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“Respect in a world of inequality”
Norton ed. 2003

Extracts sentences by Laurent Ledoux, providing interesting insights on contemporary managerial issues:
Competence, bureaucracy, pyramids, networks, flexibility, change, measurement, learning...

“Ambition is usually taken to be the driving force of self-made men and women, and I certainly had my full share of it. But the *development of any talent involves an element of craft, of doing something well for its own sake*, and it is this craft element which provides the individual with an inner sense of self-respect. It’s not so much a matter of getting ahead as of becoming inside. The craft of music made that gift to me.”
(p.13-14)

“It takes a long time, and a great deal of *trust*, for highly educated professionals and unskilled laborers to speak freely to one another; the beautiful and the ugly don’t talk easily to each other about their bodies; people whose lives are full of adventure have trouble “relating” to the experience of people constrained within narrow routines.” (p. 22)

“*Knowing what to do with oneself* can, of course, become a trap. The craft competence children develop is strongly related to play, like learning how to master a game; there is little need to measure its ultimate purpose or value. Purely functional competence of this sort can later damage the life of young adult. Society in the person of parents and teachers may approve the functional choice, but the young adult knows it is too easy; complex desires, the noise of life, may be shut out. The adolescent who knows exactly what he or she wants may often be a limited human being.” (p. 27)

“The Renaissance philosopher Pico della Mirandola, in his Oration on the Dignity of Man, formulated the dictum of “*Man as his own Maker*”, which meant self-formation as an exploration rather than the following a recipe. Religion, family, community, Pico argued, set the scene, but one has to write the script for oneself.” (p. 28)

“*Personal “liberation”* became my generation’s word for a self-confidence which did not recognize, or know, what a weight of privilege supported it. It was among young adults the opposite but equal in weight to self-confidence gained through the rigid pursuit of a career; each in its own way could produce a limited human being. Neither was viable as a long-term project for forming *self-worth*” (p. 31)

“In every social relationship we are at some point taken in hand by another person who guides us. *The mentor’s task* is to present his or her own competence in such a way that the adult or child can learn from it.

Just because competence is so elemental a component of self-worth, people who are meant to show their capabilities as role models face a problem akin to the reserve of social workers: the fear of making an invidious comparison can mean they do not speak of their abilities. Not alluding to the touchy subject, however, not mentioning the divisive inequality, only makes the unspoken difference more important.”
(p. 36-37)

“*Status* usually refers to where a person stands in a social hierarchy. [...] *Prestige* refers to the emotions which status arouses in others, but the relation between status and prestige is complicated. High status does not invariably dictate high prestige. A corrupt or bumbling aristocrat can lose prestige in the eyes of others while retaining his legal, privileged status; the person has, we say, demeaned his office. Prestige can also be detached from sheer rank. Research on occupational prestige shows, for instance, that people do useful and independent craftwork, such as cabinetmakers, enjoy more prestige than elite business executives, wrapped up in corporate politics and not fully in control of their own labors.” (p. 53-54)

“*Character* [...] means a person’s communication with others through shared “social instruments” – [...] laws, rituals, the media, codes of religious belief, political doctrines. [...] The distinction between character and personality helps to clarify what it means. Many elements of personality go into suspension at testing moments of engagements with institutions; other elements come forward, like the commitment to invisible comrades or to an abstract principle. It is such a *capacity to engage the larger world* which defines a person’s character; character can be thought of, they say, as the relational side of personality, and transcends the dictum that only face-to-face relations are emotionally gripping. [...] (p. 63)

Society shapes character in three ways so that people earn, or fail to arouse, respect:
- The first way occurs through *self-development*, particularly through developing abilities and skills. [...] Self-development becomes a source of social esteem just because society itself condemns waste, putting a premium on efficient use of resources in personal experience as much as in the autonomy.

- The second way lies in *care of the self*. [...] Care of oneself can mean not becoming a burden upon others, so that the need adult incurs shame, the self-sufficient person earns respect. This way of earning respect derives from modern society's hatred of parasitism; if society fears waste, it even more fears – whether rationally or irrationally – being sucked dry by unjustified demands.
- The third way to earn respect is to *give back to others*. This is perhaps the most universal, timeless, and deepest source of esteem for one's character. As though watching a play, we might applaud brilliance or displays of ability. Machiavelli's prince might arouse the homage of submission, but neither the virtuoso nor the tyrant touches the sentiments of others as does someone who gives something back to the community. Exchange is the social principle which animates the character of someone who gives back to the community.

Inequality plays a particular and decisive role in shaping these three character types:

- The unusual person who makes full use of his or her abilities can serve as a social icon, justifying inadequate provision of resources or regard for people who are not developing as fully;
- The celebration of self-sufficiency and fear of parasitism can serve as a way of denying the facts of social need;
- The compassion which lies behind the desire to give back can be deformed by social conditions into pity for the weak, pity which the receiver experience as contempt.” (p.63-64)

“As the historian Johann Huizinga reminds us, the ***absolute moral value put on work***, the supremacy of work over leisure, the fear of wasting time, of being unproductive – this is a value which only takes hold of all of society, the rich as well as the poor, in the nineteenth century.” (p. 109)

“The best protection I'm able to imagine against the evils of invidious comparison is the experience of ability I've called craftwork, and the reason for this is simple. Comparisons, ratings, and testings are deflected from other people into the self; one sets the critical standard internally.

Craftwork certainly does not banish invidious comparison to the work of others; it does refocus a person's energies, however, to getting an act right in itself, for oneself. The craftsman can sustain his or her self-respect in an unequal world. [...] Still, if the dignity of craft might provision self-respect, it does not dispose of the problem of mutual respect across the boundaries of inequality. Craftwork tends, indeed, to focus on the activity of making at the expense of interpersonal processes and relationships; it provides protection but also risks isolating the maker.

The risks this isolation poses to the craftsman's own character become clearer in probing the second formulation of respect in modern society: respect accorded only to those who can, indeed, take care of themselves.” (p. 98-99)

“Trust in the mentor begins at the moment when the protégé freely asks for help. [...] In the course of studying people at work, the ***fear of asking*** for help more and more impressed me as a reliable sign of a dysfunctional organization. Asking for help too often sends out a signal that the worker is “needy” – but how often is too often? At one high-tech firm I studied, the usual answer was not to ask for help until something went wrong. [...] We might in this regard want to reconsider the invocation to the sturdy yeoman, the independent craftsman, or today the consultant, as the Jeffersonian ideal of an adult citizen. Celebration of this ideal may be disempowering to others whose need for help they are ashamed to voice – producing in the polity, as in the high-tech company, a discussion of needs only after things have become a mess.” (p. 119)

“Two institutional principles underlie the ***changes in organizational design*** (towards a “platform design”) implemented by companies today: the organization is flatter in form than the bureaucratic pyramid and shorter in its time horizon:

- “Flat” means removing the intermediate layers of bureaucracy in a pyramidal organization.
- “Short” means replacing fixed functions by more temporary tasks in an organization.

The new ways of work emphasizes teams which come together to perform tasks and then split apart, employees forming new groups. For a flexible business to respond quickly to new market opportunities outside, however, these teams may well compete against one another, trying to respond effectively and quickly to goals set by the top.

The result is to ***change the meaning of efficiency***: there is an intentional duplication of effort, in order to stimulate innovation. [...]

When businesses began to revolt against the architecture of the pyramid, they hit on the image of the “network” to describe this new flat and short construction, an organizational form loose and easy to recombine. Moreover, some management gurus have argued that the networked organization is democratic rather than militaristic, just because the network has fewer links in its chain of command. But this is a somewhat misleading claim; a “network” does not really convey how power works in such short, flat organizations. Instead, the two types of business architecture tend to different kinds of inequality. [...]

The increasing inequality is not just a product of managerial greed; it derives from the very way modern corporations function. This functional inequality results from the fact that modern work *organizations operate somewhat like the innards of a disk player*. Within a CD machine, the central processing unit (CPU) can scan various versions of a song on disk and select which it wants to play, or the order of materials. So too a flat, short bureaucracy contains a CPU. A small number of managers can rule, making decisions, setting tasks, judging results; the elements on disk can be reordered and reprogrammed quickly; the information revolution has given the CPU instantaneous readings on the total organization.

Flexibility thus permits a particular exercise of inequality. As in the pyramidal corporations, the top can make sudden decisions about investment or business strategy without votes from below. Unlike the pyramid, however, the execution of these decisions can be both swift and precise. In a pyramid, commands tend to modulate in content as they pass down the chain of command, altering a bit in each link. Conversely, when people at the top are dependent on thick layers of bureaucracy below, information changes as it passes upward; bad news often does not make it to the top.

Eliminate links in the chain of command and you can reduce this interpretative modulation. Instead, the surveillance and command powers at the top can be increased.

Modern technology plays a crucial role here; thanks to computerization, top leadership can measure on a daily, even an hourly basis how well the troops are doing, market behaving. Investors want transparent information rather than interpretations. True democracy is always slow – deliberative and unfolding.

In a disc institution, slow becomes dysfunctional. In a place of minutely graded inequalities, then, the flexible organization permits a sharper distinction between elite and mass.” (p.183-185)

“*Autonomy* is not simply an action; it requires also a relationship in which one party accepts that he or she cannot understand something about the other. The acceptance, that one cannot understand things about another, gives both standing and equality in the relationship. Autonomy supposes at once connection and strangeness, closeness and impersonality.

The *history of welfare bureaucracy* is one of in which precisely this element of autonomy was excluded. It seemed to the welfare state founders that to provide for those in need required an institution to define what its clients need. It would have seemed irrational to provide resources without articulating their uses, but the result was that bureaucracy did not learn how to admit the autonomy of those it served.

The homeless teenage was not treated as possessing a certain expertise about homelessness.” (p. 177)

“The *social deficits of flat, short organizations* apply particularly to new, needy workers at the bottom. Without outside intervention, new workers have trouble forming support networks in such workplaces; the climate of detachment, institutional distrust, and passivity is not good for learning how to work. Their problems are sharpened because the last and lowest hired are often the first fired; without expensive employment assistance, these entry-level jobs can prove particularly demoralizing to workers who formerly relied on welfare. Some have therefore concluded that community life will have to make up for the social deficits of flat, short organizations: community serving as a compensation for work. What sort of remedy is it?” (p. 190-191)

“When he coined the term “*individualism*” in the second volume of *Democracy in America* Tocqueville drew out this problem in the most dramatic way. Individualism, he argued, consists in love of family and friends, but indifference to any social relations beyond that intimate sphere. Equality only makes the problem of individualism worse: because most people seem the same as oneself in tastes, beliefs, and needs, it seems one can and should leave it to others to deal with their own problems.” (p. 197)

“In the United States, Robert Wuthnow (in *Acts of Compassion*) has found that most “*institutional kindness*” comes from volunteers who want to transform something in their own characters, adding to themselves and their experiences of others what they cannot find in the cold world of functional or rational relationships. Sherryl Kleinman & Gary Fine (in *Rhetoric and action in moral organization*) have shown how voluntary organizations attract recruits by promising, indeed demanding, changes in their “core selves”. (p. 198)

“To explain the motives for the free gift of blood, Titmuss (in *The gift relationship*) had to pose an abstract question: “Who is my stranger?” He meant to signal the most important fact about Type H motivation: these freely giving donors had no idea where or to whom their blood would go. Just as they were not returning blood their families had used, there could be no face-to-face interaction with recipients. In his view, *community is strong when that interaction is not needed, weak when the gift is personalized*.” (p. 199)

“The spread of flexible institutions of work is more than an American phenomenon; so is the effort to restructure welfare along new bureaucratic lines. Both arouse the desire for a compensating, countervailing community. *Volunteering is a poor remedy for binding strangers together*, or dealing with social complexities. *It lacks what might be called an architecture of sympathy* – that is, a progressive movement up from identifying with individuals one knows to individuals one doesn’t know. The prerequisite of autonomy is missing too: the willingness to remain strangers to one another in a social relationship. If the possibilities of making personal contact and sharing understanding diminish, the impulse to engage weakens. The Dutch sociologist Abram de Swann (in *In care of the State*) has argued that the civilizing functions of the welfare state require the “generalization of inter-dependence” in society. Yet the sphere of mutual regard is too small, too intimate, when the volunteer is taken to be the ideal figure providing care to others. Saying this is not to denigrate volunteers, but rather to criticize the idealization of these “friends” when something other than friendship is required.” (p. 200)

“In the same measure that welfare reformers have celebrated the local volunteers, they have attacked public service workers – and indeed the very *ethos of public service*. For the last quarter century, more largely, the honor of public service work has been slighted. What’s striking is how those subject to this onslaught have defended their self-respect. They’ve done so by asserting the value of useful rather than flexible labor. [...]

The defense mounted by these public service workers focuses not just on one’s value to the organization, nor just on one’s value to the general public, but on the act of *doing something useful*. Usefulness takes on the characteristics of craftwork, characteristics which include an egoistic involvement in the task itself. There is no reserved holding back about the value of this work to others, but neither is there amour-propre in Rousseau sense of invidious competition – simply a belief the work is worth doing. [...] Service to others certainly matters to public service workers but the craft aspect of usefulness helps people to persevere under conditions in which their honor is frequently impugned. The work itself provides objective standards of feeling oneself worthwhile. The street sweeper likes a clean street, the handler of drug-sniffing dogs likes handling dogs.

Focusing on the craft of useful work separates this kind of caregiving from compassion. It does not turn on pity for those in need. The craft dimensions of useful work serve as a caution against the error of believing that doing good necessarily entails self-sacrifice. Usefulness must, by contrast, have an inherent value, a focus on a specific object, which gives the service worker satisfaction.” (p. 202-203)

“Pyramidal bureaucracies could provide everyone a place and a proper function, see them as *whole human beings*, but at the cost of denying them participation. The institutional innovations of our time embodied in disk bureaucracy do not place people stably, and do not see people whole. In compensation, people may seek to connect to others, voluntarily, locally, face to face. A social void may indeed be filled this way. But there is no solution to the problem of welfare here. The welfare client in need, but treated with scant respect, cannot be liberated simply by opening the iron cage, no more than the worker has been set free by unlocking the iron cage. It is not liberation from formal constraint but a better connection to others which the welfare client requires.” (p.202)

“Depressing as the problems of welfare are to most of us, they are satisfying challenges to many public service workers. When dedicated to their jobs, these workers have tried to maintain self-respect by doing something useful; those they serve are strangers. There is self-interest in this impulse to do something useful, and also an acceptance of social distance. Perhaps these elements suggest something about how *self-respect and recognition of others* might more largely operate in an unequal and unstable society.” (p. 204)

“In *On the obsolescence of the concept of honor* Berger explains: “In a world of honor, the individual discovers his true identity in his roles, and to turn away from the roles is to turn away from himself. ...[Today] the individual can only discover his true identity by emancipating himself from his socially imposed roles – the latter are only masks, entangling him in illusion...” (p. 214)

“*The Gift* is perhaps a misnamed book, for Mauss believed that those who benefit must give something back, even if they do not and cannot give back an equivalent. They must do so to achieve respect in the eyes of others and their own. [...] Though we laud charity as a Christian virtue we know that it wounds. If we ask nothing in return, we do not acknowledge the mutual relationship between ourselves and the person to whom we give. “*There are no free gifts*,” Douglas writes in *No free gifts*, her foreword to Mauss’s *The Gift*. Put simply, reciprocity is the foundation of mutual respect. It may seem that this precept excludes the blood or breast milk donor who does not know the recipient, or the volunteer who just sends a check to an organization; they appear to be making a free gift. But there is, however, a transaction involved, if impersonal or defined in the head of the donor: he or she is *giving something back to society*. The public service worker doing a useful job will make that same transaction mentally.

Here is an imagination of responsibility which cannot be confirmed materially. Mauss's student Alain Caillé says all symbols acquire an emotional power just because we can't translate them into *equivalent values*. In daily life, Caillé says, we are constantly giving and receiving meanings *without being able to measure them*." (p. 219-220)

"An *economic exchange* is a short [symmetric] transaction; the new institutional forms of capitalism are particularly short-term. By contrast, a ritual exchange, particularly of this asymmetric sort, creates a more prolonged relationship, reciprocal speech acts become like threads woven into cloth.

The welfare state Mauss imagined in France, like the rituals Bourdieu studied in the hills of North Africa, have the character of social projects which cannot be finished, which remain ongoing just because they are *ambiguous*. They are like *stories which can't conclude*, in which there is no denouement – whereas in the world of [symmetric] transactions, in truly flexible capitalism, sharp, rapid endings rule." (p. 221)

"Levi-Strauss called:

- *bricolage*, the process of disassembling a culture into pieces and then packing it for travel;
- *Métics*, those who practiced bricolage, traveling people who can remember where they came from even while accepting they can no longer live there;
- *Métissage*, a journey in which there is change but not forgetting. The traveler thereby retained a certain measure of security and self-confidence in facing, and accepting, the incoherence of the outside and the new.

Tristes Tropiques [...] became a parable for many Western readers: *how to preserve a sense of self and group in the process of change*. The secure *métic* packed more cultural baggage than he or she needed, knowing some of the pieces in the suitcase would prove useless. Still, the abundance was reassuring, allowing some give and take. [...]

But Levi-Strauss does not explain *why people might indeed seek something new or how the human being interprets the alien and the new*." (p. 230)

"The *learning curve* has a formal name: it embodies a passage from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge and back to tacit knowledge. The tacit realm is formed by habits which, when once learned, become self-conscious; the explicit realm emerges when habit encounters resistance and challenge, and so requires conscious deliberation. The return to the tacit realm is not to the knowledge with which one started; if now unself-conscious, new habits have enriched and modified the old.

Movement from the tacit to the explicit differs from Levi-Strauss's account of *métissage* in two ways:

- First, the *contents of one's habits and beliefs are transformed in meaning* when they encounter resistance or unfamiliar demands. It is as though, unpacking in a foreign country, the migrant discovers the precious possessions he has packed has changed.
- Second, *self-confidence has changed its character*. Self-confidence was rooted in the initial stage of tacit knowledge; what made it work, before it was challenged, was its seeming naturalness. These were not people doubting at every moment about what to do, what to think. An enlarged repertoire of expressive gestures, of social practices, has to recover that functional confidence. [...]

There are practical reasons why the tacit realm has to encourage the confidence of acting naturally, rather than self-consciously:

1. First of all because this *permits efficient communication between people*. [...] This is due to what Bakhtin (in *The Dialogic Imagination*) calls the "the primacy of context over text", so that every time we read a sentence we nest its value into many other sentences of which we need not be immediately aware.
2. If efficient, the tacit realm also *provides emotional support*, in the form which the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (in *Phenomenology and the social science*) calls "*ontological security*". To worry in a love affair constantly about "the meaning of our relationship" would kill it. Similarly, trust requires tacit understandings; unremitting, questioning consciousness carries a poisonous anxiety. "Ontological security" is more than a psychological experience; the bureaucratic pyramids of work and welfare also sought to provide it.
3. Most of all, the realm of tacit understandings, supporting assumptions, ontological security, provides the background which permits a person to focus on *doing a particular task well*. [...]

Tacit knowledge provides, then, a picture of the world we take for granted, and doing so we can communicate effectively, focus on executing specific tasks, trust others, and feel confidence in ourselves. [...]" (p. 232-236)

"But to believe tacit understanding will endure is to succumb to a *false sense of security*. [...]; if feelings of security are indeed necessary to form a self, they will not sustain it in time. The modern institutional realm, with its ever-changing, short transactions, wants to rescue people from that false sense of security.

This new institutional regime puts a particular emphasis on breaking the bonds of ingrained, unconscious habits, even if these have served perfectly well in the past. The institution uses information technology to eliminate the often tacit mutual understandings which modulate information as it passes layers in the traditional bureaucratic pyramid. The new order seems instead to require explicit, self-questioning knowledge. This credo is in a way the modern reflection of the proposition put to Burke in 1792 by English advocates of the French Revolution: ***trust in things as they have been must always break down***. While obviously true, this truism is not simple. ***From some breakdowns, some ruptures, people learn nothing; from others, they turn themselves outward.***” (p. 236)

In the 1930s the philosopher John Dewey found himself trying to make sense of ***what painters learn when they challenge themselves***. [...] His book, *Art as Experience*, is in large part a study of the moment when tacit knowledge is challenged to become explicit. Like Merleau-Ponty, Dewey believed in the orienting, initial need for tacit knowledge; “Only when an organism shares the ordered relations of its environment”, he writes, “does it secure the stability essential to living”. But he wanted to understand why an artist might voluntarily surrender control over that expressive stability. His answer was both simple and not simple: simple as the desire to learn something new about the world, not simple in that, Dewey said, a person has to take responsibility for the breaking down of his or her own tacit understandings. He called that taking of responsibility “***surrender***”. [...] In *The treatise of human nature*, Hume asserts that “when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure”. The key word is “stumble” – by accident, by force of circumstances, unbidden sensations flood us. The self then becomes animated in treating the stumble as an opportunity rather than a threat to self-control. [...] Dewey took Hume one step further: ***“I have to trip myself up.”*** (p. 238)

“Dewey stood godfather to a school of psychology which sought to understand in ordinary life what happens when people surrender rather than simply loose control. These psychologists view that act of temporary surrender as a “***renunciation of possession***”; by suddenly letting go, a person is restimulated. The commonsense way of expressing this activity is as a ***self-testing***. Again, the expression is simple, and not simple: simple in confronting the resistance, not simple in staging the test. The phrase “renunciation of possession” seeks to convey letting go of a habit, consciously exploring something new and difficult, but actively so, ***not as a person defeated by the outside world***.

In declaring that “form follows failure,” the computer technologist Henry Petroski (in *The evolution of useful things*) tried to convey something akin; the good programmer tries to make programs malfunction, not wait passively for things to go wrong. ***Conscious learning occurs only when a person is actively involved in pursuing difficulties, staging them.***” (p. 238)

“The act of turning outward embodies a condition of character as well as of understanding, a new relation to other people as well as to shared symbols like those contained in a religion. For this turn to occur, something has to happen deep within the individual. ***“Turning outward” means the prisoner reforms rather than is reformed***; he cannot simply be prescribed another, better set of social practices. But it would be naïve, indeed folly, to believe that society encourages this change. It is particularly a folly to accept on faith the professions of belief in “change from within” on the part of the modern organizations. In the “disk” form of bureaucracy, the reality of change is that it is imposed from the above; in disk businesses, employees do not vote on mergers and acquisitions; in welfare disks, the unemployed do not vote on the length of their own benefits. ***What makes disk organizations distinctive is the ideological effort to present these controls as representing the subject’s own desire for change***. The reality is an inequality of power; the ideology is a shared desire for innovation, initiative growth. Disks speak John Dewey’s language but they hardly practice the “renunciation of possession.” (p. 240)

“This gap between language and practice explains a pattern now appearing in fieldwork and ethnographies about new institutions. ***Subjected to change, people do not feel themselves changing***. They do not become more self-conscious in ways that open them up to others. The psychologist Daniel Kahneman (in *Prospect theory: an analysis of decision under risk*) believes that for the mass of modern workers, risk-taking inspires depression and foreboding rather than hope; people focus more on what they have to lose than to gain; they are being gambled with rather than themselves gambling. What Albert Hirschmann calls a ***mentality of “exit” rather than a “voice” results***.

What disk organizations make clear is that the turn outward in society, if not in art, requires financial resources, or a thick network of professional contacts, or control over others. At the top, change and risk can thus be managed without a person coming apart. But lower down in the modern institution, risk can be depressing just because these powers are lacking.” (p. 241)

“What most complicates the shaping of character – if a person does turn outward, changing his or her ideas and sentiments through the influence of new people or events – is **return to the world he or she has left behind**. Changes in behavior or attitude usually happen long before people become aware they have changed. [...] It takes even longer for those who have not made a journey to understand those who have.

This difficulty seems obvious, yet bears on a large and somewhat complicated subject: **group identity**. Untested tacit social knowledge is like a group portrait, a shared image of how things should be. Tested social knowledge takes the form of a narrative, a shared story of change. The sharing of a common image is both equal and instant; the sharing of a history is more arduous. Individual life histories entwine in complicated ways over time, and the insights which history has vouchsafed to one person it may have withheld from another.

Images classify: who belongs in the group portrait, who does not. The old American laws that assumed a drop of black blood made one black are an extreme of such classification, a tinted skin imposing a total identity. A shared history can also rigidly classify, as in the sharing of national narratives separating the “true” Serb from the person whose family happens to have lived in Serbia for several hundred years. **Yet the personal act of narrating one’s history to another person can also break down such rigidities**. The narrator wanders from his or her point, the listener interjects something obscurely relevant; wandering off point often prods a sudden, conscious understanding for both. In this uncertainty of narration lies **one key principle of mutual respect**. [...] The content matters less. But the difficulty of returning lies also just there: the listeners may attend to the story of a transforming journey yet cling, still, to their own fixed picture of the world.” (p. 242-244)

“**Pictures of identity**, [Weltanschauungen, that roughly translate as “outlook on the world”, shared by a group] are **necessary, sustaining group illusions**, even though these pictures, these tacit understandings, are bound to betray those who believed in them. [...] The person who returns to others with disturbing news has, somehow, to impress on them that his story bears on their lives.

[This will be made difficult for two reasons]:

- The picture of “us” dominates, overshadowing any story in which differences and discontinuities emerge.
- It will be hard for the person who returns to express himself, [as his own turn outward might seem consigned to the pigeonhole of a private history].

In an ideal world, groups would change through drawing those transformations of individual character which exemplified curiosity, an unexpected pleasure, or the lessons of unforeseen suffering. Distant as is this ideal, still a narrator can inspire respect in recounting his story. **This expressive performance is the only hope we have of breaking the power of collective group images, of tacit knowledge which paralyzes our sense of society and of ourselves.**” (p. 245)

“The historical irony of my generation was that capitalism made New Left desires come half true. The attack on the bureaucratic pyramid in favor of disk organization often succeeded in destroying the institutional rigidities of the old order, in public institutions as well as private ones. The shift from bureaucratic to flexible capitalism reinforced the emphasis on voluntary social action and on face-to-face relations in civil society. The **ideology of flexibility** emphasized risk-taking and spontaneity, the life narrative set free from a determinate course. [...]

We hoped the dismantling of fixed bureaucracy would promote stronger social connections between people. Our faith lay in improvisation, in social relations which more resembled jazz than classical music. As it turns out, social jazz did not bring more sociability. [...]

My generation wound up facing the same dilemma of older people in social relations: **goodwill combined with improvisation – social jazz – does not bind.**” (p. 260)