

# What art tells about corporate restructuring: The unthinkable and experiential knowledge

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Can art propose a new understanding of corporate restructuring? To identify and describe the sort of knowledge produced through art, a European research program brought together researchers, artists and persons involved in restructuring companies. The initial findings are presented herein. In line with Becker's (2007) suggestion to see artworks as possible, potentially fertile descriptions of society, the idea is advanced that what art tells us about corporate restructuring can affect the nature and modes of production of academic knowledge about it. Two artworks (from photography and theater) are discussed that reveal, deliberately or involuntarily, hidden aspects of this phenomenon. Through an experiential knowledge, these artworks offer an unconventional (sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory) view of economic restructuring in contrast with what academic research usually proposes.

How to produce new, relevant, valid and useful knowledge about corporate restructuring, a phenomenon with economic and societal issues that deeply shape contemporary society? What methodology should we deploy to handle a complex process requiring a multilayered analysis and involving a multitude of players with different, even contradictory, rationales and objectives? How to react to the gaps and points of obscurity to which the specialized literature has repeatedly drawn attention while mentioning the lack of in-depth, longitudinal and qualitative approaches for elucidating the so-called “paradox of performance” in corporate restructuring?

These initial questions underlaid the research program “Arts and Restructuring”, which, from November 2010 to March 2012, brought together a group made up of researchers in management, artists and “practitioners” (managers, union members, experts, consultants)<sup>(1)</sup>. This program entailed organizing several meetings to explore the general question: Can art yield new knowledge about corporate restructuring? Five seminars, two days each, were so many occasions for discussing a variety of artworks (photographs, films, works of music and literature, plays, comics, sculptures, contemporary installations...) that directly or indirectly evoked situations of corporate restructuring. By concentrating on this question, this article seeks to identify and describe the specific nature of the knowledge delivered by art. For this purpose, we have selected two of the many artworks presented and discussed during the seminars: the series of photographs *Soutien aux Chaffoteaux* [Support for Chaffoteaux workers] and the play *501 Blues* by Bruno Lajara. Directly related to actual cases of restructuring, these two works were co-constructed by artists and employees.

Following up on Becker’s invitation (2007) to consider artworks as a possible, potentially rich portrayal of society, we advance the idea that what art tells us about corporate restructuring can add to, even renew, academic knowledge about the nature and modes of production of this phenomenon. The two aforementioned artworks serve to show how art contributes to our knowledge of corporate restructuring. We defend the idea that they reveal aspects of the restructuring process that have been deliberately or involuntarily left aside or concealed. They often offer an unconventional, (sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory) view of economic restructuring in contrast with what academic research usually proposes.

<sup>(1)</sup> ABRIR, for Art-Based Research Initiative on Restructuring, the name of the group of researchers who have authored this article. This abbreviation also served as the name of a research program funded by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (2014-2017), as a follow-up to Arts et Restructurations (2011-2013), which was part of the European Commission’s PROGRESS program. For eighteen months, Arts and Restructuring brought together researchers from: GREGOR (MAI Chair at the Institut d’Administration des Entreprises de Paris, IAE), DRM (University of Paris 1), LENTIC (HEC, Liège) and WLRI (London Metropolitan University).

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## Art: For a different discourse on corporate restructuring

### Restructuring: Its complexity necessitates a new methodological approach

Corporate restructuring, though not new (DIDRY & JOBERT 2010), has evolved considerably over time: its causes and decision-making contexts as well as its modalities and forms. It has turned from a major event into a quasi permanent practice, from being a highly visible to a sometimes silent event; and decisions for it have changed from reactive to proactive, from being conducted in a recession to being carried out to improve competitiveness; etc. The current economic recession has stoked this phenomenon: its frequency and scope as well as the related social, political and economic issues. Restructuring is now considered to be ordinary, general, even though many aspects are still closely linked to the circumstances of its occurrence. The practices related to it are complex and distressing for the organizations and local areas concerned as well as for the people affected: those who make the decisions, those who implement them and even those who “survive” (BEAUJOLIN-BELLET & SCHMIDT 2012). In this respect, they are emblematic of organizational complexity, since several subworlds of meaning coexist while being part of the same collective action (CZARNIAWSKA 2005).

Over the past thirty years, the problems related to restructuring have been abundantly debated in the media and, too, have drawn the attention of researchers from several fields. During this period, the academic literature has made but a partial contribution to understanding the deep complexity and the many barely visible dimensions of the situations where restructuring occurs. Most empirical studies have tried to describe the causes (or motivations) and effects of the decision to restructure. A synopsis and critique of 91 studies devoted to downsizing has concluded that research should use less static, more longitudinal methodologies so as to identify this phenomenon’s nonlinear effects and multiple dimensions (Datta *et al.* 2010). Many a shady area remains that, if set in the light, would explain the “paradox of performance” in restructuring operations. Cornolti and Moulin (2007) have urged us to break with an oft simplistic (financial and bookkeeping) view of restructuring and its effects, and to focus on other aspects that often contain “hidden costs”. How to open the “black “box” of restructuring and move beyond the test of causal relations between variables or constructs (which are hard to hold steady) so as to discern its often hidden but eminently important aspects, such as emotions, identities, the timing, actual experiences, etc.?

Although a qualitative method, as in a case study, seems best suited to locate shady areas and bring them into the light, researchers run up against the problem of access to data about such a sensitive topic. Doors are not easily opened to researchers unless they are making

a “cold” analysis several years afterwards<sup>(2)</sup>. Adding to the complexity is the number of persons involved in a restructuring (BEAUJOLIN *et al.* 2006). Researchers seldom manage to take into account the roles and perceptions of each category of persons implicated. The highly “polyphonic” nature of restructuring forces researchers to strike a fragile balance between, on the one hand, the centripetal forces accounting for the coherence of their findings and, on the other, the centrifugal forces explaining the diversity (BAKHTINE 1981; TODOROV 1981; CZARNIAWSKA 2005; SHOTTER 2008).

### When art “tells about” restructuring: Ideas drawn from Howard Becker

Artists are showing ever more interest in contemporary social issues, in particular corporate restructuring. Evidence of this are the number of films recently devoted to this subject in France. Among those released during the past decade, we might mention: *Entre nos mains* (2010), *Les Neiges du Kilimandjaro* (2011) and *La Mer à boire* (2012). This cinematic output should not keep us from mentioning other works on the same topic and in the same spirit but in theater, photography, literature, poetry, music (songs) and comics. Art provides material that researchers can use to better understand situations of corporate restructuring. Like other types of information (statistics, case studies, surveys, etc.), art “tells about society”.

In *Telling about Society*, Howard Becker has pleaded for social scientists to open to methods, both investigatory and expository, from other fields. According to him, there are several ways to tell a story about society (or several types of “relations” with social reality); and none is, in the absolute, better than the others. Each is perfectly useful for “something”. This implies that we know exactly what we want to do and for whom. Becker has proposed the concepts of the “makers” and “users” of “representations” and the “interpretive community” (an organized set of makers and users forming what we might call a “world”).

Makers produce “representations” of the society for certain users, thus telling them what they know. For a representation of the society to actually be one, both these types of activity are necessary. An object represents nothing (or at least nothing of sociological significance) if no one pays attention to it, if no one uses it to attain a form of understanding (Becker 1988). The sharing of roles, the “division of labor”, the degrees and modes of cooperation between makers and users vary considerably from one situation to the next, from one representation to the next. In some cases, makers are clearly distinct from users when they leave them free to perceive and interpret the artwork. In other cases, the two are nearly identical, in particular when the aptitudes required of users are nearly as demanding as those required of makers, as in the case of very sophisticated mathematical models.

<sup>(2)</sup> Even in a “cold” analysis, employees are still reserved about contacts with researchers, lest “skeletons in the closet wake up”.

The artist’s viewpoint is not, Becker has insisted, the same as the social scientist’s. Nor is it the same as the view of persons involved in the situation to be represented. In an interview in 2011, Becker was asked whether art helps us understand corporate restructuring better or differently:<sup>(3)</sup> “*I am tempted to answer ‘yes’ [...]. Very often, the thing that makes art very interesting is that the artists usually have their own interests to consider, and they don’t really care about the union or their business. They want to make a piece of art [...]. If you are an artist, you can think about anything. Because in the ideal case, the artist is completely free. Usually not, but usually more free than any of the people involved in a particular organization*”.

When making a social analysis, artists do not try to produce stereotyped representations through codes familiar to everyone but, instead, to show viewers something they have never seen. When using a well-known visual code, the artwork intends to make the public discover new meanings in it (Becker 2009). The artist focuses on a few “pearls” hidden in a mass of rather ordinary information and attracts the public’s attention to these details, which might be provocative and, in any case, make sense (BECKER 1988). In the same spirit, the artist also thinks — more intensely and perspicaciously than an academic — about the most relevant way to communicate, the most effective way to give form to his ideas (to stage or display them) so that spectators imagine they have discovered something (BECKER 1988). For their part, academics, to display their ideas, write articles of popular science.

Adopting Baker’s theoretical and, in a way, epistemological framework along with Bakhtine’s concept of polyphony or heteroglossy (BAKHTINE 1981; TODOROV 1981; SHOTTER 2008), we shall argue that artworks on corporate restructuring have special interest for social scientists. As a method of investigation, they reveal this phenomenon’s unthinkable, inaccessible dimensions.

## Two artworks on corporate restructuring

### Methodology

Our methodology consisted of using artworks for an intermediation to stimulate a dialog between artists, researchers and the protagonists of restructuring (corporate executives, union members, employees, consultants). A group of approximately thirty persons made up of artists, researchers and these “practitioners” met for five seminars (two days each) over an 18-month period. The seminars were organized to stimulate interactions over the two-day period. To prepare each seminar, interviews were conducted with the artists whose work would be presented. The purpose was to lead them to tell about their work: how they made it

<sup>(3)</sup> Interview with Howard Becker in November 2011, during his annual visit to Paris. We thank him for the quality he brought to our exchanges and the friendliness shown during our meeting in preparation of the program, Arts and Restructuring.

and what it portrayed. Each session followed the same pattern: an artwork was presented and then discussed. This discussion took place from several viewpoints — the artist's, the protagonists', the researcher's — in line with the procedure described by Nicolas Fraix (2012). Discussions were filmed so that researchers could later reexamine the verbal and, too, nonverbal reactions of the members of our occupationally diverse group. These exchanges were transcribed and subjected to a content analysis.

Two criteria served to choose the two artworks discussed in this article: each is directly related to a real case of restructuring and was coconstructed by an artist and protagonists. The photographs *Soutien aux Chaffoteaux* were made to support the employees' protests against the shutdown of the Chaffoteaux & Maury factory in Ploufragan, near Saint-Brieuc (Côtes d'Armor department, France); and the play *501 Blues* was written and staged by Bruno Lajara with former wage-earners of the Levi-Strauss factory (in Nord department).

This methodology did more than simply stimulate discussion; it resembled what Y. Clot has called a "crossed self-confrontation" (CLOT 2008; CLOT & FAÏTA 2000; DUBOSCQ & CLOT 2010). From a Bakhtinian theoretical framework — the creation of a different space-time for liberating subjective potentials — we wanted to organize "confrontations" around "traces" (the artworks) so as to spark controversies that serve as a reflecting surface (CAHOUR & LICOPPE 2010).

Art offers us contents for understanding what is being represented. This approach through art elicits not only the stakes in corporate restructuring but also the experiences of a variety of people ("users" in Becker's words), in particular when they interact around an artwork, which functions as a means of intermediation.

### *Soutien aux Chaffoteaux: Everyday life during a labor dispute*

On 18 June 2009, the head office in France of Chaffoteaux & Maury, a company belonging to the Italian group Merloni, announced what amounted to a shutdown of the factory at Saint-Brieuc: 204 jobs were to be cut; only a few in R&D were to be maintained. Locally, the impact was heavy, since the factory had long been a landmark in the town. It had up to 2.200 employees in the late 1980s.

In reaction to this announcement, labor union representatives organized demonstrations in Saint-Brieuc and Paris, and then occupied the plant. At the site, management was absent, apart from a few episodic visits. During this period, the plant belonged, we might say, to the wage-earners who opposed the closing. Lasting a little longer than six months, this dispute ended with an agreement foreseeing: a bonus of 25.000 euros for each wage-earner (in addition to the financial arrangements set under the employment contract), a "preretirement" program for certain wage-earners (those exposed to asbestos) and the opening of a branch office of the National Employment Agency (henceforth, ANPE).

A little after this dispute started, a local official contacted representatives of the personnel about asking a photographer to take pictures of the conflict. For personnel representatives, this action would make the dispute more visible and help rally the population to their "cause". The official hired a photographer to visit the occupied plant daily.

Set up in the occupied plant in direct contact with wage-earners, the photographer followed the activities (demonstrations, etc.) organized by the labor unions. He shot photos every day, printed them in the evening and posted the strips the next day: "*The initial idea was to describe what was happening, to bear witness*" in order to "*place faces on what people were going through [...] The pictures I was making during the day, I printed them in the evening, at home, and then, every day, posted them on the walls of union headquarters, that's where they were displayed.*" He also created a blog, where he posted photos<sup>(4)</sup>.

With union leaders, he decided to print a first series of post cards with the title "Summer plans? Being dismissed". These cards, sent to destinations all over Europe, were intended, as Ms. B., union representative for the CGT, explained, to "*provide news of the dispute*". In stride, a second series of post cards was made on the theme "Back-to-school plans? Being dismissed", along with a calendar, which caught the media's attention. The photographer spent several months with wage-earners and was closely involved in the everyday course of this labor dispute.

This work focused on seemingly unspectacular events. Apart from a few demonstrations, the photos tell about everyday life during a labor dispute, with its share of waiting, working, organizing and, too, basking in the afternoon sunlight. They present an unconventional view of collective actions: waiting in front of buses; conversations on the sidelines of a march; union leaders stepping up to the microphone; a bailiff writing out an affidavit on the occupation of the factory; a journalist photographing demonstrators; the mayor with, on his jacket, a sticker reading "Not a single dismissal". The photos also show the backroom of negotiations at the plant: votes and speeches during general assemblies, wage-earners listening to a management representative during one of the rare visits. These photographs show, in particular, the backdrop of the occupation of a factory that management had, in fact, nearly abandoned: wage-earners making posters, preparing and serving meals, eating together in the plant, playing percussions on cans, moving palettes, playing darts with caricatures of managers as targets, painting banners, taking a siesta in the middle of a lot with crosses representing deaths due to dismissal, conducting an open house of the closed plant for their families... Children are very present on the photos. They accompanied their parents, especially during the summer. In the photographer's words: "*These are ordinary rather than sensational moments in a labor dispute.*"

<sup>(4)</sup> [www.soutien.chaffoteaux.over-blog.com](http://www.soutien.chaffoteaux.over-blog.com)

Participants in the seminar were surprised by what seemed, ultimately, to be happy times. One of them said, *"This series shows us intervals between events. During these intervals, we see people who tend to be expansive, smiling, liberated."* The photographer confirmed this experience: *"The labor dispute was rather joyous. There were a lot of fun times, meals, time spent together. This bothered some viewers, who did not understand how people were joyous while the factory was going to shut down."* This revelation threw light on the experience of a labor dispute, an aspect that is hard to show because it is hard to understand from the outside: a perception of lightness in a very gloomy situation.

However these festive occasions can be seen as typical of a crisis, even necessary to be able to put up with the stress and form a group, whose force and solidarity at least partly offset members' fears and distress. We also detect a sense of relief, even liberation, on the faces of employees whose jobs might have previously been a source of stress. By taking into account working conditions, light is cast on what seems paradoxical: the perception of a sense of relief on the faces of people afraid of losing their jobs.

#### **501 Blues at a Levi-Strauss factory: The rupture between work and out-of-work**

The last factory in France for making Levi Strauss blue jeans was shut down in March 1999 in Yser-La Bassée: of the 541 wage-earners dismissed, 86% of them women. Beyond the shock to wage-earners caused by the announcement of this decision, the whole local area, even the "world", was caving in. In the early 1970s, the arrival of Levi-Strauss in this area, where most women stopped working after marriage, had symbolized emancipation through work (on the assembly line), moreover, in an American company whose local factory was going to make the famous 501 jeans.

In this setting, Lajara undertook something original, which would mark the start of "documentary theater". He organized a general meeting with employees to present his project: a writing workshop for voluntary wage-earners. Twenty-five employees enrolled in the workshop headed by Christophe Martin, an author. Considered to be a training program, the workshop benefitted from the ANPE's support. A small collection of texts written during the workshop was published: *Les mains bleues [Blue hands]* (Martin 2001). Lajara then proposed a followup; using these texts to stage a play with wage-earners and his theater company (Vies À Vies). Five former employees took part in this adventure. The play, *501 Blues*, was performed for the first time in March 2001. Several other performances, widely covered in the mass media, took place till 2005.

The play was built around several scenes: monologs, group scenes at the workplace, choreographic acts with the five amateur actresses, video projections (without any actors), dancing or singing acts by another actor fully involved in the project. The plot was organized around two periods: work in the factory before the announcement of the shutdown and after the dismissals. A long account narrating events on the day

of announcement and the day of the shutdown marked the passage from the one period to the other, as if it were a rite of passage between the world before and after.

Among the several ways of analyzing this play, we have chosen the one that evokes a rupture. Staged around the traumatic announcement of the shutdown, the play narrates a violent, total rupture. In effect, *501 Blues* seems emblematic of a play's power to elicit both an event's material and physical aspects, its impact on identities and, too, the rupture: the loss of sense, of bearings, of values, and the disruption of body rhythms.

A scene clearly evinces the rupture in the dismissed wage-earners' identities by presenting Linda, a worker in the textile factory, who has fallen sick. It takes the form of a monolog in a place, apparently neither the factory nor her home. Behind her, we see two other women making very slow gestures that contrast with the nearly furious pace of work. Using a monolog clearly symbolizes the isolation into which Linda has sunk since losing her job. Illness and the loss of employment are placed in parallel: both signal a rupture and isolation. The rupture is not just occupational; it affects all spheres of her life: social, intimate, family, friends... Linda talks about her husband, children, parents, neighbors, cousins...

A phrase repeated by Linda conveys the monolog's theme: *"No one needs me any more"*, as though what is at stake is the loss not just of pleasurable or joyous occasions but also of her utility in society and the family. Linda increasingly turns inwards and continues the monolog in her native Portuguese: *"They're going to make do without me, I'll not work again. I hope my children aren't sick. I'm stunned that they no longer need me. I recall when, with my grandfather, we loaded a cart with compost, me on top, my grandfather wanted me to take his hand to help get down. I jumped. My skirt was stuck..."* Talking in Portuguese releases Linda from the need to make herself understood. She needs to find her roots, as though they were all that was left of a disintegrating sense of identity. Recollection of the time with her grandfather is a reminder of relations with others, of the social and family forms of utility that shape us but that the loss of a job threatens.

What is remarkable about *501 Blues* is the play's presentation of the physical ruptures caused by restructuring and dismissals. The play uses contrasts in tempo and rhythm: the choreography at the start of the play; the increasingly frenzied gestures and body movements on the assembly line; disillusioned workers slowly sweeping the floor of the factory, now emptied of its machines and employees; and so forth. While recording noises in the factory, Lajara expressed his amazement about the synchronization among workers. One of the actresses, a former employee, put the idea into strong words: *"When I worked at the factory, I wasn't living, I was a robot."* Dismissals suddenly broke with the way the body operates, its gestures and movements; and aroused a feeling of immense emptiness. The play shows us that, behind the bodies, are women with personalities, identities. It transforms work-related movements into a choreography.

## Conclusion: Revealing the unthinkable and producing experiential knowledge

Although these two works depict different contexts and belong to quite distinct fields of art (photography and theater), they both offer a wealth of material that offers insight into the processes that unfold during corporate restructuring. The approach via art opens toward an understanding of aesthetic qualities and provides access to elusive aspects of reality. A polyphonic approach lets us hear, simultaneously or successively, diverse voices. These two artworks let us see corporate restructuring from several angles, as tension builds up through words, sounds, rhythms, etc. Among the aesthetic dimensions of social life that the dialog organized around these artworks brought to light, we would like to draw attention to the dynamics of bodies and identities.

### The dynamics of bodies

The effects of corporate restructuring are often assessed from a distance, in the abstract. The number of lost jobs is counted; the benefits in “social plans” for redundant workers are calculated; the financial impact on the local economy is assessed; etc. But underneath the statistics are men and women hurt in their bodies, not just in their social status. This negation of the body (of persons and the locality where they live) is a call to artists, especially actors, since the body is their medium of expression. To present corporate restructuring, artists feel they must “bear witness to human beings, from the feet to the head [...] The city is affected, bodies are affected. And when I hear ‘body’, I hear ‘actors’. It is no coincidence that theater is an art that can talk about restructuring” in the words of the actor Nathanaël Harcq during the Arts and Restructuring seminar in Liège.

What impresses us, especially in *501 Blues*, is the play’s focalization on the bodies of women workers, on their hands turned blue, on the repetitive gestures of work on the assembly line, which, incorporated so deeply, still haunt them, long after the factory has closed. Lajara has revealed this close linkage between bodies and the factory, the indelible mark left by the factory on bodies. The shutdown suddenly stopped the world. It totally altered the timing and rhythms of the lives of many an employee. To present this shock and the time needed for their bodies to adapt, so that their minds could appropriate and tell their story, and so that thoughts once again dwell in these bodies, Lajara has used contrasting rhythms in a sort of polyphony that alternates between the group’s recollections of the factory and the individual viewpoints and experiences of (women) workers.

Apprehended as a means of intermediation in social relations, bodies are presented on stage in situations at the workplace. The play lets us see well-executed occupational gestures and movements as well as the automatic reflexes for controlling them (CLOT & FAÏTA 2000). It also calls attention to the gender-related aspects of these gestures and movements. This tells us much about women’s know-how, which, exercised beyond language, risks not receiving recognition in the world of work (HIRITA & KERGOAT 1988).

In a similar way, in his relation with workers at Chaffoteaux, the photographer has chosen to focus on the faces of individuals rather than on groups and collective actions. He has not presented a labor dispute through panoramic views or well-known situations; instead, he has shown the range of personal feelings and narratives, often intermingled with the joyous sounds of children.

### The dynamics of (collective) identities

This approach via art helps us apprehend the dynamics of deconstructing/reconstructing collective identities. Academic studies of corporate restructuring have insisted on the ruptured sense of identity, the loss of bearings, the breaking of solidarity, the grieving and withdrawal. In a book, with the evocative title *Loss of employment, loss of self*, Linhart et al. (2002) have thoroughly analyzed the closing of the Chausson factory in Creil. They have shown how even a supposedly “exemplary social plan” for the redundant did not forestall the trauma deeply felt by wage-earners who lost their jobs. In such cases, dismissal is an ordeal in the person’s career and, whenever a collective identity has been constructed around the firm, a genuine rupture in the sense of identity. The approach via art brings to light less conventional aspects of the loss of employment, labor disputes and acts of resistance, namely a renaissance that takes the form, probably ephemeral, nearly evanescent, of a new sense of identity that refuses to “lose face”.

The decision to shut down the Levi-Strauss plant suddenly broke up a closely knit group, which had played a decisive role in its members’ identities. For many of these wage-earners, working for Levi-Strauss meant belonging to a united “family”; it also meant freedom outside the family sphere. But *501 Blues* shows how the dismissed workers formed new relationships and gradually reconstructed their identity and dignity through alternating periods of collective catharsis and solidarity and of isolation and solitude. Taking part in the theatrical performance helped these women workers “gain face”.

This brings us to the role of theater in inventing and changing collective identities through the phases of creating/writing and communicating/performing. Theater can be seen as the “place where individuals and society see each other in the mirror of a performance that faithfully renders or distorts what it reflects, but also [as] the place where individuals form groups (even ephemeral) and present themselves as a public that has a certain social existence” (ALCANDRE, 2008).

The photographer has shown us something out of the ordinary about the group of workers at the Chaffoteaux plant. Instead of despondency, sadness, discouragement and withdrawal, which we come to expect in such a situation, even instead of the hard faces of men and women committing acts of “resistance”, he has caught light, convivial moments during the labor dispute: snapshots of happiness, fun. The presence of children makes some photographs look like they were taken in a summer camp, thus causing cognitive dissonance as we see a group changed and regenerated through the struggle it put up during the

dispute. By showing us what we do not expect to see, by making us feel it through dancing, rhythms, laughs, and expressions of relief, these artworks arouse paradoxical emotions. This rupture in tone, this polyphony, turns out to be an amazing stimulant since it makes “users” feel uncomfortable, even uneasy; and this can stimulate reflection.

### Art: A sharing of experience and production of experiential knowledge

The artworks on corporate restructuring discussed herein help us catch sight of a subtle dynamics that is hard to perceive offhand. But does this approach via art, by playing on emotions, surprises, perplexity, discomfort, etc., not shake the foundations of ordinary academic arguments?

Owing to its experiential dimension, art becomes “one of the means whereby we enter, through the imagination and emotions [...] into other forms of relations and participation than our own” (DEWEY 2005). It thus lets “users” — the general public, politicians, experts, academics, etc. — share in the experience of restructuring through a specific “expository method” (Becker 2007), which complements this article’s investigative method. Obviously, users do not, strictly speaking, experience restructuring in their bodies and emotions. This somewhat vicarious experience echoes the method advocated by Strati (1999, 2009) of “imaginary participant observation” for producing knowledge through an “evocative” process. Nonetheless, by feeling what others are experiencing and by moving beyond the register of discourse, the grounds are laid for a democratic experimentalism (DORF & SABEL 1998; LENOBLE & MAESSCHALCK 2010), for breaking free from routines, “dramatic repetitions” in Dewey’s (2005) words. From a pragmatic perspective, experimentation gradually alters users’ perceptions and concepts (XHAUFLAIR & PICHULT 2012). The artwork thus becomes an intermediary between those active in a restructuring and “users” in Becker’s (2007) sense. It let them enter into joint arrangements for “learning by monitoring” (SABEL 1994; DORF & SABEL 1998) and comparing experiences.

The line of inquiry explored herein, presented for basically heuristic purposes, should be pursued farther. We advocate increasing the improbable encounters of this sort between researchers, artists and people working in firms around the pivotal, complex questions raised by corporate restructuring. The unease and discomfort aroused by these encounters inevitably rattle each party’s beliefs and sets off a process for changing ideas. This is the *sine qua non* for working out sustainable alternatives (LENOBLE and MAESSCHALCK 2010).

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