Unplugged - Voices:
Two days, one night (2014)

Research in management and organization may only gain by being inspired from arts, culture and humanities in order to rethink practices but also to nourish its own perspectives. Life in organizations is artificially separate from ordinary life: all of mundane objects are thus conducive to astonishment, inspiration, and even problematization. The unplugged subsection "voices" gives the opportunity to academics and non-academics to deliver an interpretation about an object from the cultural or artistic world. Interpreted objects are or not directly related to organizational life, resonate or not with the moment, but share some intriguing features. These interpretations suggest a patchwork of variations on the same object.

Directed by Jean-Pierre et Luc
Dardenne
Producted by Les Films du
Fleuve

Introduction: Two days, one night

This issue of M@n@gement's Unplugged - "Voices" draws together four academic essays that reflect on the struggles of solidarity, ethics and personal realization in the context of the contemporary workplace. Recent literature on the changing context of work has noted the pervasive precarity arising from workplace "flexibilization", and the social and personal difficulties that precarity creates (e.g. Prosser, 2015; Mole, 2010; Kalleberg, 2009). Attempts to increase worker "choice" often have the paradoxical effect of augmenting control, and putting workers in the position of choosing their own forms of subjugation (Endrissat, Islam & Noppeney, 2015; Ekman, 2014). The cynical use of choice by management is nowhere more evident than in the film Two Days, One Night by the brothers Dardenne, which is the object on which these four essays reflect. Each, in its turn, looks at a distinct but related aspect of Sandra's struggle as she attempts to convince her co-workers to forgo their monetary bonuses and "vote" for her to keep her job. Struggling with her own personal demons, Sandra is forced to come to terms with herself and her situation, ultimately leaving the workplace that maintains conditions of injustice, losing her job but gaining self-respect. In these four essays, we reflect on Sandra's condition, and how it can inform the conditions of contemporary workers more generally.

Bénédicte Vidaillet's essay draws upon Slavoj Žižek to examine the conditions of objective and subjective violence that confront workers in the film. She attributes the difficulties they have opposing their boss's blackmail not to their own "evil" intentions as individual agents, but to the form of violence characterizing this situation, which is purely systemic and anonymous. She argues that such violence has, with global capitalism, come to occupy an unprecedented central place in our society. Taking a Lacanian perspective, Hélène Picard examines how the simulacrum of the "vote", in creating a false sense of democracy, builds an imaginary of the workplace that juxtaposes the law of the market against the personal, intersubjective connection between workers. Comparing the movie with another story of precariousness and isolation (The Measure of a Man, 2015), her contribution questions the ways in which face-to-face, embodied dialogue may or may not subvert pervasive competition in the contemporary workplace. Yoann Bazin provocatively asks us "Why don't employees rebel?", using the film as a way to understand continued employee submission to a patently unjust system. In his essay on time, Gazi Islam reflects on the paradoxical juxtaposition of the weekend, during which the action takes place, and the conventional work week, placing contemporary work in the space of liminality where social reproduction takes place. The essays, written individually and then reviewed collectively by the other authors, share a common concern with a pressing sense of injustice. But each description presents a distinct angle of this, creating a kaleidoscopic vision of the film. They are meant to be read individually and together.

Finally, underlying all of the essays is an enduring concern, reflected in the objectives of the Unplugged section: How does popular culture, by imagining, constructing and screening visual narratives about organizations, compel us to rethink how we work, collaborate and organize? Is film real, and, if so, in what sense? Does Two Days, One Night tell a dystopian tale of a current reality for us to reflect upon? Does it express in the language of fiction issues that are too sensitive to discuss in our own, real-life, workplaces? Or does the film provide us with a warning, of the workplace of tomorrow that we may confront if we do not take measures to prevent it? Film speaks, but to whom, in what language, from what position of enunciation? Each essay struggles with the content but also the

filmic representation of Two Days, One Night, and in so doing, challenges future research to consider forms of organizational representation that are distinct from those usually deployed in constructing our knowledge.

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Two days, one night, or the objective violence of capitalism

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Violence is omnipresent in the Dardenne brothers' film Two Days, One Night. But does the violence lie with the characters, willing to sacrifice one of their already vulnerable colleagues, or does it lie with the system, which forces them to make an impossible choice where everyone, ultimately, has something to lose? Using the works of philosopher Slavoj Žižek as a framework, I shall attempt to ponder this question of violence and how it might be overcome.

MORAL DILEMMA AND REDEMPTION

The position of having to make an impossible choice, in which the characters of the movie are placed, could not, under current labour law, occur in France, Germany or Belgium. In this small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) of seventeen employees, including one working under a fixed-term contract, the workers are asked by their boss to decide by vote whether they would prefer to receive a €1000 bonus, or to reinstate Sandra, a permanent employee due to return to work after long-term sick leave (the two options being irreconcilable for economic reasons related to international competition). Indeed, according to employment regulations, the dismissal of an employee cannot result from such a choice. Moreover, in reality it is the fixed contract position that would be eliminated in such a case, a solution which Sandra's boss only considers at the very end of the film.

However, this situation of being forced to make a choice, though fictitious, does refer to an already large number of cases in which employees have been placed in such a dilemma and made directly responsible for solving such a problem. For instance, in France, in 2004, the German Bosch group asked its employees to vote between a reduction in wage costs or 400 job cuts. The 2013 National Inter-sectoral Agreement (ANI), or "competitive employment agreement", allows employers to negotiate with their employees whether to increase working hours without increasing wages, or to cut wages without reducing working hours. Thus, in 2015, the management executives of the Smart factory of Hambach (Moselle) organized a referendum in which its 800 employees were asked to vote for or against a proposal to increase their working hours (i.e. to work 39 hours a week and be paid for 37) in exchange for guaranteeing their jobs until 2020. Such situations are likely to become more common in France, as the government wishes, through the new labour law, to give more weight to local agreements at company level than to sector-wide agreements and legal codes, and to encourage the widespread use of company referendums. Such local arrangements risk creating the situation described in the film. The film can therefore be understood as a fiction built around a very simple plot line[1], which strongly brings to light the implications of the practical application in the workplace of a neoliberal paradigm based on deregulation and individual choice, and the way in which workers may confront it.

The movie could at first be perceived as conveying a message about individual morality. Indeed, the decision each of Sandra's colleagues faces can be understood as a moral dilemma which conflicts personal interests with values of solidarity. The movie shows individuals absorbed by a pressing need to earn money, some having to moonlight at weekends to make ends meet; some with materialistic motivations, such as wanting home improvements, to buy new household appliances or a bigger house (such as Sandra and her husband, for whom moving back to social housing is out of the question); and some with problems such as an unemployed spouse, debts or school fees to pay. But,

1. That is, that, over the weekend following a first round of votes in which her co-workers overwhelmingly opt for her dismissal, Sandra attempts to convince each of her colleagues to change their minds and relinquish their own bonuses.

beyond the diversity of these individual situations, the movie paints the portrait of an individualized and weakened contemporary subject. The film depicts a range of possible responses, which often affect the workers' families, to an extremely difficult moral dilemma: from support, avoidance, denial, remorse, ambivalence, and finally to violence. This violence can be direct, in the form of criticism of Sandra, for instance for "asking us to give up that bonus we so badly need for our children", or for "taking our bonus from us"; or in the form of a physical attack, when someone attempts to hit her. But it can also be more subtle, as when a co-worker disqualifies Sandra by mentioning the depression she went through and his doubt as to her ability to work again.

The series of scenes in which Sandra meets with each of her colleagues to ask them what they have decided, does seem to reduce the situation to a direct face-to-face in which one of the two characters necessarily loses something. But each face-to-face interaction also serves as an opportunity for the characters to identify with each other, in terms of the co-worker imagining Sandra's risk of losing her job on the one hand, and Sandra's understanding of her colleague's personal reasons for wanting to receive the bonus on the other. Exhortations to "put yourself in my shoes", for instance, punctuate all these sequences, and each party has the same argument: the need for money, either the salary or the bonus. "I'd like you to vote for me; we need my salary", "without my salary, we can't make it", Sandra repeats, which meets responses such as: "I can't, I need my bonus". This confinement within a closed-door encounter during which, through a mirror effect, Sandra and a co-worker are set up to identify with each other, makes it difficult to condemn their decisions (except in the case of the few who respond malevolently). Sandra frequently responds with "I put myself in their place: one thousand Euros", "I understand, don't apologize", "that's too bad for me but I understand" when people try to apologize or ask her to "not take it the wrong way". When the reasons given for preferring to receive the bonus are "understandable" and human, the only argument likely to make them change their mind seems to be one of a moral nature, arguments that counterbalance the others based on values of solidarity, which invariably involve some form of sacrifice.

Analysed from this perspective, the movie can be seen as depicting Sandra's journey to redemption. The beginning of the movie describes a woman in a state of vulnerability, who relies on drugs to cope, is about to give up everything, including life, but who gradually starts fighting back (beginning with her meetings with co-workers), and in so doing regains health and dignity. Initially beset by a feeling of loneliness, she realizes that she is loved and supported by her husband, but also by some colleagues. When Sandra's boss eventually proposes to reinstate her once one colleague (who had voted for her reinstatement in the second round) employed on a short-term basis has completed his contract, she is faced with the same dilemma with which she has relentlessly confronted her colleagues. Sandra then makes the decision to leave the company and the final scene shows her beginning her job hunt and moving on.

OBJECTIVE VS. SUBJECTIVE VIOLENCE

This initial interpretation of the movie might suggest that the only right choice to make when faced with such a dilemma is to choose the option that involves sacrificing oneself in the name of solidarity. The idea being that this self-sacrifice allows subjects to keep their dignity — even if this means losing their money or job — and keeps them from behaving like the bastard the system relies on to survive. The movie can thus be seen to be teaching the ethic of reciprocity: "Treat others as you wish to be treated", "Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you".

But this limited interpretation of Two Days, One Night would not seem to do justice to the Dardenne brothers' work overall. The first of their films that met with international success and recognition, Rosetta (1999), portrays a young woman desperate to find a job and a way out of poverty, following a first failure which was the result of an injustice. Despite Riquet being the only person to have given her comfort and support, Rosetta betrays him to his boss in order to get his job. The point of the movie is not to condemn Rosetta, but to question the system that causes the characters to go to such lengths. Similarly, Two Days, One Night shows the system to create situations in which everybody loses. This "system" is not referred to directly, but is implicated, for instance, in the references to the competitive situation and financial difficulties in which the company finds itself, as well as the pressure the company's management is under. This pressure is passed down to Sandra's colleagues who are forced to make a difficult decision within a short timeframe. The cinematic technique of repeated close ups of characters' faces during their one-to-one confrontations with Sandra conveys the strain of their struggle with this. Because Sandra's appeal to her co-workers takes place outside working hours (please see Gazi Islam below for more on this), the fiction of common objectives around work is dissolved, and all that remains is a fight for the job (de Gaulejac, 2014).

One can infer from this analysis that the only way out would be to challenge the rules of the system, by, to begin with, refusing to be placed in this dilemma. Although they understand that the rules are unfair, no one directly disputes them. When Juliette one of Sandra's colleagues, who supports her from the start, calls on the managing director of the company to hold a new vote, she contests the validity of the first poll's results, but not the principle of the vote itself. Whatever their ultimate choice, the characters implicitly agree to participate in what philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2009, p.2) refers to as "objective" violence. Objective violence is "systemic", cannot be attributed to an identifiable agent or agents (e.g. global poverty or the sexism embodied in some habitual forms of language), and exists insidiously and almost invisibly within the system and "the 'normal' state of things" (Slavoj Žižek 2009, p.2).

According to Žižek (2009), "subjective" violence, however, is more immediate, physical and can easily be attributed to a specific agent (subject) or agents (States, groups, etc). One example of subjective violence in the movie is a fight initiated by a son against his father because he chooses to support Sandra. Subjective violence produces a sense of horror, revulsion and fascination, and, above all, disrupts a "zero level" of violence. Thus, subjective violence is seen to disrupt the normal state of things, whereas objective violence remains within it, and is thus, barely visible or recognizable, while, ironically, simultaneously working to sustain the illusion of the existence of the zero-level. Žižek compares objective violence to the "dark matter" of physics, a major constituent of the universe, which seems undetectable but which is the only explanation for certain gravitational effects on visible matter. Similarly, objective violence is the only way to make sense of outbreaks of subjective violence which otherwise seem irrational and gratuitous. Žižek argues that such violence has, with global capitalism, come to occupy an unprecedented central place in our society.

> Therein resides the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, much more uncanny than any direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence: this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their 'evil' intentions, but is purely 'objective', systemic, anonymous. Here we encounter the Lacanian difference between reality and the Real: 'reality' is the social reality of the actual people involved in interaction and in the productive processes, while the Real is the inexorable 'abstract', spectral logic of capital that determines what goes on in social reality. (Žižek, 2009, p. 11)

One aspect of the fundamental violence of capitalism is that it creates a social space experienced as "worldless", in the sense meant by Alain Badiou, which is a space in which the subjects are no longer endowed with the mental representation that helps them make sense of the world they live in. 'Perhaps, it is here that one of the main dangers of capitalism should be located: (...) it sustains a stricto sensu 'worldless' ideological constellation, depriving the large majority of people of any meaningful cognitive mapping. Capitalism is the first socio-economic order which detotalizes meaning' (Žižek, 2009, p. 67). Capitalism deprives individuals of the cognitive references that could provide a framework of intelligibility. Thus, objective violence must be understood as what, within this system, prevents the subject from contesting or actively resisting it (see Yoann Bazin below). The Dardenne brothers' movie shows how the objective violence of capitalism creates an internal struggle between employees in the same team. It creates in them a sense of guilt which they try to justify (–("understand my situation"), or deflect by blaming Sandra, who takes on much of the responsibility: "It's my fault; I'm the one who causes this violence ", "It is because of me that they are prepared to get into a fight".

THE POSSIBILITY OF A POLITICAL COMMUNITY?

However, the film seems to outline the beginnings of a possible shift beyond this boxed-in position. First, each of the characters eventually expresses some opposition. Sandra, who eventually rejects the rules of the game she initially thought "normal", overcomes her sense of guilt and refers to the responsibilities of her superiors in the matter: "I'm not the one who decided that you would lose your bonus if I stayed"; "It's not my fault that they force you to choose." She overcomes her fear, confronts her foreman and makes him face up to his actions: "You called them on the weekend; you tried to scare them" (it is almost regrettable that she accuses him of being "heartless", because this continues to situate the problem at the level of the subjects' identification with others, of individual choice and subjective violence, rather than at the level of objective violence and political struggle). Eventually she opposes her boss altogether by refusing his offer.

Some opposition also emerges among those of Sandra's co-workers who publically support her even though the vote is secret. Their choice to forgo their anonymity and accept the consequences possibly creates the conditions for the birth of a political community. This is what one of the final scenes, when Sandra meets her waiting colleagues in the factory's canteen to say goodbye, seems to suggest. Sandra no longer addresses individuals one by one, but faces a group of people who have dealt with a difficult choice in a similar way. This shared experience, which they will always have in common, makes their choice collective, rather than individual, and marks the possible beginning of a community. They no longer face Sandra alone, but instead she seems to have been the condition for their coming together, and it is a group that she leaves behind and feels bonded to: "I will never forget what you did for me". The seeds of this outcome can be found in other scenes in the movie. For instance, when Sandra's colleague, after being confronted by her, becomes conscious of the need to make choices and stop being a victim, thus decides to leave her husband; and then, when the same colleague unexpectedly offers her support, it inspires Sandra to choose to fight for herself. Other examples occur when another colleague reminds Sandra that she once took the blame for a mistake he had made during his trial period, and when Sandra realizes that another colleague is "afraid of Jean Marc [the foreman], just like me". All these moments posit the possibility of building a human community endowed with self-awareness, made of bonds, relationships, reciprocity, with a common memory and a common history; all conditions for the formation of a political community.

In this regard — the link between the ability to fight and building a community — Two Days, One Night can be compared to Mark Herman's movie Brassed Off (1997). When a group of miners is rendered helpless in the face of the closure of their pit, a prospect which threatens their identity and their sense of belonging to a community, the characters focus on saving their colliery brass band at all costs and participating in a national music competition. While this objective may seem futile in the context of a struggle for the survival of their livelihood, it becomes a symbolic challenge, and while the mine is eventually closed, their community, symbolized by the band they belong to, remains, and this belonging is itself an act of affirmation of their fidelity to their political struggle. As one of the miners puts it, "when there's no hope, only principles remain". In this respect, Žižek (1999: 472) notes that fidelity to such principles keeps the political subject, a subject that belongs to a community, in existence. In the Dardenne brothers' movie, hope, and the potential creation of a new, symbolic community, stems from the characters' fidelity to the ordeal they go through and to what develops between those who support Sandra. Those who choose to keep their bonuses, however, are left alone to face a world that remains unchanged for them, and in which there is no possible mediation.

But another possible outcome can be illustrated by the film directed by Gustave Kervern and Benoît Delépine, Louise Michel (2008). When the workers of a factory in Picardy discover with dismay that the factory has been relocated overnight, despite the efforts and concessions they had been making for years, they meet at a local coffee shop and decide to pool their small severance pay to hire a hit man to kill the boss. One of the workers, Louise, takes it upon herself to find a suitable professional — Michel, who has never actually killed anyone before — and together they set off in search of the unscrupulous boss. But as their adventure unfolds, they discover that the man they have just killed was not the person responsible but merely the executor of a decision made in a company which itself was owned by another company, and so on. This leads them into an endless series of murders. When they identify the "real" boss, hiding in Jersey, they appear to have reached the end of their search. But it turns out that this boss is in fact under the thumb of an American pension fund, and so the series of murders continues.

In this caustic movie, the main theme, which is the difficulty of identifying, and thus resisting, the ultimate source of power and responsibility, goes hand in hand with the reactions this causes: initial acceptance, resignation and apathy, which give way to a form of violence which, because it remains non symbolized, can become radicalized and directed towards all those who, at some time or other, have played a part — inadvertently or not — in the system. This subjective violence, terrifying and visible, emanates from the objective violence of the system, which had been invisible and is suddenly revealed for what it is.

Although this is a fictional case, the gap between fiction and reality may not be that narrow. For instance, in France and other countries, recent outbreaks of anger and violence have followed sudden announcements of factory closures or mass layoffs. A human resources director of Air France once had his shirt ripped off his back, for example, and there was an explosion of violence in 2009 when some employees of a Continental plant in France heard that a court of justice had rejected their request for the suspension of the plant closure procedure, which resulted in the immediate destruction of the Sous-Préfecture[2]. In the years prior to this outbreak, the factory's employees and trade unions had made a number of concessions and accepted significant pay cuts in the hope of saving the site. As in the Louise Michel film, the ultimate outbreak of destructive violence was the outcome of a long period of acceptance of and participation in the system. The sense of having been fooled, and of being personally affected, can generate a level of anger that can no longer be mediated or controlled. It is as though the objective violence (Žižek, 1999, 2009) which for years was directed from within

2. An administrative entity representing the state locally.

the system is transferred to the employees themselves. What will the Two Days, One Night employees who choose to sacrifice Sandra for their bonus do when their turn comes around?

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Two Days, One Night and *The Measure of a Man* Subjective struggles in the contemporary world of work: Fighting for what?

Caught up in the competitive gears /
Small employees full of sparkles and glints /
Often are more insane than the rules themselves.
So, if competition never ceases to tease you /
Come on, let us remain as humane as we can.
One gets exploited / one exploits in turn /
This world turns us into small-time tormentors.

Rocé[1]

"We put up a good fight, didn't we?
I am content[2]."

Sandra (played by Marion Cotillard), Two Days, One Night
(J-P. & L. Dardenne, 2014)

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In the movie *Two Days, One Night*, the main character, Sandra, works for Solwall, a Belgian solar panels factory. Returning after almost a year-long sick leave, it is unclear whether she will be allowed to keep her job. The factory manager delegates responsibility for this decision to her colleagues, who must vote either to give up their annual €1000 bonus so that Sandra can keep her job, or to lay her off and keep their bonuses. In the first poll, the majority vote against Sandra's reintegration. Yet, because of suspicions that Jean-Marc, the plant's foreman, pressurized people before the first vote, a second is to be held on the coming Monday. The focus of the film is, then, on the weekend, during which Sandra tries to meet face-to-face with each of her colleagues to convince them to switch their vote.

Beyond this simple plot, the first few minutes of the film begin to raise questions, particularly apparent in the dialogue between Sandra and her husband, that go on to structure the narrative. Such questions first arise during an argument with her husband, after Sandra receives a call from her colleague Juliette who wants to head back to the factory that Friday night to get the manager to agree to a second vote. For Sandra, still fighting to recover from her long depression, to learn that all but two of her colleagues have voted against her is tough news and she wants to give up: "they would rather have their bonus, it's normal". Her husband, however, sees things differently: "no, it isn't normal. The only way to stop crying is to fight. You have to fight this", he says. This raises questions about what can be considered "normal", or rather legitimate about the dilemma that this pretence of a democratic vote presents. What is the nature of the fight that Sandra "has to" fight? How will she be able to justify this fight to herself and particularly to the colleagues that she will try to convince to give up their €1000 (close to a month's salary) bonuses, so that she can keep her job? Finally, what has Sandra's struggle really been about as we see her walking away from the factory at the end of the film, telling her husband on the phone: "we put up a good fight… I am happy"?

The film stimulates a critical reflection on the stakes of such subjective

"fights", giving us an inside perspective on the difficulties of connecting to one's other. However, some scenes of infra-collective, or even individual, resistance, raise the issue of what the potentialities and resources of "togetherness" might be for this shaken collective. Relying on a psychoanalytical framework referred to Jacques Lacan's work, I will study the fight led by Sandra, focusing on its subjective and intersubjective implications. The perspective taken here allows me to question the hurdles that need to be overcome in order for people to move on from the scattered, subjective fights of the individual, to organized collective resistance as political action (see Yoann Bazin's contribution on this matter, below). The limitations restricting this move are linked to the "objective violence" inherent in the contemporary world of work (see Bénédicte Vidaillet's contribution on this matter, above). This perspective will also highlight how face-to-face, joint presence in speech may help to subvert the dominant, market-economy-driven logic in intersubjective encounters.

To enrich this reflection, I will compare it to another film, *The Measure of a Man*, by Stéphane Brizé, released in 2015, which, although painting a much darker picture, also focuses on the narrative of a vulnerable worker looking to secure his situation. The main character, Thierry, is a former specialist worker who is fired as a result of restructuring. We follow him in his fight, a succession of confrontations where his value as a subject and as a worker is constantly put to the test, whether it be by an employment agency worker or by the management of the supermarket that hires him as a security guard.

One particularly striking scene shows Thierry joining his former co-workers at a café, where they try to convince him and each other of the necessity to carry on the struggle and bring their bosses to trial, so that the abuse they have suffered and the injustice of their redundancy can be acknowledged. Yet, pushed to react by his mates, Thierry says he "merely" wants to find a new job, and "put all of this [the redundancy, the trial] behind". His stake is "merely" to gain back a measure of his own dignity by securing a job which will enable him to support his family, and this seems to be incompatible with a more collective form of engagement and struggle.

In Sandra's, as in Thierry's, narrative, the tension between subjective and (infra) social struggles raises questions particularly pertinent to the conditions and the seeming fragility of the connections that the most precarious of workers can forge (Standing, 2011). Moreover, the staged face-to-face interactions bring into question the ability of workers to open up and listen to the other's speech, as well as their capacity to inscribe their dialogue in a shared symbolic dimension, beyond relations of opposition and hyper-local negotiation.

A FIGHT "FOR ONESELF", AT WHAT COST?

At first, Sandra's battle in *Two Days, One Night* is exposed in straightforward terms: the point being to save her job, her income, and the material living conditions her income guarantees (meaning, for Sandra, being able to meet her mortgage payments and avoid, at all costs, returning to social housing). These are the points she systematically brings forward in her discussions with her co-workers: "my job… vote for me… what about my income…", while recognizing their implications for the others: "… to make you lose your bonus". Furthermore, a rumour spread by Jean-Marc suggests that if Sandra stays someone else will be laid off, which means they risk both bonus and job. The dilemma is thus framed as a binary opposition: either "her *or* me". Still, as Sandra eventually realizes, the rules of the vote are not her responsibility. It is Dumont, the plant's manager, forcing her colleagues to make this decision under the pretence of a democratic process, which deprives the subjects of the space and time to discuss and deliberate together through intersubjective speech. The vote, thus, appears to have taken place in a tense atmosphere,

loaded with rumour and suspicion of Sandra, who has returned from her illness to "take our bonus from us".

Lacanian interpretation: pretence democracy, binary oppositions and "imaginary" dynamics

A Lacanian framework allows us to interpret the dual logic as "(s)he or I", and to reflect further on the consequences of such an ersatz democratic process, which is preventing intersubjective encounter. Lacan, returning to Freud's foundations, introduces an original understanding of human subjectivity as "divided", in order to stress the difference between the (conscious) ego and the subject (as an effect of the unconscious). Thus, the ego is expressed in the conscious, "official" discourse of people. It is moved by their impulses, wishes and needs, and is driven toward the securing of certain objects and images. For instance, in pursuing the accumulation of consumer goods or social prestige, the ego strives to stabilize a coherent image of the self in order to give satisfaction to others by presenting them with this stable "identity" (this, thus, repeats the processes of the "mirror stage" of child development and the "imaginary" order) (Lacan, 2006: 75-81). What is more, such ego discourse is an objectifying and instrumental language, aiming for exactness rather than truth, as can be observed of modern information systems (Faÿ, 2008).In turn, the "subject" (S) is referred to the desire of the Other, meaning that it depends on what happens in the unconscious. The Other is "the locus from which the question of his existence arises for him" (Lacan, 2006: 459). Thus Lacan develops the concept of a subjectivity founded "elsewhere" than in the sole images or identifications of the ego (Lacan, 2006 : 197-267), in a founding act of division that marks the exit from imaginary duality and the entry into the "symbolic" dimension that is marked by the third presence of radical alterity, that of the big Other.

Speech, open to the language of the unconscious (as "discourse of the Other"), bears its effects in the speaking subject, the *parlêtre* (speaking being). That is why Lacan can state that entry into the symbolic order prevents the subject from being trapped in a binary, instrumental, imaginary relation to a little other, in which he or she might be indefinitely looking for "confirmation". Going back to the issues involved in the sham democratic vote, although it appears to give a voice to the employees, it actually immediately closes any speech outcomes that might provide an alternative to the binary, oppositional logic of "Sandra or me" or "her job or my money". Likewise, for Sandra, the stakes are binary: "them or me". This same binary logic leads us to analyze the psychic dynamics that lead the Solwall workers to retreat into the imaginary position in discourse.

The (imaginary) discourse of economic exactness is introduced by the plant manager at the very beginning of the film, when he justifies the need to cut a job or cancel bonuses because of global competition. Such are the market laws (La loi du marché (market law) also being the French title of *The Measure of a Man*) that dictate the terms of human exchanges, following the model of pure and perfect competition, thereby preventing the advent of intersubjectivity as borne by living speech.

This analysis can also be applied to *The Measure of a Man* in order to interpret the construction of face-to-face confrontations that Thierry goes through during his months of job seeking. The director, Stéphane Brizé, films the face-to-face encounters in long and static close up shots rather than using a more dynamic, "shot reverse shot" technique. This effectively emphasizes the polarisation of the interlocutors' discourses and the isolation of subjective speech faced with the (objectified) "criteria" and "expectations" of the other party of the dialogue. Human relations are thus revealed to be reduced to a trade, a negotiation, in which everyone is trying to subjugate the other.

Violence then, is not, solely, that perpetrated by the dominant (the plant manager, executive director, foreman) against the dominated actor (the jobless, precarious, short-term salaried worker). These films show the widespread violence of human relations governed by liberal capitalist precepts, and of interactions which are first and foremost conducted through the objectifying, instrumental and imaginary dimension of language. In this world, maybe all individuals will eventually find themselves in the position of acting as "small time tormentors" (Rocé).

Furthermore, the main characters in both films face expectations that the "new spirit of capitalism" brings to bear on salaried workers as individuals and subjects (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005) through the image of the "new ideal man (sic)" (Sennett, 2006). This "ideal" figure is a subversive entrepreneur (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Žižek, 1999), creative to the point of constantly reinventing their own identity, seemingly maintaining control of their own destiny and even their own happiness, for which they are perpetually competing with their fellows (Cederström & Grassman, 2010). By claiming that each individual is responsible for their own destiny, for who and what they are, and what they present as their identity (as entrepreneur, consumer, etc.), this "new spirit" effectively distracts people from making any analysis of or dissenting from the social and the political (ibid.).

Social and psychic consequences of a retreat into the imaginary: violence and discipline

I will now examine the way in which such violence is displayed, and how it surfaces in the embodied interactions performed in *Two Days, One Night* and *The Measure of a Man*. I will analyse the symptoms of a retreat into the imaginary position, as structured by the dispositive of generalized competition and precarization of the contemporary world of work.

In the confrontations staged by the Dardenne brothers in *Two Days, One Night*, violence at first translates into silent hostility, typically when Sandra shows up at her colleagues' residence. For instance, she is not invited in, her colleagues appear to step back in hesitation and to just want to get the discussion over with as quickly as possible. One co-worker she was close to, Nadine, even pretends to be absent and refuses to talk to her.

This urge to make one's counterpart, (or "little other"), disappear as fast as possible, culminates in physical violence. A brawl is sparked between a father and his son who are repairing a car when Sandra visits them. "This violence is because of me… *and I want to punch them too…"* says Sandra, caught up in the net of a fantasy of disposing of the little others who get in her way. Fantasy is itself on the side of the imaginary, operating in the form of a narrative structure, an ideal scenario opposing the promise of a recovered unity in fusion and *jouissance*, to a disaster scenario (Glynos, 2008). In Sandra's case, the ideal scenario may be one in which the angry co-workers disappear so that the bonus dilemma is solved.

Organizational psychoanalysis sheds light on such dynamics, suggesting in particular that a subject's retreat into the imaginary order will tend to reinforce the disciplinary effects of managerial control (Roberts, 2005). Indeed, the imaginary relation is at the core of power/control dynamics because individuals seek an, illusory, objective image of themselves (notably, through complying with the expectations of the "ideal", obedient and committed employee), and place themselves in a position of dependence on the confirming gaze of an other (little other). This dynamic can be interpreted, for instance, in the case of the colleague that Sandra meets outside his local pub. Given the current situation, he says, it is time for him to work twice as hard, to accept whatever extra hours might come his way, and since he can perform better than the weak and sick Sandra, she is even more dispensable.

The colonization of human relations by the economic logic of exactness is conveyed in both films through the staging of incessant appraisal situations: who is worth what *exactly*? Past experiences are discounted, and everyone is authorized, and even encouraged (in a vote, in the collective assessment of a job interview, etc.), to evaluate the individual (professional as well as personal) worth of others.

This, notably, leads to one of the roughest scenes in *The Measure of a Man*, which takes place during some training of unemployed workers. Participants have to assess Thierry's filmed performance in a mock job interview. The naked violence and almost sadistic[3], destructive criticism — "well, *he does not make me* want to hire him", "it doesn't *look* like he wants that job!", "I would not trust him… he *should smile* more" — that each seem to indulge in highlights the absence of solidarity between subjects, despite the fact that they all take this same test.

In *Two Days, One Night*, as Sandra confronts her colleagues, she tries to provide justification for deserving to keep her job: she is cured, fit for work and as competitive as before; she is worth as much as those who, as her colleague puts it, "have really worked hard to get their bonus". The workers are trapped in an imaginary pursuit of some sort of validation, of elusive and illusory evidence of their worth, and, ultimately, of domination of the others (Vidaillet, 2013). As a potential employer asks Thierry: "How far are you willing to go?"

THE FIGHT TO MEET THE OTHERS IN SPEECH

The Dardenne brothers' film, and, notably, the most intimate scenes that take place between Sandra and her husband at home, does, however, allow a second interpretation of the fight that is being fought.

For Sandra keeping her job, and, perhaps even more importantly, for her to be supported by her co-workers to that end, represents confirmation of her existence. For instance, Sandra says in the opening section after learning that only two of her colleagues have voted in her favour: "I don't exist, no one thought of me". Such an existential stake can be interpreted when Sandra participates in open and careful listening to others, as this provides her with confirmation of her own subjectivity, which the first vote deprived her of. Thus, while *The Measure of a Man* offers a compelling case in support of the "dead men working" notion of the contemporary work environment (Cederstrom & Fleming, 2012) and leaves little room for hope for solidarity at work, *Two Days, One Night* conveys a more nuanced depiction, which includes the possibility of the emergence of localized spaces for, and instances of intersubjective speech, which allow people to relate to their other in difference, as opposed to only through imaginary modes (such as fusion or opposition).

Opening breaches: speech, face-to-face encounters and subversion of the economic logic of exactness

"When they see you, they won't be able to think only of their bonus", Sandra's husband argues. What does in fact happen when the characters see each other face-to-face, when they enter in relation as *parlêtres*? Two moments in particular illustrate a subversion, an overturning of the objectifying discourse of exactness: when Sandra goes to meet Timour who is training the local little league soccer team on a sunny Saturday afternoon, and later when she meets Alphonse at the laundromat as night falls on Sunday.

Useful here is the Lacanian notion that the division of the subject is related to the distinction between "language" (discourse, the domain of conscious expression) and "speech" (which refers to the unconscious and the discourse of the big Other). I refer here to Lacan's formulation of the "function and field of language and speech in psychoanalysis" in which he argues for a return to Freud,

3. In this regard, Vidaillet (2013) suggests that the general application (with very little questioning) of individual, sometimes anonymous (as with some forms of 360° appraisal), feedback appraisal in company and job evaluations, allows the expression of unconscious forms of sadism, particularly because the symbolic frames that gave the professional appraiser a distinct, and thus independent, role have been abandoned in favour of a posture of "all-appraisers".

notably in order to understand the centrality of language and the function of speech (2006: 197-267). This conceptualization underlines the type of relation that is established between me and an other individual, or many individuals, in dialogue: "There is no speech without a response" (Lacan, 2006: 206).

Such understanding of speech is unmistakeably intersubjective (Frie, 1997; Vanheule, Lievrouw, & Verhaeghe, 2003). The *parlêtre* makes "the gift of speech" by speaking to his or her other, a "you", who in turn has the power to recognize the speaking subject through listening and responding: "Finally, the speech value of a language is gauged by the inter subjectivity of the 'we' it takes on" (Lacan, 2006: 247). Only by acknowledging that "I" cannot know everything of the other, or of myself, that "all" meaning cannot be assigned (because an unconscious dimension always remains), can "I" then come into relation with an other, through speech.

In spite of binary dynamics, subjects maintain a capacity to reach out to others. "Something" (unexpected, unintended) might still happen in intersubjective speech and through embodied affect, such as occurs in the encounters between Sandra and her colleagues Timour and Alphonse as they carry on their more personal weekend tasks (see Gazi Islam, below, for an exploration of that weekend temporality). The very fact that these events take place "behind the scenes" (of daily, supervised work) may facilitate something happening in the speech encounter, that subverts the economic logic of the (work) "contract" that defines behaviours and interactions *a priori* (Chaumon, 2004).

Both Alphonse and Timour remember, in turn, that Sandra had previously protected them by taking the blame for mistakes they had made in their early weeks on the assembly line. Such moments, in which Sandra acted according to her own personal ethics and contrary to managerial instructions (to monitor and control individual performance), could be interpreted as moments of free, interpersonal solidarity. In remembering such moments, the two characters seem to find the resources to mobilize themselves against the binary choice enforced on them, to overcome the fear induced by the law of the market and the continually underlying threat of precariousness.

Moreover, these dialogues allow for subjects to know "something" of their unconscious desire, through shared (embodied) speech, or in Lacan's words, to perceive "a little truth" on which they can then build their existence. For Sandra, these encounters allow her to connect to the other, as different from her but not as an obstruction (to her reinstatement), and also to (re)connect to herself, to her subjective truth. This is manifest in the final dialogue when Sandra finds the strength to say no to her boss, to refuse the binary opposition that is again given as the only option (either her or her colleague on the short-term contract).

Beyond Sandra's subjective itinerary, the Dardennes's work shows how a collective act of resistance might emerge, through a local struggle for solidarity — in which, notably, the first act of resistance is the individual "no" vote. Indeed, the group thus formed in solidarity only gets together at the very end of the film, while waiting for Sandra after the final vote. What appears to have emerged is a fraternal collective, almost the reverse image of the collective aggression in the mock job interview in *The Measure of a Man*. Such determination to be together marks the emergence of a "we", formed through the intersubjective dialogues in which the words exchanged have taken on speech value and allowed for the expression of the Other's desire for togetherness.

BUT THEN WHAT…? REFLECTING ON CONTEMPORARY FIGHTS AND SUBJECTIVE STRUGGLES AT WORK

The ending of the film invites us to reflect on the scope of the symbolic bond established within the community of Solwall's workers during the course of

the two days and one night. Could a collective capacity of (political) action emerge from this togetherness, or would it be limited to a mosaic of individual, subjective experiences momentarily aggregated around that Monday morning vote, and the (albeit important) refusal of the established rules of the game?

In *The Measure of a Man*, this issue is highlighted in a dialogue between Thierry and his former colleagues, who have also been laid off for economic reasons. As a trial to get compensation for this unjust lay off is about to take place, Thierry says that he no longer wishes to be involved in the fight. Thierry subjectively experiences the struggle as too painful and no longer finds it relevant to his current concern — which is, plain and simple, to find a job, "at whatever cost":

"Personally I would like to move on! I just, for me… I think that… for my mental health… I would rather let it go. Move on.

Can you hear this? Does this make me a coward?!"

(Thierry, The Measure of a Man, 2015)[4]

Some recent comments come to mind here, notably those of Zygmunt Bauman[5] who raises the difficulty of rooting contemporary struggles in more permanent forms of political action, beyond the fleeting mobilizations of local, and online, communities. This tension is explored further in Yoann Bazin's piece in this issue, below.

4. "Personnellement j'aimerais bien passer à autre chose ! Moi, je pense que… pour ma santé… mentale, je préfère tirer un trait. Passer à autre chose. Est-ce que tu peux entendre ça ? Est-ce que ça fait de moi un lâche ?!" Thierry (V. Lindon), La loi du marché, 2015

5. http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/01/19/inenglish/1453208692_424660.html

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Why don't employees collectively rebel against organizational injustice?

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The Dardenne brothers' movie Two Days, One Night can be understood as the story of an injustice of which all the actors are acutely aware, but against which none of them knows how to actually rebel. Whether they intend to vote to receive a €1000 bonus or for maintaining Sandra in her position, few are at ease with a decision they have to make within the frame imposed by Dumont, their boss. All through the movie they doubt and argue, they apologize and find excuses, they get annoyed, angry or sad, but in the end they do not challenge the authority, or even question the frame.

The questions I would like to tackle, then, are: What drives men and women not to rebel when faced with such an obvious injustice? If they did wish to, how could Solwall's employees protest against the authority of the boss who imposes such a situation? Why, beyond individual protests and frustrations, can they not build a collective opposition?

To answer these questions I draw on Nicolini's (2009) methods for studying organizational practices, and zoom in and then out on Sandra's situation. In the following section, I start by focusing on the individual emotions and dilemmas of Solwall's employees by referring to the many studies conducted in psycho-sociology on rebellion and protest. I then examine the more collective issues of workers' mobilization in the literature on social movements. I conclude on the sad acknowledgment of the infinite difficulty encountered by outraged individuals facing an authority against which they try to rebel.

WHY DO(N'T) MEN AND WOMEN REBEL?

For a long time now, sociologists and political scholars have studied matters of collective action and social movements (Davies, 1971; Olson, 1965; Tilly, 1975). A classic reference in this literature is Ted Gurr's book, *Why Men Rebel* (Gurr, 1970), which grounds protests in psycho-sociology, and more precisely in actors' frustration and aggressiveness. Gurr's theories have initiated a stream of research trying to understand the variables and thresholds of protest around one main question: At which point do men and women come to rebel?
Rebellion is not simply triggered by any, however intense, feelings of frustration or pain. Indeed, many variables, acceptance of exploitation in submission to authority (Zinn, 1968) or social dominance (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), for instance, can limit it. One of the most studied variables in the academic literature is the impact of system-justifying discourse on actors' mobilization (Jackman, 1994; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Scholars of this perspective focus on "the manner in which consensually endorsed system-justifying ideologies (or legitimizing myths) contribute to the stability of oppressive and hierarchically organized social relations among groups" (Jost & Sidanius, 2004: 11).

Jost et al. (2012) study the effects of system justification, group identification, collective emotions and uncertainty salience on protest, and, more precisely, on disruptive and non-disruptive forms of protest. These variables clearly echo the situations presented in *Two Days, One Night*: solidarity and cohesion among employees (or lack thereof), frustrations, sadness, fear and anger, hierarchical pressure and domination, discussions and arguments between Sandra and her colleagues.
One of the issues studied by Jost et al. (2012) at the centre of the movie is uncertainty salience, which manifests itself in the precariousness and

vulnerability of the employees' situations, and consequently in their need for the €1000 bonus, and their fear of the future (inside and outside of the company). When Willy tells Sandra that he is going to think about voting for her, his wife instantly gets annoyed and aggressive: "There is nothing to think about! (…) I wish we could help you, but I'm unemployed since February. And without the pavement that we recuperate and sell we cannot make ends meet". Moreover, system justification or submission to an authority figure provide a substantial decrease in uncertainty, even if the near future remains unclear. In this context, rebellion and protest would trigger risk and unpredictability (Jost & Hunyady, 2005), whereas authority, stereotypes and justifying discourses bring a sense of order and structure (Calogero & Jost, 2011).

Two trends can be seen in the exchanges between Sandra and her colleagues: they are afraid of the consequences of the vote and, more importantly, they do not seem to feel a sense of belonging to a collective.

> Mireille – But if I vote for you, I lose my bonus.
> Sandra – I'm not the one who decided that
> Mireille – It's not me either… The others agree to lose their bonus? (…)
> Juliette it's easy for her (…) Me, I can't afford it

The first trend clearly relates to uncertainty salience, the second is rooted in the issue of group identification. Members of a group with which they strongly identify are more likely to engage in protest and rebellion (Abrams, 1992; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Moreover, strong emotions, such as anger, if shared in a group, significantly reinforce collective movements (Martin, Scully & Levitt, 1990; Van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008).

In the movie, the emotional reactions of actors tend to conflict. Their respective frustrations trigger a potential for rebellion, but the salience of their uncertainty weakens it. Moreover, the fact that Sandra has to meet her colleagues one by one during the weekend adds an important variable. Indeed, these face-to-face meetings are symptomatic of an individualization of employees in Solwall, a phenomenon that actually happens in many corporations, and which renders the emergence of a collective reaction particularly difficult. Gazi Islam offers, below, a detailed analysis of the temporality of *Two Days, One Night* (workweek vs. weekend) and of its consequences on the relationships between actors.

The model offered by Jost & al. (2012) (see Fig. 1) can help us represent, analytically, the situation in which Sandra and the other employees of Solwall find themselves in Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's movie.

Uncertainty salience could reinforce system justification rhetoric, but in that case, the lack of any reflexive or analytical discourse would just maintain actors in their emotional reactions. Moreover, the lack of cohesion (or "ingroup identification") among the workers' collective triggers two main dynamics: (1) a low ability to consider and organize any form of protest, and (2) a tendency to protest in a non-disruptive manner, meaning in ways that do not really question the frame from within which injustice and frustration emerge. In that case, the vote imposed by Dumont that aims to transfer the responsibility of the decision to his employees remains unchallenged. Every time Sandra mentions that the situation is not her fault, her colleagues annoyingly remind her that it is not theirs either.

However, these psycho-sociological considerations remain limited by their focus on mainly individual emotions and dilemmas. Consequently, after having zoomed in on the actors, I shall now zoom out and try to account for the absence of collective organization or protest. Studies of social movements provide a powerful conceptual framework for this.

Figure 1. Adaptation of the path model illustrating the effects of assignment to the system rejection (vs. control) condition on system justification, ingroup identification, anger and willingness to protest by Jost et al (2012: 205)
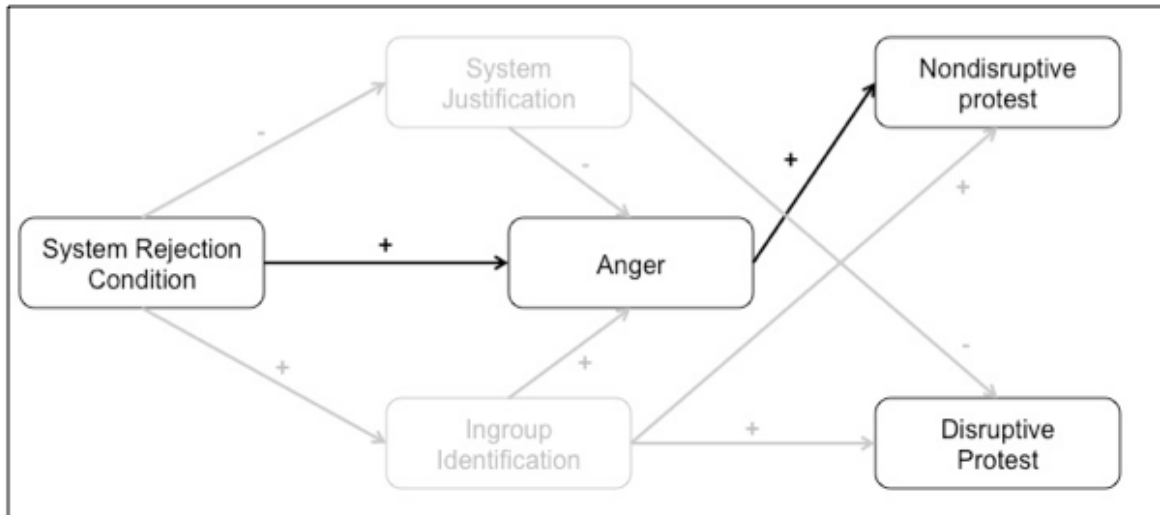
WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR A COLLECTIVE PROTEST TO EMERGE?

Following Sandra's personal trajectory, *Two Days, One Night* can also be seen as the story of the failure of a social movement; the story of one that could, but does not emerge. According to Neveu (2005: 10), social movements are "concerted forms of collective action supporting a cause". More broadly, they have also been seen as collective enterprises aiming at asserting "new public values" (Ganz, 2010: 1) and establishing new orders of life (Blumer, 1946). In the movie, however, the order does not change; it does not even come close to being challenged. But what, then, is missing in the case of Solwall that prevents a social movement, even a local and limited one, to emerge?

A social movement is partly built on the identification of an adversary or something to be against, which is often unclear and changing, but helps to structure a collective protest (Neveu, 2005). The fluidity of this "against" allows actors with potentially very different understandings, values and emotions to come together. To understand this phenomenon, Gurr (1970) builds on the concept of "relative frustration". It is defined by a state of tension, an expected or desired satisfaction, the absence or denial of which triggers a potential for discontent, anger and even violence. It is relative because it depends on a comparison, and is therefore contingent on the social contexts and norms that define systems of expectation. From then on, the key question becomes at which point does the conjunction of individual frustrations turn into collective action.

It becomes obvious, when one sees Kader, Nadine and Timour, or when one witnesses the violence of Yvon's son toward his own father, that the frustrations of Solwall's employees are extremely high. Almost no one defends the company and Dumont's decision, or even appears slightly satisfied with their situation. As a matter of fact, Timour bursts into tears when Sandra comes to see him:

> Timour – I'm so happy you came. Since yesterday I feel guilty to have voted for my bonus. I'm so sorry
> Sandra – Don't apologize, I can understand… 1,000€…
> Timour – No. I'm ashamed.

What, then, is missing from these individual frustrations that stops them from triggering a collective action? According to the academic literature on social movements, the threshold is generally reached through the emergence of a discourse that "tells the story" (Ganz, 2010) and gives sense to lived experiences, and through organizations that channel and frame emotions toward resource mobilization (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

Discourse can transform a crowd of frustrated actors in a social movement by giving them a shared identity, a collective dimension. As Neveu (2005: 100) explains: "In their study of a pacifist mobilization in a small town near Amsterdam, Klandermans and Oegema (1987) revealed the strategic dimension of the 'political work' of diffusing an explanatory and normative discourse. They offer, in particular, to decompose any social movement in two sequences. [The first is] consensus mobilization, [which] relies on this activity of propaganda. Through an activist work – posters, meetings, flyers -, it aims at diffusing a point of view on the world, the 'problem' at hand, and at constituting an audience favourable to the defended cause. It is only once this in-depth work is achieved that a 'mobilization of action' [as the second sequence] can occur".

In *Two Days, One Night*, there is a chronic lack of structuring discourses that could characterize the injustice of Sandra's situation. What we are witnessing instead is individual discussions, personal stories and trajectories that are expressed, influence each other, and sometimes clash. Actors remain focused on local emotions and individual frustrations in the face of injustice. There is very little distance in the discussions and negotiations between Sandra and her colleagues. Even the justifications of their situations, or of the "system", to use the vocabulary of psycho-sociology, tend not to include mention of any social, managerial or political frames of reference. Their collective inertia is all the more important for the fact that a crucial element of social movements remains absent from the movie: the organization.

Indeed, discourse, as powerful and unifying as it can be, is not sufficient. Discourses accumulate without necessarily leading to directed or effective action. However, when coupled with an organization (political party, union, NGO, etc.), a social movement can make better progress. Tilly (1986) understands the regularities in the many forms of the organized actions of social movements to be variations around "repertories of collective action". To stake their claims, actors can be inspired by pre-existing, more or less codified, but unevenly accessible patterns of protesting actions. Depending on the context and specifics of the organization, marches, demonstrations, public meetings and strikes are the classic institutionalized forms of demand, with infinite variations and innovations: press campaigns, lobbying, happenings, gatherings, occupations, etc.

The chronic absence of any "political" discourse in *Two Days, One Night* can be understood through the symptomatic, and yet discrete, absence of workers' unions, employees' representatives, or even mere references to labour law (Bénédicte Vidaillet comments relevantly, above, on the legal aberration of such a situation). Discourse in the film remains partly personal because Solwall's employees do not have any wider external references that could be provided by social movement organizations. Where unions eventually recuperate frustrations, and sometimes manipulate them, they also provide the opportunity to escape the trap of individualization.

A study conducted by Gamson (1975) on 53 social movements in the US shows the essential role of their organizations in terms of efficiency and success. Consequently, the Anglo-Saxon academic literature tends to focus on social movement organizations (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), and organizations have thus become the conceptual basis used to analyze and account for the way in which social movements structure groups, discourse and resource mobilization.

From this perspective, *Two Days, One Night* is the story of a social movement that does not happen. But there seems to be a close, latent potential

in the suffering and frustrations of Sandra, of course, but also Miguel and Yvon's son. Hélène Picard (above), relevantly underlines the binary oppositions ("me or them", "her or my bonus") that haunt Sandra and her colleagues. Yet, a collective reaction does not occur. And it cannot, partly because Solwall's employees lack the very resources, rhetorical and organizational, that would allow them to gather, think of themselves as a collective and thus act together. The absence of "political consciousness", linked to a chronic lack of political references and any kind of organization, fundamentally limits their ability to escape the narrow context in which Dumont has them trapped.

CONCLUDING ON A DEAD END

Sadly, Sandra's situation is far from exceptional. The emotions and frustrations of Solwall's employees are painfully mundane and unfortunately constitute the actual day-to-day life of many people. Injustice, in corporations and in society, is an integral part of our lives and does not always trigger indignation, let alone mobilization. Some may not warrant it, but some injustices are not acceptable. The question that then remains, and that *Two Days, One Night* asks, is essential: If we need to, will we be able to face and deal with these injustices together, as a collective? And, if so, how can we prepare ourselves?

The movie can be seen as a story of personal emancipation: Sandra recovering part of her freedom. I choose here to understand it as the failure of a collective action. The Dardenne brothers show us the painful difficulty, and somehow the inability, of actors to gather and unite; not only to protest, but simply to be united in order not to be alone. Sandra's colleagues are not responsible for the situation in which their boss has put her. As Willy says when she goes to him: "I didn't vote against *you*, I voted for *my* bonus. Dumont connected the two, not me". But does this mean they are totally unaccountable for the situation?

Social movements, whatever their form, are counter-powers, by definition misaligned with, if not opposed to, the context from which they emerge. They can be political or union led, as well as spontaneous and independent. And they are not necessarily revolutionary. But they have to be collective by essence. Their force and necessity lie there, this is what the Dardenne brothers shed light on. While they also illustrate how difficult collective movements can be, they perfectly demonstrate the extent to which renouncing the collective and accepting individualization can be a dangerous dead end, not only for the rights, but also for the survival of the employee.

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Weekend as community, consumption and colonization: struggles over liminal time in *Two Days, One Night*

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With this major shift in the location and working lives of the population came significant changes in lifestyle and consumption—the rise of a new way of life. Days and weeks were more clearly delineated into work time and home time…This was, perhaps, the birth of the hallowed "weekend." (Florida, 2010:31)

Work in contemporary society is hidden. Work's products accumulate and fill the spaces of leisure with traces and memories of past labour. Yet work, and workers, are both necessary for this accumulation and impossible to imagine through its artefacts. The memory of workers' efforts haunts consumer products like a premonition or a limit. This invisibility of work, like the modern subject itself, seems to exist outside of time, inhabiting another kind of time than the linear progression of objects that constitute its past. Symbolically positioned as the antechamber of subjectivity itself, the body and spirit of the worker are produced and repaired over the weekend.

The weekend is a liminal, paradoxical space, an ending and a beginning of production, a place where subjects are free to be themselves, yet are faced with the anxiety of empty time to fill and are alienated by the weakening of personal ties. Bereft of strong social relations, consumer goods, atomized tokens of individualized work processes, fill the gaps left behind. These objects act as talismans against the social void they obscure, sparing us the trauma of directly facing our lack of solidarity. When the demand to help those near us confronts us in the form of a plea, an accusation, or merely the questioning gaze of a work colleague, we realize we are unprepared to meet this demand.

A growing discussion is emerging around the relationality of individuals in work contexts, the relational subject, the *people* of organizations. But what about the *time* of organizations? If the work week is the space of mundane ethics, the ethics of codes, rules and norms, of responsibilities, then the weekend has its own ethics, the messianic, liminal ethics of the sabbatical, where individuals ritualistically invoke the love behind the law. In the mythical space of work/leisure, if the work week serves for the production of goods, the weekend serves for the reproduction of society. If the work week works on standardized, linear time, the weekend comes to symbolize unstructured spontaneity. These two spheres co-constitute each other, the weekend giving meaning to the work week, which frames and nourishes the weekend. Opposed, the two times exist in a tenuous balance.

I reflect on the timing of work and leisure in response to a certain uneasiness I felt when watching the film *Two Days, One Night* by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, one Saturday afternoon, with the goal of relating the film to contemporary understandings of work and organizations. The prima facie relation was obvious — a film about a firing, a burnout, the roller coaster of contingent work, the theatre of workplace democracy faced with the brutal reality of self-interest. I combed through the many work-related themes, from the personal to the societal, from anxiety to alienation, searching for the hermeneutic key that would reveal to me the complexities of modern work as portrayed in the film. Yet a lingering question remained with me: Where is the work in this film?

I was struck, then, by the ironic fact that the film, a tour de force about working life, takes place almost entirely on the weekend. It was right there in the

title — *Two Days, One Night*. The movie begins just as the boss is leaving work, drawing us inexorably through a Saturday and Sunday that seem both endless and exhausting and yet all too quick, and ends at the beginning of the workweek. I was left with the lingering question of why a movie whose focal point is labour relations would so obviously situate the action outside of the temporality of work, even taking the title of those few moments outside of the working week.

Despite the volumes that have been written about the intensification of work and the erosion of leisure, a quick search revealed that the weekend is a largely untheorized domain, perhaps representing an off-limits area where work is considered taboo, or at best a protected space the social status of which has been won through historical struggle and the subsequent erosion of which is a source of nostalgic lamentation. Perhaps scholars of work have better things to do on a Saturday than write about the weekend. Watching a film, however, seemed a legitimate weekend activity, and I felt thus justified in using this film to enter into an exploration of the uses of leisure. Whether the film presents a welcome catharsis from the work week, or a Trojan Horse bringing workplace issues into the leisure sphere, *Two Days, One Night* seemed to offer an experiment in cinematic representation that was worth exploring.

It must be said, however, that watching this particular film is far from a leisure activity; a hard film to sit through, it enacts, through its pace, the slow but urgent ticking away toward a moment of confrontation — with one's own demons, with one's boss, and most of all with one's colleagues. Each shuffle-step of Marion Cotillard's hesitant moments of encounter presents us with the dread of a woman who must face the judgment of her peers, as she demands the reinstatement of a social bond that has long been forgotten. Should she be expected to disrupt her colleagues' hobbies, their shopping and drinking, their moments with their families, to stir up the injustice that they all face? Are her demands unfair, or just? As her colleagues ask her over the telephone or as she rings their doorbell – couldn't this wait until Monday?

A BRIEF INTERLUDE ON THE WEEKEND: TIMES AND DIVISIONS

The weekend is a modern concept, born out of the struggles of nineteenth-century British workers (Walton, 2014). The establishment of the weekend as a limitation of work hours formed part of a larger shaping of work and leisure time that became a distinctive mark of modern society. The "spatio-temporal" ordering of modern life into work and leisure spheres included negotiations about the shape of the weekend and the "disciplining" of labour time (Ebrey & Cruz, 2014). This division, according to Habermas (1981), became an important way of seeing modern life, as reflected in the separate spheres of an economic-productive "system" on the one hand, and a phenomenal "lifeworld" of intersubjective meaning on the other. The former became marked by an ever-increasing demarcation and control of time, as instituted by the imposition and regulation of clocks, whistles and other time-structuring devices, leading to a linear and "rational" approach to time. Yet, the cyclical time of "wakes and feasts" (Thompson, 1967: 76) was retained on the Sabbath, but was also seen as characteristic of archaic tradition, as well as non-western, "pre-industrial" societies (Evans-Pritchard, 1969).

The division of time into the linear time of clocks and labour, and the cyclical time of events and festivals, was itself subject to a paradox. Labour time was to be increasingly structured and disciplined, while festive time was to be unstructured and based on pleasure and enjoyment. Yet the distinction between the two itself rested on a fundamental structuring which constituted both categories. What could unstructured time consist of if it was bound to the structured whole within which it functioned as a catharsis? How can a weekend be leisure if we count down the moments until it is over? No sooner had the

division between system and lifeworld, between production and meaning, been instituted, than this division began to break down, a process described by Habermas (1981) in his discussion of the "colonization of the lifeworld".

The paradox of a period of unstructured time existing within a structured work-life system could be explained as an ideological move to mask the nature of leisure as a support for the productive system, by clothing it in a guise of personal and social freedom. If, as Laclau (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) states, hegemony is the state in which a part of a system masquerades as the whole, then ideology might be characterized by the illusion that a part of the system floats free from, sets limits to, or stands in opposition to the whole. The weekend was a time dedicated to replenishing personal energy, rebuilding family and social bonds, and preparing for the coming week. In other words, if the work week was dedicated to production, the weekend was meant for social reproduction.

The institution of the weekend allowed workers to "let off steam", largely through spending the disposable income accumulated through the week on consumption. Peggy (2001: 200) describes the alienation of working immigrants, "On the weekends, they go to the mall, where they can choose from a range of products so vast it is almost unimaginable. But work consumes them." Leisure time, far from providing a way to find one's freedom and enjoy the fruits of one's labour, becomes an integral part of the work system, supporting increased performance and keeping workers satisfied enough to remain accommodated to their working conditions:

They are either getting ready to work… working... or recuperating from work (from exhausted weekends and too short vacations to retirement). Instead of the divorce of family life and leisure consumption from work we find that most such time is still shaped by work or geared to the reproduction of labor power (Cleaver, 2005: 122)

The culture of weekend consumerism, far from a countercultural movement, positioned itself as a respite from and not a critique of workplace culture. Popular cultural movements progressively relaxed their oppositional stances to emphasize enjoyment and positive experience. As Goulding, Shankar and Elliot (2002) describe the transformation of oppositional cultures in music, "Punks, for example, adopted a highly visible and distinct code of dress and ideology which permeated everyday life. In contrast to this, rave, for the majority, is a 'weekend' culture of hedonism, sensation and escape."

In short, the "right" to the weekend was the right to a world made increasingly meaningless by its inability to locate itself in the production of common values. Personal liberty and enjoyment stood in as consolations for the lack of communal and political solidarities, consolations guarded jealously as the traces of an illusory respite from an alienation that became thereby more entrenched. Such spaces, soon seen as hedonistic "entitlements", drained the social and political legitimacy of workers' movements, which came to be seen as no longer standing for social solidarity but for self-interest. Such a situation was ripe for "reform", and the slow erosion of weekends and other spaces of personal time, half expected, drew systematic protest only from the most stalwart of activist circles.

Contemporary workers often work on weekends. Online, on their phones, from home, the barriers between system and Habermas's lifeworld, are becoming increasingly fluid. This reunification has been asymmetrical; work has invaded "life" more than the reverse, despite the proliferation of plush, colourful furniture and casual Fridays in many workplaces. Yet scholars have noticed that workers are often relaxed and enthusiastic about this reunification, and have taken to their new "entrepreneurial" roles with surprising zeal. Perhaps a growing sense of fatalism, a willingness to embrace the new "realities" of the workplace with a pragmatic spirit? Perhaps, a case of ideological capture, where discourses of dignity and equality have become eclipsed by messages exalting the free market

and individual choice? Or, perhaps, as suggested above, the division between work and leisure was always wrought by a certain persistent contradiction, a feeling of bad faith in the value of the mini-freedoms recycled and anxiously guarded each weekend, not knowing what to do until freedom magically disappears two days, one night later. If that is the fate of weekends, then perhaps working over the weekend is not such a bad idea … perhaps. But is another kind of work possible?

OUT OF TIME, OUT OF JOINT

Faced with being rejected by her colleagues, after a divisive and unfair vote set up by her manager, Sandra approaches her boss at the last moment on Friday, just in time to secure a second vote on Monday. Reticent to come in, her physical presence is nevertheless necessary, because "once he saw you, it would be impossible to refuse a second vote." Similarly, Sandra spends the weekend first telephoning, then physically appearing to face each of her colleagues, one by one, with the proposition/demand/plea that she be "reintegrated" into the social group.

The small universe Sandra traverses feels in the film like an odyssey through different islands of isolated, personal mini-worlds. Apartment complexes, corner stores, large, isolated suburban houses, the multicultural, ideologically diverse, class-divided social fabric within which Sandra is seeking reintegration seems anything but integrated. As Sandra approaches each household, neither she nor the viewer have any idea what may await. She is filled with dread at each encounter, a symptom of the lack of community between the workers.

Sandra has no arguments. She wields no institutional levers, coercive power, legitimate reasons or economic incentives. Everything seems to work against her. She simply repeats — will you vote for me? As an interruption of the system of rationality, the weekend would seem a good time in which to make such an irrational demand. Largely, however, the weekend has been filled with alternative logics.

First, some colleagues avoid her encounter, asking her to call back during the week. She struggles with spouses, who seem reluctant to cede yet another moment to a work-related activity. In the first house she visits, a man absorbedly works on his woodwork, too involved and busy, and too cash-strapped to help. After all, they have to pay university fees and cannot forgo the bonus. Similarly, a colleague quickly entering her apartment with hands full of shopping bags, dismisses Sandra off hand, saying that having left her husband she is forced to purchase all new appliances, television, washing machine, etc. … "everything". Her first sign of support comes from Timour, who is coaching a sports team. Coming off the field, Timour seems relieved to have the chance to change his decision. Perhaps not all hobbies are created equal.

Yet, by and large, those who support Sandra are those who seem themselves to be wrapped in household conflicts. Domestic violence and generational conflict mar the bread and circuses of the weekend, and flare up as Sandra appears. As she solicits an older worker washing his car with his son, the man is attacked by the latter as he tries to listen to Sandra. Injured, with Sandra wracked with guilt, he pledges his solidarity. Later, Ann, an isolated wife in a surreally elevated suburban home, invites her in, but Sandra pauses saying "I'd like to but, I have work, uh, I mean, work", referring to her continued weekend solicitations. Ann, wanting to help, fears her husband, who wants to use the money to build onto the terrace. She has to check with him, as he tears her away from the conversation. Ultimately, Ann breaks free to show her backing for Sandra.   Rather than an inconvenience, these two latter individuals seem themselves to need support and respite from their home lives, and together they build the beginnings of solidarity.

Such a basis, however, is insufficient to provide Sandra with the final vote. Tellingly, the last vote she needs involves a precarious worker, of African origin, who is on a temporary contract. Differently than the home life struggles of the other, this conflict centres on work life itself, its temporariness and instability, and the struggle to demonstrate solidarity in the face of one's own precarity. Solidarity for the others had involved supporting a colleague as a respite from home life; for Alphonse, the choice is to demonstrate solidarity in sacrifice of one's own work. Yet Alphone affirms that he will support her. This decision seems decisive, because ultimately Sandra herself is faced with the choice of sacrificing Alphonse in order to keep her own job, and it is this that most immediately precipitates her leaving the organization.

The sequence of encounters Sandra passes through leads her through different visions of the weekend: from a time of shopping and hobbies, through an anguished time of domestic strife, and finally to the intersectional shared suffering of workers more marginalized than herself. Each of these encounters constitutes an interruption of the normal course of the weekend, as she interrupts the everyday with a question, escaping timidly from her lips but with the ethical force of a demand for a right. Some attempt to escape her demand: burdened with their own problems, they plead clemency; drunk and in denial, they become aggressive towards her; too busy to speak, they ask her to come back during the week. But, it seems that those also in a position of suffering are willing to meet her in this moment of disjointed time, to try to set things right.

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida (1994) uses the theme of disjointed time to interrogate whether it is not exactly in such times of irregularity, of disjointedness, that the search for new forms of society could take place. The break from homogeneous linear time has a mystical quality, one that can be used to ideologically cover the stark reality of material exploitation, and can thus serve powerful interests through a strategic reversal. Yet, this break can also open a space of insulation, where the meanings of work, solidarity and collegiality can be remade. Rather than "setting time right", facing the impossibility of the present is a step toward rethinking a just society. Just as the performative break of fiction or performance, and the liminal space of the movie theatre can present a circus-show that makes us forget about our travails, or, rather, can confront us with them in a moment when our defences are down, inviting us to recreate our society out of this liminal space. As Sandra tries to patch together a social bond between the workers, phone call by agonizing phone call, the Dardenne brothers drag us, scene by scene, through the modern wasteland of the non-work world and ask us to whom we will give our solidarity on Monday morning.

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