the issue at hand, using the words of Mats Alvesson:

[A]ll accounts of the empirical are theoretically constructed and all the theoretical work is in a sense an empirical phenomenon – a researcher writing is as “real” as a manager talking and an academic text is as “empirical” as a corporate building or a product. (1996: 5)

In other words, no matter what the concrete object of our concerns, in social science one constantly deals with (re-) presentations. This means that the analysis of organizations cannot but take into account the symbolic dimension of social reality, which implies that the meaning of management lies to a large extent in the management of meaning (Clegg’s 1989 ‘Radical revisions’; Gowler and Legge, 1996). Hence, the emphasis given to organizational symbolism throughout the thesis derives its justification from the essentially symbolic nature of organizational reality. By the same token, the thesis will take into account the indeterminacy of any symbolic relationship; an insight traced back to Saussure (1959) that has almost become a commonplace today. Thus, the management of meaning is not primarily a technological task; it is vested with power, an essentially political enterprise. As a consequence, the thesis will focus on those aspects of organizational reality in which the politics of meaning are at play – in which the legitimate view of the organizational world is at stake (Bourdieu, 1991).

The textually diverse material used within this thesis incorporates not only academic literatures concerned with flexible organizations, power, discourse, and related matters but also those texts constructed as a result of an organizational ethnography conducted at the Grand Seaside Hotel. With respect to academic texts, the thesis will draw on a variety of sources, repeatedly crossing traditionally established disciplines. Consequently, there is no single stream of theory or academic genre that prevails during this enterprise. In other words, there is no single set of (academic) glasses through which the thesis views and evaluates the emerging narrative. This form of ‘eclecticism’ is not accidental though. Against any favouring of one particular concept or theory on the expense of others, one can cite Pasquale Gagliardi’s justification for the founding of the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS):
... The study of organizations, as human and social phenomena, requires an authentically inter-disciplinary approach, using methods, concepts, and metaphors, taken from anthropology, linguistics, history, psychoanalysis, and the other life-sciences, and not just those of sociology and/or social psychology... any disciplinary paradigm will tend to restrict the creative interpretation of organizational and social phenomena, and... such paradigms — together with the types of social control operating in any institutionalized scientific context — will tend to smother expressiveness and hinder intellectual exchange.

(Gagliardi, 1990: VI, emphasis DB)

There is no reason why we should restrict Gagliardi’s credo to discussions among members of a certain scientific community. The reductionism that Gagliardi criticizes is present in the frequently unitary perspective researchers apply to their respective research field. In contrast, recent examples in organization theory have demonstrated that the application of a whole number of different theoretical perspectives to a research field sheds light on additional aspect of organizational reality (Alvesson, 1996).

Furthermore, with this thesis I will try to heed recent calls for a higher level of self-reflexiveness and self-reflexivity in ethnographic research (Denzin, 1997). Such self-reflexivity requires, first, not to pass off as objective, research findings which, ultimately, are (only) constructions of the author, that can only ever be in brackets — for what else could such findings ever be? In that respect it is worthwhile putting into check some of the aspirations that go along with the call for self-reflexivity, reminding us that it is not a new antidote for a perceived lack of truth, objectivity, or authenticity.

It would seem to be paradoxical that what is a situation of the ultimate subjectivity, i.e., the subject presenting the subject, should be offered in the service of objectivity (Linstead, 1994: 1325).

Self-reflexivity attempts to both narrow the ultimate gap between representation and meaning and to legitimate author and text. But reflexivity also implies contextualizing research; to account for the process of conducting research and constructing research accounts comprehensively and honestly. Hence, in an attempt
to create an image of the Grand Seaside Hotel not only a very selective but also a very personal account is provided. Ethnographic research is not a one way street, though. The inter-relationships and influences are multiple and diverse. It is not only the encounter with the field that has had an impact on my development as a researcher; I may also have influenced those who I studied.

It would also be dishonest to pretend that the ethnographic account provided has emerged consistently and coherently over time. I would rather characterize the process of the research as a continuous process of reading and writing that implied the oscillation between various forms of texts. Having read extensively on the issues of flexibility and New Organizational Forms, I went into the field equipped with only a vague idea of what I was going to study. Reading organizational life-world texts (that is, observing peoples behaviour, collecting interviews or more general answers to my questions), I went back to study theories of power and discourse, which subsequently informed my field research, and so on. In sum, the whole enterprise of conducting ethnographic research was a tremendous learning experience — most of it learning by doing. Unfortunately, my own experience of this learning process was hardly in line with examples from those (more realist and systematic) textbook descriptions that tell a more or less experienced audience how one ought to conduct ethnographic research. This fact proved a source of continuous unease and insecurity in the early stages of research. Frankly, my research seemed to me rather fragmented, provisional, lacking clear direction. It resembled, rather, a journey, an expedition into unexplored territory in an attempt to map the unfamiliar terrain. Without a clearly specified target, I seemed to make up the way as I went along. I left signposts. But I did not avoid various side steps and impasses. I jotted down on paper impressions encountered on my route. Slowly and gradually, these traces of paper developed into some kind of image of the organizational terrain. At the end of the day, I was happy that I had seemed to arrive somewhere.

I decided that I would attempt to explicate as much of this continuous yet uneven process of ethnographic research as possible. In other words, this thesis seeks to account for the process of ethnographic research and does not only present the final product. If our accounts of the field are (our) constructs, then (self-) reflective
research requires us to make transparent the very process of production. Obscuring the process of production is a common and legitimate strategy in academia — or, perhaps, a legitimizing strategy. Yet, it seems to me that such a strategy follows a tradition, namely (neo-) positivism, that evaluates representations purely in terms of (absolute) truth, validity, or coherency as measured against parameters of rigour in the handling of research instruments, the latter being defined by a small elite of scholars. The recent debates in the field of ethnography discussed above have to such an extent shaken the self-evidence and creditability of this tradition that I could not simply ignore these critiques.
3 Flexibility, New Organizational Forms, and organizational culture

The chapter begins by sketching some of the main assumptions and arguments in discussions of both flexible organizations in management theory and labour flexibility and flexible specialization in industrial sociology. It then turns to a body of literature that seems most relevant for the conceptualization of flexible organizations today: the discussion of New Organizational Forms. This part will review accounts of the emergence and increased dissemination of externalization strategies to critically reflect on contemporary approaches that attempt to define the nature of New Organizational Forms as either unique modes of coordination or hybrids. Integrating different theoretical contributions to the issue, the chapter argues for the theorization of New Organizational Forms as new modes of domination. Finally, the chapter will extend these considerations by drawing attention to issues of power and language. It will elaborate on the discursive constitution of subjects/objects identifying power and domination as residing in the symbolic sphere. Consequently, the subsequent focus of the thesis on the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside Hotel is explicated.

Overall, the chapter reviews the body of literature that I studied before entering the research field. Identifying the (pre-) concepts that structured the research conducted should not only help the reader contextualizing the account provided; it will also illuminate the processes of constructing the Grand Seaside Hotel as an object (of research) letting the reader see, as far as this is possible, the field with the eyes of the author.
3.1 Flexible Organizations and Labour Flexibility: Past Discussions and their Limitations

3.1.1 Flexible Organizations and Management Praxis

In recent years, many theorists, particularly in the field of Strategic Management, have dealt with the issue of flexibility (Goodstein et al., 1996; Leonard-Barton, 1992; Sanchez, 1993; Upton, 1994; Volberda, 1996). Their focus has been, primarily, on strategic flexibility as a precondition for effective management in an increasingly dynamic, competitive, and globalized market place (Goodstein et al., 1996; Sanchez, 1993; Volberda, 1996).

The overall perspective of many such discussions of flexibility is predominantly practical, not to say, instrumental. Upton (1994), for instance, claims that although most managers are well aware of contemporary needs for more organizational flexibility, often they are neither in a position to understand the precise nature of the flexibility required nor can they identify what mechanisms and investments might enable it. Consequently, authors sharing Upton’s concerns (e.g. Sanchez, 1993; Volberda, 1996) seek to provide analytical devices that assist managers in overcoming problems that arise from the (conceptual) indeterminacy and ambiguity of the flexibility issue.

The conceptual metaphor that underlies most of these approaches is that of the organization as organism (Morgan, 1997). Either it is changes in market constellations that require an organization to adapt to its environment or the organization tries to influence the environment in its favour. Both will be done in the name of survival and/or prosperity of the organization. Metaphorically expressed, one can envisage the organization as engaged in an epic battle with natural forces of the market, struggling for survival. From this perspective, flexibility appears as a logical continuation of either a human appropriation of nature or, alternatively, as an adaptation of people to natural forces. Linking flexibility and organizational survival
in this manner reassures that neither value of flexibility as such nor its consequences are questioned.

In line with the root metaphor of organization as organism are definitions of flexibility as either an attribute of the organization (Upton, 1994) or as management capabilities (Volberda, 1996), both signalling a capacity for change. Significantly, it is always management that perceives the need for changes and acts upon this need accordingly. Metaphorically speaking, one can envisage management as the brain of an organizational body in its struggle with the (natural) external environment. By drawing on the body-mind-analogy, a quasi-natural explanation of organizational change emerges, nourishing the myth that organizational reality is masterable through management’s direction and intervention. Similarly, conceiving of management as brain (that is, as centre of reception, creation, and dissemination of information and knowledge) is based on a view of management prerogatives as legitimate, which strips the organization of any real social element other than management. Such subtle root metaphors seem to carry on the tradition of scientific management founded by Frederick Taylor (1911). Characteristically, one of the essential features of Taylorism, the division of planning and execution, finds its metaphorical expression in the mind-body concept.

In sum, discussions of flexibility designed for management practitioners assist the latter in designing and implementing changes that seem imposed on the organization through external market forces and that seem, consequently, inevitable to secure the organization’s survival and prosperity. Hence, such approaches to flexibility have a strong explanatory (and normative) power in the confines of instrumental knowledge (Habermas, 1969). However, as they remain purely in the discursive logic of instrumental activity, these discussions do not (explicitly) address issues of power or conflicts of interest.
3.1.2 Flexible Specialization and the Utilization of Labour

Attempts to understand flexibility in terms of employment relations and human resource strategies represent a tradition distinct from that discussed above. This tradition is significant to this thesis for two contributions. First, it explicitly discussed flexibility in the context of power, resistance, and control. Second, supplemented by taxonomies from the field of Human Resource Management, it introduced a set of analytical categories that have subsequently found widespread application in flexibility debates.

Much of what has been said about flexibility in industrial sociology or Human Resource Management theory over the past 15 years has been, at least indirectly, linked with the Labour Process Debate. That debated dominated some areas of academic discourse in the aftermath of the publication of Braverman’s controversial book, Labour and Monopoly Capital, in 1974. Braverman’s thesis of a unidirectional industrial development towards specialization, deskillng, and tighter control systems did not remain undisputed. Initial critiques centred on his neglect of the subjective dimensions of employees (Burawoy, 1979) and pointed to potential discretion in the utilization of labour and technology (Edwards, 1979). In two influential books, Piore and Sabel (1984) and Kern and Schumann (1984) took up and extended these critiques by questioning the apparently fixed relationship between technological rationalization and organizational control systems in a variety of industrial sectors. In sharp contrast to Braverman’s deskillng-thesis, the flexible specialization thesis (Piore and Sable, 1984) focussed on technological developments that lead to new production concepts (Kern and Schumann, 1984) that offered potential for an upgrading of skills, re-professionalization, and increased worker autonomy.

The various arguments of the labour process debate are not a subject of this thesis and are comprehensively discussed elsewhere (see Hildebrandt and Seltz, 1987; Littler, 1991; Littler and Salaman, 1982; Pollert, 1991; Smith, 1994 b; Thompson 1983). I will only point to the fact that the flexible specialization thesis sparked a whole number of controversial responses ranging from empirical support (e.g.
Boehle and Milkau, 1990; Schimank, 1986), to qualifying statements (Littler, 1991; Lutz, 1986; Pollert 1991; Smith, 1994a and b) to emphatic refutations that claimed that flexible specialization was only the advancement of Neo-Fordism (Williams et al., 1987).

The discussion of new forms of labour utilization also lead to the introduction of new taxonomies. Atkinson (1984), for instance, introduced what became a famous classification that identified three forms of flexibility: numerical, functional, and financial. This classification subsequently received numerous qualifications, as did Atkinson’s thesis that companies deal with flexibility demands by establishing internal labour markets that divide the work force into core and peripheral workers (Bagnuley, 1990; Capelli, 1995 and 1997; Guerrieri and Lockwood, 1989; Smith, 1994a; Walsh, 1991). The former, according to Atkinson, tend to enjoy high job security and pay and perform high-skill jobs vital to the organization. Those subsumed under the peripheral categories do not enjoy such benefits. They have to put up with low-skill and less secure jobs in non-core operations of the business. In Atkinson’s conceptualization, peripheral staff serves mainly as a buffer zone protecting the core of the organization from direct influences of flexibility demands. Consequently, organizations often subject workers in peripheral jobs to hire-and-fire policies, with disturbing effects for workers employment biographies and mobility (Capelli, 1995; Davis-Blake and Uzzi, 1993).

The conceptual underpinning of these discussions were heavily anchored in industrial sociology and political economy. Many of the contributions were either directly inspired by or critically reflective of Braverman’s Marxian interpretation. It is not surprising then that issue such as power, control, and conflict were top of the agenda of many contributors to this debate. Against the quasi-technological conceptualization of flexibility provided for management practitioners, the turn to issues of power and conflict proved a change and enlargement of perspective. Flexibility was put back into the realm of the social. The focus on management as the primary or sole agent of flexibility was abandoned in favour of a perspective that acknowledged the contributions of various organizational actors and the
distinctiveness of their experiences of flexibility. *Flexibility* was conceptualized as primarily a political process negotiated between different actors and coalitions.

However, with respect to the conceptualization of power and agency, the debates that evolved around the flexible specialization thesis fell short of capturing recent theoretical and socio-economic developments. First, power, conflict, and control were generally conceived of as one-dimensional (Lukes, 1974) and trapped in a concept of sovereign power (Clegg, 1989). As Clegg (1989) has shown, the basic model of thought underlying sovereign perspectives of power is that of a changing a course of events by breaking the resistance of B. This model draws on a concept of agency as realization of strategic intentions; a form of agency “in which ‘ontologically autarchic’ individuals held sway” (Clegg, 1989: 8). The roots of the concept of sovereign power date back at least to Hobbes who, in his *Leviathan* (1997), equated power to causation. The parallels drawn between the causal forces of nature and the contemporary business world are not accidental. As Clegg suggests: “Where event causation refers to Humean universal causal laws, social causation refers to concepts of rules and games” (1989: 11). Hence, metaphorically we may envisage the battle between management and labour evolving around the flexible utilization of labour as a strategic game. What such a conceptualization of power, falls short of, however, is an adequate conceptualization of Luke’s second (non-decision making) and third dimension (ideology) (Clegg, 1989).

Second, in line with the concept of sovereign power, the exercise of power is conceptualized as modes of episodic agency (Clegg, 1989) in the struggle between pre-defined groups. In other words, the teams participating in the strategic game of flexibility are pre-defined (management and labour). Players are simply allocated to the teams according to external criteria (such as their position in the socio-economic division of labour) and their intentions and strategies in the game are pre-defined respectively. However, in a period of extensive externalization, the focus on management-labour relations implies empirical and conceptual problems. With more and more managers and workers gaining the status of self-employed, the distinctive qualities of each of the two categories start to erode (Capelli, 1997). Hence, identifying agency only on the basis of external socio-economic criteria such as
management and labour is conceptually questionable as it seems to obscure the complexity of strategies and intentions found in organizations.

In sum, discussions of flexibility in the context of both management praxis and labour utilization strategies illuminate divergent aspects of organizational life serving different knowledge interests (Habermas, 1969). In the light of recent socio-economic and theoretic developments it is questionable as to whether either of the approaches serve best the knowledge interest followed in this thesis: that of critical reflection on organizational reality. In search for a more adequate conceptualization of flexible organizations, I turned to another body of literature: New Organizational Forms. This literature focuses on recent changes in employment such as externalization and their consequences and will be discussed in more detail in the following part of this chapter.

3.2 In Search of the Flexible Firm: Internal or External?

3.2.1 A Decade of Increased Externalization

More than a decade has gone by since Pfeffer and Baron (1988) systematically reviewed trends of externalization. At that time, a substantial increase in outsourcing, subcontracting, and large-scale downsizing among organizations in various industries seemed to indicate, increasingly, that companies sought to loosen relationships with their employees. Externalization applies not only to traditional employment and the place of production, in terms of different forms of homework and outwork; but also to the delegation of administrative control to temporary-help and staff-leasing firms (Pfeffer and Baron, 1988; Capelli, 1995).

Pfeffer and Baron identified three modes of externalization that suggested a loosening of attachments between firms and employees. First, increasing use of homework led to an externalization of place, that is, the spatial decentralization of workers from a central site of production. Spatial decentralization resulted,
significantly, from technological developments. Sectors such as banking, insurance, and engineering used the opportunities offered by new information technologies and computerization to keep relationships with their employees at arms-length. Spatial decentralization, however, is not a novelty. Some industries, such as textiles, had a long history of homework, often sited in grey-zones of the economy and, therefore, resistant to socioeconomic and legislative changes (Taplin, 1995). In these cases, one might rather talk of a renaissance of spatially decentralized production. Moving production outside the spatial confines of the firm provides several benefits to employers. Despite obvious savings for accommodating (parts of) the production process (such as rents for office space, etc.), spatial externalization individualizes labour and diminishes opportunities for solidarization and collective action. The spatial division of labour has always been intrinsically political (Lefebvre, 1991; Sack, 1986; Thrift, 1983).

Second, firms externalized administrative control “either by hiring temporary and contract workers who remain on another’s payroll while under the direction of the firm, or else by simply contracting out altogether tasks that need to be done” (Pfeffer and Baron, 1988: 266). Advantages of delegating administrative control by leasing staff lie not just in greater numerical flexibility, but also in savings for sick-leave payments, pay for annual leave, and contributions to retirement schemes (Bennett, 1986; Capelli, 1995). Therefore, leasing staff also increases financial flexibility. This mode of externalization allows firms to bypass legal restrictions or enables them to operate in grey-zones of employment legislation. In other words, the benefits of externalizing administrative control lie most notably in the delegation of employer responsibilities.

Third, besides complete delegation of administrative control by leasing employees, firms also sought to further reduce attachments with remaining staff. This kind of externalization primarily targets the duration of employment by increasing the number of temporary or part-time staff. Employing part-time staff offers increased numerical flexibility. As the number of work hours required might vary, for instance, across the day, additional part-time staff can cover peak periods, which represents a very common staffing practice (not just) in the hospitality industry.
However, part-time staff seems to offer, at least in theory, less financial flexibility than staff leasing; the reason being that with part-time employment costs for administering labour and certain compulsory installments still apply. In practice, however, the boundaries between both categories tend to blur. Many employers use legal grey-zones to save those costs for compensations and allowances that render the cost of part-time work inferior to staff leasing (Capelli, 1997). Nevertheless, the latter two strategies of externalization, leasing and part-time work (casualization), fit well with a model of gradually stratified internal labour markets segmenting staff into several hierarchically structured categories (Guerrier and Lockwood, 1989; Osterman, 1984). Those staff most valuable to the organization gain access to its core. With decreasing significance, however, staff find themselves further expelled from the centre into one of the several semi-core or peripheral areas. Yet, concerns with externalization also provoke major ontological problems for organization theory. Despite their relative distinctiveness, all three modes of externalization that Pfeffer and Baron identified share one crucial implication: they tend to blur organizational boundaries (Sydow, 1992).

3.2.2 Externalization Today

Embedded in larger socioeconomic developments, the trend towards externalization has increased in the decade following Pfeffer and Baron’s publication (D’Aveni, 1994). Socioeconomic trends suggested the near end of organized capitalism in the 1980s (Offe, 1985; Lash and Urry, 1987), and, more recently, the same observers have claimed the advent of an era of utterly disorganized economies of signs and space (Lash and Urry, 1994).

The latter developments seem to indicate an end to the ‘internal system’ on a large scale. At the same time, long-term and lifetime employment, strongly segmented internal labour markets based on qualification, gender, and race, as well as clearly defined career paths with promotion based on seniority, which characterized the internal system, seem to be eroding (Capelli, 1995). Significantly, it was the lack of flexibility, creativity, and innovativeness attributed to hierarchically designed and
rigidly structured organizations that rendered them anachronistic in the eyes of management theorists like Upton (1994) and Volberda (1996). Hyper-competition, changes in customers’ demands, shortened product life cycles, new information technologies and corporate responsibilities have promoted the desire for flexible firms capable of coping with the recurrent adaptations required (D’Aveni, 1994; Dunford and Palmer, 1999; Sanchez, 1996; Volberda, 1996). In the wake of new management doctrines that focus on shareholder value and short-term return on investment, companies increasingly seek to reduce financial risk by externalizing some of their staff and operations (Appay, 1998; Capelli, 1995 and 1997).

Some authors argue that product markets and global pressures have dictated externalization less than is commonly assumed. Appay (1998), for instance, recognizes externalization as a new paradigm of corporate restructuring that primarily seeks to pass on companies’ risks and responsibilities to the larger social community, yet without abandoning control over the externalized businesses or employees. Although she is far from ignoring the constraining effects of market forces on business management, Appay is highly sceptical of the uncritical identification of externalization with a more or less blind organizational response dictated by its environment. To her, externalization is not a “natural” response to market dictates; it unfolds according to a new management doctrine, cascading subcontracting, and is based on strategic decisions.

3.2.3 The Emergence of New Organizational Forms

The discussion of the consequences of externalization has been as controversial as the explanations given for the driving forces behind this development. From the early 1990s, some management theorists addressed the new inter-organizational arrangements evolving from the formal disintegration of production (Clegg, 1990 and 1992; Muetzelfeld, 1992; Powell, 1990; Powell et al., 1996; Sydow, 1992). The sheer variety of labels invented to represent such New Organizational Forms can be bewildering. In a recent paper, Dunford and Palmer (1999) identified no less than twenty-eight different labels to designate New Organizational Forms. Although the
most prominent among these labels, such as strategic alliances, networks, collaborative arrangements, or socially embedded firms, have gained widespread use in management theory, the diversity of labels indicates more than merely different preference for certain signifiers among authors (ibid.). Rather, the multitude of signifiers points to substantial differences that separate the respective theoretical approaches. Even where there seems to be agreement about the signifier to label inter-organizational relations, as in the case of networks, approaches to the issue of New Organizational Forms differ considerably. The fact that the term network, for instance, carries quite different connotations and implies sometimes divergent theoretical assumptions, aggravates efforts at complementary research and theory, according to some authors (Gensier and Fischer, 1995).

At the present, the various approaches to study New Organizational Forms seem dispersed and isolated and are far from integrating into a coherent field for theory and research. It should not come as a surprise that the assumptions held differ not only with respect to the proper design of New Organizational Forms; the very functionality of these new forms for the mastery of today’s economic challenges has become a matter of dispute. Recent empirical evidence suggests that new modes of organizing (among them outsourcing, dis-aggregating of workgroups, using short-term employment policies, implementing flexible workgroups, and setting up collaborative networks) coincide with high degrees of formalization (Dunford and Palmer, 1999). The consequence is a modification of traditional (functional or divisional) organizational structures instead of their more radical replacement.

Dunford and Palmer also elaborate three arguments for this “peaceful coexistence” of traditional and new modes of organizing. First, organizations operating in high reliability environments “suffer when there are insufficient organizational controls in place” (1999: 27). Second, as Adler and Borys (1996) have shown, rules can free up creative and innovative energies; hence, they can be as much enabling as constraining. Third, some authors see hierarchy as a quasi-natural imperative of social organization that has to be (naturally) extended to inter-organizational modes of interaction. Dunford and Palmer conclude that, after all, bureaucratic organization may not be as anachronistic to contemporary economic challenges as is often suspected. Rationalization unfolds as more incremental and non-linear than

The dispute about New Organizational Forms continues the discussion about the New Production Concepts or Flexible Specialization that flowed from the Labour Process Debate and dominated a certain sociological literature in the late 1980s. The same underlying meta-theme that once kindled discussions about the humanization of work seems to drive the current debate of new organizational forms: The future of work.

In another sense, however, the contrast between the two debates could hardly be bigger. In the late 1980s, historical optimism prevailed outside the circles of proponents of Braverman and Neo-Fordism, and developed on the grounds of tentative empirical realizations of human-centred production. The break with Fordist production systems, the introduction of semi-autonomous work groups, and the delegation of conceptual aspects of work from engineering offices to the shop floor seemed to indicate a new era of work. The End of the Division of Labour seemed, at least, conceivable, apparently contravening the Marxian thesis, reiterated by Braverman, of the real subordination of labour (Kern and Schumann, 1984). Western managers and theorists turned their gaze eastward to draw on Japanese experiences in managing multifunctional teams and quality circles. Concrete empirical realizations of this dawning era of humanized work, such as Volvo’s Uddevalla plant, became icons. In management theory, this was an era when the old doctrines of Personnel Management retired in the face of Strategic Human Resource Management. Labour was no longer an obstacle to the technological rationalization of the production process, but, according to the new doctrine, required nourishment and development as a strategic asset.

Meanwhile, however, euphoria has been brought into check. In face of the millions of unemployed and underemployed in even the major industrialized countries, deep pessimism and resignation have gained ground and have found their provisional culmination in Rifkin’s apocalyptic enunciation of the End of Work (1996). With the distance of one decade, the optimists of the 1980s seem surprisingly naive. Did they
simply overlook that icons like Volvo-Uddevalla represented merely (humanized) cathedrals in a (Fordist) desert (Appay, 1998)? Were they unable to imagine that those who lose out on rationalization would not represent an insignificant minority but would include a large proportion of the total workforce? Finally, did they indeed believe that those "losers" would receive better training and would not end up long-term or even permanently unemployed (Schumann, 1998)?

Today, evaluations of contemporary work practices are very different. Now it has been realized that lean management is primarily about raising productivity by reducing the ratio of personnel hours per item produced, which results in externalization and a massive redundancy of labour (Appay, 1998: 164). Not Human Resource Development but cascading subcontracting seems to mark the fate for the large majority of employed, unemployed, and underemployed people in industrialized societies (ibid.). It has also become obvious that "with systemic rationalization there is no 'good work' without 'bad work'" (Altmann and Deiss, 1998: 142) and that even new forms of work-organization – such as group-work, decentralization, and shop-floor optimization – are compatible with traditional modes of organizational structures. Inside the confines of formally renewed but structurally conservative models of work organization "the status quo Taylorist organization is reinforced and the traditional work organization is, at best, modified" (Schumann, 1998: 24). As one of the leading figures of the flexible specialization debate clarified recently:

New concepts of production were for us concepts of rationalization since the intent was to raise productivity. There was no humanistic agenda or social intent involved (Schumann, 1998: 17).\textsuperscript{386}

As Appay points out "(c)ascading subcontracting follows one major principle: the externalization of financial, social, and environmental costs and risks and their related responsibilities down through different levels of subcontractors" (Appay, 1998: 171). In light of these developments, doctrines of Strategic Human Resource Management that call for treating human labour as an asset instead of a cost factor appear almost cynical. Somewhat simplifying, one can conclude that against the optimistic predictions of the late 1980s, what has prevailed is not a new humanized
pattern of work-organization (apart from a small minority of employees in predominantly high-tech industries) but the *End of the Internal System* (Capelli, 1997).xxiv

Given the radically altered landscapes of employment and work, given the vanishing optimism about humanizing tendencies in new technologies, given the resulting lean decentralized organizations often operating in network structures on a global scale, new modes of conceptualizing flexible organizations seemed appropriate. The next section will, therefore, review recent conceptualizations of New Organizational Forms and explore their consequences for organization theory and research.

3.3 New Organizational Forms and Power

3.3.1 Conceptualizing New Organizational Forms as Networks

In a recent article, Krebs and Rock (1994) have reviewed different approaches to new forms of inter-organizational relations subsumed under the concept of networks. By drawing mainly on contributions from academic discussions in Germany, they established a classification that provides a useful starting point to discuss conceptual foundations of contemporary theory on New Organizational Forms. The authors claim that the decisive difference between the various approaches to networks lies with their status as either hybrid forms or distinctive modes of organizing.

Krebs and Rock subsume those approaches under the category of *hybrids* that conceptualize New Organizational Forms as displaying characteristics of both market and hierarchy. Among the most prominent of the ‘hybrid approaches’ is *Transaction Cost Theory*, most prominently embodied by the work of Williamson (1975, 1985) but also prominent in the German academic community (Ebers, 1994; Neuburger, 1994; Scharpf, 1993). Because of the irrelevance of Transaction Cost Theory for the context of this thesis, I will neither engage in a comprehensive
discussion of this approach (see Scharpf, 1993); nor will I discuss criticism directed at this theory, for instance, that it represents an under-socialized concept of agency (Clegg, 1990). What is characteristic of Transaction Cost Theory, however, and what applies to all hybrid approaches, is that they conceptualize New Organizational Forms primarily as inter-organizational relations sustained by legally autonomous entities and mediated through external markets.

To some extent, hybrids show all the characteristics of ideal-type market relations. However, hybrid networks draw on trust and collaboration to prolong relations between such entities beyond the limits of ideal-type market transactions. Whereas the latter describe the (more or less) sporadic interactions of rational and utilitarian actors, network relations seem to show greater temporal and spatial persistence and involve aspects of trust and collaboration. In a way, this argument is not all that recent and follows the insight that market transactions are socially embedded relying to different degrees on trust, rules, and collaboration (Granovetter, 1985). One may wonder, therefore, what the newly coined term ‘networks’ contributes to our understanding of hybrid relationships. We may conclude then that to authors conceptualizing New Organizational Forms as hybrids the difference between traditional modes of organizing, such as markets and hierarchies, and networks is gradual and does not represent the crossing of a qualitative threshold (Sydow, 1992). In other words, what has changed is precisely the form of these social relationships but not their nature. As we will see shortly, whatever one thinks the nature of these relationships to be – e.g. whether it is derived from functional imperatives of the market or socio-economic determinants of class struggle – their essential characteristics remain intact despite the recent changes in the world of work and employment.

In contrast to a conceptualization as hybrids, a number of theorists from different theoretical backgrounds ascribe New Organizational Forms a distinctive quality that transcends traditional modes of coordination (Lawrence et al., 1998; Semlinger, 1993). To them, such new intra- and, in particular, inter-organizational relations represent “neither market nor hierarchy” (Powell, 1990) but a qualitatively new mode of coordination. Proponents of this position, however, differ considerably not only
in the use of their signifiers (e.g. collaboration, networks, or cooperation). They also
differ when identifying the nature of this new quality, for example with respect to the
stability or reciprocity of such relations — conceptualizations of reciprocity hinting at
the issue of power.

Implicitly, attempts at defining New Organizational Forms as new modes of
coordination require the establishment of some sort of third ideal-type, which implies
conceptual problems, as I will show below. Alternatively, and a more serious
problem, they define New Organizational Forms, such as collaboration, negatively;
that is, authors such as Lawrence et al. (1998) operate with the tacit assumption that
any relationship that represents neither market nor hierarchy constitutes a form of
collaboration. This assumption leaves us in limbo, however, for it erodes such
conceptualizations of New Organizational Forms of their relevance for empirical
research: collaboration, for instance, could be anything except for ideal market or
hierarchical relations. Since the ideal-typical status of hierarchy and market implies
its very limited empirical dissemination, which may even be zero (see Weber, 1948),
it will be hard to identify any empirical relation that does not represent a form of
collaboration. The issue of identification, or more generally of observation (in
empirical research), will be of continuous importance for the context of this thesis, as
I will demonstrate below with respect to the issues of power and intentions.

Returning to our point of departure, Krebs and Rock’s (1994) dichotomization
between hybrids and new modes of coordination seems a useful distinction. It sheds
light on, for instance, the different conceptual presumptions and classifies the often
puzzling variety of signifiers used to theorize New Organizational Forms in a
coherent manner. Most notably, the authors’ contribution raises the question as to
whether we are only dealing with ‘old wine in new bottles’ or whether New
Organizational Forms are founded on a distinctively new mode of coordination. The
answer to this question has not only heuristic justifications though. It has very
practical consequences indeed, particularly with respect to empirical research as a
social practice. One side effect of the inflationary issued literature on New
Organizational Forms is, of course, the normative regulation of inter-organizational
relations that seems to restrain a classification in terms of either market or hierarchy.
It does not seem hard to imagine that New Organizational Forms or its sub-concepts such as collaboration could become a new management doctrine and, ultimately, a potential legitimation device. We are already witnessing the usurpation of a still relatively unregulated social (academic) space by those who claim to know what ‘good’ or ‘effective’ networks or collaborations should look like, how they should operate, etc. In other words, conceptualizing New Organizational Forms has undoubtedly practical consequences and seems closely linked with the issue of power.

3.3.2 New Organizational Forms as New Modes of Domination

Alternatively to Krebs and Rock (1994), one could address the issue of New Organizational Forms from a slightly different perspective – one that focuses rather on the issue of power and its relevance to New Organizational Forms. Following the latter strategy, I will draw on an approach that has most overtly expressed the more implicit concerns with power characteristic of a number of other contributions to the issue New Organizational Forms (Semlinger, 1993; Sydow, 1992).

In the context of large scale organizational restructuring since the mid 1980s, researchers from the Institute for Social Research (ISF) in Munich (Germany) have developed a theoretical approach, *systemic rationalization*, that has been applied to a whole range of predominantly manufacturing industries (Allmann and Deiss, 1998; Sauer and Doehl, 1994; Doehl and Deiss, 1992; Semlinger, 1993). In contrast to traditional Taylorist modes of reorganization of production, these new systemic rationalization strategies:

address the reorganization of the value creation chain of a final product over and beyond the reach of individual companies. These strategies seek to increase the overall productivity of the entire production chain. They are pursued by ‘focal’ companies, usually final manufacturers capable of exerting powerful influence on the dependent companies within the value creation chain thanks to their development and manufacturing know-how, their investment strength and innovative capacity. In pursuing this course of action the focal or dominant
companies must seek to balance the ratio between their control over dependent companies, and these companies' autonomy, so as to best utilize their potential contributions to enhancing productivity (Altmann and Deiss, 1998: 139).

This approach seeks to reveal a more fundamental development beneath the technological and functional surface of systemic rationalization: a transformation (Formwandel) of domination (Altmann and Deiss, 1998; Sauer and Doehl, 1994; Deiss and Doehl, 1992; Semlinger, 1993). Domination, thus transformed, no longer operates based on direct control and intervention. Instead, collaboration as "supra-company regulation of functions such as joint Research and Development, logistics and quality management" draws on "indirectly built-in control mechanisms, especially in simultaneous engineering, delivery on demand systems (Just-In-Time), ranking of suppliers by ABC-evaluation, and so forth, not to mention the continuing pressure on competitors for (supply) orders to disclose their costs" (Altmann and Deiss, 1998: 139). Such modes of domination depend on the creation of new media of integration (such as Just-In-Time) and the implementation of New Information Technologies. These media fulfill a double role: they enable coordination across time and space and simultaneously objectify the nature of these relationships (domination) behind technological and functional imperatives (Sauer and Doehl, 1994: 261).

Sauer and Doehl are suspicious of the non-conflictual connotations implicit in descriptions of New Organizational Forms as based on trust and collaboration. Instead, they argue that these are not free of domination. Functional imperatives, such as a concern with quality or customer satisfaction, tend to conceal dependencies and modes of domination underlying these relations. Particularly, these enterprises marketing the final product can position themselves as focal enterprises. They respond to fluctuations in market demand by segmenting the chain of production into discrete parts. Based on their dominant position in the chain of production, focal enterprises enjoy the discretion to externalize some of the market pressures they face via the utilization of market mechanisms. They can do so either by externalizing parts of the production chain to independent businesses (subcontracting, outsourcing) or by generating quasi-market relations with internal units (profit centre). As a consequence, “market mechanisms retain their influence, being internalized and globalized at the same time” (Altmann and Deiss, 1998: 140).
Sauer and Doehl emphasize that the inter-organizational division of labour, emanating from systemic rationalization, becomes a distinctive source for the generation of profit (Wertschöpfung, 262). Although cooperation inside the chains of production unfolds according to functional criteria, it also implies an aspect of profit generation. *Focal enterprises* can subcontract and sub-exploit dependent organizations in the production chain because of their position as the marketers of the final product. However, Sauer and Doehl maintain that the targeted strategic domination of networks through focal enterprises is imperfect. The targeted increase in profitability remains largely fictitious for the total capital involved. This is because the total capital involved depends for its realization on the participating (concrete or fictitious) dependent organizations in the production chain. Furthermore, the orientation of individual organizations involved in the production towards higher productivity for the total chain of production remains fictitious, since productivity growth unfolds only according to particular interests and rationales of the parties involved. In short:

The orientations towards fictitious variables and demands and their actual realization constitute a contradictory relationship that limits the effects of rationalization strategies oriented towards increased production and profit (Sauer and Doehl, 1994: 262, translation DB).

In other words, Sauer and Doehl conceptualize the inter-organizational division of labour characteristic of New Organizational Forms as a zero-sum-game, as struggle among semi-autonomous agents following their particularistic rationales and intentions. More importantly, Sauer and Doehl show that New Organizational Forms conceal behind an apparent foundation in functional imperatives a structure of power and domination not unlike those in traditional hierarchies. However, whereas hierarchies rely, predominantly, on obedience and fiat, New Organizational Forms endure through *controlled autonomy*. Analogous to the legitimation of management prerogatives in the intra-organizational context, the degree of inter-organizational autonomy seems to derive from process or product requirements in the chain of production. Apparently objective criteria, such as striving for high quality products, conceal the social nature of the organization of the production process behind
functional and quasi-natural imperatives. Market exchange remains, formally, the primary mode of coordination among independent businesses in networks, yet in practice functional dependencies (that is, hidden relations of power) increasingly replace market transactions as the primary mode of inter-organizational relations (270). Hence, power and domination are objectified in a double manner through the instrumentalization and internalization of competitive and market principles into the chain of production and, on the other hand, through the execution of directive and control interests through functional media of integration (Sauer and Doehl, 1994: 271, translation DB).

Sauer and Doehl deserve credit for pointing out a hidden dimension of power underlying New Organizational Forms. They reveal under the surface of collaboration a new form of domination and expose apparently functional demands of the production process as power strategies. However, Sauer and Doehl conceptualize power as mainly derived from the (inter-organizational) division of labour privileging some groups at the expense of others. As they occupy a privileged place in the chain of production, focal enterprises take on the role of dominators that integrate or disintegrate parts of the production chain according to their strategic considerations.

Sauer and Doehl's theorization of power is exemplary of the whole ISF approach and shows a clear affinity to Pfieffer's (1981) conceptualization of power as resource dependency. One need only to interpret the strategic position of focal enterprises in the chain of production as a specific resource to see this affinity. Simultaneously, they share some of the shortcomings of resource dependency approaches (see Clegg & Rura-Polley, 1998). Most notably, the ISF approach locates power exclusively in the sphere of production and, even more restrictively, as a form of either hierarchical domination (intra-organizationally) or non-reciprocal exchange (inter-organizationally). By doing so they remain within the tradition of the Labour Process Debate and, as do the former, fall short in two respects. First, their conceptualization of power as unfolding from sovereign agency is problematic, as we have seen above. Recent developments make it difficult to uncritically assume the
boundaries, and hence the interests and strategies, of organizations (be they focal or sub-exploited) are clear-cut. Second, ISF approach, although quite adequately conceptualizing New Organizational Forms as constituted by power, misses out on the symbolic dimension of (organizational) reality. One way of embracing this dimension is to conceptualize New Organizational Forms as discursively constructed, as the next section will elaborate. Thus, they neglect the 'turn to language' in organization studies. Theorists as diverse as Wittgenstein, Schutz, and Foucault have inspired the latter development among scholars of organization studies. The turn to language shifts organizational research and theory to issues such as the (interactive) creation of meaning and the constitutive role of language in everyday life in organizations and links them with issues of power, knowledge, and identity.

3.4 Discourse and New Organizational Forms

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a satisfactory analysis of flexible organizations (or New Organizational Forms) has to take into account issues of power and agency. To this end, we have conceptualized, in line with the ISF approach, relationships sustained in New Organizational Forms as new modes of domination. With the *turn to language* in organizational studies, particularly as inspired by Foucault's work on power/knowledge regimes and his emphasis on the reality (truth) producing quality of discourse, there has also been an increased interest in the symbolic dimension of power (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Turner, 1990). Instead of locating power primarily in the sphere of production – as, for example, theorists writing in the tradition of the Labour Process Debate do – we require an approach that embraces the symbolic nature of organizational life. In what follows, I will elaborate on the issue of discourses and their constitution. Subsequently, I will, briefly, discuss concepts of (organizational) culture and their affinities with the textual approach to organization studies outlined in Chapter 1. The section will close by justifying the focus on the *discourse of customer service* of the Grand Seaside Hotel within this thesis.
3.4.1 Discourse as constitution of social subjects/objects

A discourse is, as Parker puts it, "a system of statements which constructs an object" (1992: 5; emphasis DB). Discourse is constituted through texts, the latter being "delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given an interpretative gloss" (ibid. 6). Discourse analysis implies constructing one's objects, that is, those aspects of social reality that will be put under scrutiny, as texts (Czarniawska, 1997). Emanating from a status of reality as socially constructed, as held by (radical) constructivists, we may "suggest that organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse" (Mumby and Clair, 1997: 181). However, when the same authors remind us that this does not imply that organizations are nothing but texts, we should be cautious not to create a conceptual division that is highly problematic when informing our research and theorizing: one between a sphere of meaning and one of 'pure' materiality. This requires some further elaboration.

With most realists, we could jump to the conclusion that texts are only representations (reproductions) of a material objective reality. Representatives of what is called Critical Language Studies, such as Fairclough (1989 and 1992), Kress (1988), or Kress and Hodge (1979), for example, have argued that discourses ought not to be reduced to their outcomes: texts. Instead, one can address discourses as texts, interactions, and contexts (for interactions). In this respect, Critical Language Studies differ from more relativist or constructivist inclined authors who conceptualize all social action as texts (e.g. Czarniawska, 1997). Fairclough, for instance, understands discourse as:

the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part. This process includes in addition to the text the process of production, of which the text is a product, and the process of interpretation, for which the text is a resource (1989: 24; emphasis original).

At the heart of the apparent problem with organizations as texts is confusion between issues of ontology and those of epistemology. In other words, the question of
whether organizations are nothing but texts, which seems to address an ontological problem, actually implies an epistemological question. The issue is not about being, about "objects" and their ontological status (e.g., whether they are material or merely mental constructs); it is about the way we know reality (and hence, objects).

From a (radical) constructivist position, cognition and knowledge are always (inter-) subjective. This position does not necessarily imply some form of solipsism. As Schmidt (1987) explains, radical constructivism is perfectly in line with a (neo-) Kantian position, one that implies an ontological objectivism while also holding an epistemological subjectivism. In other words, whatever the status or condition of a world or universe may be, we cannot know but through our subjective constructions of the world as reality. This is what radical constructivists have in mind when asserting that we do not have access to our environment as organisms but only as observers; with the result that perception (Wahrnehmung) is interpretation (Schmidt, 1987: 18).

Adapted to the context of organizational studies, a radical constructivist position entails that organizations exist only insofar as we construct them, as Mumby and Clair (1997) have pointed out. Yet, Mumby and Clair’s assertion, which is shared by Critical Language Studies, that organizations are not reducible to texts, is misleading. Whatever may exist in organizations beyond our (cognitive) constructions will forever remain mysterious to us and, hence, is subject to speculation only. But it somewhat crudely, we cannot say how things exist, we can only describe how we perceive (construct) them. Organizations exist only as our constructions; they are products of our language, recorded in the form of (meaningful) expressions: as texts. Therefore, organization study cannot but deal with the meanings constructed – it is, essentially, discourse studies, the interpretation of different forms of texts. This counts for contexts and interactions of discourses too. Hence, the difference between texts and non-textual aspects of (organizational) reality, as asserted by Critical Language Studies, seems misleading. Interactions, for instance, come into existence through an act of perception/interpretation. They have to be read as interactions by an observer (or participant as observer). In this respect, it makes sense to talk of interactions (as of all organizational reality) as texts.
3.4.2 Discourse and Subjects

Discourses also constitute subjects. To proponents of psychoanalysis, for instance, this holds true in a double sense. One may here refer to Lacan’s distinction between the subject of enunciation and the subject of the enunciated. The latter represents the object of any given statement, whereas the former points to the locality from which the author speaks (Alcorn, 1994; Bracher, 1994). At this point, Foucauldian-informed discourse analysis might object that the subject of enunciation, the author, is not given a priori but, instead, is constituted by the very discourse it enunciates. Furthermore, a discourse is a system of meaning, a discursive formation as Foucault (1989) calls it, which is guided by specific rules. As such, each discourse has a certain history, a context of its creation and distribution (Parker, 1992). A discourse also refers always to other discourses, a phenomenon referred to as intertextuality (Kristeva, 1986). Finally, a discourse has ideological effects as it tends to reproduce power relations and related institutions (Parker, 1992).

Critical Language Studies treats language as a social discursive practice – one that stands in a dialectical relationship to social structures that pre-determine and, simultaneously, reproduce it (Fairclough, 1989). The agents of discourses are subjects; yet, these subjects are not self-created autonomous entities. Instead, subjects are produced and limited by subject positions that characterize a certain discourse. By (creatively) enacting these subject positions, subjects become what they are doing (Fairclough, 1989). Foucauldian inspired discourse theory tends to stress that subjects, ultimately, are constructed through discourse and that certain forms of subjectivity have no existence outside of discourse (Haugaard, 1997). Subject positions are not created ‘inside’ specific discourse, but subject to external determination by other discourses. In other words, while there may be no subject such as a teacher outside the discourse of education, not every one in society is equally capable of occupying the institutional position of the teacher. This is why power is not intrinsic to one particular discourse. Relationships of power are interdiscursively constituted, so to speak.
Specific discourses produce social objects, yet they do not do so in a social vacuum. Individuals enter any given discourse (unequally) equipped with certain predispositions, competencies, and prerogatives. The process of subject formation is neither self-sufficient nor autonomous but externally constrained. Although, as Foucault points out, discourses are systems operating according to their own rules of formation, they are not autarchic. Hence, what can be said inside a certain discourse is limited by formative rules in such a way that the abilities of individuals to ‘move’ their positions inside discursive limitations are largely institutionally defined. In other words, “statements cannot come from anybody . . . statements cannot be dissociated from the statutorily defined person who has the right to make them” (Foucault, 1989: 51), while the discourse reproduces the institutional position of the person(s) involved. Hence, the embeddedness of discourses and current social institutions interrelate; in fact they are mutually self-constituting (Haugaard, 1997).

Discourses constitute objects; they produce (a certain form of) truth, as one may say with Foucault. Yet, the process of constitution is a conflictual one vested with power. The definition and establishment of objects/truth is always achieved by struggle among those involved in a discourse. In this respect, subject positions are not neutral. Discourses are sites of power and subject positions manifestations of domination. Foucault stresses that while relationships of power are intentional, this does not mean that they unfold according to the decisions of particular individuals (Foucault, 1982). What Foucault has in mind here is a de-coupling of power from modes of decision making that allow for clear-cut identification of cause and effect. Yet, he also seems to suggest that we should not conceive of power as resulting from autonomously acting and rationally calculating agents. Intentionality does not presuppose a state of conscious awareness on the side of its subject – an insight that has been paradigmatic for psychoanalysis and that finds its reminiscence in contemporary social theory such as Giddens’ practical consciousness or Bourdieu’s habitus.

Drawing on the insights of both Foucault and Critical Language Studies, we can conceive of discourses as sites of power in which objects/truth (or more generally
meaning) are produced by individuals occupying different subject positions. Simultaneously, we should avoid both a voluntaristic interpretation of discursive struggles that overlooks institutional constraints, as well as a crude determinism that sees subjects as completely externally determined in such a way as to void them of any creativity.

3.5 Organizational culture and the symbolic, processual, and contested nature of organizational life

In light of what I have discussed in the first chapters of the thesis, organization studies imply, inevitably, processes of interpretation. What they interpret are various forms of texts. Such texts are produced in discursive systems. Discursive systems (re-) produce subjects/objects; however, they are also 'sites of power' and the processes of producing subject/objects are inextricably linked to issues of power and domination. What is required, then, is a concept that is capable of addressing organization as (based on) processes of reading/writing, of subjectifying and objectifying (identification), and of subjecting/dominating. In this section, I will claim that the concept of (organizational) culture provides a perspective that allows for thematizing organizations as process and product, as evolving around acts of interpretation/representation, and as constituted by and constitutive of power.

3.5.1 Different concepts of culture

Before turning to the concept of organizational culture, it is worth mentioning that there are several notions of culture discussed within academia. Heller (1999) has recently distinguished between three concepts of culture, which each have a distinctive history and different implications. Culture understood as high-culture refers to a normative concept that distinguishes those that 'have' taste as being civilized or cultivated from those who lack the respective qualities or capabilities. This concept – which emerged in the 19th century and was retrospectively applied to
ancient cultures—is elitist and, as such, exclusive on grounds of an acquired form of social conduct, values, and judgements. However, its implicit elitism and bipolarity, which clashes with basic doctrines of modernity, such as equality, has rendered this concept increasingly problematic and, indeed, makes it paradoxical. \textsuperscript{xvii} 

\textit{Culture as discourse}, the second concept, is more democratic in that it designates a particular form of conversation that evolves around the free exchange of ideas and interpretations about (potentially) any topic. This ‘culture of conversation’, which originated in the salons of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, is not oriented towards consensus—quite the opposite, it is characterized by an attitude capable of criticizing anything—and as such is an end in itself. As this culture is basically ‘open’ to everyone and not dichotomous, it is essentially modern and, hence, does not imply the same problems and paradoxes. The third, and to the context of our discussion, most relevant concept, the \textit{anthropological concept of culture}, “is an empirical universal (it encompasses everything that in fact exists)” (Heller, 1999: 134).

\begin{quote}
There is no culture in the singular, nor are there two cultures (for example, humanistic and scientific, or high and low), but there are cultures in the plural. Every way of life is a culture (Heller, 1999: 134).
\end{quote}

Cultures, in the anthropological sense of the term, are functional equivalents and, as such, eschew attempts to compare or hierarchize them. Anyone who still attempts to do so reveals himself or herself as being \textit{ethnocentric}.

\begin{quote}
A culture as a whole can as little be compared with another culture as a whole as a person as a whole can be compared with another person as a whole. The whole is qualitative and not quantitative. It does not offer any standard for comparisons; standards for comparisons need to be quantitative and quantifiable (Heller, 1999: 136).
\end{quote}

However, the impossibility of comparing or hierarchizing culture is not only caused by the lack of a (universally agreed upon) standard. On the side of the subjects, then, their inclusion into different cultures prevents them from (ever) acquiring a position external to culture.

\begin{quote}
Everyone is a member of one culture or another; none of us is an outsider or indifferent (Heller, 1999: 137). \textsuperscript{xviii}
\end{quote}
Anthropological cultures are, paradoxically, both universalistic and idiosyncratic. Their very universalism assures their idiosyncrasy. In other words, all cultures are equally different! This difference, however, is one of undifferentiated pluralism, one that, ultimately, implies a cultural relativism.

Heller points out that the anthropological concept of culture is a historical product. She conceives of ethnocentrism as the “natural attitude”. It was the “modern/Western/European” societies that invented the anthropological concept of culture and thus relativized themselves.

In a radical turn, Europe relativized its own culture. Extremist rationalist enlightenment (the globalization of the idea of modernity as universal progression) and extremist romanticism (the relativization of European culture) appear in context (Heller, 1999: 138).

The relativization of (European) culture also implies a break with the first concept of culture, that is, that of high culture. This development has elsewhere been described as the “jailbreak from the Grand Hotel” (Wagner, 1995: 16)xxix of culture – which meant

... that “culture” no longer can be viewed as a Grand Hotel, as a totalizable system that somehow orchestrates all cultural production and reception according to one master system (Collins, 1989).

However, to Heller, this third concept of culture is also intrinsically paradoxical: it is both the extreme expression of and incommensurable with fundamental values of (post-) modernity.

Cultural relativism prohibits the expression of preferences of certain ways of life over and above other ways of life on any other ground than that this ways of life is “Ours”. Yet this claim sharply contradicts with the tradition of enlightenment, a tradition that is not only European but also modern... In fact, the fundamental values of modernity (the acknowledgement of human rights, of political liberties, of symmetric reciprocity, of pluralism, of publicity, and so on) have placed serious limitations on the recognition of the norm that all cultures must be
acknowledged as equally worthy in the sense of the anthropological concept of culture (Heller, 1999: 139).

In other words, value judgements are possible – indeed they are necessary in the conduct of everyday life as well as research. This holds despite the fact that such judgements can no longer be grounded in either globally universal standards or the superiority of any particular perspective.

In practice, however, every culture makes a choice . . . There is no absolute foundation for the rejection of cultures that do not recognize the norms of Enlightenment in full, but there is also no absolute foundation for recognizing every difference by its own standards. The decision that one normally makes – that is, the leap – is not theoretically founded but contextual. In any given context, when the paradox appears and choice (in action and in judgement) is unavoidable, one chooses either the one statement of the paradox or the other as the foundation of one’s decision. This is not a logical but an ethico-political choice in each case. And this means that the man or woman who so chooses is taking responsibility for his or her choice (Heller, 1999: 140).

With the last statements by Heller, we seem to have arrived at a point similar to that discussed in Chapter 2. We may notice the affinity to Parker’, who also hinted at the gap between theoretical reflection and practical conduct of research (and the “leap” required to bridge that gap). Once more, Heller’s excursus highlights the implicit tensions and occasionally paradoxical situations that one confronts when doing research in a (post-) modern world. Perhaps it is needless to say that it is the third, the anthropological concept of culture that has informed most discussion of organizational culture in academia. Hence, the similarities between Heller’s elaboration on the anthropological concept of culture and my discussion of ethnography in Chapter 1 are not accidental. The textual approach to organization studies that I have outlined above was informed by writings on ethnography, which emanated from the anthropological study of cultures. However, whereas the discussion in Chapter 1 evolved around different forms of texts and the processes of reading/writing, the discussion in this section has focussed on the concept of culture. I will use the next section, therefore, not only to outline different concepts of
organizational culture but – to avoid confusion – I will also clarify the terminology used and the inter-relationships between the concepts discussed.

3.5.2 The symbolic, processual, and contested nature of organizational culture

A number of authors (Alvesson, 1993; Mumby, 1988; Parker, 2000) have followed Smircich (1983), in identifying two different concepts of organization culture.

Culture as a variable is based on the assumption that organizations have a culture. As such, culture is an attribute of organizations and not exhaustive of it. Culture, as the symbolic dimension of organizations, as the sphere of values, beliefs, attitudes, and their representation within stories, myths, and rites, is, as such, accessible to manipulation and can therefore be managed according to parameters of organizational success. This managerialist view of organizational culture, often referred to as corporate culture (Parker, 2000), differs distinctively from a view of organizations as cultural microcosms. Culture, in this view, has the status of a root metaphor, which implies that each organization is a culture (Smircich, 1983). Proponents of this approach are much more skeptical about the manageability of culture (Parker, 2000) and have criticized the managerialist bias of the corporate culture concept (Alvesson, 1993; Salaman, 1997; Willmott, 1993).

Analogous to the distinction between culture as a variable and culture as a root metaphor one can distinguish between symbols as representations of organizational reality or as constituting that reality (Mumby, 1988: 13f.). The first, representational, view is closely associated with the view of culture as a variable. Communication, in this view, is seen as symbolic activity, as a mechanism to transport information/meaning (ibid.). Consequently, the symbolic (cultural) ‘sphere’ is only one of several spheres of organizational reality. In contrast, when organization is culture, communication is not only a representation of that reality, a process that uses symbols to transfer information/meaning. Rather, “meaning is produced in communication” (Mumby, 1988: 14; emphasis original) and symbols (as well as arrangements of symbols such as texts) are the very matter of culture and, what amounts to the same, organizational reality.
Communication is thus not simply the vehicle for information, but rather is the very process by which the notion of organizing comes to acquire consensual meaning. Organizing is therefore continuously created and recreated in the act of communication among organizational members (Mumby, 1988: 14f.).

Thus symbols both regulate and constitute organizational reality (Mumby, 1988: 18).

From this we can conclude, “communication is culture” (Mumby, 1988: 12; emphasis original). Linking the textual approach to organization studies outlined in Chapter 2, with the discussion of (organizational) culture so far, we can draw some further conclusion that will clarify the meaning and relationships of some of the concepts discussed. As we have said, texts are the matter of (organizational) ethnography, the latter referring to the process and product of studying organizations. Texts are meaningful arrangements (chains) of symbols. As such, texts are produced through processes of interpretation/representation or, if one prefers, communication. When communication is culture then culture is (analogous to ethnography) recursive interpretation/representation – it is, simultaneously, both product and process.

Further, as within a textual approach to organization studies, reality is studied as texts, so culture is a special form of text (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992) and thus can be studied accordingly (using ethnographic methods).

It is the universality of culture that, as Heller has pointed out, is immanent to the anthropological concept, which has become subject to criticism. When culture is “the medium of life” (Czarniawska, 1991), when indeed each and “every way of life is a culture” (Heller, 1999: 136), than everything will be reduced to symbolism (Alvesson, 1993). Alvesson, therefore, criticizes proponents of the anthropological view of culture:

“... for them, nothing is 'not culture', and therefore, culture cannot be related to anything else. (Of course, different elements of culture can be related to each other.)” (Alvesson, 1993: 15).
In a slightly different version, then, we here encounter the same problem that Heller has raised above: How can we account for difference (diversity), given the universal nature of culture? One possible response is to shift from an ostensive to a performative definition of culture. The latter differs from an ostensive definition which "assumes that, in principle, it is possible to discover properties that are typical for a given culture and that could explain its evolution, although in practice they might be difficult to detect" (Czarniawska, 1991: 286, emphasis original). In contrast, a performative definition is one that "admits that it is impossible in principle to describe any given culture, but in practice . . . it is possible to do so" (Czarniawska, 1991: 286, emphasis original) – a strategy closely related to Heller's ethico-political choice.xxx

Actors, be they individuals or groups, live in the culture as ostensively defined. Even if they are active, their actions are restricted because they are only part of a larger pattern. If, however, culture is to be preformatively defined, it is the actors who in practice define – both for themselves and for others – what culture is, what it contains, what is the whole, and what are the parts . . . Thus ostensive definitions are attempts to explain principles, whereas performative definitions explore practices" (Czarniawska, 1991: 286, emphasis original).

Further, while, in practice, we do make choices, either ostensively or performatively, as to what constitutes a culture (as a microcosm), we should not assume that the "bubbles" (Czarniawska, 1991) thus constituted are completely homogeneous.

Arguing against a tendency towards reification and stressing the processual, fragmented, and provisional character of concepts such organization or culture, Parker explains:

... that neither term refers to a bounded entity: culture making processes take place 'inside', 'outside' and 'between' formal organizations and organizing processes are constitutive of many different senses of culture. I want to argue that neither organization nor culture are cohesive wholes, or indeed words that have stable referents, but rather they are disparate collections of accounts, people, technologies and so on which are deployed in different ways, by different people, at different times (Parker, 2000: 82.
In other words, each culture has its own ‘intertextuality’. Not only can cultures ‘host’ different subcultures; they also relate to their wider cultural horizon (that is societal or other cultures). As Parker (2000: 82f.) acknowledges, this conceptualization of culture implies the (apparent) double paradox that culture is simultaneously both unitary and divided, a verb and a noun.

Culture – another word for social reality – is both product and process, the shaper of human interaction and the outcome of it, continually created and recreated by people’s ongoing interactions (Jelinek, M.; Smircich, L.; Hirsch, P., 1983: 331-338; as quoted in Mummy, 1988: 11; emphasis DB).

Culture, however, is also inextricably linked with power, in a double sense. On the one hand, the inter-subjective processes of sensemaking that (re-) constitute culture are contested (Mummy, 1988). More precisely, since meaning is never entirely fixed, since it is brought to the text by the reader rather than being intrinsic to it, different interpretations of the same phenomenon may coexist. Which interpretation becomes dominant, which name is chosen to designate a certain phenomenon is anything but trivial, nor is it an act of innocence.

... the act of naming helps to establish the structure of this world ... There is no social agent who does not aspire, as far as his circumstances permit, to have the power to create the world through naming (Bourdieu, 1997: 102).

At this level, (symbolic) power is the power to construct reality, to establish the legitimate view of the world, to speak in the name of another person or group (Bourdieu, 1997). On the other hand, power is – via language – involved in the very construction of the subjects of culture, shaping the identity of those who constitute meaning in form of a legitimate worldview (Foucault, 1984). Not surprisingly, both identity and culture represent “an ‘us’ and ‘them’ claim, an identification, a boundary construction” (Parker, 2000: 3). The capability of defining such cultural boundaries, then, is that power, in (re-) creating the legitimate view of the world, (re-) creates the identity of those individuals inhabiting that world (Bourdieu, 1997).
We can conclude, then, that within a textual approach to organization studies, organizational reality is culture, and, as such, culture is both product (special form of text) and process (interpretation/representation or, if one prefers, communication). Culture is then a symbolic (textual) universe and organization is a special symbolic (textual) segment, a ‘cloud of meaning’, carved out of that universe by individuals who recurrently make and remake sense of their reality (be they researchers or members of the organization). Thus far, within a textual approach, terms such as culture, organization, and text can be used synonymously to describe such a particular ‘cloud of meaning’ – although, we may prefer verbs such as reading/writing, communicating or organizing to stress the processual qualities of the phenomena described. Meaning, however, is not entirely fixed, it is subject to continuous power struggles to define the legitimate view of the world and the identity of those inhabiting that world. Hence, cultures, as ‘sites’ for the creation of meaning, are symbolical battlefields. Discourses, as special forms of communication that (re-) create objects/subjects, are constituents of culture, although the latter may not be reducible to any particular discourse. As there are several objects/subjects within organizations, there may be several discourses that constitute them. It seems appropriate, then, to explain why, within this thesis, I will focus on one particular discourse (and the objects/subjects it constitutes): the discourse of customer service. Concluding this chapter, I will therefore elaborate on the choices involved in selecting/constructing that particular discourse.

3.5.3. The discourse of customer service

This thesis will concern the creation and recreation of a particular discourse: a discourse that I will claim is particularly important to life in the Grand Seaside Hotel: the discourse of customer service.

In line with the theories of discourse discussed above, we can assume that this discourse is productive of subjects as well as of objects. The discourse of customer service is, as I will demonstrate, productive of certain subject positions, for instance, those of managers, staff, and more generally members of the organization. By the
same token, this discourse also produces a sense of identity among the members of the organization. Perhaps more importantly, the discourse of customer service produces objects: most notably customers and the process of serving them. Hence, this thesis will focus on those texts in which customer service and different categories of customers are discursively constructed, while, simultaneously, it somewhat neglects the aspect of enactment of such texts (Czarniawska, 1997).

As the thesis will further show, customers hold a prominent, 'double' position in this discourse, being object and subject at once. They are objects as far as they are the product of the discourse – constructed as reference points for organizational interaction and identity. As such they are, for instance, subjected to various procedures that seek to allow for their governance by rendering them into cases or categories. However, they are also present as (distant) mediated voices in the very same discourse of their constitution/objectification. As I will show, customers are at once present and absent in this discourse: a somewhat paradoxical situation at first glance. They are symbolically mediated, that is, made present, through writing and speech. Their status, hence, is that of being involved in the process of their own creation. They are the incarnation of an (organizational) paradox. They are the omni-present yet (physically) absent subjects/objects of the customer service discourse.

A number of reasons exist for choosing the discourse of customer service among the various discourses I encountered in the Grand Seaside Hotel. The first and most important reason is related to my participative role as a researcher in the field. By the time I entered the field, the hotel had just undergone a major restructuring process during which layers of hierarchy, particularly middle level management, were abandoned and a number of employees lost their jobs.

This is not the place to report in detail on the restructuring process. I will reserve such a report for the following chapters. What is relevant to my choice of customer service as the primary target of investigation is the fact that this issue seemed to be of considerable importance to management in the organization. At my first face-to-face
encounter with employees of the Grand Seaside, the General Manager – Tim, as I will call him throughout this thesis – pointed out that customer service was top of his agenda for changing the hotel into a “modern business. By and large, the whole restructuring process was subordinated to this aim. Hence, my interest raised a number of research questions that were closely related, such as ‘Why customer service seemed so important to the hotel’s management?’ ‘What were the latter perceiving as constitutive of customer service?’ and ‘How did management try to improve customer service?’

My interest in the issue of customer service was further channelled through the choice of the events studied. The most prominent among those events were the customer service training and award programs that had just been launched when I arrived at the hotel. Yet, there were also the regular meetings of the management group that I regularly attended and that seemed to put a strong emphasis on issues of customer service. Last but not least, there was the annual All-Staff-Meeting that I witnessed – a theatrically staged event that seemed to unveil the centrality of the customer service discourse as a means of influencing employees’ expectations, behaviour, and identities. The combination of events and choices mentioned, on which I will report in detail below and which unfolded over the early stages of my research, increasingly channelled my research interests towards a preoccupation with the issue of customer service and its discursive production.

Further advancing the convergent effects of the more practical rationales that I have just mentioned was my theoretical interest in the issue of customer service. At the early stages of my research, there were three conceptual reasons for focussing on the discourse of customer service. First, service organizations, such as hotels, that host service encounters, differ from manufacturing organizations in several respects. Because in service encounters service production and consumption are intertwined, the temporal/spatial separation between both processes, as characteristic for manufacturing, becomes blurred (Czepiel et al., 1985). This means that service organizations not only provide localities for the production but also the consumption of services. Consequently, customers are co-present in the processes of service production and consumption.
The implications of customers’ co-presence for service organizations are plentiful. Most notably, customers can monitor the process of production (at least as far as the aspects produced during the service encounter are concerned), which implies that service evaluation happens in the same spaces as service production. In contrast to the manufacturing of goods, service encounters do not allow for quality control prior to completion and service of the product to the customer. Hence, it is much more difficult to disguise any stochastic problems of the production process in service encounters. To staff providing the service this means that control is not only exercised by their superiors, but also by those being served. Yet, the role of customers in service encounters goes beyond that of a source of control. Because service encounters are interactions in which each partner has to perform a certain role, customers play an active part in the production of the service. In other words, the quality of any given service (encounter) is not only evaluated but also co-produced by customers. This is why Mills and Morris (1986) refer to Clients as Partial Employees in Service Encounters. Consequently, for management to control the process of service production not only requires the control of employees but also the expectations and performances of customers. For the context of organizational analysis, this suggests that I would be unable adequately to address issues of power and control without reflecting on the organization’s relationships with its customers.

Second, given the active role of customers in service encounters, I expected the relationships between organization and customers to be particularly significant for issues of organizational identity. As I will demonstrate below, customers do not only function as alter ego in service encounters, hence shaping organizational members’ behaviour and sense of identity. In doing so, customers, or their (symbolic) representatives, also become involved in the discursive dynamics of the organization and play a pivotal part in symbolic struggles about the legitimate view of the organizational world.

Third, symbols are not only constituted by difference, they are also representatives of absence (Saussure, 1959). The symbol is the murderer of the thing. A symbol stands for something other than itself. It represents an absent Other. Hence, when
addressing issues of symbolic power, I assumed that I had to pay attention not only to the obvious (present) but also to what is absent (hidden).

The demarcation between absence and presence marks the foundation of symbolic struggles, as the thesis will demonstrate. Because of the nature of service organizations (hosting service encounters), this demarcation evolves around a particular tension. In manufacturing organizations, customers tend to be absent. They are symbolically represented through the anonymity of the market; a process that has been discussed since Marx as that of alienation. In service organizations however, things are somewhat different. In hotels, for instance, customers are the concrete alter ego of service encounters. In this respect, one could argue that employees in service encounters are apparently less alienated. Yet, not all aspects of service provision happen in service encounters. Some functions, such as cooking in the hotel kitchen, cleaning of hotel rooms, washing in the hotel laundry, as well as most administrative work, occur without customers being present. These aspects of service provision happen behind the scenes, disguised from the gaze of the Other (customer), to use Sartre’s (1996) expression. This area, in hotel jargon called back of house, is distinguished from front of house, the area where service encounters take place. Both areas echo Goffman’s (1959) distinction between public and private spheres. The demarcation between both areas is a very symbolic frontier indeed; it is one marked by the presence/absence of the Other (here, the customer). Hence, hotels provide symbolic localities for both the presence and absence of customers. Some of the questions relevant for this thesis, therefore, address the issue of ‘How the presence/absence of the other (customer) is mediated?’ ‘How do people in the back of house (symbolically) constitute an image of the Other (customer) vis-à-vis its presence in service encounters?’ ‘How does the image thus created reflect on the customer’s presence in service encounters?’

The questions just posed will inform the discussion in the chapters that follow, which elaborate how, in a flexible organization such as the Grand Seaside Hotel, the discourse of customer service is constructed. In order to elaborate comprehensively how the legitimate view of customer service is established and reproduced, I felt that I would have to address diverse aspects of organizational life in the Grand Seaside —
to read and represent a diversity of texts, to put it into another form. First, I sought to analyze aspects of symbolic life in the organization, such as ritual events or award systems, involved in the discursive production of customer service. I also intended to identify who participates in the discursive negotiation of organizational worldviews and how power operates in these struggles about meaning. Finally, I set out to explore what were the consequences of the discursive construction of customer service for behaviour and identities in the organization.
4 Restructuring, Rewards, and Training

In this chapter I will report on a number of events that happened in the Grand Seaside and that I regard as important for comprehending the customer service discourse and its impact on life at the hotel. I will start with a brief description of the Grand Seaside's organizational restructuring program followed by some remarks about Tim's career path and his mission to render the Grand Seaside into a modern hotel business. In pursuit of this report, I will also reflect on difficulties that arise when ethnographers are confronted with inconclusive or contesting accounts of organizational reality. Eventually, I will describe the reward and training systems introduced to the Grand Seaside as part of Tim's mission. Overall, the style of representation I have chosen for this section is rather that of reportage, indicating the 'second hand' status of my knowledge about the events.

4.1 The restructuring of the Grand Seaside Hotel

When Tim took over his position as General Manager in 1995, the Grand Seaside Hotel had just undergone a change in ownership. Given the context of the previous inefficiency of the hotel, the new owners decided to change the management of the hotel. Consequently, the contract with the former Hotel Management Company was cancelled and Globe Hotels, a major international Hotel Management Chain, took over. In the beginning of 1996, a large restructuring program followed the takeover. The aim of this restructuring program was to make the hotel operations more efficient and, overall, to increase the profitability of the property. Tim, who was by that time the Chief Controller of the Grand Seaside Hotel, was asked by Jim Carson, the responsible Director of Operations at Globe Hotel's headquarters for the South-Pacific, to take over the position of General Manager and to implement the changes required.
The next steps in the restructuring process are not easily to reconstitute and reporting on the pursuit of the program and its implementation is not as straightforward as it may appear. Since most of the changes took place before I entered the hotel, I had to rely to a large degree on second-hand accounts of members of the organization to construct my story. These accounts, however, differed considerably across the hotel when I sought to identify who masterminded the restructuring program or what rationales underlie the strategies implemented.

According to staff at the Grand Seaside Hotel, Jim Carson’s plans for the restructuring of the hotels into profitable organizations dated back to the time of an earlier appointment. He had already developed these plans during his time with Venezia, another major international Hotel Management Chain. Pivotal to his plans was the restructuring of core operations of the hotel business, such as Food and Beverages, to reduce the overall levels of hierarchy. Simultaneously, the number of staff was to be decreased to cut fixed costs and to make the organization more profitable. For the same purpose, all aspects of the businesses that were not considered essential were supposed to be subcontracted or outsourced. Listening to staff, I received the impression that Jim’s blueprint for the hotel might have been that of a ‘lean organization’, downsized to its bones and operating at the margins of necessary staff numbers to continuously generate maximum profits for its owners.

According to rumours spread by staff of the Grand Seaside Hotel, his attempt to implement the restructuring program at Venezia failed. Increasingly, he encountered resistance for his plans from staff, management, and owners. Accordingly, his resignation from Venezia was rather involuntarily and his subsequent appointment at Globe Hotels offered him a second chance for implementing his plans. By that time, however, he had already established a reputation as a “hard-liner” and “job killer”. Consequently, some staff anticipated his appointment and the subsequent launch of the restructuring program with rather mixed emotions. To these staff, it did not come as a surprise that the restructuring process was accompanied by layoffs.
Significantly, I was unable to establish the exact number of layoffs during my research. When I started my research, parts of the overall restructuring were still underway. Yet, as far as layoffs were concerned, the bulk of them had already happened. Although I initially made some inquiries about the number of staff who were sacked as a result of the restructuring program, I only received deferring answers from the Human Resource Manager: “Well, quite a few. But I do not know the exact number”. After I had received several similar responses and I realized the discomfort that my question seemed to generate, I decided not to insist any longer on a formal answer. Eventually, I figured out that this was one of the sensitive issues that had become externalized from the organization’s customer service discourse.

One of the most important changes introduced during the restructuring was to abandon the previous juxtaposition of the Food & Beverages Departments and the Conference Unit. The responsibility of organizing food and beverages was taken over by Brett, the Executive Chef, and responsibility for the Nightclub was decentralized to the respective manager. The Conference Department was subsequently headed by a Guest Services Manager, who was in charge of the Conference Coordinators as well as the Banqueting Staff. Some parts of the hotel operations were completely outsourced, such as the Audio-visual Service for conferences and meetings hosted in the hotel or the shops located in the arcades surrounding the outside of the hotel. Other parts of the hotel were largely decentralized as in the case of the hotel restaurants, the Bar, and the Fitness Club, which were rendered into profit centres.

Although major changes happened prior to my arrival at the hotel, the restructuring process was not a one-off event. Strategies were rather implemented step by step and there were still a series of changes that I witnessed during my research. The Fitness Club, for instance, was outsourced and subsequently run by the previous manager as private business. Jobs were either cancelled, such as the position of Assistant General Manager, or outsourced to private companies, such as positions in the administration of the hotel. Nor did the restructuring occur merely as a result of
strategic decisions and without conflict about the design and implementation of decisions, as the following example will show.

4.1.1 The Restructuring of the Conference Unit

The Conference Department, which underwent several cycles of restructuring during the period of my research, provides a good example for the kind of difficulties Tim and other managers faced during the restructuring process. As Alice, who was Head of the Conference Department by the time I started my research, explained, the internal restructuring came underway through the transferral of one of the Conference Coordinators to the Public Relations office. Alice, who used to be the Food & Beverage Manager under the old structure and had just become Head of the Conference Department two months ago, used the occasion of her appointment and suggested to Tim changing the whole structure of the department.

By that time, just following the first round of restructuring, the Conference Department was headed by a Guest Services Manager and operated with two Conference Coordinators and one Administration Assistant. The latter did mainly administrative, almost secretarial work that was preparatory for the work of the Coordinators. This job, which did not involve much more than filling in form-sheets plus some typist work at the computer, was described to me as being most boring and ill paid. Consequently, the position of Administrator was regarded as having the lowest status in the department and constituted an entry position for newcomers. Staff who had just joined the department, for instance, would regularly start as Administrators to get “their hands dirty” before upgrading to the position of Coordinator. The latter, in contrast, had a more complex and diversified job. It included only a small amount of paperwork with client files. Apart from that, it involved work at the hotel’s computer booking system as well as direct contact with customers either by telephone or face to face. The job required, therefore, a very good understanding of the whole process of customer service in conference and event management as well as good social skills for mastering service encounters.

Finally, the Guest Services Manager worked as a Coordinator, parallel to the others,
while, additionally, being responsible for coordination with other departments such as the kitchen, for example.

By the time the vacancy arose, the usual, traditionally established way of replacing the person leaving would have been to ‘up-grade’ the acting Administration Officer to the position of Conference Coordinator and hiring a new person for the administrative job. Instead, Alice – inspired by a recent training course she attended that stressed the virtues of “multi-skilling” and “growing people” – surprised Tim with the proposal to split the work tasks equally among all four people in the office. As a consequence of this proposal, everyone in the office would have been supposed to do virtually the same job, that of Conference Coordinator, while serving different clients. Simultaneously, the majority of “paperwork”, which was previously handled by the Administration Officer, would now have been divided among all four Coordinators. Thus, by integrating the work of the Administration Officer into the other jobs, everyone in the department would not only have to look after his or her own paperwork but also accompany clients through all stages of the customer service process in a sort of project management. The remaining part of paperwork, such as the writing of schedules and the preparation of the weekly meeting with other department heads would have been rotated among the Coordinators on a weekly basis.

Alice stressed that to her mind this division of labour has several advantages. It would result in a lower workload for each of the Conference Coordinators, the people in the unit would become multi-skilled, and it would give the department greater flexibility, as each of the Coordinators was capable of taking over the others’ work if need be. The latter issue had frequently lead to problems, particularly on occasions such as sickness leave or holidays. Simultaneously, Alice said, customers would be happier, as they had only to deal with a single Coordinator throughout the whole process of organizing and running a conference instead of being ‘handed over’ among different staff. In short, what Alice proposed was a de facto vertical integration of the customer service process eliminating almost any division of labour in the unit.
Eventually, the restructuring Alice proposed was implemented – against some resistance though. In fact, her victory was not an easy one. When she presented the proposal for the restructuring to Tim, her plan required to “push for a higher part of the budget for the Conference Unit”. This was because the position of the Administrative Assistant, which was subordinated to the Conference Coordinators and, therefore, received lower compensation, was replaced by a Coordinator who was entitled to a higher salary. Furthermore, by the time Alice brought her plan forward, Tim, his Assistant General Manager, Ray, and Madeleine had already discussed a different structure for the Conference Department. According to their plan, the Conference Unit was supposed to take over the booking of accommodation from the Reservations Department; a task that the Conference Unit had handled in the past. Alice argued against this plan – which was, according to Alice, driven by the cost-saving agenda of Madeleine and the Assistant General Manager – that the workload for the Conference Department would grow dramatically. The increased workload would require, as Alice argued, to have at least another, fifth Coordinator in the department – a suggestion that she knew was impossible to implement given the very limited space in their office.

As Alice reported further, the acting Reservations Officer, Pamela, was quite supportive of her proposal, perhaps because Madeleine and Ray’s proposal implied further redundancies. Pamela must have surmised these implications, at least since, in a face-to-face conversation, Tim had ask her rather bluntly: “What kind of job do you think you will be doing in the future, if I take away 80 per cent of your workload and allocate it to conference people?” Maybe because Pamela was a long serving employee in the hotel, Tim finally took sides with Alice. While his Assistant General Manager was on annual leave, Tim decided that he would support the restructuring suggested by Alice. He announced that he would monitor the developments in the conference department, and that he would suspend any further functional integration to reconsider the issue in half a year’s time.

The example of the Conference Department indicates that the restructuring process may have been less than smooth and that different rationales, divergent strategies, and shifting coalitions may have been at work during its implementation. What may
become clear in the following is that there are perhaps as many different stories about the restructuring, its rationales, and its implementation collectable as there are people in the organization.

Tim’s versions of the developments leading to the restructuring program as well as the agencies responsible for its design and implementation differ greatly from the accounts that I derived from staff. In our very first meeting, he acknowledged the role of the hotel owners, who seemed to have exerted considerable pressure in a desire for higher profits, as a major force for driving the restructuring. At another occasion, however, Tim provided a quite different version of the events. In an informal interview that two colleagues and I had with Tim over lunch, he claimed the restructuring process to be “his project”. While elaborating to us his vision of a “modern hotel business”, Tim asserted that he was the person responsible for design and implementation of the program. Without explicitly referring to his name or position, Tim degraded the role of Jim Carson to that of a mere spectator. Tim pointed only indirectly to Jim, when he mentioned that his superiors were impressed with and supportive of the plans for the restructuring that he suggested to them.

The accounts provided by Tim contrast considerably with the one given above, which is mainly based on information from other members of staff. Faced with the different interpretations/accounts derived from people in the organization, I had to choose, on this as well as on other occasions, which accounts I should present in the thesis. This is a less than easy choice. Given the epistemological position chosen in this thesis, it was impossible to construct one single account that could claim to be more authentic or real than others were. Yet, I also felt that representing all accounts I (could have possibly) derived was not a very convincing option either. It certainly would have been at the cost of narrative coherence, a fact that not all readers may welcome. I chose, therefore, a middle-way, representing different accounts on occasions, such as the restructuring of the hotel, where I felt interpretations differed remarkably or even contradicted. At other occasions, I decided to represent accounts that seemed plausible – or veritable, to use a better term – to me. Since verisimilitude played an important role in the construction of my research account, I will now briefly elaborate on this issue in the context of ethnographic writing.

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To recapitulate, I think there are good reasons for not accepting Tim’s accounts at face value – but reading them in their specific context of enunciation. In this respect, all his different accounts are meaningful and it is from my position as observer impossible to decide upon their authenticity or accuracy – that is, upon their truth. If we subscribe to a view of reality as socially constructed, we cannot but abandon questions for ultimate truth as fundamentally undecidable and speculative. By the same token, in everyday life and also in research (if there is a difference), we certainly can and often must judge on what we believe to be true or plausible. As Parker expresses it:

Somewhere in my analysis I have to leap from the convenient (but philosophically unchallengeable) distance of postmodern relativism to what I think is happening, and what I think might be possible (Parker, 1995: 558).

Realism, as applied in the conduct of research, still has the closest affinities to our common sense assumptions about the nature of things and the state of the world (Schmidt, 1987). It allows us to act “as if” (there is an external reality), and as long as the course of action we choose “works”, we may consider the assumptions guiding our action to be “true”, according to pragmatist standards (Rorty, 1982). Hence, it is some form of realism that seems to underlie the kind of practical consciousness (Giddens, 1984) that is guiding our (everyday) course of action.

After this short excursion into the narrative reconstruction of the restructuring program at the Grand Seaside hotel, we may be reassured of the indexicality of meaning and, hence, of social reality. The question that realist ethnographer would worry: ‘Which account is true/valid?’ seems utterly undecidable and inappropriate to me. As I have pointed out, this does not mean that different versions of reality cannot carry more or less verisimilitude to me, an evaluation that may or may not be shared by the readers. Hence, in what follows I will, for the purpose of a less complex narrative structure, usually present/construct accounts that seem most veritable to me.
4.2 Tim’s mission

When Jim Carson took over his position as Director of Operations at Globe Hotels, he must have thought that, by appointing Tim, he had found the right person to implement his plans. There are several qualities that Tim has to offer. He is about forty years old, highly intelligent, dynamic, and very sociable. Tim seems almost tailored for such an organizationally and, most importantly, socially sensitive process as the restructuring of the Grand Seaside Hotel. As many members of staff stressed, the contrast between Tim and his predecessor Helmut, a German, who had been very autocratic and authoritarian, could not have been stronger. Tim’s egalitarian attitude, his genuine concern for the employees, and his participative style of leadership took many staff by surprise. Indeed, I would suggest that the fact that the changes the employees had to bear in the process of restructuring did not seem to result in any explicit form of collective resistance, was in part due to the fact that “He is simply a very likeable character”, as one staff member expressed it.

Many of the staff I talked to seemed to feel genuinely sympathetic towards Tim, regardless of the hardships they had to go through during the restructuring process. This holds true despite the fact that the restructuring process was demanding indeed, in particular for management. Many of the managers working at the hotel had to pay a double price. On the one hand, there was a price to pay in the form of actual or potential redundancy. With the abolishment of many management positions, the toll among managers and supervisors was considerable, which resulted in an underlying fear of job-loss among managers. On the other hand, many of those who survived the restructuring found themselves in often unfamiliar positions and had to cope with significantly increased levels of work intensity and overall responsibility.

Madeleine, the controller, seemed to epitomize this new situation. Many managers indicated that the degree of self-responsibility and autonomy demanded by Tim stood in sharp contrast to the military-style culture experienced under the previous General Manager in which everybody was supposed to do exactly as they were told.
Tim, of Chinese-Malaysian decent, started his career as an accountant and had been with Globe-Hotels for more than 15 years. After he had worked his “way through the ranks” in several accountant positions, he came to Australia in 1993 and was appointed the senior accountant for the Asia-Pacific region. According to Tim, this job involved a lot of travelling, which put considerably pressure on his family life. Consequently, “I decided to explore other career opportunities”, as Tim reported. He joined the Grand Seaside Hotel and became its chief controller. Two years later, in 1995, he took over as General Manager of the same hotel, and since early 1996 he has headed the implementation of the restructuring program.

After he had taken over full responsibility for the hotel, Tim was determined to introduce changes. By that time, the hotel had received many complaints from customers about the poor quality of service encountered. Convinced that the key to the improvement of service quality lies with the organization’s employees, Tim listened carefully to any suggestions or complaints of his staff. One of the most common complaints addressed the limitations that arose from the very hierarchical structure of the hotel at the time. In particular the obedience demanded from superiors and the formality of the overall decision making frequently became objects of such criticism. Hence, Tim proposed to his superior to flatten the hierarchy and to move towards employee empowerment. Once he had received approval for his project, he started with the restructuring of the Food & Beverage Department. More precisely, he made the position of the Food & Beverage Manager redundant. Tim chose the Food & Beverage Department to be the starting point for the restructuring mainly because it was the target of many complaints launched by managers of the outlets of the hotel. The outlet managers saw “the functioning of the Food & Beverage Department as the major hurdle that prevented them from providing service excellence”, as Tim explained. Once the decision was taken to abandon the position of Food & Beverage Manager, the outlet managers received full control of their business. Today, they get a certain budget allocated and run their outlet independently as profit centres. This new structure, however, implies that the new heads of departments or units have to take on more responsibility and have to acquire
more and broader skills. As compensation, they will receive a percentage of the profit made in their outlets.

Tim also mentioned that he is very proud that, to his knowledge, the Grand Seaside Hotel is the first hotel ever to operate successfully with this very decentralized structure. Although previously attempts had been made to implement such a decentralized structure at Venezia, the executives at this company seemed to operate with little fortune and eventually their attempts failed. In case of its success at the Grand Seaside, the restructuring program is likely to become a blueprint for the restructuring of most of the other outlets of Globe Hotels in various countries.

4.3 Rewards and Training

According to Tim’s account, the restructuring of the hotel was mainly part of his mission to render the Grand Seaside into a modern hotel business. His particular concern was with the quality of customer service as the foundation for business success in the hotel industry. Hence, the first part of achieving his mission implied the modification of the formal organizational structure. This process, which was, by and large, already completed by the time I started my research, has been described above. The remains of this chapter as well as the next chapter will concern another aspect of Tim’s mission, that is, the attempt to change employees’ attitudes towards the business in general and the issue of customer service in particular.

As Tim explained, he sought completely new ways to improve the quality of the service provided and to raise the level of customer satisfaction at the Grand Seaside. For that purpose, he launched the Customer Service Training Program and restructured the hotel’s reward systems. Although very restricted in his budget, Tim has regularly approved the spending of a substantial amount of money on training and Human Resource Development. However, his commitment to education and training does not stop with educating his staff but is reflected in his personal career development. At the time of my research, he was doing a Master of Business
Administration in Hotel-Management at an Australian university through distance education. This course, as he admitted, provided Tim with many insights and new ideas. As he said, his commitment to educating and training staff derives from his conviction that:

Nowadays, customer service is the key to survival in an ever more competitive market. I have to do more than the other competitors; I have to provide service-excellence, really outstanding service. I can only do that by listening to what the customer says and by listening to my staff. But, actually, it's about more. It's not just meeting customers' expectations; that's what all do. It means exceeding them, providing service beyond the customer's expectation, that's my philosophy. And you can only do that by training your people properly.

Equipped with his philosophy, Tim used every opportunity to get his message across to management and staff. Apart from the Morning Briefings, which we already encountered and which are normally attended only by management, Tim communicates using the monthly hotel newsletter that is distributed among the hotel staff, the notice board, or even the walls of the staff canteen. In particular, he uses events such as the All-Staff-Meeting, to reach also those employees in the lower ranks of the hierarchy. I will report on these more informal “distribution strategies” further down. For the time being, I will focus on more formal aspects of the customer service program such as the training courses and the reward system introduced at the Grand Seaside.

4.3.1 The hotel’s reward and training programs

There are two different employee reward programs in place at the hotel. The first program, the Employee of the Month Award, has been in place for several years. This program is designed to reward employees who have consistently shown excellence in their overall job performance. To become a candidate for the Employee of the Month Award, the respective Department Head has to nominate the employee. For that purpose, the Human Resource Manager distributes, on a monthly
basis, special nomination sheets during the Morning Briefings. The respective Department Head then has to fill in these forms to nominate one of their employees. The management team makes the decision about who is granted the award during one of the Morning Briefings. Besides a small monetary acknowledgment (one hundred Australian dollars), the winner’s photo will be exhibited in the front lobby of the hotel. The following sequence, out of one of the Morning Briefings, illustrates the process of decision making that precedes the granting of the award. In this particular sequence, the award granted is that of the Employee of the Year. The winner of this award is chosen (mainly) out of the pool of the Employee of the Month winners of the respective year.

Tim: So, okay we are just left with the Employee of the Year Award.
Di: So we have the list with the nominees. We have decided only to take those ones into consideration who have been Employee of the Month before.

Tim is almost interrupting Di when he takes over.

Tim: We had a look at the list with the nominees for the monthly awards and we would have to come up with 30 odd nominations. That wouldn’t have been sensible.
Elsa: No you couldn’t handle that. But what happens with those who had been in the draw several times but never made it?
Tim: We had a look at this already when we gave away the Monthly awards.
Bill: Yes, that would have been an issue for the monthly awards.
Di: So, here are the nominations. (Passes around sheets with the names of the nominees.)
Tim: Any sales for the Employee of the Year?
Madeleine: Yes, I think Alistair is outstanding under these nominations.

Many people are nodding their heads.
Tim: Yes I also think Alistair is the best the hotel has to offer. He accounts for so many return guests. He entertains the whole fifth floor. I know of guests who only return because of him. They don’t want to have anything to do with anybody else, not even with me. They only ask for him, which is good!

Brief pause.

Tim: All agree?” (He looks around.)
Bill (somewhat hesitant): Well, I was just thinking of Roger.
Brett: Yes I also think he’s terrific. I mean he works back of house and not many people see him, but because I have a lot to do with him, he’s always there and helps, and his attitude is fantastic.

Madeleine, who is Roger’s direct superior:
Yes, he’s really great. Whenever we have questions, you know that you can go to him and he will always know what to do.

Bill: I know that he has an enormous workload and I never heard a single complaint from him. He just does it.

Tim: Yes, that’s true, he’s really good. It’s a bit unfortunate because he’s back of house and Alistair works front-line and this is still more important and more recognized because he serves the customers.

Brett: Yes, I know. I just wanted to mention this, but I have to admit that Alistair is a hard act to follow.

A brief moment of silence.

Tim: So okay, hands up for Alistair.

All participants of the meeting with the exception of Bill, Brett, and Madeleine are raising their hands.

Elsa: So, I think we can stop voting.
The other award granted by the hotel is the Make the Little Things Count Award. This award has been introduced jointly with the customer service training of the same name and has replaced the Achiever of the Month Award. The latter award was designed for outstanding employee performances during the respective month. Whereas the Employee of the Month award stresses employees' continuity in the conduct of their duties, honouring, for instance, the fact that some staff had been nominated repeatedly, the Achiever of the Month Award (as well as its successor, the Make the Little Things Count Award) valued extraordinary performance for the respective month.

Again, we may peep into one of the Morning Briefings to get an impression of the proceedings that precede the granting of the award. The sequence we encounter will also demonstrate that the decisions that lead to the granting of the award are not always made unanimously and that they may be subject to forms of politics. For the Make the Little Things Count Award there are, usually, close to ten people nominated. The person nominating could be anyone and not just department heads as for the Employee of the Month Award. During the meeting concerned, Elsa announced, on the behalf of persons nominating, all the achievements potentially to be awarded. One of the meeting participants had to leave the room, as he was himself one of the nominees. After the votes had been counted, Tim announced that the person placed second, Eddie, to whom he gave his vote, should also receive a prize.

Tim: Given the very high standard this month, I think it'll be fair to give away two awards.

After a moment of silence during which most participants of the meeting look rather surprised, Brett responds somewhat puzzled.

Brett: But that's the case almost every month. Last month we had seventeen nominations. That was also a hard one to decide.
Tim: Yes, but Eddie has been a high performer for a very long time. And he is usually quiet and his excellence is often overlooked. He has been nominated before and I feel that he should get some remuneration.

Tim’s last statement sounded very determined. It appears that he has already made up his mind, only informing the others about his decision. Perhaps realizing the rather authoritarian style of his decision, Tim puts on a big smile and adds in a rather joking manner:

Tim: Well, sometimes I have to make use of my formal power.

Tim then turns to Matilda.

Tim: So, I’d actually like to see two awards to be given away.
Matilda: So would you like to have two winners? Or an encouragement award for Eddie instead?
Tim: No, no. The person that was first is and remains the winner. Eddie will just get an encouragement award.

The Make the Little Things Count Award pursues similar objectives to the Achiever of the Month Award with respect to the extraordinariness of the performance shown. What has changed, however, is the stronger focus on customer service. This shift in focus stems from Tim’s dedication to render customer service into a top priority for all employees of the hotel. Therefore, the replacement of the Achiever of the Month Award by the Make the Little Things Count Award was accompanied by the launch of an extensive customer service program that is designed to involve all employees of the hotel into a general striving for service excellence. Tim initiated this training program as a device to upgrade and continuously improve the overall performance of staff in delivering customer service.
Initially, Tim hired trained external professionals to run courses for the management. This was done with the intention to pass over the task of designing and delivering customer service training to a few selected members of the management team. Therefore, one trainer continued to work with two members of the management team, Di and Leo (the manager of The Ocean), and helped them to design a course for all employees of the hotel. After a few months, both Di and Leo were confident enough to run the courses on their own.

4.3.2 Attending a Training session

For the first round of the course delivered by Di and Leo, which has seen several additional rounds since and which has become a fixed institution at the Grand Seaside, a number of staff (about 30) were invited into one of the hotel’s conference rooms. The focus of the training course was on raising employee awareness towards the issue of customer service. For that purpose, a short introduction was given to the staff attending the session about the importance of customer service for the overall success of the hotel. Additionally, the trainers stressed how much the hotel valued its staff as its most important asset. Most guests, the trainers explained, did not return to the hotel for its facilities or for its location close to the beach. Instead, those guests would return because of the natural friendliness and helpfulness of staff at the Grand Seaside. From that, the trainers concluded that it was staff that were responsible for running the service encounters and, consequently, it was also staff who were holding the hotel’s reputation in their hands.

To help employees do an even better job, the trainers raised their attention for the little things in service delivery. Nowadays, the trainers continued their message, meeting customers’ demands is no longer good enough. Successful companies have to deliver more: “service that exceeds customers’ expectations!” It is precisely those little things, the trainers explained, the capability to pick up or anticipate customers’ needs and wants, that make the difference in service delivery and that, ultimately, define service excellence. Therefore, staff have to “expect the unexpected” in order to deliver customer service that exceeds their expectations.
To visualize their message and to make more transparent the kind of behaviour that staff are expected to display, Di, Leo and another employee performed a short role-play. This play was based on “a real life event” that had happened a few weeks before at the hotel. A room cleaner on duty discovered through the open door of a hotel room how a young mother tried to give her baby the bottle. As the baby was crying loudly and the mother did not find a way to calm him down, the cleaner figured out that the milk in the bottle was too cold. Since the mother appeared to be rather inexperienced and in need for help, the cleaner went to her and offered to warm up the bottle. The mother agreed, and when the cleaner came back with the warm milk, the baby calmed down and drank his bottle.

At this point the play stopped. The trainers continued by pointing out that the mother was “over the moon” and that she went to the General Manager to thank the cleaner for her effort. This, they explained, is the sort of proactive approach that they expect staff to show and that management would appreciate and reward. Linking efforts in striving for excellence to the issue of rewards, the trainers pointed to the Make the Little Things Count reward program. Each employee, and not only the department heads, was eligible to nominate other staff. Whenever they perceived any of the staff performing an extra “little thing” in the process of service delivery, they could put their nomination into a box at the Human Resource Department.

The trainers concluded the session stressing that the winners of the Make the Little Things Count Award would be announced on a monthly basis. They also would receive, besides a gift-voucher, over one hundred Australian dollars, a T-shirt with the newly designed logo of the program on the front and the sentence “I Made a Little Thing Count” on the back.

I was present when the design for the T-shirt to be awarded was discussed. On this occasion, Tim, Di, and Leo were reasoning about the sentence that should decorate the back of the shirt. After several suggestions, Leo proposed: “I made my little thing count”. Because of its vulgar connotations, this proposal yielded funny comments and laughter from the people present. Although Leo and Di felt that this
slogan would raise the attractiveness of the T-shirt to employees. Tim decided that customer service was too serious an issue that should not become subject to this sort of jokes. Finally, “I made a little thing count” was agreed upon as being more neutral in its connotations and, therefore, more befitting, given the seriousness of the issue and its importance to the business.

Staff’s general response to the program was difficult to evaluate. One can suspect that after the extensive restructuring of the hotel, which was accompanied by massive layoffs, many people greeted the ‘good news’ that they are now ‘the hotel’s most important asset’ with distrust. The general interest that staff showed for the training program seemed rather limited. On several occasions, the Human Resource Manager had to remind Department Heads to secure staffs’ attendance. Those courses were run on a weekly basis for a fixed number of staff (usually between 15 and 20) and attendance was compulsory. Nevertheless, several staff members did not attend these courses and tried to find various excuses for their absence. Hence, the reminder of the Human Resource Manager that the Department Heads had to check and to guarantee that each employee would attend at least once. As one Department Head reported, though, many of his employees deliberately rostered their shifts in such a way that they were unable to attend the training. In this respect, it may be significant that during the whole period of my research in the hotel, I never saw anybody wearing one of the T-shirts awarded.

Overall, the Make the Little Things Count Award resulted in five to ten nominations each month. Similar to the procedure for the Employee of the Month Award, the winners are elected during the morning briefing. They range from working overtime to helping out other colleagues, to driving to the next chemist to get some headache tablets for a guest. In general, the performances are extraordinary in the sense that they mainly represent actions that the organization has not explicitly defined as part of employee duties. Rather, they address life world norms and represent the kind of proactive behaviour towards customer expectations that management like staff to display.
As we have seen, the restructuring program has considerably changed the organizational landscape of the Grand Seaside. Although we may not be able to present a reconstruction of the events that qualifies for being ‘authentic’, it seems suggestive to me that Tim’s mission to render the Grand Seaside into a modern hotel business played a vital role in the planning and implementation of the program. This mission goes far beyond the formal aspects of changing the organizational structure, as in the case of the Conference Department. Arguably, even more important is his desire to provide service excellence, which implies to him changing staff’s attitudes towards the organization and customer service. The means of achieving this aim are multifold, and we have only received an impression of the customer service and reward programs that are designed to equip staff with the skills and attitudes towards customer service desired. However, Tim’s dedication for providing service excellence does not stop with his attempts of training and rewarding staff. His strategy also implies an element of control. Instead merely relying on staffs’ capability of providing service excellence, ensured through the training program, management at the Grand Seaside continuously seeks feedback about the actual performance of their employee – a basis for any attempts of bringing that performance into check, if need be.

Apart from strategies such as self- and peer-surveillance, which we will discuss in Chapter 7, the customer feedback system plays an important role in the monitoring and adjusting of staff performance. As we shall see in Chapter 5 and 7, more traditional means of shaping employee behaviour are supplemented and even to a certain extent overruled by modes of normative or cultural control. For the time being our concern is with the customer feedback system of the Grand Seaside and the law-like status that it assumes. In the next section I will demonstrate, based on observations during the Morning Briefings, that the reading of the guest questionnaires during such meetings and the responses of the meeting participants allow for constructing categories of staff behaviour that differ in their centrality to and compatibility with the normative demands of customer service.
4.4 Making sense of guest questionnaires: control through feedback

Having changed the organizational structure and having staff informed about the demands that a proactive approach to customer service puts upon them, there is virtually nothing that ought to prevent staff from providing service excellence. Still, staff do not always perform as desired by management and not always is the result of any given service encounter an experience that exceeds customer expectations. Certainly, it is hard for staff to identify, at any given moment, the constituents of the proactive approach to service delivery and render them into concrete guidelines for their behaviour. There is no policy or system of rules in place that define such a proactive approach. There are no job descriptions either that allow staff to identify what it means to deliver service beyond customers’ expectations. Then, how can staff know what customers may or may not want beyond the level of what the letter express? And, how can management judge on the performance of their staff in service encounters?

We should notice, though, that the lack of formal definitions of constituents and variables of service excellence does not indicate that there are no rules or guidelines in place at all at the Grand Seaside. Although not formalized, the managers have (usually) a very clear understanding of what constitutes appropriate staff behaviour in a given situation. By the same token, management almost uncritically assumes that staff share their understanding of service excellence, although often the latter may be unable to anticipate (the details of) such understandings. When referring to the reading of the guest questionnaires, as usually performed during the Morning Briefings, we can extrapolate a quasi-system of rules that defines different categories of behaviour that differ with respect to their centrality and compatibility to the ideal of customer service excellence.

By recalling those sequences of the ideal-typical Morning Briefing described above, paying special attention to Elsa’s reading of the guest questionnaires, we may remember the variety of issues addressed and the equally variable responses of the meeting participants towards them. In the following section I will analyze and
systematize the guest complaints as well as their interpretations by the members of the management team. This analysis will provide the background for the role that feedback from guests plays in the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside. In brief, I will argue that the reading of the guest questionnaires not only represents a ritual component of the Morning Briefings. The questionnaires are part of a larger and more complex discursive system, the customer service discourse, that exercises control over employees' by shaping both their behaviour and their identities.

At first glance, what is intriguing about the reading of the questionnaires is the variety of responses participants attach to the various guest comments. Some of the issues raised by guests are discussed in great detail; others do not receive any discernible reaction at all. This counts for complaints as well as for positive remarks. It seems that the majority of the positive remarks, with which guests value the service experienced, receive less explicit responses than negative comments. As seen above, on occasions negative feedback may provoke discussions about its validity, possible causes, responsibilities, and appropriate action to follow from it.

Where participants of the Morning Briefings respond explicitly, the character of such responses is heterogeneous. Positive remarks often receive signs of approval. This does not have to occur verbally; more frequently, gesture and mime 'tell' peoples reaction. A standard example is the common nodding of the head that accompanies positive guest comments. With negative feedback, the responses tend to be more explicit and diverse. Often, the perceived validity of a complaint will determine what response follows. As in the case of the tea bags in the ideal-typical Morning Briefing, there is hardly any sign of discernible concern. There seems to be an implicitly shared understanding that this issue does not require action. However, there are many other occasions on which the validity of a complaint may become subject to different interpretations. In case the guest's critique is taken seriously, as with the apparent unfriendliness of the staff in the Garden Terrace, action will be taken.
Whenever interpretations of complaints differed, not so much between the participants as with respect to the issues concerned, I wondered about the criteria underlying the different evaluations. What were the codes according to which the meeting participants constituted their (shared) understandings? Was there an underlying categorization of guest remarks that could account for the interpretations? Further, if the latter was the case, were there any linkages between the categories of guest remarks and the respective responses?

In what follows then, I will establish, based on the observation of 37 Morning Briefings, a classification of guest complaints and participant responses attached to each class. However, there are some restrictions implied in the classification system here provided that requires clarification. Most notably, the classification is based on a population of remarks and responses that is selective in a multiple sense.

I have established the classification on the basis of those guest remarks that were mentioned during the meetings. This population is far from being exhaustive. Some remarks were not explicit mentioned during the meeting, although they were entered into the hotel’s “Customer Feedback” database. Certainly, the person reading the guest remarks, usually Elsa, plays a crucial role in this selection process. As described in the ideal-typical Morning Briefing, it frequently occurred that Elsa simply skipped over some of the guest questionnaires. This may be due to her perception of these questionnaires as irrelevant or not worth mentioning. Alternatively, the guest comments omitted, perhaps, address issues that she does not consider appropriate for public discussion during a meeting. The latter category may contain ‘hot’ or sensitive issues, or it may address issues relevant to a unit of the hotel that is not personally represented at the Morning Briefing, such as the outlets of the hotel. For instance, complaints that address the service in one of the restaurants of the hotel, be it The Ocean or the Garden Terrace, did sometimes not receive explicit discussion during the meetings. This is because the managers of both restaurants start their work in the evening and, therefore, do normally not attend the Morning Briefings. On many of these occasions, Elsa would silently read the questionnaire and put it aside with the remark: “Well, this is for the Garden Terrace”.
Extending our considerations about the guest questionnaires, I should mention that customer feedback is not restricted to formal remarks in the guest questionnaires. Frequently, participants of the meetings would report what customers told them (informally) about the service, what they picked up from guests’ conversations, or what they simply, in observing guests’ behaviour or expressions, interpreted as constituting an (implicit) guest response to the service experienced. However, it will remain to Chapter 6 to demonstrate how both the explicitly articulated and the implicitly perceived ‘real’ guest responses receive continuous extension by an imaginary element. On such occasions, members of the management team, most often Tim, will contemplate scenarios of what may have happened if customers had experienced a certain type of service. For that purpose, hypothetical (imaginary) needs or expectations of guests are introduced to justify or sanction certain forms of staff behaviour.

For the time being however, we confine our scope to those sequences of the Morning Briefings that deal with explicit complaints by guests. Most guest comments that are read out during the meetings are interpreted in terms of their causation. More precisely, guests remarks are interpreted as evaluations of staff’s either excellent or poor performance in providing service. In consequence, the (unit of) staff that provides or oversees the part of service addressed by the comment will be held responsible. Hence, the guest questionnaires also represent a basis for gratification and sanctioning.

4.4.1 Valid complaints and primary inappropriate staff behaviour

Most comments read out during the meetings relate to either extraordinarily excellent or, alternatively, (extremely) impolite and rude staff behaviour towards guests. For the case of complaints, the following comment that Elsa reproduced during one of the meetings is exemplary.
Elsa: The Garden Terrace was not worth the money. The staff was unfriendly and the menu was poor.

She suspends reading for a moment and gazing around the table.

Elsa: Maybe we should send out an apology?
Gerald: That's already been done.

Typical for the handling of such complaints is that, first, hardly any discussion about the validity of the complaint takes place. In the example given, the fact that a guest has perceived staff behaviour as unfriendly seems reason enough to accept the complaint at face value. Such shared acceptance is not as self-evident as it may appear. In the example above, no further explanation about either the concrete nature of the staff behaviour or the particular persons responsible is demanded. Yet, on other occasions, participants of the meeting may insist on an elaboration, which can lead to controversial discussions, as the following scene from one of the meetings, shows.

Tim: What's in the logbook? (Tim looks at Gerald.)
Gerald: We had a small incident today. A staff member was caught in a guestroom. So, we had to give an apology, although the lady had already calmed down.

Tim is visibly annoyed about this incident. He inquires brusquely:

Tim: Who was it?
Elsa: Charlie. A very young guy. He has just started working as a casual at the functions department.

Elsa sounds rather reconciliatory. In face of Tim's anger, the tone of her voice suggests that she feels somewhat sorry for the young guy. Then, Di, the Human Resource Manager preceding Matilda, comes to her aid with an elaboration of the
events. As with Elsa, her voice suggests some sympathy and understanding for Charlie.

Di: The story was that there were two young girls alone in this room. They were sent there by their parents who spend the weekend in our hotel. Charlie had just finished his shift, and because he knew one of the girls, he wanted to go up to the room and ask her whether she wanted to go with him to the beach. So, when he was up there, the other sister came and he, because he was still in his uniform, was hiding behind the curtain. Well, and the sister called the parents. And they came. And the girl was afraid of her parents and was claiming that she had never seen Charlie before – denying everything. But the parents calmed down and, fortunately, the father said that he believed Charlie. So, he doesn’t even believe his own daughter! I think that says everything.

Di looks around as if looking for approval of her version of events. Some staff members are nodding their heads. Before anyone can say something, however, Tim qualifies, again rather brusquely:

Tim: Still, it’s unacceptable that staff get caught in a guestrooms! He was still wearing his uniform! So, we have to react.

Tim looks at Elsa in a very determinate manner. Elsa seems to understand his message, as she concedes:

Elsa: So okay, we’ll give him a formal written warning.

As Tim has put customer service top on his agenda to render the hotel into a modern and profitable business, guest complaints about the service experienced are treated very seriously. Yet, not each complaint is handled the same way; not all of them are considered equally valid. Reports about inappropriate staff behaviour almost always meet the criteria management sets for a valid complaint. In contrast, objections to
other constituents of the service experience, for instance related to the price guests are supposed to pay for the service, are either met with scepticism, or they are bluntly rejected, as we shall see soon.

The second regularity in dealing with valid customer complaints is that immediate action follows. An apology for the behaviour of the staff is offered promptly. The compensations granted to guests stretch from an informal apology (on the spot), to formal letters, often signed by Tim, to complimentary drinks at the hotel bar. In severe cases, a free dinner or even a free stay in the hotel is offered. However, compensation for guests is not always accompanied by disciplinary measures against the employees responsible. Whereas in the case of the complaint about the Garden Terrace, no concrete person was held responsible, in the case of the staff member caught in a guestroom, severe disciplinary measures were taken. Hence, there is a certain degree of discretion involved with respect to the punishment of primary inappropriate behaviour.

Finally, valid complaints relating to primary inappropriate behaviour address an explicitly established organizational norm. This can be read from the fact that, with respect to the complaint about the Garden Terrace, appropriate action was taken immediately and even prior to any official evaluation of the incident during the subsequent meeting. Further, none of the meeting participants seem to require any explanation either about the validity of the complaint or about the responsive action. Apparently, there are already routines in place that define how to react to this form of complaint that is, to compensate (apologize) and, in severe cases, to punish the employee responsible. The example of the staff member caught in the guestroom also reveals the general character of such norms, with those subjected to the latter actively acknowledging their validity. It was apparent in the example provided that the young staff member knew his ‘wrong doing’, as his attempt of hiding behind the curtain shows.

In sum, valid complaints derived from primary inappropriate staff behaviour address violations of explicitly established organizational norms. The specific type of action under scrutiny is defined as deviant (or dysfunctional) per se. In the example above,
Tim did not pay much attention as to whether the girl knew the staff and granted him access or not. The simple fact that he was caught in a guestroom (while still in his uniform) proved evidence enough for Tim that this was indeed deviant behaviour. Normally, the concrete content and context embedding the action are not considered relevant. The mere fact that guests complain about a form of primary inappropriate behaviour offers sufficient ground for 'conviction' in most cases. Such incidents are relatively inaccessible for interpretation and discursive negotiation. In other words, one could label such complaints as "Simple Don'ts".

4.4.2 Quasi-valid complaints and secondary inappropriate staff behaviour

In addition to complaints about primary inappropriate staff behaviour, which are usually discussed during the meeting and which are taken very seriously, there are complaints that receive less attention. Complaints, for instance, that do not directly represent an assault on standards of customer service as set by management nor seriously affect the functionality of the overall business can be classified as addressing secondary inappropriate staff behaviour.

Under this category, we can subsume, for example, the frequent complaints about noise from the hotel's Nightclub, the necessary queuing for the breakfast buffet at the Garden Terrace, or the variety or selection of in-house movies. In each case, participants of the Morning Briefings may regard such complaints as (somewhat) justified, while at the same time they are not directly addressing any violation of important standards of customer service. As such, these complaints are not considered valid per se. Consequently, under normal circumstances, there will not any responsive action follow from the complaint. In order to trigger responsive action, such quasi-valid complaints require particular circumstances that allow them to qualify as valid.

Circumstances that allow complaints addressing secondary inappropriate behaviour qualifying as valid require, for instance, that not only one, but several, guests complain either simultaneously or subsequently, for instance. In the first case, a
secondary dysfunctional complaint may trigger action when (too) many guests
complain, for instance, about the noise from the Nightclub. Such guest complaints
may provoke conflict of interests for the organization, as in cases with respect to
contrasting guest demands. Often, when guests are complaining about the noise
from the Nightclub, the Duty Managers will have to make a decision between the
comfort and convenience of hotel guests complaining and those who want to party at
the club. With the Nightclub contributing considerably to the hotel’s revenue, it will
normally take a number of complaints for a Duty Manager to intervene demanding
to turn down the volume at the club.

In the second case, a certain complaint has shown to have a certain history, that is,
several guests have expressed the same displeasure about a certain aspect of service
over a period. For example, when the number of guests complaining about the
variety of in-house movies offered increased over months, the hotel eventually took
responsive action in offering greater choice.

Formally, quasi-valid complaints addressing secondary inappropriate behaviour do
not directly violate core organizational norms as to what behaviour or expectations
are appropriate in the context of normal service encounters. This is where they differ
from the former category of complaint. Instead, these quasi-valid complaints address
what we could refer to as peripheral organizational norms, that is, norms that
prescribe behaviour or expectations that the organization regards as desirable or
justified but not vital for the operation of the overall business. As mentioned, such
complaints may qualify as valid complaints only over time, either diachronically or
synchronously. As a rule of thumb, one may specify that the more often or
persistently a complaint occurs, the greater its chances to achieve validity. This does
also mean that the boundary between, what I have called, organizational core and
peripheral norms is not static or fixed but rather flexible. The fact that the normative
demands of the organization are not purely dichotomous (compliant/deviant) but
rather discretionary, stretching a whole continuum of values (from good to evil),
allows for conceiving of the Grand Seaside as a disciplinary institution. With
Foucault (1977), we may distinguish discipline, as distinctive from punishment,
precisely on grounds of its discretionary characteristics.
4.4.3 Valid complaints addressing ethically inappropriate behaviour

This type of guests complaints refer to (commonly) shared societal principles of everyday life that transcend the immediate context of the organization, such as basic rules of courtesy, safety, or respect. To that extent, such principles are not explicitly defined through the organization; yet, nonetheless, they qualify a complaint as being valid. These principles are rooted in and legitimized by common sense knowledge, which is, of course, not independent of social context and variables such as class, gender, ethnicity, or religion.

When complaints address staff behaviour, the latter is marked inappropriate or deviant with reference to norms of appropriate behaviour or civilized conduct as established, internalized, and commonly shared in the organization’s external environment. An incident, which had not directly risen from a guest questionnaire but from a remark in the Logbook, may exemplify the sort of behaviour that such life world norms address.

Gerald: We had an incident where a child was involved on the weekend. A lady complained that Frank (a male employee working in the Garden Terrace, DB) had kicked her child with his foot.

Somewhat qualifying, his voice revealing a degree of distrust, Gerald adds:

Gerald: I mean, that's her version.
Elsa: Didn't that happen before?

Looking down on his notepad, Tim is shaking his head and appears seriously concerned. Others in the meeting start talking with each other or mumbling.

Kyle: That's the second time that this happened. There was a similar incident some years ago.
Tim: Yes, I know. Frank is sometimes very rude with children; he just doesn’t know how to behave with kids.

Although normally quite expressive, Tim’s voice does neither reveal any anger nor sympathy towards Frank. A brief moment of silence follows. Nobody seems prepared to say anything. All participants seem to have realized the seriousness of this allegation and its potential consequence to Frank as well as to the reputation of the hotel. When the atmosphere becomes almost agonizing, Gerald breaks the silence.

Gerald: Well, the situation was that he was outside and was handing out the raffle tickets. And this boy wanted to run along the hall. And he just wanted to stop him using his foot.

Gerald seems honestly concerned about Frank. The explanation offered is obviously intended to raise understanding for Frank. However, Madeleine adds rather brusquely.

Madeleine: But that’s very rude!
Tim: Yes that’s not a way of stopping somebody!

Tim’s voice suggests that he shares Madeleine’s point.

Elsa: When was it?
Lisa: On Sunday.
Kyle: But, wasn’t this his birthday?
Bill: Yes, and I saw him out there. He had a bit to drink.

Bill stresses the term “bit” in a way that it seems to suggest that Frank may indeed have had much more than just a bit to drink. Then, Gerald makes another attempt of interpreting Frank’s behaviour.
Gerald: Well, he told us that he did by no means intend to kick him or something like that. It was just that he called the kids to help him with the raffle tickets. But he wanted only the help of one of the girls. And instead came this boy and he just wanted to say: “No, not you!” But because he was holding the raffle tickets, he had no hand free; so, he used is foot instead.

Tim: But that's an impossible behaviour to treat a child. You cannot do anything like that!

Elsa: Was this an Asian lady?

Gerald: No.

Elsa: It's just that in some of these countries this is a very serious offence.

Gerald: I mean, we gave an apology to her immediately and explained everything, but she didn't accept it. Apparently, she thought we would sack him.

Bill: We have had this before. And we had to take him away and to put him into the back of the house. The trouble is just, when he's not out there a lot of people come and ask for him because he's a real character and many people like him.

Tim: But that's no behaviour for somebody who works out there!

Tim made the last statement in a tone that indicated as an end to the discussion. Subsequently, no further comments about the issue were made during the meeting. I do not know what decision was made after the meeting; whether Frank was sent to work (again) backstage or whether he was indeed dismissed. But that is not the relevant point for the concerns of the thesis. What is apparent is that, apart from Gerald, no one seems to question the validity of the customer's complaint. In this respect, violations of life world norms are not merely treated as quasi-valid, but, analogously to complaints about primary inappropriate behaviour, they are accepted at face value.

It is worth noticing that such behaviour is classified as deviant regardless of a violation of explicitly defined organizational norms. Rather, the point of reference for the (normative) classification of these cases lies outside the organization. As Tim
expressed it: "You can't do something like this!" The individuals concerned (that is, staff and, as the thesis will show below, guests too) are assumed to have internalized these norms through their external socialization. On those occasions, the normative demands of the external life world are in line with the organization's normative system, which may not always be the case as the examples of invalid complaints show below.

Furthermore, as discussions of violations of life world norms tend to be rare, this type of norms enters the organizational discourse mainly through positive guest feedback. There are examples of how staff spontaneously adjust to, meet, or exceed guests’ expectations. Sometimes it takes only a small bit of advice to help a guest find the right place for dinner; at another time, staff will help repairing a tire of a guest’s car. On one occasion, a lady who was one of the speakers at a conference ruined her dress during lunch and did not have any clothing to change into. A woman working in the hotel’s conference department lent her quickly one of her dresses, which was very much appreciated. Such approval of staff’s courtesy, friendliness, and helpfulness are evaluated as confirmation of the hotel’s dedication to customer service. In this respect, what is targeted is the exceeding of guests’ expectations by incorporating life world expectations into the hotel service. This strategy also entails a speculative (imaginary) element, as exceeding real expectations requires imagination (that is, the representation of what is not real) that fantasizes what guest might want (but have not yet realized or asked for).

4.4.4 Invalid complaints

As indicated above, not all complaints receive the same level of attention nor are they seen as equally valid. There are a number of guest complaints, some of them recurrent, that will not result in any active response from members of the organization or that are simply dismissed as being invalid. Again, one can discern examples of such complaints in the ideal-typical Morning Briefing presented in Chapter 3.
Elsa: Tea bags don’t live up to the level that one should expect on the fifth floor.

Elsa looks at Lisa.

Elsa: What’s wrong with those tea bags? We never had any complaints before.

Lisa: I don’t know. They are all the same on the whole floor.

Both look at each other. They raise their shoulders and looking as in disbelief at this complaint. Then Elsa continues.

This complaint is not taken very seriously. Apparently, no one seems to recognize a valid complaint in this comment. The fact that this complaint has never risen before does not qualify the comment for a quasi-valid complaint either. Finally, as Lisa reassured that all other guests receive the same sort of tea bags (without complaining), the silent consent of the other guest is taken as final indication that this complaint lacks sufficient validity.

There are other examples of invalid complaints discussed during the meeting for which an explicit process of evaluation is not discernible either:

Elsa: Whether we could offer them check out at 4 p.m.?

She shakes her head as in disbelief. Many of the other participants make similar gestures, some utter even disfavouring comments about this complaint. Elsa continues reading.

The frequent complaints about the check out and/or check in times have never resulted in any serious attempt at classifying these complaints as valid or to led any responsive action. The fixed times for check in and check out are important for the functioning of the hotel operations. Check out at eleven in the morning gives the hotel’s cleaners only about three hours to clean and reset the rooms before the first guests are allowed to check in. For that reason, the check in and check out times are
crucial for the hotel's smooth operating and the hotel's management treats them very much as an issue of their discretion. Moreover, since the hotel business is about selling (renting) time-space, the latter is a scarce resource and the effective and efficient utilization of this resource is one of the core aspects of the business. Additional provision of time-space without compensation must, therefore, question the very foundations of the business. There are exceptions, though, granted to VIP guests or members of the hotel's international reward system who are allowed early check in and late check out. Yet, this privilege is granted to a small number of sharply defined guests and not a valid expectation for ordinary guests. Furthermore, in contrast to ordinary guests, such special guests have already paid indirectly (through higher rates or through their membership fees) for the extraordinary utilization of time-space.

Integrating our considerations, we can distinguish at least four different categories of guest comments (complaints), based on their discussion during the Morning Briefings. *Valid complaints* addressing primary inappropriate behaviour represent violations of explicitly defined organizational (core-) norms. Such organizational core norms are relatively independent of the specific context and, therefore, relatively inaccessible to interpretative negotiation. Importantly, this type of complaint is answered (almost) instantly by organizational action. In each case compensation to guests (in various forms) is granted, in severe cases the staff responsible is punished.

*Quasi-valid complaints* addressing secondary inappropriate behaviour are not regarded as deviant per se. Instead, they require extraordinary circumstances or (more frequently) a certain history (of repetition) to trigger responsive action. They may be independent of the concrete context of their occurrence not, however, of the general context of their history. This history is, therefore, frequently subject to interpretative negotiation, ultimately, to be decided whether it qualifies for a valid complaint or not. The latter decision is influenced by criteria such as frequency or persistency of the complaint.
Third, valid complaints referring to ethically inappropriate behaviour relate to normative demands established outside the organization. Although not formally defined by the organization, such demands arise from life world assumptions about proper behaviour and conduct, particularly in service encounters. Nevertheless, such complaints are not only treated as quasi-valid. Similarly to complaints about primary inappropriate behaviour, they acquire the status of valid complaints and responsive organizational action follows (compensation and/or punishment). Yet, in contrast to the latter the reference point for ethically inappropriate behaviour is outside the organization. Both staff and guest are expected to have been socialized into those norms that penetrate the organizational sphere and that of its external environment.

Finally, invalid complaints are those that occur over and over again without responsive action following. In such cases, the guest complaint is judged as invalid. The behaviour in question neither conflicts with the organization's normative system or with the ethical standards as recognized by the organization's external life world, nor does it threaten functional aspects of the business. With invalid complaints, it does not make any difference as to whether they occur frequently or persistently. In an inversion of valid complaints, responsibility for the perceived inferiority of the service (encounter) is allocated to the guests, who, from the viewpoint of the organization, do not meet the criteria of a proper customer.

In sum, the different categories of complaint refer to different normative demands the organization holds to its employees and, as the thesis will subsequently stress, also towards its guests. One can extrapolate a hierarchy of values from those different categories of complaints that stretch from those essential (core) to the organization to almost indifferent ones (invalid). Hence, the process of reading and (re-) interpreting the guest questionnaire is not only of importance for the reproduction of the normative system of the organization. By mutually confirming legitimate interpretations of guest complaints (and, ultimately, the normative system of the organization), members of the management team consolidate a common stock of knowledge about what constitutes appropriate behaviour. Hence, by integrating the various existing rationalities, those of employees, management, and guests, under
the umbrella of a commonly shared organizational rationality, the attendees of the morning briefing make up for the apparent lack of formal rules.

The homogenization of meaning that results from such ritual events allows staff and management for handling the indexicality of service encounters. It also represents a fundamental component of new forms of control and management, as we shall see in Chapter 7. As the thesis will demonstrate in the following sections, the guest questionnaires are integrated into a larger system of domination with which management seeks to guide and control employee and guest behaviour. By the same token, this system allows for revealing and legitimizing management prerogative under the banner of customer service. However, as the customer service discourse is not only about producing obedience, but, as we shall reveal, asks for employees commitment to the principles of service excellence, explicating and sanctioning behaviour will not suffice. Tim and other members of the management team aspire staff to identify with organizational objectives. They do so, most notably, by attempting to create a common sense of belonging among staff in the organization. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the means for achieving this aim are plentiful and range from ceremonial events, such as the All-Staff-Meeting, to the use of artefacts and symbols that ought to emphasize the communal character of relationships at the hotel. As we will see later, though, the organizational identity thus created has implications for staff’s behaviour at the hotel.
5 The Grand Seaside Hotel Family

The previous chapters have discussed the recent changes experienced by staff at the Grand Seaside. These chapters accounted for the takeover of the property by Globe Hotels, the restructuring program that followed the change in ownership, and Tim’s attempts at rendering customer service into a pivotal concern for any member of the organization. In the course of these events, most staff at the Grand Seaside became subjected to developments that, at times, dramatically altered the demands attached to their jobs and the relationships they sustained with fellow workers or managers.

Summing up my impressions about the restructuring process, I would claim that the main actors involved in the design and implementation of the changes were Jim Carson, Tim, and to a certain extent other senior managers such as Alice or Madeleine. The majority of staff, however, did not have any say in the decision making. Neither were they asked whose position should become redundant; nor had they any say in determining which jobs should be altered and who was supposed to take them over. I suggest, therefore, that the whole restructuring process, including the customer service program, must have been a rather alienating experience for many members of staff.

For the most part, this chapter will report on attempts by (senior) management of the Grand Seaside to evoke a common sense of belonging among members of the organization. Occasionally, I will also report on some manifestations of distrust or alienation, as they provide the context of such attempts. In other words, I suggest that management, in evoking the image of a Grand Seaside Family, sought to balance the alienating experiences and the distrust generated among staff during the restructuring process.

I will begin the chapter by presenting an account of the annual All-Staff-Meeting. This theatrically staged event, during which the image of the Grand Seaside Family was evoked, gives voices to management and their idealized description of life at the Grand Seaside. The meeting will also allow us to identify, subsequently, the
principles underlying this family image such as paternalism and the pervasiveness of
harmony. In the remainder of this chapter, I will elaborate that the image thus
created constitutes a (discursive) system of obligation dominating those subjected to
it by demanding the display of harmony and by marginalizing the expression of
dissent or conflict.

I ought to mention, however, that the accounts presented in the following are part of
a larger meta-account. In line with Bourdieu (1990) and Bourdieu et al. (1991), I
attempt extending this ethnography beyond the production of “accounts of accounts”.
Instead, I will investigate the social processes and relationships that structure the
production of such accounts. This implies, throughout the following chapters,
reading between the lines, reading different forms of texts, and repeatedly re-reading
some of those texts to understand what makes people produce the texts in the first
place. In other words, the texts in this chapter are presented not only for their
narrative content, but also as constituents of the meta-account, the customer service
discourse, the one that I will construct subsequently in the background of the various
accounts derived from the people studied. In constructing this discourse, the
accounts presented in this chapter may also lend themselves to another reading – one
that will, perhaps, allow for identifying the circumstances of their production.

5.1 The All-Staff-Meeting

The All-Staff-Meeting is a major event that occurs every year in October. This is
because in September the hotel management negotiates with the owners of the
business the budget for the next financial year. Contrary to the official start for the
new financial year in Australia, the 1st of July, the new financial year commences in
October at the Grand Seaside.

The meeting is usually announced weeks in advance and is posted on notice boards
throughout the backstage area of the hotel. This year, it is scheduled to be held
twice, at 14:00 and at 15:00. The event is repeated, mainly because not all staff are
allowed to leave their jobs during their working hours. Some positions, such as those occupied by staff working at the reception desk, have to be attended 24 hours a day. In order to enable all staff working in such functions to attend the meeting, half of the receptionists, for instance, are supposed to attend the first session, while the other half remains at the front desk and subsequently joins the second session. Apart from functional considerations, there are temporal-spatial restrictions too. The scheduled venue for the event, the hotel’s Nightclub, does not hold more than a maximum of two hundred fifty people per session, which amounts to about half of the staff supposed to attend.

When I arrive at the night club, approximately thirty minutes prior to the first session, Tim, Matilda, Madeleine, and Hannah (the newly appointed Director Marketing) are already there. Together with Jack and Joe from the private Audio-visual Company, Tim is trying to set up his laptop for a graphic presentation on the large screen behind him. The Audio-visual Company is located at the second level of the hotel and is supposed to look after conferences hosted at the Grand Seaside Hotel.

On the occasion of the All-Staff-Meeting, the Nightclub’s dance floor has been rearranged to hold about two hundred and fifty chairs. The chairs are ordered in rows of twenty, divided by a middle corridor. The dance floor measures about twenty by twenty metres. On one side, it is bound by a mirror-wall. The other side leads up to small bar tables and chairs located on a small platform. Another side of the dance floor is set up as a stage. It is marked by a large screen. In front of the screen, about five metres from the first row of chairs, there is a small table with Tim’s laptop on it. On the other side of the dance floor, opposite to the screen, is the bar. The bar closes the space surrounding the chairs for the attendees. At the bar, bottles of beer, wine, Champagne, and orange juice are lined up. The alcoholic liquids lined up at the bar, in conjunction with a dozen coloured balloons hanging on each side of the screen, signal the rather informal character of the upcoming event.
Tim and Jack are still busy adjusting the volume of the tiny microphone that Tim has attached to his tie. Tim seems particularly concerned that the sound for the salute, which is supposed to launch one of the slides, is not loud enough to achieve the desired effect. He appears increasingly nervous. He is running around among the audio-visual equipment, juggling, here and there, one of the plugs, and offering Jack all sorts of advice.

Then, he suddenly turns around, sending the manager of the Nightclub, Rod, to get a particular music CD from his office. The CD is supposed provide the aural background theme that ought to relax people until the start of the meeting. Finally, the problem with the volume is fixed and everything seems prepared. When Rod returns with the CD, Tim turns on the music, some soft pop. Now, he appears much more relaxed. He indicates a few dance steps and, suddenly, approaches Rod as if he wants to ask for a dance. The latter pretends fleeing to the edge of the dance floor—a scene that yields general laughter from all the people around. Meanwhile, Madeleine, Hannah, and Matilda, who are having a soft drink at the bar, add some funny comments to the scene.

By 13:50, the first staff members arrive. Most of them come in casual clothes, some wearing jeans and a T-shirt. Others attend in their hotel uniforms or work dresses. The more casual outfit distinguishes the other attendees from the managers who are supposed to present during the session. The latter are all dressed elegantly in suits or dresses.

By 14:00, there are only fifty people in the room. Most of them stand in small groups and chat. No one as yet seems very concerned about the start of the session. Most people present seem to enjoy their drinks and are having a good time. Tim walks around, a glass of orange juice in his hand, here and there stopping for a small chat with people. He still does not make any effort to start the meeting; probably, he is still waiting for a few more staff to join the event. Meanwhile, more and more people arrive on the scene. Most get themselves a drink before they take a seat.

By 14:15 the room is no more than half filled, when Tim decides to launch the official part of the meeting. He goes to the table with the laptop and turns on the
microphone. After testing the microphone, by tapping it with a finger, he turns
around to the attendees.

Tim: Can I ask you to sit down please?

There is still a lot of noise and only half of the people present have taken their seats.
Tim waits for another few seconds, while some more people take their seats. He
then starts talking a bit louder.

Tim: Would you please come forward and sit down. I don't want you to
stand the whole time.

Most of the people who were lingering at the bar are now coming forward and take
their seats. A few rows remain empty though. Some people prefer to sit on chairs at
the bar, others are simply leaning against the walls with a glass of wine or beer in
their hands. Almost all attendees are sitting or standing in small groups. The
managers, although not all of them are supposed to contribute a presentation, are
sitting next to each other in the front left row, close to the desk with the laptop. As
the two rows behind them are almost empty, they appear somewhat detached from
the other attendees. The lighting of the room is dimmed as Tim continues talking.

Tim: Somebody was asking me at the bar what we are here for today. Well,
today we are here for sharing information. We want to share
information about the hotel with you. Some people think that it is
better to keep information secret. But we, at the Grand Seaside, are a
bit different. In fact, I think we are quite different. We want to share
information about the hotel with you, because it is you that make it all
happen, and you should be informed and involved. If we have good
news, we share it with you; and if we have bad news we also share
them with you.

During the last sentence, Tim smiles. He is now starting with his computer-graphics
presentation. Initially, he has some problems bringing the presentation up on the
screen, but he fixes the problem in a matter of seconds. The first slide he presents shows a photograph of the hotel. Beside the picture, it provides some numbers related to last year's budget under the heading: 'The Bumper Year'.

Tim: Last financial year, which started in October and has just ended in September, we did exceptionally well. We did not have any difficulties in reaching the budget. In fact, we ended up well ahead of budget. The years before it was often very hard and sometimes we had to . . .

At this point, Tim hesitates for a moment. Then he puts on a broad smile and continues.

Tim: . . . Well, we had to cook the books a bit to reach the budget.

During the last sentence, he cannot suppress a small laugh, while making eye contact with the managers in the front row.

Tim: But last year it was pretty easy.

Tim points at some of the budget figures that appear on the screen using an extractable pen.

Tim: You may wonder what these Japanese signs mean. They are not typos. They mean Kaizen, that is, in search for excellence. You probably have heard about TQM . . . Total Quality Management (he strongly emphasizes his last words) . . . which was a business buzzword of the last few years. And that's our goal as well. Always try to do things better.

Tim brings up the next slide that has more numbers under the heading 'Budget' and presents details about last year's revenue.
Tim: We performed exceptionally well last year. The revenue and the profit were the highest for years. We have an exceptional CIP, that is a parameter for the customer yield established for all Globe Hotels. The lower the score the better. You can see that we have achieved 1.16 whereas the average is 1.6. That's the best score in the whole region: and you have made this possible!

Tim stresses the word “you” while pointing with his right arm at an imaginary point in the audience indicating a half-circle that includes the whole audience.

Tim: Also, our revenue was higher than ever before and so was the profit. We have steadily increased our profits because we have become much more efficient. As you know, when I took over here as the new General Manager we had to go through some restructuring, which started with the F&B managers. But we have become much more efficient since and we have improved our performance remarkably. All because of your work!

Tim repeats emphasizing the contribution of the addressee, “your work”, and the accompanying gesture towards the audience. Then, he turns to the next slide that is titled 'Objectives and Success Factors’ using, once more, his pen to lead the audience step by step through each of the six bullet points: customer focus, team effort, vision, marketing philosophy, culture.

Tim: These are our objectives for the next year. Above all, we aim for service excellence and customer satisfaction. That's why the customer focus is so important, as I always stress. We are not doing this business only for the sake of profit. We want to please customers with our service. There are many hotels out there that look only for the profit; but we are nothing like that. We strive for service excellence! The key success factor for reaching that is: You, the staff!
Once more, Tim repeats the emphasis of his words and his gesture towards the audience.

Tim: It's not the management! We are only working in the back to support you. It's your performance that counts, because you deliver the service! Our success was possible because we have such a great team here, and you all are part of that team.

After he has finished the last sentence, Tim presses a button on the laptop. The second bullet point dims while the third point is highlighted. Then, he continues in a determined voice.

Tim: Our vision is service excellence! We want to deliver service, so that people recommend us. We want people to tell about it; tell their friends, tell their families, and finally come back to us. We want to be known as a hotel where exceptional service is standard and standards are above expectation.

Tim highlights the next bullet point.

Tim: Our marketing philosophy. Marketing is not just a department. It's not just something for Hannah. (He points at her.) It's a philosophy! Every member in the hotel is a marketer of this place. And to achieve all this we also need an open and collegial culture. We are all equal, and I support open and honest communication. I do not support politics and I have stopped these politics that have been going on here before. So, we want a culture where all are equal and that's why I want everybody to call me by my first name.

During the last few sentences, Tim appeared very emphatic – trying hard to evoke a common sense of equality among the people present. However, his remark that everyone was allowed to call him by his first name – which was probably meant to affirm his claims towards equality – appeared a little peculiar in this context, as in
Australia, virtually regardless of the formality of the occasion, it is standard practice that people address each other by their first name. Nevertheless, Tim continues by further stressing the achievements of the hotel. His main message is still that all the success depends on customer satisfaction, which can only be realized through excellence in staff performance.

Tim: Guest satisfaction is the key factor for the hotel's success! That's what we get out of all the responses we receive from customers. We have improved remarkably according to guests' feedback. There are still some negative comments, of course, but the overwhelming majority stress the performance of the staff as exceptional and excellent.

Tim symbolically dismisses the negative guest comments with a gesture of his hand, before continuing in emphatic voice.

Tim: It's your friendliness and helpfulness and how you deliver the service. It's something that is special about you. Our guests do not want to meet staff who always say 'Yes' and smile all the time. You know that this can be very distressing sometimes. They like your natural attitude. They like to have a chat with the staff about the weather or sports; that's what they like. It's your natural attitude and friendliness that makes our success!

Having stressed the name of the addressee, "you", throughout the last sequence, Tim ends the last sentence by stretching both arms towards the audience before indicating another half circle, symbolically embracing the whole audience. He then turns around to press a button at his laptop. The next slide, 'Achievements', appears, which lists all the awards the hotel has received during the last financial year. There is a photograph in the centre of the picture that shows five chefs, who all work in The Ocean, holding a trophy. Tim makes a funny comment saying that Karl, a very big and corpulent Chef, takes up almost the whole picture. He receives general laughter for his joke. He stresses, furthermore, that it was, in particular, The Ocean that has fostered the hotel's reputation by winning several awards for 'Best Luxury
Restaurant’ at state level and against very serious competition. The news about the award winning hotel restaurant is accompanied by Tim’s demonstratively applauding gesture, which is answered with general applause by the audience.

Tim: There are very serious competitors out there. We don’t admit this normally . . .

He throws a cursory smile towards his management colleagues before he continues.

Tim: . . . but they are, in fact, very good.

Tim also stresses an award the hotel received as ‘Best Conference Venue’ in the local area.

Tim: This is thanks to the conference staff. Actually, I have to congratulate the audio-visual providers as well. They also contributed to that.

Again, the audience is applauding. He turns to his right, pointing at the spot where one of the two staff of the private Audio-visual Company who are looking after the equipment, Jack, stands somewhat hidden by the dark surrounding the large screen. Encouraging another sequence of applause, Tim honours the two men.

Tim: Well done guys!

Tim moves rather quickly through the next slides without adding much information. The first shows a graph of the room rates: the average money spent per room and night for the last financial year. The following shows a graph of origins and destinations of money transfers in among the functional areas of the hotel. The majority of the produced revenue comes and goes back to Food & Beverages.

For the next slide Tim adds again some comments. The slide shows the current market share of the hotel holds against its competitors.
Tim: Who are our competitors? We say that every hotel 2 hours drive around Boomtown is our competitor. So, you've got these six hotels who compete with us. (Points at the screen.) As you can see, we have a market share of 22 per cent, just slightly lower than the 'Adory'. We have gained this share by stealing from our competitors. Why did we do this? Because there is no market growth. We are in a stagnating market. But we started out with sixteen a few years ago and even in this tricky market situation we gained a considerable share and improved our position. As you see, we gained mainly from the 'Glorial'. And why did we achieve this? Not because of the nice hotel or its facilities. It's because of the service that is better here than anywhere else!

Tim goes to the next slide that shows the expenditures for capital equipment. It shows that the major part of the money goes, again, into Food & Beverages.

Tim: This is where our money goes.

Tim brings up the next slide, introducing it by giving his voice an emphatic sound.

Tim: The big spenders! Who are they? You may think that most of the money goes into marketing. But that's just a very small part, as you see. Most of it goes to F&B, but they create also most of the revenue. And here, look at this.

Tim points to the slide using the large pen.

Tim: Do you know what this is? A Lexus GL. It's a Japanese car. A beautiful car! In fact, it's the most expensive Japanese car. About 150,000 dollars dear. That's how much we spent for staff meals last year. Human Resources do not appear here on this graph, although they take up quite a big share of the expenditures. But Human
Resource expenditures are distributed though the different departments, so they do not appear here.

Tim brings up the next slide. It shows the goals of the hotel for the next year. Tim explains each of the bullet points, step by step: occupancy rate, QAS, and tax. He stresses that 7 per cent of each dollar the hotel earns has to go into tax and that, therefore, people should remember the name of the current state Premier at the next state elections. The next figure represents the QAS, that is, as Tim explains: "A ratio for investment into capital in relation to performance as developed by the Globe-Hotels management company”.

Tim continues with the next slide, containing again a variety of numbers, by explaining that the aim of the hotel is further to decrease the amount of casual staff. The number of casual staff should remain under 30 per cent.

Tim goes to the next slide that quotes statements of senior executives of the Globe Hotel company. Tim stresses the issues of innovativeness, effectiveness, and competitiveness as representing “what we want to be”. Furthermore, he emphasizes again the importance of customer service and the hotel’s internal Make the Little Things Count customer service training program. Business success depends on customer service. Tim continues elaborating on this issue.

Tim: That’s because of the nature of service; it’s largely intangible. It’s so intangible that you cannot see it or touch it. We do, of course, have some figures to measure it. But that’s why it’s your performance that is so crucial! That’s why I spend so much money for training the staff! To enable you to deliver better service!

He then closes his speech and gives the microphone to Hannah. She starts with a new slide show showing a postcard image of the hotel. Initially, she appears a little nervous, showing difficulties in adjusting the tiny microphone to her jacket. Once she starts her presentation, however, she appears more secure by the minute.
Hannah: Tim asked me to talk to you about marketing today and what it means for the hotel. Well, marketing is not just another function in the hotel; it's a general approach. It's not just me and a few people that are involved in it, but all of you, each and every single employee is a marketer of the hotel. All of you belong to it.

Hannah brings up the next slides showing some bullet points.

Hannah: In fact, we had some focus groups throughout the year, which is basically a get-together with our guests, and it's a very useful marketing tool. So we talked to some of our return guests about what they like and why they come back. And guess what they said why they are coming back? It's not because of the location or the beach or whatsoever. It's because of you! It's because of the staff and the service they experience here!

In contrast to Tim, Hannah does not use gestures to stress the name of the addressee of her message. However, the strong emphasis in her voice makes up for this omission.

Hannah: And, do you know what else they want? They like to be informed about us, about what's going on here. They like to be in touch. They want to be part of the family. The Grand Seaside Hotel Family!

Her voice stresses the name of the family – almost flourishing the words as a fanfare.

Hannah: That's why we started our campaign 'Grand Seaside Hotel Family'. We will send out cards to our guests and try to keep them in touch, so that every time they'll come back, they'll feel like meeting their family.

Hannah finishes her part of the presentation and hands over to Matilda, who also has, initially, some problems with the microphone. When some people from the audience
ask her to talk louder, Tim comes to help her adjust the microphone. In spite of this
case, she appears calm and secure. She sets her pace, as if determined to get over
with her presentation quickly – rather short of gestures, she adds little emphasis to
her voice.

Matilda: I would also like to say how wonderful the staff of this organization
is. It's really a great team, and I enjoy every single day I go to work.
Thank you for that. Above all, the last financial year has been very
successful. It was not the hotel that got all the prizes and awards, but
you, the staff!

Matilda shows a slide that signals the mission of the hotel: ‘At the Grand Seaside
Hotel exceptional service is standard and standards are above expectation’.

Matilda: That is what we aim for and that is what we all work together for.

She then continues by bringing up a slide that quotes comments from guests praising
the quality of the service and the friendliness of the staff.

Matilda: In the overwhelming majority of all our guest feedback, people praise
the Grand Seaside staff for their friendliness.

Matilda runs through the next three slides without many comments. These slides
quote words of praise from executives of the Globe Hotels headquarters. The words
express satisfaction with the service found at the Grand Seaside. Apparently, the
executives were impressed with the high standard of service delivered by staff,
which they characterize as being exceptional for the whole region.

Matilda goes to the next slide and explains the targets for the next year.

Matilda: We have raised the level of permanent employment and have come to
a figure of not more than 30 per cent casuals. We also promote from
within, as many of you know. (She shows a slide with the name and
department of approximately 30 people.) All these people (she points to the slide) have been promoted last year. You will know many of them. So, we do promote! And we do promote from within! You will find this list in the staff room.

Matilda’s last statement sounds like the answer to a question that no one has actually explicitly raised. She acquaints the audience with the facts almost like in a court session, presenting the list of those promoted like vital pieces of evidence supposed to shatter any doubts about her version of events.

To end of her presentation, Matilda presents a slide with a cartoon that shows two groups of three people each engaging in a tug of war. The whole scene is located on a tiny island, which provides just enough space for the six people to stand. This small island appears like a platform on the water; a platform surrounded by huge crocodiles with widely opened mouths. The rope on which both groups are pulling is already tearing apart, so that each group is about to fall into the sea and to get caught by the crocodiles.

Matilda: Yes, this makes it clear. We are a great team here, and only by working together will we succeed.

Matilda thanks the audience and ends her speech by removing the microphone. At the same time, Tim comes up to the screen and talks into the microphone.

Tim: So, let’s have a few drinks now.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the All-Staff-Meeting allows not only for perceiving the image of the Grand Seaside Family as seen through the eyes of management. In what follows, I will also identify constituents of that image that underlie the ‘bond’ symbolically created by management. In doing so, I will show that the family life envisioned by management involves a sense of paternalistic care in return for staff’s obligation to embrace the culture of service excellence. In a
sense, the carefully designed and staged nature of the All-Staff-Meeting can be regarded as symptomatic of life at the Grand Seaside. As the last part of this chapter will show, the display of harmony called for by management, leaves only limited room for the expression of dissent or conflict – which does not mean that they do not find any expression at all, as we shall see.

5.2 Constituents of the Grand Seaside family life

On several occasions during the meeting, we may have perceived, more or less clearly, the eagerness of management to generate trust and a common sense of belonging among the members of the organization. The means they employed for this purpose were manifold. The language and metaphors used by the managers presenting are important in this respect. The image of the Grand Seaside Family triggers a whole number of associations: affiliation, care, belongingness, trust, or mutual support, for instance. With their carefully designed and staged presentation, management seemed to address most if not all of these sentiments. Perhaps most obvious were the continuous reminders reassuring staff of their crucial contribution to the hotel business in general and their value to the Grand Seaside in particular. Staff are those who “make everything happen” and customers come to the hotel primarily because of “the friendliness and natural attitude” of staff, as management put it. In other words, staff are indispensable to the operations of the Grand Seaside; a fact that ought to reassure them of their pivotal role inside this family. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Grand Seaside management “looks after” their staff and, in doing so, assumes the role as quasi-head of this ideal family. As the following sections will show, management’s paternalistic attitude is persuasive, almost a distinctive feature of life at the Grand Seaside quite tangible on various occasions and places at the hotel. As I will demonstrate, the paternalistic family atmosphere is manifest even in the artefactual arrangements that constitute the material aspects of the hotel.
5.2.1 Gifts

Management's aspiration to look after their staff assume various forms. Central to their approach is the granting of support and gifts – the latter referring to items or processes that management, sometimes implicitly, define or present as such. During the meeting it was intriguing to observe how the managers presented strategies, such as training in various forms or the sharing of information, as acts that ought to demonstrate the company's commitment to its staff. By presenting such measure as training, for instance, which are (primarily) functional to the operations of the business, as gifts, management not only seeks to raise staff's commitment to the company, but also, implicitly, they induce a form of obligation on those on whom they are bestowed.

This is not to say, however, that we are dealing here with some form of fraud – passing off water as wine, so to speak – or self-deception by management. I think that the managers of the Grand Seaside do indeed see the supply of training or the (with-) holding of information as their privileges, which, in turn, renders the granting of such privileges into an act of concession towards staff. The following sequence from one of the Morning Briefings may demonstrate, for the example of training, that the supply of such privileges is anything but self-evident to managers and that staff (to be) cannot in each case expect such concessions.

Matilda: We've also still got some positions vacant. We have just advertised for the Health Club and for the Lounge Supervisor. We already have twenty applications for the Lounge although the advertisement just started on Tuesday. Most of them are very qualified people...

Leo interrupts her.

Leo: Tell them about this lady.

Leo looks at Matilda and seems fairly amused in anticipation of her story. Matilda hesitates for a moment and seems rather reluctant to follow Leo's request. Yet, since
Leo seems to have raised the interest of the managers present, who are all looking at her, she finally gives in.

Matilda: Well, Okay. There was one application, a woman, who has never worked in a hotel or a bar before. But she said she would be inclined to go to a weekend course, if we were paying for it. And she also told us that she actually does not like our bar because they don't sell any Mosel.

During Matilda's report, the people become increasingly amused. At the end, all of them are laughing cheerfully. Bill, perhaps summarizing the feelings of the others, bursts out laughing:

Bill: If we pay for it! . . . hahahaa . . . I do not believe it! . . . hahaha

Management's attempts at creating commitment and obligation among staff become most obvious in the case of the free meals. I think it was not accidental that Tim used the example of a luxury car to illustrate the amount of money the company spent on free staff meals. Just before the start of the meeting, I saw Tim replacing the original number of 150,000 dollars with the name of the Lexus luxury car.

Initially, I was puzzled by the incident. Why is someone like Tim, who has an accounting background and who usually values numbers as superior signifiers for the representation of organizational reality, replacing a number with the name of a luxury car? I felt that this swap of signifiers was even more puzzling as most attendees (including myself) were probably unable to relate to the value of such an expensive car. Why would he replace a sign that was intelligible to his audience (A$ 150,000) by one that was more or less unintelligible (luxury car)?

Obviously, Tim must have felt that the change of signifiers would support his point more effectively. However, what was his point? Perhaps his main intention was not to account for the exact amount of money spent on staff meals. There must have
been another underlying symbolism involved that brought Tim to choose the sign of the Lexus car. In other words, the concept of the Lexus car must have stood for something else other than the (exact) worth of the money spent on staff meals. It may have been that the implicit message he wanted to convey was: "Look, somebody (maybe even I, Tim) could have bought a Lexus car for this money. Instead, we gave it away to you. For your meals!" In this interpretation, the symbol of the Lexus car assumes two meanings. First, it expresses a supposedly generous act of somebody (A, who could stand for Tim, the management, or the owners) who forgoes the pleasure of owning a luxury car for the benefit of the staff. Hence, the latter ought to be grateful for such a noble gesture. Second, this act is based on some assumptions about the social structure that are rather implicit. Without doubt, it is accepted that it is A's right to buy a luxury car instead of spending the money for staff. Otherwise, this would not be a noble gesture. Hence, the existent property rights appear legitimate. Moreover, the fact that the initial number was replaced by a luxury car signals a difference in status as well. In connection with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, we could claim that luxury cars are something for General Managers or owners, and not for staff — a fact that would be tacitly understood by both groups, according to Bourdieu. In the face of an abstract number, staff may have asked: "Where does this money come from?" "Why didn't they give us a pay increase instead?" "Why do they talk about the high costs while having a A$ 150,000 surplus?" Ultimately, this may lead to the question: "How many staff could have stayed in employment (instead of being sacked) for A$ 150,000?"

Of course, we would go too far claiming that Tim consciously made his decision to replace the number with the name of the luxury car on the grounds of the rhetorical questions posed above. Yet as Giddens (1976) reminds us, intentionality does not presuppose consciousness. Nevertheless, we could claim that Tim's act of replacing the amount of money spent by the name of the car rendered an abstract figure, which in this context does not indicate issues of ownership or property rights, into a concrete thing, which obviously does belong to somebody. In the case of the Lexus the form of signification used seems to suggest that a luxury car belongs to someone, although obviously not to staff. It also signals to staff: "What you have received (the meals) was actually not yours. It was ours, and we gave it to you."
In the same way as he presented the amount spent on staff meals, Tim made sure, at the beginning of the meeting, that the sharing of information was, essentially, a generous act by management. Tim also made transparent the contingent character of this gift by claiming that such procedure is distinctive to the Grand Seaside – a procedure that identifies this family as different from others. The very process of granting and accepting the privilege of information sharing seems to unite staff and management and seems to found a particular identity: that of being different!

It is worth noticing that the way in which management presents the privileges granted to staff implies not only an element of contingency – dependent on management’s generosity and rooted in their prerogative of access to specific resources such as money and information. In a stronger sense, such privileges are essentially gifts and as such always imply a form of obligation. There is an abundant literature on the nature of gifts (see as exemplary Bourdieu, 1990a and 1991; Mauss, 1970) and the issue ought not to concern us in any detail. For the case at hand, however, we may notice that any form of gift exchange entails a silent or hidden element of obligation. The subjective ‘truth’ of the agents – in this example the fact that giving is seen as an altruistic act of goodwill – depends on a process of misrecognition of the objective ‘truth’ – that each gift commits the recipient to a counter gift (Bourdieu, 1990a and 1991). Hence, the silent truth of the privileges granted by management is that they entail an obligation to a counter gift: what is offered is contingent on staff’s dedication to and success in the delivery of customer service.

5.2.2 Run for your life: ‘The race’ and the symbolic creation of community

The caring attitude management displayed during the All-Staff-Meeting is reflective of another characteristic of life at the hotel: the segmented and hierarchical structure of the Grand Seaside Family. The segmentation of this ideal family into different sub-groups is illustrated by Tim’s recurrent oscillation between the plural forms of

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the grammatical first and second person. Although, it was “you” (staff) that made it all happen, “we” (management) share information with you.

The picture Tim paints during the meeting is illuminative as it suggests a social bond between staff and management based on their complementary roles in the process of production. “It’s not the management! We are only working in the back to support you. It’s your performance that counts, because you have to deliver the service!” as Tim points out. With some imagination, it can be seen that we are here encountering the same metaphorical argumentation that is familiar from Strategic Management approaches to flexibility (Upton, 1994; Volberda, 1996). The organization as an organism – or, for the case at hand, the Grand Seaside Family – finds itself engaged in a struggle for survival in a hostile economic environment; a struggle that links both staff and management in a bond of organic solidarity, to use Durkheim’s (1988) expression. There were frequent references made by managers during the All-Staff-Meeting that pointed towards market pressure from competitors, budget demands, and the importance of performance indicators and that symbolize this struggle. This struggle seems to know no difference between the various members of the organization and that seems to unite them through a common fate – a fate that is perhaps best visualized by Matilda’s slide of the islanders and the crocodiles.

In the light of this metaphor, some sequences of the Morning Briefing also appear in a different light. During the early stages of my research, I was wondering as to why ‘the numbers’ – that is, the reading of the latest business result, usually performed by Madeleine – were announced with a degree of regularity unmatched by any other aspect of the meetings. I was also puzzled as to why Madeleine would announce those figures with an incredible speed, almost bombarding people with numbers and rates and giving them hardly any chance to keep track with the pace of her reading. After all, I do not recall that I have ever seen anyone seriously attempting to jot down those figures. Most of the time, peoples’ behaviour seemed to indicate attitudes ranging from indifference to polite interest towards this ritual component of the Morning Briefings. My suspicion that hardly anyone was seriously interested in the concrete value that those figures represented was confirmed in conversations with several attendees of the Morning Briefings. “No, I don’t really know what these
numbers are about”, said Sascha, the Conference Manager. “And I think most other people don’t know either. Those numbers just give you a feeling of how we are going.”

Yet, if no one really understands these figures, how can they provide such a feeling? And if they are more or less non-intelligible to the recipients, why are the ‘numbers’ read out at all? It was another of Sascha’s remarks that triggered an idea of what may be the issue in the implicit symbolism involved in the reading of the numbers. On a different occasion, Sascha characterized the Grand Seaside as: “This is simply a very number driven organization”, a statement that I could only confirm from my observations. Yet, what if it was not the manifest, obvious meaning of the numbers as representing parameters of the hotel’s performance that mattered? Maybe it was less the concrete value of the numbers announced that mattered; instead, it was the illustrative phrases and idioms accompanying the reading of those numbers that gave them their particular meaning: “a feeling of how we are going”.

Suddenly, some sequences in the meeting appeared to me in a different light. Was it possible that the reading of those numbers symbolized the struggle of the organization with the market? Emanating from that assumption, standard phrases such as “we are ahead of budget”, “we are behind budget”, “we have to make up ground”, “we are gearing up”, and the like, that were routinely uttered during the Morning Briefings and that constituted established parts of the hotel jargon at the Grand Seaside, received a different meaning. All of them seemed to symbolize the hotel as struggling, as moving relatively to some external entity. In the light of this symbolism, one could envisage the Grand Seaside as engaged in a race against the budget, the latter symbolizing the external forces of the market. In the logic of this metaphor, phrases like “being ahead of (or behind) budget” clearly transpire a sense of the organization’s (economic) performance, independently of the concrete and often unintelligible meaning of the figures presented.

The element of fatality that underpins the metaphor of the race has another effect though: it allows for the symbolic construction of community (Cohen, 1985), that is, more specifically to the case at hand, the Grand Seaside Family. This fatality unites
management and staff and binds their (common) future to their capability of standing
the challenges of the race, while simultaneously defining the obligations attached to
membership. Only those contributing to the hotels performance in the race, and
hence the survival of the group, are worth being part of this community.

Perhaps it is this underlying obligation to contribute, to perform in the race, that
explains another habitualized performance during the Morning Briefing. Whenever
someone is supposed to report on his or her department or function and has actually
no information he or she considers relevant or important enough mentioning, the
usual reply will be: “Nothing from me – just busy”. This phrase reassures the other
members of the family that the person concerned is still performing his or her
obligations, despite the fact that the details of this performance are considered as
constituting more or less insignificant information. It also transpires a sense of
movement, of urgency, of keeping up the pace – no matter what.

The specific metaphor of the race, however, is significant to the symbolic creation of
community for another reason. As Benedict Anderson (1983) elaborates in his
*Imagined Communities*, the constituting of a *sense of simultaneity* is fundamental for
creating and sustaining (imagined) communities. A community is imagined,

because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their
fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives
the image of their communion (Anderson, 1983: 15).

Although Anderson’s subject is the nation, we can adopt some of his insights to the
case of the Grand Seaside Family – if only because, as I will show later, this family
entails a strong imaginative element. As Anderson explains:

The idea of a sociological organism moving calendricaly through homogeneous,
empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of a nation, which also is conceived
as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history (Anderson, 1983:
31).

We can clearly discern the analogy to the Grand Seaside as a sociological organism
that is constantly in motion. In the light of this metaphor, my initial suggestion that
we ought not to conceive of the hotel as an entity rigidly fixed in time and space acquires a different meaning. The hotel as a sociological organism appears to live a quite vivid life – drifting along the line of socio-cultural standardized temporal frames: season, week, day, special occasions. It changes its face with the seasons, offering different visual, oral, or culinary experiences to its guests, adequate to the occasion (be it the Melbourne Cup or Christmas). It contracts and expands with the unfolding of the week, swallowing up masses of guests on Friday night only to ejaculate them again on late Sunday. It speeds up during peak times in the morning and late afternoon, with guests arriving or departing, whilst somewhat slowing down outside of these periods. In short, the hotel seems to possess its very own life and rhythm. While its heartbeat increases during peak times (high season, weekend, or peak times of the day) when the race is on most intensely, it also enjoys periods of relative rest (off-season, working week, off peak times of the day) when the pressure eases somewhat.

The experience of the hotel as a social organism, the sensing of its heartbeat, which is probably all too familiar to employees and which can be discerned by guests and external observers as well is one of its most fundamental characteristics. Yet, this heartbeat integrates and transcends a whole variety of very different time experiences into a coherent and unifying rhythm. Given this diversity of temporal experiences in the hotel, establishing a sense of simultaneity becomes a highly complex and yet fundamental task for the constitution of community. Again, we may draw on Anderson who claims for the case of the nation that:

[An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has the complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity (Anderson, 1983: 31).

“Nothing from me – just busy”, used as a standard response during the Morning Briefings, is one way of preserving such confidence.
In sum, it is the underlying root metaphor of the (hotel’s) Race against the budget that allows for a sense of “how we are going” and that, by the same token, provides the symbolic underpinning for organizational identity, the founding narrative for the Grand Seaside Family. Emanating from this founding narrative, members of the family are capable of sharing their experiences, most fundamentally by establishing a sense of simultaneity. The product of this process, the rhythm of the organization, can be said to represent one of its most distinctive characteristics – the Grand Seaside’s organizational identity largely evolves around its rhythm.

5.2.3 Paternalism

The caring attitude management presents at the All-Staff-Meeting allows them to give evidence of their contribution to the race and their concern for the proclaimed bond between the members of the family. Whereas staff are asked to strive for service excellence and to deliver service beyond customers’ expectations, management’s specific contribution to the race is supporting staff and looking after their needs. Yet, as management presents it, their sacrifice goes further. From the All-Staff-Meeting, one could get the impression that the struggle against the quasi-natural laws of the market occasionally requires cooperation among those participating in the race that exceeds the normal routines of work practice. As claimed at the meeting, management does not only support staff in their striving for service excellence; if need be, they will also “cook the books a bit” when staff fail to deliver on their promise. In other words, management will engage in (almost) illegal action, making up for staff’s insufficiency. What bigger sacrifice could management offer? What sign could represent more clearly management’s dedication to the bond, their willingness to look after their staff? After all, both management and staff participate in a form of conspiracy. Who could still claim that the Grand Seaside management would not do anything for their staff, given all this?

The paternalistic and largely caring ‘family attitude’ that management of the Grand Seaside holds towards its staff is underlined by the way in which staff in the Human Resource Department handle their work. During the period of my field research, I
was allocated a table in this department where I spent a considerable amount of time writing up my field-notes. The department itself is located close to the staff canteen, back of house, at the ground level of the hotel.

The Human Resource Department is, however, rather remote from the administrative centre of the hotel. The latter, located back of house at the directly opposite side of the ground floor, hosts most of the management offices. It represents the spatial core of the organization. Separated from the more public back of house areas – that is, those areas that are accessible to all staff, yet prohibited to guests – by doors secured with number locks, the management centre represents the most ‘holy’ part of the hotel, prohibited to guests and ‘profane’ staff alike.

Again, the implicit symbolism of this socio-spatial arrangement seems intriguing. Although the fact that the business of the hotel is essentially about renting time-space seems to underpin much of its architectural design, it is revealing that it is the Human Resource Department, amongst a whole number of management offices, that is located outside the core of the hotel. In contrast, the fact that the financial administration, for instance, is located at the core, the holy part of the hotel, seems to underline the centrality of monetary issues to the organization and speaks for Sascha’s observation that the Grand Seaside is a “very number driven organization”.

It also signals the hierarchical structure of the Grand Seaside family. At the core are management and financial administrators, whereas other staff are somewhat peripheral.

Consequently, in contrast to other management offices, the Human Resource Department is accessible to all staff and is, on many occasions, a meeting place for various people working at the hotel. Often people just “pop around” to have a chat with the Human Resource Manager or her Assistant. Often they will start off the conversation with work related issues, only to quickly shift towards private matters. On these occasions, staff approach the office regarding minor official matters – requesting a new key for the locker in the dressing room, inquiring about the date for the next training course, or submitting a formal application for the yearly holiday – and stay on for a small chat about their job, the family, or spare time activities. If someone presents a doctor’s certificate, an informal inquiry about his/her health will
regularly follow. Someone submitting a formal request for his or her yearly holiday will not be released unless he or she has revealed their plans for the holiday and their travel destination. Often such an inquiry will spark off into a lively discussion, with participants openly sharing their holiday experiences and advising each other on favourable travel destinations and holiday sites.

The sociable and informal aura that surrounds the Human Resource Department is also manifest in the caring attitude that staff working at the department display. They are not only providing advice to staff and listening to their troubles. There is no major anniversary, birthday, or wedding, for example, of which staff at the Human Resource Department are not aware of and that they will not acknowledge by at least a card and a bottle of Champagne.

Although the hotel’s staff comprises up to two thirds casual workers (in peak season), there is a fixed group of about 150 staff who work permanently at the hotel. Out of the two thirds of casual workers, the hotel tends to recruit a number of staff recurrently from a pool of ‘permanent casuals’. The result is that most of the people in the hotel know each other, which contributes to an atmosphere of familiarity. The hotel has, furthermore, a Social Club. Orchestrated by the Human Resource department, the club organizes and sponsors social events such as barbecues, theatre visits, or spring balls, extending social bonds beyond the workplace. However, membership to this club is free to managers only, whereas other staff have to pay fees—an issue that on one occasion sparked off a controversial discussion, which I will present later in this chapter.

In sum, if there is one location in the hotel that seems to epitomize most vividly the vision of the Grand Seaside Family, I suggest it is the Human Resource Department.
5.2.4 The Staff Canteen

Apart from the Human Resource Departments, there are other places that seem to inspire a touch of that family atmosphere that management so eagerly tries to evoke. One such location is the staff canteen. The room itself, measures less than a hundred square metres. It is located at the back of the hotel and can be accessed from a small corridor that links the hotel’s laundry with some of the store rooms for food and beverages on the one side. On the other side of the corridor, one finds the lift leading up to the Main Kitchen on the second level. There are two entry doors to the canteen on each side of the wall that separates the room from the corridor. As all the other rooms are located backstage at the first level, the room has no windows and is constantly illuminated by fluorescent light.

When entering the room, one finds all along the right wall (more precisely, about two metres in front of the wall) a buffet where hot and cold food is served by canteen staff. Further to the left, on the wall opposite to the entries are small tables juxtaposed to each other. At the first table there is a coffee-machine (which is out of order for most of the time), and a hot water boiler. In front of that boiler are dozens of plastic cups, a box with tea bags, and another one containing instant coffee. On the table to the left of the coffee table are cutlery and serviettes. There is always a basket with bread, margarine, some peanut butter, and sometimes some marmalade at the table. The bread is for people who are on late or night shifts and who want to make themselves a sandwich for dinner or breakfast. Further down that wall is a “water-bubbler” and two machines that offer snacks or chocolate bars and soft drinks. By the left wall, there are two garbage cans, one for normal garbage, the other for food leftovers. In the centre of the room are six canteen tables that offer space for six to eight people. Except for the items in the machines, all food and drinks served or offered to staff are free. This is part of Tim’s strategy to “look after his people”. There are also local and regional newspapers and the less frequently consumed newsletter of the hotel that people can enjoy while having a break.

Apart from the culinary potpourri offered to staff, people find plenty of ‘visual food’ on the surrounding walls, which are painted in the same pale yellow characteristic of
the hotel. The wall at the entry holds several pictures that show scenes from past events of the hotel life. Some of them show award ceremonies with staff proudly presenting themselves to camera. Others display scenes from social events such as past staff parties. On the wall behind the garbage cans is a notice board, where excerpts from the latest issue of the hotel-newsletter are hung as well as some advertisements, such as the one that offers staff a ten percent discount with a local travel agency. To the right of the fire extinguisher is a pamphlet about 'organizational health and safety' that explains, among other things, what to do in cases of accidents or when first aid is needed, and a cartoon shows how one should lift heavy weights. Finally, on the wall opposite the entry one finds a copy of the hotel's mission hung in a rather fancy frame. Next to the mission statement is a yellow circle that measures about half a metre diameter. The circle is divided by six red lines that all go through its middle, so that it appears to be representing a wheel. Each of the equally large parts of the wheel contains the name of one or more units or departments of the hotel. The heading of the wheel reads: 'The structure of our organization'. As Tim explained to me:

'That's our organizational structure. There is no hierarchy; each and every employee is equally important. That's what the circle means. In particular, it is the staff out there that have to deliver the service and to represent the hotel.

Tim’s egalitarian attitude is emphasized by the fact that there is no extra canteen for management and staff. "We all use the same facilities," says Tim. Indeed, he often takes his lunch at the canteen, mingling with the staff. On such occasions, Tim involves staff in discussion about their job or even private matters. Of course, on other occasions, members of the management team will have lunch together outside the hotel or in one of its outlets. Tim would never expect official visitors to the hotel or business executives to share his egalitarian attitude. On occasions like the lunch that two colleagues and I had with Tim, for instance, the venue for the meeting would be one of the hotel restaurants or even the launch or bar. I also found quite often the same people sharing a table in the staff canteen, which suggests that people do not mingle randomly. Yet, there is indeed a certain equalization of status recognizable in the staff canteen and front- or backstage workers often mingle with managers.
This equalization of status in the staff canteen is facilitated through extra-organizational relationships such as kinship and friendship that penetrate into the life at the hotel. In other words, the Grand Seaside is not only a place of organizational (employment) relations. Many of the staff are “locals” and socialize privately outside the hotel across hierarchical levels. Some of the staff are also linked through kinship. Susan and Richard, for instance, are married. While he works as Conference Coordinator, she works as Financial Assistant in the hotel’s administration office. Although they work in separate departments located at completely different sites in the hotel, both meet regularly over lunch at the canteen. When Richard left the hotel a few weeks before the end of my research and I met Susan and asked how she felt about his resignation she answered, “Well, actually it’s nice. At least we’ve now got something to talk about at home.”

As seen in the example of Richard and Susan, who lived part of their family life at the hotel, the Grand Seaside is a location where the boundaries between different spheres of life, such as work and private life, blur. We will see later in Chapter 6 that a whole range of different social spaces coexist at the hotel. These spaces are structured to discipline the individuals that inhabit them and, by the same token, (spatially) define the latter’s identities. For the time being we continue our considerations about the image of the Grand Seaside Family and its reflections in everyday life at the hotel.
5.2.5 Pervasive harmony and the marginalization of dissent

There are, as demonstrated, several occasions on which one can grasp a sense of that family atmosphere management suggested at the All-Staff-Meeting. At least among managers, there seems to prevail a certain sense of belongingness that suggest that the family is, partially, lived experience. The occasion that I recall as manifesting most clearly the feeling of commonality among managers, was a small ceremonial event during one of the meetings I witnessed. During that meeting, Madeleine’s reading of the numbers took a somewhat unusual turn.

Madeleine: Some good news from me. We’ve just reviewed the financial results for this financial year. To make it short, we are 307 above, so that we will finish well ahead of budget. (Comments of approval around the table.) Congratulations and thanks to all of you.

Tim: Well done, all of you! I think that requires a small celebration.

Madeleine gets a bottle of Champagne and some glasses on a tray from one of the tables in the back of the room. When everybody has received a glass of Champagne, Tim proposes a toast.

Tim: To all of you – for your effort.

People start toasting each other while Bill adds emphatically and rather roaring, another toast.

Bill: Yes, to the Team! It’s a great team to work for!

Most other attendees answer his salute.

Others: To the team!
This small ceremomial intervention during one of the many meetings I witnessed stuck in my mind for another reason though. Besides displaying some form of affiliation among managers, it also seemed to express the, often, staged character that large parts of organizational life at the Grand Seaside assumed. The pervasiveness of this feature often raised my doubts about the authenticity of peoples behaviour, gesture, or utterances and made it occasionally difficult to read their intentions. The way people dealt with each other, in and outside of meetings, was characterized by a friendliness and politeness that left virtually no room for any expression of disagreement or even conflict. Indeed, one of the most characteristic features of the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside is that it tends to marginalize, if not to exclude, the articulation of dissent or conflict. Whatever the occasion, everything seems to be covered by a mantle of harmony, so to speak.

Like an unwritten law, a rule of custom, tacitly understood and acknowledged by the members of the organization, the dogma of harmony infiltrates interactions and communication at the hotel. Those aspects of reality that threaten the harmonious family image are marginalized; they are either pushed to the communicative and rhetorical edges of the customer service discourse or simply ignored, turned into non-issues. Hence, there is a fine but well marked line between those issues that enter the discourse and things that will (better) not be talked about. We may recall, for instance, the reluctance of staff and managers to account for the concrete number of redundancies. Alternatively, we may recall the way in which Jim Carson (the grey eminence) and the sheer mention of his name created an atmosphere of conspiracy, with those involved being well aware of the fact that they are moving on the edge of the (official) customer service discourse, potentially threatening to pull away the curtain of harmony that covers life at the Grand Seaside.

Having said that the overt expression of dissent and conflict is, at best, unusual for discourse at the Grand Seaside, this does not imply that such feelings do not find any expression at all. As we shall see in the following sections, the members of the organization have very different ways of dealing with this pervasive atmosphere of harmony.
5.2.5.1 Cutting off the Right Hand

One such strategy for dealing with the implicitly stipulated non-articulation of dissent is to not participate in the harmonious family spectacle through the sheer refusal to play the game; so to speak. A concrete example of such refusal is silence a mode of non-participation that is, simultaneously, a form of communication, a silent articulation of dissent.

An example of such behaviour can be drawn from one of the Morning Briefings. During that meeting, Tim announced the redundancy of his ‘right hand’, Edward. The latter had been working at the Grand Seaside for years. In his job as Assistant General Manager, he certainly belonged to the core of the management team.

With the core, I wish to designate a group of managers that I hold to be the most senior figures at the Grand Seaside. By and large, there have been three to four people in the core at any time of my research. While Tim and Madeleine remained members throughout this time, Edward dropped out rather early in my research. After a few months, Hannah, the newly appointed Director of Marketing and Matilda, the Director of Human Resource, seemed to progress to join the core.

Members of the core differed from ordinary managers in a number of respects. First, Tim, Madeleine, and Edward were the only ones who attended the meetings with the owner representatives. These meetings, which happened on a regular basis, were not public. In contrast to most other events, these meetings were not regularly announced during the Morning Briefings. Often, other managers just picked up from a conversation that a meeting with the owners had happened, yet the information given during management meetings about its outcomes were very selective and, in general, rather meager. Consequently, the meetings with the owners were regarded through an aura of dubiousness or conspiracy. Although excluded from participation in these meetings, every manager knew about their importance, in terms of their wide-ranging consequences for the hotel and its employees. As in the case of the budget negotiations with the representatives of the owners, people in the hotel could do nothing but wait patiently for the outcome. On occasions, such a meeting would
not only result in increased pressure through higher profit targets being decided but might also lead, at least indirectly, to redundancies. Hence, people seem to take a somewhat fatalistic attitude towards these meetings.

Second, the members of the core also distinguish themselves from ordinary managers through their job titles. Besides the General Manager and the Controller, Hannah, and Matilda were the only managers that carried the title of Director. Assigning managers to the position of Director was part of Tim's strategy "to get people with degrees" into management positions at the Grand Seaside. Tim, Madeleine, and the two directors thus also differed from the rest of the managers in their level of formal qualification.

Third, as an unobtrusive measure, there was the pattern of the managers' attendance at Tim's golf expeditions. Usually Monday mornings, Tim, a passionate player, would go to the local golf club for a game, inviting other managers to come along. Although non-members of the core also attended these trips, most frequently Tim was joined by one of his fellow core managers.

Edward who was, as mentioned, a member of the management core, was highly respected, not only because of his long service in the organization but also because of his influential position, as the second man in the hotel. As a core team member, he had been intensely involved in the implementation of the restructuring program. As witnessed in the case of the restructuring of the Conference Department reported above, he even attempted to realize his own visions and strategies – sometimes against the more or less hidden resistance of other managers such as Alice. However, Edward, unlike Madeleine, for instance, was regarded with a feeling of fear and dislike by most of his colleagues and, in his absence, some of the managers hardly bothered to conceal their distaste.

The Morning Briefing during which Tim announced the redundancy of Edward's position, was not held at its usual place in the level floor conference room near the frontdesk. As on a few other occasions, that room had been taken up by conference
guests, so that the management team had to relocate to the Lobby, a room adjacent to the Breakfast Garden, the hotel’s main restaurant for breakfast and lunches. During the morning, the Lobby and its Coffee Bar were not opened for the public. It would not open until lunchtime and the various coffee tables and the rattan furniture that marked the Coffee Bar lay idle. At lunchtime, however, the place would offer guests the chance to have their coffee while reading newspapers or journals that one found in abundance throughout the room.

The Coffee Bar was separated from the actual Lobby by a large wall that stretched almost the whole range of the room. Both sides of the wall ended in a gap of about two metres, offering access to the Lobby room. The latter was about eight by six metres. There was a large fireplace on the wall adjacent to the Coffee Bar, surrounded by heavy leather seating and a large wooden table. On the other three sides, large glass windows offered a stunning view of the town and the nearby beach beyond the Lobby. Facing east, one could gaze over the large pine trees surrounding the hotel at the beach of Laguna Bay and beyond lay the sheer endless horizon of the Pacific Ocean. This breathtaking view made the Lobby one of the most impressive and spectacular rooms in the hotel. As it was late morning, the sun was already high and blinding, and it did not take much to imagine what a spectacular view the Lobby must have offered at sunrise. Given this spectacular view, it was surprising that the location was not open earlier.

When people took their places around the large wooden table, the meeting went the usual way. Cliff, one of the Duty Managers, made the opening, reading from the logbook. Madeleine, sitting to his right, was next. Her customary bombardment with numbers received the same more or less disinterested response as usual: silence. When she finished, she looked to her right and made eye contact with Di, the Human Resource Manager. However, before the latter could say anything, Tim took over. The fact that it was not actually his turn and that he broke with the almost natural anti-clockwise order of speech signalled the extraordinary status of what he was about to say.
Tim: I have a very important announcement to make. Edward will leave us at the end of the year.

Tim’s first two sentences had hit the place like a bombshell. Was it true? Edward, Tim’s ‘right hand’, the second man in the hotel, was to be made redundant? Many people must have been taken by surprise by this message. Some of them looked at each other as in disbelief. Others were gazing puzzled at Edward, perhaps hoping that his face would reveal some clues to help them to unravel this sheer unbelievable announcement. Edward’s behaviour, however, hardly revealed anything illuminating. He gazed sternly at an imaginary point on the carpet. He did not look up; nor did he say anything.

Tim did not waste too much time though. He was quick to add an explanation.

Tim: It’s because, as you may know, his position has become redundant through the current restructuring. Unfortunately, there is no position that would suit him that is currently vacant at Globe-Hotels. He was offered a job in marketing, but that’s not what he wants, and he has decided to explore other alternatives.

Tim looked at briefly at Edward, perhaps offering him the chance for a statement. Edward, however, did not respond. He still sat in silence, appearing almost indifferent to the events unfolding. Only closer observation revealed his gums moving slightly sideways, as if he was going to chew the message received into pieces.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere of shock spread by Tim’s announcement seemed to have intensified and the expression of disbelief had not vanished from the faces of most of the managers. In fact, as time elapsed, the managers present appeared increasingly concerned. Only gradually, it seemed some of them realized the importance, if not the sheer outrageousness, of the scene they had just witnessed. Although most of the managers did not like Edward personally, one could read the concern from their
worried faces: If the second man in the hotel could not escape redundancy – who else could claim to be safe?

Into this scene of general disbelief, Tim added:

Tim: So, that means that he remains on the payroll and is on sabbatical leave until March. Would you like to say anything, Edward?

Tim was now looking bluntly at Edward, visibly annoyed that the latter obviously did not want to meet his eyes, nor make any effort to respond verbally. A short moment of silence followed. Edward still did not say a word, but one could see the tension running through his body. The muscles under his shirt constantly seemed to contract and release. He did not look up, continuing his stern gaze at the carpet, when, eventually, he responded curtly.

Edward: No!

Edward's crude response seemed to set a blunt end to the scene. Obviously, there was nothing left to say. None of the other managers witnessing the scene said anything either. None of them articulated any of the questions written onto their faces. After another brief moment of silence, Tim continued.

Tim: Okay, further with Di.

As seen in the sequence just reported, one way the customer service discourse at the Grand Seaside marginalized dissent and minimized resistance stemmed from the sheer unwillingness of participants to speak out. Although Tim seemed to encourage Edward to express his feelings about the decision and, perhaps, to offer an explanation to the puzzled management team, the departing Assistant General Manager refused. We may assume that there was indeed nothing left to say on Edwards's behalf. His decision to decline the offer of taking over the marketing of the hotel was, most likely, the result of serious considerations and preceding
discussions. Nevertheless, his refusal to talk, to play the game, rendered his silence into a strong comment; into a voiceless yet intelligible articulation of dissent – resistance through silence in the face of ritual humiliation.

What is, perhaps, as revealing as Edward’s behaviour is the unwillingness or inability of the other participants to articulate any questions and concerns, or even to ask for further explanation. Doing so might have involved disrupting the general harmony characteristic of the discourse at the Grand Seaside, exposing the essential contingency of the family relationship; a bond that, although it may be on occasions emotionally strong, top management or owners could terminate at any time.

We may notice further that my interpretation of the scene presented above sits somewhat uncomfortably with the account Tim provided in the interview that two other colleagues and I had with him over lunch, just a few days after the incident described. On that occasion, as the reader may recall, Tim suggested that he was masterminding the whole restructuring of the hotel. Almost as a proof of his authorship, he claimed that he “had just made the position of Assistant General Manager redundant”. During the meeting, however, Tim carefully avoided acknowledging any ownership of this decision. The way in which he used Edward’s silence to swiftly switch to another issue indicated that he was not interested in discussing the issue in any detail. After all, he did not ask any of the other attendees for comments, nor did any of them raise any questions spontaneously. People seemed to share the understanding that overt conflict was one of the issues excluded from the customer service discourse.

5.2.5.2 Di’s Resignation

In contrast to the scene described above, there were other occasions where conflict was not resolved publicly either, but which did not bear the traces of more or less hidden discord, as with Edward’s response to his resignation. More precisely, refusal to speak out (or ‘telling silence’) is not the only strategy available to participants in the customer service discourse for complying with the dogma of harmony: a dogma that prevents conflict from overtly entering the scene.
Occasionally, managers were versatile and gifted actors, leaving others in doubt about their true emotions. The events that led to Di’s resignation are an illustrative point in case, which I will report on briefly.

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, Tim’s vision of turning the Grand Seaside into a modern and profitable business not only provoked his devotion to the issue of service excellence but also resulted in his efforts “to get people with degrees” into leading management positions. Unfortunately, Di, who held the position of Human Resource Manager at the time that I started my research, did not possess any such degree. Di, a woman in her early thirties who was considerably overweight, was very sociable, always in the mood for a small chat or a joke and, in general, well liked among staff at the hotel. In spite of her thirty-odd years, her long blond hair, her round face, and her big shining eyes, gave her the appearance of a big girl, especially when she was giggling or joking around with her colleagues. This impression was reinforced by Di’s general way handling the responsibilities of her job. Although very sociable, Di showed a certain shyness in taking on responsibility and often appeared insecure when engaging in conversations addressed to an official matter. During the morning briefings, she would hardly ever engage in any discussions and when approached for her opinion, she often seemed discernibly uncomfortable. Whenever it was her turn to announce news or raise issues related to her activities, she did so in an almost apologetic manner, as if she felt sorry for wasting the other managers’ time.

Some of the shyness and insecurity she frequently displayed may have been due to the status that was attached to the formal position she held at the hotel. The Human Resource Manager was certainly not part of the core of the management team. She was not in a position to announce one of the pillars, the sequences constituting the ritual backbone of the morning briefings, as were Madeleine (the numbers), Elsa (guest questionnaires), or the Duty Managers (logbook). The fact that the importance of her contribution to the meeting was not acknowledged ex ante, as in the case of the pillars, might have contributed to her insecure appearance during the Morning Briefings – a characteristic that I occasionally observed in other (non-pillar reading) managers. However, much of her insecurity seems to have been related to her educational background and her past career path.
Di did not match Tim’s ideal of a well-trained and formally educated hotel manager. She had received most of her education through ‘learning by doing’ and had to work her way up through the ranks. For the last two years, since her predecessor, a “very authoritarian woman” had left for a “better position in the city”, she had struggled to make her way from a “simple Human Resource Assistant” to a Human Resource Manager who was “responsible for the whole lot”.

Used to taking orders and rather inexperienced in taking on responsibility, this career step proved a real challenge for Di. Over several months she managed, learning by doing and lacking any formal training and guidance, to replace the gap the previous Human Resource Manager had left. She did all the interviewing for job applications, took over the Human Resource planning, managed the reward systems, and looked after apprentices. When Tim decided to implement the new customer service program, Di and Leo were responsible for designing and running training courses. In sum, Di learned, virtually autodidactically, to cope with a huge variety of different tasks in a very short period of time.

In the third month of my research, Tim decided to create the position of Director Human Resources. I had already heard ‘through the grapevine’ that the person to be hired ought to possess a formal University degree and was to be recruited from the outside. I was wondering what might happen to Di and what her feelings were about this decision. By any standard, one can assert that she had managed the tasks assigned to her in the role of Human Resource Manager quite successfully. Hence, if there was a new position in Human Resources to be filled, one may assume that she had reasonable hopes of being, at the very least, considered for this job. Yet, with Tim’s decision to hire somebody with a degree, she was standing on lost ground right from the outset. Her response to this decision was somewhat bizarre; yet it also exemplified another way in which personal dissatisfaction and discontents were handled at the hotel.

For the purpose of my research, I was assigned a desk in the Human Resource Department just opposite to Di. Particularly during the first weeks of my research,
we spent a lot of time in conversations about the hotel and also about private issues in an attempt to touch base and to get to know each other. She told me about her experiences at the hotel, her trouble with the former Human Resource Manager, the weekend trip to visit her soon-to-be parents in law. I told her about my life in Germany, the reasons that lead me to come to Australia, and my further career plans. In short, we developed a working relationship that was as good and pleasant as one could hope for in such a short period of time.

As the days passed after I first heard the rumours about the Director of Human Resources, I was wondering why Di did not raise the issue. Without any doubt, she could be considered one of the best-informed persons in the hotel – due to the strategic location of her office as a centre for the exchange of informal news and gossip. Normally, she could hardly wait to pass on her knowledge. Did she really not hear the news? I could hardly believe that this was the case.

Then, one morning, when we were sitting in her office, Di suddenly told me:

Di: You know, we’re advertising for a new position in the hotel. We’re looking for a Director in Human Resource Management – somebody with a degree, who handles the strategic issues.

Her voice sounded unusual; somewhat formal – almost cold. I could not really relate to the sound of her voice and I must have looked at her quite puzzled. Why did her voice sound that chilly? Certainly, simply bypassing her was an extraordinary act of injustice, I felt. Hence, I would have expected her voice to sound angry, offended or upset. I was even prepared to see her get mad about Tim’s decision, as unusual as this may have been in respect of her normal personality. Instead, she seemed rather calm; as if she had carefully prepared that speech for quite some time. All this did not make sense to me. Yet, considering the sound of her voice, I did not dare to say anything. Without further waiting for my response, she continued:

Di: I think this is terrific!
I was shocked. What did she say? This was not real! This woman had worked her guts out over the last two years. She was repeatedly confronted with new challenges, without any help and hardly any recognition she had been left deserted in her situation — and still: She had managed! And now? Instead of being rewarded for her efforts and loyalty, she was being made second best, simply passed over, in an almost humiliating manner. What on earth was wrong with that woman that she was telling me she considered this treatment to be “terrific”?

I must have looked utterly perplexed, and Di was quick to add:

Di: You know, I always liked working under someone’s direction. And now, I’m gonna have a new boss again. That’s great!

She tried to give her voice a touch of excitement; yet, somehow it failed to make the desired impression on me. I was still staring at her, unable to say a word. I could not figure out why she gave me this absurd theatrical performance. I was at a complete loss.

Di must have realized my confusion. Suddenly, her mood changed. She looked down for a moment, attempting to avoid my gaze. Then she looked up again. Looking almost embarrassed, she was the big girl again and the cold and controlled attitude had vanished. The sound of her voice switched back to normal when she added almost apologetic:

Di: Well, you know, I was quite overwhelmed with all the work I had to do over the last few months. And Tim explained to me that he needs someone who helps him with the more strategic things. Someone with a degree. (Short pause.) And I think I’m not that good at that. But I really enjoy running the customer service program. And, I mean, I’m going to have much more time for running the training.
Later, I was able to figure out that, at that point in time, Di must have thought (as other people reportedly did too) that I was the person that Tim had in mind for the job of Director Human Resources. This incident was neither the first nor the last time that I was the subject of some sort of distrust. As people confessed to me subsequently, I frequently was the subject of rumours and suspicions, without me noticing. Just when I had started my research, for example, the rumour was going around that I was sent by the Globe-Hotel company head-quarters in Hong Kong, apparently with the mission of investigating further options for restructuring and downsizing of the hotel. As Di told me several weeks later, it may have been the fact that I mentioned my intention to do research in Hong Kong at a later stage of my Ph.D. that (unintentionally) triggered these suspicions. Although I do not intend to discuss these issues any further, peoples’ perceptions about my role in the hotel certainly influenced my positioning in the field and, in turn, pre-determined my experience of the field and the account that I produced of it (the data I was able to collect, as realists would say). In general one can say that as a result of the restructuring process and the management strategies employed, there seemed to prevail a slightly paranoid atmosphere at the hotel, which made it difficult addressing issues or asking questions that were considered sensitive.

A few days after the incident in the Human Resource Department, in one of the Morning Briefings, Di gave a similar performance to the participants of the Morning Briefing, this time more public. The moment her discursive predecessor stopped talking and looked at her, as if for her to take over, Di became visibly nervous. While she was talking, she constantly played with her pen.

Di: Well... Yes...

Given the way she was holding the pen tensely, trying to bend it by applying pressure to both ends, it seemed virtually a miracle that the pen did not break. Her voice sounded very insecure. Obviously, she seemed anxious about not finding the right words. Then, she took a deep breath and announced shrilly:
Di: Yes, I have got some exciting news. We are going to advertise a new position for Director of Human Resources soon. We are looking for someone with a degree who can take over the strategic things in Human Resources. So, I’m going to have a new boss, which is terrific.

She had spoken very fast. Finishing with a broad but somewhat cramped smile, Di tried hard to look and sound excited – with little success though. Every bit of her performance appeared artificial. However, no one said a word; the room was all silence. Most of the other managers looked down at their notepads or played with their pens. No one looked up, and no one seemed to dare look at Di. Most of them looked as if they were torn between feelings of compassion for Di and some sort of embarrassment about the spectacle they were just witnessing. Yet, no one seemed willing to help poor Di out of her impossible situation. They did not even dare looking at her.

Breaking the silence, Di added:

Di: You know that I always liked working with a boss. I really enjoy working under some guidance. And... I was recently pretty overloaded with all the work. And... now I’m going to have more time for the customer service program.

Di tried hard to sound convincing. But she appeared not to be convinced herself.

Di: So, I’m really looking forward to that new person coming in.

Again, the room was all silence. Most people were still looking at their notepads or playing around with their pens. Others looked briefly at Di, trying to avoid her gaze. Still, no one came to her aid. No one asked: “Why do we need a new Director?” “Did not Di do a good job?” People just looked down – saying nothing. When the silence seemed to become too agonizing, Tim took over and allocated the word to another person.
Tim: Gerald!

Only a few weeks after this incident, Di left the hotel to take a position with another company.

5.2.5.3 A glimpse of dissent

So far, we have encountered two strategies for dissent or conflict to be displayed inside the Grand Seaside’s management team. One, exemplified in the case of Edward’s redundancy, results in an obvious refusal to speak, a demonstrative silence that, without using words, gives a clear indication of the underlying conflict. In a sense, Edward’s silence broke with the accepted facade of harmony; it was, essentially, a refusal to play the game. The other strategy, used by Di, was more conformist. Di chose to play the game, to maintain the facade of harmony, even at the cost of absurdity.

Both Edward and Di, however, did not express their dissent overtly or turn the issue into open conflict. Both chose, to differing degrees, loyalty and eventually exit rather than voice (Hirschman, 1970). On the basis of my experiences in the field, I would claim both options constituted dominated responses to dissent or conflict. Indeed, I remember only one occasion at which someone did speak out, at which voice overruled loyalty, and the facade of harmony was brusquely torn apart – if only for a short moment.

The incident I have in mind happened during one of the Morning Briefings. As on other occasions, the normal location for the meeting, the conference room close to the front desk, was once more occupied and participants of the meeting had to use one of the ‘Breakout Rooms’ for conference delegates on the third floor. The room was of approximately the same size as the normal meeting place, with chairs located around a large table at its centre. In contrast to the normal meeting place, which did not have any windows and was illuminated by fluorescents, one wall of this room comprised a large French-window that led to the adjacent terrace. The morning sun
turned the room into a dazzle of brightness, blinding the eyes as soon as one entered the room.

The meeting had progressed in the usual way, with readings from the logbook, the announcement of the numbers, and some feedback from the guest questionnaires. Other managers reported on news relating to their function or department, as usual, according to their seating order. Then, it was Tim’s turn.

Tim: I have to make another announcement.

He hesitated for a moment before he continued. The sound of his voice indicated clearly that he regarded the issue he is going to address as a rather serious matter.

Tim: You know that we had an agreement that the spouses of all our executives would receive free membership of our Social Club.

Again, Tim hesitates for a brief moment.

Tim: To strengthen my policy of equality among all the staff, I do not intend to renew the Social Club membership for the spouses. That doesn’t mean they are not welcome any more. Everybody is invited to bring along his or her spouse to the Social Club events. It’s just that they won’t get formal membership for free any longer.

During the uttering of the last sentences, his voice sounded somewhat apologetic. Yet, his voice was back to normal when he continued to express his rationale.

Tim: I can’t justify why some of the staff are getting it while others don’t. And I don’t know where to draw the line, because all of the staff contribute to the organization’s success. So, I would like to hear your opinion on this matter.
For a moment everybody remained silent. No one seemed prepared to accept Tim’s invitation for comments. As so often when one may suspect underlying dissent, yet people seem not to dare articulate it, many of the managers present played with their notepads and pens. Eventually, it is Tim, who broke the silence.

Tim: What about you Bill? I could see that you were shaking your head.

As mentioned earlier, Bill was one of the longest serving employees at the hotel. Not just because of his age, he was in his fifties, but also because of his caring attitude, he represented somewhat of a father figure. Whenever there was a chair missing at one of the meetings, it was Bill who would jump up and offer his own seat to the person in need. He was also a straightforward and outspoken person, who did not let his colleagues doubt his feelings. On one occasion he shouted at the manager responsible for the concierge staff: “You should teach your guys how to behave properly. I caught them again speeding in the hotel garage. You know how dangerous that is. So, if you can’t look after them . . . then I will teach them how to behave.” On another occasion he was just “over the moon” with the staffs performance at the annual Spring Ball, which some members of staff attended along with the guests. “You Lisa” he addressed one of the managers present, “tell your guys that their performance was excellent at the Spring Ball.” Turning to the other people present he explained: “These guys had to run their shoes off to keep us happy. Some of them stayed until four in the morning, although they were off shift at one. It was really super-dooper!” Yet, his outspokenness never turned really offensive and people just knew how to take his comments. By and large, he seemed one of the most respected and well-liked characters in the hotel.

Bill: Well . . .

Bill made a brief pause. So far, he had been looking down, apparently scribbling something on his notepad. Now, he raised his head – looking straight into Tim’s eyes.
Bill: I don't agree with that. The free membership was one of the compensations the hotel has given to those people who spend hours after hours outside their normal working time at the hotel. It was also a nice gesture to the people at home, who have to cope with all the crap that's attached to our job.

While Bill was talking, he was starting to play with his pen – holding it with his right, while continuously tapping it onto the palm of his left hand.

Tim: Yes I know, but they are welcome any time.

Tim looked and sounded emphatic – almost conciliatory.

Bill: But that's not the same! The fact that they have received the club membership made them feel a part of it.

Bill appeared to get increasingly irritated. His pen was tapping on his left hand with increasing frequency; his voice was getting louder.

Bill: I mean, they had to cope with all that crap, when we were working weekend after weekend. It was a compensation offered to those who thought we spend too much time here anyway. To say: “We won't give you free membership any more, but you can certainly come along, if you like to”; that's just a nice way of saying: “See you later!”

Gerald: I mean, it's probably something different for Bill, because his wife has always been an ambassador for the hotel and has brought a lot of business in.

Although he seemed in line with Bill, Gerald's voice sounded conciliatory rather than a challenge to Tim's position.

Tim: Yes I know. But I can't give it to one and not to the others. All of our staff are valuable to the hotel. And we have to recognize especially
the performance of our front staff because they are the ones who actually serve the customer. So, they will say: "Why does he get it and we don't?" And my policy is to break down this barrier. All should be treated equally, because all are part of the team and equally important.

Now, Tim seemed to get irritated as well. During the last sentences the loudness and determination of his voice was increasing.

Brett: I mean, I can understand Bill, although I like your philosophy.

Brett looked at Tim to signal some form of acknowledgement of his position.

Brett: I mean, my wife wouldn't care. Quite frankly, she doesn't like this place; and she thinks I spend too much time here anyway. But in the case of his wife, it is something different. She has done a lot for the hotel and has always been very closely connected and, as you said (he looks at Gerald), she has been an ambassador for the hotel. I can understand that.

He sought eye contact with Bill, who was again scribbling on his notepad without looking up.

Brett: I also like Tim's philosophy, but it's just hard to put in into practice. Particularly in the kitchen!

Some people were laughing, and Brett, who was the Executive Chef of the hotel, responded with a somewhat embarrassed smile.

Brett: Yes, I mean the kitchen is a very hierarchical place; and it has always been that way; and I can't really see how it should work without some direction - with 'flat hierarchies' and all that stuff.
Most people laugh again. This time however, Brett, who is getting more and more excited, paid no attention.

Brett: Yes, I mean how should I explain to somebody who puts in that extra-bit of effort to become a Demi Chef that he won't get something out of it in return? I mean the wage differences are not very high. You will always have this division – somebody has to take over the responsibility.

Tim: But that will always be the case. I'm not talking about that. I'm not talking about some sort of communism. That's not what I want! I want people to participate.

Tim sounded somewhat frustrated that the others do not properly acknowledge his argument.

Tim: So, Di what are you thinking?

Di does not seem to enjoy the fact that she has been asked for her opinion. Somewhat startled, it takes her a short moment before she realizes that she has to respond – somehow. Still, she appears quite nervous and insecure when she says:

Di: Well, I'm actually not at all that much affected. I'm not married yet.

Some people looked somewhat puzzled; others could hardly hide their laughter. Di became even more nervous. Extremely shy, she looked at Bill, as if she would like to apologize for what she was going to say.

Di: But I really like Tim's philosophy. I think it's good to treat all equally.

Tim swiftly took over, as if he was only waiting for this cue.
Tim: I want you to understand my philosophy. I can't draw a line; because where should I start? Give it to executives? All those around the table have already got it. To the deputies? Should I give it to Howard (a supervisor, DB), for instance? But then, all the supervisors would come and ask: “Why him and not me? And with the front staff it’s the same.

Kyle: Can't we offer it to all staff?

Larry: It's too expensive!

Bill, who has been very quite during the last few moments, apparently occupied with the scribbles on his notepad, entered again into the discussion.

Bill: But it's not okay to take it away! Then you should rather give it to all!

Gerald: Yes, I think that's the real point. After all the hardships, the whole restructuring that we have gone through, most of the people will think: 'It's just another thing they take away from us'.

Bill seemed back on track. His voice sounded more determined than ever.

Bill: Exactly! It looks like you have already made the decision (looks at Tim). And again: it's the most cost saving alternative.

Tim: Don't give me that crap! Cost saving!

Tim shouted at Bill. He was furious with the last comment. His face turned red immediately; one could see veins under his temple. He seemed to have difficulty calming himself down and a brief moment passed before he was ready to respond. When he turned to Bill, he sounded extremely enraged.
Tim: It's not about costs! And I don't make a decision! I asked you for your opinion! That's my way to do it!

He still looked enraged, but this first outburst seemed to have channelled the peak of his rage. With every moment his fury seemed to ease, and he appeared more controlled. Bill looked straight at Tim – surprised about his outburst, perhaps, but certainly not impressed by this display of rage.

Tim: You may remember that we used to have a different style when Helmut was still here. He was extremely autocratic. But that's not my way to do it! I want people to participate. And I make decisions very democratically. So, don't come to me that way!

A brief moment of silence follows. No one said a word during Tim's outburst but most people seemed surprised or even impressed with his display of fury.

Meanwhile, Tim was back to normal; the calm and composed management executive.

Tim: Sorry, if I was a bit loud. I just want you to understand my philosophy! You have to understand it, because you have to cascade it to your staff. And if you don't even understand it, how are they supposed to comprehend? If it was up to me, I would give it to all! I understand that all of you spent a lot of time in the hotel. And you get also some profit shares now. I had to fight hard for this with the owners! If I was the owner of the hotel, I would even give all the staff a part of the profit; but I am not! So, I simply cannot do it!

Madeleine: I also think it's a good idea, and I understand the philosophy. But I also understand the problems involved.

Tim looked at Bill. His voice sounded emphatic and conciliatory.
Tim: Look, to treat all people equally means that we also have to give away some privileges. I mean I don't get any privileges either, although I would be entitled to.

Bill, has remained surprisingly calm during the whole scene. Obviously, he is not the kind of person that is easily impressed or intimidated in the face of rage. But he remained silent, and he has not yet responded to Tim's offer to make up.

Brett: But couldn't we make an exception for people like Bill's wife? I mean, I don't care about it – but in his case?

Kyle: Look it's the same problem again. You can't make exceptions!

Tim: I won't renew it to somebody who comes new into the organization, anyway. But if I leave it for the others, then I draw a line again.

Gerald: And what if we offer it only to those who have already received it. Send them out an application form, you don't even know whether all of them want to remain members. In the case of Brett's wife, she probably won't.

Di: Yes, what about that?

Tim hesitates for a moment before he turned to Bill.

Tim: Would you agree with that?

Bill leaned back, his arms crossed over his chest, and nodded his head while answering.

Bill: Yes, that sounds okay. If they don't want to be part of the team . . .

Gerald looked at Tim, who is visibly at ease about this resolution.
Gerald: So, we'll send out the applications and we'll see.

Tim: Okay?

He gazed around the table while the majority of the people were nodding their heads.

Tim: Good! Let's do it!

Tim looked at Bill in a second attempt to make up.

Tim: I'm sorry that I got a bit violent, but I didn't want to spend the whole day with this matter.

Bill: I'm sorry too. So, the apology goes back.

Tim: Okay. So who was next?

Bill was the only person that I ever witnessed confront Tim is such an open and direct manner. Not surprisingly, Bill was one of the few among the managers, who could have made such an 'assault' — given Bill's seniority and his personality as someone who, although in general not looking for trouble, does not mind butting heads if need be.

What is, perhaps, more surprising, at least at first glance, is the occasion for the conflict. On several occasions — such as when managers where making jokes about the selective criteria for Tim's golf expeditions, for instance — members of the management team pointed critically at the hidden hierarchies and status differences among them. The distinctions stood in sharp contrast to the proclaimed egalitarian culture of the Grand Seaside Family. On this occasion, however, one finds members of the management team defending status differences related to the formal hierarchy of the hotel. It is Tim, who actually Thrusts towards an abolition of privileges and the
levelling of status differences. Obviously, it is not always and exclusively top management that resists the levelling of status hierarchies.

One may understand the reluctance of some managers to give up their privileges considering that the hotel business has largely been very conservative, relying on strong hierarchies and seniority based promotion and training. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that most resistance comes from senior members of the management team. Brett makes his point very clear: “(T)he kitchen is a very hierarchical place, and has always been; and I can't really see how it could work without it . . . “. Additionally, in the view of these senior members of the management team, hierarchy (and with it status and privileges) have a legitimate functional aspect. They are compensations for “that extra bit of effort to become a Demi Chef”, for instance, that probably nobody would be willing to make if s/he “won't get something out of it”. This particularity holds true, as, under the condition of flat hierarchies and tight budgets, as in the case of the Grand Seaside Hotel, the options for alternative forms of compensation are limited.

The incident shows, furthermore, that the restructuring of the hotel has left unhealed wounds among staff. In particular, middle management had to take the heaviest burden during this process. Many of them had to take over newly created positions, often emerging from the merger of two previously abandoned positions. Most of them also had to cover staff shortages, which required that managers themselves, in addition to their normal duties, helped their subordinates in the production process, demanding from managers extra-long hours, often outside their normal workdays. To many managers it seemed, therefore, that the restructuring had changed (not only their working) life completely, while their subordinates, apart from occasional overtime, did not have to carry the consequences of much change.

It seems intriguing that the actual trigger for Tim's outburst was the issue of cost saving. This is not only because the issue of reducing costs frequently served as a legitimization device for all kinds of strategies related to the restructuring process. In spite of the official (top-) management rhetoric of customer service, at least some of the staff seem to have identified cost saving to be the true rationale behind the whole
restructuring process. Bill's challenge, his overt resistance to Tim's proposal unmasked the dominant organizational discourse, that of customer service, as nothing but a disguise for an agenda that essentially knew only cost saving as primary rationale. Bill, if only for a moment, tears apart the façade of harmony, showing that underneath it lies a whole range of repressed conflicts and non-articulated dissent. His refusal to play the game is, however, fundamentally different from Edward's. While Edward more or less chose loyalty, Bill chose voice in that he questions the rules of the game rather than merely refusing to participate.

5.3 The customer service discourse: Some tentative conclusions

At this point I would like to recapitulate our journey to map the flexible organization so far by providing a tentative reading of my research account. It is an account that will construct the discourse of customer service as a (disciplinary) system of power that is rooted in techniques for channelling and controlling the behaviour, as well as shaping the identities, of the members of the Grand Seaside Family. For that purpose, it draws largely on forms of normative/cultural control. As on others occasions in this thesis, I will draw on a particular text to reflect on the process of mapping as well as on the route travelled. I use such texts as signposts, indicating not only our current position on the map (the route travelled) but also hinting at the further direction of our journey.

For the purpose of signposting our discussion so far, I will refer to a recent article that addresses the role of discourse in establishing discipline and (self-) control among employees in a knowledge-intensive corporation. Deetz' (1998) analysis of discourse and normative control is relevant for the context of this thesis, as his findings seem to mirror many aspects of (organizational) life at the Grand Seaside.

In echoing, among others, Alvesson, (1996), Barker (1993), Casey (1996), or Kunda (1992), Deetz asserts that forms of normative or cultural control have taken over
from bureaucratic rules and modes of direct supervision. As I will claim with reference to the example of the Grand Seaside, this trend ought not to be restricted to so-called knowledge-intensive industries. Following Deetz’s slightly deterministic argument, which identifies the trend towards normative/cultural control as deriving from features of knowledge-intensive work, I assert that most of these features also apply, by and large, to service work at the Grand Seaside.

First, the “lack of clear normative standards for the product” (Deetz, 1998: 155, emphasis DB) and the often uncertain and ambiguous nature of tasks that Deetz identifies with knowledge-intensive work also applies to many other service industries, particularly to those evolving around service encounters (Czepiel, 1990; Czepiel et al., 1985; Gronroos, 1988 and 1990). Independently of the discussion of knowledge-intensive work, a whole number of academics have already discussed the difficulties involved in defining and measuring service quality (Gronroos, 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1988). The provision of service excellence, which entails the anticipation of customer wants and needs and the provision of customized service, supply frontline staff with rather “high levels of autonomy and self-management” and “reduce what Foucault called ‘sovereign’ power” (Deetz, 1998: 155). The apparent autonomy enjoyed by front-line staff provokes a recurrent re-creation and re-negotiation of roles at the Grand Seaside as much as in knowledge-intensive firms.

Second, the active participation of customers in service encounters, which we have already discussed in Chapter 3, does not only imply that “[r]ole definitions are quite fluid” (Deetz, 1992: 157); it ultimately requires management to extend control beyond the level of the employees to include customers (guests), as I will demonstrate below.

Third, the intangibility of the product in service encounters renders the process of service provision as well as the identity of the provider pivotal.

The often hidden and mysterious work plus the absence of a clear physical product within measurable characteristics, leaves identity to be acquired from the projection of the subject rather than drawn from the product or work activity . . .
Often the provider's symbolically produced identity was more secure and lasting (and accounted for a client's product assessment) than the work product (Deetz, 1998: 157f.).

Recalling sequences from the All-Staff-Meeting, where management asserted that guests did not come to the Grand Seaside for the hotel or its location but because of staff and their natural and friendly attitude, we can certainly discern strong parallels between Deetz' characterization knowledge-intensive work and service at the Grand Seaside. As in Deetz' example, the instrumentalization of service providers' identities becomes an essential aspect of the process of profit generation at the Grand Seaside. Characterizations of staff as being friendly, helpful, or natural, regardless whether they are derived from managers or guests, constitute evaluations of the overall service experience (product) as much as they describe personal attributes of employees. Perhaps it is customers' desire to be part of the Grand Seaside Family and to keep in touch with people and developments at the hotel, as reported by the Hannah during the All-Staff-Meeting, that underlines most strongly the importance of identity and relational aspects to the overall service experience. It is an experience that seems to transcend the temporal and spatial confines of the actual service encounter. Such *emotional labour* (Hochschild, 1983) implies "the transforming of the self into a commodity" as Deetz (1998: 161) points out. The proactive approach to customer satisfaction that entails the anticipation of customers' wants and needs, as propagated during the customer service training at the Grand Seaside, is part of this process of commodification. As Deetz indicates, when subsumed to the paradigm of service excellence, as nourished at the Grand Seaside, the well being of customers turns into a mere end: a vehicle for the generation of profit.

Fourth, the instrumentalization of the staff-customer relationship does not stop at the point of its transformation it into a means for profit generation. As I will show soon, customers (real and imaginary ones) are used as devices to control employee behaviour.

Fifth, as Deetz explores, this discourse – in our case that of customer service – that subjects staff to an instrumentalization and commodification of their self, tends to
dominate other forms of (organizational) communication. It brings about a tendency to suppress conflict and to marginalize other voices. As seen in Chapter 5, exit (following disillusion with loyalty), exemplified by Edward and Di, becomes the dominant strategy of dealing with the imperative of harmony. Only rarely is the curtain of harmony that characterizes the customer service discourse torn apart. On such occasions, the dominance of the customer service discourse is challenged allowing for other discourses to be discerned. Only when Bill speaks out, the previously suppressed discourse of cost-saving surfaces. As Deetz puts it:

At moments, other discourses can be heard, and without a doubt most employees know that if they did not work this way, direct forms of control would quickly reappear. The dictator may be inside, but it also resides just over the horizon.
(Deetz, 1998: 166)

Although the image of the Grand Seaside Family may suggest equality, and although management, and Tim in particular, do not cease emphasizing that all staff ought to be treated equally, the equality thus proclaimed has certainly its limits. While the formal hierarchy underlying the family structure is usually not overtly manifest in the customer service discourse, it is always present at the background, concealed behind the curtain of harmony, waiting to surface if the situation requires it. Often, a short hint will do, reminding members of the family of their place inside that hierarchy. Tim’s reminder during one of the Morning Briefings that, sometimes, he has to make use of its formal authority, even though wrapped in humour, does not fail to make its point: (formal) power does not have to be (visibly) actualized at any point in time to be effective. “[P]ower is somehow present in its absence from the social terrain” (Clegg, 1998: 33).

Sixth, Deetz explains that the forms of normative/cultural control he describes thrive on an amalgam of fear, commitment, and self-subordination.

Obedience rather than voice or self-determination is produced from fear and commitment... Direct control processes largely use forms of fear. Consent uses commitment. (Deetz, 1998: 166f.)
Following Deetz' exploration, we could interpret the implementation of the customer service program and, particularly, the creation of the Grand Seaside Family and its attached symbolism as management's attempts to create staff commitment. Deetz also makes clear that commitment is supplemented by fear, often represented by economic difficulties and challenges imposed on the organization and linked to negative consequences for individual employees. Once more, we may recall the symbolism of the race. This symbolism not only provides the Grand Seaside with a particular organizational identity by positioning it opposite to an external, hostile environment represented by the budget. The bond thus developed mainly rests on the fatality of the race and has the members of the family virtually running for their lives. In uniting staff and management in a battle for (economic) survival, the race provides the founding narrative for the identity and the rationale of the Grand Seaside Family, while, by the same token, it defines obligations and duties of those involved.

The family, as a conditional bond, is built on individuals' commitment to participate in the race, to contribute to the survival of the organization. It is the status of the Grand Seaside Family as a conditional bond that infuses an element of fear. In short, the Grand Seaside Family is essentially an identity-granting institution: it offers identity in exchange for commitment. However, management and owners in particular but also staff (e.g. Di) are able of abolishing the bond at any time. Hence, the race targets both body and soul, so to speak, of the subjects. It does not only jeopardize (economic) survival of the organization; it also threatens the identity of the family members. Again we may quote Deetz:

'To the extent that the company owns their soul, employees respond to crisis with fear and loyalty. In a vicious circle, as the employee increasingly strategizes feelings, life style, home situations, the having of children, work effort, and relation to management for what the company offers, the company grows and the consequences of not consenting (identity loss, exit costs) are perceived as greater. The behaviour of . . . employees can be characterized as 'anxiety-driven enthusiastic play acting' . . . (Deetz, 1998: 167, emphasis DB).

We only need recalling Di's theatrical performance on the occasion of her resignation to discern how much life at the Grand Seaside resembles Deetz' picture of knowledge-intensive firms.
Seventh, the virtual omnipresence of the customer service discourse and its symbolic constituents, in particular of the race and the image of the Grand Seaside Family, in any form of communication at the Grand Seaside illustrate Deetz' point that normative control depends on its symbolic reproduction in the everyday life of the organization. As Mc Kinley and Starkey put it:

Normative control is effective only in so far as it is sustained by the practices and discourses of daily organizational life. Normative control seeps into the unspoken codes of the workplace, the dress code, acceptable behaviour towards colleagues and clients and so forth (1998a: 11).

The pervasiveness and regularity with which the numbers are announced at the Morning Briefing, for instance, allow for identifying those sequences as being forms of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991), employed in the struggle for the legitimate view of the (organizational) world. By reproducing the customer service discourse, the symbolic aspects of such sequences, apart from their obvious or 'manifest' meaning, serve the conservation of a concrete form of domination. Not present in the customer service discourse, domination and (management) prerogative is reproduced and legitimized through the backdoor, that is, symbolically, by subtly pointing to the absent (hierarchy). Hence, the customer service discourse derives its meanings from other discourses. While apparently concerned with customer satisfaction or figures, its meaning is constituted inter-textually (Kristeva, 1986). The 'numbers' represent the rhythm of the organization and, by doing so, entail obligations to staff to increase/maintain their efforts.

Having interpreted life at the Grand Seaside in reference to Deetz' (1998) analysis, let me now, briefly, sum up the discussion so far. In line with Deetz, we can characterize the customer service discourse at the Grand Seaside as a discursive formation a dispositif, as Foucault calls it, a form of power that uses normative (or cultural) control to channel staff behaviour along the parameters of customer service as established by (senior) management. The constituent of this discursive formation — the restructured training and reward system of the Grand Seaside, the vision of the hotel as a business providing service excellence, ritual gatherings like
the Morning Briefing, *ceremonial events* such as the All-Staff-Meeting, and the (implicit) *symbolism of myths and metaphors* such as the Grand Seaside Family or the Race against the budget—whether they are manifest in everyday conversations or jargon (the race) or in the artefactual composition of the hotel (staff canteen) together constitute a system of domination that thrives on the *strategized subordination and (self-) surveillance* (Deetz, 1998) of those subjected to it.

By the same token, the *customer service discourse subjects*, in Foucault’s terms, its participants; *it constitutes employees as members of the Grand Seaside Family*. The identity thus acquired implies the recognition of a number of obligations and conditions: the (implicitly) hierarchical structure of the family including the paternalism displayed by management; the conditional character of the bond that obliges staff to striving for service excellence; and the imperative of harmonious communication that leads to the marginalization of conflict and dissent, to name only the most important ones. As I will elaborate further below, by drawing on Foucault (1988), we can distinguish the constituents of the customer service discourse as representing either *technologies of power* (those discussed in Chapters 3 and 4) or *technologies of the self* (those reviewed in Chapter 5). The efficacy of this discourse as a form of domination, however, will be seen to depend in the interplay and integration of both technologies into what he calls *governmentality* (Foucault, 1988).

The customer service discourse at the Grand Seaside shows *totalitarian* features, as it suppresses, excludes, or marginalizes particular subjects, individuals, or interpretations (Willmott, 1993). Suppressed are, for instance, subjects such as cost saving, profit-generation or management prerogatives. Marginalized are conflicts of interests and the expression of dissent (Boje, 1995). Marginalized are, furthermore, individuals or groups such as deviant employees or, as I will show soon, abnormal customers. Marginalized are, finally, alternative interpretations, for example, addressing the overall meaning of the hotel-business. The officially issued interpretation that the Grand Seaside is in the business for the sake of satisfying customers is only challenged under exceptional circumstances.
The symbolic distanciation from the customer service philosophy, as in jokes or irony, marks a form of rationalization of the employees’ own subordination, which helps employees to preserve a sense of autonomy by “denying that others are controlling them” (Deetz, 1998: 168). One may read the different versions Tim distributed about the restructuring process as an attempt to preserve such a sense of autonomy. The apparent autonomy, however, is only exercised inside the constraints of the employees’ immediate organizational context. Hence, the very indexicality of their freedom becomes a constant source of identity crises, since the employees are largely excluded from participating in the creation of those structures that their identity depends upon (Deetz, 1998: 168). In other words, freedom becomes self-control; or, as Willmott expresses it: slavery is freedom (1993).

It is worth noticing, then, that the discursive silencing of “other voices” in the Grand Seaside is not only totalitarian but also systematic: It reproduces the structures of power and domination that lead to its own generation (Kunda, 1992; Willmott, 1993). The perseverance of the customer service discourse and its systematic and totalitarian qualities rest on a combination of commitment and fear. The structuring qualities of this discourse, positions subjects in such a way that their courses of action reduce to three alternatives: exit, voice, or consent (Hirschman, 1970). For those who do not deliberately choose exit, the ultimate threat remains, nevertheless, that of social exclusion: A fate that endangers (economic) survival and that threatens with potential loss of (collective) identity. Hence, the identity granted by the customer service discourse is conditional, tentative, always at risk. The customer service discourse grants identity to those it subjects, yet it does so only in exchange for their commitment and obedience.

So far, we have only discussed those aspects of the customer service discourse that address implications for staff and management. By doing so, we have neglected another party involved and subjected to this discourse: the customers. As pointed out in Chapter 3, discourses construct objects/subjects (Parker, 1992) with customers being the incarnation of an organizational paradox: constituting the omni-present yet (physically) absent subject of the customer discourse. In the following chapter, I will, therefore, reflect on customers and their position in the customer service
discourse. After briefly reflecting on the ambivalence of the process of customer service provision at the Grand Seaside, I will demonstrate how customers are classified and individualized. I will identify the disciplinary techniques that aim at normalizing customers and making their expectations and behaviour calculable. Yet, I will also demonstrate the role that customers play as reference points for behaviour and identity of staff and management. The discourse of customer service incorporates both customers and staff with real customers not only serving as concrete alter ego in service encounters but also constituted as normal customers, conceptualized as Generalized Other, that play a pivotal role in the process of staffs' self-subordination. I will conclude that the customer service discourse constitutes a (disciplinary) system of power that, with the introduction of imaginary service encounters and customers, takes on virtually Panopticist features.
6. Customer service, identities, and control

6.1 Between McDonaldization and customization: Service provision at the Grand Seaside

When discussing issues of customer service, one can hardly overestimate the importance of Ritzer’s (1991) book *The McDonaldization of Society*. In this section, I will discuss its major arguments to help understand the ambivalence involved in the processes of service provision at the Grand Seaside. The chapter will outline the apparent tension between the targeted provision of customized service and considerations concerning the efficiency and control of the business. The following sections of this chapter will elaborate on how aspects of life at the Grand Seaside are structured in an attempt to overcome this tension.

In his book, Ritzer describes socio-economic and cultural developments that seem to indicate the advent of an *Iron Cage Society*: a society that incorporates on a large scale the principles upon which companies such as McDonalds and Ford have build their success. In line with Weber’s characterization of bureaucracies, Ritzer identifies *calculability, predictability, efficiency*, and *control* as the four essential factors that McDonaldized organizations thrive on. As a consequence, employees in McDonaldized organizations are administered according to those principles, which renders the Fordist assembly line into a prototype of all McDonaldized production systems.

One aspect of Ritzer’s analysis is especially relevant for the context of this thesis: his suggestion of an elective affinity between the McDonaldization of production and a general positive attitude by consumers towards a McDonaldized life style. After all, McDonaldized consumption offers several advantages not only to organizations but also to customers. The latter can enjoy a form of consumption that is efficient and time saving, consistent with respect to their preferences (standardized), while

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simultaneously expending the time during which services are offered for consumption (flexible). With its high degree of calculability and predictability, McDonaldized service reduces the risk for consumers as to whether the service they will encounter will meet their expectations.

Although Ritzer sees a McDonaldized society as being potentially egalitarian, he is highly critical of the dehumanizing tendencies that he sees resulting from its immanent irrationality of rationality, hinging around the notion of efficiency that is privileged. Efficiency, according to Ritzer, a key value in the McDonaldized system of production and consumption, “remains the common theme that unifies the various components of the McDonaldized world” (1991: 45). First, efficiency is at the core of the business doctrines that drive the McDonaldized firm, as efficiency means profitability. Second, efficiency, which involves finding optimal means to given ends, is fostered by standardization. The latter is prevalent in many service organizations, as it “would be inefficient for people to be required to continually rediscover the optimum means to ends” (Ritzer, 1991: 35). Third, McDonaldized systems of production suggest efficiency to employees and to customers alike, as they apparently save time, costs, and effort. Therefore, customers seem to be willing to perform various forms of unpaid labour.

[We are expected to log a few minutes per week as sandwich makers . . . we are handed an empty cup and expected to go to the fountain and fill our glasses with ice and a soft drink, thereby spending a few moments as what used to be called a “soda-jerk” . . . [and] . . . people are met by computer screens when they enter, and they must punch in their own orders (Ritzer, 1991: 41).

The salad bar is a common feature of the Grand Seaside’s service when serving meals in the Garden Terrace or when catering for conferences. Yet, according to Ritzer, “(t)he salad bar is a classic example for putting the consumers to work” (1991: 41). Of course, the salad bar offers customers a maximum of discretion in composing their own food. It also offers the convenience of not being required to rely on the mediation of a waiter or waitress, which provides further discretion concerning the times and duration of the service. Yet, customers have to pay the ultimate price for this sort of flexibility, since “what is efficient from the perspective
of the fast-food restaurant is often inefficient from the viewpoint of the consumer” (1991:41) as they queue to serve themselves. The frequent complaints about queuing for the breakfast buffet at the Grand Seaside indicate that obviously not all guests are prepared to accept their status as de facto unpaid part-time employees.

The McDonaldized system thrives on standardization of both the behaviour and expectations of not only staff but also customers. In return, it seems to offer both groups maximum efficiency and predictability. In contrast, service organizations that claim to provide customized service, such as the Grand Seaside Hotel, cannot rely on standardization to the same extent. To them, the match between customer expectations and service provision represents a much more complex problem. There are, however, strategies available that allow hotels to provide (apparently) customized service without relinquishing efficiency. In this regard, it is important to consider the spatial structure of the hotel. More precisely, the segmentation of the hotel into front of house (where service encounters take place) and back of house areas is crucial for the issue of customer service, as will soon become clear.

The segmentation of settings for everyday interactions into public or front-regions and private or back-regions draws on the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman. In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman (1959) explores people’s behaviour through metaphorical reference to the behaviour of actors in a theatre. The performances that actors give on stage differ crucially from their behaviour behind the scenes. In other words, people may play certain roles in front regions that are more or less detached from their self, whereas the behaviour displayed in the more private back regions, concealed from public perception, will be more authentic. William Foote Whyte was among the first to take up Goffman’s theoretical regionalization of interactions in a study of restaurants. Other writers have incorporated this regionalization into the concept of Impression Management (Baumeister, 1986; Schlenker, 1980). Representatives of this theoretical stream point to the manipulative capacity of human behaviour as it is employed in strategies that seeks to create certain impressions in other individuals.
The frontstage/backstage segregation is, therefore, one of the most crucial demarcation lines in hospitality. It enables hotels to partially sustain the customers’ exclusion from certain aspects of the production process by confining their involvement to service encounters. Flexibility as a prerequisite for customized service depends very much on the flexibility of frontline staff responding quickly to changes in customers needs and wants. I will underline this argument with a brief episode drawn from the Grand Seaside Hotel. Usually, the hotel, when hosting conferences, prefers to sell conference packages, including accommodation and meals, that offer the customer standardized courses with two alternative meals to choose from. The kitchen will then prepare an equal amount of each course. As a conference manager at the hotel explained to me:

Offering alternative meals makes it easier for us to prepare the food. Although each delegate has the choice between the two courses, it will normally work out fifty-fifty. So, we prepare half chicken and half beef, for instance. That makes it easier for the kitchen and they do not end up with too many leftovers.

In these cases, it remains to the frontline staff to assure that all guests get the meal they desire, which, despite the standardization, is not an easy task. As one waiter reported:

You then have to ‘juggle around’ a bit with the meals. This is not that easy.
You always have to ask who wants what. You might even have them (the guests) dividing the meals between them. At least you have to make sure they get what they wanted.

As demonstrated, the flexibility produced by frontline staff covers or conceals organizational inflexibility or routinization in the back of house area. In this respect, frontline staff often have to make up for inflexibility in the back regions of an organization. Frontline flexibility enables hotels to routinize their back of house operations and to enjoy the benefits of economies of scale, while still preserving the impression that they are providing customized service. This applies also to the treatment of VIP guests. The very idea of VIP service is to treat customers as unique individuals, which seems to imply the inverse of standardization. To enable VIPs to experience this kind of service the hotel makes preparations that trigger a chain of
events that are far from being free of routinization or standardization. The arrival of VIPS will be announced at management meetings, the frontdesk and concierge staff will be advised, and (in the case of return-VIPs) the guest history will be checked for possible preferences, to name just a few examples of the routines activated. Consequently, standardization and customization are not always exclusive concepts; in the case of the hospitality industry, they coexist. 

What is important to note, though, is that both concepts, McDonaldized and customized service, achieve the apparent match between customer preferences and production systems by controlling the behaviour and expectations of both employees and customers. Thus, the next sections elaborate some of the processes producing such a match. They will demonstrate how processes of categorization, especially as they are exercised during the Morning Briefings, make customer expectations and service encounters more predictable and calculable, to use Ritzer's terms. As will be elaborated, the co-productive role of customers in service encounters requires particular modes of controlling both customers and staff.

6.2 Constituting customers

The previous chapters have demonstrated how the use of guest questionnaires, in conjunction with the Grand Seaside's reward and the customer service training programs, not only establish role models for staff behaviour but also constitute a system for rewarding or punishing employees' performances and behaviour. Yet, the impacts of the guest responses and the reward and training system are not only confined to the sanctioning of employee behaviour. Additionally, this system also defines, implicitly, appropriate guest behaviour and expectations. By analyzing both the sequences of meetings, in particular the reading of the guest questionnaires, and the staff behaviour rewarded or punished, one can extrapolates an ideal-typical customer profile. This profile of the normal customer can not only serve as staff's alter ego in service encounters, but as we shall see later, it also provides the
Generalized Other for the process of staffs' self-subordination to the principles of service excellence. The following discussion will link these processes of normalization to the larger disciplinary system constituted by the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside.

6.2.1 Customer complaints and categorization

The different categories of complaints as constituted by the questionnaires and the logbook, to use the most prominent examples, not only point out what the organization values as appropriate or desirable staff behaviour. They also reveal what management sees as appropriate or, alternatively, inappropriate guest behaviour and expectations. In this view, the different categories of guest complaints, as extrapolated from the Morning Briefings in Chapter 4.4, also define, implicitly, appropriate behaviour and expectations for guests.

The set of guest expectations categorized as valid complaints are those that from an organizational point of view express guest demands which may be justified by the (normal) context of service provision. For instance, guests can expect staff to be friendly and polite. They can expect, furthermore, that they will not be exposed to unacceptable noise, that all appliances work properly, and that the rooms will be clean and tidy. The same holds true for valid complaints addressing ethically inappropriate behaviour. Although the normative frame of reference is not primarily that of the organization but that of the (external) life world, guests have a right to expect to be treated according to these norms. However, simultaneously guests are expected to conform to these norms too. As this section demonstrates, guest expectations and behaviour are judged according to such life world norms, at least, as long as they do not overtly conflict with organizational norms.

On the other hand, quasi-valid complaints do not easily lend themselves to a clear-cut (normative) classification. Rather, such complaints demarcate a 'grey-zone' with respect to organizational norms. A single complaint, for instance about queuing at the Breakfast Garden, does not qualify as a violation of justified customer
expectations. Only when several guests, simultaneously or more often
diachronically, perceive something as not meeting their expectations, will the hotel
make amendments. With quasi-valid complaints, a conflict of interests is often
involved, as for instance in the case of complaints about the noise from the hotel’s
Nightclub. Although management in general, and the manager of the bar in
particular, are keen to avoid any disturbances of guests, when guests complain about
noise from the Nightclub the suggestion that the Nightclub be closed earlier is met
only with reluctance. The Nightclub accounts for a considerable part of the revenue
of the hotel, and what holds true for most economic activities counts also for the
hotel business: (opening) time is money. In other words, there is a conflict of
interest among the various stakeholders involved. On the one hand, management has
to deal with divergent demands from different groups of customers (those who want
to party and those who prefer to sleep). On the other hand, the hotel management,
who do not want to alienate either group of guests, has to strive for balance between
the divergent guest demands and the profitability of the business. Management
experiences this conflict as tension between their expressed desire to please the
customer and the profit demands of the business side of service provision.

A further, and different category, comprise invalid complaints. Whenever
management identifies a complaint as invalid, they regard the expectations
underlying the complaint as not justified. One can interpret invalid complaints, from
an organizational point of view, as signalling inappropriate expectations or behaviour
on the part of guests. Hence, when guests complain about the quality of tea bags, the
rigidity of times for check in and check out, or sometimes even about the weather,
their complaints conflict with the organization’s (self-) understanding about what the
provision of (normal) customer service ought to imply. In other words, invalid
complaints clash with the organization’s understanding of what a normal customer
should be like, that is, what she or he ought to expect, but also how she or he should
behave. Whenever a complaint is classified as invalid, the frequency or number of
complaints is irrelevant. Even when complaints, such as those relating to the check
in and check out times or to the prices for in-house videos, recur over and over again,
they are simply dismissed on the basis that they represent inappropriate expectations.
The following sequences, adopted from the Morning Briefings, may exemplify how
management classifies invalid complaints and stigmatizes them with a negative customer profile.

Elsa: **The** guest feedback has been very positive, particularly, about the staff. The only complaints were again about the prices for the in-house movies and about the prices for the mini-bar.

Tim: I don’t believe it! They pay two hundred dollars for a night, and than they complain about three dollars for a Coke.\textsuperscript{xxviii}

On another occasion, the Duty Manager reported from the logbook that he was called to a room where people complained about a baby crying next door. When he knocked on the door nobody opened it, and after entering the room, he found a six-month-old baby left alone. He then left a staff member with the baby and went looking for the parents throughout the hotel. When he finally found the parents, they were having dinner at The Ocean and did not seem to be worried at all about their baby. The Duty Manager’s report at the Morning Briefing caused general outrage about the negligent behaviour of the parents. Bill epitomized the general perception with the cynical comment that: “Those parents should be given the ‘Parents of the Month Award’”.

Similar to the processes, by which valid and quasi-valid complaints implicitly establish the profile of an ideal-typical normal guest, invalid complaints allow for identifying particular forms of guest behaviour as abnormal. The profile thus created transmits a negative customer image: one of an unjustly complaining (always) dissatisfied, thus deviant guest. Consequently, we may distinguish, from the organization’s perspective, two meta-categories of guest: those displaying appropriate demands and behaviour, the rational or normal customers, and those who hold unjustified expectations or display inappropriate behaviour, that is, irrational or deviant customers or, in hotel jargon: the troublemakers.

We should be careful though, particularly while operating with ideal-types, not to over-determine the two divergent guest profiles outlined. It is, therefore, worth noting that, in practice, there is no stringent and clear-cut one-to-one relationship
between a characterization of behaviour as, for example, morally questionable in terms of life world value horizon and classifications of guests as normal/abnormal according to organizational standards. Not all guest expectations or behaviour that management interprets as (organizationally) deviant, for instance, is equally regarded as irrational or immoral in life world standards. In the example given above, Tim classifies the guest expectation as deviant (invalid) from an organizational perspective, yet there is no indication that he identifies this expectation as similarly immoral with respect to life world standards. In other words, although the guest has the right to complain about the prices for the mini-bar, the substance of his complaint does not comply with what the organization, as represented by Tim, regards as normal. After all, there is no law that prescribes that guests have to make use of the mini-bar or that they have to agree on the respective price level. Still, not doing so may mark them as abnormal in the eyes of members of the organization.

The same counts for children who, when running around in the hotel and being noisy, do not violate any laws; yet, as we shall see soon, such behaviour classifies them as deviant from the organization’s perspective. On other occasions, however—for example, when customers do not pay their bills on time—such behaviour would be classified as deviant both from a life world and an organizational perspective. The same occurs when guests, particularly when intoxicated, verbally or even physically abuse staff.

In other words, organizational and life world frames of references coexist inside the temporal spatial confines of service encounters. We see this manifested in the imprecise demarcation between quasi-valid complaints and valid complaints about ethically inappropriate behaviour. Occasionally it implies the incongruence of organizational norms and life world rationality (or vice versa). Often, this will result in divergent demands attached to front staff between what is appropriate behaviour in service encounters. This holds even more true as a result of the customer service philosophy of the Grand Seaside demanding that the frame of reference be actively extended beyond the boundaries of the organization into the life world of customers and staff. Hence, in contrast to the incumbents of traditional hierarchies, (front) staff at the Grand Seaside are encouraged to be multi-rational; to be, simultaneously.
incumbent of both a formal organizational position and the (informal) life world surrounding (and penetrating) the organization.

As Deetz (1992) and du Gay (1996), among others, have observed, customer service, and service encounters in particular, seems to transcend the boundaries between organization and environment. In the case at hand, the transcendental tendency of customer service provokes imprecise demarcations between organization and life worlds as frames of references for normative demands. Consequently, organizational life at the Grand Seaside provides space for a multitude of rationalities that are not always congruent with the normative system of the larger life world. The permeation, or interpenetration, to use Luhmann’s (1987) terminology, of organization and life worlds leads to a (partial) incongruence of normative demands. Management and staff have to deal with a situation where normative classifications from an organizational perspective, such as normal/deviant, do not necessarily coincide with, for example, moral/immoral life world standards. Interpreting guest expectations and behaviour in line with the legitimate view of the organizational world, as established by management, while matching guest expectations largely shaped outside this sphere, represents a permanent challenge to staff, as we can already see from the examples provided so far. The following section seeks to further illustrate some of these challenges and the processes of categorization they provoke.
6.2.2 Of "doctors", "kids", and other "troublemakers"

The process of categorizing guest complaints analyzed above reveals how customers are individualized and classified as normal or abnormal in the eyes of the organization. In this section we shall see that staff, although usually not using the same analytical categories of normality, are well aware of the existence of different classes of guests with their often peculiar habits and preferences. Frequently based on personal experience, staff identify groups of guests known for violating the organization's expectations of normal guest behaviour and classify them accordingly. In the hotel jargon of the Grand Seaside, such abnormal customers are referred to as "troublemakers".

One category of guests that has acquired a reputation among staff for being notorious troublemakers is that of the "doctors". Those subjected to this classification derive much of their reputation from annual conferences of medical associations regularly held at the hotel. As one of the supervisors of the conference unit summarized, "they are really the worst". This stigmatization is closely linked to the fact that conferences of medical associations are often held over the weekend, which gives the attendees the opportunity to bring along their spouse (or partner) and children. The fact that doctors' families stay at the hotel causes considerable problems for staff. Another supervisor described the problems involved as follows:

While the parents are having a good time in the ballroom, those kids are running around here and there, and they scream and vandalize throughout the whole hotel. Last year I had five kids jumping and dancing on an antique table in the Lobby, with the table being severely scratched and damaged as a result. I mean, we're talking here of a piece that's worth about two thousand dollars! And when I went to the parents and asked them to look after their kids, they just said 'Oh, don't worry about the kids; they are just having a good time.'

It is hardly surprising, then, that any arrival of a group of doctors is announced in advance during the Morning Briefings. Often, such announcements are made with an ironic undertone and responded to by equally ironic comments:
Sascha: We are going to have the annual health conference in again. That means we'll have a hundred and fifty doctors with kids and spouses at the hotel this weekend.

Some people add comments such as “Oh no!” or “Not again!”

Sascha: As we know from last year, this will be real fun! (Sascha stresses the term ‘real’ so that it is clearly meant ironically.)

Bill: You better believe it! (He also sounds very ironic.)

Sascha: We are going to have fifty-nine kids here, and they will certainly stroll around and explore the hotel while their parents are in the conference.

Gerald: Great! Last year they were chasing around throughout the whole hotel. I had to grab two of them who were just jumping on an antique table.

Kyle: I know. But when you call out their parents, they'll just tell you “No worries! The kids are fine.”

Sascha: So, we will organize some activities together with the Health Club, and we will even have a special dinner for the kids.

Apart from such well-known and clearly defined categories of troublemakers, management and staff also report more vaguely classified groups, established on the basis of peculiar characteristics. Again, the conference supervisors are an abundant source of information of incidents with guests that lead to such classifications. As one of them explained:

You know, some of the people who come here for a conference do really behave like children. I mean, we are talking about business executives, CEOs, and so on. I mean, these guys are forty or fifty year old men in black suits, and when they come here, they are so happy that they've got away from Mummy ...
could tell you stories, Mate! I don’t know how often I had to argue with some totally drunk guys who couldn’t behave. And then they are so bloody drunken that they may even ruin your uniform; and you still have to keep calm and be polite.

On other occasions, staff have to handle verbal or even physical assaults from guests. The job of the Duty Managers, in particular, is often rather dangerous, as they have to ensure security in and around the hotel. The task of protecting staff, other guests, and the hotel property can sometimes even involve responding to physical assaults, as the following example, drawn from a Morning Briefing, shows.

Gerald: Okay, so we leave this up to Bill. There was a broken ashtray in the pool. But in general there were no complaints. There was also no negative feedback on the fire alarm from the guests. I mean all of them must have realized it but there was not a single word of complaint. A Mr. and Mrs. X where driven to the hospital because he was having high fever. Yes, and then there was an incident on Saturday, which some of you might have already heard about.

Elsa: I think I’ve already heard something about it in the news. They didn’t mention the hotel but . . .

Gerald: I mean I’ve already heard some stories about it being around in the hotel, and some employees approached me this morning because of the rumours; so I’d better explain what actually happened. There was a bunch of blokes*** and girls going out separately on Saturday, and the boys came into the Nightclub already a bit intoxicated. So, we got some complaints from a different group of girls that they were being abused by the guys, pushed around, and so on. So, we had a word with them. Later on, the other group of girls turned up – they were actually girlfriends and wives of the boys – not knowing what had happened earlier. So, they went on causing problems, pushing other couples while dancing, and so on. Finally, Al (one of the Duty Managers, DB) had to act and to intervene. So, he asked one of the
guys to come outside with him, because that bloke was already pretty intoxicated, and Al wanted to send him home. But, the guy was insisting that he still should get access to the club. Meanwhile, other blokes from the group of boys turned up and the group of wives as well, and they started an argument with the security guys. So, it came to fighting between the boys and our security guys, and the girls tried to get around back of the security guys, and to hit them from behind. Al was hit on his head from one of the girls from behind, and while he was falling over he didn't want to lose the grip on the guy he was fighting with, and so he fell down and broke the guy's arm.

A moment of silence.

Elsa: So, how is Al now?

Gerald: Well, he's okay, he's fine. It's just that one of the boys involved was a former under cover policeman in the drug squad, and he still has very good connections to the police authorities. So, our guys will have to answer a lot of questions and to write reports and so on. It's just that it's very hard for security to deal with these issues. I mean, particularly at this time of the year there are many people coming here. They are no idiots, they are ordinary people who want to have a good time. But after a few drinks . . . and, it's hard to prevent something and to be proactive. There are too many of them, and it's impossible for one Duty Manager to handle that. We have people walking around here from outside, using the restaurant, or just recently we've found some guys sitting in front of the windows of The Ocean and having a beer. So you have to be on all those places simultaneously. Maybe we should double up the shifts on weekends, so that there are two Duty Managers here, and one stays in the front while the other looks at the bar.
In light of this report, it is not surprising that staff working frontline — and in the
type of example given above, one may quite literally talk of a frontline — develop informal
classifications or profiles of guests and their typical, or sometimes peculiar,
expectations and preferences. The classifications established by staff and/or
management are not confined to particular individuals who are known as notorious
troublemakers. As seen in the example of the doctors, such classifications may be
applied, stereotypically, to whole groups of customers. In contrast to the doctors,
who almost consistently exemplify the inversion of the (ideal-typical) normal
customer, other classifications are more ambivalent. As seen in the Ideal-typical
Morning Briefing and in the sequence about the health conference above, one such
ambivalent category is that of “kids”.

Children are generally well liked at the hotel. In fact, given the market segment
established by the hotel, families with children represent one of the most targeted
groups of customers. Therefore, the hotel offers many facilities tailored for the
needs and wishes of children. There is, for instance, the ‘Kids Club’. Daycare for
children is provided, and the hotel offers to arrange for its guests a baby-sitter if so
desired.

Yet, simultaneously, children are seen as troublemakers. Apart from severe cases of
vandalism as described above, children tend to be noisy, not only when left alone but
also when in the company of their parents. As the Idea-typical Meeting illustrates,
there are places in the hotel, such as in The Ocean, where the presence of children is
regarded as inappropriate or even dysfunctional. Although children are not officially
banned from these places, staff politely remind customers to consider the special
atmosphere of the restaurant when guests with children make their bookings.
Usually though, it is left to the empathy of the parents to ensure the proper behaviour
of their children.

The hotel’s expectations towards its customers demand the latter’s empathy for
behaviour appropriate at certain times and places. However, the demand for
empathy is not restricted to children or their parents. Particularly, the service
provided at The Ocean, with its exclusive ambience, thrives on the production of a
special atmosphere that requires active participation by the guests as co-producers of the reality being sustained. Again, one may understand the notion of co-producer quite literally in this context. Violations of proper conduct—in other words, the refusal of obedient co-production—that may deteriorate the aesthetic features of the service experienced are punished promptly. As Leo reported in one of the Morning Briefings:

Leo: I again had some very uncivilized guests yesterday in The Ocean. They were chatting and laughing, probably telling jokes or so, but so loud that other guests complained to Carol (one of the waitresses, DB). So, when Carol told me, I went over there to the table and asked them very politely whether they could lower their voices a bit with respect to the other guests.

Elsa: So, what did they say?

Leo: Oh, they were very rude. One lady told me rather harshly that she didn’t want to be told by some waiter as to how loud she could lead her conversations. ‘After all’, she said, ‘I have paid for dining here’. Well, and I just replied: ‘That’s correct, Madame, but so have the other guests.’

Courtesy and respect for other guests are, therefore, key arguments and, simultaneously, effective tools of legitimation for staff and management alike to secure obedience from guests for what is, essentially, a form of unpaid co-productive labour. The aesthetic dimension of service requires that customers actively play their part in the scenery, even if it is only by accommodating the volume of their talk to the local ambience or by dressing up appropriately, as the following sequence from another Morning Briefing demonstrates.

Kyle: Well, we had a quiet Saturday, but we had super comments about the Spring Bowl. The whole event was super and especially the theming was excellent.
Bill: Yes. I think this was really super-dooper. The boys and girls up there did a terrific job. The band was brilliant. I mean, they really got into it and people were dancing like mad. And all the people were very elegantly dressed. I'd say 80 per cent of the men had dinner suits.

Kyle: Yes, we had one guy who came in jeans and a T-shirt. At first, we were almost going to say something. But, you did not have to say anything. You could simply see how embarrassed that guy was and that he felt very uncomfortable. He also complained to his girlfriend, who apparently didn't inform him that he was supposed to wear a suit.

Elsa: But I mean, what did he expect? (She shakes her head as in disbelief.)

Bill: Well, and some of the blokes up there made funny comments: "Nice suit, mate!" and so on.

Bill's whole body is shaking in laughter. Many others are laughing too.

Kyle: So, we did not have to say anything, you could really see he felt uncomfortable and embarrassed.

After having encountered the processes by which different categories of customers are constituted and come into existence, the next section will take a closer look at some of the consequences that such classificatory activities provoke. The image of the normal/deviant guest and other such categorizations provide staff with routine assumptions (scripts) concerning what customers can legitimately expect in the conduct of a normal service encounter. Also, they are relevant for the establishment of (organizational) identity, an issue that we will explore later in the thesis. Such scripts help filling the gap constituted through the indexicality of any labour contact (Fox, 1974), an indexicality that becomes even more complex in the provision of customized service. Given that the participation of customers in the provision of
service is not just desired but indispensable, the performance of customers and that of staff poses a similar problem of coordination and control to the organization. From another perspective, then, we can conceptualize such categorization processes and their outcomes as (part of) control strategies, identifying them as essentially political and through and through infused with power. Such a conceptualization is what the next section provides.

6.3 Customer service and disciplinary power

Chapter 4 has already elaborated management’s attempts to shape employee behaviour through the utilization of guest responses, reward systems, and customer service training. Chapter 5 has identified strategies of symbolic management employed to commit staff to the hotel’s customer service philosophy. Chapter 6 has so far looked at processes of categorization arisen during attempts of the organization to manage its relations with its customers. The remaining part of this chapter extends these considerations by putting a stronger emphasis on the issues of power and control. It will eventually show that the discourse of customer service of the Grand Seaside Hotel constitutes a Panoptic system of control and surveillance that subjects both members of the organization and customers. This part (6.3) identifies processes of normalization and spatial segregation as disciplinary strategies employed by the Grand Seaside. The subsequent part (6.4) will then establish how the process of imaginization lifts the issue of control into a new, Panoptic dimension.

As seen from the discussion so far, flexible organizations such as the Grand Seaside Hotel face the complex task of providing customized service to their customers while conducting their business operations as effectively and efficiently as possible. The striving for service excellence that is seen by the hotel’s management as the road to business success presupposes the creation of a match between customers’ expectations and the service provided by staff. As Ritzer (1991) has shown for the case of McDonald’s, the number of expectations to be met tends to be a function of the degree of standardization and routinization of service encounters, with the latter
being almost inversely reciprocal to the discretion left to the customer. McDonald's reduces insecurity by standardizing customers' expectations and behaviour, which allows for a strong standardization and routinization of the production process on the side of the organization. In contrast, customized service should then be all about leaving as much discretion as possible to the customer, while leaving employees with a huge degree of uncertainty as to what customer expectations they may encounter and, ultimately, have to meet.

To the organization, the creation of a match between expectations and service provision translates into an issue of controlling the agency of both staff and customers. In this sense, we can describe the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside, and the processes of categorizing customers in particular, as constituting a system of disciplinary power. In Foucault's view, discipline is not merely a mechanism to control or subject individuals. "Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals as objects and instruments of its exercise" (Foucault, 1977: 170). It does so, for instance, by employing strategies such as hierarchical observation and normalization to reassure the correct behaviour of individuals.

6.3.1 Normalization: Management by Identities

As shown earlier, the categorization of guest responses allows for revealing insights into the normative foundations of the organization. According to the typology established, complaints can be classified as valid, quasi-valid, and invalid. These categories do not only allow evaluation of staff behaviour as appropriate or inappropriate according to organizational norms but also enable the classification of guests in terms of whether their expectations coincide with those of the organization. In other words, what these classificatory processes conjointly attempt is the establishment of normal service encounters. They do so by subjugating people to a particular identity (Knights and Willmott, 1989). In short, in striving for normal service encounters, such processes produce normal guests and normal staff.
With Foucault (1977), we may identify constituents of the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside, such as rewards, training, or the guest questionnaires, as strategies of normalization. The latter refer to penal (and reward) mechanisms as part of more complex disciplinary systems.

The work-shop, the school, the army were subjected to a whole micro-penalty of time (intensity, absence, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body (incorrect attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency) (Foucault 1977: 178).

Simultaneously, disciplinary penalty focuses on non-observance, on “that which does not measure up to the rule, that departs from it”, whereby “(t)he whole indefinite domain of non-conforming is punishable” (Foucault 1977: 178f.). More precisely, disciplinary punishment ought to be corrective, it should not only seek compensation but should include exercise and correction through training. Hence, “punishment is only one element of a double system: gratification-punishment” (ibid. 180). It is, therefore, a system that thrives on a ‘carrot and stick’ principle so to speak. In sum,

[T]he régime of disciplinary power... brings five quite distinct operations into play: it refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed. It differentiates individuals from one another, in terms of following this overall rule: that the rule be made to function as a minimal threshold, as an average to be respected or as an optimum towards which one must move. It measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the ‘nature’ of individuals. It introduces, through this ‘value-giving’ measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. Lastly, it traces the limit that will define the difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier to the abnormal... The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes. (Foucault, 1977: 182f.; italics original)

When considering the situation at the Grand Seaside, one can clearly find evidence for disciplinary strategies in general and that of normalization in particular. The
whole process of evaluating and categorizing customer feedback represents a subtle mechanism for dividing normal behaviour from abnormal behaviour and, simultaneously, for separating normal from deviant employees. Those who behave abnormally become subject to different forms of punishment or corrective action. It is important to note, though, that

the definition of behaviour and performance on the basis of the two opposed values good and evil; instead of the simple division of the prohibition, as practiced in penal justice, we have a distribution of between a positive pole and a negative pole; all behaviour falls in the field between good and bad marks, good and bad points. (Foucault, 1977: 180)

The aspiration of service excellence operates here as a minimal threshold, to use Foucault’s words, as simultaneously representing a demand and an ideal to strive for. Hence, those behaving normally are differentiated further according to their achievements in aiming at the ideal of service excellence. In this respect, it is interesting to note that discussion during the meetings centres on the two poles of exceptionally good or bad behaviour in service provision. Those performing exceptionally well may even qualify for one of the employee awards of the hotel; those performing poorly may have to undertake additional training. Hence, the repeated reading of guest complaints and evaluations, the customer service training, the various staff awards, and the ceremonial events that stress the essential importance of customer service, can all be regarded as contributing to the creation of an ideal-type of service excellence. It is this that marks the boundary between normal and abnormal.

We should notice, though, that it is not only the staff who are compared, differentiated, hierarchized, and excluded, in short, who are normalized. As suggested, customers also become subjected to such processes of normalization. Whereas those customers who express no complaints, or valid and quasi-valid complaints, about the service experienced are classified as normal guests, those who raise invalid complaints or fail to meet the organization's expectations of appropriate guest behaviour are stigmatized as abnormal or troublemakers. The expectations of the latter are either ignored, as during the Morning Briefings, or they are (often
promptly) brought into check when they, in the eyes of the organization, misbehave. Most often it will be staff that trigger corrective intervention, as seen during the incident in The Ocean, when Leo reminded a noisy guest of her ‘duties’ as service co-producer. On other occasions, peer pressure from a fellow guest might do as well, as the poor guy who dressed inappropriately for the Spring Ball had to find out. Hence, what counts for staff also applies to guests: both are subjected to disciplinary strategies that attempt to establish the normalcy of service encounters desired by the organization. Normal service encounters demand normal staff and normal guests.

Categorization, with its implicit comparing, differentiating, and hierarchizing of staff and guests, is not the only disciplinary strategy applied at the Grand Seaside that aims at normalization. As the next section will demonstrate, spatial strategies such as segmentation and exclusion are very effective disciplinary techniques as well.

6.3.2 Segmentation and exclusion: Spatial aspects of discipline

The establishment of normal and abnormal behaviour of individuals is one of the most important mechanisms in disciplinary systems of power. To Foucault, such binary division and branding represents a “dualistic mechanism of exclusion” founded on a “constant division between the normal and the abnormal, to which every individual is subjected” (Foucault, 1977: 199). In this sense, the branding of guests as “kids”, “doctors”, or “troublemakers” represents a subdivision of their classification in terms of normalcy.

Children, for instance, represent, in this respect, a class of abnormal guests. They are loud, constantly chase around, vandalize hotel property, will – when not properly looked after – disturb other guests, and spoil the atmosphere in the hotel’s luxury restaurant. As Foucault (1977) explains using the example of (medieval) lepers or plague-stricken towns, dealing with abnormalcy implies hierarchy, observation, and surveillance in an attempt to separate or segmentize, that is, to analyze and distribute those that do not comply with the norm. We find traces of such separation and segmentation also at the Grand Seaside. As children have been identified as
departing from the profile of the normal guest, they are put under constant control and supervision. This is either through their parents, who have to secure the children's compliance with the normal conduct of behaviour at hotels, or through professional staff, such as baby-sitters or Kindergarten teachers, at the hotel. In each case, the children are subjected to a certain discipline. Moreover, children are not just (informally) banned from certain areas of the hotel, they are also allocated a special area as their own domain: the Kids-Club.

From this perspective, many of the activities the hotel offers to children and other guests are, essentially, disciplinary strategies aimed at securing the functionality of the overall hotel operations by separating or segmenting the overall population of guests according to criteria of normalcy. That the classification of normal/abnormal does not in each case coincide with superior/inferior shows in the example of VIP guests. Such guests represent, in a different way to children, an abnormal type of customer. Their prominent status entitles them to a variety of special services (e.g. special time for check in and check out) that are not accessible to normal guests. Some VIPs are separated from ordinary guests by residing on the fifth floor, an area reserved for executive suites. Yet, some VIPs mingle with the crowd, which makes it more difficult for hotel staff to segmentize, that is, to mark and distribute these guests. To do so, staff have to register those guests: their names, time of arrival, room number, preferences, and the special services they are entitled to receive. Hence, whether they like it or not, VIPs (as well as children) are marked with the stigma of abnormalcy.

In the light of the techniques employed at the Grand Seaside Hotel, one may even reconsider the architectural design of the hotel as bearing traces of disciplinary strategies. In particular, the spatial (and temporal) division between front and back regions of the hotel is of relevance in this context. The separation of guests from operations in the back of the hotel prevents them from gazing at (and potentially influencing or even controlling) those aspects of the hotel business that management regards as organizational prerogative. This does not only count for sacred parts of the business such as administration. Probably, no one would expect guests to look into the hotel's financial statements or books. This exclusion also applies to quite
profane duties, such as the preparation of food, or the cleaning of rooms. The latter process indicates that the separation between front and back is not a purely spatial one. Guestrooms are public (front) areas only at certain times. They are usually cleaned in the morning after guests have left and before they return or new guests arrive. During that time, guestrooms become quasi-private (back) areas where guests are not particularly welcomed.

The fact that the boundary between front and back regions of the hotel is temporally variable indicates already that this spatial demarcation is not entirely fixed. We may instead envisage the borderline between public and private spheres as subject to conquest between guest and organization: as contested terrain, to paraphrase Edwards (1979). As the hotel business is essentially about renting time-space to guests, we should not be surprised about the territoriality displayed on both sides. Ideal-typically, the hotel’s interest is to rent time-space as efficiently as possible, that is, to give away as little time-space as possible for the maximum rent. Guests, on the other hand, expect to get usage of the time-space rented as extensively as possible. That both positions do not necessarily coincide is obvious. The implicit tension between the interests of the hotel representatives and those of the guests explains why the times for check in and check out are so highly contested. Controlling the times for the check in and check out means controlling the space of the respective guestrooms and, hence, the profit source of the business.\[\text{1]\[\]

The division between public and private spheres of the hotel, however, matters in another respect. Frontline staff work in an area in which they are almost constantly on display to guests. As we have seen from the sequences of the Morning Briefing, particularly the discussion of the guest questionnaires, guests fulfil a controlling function in service encounters. The same role applies to fellow staff members, who frequently remind their peers of their inappropriate behaviour or their failure to meet the standards of service excellence, as we soon shall see in the section on Panopticism. Consequently, (frontline) staff are subjected to the gaze of at least three Others: management, peers, and guests.
What is important to note, though, is that most of the visibility in service encounters at the Grand Seaside is bilateral. This is what distinguishes such gazing from surveillance, which marks the transition to the most sophisticated form of disciplinary control, Panopticism, to be discussed in the following section. The frontdesk is a point in case. It’s construction – as opposed to the entrance and threefold surrounded by walls – is so as to secure the rights of staff as those who see (first) without normally being the uninformed subject of the gaze of an Other. On the other hand, when entering the hotel, guests may well see the staff at the frontdesk, yet when leaving the desk, they have ultimately turned their back on them. One may therefore contend that the frontdesk privileges the gaze of staff on guests.

As seen in this section, strategies such as normalization or the temporal/spatial structuring of service encounters seek to secure control of both agencies involved in the process of service production: (frontline) staff and guests. The front of house area, in particular, is one of (almost) constant bilateral visibility in which staff and guest mutually adjust and control their behaviour in line with their perceived visibility. As the next section will demonstrate, however, control does not stop at this level. The process of, what I would call, *imaginization* — which is brought about by symbolic means, and which lifts out or *dismembeds* service encounters into an imaginary sphere – transforms bilateral visibility into surveillance and control into self-subordination. This process renders, at least potentially, the Grand Seaside into an (inverted) Panopticon.

### 6.4 Imaginization and Panoptic control

As indicated in the sections above, one way of dealing with the uncertainty involved in providing customized service is to establish categories of customer expectations and link them with respective staff behaviour. In the case of normal guest expectations, staff’s natural friendliness and helpfulness in conjunction with the training they have received should suffice to please the guests. However, when a complaint occurs, staff have to interpret it with respect to its justification and, in case
the complaint is judged as valid, they have to apologize and consider compensation for the guest. On such occasions, the interaction between staff and guests happens in real time, that is, staff receive feedback (demand) from particular (real) customers in respect to concrete (real) events. Hence, staff can (and in fact often must) respond to a (real) demand (external stimulus) at the time and place of its occurrence.

During such service encounters in real time, staff can often control the success of their intervention, through the reaction of the guest, on the spot. Under these circumstances, staff, equipped with certain predispositions, engage in an interaction with guests, during which a (step-by-step) discursive negotiation of meaning and relating actions occurs. Most importantly, the interaction that takes place is that between real individuals in real time, an apparently self-evident presupposition for the management of service encounters at the Grand Seaside Hotel. The process of making sense of the interaction relies, therefore, on mutual feedback; a process in which guests assist staff in interpreting their wants and needs. Therefore, real time communication helps to overcome the uncertainty involved in interpreting what guests expect staff to do.

6.4.1 Guests, trust, and distancing

In addition to the service encounters happening in real time, there are other occasions during which staff receive clues from guests as to what it is they are supposed to do in the process of service delivery. Most obviously, one can think of the guest questionnaires discussed above. In contrast to the service encounters, demands (and feedback) occur temporally and spatially displaced from the actual event in question on such occasions. In other words, staff may gain insights about what they did right or wrong in retrospect. Hence, guest questionnaires 'tell' staff how they have done or what they should have done differently. Of course, such feedback is used for future adjustment of behaviour. Yet, the insights gained are temporally and spatially separated from the concrete context in which they arose. Similarly, the adaptation of behaviour that follows from such feedback is displaced from the concrete context of its application. In other words, guest questionnaires are means of stretching, or
**Distancing**, to use Giddens’ (1990) terminology, service encounters both temporally and spatially.

**Distancing** refers to the tendency prevalent in (high-) modern societies to rely on mediated interaction. In contrast to face-to-face interaction, distancing allows for "interaction with others who are physically absent (and often temporally absent also)" (Giddens, 1979: 203). This process is closely linked to that of **disembedding**, that is, “the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space” (Giddens, 1990: 21). Two mechanisms have fostered the diffusion of modern (disembedded) institutions. One is that of **symbolic tokens** such as money. The other is that of **expert systems**, most prominently embodied by the system of modern professions. **Printing** is another symbolic token. Its popularization as an effective way of exchanging and storing information and making it accessible to large groups of people divided in time and space has significantly fostered the development of disembedded institutions (Giddens, 1990). The guest questionnaires (as well as the logbook and the numbers) that are regularly read during the Morning Briefings represent such tokens that allow for disembedding service encounters, as I will argue.

“All disembedding mechanisms, both symbolic tokens and expert systems, depend upon trust . . . Trust here is vested, not in individuals, but in abstract capacities” (Giddens, 1990: 26)”. This form of **systems trust**, as Giddens calls it, is a prerequisite to the disembedding of social interactions from time and space. Hence, for service encounters to be disembedded from concrete temporal and spatial contexts, they have to be vested with trust. The trust vested into service encounters is not directed at any particular individual, for instance, a specific guest. Rather, the trust required relates to the system of socialization, which has to prepare individuals for service encounters and which ensures that these individuals know how to behave as a (normal) guest. In this respect, one may talk of the **institution of the service encounter** being vested with **systems trust**. Of course, the organization does not play a completely passive role in this process. As Ritzer (1991) has shown in the case of McDonalds, organizations may structure very successfully the expectations and behaviour of their guests.
We should note that the disembending of service encounters has significance for the organization as a whole. Usually, a single event (encounter) will remain a rather private issue between the staff and guests involved; that is, it remains confined to the social context of its occurrence. This holds true unless staff tell other members of the organization about the incident, which happens frequently during the meetings. In doing so they lift out, or disembled, as Giddens terms it, the encounter from its original context (by aural means). In this way the encounter is represented to those who were absent at the time and place of its occurrence. However, the tools par excellence used for lifting out service encounters are the guest questionnaires. By disembending service encounters through the reading of the questionnaires, those encounters are rendered from private into public affairs. When staff report on certain incidents or when guests comment in questionnaires, they render the (private) experience of those encounters accessible to other members of the organization. Alternatively, one may refer to this process as the sharing of private experiences with the (potentially whole) organization.

The lessons that one can draw from such shared information, however, are somewhat ambiguous. As these lessons refer to incidents that happened in the past, they are not directly relevant to future behaviour. Rather, management will use such feedback to adjust behaviour of staff for future encounters (and occasionally to compensate the customer who complains). Yet, the application of such directed action will, at least to a certain extend, depend on similarities between the context of its (future) application with the encounter that lead to the complaint. In other words, for insights gained from guest questionnaires to be successfully applied in future encounters, they require contexts analogous to those of the original complaint. The lessons drawn from an idiosyncratic event will be very limited in their applicability towards future action, if there are not any analogies between the original and future events.

It is at this point that trust again comes into play. The organization has to have a certain type of confidence, as Giddens (1990) characterizes trust, in the reproduction of (normal) service encounters. In other words, to use guest questionnaires for guiding future behaviour demands that the context of their application shows at least
some analogies to the context of their generation. As such, the usage of guest questionnaires involves a conservative aspect and, as any disciplinary technique, favours the establishment of routines (Clegg, 1998).

Given the remaining linkage between past and future events, the de-contextualization achieved through guest questionnaires remains necessarily incomplete. However, as soon as one extrapolates lessons from one context to another - for instance, by drawing analogies from past to potential future behaviour when, as we shall soon see, staff and managers of the Grand Seaside commonly speculate about what a guest may or may not expect in a given context - one enters the sphere of imagination. It is almost impossible to discuss imagination in the contemporary social science without reference to Cornelius Castoriadis, a writer for whose social theory the notion of imagination is pivotal.

6.4.2 Castoriadis and the imaginary institution of society

With Castoriadis, one can define imagination as:

the power (the capacity, the faculty) to make appear representations ('ideas' is the old English term, e.g. in Locke), whether with or without an external incitement. In other words: imagination is the power to make be that which 'realiter' is not (1997: 322).

Realiter here means "something which 'physically' or 'really' is not" (323). To put it another way, images are "... Vorsellungen, representations, or, better, presentations: presentations of something about which nothing can be said except by means of other presentation " (323f.). Of course, according to these criteria, each representation (including scientific concepts) has an imaginary element, as have the questionnaires representing guest complaints. The same holds true, as this section will demonstrate, for all modes of time-space distanciation or disembedding, which also presume imagination.
There is a mutual dependency between the symbolic and the imaginary as Castoriadis claims. *Imagination* requires symbols for its expression; yet, the *symbolic* can only exist by virtue of the imaginary, that is, due to the faculty of representing (*Vergegenwärtigen*) something that is not present (*gegewartig*) (Castoriadis 1990: 218). This faculty, which Castoriadis calls *radical imagination*, is the source of both the *actual (aktuale) imaginary* (the product of imagination) and the symbolic (ibid.).

The distinction drawn above between experiences received in encounters in real time and representations of the latter, such as guest questionnaires, should not lead one to accept a naive realist stance. The former mode of experience does not constitute real representations of an objective reality, whereas the latter are purely fictitious inventions. Even a distinction along first or second hand impressions is questionable. As Castoriadis says:

> In truth, there is no ‘receptivity’ or passivity of the ‘impressions’. To begin with, there are no such things as ‘impressions’. ‘Impressions’ are philosophical or psychological artifacts. There are, in some cases, perceptions that is, representations of ‘external’ and more or less ‘independent’ objects. These possess, certainly, a ‘sensorial’ component. But this component is itself a creation of the imagination. The ‘senses’ make emerge, out of an X, something which is ‘physically’ or ‘really’ is not. There is, of course, no real distinction between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ qualities – number, figure, size as opposed to colour, sound, taste, touch, smell, pain, or pleasure” (1997: 323).

Consequently, one never ‘really’ deals with impressions, but only “with perceptions, that is, classes of representations (*Vorstellungen*)” (Castoriadis, 197: 326). This is what one has to bear in mind when drawing on the above-established distinction between face-to-face encounters in real time and their representations. This is also what underlies Castoriadis’ notion of *social imagination*.

> My, and our, creation of a world entails also the creation of an ‘exterior’ where object, colour, etc., present themselves as different and distant from me – me being always and irrevocably here – as it entails also the creation of a double temporal horizon (‘backward’ and ‘forward’) within which I am the permanently moving now” (1997: 325).
Social imagination is, therefore, constitutive of what Castoriadis terms *institutions*, that is, self-sanctioning symbolic networks (1990: 218). The relationship between the symbolism of an institution and its functional requirements is one of *relative autonomy*. Neither do the functions of an institution, for instance of a society or an organization, determine its symbolism, as one could read in a vulgar interpretation of Marx’ notions of base and superstructure; nor does the symbolic determine the functional aspects of an institution. As Castoriadis explains, an institution (society) cannot constitute its symbolism in complete freedom, since it always has to be built on (or to be connected to) the historically inherited symbolic structures. Castoriadis is also sceptical of naive (communist) fantasies of a final (ultimate) reconciliation of functional and imaginary components of society. Alienation is to him the dominance of the imaginary moment of an institution, which simultaneously leads to a domination of the whole society by that same institution (1990: 226). In other words, alienation is, essentially, a process of *mis-recognition*, in which “society does not recognize the imaginary of institutions as its own product” (translation: DB, ibid.). Claiming that the alienation of humankind derives from the mis-recognition of needs, however, is insufficient, as it would entail defining what the concrete needs of humankind are. Such a definition must inevitably fail, since, in a historical process, (wo)man continuously exceeds his/her own definitions. In other words, “man is, precisely, what he is not” (1990: 233; translation: DB).

Apart from Castoriadis’ imaginary institution of society, language seems to be the most prominent example for such institutions. As Bourdieu (1997) has shown, language exists always in the objective – that is, in a Marxian sense, independent of the will and consciousness of individual subjects. Yet, this does not mean that language determines individuals or, as post-structuralists (e.g. Foucault) may suggest, subjects do not speak but are spoken (Caws, 1988). In contrast, Bourdieu stresses the freedom and creativity of individuals’ speech while, simultaneously, acknowledging their embeddedness into a larger socio-cultural context of language production. The latter is important, for it allows us, against advocates of structuralists to understand language not as a fixed system, but as historical product
dependent on the active and creative reproduction in a multitude of individual speech acts (Caws, 1988).

Consequently, institutions are human made, although the latter are, inversely, as much created by the former. In Castoriadis’ words this reads as:

Society is a creation, and creation of itself: self-creation... Athens cannot exist without Athenians (not humans in general) – but Athenians are created only in and by Athens. Thus society is always self-institution (1997: 332f).

We only need to replace society by organization to envisage a framework for organizational analysis as applicable to the Grand Seaside Hotel. The following section seeks, therefore, to explore how members of the organization, by constituting imaginary guests and service encounters, construct an imaginary sphere of the organization. Subsequently, the section will question how such socially imagined constructs influence social behaviour and identity of the organizational members.

6.4.3 Imaginary service encounters and customized service

As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, management does not derive all the guest responses it uses for directing staff directly from service encounters. Instead, the frequently employed guest questionnaires represent retrospective evaluations of such encounters. Both modes of feedback (deferred or in real time), however, refer to concrete individuals and their actions, which are situated in concrete contexts in time and space. They are real in the sense that they are not hypothetical. Those guests complaining did indeed (really) participate in service encounters, and they did indeed perceive the respective encounter in a certain manner. This criterion of reality, however, does not hold equally true for all service encounters. In fact, as soon as guests do not respond directly, such as in face-to-face encounters, responses will always contain a strong imaginary element. However, as we can see in the following sequence from one of the Morning Briefings, frequently it is not guests who comment on service encounters, but staff or management.
Tim turns to Amanda.

Tim: I just wanted to remind you that you have to put the slippery sign away. It's such a nice gangway from The Garden Terrace to the pool and then you have this ugly sign there.

Amanda: Yes we did this but somebody must have taken it away . . .

Tim is interrupting her.

Tim: . . . I don't care who has taken what. Just put it away!

In this sequence, Tim evaluates functional and aesthetic aspects of scenery for potential service encounters. He does so based on his assumptions about what customers may or may not perceive as desired or appropriate. In other words, he bases his demands on imaginary guest expectations. They are imaginary, in a double sense. First, with respect to the persons involved. The expectations relate to imaginary guests and do not derive from concrete individuals. Second, with respect to the expectations in question. One cannot draw any conclusion from the sequence above as to whether guests would indeed perceive the scenery similarly to Tim. Hence, imaginary guest expectations are abstract and based on what Tim, or other members of management or staff, perceive as what normal guest expectations would have been if they had transpired.

References to imaginary guest expectations or evaluations are common during the Morning Briefings. Frequently, Tim will remind other managers of the importance of the aesthetic dimension of the service experience.

Tim: Where is Housekeeping? (He gazes around the table.)

Elsa: She's not in, today.
Tim: Okay! Then tell her that the area around the hotel looks like (He hesitates for a moment.) . . . well, it really looks like shit! So, they have to clean it regularly!

In the example given above, the hypothetical element is not confined to guests’ expectations. In fact, the guests themselves are hypothetical. The following sequence from the ideal-typical Morning Briefing illustrates this even more explicitly:

Tim to Nigel: Just a reminder to you that the frontdesk is a public area for customer service and not for socializing of staff; even if they are not busy with a guest at that moment. Sometimes when you pass by there, the guys from concierge are chatting with each other or hanging around. This does not lead to a good impression, if guests are passing by. This morning I saw even Celine (an administrative assistant, DB) standing around there having a chat with some of the guys. I mean, she is not even from reservations; so what does she have to do there? So, please inform your staff: The frontdesk is not a staff room! It’s not a chatting area!

Nigel: Okay.

In this sequence, as in the one above, not even the guests are real. They are merely hypothetical (imaginative), as the usage of the grammatical conditional indicates: “This does not lead to a good impression, if guests are passing by”. Such references to imaginary service encounters are common and they are not solely Tim’s prerogative as leader of the management team. Other managers will express their judgments too, reminding their colleagues of their responsibilities. During the one of the Morning Briefings, Gerald, for example, claimed that the car park “has become the most messy place in the whole hotel – an insult to our guests.” On several occasions, participants of the meeting reminded Bill, for example, that some light bulbs have to be changed or that one of the toilet flushes is not working properly. Others informed the meeting participants about dirty carpets, empty bottles around
the pool area, or inappropriate dress code of staff members, putting those responsible for the deficient service provision on public display.

Although such comments are most often uttered in a rather helpful voice, dropped like side-comments in conversations during meetings – "... by the way, I just wanted to remind you of..." – those addressed seem often embarrassed through these "helpful" reminders and respond usually in an apologetic manner. The fact that these reminders are uttered during the meetings, that is, publicly, makes them not only an instrument of (public) punishment. They are also a disciplinary technique: the peer pressure exercised by the meeting participants will almost inevitably trigger corrective action of those who failed (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Sewell, 1998). In this sense such reminders are not only punishing, they are corrective: offering the failing individual a chance to 'make up' and become once more a good and useful member of the Grand Seaside Family.

Frequently, the reminders point to the importance of the aesthetic side of the hotel business: somebody may see staff hanging around and chatting, which potentially threatens the aesthetic aspect of the service experience. Because of the deference involved, the service encounters are temporally and spatially disembodied. Hypothetically, (imaginary) service encounters can occur anywhere and any time, not only when guests are present. In fact, imaginary service encounters are, per definition, marked through absence. In other words, in representing the absent, imaginary service encounters are mechanisms for disemboding social interaction from its concrete temporal-spatial context.

The disemboding acquired via imaginization that implies the instrumentalization of individual's imagination and fantasy proves quite beneficial for the management of hotel operations. Instead of relying on fixed scripts, which may or may not prove appropriate in real face-to-face service encounters, staff are expected to use their imagination to respond flexibly to the infinite number of demands that may arise from guest expectations. This makes staff imagination crucial for the organization: the proactive approach demanded from staff is based on the latter's social imagination (as to what expect and how to respond in service encounters).
Simultaneously, it directs staff commitment away from the mere following of rules, typical in bureaucratic organizations. *Imaginization asks for commitment*, not obedience. It does not confine to the overt display of conformity (the body), it asks for people’s soul (Barker, 1993; Jackson and Carter, 1998; Sewell, 1998).

Hence, much of the customer service training provided seeks to stress and develop staff’s imagination of what guests may expect and how to respond. When recalling the role-play performed during the customer service training session, it becomes clear that the response of the cleaner (warming up the bottle of milk for the crying baby) is based on the imaginary assumption that the mother will indeed perceive this behaviour as desirable. This assumption, however, is not self-evident. The mother may refute the offer, perceiving it as an insult to be told by a cleaner as to how to feed her baby. The fact the mother was pleased about the cleaner’s intervention points to congruence between the social imaginations of the cleaner and the mother in this particular incidence.

It may be worth addressing the issue of congruence more explicitly to understand what divides the proclaimed customized service of the Grand Seaside from standardized service as described by Ritzer (1991). In the case of McDonaldized modes of services, the customer is required to adopt his/her social imagination to the organization. This counts at least for the first encounter. The standardization and routinization of the operations, however, will require only a minimum of imagination from regular visitors (or staff) of McDonalds. In fact, much of the quality of McDonaldized services derives from the fact that they almost completely relinquish the customer from any need for imagination. In such encounters, the uncertainty that always surrounds imagination, as the representation of what is not (yet), is reduced to an almost inevitable certainty. In other words, McDonaldized service is founded on trust in the routine recurrence of certain modes of guest expectations and service encounters.

In the case of the Grand Seaside, it seems as if the tables have been turned. Here, staff have to adapt (even proactively) their imagination to that of guests. This means, at least theoretically, that the uncertainty involved for staff is much higher. It is not.
up to guests to adjust their behaviour along pre-defined organizational norms, as in the case of McDonalds. Instead, staff have to conform to the normative expectations of guests. Hence, there is a double normative commitment involved for staff. On the one hand, staff have to comply with organizational norms as exemplified in Chapter 4 with the discussion of valid complaints. On the other hand, they have to anticipate and respond to life world expectations of guest, which acquire, as seen in the same chapter, the status of quasi-organizational norms. In other words, staff who are expected to provide customized service, as in the case of the Grand Seaside Hotel, find themselves in the position of having to serve two different Masters.

It is the prominent status that guests’ life world expectations acquire in customized service encounters that makes it difficult for service organizations to achieve a fit between those expectations and staff’s (social) imagination. This constellation increases not only the importance of staff recruitment policies, but also on training and education of staff. Although, as mentioned earlier, most employees working in frontstage positions are casuals at the Grand Seaside Hotel, most of these casuals are students either of the local TAFE college or the nearby University. This fact seems to ensure that most of the staff engaging in service encounters enter with the necessary social skills (and imagination) to match the expectations of their clientele, the guests. It is not accidental, therefore, that most guests praise staff not for being expressively polite or obedient, but for their “natural friendly attitude”.

As far as training is concerned, one can seriously question as to whether one can educate staff to display a natural and friendly attitude or whether organizations have to rely on recruiting people with the desired attitudes. By doing so, organizations externalize just another cost factor into their larger social environment. Why should the hotel pay for something those societal institutions, such as the family, school, college or university, provide for free? In this respect, the Grand Seaside has even externalized (sub-contracted) their apprentices through the mediation of an independent agency. Those apprentices are employed by the agency and contracted out to the hotel. The advantage for the hotel lies with the increased flexibility and choice, as the Human Resource Manger explained. Not only can the hotel choose among the best employees, they can also send back any unwanted apprentices.
without having to engage in any legal considerations. Of course, the Grand Seaside spends a lot of money on training and education of staff. The hotel holds regular induction days and training on the job is still an important element of skill development. There are also those training courses, as for instance the course for the proper serving of alcohol, that the hotel has to run to obey state legislation. However, as the thesis has already indicated, customer service training at the Grand Seaside Hotel is less about changing or upgrading employee skills as about stretching staff’s (social) imagination. According to the (silent) doctrine of the hotel’s customer service philosophy, people with the proper attitudes seem to require hardly any explicit directives how to behave.

The newly shaped type of *Total Quality Employee* seems to provide a favourable resolution of management’s battle for control of the production process (du Gay, 1996; Sewell, 1998). When staff have internalized the philosophy of customer service, they seem only to require (enough) imagination to anticipate customer expectations and will respond intentionally (automatically) in the appropriate way. Issues such as conflict of interests seem excluded from this discourse (Deetz, 1998). Instead, a general identification of staff with the organization’s goals seems presupposed by management. The context is one of pressure from the external labour market (the hotel is the major employer in the region). Given the underlying fear of joblessness, as experienced during the restructuring process, the simple equation of business prosperity and job security seems to ensure the required degree of compliance and identification. Hence, why staff should strive for service excellence, as is most obviously exemplified during the All-Staff-Meeting, remains tacitly understated but also understood. Characteristically, the official negation of issues of power and interests that this mode of discourse displays is explicit, while, as the thesis has shown, the implicit and underlying reality is another story. In such an environment, there remains no place for collective representation of employee interests. When asked, in our very first conversation, whether the hotel is unionized, Tim responded:

> We don’t have any Union members in our hotel. We treat our people well! So, there is no need for any Union. And if we still find somebody ... (He speaks
somewhat more carefully) . . . Well, we'll find a way to get them out (He puts on
a big smile).

Let us recapitulate the discussion in this chapter so far. We have seen that in order to
achieve the provision of service excellence that management at the Grand Seaside so
eagerly aspires to, they have to rely to a large degree on (front-line) staff's
imagination to meet the expectations of customers. This constellation not only
requires recruiting staff with the desired imagination but is also a process that applies
to the acquisition of customers. It also implies delegating responsibility for the
provision of service excellence to staff (and guests). In other words, the organization
has to invest a certain amount of (systems-) trust into the generation of normal
service encounters, which implies the matching of normal guest expectations with
normal staff behaviour.

Far from taking a passive stance in the generation of the service match, management
has several techniques at their disposal, most notably those of imaginization. It is
with these that they seek to ensure that service encounters at the Grand Seaside meet
the standards of normalcy, as defined by the organization. Guest questionnaires, for
instance, do not only provide feedback about the service quality but are also used to
categorize staff and guests according to the standards of normalcy. Simultaneously,
they lift out service encounters from the temporal/spatial context of their generation,
rendering more or less private experiences as accessible to a larger public. The
lessons drawn from such encounters, supplemented by hypothetical scenarios
established during the meetings, will then be applied in the context of potential
future, imaginary, occasions of service provision. The feedback loop thus
constituted is supplemented by a complex system of control and surveillance. For
that purpose, comments by management, peers, or guests are used for either
encouraging the striving for excellence or for triggering corrective action whenever
someone fails to meet the desired standards. As we shall see in the next section, the
linkage between aspirations, control, and imaginization that characterizes the
customer service discourse at the Grand Seaside, can take on almost Panoptic
features.
6.4.4 Imaginary service encounters, self-surveillance, and Panoptic Control

From our discussion so far, we can conclude that in the Grand Seaside’s customer service discourse control seems to be located in dimensions that are confined neither to the temporal spatial co-presence of those exercising control nor to the temporal spatial boundaries of the organization. Hence, control, as applied in this context, seems primarily exercised through the shaping of employee (social) imagination. In other words, control at the Grand Seaside implies governing the soul of its members, to use Nikolas Rose’s (1989) terms.

Let me elaborate this line of argumentation more explicitly. Since guests are those who, ultimately, evaluate the quality of the service provided, they exercise, simultaneously, control over staff performance (Czepiel, 1990). However, with the introduction of imaginary customers, control enters into a new virtual, that is, imaginary, dimension. From this perspective, the situation that staff at the Grand Seaside encounter is that of a virtually constant state of insecurity about who counts as customer and what he or she may expect.

It is important to note that the introduction of an imaginary sphere makes all the difference in terms of disciplining employees. As mentioned above, control in the context of real service encounters is rather direct and based on bilateral vision. This means, that not only are both staff and guests mutually subjected to each other’s mutual gaze. Staff will normally realize that guests or management will gaze upon them. However, the introduction of a sphere of imaginary service encounters and guests renders visibility into a trap. Imaginary service encounters imply a lateral invisibility. The gaze of the guest or the manager is no longer bound to presence. As the incidents reported above have demonstrated, any one, at any time, could, potentially, function as an imaginary guest and, hence, exercise control through his or her gaze. From this perspective, the situation of the average frontline worker resembles one of almost constant surveillance in which “(h)e is seen, but he does not
see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication” (Foucault, 1977: 200). The implications of the lateral invisibility are quite profound.

The major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility (Foucault, 1977: 201).

We may recall the situation cited above, in which Tim accuses staff of rendering the frontdesk into a chatting area. Although no guest may have been close to the frontdesk, staff were supposed to behave as if guests are omnipresent. The same applies to the sequence when Tim complains about the positioning of the slippery sign. Although not even a single guest may have expressed any objection to the aesthetic features of the sign, staff were expected to anticipate such complaints.

By introducing an imaginary sphere, Tim transcends the temporal confines of the public space. As mentioned, front areas are public spaces only at certain times, that is, when they are the location of service encounters. What Panopticism does, however, is to overcome the very temporality of the public sphere, rendering it into an (imagined) constant area of display. What counts for the temporal confines of public space, applies also to its spatial confines, as another anecdote from the hotel illustrates. During one of the Morning Briefings Tim complained to the head of the concierges that he was told that concierge staff had left the hotel during their lunch break to get some food in one of the local fast-food outlets. The fact that those staff members where seen “hanging around and chatting” in a local café while still wearing their uniform annoyed Tim. After all: “As long as they wear their uniform, they are recognizable as hotel staff. So, they have to act as representatives of the hotel and behave accordingly”. Hence, Tim told the supervisor that he should ensure “that staff change at least their jackets before they go out next time”.

We can conclude, then, that the faceless gaze on which Panopticism thrives not only “automatizes and individualizes power” (Foucault, 1977: 202), but it also transcends (organizational) time and space. It is indeed the imaginary element, the process of imaginizing, that renders (traditional forms of) direct control into disciplining systems of surveillance. As Foucault expresses it: “A real subjection is born
mechanically from a fictitious [imagined, DB] relation” (1977: 202). As Foucault has demonstrated, such a constellation results in the internalization of control and the surveillance of individuals (staff) to the gaze of an (imagined) omnipresent Other. Hence, the shaping of staffs’ (social) imagination through the Grand Seaside’s customer service philosophy has a double aspect. It seeks to direct and stretch staff’s imagination towards potential guest expectations, and it subjects their imagination to internalize the omnipresence of surveillance. Panopticism, despite being founded in an architectural design, derives its efficacy from the absence of any concrete ‘physical’ gaze. It depends on the internalization (imaginization) of the gaze, which renders control into self-surveillance. In other words, Panopticism is not an architectural but a mental structure.

It is, then, not by accident that Panopticism demands the introduction of an imaginary sphere through forms of symbolic management such as meetings and rituals. Essentially, Panopticism is a mental structure, dependent on a process of self-subordination under the principle of (constant) visibility. As Clegg observed, the nature of surveillance is "less in the actual superintendence, more in the sheer impossibility of avoiding the observer's gaze" (1998: 35). As a result, power becomes "internalized . . . as subjects learnt to survey themselves, to be reflexively self-regarding as if under the ever present and watchful eyes of surveillance" (1998: 35). However, as McKinley and Taylor (1998: 182) observed, the illusion of constant surveillance, which constitutes the efficacy of the Panopticon, requires at least periodical reaffirmation. The reminders uttered during the meetings achieve precisely this reaffirmation: they reconfirm the (potential) omnipresence of the gaze. Significantly, both Panopticism and the symbolism underlying the process of imaginization thrive on absence! Whereas Panopticism derives its efficacy from the absence of any concrete gaze, symbolism mediates the absence of the thing (here: the gazer), as Saussure may have said. Consequently, when analyzing Panoptic systems of surveillance, one cannot but address the symbolic means of their (re-) creation, as we have done.

We can draw a number of conclusions from our conceptualization of the customer service discourse as a disciplinary system as described in this chapter. First, with the
introduction of imaginary guests, categories of organizational membership tend to become extremely blurred. As mentioned earlier, the nature of service encounters renders customers almost automatically into partial employees of the service organization, as they have to co-produce the service experience. However, the sequence above extends such partial membership even to imaginary customers. It is the introduction of imaginary guests and their equally imaginary expectations that shape employees' pre-dispositions and, hence, pre-structure service encounters at the Grand Seaside Hotel. Under these circumstances, one may indeed talk of a 'virtual organization'.

Second, management, and Tim in particular, uses the reference to imaginary customer expectations as a legitimation strategy for management prerogatives. Ultimately, it is the customer, not management, who wants staff to behave in a certain way. Management only supports staff in striving to please the customer, as Tim expressed it during the All-Staff-Meeting. Hence, when directing staff, management seems only to translate or interpret customers' needs and wants. In this sense, one can interpret the discourse of customer service of the Grand Seaside as a disciplinary system that directs and controls employees while, by the same token, legitimizes management prerogatives.

Third, the introduction of imaginary customers renders the demands ensuing from (hypothetical and real) guests' expectations even more complex and unpredictable. Hence, the demands for appropriate behaviour that staff have to show increase virtually ad infinitum. Potentially, management can render (virtually) anyone into a (hypothetical) guest either to legitimize management prerogatives or to demand obedience/commitment from staff. From this perspective, even apparently 'neutral' remarks as uttered at the All-Staff-Meeting appear in a different light. When Tim announces that "staff are expected to provide service excellence that is beyond expectation"; when he wants "people to talk to their friends and families about the service they have experienced in the hotel" he creates, consciously or not, a pool of hypothetical guests. Hence, the potential source of service demands and evaluations, as well as instances of control, are virtually unlimited and unlimitable.
From this perspective, the situations that staff encounter resemble those of a Panopticist system of power and surveillance. Surveillance seems all encompassing and omnipresent. Potentially, virtually anyone, at any time, and anywhere, could be a customer and, hence, exercise control in the form of judgements about the service experienced. The situation mirrors almost that of a Benthamite Panopticon, where those under surveillance can never be sure whether they are subjected to the gaze of the guest: the guest could be anybody, the guest could be anywhere at any time.

Moreover, even if guests do not directly complain to authorities at the hotel, they still have friends or relatives to whom they can share their complaint. In this sense, (the indeterminacy of) Tim’s statement during the All-Staff-Meeting seems to epitomize the quintessence of this Panopticist system: “We want to be known as a hotel where exceptional service is standard and standards are above expectation”. In other words, (guest’s or management’s) expectations can be unlimited and so are the demands to meet them!

This seemingly vicious circle of discipline – which incorporates different forms of surveillance, which categorizes and individualizes those subjected to the customer service discourse in an attempt to normalize them, and which, via imaginization, seeks to infiltrate peoples souls – is only closed, however, when the subjects thus constituted identify with their appointed identity. It is in these circumstances only, that control is rendered into self-surveillance, with normal guests taking on the status of a Generalized Other, thus gaining access to peoples’ souls. The Hotel, as a secular out-of-time experience, stands nonetheless, as a total institution as surely as those monasteries of old from which the form evolved.
7 Images of the flexible organization: Managing meaning in customer service discourse

In this chapter a number of issues discussed in the thesis are linked to current debates in the wider field of organization studies. I will identify the processes of *imaginization* and *subjugation* as underlying the shift from bureaucratic to normative control. Whereas the former process extends visual control into an imaginary sphere, the latter attempts to control people through shaping their identities. As we shall further see, both processes merge within strategies of normalization. The second part of this chapter introduces, on a more general level, the concepts of conflict and consensus through a discussion of the different instances of power identified by Haugaard (1998). With the latter, we shall see that both conflict and consensus presuppose interpretation, and that social order rests, ultimately, upon the negotiation of meaning. In section 7.2 we will undertake a short excursus of critical reflection on the process of categorization in (ethnographic) research. Using the example of Foucauldian technologies of care and control, we shall see not only the difficulties of applying conceptual devices in the conduct of empirical research, but we shall also discover that the latter inevitably requires exercise of authoritative power.

Ethnography may achieve some power from the verisimilitude with which it constructs a sense of authenticity but it is also authored – it is, essentially, the result of creativity. We conclude this section with a discussion of new modes of control and their integration into a new management doctrine: corporate culturism. While identifying the constituents and characteristics of this new doctrine, we shall present the Grand Seaside Hotel as an organization thriving on corporate culturism.
7.1 Governing the flexible organization: From bureaucratic to normative control?

Over the last decade, a considerable number of authors from the larger field of organization studies have addressed issues of control. One coherent line of inquiry linking diverse contributions suggests that traditional modes of control, focussed on direct supervision and bureaucratic rule, have been replaced by more subtle and indirect modes of normative or cultural control. These seek to shape individuals in their behaviour as well as their sense of identity (Alvesson, 1994 and 1995; Barker, 1993; Barley and Kunda, 1992; Boje and Winsor, 1993; Casey, 1996; Clegg, 1994 and 1998; Covelevski, et al., 1998; Deetz, 1992 and 1998; du Gay et al. 1996; Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998; Knights and Willmott, 1989; Oakes, et al., 1998; Rosen and Baroudi, 1992; Salaman, 1997; Sewell, 1998; Sewell and Willkinson, 1992; Townley, 1993 and 1994; Webster and Robbins, 1993; Willmott, 1993). Such contributions sought to provide a way out of the theoretical impasse into which organization studies had been channelled by Labour Process Theory. At the core of the impasse was the under-explored concept of human agency and subjectivity (Knights and Willmott, 1989; Willmott, 1993), which had already been criticized a decade earlier (Burawoy, 1979; Clegg 1979; Clegg and Dunkerley 1980; Edwards, 1979).

The terminology used to denote these new forms of control has been diverse. Various terms have been introduced *normative* (Willmott, 1993), *cultural* (Casey, 1996; Alvesson, 1996), *concertive* (Barker, 1993), or *chimerical* (Sewell, 1998) to signal the new quality of these forms of control. The authority of Foucault has been drawn on when subsumed under the concepts of *discipline* or *surveillance* (McKinlay and Starkey, 1998; Sewell and Willkinson, 1992; Sewell, 1998; Willmott, 1993). What all of these labels have attempted is to signify the advent of a *new management doctrine*: a doctrine that is based on management at a distance and that seeks "to increase employee *identification with corporate values*" (Ezzamel and Willmott 1998: 362). This new management doctrine – that with Willmott (1993) we denote as *corporate culturism* – stands for a type of control that implies a shift
from controlling people’s bodies to controlling their minds (Knights and Willmott, 1989). It culminates in an attempt to grip the individual’s soul, with corporations seeking commitment, loyalty, and sacrifices from their employees (Jackson and Carter, 1998; Deetz, 1998). Ultimately, this new mode of governance seems to imply a colonization of psyche (Jackson and Carter, 1998).

At the theoretical level, these new modes of control seem to reverse the whole conceptual geometry of power. The focus previously was on a descending analysis of power, one that concerned itself with power “held (or possessed) by an institution, organization, group, or individual . . . used to control the actions of other (less powerful) institutions, organizations, groups, or individuals” (Oakes et al., 1998: 270). It shifts to a concern with an ascending analysis of power. The latter is one that, following Foucault, evolves around a microphysics of power and engages in a “political anatomy of detail” (Townley, 1998: 194). By the same token, this new type of control provokes another shift: a shift from supervision and surveillance to self-subordination. This transformation marks the culmination of these new forms of control, and it seems to invert the whole thrust of control. Covaleskii et al. (1998), who regard bureaucratic control as being identical with Foucauldian disciplinary techniques and who conceptualize new modes of control as representing technologies of the self, contend that:

Whereas disciplinary techniques define personal identity from the outside in (that is, scientific and quasi-scientific categories, criteria, and language are inscribed on people and then internalized) the techniques of the self require that people act on themselves, using these very same resources to define identity from the inside out (Covaleskii et al., 1998: 298f.; emphasis DB)

Downwards becomes upwards; inside becomes outside – it seems that the whole organizational world has turned upside down and inside out in these new and flexible organizational landscapes. For better orientation, this chapter will explore the issue of new modes of control in these new and flexible organizational landscapes, using images created in and from the Grand Seaside Hotel. In other words, I will put the
disciplinary qualities of the Grand Seaside’s customer service discourse under closer scrutiny, comparing the images I have constructed to those that other visitors have produced. I will argue that the thrust of this disciplinary system stems from three processes that, taken together, transform established qualities of control. First, we will look at processes of imaginization, as underlying Panopticism, that mark the transformation from merely visual to imaginary control (self-surveillance). Then, we will explore how processes of normalization link what Foucault calls technologies of the self to technologies of power. Eventually, we will focus on the subjects of control, discussing the move from mere obedience to commitment.

Although the locus of power of both technologies of power and technologies of the self is intrinsic to those subjected (mind), Panopticism does not imply a colonization of psyche to the same extent. Panopticism asks for obedience not authenticity, with the result that the individual can stay somewhat detached from the behaviour it displays. Technologies of the self go further in that they demand commitment from individuals, subjugating them under a particular model of identity. Finally, as we shall see, the new management doctrine of corporate culturism thrives on the interplay of imaginization, normalization, and subjugation. We will further see that corporate culturism rests on the management of meaning and that it therefore requires symbolic reproduction for its endurance.

7.1.1 Imaginization: From visual to imaginary control

What are, then, the processes that grant these new modes of control their distinct quality? At a first glance, processes of discipline and surveillance do not look terribly different from those we know from bureaucratic regimes. Both seem to thrive on an excessive formalization. Whereas traditional forms of bureaucratic formalization apply primarily as a mode of structuring work routines with the detailed enumeration of practices and procedures (rules) techniques of surveillance seem to add a different thrust. As Sewell and Wilkinson (1992), among others, have shown, new modes of surveillance are introduced in the wake of Just-in-Time (JIT) production, Total Quality Management (TQM), and Total Quality Control (TQC)
which produce masses of information in an attempt to increase the visibility of employees, a strategy that lays the foundation for Panopticism, as we have seen. Even with the apparent lack of formalization of rules and procedures in flexible organizations like the Grand Seaside, we should not assume that they thrive on a complete absence of routines. As we have seen in Chapter 6, freedom from formal rules does not necessarily imply the absence of routines, despite a delegation of authority to frontline staff (and customers). As this chapter will demonstrate, the required homogenization of meaning underlying the establishment of routines, which rules attempt to secure, can even more effectively (since more flexibly) be achieved by other means.

It is important to note that forms of horizontal and vertical control are not always negative, that is, they do not always identify behaviour that fails to meet a certain level of normalcy but may also refer to that which exceeds it. The latter is even more important in the context of a philosophy of service excellence that demands continuous improvement and the exceeding of customer expectations. When used in the context of group work and peer surveillance, for instance, continuous improvement can become "a powerful instrument by which management can appropriate the ingenuity of the work force" (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992: 285).

Forms of horizontal surveillance (Sewell, 1998) may then be used to identify deviancy as much as excellence. Drawing employees' attention towards the identification of excellence can be an effective tool for breaking the reluctance of individuals to participate in the supervision of their peers. If spying on peers is expected to show beneficial consequences for those subjected to the gaze, individuals are more likely to engage in an activity that they, under different circumstances, may regard as illegitimate or immoral. In this respect, we may identify the Make the Little Things Count customer service program – which actively encourages employees to identify any form of excellence that their colleagues display and to reveal (indict) those responsible for acts of excellence to management – as an important technology of inducing and legitimizing surveillance. Not only does this technique bypass potential scruples of employees to work as organizational spies, introducing the morally questionable principle of peer surveillance through the back
door; it also instills a sense of constant visibility into those subjected to the Gaze of their peers. Even in instances where people are acclaimed or rewarded for the display of excellent behaviour, staff and management may come to realize that they are constantly on display: for better or worse. As Sewell (1998: 420) – who also identified team meetings as locations for the exercise of horizontal control, as "a forum for the team to reward or sanction its own members through public celebration or humiliation, respectively" – notices:

[It is the exposure of high performers that holds the key to continuous improvement through chimerical control: it provides a means by which the team's performance norms are continuously moved forward (Sewell, 1998: 420).

Despite the fact that vertical and, perhaps even more important, horizontal forms of control are crucial to corporate culturism and to technologies of power in particular, the new management doctrine is not confined to organizational members proper. "[E]xcellence is explicitly aimed at everyone" (du Gay 1996: 68), which is why processes of normalization, for example, do not stop with staff and management but also involve guests. Bill’s remark that the negligent parents, who left their baby on its own while dining at The Ocean, “should be given the Parent of the Months Award” bears a certain irony. While clearly made with a cynical undertone, it points to the crucial role and inevitable responsibility of customers as co-producers in the conduct of service encounters. Withholding cynicism, we could therefore quite legitimately ask why the hotel does not grant a “Guest of the Month Award” to those guests most obedient and committed to the co-production of service encounters?

As Sewell (1998) and Barker (1993) have demonstrated, at the level of peer-surveillance, it is not the authentic internalization and acceptance of norms that is demanded by group members. What members of the group are asked for and what they, respectively, will be held responsible for, is displayed compliance with the norms and rules of the group. In other words, as with vertical control, horizontal control implies a strong demonstrative element. It is people’s perceivable (visual, oral, or other) compliance that counts and this is where modes of (external) control and surveillance depart from forms of self-discipline (technologies of the self) that we soon will discuss. With the latter, the censor sits inside, which is the reason why
spatial metaphors such as horizontal or vertical fail as denotations for these technologies. To put it somewhat crudely, the difference between technologies of the power and those of the self appear, at the level of the individual subjected to them, as the distinction between coercion and commitment, between obedience and identification, as I shall elaborate in section 7.1.3. This does not, however, rule out — in fact, it implies — that the wants, needs, and desires thus suggested are imposed upon the subject. As we shall see in this chapter, subjectivity is only apparently constituted by freedom.

Once more, we should not overestimate the capacities and effectiveness of even the most sophisticated forms of surveillance, as intimidating as they may appear. Sewell (1998) notes rather amazed that, after all, surveillance seems to work: "there will always be blind spots in the gaze of the electronic eye" which offers, up to a certain point, those subjected to the gaze the chance of resistance — if only through sheer ignorance (Sewell: 1998: 425). As McKinley and Taylor observed in their study of an American multinational consumer electronics company, the same processes that ought to subject individuals to power through forms of horizontal control may turn out to constitute the locus for resistance:

The key to the workforce's resistance was, ironically, the public nature of peer review. Public scoring rendered those who continued to exercise the normalizing gaze visible. The disciplinary intent of peer review was inverted: public scoring identified not the deviants from the factory culture but its strongest adherents (McKinley and Taylor, 1998: 186).

The analogies to the public nature of guest and peer comments during the Morning Briefings are obvious. Those staff who publicly remind their colleagues of their duties, for instance, expose themselves as organizational spies. Those who are honoured for excellence and who establish, at the same time, a new benchmark that signals to their peers what they are expected to strive for, will not in each case attain the sympathy of their colleagues. In the context of continuous improvement as advocated in the customer service discourse, where excellence (the extraordinary) is considered normal, each person honoured silently reminds the others of their abnormality (insufficiency), their failure to live up to the standards of excellence.
Of course, it may be more difficult to ignore peer pressure, as Sewell (1998) points out; yet any external authority can be manipulated. This is why control is less effective than self-manipulation. Any physical Panoptic structure, be it created by architecture or electronic cameras, remains inevitably incomplete, even largely ineffective, unless it is incorporated by the individual. In other words, the Panopticon does not represent a physical but an essentially mental structure. After all, even Bentham's architectonic 'masterpiece' owed its functionality to the prisoners (self-) internalization (imagining) of control. If Panopticism was merely vertical control from a central source (Webster and Robbins, 1993; Hopper and Macintosh, 1998), it would constitute only another form of direct control asking for the same cost as any other of them: supervision. What makes Panopticism distinctively more effective and efficient is that it departs from even the more sophisticated forms of supervision by, ultimately, shedding the need for continuous external supervision. Hence, identifying Panopticism merely as a form of vertical (and unilateral) surveillance limits our analytical scope unduly and misses the full force of Panoptic control.

It is the internalization of control – brought about by a system of horizontal and vertical surveillance (sections 6.2 and 6.3) and furthered by the invocation of hypothetical service encounters and guests (section 6.4) – that provokes the transformation from mere control, supervision, or surveillance to forms of self-surveillance, such as Panoptic control. As seen in sections 6.2 to 6.4, the new quality of Panoptic control evolves around the transmutation from visual to imaginary control and implies a paradigmatic shift from the principal of presence to that of absence. Sewell and Wilkinson notice in this respect:

Within a purely visual approach to surveillance, the capacity of the system is at once created and limited by the physical architecture of the machinery and the factory which determines the penetration of the Panoptic gaze. The superstructure of control is created by the building itself and the arrangement of the machinery within the space it defines (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992: 283).
Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) distinguish such visually limited surveillance from an *Electronic Panopticon*. The latter thrives on computer based technology "but is no longer constrained by the limitations of physical architecture – a Panoptic gaze which can penetrate walls and where the physical presence of the overseer is no longer required" (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992: 283). Such an extended Panopticon would:

provide the means by which management can achieve the benefits that derive from the delegation of responsibility . . . whilst retaining authority and disciplinary control through the ownership of the superstructure of surveillance and the information it collects, retains, and disseminates (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992: 283).

As a result of such strategies of surveillance, power becomes "internalized . . . as subjects learn to survey themselves, to be reflexively self-regarding as if under the ever present and watchful eyes of surveillance" (Clegg, 1998: 35). In other words, emanating from the imaginization of the gaze of the Other and leading to an internalization of control, the logic of Panopticism demands that surveillance becomes effectively self-surveillance. However, this imagined gaze demands reproduction. Hence, to remain effective as a principle of subordination, Panopticism depends on the principle of checking (most often, visual) compliance (Jackson and Carter, 1998; McKinley and Taylor, 1998) – a principle that is, nevertheless, all the more efficient than executing supervision.

It should not be surprising then that forms of peer surveillance are constantly reaffirmed during the meetings in the hotel. In this sense, the ‘helpful’ comments that remind colleagues of their duties, which are made quite regularly during the Morning Briefings, function not only as a form of publish punishment for deviant behaviour. Perhaps more importantly, they (re-) evoke the belief in the omni-present gaze of the Other, reminding staff that they are constantly on display. The same applies to the *Make the Little Things Count* program. While the manifest purpose of the program is to honour excellence, its latent function is to reproduce the internalization of control. In this respect, those nominating their peers for an award could quite legitimately demand that they should be rewarded for their spy services.
to the company. The fact that such demands did not overtly arise reaffirms the subtlety of disciplinary control.

As we shall see in the next section, the thrust of discipline goes beyond the internalization of control, which logically implies a need for coercive power. Ultimately, discipline aims at another dimension: the soul of the individuals. In other words, whereas (self-) surveillance demands controlling individuals in the face of conflict; discipline attempts surrogating control through technologies of the self which aim at shaping individuals values and desires in an attempt to create consent.

7.1.2 Subjugation: From obedience to commitment

It is one thing developing systems of surveillance to the level where those who are made subject to an external censor (gaze) instill a sense of control as being omnipresent. It is this feeling of being constantly on display what makes Panopticism such a powerful technique for the generation of obedience.

Panopticism, however, is a conditional structure: it depends on the imagination of those subjected to it! These subjects have to act as if they are constantly watched by an external vigilant eye. It is, therefore, somewhat misleading when we refer to Panopticism as a representing an internalization of control. The locus of control is imagined by the individual, of course; yet, by the same token, the resulting image of the vigilant eye is projected into the outside world. The Other as the gaze of Panoptic surveillance is inevitably constituted as being external, this is why Sartre could say: “hell is other people” (Sartre, 1997).

It is another thing, however, to aspire to compliance by shaping an individual’s wishes, desires, and, ultimately, their sense of identity. Whereas surveillance seeks to control people’s behaviour, discipline attempts, ultimately, to control people’s thoughts. In other words, the step from surveillance to discipline, from bureaucratic (or direct) to normative (or cultural) control implies the shift from controlling people’s bodies to controlling people’s minds (Knights and Willmott, 1989). In the context of organizations, controlling people’s behaviour becomes (almost)
superfluous when those subjected to control commit their souls to the organization. We can certainly not expect that of prisoners of a Benthamite Panopticon. Although they may obey the orders of their guards, they do not have to identify with these orders: *obedience is not consent.* To achieve the latter, individuals subjected to power voluntarily have to comply with what is demanded. Although their *will* may not be power, they somehow have to *want* (the subjection to) that power.

Although a view of organizations as disciplinary institutions traces its origins back to Lukes’ (1974) three-dimensional view of power, we are not obliged to follow Lukes into the theoretical impasses his radical view of power creates (Clegg, 1989; Knights and Willmott, 1989). A conceptualization of organizations as disciplinary institutions is capable of identifying processes in which subjects come to recognize themselves as discrete and autonomous individuals whose sense of a clear identity is sustained through participation in social practices which are a condition and consequence of the exercise of power and the production of specific knowledges (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 538).

Especially, this will be the case when it refrains from ultimately inconsistent claims about *real interests* and *false consciousness.* In other words, although there are no subjects outside power/knowledge, we can analyze the processes and forms of knowledge that constitute particular identities.

**7.1.2.1 From technologies of power to technologies of the self**

We may conceptualize the shaping of individual’s sense of identity through technologies of the self, which underlies the shift from control to commitment, as a logical extension of techniques of power. There are a number of writers who have explicitly highlighted the role of such techniques in the process of identity formation (Covalevski et al., 1998; Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998; Townley; 1993 and 1998). Ezzamel and Willmott (1998: 364), for example, assert:
that the development of structures of control in capitalist enterprises is mediated
by the social construction and maintenance of a sense of self-identity by those
who are engaged in changing or defending these structures.

Accounting, for example, plays an important role in the subordination of labour
under the dictate of the market economy. It does this by making the complexity of
the process of production and the related activities more transparent and intelligible.

Quantitative measures of performance serve to translate the messiness and
uncertainties of managing complex divisions of labour into a web of seemingly
neutral and objective calculations that render human activities visible and

Disregarding its seemingly neutral appearance, Ezzamel and Willmott ask us to
notice the "role of accounting in constructing economic and organizational realities"
(Ezzamel and Willmott 1998: 366). The realities thus constructed have severe
implications for individuals in organizations.

Measures of performance do not simply report performance but actively shape
activity to the extent that employees are induced to adjust their behaviour in an
effort to produce a level of performance compatible with maintaining their

In other words, accounting as a disciplinary practice invades the processes of identity
formation and reproduction.

In Chapter 5, we could clearly discern the symbolic value of numbers to the Grand
Seaside hotel. In representing organizational reality, the numbers did not only
allowed for "a sense of how we are doing", they also aided the symbolic (re-)
construction of individual and organizational identity. The meta-narrative of the
race between organization and budget linked a latent representational aspect of the
numbers with the construction of a particular (collective) identity. However, this
"sense of how we are doing" also provoked responsive action: an action that became
prerequisite for that (collective) identity. In other words, the numbers not only
represented the performance of the organization, they also implied a certain
obligation: they asked for the demonstration of commitment to the Grand Seaside
Family. Such commitment was expressed by the contribution that each individual made to the survival and prosperity of that bond. Whoever wanted to be a useful member of the family had to meet the obligations and demands arising from the discourse of "customer service.

In another study, Covalevski et al. (1998) conceptualize Management by Objectives (MBO) and mentoring as technologies of the self. These management practices owe their efficacy to disciplinary techniques such as confession. In confession, "people, either by themselves or with the help of others, act upon their bodies, thoughts, and conduct so as to attain happiness, fulfillment, success, health, or wisdom" (Foucault, 1988: 18, as quoted in: Covalevski et al., 1998: 297). Or they may be structured around avowal: a process during which "the one who speaks identifies with what is being said and thereby avows" (Covalevski et al., 1998: 298). Both technologies complement each other as ways of knowing and seem to generate an almost vicious circularity: "Self-knowledge is thereby linked with self-disclosure and self-transformation" (Covalevski et al., 1998: 298).

In practice, the consequences of such technologies of the self, however, may be ambiguous. Covalevski et al. (1998: 313) demonstrate further that the same technologies that drive individuals into confession or avowal may "serve as locus of resistance to disciplinary practices". Most importantly, Covalevski et al. (1998) highlight that those trying actively to shape the identity of the subject may become subjected to the very same process of identity formation. Managers who attempt leading by example to invoke particular values and behaviour in their subordinates, may have to change themselves to resemble the ideal they are 'selling'. Mentoring, for example, disciplines both protégé and mentor.

While the intent was to assist the protégé to develop and become tied to an emerging organizational identity, in the act of listening, verbalizing, and making visible partner-like behavior, even the identity of the mentor showed signs of subtle transformation (Covalevski et al., 1998: 315).

The ambiguity of these technologies also becomes apparent in the context of the Grand Seaside. Those who set the standards for service excellence are also required

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to strive towards this goal and those who ask for commitment to the Grand Seaside Family have to show their attachment and their sense of responsibility too. From this perspective, we may understand Tim’s concern with equality as a form of demonstrating his commitment to the family. Indeed, his concern with equality—that is, his desire to prove his commitment—is so intense that he not only enters into an open argument about the issue of the Social Club membership with Bill. His various attempts to demonstrate an egalitarian attitude—for instance, when he mingles with the staff during lunch or when he encourages staff to call him by his first name at the All-Staff-Meeting—bear a sense of desperation, if not autocracy: people are almost ordered to feel equal. That the equality thus demonstrated is strictly confined and does not subvert the essentially hierarchical structure of the family bond has become evident on several occasions in this thesis. Ironically, the Grand Seaside Family indeed implies an egalitarian element, one that escapes Tim’s demonstrative efforts: the display of commitment, in its various forms, is compulsory to all members of the family.

Discipline is thus a configuration of power inserted as a way of thinking, acting and instituting. The disciplined member of the organization wants on his or her own what the corporation wants. The most powerful and powerless in traditional terms are equally subjected, though there is no doubt who is advantaged (Deetz, 1992: 42).

Townley (1993 and 1998) conceptualizes discipline as a way of knowing. She asserts that power individualizes in a double sense: it renders individuals into both objects and subjects of knowledge. In the first sense, they become known; in the second sense, they render themselves into subjects when knowing themselves as objects (self-knowledge) (Townley, 1998: 200). "In both cases, knowledge of becomes knowledge over" (Townley, 1998: 203). As Townley argues that technologies of the self are not purely negative, that is, constraining; they are also positive in that they allow individuals to create and maintain a sense of identity. Technologies of the self "present the individuals with a way of seeing themselves measured against a transitory ideal" (Townley, 1998: 203).
In line with Townley, a number of other writers have stressed the importance of the establishment of an *ideal-type* or *model worker*. In the past the term was associated with collectivist regimes (Stalin's use of Stakhanovites; the various model workers glorified in Maoism) and to societal exhortation. However, reference is being made here to an image that functions as role model for individuals in the organization, an ideal that they are expected to match or, at least, to strive for. It serves to underscore the efficacy of technologies of the self (Deetz, 1992; Doray, 1988; Hopper and Macintosh, 1998; Jackson and Carter, 1998; McKinley and Taylor, 1998; Townley, 1998). Jackson and Carter (1998) claim that in order to manipulate those subjected to discipline, an ideal-type is constructed, one that is designed to constitute a benchmark for those aiming to comply with the demands of the disciplinary system. As Doray (1988) has shown, attributes and behaviour of such an ideal-type can acquire the status of an internal law. Hopper and Macintosh (1998) confirm these findings. They claim that managing identities was an important aspect of the disciplinary system at Ford. By implanting into the minds of those governed an ideal-typical role model of worker or manager, those identities became self-policing (Hopper and Macintosh, 1998: 144).

### 7.1.2.2 Normalization: Merging technologies of power and technologies of the self

The similarities between the ideal-types just described and those established at the Grand Seaside Hotel are striking. The processes of categorization that produce normal staff (and normal guests) provide model identities for those subjected to the customer service discourse and lay the foundation for the normalization of management, staff, and guests. It is important to note that on this occasion not only practices of categorization enter directly into processes of identity formation. As a consequence of the construction of and identification with such model identities, technologies of power and technologies of the self *amalgamate* within the processes of *normalization*. Quoting Foucault, we can refer to this amalgamation as *governmentality*.
This contact between technologies of domination of others and those of the self I
call governmentality (Foucault, 1988: 19).

Systems of signification that enter the process of identity formation ought not to be
reduced just to language. From a (radical) textual perspective, other institutional
forms, such as artefacts and routines, are equally relevant (Deetz 1992). An
artefactual structure such as the architectural design of the hotel, for example, can be
quite enlightening in this respect. It not only positions (segmentizes) the division
into front and back area individuals in the organizational space, it also constitutes
particular identities: such as staff and guests. The circle becomes closed with
individuals identifying themselves with (being) staff or guest. Once more,
technologies of power and those of the self seem to merge and the front/back division
of the hotel turns into a demarcation of governmentality.

As we have seen in section 6.3, normalization implies the establishment and
specification of norms, the ranking of individuals according to those norms, and the
active normalization of individuals by correcting abnormal thoughts, deeds, or
feelings (Foucault, 1977). Normalization allows for much more flexible forms of
management, as the norms thus established are neither fixed nor static (Covaleski et
al., 1998). But normalization depends on the existence of abnormality. Covaleski et
al., (1998) contend that:

To define something as abnormal not only implies that it is against the norm but
that it can be made subject to normalization. Accordingly, norms do not situate
the abnormal outside the normal as heterogeneous and “other” ; rather, they
homogenize qualitative differences through quantitative comparisons and then
incite effort to normalize the abnormal (Covaleski et al., 1998: 296).

I would like to qualify this statement with respect to experiences at the Grand
Seaside Hotel. Of course, abnormality can never be completely external to the
discourse of normality. Yet, conceptual normalcy is precisely defined through its
Other, that is, deviancy. At a conceptual level, normalcy is established by
positioning its Other, deviancy, as being outside the realm of the normal: for how
else could I define myself as being normal if not against the horizon of deviance.
Hence, the Otherness of abnormalcy requires a certain externalization of those who are deviant.

With respect to the Grand Seaside, externalization means that the organization segments or marks abnormal guests, for example, significantly for symbolic purposes: to make apparent those who do not comply with the norm as being deviant, to mark them with the stigma of abnormalcy. Covalevski et al., (1998) are correct when observing that such exclusion is hardly ever total or continuous. The whole thrust of normalization derives from the fact that those subjected to this discourse are offered the chance of amendment. Those categorized as abnormal are deliberately left with the opportunity for improvement. Hence, it is through the desire to achieve, maintain, or – in the case of excellence, where the extraordinary becomes normal – even exceed a certain level, that normalcy ultimately channels behaviour. Disciplinary power, then, "is based on the action of the norm" (Covalevski et al., 1998: 295).

Drawing on considerations about practices of normalization, we can now specify (and justify) identification of the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside as a disciplinary system and the Grand Seaside Hotel Family as a normalizing form of identity. This family is, as we established in Chapter 5, an institution that grants identity only in exchange for commitment to the principles of service excellence. This conditional bond is normalizing, as it involves not only the establishment of members of the family (management, staff, and guests) as objects of knowledge (objectification), by recording their behaviour, preferences, etc.; it also assigns a particular identity to them (subjection). Whether those subjected to the customer service discourse will be granted the aspired model identity depends on their display of obedience and commitment, that is, the normalcy of their behaviour. In sum, the individualization of the objects/subjects thus constituted comes about through a "technique of overlapping subjection and objectification" (Foucault, 1977: 305).
7.1.2.3 Subjugation and the crisis of fetishized identity

The spread of technologies of the self and their overlapping with technologies of power induces the process of what Knights and Willmott (1989) have termed *subjugation*: a process "which produces self-disciplining subjectivity" (550) and in which "subjectivity is fetishized in identity" (535). As the authors elaborate:

modern technologies of power subjugate by forcing individuals back in on themselves so that they become tied to their own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 550).

Following the example of Ezzamel and Willmott (1993), we can define *self-identity* in reference to Giddens (1991):

> Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is *the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography* . . . the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going* . . . the persistence of feelings of personhood in a continuous self and body (Giddens, 1991: 53ff.; emphasis original)

Knights and Willmott (1989) make clear that the persistence of such an ongoing narrative cannot be presupposed uncritically and they highlight the vulnerability of the modern individual: an individual that is doomed to be free (Sartre, 1997). The individual experiences the sheer contingency of modern identity as a threat. Exposed to the insecurity and instability of modern identity and forced to constantly reinvent itself, the individual seeks comfort in *identity fetishism*: "an illusory solidification of subjectivity" (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 543). This "fetishism of identity disregards the social processes through which identity formation and reproduction is accomplished". More precisely, such fetishism "involves a self-deception in which subjectivity as a sensuous process is identified as an objective characteristic of subjectivity, as a given identity" (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 544).

It is illuminating that the individual’s desire for stability, that Knights and Willmott suggest, seemingly balances the precarious and isolating tendencies of (post-) modernity. Such balancing of flexibility/contingency with stability also becomes apparent in the context of the Grand Seaside. The status of the Grand Seaside
Family as an identity granting institution is quite ambivalent in this respect. While it clearly shows disciplinary tendencies, subjecting individuals to a particular identity that is contingent and precarious, it also provides a sense of (an imagined) community and stability. The risk and anxiety that is associated with the contingency of that bond and the identity derived from it, is balanced through both the paternalism permeating life at the hotel and the complementarity associated with the family image. In other words, the Grand Seaside Family as a bond of organic solidarity seems to prevent what Durkheim (1988) called a state of anomie.

It should not surprise us that in the context of everyday life at the Grand Seaside, the apparently natural and objective status of identities such as management, staff, or guest, is rather uncritically accepted. Why should individuals in the conduct of their everyday routines question the very foundations of their sense of self and reality? Even some of those who, for professional reasons, study organizations often fall short of displaying such reflexivity. Deetz (1992) therefore feels therefore compelled to remind us that:

Prior to any analysis focusing on managers, worker or women, and their various interests and reasoning processes is a concern with how these classifications come to exist in at all. This leads further to questions regarding how they are produced as meaningful, how they are utilized in producing certain types of conflict and their resolutions, and how they preclude other interests and conflicts within and among the various groupings (Deetz 1992: 28).

As this thesis has also shown, the (categories) identities granted through the customer service discourse are anything but objectively given. As we have seen, (normal) staff as well as (normal) guests are discursively constructed through a whole number of symbolic processes. In the normal conduct of life at the Grand Seaside, that these concepts of staff and customer and the membership status (identity) they signal are taken for granted, only underlines their fetishized character. Only on rare occasions, in situations of crisis, is this form of self-deception suspended, is the curtain of normalcy torn apart, and the contingent and precarious character of these identities becomes obvious. In this respect, we can quite literally identify occasions such as Edward’s redundancy or Di’s resignation as instances of identity crisis.
We can conclude, then, that within the institution of the Grand Seaside Family, as in
the example of strategies of normalization, technologies of power and technologies
of the self seem to merge, objectifying and subjecting, that is, *subjugating*, its
members. Membership in the Grand Seaside Family bears, therefore, all the
ambiguity of modern identity: being sovereign yet dependent, being free yet
constrained, being subject yet subjected.

7.2 Contextualizing conflict, consensus, and meaning

As I have argued, it is the contingency of the Grand Seaside Family and the
precarious status of the identity it grants that allows for normalizing and, ultimately,
subjugating individuals. Those who *want* to be or maintain themselves as members
of the organization also acquire with their identity a set of obligations that defines
this very identity that they *must* comply with. As indicated, such membership seems
to imply elements of both freedom and determinacy, of *consent and compliance*.
The issues of consent and compliance are closely linked both to Foucauldian
technologies of power and those of the self. So far, my usage of the former notion
seemed to suggest technologies that achieve compliance and that imply some form of
*coercion*. My usage of technologies of the self, on the other hand, was associated
with strategies of self-subordination and seems to imply elements of choice, *consent*,
or commitment. The notions of technologies of power and technologies of the self,
however, are rather complex and it happens only rarely that authors explicate the
processes and criteria that brought them to subsume particular social practices under
either of these categories. Do technologies of power, for instance, rule out any form
of consent, and are they based purely on coercion? Conversely, do technologies of
the self result from an individual’s free will, and are they, hence, purely based on
consensus? Or, do such technologies imply elements of conflict? Ultimately, does
social life dichotomously separate into instances of conflict and those of consent?
For the purpose of contextualizing (signing) the account here provided, I will add some considerations on the issues of power, consent, and coercion that attempt to address the questions just raised. To shed some more light on the essentially hybrid nature of social life and to further explicate processes of categorization in ethnographic research, we may turn to Haugaard’s (1997) elaboration on consent and conflict in his book *The Constitution of Power*. Through its interpretation of Haugaard’s book, this section demonstrates not only the multi-faceted nature of power and the complexity of the social relationships it infuses. Haugaard also provides an insightful account of the immanently precarious status of social order that is brought about through the generation of shared meaning—an insight that will provide the basis for our further discussion. Finally, by critically reflecting upon Haugaard’s thoughts, we shall be able to identify that it is the creative (definitory) power of authors/ readers that brings power into existence.

### 7.2.1 Haugaard on power, consensus, and conflict

Among the various theorists of power, who either see conflict or consensus as the foundation of social order, Haugaard claims to assume “a middle position: sometimes there is consensus, sometimes conflict, most frequently, there is both” (Haugaard, 1997: 137). He seeks to write himself into a position that associates him with theorists such as Foucault, Clegg, Bourdieu, or Giddens, on all of whom he frequently draws. The assumed coexistence of conflict and consent not only results from the “complexity of people’s motives” but also arises from the “dual nature of all social action whereby it has both a goal-oriented and a structural aspect” (Haugaard, 1997: 137).

To Haugaard, *goal-oriented* (teleological) conduct implies “a decision among alternative courses of action” (Haugaard, 1997: 119) with choice being derived from discursive consciousness. Haugaard here uses Giddens’ (1984) distinction between *practical and discursive consciousness* (knowledge). In brief, the former constitutes our stock of taken-for-granted knowledge that remains on a level of tacit
understanding, whereas the latter is explicitly manifest in people’s consciousness and can be called upon, for instance, for the purpose of rationalizing a certain conduct.

It is important to note that although goals are always discursively available, not all social conduct is governed by goals. More often this will not be the case, since the most social action is produced and reproduced (routinized) at the level of practical consciousness, as authors such as Giddens and Bourdieu assert. Hence, our daily routines – the taken-for-granted practices of everyday life that constitute the structures of society, as Haugaard calls them – are mostly based on tacit understanding. It usually takes an external stimulus – for instance, when people are approached to elaborate the apparently self-evident aspects of social life – to provoke individuals’ questioning of these structures. On occasions where such questioning does occur, however, processes of (self-) reflection transform practical into discursive knowledge while turning structures into institutions.

While goals are always discursive it may not be assumed conversely that all social order has its origins in practical conscious knowledge... In order to distinguish between structures with discursive origin from those of social life as a whole, let us call the former institutions and the latter structures (Haugard, 1997: 130f; emphasis original).

Such “[s]ocial structures/institutions enable actors to realize predictable outcomes through the reproduction of meaning” (Haugard, 1997: 138). This implies to Haugaard that “[s]tructures and institutions are always goal-specific and frequently actor-specific” (Haugard, 1997: 138).

7.2.1.1 The six instances of power

Based on Haugaard’s identification of goals and structures/institutions, we can, then, identify six ideal-typical constellations that structure social life: six instances in which an A wants a B to do X. What comes, perhaps, most easily up to our mind are instances in which actors either agree or disagree on both goals and structures (Haugard, 1997: 142). Such instances of either pure consensus or pure conflict are
extreme situations. Whereas the former would lead to the (almost) certain production of the agreed outcomes, the latter would represent a state of war in which the outcome would be uncertain and determined by coercion. Except for instances of pure conflict — where A and B agree to disagree on both structures and goals — or pure consent — where A and B agree on both points — there are, then, another four hybrid alternatives conceivable. On these occasions, actors agree/disagree on one aspect, yet overall either conflict or consent prevails, that is, structures overrides goals or vice versa (see Haugaard, 1997: 145).

Where, for instance, consent prevails while the goals are disputed, “a commitment to the rules of the game entails a tacit acceptance of the possibility of defeat” (Hauggaard, 1997: 148). Hence, power is exercised in the face of conflict, yet without the force of coercion. This form of power is common in organizational life and at the Grand Seaside. Wherever an individual obeys while disagreeing with the order received, this form of power prevails. For example, staff may be in conflict with an order given by Tim, yet they may still obey based on their acceptance of management’s prerogative to assign orders. Discursively, such staff are in conflict, while practically they consent. In other words, this constellation is one of consensual conflict (Hauggaard, 1997: 153). Although this constellation is based on normative commitment to the rules of the game and their legitimacy, such commitment is not unlimited. Often, defeat is accepted under the assumption that others may also consent under similar circumstances. Therefore, defeat is accepted only (as long) as it implies the chance of (future) winning.

It is precisely the absence of the possibility of ever winning which makes minorities in divided societies withdraw their consent to majority rule democracy (Hauggaard, 1997: 149).

Under circumstances where future wins appear impossible, exit (Hirschman, 1970), as performed by Edward and Di of the Grand Seaside, becomes the logical consequence.

The second hybrid is the one where consent prevails as goals override structures. As goals imply discursive consciousness, this process implies a transformation of
practical to discursive knowledge. Haugaard uses the example of the Marxian categories of class-for-itself and class-in-itself to illustrate this constellation.

By virtue of class consciousness, the class-for-itself, knows that the structures which it reproduces, through its social practices, are contrary to its interests (Haugaard, 1997: 155).

In the context of organizations such as the Grand Seaside, such behaviour is, although irrational at first glance, anything but rare. We may only remember Bill’s public confrontation with Tim over the issue of Social Club membership. During that dispute, Bill tore apart the facade of harmony characteristic of the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside when he revealed that cost-saving (profit-generation), and not dedication to staff or guests, formed the basis of Tim’s concern with service excellence. In other words, although staff, for one reason or another, actively played their part in the customer service discourse, they seemed to be well aware that the goals of the organization were not their own. Hence, staff may be committed to goals of service excellence — for instance, when showing a genuine concern for customer’s wants or needs — while, at the same time, they may realize that their behaviour ultimately benefits other interests. In effect, this constellation shows the same consequences as the other hybrid discussed above:

Whatever the type of conflict or consensus, on the consensual side of the spectrum outcomes are always realized unless resources are lacking (Haugaard, 1997: 156).

Things are somewhat more complicated wherever conflict prevails. To produce outcomes, the situation “must artificially be tipped in favour of consensus or compliance” (Haugaard, 1997: 156). In other words, what is needed is some form of coercion:

Coercion works by making non-compliance in some way costly. It does so in the form of a threat. This threat means artificially adding a consequence to certain outcomes which is not actually intrinsic to those outcomes (Haugaard, 1997: 156).
As Haugaard claims, order based on coercion is more precarious than that founded on commitment: potentially, any change in the status quo between compliance and consensus may result in the tipping over of that (im-) balance and may thus produce different outcomes.

The third scenario is one where there is the *dominance of conflict with goals overriding structure*. Typical examples are, on one side, free-riders – who are similar to “the person who cheats at chess” – and, on the other side, people who “fully accept the rules of the game but are unable to consent to defeat because of a deeply felt opposition to the outcome” (Haugaard, 1997: 157). When Leo, for example, reminds customers of their duties as co-producers in service encounters (asking them to adjust the volume of their conversation to a level appropriate to the ambience of The Ocean), he does not deny, in principle, the right of guests to lead a (loud) conversation. Yet, his opposition to the outcome of such behaviour (other guests felt disturbed by the loud conversation), provokes him to confront those guests (although he may have reacted differently in case those guest would have been the only guest in The Ocean at that point in time).

The fourth alternative course of action is, once more, one where *conflict prevails*. However, while *agreement* is established on *goals*, it cannot overcome the *conflict about structures*. As Haugaard explains:

Given that conflict over structure always implies conscious knowledge, it is an instance where, when allowed a free choice, discursive consciousness knowledge of practices would lead actors to refrain from the pursuit of common goals. Consequently, as in the other two forms of predominantly conflictual interaction, coercion is necessary to make up the consensual deficit if goals are to be realized (Haugaard, 1997: 159f).

In other words, actors with common interests may yet enter into conflict, as one of them perceives the proposed conduct as illegitimate. Without too much effort, we may envisage staff at the Grand Seaside who – although agreeing on the principles of service excellence – will report (nominate) neither excellent nor inferior conduct of their colleagues to management because they see such a form of spying on their
peers as immoral. It is the 'Make the Little Things Count' customer service program, with its focus on excellence, that seeks to provide the necessary 'persuasive force' to achieve these goals.

What distinguishes the last two alternatives from a state of pure conflict, is the fact that with the latter any resolution is entirely based on coercion:

In a situation of pure conflict (war), there are no rules which will allow one actor to prevail over the other. Structures and institutions, on the other hand, encode conflict of war by proceduralizing conflict (Haugaard, 1997: 161).

The two hybrids that imply conflict as overriding consent, however, are not purely coercive, as they always imply an element of consensus to either structures or goals. Often, constellations of this type may result in a "high level of cognitive dissonance" (Haugaard, 1997: 157) of those involved, leaving them somewhat torn apart between their sense of commitment to and (simultaneous) disagreement to either structure or goals.

As we have seen, individuals often act under circumstances where they either choose the conduct they pursue in line with their own will, or, alternatively, where they are forced into action against their intentions. Except for the three instances in which consent prevails, any mode of conduct chosen will entail an element of coercion with the result that the outcomes of such conduct are rather uncertain and precarious. Only in instances where conflict prevails, may we assert that the outcomes thus realized are brought about by force. Where consent prevails, however, we may assume, even in the face of conflict about either structures or goals, that the consequences of such conduct are founded in consensus. However, as Haugaard points out:

The idea of self-imposed suppression and constraint runs contrary to the common perception of domination where it is assumed that one class dominates the another by subjecting that class to interdictions and oppressive rules (Haugaard, 1997: 192).
In other words, we find it rather difficult accepting that people may “fight to be repressed” as such a thought “runs entirely counter to our tacit assumption that people enjoy freedom and, as a consequence, never impose constraint upon themselves” (Haugaard, 1997: 193). Why is it, then, that people choose constraints, and why do they consent to lose? To answer this question, we have to address the issues of meaning and truth.

7.2.2 Introducing structures, meaning, and truth

Haugaard argues that conflict requires discursive knowledge, which distinguishes it from consent, as the latter may be tacit. As a consequence, conflict may arise either out of disagreement about goals and/or structures or through misunderstanding or as a result of both.

Conflicts over meaning are integral to conflict which is ultimately rooted in culture (Haugaard, 1997: 161).

However, where a conflict is solely about meaning (and not about goals or structures), such “conflict is inherently irresolvable except through coercion” (Haugaard, 1997: 161; emphasis DB). As Haugaard elaborates:

Meaning is created through structure and, as a consequence, conflict over meaning is a form of structural conflict. When a conflict arises solely out of a disagreement over meaning, it is a form of conflict which is not open to conflict resolution. Even if the conflict is removed by one stage and a set of procedures and norms are agreed for the purpose of resolving the conflict, the conflict will not be resolvable because of the arbitrary nature of meaning (Haugaard, 1997: 160).

In any event, the struggle for meaning is the presupposition for any conflict – goals and structures must be interpreted first if one is to disagree about them.
Social conflict over goals does not take place without the establishment of a surrounding context of social order... For those inside the system, structural stability creates the parameters for meaningful conflict (Haugaard, 1997: 191).

Meaning, then, is systemic, created by structure. More precisely, it is created by a system of differences – an issue that we will take up again below. For any statement or act to be meaningful, it has to be acknowledged as such by the receiver, not the sender. It achieves this by referring to a shared interpretative horizon, as Haugaard calls it.

If any action is meaningful, it is so as part of a social system. It is the system which confers meaning upon acts through difference (Haugaard, 1997: 164).

Meaning is determined by conditions of felicity being conferred upon actors by other actors. If others are willing to grant the same meaning to an act of commanding as is intended by the speaker, then the intended meaning of the command is reproduced (Haugaard, 1997: 167).

Haugaard concurs with Foucault and other post-structuralists that “the meaning of a text cannot be determined by the author” (Haugaard, 1997: 171. However, Haugaard is careful not to drive this thought too far and to proclaim, precipitously, the death of the author. To him, “constraint is not the same as determinacy” (Haugaard, 1997: 163).

What actors say is not determined by discourse formations but is constraint. In this sense, the author is never the product of a discursive formation. A discourse formation does not determine internally what a person thinks, rather, an individual finds him or herself constrained by the desire to make statements in preference to utterances (Haugaard, 1997: 171; emphasis DB).

Hence, although a discourse imposes structural order upon those individuals it subjects, it cannot fully determine their action, if only because of the indexicality of meaning. Yet, in the face of the latter, in the face of the indexicality and fluidity of meaning, how is social order possible? Haugaard provides an answer: Order comes about through the production of truth. Discourses, according to Foucault are systems of truth production.
A regime of truth production is a set of structural constraints constituted as a set of local conditions of felicity and infelicity (Haugaard, 1997: 169).

In other words, a discourse produces order by constraining the choice of actors with respect to what can meaningfully be said or done. In this sense, (shared) meaning provides the foundation for both consensus and conflict.

Literally speaking an actor can choose not to affirm truth but such failure to react appropriately is infelicitous. Those who do not affirm truth will not be heard and, by not hearing them, social order will have been protected by structural constraint (Haugaard, 1997: 209).

This is why statements that exceed the constraints set by any discursive community as an interpretative horizon are not merely to be regarded as inappropriate but are also to be considered as constituting nonsense. Elements of recognition by those authored of those authoring are essential, one might say.

The constraining force of discourses is not something that merely 'happens' to individuals. Such interpretative horizons are collectively created over time and, as Bourdieu (1991) has shown, exist objectively, independently of the will and consciousness of particular individuals. This is why discourses are systemic. Although, individuals may sometimes feel 'thrown' into such constraints, for instance when entering a new discursive community, they have to actively acquire (learn) the rules that structure the particular discourse. In other words, individuals are socialized into discourses.

A system of truth production has within it a body of constraints – a regime of felicities to be made and infelicities to be avoided. Hence, the common speech usage of discipline to refer to an academic discipline captures a very real aspect of social life. When people are socialized into a discipline of knowledge they are not only taught facts but they acquire way of thinking about problems. This way of thinking about problems is a system into which they are socialized (Haugaard, 1997: 210).

Again, being socialized into a system does not necessarily mean that one concurs with the rules it has established. Still, as we have seen, shared meaning provides the
basis for both consensus and conflict — an insight that Haugaard draws from the analogy of social life with a game of chess. However, as he acknowledges:

real life is unlike chess in a number of important respects . . . Firstly, in real life, players do not begin with the same number of pieces and, secondly, the meanings of the pieces which they begin with do not appear so obviously conventional as they do in chess (Haugaard, 1997: 207, emphasis original).

If the latter is the case, this is because, in real life, what is essentially conventional (such as social structures) is represented in the form of truth. The apparent non-arbitrariness of social structures explains why people consent (to lose) even in the face of very severe consequences. As Haugaard continues:

Truth is a method of reification which reinforces specific modes of domination; truth is a way of stabilizing social relations by enabling one actor to prevail over the other without physical violence. If there were no belief in truth (or . . . other reifying factors) the only alternative to agreement would be war (Haugaard, 1997: 208).

Such stabilization may as well be accomplished by means of other modes of reification. While, more recently, tradition and authority are on the decline, new forms of reification, such as naturalization, have become increasingly important. As we shall see in our discussion of corporate culturism below, the discourse of customer service is such an order-generating institution, one that seeks to naturalize (normalize) meaning. Hence, de-naturalization, achieved through exposing the reification of social relationships, is what social analysis should aim for — a task that echoes the calls of those who call for a critical analysis of organizations (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Deetz, 1998; Willmott, 1993).

7.2.3 Contextualizing technologies: the ethnographer’s struggle for meaning

Let us briefly follow the suggestion just made and apply such a critical perspective to our own enterprise of reading/writing organization studies. To do so, we will put some of Haugaard’s (1997) elaboration under closer scrutiny. Despite the
complexity and insightfulness of Haugaard's considerations, some problems emerge when we try to apply them in the context of empirical research. In this section, I will point out some of those problems. This is not done, however, just to reveal inconsistencies in Haugaard's conceptualization — no concept could ever be completely free of inconsistency. I will point out difficulties that surface when we attempt to apply categories or concepts, such as those of Haugaard or Foucault, in the context of empirical research. Hence, we may consider the problems that unravel in this section as being somewhat significant to Foucauldian inspired analyses of power.

Part of the problem with Haugaard's concept stems from Foucault's (1988) explicit definition of technologies of power and those of the self — which represent only two among four technologies, the others being those of production and those of sign-systems. Foucault (1988) distinguishes technologies of power (or domination) "which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject" from technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988: 18). Technologies of the self are those:

which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1988: 18).

It becomes apparent, that, as Foucault himself stresses, the separations between these technologies are somewhat blurred and that they "hardly ever function separately" (1988: 18) — owing to the hybridity of social life. This means that in the analysis of disciplinary technologies, such as those employed in the Grand Seaside hotel, it is often difficult identifying a certain organizational practice as representing one or the other technology — the institution of the Grand Seaside Family may be considered exemplary in this respect. I suggest, therefore, that Foucault's definition stated above offers two (most) plausible ways of categorizing.
7.2.3.1 Technologies and direction

We could identify technologies of the self as essentially self-directed, whereas technologies of power target other people. To put it somewhat cruelly, in this case we could start with the assumption that social practices are generally directed towards others to separate those from instances where this would not be the case. The latter would then constitute instances of self-directed conduct, which one takes to mean technologies of the self. This distinction is further suggested through Foucault’s exploration of the idea that technologies of the self arise from the individual’s care for the self mediated through and obscured by self-knowledge (Foucault, 1988: 22ff.). However, what constitutes such self-directed action may well be subject to dispute. One could argue, for instance, that any operations that people conduct “on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1988: 18) are never performed in splendid isolation but comprise a whole network of social actions. When a person B performs an operation upon herself as to transform herself into a useful member of the Grand Seaside Family, for example, she may do so as part of an attempt to determine the conduct of others. In other words B may decide to strive for excellence (e.g. by participating in the customer service training) as part of a strategy to acquire the recognition of other family members. In this sense, B’s transformation of herself implies an attempt to determine the conduct of others and in this respect we would be at pains classifying her conduct as representing either of the two technologies.

In other words, when used in the context of empirical research, Foucault’s definition seems rather under-theorized. This problem surfaces, as soon as we are confronted with the network of social action that constitutes (organizational) reality, and we attempt to subsume a certain action under the notion of technologies of the self, for instance. There is hardly any social action that we could not identify as representing peoples’ operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” (Foucault, 1988: 18). As long as people seem to act according to their own will (and are not forced into action by others), we could identify such instances as implying operations on those individuals’ thoughts or conduct. Further, with respect to the
aims of such conduct, we could hardly envisage any self-determined action that does not, in one sense or another, attempt "a transformation of self in order to attain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1988: 18). Finally, we have seen above that what counts, as "transformation of self" may be open to dispute. A classification of a certain action to either of the categories seems to require cutting arbitrarily into the flow of action (Schutz, 1974). What becomes clear, however, is that technologies are defined not by their outcomes but through the intentions people have for choosing a certain conduct.

7.2.3.2 Technologies and force

In contrast, we could attempt separating technologies of power from those of the self by associating the former with coercion whereas the latter imply the consent of the individual subjected to them. This separation is supported by the terminology Foucault uses. To write of how one might "determine the conduct of others" or "submit them" to certain ends or domination "clearly provokes associations with coercion and points to the constraining force of power. To say that one will "permit individuals" or they will "transform themselves" grants these individuals authority and will and points to the enabling aspects of power (Foucault, 1988: 18; emphasis, DB). However, what is less clear is whether the voluntarism/determinism that seems to underlie such categorization is tenable or whether instances are conceivable under which conflict and consensus coexist. With Foucault, we can clearly reject any voluntarism/determinism and approve of the essentially hybrid nature of social life. He has spent much time to show that power is not something merely negative, determining the conduct of others, that is forcing them, but shows clearly positive tendencies, enabling individuals to act according to their 'own' will. Further, as Haugaard has shown, except for instances of pure consensus or pure coercion, social life is rather hybrid in nature with consent and conflict coexisting.
7.2.3.3 Identifying intentions

In any event, identifying social action as representing technologies of the self seems a rather difficult enterprise. So far, we have not been able to identify a conceptual Other that would define what technologies of the self are. In either case, whether we define such technologies around a 'transformation of self' (whatever that may imply) or around 'non-coercion', we would not only have to arbitrarily isolate sequences from the flow of action, we would also have to identify the intentions that brought actors to chose a certain conduct.

There are, basically, two ways of establishing people's intentions. On the one hand, we could ask the respective individuals themselves. This procedure would be in line with most interpretative approaches in social science and has philosophically been justified most vigorously by Anscombe (1958). On the other hand, we could, on the basis of our interpretation of the intentions of others, ascribe certain intentions to people's conduct. At first glance, the second option seems autocratic if not invalid in the context of social research. It seems to imply the (in principal untenable) position of a detached observer and seems to lead to the production of what ethnographers have called a colonizing account (Denzin, 1997). The first alternative appears much more sound, as it suggest taking people seriously and presenting their thoughts (intentions) in an unfiltered way. There are some reasons, however, why we may question this appearance.

First, when put under closer scrutiny, claims to represent people's thoughts in an unfiltered way are ill founded. When approaching social reality with a textual approach, as we have done throughout this thesis, reading social action is clearly a process of interpretation. As we have elaborated, meaning is always brought to a text by the reader (receiver), not the author. This fact is not transcended when we ask people directly about their intentions. Whatever their answer may be, its meaning is ultimately defined by the one who receives the answer. To put it somewhat crudely, the difference between asking people directly about their intentions and authoritatively ascribing such intentions to their conduct is only gradual and does not imply a qualitative threshold.
Second, as authors as diverse as Bourdieu (1990a and b), Clegg, (1989), or Giddens (1984 and 1991) have argued, people can be mistaken (and often they are) about their intentions. Only a (very) limited amount of such intentionality may be given to people in their discursive consciousness. Hence, asking people about their intentions may result in the production of accounts of accounts (Bourdieu, 1990a; Bourdieu et al. 1991) that seem to obscure rather than illuminate the forces that shape individual’s conduct.

Third, there may be practical reasons why researchers either cannot or do not want to ask people about their intentions. Under certain circumstances, such as when people may have reasons to conceal their intentions, researchers may opt for ascribing intentions to actions, according to their own interpretation. On other occasions, it may not be possible to ask people directly about their intentions, as the researcher may address conduct that is deferred in time and space. The latter would, for instance, apply to Foucault’s historical analyses. In both cases, however, we can conclude that whatever is ascribed to a certain conduct is based not on truth but verisimilitude (see section 2.3.3).

In other words, ascribing attributes (intentions) to social conduct in a rather authoritative manner does not only seem a legitimate procedure, it seem to constitute the most common way of social analysis. Presupposition for the legitimacy of this procedure is, however, that the researcher contextualizes his or her account by historicizing and signing it (see Chapter 1). By doing so, he or she reveals the criteria underlying the process of ascription. Exposing my labelling of social conduct as either technologies of power or technologies of the self as associated with issues of directness and conflict/consent, is what the discussion in this section has been about. However, a side-product of this discussion has been to question the processes with which we analyze power in empirical research. This is, then, what the remainder of this section will elaborate on.
7.2.3.4 Authoritative power

Turning back to Haugard's analysis, it appears that he identifies intentions in a similar manner as discussed above, that is, by authoritative ascription. Except for the case of pure consensus, where we could assume silent (tacit) consensus, the other five of his six constellations imply an element of conflict and, therefore, discursive consciousness. This means that in the case of conflict, goals and/or structures must be discursively available to the actors involved; for how else could they disagree about them? On such occasions, it would be possible to ask people directly about their intentions, if one wishes to do so. Only in instances where goals/structures are undisputed (pure consensus) does it make sense to talk of structural power, which implies, by definition, that these structures are tacitly understood. This constellation does not only suggest, in fact, it presupposes a procedure of authoritative ascription. Although, as we have seen, there is no qualitative difference between authoritative ascription and the collection of accounts — both processes are based on interpretation — let us, for the sake of clarity of the argument, focus on the (ideal-typical) instance of pure consensus for the moment.

As mentioned, pure consensus may be based on tacit agreement about both goals and structures. Under such circumstances, authoritative ascription is inevitable to the analysis of power. Haugard suggests for his analysis a constellation where A gets B to do X. In the absence of individuals' accounts about their intentions, X is qualified as such by H, according to the intentions he ascribes to A and/or B. The model is somewhat problematic, however, as the actual relationship of power is not that between A and B: it is that between H and both A and B, with H authoritatively ascribing certain intentions and qualities to the conduct of A and B. In other words, what Haugard refers to as the structural power of A over B turns out to be the definitional power of H over both A and B.

What the example teaches us is that any analysis of power, whether conducted in the field or at the desk, is inevitably an act of exercising (authoritative) power. As we have seen, the exercise of such authoritative power is not reduced to the case of Haugard. It is immanent to the process of reading/writing (ethnographic) research — be it through the interpretation of other's statements, through authoritative ascription,
or simply by (arbitrary) isolation of sequences from the flow of events. We are all at risk of committing the ontological slippage that Bourdieu (1990a) has identified where research (reading/writing) seems unavoidably on the verge of reification. However, as there is no escape from the Prison House of Language (Jameson, 1972), all we can do is expose our reading/writing as an exercise of power — the real constitution of power for researchers.

### 7.2.4 Haugaard’s implications

Despite some of the problems just discussed, there are a number of important conclusions that we may draw from Haugaard’s account that will be significant to our further discussion. First, social life is always constrained, yet only rarely is it determined. As Haugaard points out, if we exclude the choice of a voluntaristic death by an individual as the ultimate choice/sacrifice, we could even argue that there is no such thing as (complete) determination of social conduct.

Second, at the bottom of all constellations of power is a struggle for meaning. All instances that involve conflict (that is five of the six constellations identified) are based on interpretation. They require individuals to discursively reflect on those issues they disagree upon. Even the sixth constellation, that of pure consensus based on silent consent, is not free of a need for interpretation. As we have seen, the only way of establishing that actors do not reflect about their (tacit) agreement is through an act of authoritative ascription (interpretation) by a (third person) observer. Hence, such relationships are not free of power. What changes is the exercise of power: instead of A dominating/agreeing with B, it is C (the observer) who exercises definitory power about A and B.\[a\]

Third, discourses do not only constitute subjects/objects. They supply order to social relationships as they constrain the choice of interpretation. They do this by providing an interpretative horizon that actors have to acknowledge when they want to make meaningful expressions (or actions). Discourses stabilize such horizons by
making appear natural what is inevitably conventional: the rules that establish acts as meaningful. In other words, discourses naturalize by producing \textit{truth}.

Having reflected upon the essentially hybrid nature of social life and having identified a fundamental struggle for meaning as underlying social life at a rather theoretical level, we shall now turn back to the organizational context. Drawing on the processes of imaginization and subjugation and their amalgamation in new modes of control, we shall now take a closer look at their incorporation into a new management doctrine: corporate culturism. We shall see that the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside hotel integrates various disciplinary technologies and renders the hotel into an organization that clearly thrives on corporate culturism and that the latter is essentially about the homogenization of meaning. Despite its totalitarian tendencies, corporate culturism depends for its efficacy and endurance on processes of symbolic reproduction, which offer the chance for (micro) emancipation.

7.3 Corporate Culturism and the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside Hotel

As seen in the sections above, new strategies of control that either extend traditional forms of supervision into an imaginary sphere or that seek to accomplish commitment by shaping people’s identities are widespread at the Grand Seaside. A number of authors have identified this combination of supervision and commitment that seems to be at the forefront in many organizations as a \textit{new management doctrine} (Alvesson, 1995; Casey, 1996; du Gay, 1996; Willmott, 1993). These authors seem to agree in their perception that – in contrast to more traditional management doctrines, such as the human relations movement – the new mode of governance, which we call with Willmott (1993) \textit{corporate culturism}, does not assume a fundamental consensus of values and interests. Instead, it attempts to actively "\textit{construct} this consensus by managing the culture through which employee values are acquired" (Willmott, 1993: 524; emphasis original).
The guiding aim and abiding concern of corporate culturism... is to win the 'hearts and minds' of employees: to define their purposes by managing what they think and feel, and not just how they behave" (Willmott, 1993: 516).

As we shall see in this section, the attempt of winning over employees, which characterizes corporate culturism, involves, essentially, the management of values and, ultimately, means marginalizing or excluding alternative interpretations of such values. From this perspective, corporate culturism appears to be imbued with totalitarian features that require symbolic reproduction to endure as a doctrine that manages meaning.

7.3.1 Corporate values and hybrid control

A number of authors have stressed the pivotal status that the concept of service excellence assumes in customer service discourse. As a consequence, the customer service discourse will shape values, behaviour, and identities of those subjected to it. The disciplinary power of this discourse and the techniques employed to control and subjugate individuals will allow for more flexible and efficient forms of domination (Barker, 1993; du Gay, 1996; Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998; Sewell, 1998). Hence, what develops under the customer service discourse are *hybrid forms of control* (Sewell, 1998) that incorporate different disciplinary technologies.

What Barker (1993: 408), for example, calls *concertive control*, "grows out of a substantial consensus about values, high-level coordination, and a degree of self-management by members or workers in an organization". As he elaborates, concertive control differs from bureaucratic control in two important aspects. First, such control "represents a key shift in the locus of control from management to the workers themselves" with the latter "reaching a negotiated consensus on how to shape their behaviour according to a set of core values, such as the values found in a corporate vision statement" (Barker, 1993: 411). A new form of substantive rationality results that is induced by workers who "create the meanings that, in turn,
structure the system of their own control. (Barker, 1993: 412). Second, the locus of authority "transfers from the bureaucratic system and its rational-legal constitutive rules to the value consensus of the members and its socially created generative rules system" (Barker, 1993: 412). Barker's assertion that concertive control is more powerful than bureaucratic control is based on two assumptions. First, in systems of concertive control, "team members had become their own masters and their own slaves" (Barker, 1003: 433; emphasis original). The system of values and rules that entrap and also inculcate workers in a new substantive rationality were created by them. Second, because the control system has been created by those subjected to it, concertive control is much less apparent and subtler than its bureaucratic counterpart. In this system, control is based on identification with values and penetrates into identity.

[W]orkers create a value based system of control and then invest themselves in it through their strong identification with the system . . . Because of this strong identification, the team members are socially constructed by the system they have created . . . When this happens, the team members readily accept that they are controlling their own actions (Barker, 1993: 434).

As in the case of the Grand Seaside Family, the ultimate threat of concertive control rests with exclusion, that is, with economic hardship (job-loss) and a potential loss of identity. As Barker describes it:

Concertive workers must invest part of themselves in the team; they must identify strongly with their team's values and goals, its norms and rules. If they want to resist their team's control, they must be willing to risk their human dignity, being made to feel unworthy as a 'teammate'. Entrapment in the iron cage is the cost of concertive control (Barker, 1993: 436).

Sewell (1998) has identified a similar combination of disciplinary techniques. What he refers to as chimerical control, an "unexpected hybrid", is the result of "a complex interaction of rationalizing surveillance and disciplinary forces" (Sewell, 1998: 414). Sewell introduces this notion "as a corrective to the rhetoric of normative management discourse . . . conveying that emerging forms of workplace control may well be, either intentionally or unintentionally, monstrous creations"
These monstrous creations are, according to Sewell, the outcome of a new 'geometry' of control in which horizontal and vertical forms of surveillance merge:

The hybrid nature of chimerical control stems from the interaction between its vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension relates to Panoptic control enacted through surveillance of individuals, and the horizontal dimension relates to the operation of concertive control purported by peer scrutiny within teams (Sewell, 1998: 415).

As indicated earlier, this new geometry does not only turn traditional modes of control upside down, but also outside in. Hence, with Knights and Willmott (1989) we can identify corporate culturalism as also being characterized by a relocation of the locus of control from external supervision to self-subordination. Consequently, the hybridity of corporate culturalism is not confined to the vertical/horizontal dimension that Sewell (1998) points to. Perhaps more importantly, it evolves around the amalgamation of technologies of the self with technologies of power. As du Gay, (1996: 141) observed, "a distinct interrelation can be delineated between 'technologies of power' . . . and enterprising technologies of the self". Linking these considerations back to Foucault (1988), we can call corporate culturalism a doctrine of governmentality.

Drawing analogies to the Grand Seaside, we can observe the interrelation between the training and reward system (technologies of power) and the centrality of excellence as well as normal staff (and guests) to the organization's value system (technologies of the self). The Grand Seaside family seems to incarnate this amalgamation between technologies of power and those of the self. As an identity granting institution, it disciplines subjects by offering an ideal identity that individuals commit themselves to. While individual performance is objectivized (e.g. the customer feedback system) to channel employees behaviour towards organizational goals (technologies of power), positive and negative sanctions are used (e.g. granting of rewards, training, or public acclamation or humiliation) that allow individuals to act upon themselves in order to become 'better' employees. The Grand Seaside Family is a disciplinary institution: only those employees measuring
up to the standards of service excellence are worth of being members. Hence, demonstrated excellence in customer service becomes a means for securing a certain (collective) identity just as excellent grades secure identity as a student, for example.

7.3.2 The totalitarian aspects of corporate culturism

Informed by the critical elaborations of Barker, Sewell, and du Gay, one should not be at risk of falling for the suggestive rhetoric of corporate culturism. While strategies such as TQM, JIT, or TQC hold sway under the banner of empowerment, we have seen that corporate culturism does not mean a democratization of the firm. Rarely, are the values that rule excellent organizations (du Gay 1996) established by consensus. Neither staff nor managers outside the management core of the Grand Seaside were involved in the processes that lead to the establishment and formulation of values: values that the management core proclaimed as those of service excellence. For the sake of flexibility, the interpretation of such meta-values as excellence may well be left to the discretion of the workers (Barker, 1993). In fact, such interpretative authority has to be granted, at least, in the direct conduct of service encounters. Still, those interpretations are pre-shaped, subordinated to the interpretative prerogative of management. As seen from the sequences of the Morning Briefings, in case of a doubt, it will be Tim who decides on the interpretation of behaviour as normal or deviant. As Boje and Winsor observe:

Clearly, TQM is no less a methodology of personal control than Taylorism, but has, incredibly, been extolled for its ability to indoctrinate workers into a rhythm of self-surveillance and self-control under the rubric of “returning control back to the workers” (Boje and Winsor, 1993: 61).

Management, therefore, makes sure that the ad hoc interpretations carried out by staff during service encounters are in line with what seems desirable to the organization, as we will see in the next section.

Nor does corporate culturism allow for a plurality of values. Although, as mentioned in Chapter 6, employees are expected to be multi-rational, when

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reconciling (sometimes divergent) normative demands of organization and life world, their multi-rationality is subordinated to the organization’s demands for loyalty, commitment and, most importantly, efficiency of the operations. Willmott (1993) even contends that corporate culturism systematically suppresses the formulation and articulation of alternative values and that the development of autonomy is severely restricted, if not impossible.

In the name of expanded practical autonomy, it [corporate culturism, DB] aspires to extend management control by colonizing the affective domain. It does this by promoting employee commitment to a monolithic structure of feeling and thought, a development that is seen to be incipiently totalitarian (Willmott, 1993: 517).

The vitalization of the normative and affective domain of organizational life becomes a mere means to direct employees towards company goals (Willmott, 1993). As the ambiguous category of quasi-valid complaints demonstrates, life world values are relevant only if and when they affect the effectiveness or efficiency of the business.

[C]orporate culturism aspires to extend the terrain of instrumentally rational action by developing monocultures in which conditions for the development of value-rational action, where individuals struggle to assess the meaning and worth of a range of competing value-standpoints, is systematically eroded (Willmott, 1993: 518).

The new mode of value rationality thus created does not transcend the sheer autocracy with which the normative backbone – that is, the meta-values of calculability, predictability, efficiency, and control (Ritzer, 1991) – are implemented and sustained. Corporate culturism is not the antidote to McDonaldization: it is its inversion (with respect to the adaptability of staff to customers) and, at the same time, its culmination (when relying on modes of hyper-control and a normalizing formalization of operational data). In other words, corporate culturism is a truly postmodern form of governmentality (Best and Kellner, 1991; Denzin, 1995).

In this respect, corporate culturism does not provide a cure to the excesses of instrumental rationality as attributed to traditional bureaucracies. Instead, it
represents a proliferation of the latter: a "culturist extension of Zweckrationalität", so to speak (Willmott, 1993: 532).

Far from abandoning Zweckrationalität (instrumental rationality), corporate culturism extends it to the affective domain... [It represents a system in which, DB] culture strengthening devices, which bear more than a passing resemblance to methods favoured within totalitarian regimes, are designed to structure employees' immediate wants and provide the calculus for their realization (Willmott, 1993: 532; emphasis original).

Given its totalitarian quality, Willmott (1993) sees modes of disengagement as consequential acts of resistance in corporate culturized organizations. In reference to Kunda (1992), he points out, however, that such acts of resistance lead to the "promotion of an almost universal, undiscriminating cynicism... [that leads employees, DB] to question the authenticity of all beliefs and emotions" (Willmott, 1993: 538). Such acts of resistance do not only manifest themselves as exit, voice or loyalty, as directly observable in the three examples given at the end of Chapter 5. Often resistance will be subtler. It will be wrapped in humour and irony, or it will surface in the spatial distancing that (consciously or not) allowed staff to appear distinctive from management at the All-Staff-Meeting. However, to Willmott (1993) such forms of resistance are idle, as individuals leave untouched and indeed actively reproduce the conditions of their subordination (subjugation).

For corporate culturism, the moral issue of whether employees are enabled to develop a (socially organized) capacity to reflect upon, and choose between, competing values is irrelevant so long as they believe, or feel, that their needs or purposes are being fulfilled (Willmott, 1993: 534).

No wonder, then, that Tim, the Grand Seaside’s master of ceremony of corporate culturism, was utterly convinced that treating employees well would relinquish any need for unionism or the collective representation of (divergent) interests.

As seen in this section, the force (effectiveness and efficiency) of corporate culturism as a new management doctrine derives from the totalitarian implementation and maintenance of a set of core values (of excellence). As we shall see now, the
maintenance of such values depends on processes of interpretation that reassure that values are interpreted synonymously. Corporate culturism, as this section will conclude, is essentially about the management of meaning, and, given the indexicality and instability of meaning, requires symbolic reproduction.

7.3.3 The symbolic reproduction of corporate culturism

Fundamentally, it is the *indexicality of any contract* (Fox, 1974) that "creates an imperative for control" (Clegg, 1994: 304). In the context of organizations, the articulation and explication of rules for proper conduct cannot overcome this problem, not even in the most rule-driven bureaucratic institution. As such, rules are not free from the spell of indexicality that affects all social reality: "[n]o rule can ever provide for its own interpretation" (Clegg, 1994: 281). The inevitable need for interpretation, a process that implies the articulation and negotiation of different or even divergent meanings, renders the symbolic sphere into contested terrain: a terrain that hosts the struggle for the legitimate view of the (organizational) world, where different forms of symbolic violence are exercised (Bourdieu, 1991). It is this fundamental quest for meaning that makes interpretation a power-laden process and *ruling an activity* (Clegg, 1994: 282).

In this sense, we can identify the Morning Briefings at the Grand Seaside as symbolic battlefields, as occasions for the interpretation and negotiation of meaning. More precisely, discussions evolving around customer feedback, for instance, are occasions for interpreting rules for proper conduct for both staff and guests. "[P]ower is the right to speak in the name of another person or authority" (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992). Thus, Tim's definitional authority as displayed during the meetings – which even incorporates the interpretation of hypothetical (imagined) events and the extrapolation of imaginary peoples' minds – clearly represents a form of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu, 1991).

We should be careful, though, not to over-determine the concept outlined above. As reality is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) and as such is
fundamentally indexical, “any solution to the problem of meaning is always
temporary and fragile, as it has to be repeatedly accomplished” (Linstead and
Grafton-Small, 1992: 336). Following Foucault’s claim that power is inextricably
linked with resistance, it is only consequential that Clegg (1991) identifies the very
indexicality that brings about (symbolic) power as also constituting the locus of
resistance.

The indexicality of reality is, perhaps, most clearly articulated through Derrida’s
notion of difference. Derrida uses difference, “a sameness which is not identical”
(1973: 129’, italics in original) to exemplify the instability and non-positivity of any
relationship of meaning. Since any entity derives its meaning (and hence its identity)
from a system of differences, Derrida holds that one can never positively define the
meaning of something. Instead one can always just refer to other concepts, that is,
another set of differences. Hence, meaning is never positively given, present, but
always deferred. The meaning of difference is then derived from both ‘to differ’
and ‘to defer’, which denies difference any stable relationship of meaning. He
concludes from this that any present meaning depends on difference, that is, on that
what it is not. Since what something is not is not directly accessible as an
ontological entity but only through its meaning, we enter an infinite circle. Each
meaning depends on another meaning which itself can only be identified through
another meaning, etc. The result is an endless play of differences (Derrida, 1973). In
other words, the present meaning depends on a form of absence. Hence, language
(and thus reality) is nothing but a system of differences. There is no fixed point in
this endless system of references: meaning is always deferred to another meaning.

With meaning being thus deferred, intangible, and fluid, it is impossible to assume
that any symbolic system – and, hence, any relationship constituted by power, be it
rules or identities – ever becomes completely fixed. Identities, such as (normal) staff
or (normal) guests, require continuous recreation (Deetz, 1998). Hence, all efforts to
establish and maintain a certain system of domination are tentative and require active
reproduction. This also applies to collective identities such as the Grand Seaside
Family. As Linstead and Grafton-Small observe:
Organizational membership then is a mere epiphenomenon of social being, and ironically, despite the best efforts of those who organize and seek to control formal organizations (Linstead and Grafton-Smith, 1992: 342).

This is why (foundational) narratives like the race against the budget require continuous reproduction through the routine reading of the numbers, without, however, guaranteeing neither the internalization nor the reproduction for the desired family identity. Resistance, in this sense, is inevitable: a process that is neither necessarily conscious nor heroic (Butler 1997). As the fundamental indexicality of social reality cannot be overcome in principle, corporate culturism seeks to ‘normalize’ meaning by minimizing alternative (deviant) interpretations. To put it another way, it is through the discourse of customer service that corporate culturism produces truth.

As seen in the previous section, management cannot but delegate to staff (and guests) the authority for ad hoc interpretations of norms and rules in service encounters. To reassure that these interpretations (and the actions that follow from them) are in line with corporate goals, management uses different techniques to acquire a homogenization of meaning. Not only will the Morning Briefings establish over and over again what are normal expectations and responses in service encounters; the customer service training programme is essentially concerned with offering employees interpretative devices that allow for a the desired homogenization of meaning. The centrality of the concept of excellence, that asks employees to deliver service beyond expectation, carries this imperialism of meaning even further into the imaginary domain. Role-plays – like the one involving the baby and the warming up of the bottle, performed during the training session we witnessed – are thought to shape even the fantasy of employees towards organizational goals. In these instances, we may even talk of a corporate colonization of fantasy.

There are a number of writers who share our interpretation of corporate culturism as evolving around the management of meaning. As Salaman observed, the project of corporate culture thrives on an implicit teleology characterized by "an obsessive commitment to customer service – to ensuring that staff, even when not under the direct control or surveillance, have internalized high standards of customer service"
For that purpose, rules and obligations are established that ought to commit staff to the ultimate goal of service excellence. As seen in the example of the customer service discourse in the Grand Seaside, the system of rules and obligations is omnipresent and manifest in almost any aspect of organizational life. It can be found in ritual and ceremonial events as well as in everyday language and the symbolism of the artefactual composition of the hotel.

These rules are communicated energetically; staff are encouraged and rewarded for showing compliance; those who fail to accept them are subject to remedial counselling support. The rules are enshrined in training programmes and displayed on notices and leaflets . . . (Salaman, 1997: 243).

Du Gay (1996) confirms these considerations when he notes that "[e]xcellent organizations are those that 'make meaning for people' by encouraging them to believe that they have control over their own destinies" (du Gay 1996: 60). The same author asserts that "excellent organizations get the most out of their employees, not by manipulating group human relations to secure a sense of 'belonging', but by instilling a sense of entrepreneurial individualism that ought to develop and nourish individuals' capacities, creativity, and ingenuity" (ibid.). One feels compelled to add a qualification. As this thesis has shown, corporate culturism does not inevitably thrive on enterpreneurialism and individualism but can also be nourished, hand in glove, with paternalistic management and forms of (romantic) communitarianism. Instead, I concur with Willmott (1993) who reminds us that the communal component of corporate culturism evolves around its capacity to offer "a totalitarian remedy for the resolution of indeterminacy and ambiguity: thought control through uniform definition of meaning" (Willmott, 1993: 527; emphasis original). The latter is important, as it helps individuals overcoming the indexicality of social (organizational) reality through acts of collective sense making. The Morning Briefings at the Grand Seaside, and the repeated reading of some guest comments in particular, are illuminating examples of how members of the organization actively reproduce a shared stock of meaning and values over time.
With respect to the symbolic aspects of this reproduction process, we may notice Salaman's (1997: 253) elaboration that corporate culturism is founded in three root narratives. The first links stresses the organization as an imagined community, as a collective symbolic creation. The second envisages employees "as microcosmic organizations", as founded in an enterprising self. The third, in turn, constructs the organization as a "human organism", as equipped with human characteristics. Once more, the similarities of Salaman's description to our account of the Grand Seaside are striking. Whereas the Grand Seaside Family provides the imagined community, the metaphor of the race against the budget provides the other two narratives. Hence, in concluding the considerations of this chapter so far, we can identify the Grand Seaside as an organization that clearly thrives on corporate culturism.

In sum, what this section has shown is that the value system created and sustained at the Grand Seaside is symbolically constructed and reproduced. We can claim that the major thrust of corporate culturism, the linkage between modes of hyper-control and the engineering of people's identities, derives from the management of meaning. The emerging hybrid forms of control, which seek to subdue both people's bodies as well as their souls, may well be more effective and efficient when using consent rather than coercion. What they, even in the apparent absence of conflict, do not and cannot achieve is to render organizations into power-free zones. Power, which is inextricably linked with knowledge and meaning, will always be present in organizations – in fact, it is always constitutive of the them.

7.3.4 Summing up: The constituents of corporate culturism

There are, then, a number of conclusion we can draw from the Grand Seaside Hotel with respect to the status of the new modes of control and their incorporation into a new management doctrine: corporate culturism. From my experiences in the field, as well as from the reading of other texts on the issue, I would identify corporate culturism as evolving around the following principles:
First, corporate culturism employs and extends traditional modes of horizontal and vertical control into a system of disciplinary power with virtually Panoptic features. Apart from an intensification of vertical control through supervision (for instance, as based on customer feedback), horizontal forms of control, such as surveillance and pressure from peers are common. It leads to an extension of modes of horizontal control and group pressure towards a "hyper-awareness" (Boje and Winsor, 1993) among organizational members with respect to behavior and attitude of their fellow employees. Customers, who in this sense are neither vertically nor horizontally positioned to staff, extend the circle, introducing a new geometry of control. Staff are watched by (at least) three Others: management, peers, and guests. With the introduction of hypothetical guest and service encounters, the pool of potential observers is, once more, increased – this time, almost ad infinitum. What constitutes the Panoptic character of this system of surveillance, is the process of imaginization: a process in which individuals internalize control by subjecting themselves to an imaginary Gaze. Consequently, we can characterize Panopticism as an essentially mental structure, and imaginization as the process that grants control this new quality.

Second, corporate culturism not only extends the scope of traditional modes of control, it aspires the generation of consent by shaping people's values, desires, and, ultimately, their identity. The processes of constituting and maintaining the value system of the organization entails a totalitarian aspect: all other values are marginalized or subordinated to the goals of service excellence. With the imposed system of values, corporate culturism aims far beyond securing obedience: it wants to incorporate people's ingenuity and creativity, which implies relinquishing the need for coercive force. By providing model identities such as (normal) staff and (normal) guest, corporate culturism offers reference points for identification to those it aims to subject. The identity thus offered, however, is conditional: it is granted only in exchange for the demonstrative commitment to the ideals of customer service. Employees respond to the threats of exclusion and, ultimately, loss of (collective) identity with a mixture of fear, commitment, and self-subordination (Deetz, 1998). Hence, the apparent freedom of the modern (organizational) subject
turns out to be only another form of slavery: management of identities thrives on individual *subjugation* (Willmott, 1993).

Third, corporate culturism owes its efficacy to modes of control that represent *hybrids* or monstrous creatures (Sewell, 1998) rather than ideal-types. The characteristically hybrid nature of corporate culturism, however, goes beyond the suggested interpellation of horizontal and vertical control. As du Gay has noticed "within the discourse of excellence [or, for the case of this thesis, the discourse of the customer, DB], technologies of power . . . and technologies of the self . . . are imperceptibly merged" (du Gay, 1996: 66). Corporate culturism is then a doctrine of governmentality (Foucault, 1988). This became evident from both the constitution of (normal) guests and staff as well as from the imagined community of the Grand Seaside Family, which appears as an incarnation of corporate culturism: processes of *normalization* seem to provide the glue for this 'technological' merger. As we have noted, corporate culturism is not an antidote to the bureaucratic mode of control: it represents its inversion and, simultaneously, its radical extension. In this respect, corporate culturism seems a truly postmodern form of governmentality.

However, there is another merger at play in corporate culturism: it seems to blur the boundaries between the organization and its environment. This becomes most evident in the case of staff and customers, which both constitute the respective Other in acts of self-identification, yet which are both subjected to the same principles of normalization. The consequences of the blurring of this boundary are quite profound as du Gay's (1996) explains:

*Changes in the ways of conceptualizing, documenting and acting upon in other words, governing the internal world of organizations actively transform the meaning and hence 'reality' of work . . . a key feature of these new modes of governing organizational life is the way they problematize traditional separations between production and consumption identities . . . between what is properly thought of as inside and what is properly thought of as outside the domain of organizational existence. I suggest that, by re-imagining organizational life through the language of consumer culture, these new discourses of work reform brook no opposition between the mode of self-representation and self-


understanding required of people as consumers and that required of people as employees (du Gay, 1996: 6).

As we have seen from the Grand Seaside: normal service encounters demand normal staff and normal guest.

Fourth, resulting from the indexicality of social reality (and labour contracts and organizational norms and rules in particular), corporate culturism is essentially concerned with the management and homogenization of meaning. Such management implies not only imposing and maintaining a set of organizational core values and securing their interpretation in line with corporate goals. Given the instability of meaning, any legitimized view (interpretation) of the organizational world depends for its endurance on processes of symbolic reproduction.

In sum, the processes that constitute the backbone of corporate culturism – normalization, imaginization, and subjugation – represent, therefore, different attempts of managing meaning. As this thesis has shown, the process of imaginization is crucial to this new management doctrine. It is indispensable both to processes of the extension of control into Panopticism and to the shaping of individual’s desires, aspirations, and identity. Within corporate culturism’s pursuit of the colonization of the psyche, imaginization represents the attempted colonization of fantasy. It is, however, the indexicality and indeterminacy of social reality that effectively provides the limits to the grip of corporate culturism for the employee’s soul. Resistance, in the sense of mis-interpretation, is as inevitable as it may be idle. Hence, what is left to critical organization studies is to make more transparent the implications of processes such as normalization, imaginization, or subjugation.

In the meantime (!), a relevant challenge for management academics and practitioners is to identify and utilize opportunities for ‘microemancipation’ within modern organizations (Willmott, 1993: 535).

In this sense, studying (excellent) flexible organizations seems not to be an idle enterprise.
Chapter 8: Flexibility, new modes of control, and corporate culturism

This chapter briefly reviews three issues that have been central to the discussion throughout this thesis. The first issue is that of researching flexible service organizations, such as the Grand Seaside, in a postmodern era. Closely connecting flexibility to concepts such as discourse and culture allows for the issue of power to be addressed more adequately, critically, and radically. The second issue concerns new modes of control. The development from control to commitment, and the resulting governmentality that characterizes many postmodern organizations, rests on a double process, when seen from a disciplinary perspective. The process is that of a supplementation/complementation of coercive modes of control through more consensual forms, as well as an extension of both technologies of power and technologies of the self into an imagined/virtual domain – establishing a new geometry of power. Finally, we shall discuss the increasing fragility of the homogenization of meaning underlining both old and new forms of control. The drive towards flexibilization and customization of services, for instance, which rests on the realization of individuals’ imagination and fantasy, acts to undermine management prerogatives of control. The attempted colonization of the psyche through processes of imaginization is inevitably ambiguous and implies both the risk of alienation and the chance of resistance. Finally, one may note that corporate culturism, while not an antidote to McDonaldization and the meaninglessness of much modern work, does not necessarily lock individuals within the customer service discourse and the new geometry of power.
8.1 The textual approach to organization: Power, discourse, and the study of organizational culture

As we have elaborated in Chapter 3, studying flexible organizations requires an approach capable of addressing issues of power and control in an appropriate manner. Appropriate here means that such an approach should take into account theoretical and socio-economical developments of the last two decades – most notably, the emergence of New Organizational Forms and the 'turn to language' (Clegg, 1975 and 1987; Astley and Zammuto, 1992) within the wider field of organization studies. Reality is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) and knowledge and identity are constituted within discourse (Foucault, 1989; Parker, 1992). Drawing on these streams of sociological thought, the conceptualization of New Organizational Forms as new modes of domination (Sauer and Doehl, 1994) was extended beyond the sphere of socio-economic relations to address power, more radically, at the symbolic level. Power, as immanent to communication, language, and discourse, is not only constitutive of socio-economic dependencies but, more fundamentally, of individuals’ sense of identity and, generally, of social reality. Hence, the focus on discourse within this thesis implies the analysis of those processes that provoke individuals to experience, envisage, and articulate organizational life in terms of customer service excellence, (global) competition, or organizational community (family). In other words, instead of taking such notions simply as given antecedents (objects) of organizational analysis, the textual approach favoured in this thesis problematized these concepts, explicating how their meaning is generated and reproduced in the conduct of everyday life.

As the thesis has shown, the discourse of customer service is productive in a double sense. It not only constitutes objects, those of customer service (encounters), but also produces subjects. To be a subject is to be subjected to power, to be ‘fixed’ in certain positions within a discourse. Such positions make an individual’s sense of identity (e.g. guest, staff, or Grand Seaside Hotel Family member) dependent on experience of certain thoughts or feelings, the creation/possession of certain attitudes, and the display of respective behaviours. The result of such power is that these subjects become what they do (Fairclough, 1989).
As we argued in Chapter 3, in the context of organization studies, a focus on discourse can usefully be incorporated into the concept of organizational culture. The latter, when used as a root metaphor instead of a variable (Smircich, 1983), shows close affinity to the textual approach advocated in this thesis. This affinity—which, in part, stems from the genesis of the textual approach out of the anthropological and ethnographic study of cultures—reveals, on closer investigation, common conceptual foundations. Organization is culture (Mumby, 1988) and with culture being communication (ibid.) we can conclude that organization is communication. Communication provides the foundation for social organization (Luhmann, 1986): thus, in the approach favoured by this thesis the focus is on texts as its ‘matter’ and the processes of reading/writing that produce them.

As we have said, culture is both a product and process (Jelinek, et al., 1983). The same is true of its research through ethnography. This means that the process of (re-)creating culture presents similar, if not the same, qualities, as does the process of its study (Denzin, 1998). Both creating and studying cultures implies processes of recursive reading/writing (Morgan, 1997). However, this does not mean that the process of living culture is necessarily congruent with that of researching it. While the former requires a practical attitude, the latter implies reflexivity. Effectively, the difference is that between first and second order observation, as constructivists would put it (Maturana and Varela, 1980 and 1992), between one’s role as observer and that of analysing (observing) one’s role as observer. It is then a difference in perspective (based on reflexivity) rather than the rigour in the process of meaning production (as measured against parameters of objectivity, reliability, or authenticity) that qualifies attempts to surpass the mere production of accounts of accounts (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu, et al. 1991).

In the study of culture this reflexivity allows one to generate (meta-) accounts that highlight, rather than obscure or neglect, the ambivalence and transience of subject and object, product and process, emic and etic perspectives. Consequently, within this thesis, the recurrent reflection on the status and process of ethnographic research in a postmodern world not only paid tribute to reflexivity but also implied a double
(second order) perspective: ethnography as a thesis and the thesis as an ethnography.

As we have argued in Chapter 2, the indexicality and intertextuality of social reality requires contextualization of both the product and process of research. The customer service discourse does not exist in isolation. It is coexistent and interdependent with other discourses. As part of a larger symbolic universe, it is a site for producing meaning of a particular quality – thereby constituting objects/subjects. More precisely, the discourse of customer service and the objects/subjects it constitutes depend on other discourses to receive their meaning. As normal guests, for instance, are only constituted against the background of abnormality or deviance, thus customer service, as a process and concept, is constituted in differentiation to other processes and concepts, such as cost saving. With reference to Kristeva (1986) one could argue that such discursive intertextuality exists not only horizontally but also vertically. Horizontally, it relates to author(s) and audience. In the case of the Grand Seaside Hotel, this implies, for instance, management, staff, and guests. However, since this thesis is not a representation of the customer service discourse ‘out there’, horizontal intertextuality also implies one’s positioning as a researcher within the field as well as one’s status as a PhD student within the academic community. Vertically, intertextuality refers to an anterior or synchronic corpus of discursive elements. In the case of the Grand Seaside, issues such as cost saving, global competition, or the discourse of ‘autocratic management’ that prevailed under the former General Manager, comes to mind, as would the relationship of the thesis to the literature reviewed. In other words, the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside derives its meaning from the explication of these horizontal and vertical relationships. As seen with the issue of cost saving, the interrelationships sustained are often conflictual, with one discursive element marginalizing, or repressing, the other and vice versa.

Critical organization studies, therefore, may be well advised to transgress dominant discourses in order to look for the absent and to listen to the silence. Part of a critical attitude is the attention paid to the ambivalent ‘double’ status of the objects/subjects constituted by discourse. The status of customers (guests) within the customer
service discourse is instructive in this respect. As the example of the Grand Seaside Hotel has shown, guests hold a ‘double’ position in this discourse, being at once both object and subject. In the first sense, they are the products of this discourse – constituting reference points for organizational interaction and identity – and being subjected to techniques that allow for their governance. In the second sense, they are present as distant voices in the very same process of their constitution/objectification. Symbolically mediated (represented) through the reading of guest questionnaires and anecdotal evidence, they become involved in the processes of their own creation. As such, guest status is paradoxical, being object and subject, present and absent at once. Hence, if we do not search for the subject constituting the object (and vice versa), for the presence that lies behind apparent absence, and the presence achieved at the expense of (another’s) absence; if we do not identify the demarcation between absence and presence as contested symbolic terrain, we will miss out on important aspects of (organizational) reality. The result is that we will unduly truncate the complex interplay of meaning and power. A textual approach within organization studies implies the deconstruction of those concepts that seem to provide the very foundation of its analysis (Gephart, 1996).

In this respect, it is worth noting that the objects constituted and the corporeal structures hosting their production are not necessarily congruent. The customer service discourse simultaneously constitutes, segments, and transcends the artefactual composition of the organization (the hotel). Although we could say that the discourse of customer service constitutes (and segments) certain areas within the hotel (front- and back-regions), it also stretches beyond the spatial confines of the organization. For instance, it occurs when staff are wearing their uniform: on such occasions they are asked to behave as if they were on duty (even outside the hotel and their official working hours). It occurs also when guests are encouraged to tell their friends and families about the service experienced. In other words, the essentially intertextual nature of social reality – which implies that meaning is deferred, never completely fixed, and hence non-locatable – stretches the objects/subjects constituted beyond the here and now. For the case of the customer service discourse, this means that the boundaries between production and consumption (Baudrillard, 1998), between organization and environment (du Gay,
1996), and between work and home (Hochschild, 1997) are becoming increasingly blurred. In other words, with objects/subjects being constituted by (discursive) acts of sensemaking, future analysis of flexible customer service organizations should critically reflect on the (temporal/spatial) incongruence of concepts and corporeal/artefactual structures.

We can conclude, then, that while the processes of studying and living a culture are fundamentally similar (reading/writing), the products may be different. It is the degree of intertextual reflectivity (historicizing) and authorial reflexivity (signature) that distinguishes natives’ accounts (as being more local) from those of the researcher. Hence, historicizing and signing research accounts should constitute fundamental aspects of the product and process of social research. As for the study of flexible service organizations, we should note that the questioning of the status of concepts such as customer service ought to be part of the research process. Hence, transcending approaches that confine customer service to the level of variables and measurement or that identify social-economic interdependencies, organization studies should investigate the processes by which customer service is constituted (as a meaningful concept) within everyday organizational life. The textual perspective advocated in this thesis is more radical with respect to the issue of power, as it identifies it at the most basic, symbolic, level of society. However, this does not necessarily discredit approaches that localize power purely within the socio-economic circuits of power (Clegg, 1989). It only adds the necessary dosage of nominalism/relativism to balance the often strongly reified forces acting within concepts of sovereign agency.

8.2 From hard to soft control? Governing bodies and souls in the customer service discourse

As we have elaborated above, the customer service discourse produces objects/subjects thus influencing the individuals’ construction of social reality. From a somewhat different perspective, we have argued that it also constitutes a disciplinary system of power, (re-) producing the normalcy of organizational life (in
particular that of service encounters) and thereby *subjugating* (Knights and Willmott, 1989) staff, managers, and guests alike. Normal service encounters demand normal staff and normal guests. Thus, in producing its object (normal service encounters), the customer service discourse also subjects individuals to certain practices and techniques that subjugate them to a particular identity (staff, manager, guest). The subjects thus constituted are disciplined, that is, they are subjected to a corrective system of reward, punishment, and aspiration/identification that seeks to channel their behaviour (body) and to infiltrate their thoughts (soul). As such, we have concluded that the customer service discourse is a disciplinary institution that grants identity contingent upon individuals’ commitment and displayed contribution to the values of service excellence. In the background are recent discussions about the shift from direct and bureaucratic control towards more indirect, normative or cultural modes of control (Alvesson, 1996; Barker, 1993; Casey, 1996; Deetz, 1998; Kunda, 1992). These provoke, at least partially, the emergence of hybrids (Barker, 1993; Sewell, 1998) into which we can gain insight through analysis of phenomena such as the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside Hotel.

To begin with, through studying organizational life at the Grand Seaside Hotel, we were able to identify a number of trends associated with the new ‘soft’ modes of control. Besides the obvious instrumentalization of the staff-customer relationship (Deetz, 1998) and the introduction of more lateral forms of control (Barker, 1993; Sewell, 1998), the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside Hotel showed a tendency to suppress conflict and to marginalize other voices (Boje, 1995; Deetz, 1998). The implicit yet effective marginalization of dissent and the resultant atmosphere of pervasive harmony thrived on an amalgam of fear, commitment, and self-subordination (Deetz, 1998), the latter occasionally resulting in emphatic outbursts of self-denial, as demonstrated by Di, the Human Resource Manager denied of the warranted internal promotion. Despite dispiriting the overt expression and resolution of conflict, this atmosphere does not completely eradicate the possibility for resistance. While, occasionally, individuals such as Bill dare to tear apart the façade of harmony – revealing, by the same token, a whole range of repressed conflicts – other more subtle articulations of dissent are ‘wrapped’ in humour, irony, or cynicism prevail. As the case of Edward’s resignation
demonstrates, the refusal 'to play the game' may result in a publicly articulated cynical distancing from the formally displayed obedience.

Further, with the introduction of customized service and the ambition of organizations such as the Grand Seaside Hotel to provide flexible, customized service, obedience and mere following of rules as the basis for organizational action meets its limits. What is required is the employee's fantasy to respond quickly and flexibly to market demands, that is, to customer needs and wants. As opposed to a bureaucratic production/consumption system, which centres on the identification, routinization, and formalization of optimal solutions to given ends, the hyper-competitive world of today has accelerated and diversified at incredible speed. Under the doctrine of service excellence - which evolves around the continuous creation of what are in principal, indefinite and insatiable needs and wants as well as an obsession with exceeding whatever desires are evoked - goals and targets have become inflated and so have demands to meet them. Consequently, commitment to anticipate and satisfy these desires become basic requirements for the provision of customized service, for meeting/exceeding the challenges of service excellence. This holds true, however, only as long as these goals (e.g. exceeding customer expectations) contribute to the single most important end: the profitability of the business. Hence, corporate culturism does not cure the excesses of instrumental rationality (Ritzer, 1991/1999); rather it proliferates them towards a "cultrist extension of Zweckrationalität" (Willmott, 1993: 532). Thus the status of corporate culturism remains ambiguous: what is discussed elsewhere in terms of empowerment (Peters and Waterman, 1982), appears from a different perspective as an exploitation of individuals' fantasies (Baudrillard, 1998; Ritzer, 1999). Effectively, commitment is gained through imaginization, that is, through a colonization of fantasy by doctrines of service excellence.

Eventually, we have been able to ascertain that the technologies of power at work in flexible (service) organizations and the new management doctrine, corporate culturism, which attempts the instrumentalization of social relationships for the sake of profit generation, thrive on a complex interplay of different strategies and mechanisms. With Foucault (1988), we have distinguished between technologies of
power (which implies, according to our definition, a strong affinity to coercively determine the conduct of others) and technologies of the self (which describe more voluntary forms of self-transformation). There was ample evidence of both technologies being at work at the Grand Seaside. Chapters 4 and 5 focussed on technologies of power, describing the hotel’s customer service training and rewards program, the use of guest questionnaires to reward and punish employee behaviour, and the pressure exercised by the number-driven culture of the Grand Seaside. Chapters 6 and 7 elaborated how the Grand Seaside Hotel Family sought to channel, institutionally, individuals’ aspirations towards a match with the ideal of a useful and dedicated family member, thereby linking individuals’ sense of identity to their commitment to (and display of) values of service excellence. In effect, however, both technologies are intertwined – merging into what Foucault (1988) calls governmentality and, thus, subjugating individuals to a self-disciplining identity (Knights and Willmott, 1989).

We may notice, though, that the merger just described, and the resultant hybrid technologies and modes of control, have several sources. At the most fundamental level, the identification of both technologies implies the authoritative (definitory) power of the author, as we have extensively elaborated in section 7.2. In this respect, some form of reification seems unavoidable in the conduct of organizational research\textsuperscript{19}. At another level, we have argued for the hybrid nature of social reality, which evades representation in terms of pure determinism or voluntarism. Coercion is rarely complete, identity is inextricably linked to others, and freedom implies constraint. The distinction between technologies of power and technologies of the self appears, at the level of the individuals subjected to these technologies, as the contrast between coercion/obedience and commitment/identification. However, this distinction does not rule out but implies that the aspirations and desires that shape processes of identification are imposed upon the subjects. The Grand Seaside Hotel Family seems a perfect example for the hybrid nature of governmentality. At once, it enables and restrains, integrates yet excludes, appeals for commitment while demanding obedience.
With these comments in mind, we can conclude that at the Grand Seaside Hotel new hybrid modes of control are not only widespread but seem to have reached a new dimension. In principal, two processes are at work here. On the one hand, we find a supplementation/complementation of coercive modes of control through more consensual forms – this responds to the supplementation/merger of both Foucauldian technologies. On the other hand, we have witnessed the extension of both Technologies of Power and those of the Self into a virtual domain, achieved by processes of imaginization and a corresponding colonization of the psyche. While the first process implies a paradigmatic shift from controlling individual bodies to governing their souls, the second, no less acute process, extends the grip on both – body and soul – beyond the sphere of perceived presence. A focus on obedience gives way to a concern with commitment, while supervision develops into (Panoptic) self-surveillance as identity becomes fetishized. Thus, the objects/subjects of the customer service discourse are virtualized – they are rendered ever more flexible, contingent, transient, and hypothetical. As a consequence, obedience is achieved by extended supervision (vertically and horizontally). Supervision becomes virtual (hypothetical guests) and takes on almost Panoptic features. Forcing individuals back upon a self-disciplining identity creates commitment. The subjects of the customer service discourse thus seem to be ‘trapped’: Their desire to meet the standards of service excellence becomes tantamount to their struggle for securing identity as a member of the Grand Seaside Family (see Diagram 8.1).

8.3 The management of meaning, resistance, and the new geometry of power

We have already mentioned that the textual perspective applied in this thesis rests on the assumption that (organizational) reality is socially constructed and that objects/subjects are constituted within discourse. As the latter is infused through and through with power, it not only represent the site for the generation of meaning but, more precisely, the battlefield for the legitimate view of the (organizational) world (Bourdieu, 1991). Consequently, organization is conceptualized as communication, as ongoing narrative, as the process and product of recursive reading/writing. The
implication of this conceptualization is that the meaning of management evolves around the management of meaning (Clegg, 1979; Gowler and Legge, 1996).

We have also seen that the imperative for control ultimately results from the indexicality of social reality and the instability of meaning (Haugaard, 1997). We acknowledged this heritage with our attention to the symbolic aspects of life at the Grand Seaside and through our focus on the management of meaning. Although it is "[t]he gap between the capacity to labour and its effective realization [that, DB] implies power and the organization of control" (Clegg, 1994: 283), we should be careful not to regard ruling and controlling as merely intellectual activities somewhat separated from the more mundane processes of production (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992). "[R]elations of meaning and production are inexorably interlinked" (Clegg, 1994: 283).

With production/consumption processes having become ever more flexible and customized, meaning is less fixed and increasingly contested. With less formalization and standardization of service encounters, for instance, fewer rules for interpretation are at hand (Ritzer, 1991/1999). As we could see from the example of the Grand Seaside Hotel, the doctrine of service excellence and particularly the virtualization of objects/subjects augment the indexicality of service encounters. Therefore, the creation of organizational order, which results from the homogenization of meaning (Haugaard, 1997), becomes an increasingly complex, fragile, and somewhat paradoxical, task: While customization/virtualization increases indexicality, management is concerned precisely with reducing the indeterminacy of meaning. Thus, the doctrine of service excellence seems to undermine the very foundation of management (as controlled generation of meaning), hence, limiting the thrust of the customer service discourse and the new modes of control accompanying it.

In practice, the required balancing of indexicality and homogenization has lead to the generation of disciplinary institutions with often totalitarian features. Institutions such as the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside Hotel thrive on a marginalization of dissent, exclusion of other (deviant) voices, and a colonization of
fantasy through controlled imaginization. However, the homogenization of meaning achieved is always incomplete and provisional, while the normalcy of organizational life requires continuous symbolic reproduction. This is why the rituals and ceremonies, such as the regular reading of guest responses, the repeated helpful reminders by colleagues, or the evocation of the Race, are so vital for reproducing organizational order. The instrumentalization of fantasy, as aspired to in the processes of imaginization that characterize the customer service discourse of the Grand Seaside, shows ambiguous consequences. Fantasy and imagination eschew fixation almost by definition and as such are potentially both alienating and liberating (Castoriadis, 1997). Simultaneously, irony, humour, or cynicism – which also play with the indeterminacy of meaning – allow for distancing the said from the saying.

Edward’s cynical reaction to the eradication of his position is illustrative. Such a staged performance of obedience/resistance implies a distancing of subject (of the speech) and object (content of the speech). By playing with the indeterminacy of meaning, Edward subverts the legitimate view of the (organizational) world. Such forms of obedience/resistance have significant implications for organization studies. Analyzing social action beyond (or perhaps beneath) its apparent meaning, raises issues of authenticity and seems to suggest a search for deeper (hidden) meaning (‘truths’) under (behind) the surface of public appearance. This is the case, at least, for the analysis of those forms of control that seek obedience and, as such, imply a strong demonstrative element. Where obedience is demanded, distancing is, perhaps, the most common form of resistance – while the body is compliant, the soul defies. This quest to ‘dig deep’, however, suggest an approach that avoids both the extreme of an infinite search for essences and the mere aesthetic contemplation of the ‘obvious’. Advocating such a hybrid approach, we may argue that the modern and the postmodern perspective complement rather than eradicate each other. As in the case of the double nature of objects/subject, the complexity of the relationship between power/resistance and meaning requires one to transgress the apparent and to surpass the surface.
In light of what has just been said, we may qualify the characterization of the customer service discourse made above. As powerful and encompassing as this discourse might appear, individuals' domination by customer service discourse is not absolute. The new geometry of power — in which power becomes both ascending and descending, penetrating inwards and outwards — remains ambiguous. Far from being all determining, power evokes (its own) resistance, if only because the play of meaning can never be fully fixed. The very essence of service excellence — increased indexicality through customization — seems subversive to management's prerogative to control. Further, the efficacy of the customer service discourse depends on individuals' identification with the identity it offers. However, such identification is anything but certain, particularly given the casualization of labour. The discursive intertextuality that grants the customer service discourse its meaning signifies that it does not become autarchic; these other discourses may offer alternative identities more appealing or persuasive to its subjects. Hence, identification becomes performative — the compliant body disguises the soul released.

In sum, the customer service discourse might be totalitarian but it is not total. Both constituents of that discourse, imaginization and subjugation, are highly ambiguous processes. While certainly dominating objects/subjects, they are undermining their own efficacy. Fantasy is, for that matter, often as subversive to domination as are other forms of resistance, such as humour, cynicism, or irony. As this thesis has shown, exit is not the only response left to evade loyalty. Voice is still possible — although, sometimes, we may have to listen very carefully.

8.4 Conclusion

Concluding our considerations, one implication of the insight that meaning and production/consumption are inexorably interlinked may entail that it is, indeed, good novels that offer one of the best chances of gaining a better understanding of management (Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux, 1994). (Organizational) reality can thus be considered as textual (Czarniawska, 1997),
although this assumption does not necessarily imply a single source or author (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992). Instead, the account produced in this thesis was constituted on the basis of a multitude of images (texts). The texts read in the field, for that purpose, were neither ‘first-hand’ representations nor were the interpretations suggested free of ambiguities or contradictions. In consequence, my reading/writing of those texts included fictive elements as well as normative judgements concerning the verisimilitude of these texts. I even had to admit reification – a process almost inevitable when reading/writing ethnography yet one that may be constituted as a sin to more traditionally inclined researchers. The continuous, and hence unfinished, process of reading/writing – which evolves from the intertextuality of organizational reality and which characterizes the ethnographic project – has now been returned to the reader.

From what we have said it follows that while “[o]rganization means control” (Clegg, 1994: 283), control means interpretation. Extending this equation, we can conclude that organization means interpretation, or better: organizing means interpreting. Since any act of interpretation/representation requires imagination (Castoriadis, 1997), our capability to organize or manage (flexible service) organizations depends on our symbolic capacities, not least, on our fantasy. Hence, any homogenization of meaning ought to be incomplete and tentative to allow for acting (managing) flexibly. Extending Czarniawska-Joerges’ and Guillet de Monthoux’ (1994) credo, we could hence proclaim: More imagination (fantasy) – better management.
Diagram 8.1

The new geometry of power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bureaucratic Organization</th>
<th>Consensual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Low indexicality)</td>
<td>(shaping aspirations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(supervision)</td>
<td>(Ascending)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience</td>
<td>Imaginative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Descending)</td>
<td>(colonization of fantasy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panoptic</td>
<td>Flexible/Virtual Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(surveillance)</td>
<td>(High indexicality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Endnotes

1 Throughout the period of my research, the frequency of the meetings varied from one to three times a week.
2 And of course, as non-Australians may need reminding, all of this occurs in a context of blinding sunshine and blistering heat outside the air-conditioned building.
3 TAB is the acronym for Totalizer Accumulation Board, the state licensed betting facility.
4 Stockmen is the denomination for Australian cowboys. The Ocean is a five-star luxury restaurant at the second level of the hotel. It has a reputation for its excellent cuisine well beyond the local level. In recent years, it has repeatedly won the price of Best Restaurant at state level.
5 The fifth floor is the one on which most suites are located. At this floor, guests receive extra services such as the comfort of a separate breakfast lounge, which means that guests do not have to use the buffet at The Breakfast Garden, the hotel’s breakfast restaurant at the second level.
6 The Garden Terrace is an additional dinner restaurant at the second level of the hotel, connected through a glass door with The Breakfast Garden.
7 Akubra is a hat traditionally worn by Australian cowboys ("stockmen").
8 To understand the content of the following verbal exchange between Tim and Brett, it is worthwhile mentioning that, on weekends, the hotel’s restaurant and bar facilities cater for a lot of customers that are not hotel guests but rather visitors or residents from the local area. In contrast to hotel or conference guests – who often receive discounts for lunches and dinners within the hotel, for instance, when having a buffet as part of a conference package – guests from "outside" the hotel will usually be served a la carte and will be charged the full prices for their meals, drinks, etc. This implies for the individual restaurants that (usually) they receive less revenue from conference or hotel guests than from "external" customer. Hence, from an economic point of view, hotel restaurants would try to reserve as many places as possible to external guest to maximize their revenue. While during the week, when only few external customers come to visit the hotel restaurants, the latter are quite happy about additional business brought in by hotel and conference guests, on weekends, when many external customers want to make use of the hotel restaurants, managers of those establishments are rather reluctant to reserve places for guests who will bring in less revenue. In other words, there is an implicit tension between the rationality of the hotel’s restaurants as profit centres (which do not appreciate conference guests on weekends) and the overall economic rationality of the hotel as a whole (which depends on hotel and conference guests to fill the rooms and, hence, expects the hotel restaurants to cater for these guests).
9 For reasons of confidentiality and to secure the anonymity of the persons and organizations involved in the research, all names of persons, places, or organizations used in the thesis have been changed.
10 Geertz borrows the concept of inscription from Paul Ricoeur.
11 With this quote I depart somewhat from Denzin’s history of ethnography. He cites this sentence as one of the consequences of the fourth stage, the crisis of representation, marked by contributions from post-structuralists and postmodernists (e.g. Clifford, Marcus, Rosaldo). I think, however, that some of the characteristics he reserves for this later stage in ethnography – namely the insight in the socially constructed nature of social reality and the non-privileging of the voice of the author – can already be found in Geertz' Interpretation of Culture and Local Knowledge.
12 This definition describes very well the qualities that I have found characteristic of my ethnographic research activity. As I will further elaborate below, in my experience, the process of ethnographic research will almost inevitably become pragmatic, imaginative, fragmented, and provisional.
13 This is an insight that traces back at least to the days of Evans-Pritchard: see Mary Douglas (1980): Evans-Pritchard. Fontana Paperbacks, Glasgow.
14 I am not sure in how far all of the authors mentioned would label their work using the notion of “radical”, although all of them subscribe to a form of constructivism. Nevertheless, I will use in what
follows the notion of radical constructivism, which has been coined by von Glaserfeld, to refer to concept of all these authors.

Czarniawska makes clear, though, that she owes this approach to the Paul Ricoeur.

One of the particularities of that genre, stories, is that it connects and integrates facts into chains of representation; chains that are purposefully arranged for that matter – which does not necessarily apply to all forms of representation. However, my point here is that facts do not exist prior to the horizon of meaning that allows for their construction. In other words, the selection of facts to build up a chain, if we would like to use this metaphor, already happens with the structure of that chain in mind. Within (ethnographic) research, I collect facts and connect them such as to make up a chain which I have already designed (however vaguely and tentatively) – I do not collect and connect parts at random to suddenly find that what I have constructed is a chain. Which pieces are selected for the chain (facts) is defined by the idea (meaning) of that chain. There are no chain pieces prior to the idea (design) of a chain!

I felt tempted to use the Foucauldian terminology and to talk of facts as discursively constructed. However, this may have provoked some conceptual problems, as this terminology seems to suggest that facts are the result (product) of discourse. The result would have been a potential argument analogous to the debate between Foucauldians and proponents of Psychoneurosis as to whether the subject is in discourse or contains discourse (Alcorn, 1994). As I wanted to avoid any such debate, I preferred to talk of facts and discourse (context) as mutually constitutive, leaving aside quasi-ontological debates as to what precedes the other.

Kristeva (1986) further distinguishes between three dimensions that qualify the textual space: subject (of the statement), addressee (of the statement), and exterior texts. As she states: “The word’s status is thus defined horizontally (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronous literary corpus)” (Kristeva, 1986: 37; emphasis original). My plea for contextualizing (ethnographic) writing, as expressed within this section, pays tribute to Kristeva’s concept by calling for a ‘mapping’ of the textual space. It asks, essentially, for addressing both the horizontal (revealing the author and its audience through signature) and the vertical dimension (historicizing the account and the context of its production) of the text.

Such apparent harmony is rather surprising given that some of the founding fathers of ethnography were very much “armchair researchers” as van Maanen (1995) remarks.

This does not mean that we cannot be aware of our role as ethnographers while doing ethnography. Authors such as Bruner (1986) have correctly pointed out that reflexivity is at the core of the anthropological, and I would add ethnographic, enterprise. Yet such reflexivity remains always incomplete and partial; if only because it requires time. As Dilthey has pointed out, and later Schutz, experience as lived through, ‘mere experience’, is different from ‘an experience’, the latter being carved out of the former by the analytic mind. In short, while I construct ‘an experience’, I cannot simultaneoussly analyze my experiencing of this process of construction.

Of course, if we would not like to confine ethnography to the production of accounts of accounts (Bourdieu, 1991), we have to assume that the accounts of the ethnographer are not only different from but, more precisely, to varying degrees less local than those of the natives – which, of course, does not affect the fundamental indexicality of such accounts. Hence, although the understanding of the researcher does not differ qualitatively from that of those researched, it differs in its conscious and methodical detachment from the practical conduct of the social action observed (Bauman, 1978).

One may ask, in this context, whether attempts towards a ‘humanization of work’ have been taken off the agenda. Dunford and Palmer (1999), for instance, found in their above-mentioned study that companies that introduced new organizational practices (among them outsourcing, dis-aggregation of workgroups, and usage of short-term employment policies) perceived themselves as operating in an environment that demands them to be (too?) socially responsible as a corporate body. Appay is even more explicit when he characterizes cascading subcontracting as new mode of corporate restructuring that “... is not only related to the externalization of labour costs, but also to the externalization of risks and responsibilities and, as such, contradicts more and more the basic principles of democracy” (1998: 161). To her, the tendency of corporate agents to withdraw from their social responsibilities benefits from the fact that “a major consequence of the externalization process is a shift of employment towards smaller firms”. It seems only too convenient then that such small firms lead a rather unobtrusive existence: “... when they disappear they disappear quietly, with no social conflicts, and not making the front page news” (Appay 1998: 166f.).
In this respect, the closure of the Uddevalla plant seems to indicate more than the loss of an icon.

We may notice the close affinity with Blumer’s (1967) three premises of Interpretive Interactionism.

The latter implies that one could interpret/rend other forms of recording and communicating experiences, such as painting or music, as texts.

For a more detailed discussion of this paradox see Heller (1999).

One may notice the similarity between the “trap” position of subjects within language (Heidegger, Derrida) or power (Foucault) on other occasions.

Wagner, however, sees this development as being characteristic for the dawning of postmodernism rather than being essentially modern as in Heller. This difference is due to Heller’s specific philosophy of history that incorporates many moments elsewhere discussed under the label of postmodernism into the (paradoxical) project of modernity. For a more detailed discussion see Heller (1999).

While the recent trend within organizations studies seem to have favoured “shifting from principle to practice” (Czarniawska, 1991: 287), I would consider the process of ethnographic research rather as oscillating between both perspectives (Linstead, 1994 and 2000).

The following passages are based mainly on the mentioned interview and several conversations with Tim.

This remark counts only for overt forms of resistance. The thesis will show below that there were other, more subtle forms of resistance discernible.

Only one external trainer kept on running leadership training courses for the managers. Due to the latter’s euphoric response to his courses, Tim agreed to keep this form of training running.

In this section, I will predominantly pay attention to negative guest comments (complaints). This is mainly because they tend to be discussed more frequently and explicitly during the morning briefing. Such discussions allow for identifying underlying organizational norms manifested in approving or rejecting responses from management to guest complaints. It does not mean, however, that this would not count, similarly, for positive guest feedback. The reason for the focus on negative guest responses lies, therefore, only in the frequency and explicitness of their discussion by management.

It is important to note, however, that, contrary to the associations raised by everyday language, the rhythm is not an attribute of the object but a constructive performance of the observer and his or her rhythmizing consciousness, as Abraham (1985) points out (from a phenomenological stance). Hence, the integrative act of constructing an inter-subjectively shared rhythm is, in a constructivist understanding, a very complex accomplishment indeed. However, there are forms of inter-subjective rhythmicity, such as dancing, that allow for a synchronization of action.

The very brief and rather crude description of Goffman’s complex and tremendously insightful work is an unfortunate tribute to the limited space available in this paper. It does by far not pay justice to Goffman’s prominent position in the history of social theory. In particular, I have to omit a detailed discussion of the issue of authenticity of behaviour. For such a discussion see Tseleons’s (1992).

In his more recent work, Ritzer (1999) points to another contradiction within in the process of McDonaldization – that between the economic imperative of rationalization, which is, potentially, disenchanting, and the need to lure consumers into excessive and expressive forms of (hyper-) consumption, which requires products and services to be enchanting. Drawing on the theories of Debord (1967/1995) and, most importantly, Baudrillard, Ritzer suggest that recent developments have brought about new means of consumption that centre as much on the exploitation of consumers as earlier periods of capitalism centred on the exploitation of producers. Analogous to factories as prison houses of labour, new cathedrals of consumption (such as shopping malls or, for that matter, hotels) have emerged that seek to entangle consumers into an iron cage of (artificially evoked) needs and desires, debts (created by excessive spending on consumer goods), and subjection to increasing demands within the world of work (demands for working longer and harder as a pre-supposition for hyperconsumption). However, although the developments described are certainly relevant to life at the Grand Seaside Hotel, Ritzer’s considerations fall outside of the scope of this thesis. They address the issue of control and discipline from a disparate angle, that of new modes of consumption and consumers’ subjection to disciplinary techniques and institutions. In contrast, this thesis confines its scope mainly to the sphere of production and the disciplining of its subjects: the service providers. In contrast, this thesis confines its scope mainly to the sphere of production and the disciplining of its subjects: the service providers. Although the subjugation of customers (guests) is a debatable and interesting issue in itself, the theoretical and practical limitations of the research conducted suggested
to confine the scope of the thesis in the way described.

Of course, alternate readings are possible: if they are paying A$200 a night then to have to pay A$3 for a Coke seems a bit much!

"Blookie" is a traditional Australian denomination for (young) men, similar to the American term "guy" or the British "chap".

The focus on the temporal/spatial separation between front and back regions of the hotel does not mean that there are no other separations at work. The back region, for instance, implies a further subdivision between the administrative centre and the rest of the operations area, a centre/periphery division, so to speak. The centre hosts not only most of the administrative staff and management (except for the Human Resource Manager and Assistant), but also the communications area with the telephone switchboard. The only access to this area is through one of the two security doors that require any person entering to have a security code before gaining access to the centre. Staff who do not know their security code will remain excluded. The (official) explanation for the restriction of access given by management referred to issues of security, as the administrative centre also hosts the finance department, where larger sums of money are often stored.

The notion of immagination was coined by Gareth Morgan to designate a process whereby people to reinvent their roles and the contexts that constitute the latter in an attempt to break free from the regularity and the routine order of everyday life in organizations: "Imagination extends an invitation: an invitation to a way of thinking, a way of seeing, a way of doing. It’s more of a mind-set and a capacity than a technique" (Morgan, 1993: 18). To Morgan, immagination is then a creative and, fundamentally, strategic act, empowering people to think ‘outside their nine dots’ and to re-create their organizational world. It is a process of strategically envisioning a future state of affairs along parameters that seem desirable (from an organizational point of view).

While sharing the concern with creative and imaginary capacities of individuals, to me immagination refers precisely to a ‘technique’ (in the Foucauldian sense of the term). It is not the strategic utilization of imaginative capacities than the more ambiguous subjection to the Plague of Fantasies, to paraphrase Zizek (1997). As will become more clear later in the thesis, immagination, as I use the term, is less about re-inventing the self in the sense of a free play with possible identities or roles as the attempt of ‘completing’ the self by striving to emulate a model identity. Hence, to me, immagination is less a process of liberation as it is a process of subjugation – the obligatory attachment (fixation) to an externally defined identity. Immagination is discipline! It is a way of Governing the Self (Rosen, 1992), of colonizing the individual’s psyche by binding their sense of identity to (demonstrated) success as defined by economic parameters. Further, immagination implies the extension of organizational reality beyond the here and now; beyond the sphere of immediacy, into a realm of imaginatively envisioned absence. Be it in Panopticism or inside the doctrine of service excellence, employees are asked to tune their senses beyond the apparent and obvious to either incorporate potentially omnipresent surveillance or to creatively evoke hypothetical customer wants and needs. In both cases, however, the consequences of imagining that absence are very real indeed. Hence, immagination aimed at exceeding customer expectations implies a shift towards hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1994), with imaginary service encounters and guests, for instance, being, in a sense, more ‘real’ than those events that do or did take place in real-time and space.

It is worth noticing that, to Castoriadis, imagination, as a fundamental characteristic of all collective human activity, can be both liberating as well as constraining. In this respect, the power of imagination is, in a Foucauldian sense, both positive and negative.

Grammatically one can identify the hypothetical as spoken or written in a conditional form: (if . . . ). It is interesting, though, that often when, for instance, Tim refers to hypothetical service encounters or guest expectations, the conditional term “if” remains unspoken. It is simply assumed that the authority of the normal customer has already been internalized.

The adjective ‘strong’ here indicates the difference between fact-to-face interaction and representations of the latter. Whereas in the case of the face-to-face interactions the context of the encounter (e.g. the artificial context and the persons involved) is real, in the Castoriadian sense, representations such as the guest questionnaires have to represent (imagine) the context of scenario in question. Nevertheless, it remains true that, according to Castoriadis, all symbols, and hence all representations, contain an imaginary element. Nevertheless, in what follows I will use the notion of imaginary to designate those incidents based on fictitious (not real) representations (images), whereas the guest-questionnaires are assumed to refer to (past but real) encounters.

TAFE stands for Tertiary Advanced Further Education.

In this light, Tim’s attempts of demonstrating commitment through his egalitarian attitude acquire
another sense of irony. We may suspect that the apparent desperation that characterizes his proclamation of equality results from the status of the Grand Seaside Family as, essentially, a bond of organic solidarity. The latter, however, is not based on equality but complementarity, as Durkheim (1988) showed.

We should bear in mind, though, that nonsense can still be (considered to be) true.

Of course, such a position implies identifying people’s ‘real’ intentions, a position that seems to fall back behind critiques of three dimensional power. As I will show, however, we (inevitably) commit such authoritative ascription all the time; even those who apparently refrain from such sins.

Based on the evidence provided, there are no indications that those engaging in Foucauldian analysis of power in organizations have indeed asked the individuals studied for their intentions.

In this respect, Haugard might have spoken of conflict about institutions instead of structures.

In the presence of such accounts, the process would not be much different. If still would have to ascribe (his or her) meaning to the statements of A and B. In other words, H would be constrained in her or his interpretation of what A or B say by an interpretative horizon. It is arguable, though, whether this would mean more constraints upon his or her interpretation than in instances authoritative ascription. As we can assume that the interpretative horizon(s) may be the same in each instances, we would somehow have to argue that what people say ‘tells’ us more than that what they actually do.

We cannot know, however, whether the power exercised by C involves conflict or consent. To do so, we would have to ask A and B, which would require that their tacit agreement is made public (discursive). If there was, however, a way of establishing that A and B disagree about C’s ascription (conflict) than there would indeed be instances in which silent consent involves conflict. In that case, we would have to qualify our definition of technologies of the self in such a way that they are free of coercion by A or B, yet may involve coercion by C.

Nevertheless, establishing ideal-typical classifications such as self-directed/other-directed, voluntary/forced, obedient/committed – despite their reifying qualities – narrow down the indeterminacy of social reality and are thus essential to the conduct of organization studies, as we have argued in section 3.3.